



# Advancing Human Development in Bangladesh

## Looking Ahead

National Human Development Report 2021  
Celebrating the Birth Centenary of the  
Father of the Nation and Golden Jubilee of the  
Independence of Bangladesh





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**Economic Relations Division  
Ministry of Finance**

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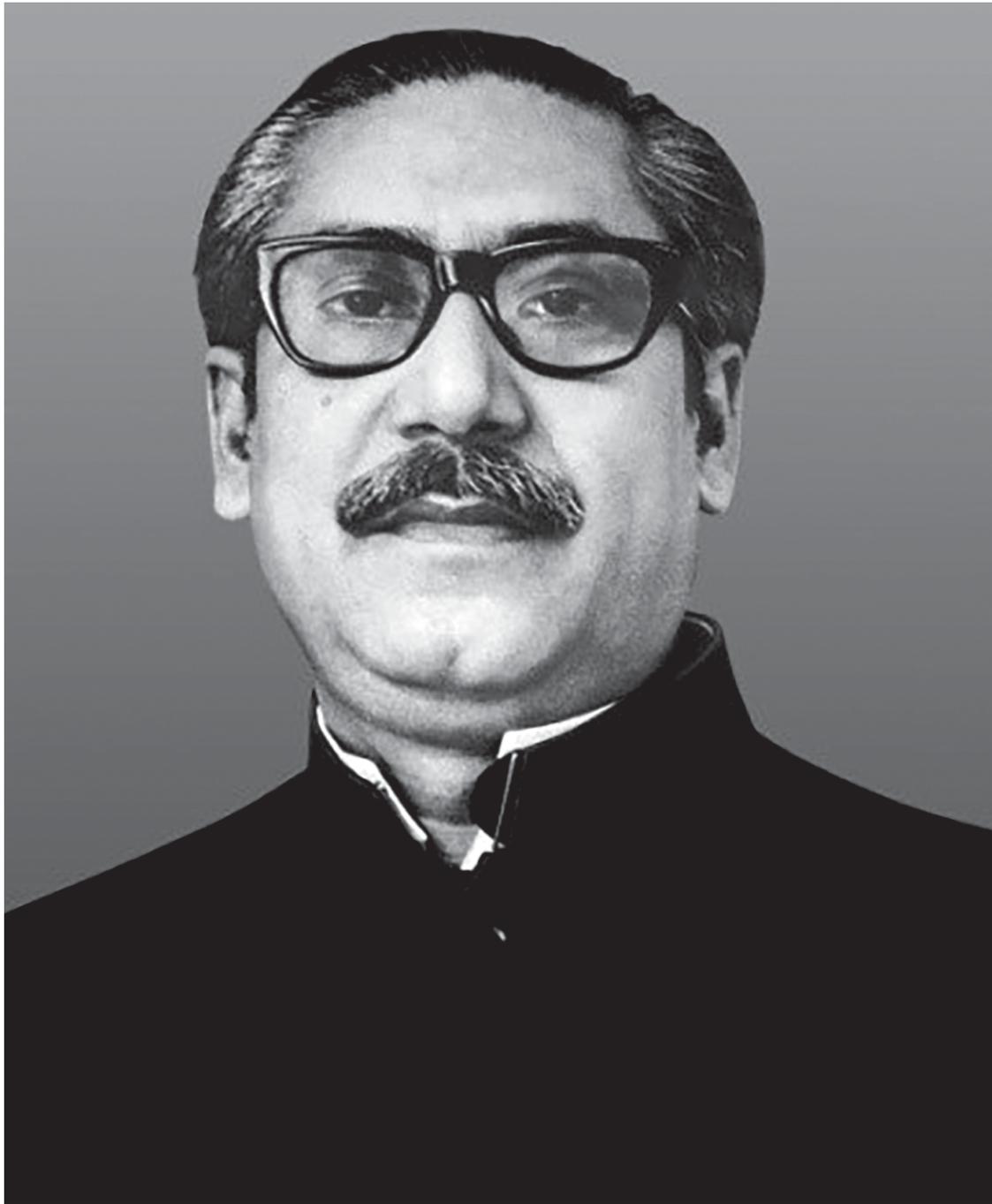


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74/B/1, Green Road, RH Home Centre, Level 3, Suite No. 224-239  
Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215  
Phone: (+8802) 44815288, 44815289, (+880) 1917733741



The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

“Let us together create a world that can eradicate poverty, hunger, war and human sufferings and achieve global peace and security for the well-being of humanity.”

— Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman  
Father of the Nation  
United Nations General Assembly, 25 September 1974





Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

“Our development paradigm has a humane feature in it. The main objective of our development schemes is to improve the living standard of the impoverished and vulnerable people. Social protection schemes and inclusive growth have played an enabling role in attaining this objective.”

— Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina  
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October 2016





**PRIME MINISTER**  
**GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF**  
**BANGLADESH**

11 Bhadra 1428  
26 August 2021

## Message

I am happy to know that Bangladesh is publishing a National Human Development Report on the occasion of the country's Golden Jubilee of Independence. It is only befitting that such a report would come out as the whole nation is celebrating the 50 years of its independence with utmost pride and joy. Born out of a nine-month liberation war, marked by tortures, deaths, and destruction, what Bangladesh achieved over the past 50 years has been marked as a development miracle of the world. In throughout this development journey, the ideas, thoughts and visions of the Greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman have been our guiding principles.

Bangladesh has always put her people at the centre of its development. Its focus has never been simply on the richness of the economy, but on the richness of the lives of its people. Bangladesh strives for ending poverty, reduce inequality, and ensure environmental sustainability while building a fair society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights, freedom and justice would be secured for all citizens. As a development ideology, Bangladesh through its belief and work, is committed to human development.

For this reason, along with other world leaders, I was a signatory to the Millennium Declaration in 2000. We deeply believe in the set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and those goals which have informed and profoundly influenced our development plans. We have been making all out efforts to improve the lives of our people through maintaining a high economic growth, impressive successes in poverty reduction, and providing basic social services to our people. Our commitment to gender equality and women empowerment, climate change and environmental sustainability, and peace and security is solid staunch. At the global level, Bangladesh's contributions to global development initiatives and peace keeping have earned laurels for the country.

No doubt, like any other nation, Bangladesh still has development challenges. A global pandemic like Covid-19 is a grim reminder of that. But no challenge is too big for Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh have indomitable spirit and irrepressible power, and with the firm commitment of the government, we shall be able to overcome all the challenges, whatever daunting they are.

Today, we not only look back as we celebrate the five decades of our independence, but also look forward. A new world with opportunities is also emerging and Bangladesh is well-poised to take off to new heights. By 2030, Bangladesh is expected to be the 24<sup>th</sup> largest economy of the world and by 2041, it is expected to be a developed economy.

I am committed to ensuring human development for everyone in Bangladesh. I strongly believe that human development for every Bangladeshi is not merely a dream, but a reality. Today, hopes are within our reach to realize it. The nation can build what has been achieved, can attain what once seemed unattainable. And with that, let us start a journey from poverty to prosperity: from challenges to opportunities, from ideas to actions. Let us make sure that in our journey, no one is left behind.

I consider the report as an integral part of that journey. I hope that the present report would inform and influence our Vision 2041.

I wish the publication of Bangladesh National Human Development Report 2021 every success.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

  
**Sheikh Hasina**





**A H M Mustafa Kamal, FCA, MP**  
**Minister**  
**Ministry of Finance**  
Government of the People's  
Republic of Bangladesh

## Message

Date: 11 October, 2021

I welcome the initiative of preparing the National Human Development Report of Bangladesh in 2021, which marks the historic milestone of 50 years of our independence. The country and its people have every reason to celebrate their achievements over the past five decades. In 1971, Bangladesh has emerged like a phoenix from the ashes of destruction, after a nine-month liberation war. With the vision and the leadership of the Father of the Nation, Bangabadhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as well as with the combined efforts of its people the country has turned around, and did achieved *development wonders*, which continue to attract praise and appreciation from the global community.

That legacy has been kept alive by the strong leadership of our honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, the able daughter of the Father of the Nation. Today, Bangladesh has achieved impressive progress in socio-economic and human development. The country's mere \$35 billion economy of the mid-1990s has increased tenfold to almost a \$350 billion economy. During the same period, the per capita income of Bangladesh has registered a more than sevenfold rise from \$300 to \$2,227. The poverty incidence has fallen from 58 per cent in 1990 to 20.5 per cent in 2019. Over the past three decades, the life expectancy at birth has increased significantly in Bangladesh – from 58 years to about 73 years. The expected years of schooling rose from 5 years to 11 years between 1990 and 2019. Definitely, these successes over the years are to be lauded.

The outstanding development of Bangladesh over the past years bears the hallmark of the vision and political leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. One simple, but prime example of such commitment is the undertaking and the completion of the *Padma Bridge*.

In celebrating the Golden Jubilee of our independence, the 2021 National Human Development Report highlights the impressive human development progress of Bangladesh, but does not shy away from challenges faced by the country, including the latest challenge of Covid-19. With the indomitable spirit and irrepressible power of the people of Bangladesh, and the vision and guidance of our Honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, we shall not only be able to maintain our human development trajectory, but will also move it to a new height.

I congratulate everyone who has been part of this intellectual journey and I thank my colleagues at the Economic Relations Division who coordinated its production and publication. I am sure that the report would greatly be helpful for the policy-makers, stakeholders, academia and all sorts of end users.

(A H M Mustafa Kamal FCA, MP)





**Secretary**  
**Economic Relations Division**  
**Ministry of Finance**  
**Government of the People's**  
**Republic of Bangladesh**

## **Foreword and Acknowledgements**

The National Human Development Report marks the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the independence of our country a country of the vision and ideas of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. People are the centre of all development. Their Indomitable spirit, irrepressible courage, creativity and hard work along with the strong vision and commitment of our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, have made it possible what Bangladesh is today. The Report tells the struggle and success of the nation. Overcoming all odds it has established itself as a development wonder of the world and proves that no development challenge is too formidable for Bangladesh.

The initiative of Bangladesh's National Human Development Report (NHDR) takes place during 'Mujib Borsho' to celebrate the centennial birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation. Despite Covid- 19 challenges, and time and resource and mobility constraints, the initiative has gone forward, showing the tireless commitment of all stakeholders involved. Guided by an Advisory Panel of well-known personalities of the country, and authored by a pool of eminent experts, the Report was prepared through a participatory approach going through peer review and consultation with various ministries.

With this note, I would like to express my heartiest gratitude to Hon'ble Finance Minister Mr. A H M Mustafa Kamal FCA, MP, for his invaluable support in initiating NHDR development and providing strategic guidance.

I would like to express my deep appreciation for Dr. Selim Jahan, Advisor of NHDR for his overall coordination support and valuable strategic and methodological guidance throughout the NHDR formulation process. I am also grateful to Chowdhury Mofad Ahmed, Dr. Fahmida Khatun, Dr. Rizwan Khair, Dr. Ahsan H Mansur, Dr. Mustafizur Rahman, Dr. Rushidan Islam Rahman, Sultan Hafizur Rahman and Dr. Jayedi Sattar for their overall advisory support in the NHDR development process and for complementing the guidance from our Advisory Board, on several methodological aspects of the Report.

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I am thankful to the BBS especially for their supports and close collaborations with the writers regarding several methodological and data-centric aspects of the report. I would like to recognize the effort of the peer reviewers for their valuable feedback concerning the draft chapters; without their support the NHDR formulation work could not be completed within the stipulated time. I am thankful for close collaborations by our partners and line ministries, and for their feedback and insightful inputs for finalizing the draft through a number of virtual consultations on respective thematic areas.

I would like to appreciate Dr. Nahid Rashid, Additional Secretary, Wing Chief (UN) and NPD of K4DM Project and her team, in particular the efforts of Baby Rani Karmakar, Deputy Secretary, ERD (UN-6), for coordinating the effort for this Report. I thank all ERD officials, UNDP Bangladesh and other stakeholders.

I am confident that the National Human Report 2021 would greatly contribute to our development priorities and going forward, will inform our future development strategies.

**Fatima Yasmin**

## National Human Development Report 2021 Contributors

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**Dr. Selim Jahan** (Overview, Chapter 2, Chapter 7 and Lead Author )

Former Director

Human Development Report Office and Poverty Division  
United Nations Development Programme, New York, USA

**Professor M M Akash** (Chapter 3)

Department of Economics

University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000

**Professor Ayesha Banu** (Chapter 6)

Department of Women and Gender Studies

University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000

**Dr. Khondaker Golam Moazzem** (Chapter 5)

Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

House 40/c, Road No 11 (New), Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1209

**Dr. Nazneen Ahmed** (Chapter 6)

Senior Research Fellow

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)

E-17, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka 1207

**Dr. Imran Matin** (Chapter 5)

Executive Director

Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)

SK Center (3rd - 7th & 9th Floor), GP, JA-4, TB Gate

Bir Uttam AK Khandakar Road, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212

**Dr. Mahfuz Kabir** (Chapter 4)

Research Director

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

1/46 Eskaton Road, Ramna, Dhaka 1000

**Dr. M A Razzaque** (Chapter 1)

Research Director

Policy Research Institute (PRI)

House No-16, Road No-10/A, Block-B, Banani, Dhaka 1213

# Abbreviations

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4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution	INGOs	International NGOs
8FYP	Eighth Five Year Plan	LDCs	Least Developed Countries
ADB	Asian Development Bank	LEDP	Learning and Earning Development Projects
AIRP	Community Arsenic Iron Removal Plant	LFS	Labour Force Survey
APA	Annual Performance Agreement	MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorders	MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics	MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
BCCSAP	Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan	MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
BCS	Bangladesh Civil Service	NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action
BDP2100	Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100	NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation	NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution of Bangladesh
CFF	Climate Fiscal Framework	NDD	Neuro-development Disorders
CHT	Chattogram Hill Tracts	NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
CPR	Common Property Resources	NHDRs	National Human Development Reports
DPT	diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus	NPSWSS	National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation Policy
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council	NSSS	National Social Security Strategy
EPI	Environmental Performance Index	OMS	Open Market Sale
GCF	Green Climate Fund	OPHI	The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
GCRI	Global Climate Risk Index	PaCT	Partnership for Clean Textile
GDI	Gender-Development Index	PP2041	Second Perspective Plan 2041
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders
GHDI	Global Human Development Index	PWD	Persons with Disabilities
GHG	Greenhouse Gas	REE-CALL	Resilience Through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership, and Learning
GII	Gender Inequality Index	RHS	Rainwater Harvesting System
GNI	Gross National Income	RMG	Readymade garments
GRS	Grievance Redress System	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
HCR	Headcount Ratio	SHSs	Solar Home Systems
HDI	Human Development Index	SNAP	Stocktaking for National Adaptation Planning
HIES	National Household Income and Expenditure Survey	SoD	Standing Orders on Disaster
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
ICT	Information and Communication Technology	TFR	Total Fertility Rate
IDCOL	Infrastructure Development Company Limited	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
IFC	International Finance Corporation	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IHDI	The inequality adjusted HDI	UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
ILO	International Labour Organization		



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# Overview



# Overview

The year 2021 marks the Golden Jubilee of the independence of Bangladesh. The whole nation is celebrating this milestone with immense pride and joy. When Bangladesh was born in 1971, in the aftermath of a liberation war, marked by death, destruction and torture, the world could have never comprehended that this new-born nation would be an example of *development miracle* within a span of just 50 years. But, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose Birth Centenary the nation has celebrated last year, had a dream and a vision. Following his vision, Bangladesh started its journey towards development by tackling a varied range of odds and taking advantage of different opportunities. This journey has put the country on an enviable development trajectory over the past five decades, with an even more admirable and accelerated pace of development specially during the last decade. This has only been possible based mainly on the long term vision of the Father of nation, along with the ingenuity, creativity and hard work of the people of Bangladesh, and, last but not the least, due to the exceptional political leadership of the country.

So, Bangladesh and its people have every reason to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Independence of Bangladesh. In 1971, after a nine-month bloody liberation war Bangladesh emerged, from the ashes of destruction like a phoenix. Initially, there were lots of doubts expressed about the future of the new country. No doubt there were many twists and turns faced by Bangladesh on its way to development, but over the years, the country has not only remained on a steady path to success, but has succeeded in pushing that trajectory even to a higher level. So, it is only natural that, the achievements of the development milestones in the last decade have earned Bangladesh a lot of praise and appreciation from the global community.

In its development journey, Bangladesh has always put the people at the centre. The country's focus has never been simply on the richness of the economy, but also on the richness of the lives of its people. Bangladesh strives towards eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, ensuring environmental

sustainability, while building a fair society in which the rule of law, basic human rights, freedom and justice will prevail for all its citizens. As a development ideology, Bangladesh, through its belief and work, is committed to human development.

Today, Bangladesh enjoys a steady economic growth of nearly 7 per cent per annum and as a result, a mere \$35 billion economy of the mid-1990s has grown more than nine-fold to a \$330 billion economy in 2020. During the same period, the per capita income of Bangladesh has registered a nearly seven-fold rise from \$300 to \$2,064. The poverty incidence has fallen from 58 per cent in 1990 to nearly 21 per cent in 2019. Over the past three decades, the life expectancy has increased significantly in Bangladesh – from 58 years to about 72.6 years, an increase of about 15 years. The expected years of schooling – the number of years that a child of school-age can expect to receive education – rose from 5 years to 11 years between 1990 to 2019.

The country has been praised for its impressive progress vis-à-vis its neighbours. Today Bangladesh has achieved a life expectancy of 72.6 years as opposed to India's 70 years and Pakistan's 67 years. In Bangladesh, the under-five mortality rate is 28 per 1,000 live births, compared to 48 in India and 81 in Pakistan. Bangladesh, as a country, has every reason to be proud of all its achievements, and deserves to be celebrated.

Bangladesh has made impressive contributions to the global community. Its voice and role in raising the concerns of developing nations have been lauded in various global forums. Bangladesh has been a signatory to the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and today due to its commitment towards sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has drawn the attention of the global community. Its role and involvement in global peacekeeping is noteworthy. So far, 163,887 peacekeepers from Bangladesh have participated in UN missions in over 40 countries. The country has a total of 6,731 peacekeepers to the UN peacekeeping operations.

Today, Bangladesh has graduated to the middle-income category of nations. Its move towards graduation from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is on track. It has achieved all the important Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. By 2030, Bangladesh is expected to be the 24<sup>th</sup> largest economy of the world. Bangladesh has also become a *digital economy* and by 2041, the nation envisages that it will be a developed economy.

These successes over the years definitely deserve to be lauded. But they did not come easily or automatically. One critical element in those achievements has been the commitment, the vision and the stand taken by the political leadership. One simple, but prime example of such commitment, vision and stand is the undertaking and the completion of the *Padma Bridge*. Staying steadfast against all external odds, global pressures, and non-cooperation from powerful international institutions, the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, drawing on domestic efforts and resources, delivered what she promised the nation. The Padma Bridge is not only a bridge, but a symbol of the indomitable spirit and irrepressible power of Bangladesh.

And because of said indomitable spirit and irrepressible power, as it has done in the past, Bangladesh will be able to overcome all the challenges no matter how daunting they are. Yes, there are lingering issues that needs to be addressed and resolved. Human deprivations, like

poverty is a challenge where more than 30 million people are still extremely poor. Inequality has become a deepening challenge and climate change has emerged as a serious threat to development. Bangladesh is yet to erase gender-disparity and to create enough exciting opportunities for its young generations. The country's institutions and governance are yet to reach its zenith. Basic human values like tolerance, mutual respect, and basic rights need to be strengthened. Last, but not the least, like many other countries, Bangladesh is also facing the challenges of dealing and managing the COVID-19 global pandemic. This has made it doubly more challenging for the country to stay on track on its human development trajectory.

The country's commitment to human development will facilitate its efforts to overcome other development challenges. Over the years, Bangladesh has produced seven National Human Development Reports (NHDRs), which have contributed to public debates and influenced policy debate in the country (box 1). As part of that legacy, the country strives to further human development, particularly for its future generations to enable them to realize their dreams and aspirations. So, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of its independence this year, Bangladesh produces its eighth NHDR and the 2021 NHDR of Bangladesh is aptly titled as *Advancing Human Development in Bangladesh: Looking Ahead*. This is the first time an NHDR has been prepared under the auspices of the Government of Bangladesh.

#### **Box 1: The National Human Development Reports of Bangladesh – a historical chronicle**

Since the first NHDR of Bangladesh in 1992 on *Local action under national constraint – focusing on local development*, five more NHDRs were produced in the country. The themes of these reports were quite diverse – ranging from *empowerment of women – focusing on gender equality* in 1994 to *monitoring human development in Bangladesh in 1998*. All these reports provided solid analysis of human development situations of Bangladesh, presented up to date and disaggregated data on human development indicators and suggested policy options. These reports were used by academics, media, civil society and policy makers both for public and policy advocacy.

A list of all the NHDRs produced in Bangladesh is provided below. It is important to indicate that like the global trend, the NHDR initiative in Bangladesh was limited to the decade of 1990s. In fact, no NHDR was produced in Bangladesh after 2000.

- 1992 Local action under national constraint – focusing on local government
- 1993 Decentralization of local action – looking at the institutional constraints to decentralization and devolution
- 1994 Empowerment of women – focusing on gender equality
- 1995 Environment report - Bangladesh
- 1996 A pro-poor agenda – focusing on poverty and on the need for social sector investment to be effective and equitable
- 1998 Monitoring human development in Bangladesh
- 2000 General human development report Bangladesh

Source: Jahan (2015)

## The human development framework

People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an environment that enables people to enjoy a long, healthy, and creative life. This may appear to be a simple truth, but it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth. For far too long, there has been a preoccupation with creation of wealth and material opulence. And in that pursuit, it is often forgotten that development is all about people. In our preoccupation of economic growth, people were systematically pushed more and more from the centre to the periphery of most development debates and dialogues.

### *Defining human development: notions and measurements*

Human development is simply defined as a process of enlarging choices and creating opportunities for everyone (box 2). Every day human beings make a series of choices – some economic, some social, some political, and some cultural. The ultimate objective of development, as has been explained in Chapter 2 on the analytical framework of human development, is not to create more wealth, but to enhance this range of choices for every human being. Human development, thus defined, represents a simple notion, but with far reaching implications. The human development framework shifted the development discourse from pursuing

material opulence to enhancing human well-being, from maximizing income to expanding capabilities, from optimizing growth to enlarging freedoms. Five issues are pertinent to human development:

*First*, human choices are enlarged when people acquire more capabilities and enjoy more opportunities to use those capabilities. It reflects a balance between the two and if there is a mismatch between the two, human frustration and missed opportunities may result. Human development, thus defined, represents a simple notion, but with far-reaching implications, as mentioned earlier.

*Second*, according to the concept of human development, economic growth is just a means, albeit an important one, but not the ultimate goal of development. Income makes an important contribution if its benefits are translated into human lives, but the growth of income is not an end by itself. The focus of development must always be people.

*Third*, human development is about enlarging freedoms for all so that every human being can pursue choices that he or she values. Such freedoms have two fundamental aspects, the *well-being freedom*, represented by capabilities, and the *agency freedom*, represented by voice and autonomy (figure 1). Both types of freedoms are absolutely necessary for human development for everyone.

### **Box 2: Human development – a people-centred approach**

Human development is about acquiring more capabilities and enjoying more opportunities to use these capabilities. With more capabilities and opportunities, people have more choices, and expanding choices is at the core of the human development framework, but it is also a process. Anchored in human rights, it is also linked to human security. Its ultimate objective is to enlarge human freedoms.

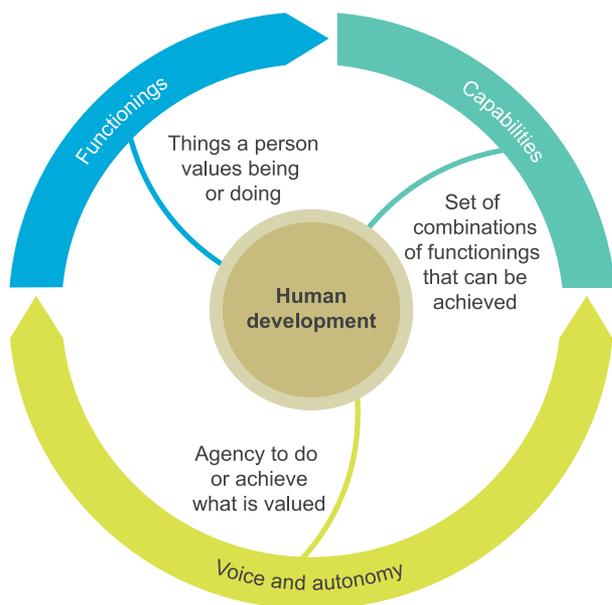
Human development is development of the people through building human resources, for the people through the translation of development benefits in the lives of people and by the people through active participation in the processes that influence and shape their lives. Income is a means to human development but not an end in itself.

The human development framework in the 1990 Human Development Report also introduced a composite index—the Human Development Index (HDI) for assessing achievements in basic dimensions of human development. It consists of three basic dimensions of human development—to lead a long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy at birth; to acquire knowledge, measured by mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling; and the ability to achieve a decent standard of living, measured by gross national income per capita. The theoretical maximum value of the HDI is 1.0.

To measure human development more comprehensively, the Human Development Report also presents four other composite indices. The Inequality-adjusted HDI discounts the HDI according to the extent of inequality. The Gender Development Index compares female and male HDI values. The Gender Inequality Index highlights women's empowerment. And the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures non-income dimensions of poverty.

Source: Human Development Report Office 2016.

**Figure 1: Human development—the analytical framework**



*Fourth*, human development is both a process and an outcome. Thus, even though it focuses on the outcome of enhanced choices, human development also represents a process through which choices are enlarged. And in the human development framework, the processes are as important as outcomes.

*Fifth*, human development, by concentrating on choices, implies that people must influence the processes that shape their lives. They must participate in various decision-making processes, the implementation of those decisions, and their monitoring.

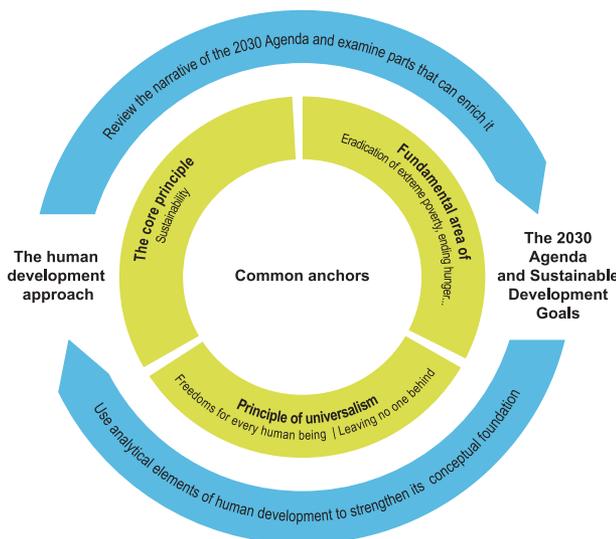
In the ultimate analysis, human development is development *of* the people, development *for* the people, and development *by* the people. Development of the people refers to building of human capabilities through human resource development. Development for the people implies that the benefits of growth must be translated into the lives of people. And development by the people emphasizes that people must participate actively to influence the processes that shape their lives.

**Interlinkages between the human development framework and the SDGs**

The human development framework and the SDGs are mutually reinforcing (figure 2 and box 2). Thus, as the global community is implementing the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development to address the wide-ranging challenges that the humanity faces, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, etc., the human development approach has a special significance in it.

**Figure 2: Human development and SDGs are interlinked**



Achieving SDGs is considered an important step for all human beings to realise their full potential, which the human development concept emphasizes on.

But it should be remembered that despite the linkages between SDGs and human development, there exists fundamental differences between the two. While SDGs are considered as a globally agreed tool to measure development progress, the human development approach is viewed as a philosophy to assess almost any development issues. Alternatively, human development can provide the opportunity to formulate a route to reach the destination set by the SDGs.

The human development approach can help design the route to a development destination that the SDGs envisage. Given Bangladesh's longstanding emphasis on materializing broader socio-economic objectives, the human development approach provides a holistic framework for assessing progress and identifying challenges for moving forward.

### Box 2: Human development and the SDGs: mutually reinforcing

The SDGs are a set of 17 interlinked goals that were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 as part of a UN Resolution called the 2030 Agenda with the objective of UN member countries' achieving those goals by 2030. The SDGs would carry on the momentum generated by the MDGs utilizing a wider framework. The SDGs under its different broad goals include a total of 169 targets and 232 indicators that are used as yardsticks to monitor and measure the progress being made by individual countries.

The SDGs are inextricably linked with the concept of human development as the dimensions of human development are deeply rooted in SDGs. Both SDGs and human development are anchored in universalism and share the common premise of enlarging human capabilities and freedom excluding no one. Moreover, the SDGs and human development can mutually reinforce each other in three different ways: the human development approach can strengthen the conceptual base of SDG framework; human development indicators can be used along with the SDG indicators to measure the progress in achieving SDGs, and human development reports can serve as a strategic tool to SDG framework.

Source: Human Development Report 2016

### Future human development of Bangladesh

As indicated earlier, human development is all about enlarging human choices through enlarging human capabilities and expanding opportunities for people. There are certain dimensions of human life which enhance human capabilities directly, yet there are certain dimensions, which set the context and facilitate enhancement of human capabilities indirectly (Table 1). Thus, dimensions like a long and healthy life and knowledge are direct drivers of

long and healthy life or knowledge); some are *supplementary* (e.g., participation or human security); some are *cross-cutting* (gender equality or environmental sustainability). The future path of human development, while recognizing the basic as well as the supplementary and cross-cutting dimensions of human development, will have to focus more on upcoming challenges of human development, such as inequalities, teenagers' dreams, peace and prosperity and so on.

Table 1: Dimensions of human development

Human Development						
Directly enhancing human capabilities dimensions			Contextual dimensions for enhancing human capabilities			
A long and healthy life	Knowledge	Decent standard of living	Participation	Environmental sustainability	Human security	Gender equality

Source: Jahan (2015).

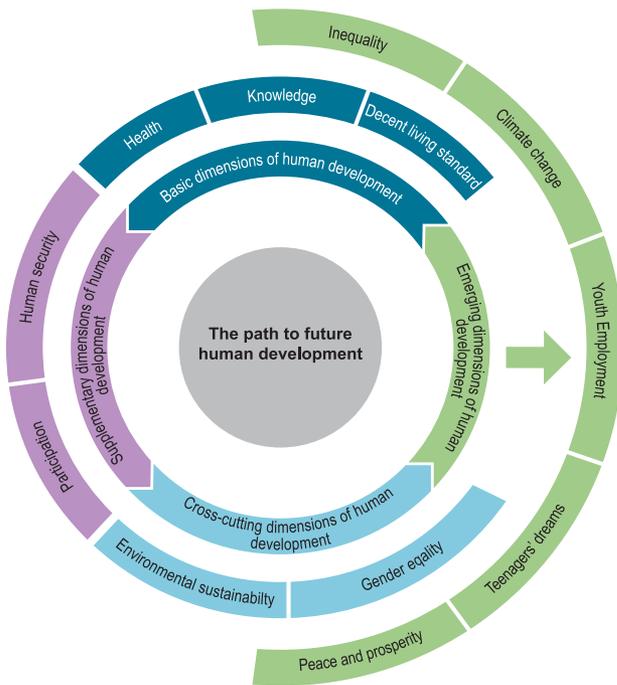
human capabilities, while issues like participation and human security creates a conducive environment for enhancing the capabilities of people.

Both the direct and the indirect dimensions of human development are inter-linked and mutually reinforcing. For example, without environmental sustainability, human security is not possible. Similarly, knowledge is a pre-requisite for effective participation. Sometimes, there may be issues of trade-offs as well. Does the pursuance of a decent standard of living through working more hamper the goal of a long and healthy life?

Looking through a different lens, some of the dimensions of human development are *basic* (e.g., a

As Bangladesh moves along the path of human development, five issues, among others, would be critical in that future path. These are *inequalities, climate change, youth employment, teenager's dreams and peace and security*. Individually and collectively, in tandem with basic human issues like health, education, standard of living, participation, human security, gender equality, these would influence and shape the future path of human development of the country. This is precisely why the 2021 NHDR of Bangladesh –focuses on these five issues. Each of these five issues are important in their own right, but interacting with each other, their mutual synergies create a dynamic for the future human development trajectory of the country (figure 3).

**Figure 3: The path to future human development – an analytical framework**



In the context of all these, the present report comes up with *five* key messages:

**Key message 1: On the Golden Jubilee of its independence, Bangladesh has every reason to celebrate its outstanding development wonders. All these achievements were possible because of the creativity and hard work of its people and the strong committed political leadership.**

Rising like a phoenix from the ashes of destruction, Bangladesh has maintained an enviable development trajectory over the past five decades. As a development miracle, Bangladesh's overall human development achievements are well-known. As pointed out in Chapter 1, since 1990, Bangladesh has climbed up the global HDI ranking by seven notches – from 126th to 133<sup>rd</sup>, among 189 countries. Within less than three decades, Bangladesh has been able to increase its HDI by 60.4 per cent – from 0.394 to 0.632 in 2019, and the country now belongs to the medium human development category. During the same period, Bangladesh has been able to cut its poverty incidence by more than half – from 58 per cent to 20.5 per cent. In the past three decades, the life expectancy at birth has increased by more than 15 years – from 58 years to nearly 73 years. The mean years of schooling – defined as the numbers of years

of education received by people aged 25 years or more – more than doubled – from 2.8 years to 6.1 years.

A committed political leadership and the indomitable spirit and resilience of the people of Bangladesh have made such progress possible. The wisdom and the commitment of the political leadership set the vision of the country's development path and identified the strategies to reach there. In adverse situations, the political process stood its ground and steered the nation on the right path. People took a leap of faith to cross land and sea to explore new economic opportunities abroad. Women came out of the four walls of their homes to work in garment industries. Farmers received incredible support from the State so that they could work to ensure the entire nation's food security. Small businesses, many run by women, broke new grounds on entrepreneurship. *Digital Bangladesh* has revolutionized the way people think, communicate and work. New frontiers of development opened up as a result, and today, Bangladesh is on its path to the development highway.

**Key message 2: With the existing development challenges, five emerging issues are critical for informing and influencing the future human development trajectory of Bangladesh.**

Even though Bangladesh achieved outstanding human development outcomes, like any other society, all the regions of the country and groups of people, did not equitably benefit from such outcomes. Both Chapters 1 and 3 highlight this point through quantitative data. For example, in 2016, the income-share of the richest 5 per cent was nearly 30 per cent, while that of the poorest 5 per cent was less 0.3 per cent. The under-five mortality was nearly 60 per 1,000 live births in Sylhet, while it is just above 30 per 1,000 live births in Khulna. About 67 per cent of rural households do not have access to internet at home, but the corresponding figure for urban areas is 47 per cent.

Furthermore, even though Bangladesh has made tremendous human development progress over the years, there are still areas of deprivations. About two-thirds of all deaths – 67 per cent – are from non-communicable diseases, like cancer, cardiovascular diseases and so on.

In recent times, five issues have emerged, which would influence and impact the future human

development of the country. Each of these issues – inequality, climate change, youth employment, teenagers' aspirations and peace and security – are unique development constraints, but are interestingly, interrelated with each other, and as such they make these impacts broader and deeper. For example, inequalities by themselves are a drag on economic growth and human development. So is climate change. Thus, each of them is critical development challenges in their own rights, but in combination, they have deeper and greater combined adverse impacts. The impacts of climate change are more serious on the poor and the marginalized group, making them more vulnerable. Similarly, if younger people remain without jobs for longer-periods, this will not only distress them, but will also have a disheartening impact on them. They may start feeling that their future is very bleak.

The strategies and instruments for tackling these challenges should be carefully identified with the following traits. *First*, there should be minimum number of strategies with maximum impacts. *Second*, each strategy should have multiple impacts such that they influence more than one challenge. *Third*, the strategies should be forward-thinking with an aim to reach win-win solutions.

**Key message 3: COVID-19 pandemic would inform and influence the future human development trajectory of Bangladesh. So, it is essential to assess its negative economic and non-economic impacts and formulate all possible short and medium-term strategies in order to deal with it effectively.**

COVID-19 is a new challenge that would impact the future human development journey of Bangladesh. Because of the pandemic, women's time allocation for unpaid care work is projected to go up by 51 per cent and for unpaid domestic work by 29 per cent. One of the major impacts of COVID-19 might be exacerbated inequalities on various planes. For example, the impact of the pandemic will be more on marginalized and vulnerable groups and they will also have tougher times getting out of it. With most of the learning now being on-line, students from poorer households would be at a disadvantage. Thus, there will be disparities in learning and in life opportunities between richer and poorer households.

Under various scenarios, the job loss of youth due to COVID-19 could be in the range of 1.1 million to 1.6 million. Chapter 5 asserts that quarter of the young

people employed suffered from income loss due to the pandemic. In addition, 20 million of the youth labour force is at risk of wage loss. Because of COVID-19, about 2 million enrolled college students and 1 million university students are living in uncertainty regarding their timely completion of studies. Due to COVID-19, the daily routine of the adolescents has been disrupted, leading to a sedentary lifestyle, idleness, sleep disorders which may ultimately result in obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes. The lack of social contact, loss in parents' incomes, continuous media coverage and anxiety of uncertainty related to COVID-19 pandemic may have adverse psychological impacts on the teenagers. Due to the pre-existing gender disparities, there has been a disproportionate impact on adolescent girls' lives.

Because of lockdown restrictions, face-to-face meetings, social gatherings, direct public interactions have ceased. Professional, official as well as entertainment initiatives have, for quite sometimes, been using information and communication technology in innovative ways. So, the uses of new media, such as webinar, Zoom, StreamYard, etc. have grown extensively. Some of the businesses like e-marketing, food takeaways have flourished. These may give rise to new ICT-based initiatives, for interactions and businesses in a world with new realities.

In terms of medium to longer-term planning for COVID-19, three issues have to be addressed. *First*, Bangladesh should develop well-formulated COVID-19 vaccination strategies for the short and medium term with concrete plans and measures. *Second*, a COVID-19 recovery plan, including domestic economic stimulus and external economic response, should be formulated and rolled out without any delay. This plan can build on the existing measures undertaken so far. *Third*, Bangladesh should be part of the global consultation and collaboration with regard to the COVID-19 recovery plan. Through South-South collaboration, Bangladesh should take the initiative to learn from diverse experiences in its fight against COVID-19.

**Key message 4: Policies have contributed immensely to human development progress of Bangladesh, but emerging challenges require innovative strategy options. Strategies must be accompanied by strengthening of institutions.**

Over time, the Government of Bangladesh has taken

a number to policies to enhance basic human development of Bangladesh. For example, the National Education Policy of 2010 planned to refurbish the existing system to make available an education which is pro-people, easily available, uniform, universal, well-planned, science-oriented and of a high standard. The Government efforts are not only limited to basic human development dimensions, they also focus on the emerging human development issues for future human development of Bangladesh. Thus, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh was formulated to address country's inequality challenge by dealing with the triple problems of poverty, vulnerability, and marginalization. No doubt, these policies have contributed a lot in achieving positive results, yet those strategies and the subsequent successes can be strengthened through further policy options (figure 4).

For example, as figure 4 indicates, in tackling poverty and inequality, some of the policy options are: making macroeconomic policies pro-poor, formulating an employment-led growth strategy, enhancing financial inclusion and targeted interventions. Similarly, combatting climate change would entail advocacy and awareness raising, provisioning of basic social services to climate vulnerable people, promoting livelihood options, cross-cutting initiatives. Combatting COVID-19 would also require out-of-the box measures to ensure that the country's human development trajectory remains intact.

With regard to institutions and governance in Bangladesh, there are three broader areas to emphasise upon more – efficiency and effectiveness of institutions, resource management, broad-based participation and wider dialogues. There are numbers of innovative governance reform

**Figure 4: Strategy options for future human development of Bangladesh**



initiatives currently present in the country. Some of the remarkable initiatives under Cabinet Division are Annual Performance Agreement (APA), Citizen's Charter, Grievance Redress System, Right to Information Act, National Integrity Strategy etc. All of these are mandatorily practised at all level and are considered to be very effective tools for ensuring good governance and overall human development.

Along with the strong political will, investment on strengthening public service delivery, people's participation in policy dialogues, citizens' right to information will lead to improvements in the qualities of policies, people's ownership, and boost confidence in public services.

**Key message 5: No development challenge is formidable for Bangladesh. The country, with, strong people's will and solid political leadership, backed with an impressive human development track record, always strives to overcome its emerging development challenges. A five-point action plan can be critical in overcoming those challenges.**

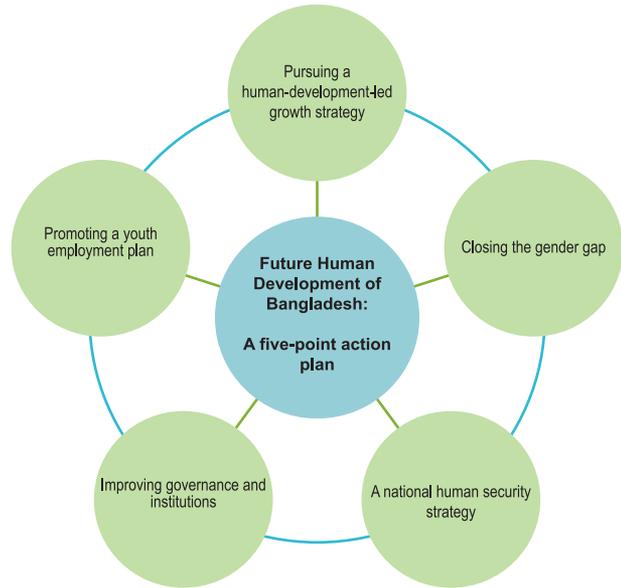
For the indomitable spirit and the irresistible resilience of the people of Bangladesh, no development constraint is impossible to overcome. And for its political leadership with vision, commitment and wisdom, the same holds true. This has been proven over and over again in the past. This is precisely why Bangladesh has been able to portray itself as a Development Miracle within a span of just 50 years.

The Golden Jubilee of the Independence of Bangladesh gives the nation a unique opportunity not only to celebrate its development success, but also to reiterate its will to build an even better future. The country, with its impressive human development track record, strong people's will and solid political leadership are poised to embark on this future path. In that context, a well-defined five-point action plan is suggested (figure 5). The five dimensions, detailed out in Chapter 7, are: pursuing a human development-led growth strategy;

pursuing a youth employment plan; implementing a comprehensive COVID-19 strategy; formulating a national human security strategy, and improving governance and institutions.

**Figure 5: A five-point action plan**

In conclusion, every human being counts, and every



human life is equally valuable. That universalism is at the core of the future human development of Bangladesh. Human development for everyone is not a dream, but a reality. In January 1972, while he was returning from his captivity to an independent Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman described his homecoming as a journey *from darkness to light, from captivity to freedom, from desolation to hope.*

Today, hopes are within the reach of Bangladesh to realize. The nation can build what it wanted to achieve, can attain what once seemed unattainable. In the coming years, the country will be on a journey from deprivation to prosperity, from challenges to opportunities, from ideas to actions. And in this journey, if those who are marginalized and are disconnected from the rest of the population, can be reached and included first, then *no one will be left behind.*



# Chapter 1

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Reflecting on  
human progress  
in Bangladesh



# Chapter 1

## Reflecting on human progress in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has made phenomenal progress in terms of economic growth and human development. Over the past decades, it has witnessed sustained economic growth, complemented by remarkable improvements in such socio-economic indicators as poverty reduction, educational attainment, life expectancy at birth, gender parity in health and education, declining maternal and infant mortality, etc (box 1.1). Moreover, the country has been able to achieve and maintain food security for its large population.<sup>1</sup> Compared to many other countries at a similar stage of development, Bangladesh is shown to have achieved faster progress in various social and

human development indicators, such as health, demographic, and gender equality outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

It has also achieved most of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the year 2015. MDGs were established by the global community following the United Nations Millennium Declaration of in 2000.<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh has moved to the middle human development category. In 2015, the rising per capita income had already enabled the country to climb up to the ranks of 'lower-middle-income' countries from the 'low-income' category, as classified by the World Bank. In 2018, Bangladesh, for the first time, met the criteria to graduate from the group of least developed

### Box 1.1: Bangladesh – A summary of socio-economic progress over the past three decades

- Since FY1991, Bangladesh's GDP has grown, on average, at an annual rate of 5.6 per cent. The comparable growth rate for the most recent past 10 years (of FY2010–FY2019) being more buoyant at 6.7 per cent.
- Sustained economic growth means a mere \$35 billion economy of the mid-1990s has grown to a sizeable one of almost \$330 billion.
- During the same period, the per capita gross national income has registered a more than seven-fold rise from just \$300 to above \$2,064.
- The headcount poverty fell from 58 per cent in 1990 to about 20.5 per cent in FY2019.
- The average life expectancy at birth registered a rise from 58.2 years in 1990 to 65.4 years in 2000, and then further increased to 72.6 years in 2019.
- Net enrolment in primary education stood at 97 per cent in 2019, up from 75 per cent in 1990; net secondary education enrolment increased to 66 per cent from less than 20 per cent.
- The adult literacy rate increased from just 35 per cent in 1990 to 74.7 per cent in 2019.
- The infant mortality rate declined from 99.6 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 21 in 2019.
- The maternal mortality rate fell from 594 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 165 in 2019.

Source: Author's compilation from various publications of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), and the World Development Indicators (WDI).

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the rice production increased from 11 million Metric Tons (MMT) in the 1970s to about 35 MMT in 2018-19 (BBS, 2020). This has contributed to achieving self-sufficiency in rice production.

<sup>2</sup> Asadullah et al. 2014.

<sup>3</sup> The eight goals of MDGs were to (i) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, (ii) achieve universal primary education, (iii) promote gender equality and empower women, (iv) reduce child mortality, (v) improve maternal health, (vi) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, (vii) ensure environmental sustainability, and (viii) develop a global partnership for development. Bangladesh achieved several goals and indicators especially in the areas of poverty alleviation, ensuring food security, primary school enrolment, gender parity in the primary and secondary level of education, lowering the infant and under-five mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio, improving immunization coverage and reducing the incidence of communicable diseases (GED 2015).

countries (LDCs). In the second consecutive triennial review by the United Nations in 2021, Bangladesh fulfilled the criteria again – paving the way for the nation to officially graduate from LDC status in 2026.<sup>4</sup>

### Progress in human development

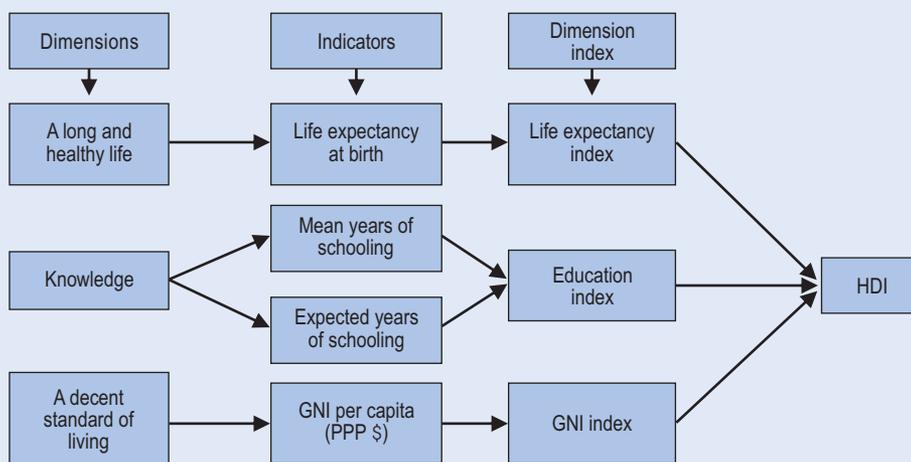
The impressive progress of Bangladesh in different socio-economic indicators has also been reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI), prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The HDI is measured, based on three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living (box 1.2). Bangladesh's overall HDI score has over the past three decades increased quite remarkably (table 1.1 and figure 1.1). Since

the inception of the Human Development Report in 1990, it rose from 0.394 to 0.632 in 2019 – a 60.4 per cent increment. It makes Bangladesh one of the top five countries in terms of largest absolute gains in the HDI score.<sup>5</sup> The sustained improvement in HDI-related indicators let Bangladesh in 2013 move up from a country categorised as low human development to amongst the group of countries with medium human development.<sup>6</sup> Public policies towards human development, and numerous initiatives by the government and non-government organisations (NGOs) have played a key role in this regard (box 1.3).

Along with rising absolute scores, Bangladesh has also improved its relative ranking in the global HDI index (figure 1.2). Since 2010, the country climbed

#### Box 1.2 Measuring HDI

The HDI consists of three fundamental dimensions of human development: leading a long and healthy life measured by life expectancy at birth; acquiring knowledge measured by expected and mean years of schooling; and achieving a decent standard of living measured by GNP per capita using the 2011 purchasing power parity international USD. Separate indices are constructed for each of the three dimensions. Finally, the HDI value is calculated as the geometric mean of those indices.



Prior to 2010, the knowledge dimension in HDI was proxied by the adult literacy rate and school enrolment ratio, while the decent standard of living was measured by GDP per capita. Since 2010, the arithmetic average of the indices has been replaced by the geometric mean to calculate the HDI value.

Source: Based on Human Development Reports published by UNDP.

<sup>4</sup> Graduation from the group of least developed countries requires a country to meet development thresholds under at least two of the three pre-defined criteria of per capita income, human asset index and economic vulnerability index in two consecutive United Nations triennial reviews. After the first successful review in 2018, in the second consecutive triennial review in 2021 as well, Bangladesh met all three graduation criteria and is set to graduate from the group of LDCs in 2026. Countries' inclusion in and graduation from the LDC group are assessed at triennial reviews conducted by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

<sup>5</sup> For the period 1990-2018 China registered the largest rise in the HDI index followed by Mozambique, Turkey and Bangladesh.

<sup>6</sup> The HDI score lies in between 0 and 1 with countries grouped into four categories. A HDI score below 0.550 indicates low human development; a score between 0.550 and 0.699 represents a medium level of human development; a score between 0.700 and 0.799 implies a high-level human development; and, finally, a HDI score from 0.800 and above indicates a very high level of human development.

up seven notches to 133<sup>rd</sup> among 189 countries for which HDI scores were constructed in 2019. It is worth noting that, in 1990, Pakistan had a higher HDI score than that of Bangladesh. However, by 2019, Bangladesh had moved far ahead of Pakistan. As shown in figure 1.2, over the past three decades, Bangladesh has also been able to significantly close the gap in the HDI score with India.

As part of the HDI scoring exercise, sub-indices for life expectancy, education and GNI are constructed separately and Bangladesh's improvement in each

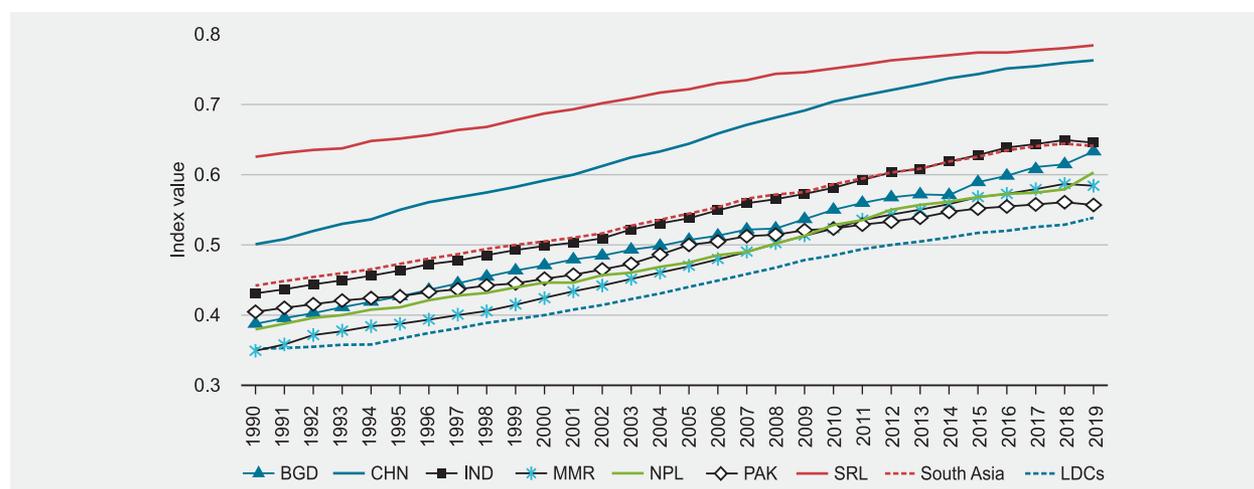
of the three components are shown in figure 1.3. A decomposition analysis of the growth in the overall HDI score during 1990–2019 reveals the three sub-indices' largely comparable contribution (figure 1.4). Educational attainment contributes the most (35.5 per cent), closely followed by life expectancy (32.9 per cent) while the contribution of GNI is estimated at 31.6 per cent. Amongst others, for India and Pakistan as well, education contributes most to their respective overall HDI growth, while for China, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, GNI is the main contributing factor.

**Table 1.1: Comparison of Bangladesh's performance under HDI components with comparator countries (2019)**

Country	HDI Value	HDI rank	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2017 PPP US\$)
Bangladesh	0.632	133	72.6	11.6	6.2	4,976
Nepal	0.602	142	70.8	12.8	5.0	3,457
Pakistan	0.557	154	67.3	8.3	5.2	5,005
Bhutan	0.654	129	71.8	13.0	4.1	10,746
India	0.645	131	69.7	12.2	6.5	6,681
Sri Lanka	0.782	72	77.0	14.1	10.6	12,707
Maldives	0.740	95	78.9	12.2	7.0	17,417
Myanmar	0.583	147	67.1	10.7	5.0	4,961
South Asia	0.641	-	69.9	11.7	6.5	6,531
LDCs	0.538	-	65.3	9.9	4.9	2,935

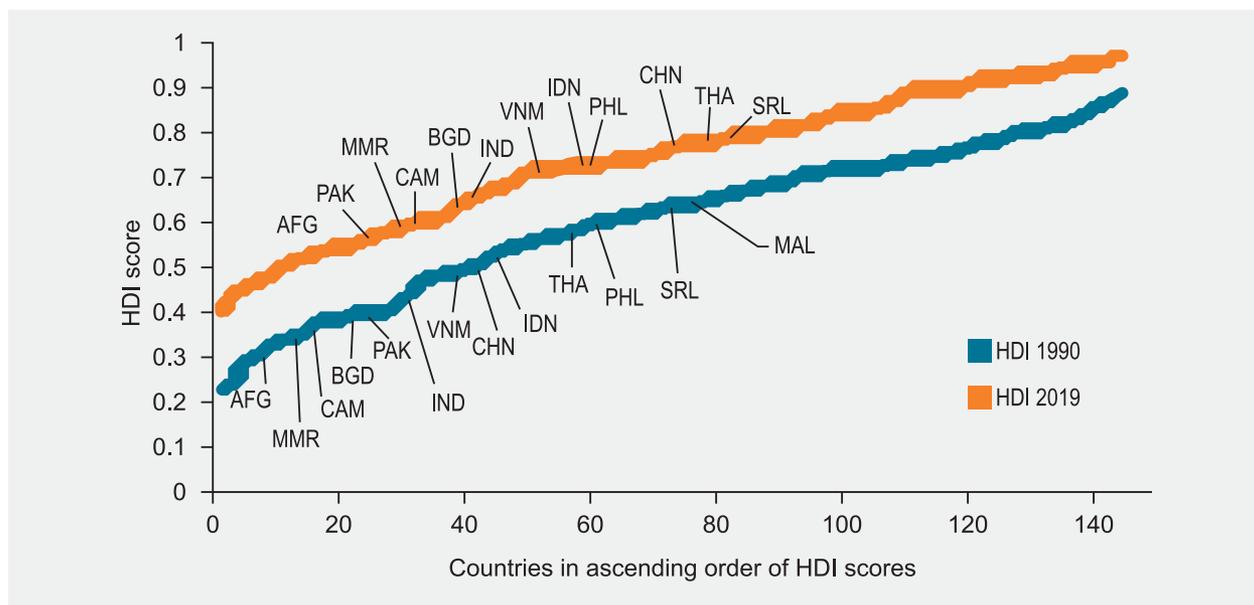
Source: Based on United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) data.

**Figure 1.1: Trend in the Human Development Index (HDI) for selected countries and country groups, 1990-2019**



Source: Based on UNDP data.

**Figure 1.2: HDI values: 1990 and 2019**



Note: countries are indicated as AFG – Afghanistan, BGD – Bangladesh, CAM – Cambodia, CHN – China, IND – India, IDN – Indonesia, MAL – Malaysia, MMR – Myanmar, PAK – Pakistan, PHL – Philippines, SRL – Sri Lanka, THA – Thailand, and VNM – Vietnam.

Source: Based on UNDP data.

**Box 1.3: The role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Bangladesh's socio-economic development**

Along with government policies and programmes, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are widely acknowledged to have played a pivotal role in promoting socio-economic development in Bangladesh. Many important NGO activities were initiated in the early 1970s following the liberation war with the objective of providing relief and rehabilitation services to war-devastated people.<sup>7</sup> Over the next decades, the NGOs would significantly expand their operation by reorienting the focus from rehabilitation to various economic and social developmental services. With this changing role, there would be a proliferation in the number of NGOs spreading all over the country.

NGOs contributed significantly in implementing various social mobilisation campaigns to render benefits especially to the marginalised, vulnerable, and hard-to-reach people. They were also involved in scaling up different interventions. For instance, the significant reduction in under-five mortality in Bangladesh was largely due to the support of NGOs in speeding up of the use of low-cost solutions i.e. oral saline for diarrhoea treatment as well as to increase awareness for immunisation, contraceptive use, girls' schooling, etc. in dealing with various health risks and social development backwardness.<sup>8</sup> Awareness-raising initiatives about the need for family planning and primary healthcare and offering family planning services by the NGOs contributed to the reduction in the total fertility rate. They also provide healthcare services to tackle such diseases as tuberculosis and malaria.<sup>9</sup> In addition, of course, they are mostly known for their micro-credit programmes that, according to many studies, helped alleviate poverty and advance women empowerment. The NGOs have been involved in imparting education and training support including through non-formal primary education and satellite schools.<sup>10 11</sup> In agricultural research and extension, livestock and fisheries sectoral development, and social forestry programmes, amongst others, the NGOs have contributed enormously.<sup>12</sup>

A productive collaboration between the government and NGOs has been an important feature of Bangladesh's socio-economic progress. On many occasions, the government has involved the NGOs directly to realise the broad-based development goals. The government also provided an enabling and regulatory environment for the NGOs to deliver their services. There are numerous examples of GO-NGO collaboration in the areas of tackling extreme poverty, malnutrition, promoting educational attainment, advancing social awareness on various issues, addressing environmental concerns, etc.<sup>13</sup>

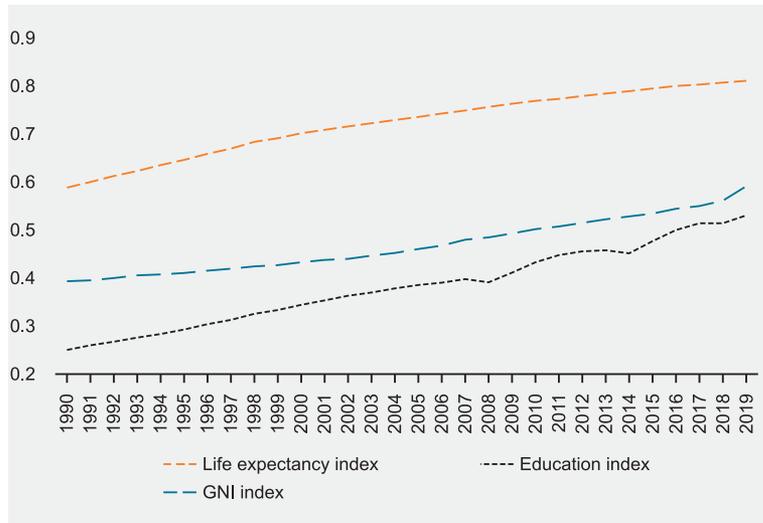
Source: Author's compilation from various sources.

*Progress in poverty reduction*

Going beyond the specific indices used for constructing the HDI, performance of wide-ranging socio-economic indicators, particularly those associated with poverty, health, and education, is also critical in better appreciating the state of human development. Bangladesh's robust economic growth (box 1.1) over the past three decades has been accompanied by rapidly declining poverty incidence. The headcount ratio (HCR), measured as the proportion of the population living

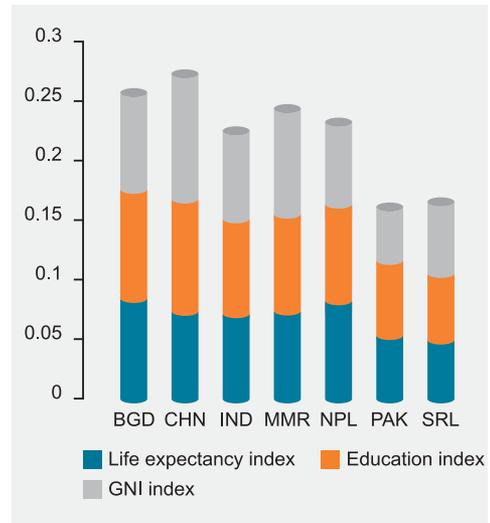
below the nationally defined poverty line income, declined from 56.6 per cent in the early 1990s to 20.5 per cent in 2018-19 (figure 1.5) – a reduction of 36.1 percentage points. During the same time, the extreme poverty declined from 42.7 per cent to 10.5 per cent. Nevertheless, poverty reduction remains a major task. Since then, the COVID-19 global pandemic has also caused widespread health and economic disruptions, leading to loss of income and livelihood opportunities for many.

**Figure 1.3: Performance of difference sub-index in Bangladesh**



Source: Based on UNDP data.

**Figure 1.4: Contribution of three sub-indices in the overall HDI progress during 1990-2019**



Source: Analysis based on UNDP data.

<sup>7</sup> Zohir 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Zohir 2004, and Mahmud et al. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Recent evidence seems to suggest that BRAC has managed to diagnose and treat 162,219 and 19,145 cases of tuberculosis (TB) and malaria respectively covering about 90 per cent of the hard-to-region areas (Chowdhury et al., 2020).

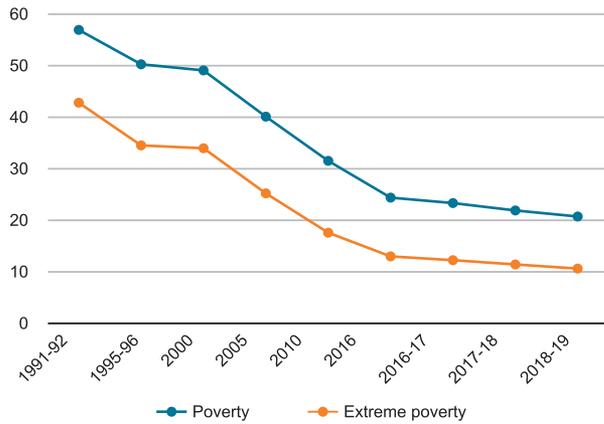
<sup>10</sup> Under the PKSF's ENRICH (Enhancing Resources and Increasing Capacities of the Poor Households towards Elimination of their Poverty) project, about 0.18 million students are provided with primary education through 6,606 Education Assistance Centers in 202 unions leading to a significant drop in primary school drop-out (PKSF 2019).

<sup>11</sup> ADB 2016, and Islam 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Chowdhury 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Chowdhury et al. 2020.

**Figure 1.5: Poverty incidence in Bangladesh (% of population below the moderate and extreme poverty lines)**

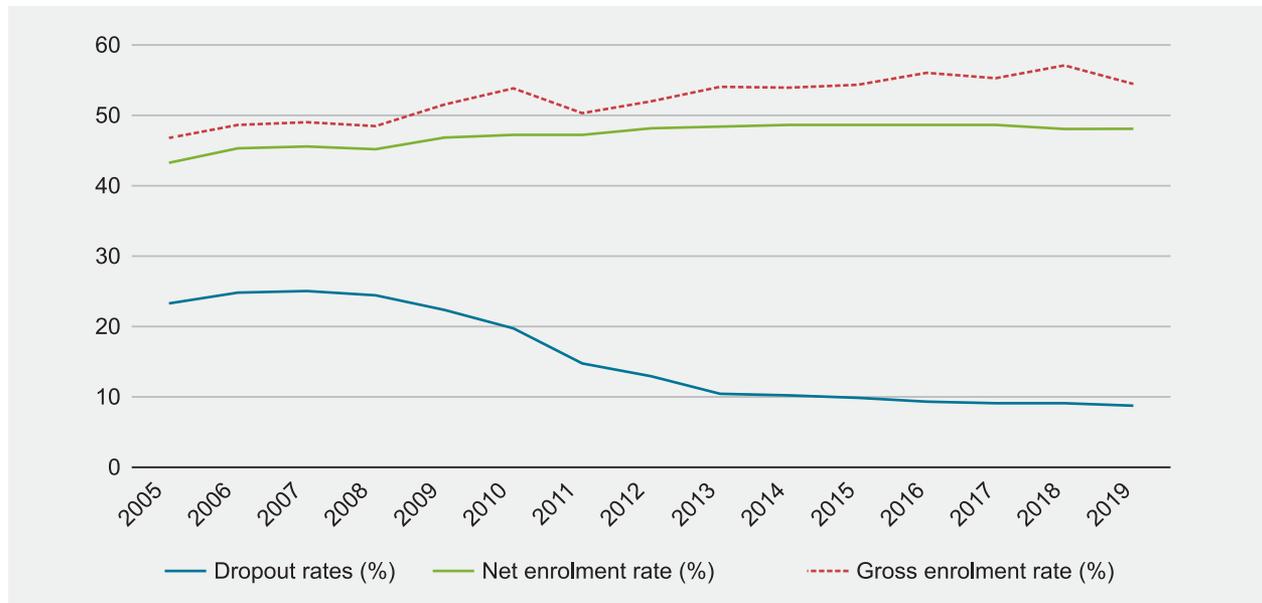


Note: Poverty rates in 2017, 2018 and 2019 are based on BBS estimates.  
 Source: Based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data.

*Improvement in education*

Ensuring access to education, especially at the primary level, has been one of the key achievements of Bangladesh over the past three decades or so. The net enrolment rate in primary education increased from 75 per cent in 1990, to 97 per cent in 2019, and the secondary enrolment rose to 66 per cent up from less than 20 per cent. Remarkable progress has been made in female secondary education enrolment where Bangladesh outperforms its neighbours including India, Myanmar, and Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> Bangladesh achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary enrolment as the gender parity index stood above one, meaning that girls are enrolling in a higher proportion than boys. Reducing dropout rate in primary education from around 50 per cent in 2005 to below 18 per cent in 2019 also constitute a tremendous feat (figure 1.6).

**Figure 1.6: Gross enrolment, net enrolment and dropout rate in primary education**



Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

<sup>14</sup> Asadullah et al. 2014.

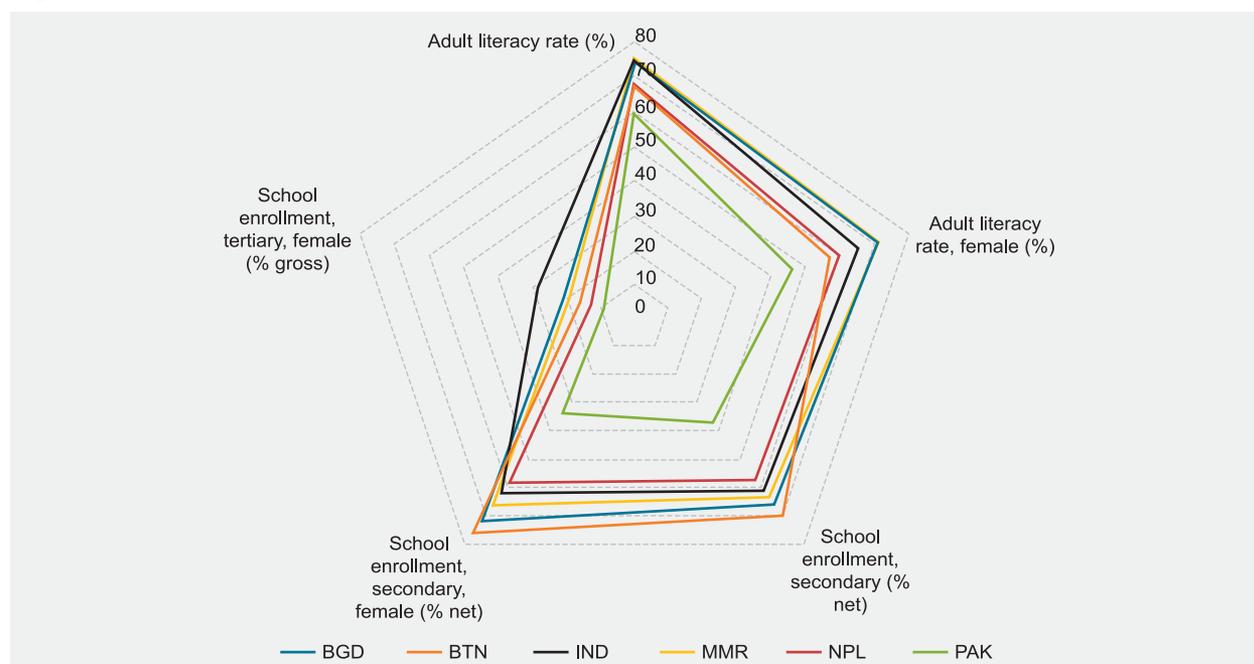
Bangladesh has fared better than India, Pakistan, and Nepal in attaining female literacy rate (figure 1.7). Overall, the adult literacy rate has increased to 74 per cent in 2018 from just 35 per cent in 1990. Government efforts to improve access including the policy of free and compulsory primary education for all (later extended to grade 8 in 2016), primary and secondary education stipend programmes, free book distribution, a huge infrastructure development including safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, and measures for inclusive education have contributed to improved educational outcomes. ICTs have been identified as a key enabler to address the quality component of the education equation. Attractive e-learning environments in schools, and distance learning through TV, radio, mobile phones and internet has significantly increased the retention.

#### Progress in health

Bangladesh has also had notable achievements in improving various health outcome indicators. This includes reducing maternal, infant, and under-5

mortality rates, improved child nutritional outcomes, and increased vaccination coverage – all contributing to higher life expectancy. Bangladesh outperformed India and Pakistan in reducing the infant mortality rate, which dropped from as high as 99.6 per 1,000 live births in 1990, to just 21 per 1,000 live births in 2019 (figures 1.8 and 1.9). During the same time, the maternal mortality rate – measured as the number of women who died from any cause related to pregnancy or childbirth – declined to 165 per 100,000 live births, down from 594 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>15</sup> Factors such as antenatal care visits, delivery at facility centres, presence of skilled birth attendance, post-natal care for mothers and fulfilment of the unmet needs for family planning, etc. have contributed to lowering the mortality rate.<sup>16</sup> Bangladesh also fared better than India, Myanmar, and Pakistan in child immunization. The diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT) immunization rate increased to cover 98 per cent of children aged 12-23 months in 2019, from less than 70 per cent of the 1990s (figure 1.9).

**Figure 1.7: Educational outcomes for selected countries**



Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), World Bank.

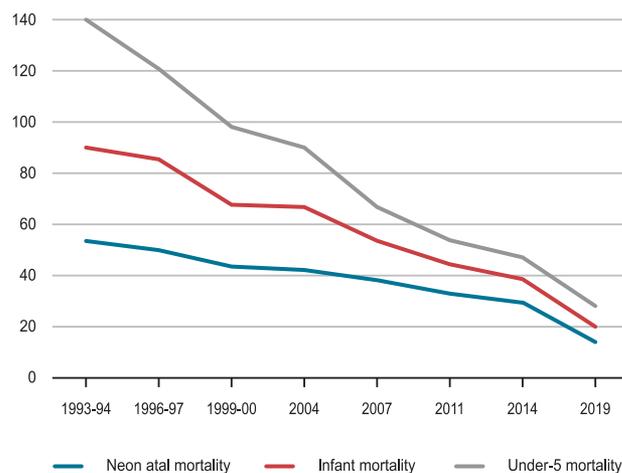
<sup>15</sup> BBS 2018a.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF 2019.

Bangladesh's success in reducing the total fertility rate (TFR) has been quite extraordinary: in 2017-18, it fell to 2.04 births per woman of reproductive health (age 15-49 years) from 4.5 births in 1990 (figure 1.10). This reflects a broader outcome of socio-economic development. Women's education and employment, reduced child mortality rate, an effective state-sponsored family planning

programme, supportive social campaign, etc., contributed to the falling fertility rate.<sup>17</sup> Data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey show a significant rise in the use of contraception, which increased to 62 per cent in 2017-18 from just above 30 per cent in the 1990s. The number of births attended by skilled personnel increased from less than 10 per cent in the 1990s to 53 per cent in 2017-18.<sup>18</sup>

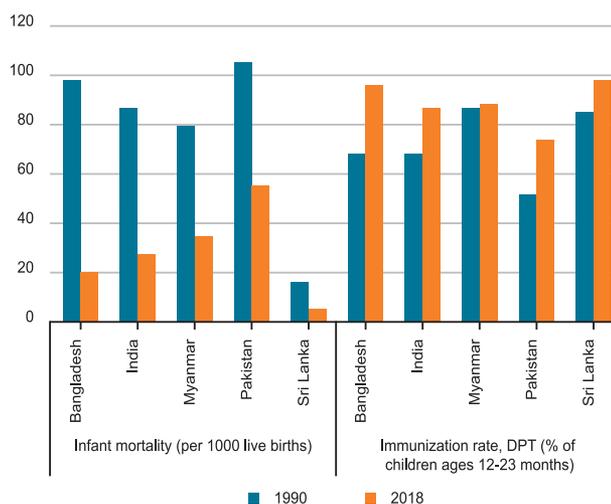
**Figure 1.8: Child mortality rates (death per 1000 live birth)**



Note: Data on 2019 are taken from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

Source: World Development Indicator (WDI).

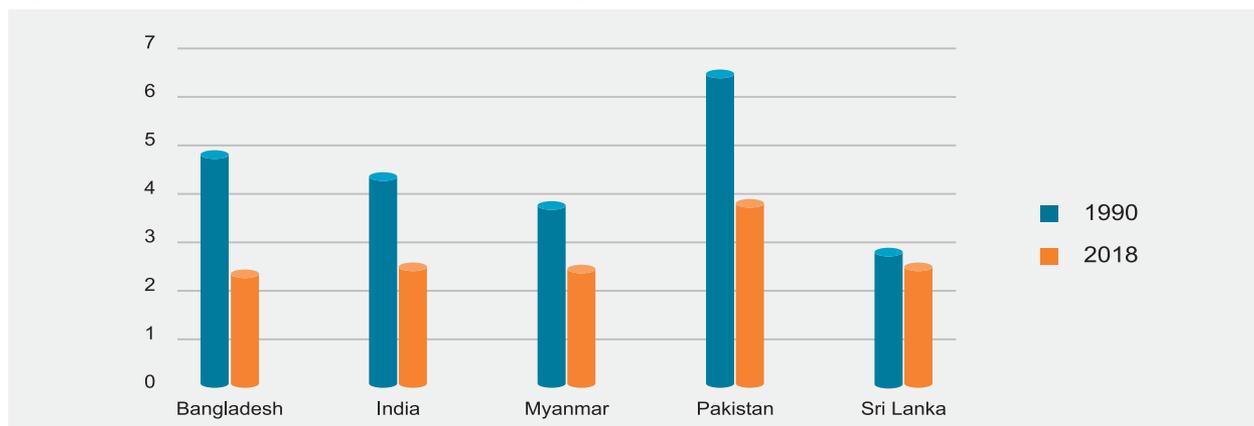
**Figure 1.9: Infant mortality rate and Immunization rate: Bangladesh and selected neighbours**



Note: For Bangladesh, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019) data are considered.

Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019).

**Figure 1.10: Fertility rate (births per woman age 15-49 years)**



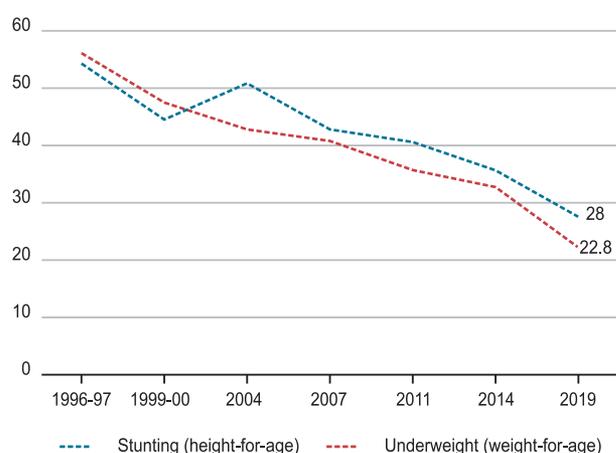
Source: World Development Indicator (WDI).

<sup>17</sup> Centre for Global Development (n.d.). CASE 13: Reducing fertility in Bangladesh. Retrieved from: [https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/archive/doc/millions/MS\\_case\\_13.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/archive/doc/millions/MS_case_13.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) and ICF International, 2019.

Over the years, child nutritional outcomes have improved substantially. The prevalence of stunting in children declined from 55 per cent to 28 per cent during 1996-2019 (figure 1.11). During the same time, the incidence of underweight children also dropped from 56 per cent to 22.6 per cent. Bangladesh's success in child immunization, nutritional outcomes, maternal mortality etc. collectively helped the country attain higher life expectancy, contributing to the improvement in the HDI index.

**Figure 1.11: Child malnutrition in Bangladesh (% of children under 5 years)**



Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019).

The Government has undertaken different strategies to improve health sector outcomes. The Eighth Five Year plan also emphasizes to increase the public health spending to 2 per cent of GDP by 2025. The main goal is to ensure that all citizens enjoy health and well-being by expanding access to quality and equitable health care in a healthy

environment. The major health policy includes expanding public health clinic and improving health care service delivery, strengthening health sector governance, improving health information system, improving quantity and quality of health professionals. In line with SDGs, the government is committed to achieve Universal Health Care by 2030. The Eighth Five-Year Plan puts emphasis on the continuation of efforts to strengthen core systems to support overall improvement in service efficiency, strengthening the regulatory functions and stewardship role for ensuring universal health coverage, increasing access to and utilization of quality services by adopting more inclusive approach, adopting new technologies to strengthen surveillance, data quality and information systems.

### Human development achievements and disparities

Bangladesh has made significant overall strides in human development. However, in terms of socio-economic groups, gender, regions – rural, urban, there are disparities. It is, therefore, important to look at such disparities through the lens of composite human development indices other than HDI.

#### *The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI)*

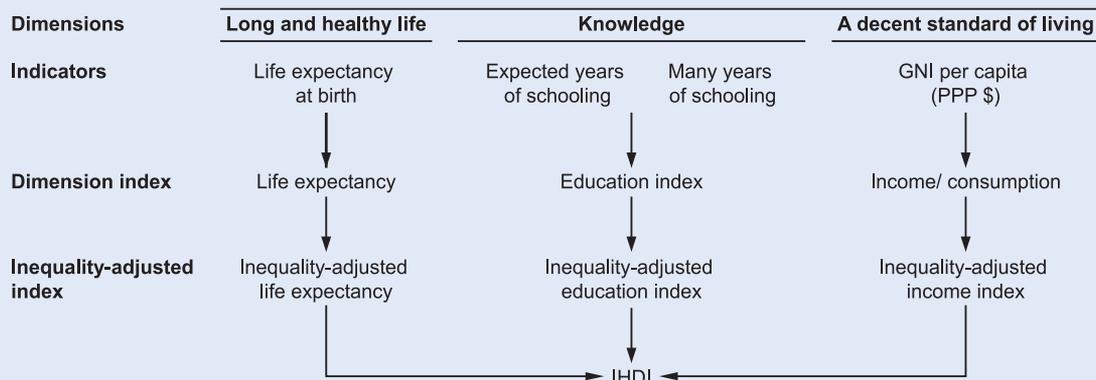
Going beyond the average trend, it is important to consider distributional aspects in assessing the progress made. Attempts have been made to measure a country's level of human development having accounted for inequality. The inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) is thus calculated allowing for inequality in the three dimensions of the HDI (viz. life expectancy, education and income). This is done by discounting each HDI dimension's average value by the level of inequality (box 1.4).

#### **Box 1.4: Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI)**

The IHDI accounts for inequality in each component of HDI – health, education, and income. It looks beyond average achievements of a country in human development to show how these achievements are distributed among its population. It is basically the HDI score discounted for inequality. The IHDI is computed as the geometric mean of inequality-adjusted dimensional indices. In the absence of inequality, the IHDI equals the HDI. However, IHDI can be less than HDI depending on the extent of inequality. The relative difference between the HDI and the IHDI can be expressed as loss in human development due to inequality. The loss of human development increases with the rise in inequality within a country. The coefficient of human inequality is the direct measure of inequality which is an unweighted average of inequalities in three dimensions. The IHDI was first introduced in the 2010 Human

Development Report. It enables policymakers to undertake evidence-based policies to combat inequalities even at the dimension level to accelerate the process of human development.

*Construction of IHDI from the Human Development Index*



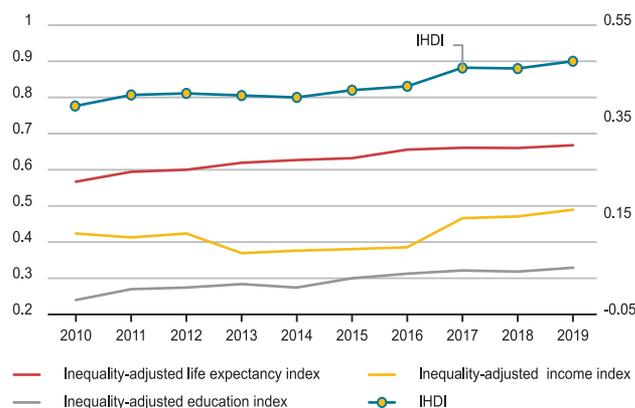
Source: Based on Human Development Reports published by UNDP.

Inequality subdues the gains in human development. Bangladesh's overall HDI score of 0.632 (in 2019) declined to 0.478 when discounted for inequality, implying a loss of 24.4 per cent in human development due to inequality. During 2010-19, the IHDI score of Bangladesh increased from 0.387 to 0.478 (figure 1.12) – implying that inequality in human development declined during the reference period.<sup>19</sup> For Bangladesh, the disparity in income is reflected in the inequality-adjusted income index, which is shown to have deteriorated considerably during 2013-2016

(figure 1.13), contributing to an absolute decline in inequality-adjusted HDI.

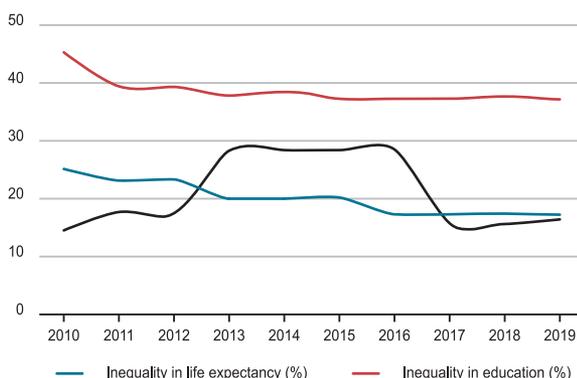
The coefficient of human inequality in Bangladesh – a direct measure of inequality calculated as an unweighted average of inequalities in three dimensions, remained at 23.7 per cent.<sup>20</sup> Figures 1.14 and 1.15 show that most global economies have been able to reduce HDI inequality between 2010 and 2019. Bangladesh was amongst the top 20 performers in terms of reducing inequality in human development.

**Figure 1.12: Inequality-adjusted indices in Bangladesh**



Source: Analysis based on UNDP data.

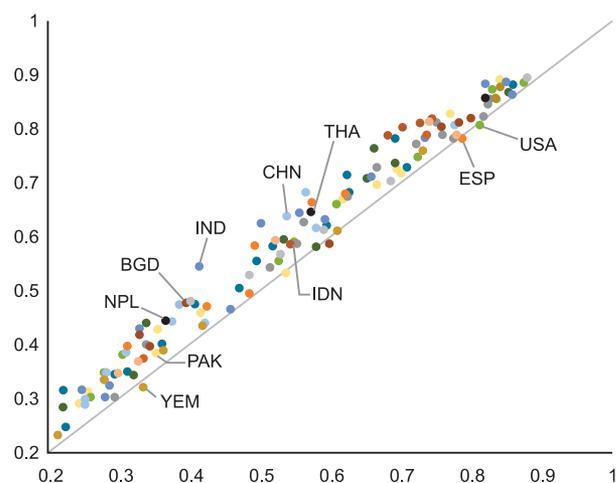
**Figure 1.13: Inequality in different components of HDI in Bangladesh (%)**



<sup>19</sup> This decline in inequality is due to the measures considered with respect to the three specific dimensions of the HDI index alone.

<sup>20</sup> The coefficient of human inequality is an unweighted average of inequalities in health, education and income. It is calculated as: Coefficient of human inequality = (A Health + A Education + A Income) / 3.

**Figure 1.14: A comparative assessment of IHDI values between 2010 and 2019**



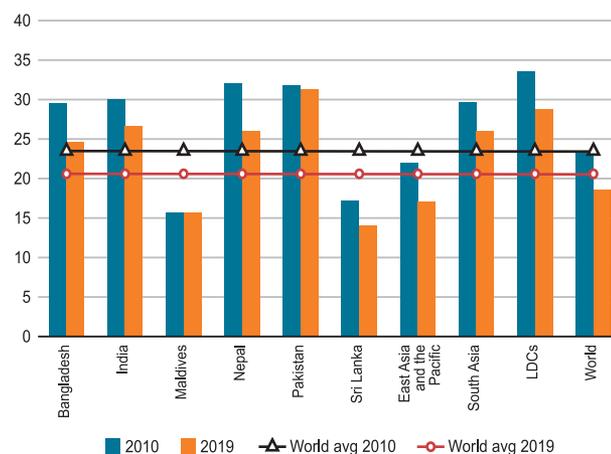
Note: A country's location above the 45-degree line indicates reduced HDI inequality between 2010 and 2019.

Source: Analysis using data from UNDP.

### Gender inequality and human development

Gender disparities are among the most persistent forms of inequality across all countries and a major barrier to human development.<sup>21</sup> Over the past few decades, commendable progress has been made in narrowing down gender-based inequality especially in terms of access to education and health outcomes. In Bangladesh, gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary education enrolment, however, drop-out rates remain higher for girls than boys. Bangladesh has achieved a higher female literacy rate (71.2 per cent) vis-a-vis other neighbours such as India (65.8 per cent), Nepal (59.7 per cent), and Pakistan (46.5 per cent).

**Figure 1.15: Overall loss in HDI due to inequality (%)**



Source: Based on UNDP data.

However, within Bangladesh, the literacy rate for women remains lower than their male counterpart (76.7 per cent).<sup>22</sup> The mean years of schooling for female is 5.7 years, which is also lower than that of the male (6.9 years). However, the expected years of schooling for female is on the rise and has actually exceeded the same for the male (table 1.2). There remains, some gender gaps in tertiary education as female enrolment (from those who graduate from the secondary level) is 17 per cent which is lower than the corresponding rate for male (24 per cent). The government has undertaken several policies and programmes to reduce gender-based disparities in education.

**Table 1.2: Gender disparity under different indicators in Bangladesh**

Indicators	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Labour force participation rate (% of ages 15 and older), female	24.8	26.5	27.8	29.9	32.4	36.3
Labour force participation rate (% of ages 15 and older), male	87.6	86.5	85.5	83.2	80.4	81.4
Share of employment in non-agricultural sector, female (% of total employment in non-agricultural sector)	9.6	13.7	14	16.9	17.7	20.7
Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	9.1	9.1	14.8	18.6	20.0	20.6

<sup>21</sup> UNDP 2019.

<sup>22</sup> This information is taken from the World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI).

Female share of employment in senior and middle management (%)	-	-	-	10.0	-	11.5*
Mean years of schooling, male (years)	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.5	6.5	6.9
Mean years of schooling, female (years)	2.5	3.5	3.8	4.5	5.1	5.7
Expected years of schooling, male (years)	7.2	7.7	8.3	9.1	10.0	11.2
Expected years of schooling, female (years)	6.0	7.2	8.5	9.4	10.6	12.0
Life expectancy at birth, male (years)	61.8	65.0	66.9	68.7	70.0	70.9
Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	62.3	66.0	68.7	71.3	73.3	74.6
Estimated GNI per capita, female (2017 PPP\$)	533	650	813	1,223	1,880	2,873
Estimated GNI per capita, male (2017 PPP\$)	2,471	2,790	3,291	4,174	4,956	7,031
HDI, female	0.338	0.391	0.433	0.488	0.544	0.596
HDI, male	0.482	0.516	0.544	0.578	0.616	0.660

Note: 1. \*Indicates data for the year 2017.

2. The GNI per capita of male and female are estimated, by Human Development Report Office of UNDP, based on female and male shares of the economically active population, the ratio of the female to male wage in all sectors, and GNI per capita in 2017 purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, and female and male shares of population. See technical note for HDR 2020 at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020_technical_notes.pdf)

Source: Based on UNDP data.

Evidence from the recent MICS data seems to suggest that Bangladesh has, however, made remarkable progress in eliminating gender-based disparities in child nutritional outcomes and child mortality. Bangladesh's success in child immunization, nutritional outcomes, maternal mortality etc. collectively helped the country attain higher life expectancy, contributing to the improvement in the HDI index.

Gender inequality in employment persists in the labour market of Bangladesh. According to the Labour Force Survey 2016-17, only 36 per cent women participate in the labour market in comparison to 81 per cent for male. The proportion of female engaged as unpaid family workers has declined over the past years but remains at a high level of 29.1 per cent against that of just 4.2 per cent for male. Estimates by the UNDP shows that the female share of employment in senior and middle management was just 11.5 per cent in 2017. The share of seats in the parliament held by women stood at 20.6 per cent in 2019 – up from less than 10 per cent of the 1990s.

Despite widespread disparity, it has been reported in the Global Wage Report 2018/19, prepared by the International Labour Organization (ILO), that the gender wage gap in Bangladesh is the lowest in the world – 2.2 per cent (meaning that men earn on average 2.2 per cent more than women) against the world average of 21.2 per cent.<sup>23</sup> According to the latest labour force survey data, the average monthly wage for male was 10 per cent higher than female (BDT 13,583 for male and BDT 12,254 for female). Women's low participation in economic activities, and relatively high engagement in lowly paid employment attributed to low per capita GNI.

#### *The Gender-Development Index (GDI)*

Using all gender disparity aspects in developing an aggregate quantifiable indicator is far from straightforward. However, the UNDP as part of its work on the Human Development Report has suggested a gender development index (GDI) as a measure of gender-based inequality in human development. It measures gender inequalities in the three dimensions of the HDI (viz. life expectancy, education and income) (box 1.5).

<sup>23</sup> Estimated as factor-weighted gender pay gaps using monthly earnings.

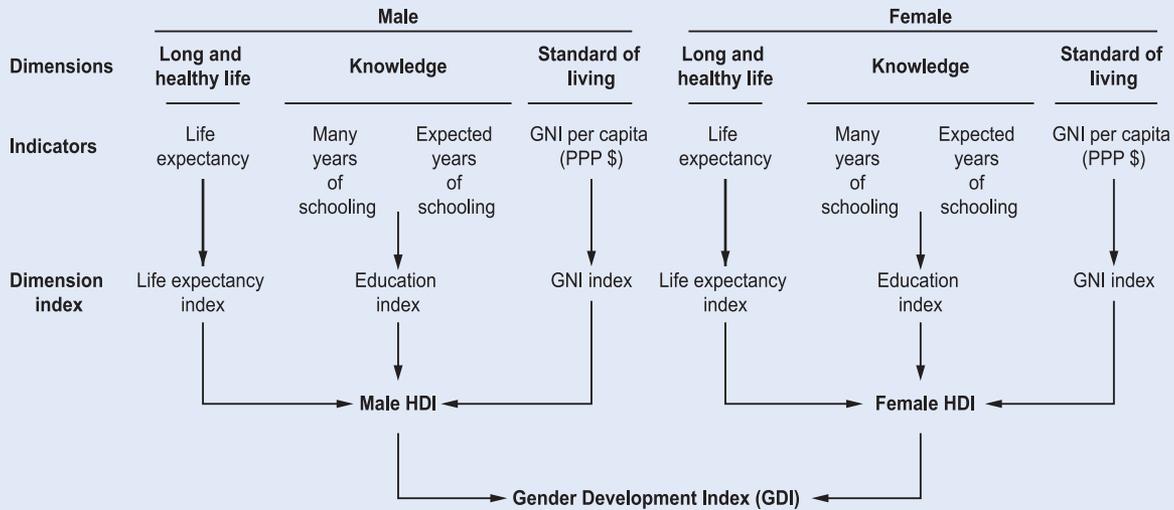
In 2019, the female HDI value for Bangladesh was 0.596 in comparison with the male counterpart value of 0.660 (figure 1.16). The male-female gap in HDI has thus fallen from about 15 percentage points in 1995 to about 7 percentage points in 2019. The overall GDI score for 2019 was 0.904,

placing Bangladesh above India, and Pakistan (figure 1.17). Both Bangladesh and India started from the same GDI score of 0.702 in 1995, but since then Bangladesh has made more impressive progress in improving gender equality.

**Box 1.5: The Gender Development Index (GDI)**

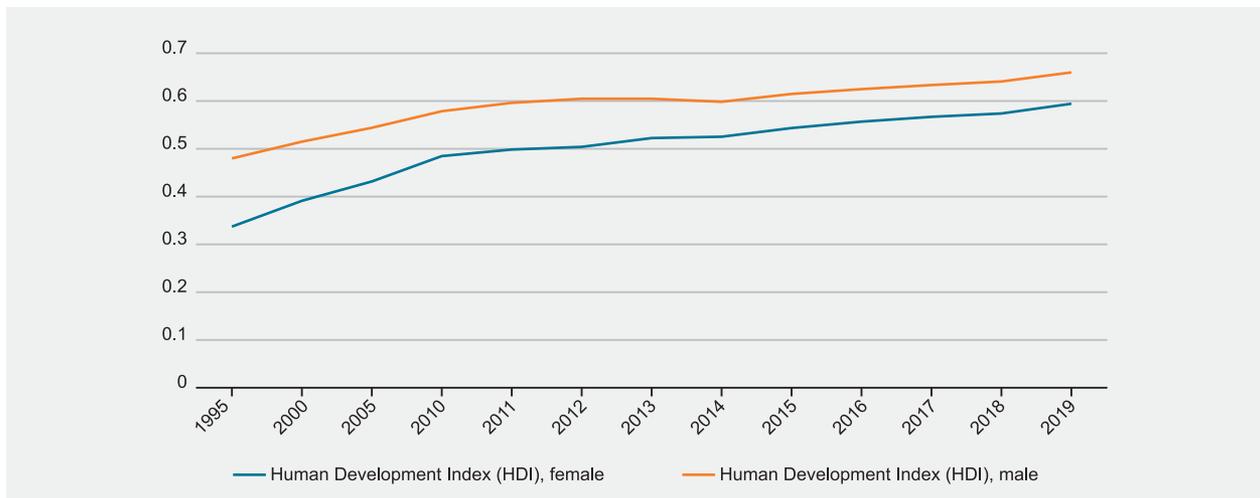
The GDI measures gender gaps in human development achievements by accounting for disparities between women and men in three basic dimensions of human development—health, knowledge and living standards using the same component indicators as in the HDI. The GDI is the ratio of the HDIs calculated separately for females and males using the same methodology as in the HDI. It is a direct measure of gender gap showing the female HDI as a percentage of the male HDI. Measuring GDI requires the calculation of HDI separately for male and female. The GDI is then computed as the ratio of female HDI to male HDI. The value of GDI close to one implies high gender equality in human development.

**Construction of Gender Development Index (GDI)**



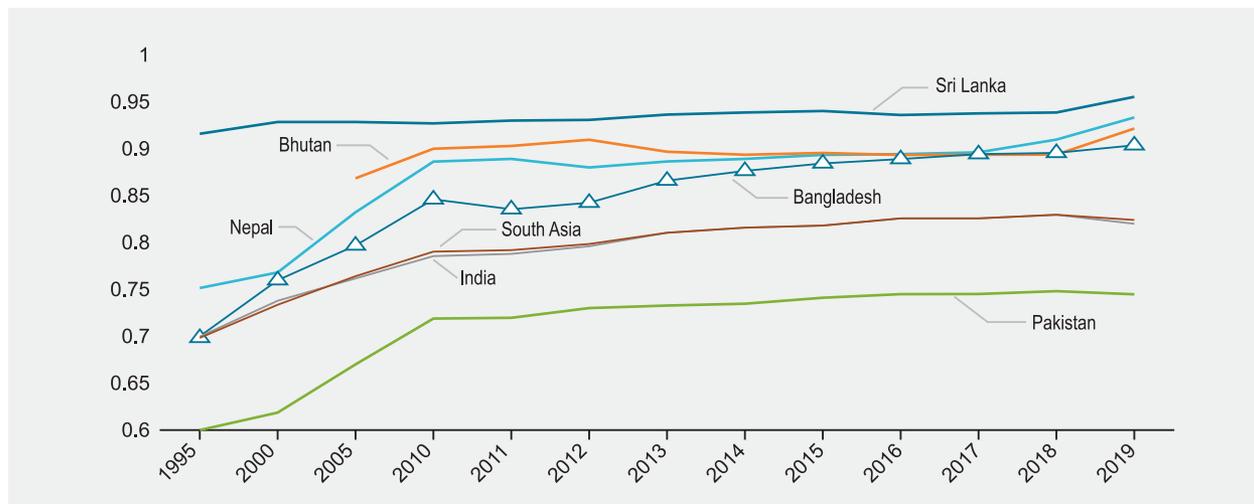
Source: Based on Human Development Reports published by UNDP.

**Figure 1.16: Human Development Index (HDI) disaggregated by male and female HDIs**



Source: Based on UNDP data.

**Figure 1.17: Gender development index for selected countries**



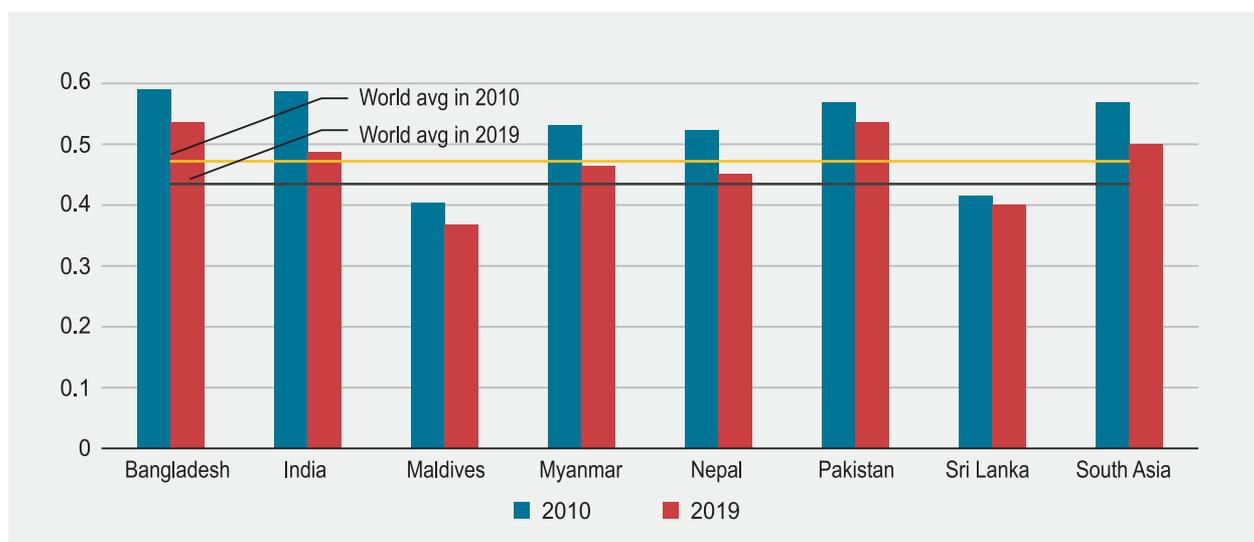
Source: Based on UNDP data.

*The Gender Inequality Index*

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures gender-based inequalities in three dimensions, namely reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity (box 1.6). A low GII score implies low inequality between women and men. The GII score of Bangladesh in 2019 was 0.537 (figure 1.18). Bangladesh has a GDI score higher than India, but India has a higher GII score. Like most other

developing countries, the GII score for Bangladesh declined from 0.588 in 2010 to 0.537 in 2019. This is attributed to the achievement in reducing gender-based inequality over the past decade. However, Bangladesh is persistently working to reduce the disparities between male and female and to meet the goal 5 of SDGs (i.e., to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

**Figure 1.18: Gender inequality index (GII) for selected countries**

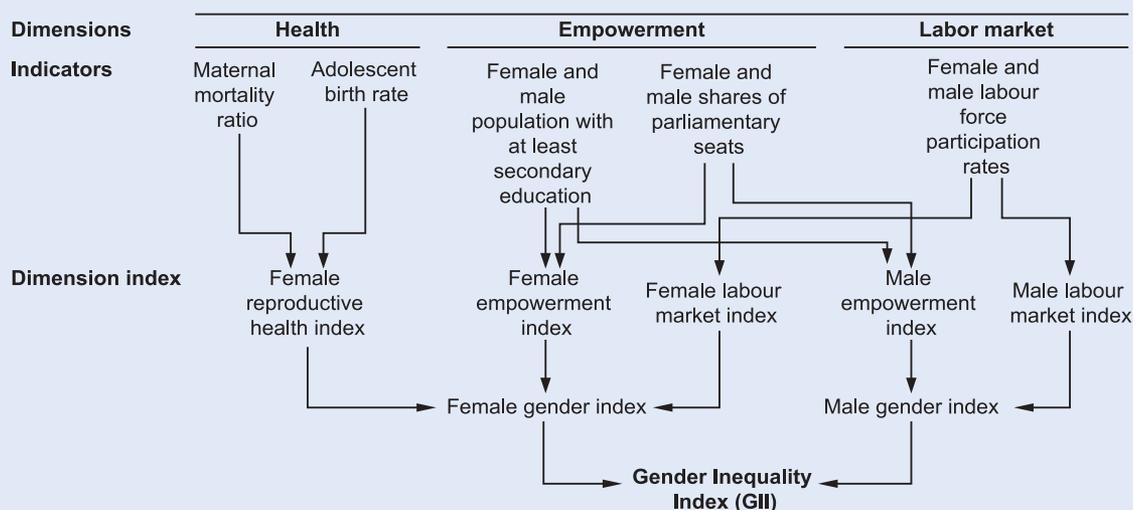


Source: Based on UNDP data.

### Box 1.6: The Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The Gender Inequality Index (GII), introduced in 2010 as part of the Human Development Report, measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development—reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older (Figure 1.24). The GII is built on the same framework as the IHDI—to better expose differences in the distribution of achievements between women and men. It measures the human development costs of gender inequality. Thus, the higher the GII value the more disparities between females and males and the more loss to human development. The value of GII ranges from 0 to 1 where 0 means absence of inequality along the gender line and 1 suggests extreme inequality from all dimensions.

**Gender Inequality Index (GII) and its components**



Source: Based on Human Development Reports published by UNDP.

### Multidimensional poverty

The concept of human development is quite broad and has many different dimensions. There is no single measure that can adequately capture it and thus one needs to look at different indicators. In recent times, what has come to be known as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is being widely used to support the assessment of human development. By identifying multiple deprivations at the household and individual level in health, education, and standard of living, MPI offers insightful perspectives to complement the traditional monetary poverty measures (box 1.7). It

assesses the incidence and intensity of poverty at the individual level with the poor people being those who are multiply deprived, and the extent of their poverty being measured by the extent of their deprivations.<sup>24</sup>

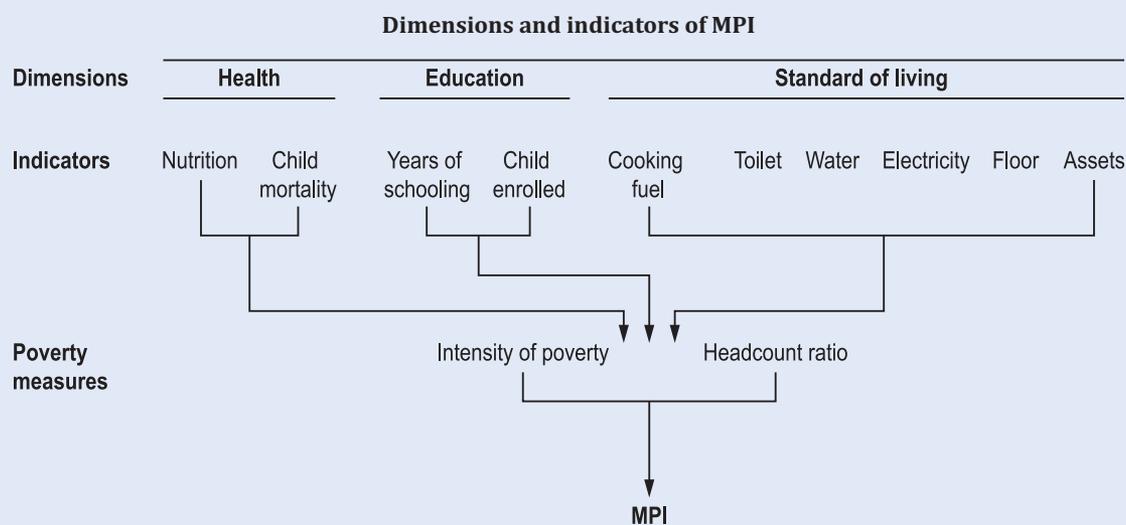
#### *Trends in multidimensional poverty reduction in Bangladesh*

Along with an impressive performance in reducing headcount poverty, Bangladesh over the years has also experienced a substantial reduction in multidimensional poverty. The poverty incidence as measured by multidimensional headcount

<sup>24</sup> The incidence of poverty represents the proportion of population who are multidimensionally poor while the intensity of poverty shows the proportion of indicators in which the multidimensionally poor people are, on average, deprived. The value of MPI is measured as incidence of poverty multiplied by intensity of poverty. See, Alkire and Santos 2014.

### Box 1.7: Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and its measure

Since 2010, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) started reporting the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in addition to HDI to shed light on non-income related multiple deprivations. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) of the University of Oxford and Human Development Report Office of the UNDP jointly developed the MPI. It is an internationally comparable measure of acute poverty that captures the multiple deprivations poor people experience with respect to health, education and living standards.<sup>25</sup> It incorporates 10 indicators covering three dimensions of human development namely health, education and standard of living. Each dimension is provided an equal weight (33.3 per cent).<sup>26</sup> Finally, a person can be defined as multidimensionally poor if the person is deprived in one third (33.3 per cent) or more weighted indicators. The intensity of multidimensionally poor people is measured by the average number of weighted deprivations they experience. The MPI is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty by the intensity of poverty across the poor. The MPI ranges from 0 to 1, and higher values imply higher poverty.<sup>27</sup> The measurement of MPI uses micro data from nationally representative household surveys, for example, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) provided by UNICEF. Moreover, it requires that the data, unlike in HDI, for all the indicators must come from the same survey. The major advantages of MPI are: (i) it incorporates more than one indicator under each broad dimension to display the poverty situation; (ii) it can be used to complement income-based poverty measures, which can also be available from the same survey; and (iii) it reflects both the incidence of multidimensional deprivation (a headcount of those in multidimensional poverty) and its intensity (the average deprivation score experienced by poor people).



Source: Based on Human Development Reports published by UNPD.

ratio decreased by 14 percentage points to about 24 per cent in 2019 from as high as 37.6 per cent in 2014 (figure 1.19).<sup>28</sup> However, the intensity of poverty remains high at 42.5 per cent (in 2019). This implies that the multidimensionally poor people were, on average, deprived in 42.5 per cent of the weighted indicators in 2019. A large proportion of multidimensionally poor people are deprived in many of the MPI indicators. Reduction

in both the incidence and intensity of poverty leads to a decline in MPI value from 0.175 in 2014 to 0.104 in 2019 (figure 1.19). A comparison with South Asian countries suggests that Bangladesh ranks third (after the Maldives and Sri Lanka) in terms of the value of MPI and its partial indices – the incidence of poverty and the intensity of poverty (figure 1.20).

<sup>25</sup> Alkire and Jahan 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Each of two indicators under both health and education dimension is provided with 16.67 per cent weight while the same for the each of six indicators under the standard of living dimension is 5.56 per cent.

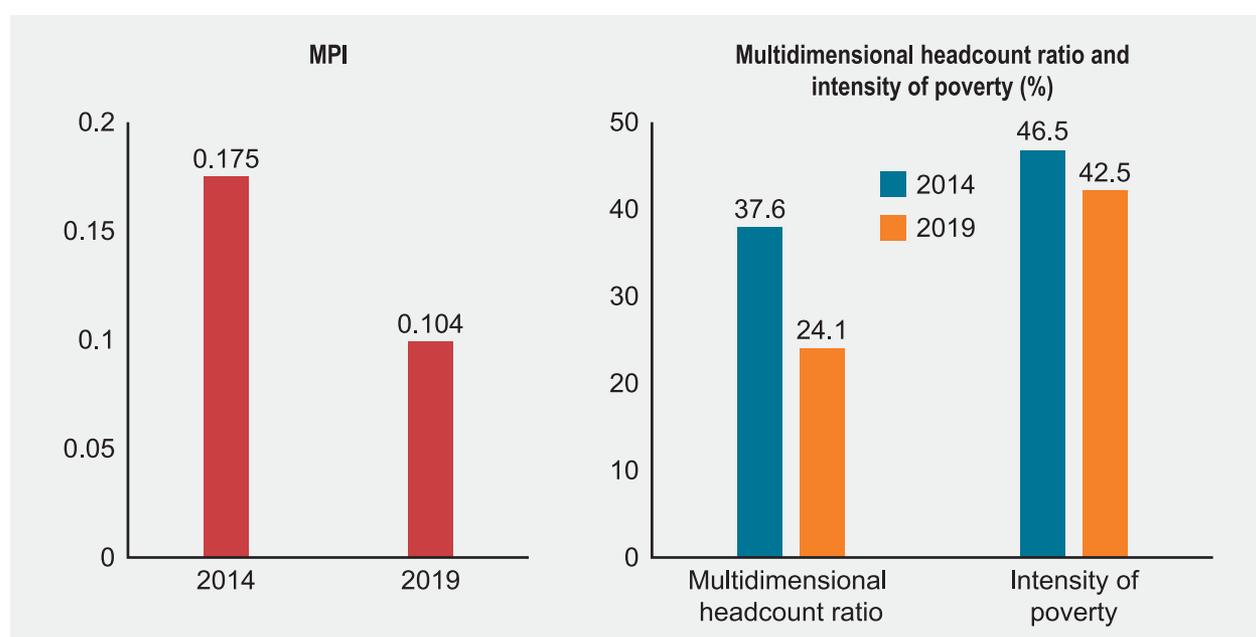
<sup>27</sup> The detail methodology of constructing the MPI is described by Alkire et al. 2020.

<sup>28</sup> The multidimensional headcount poverty ratio is found to be higher (24%) than the income-based poverty headcount ratio (20.5%) in 2019.

A disaggregated indicator level analysis shows that Bangladesh witnessed a significant reduction in the censored headcount ratio (HCR) associated with all the indicators. The censored HCR is used to measure the percentage of population who are multidimensionally poor and deprived in a given indicator, both in terms of absolute value and annualized absolute change for all the indicators of MPI (figure 1.21).<sup>29</sup> Amongst the indicators, the country achieved the highest reduction in censored HCR in terms of the proportion of people not having

access to electricity, which declined on average at a rate of 3.9 percentage points per year. The censored HCR for housing, cooking fuel, and sanitation fell at the same rate of 2.6 percentage points a year. Amongst the indicators, Bangladesh has the lowest HCRs for child mortality and access to safe drinking water – 1.3 per cent and 1.4 per cent, respectively. On the other hand, when it is measured in terms of access to clean cooking fuel and types of housing – the censored headcount ratios are 22.8 per cent for these two indicators.

**Figure 1.19: Trends in Global MPI and partial indices of Bangladesh**

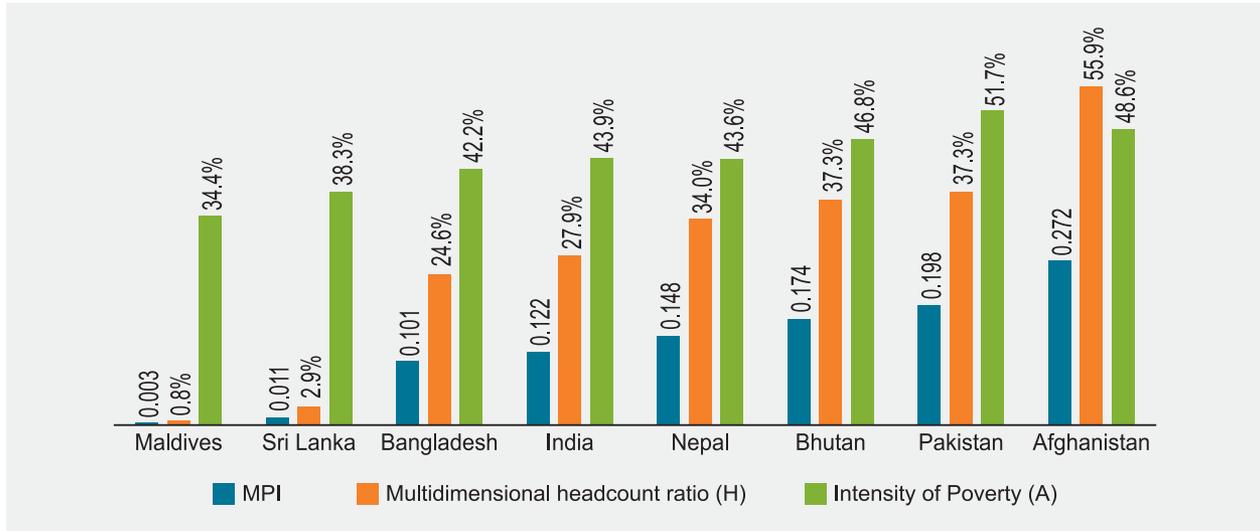


Note : MPI, multidimensional headcount ratio (H) and intensity of poverty(A) for 2014 and 2019 are estimated from Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), 2014 and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2019.

Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

<sup>29</sup> The absolute reduction in poverty is calculated by subtracting one measure of poverty from another and the annualised absolute change is this change divided by the number of years between surveys.

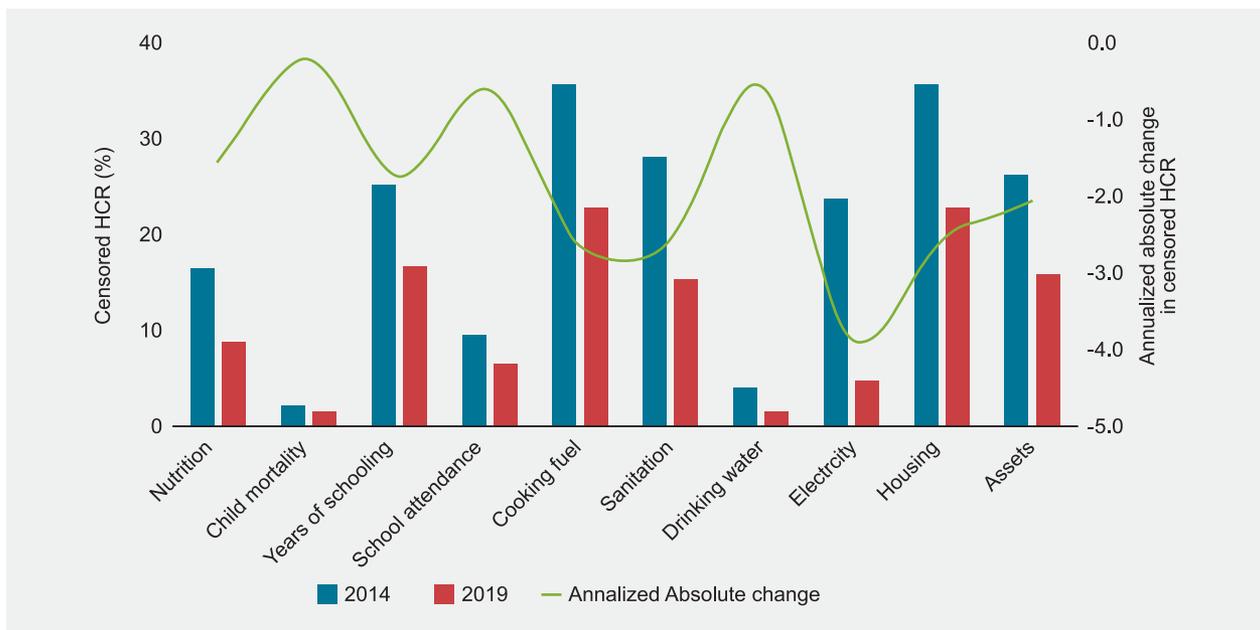
**Figure 1.20: MPI, multidimensional headcount poverty, and poverty inequality in South Asia**



Note: MPI and its partial indices are calculated for the latest nationally representative surveys.

Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

**Figure 1.21: Trends in the censored headcount ratio (HCR) in different MPI indicators**



Note: Censored HCRs were calculated for 2014 and 2019 using data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2014 and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019. Annualized absolute changes in HCRs under all the indicators are statistically significant at 1% level of significance.

Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

The use of MPI at the sub-national level offers important insights into the nature of inequalities in multidimensional poverty reduction across the country. Between 2014 and 2019, rural areas experienced a higher reduction in MPI, multidimensional HCR and intensity of poverty than urban areas (table 1.3). This could be partly due to the fact that the level of rural poverty incidence in 2014 was at a much higher level and partly due to a slow pace of poverty reduction in urban areas.<sup>30</sup> A more disaggregated sub-national analysis shows the seven divisions (the total number of division was seven during preparation of this report) of Bangladesh registering a reduction (in terms of both annualised absolute and relative terms) in the multidimensional poverty index, the incidence of multidimensional poverty as well as the intensity of deprivation.

The poverty reduction is comparatively faster among the poorer divisions with Sylhet having the fastest multidimensional poverty reduction in absolute terms since 2014. It, however, still had the highest (34.8 per cent of the population) multidimensionally poor people in 2019. The intensity of poverty also remained the largest. In terms of annualised relative reduction, Khulna

outperformed other regions, scoring the lowest MPI score of 0.06 in 2019 and experiencing a 14.4 per cent decline per year. It almost halved its multidimensional headcount ratio between 2014 and 2019 and had the lowest (15.4 per cent) multidimensional poverty amongst all the divisions. The relative reduction in MPI was comparatively smaller in Barishal and Chattogram – on an average both experienced less than 9 per cent annual decline in the score during 2014-2019.

In Bangladesh, deprivation in years of schooling indicator contributed the highest (27 per cent) to overall poverty at the national level followed by nutrition (15 per cent), cooking fuel (12 per cent), and housing (12 per cent) (table 1.4). This pattern of contribution of each indicator to overall poverty in the rural area is comparable with the national level. There are some differences between urban and rural areas in terms of contributions of several indicators in multidimensional poverty (table 1.4). The differences are small for such indicators as nutrition, child mortality and drinking water. There are variations across division in the share of indicators to the overall poverty, but years of schooling contributed the highest across division (figure 1.22).

**Table 1.3: Trends in MPI and its partial indices at the regional level**

Residence	MPI		Annualised Change in MPI (2014-2019)		Multidimensional HCR (H)		Annualised change in H (2014-2019)		Poverty intensity (A)		Annualised change in A (2014-2019)	
	2014	2019	Absolute change	Relative change (%)	2014	2019	Absolute change	Relative change (%)	2014	2019	Absolute change	Relative change (%)
Place of residence												
Rural	0.204	0.113	-0.018	-11.2	43.5	26.8	-3.3	-9.2	46.9	42.1	-1.0	-2.1
Urban	0.095	0.058	-0.007	-9.3	21.5	14.1	-1.5	-8.1	44.2	41.4	-0.6	-1.3
Region of residence												
Barishal	0.195	0.122	-0.015	-8.9	41.3	28.9	-2.5	-6.9	47.3	42.3	-1.0	-2.2
Chattogram	0.173	0.111	-0.013	-8.6	36.8	25.1	-2.3	-7.3	47.1	44.0	-0.6	-1.4
Dhaka	0.159	0.096	-0.013	-9.5	34.1	22.9	-2.2	-7.7	46.5	41.9	-0.9	-2.0
Khulna	0.131	0.060	-0.014	-14.4	30.5	15.4	-3.0	-12.7	43.1	39.2	-0.8	-1.9
Rajshahi	0.167	0.094	-0.015	-10.9	37.2	23.5	-2.8	-8.8	44.9	39.9	-1.0	-2.3
Rangpur	0.171	0.103	-0.014	-9.8	39.1	25.4	-2.7	-8.3	43.8	40.4	-0.7	-1.6
Sylhet	0.292	0.155	-0.027	-11.9	56.8	34.8	-4.4	-9.4	51.3	44.6	-1.4	-2.8

Note: P.P. stands for percentage point. Data for 2014 and 2019 was calculated from Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2014 and Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS) 2019. All the absolute change in MPI, multidimensional HCR (H) and poverty intensity (A) are statistically significant at 1 per cent and 5 per cent level.

Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

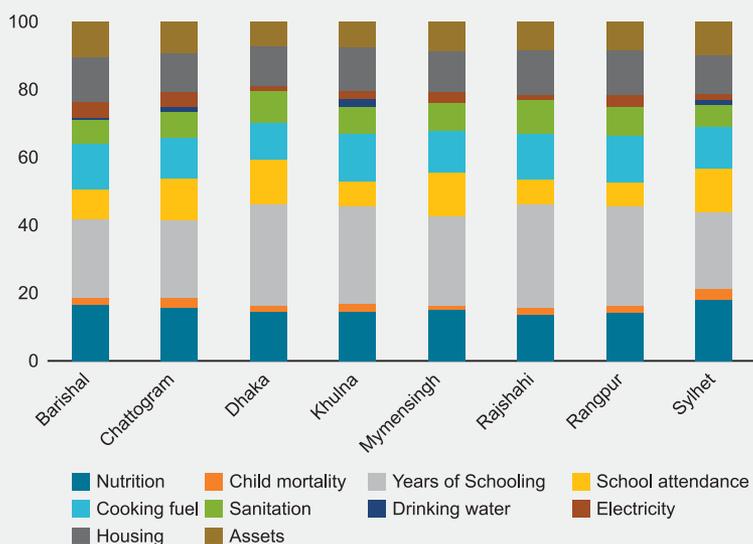
<sup>30</sup> The educational attainment in rural areas also expanded significantly contributing to a faster reduction in MPI. On the other hand, lower female labour force participation resulting from the weak employment generation in the manufacturing sector was one of the likely factors not helping the urban sector in achieving a faster rate of poverty reduction. See, for instance, World Bank 2019a.

**Table 1.4: Percentage contribution of deprivations by indicators to overall poverty by rural and urban areas (%)**

	Nutrition	Child mortality	Years of schooling	School attendance	Cooking fuel	Sanitation	Drinking water	Electricity	Housing	Assets
Urban	15.69	2.38	29.31	13.68	9.74	9.84	0.77	1.24	10.55	7.00
Rural	15.12	2.05	26.41	10.45	12.86	8.11	10.79	2.64	12.73	8.85
National	15.19	2.09	26.78	10.86	12.47	8.32	0.76	2.46	12.46	8.62

Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

**Figure 1.22: Percentage contribution of deprivations of each indicator to overall poverty at sub-national level (%)**



Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

*Inequalities in MPI reduction among age-specific groups*

Globally, children have disproportionately high multidimensional poverty incidence: one out of every three children are multidimensionally poor compared to one out of every six adults.<sup>31</sup> Like this global trend, the multidimensional poverty index in Bangladesh is also highly prevalent amongst the children of especially aged 9 or less (figure 1.23). About 33 per cent of children aged 0-9 are

multidimensionally poor against 22 per cent for people aged 18-59 (figure 1.24). Intensity of deprivation is also high among children. Considering the three broad dimensions of MPI, the standard of living contributed most for such high multidimensional poverty among children (figure 1.25). That is, households with low per capita income seem to be associated with more children. Education is the second most important dimension of children deprivation. Despite the relatively small contribution of health in MPI, a close look at figure 1.25 would reveal that children of 0-9 years have a far greater health deprivation than other age groups. Analysing the individual indicators, it is found that

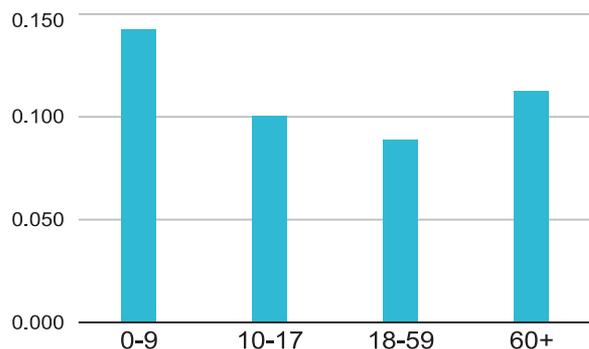
years of schooling is the most important factor behind multidimensional poverty among children followed by nutrition, cooking fuel, housing, and sanitation. While at a global level, the rate of reduction in multidimensional poverty among children is lower (in comparison with adults).<sup>32</sup> However, unlike this global trend, multidimensional poverty for children in Bangladesh has fallen at a much faster rate compared to adults.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See, OPHI and UNDP 2020. The Child MPI is based on the Alkire Foster methodology for multidimensional poverty measures. In Child MPIs, each child is identified as poor or non-poor based on the age-specific overlapping deprivations he or she experiences personally. Child MPI is then calculated based on these age-specific poverty status (Alkire et al. 2017).

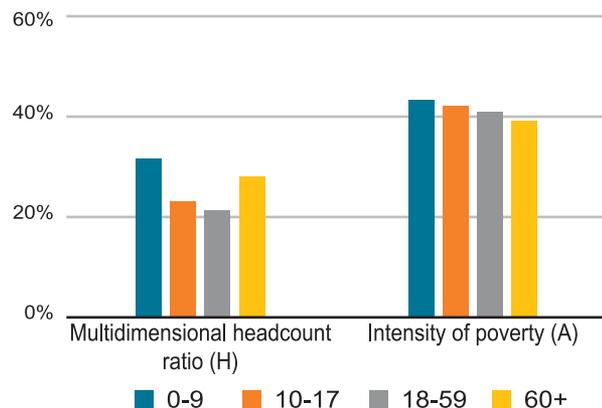
<sup>32</sup> OPHI and UNDP 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Multidimensional HCR reduction (in terms of annualised absolute value) in Bangladesh for the children (age group 0-9) was 3.4 percentage points vis-à-vis 1.8 percentage points for the adult. See, for instance, Alkire et al. 2020.

**Figure 1.23: Age group specific multidimensional poverty (MPI) in Bangladesh (2019)**

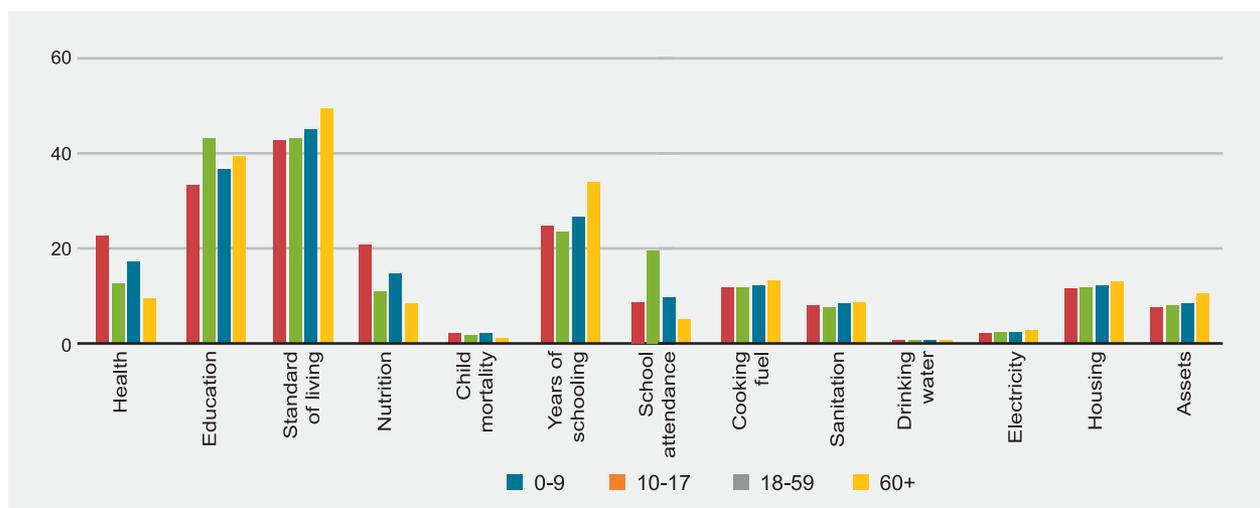


**Figure 1.24: Age group specific multidimensional headcount ratio and intensity of poverty in Bangladesh (2019)**



Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

**Figure 1.25: Percentage contribution of deprivations of different dimensions and indicators to overall poverty (%), 2020**



Source: Based on Global MPI data tables 2020, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

### Challenges of human development in Bangladesh

As Bangladesh moves forward, it faces several human development challenges. Such challenges range from rising inequality to climate change, work opportunities of younger people and the latest addition to the list is COVID-19.

### Trend of inequality

It is globally accepted that Bangladesh is progressing impressively. It has been continuously striving to ensure that the share of development benefit is fairly distributed. One of the most popular and widely accepted measure of inequality is the Gini index or coefficient.<sup>34</sup> It describes how equal or

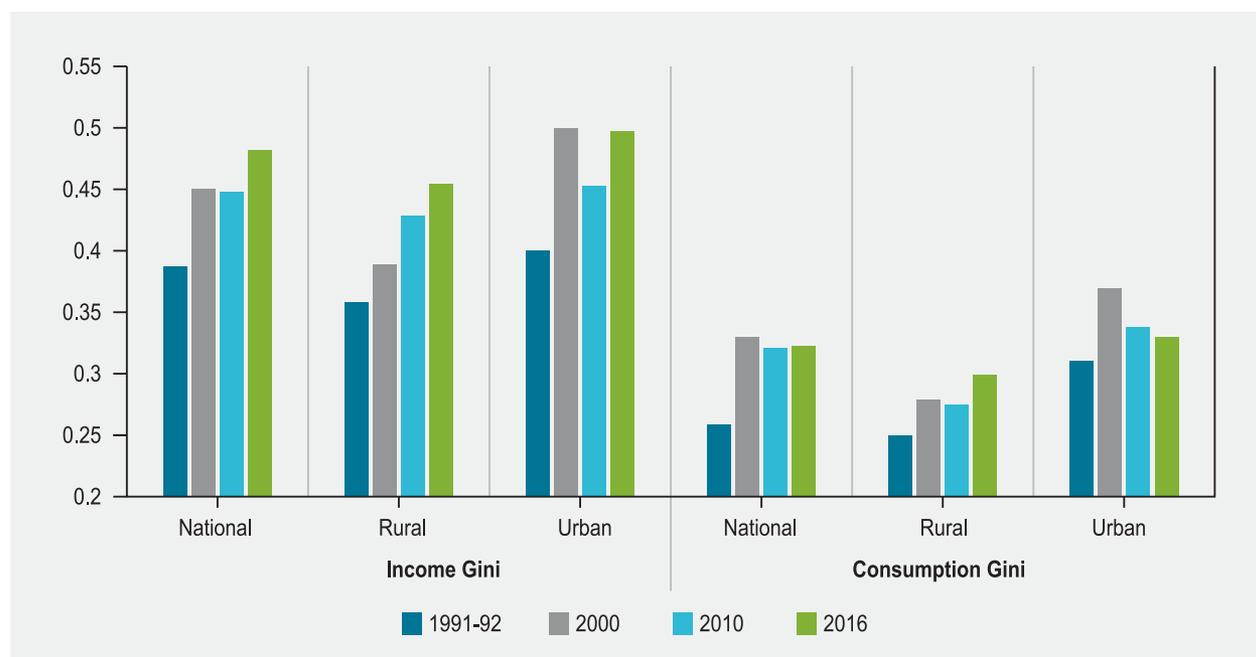
<sup>34</sup> The gini index can take any value between 0 and 1. A coefficient of zero indicates a perfectly equal distribution of resources among the population while a value of 1 represents perfect inequality.

unequal resource (income or wealth) distribution is within the population of a country. The Gini index calculated based on household income (often known as income-Gini) increased substantially from 0.39 in the early 1990s to 0.48 in 2016 (figure 1.26), suggesting an increasingly uneven income distribution over time. The worsening of income distribution has taken place both in urban and rural areas. The Gini index computed from consumption expenditures (known as consumption-Gini) depicts a moderate rise in inequality, although the same for urban areas appears to have fallen over the past two decades. The differences between income

and consumption inequality can be attributed to several public policies – including social safety net provisions – that aim to ensure a minimum level of consumption for various households and population groups.

Despite a rapid reduction in overall poverty incidence, there remains substantial variations in poverty profiles across geographical locations. According to the latest available national Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, several districts have a disproportionately high level of poverty incidence.

**Figure 1.26: Income and consumption gini index in Bangladesh**



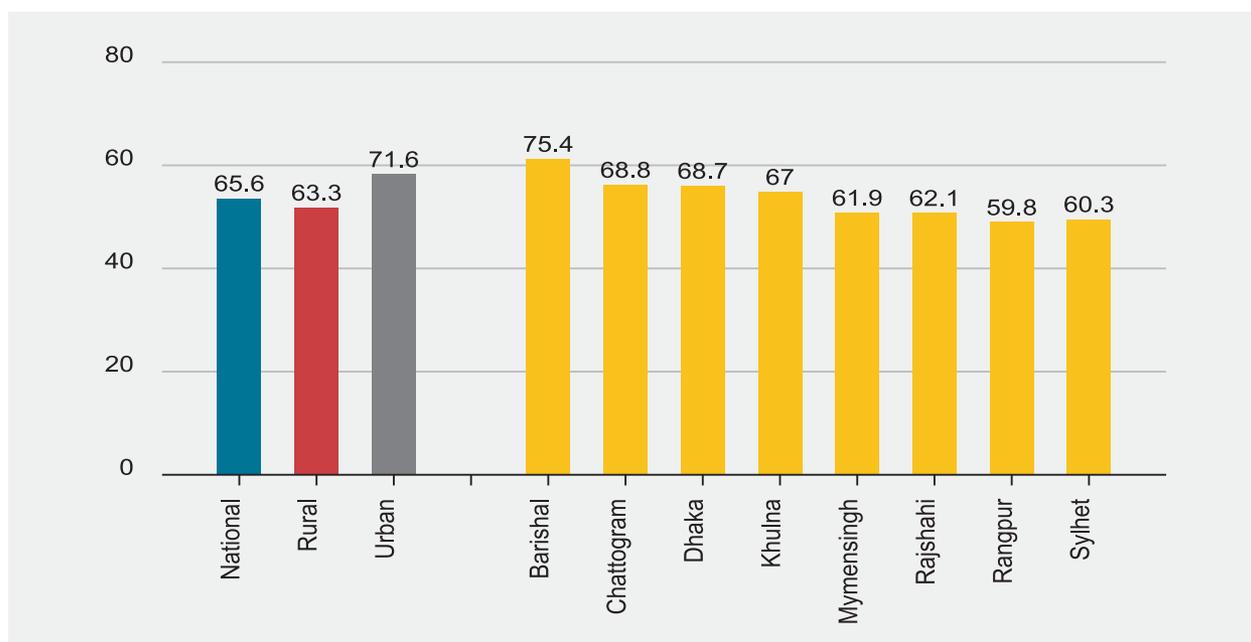
Source: Analysis using the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, various years, BBS.

#### *Disparities in education and health outcomes*

Apart from income distribution and disparities in poverty incidence, inequalities in other human development indicators among different socio-economic groups across geographical locations remain a major challenge. Substantial educational inequalities in various forms are evident. According to Household Income and Expenditure Survey

2016, the literacy rate amongst the rural population, 63 per cent, was more than 7 percentage points lower than that of their urban counterpart (figure 1.27). The same also differs substantially across districts with Barishal having a highest 75.4 per cent of population who can read and write while Rangpur recording the lowest at 59.8 per cent.

**Figure 1.27: Literacy rate: percentage of population aged 7 years and above**



Source: Based on Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2016), BBS.

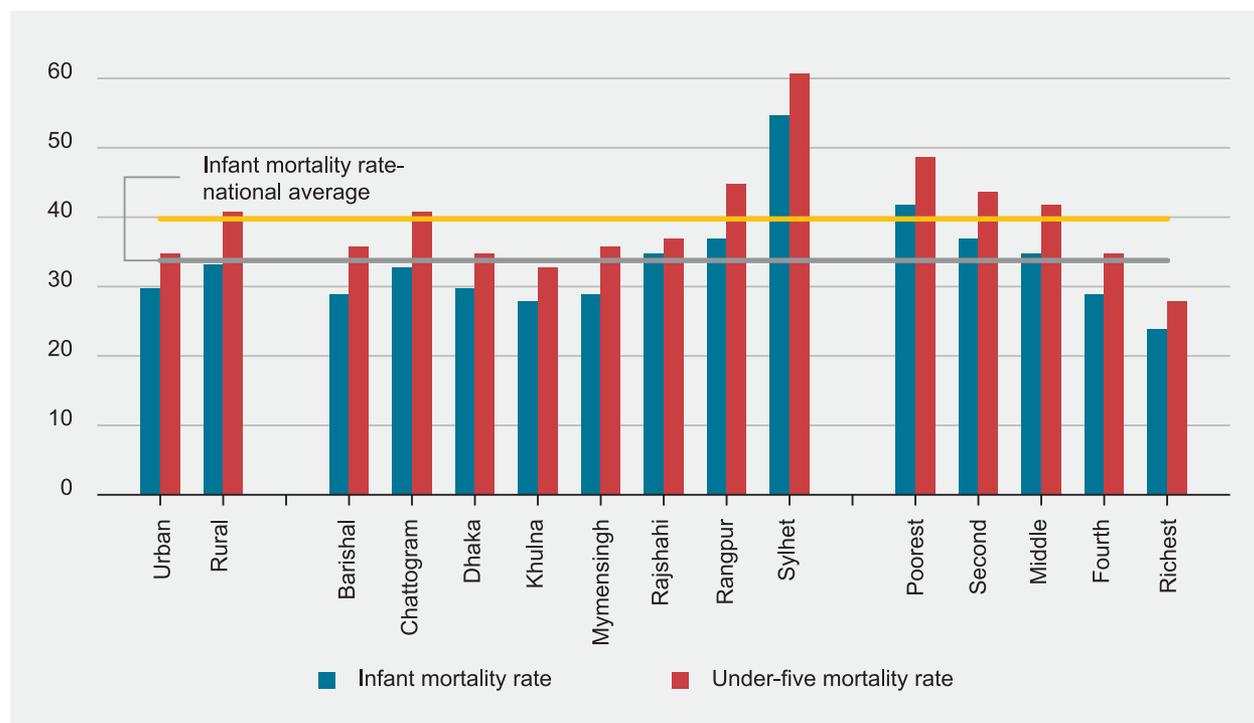
Although access to education at primary and secondary levels has improved quite significantly across all geographic locations, the quality of education across schools, different streams (English and Bangla mediums, general education, technical and madrasah education, etc.) and locations also adds to aggravating inequality. Furthermore, the Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report 2019 published by the Directorate of Primary Education suggests that although there is not much difference in net enrolment rates in primary education across districts, disparities remain in repetition rates. Magura is a district with the highest repetition rate of 11.8 per cent (in 2018) in comparison with the national average of 5.6 per cent, followed by Sylhet (11.3 per cent), Shariatpur (10.4 per cent), Moulavibazar (10.1 per cent), Dhaka (9.79 per cent) and Sunamgonj (9.69 per cent).

Inequality in accessing health services and disparities in health outcomes are important constraints faced by many developing countries including Bangladesh. Socioeconomic inequality in

several indicators including child health, nutritional outcomes, and health care services delivery among low-income group varies across regions (figure 1.28 and table 1.5). In Bangladesh, wealth-based inequalities in health were relatively high in the eastern and south-eastern regions in comparison to the western regions.<sup>35</sup> Data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 shows that there is an urban-rural divide in child mortality, nutrition and access to health care services (figure 1.28). Similar differences in fertility rate, health services at pregnancy and delivery, child nutrition measured by prevalence of stunting and underweight, across division are substantial (table 1.5). Besides, there are substantial variations in access to health and healthcare services across different socio-economic status as measured by wealth quintiles. The MICS 2019 data suggests that the population from the poorest wealth quintile has significantly lower access to health care services during pregnancy and delivery and higher prevalence of mortality and malnutrition (figure 1.28 and table 1.5).

<sup>35</sup> Pulok et al. 2018; Gruebner et al. 2016.

**Figure 1.28: Infant and under-five mortality rate by sub-region (deaths per 1,000 live births)**



Source: Based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019).

From a human development perspective, work is the means for unleashing human potential, creativity, innovation and spirits that are essential to make human lives productive, worthwhile and meaningful.<sup>36</sup> The Human Development Report 2015 makes a distinction between a job and work with the former being a narrow concept with a set of pre-determined time-bound assigned tasks or activities in contrast to a much broader concept of the latter that aims to enrich human development.

Finding a link between work and human development is not straightforward and not every type of work enhances human development. Exploitative (e.g., particularly exploitation of women and children) and hazardous work along with jobs that do not ensure productive and/or remunerative employment, and do not consider rights, dignity, and social protection of people are not compatible with human development. Considering from this perspective, the challenge of

promoting human development through work cannot be overstated for Bangladesh.

*Challenges of creating work especially for women and the youth*

For Bangladesh, which is the world's eighth most populous country with a working age population of around 110 million, even generating basic jobs for livelihoods remains a monumental task. Every year 2 million additional people join the workforce. More than 40 per cent of workers are still in agriculture, whose share in the national economy is already quite small (14 per cent). This means non-farm activities will also have to absorb the influx of labour force. Given this big and growing labour force, employment generation constitutes the first and foremost priority for Bangladesh. Since the early 1990s Bangladesh has been going through a demographic transition in which the share of working age population (15-64 years) has been growing larger than the non-working-age share of

<sup>36</sup> Jahan 2015.

the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older). This demographic dividend is projected to last until the late-2030s. The country needs to create adequate employment opportunities in order to realize the full potential of this demographic dividend. The strategy of the government for human development in the Perspective Plan 2021-2041 is to harness this demographic dividend. A major challenge is to convert the ongoing demographic transition, whereby the share of the active population (age 15-64 years) is increasing in comparison to the total population, into a true development dividend. A careful strategy is of

utmost importance to convert this age group into a well-educated and well-trained labour force through appropriate investments and incentives in education and job-based training.

Another important challenge for Bangladesh is the low level of labour force participation.<sup>37</sup> Currently, around 46 million people (almost 42 per cent of the working-age population) are outside the labour force. The participation rate of men in the labour force stood at 80.5 per cent in 2016-17. On the other hand, the women labour force participation rate is quite low and stands at 36.3 per cent.

**Table 1.5: Disparities in health indicators**

	Total fertility rate (women age 15-49 years)	Access to health care services at pregnancy and delivery			Child malnutrition	
		Antenatal care coverage	Delivered in healthy facility	Delivery with skilled professional	Stunted	Underweight
Total	2.3	75.2	53.4	59	28	22.6
Area						
Urban	2	86.7	67.7	73.7	26.3	18.9
Rural	2.3	72	49.4	54.8	28.4	23.6
Division						
Barishal	2.4	71.3	37.4	45.1	30.6	24.9
Chattogram	2.5	76.3	51.7	57.9	27	23
Dhaka	2.1	83.2	62	66.2	28	19.2
Khulna	2	85.4	71.1	76.7	20.6	18.7
Mymensingh	2.7	63.9	33.5	37	33.3	24.9
Rajshahi	2	73.1	57.1	60.5	26.3	23.3
Rangpur	2.3	67.3	49.5	57.5	26.6	22.4
Sylhet	2.6	63.1	40.2	48.4	37.6	32.1
Wealth index quintile						
Poorest	2.8	49.6	26	32.4	38.2	30
Second	2.4	66.6	41.3	47	31.4	26.9
Middle	2.1	77.7	53.8	59.2	25.9	21.9
Fourth	2.1	87.4	65.5	70.2	23.5	19.5
Richest	2.1	95.1	80.1	85.8	19.8	19.5

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019).

<sup>37</sup> Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is the proportion of economically active population (Aged 15-64) who are either employed or actively looking for work).

## *Climate Change*

Climate change related challenges and vulnerabilities are posing threats to the progress of human development by constraining economic and livelihood opportunities for people. The topographical and geographical location makes Bangladesh susceptible to natural disasters.<sup>38</sup> According to the Global Climate Risk Index (GCRI) 2020,<sup>39</sup> Bangladesh is the 7<sup>th</sup> most affected country due to climate change induced disasters (i.e., storms, floods, heatwaves, etc.) of the past two decades of 1999–2018. An analysis of GCRI shows extreme weather events to have caused, on average, 577 deaths per year in Bangladesh along with an estimated yearly loss of GDP of \$1.7 billion.<sup>40</sup> Climate-led catastrophic events are likely to be aggravated in the future as the mean temperature is set to increase between 1.5°C and 4.8°C by 2100 accompanied by increased intensity of tropical cyclones and rising precipitation.<sup>41</sup>

Climate change consequences threaten a devastating blow to human development prospects. An increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters like cyclones and storms, sea level rise, river erosion, saltwater intrusion, erratic weather patterns, etc. are already causing loss of livelihoods, displacement of people, loss of arable lands, and food insecurity. By 2050 the global Human Development Index (HDI) would be 8 per cent lower than the baseline (business-as-usual) due to the adverse effects of global warming on agricultural production, on access to clean water and improved sanitation and on environmental pollution. However, if vast deforestation and land degradation, dramatic declines in biodiversity and accelerated extreme weather events take place, the

global HDI would be nearly 15 per cent below the projected baseline.<sup>42</sup> These projected scenarios indicate that often the most disadvantaged and marginalised people will be exposed to the most adverse repercussions of environmental deterioration despite the fact that they are moderately responsible for the problem.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, water use, and deforestation are the key indicators to assess environmental sustainability. Irrespective of regions, development stages and structural characteristics, countries are required to introduce policies to foster environmental sustainability, equity and human development since these three are deeply interlinked. Indeed, climate change impacts physical and social environments, knowledge, assets and behaviours adversely, which lead to multiply its adverse impacts more severely.<sup>43</sup> For instance, mass deprivation of drinking water is acute in the salinity and drought-prone areas that intensifies the health risks of the population who are already adversely affected by climate change. A country's HDI can decrease by about 2 per cent due to a 10 per cent increase in the number of people affected by an extreme weather event, which can stem from global climate change. The impact would be even larger in countries with medium human development.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, the risks of injury and death from rapid extreme events are not equal among all populations—the poor, children, women, elderly, persons with disabilities (PWD) and people living at geographically vulnerable areas (e.g., riverine and coastal islands, hillside, and wetland areas) are more susceptible to health risks. The risks are intensified by inequality in access to resources,

<sup>38</sup> Bangladesh is a densely populated country located in a low-lying delta between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. More than 230 major rivers and their tributaries crisscross the country. About a third of the country is susceptible to tidal inundation and nearly 70 per cent of the land mass gets flooded during heavy monsoons. See, Ayers et al. 2014.

<sup>39</sup> The Global Climate Risk Index shows to what extent countries have been affected by the impacts of weather-related loss events during 1998 – 2018. Each country's index score is derived from the country's natural disaster related death toll, deaths per 100,000 inhabitants and absolute measurable losses in PPP dollars.

<sup>40</sup> Eckstein et al. 2019.

<sup>41</sup> IPCC 2014a.

<sup>42</sup> UNDP 2011.

<sup>43</sup> UNDP 2011; p.6.

<sup>44</sup> UNDP 2011.

capabilities, and opportunities. Transitory income shocks can drive children of affected households out of schools in developing countries, and trigger malnutrition due to less spending on food consumption. Such slow onset climatic events as salinity and extended drought may cause chronic malnutrition, have an adverse effect on women's reproductive health and lead to high incidence of non-communicable diseases.

Climate change is related to almost all goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the most SDGs that are linked directly with human development and affected by climate change are: end poverty in all its forms (Goal 1), zero hunger (Goal 2), health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), gender equality and women's empowerment (Goal 5), water and sanitation (Goal 6), and inequality (Goal 10). Some other goals are also related to human development, such as affordable and clean energy (Goal 7); inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work (Goal 8); biodiversity, forests, desertification (Goal 15) since many poor and marginalised community are dependent on forests and ecosystem services; peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16); and sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12).

Approximately 40 million people from 70 upazilas in 19 coastal districts of Bangladesh are feared to be displaced due to sea level rise and storm surges.<sup>45</sup> The resultant pressure of migration can make the situation in urban area precarious given the already inadequate infrastructure and public service facilities. Climate migrants are amongst the poorest and are in most cases forced to settle in slums with very limited access to water and sanitation, healthcare, and social services and are vulnerable to water-borne diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, typhoid, etc.<sup>46</sup> Climate migration thus could trigger

a reversal in human development on a much larger scale.

Various estimates suggest that a 1-meter sea level rise may subsume a total land mass of 17–21 per cent by 2100.<sup>47</sup> Besides, coastal areas are also affected by saline water intrusion. Therefore, without a significant rise in overall productivity in agriculture, poor and low-income population groups could face food insecurity. There are projections to suggest that extreme poverty in Bangladesh could rise (by approximately 15 per cent by 2030) due to the impacts of climate change.<sup>48</sup>

Climate change-led natural disasters are likely to have a disproportionate impact on children. This is attributed to the fact that children are physiologically and metabolically less able compared to adults in adapting to climate exposure.<sup>49</sup> Children are more susceptible to immediate and life-threatening dangers of climate-related disasters, rising air pollution driven acute respiratory infections (ARIs), diarrheal diseases and malnutrition.<sup>50</sup> It is estimated that about 7 million children are on the move (internally displaced) worldwide due to natural disasters.<sup>51</sup> Climate change induced natural calamities such as floods and cyclones affect children's education through damaging school buildings and study materials. Moreover, children often leave schools and are forced to engage in income generating activities to support their families financially. Thus, the consequences of climate change undermine children's potential and may create life-long cycles of disadvantages, locking vulnerable households into low human development traps.

Like children, women are also more vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. The existing gender gap in economic opportunities and access to

<sup>45</sup> Bangladesh Planning Commission 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Pachauri et al. 2014; Alam and Rabbani 2007; Rahman et al. 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Bangladesh Planning Commission 2017.

<sup>48</sup> IPCC 2014b.

<sup>49</sup> Akachi et al. 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholls et al. 2007; FAO 2008.

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF 2018.

productive resources (including, e.g., having less education) also makes women vulnerable to climate change when economic conditions deteriorate.<sup>52</sup> Occurrences of natural hazards might jeopardize women's health. For example, according to one study, pregnant women in coastal areas are significantly associated with the increased risk of miscarriage, adverse pregnancy outcomes and hypertension due to unreasonable salt intake through drinking water.<sup>53</sup> Again, there is evidence of waterlogging accentuating women's gynaecological problems due to unhygienic water use.<sup>54</sup> In the aftermath of disasters, post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) are more prevalent among women, affecting their reproductive health, amongst others. This would have direct implications for human development as women in unhealthily circumstances might give birth to children with malnutrition, causing a new cycle of intergenerational nutritional problem. Overall, the impact of climate change could have severe consequences for human development in the long run.

### **COVID-19 and human development challenges of Bangladesh**

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing an unprecedented health and economic crisis for the global economies including Bangladesh with severe consequences for human development prospects. Development gains over the past decade are being threatened by this crisis as the resultant economic consequences could push global poverty up by as much as half a billion people, or 8 per cent of the total human population.<sup>55</sup> There is an apprehension that the value of global Human Development Index (HDI) could decline this year for the first time since the concept was introduced in 1990.<sup>56</sup> The pandemic is going to have wide-ranging consequences with far reaching

implications for human development. These include, amongst others, deteriorating health situations; worsening poverty and inequality; weakened educational attainment prospects; shrinking employment opportunities with potentially disproportionate severe consequences for the youth; rising work burden of women with gender-based violence against them; etc. The future course of human development will depend on addressing these new and emerging issues while dealing with the longstanding development challenges.

#### *Health*

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of health services in many developing countries. Inadequate testing facilities, medical supplies, and care facilities for patients posed enormous challenges for the health sector.<sup>57</sup> While COVID-19 related illness has been highlighted, consequences of lack of treatment for the patients with other diseases cannot be overemphasized. That is, a much larger health crisis could be looming given that it became harder for people to seek essential medical care they needed. The pandemic inflicted the fear of losing jobs, wage cuts, lay-offs, reduced benefits, income insecurity, etc. amongst workers, thus adversely affecting people's mental well-being.<sup>58</sup> All this could have serious health implications in the near future, constraining human development prospects. In order to combat the COVID-19 health crisis, the government has been implementing several initiatives, including adequate testing facilities, quarantine and isolation of infected patients, local, regional and national lockdown, increase public awareness and enforce social distancing, etc. COVID-19 vaccination has started in Bangladesh and already a large number of the population has been vaccinated based on the prescribed priority lists.

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<sup>52</sup> Mearns 2009 and Habtezion 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Khan et al. 2008; Hossain 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Neelormi and Ahmed 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Sumner et al. 2020.

<sup>56</sup> UNDP 2020a.

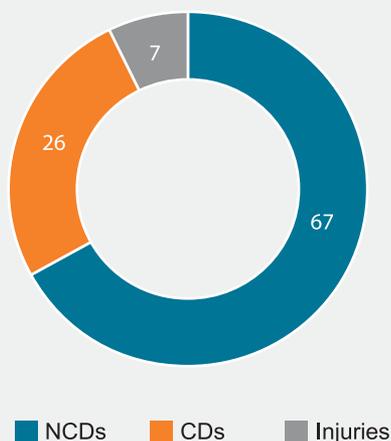
<sup>57</sup> Anwar et al. 2020.

<sup>58</sup> ILO 2020.

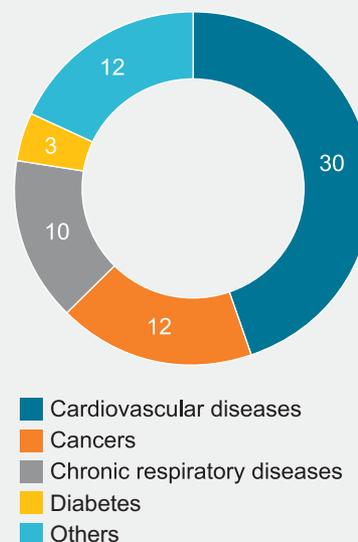
However, as the country has been experiencing significant shifts in the disease profile due to demographic transition and change in the lifestyles, new investments will be needed to for improved health outcomes. While COVID-19 shows the devastating impact of a communicable disease, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have

increasingly become a major health concern for the mass population. Prior to COVID-19, NCDs accounted for approximately 67 per cent of all mortality with cardiovascular diseases contributing the highest (30 per cent) followed by cancers (12 per cent) in 2018 (figures 1.29 and 1.30).<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 1.29: Cause of mortality (%)**



**Figure 1.30: Mortality due to NCDs (%)**



Source: Based on NCD Country Profile, WHO (2018).

### Education

COVID-19 has also caused unprecedented disruptions in educational attainment, another important dimension of human development. Closure of educational institutions due to the crisis has caused the students to lose valuable lesson time over the past several months. There are concerns that the long-term school closure in the aftermath of the pandemic can lead to severe interruptions in students' learning outcomes and deterioration in the quality of education for the entire generation.<sup>60</sup>

While learning at home can compensate for students' loss in learning to some extent, it can generate extremely unequal outcomes due to differences in such initial conditions as parents'/guardians' educational background to support children, parents' ability to allocate quality time for their children's learning, parents' non-cognitive skills, access to resources like appropriate online materials, etc.<sup>61</sup> In the wake of COVID-19 crisis, various attempts have been made to promote remote/online learning using digital platforms.

<sup>59</sup> Between years 2007-17, deaths caused by lung cancer, diabetes, ischemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and stroke increased by about 64%, 52%, 45%, 36% and 16% respectively (for more information can be found <http://www.healthdata.org/bangladesh>).

<sup>60</sup> See, Ahmed 2020; Burgess and Sievertsen 2020. Due to the crisis, globally 1.6 billion students are affected while it is 37 million for Bangladesh (UN 2020; Ahmed 2020).

<sup>61</sup> See, Oreopoulos et al. 2006. In Bangladesh, children with parents having no education were studying on average 113 minutes while the figure was 148 minutes for the children with parents having some education (SSC and above) in rural areas (Asadullah et al., 2020).

However, lack of access to appropriate digital equipment and internet and lack of familiarity with the relevant technology by many households leads to unequal outcomes.<sup>62</sup> This is despite the fact that there have been considerable policy attempts over the past several years to develop ICT infrastructure and to spread internet facilities through such government interventions as providing classrooms with laptops and projectors, setting up computer labs in schools, establishing union digital centres, etc.<sup>63</sup>

### *Poverty*

As shown earlier, prior to COVID-19 disruptions, Bangladesh had registered a remarkable progress in reducing poverty. Notwithstanding, almost 34 million people remained poor and another 25 million were vulnerable (who are not poor but at risk of falling into poverty in the face of unforeseen adverse shocks). COVID-19 mitigation measures involving economic shutdown caused income and job losses. Informal sector employees, e.g., restaurant workers, rickshaw pullers, day labourers, artisans, domestic helpers, agricultural labourers, petty business owners, shopkeepers, etc. were affected the most. However, as economic activities picked up after the withdrawal of lockdown measures, the pressure on employment and poverty has greatly been relieved. Nevertheless, the medium to long term impact of COVID-19 on poverty and vulnerability will have to be assessed further.

According to one estimation,<sup>64</sup> based on various possible GDP growth scenarios and elasticities of

poverty reduction with respect to growth can occur in the years to come. And, it is possible that any rise in poverty could be temporary in nature. Therefore, once the economy starts recovering, poverty incidence should decline at a faster pace. The nature of recovery and how pro-poor the post-COVID growth process is going to be will eventually determine how quickly the lost gains in poverty reduction can be recouped.<sup>65</sup>

### *Women's empowerment*

COVID-19 can have an adverse impact on women empowerment. Economic slowdown accompanied by weakness in employment generation can make it difficult for many female workers to find suitable job opportunities. Consequently, they might withdraw themselves from the labour market permanently, aggravating the existing gender divide in labour force participation. A protracted lockdown period and reduced off-home work opportunities caused significant shifts in many women's work pattern in which their unpaid domestic workload increased significantly.<sup>66</sup> The demand on unpaid domestic chores has also increased manifold due to school closures and the increased need for care of household members with a greater risk from COVID-19 as well as from other health-related complications aggravated by reduced health facilities even for non-COVID patients. Evidence from recent data seems to suggest that while globally women were working more than three hours on average a day now, as unpaid family works (care and domestic works) compared to their male counterparts.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The Government of Bangladesh undertook initiatives to offer educational services through online and using television, mobile phone and radio. As part of it, the government-run television channel 'Shangshad Bangladesh Television' started to telecast secondary level educational contents from 29 March 2020 and primary level contents from 7 April 2020. See, for instance, Ahmed 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Education 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Sen et al. 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Analysts are contemplating if the recovery process will be 'V-shaped' or 'L-shaped' or 'U-shaped' or 'W-shaped'. In the first case, a rapid bounce-back is expected after an initial collapse in economic activities; in the second, the recovery could be very slow, with the economy settling to a growth trajectory lower than the previous one. What now appears to be a more realistic 'U-shaped' process would see a protracted period of economic slowdown followed by an eventual complete recovery. Finally, the W-shaped process will be a fluctuating one, which can be due to the possibility of multiple waves of virus attacks in the countries that have been able to contain the initial impact. At this stage, it is not clear how the recovery will take shape.

<sup>66</sup> See, Hasselaar and Jimenez 2020. According to one survey, about 25 per cent women lost their jobs while 24 per cent witnessed significant reduction in working hours due to COVID-19 (UN Women 2020). Higher concentration of women's work in the informal sectors made them more vulnerable to labour market shocks. As much as 92 per cent of working women are employed in the informal sector (Bidisha and Faruk 2020).

<sup>67</sup> UN Women 2020; Bidisha and Faruk 2020.

In the aftermath of COVID-19, staying on-track to meet the SDG goal 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and more specifically the target of ensuring “all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education” by 2030 would be an important way for promoting human development in Bangladesh. A reinvigorated approach will be needed to consider a comprehensive action plan backed by increased and effective utilization of resources to emphasize and achieve an integrated system to amplify inclusion and learning process of all students with leaving no one behind.<sup>68</sup>

Women's empowerment has been considered a major success for Bangladesh. Factors, such as effective participation in microcredit and other NGO programmes, employment in the readymade garment sector, increased access to education, etc. contributed enormously to empower women.<sup>69</sup> However, women's economic opportunities and empowerment have been affected by COVID-19 because of the resultant reduced income-earning activities. The increased gender-gap in the allocation of time to unpaid household work during the lockdown period and economic slowdown is likely to have imposed heightened patriarchal norms on gender-segregated economic activities, potentially leaving a lasting impact.

Ensuring gender parity in every aspect of socio-economic activities and women empowerment are viewed as fundamental factors of human development. As the impact of COVID-19 subsides and economic recovery takes place, amongst other things, special attention will be needed to deal with gender disparities by promoting women's employment.

The human development approach to development emphasizes more on improving the lives of people, expanding their capabilities and opportunities rather than assuming that economic growth will

lead to greater opportunities for all. The approach can be considered as a lens to assess any development issues and perspectives. It provides a broad-based vision of socio-economic development, which many other countries including Bangladesh, aim to achieve. Bangladesh has always prioritised the human development objectives and mainstreamed those in its various national policy frameworks. Over the past three decades, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in socio-economic and human development-related indicators. This was reflected in achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals and since then, taking a proactive stance in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The average life expectancy at birth has increased by more than 18 years to 72.6, which has been accompanied by rapidly declining infant and maternal mortality. The success in poverty reduction, adult literacy expansion, enrolment in primary and secondary education with gender parity, nutrition and health outcomes for children and mothers, etc. have also been notable. In the process, Bangladesh has outperformed many of its comparators at a comparable level of development when measured by per capita GDP. This socio-economic progress has been reflected in the rising absolute value of Bangladesh's human development index (HDI). In all the sub-indices of HDI – life expectancy, education, and per capita GNI, Bangladesh has made solid progress. Along with rising absolute scores, Bangladesh has also improved its relative ranking in the global HDI index by climbing up seven notches between 2010 and 2019. Bangladesh has also been able to substantially reduce household and individual level deprivations measured by several indicators and captured through the multidimensional poverty index (MPI). Both the absolute number of people with such deprivation and the intensity of deprivation have declined.

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<sup>68</sup> World Bank 2020a.

<sup>69</sup> Pitt et al. 2006; Bhattacharya et al. 2002; Nazneen et al. 2011.

Like many other countries, Bangladesh has also made progress in reducing inequality in the major broad dimensions of human development. Inequality in life expectancy and education, in particular, declined considerably. This is reflected in the inequality adjusted HDI score. Gender-based disparities in human development have also reduced over the past decade as reflected in the gender development index (GDI) and gender inequality index (GII). However, it is important to note that beyond the HDI related measures, the concept of inequality is quite broad and disparities in many other indicators are not yet well-captured in any broad index. For inclusive development, what needs to be addressed are inequality in income distribution, wealth-based disparities in health and nutritional outcomes, gender inequality in employment etc.

By causing unprecedented health and economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to erode

some of the gains under different human development dimensions that were achieved over the past few decades. It is going to have wide-ranging consequences with significant implications for human development affecting such areas as poverty reduction, health and educational attainment, women empowerment and labour market opportunities for the youth. The Government is well aware of all future challenges and is ready to tackle those. For the future human development of Bangladesh, besides the COVID-19 issue, some of the other structural issues that needs addressing are inequalities, climate change, youth employment, teenagers' futures and peace and security. These concerns and their interactions need to be understood in the context of an analytical framework so that appropriate actions can be taken. Chapter 2 is dedicated to forming such an analytical framework for the pathway of future human development of Bangladesh.

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# Chapter 2

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Pathway for  
future human  
development –  
an analytical  
framework



# Chapter 2

## Pathway for future human development – an analytical framework

Human development has always been the focus of commitment, policies and strategies of Bangladesh. Human rights, equality and human dignity are anchored in the constitution of the country. The Honourable Prime Minister has been a signatory to the Millennium Declaration in 2000. Bangladesh has achieved the MDGs and has made good progress toward achieving the SDGs. Over the years, the country has moved from low human development to medium human development category and is very close to achieving the high human development category. It is already in the middle-income group. The commitment of Bangladesh towards human development is also illustrated by the fact that it has produced a National Human Development Report in 1992, right after the publication of the first Global HDR and has continued the tradition over the years and has published half a dozen more by 2000 (box 2.1).

Over the past years, Bangladesh has made phenomenal progress in human development, both in absolute and relative terms. As Chapter 1 indicates, the country enjoys a long-term annual economic growth of nearly 7 per cent and the headcount poverty has come down from 58 per cent in the 1990s to 21 per cent in 2019. Its HDI has increased by nearly three-fifths - from 0.394 in 1990 to 0.642 in 2019. Its life expectancy at nearly 73 years is more than 70 years in India and 67 years in Pakistan. By 2018, Bangladesh has successfully reduced its child mortality rate to 28 per 1,000

deaths. For India, the rate is 48 per 1,000 and for Pakistan, 81 per 1,000 deaths.

But even with this impressive progress, as has been highlighted in earlier discussion, lingering deprivations are yet to be eliminated. There are still millions of people who will have to be lifted out of poverty. Inequalities are prevalent on many planes. For example, while 19 per cent children in the top quintile of Bangladesh are underweight, the comparable figure for the poorest quintile is 30 per cent. And new human development challenges are emerging. Climate change, creating future work opportunities for the youth, and ensuring a bright future for its adolescents have become emerging human development challenges for Bangladesh.

### Box 2.1 The National Human Development Reports of Bangladesh – a historical chronicle

Since the first NHDR of Bangladesh in 1992 on *Local action under national constraint – focusing on local development*, five more NHDRs were produced in the country. The themes of these reports were quite diverse – ranging from *empowerment of women – focusing on gender equality* in 1994 to *monitoring human development in Bangladesh in 1998*. All these reports provided solid analysis of human development situations of Bangladesh, presented up to date and disaggregated data on human development indicators and suggested policy options. These reports were used by academics, media, civil society and policy makers both for public and policy advocacy.

A list of all the NHDRs produced in Bangladesh is provided below. It is important to indicate that like the global trend, the NHDR initiative in Bangladesh was limited to the decade of 1990s. In fact, no NHDR was produced in Bangladesh after 2000.

- 1992 Local action under national constraint – focusing on local government
- 1993 Decentralization of local action – looking at the institutional constraints to decentralization and devolution
- 1994 Empowerment of women – focusing on gender equality
- 1995 Environment report - Bangladesh
- 1996 A pro-poor agenda – focusing on poverty and on the need for social sector investment to be effective and equitable
- 1998 Monitoring human development in Bangladesh
- 2000 General human development report Bangladesh

Source: Jahan (2015).

The latest and most pressing challenge added to the list is COVID-19.

Thus, the trajectory of future human development of Bangladesh is to be framed in the context of these challenges. This requires an understanding of the emerging dimensions which would be relevant to future human development of Bangladesh, identification of inter-linkages among these dimensions and how the whole dynamics would be affected by COVID-19. The present chapter is devoted to developing an analytical framework by bringing all these issues together.

### **Human Development: the basic notion**

Human development is simply defined as a process of enlarging choices and creating opportunities for everyone (box 2.2). Every day human beings make a series of choices – some economic, some social, some political, and some cultural. The ultimate objective of development is not to create more wealth, but to enhance this range of choices for every human being. Human development, thus defined, represents a simple notion, but with far-reaching implications. The human development framework shifted the development discourse from pursuing material opulence to enhancing human well-being, from maximizing income to

expanding capabilities, from optimizing growth to enlarging freedoms. Even though the human development notion is a simple idea, yet there are several misconceptions about it.

- *Human development is the process of enlarging choices.* In fact, human development is both a process and an outcome. It is concerned with the process through which choices are enlarged, but it also focuses on the *outcome* of enhanced choices.
- *Human development is about capabilities.* In fact, enlarging human choices, both *capabilities* and *opportunities* need to be focused on. If capabilities are enhanced, but opportunities are not created, it will lead to wasted potential. On the other hand, if opportunities are there, but capabilities have not been built, that would lead to wasted opportunities.
- *Human development is about a long and lengthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.* In fact, the notion of human development goes beyond these basic aspects and includes such dimensions as human security,

#### **Box 2.2: Human development – a people-centred approach**

Human development is about acquiring more capabilities and enjoying more opportunities to use these capabilities. With more capabilities and opportunities, people have more choices, and expanding choices is at the core of the human development framework, but it is also a process. Anchored in human rights, it is also linked to human security. Its ultimate objective is to enlarge human freedoms.

Human development is development of the people through building human resources, for the people through the translation of development benefits in the lives of people and by the people through active participation in the processes that influence and shape their lives. Income is a means to human development but not an end in itself.

The human development framework in the 1990 Human Development Report also introduced a composite index—the Human Development Index (HDI) for assessing achievements in basic dimensions of human development. It consists of three basic dimensions of human development—to lead a long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy at birth; to acquire knowledge, measured by mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling; and the ability to achieve a decent standard of living, measured by gross national income per capita. The theoretical maximum value of the HDI is 1.0. The 2020 HDR has adjusted the HDI for planetary pressures.

To measure human development more comprehensively, the Human Development Report also presents four other composite indices. The Inequality-adjusted HDI discounts the HDI according to the extent of inequality. The Gender Development Index compares female and male HDI values. The Gender Inequality Index highlights women's empowerment. And the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures non-income dimensions of poverty.

Source: Human Development Report Office 2016 and Human Development Report Office 2020.

participation, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Human development is about future choices as well as present choices.

- *Income is not important for human development.* In fact, income is an important means to human development, but it is not an end by itself. Income is a necessary condition for enhancing sustained human development, but not a sufficient condition.
- *Human development deals only with soft core social development issues, but not with hard core economic issues.* In fact, human development can and does deal with both types of issues, but every issue has to be looked through as to how it ultimately enhances human lives.

security provides a secure environment where they can exercise their rights. Through reinforcing each other, human development, human rights and human security ultimately ensures *human freedom*.

### The emerging five aspects of future human development

As indicated earlier, human development is all about enlarging human choices through enlarging human capabilities and expanding opportunities for people. There are certain dimensions of human life which enhance human capabilities directly, yet there are certain dimensions, which set the context and facilitate enhancement of human capabilities indirectly (table 2.1). Thus, dimensions like a long and healthy life and knowledge are direct drivers of human capabilities, while issues like participation

**Table 2.1: Dimensions of human development**

Human Development						
Directly enhancing human capabilities dimensions			Contextual dimensions for enhancing human capabilities			
A long and healthy life	Knowledge	Decent standard of living	Participation	Environmental sustainability	Human security	Gender equality

Source: Jahan (2015, p.34)

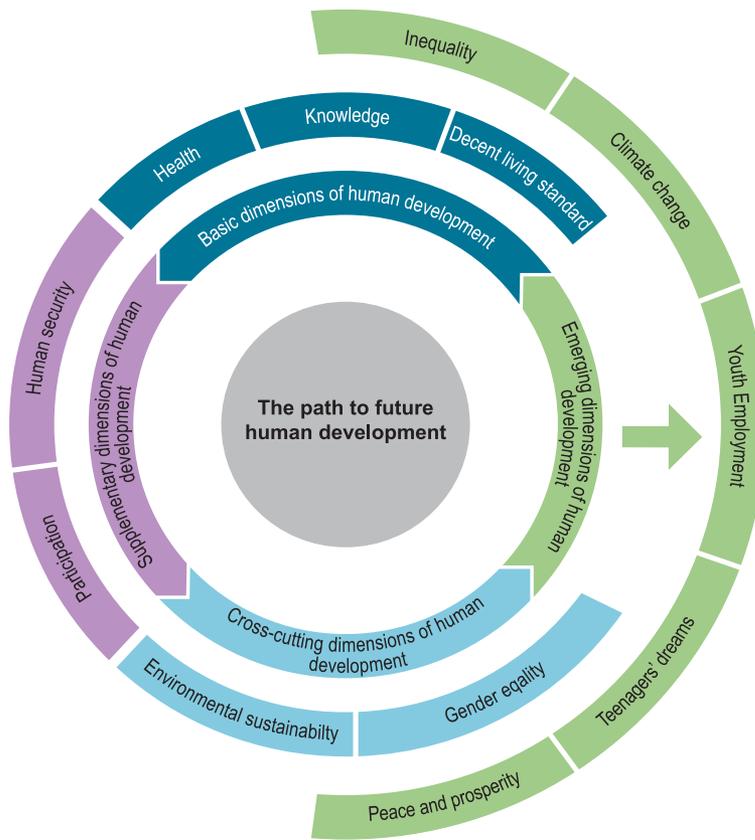
- *Human development is not different from human resource development, basic needs or human welfare.* In fact, the notion of human development is more holistic than any of these notions – human resource development treats human beings as human capital and only as a means for production; basic needs focus on minimum requirements, but not on choices; social welfare sees people only as recipients of development, but not as active participants in the development process. But human development combines all these.
- *Linkages between human development, human rights and human security are not clear.* In fact, these are solidly linked and mutually reinforcing. Human rights protect the rights of all human beings so that they can pursue their choices and human

and human security create a conducive environment for enhancing capabilities of people.

Both the direct and the indirect dimensions of human development are inter-linked and mutually reinforcing. For example, without environmental sustainability, human security is not possible. Similarly, knowledge is a pre-requisite for effective participation. Sometimes, there may be issues of trade-offs as well. Does the pursuance of a decent standard of living through working more hamper the goal of a long and healthy life?

Looking through a different lens, some of the dimensions of human development are *basic* (e.g. a long and healthy life or knowledge); some are *supplementary* (e.g. participation or human security); some are *cross-cutting* (gender equality or environmental sustainability). The future path of human development, while recognizing the basic as well as the supplementary and cross-cutting

**Figure 2.1: The path to future human development – an analytical framework**



dimensions of human development, will have to focus more on upcoming challenges of human development, such as inequalities, teenagers' dreams, peace and prosperity and so on. Figure 2.1 presents the larger perspective of human development, identifies its basic, supplementary and cross-cutting dimensions and highlights the mutually reinforcing processes of the five emerging dimensions of human development.

Thus, while looking ahead with the goal of advancing human development in Bangladesh, these emerging and upcoming dimensions of human development must be linked together in an analytical framework so that the mutual synergies, both positive and negative, of these dimensions are understood and appreciated. This is necessary not only for analytical purposes, but also for advocacy and policy making. The present chapter attempts to build that framework.

As Bangladesh moves along the path of human development, five issues would be critical in that future path. These are inequalities, climate change, youth employment, teenagers' dreams and peace and stability. Individually and collectively, these would influence and shape the future path of human development of the country. It is important to understand what each of these notions analytically entail.

*Inequalities*

Inequalities have become the defining issue of our time. It not only is an economic issue, but also has social and political dimensions. Inequalities are linked not only to deprivations but are also concerns of democracy and social justice. Inequalities and discrimination are denials of human rights.

Inequalities can be on different planes – e.g., regional, ethnic, gender, rural-urban etc. They can be *horizontal* (e.g., among groups of people) or *vertical* (along an indicator such as income).

Inequalities can be *inequalities of outcomes* – e.g., child mortality, as well as *inequalities of opportunities* – (e.g., access to education). The latter is as important as the former since opportunities are a critical determinant of outcomes.

Inequalities may be inter-generational as well – e.g., irresponsible use of natural resources by one generation may shrink the choices of the next generation. Finally, an important dimension of inequality is differing exposure to risks and ability to deal with risks that materialize. Very often those who are at the lower end of income distribution also tend to be more exposed to risks in income generation, climate change, health, education outcomes etc., and as a result have limited access to life opportunities. All these dimensions of inequalities are important for Bangladesh as the country moves along the future path of human development. Chapter 3 takes up all these issue in a more comprehensive way.

### *Climate change*

Climate change is not only an environmental concern, it is an existential development challenge. In a country like Bangladesh, as analysed in Chapter 4, climate change has multidimensional impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people. Climate change has adverse effects on soil fertility, monsoons and rains, water availability, weeds and parasites. As a result, agricultural productivity and food production are adversely affected with impacts on food production and availability, farmers' incomes and livelihoods and the progress in the rural economy. The declines in the availability of food, particularly to the poorer segments of the population, create a food crisis for them, leading to malnutrition, stunting and so on. Declines in the incomes of farming households make it difficult for them to have a decent standard of living. All these are expected to shrink the capabilities of people.

Climate change, as scientists have shown, can also give rise to new diseases, which would have adverse impacts on human health, in terms of their immunity, health itself and longevity. Climate change would also destroy Bangladesh's biodiversity, on which the lives and livelihoods of poor people critically hinge. The loss of lives and livelihoods due to climate change may force vulnerable groups to move to more fragile lands, creating a new generation of *environmental refugees*.

Finally, climate change brings in important nonlinearities: thresholds beyond which change can suddenly accelerate; irreversible tipping points, such as extinction of species; and actions (or inaction) can set in motion dynamic feedback loops that lead to escalating impact even if the triggering change is relatively minor (such as temperature rising from -0.5 Celsius to +0.5 Celsius, leading to melting glaciers in the Himalayas). Some of these effects are well known in advance, others can take societies by surprise. But their existence further raises the importance of effectively addressing

climate change without delay, and in a regionally and globally coordinated manner.

### *Youth employment*

Like many other developing regions, *youth bulge* is an emerging phenomenon in the Bangladeshi society and the economy. The younger people are a critical driving force in the advancement of any society through their energy, creativity and innovation. Work is a major route through which this can happen. Work also provides the younger generation a means of participation, an appreciation of accomplishment and a sense of pride and dignity.

The work of the youth thus has multiple positive implications for future human development of Bangladesh. But as Chapter 5 indicates there are complex issues, constraints and risks involved. The world of work and the nature of demand for skills are changing every day. Under such circumstances, the employability of younger people of Bangladesh will depend, among other things, on the type and the quality of education they get.

Traditional sectors will still continue to absorb a major part of the young labour force. In that respect, the challenge would be to enhance productivity in those sectors through innovation and management. Furthermore, there would be two more considerations – first, what kind of structural changes would be required in the labour markets of young people to adapt to the future world of work, both in terms of content as well as organization; second, how to make our young workers ready to compete in the future global job market.

### *Teenagers' dreams*

Teenagers in Bangladesh today represent both Generation Alpha and Generation Z<sup>70</sup>, they are different from the earlier generations in terms of their thoughts and ideas, outlooks and ways of life, values and beliefs. But where they are unique is that they have dreams and aspirations that are

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<sup>70</sup> Generation Alpha are kids who have early 2010s as the starting birth years and this generation is the first to be born entirely in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, Generation Z refers to young people who have mid-to-late 1990s as starting birth years and the early 2010s as the ending birth years.

different from those of their predecessors. They love their country, its literature and culture, its people and as such want to do something for their motherland and give back something to it. They would like to see their country as a land of opportunities, and potentials, where they can realize their dreams.

Such dreams are critical as the future belongs to the teenagers. It is, therefore, important to take their aspirations into account in shaping the future human development path of the country. But the issues are complex, and it is not easy, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, to understand the aspirations and overcome the constraints. Yet with appropriate approaches and actions, these issues can be addressed.

#### *Peace and prosperity*

The ultimate objective of sustained and sustainable human development in Bangladesh is to build a peaceful and prosperous Bangladesh. Peace needs to be looked at both from macro and micro perspectives. As a nation, Bangladesh wants to live in peaceful coexistence with other countries, particularly its neighbours – '*friendship to all and malice to none*' has always been its motto. Serving in the United Nations peace-keeping activities, Bangladesh has contributed to regional and global peace. Similarly, peace needs to be ensured at a micro-level in the life of a person, a family, a community. There needs to be peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths, of different ethnicities, of different regions. In the absence of peace, human development can neither be sustained nor be sustainable.

Traditionally, prosperity is often equated with limited notions of economic and material development. These are tangible dimensions of development and they are important. Yet, development is not complete without embracing the values of humanity, dignity, non-violence, tolerance, and respect for others. A country can

develop economically; but cannot attain lasting prosperity, if these norms and values are missing in the society.

#### *The linkages among five emerging dimensions*

The five emerging dimensions of human development have separate individual impacts on human development, but at the same time, they influence human development in mutually reinforcing synergetic ways. For example, inequalities by themselves hinder the capabilities of the poorer segments of people and they also limit their opportunities. They particularly adversely affect some specific and vulnerable groups, such as women, people who are differently-abled, ethnic minorities, people in conflict areas and so on.

Globally, fifteen million girls under 18 marry every year – that is, 1 child bride in every 2 seconds. It destroys their capabilities, limits their potentials and stunts their human development. In 18 countries, women cannot work without the permission of their husbands, and in 32 countries, women face a different procedure to passports. In fact, women face a life-cycle of deprivation. If the present trends continue, then East Asia would need 111 years to close just the economic gender gap and the Arab States 356 years. Inequalities have other dimensions too. Three hundred and seventy million ethnic minorities represent 5 per cent of the global population, but 15 per cent of the global poor.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, an increase in youth employment helps make good use of youth capabilities, whereas lack of jobs for young people reflects missed opportunities and gives rise to human frustrations. In 2015, 74 million young people (ages 15-24) were unemployed globally. In the Arab States, one in every four young people are without any work.<sup>72</sup>

Conflicts, not peace, have become the norm, in many countries, rather than the exception. Sixty-five million people – more than the population of France – are forcibly displaced.<sup>73</sup> Violence, not dialogue, has become a common human language.

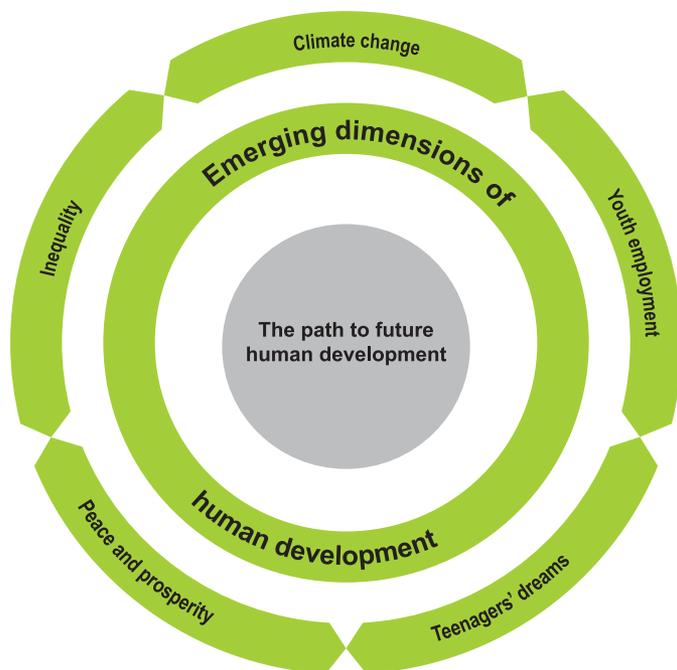
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<sup>71</sup> UNDP (2016).

<sup>72</sup> UNDP (2015).

<sup>73</sup> UNDP (2016).

**Figure 2.2: Interactions of five emerging challenges**



Isolationism, not diversity, is gaining currency. All these challenges by themselves undermine human development.

Apart from separate individual impacts on human development, these five emerging challenges interact with – and often amplify - each other to impact the path to future human development (figure 2.2). Let us take the example of inequalities first.

As inequalities work on different planes, as highlighted earlier, they have far-reaching implications on other emerging dimensions. As poorer groups have more limited access to credit or financial resources, basic social services like health and education, their chances and opportunities for a better standard of living are reduced. Unequal access to education creates different levels of opportunities for employment for younger people.

Climate change has unequal impacts on different groups of people, more adversely affecting poor and vulnerable people and other marginalized groups in society. The negative impacts of climate change would have more severe consequences on marginal groups. People who live on fragile lands would bear the unequal impacts of environmental degradation – be it deforestation or desertification.

If younger people remained unemployed and without jobs for a longer-period, this will not only distress them, but will also hamper their skill development and have disheartening impacts on teenagers. They may start feeling that their future is also bleak. If the girls are discriminated vis-à-vis the boys in every walk of life, their frustrations may have negative impact on their aspirations.

The interlinkages between peace, prosperity and human development are rather complex and multidimensional. First, the phenomenon of peace has two dimensions – internal and external. Internally, if there are ethnic and racial tensions; a persistent culture of intolerance exists; violations of rule of law and human rights are breached; or if group conflicts and absence of peaceful co-existence are norms, and citizen's insecurity persists and grows, the

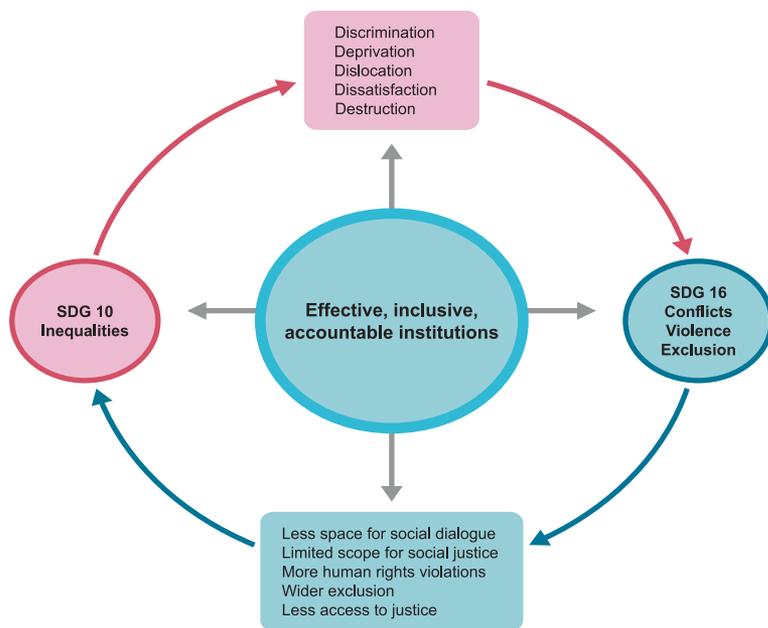
result will be conflict, instability and lack of peace. Similarly, unequal access of certain groups to natural resources, exclusion from ownership of common resources, such as community forests or water sources, often result in group conflicts and destroy communal peace and harmony.

On the other hand, countries may experience a lack of peace and an existence of instability because of external factors. Tense relations with neighbouring countries, differences of claims over borders, conflicts over ownership of common natural resources may result in instability in a country. But whatever the reason may be, lack of peace and stability hinders the path of prosperity and human development.

Similarly, if the prosperity of a society is only material, it may not contribute to the broader notions of human development, such as mutual respect, human dignity, spiritual development. If the material gains are lop-sided and imbalanced, they may contribute to expanding the capabilities and the opportunities of the few, but not all. Human development should be universal and for everyone.

But it needs to be remembered that peace and prosperity and other four dimensions of future human development are mutually reinforcing. Thus, it is not only peace and prosperity that

**Figure 2.3: Mutual interlinkages between SDGs 10 and 16**



influence the other four dimensions, but those dimensions also affect peace and prosperity as well. For example, an egalitarian society ensures a peaceful and inclusive society and a peaceful and inclusive society facilitates an egalitarian society. The relationship between the two is presented in figure 2.3 in terms of SDG 10 (inequalities) and SDG 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies).

**The future path of human development and COVID-19: analytical interconnectedness**

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has extinguished more than a million human lives across the globe, not to speak of millions of human beings suffering because they became infected. But beyond the immediate human tolls, the human development impacts of COVID-19 will also have long-term far reaching human development implications.

The impacts of COVID-19 on human development can be direct or it can be indirect. Some of these impacts would be short- or medium-term, but some of them would be long-term. For example, the impacts of COVID-19 on health and education would be direct. The burden of COVID-19 on health services is well-known, the health sector is already overstretched, as a result of which health services to non-COVID-19 diseases would shrink. The treatment of traditional diseases, the mother-child

care, women's reproductive health, immunization of children would suffer. And with the possibility of further waves of COVID-19, the situation could get even worse. Similarly, with schools closed or partially open, learning of pupils is going to suffer. Yes, in many countries, teaching and learning is being done through on-line methods – but the access to such facilities would be unequal with poor pupil from poor households ending-up without such access.

Apart from the direct routes of health and education, there would be indirect routes through which COVID-19 would adversely impact human development. Two such routes would be employment and income. Already, millions of

workers have been laid off around the world in industrial establishments. In the developing world, where the informal sector, provides employment to millions of workers, was particularly hard-hit. All these would result in losses in income for a large portion of society, especially for people, who are poor and marginalized. These loss of jobs and loss of income can very easily become a matter of survival.

With all these, both the breadth and depth of human poverty would broaden and deepen and there will be many new poor. Inequalities and disparities would expand as not only the impacts of inequalities would be unequally felt by the poor, but it would also be more difficult for them to recover when the positive transition from COVID-19 starts.

Adverse macroeconomic impacts of COVID-19 will affect human development differently. Economic growth projections around the world shows a bleak picture. Apart from having adverse impacts on jobs and income, reduced growth of the economy would also shrink the revenue of the Governments, making less resources available for the provision of public social services and public goods.

With the lockdown and quarantine due to COVID-19, participation has either been confined or taken

a different form. The traditional means of participation, such as face-to-face meetings, social gatherings, direct public interactions have ceased. Those means have been replaced by information technology-based means, such as webinar, Zoom, Streamyards etc. These platforms are used not only for social interactions, but also for official meetings, cultural events. These are also used for work as well as for businesses, affecting the form and level of employment and marketing. Thus, due to COVID-19, participation of people in various planes have taken different forms.

COVID-19 would also influence inter-generational equity since COVID-19 has changed the world so profoundly that without a shred of doubt the future

generations will be significantly different. The ability to enhance their capabilities and take advantage of opportunities may face severe constraints. They may not have the same amount or kinds of choices that we enjoy. The priority on COVID-19 may shift the focus away from climate change, which may have negative impacts on environmental sustainability and drastically raise the cost of both adaptation and mitigation efforts in the future.

An in-depth analysis of all the five emerging dimensions of human development that would influence the future path of human development in Bangladesh is discussed in the following chapters.

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# Chapter 3

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Human development  
and inequality:  
the Bangladesh  
perspective



# Chapter 3

## Human development and inequality: the Bangladesh perspective

As regards to the concept of Inequality – two questions are important – inequality of what and inequality among whom. Inequality must be measured across a dimension – for example, income, wealth, access to social services etc. The *whom* question can be investigated either in terms of various groups of a nation or between nations globally. In this context, inequalities may be between inter-groups, that is inequalities between groups; or intra-group, that is inequalities within a group.

While analysing human development, it is not enough to focus only at the aggregate levels, since the aggregate often masks the disparities in both the overall human development achievements and deprivations. Thus, concentrating only on averages, may give a misleading picture. It is, therefore, essential to go beyond the average and disaggregate the human development data to get the true picture of human development in a society. Examining inequalities in human development is thus critical.

Distribution of each dimension of human development actually may show different degrees of inequality existing within the same population or between different subsets of a population. Inequalities in income, life expectancy, and mean years schooling are never captured adequately in the composite measure of an overall HDI.

Therefore, aggregate value of HDI and the disaggregated value of the same are important to have a comprehensive picture of human development in a society. Disaggregated information may help the policy makers to develop target group-oriented human development policies.

Bangladesh has been impressively successful in reducing its absolute poverty and improving various social indicators among its income-peer group, however, the progress in reducing inequality outcomes in optimum level needs to improve further. Over time, it showed periodic fluctuations as measured by the income Gini-coefficient. During the period 2000-2010, it remained stable around 0.45. However, the latest data shows that in 2016, the income Gini-coefficient is back to its long-run value of 0.483, indicating an increase in income inequality in the last six years.<sup>74</sup> Inequalities in opportunities and outcomes have become a development challenge for Bangladesh, having adverse effects on human development. The constitution of 'People's Republic of Bangladesh' has also granted certain fundamental rights for all citizens without any discrimination. The equality of these rights ensures equal opportunities to everybody (box 3.1).

<sup>74</sup> Government of Bangladesh (2018) *Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2018*. General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, December.

**Box 3.1: The provisions for “Equality” and “Equity” in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh**

Article No.	Statements supporting Equality	Article No.	Statements Supporting Equity
11	The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed.	15	It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to attain planned economic growth, with a view to securing to its citizens-
15	It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to attain planned economic growth with a view to securing its citizen – a) the provision of basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care. b) the right to work, that is, the right to guaranteed employment. c) the right to reasonable rest, recreation and leisure.	15	b) the right to work, that is the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard to the quantity and quality of work;  (d) the right to social security, that is to say, to public assistance in cases of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age, or in other such cases
17	The State shall adopt effective measures for – free and compulsory education to all children as may be determined by law.	19	1) the State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity.
20.	Work is a right, a duty and an honour for every citizen.	20	20. (1) Work is a right, a duty and a matter of honour for every citizen who is capable of working, and everyone shall be paid for his work on the basis of the principle from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work.
25	b) uphold the right of every people freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its’ own free choice	25	c) support oppressed people throughout the world waging a just struggle against imperialism, colonialism or racialism.
27	All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.	28	4) Nothing in this article (28) shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of the backward section of citizens.
28	1. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.  2. Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life.		
31.	To enjoy the protection of the law and to be treated in accordance with law, and only in accordance with law, is the inalienable right of every citizen.		

Source: The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh

### Trends in inequality in Bangladesh

Table 3.1 indicates that whatever inequality measure is used, inequality in consumption is historically on the rise in Bangladesh. The bottom 40 per cent population used to enjoy only 24 per cent of total consumption in 1983. So, historically we started with a high inequality position and over the years, the extent of inequality has increased. The share of bottom 40 per cent has come down further to 21 per cent in 2016. The top 10 per cent used to enjoy 21.9 per cent of the income in 1983 but that has increased to 26.8 per cent.

The much-used Gini-coefficient, an aggregate index of inequality measurement, shows that over 1983-2016, it has also increased from 26 to 32, i.e., almost 25 per cent rise. Another more popular measure of inequality “Palma Ratio” also shows a 28 per cent rise of inequality during the same period.<sup>75</sup> From the table, it is also clear that the logic of using Palma Ratio is quite strong in the case of Bangladesh. In 2016, we find that the middleclass of Bangladesh i.e. middle fifty per cent were enjoying 52 per cent of national income. Thus, the remaining 48 per cent income was shared between the bottom 40 per cent and top 10 per cent population. And in this sharing struggle inequality becomes more sharply visible when we find that of the 48 per cent consumption

only 21 per cent goes to the bottom 40 per cent while 27 per cent straightaway goes to the top 10 per cent. In other words, in per capita terms, each of the top-class members consumes on average almost five times more than an average member of the bottom class. Apparently, the gap seems to be not so large. But it is not income gap which is in general higher than consumption gap because of relatively higher propensity of consumption expenditure for the relatively poor.

It is true that consumption gap has adverse implications for human development as it tends to imply less nutrition, less energy, less immunity, lesser body capacity for an average member of the bottom 40 per cent vis-à-vis top 20 per cent. Hence, a member of the bottom 40 per cent consumer group is likely to be suffering from stunted or constrained human development along with various dimensions of consumption – food and non-food.

We can also compare here the aggregate inequality in the consumption expenditure situation of Bangladesh with that of some other South Asian countries. Tables 3.2 to 3.4 reflect that situation. We should also note here that in discussing consumption expenditure inequality, we must remember that it generally underestimates the

**Table 3.1: Trends in inequality of consumption in Bangladesh**

Country	Year	Bottom 10%	Bottom 40%	Middle 50%	Top 10%	Gini coefficient (%)	Palma ratio
Bangladesh	1983	4.1	24	54.1	21.9	25.9	0.91
	1991	4.1	23.2	53.4	23.3	27.6	1.00
	2000	3.7	20.7	51.4	27.9	33.4	1.35
	2010	3.9	21.4	51.8	26.9	32.1	1.26
	2016	3.7	21	52.1	26.8	32.4	1.28

Source: HIES from various years.

<sup>75</sup> In 2011 Palma argued that instead of Gini coefficient one should use Palma ratio (i.e. the ratio of income shares between top 10 per cent and bottom 40 per cent, because of two reasons—1) it is intuitively simple to understand.2) In a study of the incidence of inequality in 2012 and later in many subsequent studies done by Palma et al. it was found with surprise that in most counties the middle and the upper middle class situated in the decile 5 to decile 9 enjoy generally 50 per cent of the national income, implying a fairly equal situation i.e. fifty per cent of population enjoying fifty per cent of the income. The real inequality is then created due to the unequal distribution of the remaining 50 per cent income between the top 10 per cent and bottom 40 per cent of the population. So, the battle over inequality is fought between the extremely deprived and the extremely rich sections of the society and victory belongs to the group which could command the support of the middle.

degree of inequality in the society since actual inequality in two other dimensions correlated with it, i.e., income and wealth inequality is in general bound to be higher than consumption inequality. But such longitudinal comparable data on all three dimensions (consumption, income and wealth) are not available for all years to us. Moreover, there are controversies about the income data or wealth data because people often underreport them.

The first thing to observe from tables 3.2 to 3.4 is that almost all countries in South Asia experienced a rise in consumption inequality over 1990-2016. It shows that in 1983 the Gini-coefficient of

Bangladesh was only 26, but in India in the same year it was higher at 32. In Sri Lanka it was still higher at 33 in 1985, In Pakistan it was 33 in 1987 and the highest inequality was observed in Nepal at a much later period for which data was available, i.e., 35 in 1995. So, it is beyond doubt that Bangladesh had initially started with the least inequality level in South Asia.

Bangladesh Government has committed itself to an equitable growth. In so far, we could reduce our inequality we shall have a better prospect in future for avoiding the middle-income trap.<sup>76</sup>

**Table 3.2: Gini coefficient (consumption) in percentage for selected South Asian Countries**

Country	1988	1995	2004	2010	2016
Bangladesh	28.8	32.9	33.2	32.1	32.4
India	32.6	32.7	36.8	37.5	37.8
Nepal		35.2	43.8	32.8	
Pakistan	33.2	28.7	32.5	29.8	33.5
Sri Lanka	32.4	35.4	41.0	36.4	39.8
Data year	Pakistan 1990; India 1987; Sri Lanka 1990	India 1993; Sri Lanka 1996	Bangladesh 2005; Nepal 2003; Sri Lanka 2002	India 2009; Sri Lanka 2009; India 2011	India 2011; Pakistan 2015

Source: World Bank.

Note: Nearest year has been considered in constructing the table.

**Table 3.3: Palma ratio (Consumption) for the South Asian countries**

Country	1995	2010	2016
Bangladesh	1.32	1.26	1.28
India	1.30	1.65	1.69
Nepal	1.47	1.29	
Pakistan	1.08	1.14	1.37
Sri Lanka	1.47	1.56	1.86
Data year	*Pakistan 1996	Sri Lanka 2009; India 2009	* India 2011; Pakistan 2015

Source: Estimation based on World Bank.

Notes: Nearest year has been considered in constructing the table.

<sup>76</sup> Bulman, Eden, and Nguyen (2014); Islam (2016).

**Table 3.4 Trend of inequality (Consumption) in South Asia**

Country	Year	Gini coefficient (%)	Palma ratio
Bangladesh	1983	25.9	0.91
	1991	27.6	1.00
	2000	33.4	1.35
	2010	32.1	1.26
	2016	32.4	1.28
India	1983	32.1	1.26
	1993	32.7	1.30
	2004	36.8	1.59
	2009	37.51	.65
	2011	37.8	1.69
Nepal	1995	35.2	1.47
	2003	43.8	2.28
	2010	32.8	1.29
Pakistan	1987	33.3	1.34
	1990	33.2	1.33
	2001	30.4	1.17
	2010	29.8	1.14
	2015	33.5	1.37
Sri Lanka	1985	32.5	1.28
	1990	32.4	1.30
	2002	41.0	1.95
	2009	36.4	1.56
	2016	39.8	1.86

Source: Estimation based on World Bank.

Notes: Nearest year has been considered in constructing the table.

### *Trends in inequality of income*

Almost a similar picture of income inequality in case of income distribution can also be noticed. The only difference is that the income inequality is at a higher level than the consumption inequality. Figures 3.1 and 3.2, represent the level and trend of income inequality measured in terms of both Gini Index and Palma ratio for all households of Bangladesh, for rural households and for urban households, respectively.

As figure 3.1 indicates, the income inequality has always been higher in the urban areas during the time period 1973-74 to 2016. Moreover, the national income Gini coefficient had increased from 0.36 to 0.48 (33 per cent increase in 42 years). But, the speed of increase was not always the same. During 1973-1991, the income inequality index

increased from 0.36 in 1973-74 to 0.39 in 1991-92, implying an 8 per cent rise in eighteen years. But, from 1991 to 2005, the income Gini increased from 0.39 to 0.47 – a 19 per cent rise in fifteen years, i.e., more than one per cent rise every year in the level of income Gini coefficient. Lastly, during 2005-2016, it rose from 0.47 to 0.48, about 2 per cent rise in income inequality in 10 years.

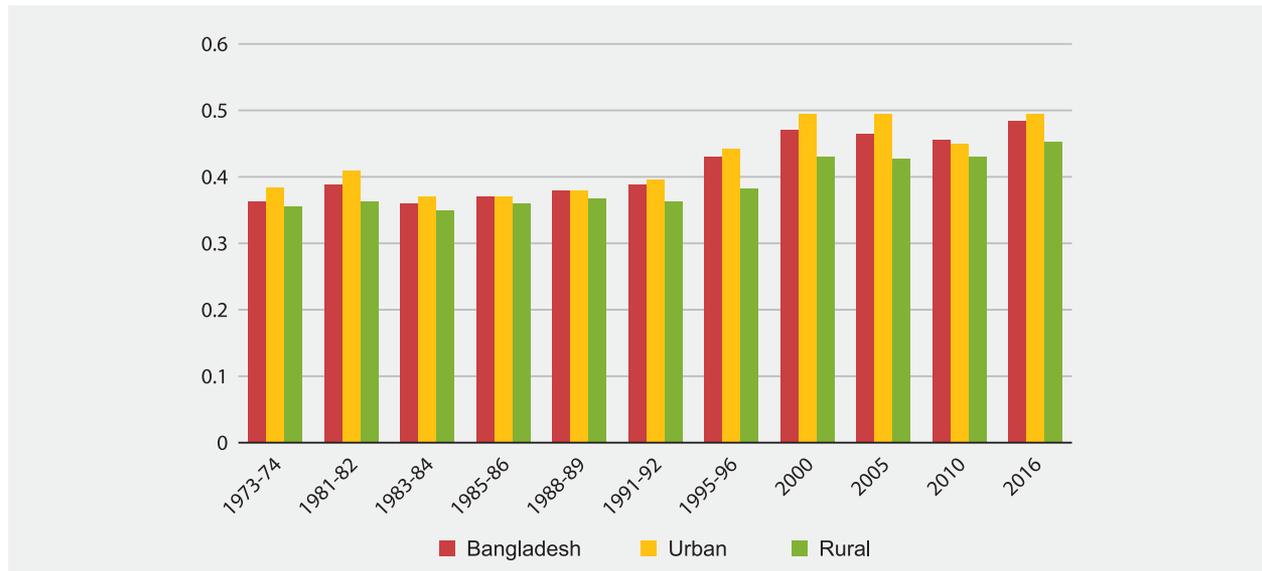
It is well-known that the overall economic growth of Bangladesh and its democracy got a boost, if not a breakthrough, from the beginning of the decade of 1990s after the fall of autocratic regime. The post 1990 period also experienced a significant decrease in poverty too. But the data in table 3.1 makes it clear that from 1995 -96 as economic growth picked up, the income inequality also increased quite sharply. This implies that growth

was more unequally divided in post 1995 period. In the urban sector this inequality gap was relatively large.

In popular parlance it means that in the early period the poor living just below the poverty line income were able to get out of poverty with a slight rise in the absolute level of their income. That is, the growth effect on poverty decline was relatively high in the early period.

But subsequently when with unequal growth, inequality of income distribution will continue to rise further and therefore the relative response of poverty to growth would slack down; implying that poverty may not decline as sharply as before. And after the current pandemic of COVID-19, poverty may increase to an even higher level, and with a slower recovery of the growth rate accompanied by a higher incidence of inequality, the situation may become dismal especially for the bottom forty per cent.

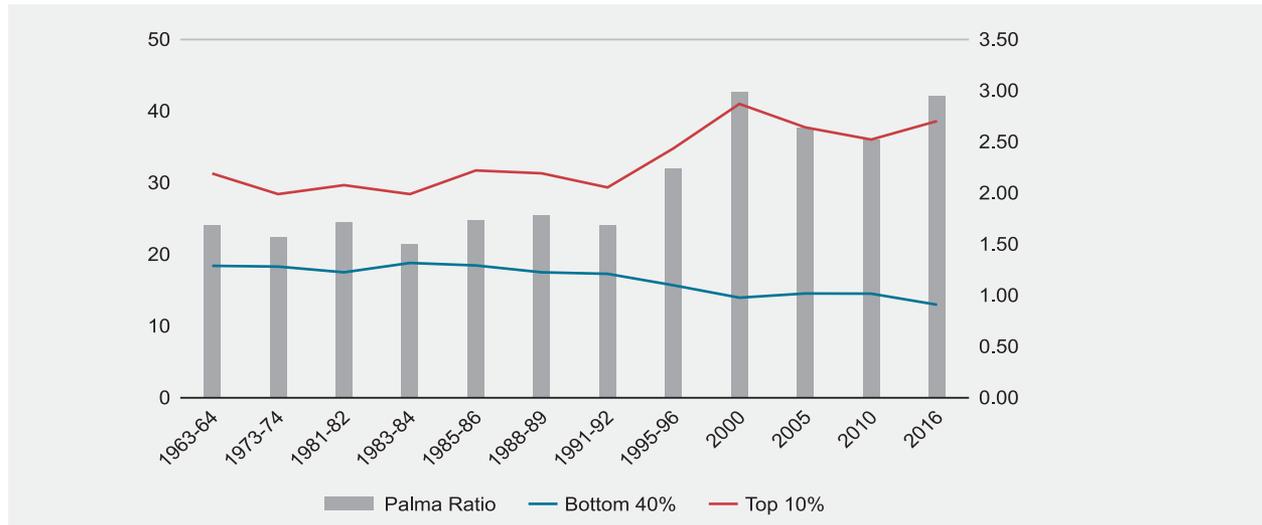
**Figure 3.1: Income Gini Index of Bangladesh**



Source: Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, various years.

Note: This one is based on the income reported by the households, not the reported consumption expenditure by them (as done before in the tables-3a-3B and 3C).

**Figure 3.2: Income inequality (Total)**



Source: Estimation based on HIES reports, various years.

The Palma Ratio therefore had increased slowly from 1.55 in 1973-74 to a level of 1.68 in 1991-92. But from then on it began to increase quite sharply and became 3 in 2016 implying that an average member of the top 10 per cent was enjoying nine to ten times more income than that of the bottom 40 per cent. Figures 3.1 and 3.3 depict the trend of both income Gini ratio and Palma ratio for national, Rural and urban Households of Bangladesh more graphically and comprehensively and proves it beyond doubt that “inequality” in our society has been increasing steadily in the recent period although perhaps, it has not yet gone out of control.

Figure 3.3 shows the implication of income inequality in terms of a ratio called Palma Ratio. It shows how the bulk of the income is going to be shared between the top 10 per cent and the bottom 40 per cent. At the national level, for all Bangladeshi Households, in 1973-74, bottom 40 per cent used to enjoy only 18.4 per cent of the total income. It continues to decline in a creeping manner and has become 17.4 per cent of total income. But since 1991 the share of the bottom 40 per cent declined quite sharply to become only 13 per cent of total income in 2016, the latest year for which data is available. Conversely, a similar pattern of first slow increase from 28 per cent to 29 per cent of total

income was visible in the case of the top 10 per cent households, but likewise after 1991 their share of income jumped up to a level of 38 per cent by the year 2016.

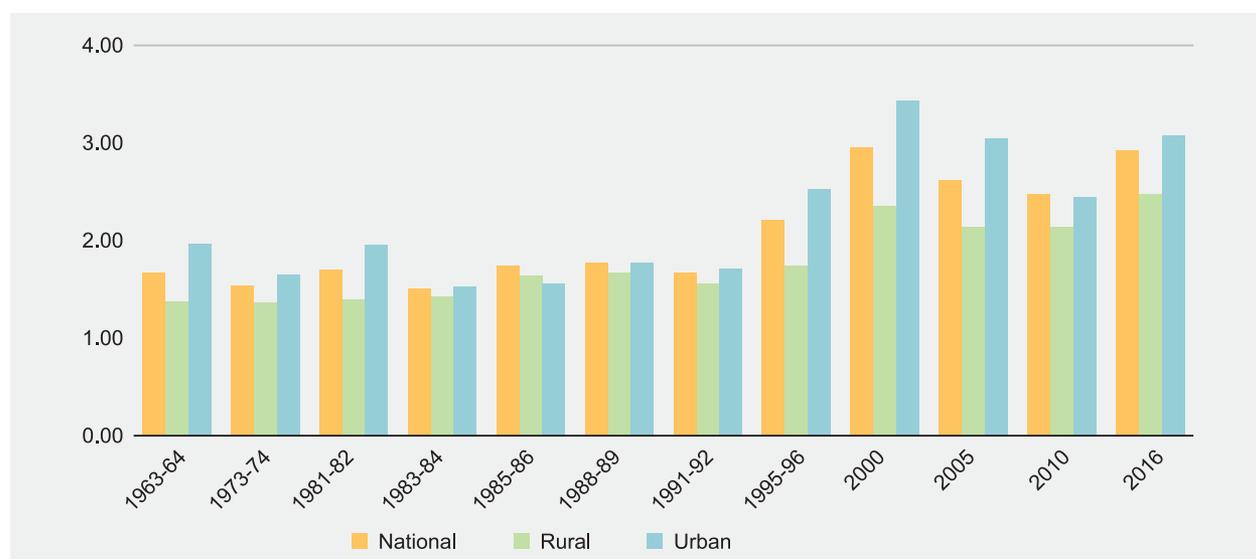
### Human development implications of inequality

Inequalities have significant human development implications. Inequalities not only exclude people from human development journeys, but also slow down the human progress. Inequalities adversely affect such human development dimensions as health, education, nutrition etc.

#### *Income inequality adversely affects human development*

It is true that the bottom 40 per cent in the income ladder necessarily spends a larger percentage of their income for food consumption. Even after that they may spend less money for food and remain relatively more deprived as compared to the members of the top 10 per cent households. They may also have less remaining capability to buy quality education or quality health service from the market because of their lower income and the necessity to spend the lion's share of that income on food. Thus, unequal income may also imply sometimes relatively less unequal food intake, but it will be generally reflected in unequal education and health expenditure of the bottom households.

**Figure 3.3: Trend in Palma ratio**



Data source: HIES, various years; Based on income deciles.

Note: The Palma ratio is calculated based on income share of the household deciles reported in the Household Income Expenditure Surveys of BBS. This one is based on the income reported by the households, not the reported consumption expenditure by them (as done before in the tables-3a-3B and 3C).

Tables 3.5 to 3.7 show us how the inequality of expenditures on food, education and health is correlated with income inequality among the members of the household at national level and regional levels (urban and rural). From table 3.6, we find that monthly per-capita food expenditure of a household from the highest income decile (10<sup>th</sup>) is almost 3 times more than a member belonging to the lowest decile. But in case of non-food monthly per-capita expenditure, it is almost 7 times more. In the case of annual per-capita education expenditure, it is almost 9 times more and in case of annual per-capita health expenditure it is 6.3 times more. Thus, from the national level data, it is clear that as a person slides down the income scale, the relative deprivation in the non-food items, health services and education services increase more sharply than that in the case of food. Thus, too much

attention to income and calorie-based poverty may fail to take into account the other important non-food dimensions of human development, especially education and health capabilities. The same pattern of higher inequality in the fields of education and health prevails in the rural and urban regions too (tables 3.6-3.7).

#### *Incidence of inequality of education*

Human capability is a multi-dimensional thing. It not only depends upon income status or consumption status or wealth/capital ownership status of a human being, it also depends quite significantly on the education status of a human being. But “Education” is so important that it itself can create larger scope for moving upward along the other HD dimensions. Primarily education creates gainful employment and through that

**Table 3.5: Per capita (mean) monthly HH expenditure by income deciles and consumption categories (National)**

Deciles	Consumption	Food	Non-food	Education	Healthcare
Decile 1	2122	1277	845	265	50
Decile 2	2282	1342	940	351	57
Decile 3	2502	1428	1074	427	74
Decile 4	2741	1538	1203	494	94
Decile 5	3022	1657	1365	602	106
Decile 6	3321	1775	1547	674	109
Decile 7	3698	1932	1766	776	135
Decile 8	4223	2093	2130	1179	181
Decile 9	5111	2345	2766	1219	194
Decile 10	9137	3032	6105	2295	313

Source: Estimation based on HIES (2016).

**Table 3.6: Per capita (mean) monthly HH expenditure by income deciles and consumption categories (Rural, Tk.)**

Deciles	Consumption	Food	Non-food	Education	Healthcare
Decile 1	2079	1262	817	253	52
Decile 2	2229	1324	905	331	60
Decile 3	2444	1406	1038	412	80
Decile 4	2625	1494	1131	470	99
Decile 5	2934	1631	1304	560	116
Decile 6	3207	1745	1462	633	119
Decile 7	3546	1887	1659	720	143
Decile 8	4032	2053	1979	828	209
Decile 9	4882	2314	2567	1051	211
Decile 10	8616	3001	5616	1522	344

Source: Estimation based on HIES (2016).

**Table 3.7: Per capita (mean) monthly HH expenditure by income deciles and consumption categories (Urban, Tk.)**

Deciles	Consumption	Food	Non-food	Education	Healthcare
Decile 1	2339	1351	988	337	42
Decile 2	2520	1421	1098	462	46
Decile 3	2713	1508	1205	487	54
Decile 4	3081	1667	1414	586	81
Decile 5	3248	1724	1525	732	81
Decile 6	3576	1843	1733	778	89
Decile 7	4003	2021	1981	903	118
Decile 8	4546	2161	2385	1850	135
Decile 9	5421	2387	3034	1460	170
Decile 10	9656	3063	6594	3054	283

Source: Estimation based on HIES (2016).

enhances income, consumption, health and nutrition, savings, wealth, security and self-dignity. An important question arises as to what determines the distribution of education among the various groups of the society.

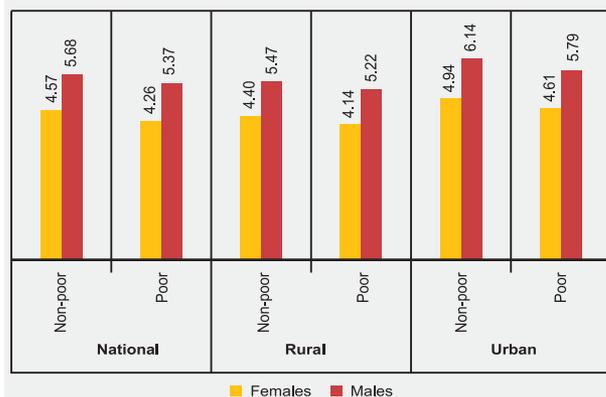
A hypothesis may be tested that educational outcome partly depends on study efforts and intelligence of the subject and partly depends on external economic circumstances and/or gender identity. If that is so, we need to treat it as “Inequity” or “Unjustified inequality”. BBS data may be used to see how educational outcome differs in respect to poverty, gender and regional conditions. Figure 3.4 presents “mean of school years” by income poverty status, gender status and regional status.

It is observed from the above tables that more interventions are required for the educational enhancement of the poor and rural people as compared to the urban people.

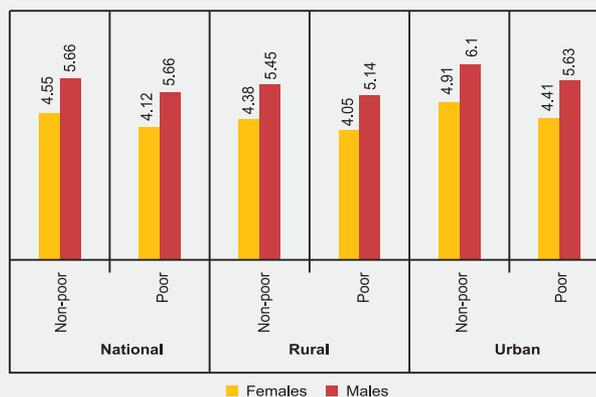
The gap in educational achievement also varies widely depending upon location and the ethnic identity of the population under focus. Data from the two extremely disadvantaged districts like Bandarban (Tribal hilly area) and Sunamganj (Haor area) are chosen and their MYS is compared with that of the top two districts of Bangladesh-Dhaka and Khulna to demonstrate this aspect of inequality of opportunity in the field of education (figure 3.5). The contrast was startling. In Bandarban, overall MYS is only 2.9 years whereas the same for Dhaka is 7.6 years (162 per cent higher).

**Figure 3.4: Mean Years of schooling by poverty status, location and gender**

Mean years of schooling (MYS) by location, gender and lower poverty (UPL)



Mean years of schooling (MYS) by location, gender and lower poverty (LPL)



Source: Estimation based on HIES (2016).

### Difference in health outcome

The success of Bangladesh vis-à-vis its neighbouring countries in various health-related outcomes is well-acclaimed regionally and internationally. In fact, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in many health-related indices in last three decades, particularly reductions in infant, child and maternal mortality, increase in vaccination coverage and life expectancy at birth. Despite these stunning achievements, there still exists some difference in health outcomes in respect to wealth and regions. Among these indices, Figure 3.6 and 3.7 show respectively the incidence of under-five mortality rate (U5MR) for households with different wealth and regional status.

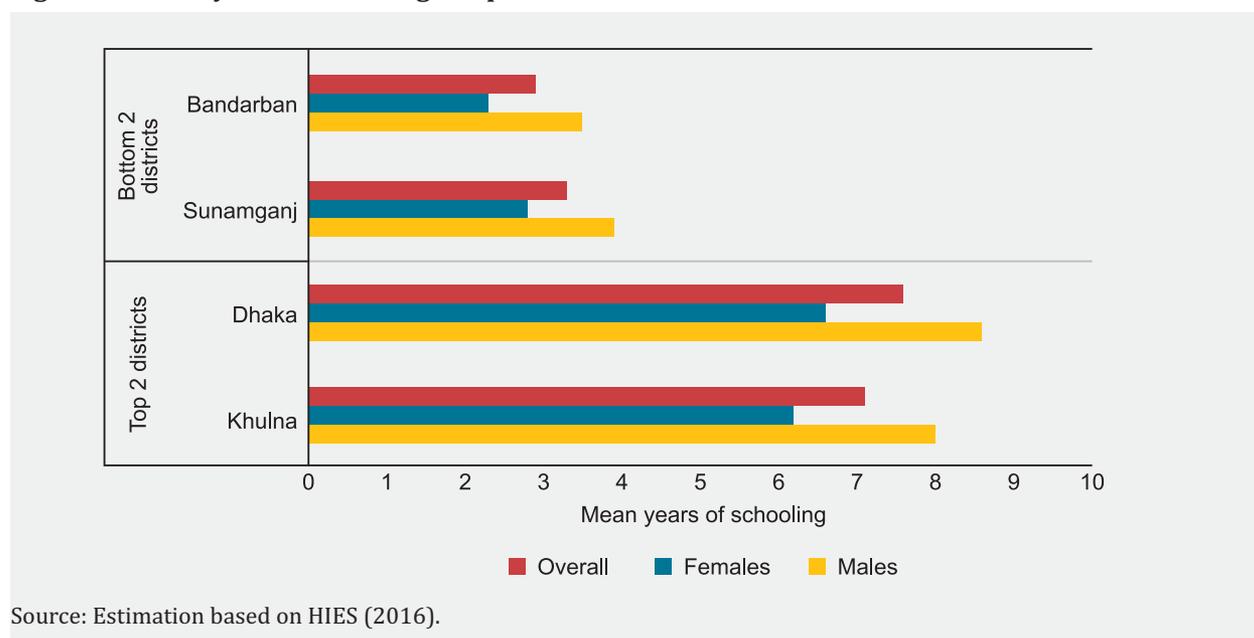
The bright side of the figures presented above is well known nationally and also internationally. There is a steep general decline in the under-five mortality rate of Bangladesh (From 149 to 40 during 1993-2019 (table 3.7).

At all levels, rich or poor, rural or urban situation, all have much improved over time. Even for the poorest quintile the U5MR has decreased from 121 per 1,000 live births to only 49 per 1,000 live births (figure 3.6). That means as high as 60 per cent decline during the period of only 15 years from the

year 2004 to year 2019. That is a good performance indeed. But here is also unequal performance as we move upward to richer quintiles. Firstly, the U5MR score is related to the wealth position of the family inversely. That means U5MR decreases sharply as wealth level increases. Thus, we find that the U5MR for the richest quintile is in general always 40 to 43 per cent lower than that of the poorest quintile. On the other-hand, U5MR decreases from 72 per thousand to only 28 per thousand, i.e., a 62 per cent decline for the richest quintile whereas that rate of decline for the poorest quintile is slightly less (60 per cent). So, in one sense, the situation has significantly improved for both rich and poor, but the position of the rich has improved at a much faster rate. So, there is a gap that needs to be addressed.

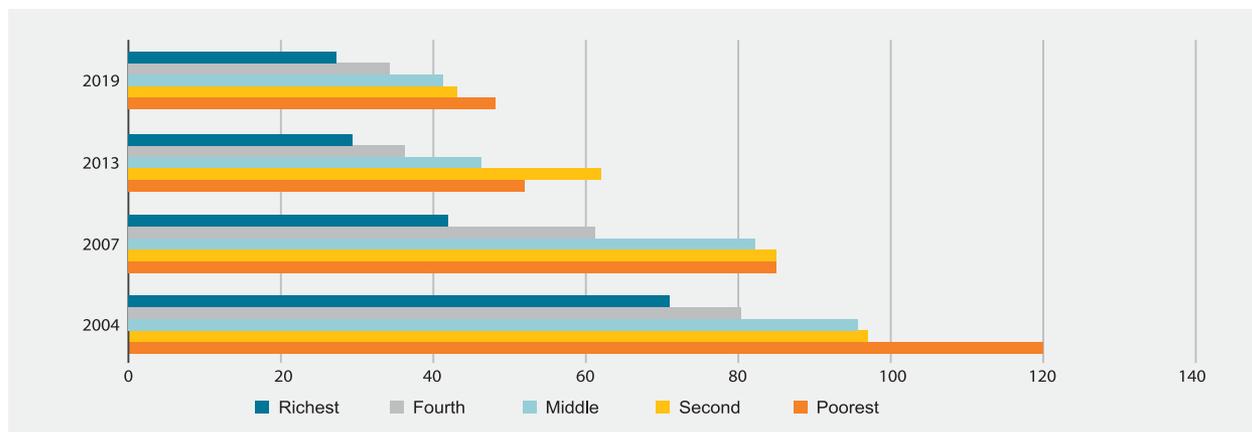
The picture for rural-urban dichotomy is also more or less similar (figure 3.7). The urban U5MR is in general always lower. In 1993 it was 26 per cent less than that of the rural children. However here the rate of decline was faster in the rural regions and in 2019 the urban U5MR was only 15 per cent lower than that of the rural children which implies that R-U gap was decreasing with respect to this indicator of U5MR. This extraordinary performance was greatly appreciated by renowned development practitioners of the world.<sup>77</sup>

**Figure 3.5: Mean years of schooling in top 2 and bottom 2 districts**



<sup>77</sup> Dreze and Sen (2013).

**Figure 3.6: Under-5 mortality rate by wealth quintiles**



Source: BDHS (different years); the 2019 data is taken from the MICS (2019).

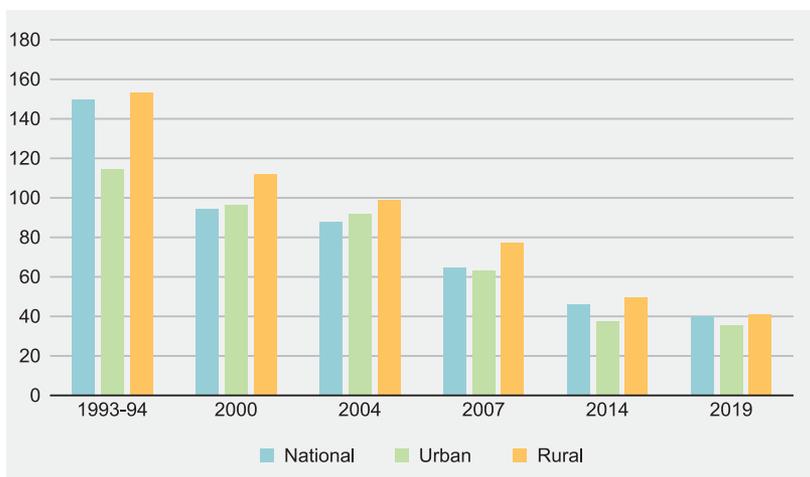
### Poverty reduction versus inequality increase

In Bangladesh, average income has been increasing continuously at an accelerated rate. However, this rising income has been shared unequally by different groups of people. That had varying effects on the distribution of consumption, education and health for the individual members of the society belonging to one or the other subgroup within the society. The relative disparity or gap of the suffering subgroup and the enjoying subgroup historically sometimes had been increasing due to unequal opportunities for increasing income, consumption, education, health and wealth. Sometimes such unequal opportunities create a polarized society leading to conflict and lack of peace.

In Bangladesh, the pattern of growth of income as a whole was unequal but that had not yet created

such an extreme polarization because everybody had been getting a positive share from the incremental growth of income. That is why the absolute poverty or extreme inequality had been decreasing continuously. The case of success in reduction of poverty in Bangladesh has been praised internationally from 1990 to 2016. Only recently after the Pandemic the doubts have been cast about this secular trend of declining absolute deprivation. It should be remembered that absolute poverty can still decline despite a rise in relative poverty (inequality). This may happen when fruits of incremental income are shared by the extreme rich and extreme poor unequally. That means when the positive growth rate of income at the lower end becomes smaller than that of the group in the upper end. This is precisely what happened in Bangladesh – income inequality has increased despite a fall in the income poverty.

**Figure 3.7: Under-5 mortality rate by regions**



Source: BDHS (different years); the 2019 data is taken from the MICS (2019).

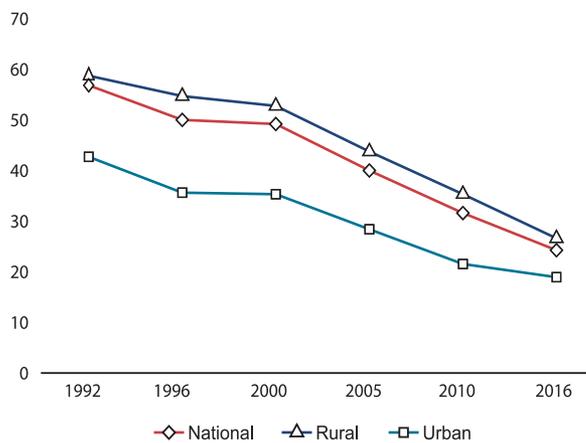
### Poverty reduction

Figures 3.8 and 3.9 shows the pattern of absolute moderate poverty and absolute extreme poverty trends for Bangladesh measured in terms of *Head Count Ratio* of those who enjoy an income below the UPL income and LPL income respectively for the period of 1990-2016 for which we have national level data as well as its rural-urban breakdown. Three observations with important policy implications for increasing rather introducing new social security

measures for urban poor of Bangladesh can be made from the trend in figure 3.8:

- Moderate poverty had a secular trend of decline from 1992 onwards nationally for both urban and rural population.
- Urban poverty rate had always been lower than the rural poverty rate.
- There was a deceleration in the rate of decline in the urban poverty rate since 2010. Thus, the gap between urban extreme poverty rate and rural extreme poverty rate has been shrinking since 2010.

**Figure 3.8: Trend in Poverty (Upper Poverty Line)**

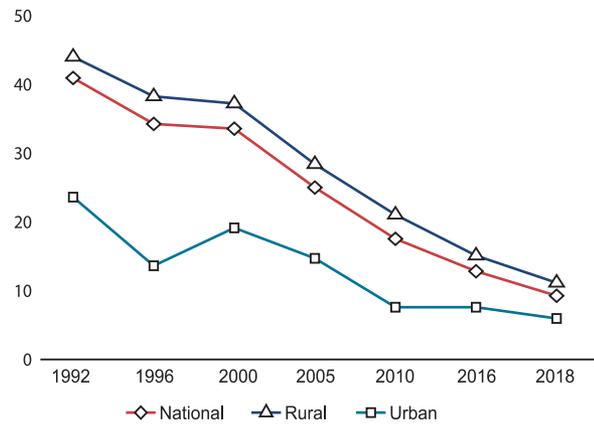


Source: HIES (various years).

Figure 3.9 highlights the trend in extreme poverty. Again, three observations are noteworthy:

- The extreme poverty rates in all situations showed generally a secular trend of decline from 1990 onwards.
- The rate of fall of extreme poverty was higher in general than that of the moderate poverty. That means extreme poverty situation was improving more quickly. And here also the rate of urban extreme poverty was always less than that of the rural extreme poverty.
- We also observe significant deceleration in the rate of decline of urban extreme poverty since 2010. So, the gap between urban extreme poverty rate and rural extreme poverty rate has been closing up since 2010.

**Figure 3.9: Trend in Poverty (Lower Poverty Line)**



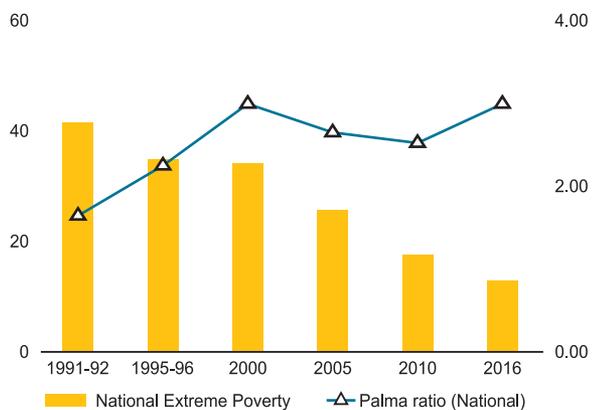
Source: HIES (Various years); 2018 data is from the SANEM-GED Household Survey conducted in 2018.\

Sometimes it is suggested that the incidence of extreme urban poverty was actually a manifestation of, extreme rural poverty, because extremely poor people actually migrated from the rural sector to the urban sector in search of jobs. This also has various policy implications for our poverty reduction strategies.

*Declining poverty versus increasing inequality*

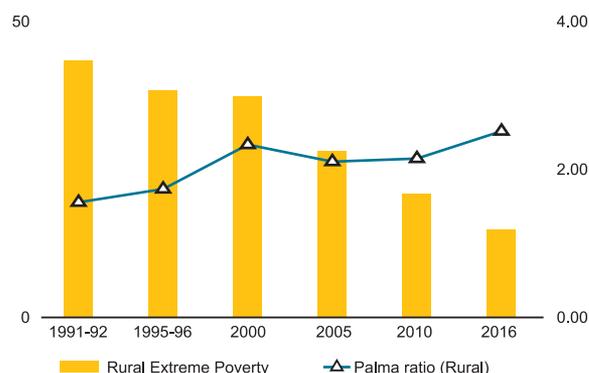
Figures 3.10-3.12 show trends of decreasing poverty and increasing Inequality over time. The contrast is more clearly visible if an inequality trend measured in terms of Palma Ratio is superimposed on the poverty trend measured in terms of extreme poverty for different scenarios – national, rural, urban etc.

**Figure 3.10: Palma ratio vs trend in extreme poverty (National)**



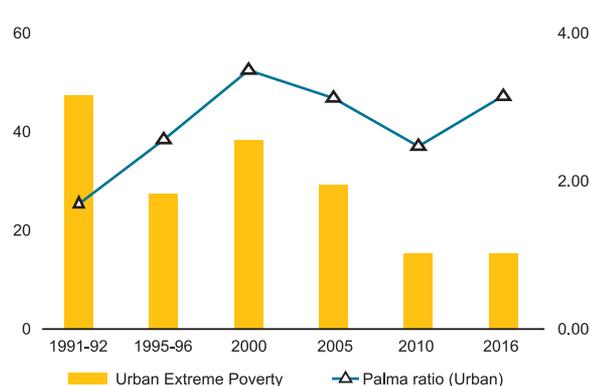
Data source: HIES, various years; Based on income deciles.

**Figure 3.11: Palma ratio and trend in extreme poverty (Rural)**



Data source: HIES, various years; Based on income deciles.

**Figure 3.12: Palma ratio and trend in extreme poverty in Urban areas**



Data source: HIES, various years; Based on income deciles.

One main driving force behind the increase in inequality can be attributed to the disproportionate distribution of wages of the workers. Due to excess supply or alternatively shortage of demand for labour, the real wage of the workers never improves

commensurately even though their hard work is one of the major contributing factors to the value added and the high growth of the GDP. Table 3.8 reflects the trends of growths in GDP, employment, labour productivity and real wage of the workers.

**Table 3.8: Growth of GDP, employment, labour productivity and real wage in Bangladesh**

Annual average growth rate; percent	GDP Growth	Employment	Labour productivity	Real Wage
Period	(%)			
1985/86 - 1995/96	4.21	1.33	2.88	1.26
1995/96 - 2005/06	5.56	3.14	2.42	1.16
2005/06 - 2015/16	5.89	2.30	3.59	0.03

Notes and Sources: Osmani (2015), — Linking Equity and Growth in Bangladesh, Ulster, University, Northern Ireland.

(1) GDP growth rates are based on constant price GDP series obtained from BBS publications on national accounts. Employment data are from Labour Force Surveys of BBS.

(2) Growth of labour productivity is derived by subtracting employment growth from GDP growth.

(3) Real wage was calculated by deflating nominal wages by national CPI. The data on both nominal wages and CPI were taken from BBS (2017b). For nominal wages, the new series with base year 2010/11 was used for the period from 2010/11 to 2015/16. See footnote.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> BBS has been issuing a new series of nominal wages since 2010-11 after a complete overhaul of its database, which was designed to improve the coverage of wages in various occupations (BBS 2015). Osmani uses the new series for the period since 2010-11 and combines it with the old series for the preceding years, while recognizing that the two series are not fully compatible. Some publications of BBS continue to update the old series beyond 2010-11, and it should be noted that if one were to use this updated series one would not find any fall in real wages. However, since the new series is based on a much superior database and is recognized by BBS as its official series on money wages, Osmani has chosen the new series rather than the updated old series for the period since 2010-11; for the earlier years there is no choice but to use the old series. Second, real wages have been derived by deflating money wages with the national CPI. This is not ideal; a more relevant deflator would be the cost-of-living index for workers, but no such index exists for recent years. As an alternative, one could use the food portion of the CPI, which might be a closer approximation of the workers' cost of living index than the overall CPI, but that has been checked and found that the major conclusions remain same, including that of the decline of real wages since 2010-11.

The above table shows that economic growth rate had been increasing successively over the three decades from 1985-86 to 2015-16. Each successive decade reveals an increasingly higher growth rate. There has been an increase in labour productivity from 2.88 during 1985-86 to 3.44 in 2015-16, but real wage has declined during this period.

#### *Progress in tackling Inequality*

Bangladesh has been recognized in the world development literature as a success story of high growth and poverty reduction. Bangladesh has been internationally termed as 'Development Miracle.' Economists termed it as 'Development Surprise'.<sup>79</sup> The main four historical driving forces behind such a progress were – strong and diversified growth in agriculture, labour intensive export growth, the rise of the garments industry, expansion of non-farm employment in the rural sector and the increasing flow of remittance from the migrant workers. The main challenge would be to keep them sustainable in the future.

The Government of Bangladesh also developed a National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) that had

helped people move out of poverty. The main vision of the Strategy was to build social safety measures for all deserving citizens throughout their lifecycle, particularly the poor and vulnerable, to make the country free from hunger and poverty. A partial record of achievements in this field until 2021 is summarized in Box-3.2, presented below.

Further, the Government is undertaking multi-faceted development projects aimed at structurally transforming the economy as well as widening the scope of social security to reduce poverty and inequality for inclusive development. In addition to large-scale development projects, various programmes are being conducted simultaneously to meet the basic needs of the backward, destitute, helpless and marginalised people of the society.

Despite the evidence presented earlier regarding the achievements in economic growth and poverty reduction, unfortunately the income inequality has been increasing over time. Therefore, the Government of Bangladesh has officially accepted the goal of reducing income inequality and

**Box 3.2: Share of top 11 programs by budget size in total safety net (SSN) programs, 2020-21**

Social safety net program	Allocation in million BDT (2020-21)
Pension for retired government employees and their families	230000
Savings Certificate Interest Assistance (Social security part)	66250
Rural infrastructure development (social security)	41870
Secondary and higher secondary stipend	39640
Food Friendly Program	38440
Honorarium for freedom fighters	33850
Gratuitous relief	30630
Refinancing scheme for low income farmers/small traders	30000
Old age allowance	29400
Agricultural rehabilitation	25000
Housing support for the homeless	21580
<b>Total allocation in 11 largest SSN programs</b>	<b>586660</b>
<b>Total of all SSN programs</b>	<b>955740</b>
<b>Share of 11 largest programs in total SSN programs</b>	<b>61.4 %</b>

Source: Calculated by the Ministry of Finance based on data from mofportal.gov.bd or compiled on basis of data of Ministry of Finance (mofportal.gov.bd).

<sup>79</sup> Asadullah, Savoia & Mahmud (2014).

mentioned it in the recently published Eighth Five-Year Plan of Bangladesh (2020-2025):

*“The reduction of income inequality is a tough challenge and a long-term endeavour. Growing economies like China and India are all experiencing rising income inequality. Since assets and human capabilities are unequally distributed historically, the benefits of growth in the context of market economy tend to favour those who have a better endowment of assets and human capabilities to start with. The long-term income inequality reduction strategy must, therefore, focus on reducing this initial gap.”<sup>80</sup>*

The Eighth Five-Year plan document also urged for a better strategy of social inclusion by eliminating all kinds of physical and social barriers against the participation of the bottom forty per cent in the growth process, recognizes the necessity of a well-designed personal income tax system that taxes all sources of income at a progressive rate and finally suggests for a radical reform of public expenditure policy giving more priority to human development sectors.<sup>81</sup>

### Challenges of accelerated inequality due to COVID-19

Rising inequality was already a concern and COVID-19 could accentuate the pre-existing situation. There is also worry of short-term spike in poverty

acceleration due to COVID-19 (Table 3.9). The initial inequality will likely make economic growth less pro-poor, putting various marginalized and vulnerable groups at disadvantageous situations during the phase of Covid 19 and the process of economic recovery.<sup>82</sup> This can constrain many people to expand and exploit their full capabilities, leading to further inequalities subsequently.<sup>83</sup> This process of rise of *inequality* may affect human development. It is also important to recognize that rising poverty incidence can also have further adverse implications for other dimensions of human development such as health and educational attainment.

As in any other country, in Bangladesh also, there were unequal impacts on COVID-19 on different groups of people. It is the poor and the marginalized who suffered most in terms job loss, income loss, consumption loss and disruptions of life. They survived lockdowns through using past savings, distress sales or borrowing.

Due to COVID-19, imparting of lessons in classes is mostly virtual, with the use of information technology, such as mobile phones or computers. Table 3.9 indicates that the children from poor households or from remote rural areas may have limited access to such technology.

In view of possible rise in poverty and inequality in the phases of COVID-19, the Bangladesh Government has responded quickly and announced

**Table 3.9: Creation of New Poor During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Name of the Research Organization	Number of New additional Poor (m)	Total Number of Poor after addition (m)	Newly estimated Poverty Rate
BIDS <sup>2</sup>	15.84	60	33.20%
Policy Research Institute	24.1	58.1	24.10%

Source: Compilation based on reports published in the national dailies/respective research bodies.

<sup>80</sup> General Economics Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (December, 2020), *Eighth Five Year Plan, July 2020-June 2025: Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness*, p.109, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh.

<sup>81</sup> See, GED, Bangladesh Planning Commission, (December, 2020), *Ibid*, p.110.

<sup>82</sup> FAO 2020; UNDESA 2020; and Maffioli 2020.

<sup>83</sup> UNDP 2019.

a stimulus package in 2020. Particularly, it increased COVID-19 related healthcare and public spending on social protection to minimise the loss of lives and to restore employment and economic activities. It also has extended generous help to protect jobs in the formal manufacturing sector by introducing G2P system and provided low cost credit and guarantee schemes for the cottage, small, and medium scale enterprises which often provide the largest sources of employment to the poor and near-poor population. The poverty or inequality situation would have been much worse without the timely intervention of the Government during the phases of the COVID-19. Further, with a view to increasing long-term capabilities and opportunities for the poor, it has planned to significantly increase social spending on rural infrastructure – roads, electricity, irrigation and food control provide universal education assistance, introduce a universal health care system as a pilot basis, promote financial inclusion, raise

farm diversification and its productivity through research/extension, price support and access to inputs, and enhance access of the people living in the lagging regions to international migration. Further, it expects that adequate job will be created in rural non-farm, manufacturing and service sectors through sustained economic growth and sectoral transformation. On containing inequality, it plans to introduce redistributive fiscal policy involving a well-designed progressive personal income tax structure together with public spending on social sectors that can increase long term capabilities of the poor and the near-poor to promote social mobility. All these comprehensive measures are expected to improve inequality situation as well as continue poverty reduction in future. The Government is committed to enhance spending on social protection and increase long-term capabilities and opportunities for the poor to contain further rise in inequality and maintain poverty reduction in future.

**Table 3.10: Digital divide – a constraint to ensure online education for all during COVID-19**

Region	% of households without a		% of households without internet access at home	% of households without a television
	Computer/tablet	Mobile phone		
<b>Place of residence</b>				
Rural	96.9	4.7	66.8	56.1
Urban	85.7	2.0	46.9	25.8
Total	94.4	4.1	62.4	49.4
<b>Region of residence (divisions)</b>				
Barishal	96.7	3.0	67.8	69.5
Chattogram	95.2	2.4	50.8	50.4
Dhaka	91.0	2.8	53.0	33.9
Khulna	94.6	3.1	61.3	47.5
Mymensingh	96.8	6.0	73.8	64.8
Rajshahi	95.1	6.3	71.7	47.1
Rangpur	96.9	6.8	81.7	59.7S
Sylhet	94.9	4.4	59.2	63.0

Source: MICS 2019.

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# Chapter 4

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## Climate change and human development in Bangladesh



# Chapter 4

## Climate change and human development in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. It is affected by a large number of rapid extreme and slow onset disasters due to global climate change, which include, inter alia, cyclones, devastating and extended floods, extended and extensive droughts and salinity intrusion. During 2000-2019, its position was the seventh in the long-term Climate Risk Index (CRI) and third in terms of annual average death toll and number of extreme weather events.<sup>84</sup>

The country has experienced remarkable progress in economic growth, poverty reduction and human development over the past two decades. It is also internationally recognised as a 'role model' for disaster management and climate change adaptation. However, these achievements are accompanied by deterioration of such key environmental indicators as soil, air and water quality and forest cover. Bangladesh, including many other countries, experience the greatest loss in agricultural production and livelihoods due to global climate change even though they are the least responsible for it.

Human development is a core priority of the Government of Bangladesh, which has been reflected in its policies, development plans, and national vision documents, such as the 'Vision 2021' to become a developing country and 'Vision 2041' to emerge as high income developed nation by 2041. Mainstream developmental factors, such as economic growth, education, health and

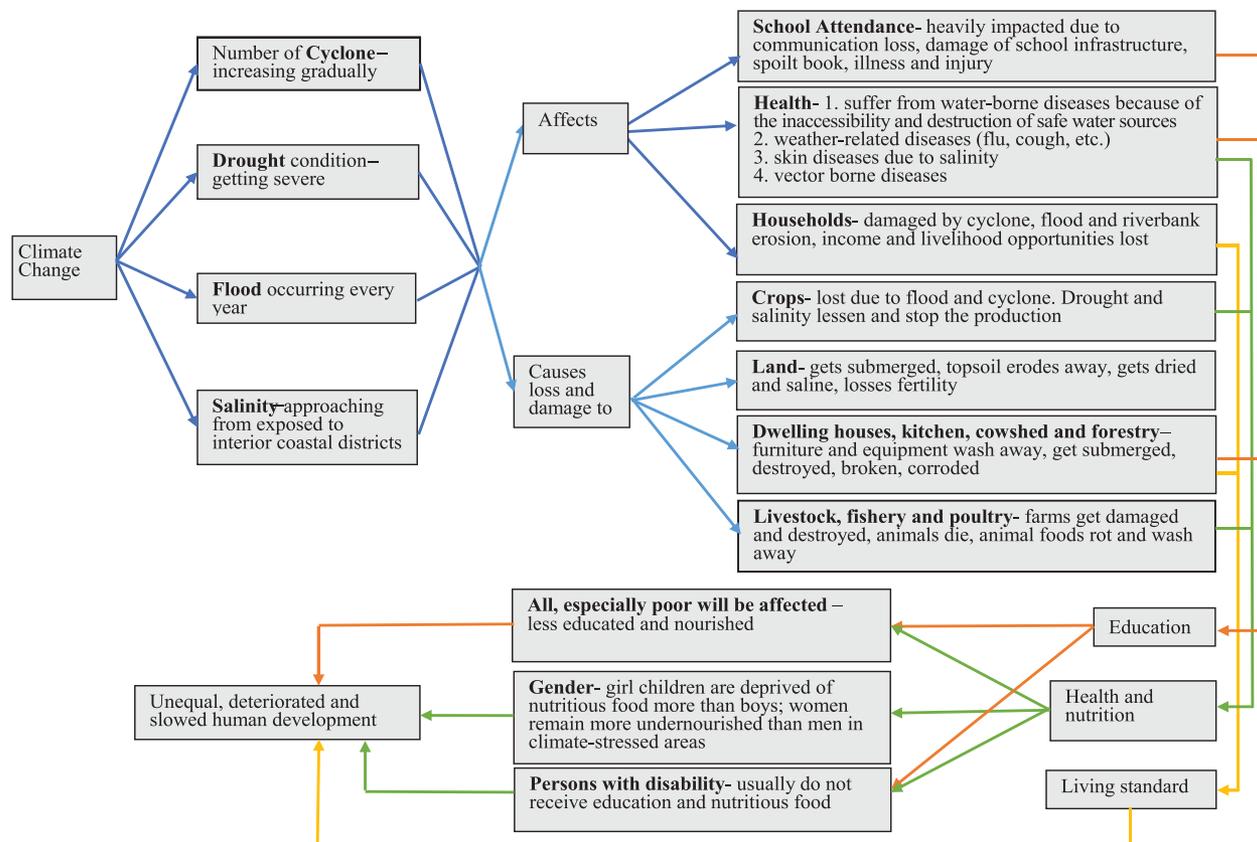
nutrition are the key determinants of human development. However, environmental quality and climate change can alter the performance of these factors and deteriorate expected human development. Climate change affects human development through various channels (table 4.1). Therefore, it is important to identify the relationship between climate change and human development in Bangladesh.

*First*, even though it is difficult to quantify, climate change is expected to have wide-ranging and complex effects with important implications for education, health and nutrition, and quality of life through its direct and indirect impacts on livelihoods, and natural physical resources. Regular, flash and coastal floods, rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, storm and cyclones, drought and salinity reduce agricultural land, create shortage of improved drinking water availability, and leads to loss of income and damage of physical assets as well as infrastructure in the affected localities. These are expected to create considerable socio-economic differences between climate-vulnerable and other regions.

*Second*, rising sea levels, salinity and cyclone in coastal areas, and flood, riverbank erosion, droughts as well as other natural adversities cause population displacement or climate refugees. Because of recurrent natural hazards and related economic and social stresses, many of them opt for migration to cities or slums in Bangladesh.

<sup>84</sup> Eckstein et al. 2021.

**Table 4.1: Climate change and human development: conceptual linkage**



Third, extreme weather events and slow onset climatic disasters are likely to increase the proportion of poor people living in the affected areas and limit their potential to come out of poverty and bring about manifold problems. These events create disproportionate effects on women, children, physically challenged population and ethnic minorities. People living in geographically vulnerable areas, such as *chars*, *haors*, coastal and hilly regions are more disadvantaged than other areas.

Fourth, because of persisting climatic events, the access to resources and basic services (such as education, skill development, health care) and opportunities (e.g., job, ownership of/renting physical capital and asset) tend to remain uneven for climate-vulnerable population. They experience frequent deaths and health risks, diseases and psychological stresses due to climatic disasters. These may lead to unequal human development

outcomes (life expectancy, nutrition, educational attainment, living standard) for them compared to people living in other areas despite significant Government interventions.

Fifth, the outbreak of COVID-19 has created additional burden on people living in climate-vulnerable areas. The economic and social processes of adaptation and coping with vulnerabilities are greatly hampered by the pandemic through reverse migration<sup>85</sup> and reduced economic activities in these areas.

This chapter tries to comprehend how and to what extent climate change impacts various dimensions of human development in the context of inequality in access, opportunities and developmental outcomes. Indeed, climate change affects people's choices, capabilities, freedoms, and opportunities, which include, inter alia, income, education, health and nutrition, and standard of living. The chapter also presents how climate change is associated with

<sup>85</sup> Rural to urban migration has stagnated significantly as job opportunities in the formal and informal sectors have squeezed in the cities. A notable portion of urban people moved to rural areas during the period of extended lockdown.

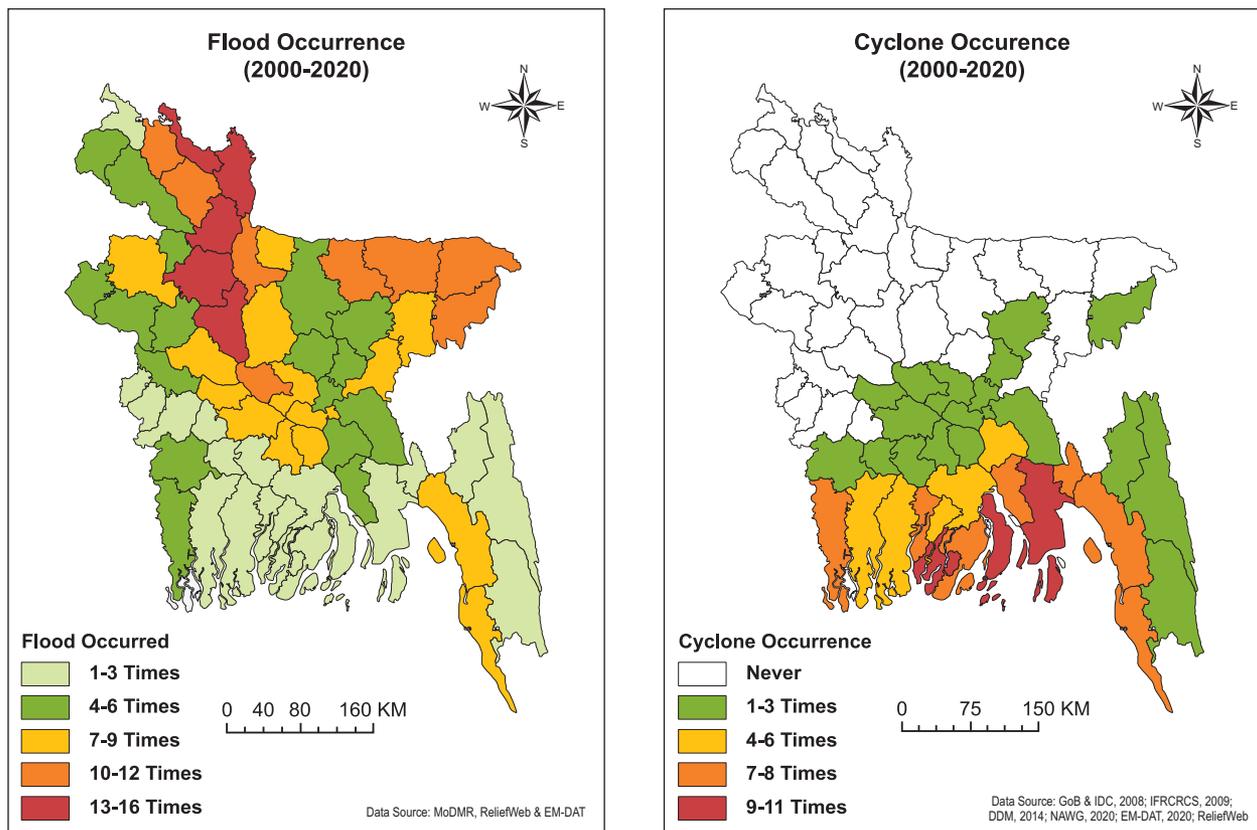
higher incidence of poverty (both national and multidimensional poverty) and inequality in socioeconomic outcome indicators in Bangladesh by gender, income, ethnicity, other demographic factors and geographical locations. It also describes the policies and actions taken by the Government of Bangladesh and other agencies to address the adverse impacts of natural disasters and climate change in the broader perspective of human development.

**Damage and loss due to climatic disasters – a disaggregated view**

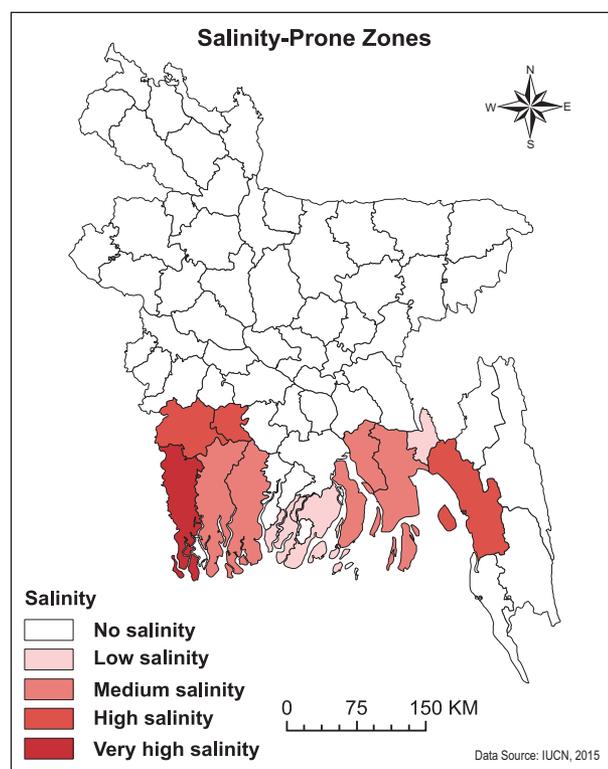
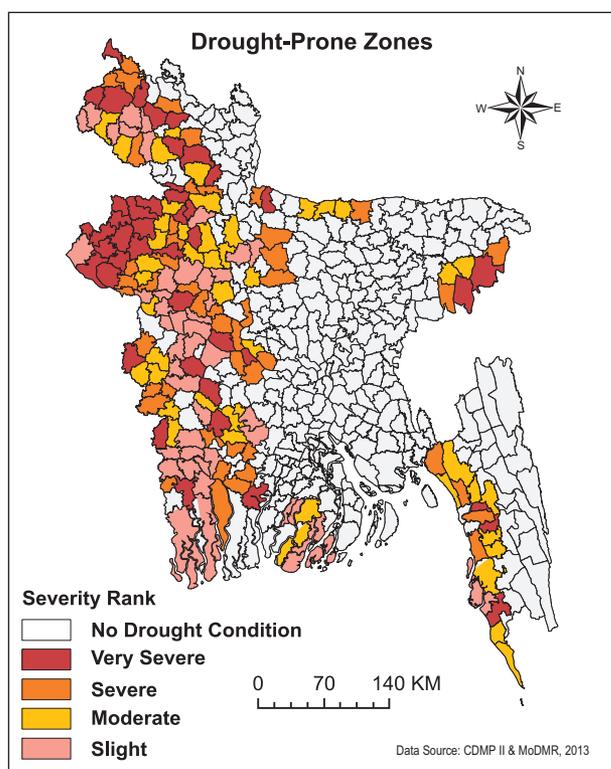
Since 2000, as many as 124 major extreme weather events occurred in Bangladesh, which include 63 storms (28 tropical cyclones), 36 floods, 6 landslides, 1 drought and 14 events of extreme temperature in addition to slow onset climatic events, such as salinity in the coastal areas, drought, and riverbank and coastal erosion. Figure 4.1 presents the climate induced fragile and disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh.

Even though the entire country is affected by climate change, there are some specific districts which are affected more by slow onset and rapid extreme events because of their special agro-ecological and climatic features. These are flood prone, drought prone, *haor*/depression, riverine *char*/island, coastal island, cyclone and salinity prone areas. Most of the salinity- and cyclone-prone districts belongs to the coastal belt, while *haor* is located in the northeast region of the country. Inhabitants of riverine islands (*char*) are highly susceptible to climate hazards because of fragile geography. As a result, they are subject to low levels of natural, human and social capital, which often forces them to deal with abject poverty, livelihood insecurity and least resilience. Climate hazards, such as recurrent flooding, riverbank erosion, and drought make their lives more vulnerable because of limited options for livelihood diversification, lack of ownership of agricultural and non-agricultural assets, jobs, formal credit and subsidy.<sup>86</sup>

**Figure 4.1: Major climate-induced natural disasters in Bangladesh**



<sup>86</sup> Sarker et al. 2020.



Source: Based on micro data of Bangladesh: Disaster Related Statistics 2015.

A recent study found that the Meghna estuarine region is highly vulnerable in terms of salinity, storm surge height and coastal protection level. A total of 2,386 km of shoreline (about three-quarters of shoreline) is found as highly vulnerable. Estuarine islands, such as Char Montaz, Char Nizam, Char Lakshmi, Char Kukrimukri, Char Kasem, Sona Char, Char Piya, Maluvi Char (Choto Dwip) are affected by severe salinity concentration in the ground water. Being a low-lying terrain, Meghna estuarine coast is also vulnerable to storm surge height. As high as 82 per cent of the total coastline covering 2,538 km is susceptible to storm surge. However, the entire Meghna estuarine coast (covering 2,703 km of shoreline) is found to be highly vulnerable in terms of coastal protection through mangroves.<sup>87</sup> These indicate dejected living standard and exposure of multiple climate hazards to the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of this area.

Households living in climate hotspots are subject to considerable damage and loss because of a number of disasters every year vis-à-vis ongoing slow onset hazards (figure 4.2). Natore, Sunamganj, Bhola, Patuakhali and Bagerhat are the most affected districts due to climate hazards. Coastal districts, *haor* areas, and north-eastern areas have the most affected households by disasters. CHT zone in the low category may be because of having comparatively less population density.<sup>88</sup> The coastal zone is always exposed to the cyclone, storm surge, and salinity. However, mainly cyclone is responsible for the abnormally high number of affected households for the coastal zone. If the other districts of the coastal zone (which are not in the “very high” category) are considered, still the number of affected households is high, which makes the coastal zone an overall vulnerable zone.

<sup>87</sup> Mahmood et al. 2020.

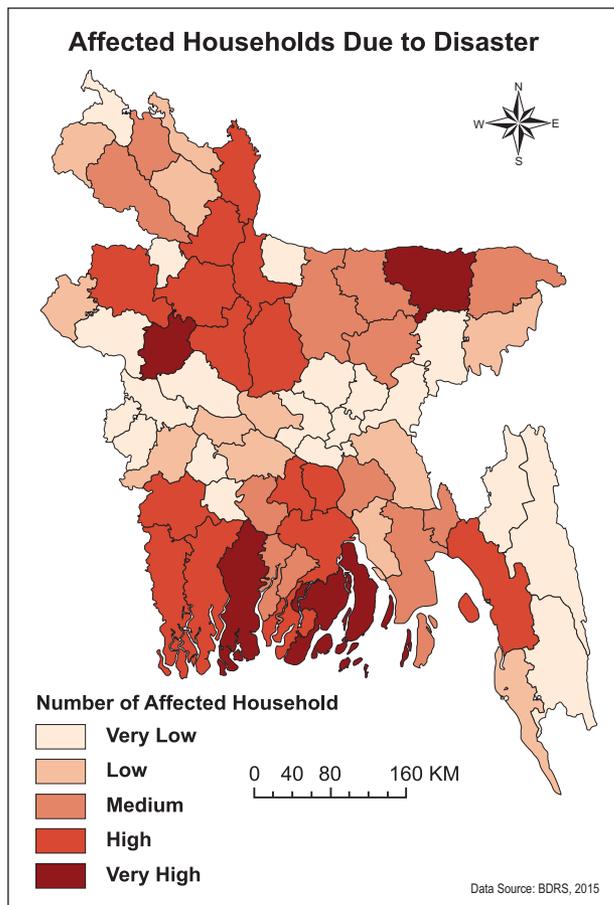
<sup>88</sup> Based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 2016, five categories have been set to observe the degree of damage and loss by district. The range of the “very low” category is 2,426 to 20,010 households. The “very high” category’s range is 156,353 to 262,060 households, which is nearly tenfold of the “very low” category. The “very high” category represents the worst affected districts, which includes districts from the coastal zone and *haor* area. See, BBS 2016.

Sunamganj is the worst affected district in the haor area, which may be because of recurrent flash floods. However, drought, flood, thunderstorm, hailstorm, and other miscellaneous disasters make Natore one of the worst affected districts. In other districts of the north-eastern zone, a large number of affected households are found with similar hazardous condition of the coastal area. Either cumulative destruction of a number of disasters or only flood is responsible for that high damage and loss.

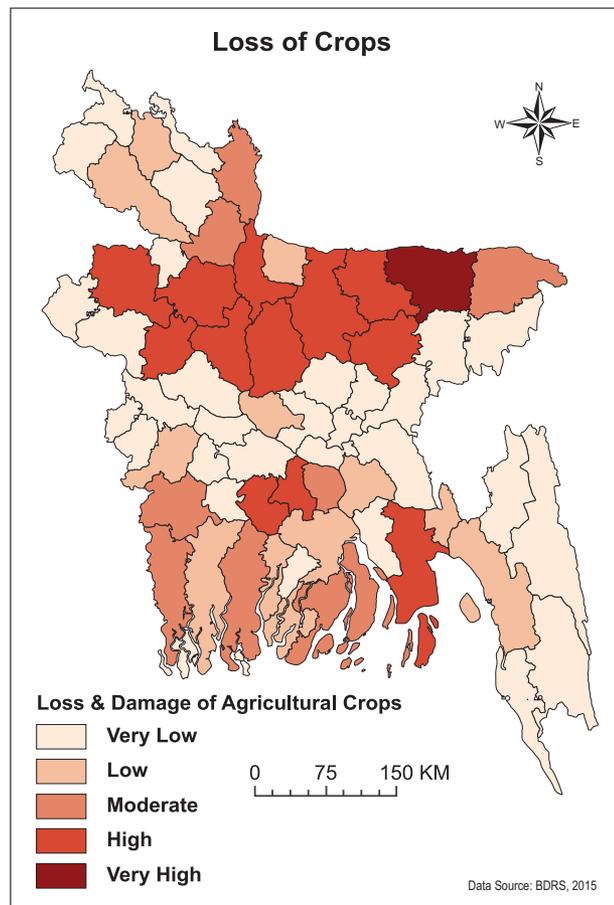
Haor district Sunamganj faces the highest amount of loss of agricultural crops (figure 4.3). Some climate-vulnerable districts of Rajshahi, Mymensingh, and Dhaka divisions also incur significant loss and damages. The loss occurs

mostly in paddy cultivation. Other crops lost in disasters are potato, maize, jute, pulse, and fruits. However, the combined loss and damages do not even come close to that of paddy. The amount is the highest for Sunamganj perhaps because paddy is vastly cultivated in this district during winter and pre-monsoon period. Early floods can destroy the crops to such an extent that it can cause massive loss and climate change is responsible for such an untimely extreme weather event. Similarly, being a part of the haor area, Netrakona and Kishoreganj also incur huge losses. The other districts which incur a similar amount of loss are mainly flood-prone (districts of Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions) and drought-affected zones (districts of Rajshahi division). Disasters also destroy livestock, fisheries and poultry (figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.2: Disasters affect households**



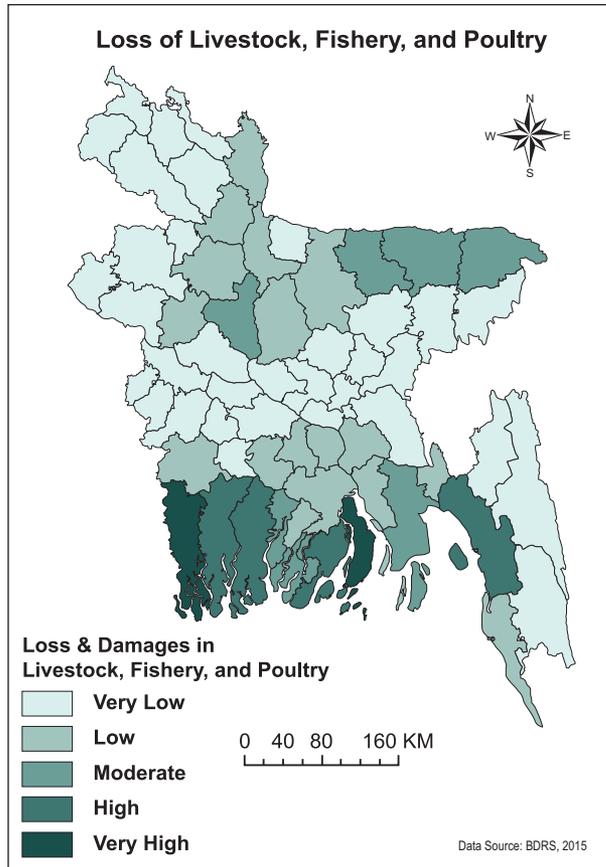
**Figure 4.3: Loss of crops**



Source: Based on micro data of Bangladesh: Disaster Related Statistics 2015.

Sunamganj, Bhola, and Patuakhali experience loss and damage the most. The whole coastal area faces more loss and damages than any other area of the country. It is because the coastal area is the only zone which is hit by cyclones every year during pre- and post-monsoon seasons. Thus, the properties of people get damaged frequently by cyclones (figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.4: Disasters destroy non-crop resources**

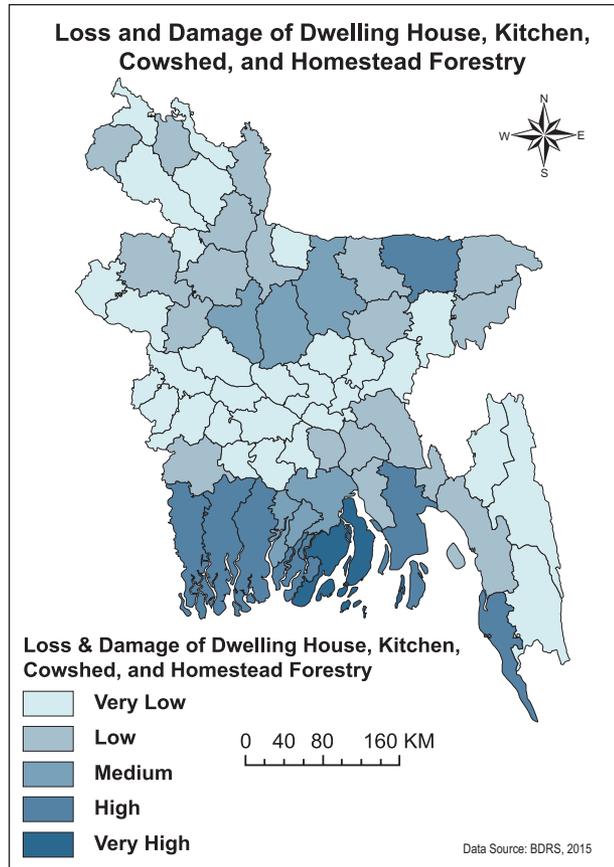


Source: Based on micro data of Bangladesh: Disaster-related Statistics 2015.

Sirajganj, Tangail, and Barishal faced the highest amount of loss in terms of land mainly because of flood and riverbank erosion (figure 4.6). Flood washes away the topsoil and riverbank erosion destructs land. Lands in the districts along the Jamuna River, some coastal districts, and Sunamganj lose more than the other districts. In the case of districts along Jamuna River, the main reason of land loss and damage is flood and riverbank erosion, while the main reason behind coastal districts loss and damage of land can be attributed to salinity and coastal erosion. Indeed, salinity has made the cultivable land infertile or not

suitable for cropping at all or not up to expectation. Even building houses or other infrastructure in saline land is difficult because infrastructures get damaged and weakened easily. Some other reasons are waterlogging, flood, and riverbank and coastal erosion. Sunamganj also suffers from loss and damages due to flood and riverbank erosion.

**Figure 4.5: Disasters destroy properties too**

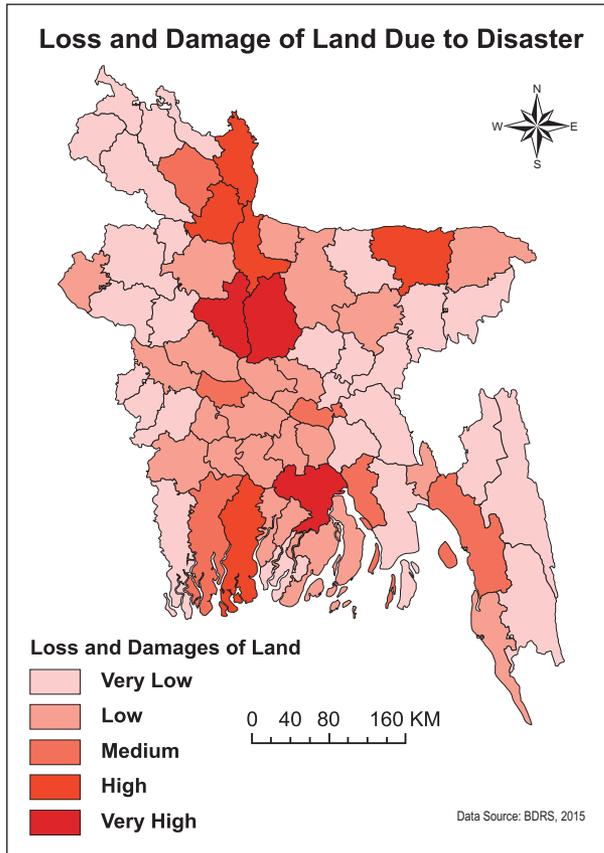


Among the disasters, riverbank and coastal erosion are the main causes for loss and damages of land.

The whole coastal area faces more loss and damages than any other area of the country. It is because the coastal area is the only zone which is hit by cyclones every year during pre- and post-monsoon seasons. Cyclone and storm along with tidal surge are the main reasons behind the highest loss and damages to livestock, fishery, and poultry in these areas. In most of the cases, the animals die and their food get damaged or destroyed. The coastal and haor area faces more loss than most other areas of Bangladesh.

Conversely, flash and regular floods keep the agricultural lands inundated for extended periods in Sunamganj. Houses, kitchens, cowsheds and trees also get submerged and washed away by water. The amount of loss and damages for Sirajganj, Tangail, and Mymensingh is at the same level as the coastal zone because these districts are flood prone. Flood causes either damage to the properties by rotting and corroding the house, kitchen, and cowshed building materials if these are made of flimsy materials, such as hay and tin, respectively, or loss if these get washed away (figure 4.5). The rate of loss and damages is also noticeably high in other north-western districts because these are also regularly hit by floods. Thus, the properties get damaged and washed away at a great extent.

**Figure 4.6: Disasters destruct land**



Source: Based on micro data of Bangladesh: Disaster Related Statistics 2015.

Climatic disasters would damage both physical and human assets, which include natural resources like land, infrastructure, livestock, financial capital and human health (Figure 4.6). Super-cyclone, flood or heavy precipitation can limit economic activity for weeks or months especially in rural and remote areas. These can reduce the food and nutrient intake, especially of women, children, and elderly populations and decrease school attendance at the affected regions because of income erosion and disruption of occupation of the poor and low-income groups.

**Impacts of climate hazards on human development of Bangladesh**

There is a strong nexus between climate vulnerability (composed of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity) and human development in Bangladesh. Climate change is linked to human development in terms of mortality and morbidity, access to healthcare services, schooling and literacy, and income and livelihoods of the climate-vulnerable population. The effects of climate change, viz. climate-induced disasters, bring additional stresses on life and livelihoods, which affect the performance on various indicators of human development.<sup>89</sup>

*Poverty*

The districts which are affected by climate change are mostly characterised by higher incidence of poverty except Barguna, Bhola and Satkhira districts. Among them, flood-prone areas (Kurigram and Gaibandha districts) have the highest incidence of poverty headcount ratio measured by population below the upper and lower national poverty line. Chapai Nawabganj, Sunamganj and Patuakhali districts also have higher share of population living under lower poverty line. Thus, most of the climate change affected districts have higher incidence of poverty than the districts which are less affected by climate change.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing overall national headcount poverty between 2010 and 2016. Similarly, reduction of

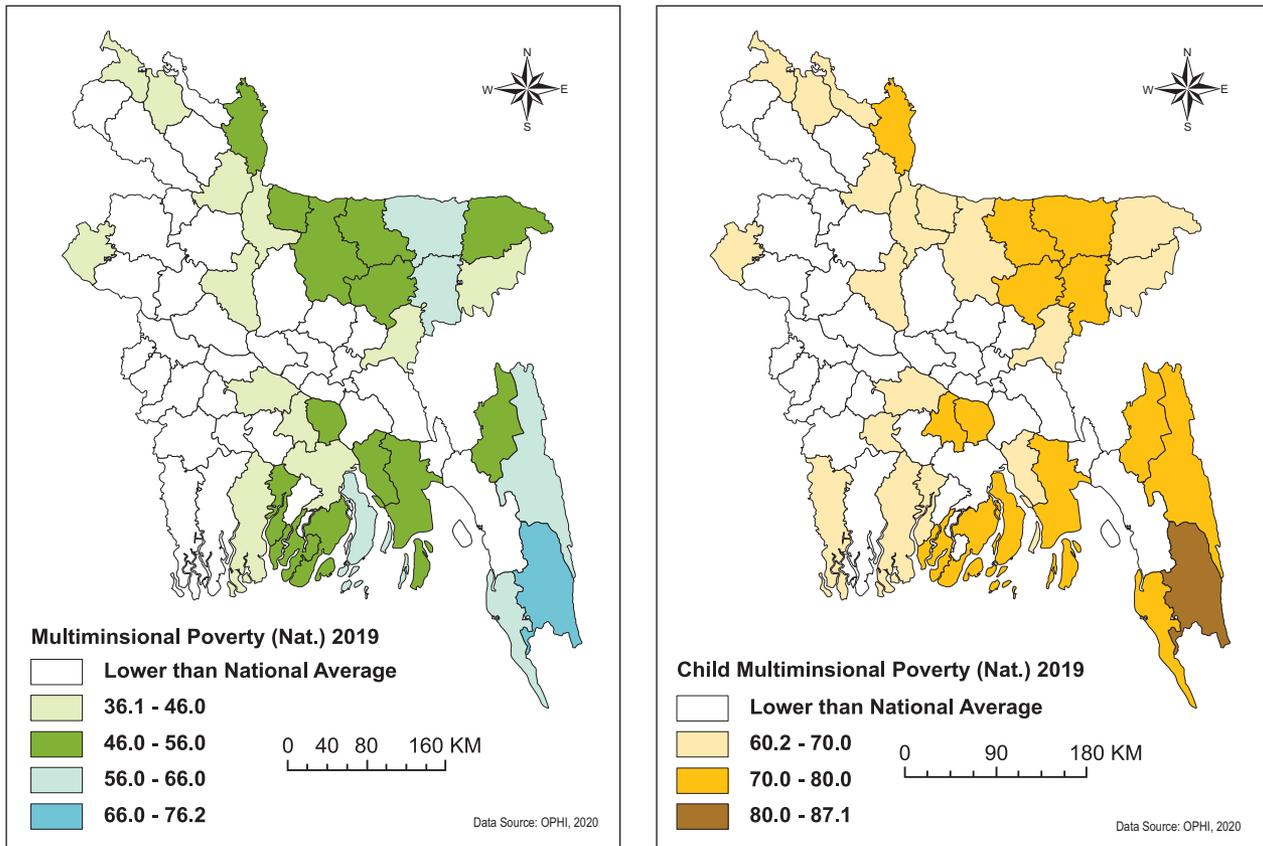
<sup>89</sup> EM-DAT 2020.

multidimensional poverty, which is linked closely with improvement in human development, has witnessed impressive progress between 2012-13 to 2019 (figure 4.7). The performance of each district improved significantly. In 2012-13, higher percentages of the coastal, haor, flood, and drought-prone areas' people were multidimensionally poor, which means people had less access to education, clean fuel, electricity, assets, food, water, and so on (figure 4.8). The progress in 2019 shows that now fewer people are considered as multidimensionally poor. Thus, even though there is a large dispersion in district-wise performance in terms of standard national headcount poverty in both 2010 and 2016 in which poverty of some climate-stressed districts has increased considerably (e.g., Kurigram, Kishoreganj, Lalmonirhat, Chapai Nawabganj and Patuakhali), the progress in multidimensional poverty is secular with lower spatial dispersion over time.

The whole coastal area faces more loss and damages than any other area of the country. It is because the coastal area is the only zone which is hit by cyclones every year during pre- and post-monsoon seasons. Cyclone and storm/tidal surge are the main reasons behind the highest loss and damages to livestock, fishery, and poultry of these two districts. In most of the cases, the animals die and their foods get damaged or destroyed. The coastal area and haor area face more loss than most other areas of Bangladesh.

Thus, even though the situation has improved in terms of proportion of population living under multidimensional poverty, climate-vulnerable zones which had higher proportion of multidimensionally poor people in 2012-13 are still lagging in 2019 to a great extent. Yet, except for Khulna and Bagerhat, most of the highly climate-

**Figure 4.7: Incidence of multidimensional poverty (%), 2019**



Data source: Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) (2020).<sup>90</sup>

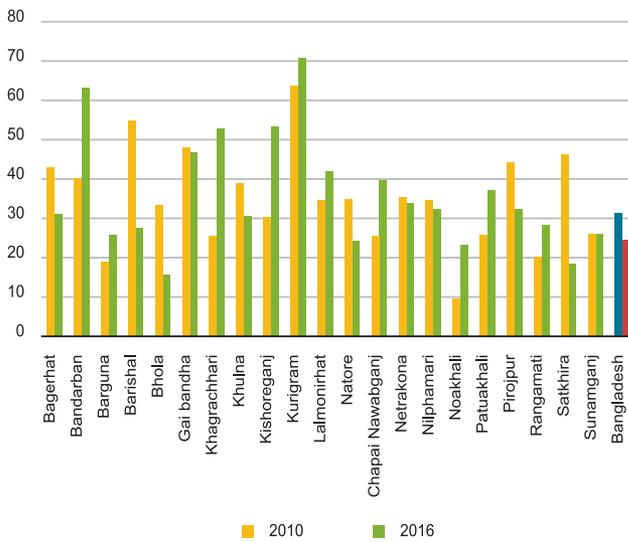
<sup>90</sup> OPHI 2020.

stressed districts demonstrate higher incidence of multidimensional poverty than the national average (for example, Bhola, Sunamganj, Cox's Bazar, Netrakona and Barguna districts). Similar pattern in the incidence of multidimensional poverty on children can be observed. Bhola, Sunamganj, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Kurigram, Kishoreganj, Barguna, Patuakhali are some of the most climate-stressed districts in which children are exposed to high to very high incidence of multidimensional poverty measured by national

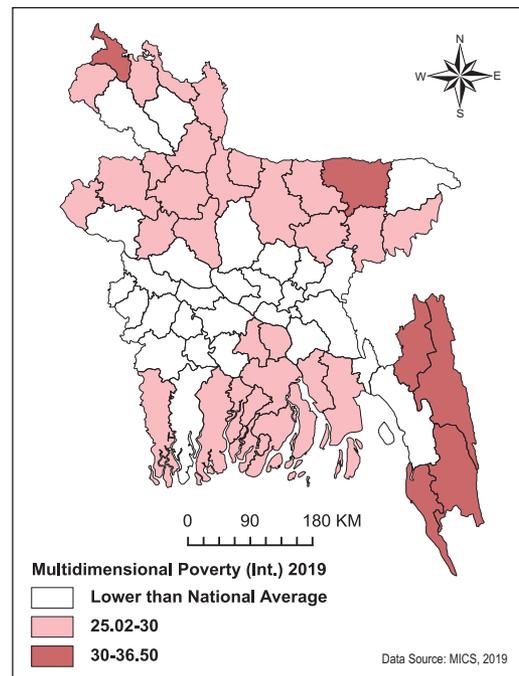
progress of the coastal area is slower than the flood and drought-prone zones. It is perhaps because the coastal zone faces more variety of disasters than flood and drought-prone zone. The most troublesome climate hazard in coastal area is cyclone. It accounts for massive loss and damage within a couple of hours which cannot be caused by other climatic hazards. Thus, for obvious reasons the coastal areas' progress in multidimensional poverty is much slower than the other zones.

**Figure 4.8: Poverty and multidimensional poverty in selected climate-vulnerable districts**

*Population Living Under Upper Poverty Line (%)<sup>91</sup>*



*Population Living in Multidimensional Poverty (%)*



Source: BBS, HIES 2010 and 2016, and calculation based on micro data of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019.

standards (figure 4.7). When measured by international indicators, it is found that except Bagerhat and Chattogram, all coastal, most haor and some flood-prone districts experience multidimensional poverty above the national average (figure 4.8). Ravaged by a couple of disastrous events every year and increasing occurrence of slow-onset disasters in specific regions (like salinity for the coastal area) are two fundamental reasons of this dismal state of multidimensional poverty in these zones. The

Climate hazards often lead to contradictory choice between physical and human capital. Poor and disadvantaged households tend to sell physical assets to meet expenses during and immediately after disasters, which curtails their ability to earn income in the future.<sup>92</sup> Disadvantaged population are often exposed to a difficult choice between human and physical capital in coping up with climate hazards. Sometimes they reduce their nutritional intake and education to retain their small physical assets.

<sup>91</sup> District-wise poverty headcount ratio of 2010 is based on poverty mapping exercise, and was an indirect estimation.

<sup>92</sup> Clarke and Dercon 2016.

## Health

Health is recognized to be a fundamental human right, an indicator of human capital as well as overall well-being, and a means of the basic capabilities<sup>93</sup> which works as an engine of economic growth<sup>94</sup> and sustainable development. Healthier workers are more productive and earn higher wages; they also help attract foreign direct investment.<sup>95</sup> Better health had a positive impact on the learning abilities of children, and leads to better educational outcomes that resulted in increased efficiency of human capital formation by individuals and households.<sup>96</sup>

Human capital is one of the core ingredients of human development. It is formed by, inter alia, health and physical well-being. Burden of disease due to climate-induced disasters reduces stock of health of the members of the affected households. Thus, incidences of climatic diseases deplete human assets and contribute to deteriorating or slowing human development (figure 4.9). It has been found that as high as 43.5 per cent of households suffer from some kind of diseases in the climate-vulnerable districts, such as coastal, flood-prone and haor areas. The diseases include hypertension, heart disease, skin diseases, diabetes and dysentery.<sup>97</sup> There was an outbreak of diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid and skin diseases after Sidr,<sup>98</sup> while the prevalence of diarrhoea and pneumonia among under-five children is commonly observed in seven climate-vulnerable districts.<sup>99</sup>

Women and adolescent girls suffer more from increased workloads, income losses and adverse health impacts and inequalities after climate-

induced disasters. They experience increased burdens of collecting water and cooking fuel, and associated health problems because of increased occurrence of drought, salinity or floods as results of climate change. They are also the victims of food shortages due to disasters.<sup>100</sup> It has been found that gender inequalities and survival rate in climate-induced natural disasters are closely associated. Climatic disasters lead women to die up to 14 times more than that of men.<sup>101, 102</sup> Young girls of drought-affected regions spend extra time spent in collecting water, which affects health and education adversely.<sup>103</sup>

In Bangladesh, population living in coastal and other climate-vulnerable regions are exposed to more non-communicable diseases, under-nutrition and health risks. They are comparatively less advantaged in terms of basic healthcare and reproductive health services compared to that of other areas. Access to water, sanitation and hygiene are also poor in these areas.

People of Sunamganj suffered the most from diseases due to various disasters during 2009-2014. Bhola and some districts of Rajshahi division suffered from diseases at a high rate. Coastal districts suffered more than the rest of the country. The pattern of disease occurrence demonstrates that the cyclone-prone districts have the most suffering people, followed by flood-prone haor area, and both drought- and flood-prone districts in Rajshahi division. Since these districts are always being hit by various climatic disasters, these disasters cause water-borne diseases (viz. typhoid, diarrhoea and skin diseases) and weather-related diseases like influenza and cough.

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<sup>93</sup> Sen 1999.

<sup>94</sup> Mankiw et al. 1992.

<sup>95</sup> Bloom others 2004.

<sup>96</sup> Schultz 1999.

<sup>97</sup> LGD 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Paul 2009.

<sup>99</sup> Kabir others 2016.

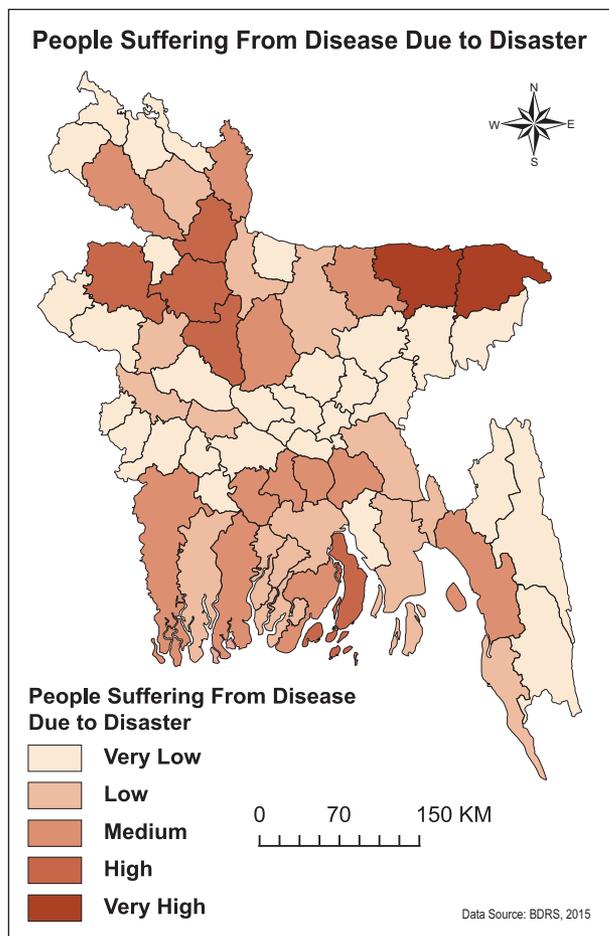
<sup>100</sup> WEN 2010.

<sup>101</sup> WHO /WMO /UNEP 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Neumayer and Plumper 2007.

<sup>103</sup> Arora-Jonsson 2011.

**Figure 4.9: Disaster-induced diseases affect people**

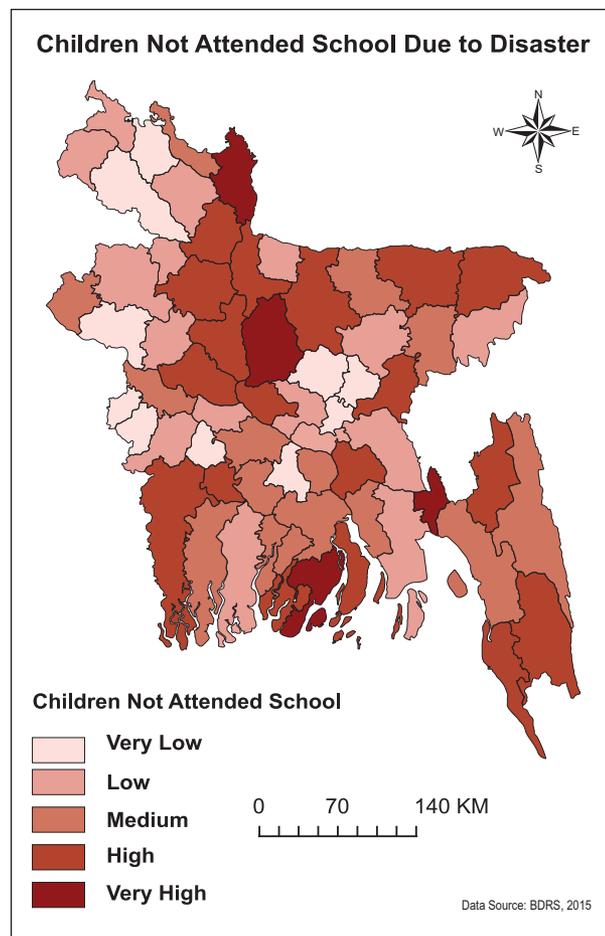


People mostly suffer from water-borne diseases because they always face scarcity of safe water at times of disaster. For instance, people's safe water sources (tube well, pond and well) usually get submerged or become inaccessible during floods. Sometimes, water sources get destroyed by cyclones. The groundwater table goes way down which results in no water in tube wells and ponds because of droughts. Thus, people are compelled to use unsafe water for drinking and other purposes which cause water-borne diseases. Weather-related diseases happen because of sudden fall of temperature due to heavy rain and cold wind at the time of cyclones. Thus, people living in coastal areas suffer from all kinds of diseases caused by disasters.

#### *Education*

Climate change impacts negatively on human capital formation through decreasing school attendance in the climate-induced disaster-prone regions (figure 4.10). The highest proportion of children of Kurigram, Tangail, Feni, and Patuakhali

**Figure 4.10: Disasters prevent school attendance**



Source: Based on micro data of Bangladesh: Disaster Related Statistics 2015.

could not attend school due to disasters. The important reasons behind non-attendance in schools are damaged or ruined schools, reduced household income, communication failure, spoilt books, and illness or injury.

Among them, the most important reason of non-attendance is communication failure since major disasters in Bangladesh ruin the communication system every year. For instance, flood submerges the land, houses, and schools which make it difficult for children to go to school and for teachers to take classes. Cyclone destroys infrastructure and trees which blocks the roads. It is usually more difficult for children in the Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) to attend schools due to difficult communication because of hill topography – disasters make it more difficult for them to commute. Even the rate of non-attendance is higher in cities because it is difficult to find vehicles to go anywhere during a disaster.

Super-cyclones cause significant damage to health facilities and outbreak of diseases. For example, Sidr fully damaged or partially damaged 351 health facilities, which affected health services for 900,000 people.<sup>104,105</sup>

These disasters increase patient-load on the existing healthcare centres, massively disrupts the electricity and water supply, and damages overhead water tanks and life-saving equipment in remote areas. In addition, local health personnel may be injured or may be unable to go to health facilities to provide services immediately after a disaster. After one year of super-cyclone Aila, the people who were evicted by the cyclone and living on embankments suffered from diseases, such as diarrhoea, skin infection, and pneumonia, etc. because of lack of adequate support for rehabilitation.<sup>106</sup>

### *Nutrition*

Child nutrition is a key to development of healthy human capital for a country. However, there is a strong linkage between undernutrition and educational outcomes through which human capital is formed. Nutrition-based efficiency-wage models imply that workers with poor health may be rationed out of the job market as they turn out to be too expensive to recruit.<sup>107</sup> Healthier children have higher rates of school attendance and improved cognitive development, investment in education would be more attractive for longer life span.<sup>108</sup>

Three indicators have been used to understand the nutritional status, viz. height for age (stunting), weight for height (wasting), and weight for age (underweight). Analysis of raw data of MICS 2019 reveals that Bandarban, Barishal, Bhola, Cox's Bazar, Jamalpur, Noakhali, Sylhet, Gaibandha, Kishoreganj, Lalmonirhat, Maulvibazar, Netrakona, Nilphamari (Table 4.2), Patuakhali, Rangamati and

Sunamganj have higher proportion of *stunted* children than the national average. Almost all of the coastal districts and the CHT zone as a whole shows higher ratio of *wasted* children than the national average.

The same pattern is observed in underweight in those climate-stressed districts, but hoar area is also facing the problem of having higher proportion of *underweighted* children than national average. Undernutrition<sup>109</sup> is the main reason behind this pattern. Economic crisis of the households living in climate-vulnerable regions results in widespread deficiency of nutrients among their children. With a few exceptions, girls are facing this problem more acutely than boys due to gender inequality in the households and society. People usually lose their livelihood options after a disastrous event. When economic crisis hits hard, boys are forced to work as labourer. Therefore, as earning members, they get more nutritious food than girls.

Micronutrient deficiency and undernutrition occurred because crops and vegetables did not grow in most cultivable land which remained inundated by saline water for a long time. Sometimes, people living on the embankments suffered from depression and mental stresses. Aila also created negative effects on women's reproductive health. Local health facilities could provide limited reproductive health and family planning services. Summer months demonstrate higher levels of malnutrition, which leads to decreased access to food and consequent undernutrition as well as morbidity. It is more so in the context of climate induced disasters. Widespread underweight, including wasting and acute undernutrition, is prevalent among children and girls living in the coastal belt.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>104</sup> UN 2007.

<sup>105</sup> GoB 2008.

<sup>106</sup> ActionAid, Concern WorldWide, DanChurchAid, MuslimAid, Islamic Relief, Oxfam-GB, and Save the Children-UK 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Strauss and Thomas 1998.

<sup>108</sup> Bloom et al. 2004.

<sup>109</sup> Children whose Z-Score is less than or equals to -2 standard deviation are considered to be undernourished, i.e., to be stunted, wasted or to be underweight. See, Seetharaman et al. 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Helen Keller International (HKI) and James P. Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH) 2014.

**Table 4.2: Child undernutrition in climate-vulnerable districts (% of Children's Z-Score  $\leq$  -2SD)**

District	Height for age			Weight for height			Weight for age		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Bagerhat	24.69	26.35	25.53	8.02	6.59	7.29	27.16	23.95	25.53
Bandarban	33.15	27.22	30.26	16.29	15.38	15.85	38.76	40.24	39.48
Barguna	25.15	27.33	26.23	15.34	9.94	12.65	33.74	26.71	30.25
Barishal	29.93	39.46	34.86	10.22	10.20	10.21	25.55	35.37	30.63
Bhola	38.07	36.77	37.41	8.72	13.45	11.11	34.40	39.01	36.73
Chattogram	24.21	19.81	21.96	13.69	13.05	13.37	30.07	33.57	31.86
Cox's Bazar	30.97	33.63	32.29	7.08	10.31	8.69	30.97	34.53	32.74
Gaibandha	28.32	29.34	28.82	5.78	11.38	8.53	24.86	42.51	33.53
Habiganj	34.40	30.45	32.45	12.40	15.23	13.79	41.60	40.74	41.18
Jamalpur	29.20	31.75	30.42	13.14	9.52	11.41	29.20	36.51	32.70
Khulna	14.67	18.33	16.30	10.00	7.50	8.89	19.33	25.83	22.22
Kishoreganj	35.71	35.75	35.73	7.14	7.26	7.20	31.63	32.96	32.27
Kurigram	20.33	33.97	26.63	14.29	9.62	12.13	16.48	23.72	19.82
Lakshmipur	27.00	24.06	25.58	15.00	17.65	16.28	30.50	31.02	30.75
Lalmonirhat	30.35	26.71	28.73	12.94	9.94	11.60	26.37	31.06	28.45
Maulvibazar	28.70	30.88	29.75	11.30	11.06	11.19	29.57	30.41	29.98
Chapai Nawabganj	24.87	23.91	24.41	8.12	6.52	7.35	23.86	26.63	25.20
Netrokona	36.67	35.76	36.27	10.48	9.70	10.13	35.71	32.73	34.40
Nilphamari	31.19	29.61	30.45	10.89	14.53	12.60	33.17	30.17	31.76
Noakhali	36.51	34.98	35.82	11.11	9.85	10.55	31.75	24.63	28.57
Patuakhali	25.13	29.94	27.37	6.81	6.59	6.70	26.18	26.95	26.54
Pirojpur	23.97	18.39	20.94	13.01	11.49	12.19	35.62	27.59	31.25
Rangamati	37.40	27.94	32.58	9.92	10.29	10.11	19.85	25.74	22.85
Satkhira	21.08	20.29	20.72	10.24	13.04	11.51	22.29	28.26	25.00
Sunamganj	39.16	44.19	41.54	7.34	6.98	7.17	27.97	39.53	33.46
Sylhet	34.51	37.13	35.77	9.80	8.86	9.35	33.73	41.35	37.40
Total	26.89	26.56	26.73	9.77	9.36	9.57	26.43	28.99	27.66

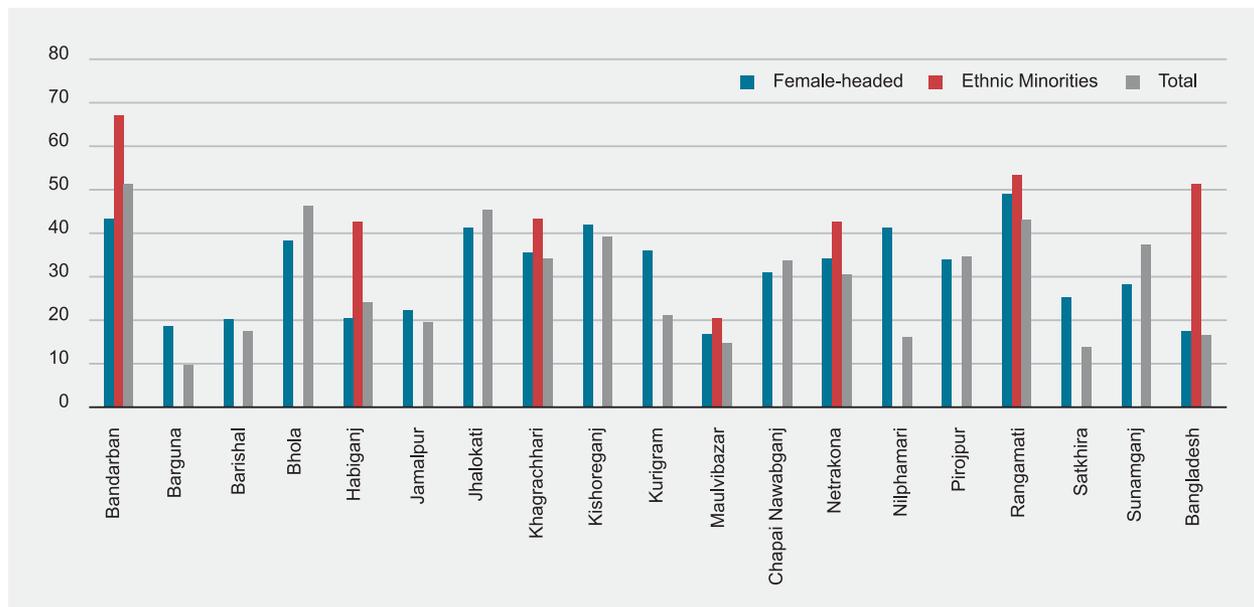
Source: Based on micro data of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019.

### Sanitation

The Government has achieved 100 per cent low-cost sanitation throughout the country. However, in some cases, gender-based and ethnic inequality exists in terms of improved sanitation facility (figure 4.11). The possible reasons behind this condition are their socioeconomic and educational backwardness. Less number of people attending higher education, poverty, and lack of awareness about diseases are the main reasons behind the problem of having unimproved sanitation in these regions.

Unimproved sanitation causes various diseases for which people have to spend extra money on health care, thereby shifting money from spending on education, nutrition and improved living. Illness causes unemployment and income erosion especially for earning members of households, and makes it difficult for schooling of children. Thus, both present and future human capital get affected due to not having improved sanitation facilities.

**Figure 4.11: Households without improved sanitation (percentage of total households)**



Source: Based on micro data of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019.

**Water**

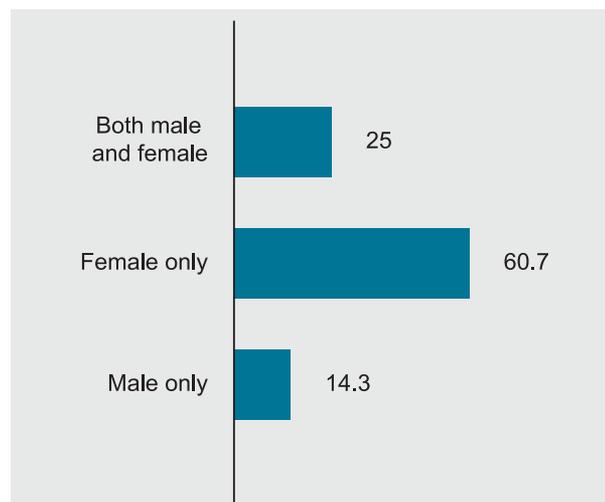
In many climate-stressed districts, a notable portion of households require more than 30 minutes to go and come back (roundtrip) to collect drinking water (table 4.3). Female-headed households of Khagrachhari face this problem significantly higher than females of other districts and males of all districts.

Some ethnic minorities who only live in Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati do not have water source within a radius of 30 minutes roundtrip, whereas ethnic minorities of other districts do not face this same problem. Usually, ethnic minorities live in the deeper parts of the CHT zone. It is more difficult for them to collect drinking water from the available sources since the zone has a unique topography. Therefore, it takes more than 30 minutes roundtrip, for the ethnic households of Khagrachhari and Rangamati to collect water.

Among other districts, people of Noakhali, and Satkhira face this problem quite significantly. In case of Noakhali and Satkhira, the reason for requiring more time to collect water is salinity. Both districts are located in the coastal zone and they are salinity prone. Drinking water source is scarce in

these districts. Using pond sand filter or some freshwater ponds are only option for them. Thus, some people have to spend more time to collect water from these suitable sources.

**Figure 4.12: Who collects drinking water in climate-vulnerable districts?<sup>111</sup>**



Data source: Local Government Division (LGD). 2019. Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC) Project: Baseline Survey Report, Dhaka: Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

<sup>111</sup> Local Government Division (LGD), 2019.

The existing sources of drinking water are usually destroyed or contaminated by floods, super-cyclones, salinity and other climate hazards, either temporarily or permanently. It requires household members to spare additional time and energy to collect drinking water from alternative sources located elsewhere. Usually, women and girls have to take this responsibility, which increases burden of household work traditionally allocated to them (figure 4.12). It happens in climate-vulnerable districts, especially in coastal zones which suffer from extreme lack of drinking water and a water source located outside of home. Damaged water and sanitation systems cause disease outbreak after disasters, such as diarrhoea, ARI, and skin-eye-ear infections.

There are cyclone and flood shelters constructed by the Government and private sectors to protect the people and to provide safe-haven facility for the coastal population. Besides this the existing primary schools are also transformed into cyclone centres. After the Independence of Bangladesh,

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman instructed to build earthen strongholds to protect people's lives and properties from cyclones and floods. Following his footsteps, the present Government is also building similar structures named 'Mujib Killa'.

#### *Livelihood options*

The households in climate-stressed districts, especially the ones living in rural areas, are overly dependent on agriculture, small businesses and fishing/shrimp farming for their livelihoods. Thus, because of excessive dependence on cropping, households in the climate-vulnerable areas are often exposed to loss of crops and employment.<sup>112</sup> Very few households can adopt alternative livelihood options, such as cultivating cash crops, crab farming, handicrafts and cooperatives, and owning small enterprises. Generally, these households lack viable alternative livelihood options in their localities.<sup>113</sup> Fishing is another major occupation in the coastal areas, where fishers are employed by boat owners in fishing seasons in Barguna, Khulna and Jhalokati. However, many

**Table 4.3: Households required more than 30 Minutes to collect drinking water (percentage of total households)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female-Headed</b>	<b>Ethnic Minorities</b>
Bagerhat	6.97	4.17	
Bandarban	2.73		7.78
Bogura	6.06	8.33	
Jamalpur	2.56	12.50	
Khagrachhari	14.77	20.69	42.03
Khulna	8.25	2.78	
Kurigram	6.25	10.00	
Maulvibazar	1.42	5.13	
Chapai Nawabganj	0.51	3.85	
Noakhali	10.26	6.25	
Panchagarh	9.09	14.29	
Rangamati	6.59		30.61
Satkhira	17.99	19.05	
Sylhet	2.45	6.06	
Bangladesh	3.55	2.92	24.85

Source: Based on micro data of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019.

<sup>112</sup> LGD 2019.

<sup>113</sup> LGD 2019

poor children are engaged in collecting shrimp fry from the coast, which refrain them from attending schools.

Disadvantaged groups are also vulnerable to climate damages because of the lack of ownership and diversification of assets. Frequent and manifold climate-related health effects weaken their income and asset position due to loss of productivity, employment and income in the short run. Lost school days, undernutrition, even future morbidity and higher mortality result in the loss of human capital in the long run.<sup>114,115,116</sup>

To cope with the adversities of climate change and to keep the sector vibrant, the government has given emphasis on invention of stress (saline, drought, heat, cold and flood/water) tolerant varieties and technologies, promoting climate smart agriculture practices, tackling health hazards, crop diversification with high value crops, climate migrants and vulnerable people, and livelihood security.

climatic phenomenon is extreme heat that adversely affects poorer segments of city dwellers, especially the ones living in slums. They are likely to be increasingly affected by heat-related illness and mortality. In addition, varying pattern of temperature and precipitation change would increase the incidence of vector-borne, diarrhoea and infectious diseases in both urban and rural areas.<sup>117</sup> Table 4.4 highlights climate stressor in various parts of CHT.

### Climate change and unequal human development impacts

Even though the climatic hazards are spread all over Bangladesh, its intensity and extensive impacts are concentrated on specific regions of the country, and among poor and vulnerable population, such as women, children, elderly, persons with disability and ethnic minorities. These people are affected disproportionately also because of their economic and social vulnerability, low asset base, marginalization and their nominal

**Table 4.4: Climate stressors and impacts in CHT Districts<sup>118</sup>**

Districts	Climate Stressors and Impacts
Rangamati	Heavy rainfall, rising temperature, low level of water in the river; deforestation
Bandarban	Erratic rainfall, deforestation
Khagrachhari	Drought, rising temperature, deforestationSource: GED (2012).

#### Climate stressors

Some climatic stressors, such as severe weather events, extreme heat and disease transmission have both short- and long-term impacts on the physical and psychological health of people living in urban areas. Among the psychological harm, cyclones and other climatic disasters cause post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, grief and depression in the coastal regions including their urban areas. Since frequency and intensity of disasters are likely to increase over time due to climate change, higher number of urban dwellers would suffer from injuries and illnesses too. A commonly ignored

capacity of adaptation and mitigation of climatic effects. They have insufficient access to and ownership of resources for investing in education, nutrition and disaster-resilient housing. They can access some government services and social protection, but these are not sufficient compared to their need to reinstate the pre-disaster asset base, occupation and standard of living immediately after a disaster. Their ability of long-term preparedness in coping with similar disasters and continuing nutritional intake is often curtailed by damage and depletion of asset base as well as interrupted flow of income. Multiple disasters at a time or with

<sup>114</sup> Somanathan et al. 2015.

<sup>115</sup> Li et al. 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Zivin and Neidell 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Gasper et al. 2011.

<sup>118</sup> GED 2012.

limited interval increases suffering of the households located in climate vulnerable zones since they get insufficient time to recover. Their vulnerability worsens further if the frequency, duration, extent and severity of the climate-induced disasters increase.<sup>119</sup>

#### *Women and girls*

Government is persistently trying to intervene through media and other campaigns to reduce the negative effects of climate change on people. Yet, climate change affects people; women are more adversely affected by climate change. It is mainly because of inequality against them in access to and control over resources (physical, natural and social resources, such as natural assets and ecosystem services, income, credit), lack of information, different roles in society, less access to education and skills, and coping mechanisms and adaptation.<sup>120, 121, 122</sup> These affect women especially from poor and marginalized communities more adversely during climate-induced disasters.<sup>123</sup> They are more vulnerable to health shocks of climate hazards, especially reproductive one, survival during pregnancy, as well as ante and post-natal care. Poor and disadvantaged women usually suffer from calorie-deficiency with fragile health status compared to males.<sup>124</sup> They take additional workload in collecting food and cooking fuel for households, affect their health as well as welfare.<sup>125</sup> Women and girls, especially from destitute, low-income and economically insecure cohorts, are the victims of post-disaster mortality, injury and sickness.<sup>126</sup>

Poor, undernourished, pregnant and nursing women and girls in Bangladesh are the most

vulnerable because of the lowest asset base and the least capacity to cope with climate hazards.<sup>127, 128</sup> A complex nexus among poverty, deprivations, gender relations, and economic and socio-cultural barriers reinforces women's climate vulnerability.<sup>129</sup>

Floods are the most common, frequent and devastating natural disasters among the climate hazards over the last two decades. Women's workloads in managing households substantially increase by floods-induced damage and loss of household assets and income. Women's overall well-being diminishes due to frequent and extensive flooding.<sup>130</sup> Poor and marginalized women undergo a period of deep livelihood crisis because of flood-laden loss of income, crops and assets.<sup>131</sup> Even though Bangladesh experiences different floods every year along with increased frequency of extensive floods in recent years, it is often difficult for them to reinstate their livelihoods after devastating floods. Undernourished women and adolescent girls are usually more susceptible to water-borne diseases. Climate hazards also intensify their mental stress and psychological trauma,<sup>132</sup> which again weaken their reproductive health status.

#### *Persons with disabilities*

Higher prevalence of disability has been observed in some climate-vulnerable regions (figure 4.13). Coastal areas have more disability than other areas. Among the haor areas, Sunamganj has 5.94 per cent disable people, which is significantly higher than others. Usually, disabled people are deprived of education, healthcare and other basic needs, which restrain them from transforming into human

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<sup>119</sup> World Bank, 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Rossi and Lambrou 2008.

<sup>121</sup> Babagura 2010.

<sup>122</sup> Petrie 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Nelson and Stathers 2009.

<sup>124</sup> Alber 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Terry 2009.

<sup>126</sup> Nelson 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Ahmad 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Cannon 2002.

<sup>129</sup> Islam 2009.

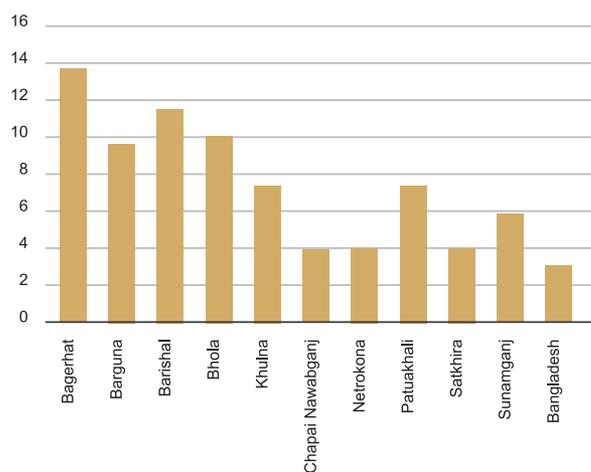
<sup>130</sup> Khondker 1996.

<sup>131</sup> Baden et al. 1994.

<sup>132</sup> Rashid and Michaud 2000.

capital. Consequently, they become the burden of their households and society, which has negative implications for human development since a large proportion of population lag behind and cannot participate in the labour force due to disability. Climate-vulnerable zones are already facing problems because of facing hazards every year, loss and damages, economic crisis, etc. Higher rate of disability is an additional burden for these zones.

**Figure 4.13: Functional difficulty (disability) by district (percentage of population)**



Source: Based on micro data of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019.

#### *Children and the elderly*

Age of the climate-vulnerable population is an important determinant of climate damage at the individual level. As both children and elderly people are relatively fragile, climate hazards can cause more physical and psychological damages than that of their adult counterparts. Ethnicity and race also determine the degree of vulnerability to climate damages. Social positions of different population groups can be an important determinant of the differential effects of climate change.

Children of coastal districts which are vulnerable to cyclones, such as Satkhira and parts of Bhola, Noakhali, Cox's Bazaar, and the islands of

Chattogram are found to be worst performer in terms of primary school attendance.<sup>133</sup> Girl children face challenges in attending school during disasters because of household responsibilities, pressure of early marriage and lack of separate toilet at schools.

There are several important reasons that deteriorate the nutritional status of the people of the cyclone-affected areas, especially of children and girls in the already prevailing high rate of undernutrition. Women feel uncomfortable in breastfeeding and/or complementary feeding at limited available space in the shelter during and after disasters. As disasters destroy and/or disrupt food crops and access to market, affected households find it difficult to avail nutritious food. It leads to inadequate energy and micronutrient intake, especially by children and younger girls. Disruption in livelihoods and income erosion due to disasters aggravate the pre-existing undernutrition through altering the child feeding practices in cyclone prone regions. Thus, cyclones may increase vulnerability of the poor and marginalized segments including pregnant/lactating women and children, which worsen undernutrition rapidly.

Elderly population from poor households run the risk of injury and death during climatic disasters. Poor asset base, low-quality housing, low income, inadequate coverage of social protection programmes and limited access to health care leave the urban poor particularly vulnerable during and after extreme weather events. Thus, interaction between climatic hazards and socioeconomic status of the affected household increases inequality and keeps marginalized groups continuously vulnerable through exacerbated poverty, food scarcity, and incidence of disease. The urban poor are compelled to live in slums and informal settlements which are subject to landslides due to climate-induced increased precipitation, such as in Chattogram city where hill-slide is a common phenomenon.

<sup>133</sup> BBS and UNICEF 2010.

### *Climate-induced migration*

Poor and disadvantaged communities live in disaster-prone areas because they cannot afford to live in safer zones. Thus, their exposure to climatic disasters (flood and river/coastal erosion) is high. However, disadvantaged groups are more vulnerable to flooding or eviction by river erosion because they live in the closest and precarious parts of the river in the flood plains, island, low-lying and depression areas and wetland. In the coastal areas, which are usually low-elevation zone in Bangladesh, poor and disadvantaged groups live in the adjacent part of the sea or islands where the damage due to coastal flooding/regular inundation, cyclone and salinity occur the most. Their houses are damaged and washed away because those are made of flimsy materials. Thus, the exposure to the effects of climate change in coastal and nearshore habitats and their ecosystems are higher than the other areas,<sup>134</sup> and poor and disadvantaged groups are more susceptible to the exposure due to limited scope of income generation. An estimated 70 per cent farmers in some coastal regions, who are mostly disadvantaged groups, partially or fully terminated farming due to high levels of salinity.<sup>135</sup>

Beside rural areas, urban population, especially disadvantaged groups, are also exposed to climate hazards like floods. For example, slum dwellers of many cities in Bangladesh including Dhaka are at high risk of flooding since many slums are located in low-lying parts of the cities.<sup>136</sup> Inequality is an important driver of choice of occupation by poor and disadvantaged groups that are exposed to climate adversities.

Climate refugees migrate either immediately after climatic extreme events, or a process of income erosion due to extreme weather and slow onset events push them to ultimately leave their living area. The destination can be within or outside the

country, depending on the pull factors and convenience to migrate. In the climatic events, a number of factors influence the decision of migration. These include, inter alia, lack of employment and business opportunities as well as access to resources, lower income than the minimum per capita requirement of the households, inability to repay the loans, loss of wage or income erosion due to protracted period of disaster and sickness/injury because of the climatic events (economic 'push' factors). A combination of these factors influences migration from those places along with the alluring hope of higher earnings or gaining property (economic 'pull' factors).

Internal migration has become an important adaptation strategy for people who live in the climate hotspots. Most of the people usually migrate either temporarily (during lean seasons) or permanently from village to city area for livelihood opportunity when their livelihood options are at risk or lost because of climate hazards. Sometimes prolonged climatic events can also force people to migrate in the hope of getting rid of living in inhumane conditions. Extreme climate events can force households to migrate from risky to safe places in terms of occupation and living. High economic and psychological impacts may intensify vulnerability, which push them to migrate even though many of them, especially the poor and disadvantaged ones take shelter in urban slums and informal settlements.<sup>137</sup> Usually, the crop growing duration for haor area is November to March and then they have to stay at home for the rest of the months. Salinity intrusion can be another reason to migrate temporarily because during monsoon 1 ppt salinity line extends to the central part of the country by 10 to 20 km.<sup>138</sup> Thus, seasonal migration can be a useful strategy for them to earn in those months. However, migration is a complex concept.

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<sup>134</sup> Barbier 2015.

<sup>135</sup> Shameem et al. 2014.

<sup>136</sup> Braun and Aßheuer 2011.

<sup>137</sup> IIED 2015.

<sup>138</sup> CDMP 2014.

Sometimes seasonal migration can lead to permanent migration. A lot of psychosocial factors work behind the ultimate decision. For instance, when slow-onset hazards compel people to migrate temporarily for a specific season to earn livelihood, it may result in permanent migration.<sup>139</sup> The reasons for this ultimate decision can be having better livelihood options, income stability at new workplace, and better situation of essential and basic services.

Sudden onset of climate hazards usually forces people to migrate permanently due to losing living place and livelihood options forever. People who migrate from their home in riverine *char* (island) to another, experienced losing livelihood option due to riverbank erosion because they rely on agriculture and for them migration is similar to material loss.<sup>140</sup> Increasing discharge rate at upstream is the main reason behind the riverbank erosion and so climate change can also shape river morphology. Erosion rate increases by 25 per cent when discharge rate of Jamuna river increases by 10 per cent, and 10 per cent increase in discharge in the Padma increases 9 per cent erosion rate.<sup>141</sup> The reason behind increase in discharge rate can be linked with high and untimely precipitation and ice sheet melting of the Himalaya due to climate change. Erosion of the main riverbanks is one of the most important reasons behind migration in Bangladesh.

Drought occurs at specific zones during specific seasons. The northwest region faces pre-monsoon and monsoon droughts and west faces monsoon and winter droughts.<sup>142</sup> Droughts usually cause seasonal migration, while permanent migration also takes place if the severity is high, drought events are prolonged, and drought-free seasons' earning is not enough to meet the needs.

Unusually high rainfall and subsequent floods can affect production cycle and significant loss of crops,

which displace poor people's livelihood in Rangpur (Ahmed et al., 2012).<sup>143</sup> Prolonged and untimed flood events can force people to migrate because they face economic and asset loss, loss of livelihood options, and living in inhumane condition. Sometimes, the same place can face the problem of high temperature which impacts agricultural patterns and production.<sup>144</sup> Climate change actually makes the changes so random that it is hard to predict how many hazards can occur within a year at the same place. Both the amount of rainfall and number of non-rainy days in a year is increasing. Therefore, if unusual and multiple climate hazards continue to occur, people will be forced to migrate because no season can give them the income security to live a decent life.

Cyclones often compel people to migrate in a different way in the coastal zones, especially from rural and remote areas. Male members usually move to the nearest city for searching livelihood options when emergency relief works come to an end.<sup>145</sup> Sometimes people continue living in temporary houses nearby because cyclone destroyed their home.

Migration takes place in climate-vulnerable districts that include coastal districts (e.g., Khulna, Bagerhat, Bhola, Patuakhali and Barguna) and flood and flash-flood affected districts (e.g., Kurigram and Sunamganj). The direct climate hazards that push household members to migrate are disasters and environmental factors and disasters, such as cyclones, storm surge, increased salinity in surface or ground water, and floods riverbank/coastal erosion and adverse environmental changes. Flash and regular floods were the climatic push factors of migration from Sunamganj. Conversely, storm surge, salinity, cyclone and coastal erosion are the main climatic drivers of migration from Khulna, Bagerhat and Patuakhali.<sup>146</sup> At least one member of poor and low-income households relocated

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<sup>139</sup> IOM 2016.

<sup>140</sup> Mallick and Etzold 2015.

<sup>141</sup> CDMP 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Alamgir et al. 2015.

<sup>143</sup> Ahmed et al. 2012.

<sup>144</sup> Azad et al. 2013.

<sup>145</sup> DMB 2010.

<sup>146</sup> LGD 2019.

elsewhere from these districts. The main economic reasons of migration are lack of viable livelihood options, damage and loss due to natural disasters, and crop failure.<sup>147</sup> The parents of these households also do not want their offspring to live where they were born and struggle with the same climate hazards.

Even though the climate-affected households expect higher welfare from migration, the actual income and asset base in the post-migration period may decline significantly. Poor migrants often take shelter in urban slums, mostly in the megacities where they are exposed to manifold uncertainties, lack of educational opportunities for children, and poor living conditions including water and sanitation. These create new challenges to human development for climate-induced migrants.

In Bangladesh, most people affected by climate hazards migrate from villages to cities. Usually, living and educational expenses in villages are significantly cheaper than that of cities. Generally, people live in slums after migrating from villages because in most cases people lose their home, assets and livelihood options after getting hit by sudden onset of disasters and so, their affordability becomes very low. Living condition in urban slums and informal settlements is unhealthy and unhygienic because of tiny and congested rooms, shared and unsanitary latrines, and scarcity of improved water. Education is also costlier in cities because of many reasons. People who migrate to cities are also affected by considerable damage and loss as extreme climatic events often put them in such a difficult situation to bear educational expenses for their children.

Skill gap is another major barrier for migrants to enter the labour market and get suitable jobs. Migrants cannot continue the same kind of work that they used to do in rural areas. Therefore, adjusting with acquiring skills at available jobs in the urban areas are challenging for them, which again affect their income.

## Environmental degradation

Environmental degradation goes hand in hand with climate change to have joint impact on human development. Environmental degradation represents the cumulative effects of different human activities such as deforestation, air, soil, water, and noise pollution which cause significant damage to the environment. Tree felling to create space for new buildings, using fossil fuels for vehicles, dumping industrial waste in rivers are a few examples to illustrate how city life is continuously giving a new face to the city environment. However, village life is also gradually getting affected by these activities in a different dimension, such as tree felling to cultivate crops, intruding saline water for shrimp cultivation, dumping untreated solid and liquid wastes in ponds and rivers, burning wastes, etc. Forest destruction, dam construction, river diversion, shrinking of mangrove due to illegal cutting of trees, etc. are responsible for using up and damaging natural resources and environmental degradation.<sup>148</sup> Together, developmental and economic activities have a huge cumulative impact on the environment. In 2020, Bangladesh ranked 162 out of 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) and her EPI score is 29.<sup>149</sup> However, the situation improved quite significantly compared to 2018's EPI rank, which was 179 out of 180 countries.<sup>150</sup> But, when the EPI score (29.56) is considered, the situation is degraded as compared to 2018.

Environmental degradation directly and indirectly contributes to climate change. Land degradation through agriculture and other land-use sectors leads to loss of organic carbon which results in biodiversity loss and climate change because nitrous oxide also escapes to the atmosphere with carbon.<sup>151</sup> Landfilling with household, industrial, chemical and toxic waste, using excessive fertilizers and pesticides, prolonged water-logging due to drainage congestion, and salinization of soil through shrimp and crab culture degrade land. The

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<sup>147</sup> LGD 2019.

<sup>148</sup> Wiggins and Wiggins 2009.

<sup>149</sup> EPI 2020.

<sup>150</sup> EPI 2018.

<sup>151</sup> IUCN 2015.

land also gets degraded through discharged industrial wastes, landfill and sewage seepage, leaching, infiltration, and percolation of pollutants, adjacency to contaminated water, and superfluous use of agrochemicals.<sup>152</sup> According to data used in the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, 18 per cent of the total land is already degraded in Bangladesh.

Having a massive river network and dependency on the river for livelihood make water pollution a serious issue for Bangladesh. Dumping household, solid, and industrial waste, releasing municipal and untreated sewage, using motorized water vehicles (release burned oil) and dumping waste while traveling in those vehicles, growth of water hyacinth, using river water for daily cleaning activities, such as showering, dishwashing, jute putrefaction, etc. are some broad reasons of surface water pollution. Different kinds of industries which are responsible for water pollution are dyeing and painting, fertilizer and pesticides, food, metal processing, pharmaceuticals and medical waste, pulp and paper, tannery, textile, etc.<sup>153</sup> According to data used in the Eighth Five Year Plan of Bangladesh (2020-2025), 11 per cent of total river areas is polluted only by industrial wastes and 10 per cent of total river areas are polluted by other wastes.<sup>154</sup>

Human development is a complex dynamic process, which is significantly affected by diseases related to exposure of environmental degradation and pollutants. Maternal undernutrition during pregnancy causes low birth weight, increased cardiovascular risk, and non-insulin-dependent diabetes in adult life of the children.<sup>155</sup> Children in Bangladesh who are exposed to indoor PM<sub>2.5</sub> more than 100 µg/m<sup>3</sup> suffer from first acute lower

respiratory infection at a younger age.<sup>156, 157</sup> Cadmium in maternal urine or blood is found to be linked with pregnancy-induced hypertension, and lower weight and size at birth.<sup>158, 159</sup> Premature birth is found to be associated with manganese, cadmium, lead, mercury, and selenium levels in maternal blood.<sup>160</sup> Neurodevelopmental and behavioural problems arise among children from 3 days of life to 10 years (e.g., low prosocial scores for girls) because of high prenatal manganese exposure, which was found in Matlab upazila of Chandpur district.<sup>161</sup> Decreased cognitive scores at 20–40 months of age children was found in Sirajdikhan and Pabna among mother with increased levels of manganese in cord blood.<sup>162</sup>

Plastic pollution in rivers and the Bay of Bengal has become alarming. It is estimated that about a quarter of plastic waste eventually arrives the waterways.<sup>163</sup> It has been damaging both inland water and coastal ecosystems, and severely affecting human health via fish intake. It has become very difficult to dredge because of non-biodegradable waste. For example, deep layer of polyethylene in the riverbed decelerated dredging of Karnaphuli River. About 500–20,000 items/km of microplastics (MP) were found in the surface water of the Bay of Bengal.<sup>164</sup> A total of 443 MP items were recently identified in the bowels of marine fish species in the Bay of Bengal (Hossain et al., 2019), which is being regarded as a serious threat to public health in the country (Sarkar et al., 2020<sup>165</sup>).

Deforestation through tree felling, cutting hills and igniting forests is major environmental concerns. Only 14.1 per cent of the total land is under forest

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<sup>152</sup> Kanta et al. 2014.

<sup>153</sup> Hasnat et al. 2018.

<sup>154</sup> GED 2020.

<sup>155</sup> Bloom et al. 2010.

<sup>156</sup> Uddin and Huda 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Gurley et al. 2014.

<sup>158</sup> Tsai et al. 2019.

<sup>159</sup> Liu et al. 2018.

<sup>160</sup> Tsuji et al. 2018.

<sup>161</sup> Rahman et al. 2017.

<sup>162</sup> Valeri et al. 2017.

<sup>163</sup> Ahamad 2019.

<sup>164</sup> Eriksen et al. 2018.

<sup>165</sup> Sarkar et al. 2020.

cover (the base year was 2015),<sup>166</sup> whereas a country needs at least 25 per cent of total land under forest cover to maintain environmental balance. Population growth, industrial expansion, implementation of development project, meeting increasing food demand, etc. are some main reasons of deforestation. Deforestation results in high temperature, less rainfall, coastal and riverbank erosion, soil cover erosion, ecological imbalance, and extinction of species. Though climate change can expedite the process of environmental degradation<sup>167</sup>, environmental degradation also causes climate change directly and indirectly.

Many climate-vulnerable communities are dependent on Common Property Resources (CPR) for livelihoods and coping up with climate hazards. Disadvantaged households generally rely heavily on access to the ecosystem services of the CPRs for timber, fish, and other means of livelihoods that help them sustain over frequent climate hazards.<sup>168</sup> For example, large mangrove forest protects disadvantaged communities during super-cyclones and provide livelihoods to the population who live in close proximity to the Sundarbans.<sup>169</sup> Households living adjacent to the Sundarbans depend on extracting forest resources and ecosystem services. Poor households collect firewood from coastal forests in river and coastal islands in Patuakhali, Bhola, and Noakhali districts.

Environmental degradation causes serious health concerns—incidence of air and water-borne diseases increase. As a response strategy, a portion of affected population tend to migrate from the polluted area to avoid health hazards and sometimes in search of livelihoods as pollution makes it difficult to maintain a healthy living and working environments. Land degradation causes soil infertility for which output per unit of land

decreases. Thus, it becomes difficult for small farmers to retain cropping as the main livelihoods option, feed their household members and maintain educational expenses for their offspring. Deforestation has severe environmental impacts as well as hits hard the community whose livelihood is dependent on the forest and its ecosystem services. Conversely, dumping plastic waste in the river and Bay of Bengal, and using harmful chemicals and pesticides are detrimental to the ecosystem and human health. Wastes enter the food chain on a very microscopic scale which makes it harder to recognize their existence while they continue to damage the DNA which results in serious health problems in the long run.

### **COVID-19, Climate change and human development**

It is important to understand the implications of COVID-19 on human development from the perspective of environmental and climatic challenges that Bangladesh has been exposed to, and the dimensions of human development in the climate-vulnerable areas of the country. Indeed, COVID-19 has posed a serious threat to the magnificent achievements of the country over the past two decades. The pandemic has potentially intensified the incidence of poverty, vulnerability and human deprivations in climate-vulnerable zones and environmentally fragile areas (e.g., chars and haors). There is an association of vulnerabilities due to COVID-19 with uneven distribution of livelihoods, access to healthcare, education and basic services in the climate-vulnerable areas of the country. The devastating floods of 2020 and cyclone Amphan and the outbreak of COVID-19 together have intensified the misery of poor people (especially women, children and the elderly) located in these areas, which have negative connotations for human development.

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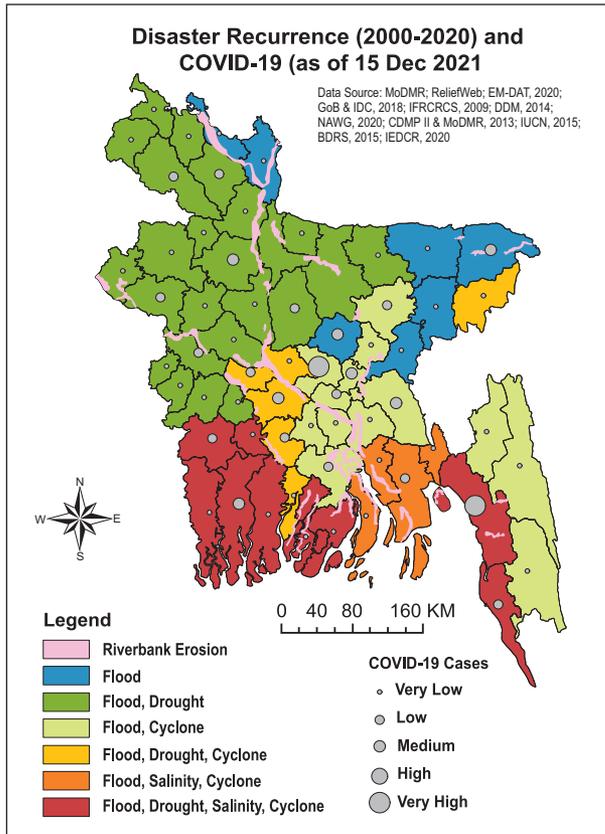
<sup>166</sup> GED 2020.

<sup>167</sup> IOM 2011.

<sup>168</sup> Barbier 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Akter and Mallick 2013.

**Figure 4.14: COVID-19 cases and disaster occurrence**



The cases of COVID-19 by districts are not related to the disaster occurrence (Figure 4.14). Mostly divisional cities are having a higher number of cases than other districts. Usually, population density is higher in divisional cities. Since COVID-19 spreads from human-to-human contact, having a higher population density increases the risk. Thus, the number of COVID-19 cases is mounting in these districts.

It has been found that COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reduced air pollution in the Dhaka city, especially during the lockdown mainly due to reduction of industrial and commercial activities, construction projects, vacation of educational institutions, shut down of mass transport, and restricted movement.<sup>170</sup> However, reopening

industrial activities in late-April 2020 again triggered the air pollution.<sup>171</sup> Lockdown resulted in the greatest decrease in Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>).<sup>172</sup> Thus, full and partial lockdowns helped significantly reduce the exposure of air pollution in the biggest city of Bangladesh, which has been regarded as one of the most polluted cities of the world.

COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the growth of global emission of greenhouse gases and helped improve environmental quality temporarily. However, despite the reduced amount of carbon emission in the biosphere and its circulation in the ocean-sphere, Bangladesh experienced a devastating cyclone—Amphan, and it is now witnessing a devastating flood leaving millions of people vulnerable. Poverty, vulnerability, and deprivations emanating from the ongoing slow onset and extreme events during the pandemic have deteriorated the despair of the affected population in those localities.

Apart from that, the super-cyclone Amphan and repeated floods in several districts made the lives of poor people more difficult. Coastal districts are already in trouble due to coastal erosion and salinity intrusion, the loss and damage from Amphan and the impact of COVID-19 on the economy has also affected the community. Thus, the socioeconomic inequality has widened because of the double-jeopardy of COVID-19 and climate change.

The incidence of COVID-19 has important implications on human development in the climate-vulnerable areas of Bangladesh. Recognizing this fact, the Government of Bangladesh undertook a comprehensive stimulus and economic recovery program containing 23 packages to the tune of Tk. 124,053 crore or US\$ 14.60 billion. The fiscal and stimulus packages have been designed to benefit maximum number of people in the country to ensure a quick recovery from the economic losses sustained by the outbreak of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. Free

<sup>170</sup> Rahman et al. 2020.

<sup>171</sup> Shammi et al. 2020a.

<sup>172</sup> Shammi et al. 2020b.

distribution of rice and wheat to the poor who have suddenly become jobless due to the coronavirus outbreak, selling rice at lower price under the Open Market Sale (OMS) among low-income people; providing direct cash transfer to 50 lakh beneficiary families to protect the ultra-poor, increasing the number of beneficiaries of old age allowance, widow and divorcee allowance and disability allowance, allocating fund for the construction of homes for homeless people are some of the major interventions of the stimulus package.

In coming days, a lot of attentions would be provided, quite rightly to tackling COVID-19. In this process, climate change may be side-lined. The policy challenge is to find options which may take care of both of these development priorities. But without a doubt, COVID-19 would influence and shape the future human development trajectory of Bangladesh.

### **Initiatives and actions to delink climate change and human development**

Various national and international initiatives are in place to address the negative consequences of climate change on vulnerable and disadvantaged communities as well as across gender, age, religion, and ethnicity of the population (Chapter 7). However, some of the programmes and projects are directly aimed at addressing the vulnerabilities in climate hazard areas through food and in-kind transfers, while others aim to promote education, health, nutrition and other dimensions of human development.

#### *Ashrayan Project—housing for landless and homeless people*

Since 1997, the Ashrayan Project has become a model of inclusive development idea of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Ashrayan aims to ensure housing for the landless and homeless people. Through this project, various activities, including employment, healthcare, sanitation, education and vocational training, have been added to housing. The Ashrayan Project is a unique example of an overall family well-being project in Bangladesh. From 1997 to 2019, a total of 298,249 families have been rehabilitated. The clustered housing provides primary health care for all. The beneficiaries have also been engaged in

income-generating activities through the provision of loans and training facilities.

#### *General programmes on disasters and climate change*

National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) helped diffuse the notion of adaptation and increase the resilience of individuals and communities. Now, National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is being formulated according to the guideline of UNFCCC. Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) aimed to promote food security, social protection, low-carbon development, capacity building, and institutional strengthening. It also played a significant role in the areas of comprehensive disaster management, research and knowledge management, health, infrastructure, and mitigation. Bangladesh Climate Resilience Fund's projects were very specific, such as building cyclone centre and road reconstruction, afforestation and reforestation of 17,500 hectares of land, and 2,000 km of strip plantation, rural electrification, and renewable energy development. This fund also had hazard-specific projects (9 sub-projects for drought-prone areas, 14 sub-projects for salinity-prone areas, and 18 sub-projects for flood-prone areas). This fund also focused on research on the spread of malaria and dengue due to climate change, waterlogging, adaptation strategies, and climate-induced migration. However, this fund has discontinued. Climate Finance Governance Project reviewed and updated the BCCSAP, and highlighted and addressed the gaps in management for climate change financing to access international climate finance funds. Another major initiative is the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) with mitigation and adaptation components. A total of 775 projects have been designed under the Climate Change Trust Fund and 415 have been completed so far. In these projects, the coastal zone has got more concentration. Adaptation and mitigation issues have been strengthened. Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) completed important tasks that include mangrove plantation in 195,000 hectares of coastal land, distribution of stress-tolerant seeds, and rainwater harvesting for climate change

adaptation. Forest Department has also planted ten million trees to celebrate Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birth centenary. Climatic hotspots have been identified in Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 and will also be mentioned in NAP.

Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) has issued Standing Orders on Disaster (SoD) with regular updates to address the sufferings of disaster-affected population and help rehabilitate them.<sup>173</sup> The government decided to prepare this document to devise a proper set of tasks to be followed by the national, district, upazila, municipal, and ward level disaster management committees after a hazardous event. The document also describes the roles and responsibilities at each phase of the disaster management cycle. It contains details about warning signals and early warning. It also contains the form to estimate damage, loss, and emergency needs. This document has made the steps of disaster management easy to follow and distributed the responsibilities coherently.

#### *Private sector*

The private organizations have contributed in various areas of human development that are affected by climate change. For instance, Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) helped 75,000 customers in association with 56 social enterprises and NGOs installed more than 4 million Solar Home Systems (SHSs) in order to improve living standard and promote rural businesses. Bangladesh's adaptation capability has been recognised by the international community. Recently, Germany praised Bangladesh's approach in installing 0.65 million solar panels. For practicing sustainable agro-business and climate-smart technologies to minimize crop losses caused by extreme climatic events, such as flood, cyclone and drought, about 75,000 farmers get support from Bangladesh Green Delta Insurance's Index-based insurance pilot programme. Around 600 dealers and 67,000 farmers received training from private companies like Energypac, Agro-G Limited,

Supreme Seed who got support from International Finance Corporation (IFC) and NGOs to cultivate high-yield stress-tolerant varieties who also helped to promote the use and marketing of stress-tolerant seeds.<sup>174</sup> The textile sector (about 200 textile factories and 13 global brands) also received assistance to reduce GHG emission, water, and energy consumption reduction from the Partnership for Clean Textile (PaCT) programme—a partnership among IFC, BRAC Bank and Industrial Development Leasing Company of Bangladesh).<sup>175</sup>

#### *NGOs and international agencies*

United Nations and other international organisations, and agencies have been working in different areas of human development which are linked with climate change. UNICEF works to ensure sustainable and equitable access to safe drinking water. Also, health, nutrition, and educational institutions are under their agenda of scaling up water supply. World Bank has been implementing a number of projects to address the problems of water supply and sanitation. The Bangladesh Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Sanitation Microfinance Programme, Scaling-up MFI lending for improved rural sanitation in Bangladesh, Chattogram Water Supply Improvement and Sanitation Project, and Dhaka Water Supply and Sanitation Project for Bangladesh are the projects which are implemented in the areas of safe water supply, hygienic sanitation, capacity building, affordability improvement, and drainage infrastructure management. Friendship Bangladesh works in the areas of health, education, climate action, and sustainable economic development, their initiatives in the health sector are revolutionary. Some of those are hospital ships, static clinics, satellite clinics, community medic-aides, diagnosis via mobile, etc. They also work in primary, secondary, and adult education.

In terms of addressing zone-specific issues, Concern Worldwide work in southwest coastal region, northeast haor region and northwest char region to install water and sanitation facilities and

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<sup>173</sup> MoDMR 2019.

<sup>174</sup> IFC 2013.

<sup>175</sup> IFC n.d.

change WASH behavior by installing deep tube wells with raised platforms, constructing 3-chamber latrines in schools, establishing Community Arsenic Iron Removal Plant (AIRP) in Char, installing Household Arsenic Removal Unit in the Char, and Rainwater Harvesting System (RHS) in the Coastal region.

The core disaster issues are addressed by several NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), and development organisations. Oxfam's Resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership, and Learning (REE-CALL) programme worked in the complex, interrelated issues of poverty to increase community resilience to climate change which resulted in better preparation, sustainable employment and income options, better use of policy and legal frameworks, and claiming rights and entitlements, and promoting leadership. UKAID also provided support in ending extreme poverty, providing basic services, developing the economy, and building stability and resilience to crises. Friendship Bangladesh works in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Green Climate Fund's projects are mainly focused on mitigation and adaptation. Oxfam's collaboration with the private sector to introduce insurance products to address climate vulnerability is also praise-worthy. Some

other forms of collaboration has been performed by ActionAid Bangladesh.

Some INGOs and development organizations are involved in various types of projects. For instance, USAID works in the areas of maternal and child health improvement, primary education improvement, small enterprise (particularly agribusiness) development, natural resource management, food security, and disaster management. Care Bangladesh works in numerous areas including health and nutrition, emergency response, women and girls' empowerment, humanitarian and resilience, etc. Care Bangladesh also receives funds from donor agencies like USAID, DFID, UNFPA, etc. to carry out those projects. HELVETAS Bangladesh works in the areas of water, skill development and education, governance, peace and migration, sustainable and inclusive economies, gender and social equity, and environment and climate change.

Climate change is critical for inter-generational equity, a balanced path of development and the future human development trajectory of Bangladesh. Thus, apart from anything else, it would influence and shape the unleashing of creativity and innovation of the youth and help in realizing the dream of our teenagers. The next two chapters are devoted to these two themes.

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# Chapter 5

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Youth employment:  
a key to future  
human development  
of Bangladesh



# Chapter 5

## Youth employment: a key to future human development of Bangladesh

The upbringing of Bangladeshi youth, their aspirations and dreams, and their motivation and hard work to achieve the dreams, all have been evolving since the long movement of the country's independence. During this movement, the youth fought with the dream of establishing a country where everyone lives a healthy and creative life and have access to resources needed for a decent living. Till today, youth are striving to fulfill their dreams. Sustainable and equitable human development, which leads to productive and empowered population, could be ensured through building the future human resource base of the country – the youth.

Productive and empowered youth can contribute not only to economic development but also in addressing social, political, and other challenges in their unique ways of intervention and solution. Such a social force could be an instrument for fighting against poverty and inequality in a country.<sup>176, 177</sup> Today's youth have better access to quality education, better modes of learning and training, and orientation to modern technologies, all of which could create opportunities for them to choose their preferred employment and also create opportunities for others for better earning and living and thereby contributing to the reduction of poverty and inequality in the country.<sup>178</sup> Youth can also contribute to social harmony and stability.<sup>179</sup>

The voting age of a person is 18 and therefore anyone can participate in the public discourse meaningfully and materialize their views in public policies.

Similarly, youth can also be a positive force for tackling vulnerabilities created by climate change. Youth today are more sensitive to climatic issues, vocal against carbon emission, and supportive of green growth.<sup>180, 181, 182</sup> Youth are also more aware of ongoing global and local climate change initiatives; this would help them explore innovative ideas and solutions for climate-related vulnerabilities in the country.<sup>183, 184</sup>

To address gender inequality and to ensure equal education and subsequent access to employment opportunities, the Government of Bangladesh has taken various initiatives, such as provision of stipend through digital cash transfer to the mothers' accounts of the female students, increase of infrastructural facilities and introduction of Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) and so on.

Access to decent employment for youth is one of the key elements for their development which determines the prospect for the labour market of the country.<sup>185, 186</sup> Youth employment is multidimensional; it represents an important aspect of the current state of human development,

<sup>176</sup> OXFAM (2016).

<sup>177</sup> UN (2018).

<sup>178</sup> UN (2018).

<sup>179</sup> Ozerdem (2016).

<sup>180</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/youth-action>

<sup>181</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/stories/climate-25-actions/>

<sup>182</sup> ILO (2017).

<sup>183</sup> UN (2013).

<sup>184</sup> ILO (2014a).

<sup>185</sup> ILO (2020) & ILO (2018).

<sup>186</sup> Robalino et. al. (2013).

it defines the challenges and builds the foundation of future human development.<sup>187</sup> Thus, youth employment is characterized both as 'recipient' and 'provider' in the context of human development. However, youths face the dual challenges in the job market – both in cases of employability and employment opportunities.<sup>188,189</sup> Employable skills among youth also remain a major challenge.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, limited formal employment opportunities and widespread informal employment mean that the youth struggle to get a decent wage.

Youth employment in Bangladesh has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 induced economic slowdown.<sup>191</sup> It deeply affected different manufacturing and service sectors, and to a lesser extent, the agriculture sector, sharply cutting down employment opportunities for everyone, including the youth. A large section of workers, mostly youth, have either been laid off, retrenched, or furloughed from their jobs.<sup>192, 193</sup> Many migrant workers had been forced to return home due to the slowing global economy and have mostly remained unemployed since coming back. Thus, COVID-19 poses serious challenges for the youth, both who were already employed and who were waiting to enter the job market.<sup>194</sup> It is particularly hard for the latter group, as they are competing with recently unemployed youth with experience.

Shrinking job market, combined with the risk of infection at work, has an adverse impact on decent employment, particularly in terms of employability, decent wage, and occupational safety and health,<sup>195, 196</sup> all of which have a profound, negative impact on the mental health of the youth waiting to enter the

job market. The closure of academic institutions is also harming the academic and job market preparation of the youths.<sup>197</sup> If situation does not improve soon, a large number of youths in the pool of existing and future labour force will become demoralized about their job prospect.

Creating an environment where youth can dream high is important. Empirical studies indicate that young people who aim high while in school are more likely to find managerial or professional jobs. In other words, youth with high ambition do well in life. This is only possible when youth, irrespective of their socio-cultural identities, get the opportunities to develop and utilize their capabilities in productive endeavours. Overall, this chapter discusses the development of country's youth as human capital, which could contribute to the current and future development of the country.

### **The landscape of youth employment in Bangladesh**

The performance of Bangladesh in youth development is yet to go further. According to the Youth Development Index (YDI) 2016,<sup>198</sup> prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat, overall, Bangladesh ranks 146<sup>th</sup> out of 183 countries. In creating employment and opportunity for the youth it ranks (177<sup>th</sup>) and in ensuring quality education for the youth (140<sup>th</sup>). The status of youth development affects the overall development of the human resources of the country.

The challenges of youth employment have many dimensions. On one hand, youth do not have the necessary capabilities to find productive employment, and on the other hand, opportunities for youth employment are limited.

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<sup>187</sup> IEG (2013).

<sup>188</sup> Rahman (2012).

<sup>189</sup> ILO (2020).

<sup>190</sup> BRAC (2018).

<sup>191</sup> ILO-ADB (2020).

<sup>192</sup> DW (2020, June 10).

<sup>193</sup> Sharmeen & Ahmed (2020).

<sup>194</sup> Young Bangla (2020).

<sup>195</sup> ILO (2020).

<sup>196</sup> Moazzem & Shibly (2020).

<sup>197</sup> Sharmeen & Ahmed (2020).

<sup>198</sup> OECD, (2015).

### *Capabilities of the youth*

Youth acquire skills and knowledge to enhance their capabilities, which ultimately create their work opportunities. Access to education and training are the two main ways for youth to acquire knowledge and skills. Secondary and high-quality education are essential foundations for an employable workforce for the future.<sup>199</sup>

Educational attainment has increased among the youth cohort in Bangladesh more than at any time before. Over the years, the country's youth have made remarkable progress, particularly in attaining basic education. The illiteracy rate among the youth has dropped significantly compared to the rate among the adults, indicating that youth are more adaptive and capable than a decade ago.<sup>200</sup> In addition, the rates of attainment in secondary and tertiary level education among the youth in Bangladesh have increased, and similar or marginally higher than the rates among the adult cohort (36-64 age group). Youth in Bangladesh are also spending longer hours for studying.

Since education is vital for the development of human mind and it has an impact on the entire human lives,<sup>201</sup> unified education system may uplift the capabilities of the youth which may eventually lead to reduce the disparity among the youth cohorts. As per the constitution of Bangladesh, the education curriculum was mandated to be unified,<sup>202</sup> yet it was not fully materialised after the independence. There are currently 13 types of

schools<sup>203, 204, 205</sup> having differences in the curriculum and standard of the schools.<sup>206</sup> All the education committee in Bangladesh had set their goals based on the Kudrat-i-Khuda Commission of 1972 – which stated about unified education system<sup>207</sup> – yet they could not fully implement the goals, particularly those of the unified curriculum. Hence, the youth educated in the curriculum which are not labour market oriented, are struggling in the job market. Most of the educational institutions have limited capacity to provide labour market-oriented skills like, developing competency and technical knowhow, professional and communication skills for the youth.

The youth of Bangladesh have to go further to progress in terms of being skilled (access to training) – another ingredient for enhancing the capabilities – and facing challenges in finding appropriate employment opportunities. Over 90 per cent of youth do not have training experience, which is eventually limiting the opportunities and choices of the youth in future work. Lack of adequate information about training is a major reason for having less trainees along with low level of public investment on the TVET education.<sup>208</sup> The existing TVET education system is also bound by a culture of memorization which further discourages the demand for TVET education among students, leaving the existing resources unused.<sup>209</sup> Due to limited opportunities and fierce competition in the job market, youth could hardly benefit from the

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<sup>199</sup> UNDP (2015).

<sup>200</sup> Only 12.9 per cent of the youth were illiterate in 2017 while the rate for the adult cohort (36-64 age group) was 42.2 per cent.

<sup>201</sup> Prodhan (2016).

<sup>202</sup> The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. (2000), pp. 5-6.

<sup>203</sup> Government Primary Schools (GPS), Registered Non-Government Primary Schools (RNGPS), HSAPS-High School Attached Primary Schools Experimental Schools Primary Teachers' Training Institute Primary School, Community Schools, Non-Registered Non-Governmental Primary Schools, Kindergarten, NGO Schools, Primary sections of Secondary Schools, Ebtedayee Madrasahs, Primary sections of other Madrasahs, English Medium and English Versions.

<sup>204</sup> UNICEF (2008).

<sup>205</sup> BANBEIS (2011).

<sup>206</sup> Prodhan (2016).

<sup>207</sup> Bangladesh Education Commission Report (1974).

<sup>208</sup> UNICEF (2017).

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

acquired training in getting specific jobs.<sup>210, 211, 212</sup> Expansion of opportunities for the youth both within and outside the country needs to be prioritized along with their skill development through training and capacity building.

Improving the quality of education and providing employable skills for the marginalized youth remains to be a challenging task. Participation among youth in education and training in Bangladesh widely varies. Emphasis has been given for skill development through introducing vocational courses at secondary level which may increase skilled human resources in future.

Higher capabilities provide choices and opportunities to the youth. Thus, youth who are unable to acquire the necessary capabilities, including those who are marginalised become frustrated. On the other hand, opportunities to take skill training and access may raise their capacities.

Gender inequality among youth is also a matter of concern. With the continuous intervention of the Government, educational disparities between male and female youth have been decreasing, particularly at the primary and secondary levels where the proportionate share of the female is higher than that of male. Due to providing stipend to the girls, underprivileged students, and marginal poor boys, both enrolment and continuation of education among the poor cohorts have been increasing. Hence, stipend plays a major role for the increased participation in secondary education level. In that context, inequality in education is shrinking, which is enhancing capabilities. Favourable public policy for basic education – primary and secondary levels – and specific policy measures for female education beyond the secondary levels have contributed to the reduction of gender inequality in education.

Economic reality is another important area of concern. Most employees with a tertiary education come from higher-income families.<sup>213</sup> Higher education is still expensive and beyond the reach of many marginalized youths. For many marginalized youths, including plainland ethnic minorities and urban slum-dwellers, access to tertiary-level education – above higher secondary – is limited<sup>214</sup> due to their poor academic record.

Beyond financial means, often social stigma and lack of acceptability prevent youth from getting a higher education. Youth belonging to the transgender community, are often humiliated and harassed by their peers (equivalent) at educational institutions and are forced to leave early. This often affects the opportunities of these marginalized youth. Physically challenged youth also face a similar fate. For ethnic minorities and slum-dwelling youth, there have been complaints about the poor quality of teaching. Marginalized youths have been deprived of quality education. In all these cases, marginalized youths are deprived of the choices and opportunities that their peers enjoy.

In order to contribute to human development, work needs to be productive, worthwhile, and meaningful and needs to unleash human potential, creativity, and spirit. By improving human capabilities, opportunities and choices, human development also contributes to work. In short, work, and human development are synergistic and mutually reinforcing.<sup>215</sup> Due to the enhanced capabilities of the female workforce, labour force participation of the youth has improved in recent decades. Still, the contribution of the youth workforce since the independence has not progressed much (59.3 per cent in 2017) compared to the adults (65.7 per cent in 2017); this indicates

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<sup>210</sup> IZA, (2013).

<sup>211</sup> ILO (2020).

<sup>212</sup> ILO, (2015).

<sup>213</sup> UNDP (2015).

<sup>214</sup> World Bank (2020, August 5).

<sup>215</sup> UNDP (2015).

the lower capability of youth, reduced choices and with limited opportunities in work.

#### *Unequal access to job market and work in different phases of youth*

About 29.9 million youth in Bangladesh participate in the labour market, 26.4 per cent of them find employment. Among them, about 90 per cent of youth have jobs, though male youth have better access compared to the female youth. The job market is narrower for youth compared to that of an adult.<sup>216</sup> Youth are deprived of jobs, mainly because of their limited experience, training, and knowledge; only 30 per cent of the total employed population are youth.

But there are positive trends as well. According to an analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 2017,<sup>217</sup> over a third of male and female youths are engaged in regular paid employment which was around one-tenth a decade ago.<sup>218</sup> Majority of the regular paid employment is of formal nature with some contractual obligations. This rise in formal employment signifies a shift of a section of youth from unpaid family work, day labourer, and other forms of informal nature of jobs. This is likely to reduce job-related uncertainties, improve wages and dignity for the youth in the labour market.

The capability and choices of self-employment enhanced opportunities more in rural areas compared to that in the urban areas, particularly among older youths (25-30 years and 31-35 years). In urban areas, younger youths are taking advantage of the technological opportunities for self-employment. Between 2006 and 2017, the rate of older youth's participation in self-employment has increased by more than one and a half times, both in rural and urban areas. This may partly be attributed to new opportunities for youth

employment, advanced technologies, and industrial development.<sup>219</sup>

It is expected that youth would choose their self-employment, based on their expertise, specialisation, skill, and something that provides for decent living and livelihood. However, the youth in Bangladesh often chose self-employment when they do not have any other option and fail to attain these desirable outcomes. Without qualitative improvement, self-employment would remain a low-paying job and be of little help in developing human capital.

Youth engagement as 'employers' over the years has improved, signifying an improvement in the choices of the youth. Male youth have increasingly been involved as employers (from 0.26 per cent in 2006 to 4.1 per cent in 2017). Older youth aged 25-30 years and 31-35 years have progressed more as employers compared to the group aged 18-24 years. Female youth participation as employers is still negligible. The gender disparity in the case of entrepreneurship development is still high due to various social, economic, and political reasons.<sup>220, 221</sup>

Overall, youth engagement in the job market indicates positive changes though the majority are still involved in informal and unsecured forms of jobs. It is expected that increasing jobs in formal sectors would create more opportunities for the youth to make progress in their career.

#### *Access to jobs for the marginalized youths and state of equal opportunity*

Majority of the marginalized youth feel that their marginalization offers no scope to dream of a better future job.<sup>222</sup> The biggest challenge is completing their education without facing financial hurdles. Their chances of getting a job equivalent to their

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<sup>216</sup> World Bank (2013).

<sup>217</sup> BBS (2017).

<sup>218</sup> BBS (2006).

<sup>219</sup> UN (2018).

<sup>220</sup> Islam et. al. (2019).

<sup>221</sup> Ahammad & Huq, (2013).

<sup>222</sup> BRAC (2018).

counterpart – wealthier, better educated, and with a stronger network – are slim. Their peers, known alias in their community who are already in employment and role model to them, earn more are also more likely to come from higher-income families.<sup>223</sup> Most people with disabilities cannot make full use of their capabilities. Access to labour markets is even more difficult for women with disabilities.<sup>224</sup> Discrimination in the workplace is faced by people of transgender communities. Lack of enforcement of laws for non-discrimination is a major weakness in this regard.<sup>225</sup>

*Earnings of the youth and those of the marginalized youth and disparity in the paid work*

Income from work helps the youth achieve a better standard of living. Decent wage is an important indicator of the standard of living. Youth generally receives a lower average wage (Tk. 12,565 per month in 2017) compared to that of the national average (Tk. 13,452 per month in 2017). In terms of

wages per month, rural youth earn more, and urban youth earn less than their adult counterparts.

Lower-income youth were mostly based in rural areas, whereas the higher income groups were based on urban areas (table 5.1). Over the years, male and female youths' earning gap has reduced, but the income of neither group has changed significantly. Industrial and agricultural wages have not increased over time.<sup>226</sup> An age-wise distinction reveals that percentage of younger age groups (18-24 years and 25-30 years) in higher income brackets is lower than that of the older age group (31-35 years) (table 5.2). Growth in the income of youth is poor compared to both national and historical context. On the other hand, women's educational attainment – except tertiary education – does not match with their choices and employment opportunities and thereby has a significant impact on the level of income.<sup>227</sup>

**Table 5.1: Location wise distribution of income of youth and adult (in percentage)**

Sex/Location	Age Distribution	Wage category (Tk/month)							Total
		1200-4000	4001-6000	6001-10000	10001-20000	20001-50000	50001-90000	90001-523000	
Rural	18-24	0.51	4.49	60.21	29.98	4.81	0	0	100
	25-30	0.68	4.78	53.19	31.23	10.03	0.08	0	100
	31-35	1.14	5.26	54.57	28.38	10.57	0.08	0	100
	36-64	1.47	6.21	58.95	21.95	11.31	0.09	0.01	100
	Total	1.08	5.45	57.31	26.36	9.73	0.07	0.01	100
Urban	18-24	0.11	3.69	58.23	32.69	5.24	0.04	0	100
	25-30	0.2	3.07	47.46	33.85	14.76	0.62	0.03	100
	31-35	0.23	3.23	42.64	31.37	21.19	1.19	0.16	100
	36-64	0.33	4.29	40.03	26.46	25.54	2.91	0.45	100
	Total	0.24	3.74	45.28	30.01	18.88	1.61	0.23	100

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Labour Force Survey, 2016.

<sup>223</sup> Moazzem & Shibly (2020).

<sup>224</sup> UNDP (2015).

<sup>225</sup> UNDP (2015).

<sup>226</sup> Rahman (2012).

<sup>227</sup> Rahman & Islam (2019).

**Table 5.2: Age-wise distribution of income of youth and adult (in percentage)**

Sex	Age Distribution	Wage Category Monthly (Tk)							Total
		1200-4000	4001-6000	6001-10000	10001-20000	20001-50000	50001-90000	90001-523000	
Male	18-24	0.24	3.19	62.19	30.1	4.28	0.01	0	100
	25-30	0.31	1.99	50.86	34.78	11.59	0.45	0.02	100
	31-35	0.39	1.83	48.55	32.5	15.78	0.83	0.11	100
	36-64	0.66	2.32	48.86	25.9	20.06	1.9	0.3	100
	Total	0.47	2.32	51.5	29.54	14.91	1.1	0.16	100
Female	18-24	0.4	6.22	51.2	35.1	7.04	0.05	0	100
	25-30	0.63	8.56	46.79	27.45	16.3	0.27	0	100
	31-35	1.2	10.49	44.6	23.37	19.87	0.45	0.03	100
	36-64	1.38	15.05	45.81	19.61	17.07	0.95	0.12	100
	Total	0.98	10.97	46.93	25.22	15.33	0.53	0.05	100

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Labour Force Survey, 2016-2017.

### *Structural transformation of work*

According to the LFS analysis (2006-2017),<sup>228</sup> the decline in the agriculture sector vis-à-vis manufacturing and service sectors created employment opportunities for the youth in the latter sectors, which are more productive. Transitioning into higher value-added services and manufacturing needs highly qualified professionals and technicians; this has created an increasing demand for workers with at least a secondary education and some vocational training.<sup>229</sup> Youth male cohort (18-24 years) have a higher participation rate in the agriculture sector; this is observed along with dropping down from the service between 2006 and 2017.

Agriculture remains a major area of work, particularly for female youth. However, the rate of increase in female participation in the manufacturing and service sectors is greater than that of the male youth. Participation of female youth has also increased in the government, non-government, and private sectors. Male youth in the 18-24 age group is mostly employed in privately-owned firms and family businesses or activities.

A wide variety of choices for the youth appear to have developed in recent years. However, it is important to understand whether youth involvement in a particular sector is by their choice. Given the lower education attainment by rural youth vis-a-vis urban youth, more employment opportunities in rural areas do not necessarily mean those would be more skill/productivity-oriented and more financially rewarding.

Overall, a large part of youth has been involved in jobs both in urban and rural areas, mainly for subsistence pressure which is lowering the choices and opportunities for these youth in the context of future work. Unable to find opportunities to transform their lives, many youths are trying to find employment abroad.

### **Youth as migrant workers abroad**

In the backdrop of prolonged youth unemployment, which leads to human capital depreciation, demoralisation, migration has emerged as a major source of employment and income generation in the country.<sup>230</sup> Youth are motivated to migrate not only to sustain livelihoods but also to avail new opportunities for their

<sup>228</sup> BBS (2006), BBS (2010), BBS (2013), BBS (2016), and BBS (2016-2017).

<sup>229</sup> UNDP (2015).

<sup>230</sup> Begum (2018).

personal growth and development.<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, migration is a double-edged sword for the youth; it can be an opportunity – in terms of obtaining higher earnings and decent work – or a risk – financial loss due to failed migration or the risks that come with irregular migration.<sup>232</sup>

Push factors like unemployment play a salient role in prompting international migration from Bangladesh. About 6 per cent of male youth of Bangladesh are unemployed while the rate is even higher for female youth (about 12 per cent).<sup>233</sup> Forty per cent of potential migrants are unemployed.<sup>234</sup> Pull factors also influence individuals to migrate with a desire to earn higher income (64.8 per cent) and to recover losses/repay loans (cumulatively 7.2 per cent).<sup>235</sup>

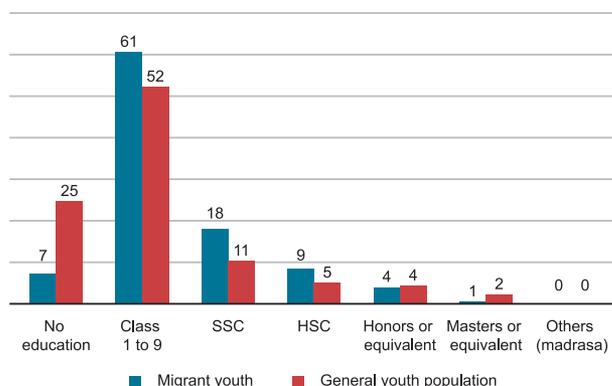
#### Profiles of youth migrants

About 5.55 per cent of Bangladeshi nationals are migrants,<sup>236</sup> with some 700,000 new migrants departing each year, of which, two-thirds are youth

(aged 18-35).<sup>237</sup> The kind of jobs young migrants get abroad depends on their level of skills and education<sup>238</sup> and the majority of the migrant youth are poor with low levels of skills and education (figure 5.1 & figure 5.2). This limits their choices in attaining decent employment at home, increasing their inclination to migrate. Cross-country comparisons show that the rate of professionals and high-skilled migrants (categorized as others in figure 5.2) from Bangladesh is still lower than the rates in countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka; this indicates to the low skill and education levels of Bangladeshi migrants. Lower skill levels of young Bangladeshi migrants prevent them from maximizing the benefits of migration.

Female migrants represent only 14.8 per cent of total migrants.<sup>239</sup> As mentioned previously, the unemployment rate is higher among female youth compared to their male counterparts. Migration could be a way of reducing the unemployment rate

**Figure 5.1: Education level of migrant youth and general youth population in the country**



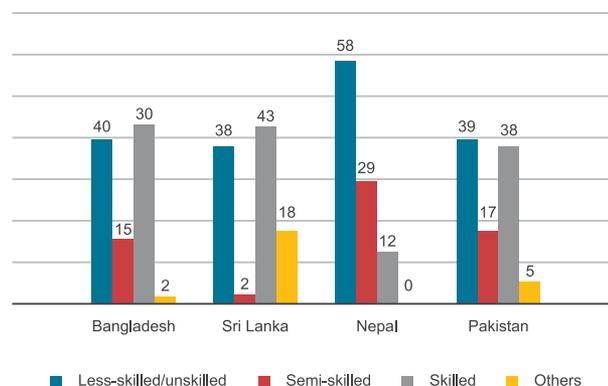
**Source:**

Figure 5.1: Calculated from LFS 2015-16 and Remittance Utilization Survey 2013.

Figure 5.2: ILO, 2018.

Notes for figure 5.2: For Bangladesh, other category includes professional and others; for Sri Lanka, it includes professionals, middle level etc.; for Pakistan, it includes highly skilled and professional.

**Figure 5.2: Skill levels of migrants from selected South Asian countries (%)**



<sup>231</sup> UN (2013).

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Calculated from QLFS 2016-17.

<sup>234</sup> IOM (2020a).

<sup>235</sup> ILO (2015).

<sup>236</sup> ILO (2018).

<sup>237</sup> Calculated from the 2013 remittance utilisation survey.

<sup>238</sup> UN (2013).

<sup>239</sup> BBS (2020).

among female youth. One reason for the low rate of female migration is that during 1981-1998, the Government of Bangladesh repeatedly banned or restricted the migration of low-skilled women.<sup>240</sup>

#### *The role of remittance in building human capital*

The spill over impact of migration on families left behind is important in building human capital in the form of health and education. The 2013 Remittance Utilization Survey shows that about 39 per cent of remittance is used on food, 4.88 per cent for treatment and 3.59 per cent for education.<sup>241</sup> In the 2009 Remittance Utilization Survey, 89 per cent of sample households reported that they have more diversity in the diet while 88 per cent reported that educational opportunity has enhanced. These statistics suggest that migration and more specifically, youth migration significantly contributes to human development of the family members left behind through improved standard of living.

Studies examining the impact of remittances in the context of Bangladesh show that remittance utilisation not only increases food security amid households<sup>242</sup> but also has a substantial positive effect on children's schooling.<sup>243</sup> Female-headed remittance-receiving households tend to invest more remittances in human capital in comparison

to male-headed households,<sup>244</sup> while overseas migration of the male household members was associated with improvements in the pace of the children's schooling, with no impact on schooling by the migration of female members.<sup>245</sup> Overall, remittance from parental migration might enhance the affordability of better food, health care, and supplies for a cleaner environment,<sup>246</sup> which again contributes to shaping capabilities of the youth, allowing them to have access to better opportunities.

#### *Costs of migration for the youth*

The migration cost is higher for males compared to females (table 5.3). The cost is also higher (about 12 per cent) for unskilled workers compared to their skilled counterparts. This suggests that skills development of potential migrant workers may reduce the cost of migration. Evidence shows that the migration cost is higher for Bangladeshi migrants compared to that of other South Asian countries.<sup>247</sup> The reason for higher migration cost for Bangladeshi workers may be that in Bangladesh, intermediaries charge a large amount of fees. The 2009 remittance utilization survey reveals that, on average, a migrant paid BDT 130,519 or USD 1,897 (at the 2009 exchange rate) to intermediaries, which accounts for 59 per cent of their total migration costs.<sup>248</sup>

**Table 5.3: Migration Costs**

Types of skills	Average costs (BDT)		
	Males	Females	All
Skilled workers	442,592	189,772	427,217
Unskilled workers	482,962	219,489	477,927
Domestic workers	353,037	79,645	118,964
All	471,668	100,102	416,789

Source: BBS (2020).

<sup>240</sup> ILO (2014b).

<sup>241</sup> Analyzing the data, we find that 4.55 per cent and 2.44 per cent of the remittances sent by youth population are used for treatment and education, respectively.

<sup>242</sup> Moniruzzaman, (2020).

<sup>243</sup> Kuhn (2006).

<sup>244</sup> Sikder & Higgins (2017).

<sup>245</sup> Kuhn, (2006).

<sup>246</sup> Islam et. al. (2019),

<sup>247</sup> Siddiqui (2012).

<sup>248</sup> IOM (2010).

### *Migrant training for the youth*

Pre-migration training on soft skills, cultural etiquette, and hard skills is vital for facilitating migrant integration into destination countries. Research shows that Bangladeshi migrants believed in the importance of learning languages (52 per cent) and that better language skill could positively impact their earnings (42 per cent).<sup>249</sup>

A study shows that Bangladeshi female migrants, who mostly work as domestic workers abroad, lack functional literacy and are provided token training in how to carry out household chores.<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, it shows that domestic works or home-based care works isolate workers and make them dependent on employers for both working and living conditions. Basic language skills, training in specific job skills, socio-cultural orientation to the destination country, and information about labour laws, immigration laws, available support networks, and services are critical pre-departure requirements for all migrants and especially for those going to work in the domestic or home-based sectors.

### *Migration related risks for the youth*

Failure to migrate is a risk for those who attempt to migrate. 34.6 per cent of attempts at migration from Bangladesh end in failure.<sup>251</sup> The study indicates three types of migration failures in particular: (i) failed attempt at migrating (28.4 per cent), (ii) discouraged attempt for more than 12 months (5.2 per cent), and (iii) stayed abroad for less than six months (1 per cent). The study also reports that the failure in migration attempts imposes substantial financial costs, amounting to USD 818 on average. These costs are likely to have a negative impact on the human development of these individuals and their families through a decrease in consumption expenditures. Further, the failure in trying to migrate discourages further attempts, and migration failure is mainly attributed to fraudulent

agents or visa scams, as well as to financial difficulties (20 per cent), family or medical problems (19 per cent), and failure to obtain a visa (9 per cent).<sup>252</sup>

Since about a fifth of the aspiring migrants who failed to migrate mentioned financial difficulty, increasing access to credit may decrease the risk of failure in migration attempts. However, causal mechanisms underlying the relationship between credit and migration in general, and in international migration, require further exploration. Government has intervened in this area by providing skills trainings and visa processing supports to reduce the cost of migration through different MOUs with the receiving countries. However, NGOs may introduce a special credit scheme for migrants. But most importantly, necessary initiatives need to be taken to contain the illegal way of migrating through different routes which often ended with the loss of life, imprisonment and ultimately loss of dignity and end of dream of these youths.

The analysis so far indicates that generally inadequate skills contribute to not reaping the maximum benefits of migration. But in the future, higher level of skills, especially those related to science and technology will be even more necessary for the youth of tomorrow just to remain relevant in the job market anywhere.

### **Future of work**

The planet is going through what is called the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is changing the nature of the work for the youth at an unparalleled pace and scale. Digitalization will make a significant impact on all sectors and transform processes, management, and governance. Technology, especially digital technology, is quickly making a vast swathe of jobs redundant and creating not just new jobs, but also new ways of working. Overall, digitization changes work (what), workforce (who)

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<sup>249</sup> Erling et.al. (2018).

<sup>250</sup> Consequently, they are likely to receive lower wages. UNDP (2008) (cited in Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012) shows Bangladesh women migrants in Bahrain, Lebanon and UAE receive monthly salaries of USD 100-125 compared to USD 120-140 and 125-400 by female migrants from Sri Lanka and Philippines.

<sup>251</sup> Das et. al. (2019).

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

and workplace (where).<sup>253</sup> Digitalization can disrupt all sectors and transform processes, management, and governance.

#### *Changing face of jobs for the youth*

Automation and digital transformation will make many current jobs redundant. Two out of five jobs are at risk of becoming redundant due to automation.<sup>254</sup> However, with the adoption of IT skills, it is predicted that technology will also create new types of jobs, perhaps proportionately more than the jobs lost to automation.<sup>255</sup> It is projected that 65 per cent of children starting primary school today would end up working in new occupations that do not exist today.<sup>256</sup> While estimates suggest 2.7 million jobs will be lost in the Bangladesh RMG sector by 2041,<sup>257</sup> initiatives to promote new jobs to meet industry demands (such as 3D printer operator, Industrial IoT expert, modelling and simulation expert, Automation and robotics control) have potential to increase employment and productivity. How the youth of Bangladesh prepare for the new ways of working and new skills required to stay relevant in the labour market will depend on the resources and opportunities available to them. Moreover, the ability to self-learn using resources available through digital platforms is essential for the agility that the rapidly changing labour market demands.

Lower costs of accessing jobs in a digitized world mean that barriers for marginalized youth, especially women, will decrease. Although there is not enough evidence to show if the returns from work will be higher, costs will be reduced in terms of transport, commute time, and flexibility of working hours. Hence given that safety at work, work-life balance, and gender parity are important aspects of human development, the effect of digitization on work will potentially improve well-

being for the youth. However, working from home, working with remote teams, and specialized task-based contractual work are associated with lower social interactions and lower job security, which can be detrimental for human development, particularly for the youth.

#### *Information technology (IT) and IT-enabled work for the youth*

The IT sector includes both purely IT jobs and IT-enabled jobs which requires skills ranging from basic computer competency (data entry) to higher-level IT skills, such as software development. Moreover, the market for this sector is global, making this a lucrative sector for growth in youth employment. With the competitive combination of a large youth population, low costs and the government mission for Digital Bangladesh, Bangladesh has over 1 lakh workers in the IT and IT-enabled industry.<sup>258</sup>

Infrastructure facilities are required in areas where marginalized youth live to reduce the constraint to taking full advantage of digitization for the youth of Bangladesh. The internet infrastructure is growing rapidly, and apart from mobile networks, the government is providing Wi-Fi at the union levels. Over 1000 Start-ups in the last four years have generated 1.5 million new jobs.<sup>259</sup>

A strategy study in 2018 indicates that the e-commerce sector in Bangladesh rose from USD 25 million in 2014 to USD 200 million in 2017<sup>260</sup> and the market is predicted to grow to USD 3 billion by 2023. Both E and F-commerce (Facebook based outlets) is on the rise – E-commerce platforms receive 25,000 online orders per day, and there are over 50,000 F-commerce entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.<sup>261</sup> A recent study on 122 female online entrepreneurs showed that most of them are below the age of 35.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Schwartz et.al. (2019).

<sup>254</sup> Ahmed et.al. (2019).

<sup>255</sup> Schwartz et. al. (2019).

<sup>256</sup> World Economic Forum (2016).

<sup>257</sup> a2i. (2016).

<sup>258</sup> Leveraging Information and Communication Technology (LICT). (2019).

<sup>259</sup> Light Castle Partners (2020).

<sup>260</sup> Islam, & Bin-Humam, (2019).

<sup>261</sup> Light Castle Partners (2020).

<sup>262</sup> Rabbani, Zahan, & Matin (2020).

Preparing the youth in Bangladesh for the future labour market is closely linked to advancements in our education and skills sectors. The wide gap between the demands of the job industry and the traditional curriculum and low labour productivity growth rate makes it difficult for the youth to pave inroads to the job market. Bolstering creativity, communications, collaboration, critical thinking, and connectedness, the 5Cs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, require proactive synergies between education, training, and digital connectivity.

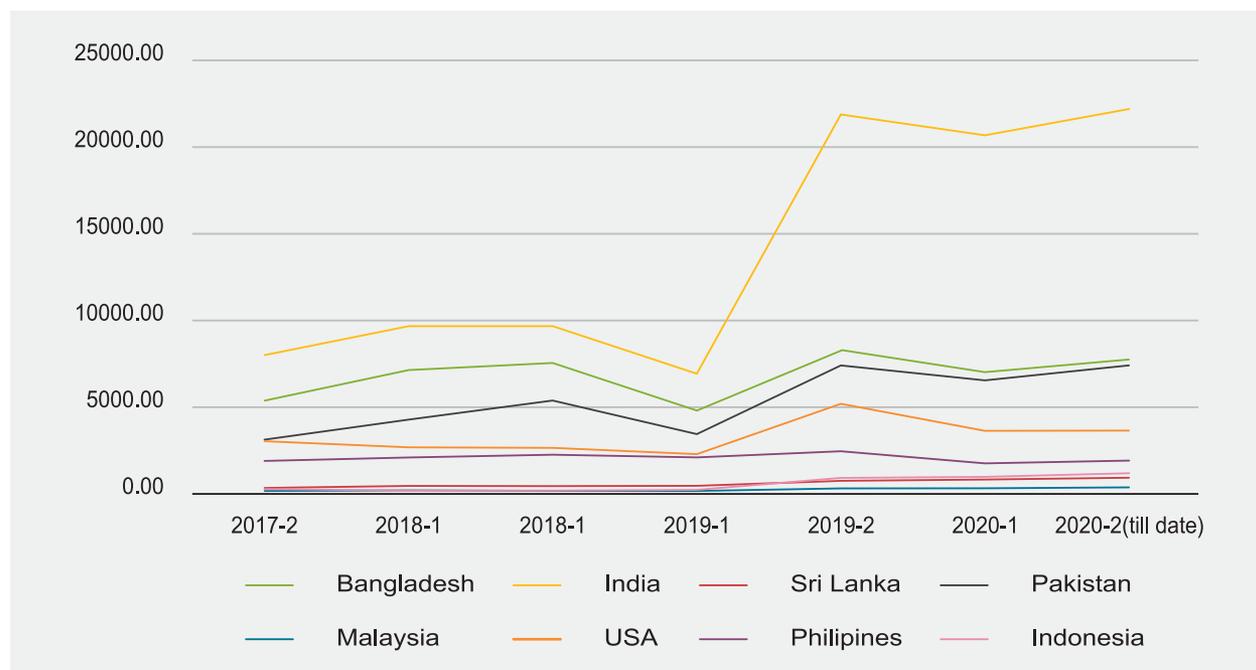
#### Rise of crowdworkers

'Crowdworkers',<sup>263</sup> are the freelancers of modern days who are involved in task-based, non-contractual earning activities, typically delivered online. Because of the nature of the work, crowdworkers are usually youth; the average age of a crowdworker in developing countries is 28

years.<sup>264</sup> Although this type of work provides easier access to employment, flexible hours and ensured payments, this can also lead to underemployment and lack of job security, which can negatively affect the vulnerable youth workers.<sup>265</sup>

It is a new type of employment opportunity for Bangladeshi youth. Bangladesh is only second to India in the world in supplying online labour (figure 5.3). The formal IT workers are concentrated mainly in Dhaka and Chittagong due to better infrastructure. Most youths are engaged in creative, and multimedia focused work is much higher than others. About 15 per cent are involved in software development, and some provide translation and other services. The number of software development has remained relatively unchanged; sales and marketing have become less popular over the last two years.

**Figure 5.3: Online workers of Selected Countries including Bangladesh**



Source: Oxford Internet Institute.

<sup>263</sup> Crowdworkers are a diverse and multifaceted population (Kittur et al., 2013) who work on individual tasks for a firm in a way similar to a self-employed freelancer (Jäger et al., 2019).

<sup>264</sup> Berg et. al. 2018).

<sup>265</sup> Torii & O'Connell (2017).

The highest percentage of the type of product/service in this sector is software development, and the market is mostly in developed countries. For areas with lower opportunities for formal sector jobs, this sector has great potential for youth employment, provided appropriate infrastructure and capabilities are in place.

#### *Digital access of youth in Bangladesh*

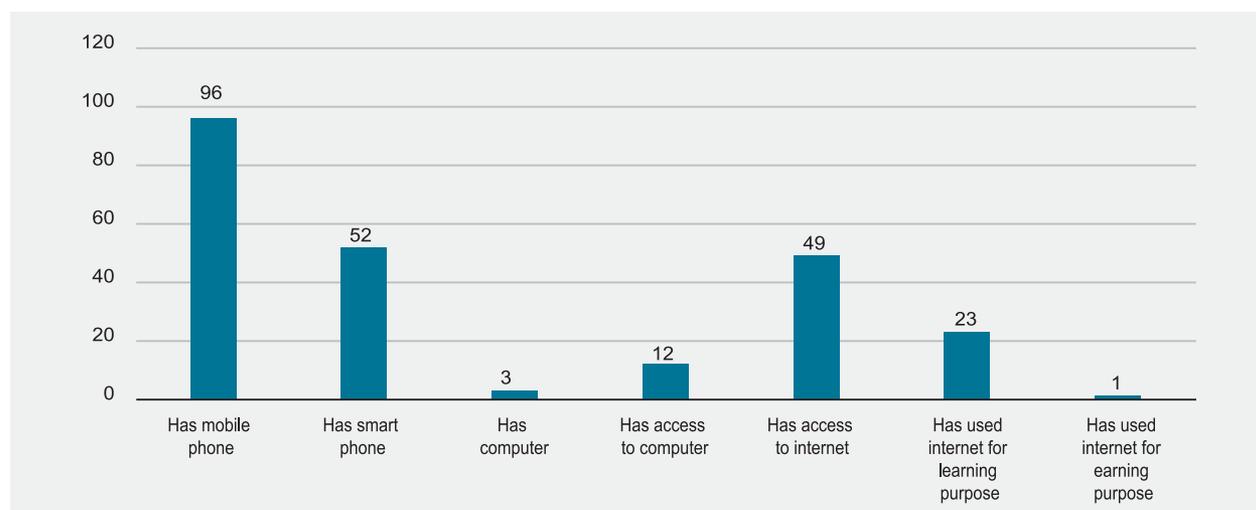
Digital literacy is an essential skill for functioning in today's world. But only 15 per cent youth expressed that they were satisfied with their computer literacy skills.<sup>266</sup> A large proportion of the youth in Bangladesh (75 per cent) live in rural areas. A nationally representative rural survey by BIGD, BRAC University in 2019 found that only 23 per cent used the internet for accessing learning materials, while a mere 1 per cent earned through online activities (figure 5.4). The survey also found that even in wealthier households, youth do not necessarily have higher access to digital devices—many do not have smartphones, and most do not have computers or laptops, which seems to be the norm even in urban areas.

Among youth with at least secondary level education, women are far behind in their access to phones, computers, or the internet. Less than 20 per cent of IT jobs in the country were occupied by women in 2016.<sup>267</sup> Despite policy and strategic focus on IT infrastructure, enabling youth to access and use IT, particularly in rural areas, is still a challenge.

#### *IT training*

Learning technology should not be just a goal of education, technology should also be a means to promote creativity, empowerment and equality and produce efficient learners and problem solvers.<sup>268</sup> In Bangladesh, apart from government training programmes, 95 Universities and 200 polytechnic/vocational institutes provide training in ICT. The country currently generates over 5,000 IT graduates each year.<sup>269</sup> Yet, the number of youth graduating from various ICT training programmes and the skills they acquire is still inadequate to meet industry demands.<sup>270</sup> Bangladesh ranks 125th out of 143 countries in terms of the skills and capacity of the population to make effective use of ICT.<sup>271</sup>

**Figure 5.4: Percent of respondents provides positive responses**



Source: BIGD Digital Literacy Survey, 2019.

<sup>266</sup> BRAC (2018).

<sup>267</sup> Hossain (2018).

<sup>268</sup> Aristovnik (2012).

<sup>269</sup> Light Castle Partners (2020).

<sup>270</sup> Hossain (2018), World Bank (2018) & Zohir et.al. (2019).

<sup>271</sup> World Bank (2018).

The future of work is unpredictable and changing fast. Regardless of which sectors sustain and create more employment for youth, digital competency and IT skills will be the key for acquiring new skills and adapting to the changing nature of work.

The level of access and skill of youth in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, is low. Investing in universal digital literacy is required for youth to be able to reap the benefits of digitisation. Technology dependent new job opportunities, such as online freelancing, are opening up for digitally competent youth in Bangladesh. This is a great example of how the youth respond to the opportunities presented to them.

The shifting dynamics of industry precipitated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) requires Bangladesh to prepare itself and its youth for the fast-changing landscape of work. Along with competitiveness concerns, equally important is the need to ensure inclusiveness during the inevitable process of transformation. For example, Bangladesh's success in women's empowerment in the last few decades will be threatened if women are not ready for the new ways of working.

Ensuring inclusive development of the local industry during the 4IR would entail a two-pronged approach. Firstly, tech industries should be incentivized so that they can grow and employ a sufficiently large segment of the youth population. Parallely, a comprehensive strategy for the education ecosystem can prepare our youth for future IT and IT-enabled jobs. This should be done from an early level of education, starting from primary schools. Especially, building English language proficiency from an early age is crucial in promoting more tertiary enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Timely measures can ensure ubiquitous access and skill development, which will be essential in the 4IR world. More specifically, targeted capacity development initiatives may be sponsored or administered by the government, existing initiatives like the Learning and Earning Development Projects (LEDP) can be expanded in

terms of scope and reach, balancing demand-oriented and geographically inclusive perspectives.

The youth of Bangladesh are already facing multifarious challenges in terms of necessary skills and capabilities and productive job opportunities both at home and abroad, and are simultaneously trying to adjust to the dramatic changes that are happening in the job market in the 21st century. COVID-19 has made their employment challenges significantly harder and accelerated the speed of change in their job market. How COVID-19 is affecting youth employment is discussed in the next section.

### **COVID-19 and its implications on youth employment**

The outbreak of COVID-19 has created uncertainty over the future of Bangladeshi youth. Disruptions due to the pandemic in jobs, education, training, rights, and physical and mental well-being could have a long-lasting impact on the country's youth labour force. However, although COVID-19 is likely to cause severe damage to youth employment, it could also produce some new sector-specific opportunities in post COVID-19 era. To take advantage of these opportunities, Bangladesh needs to adopt innovative, evidence-based and timely policies. This section highlights COVID-19 related crisis, risks, and opportunities for youth in short to medium term.

#### *The crisis and its channels of impact on youth employment*

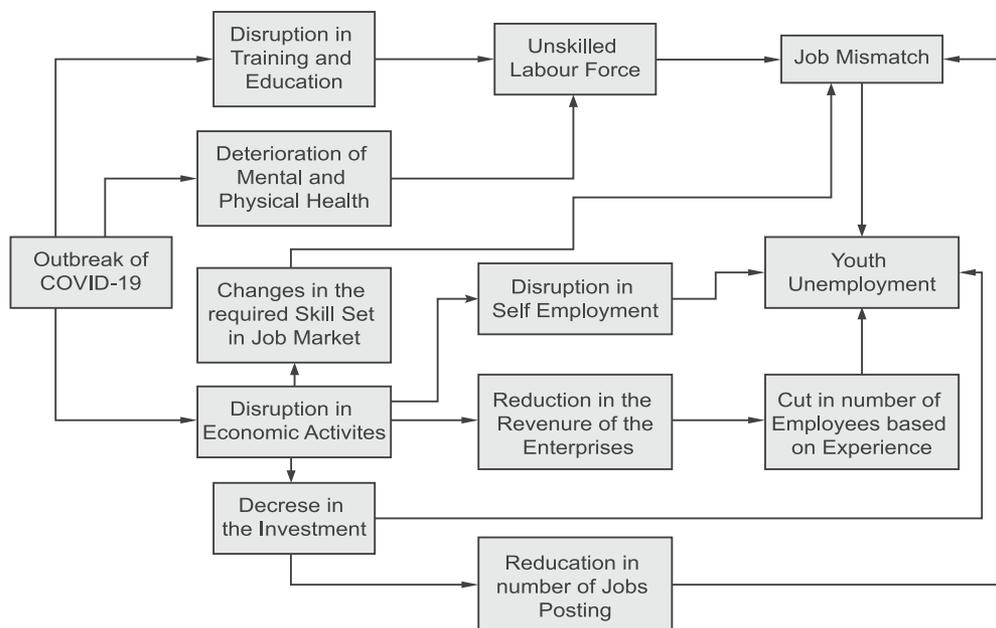
The outbreak of COVID-19 has created a deep crisis in youth employment of Bangladesh. As the pandemic is causing serious damage to the economy, ensuring decent employment for youth could become challenging. The negative impact of COVID-19 is likely to induce youth unemployment through different direct and indirect channels (figure 5.5). However, the magnitude of these impacts will largely depend on the containment of the virus.

Although it was assumed that youth were more resistant to COVID-19 infection,<sup>272</sup> it was not found

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<sup>272</sup> Mostly because prior to the severe outbreak of COVID in Bangladesh the fatality rate for the youth was very low. As of 25 March 2020, the fatality rate for COVID affected people who were in their 20s was 0.03% (*The LA Times*, 2020).

**Figure 5.5: Different channels through which COVID 19 likely to induce youth unemployment**



Source: Author's Illustration.

to be entirely true in Bangladesh. Data shows, as of 14 September 2020, 20 per cent and 28 per cent of the total COVID-19 affected patients in Bangladesh were aged 21-30 and 31-40 respectively.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, about 7 per cent of the total COVID-19 deaths patients were aged 21-40 in Bangladesh.<sup>274</sup> Even though the recovery rate is quite significant (71.7 per cent),<sup>275</sup> COVID-19 affliction can have a prolonged, negative impact.<sup>276</sup> Thus, youths might feel insecure in pursuing their career in sectors where infection possibilities are high, and thus, narrowing down their scope of getting new jobs.

The outbreak of COVID-19 is impacting youth employment of Bangladesh directly by contracting many existing jobs.<sup>277</sup> Many youths have already lost employment as a result of the ongoing

contraction of economic activities.<sup>278</sup> In an attempt to survive the ongoing crisis, business enterprises are reducing their number of employees, and youth are facing its brunt due to their lower job experience.<sup>279</sup> As a result, a total of 1.1 million to 1.6 million jobs of youth could<sup>280</sup> be lost in Bangladesh, depending on the containment of the virus,<sup>281</sup> unemployment rate among the youth aged 15-24 for the year 2020 could reach to 20.5-24.8 per cent (previously 11.9 per cent in 2019) as per ILO-ADB<sup>282</sup> estimates. Considering the anticipated global economic recession in the post COVID period, many more jobs could be lost in the future.

Besides, the ongoing disruption of economic activities has been narrowing down the scope of new investment in the economy, which is further

<sup>273</sup> WHO (2020).

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> For all Covid patients of Bangladesh.

<sup>276</sup> Palmer et. al (2020).\

<sup>277</sup> According to a survey of BIDS (2020), as of June 2020, 13 per cent of total jobs was lost in Bangladesh.

<sup>278</sup> Around 25% of youth lost job already (ILO-ADB,2020).

<sup>279</sup> ILO-ADB (2020).

<sup>280</sup> Youth aged between 15-24.

<sup>281</sup> ILO-ADB. (2020).

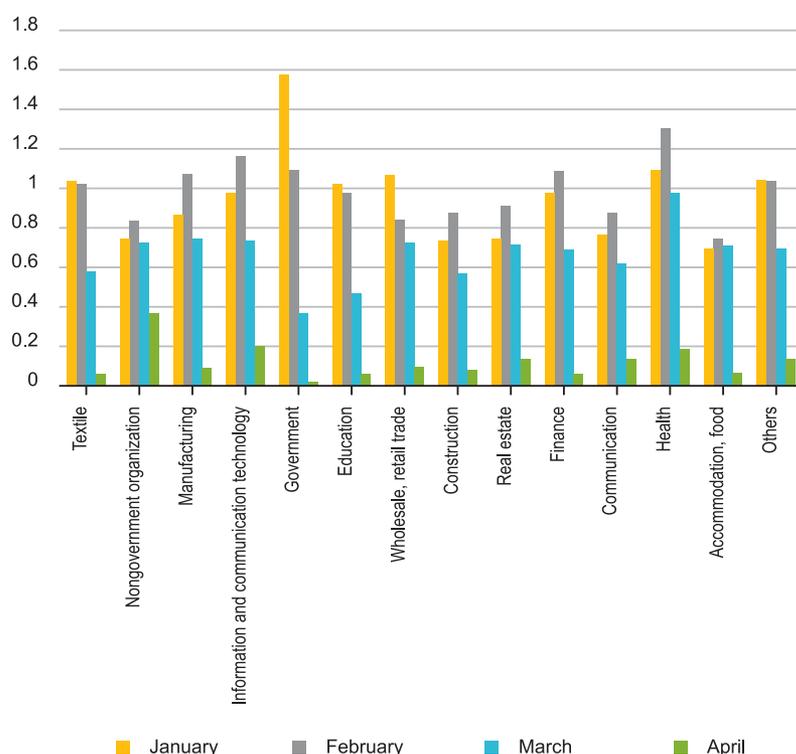
<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

squeezing job opportunity for the youth. In April 2020, the number of jobs posted on the job-related websites was 87 per cent lower than the previous month of the same year.<sup>283</sup> Among all the sectors, the number of jobs posting for the government job decreased the most (figure 5.6). On the other hand, the progress of self-employment of the youth is also under threat. The narrowed scope of new investment could make the youth feel less inspired in becoming an entrepreneur. The restriction of movements and closure of educational institutes reduces many widespread self-employment opportunities, such as travel agents, private tutors, and kindergarten teachers.<sup>284</sup>

Another major channel through which the outbreak of COVID-19 could induce youth unemployment is

through the ongoing disruption of education and training. Initially, Educational institutes of Bangladesh have remained closed from 17 March 2020. As a result, all 2.1 million enrolled college students, and 1.1 million university students<sup>285</sup> are in uncertainty regarding their timely completion of education. However, some universities, colleges and schools have started online classes. Furthermore, training institutes are not operating due to the pandemic, which is hurting the government's attempt to create a skilled labour force. Under these circumstances, the delay and disruption both in education and training could significantly affect youth's capabilities and increase in the rate of youth unemployment in future. The nature of required skillsets could change in the post

**Figure 5.6: Changes in the job postings in 2020 vis-à-vis 2019 (in percentage)**



Source: ADB (2020).

COVID-19 era to become more technology-focused and Bangladeshi youths, who were already struggling in this area, will possibly fall further behind in reaching a competitive position in the post-COVID-19 global job market, which is expected to be more competitive in future.

COVID-19 has also created concern over the physical and mental health of the youth, which could be another inducive factor in increasing youth unemployment in the future. Hossain & Ullah<sup>286</sup> found that limited mobility due to COVID-19 is likely to hamper people's mental well-being, including the youths, which could impede their natural growth and thereby decrease their analytical ability. Hence, the existing *lack of skill* could worsen and lead to higher youth unemployment in Bangladesh.

While the increase in youth unemployment is likely to be the most anticipated immediate outcome of the pandemic, several additional adverse outcomes can be

<sup>283</sup> ADB (2020).

<sup>284</sup> See details at <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/self-employed-people-worst-victims-of-Covid-pandemic-1599189980>.

<sup>285</sup> BANBEIS (2019).

<sup>286</sup> Hossain et.al. (2020).

observed as well. A large section of Bangladeshi youths are already experiencing wage and income loss. A recent survey conducted by Sharmeen & Ahmed<sup>287</sup> found that 25 per cent of youth aged 17-29 have suffered from an income loss due to the outbreak. In addition, 20 million youth were at risk of wage loss; consequently, 53 per cent of the total employed youth aged 18-34 in Bangladesh could fall into poverty.<sup>288</sup>

Consequently, COVID-19 will impact of the progress of human development of the country. Contraction in jobs for the youth is creating uncertainty over the quality of living standard of the youth at present and in the future. On the other hand, disruption in education and mental instability owing to the COVID-19 has been squeezing their scope of gaining knowledge, which plays a key role in enhancing human capacity. The fall in youth income is making them vulnerable in terms of social status. As a result, their freedom of choice could be reduced to a larger extent. Besides, COVID-19 has created concern over the long-run soundness of youth's health. This could become one of the biggest challenges in making progress in terms of human development, particularly if the spread of the virus cannot be controlled soon.

Evaluation of the sector-wise impact of COVID-19 on youth employment could help better understand the scenario, though employment in general for all sectors have been affected by COVID-19. As the proportion of youth in the labour force of Bangladesh is high, any negative effect on the general employment level will affect youth employment as well.<sup>289</sup> Contraction of economic activities due to COVID 19 hit the informal sector the hardest in terms of employment;<sup>290</sup> 89 per cent of the total employed youths aged 18-34 are engaged in the informal sector, thus they are at the highest risk of losing jobs.<sup>291</sup> Given the absence of appropriate legal protection the informal sector workers,<sup>292</sup> the violation of labour rights, such as illegal firing, partial or no wage payment might be occurring more frequently than before, causing more suffering of youth involved in this sector.

According to ILO-ADB,<sup>293</sup> in seven key sectors of Bangladesh, a total of 76 per cent jobs of youth could be lost due to COVID 19 (table 5.4). Among these, in terms of relative percentage, the agricultural sector could see the highest loss of youth employment. However, in terms of absolute number, other sectors of manufacturing and services industries might have the highest job loss.

**Table 5.4: Youth job loss (percentage of total youth job loss) in Bangladesh due to COVID-19**

Sectors	Youth job loss (percentage of total youth job loss) due to COVID-19
Agriculture (Including hunting, forestry and fishing)	22.9
Retail trade (Except motor vehicles and motorcycles; including repair of household goods)	12.1
Hotels and restaurants	2.6
Inland transport	7.6
Other services (Other community, social and personal services)	4.5
Construction	12.8
Textiles and textile product	13.6

Source: ILO-ADB, (2020).

<sup>287</sup> Sharmeen & Ahmed (2020).

<sup>288</sup> SANEM-Action Aid (2020).

<sup>289</sup> Proportion of youth labour force in total labour force of Bangladesh was 31.6% in 2017.

<sup>290</sup> a2i. (2020).

<sup>291</sup> SANEM-Action Aid (2020).

<sup>292</sup> See: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/special/2019/04/30/may-day-legal-protection-for-the-informal-sector>

<sup>293</sup> ILO-ADB. (2020).

The youth job loss forecast of ILO-ADB might be influenced by the disruption in the agro-based industries during the pandemic. The disruption includes the closing of transport routes, restrictions and quarantine measures, shortage of labour, and spikes in the product price, which hampered the routine activities of this sector.<sup>294</sup> Yet, it is to be noted that due to a number of measures<sup>295</sup> taken by Ministry of Agriculture, the movement of agricultural labour, goods and vehicles were kept normal to some extent which resulted in timely harvesting of early Boro crops. This might have played a critical role in limiting the number of job loss in the agriculture sector.

On the other hand, readymade garments (RMG), the leading industry of Bangladesh economy, was a huge source of youth employment in the country, with plans of further increasing youth employment in this sector.<sup>296</sup> However, because of COVID-19, maintaining the existing jobs of the youth in this sector has become a major concern. As of June 2020, a total of 70,000 workers had lost their jobs, and around another one million jobs in this sector were under the risk of becoming redundant by the end of 2020. There could be a 13.6 per cent loss of job for youth aged 18-24 in this sector.<sup>297</sup>

#### *Asymmetrical impact of COVID-19 on marginalized groups*

In the pre COVID-19 period, marginalized youths of Bangladesh were already struggling with education, training and employment, and had almost no effective access to critical public service.<sup>298</sup> This discrimination led them to fall behind compared to others, particularly to urban-based youths. As a result, they remained as most vulnerable to any economic crisis in Bangladesh. COVID-19 has exacerbated their sufferings.

The young female employees are likely to be more affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 compared to their male counterpart. COVID-19 is forcing changes in the mode of working. Due to the restriction on the physical movements across the country, dependency on digital technology has increased. This is changing the required skill set in the job sector. Given that only 10 per cent female youth in Bangladesh were skilled in computer operations compared to 24 per cent in case of male youth,<sup>299</sup> female youth may find it challenging to find employment at present and in future.

On the other hand, the ongoing crisis of the RMG sector is affecting female labour force severely. As 65 per cent of employees of RMG sector were women and mostly young before the pandemic, they suffer millions of jobs loss and no/partial wage payment etc.<sup>300</sup> In addition, domestic workers (such as day labourer, cleaners, maid, etc.), who are mostly women, are left with no income option.<sup>301</sup> A large section of women migrant workers, particularly in the Middle East, Italy and Spain etc. have lost their jobs and already returned home.<sup>302</sup> Disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women employment can reverse the recent progress in women empowerment in Bangladesh.

The impact of COVID-19 on disabled youth could be more severe. A large section of these youths who had to depend on different tools for special education could find it difficult to participate in online classes. In case of the disabled youths who need supports from caregivers that involves close physical contact might find it challenging to continue their regular activities.<sup>303</sup> In addition, due to the priority of COVID-19 patients in health care centres, persons with disabilities (PWDs) are deprived of getting regular emergency

<sup>294</sup> See more at <https://tbsnews.net/thoughts/Covid-19-increasing-economic-resilience-agriculture-sector-77350>

<sup>295</sup> About 19500 Crore Taka has been allocated as development assistance to keep the sector vibrant. About 371.93 Crore Tk. also has been provided for free supply of agricultural inputs.

<sup>296</sup> a2i (2016).

<sup>297</sup> ILO-ADB (2020).

<sup>298</sup> Moazzem & Shibly (2020).

<sup>299</sup> BRAC (2018).

<sup>300</sup> UN Women (2020).

<sup>301</sup> UNDP (2020, August 31).

<sup>302</sup> UN Women (2020).

<sup>303</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/2020/04/02/disability-in-the-time-of-covid-19>

healthcare.<sup>304</sup> Due to COVID-19, they are also being deprived of many other pre-existing facilities. According to a survey of a2i,<sup>305</sup> 44 per cent of respondents experienced discrimination, including exclusion from vital services. Therefore, COVID-19 could make it more difficult to meet the gap in *access to the employment* between PWDs and mainstream youth.

#### *COVID-19 and new realities for the youth*

The main challenge for the youth brought on by COVID-19 is the contraction of current and future job opportunities. Additionally, the ongoing disruption in education, training, and economic activities are posing many challenges for the youth.

*Firstly*, due to disruption in education and training, the youths are not likely to complete their education in time. A survey on youth shows that 33 per cent of participants were going to face a session gap owing to the postponement of the academic program for an uncertain period<sup>306</sup>. Another survey shows about 48.6 per cent and 27.1 per cent graduation and completion of studies, respectively, got delayed<sup>307</sup>. This delay could create a significant barrier, particularly for the female youth. Due to the social constraint, the longer period for completing the education might induce women's early marriage, particularly who belong to low-income families.<sup>308</sup>

*Secondly*, two opposing effects can take place in case of female employment: (i) *discouraged worker effect*, as jobs become more difficult to secure, female workers might feel more discouraged than male workers; (ii) *added worker effect*, women have to enter the labour market to support household income.<sup>309</sup> The outbreak of COVID-19 has already caused 80 per cent income loss for female-headed households and 75 per cent for

male-headed households.<sup>310</sup> In addition, the income of 57 per cent of female-headed households dropped to almost zero.<sup>311</sup>

*Thirdly*, due to the ongoing disruption of economic activities, family income, particularly of the poor households, has gone down. Between March and May, the average family income decreased by 74 per cent.<sup>312</sup> This could force the younger members of the family to start income-earning activities for the family instead of pursuing education; thus, college/school dropouts could increase.<sup>313</sup> Additionally, COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in the closure of technical and vocational education training (TVET) institutions and skills development organizations. This might make the creation of skilled youth labour force in Bangladesh more challenging.

*Finally*, due to the pandemic, digital technology dependence of work has been increasing. As a result, along with youth illiteracy in terms of education, digital illiteracy could become a new challenge in employing the youth of Bangladesh.

COVID-19 came as a big challenge for the youth of Bangladesh. As the pandemic was an unprecedented experience for the youth, they did not have any guideline for coping with the crisis. Due to their lower job experiences, they have been suffering the most in terms of losing jobs. In addition, the new opportunities for the jobs for the youth have also gone down. As a result, many youths are getting involved in under-waged and low-graded jobs.<sup>314</sup> Because of their inability to maintain the higher cost of living in the capital city, many youths are left with no options but to return to the villages. Around 50,000 people already left the Dhaka city.<sup>315</sup> Delay in the completion of education has created uncertainty and depression

<sup>304</sup> Kibria et. al. (2020).

<sup>305</sup> a2i (2020).

<sup>306</sup> Young Bangla (2020).

<sup>307</sup> Sharmeen & Ahmed (2020).

<sup>308</sup> UN Women (2020).

<sup>309</sup> Huq & Faruk (2020, July 14).

<sup>310</sup> BRAC (2020).

<sup>311</sup> BRAC. (2020).

<sup>312</sup> DW (2020, June 10).

<sup>313</sup> <https://www.newagebd.net/article/113970/high-dropout-likely-for-Covid-19-flood>

<sup>314</sup> Young Bangla (2020).

<sup>315</sup> See details at <https://tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/Covid-19-bangladesh/low-income-people-leaving-dhaka-96850>

among the youth. Survey shows 35 per cent of youth respondents lost their enthusiasm to work or carry on their studies in the near future, whereas 59 per cent were extremely worried about the future livelihood.<sup>316</sup>

COVID-19 has brought several risks to youth employment in Bangladesh. The youth of Bangladesh were already unprepared for the future work of the world. Due to the limited movements during COVID-19 period, the youths were not able to participate in those training programme launched for the development of ICT skills.

Although some youths have engaged in different training through various online platforms, the recent increase in the price of digital devices, possibly due to inadequate supply against increased demand, and poor internet connection in remote areas might impede the expected outcome.

A huge number of migrant youths, working abroad before COVID-19 hit, are now coming back due to the ongoing global crisis.<sup>317</sup> This could create additional pressure on the economy, as it will increase the number of unemployed youths.

Due to the lower number of jobs, a large section of unemployed youth could involve themselves in criminal activities, as Lin<sup>318</sup> found that unemployment increases the crime rate to some extent. As a result, there is risk associated that it could hamper the social stability of the country as well.

### ***Aspirations of the youth***

Young people are always exploring their self-identities – who they are, what they want to become, and what they want to achieve.<sup>319</sup> Thus, their objectives of engagement in the job market may differ from those of the adults. The youth are constantly looking for satisfaction in their lives

through high commitment, high in-depth exploration, and low reconsideration of commitment in the educational identity domain.<sup>320</sup> According to BRAC<sup>321</sup> Youth Survey, nationality and religion are the top two self-identities preferred by the youth. Besides, educational qualification and occupation are important issues of self-identities for youth. There are some notable gender differences. Male youth prefer to take occupation and educational qualification as their main identities, where the scenario is quite the opposite for female. Moksnes & Espnes<sup>322</sup> found that boys report higher self-esteem and life satisfaction than girls.

Youth also look for self-esteem, which is related to dignity – an indicator of human development; self-esteem is positively associated with life satisfaction. Thus, identifying the predominant self-identities and satisfactions of the youth is useful for understanding their motivations, attitude, and behaviour.<sup>323</sup>

Even youth with better education and training who can work more productively may not receive commensurate rewards in income, stability, or social recognition.<sup>324</sup> In line with that, satisfaction on monthly income is very low for the youth cohort, where half of the youth population are not satisfied with their income. There is a difference in the perception of satisfaction levels between average national youth with that of marginalized youth; in many cases, the marginalized youths are less satisfied.

### **Government initiatives to boost youth employment**

Bangladesh is enjoying the one-time 'demographic window' of opportunity as the working population surpasses the elderly population. This period of opportunity may last for a maximum period of 20-

<sup>316</sup> Sharmeen & Ahmed (2020).

<sup>317</sup> In between February and May, 5 lakh migrants have returned to Bangladesh (YPSA, 2020).

<sup>318</sup> Lin (2008).

<sup>319</sup> Leary & Tangney (2011).

<sup>320</sup> Dimitrova et. al. (2017).

<sup>321</sup> BRAC (2018).

<sup>322</sup> Moksnes & Espnes (2013).

<sup>323</sup> Biddle et al. (1985).

<sup>324</sup> UNDP (2015).

30 years until the growth of the elderly population overtakes the growth of the working class. Therefore, the realization of the dream to become a developed country by 2041 largely depends on the ability of the country to turn the one-time demographic window of opportunity into a 'demographic dividend.'

Anticipating the opportunity offered by the present demography, the government has taken various initiatives to skill and upskill the young generation for ensuring employability and optimum labour productivity. The Department of Youth Development is implementing a 'National Service Program' which created 2,27,402 temporary employments by providing all aspirants required basic training. At present, the Finance Division is implementing the 'Skills for Employment Investment Program.' Around 4.28 lakh people have received skills training under the project, out of which 2.48 lakh people are employed. Several similar skills development projects are under active consideration of the government.

Moreover, the government has created the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) to plan and coordinate various skills development activities catering to the national and international labour market demand. The National Human Resource Development Fund has been established to ensure funding for skills development programs. The government is also implementing a 'job development' reform program, which will bring reforms in three areas: (1) increasing investment for faster job creation, (2) protecting workers, and (3) increasing access to work for those at risk.

### **Financial assistance to protect jobs amid COVID-19 pandemic**

Like all other economies on earth, the economy of Bangladesh is also hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. As discussed before, nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of this contagious

disease put lives and livelihoods of millions in danger, including youths. Consequently, the government has allocated BDT 5000 crore as payment of salaries and allowances of the workers of the export-oriented readymade garment industries. The government is providing interest subsidies to the affected industries to keep them afloat and protect employments. In addition, a package of BDT 30,000 crore is made available as working capital loans to the affected large industries and service sector at a low-interest rate of 4.5 per cent. Similarly, financial assistance of BDT 20,000 crore has been provided as working capital loans to the micro, cottage, and SME entrepreneurs at a low interest rate of 4 per cent.

The government also recognized the necessity of a vibrant rural economy. To ensure rural employment by encouraging poor farmers, expatriate workers, and unemployed youth to engage in agriculture, agro-related production, services, and small businesses, it has extended low-interest loan facilities for the rural population. BDT 3200 crore has been provided through Karmasangsthan Bank, Prabasi Kalyan Bank, Village Savings Bank, Ansar-VDP Bank, and Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation for expanding employment-related credit activities. A similar program with planned disbursement of BDT 1500 crore, aiming at revitalizing the rural economy and ensuring job creation through micro-credit programs, is operating in the rural areas.

To mainstream returning expatriate workers in the domestic labour market and to make best use of their expertise, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) facilities are made available. Moreover, initiatives like the digitalization of migration process, implementation of various welfare initiatives for expatriates, introduction of smart cards, mobile-based visa tracking system, reform of migration laws have been undertaken by the government to benefit and ensure youth employment.

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# Chapter 6

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## Dreams of adolescents



# Chapter 6

## Dreams of adolescents

Dream is an extraordinary area to be explored, especially dreams of adolescents for the future. Dream is elusive; dream is ever-changing but inextricably embedded in reality, shaped and shaping the past, present and future of a nation. Adolescents are again an unexplored area. Although the Government of Bangladesh has taken several policy measures and initiatives to address the issues related to adolescents, the overall mindset of the society largely remains unchanged.<sup>325</sup> Since the days of Rabindranath Tagore, a noble laureate, the journey of adolescents, as depicted through *Phatik*, resonates with isolation, alienation, longing for love and acceptance, struggling to cope with the bodily and mental changes. The story indicates that “particularly, there is no greater nuisance than a boy of thirteen or fourteen” (“বিশেষত: তের চৌদ্দ বছরের মত এমন বালাই আর নেই”, short story *Chhuti* by R. Tagore, 1892). The symbolic representation of *Phatik* as an adolescent portrays the 'universal' vulnerability and dilemma of an adolescent, fraught in-between childhood and adulthood, belonging nowhere, treated as an insignificant entity by society. In the absence of proper attention, awareness and care, the adolescents do not bloom properly or reach their full potential. The story also depicts the impacts of overarching poverty on adolescent life and unfolds the multifarious layers of emotions and anguish rotating around this unique stage of life called adolescence.

In Bangladesh, lives and dream trajectories of adolescents have crossed a varied and challenging path. The angst for belongingness and inability to address an adolescent's changing context is echoed in the stories by famous contemporary writers like Humayun Ahmed and Zafar Iqbal. Narratives of

Dilu, who committed suicide for love<sup>326</sup> or the touching stories of all sacrificing adolescent martyrs (*Kishore Muktijoddha*) like Rashed, or of Topu or Rasha<sup>327</sup> portray the struggle, estrangement and strong willpower of adolescents.

Adolescence is defined as a period of human development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood (box 6.1). According to BBS (2015), Bangladesh has approximately 36 million adolescents, consisting of more than one-fifth of the population. Globally, the number is around 1.2 billion, making up 16 per cent of the world's population. According to the World Bank (2020), both boy and girl populations have increased from 10-14 to 15-19 in Bangladesh (Statistical Annex Table 5). However, the tables also show a higher proportion of male adolescents than females making it to the age group of 15-19 from 10-14. Rahman (2014, 4) reckons this large under-enumeration of young women (in comparison to men in this age group), as 'missing female youth.' This under-enumeration reveals social biases against this gender and age group, which can profoundly affect appropriate policies and provisions for young women's health services and employment generation. Gender disparity thus becomes central when exploring the life chances and visions of the adolescents.

### Adolescents have diversified dreams

Dream is multi-layered, multifaceted and diverged through gender, socioeconomic category, across urban-rural and geographical locations, not to mention education and health status across the marginalized community like sexual orientation, ethnic minority, and disability and the child born in hilly or other remote areas now, they all have a dream to show their potential at national level.

<sup>325</sup> The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has recently adopted adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030. GoB is also in the process of finalising a National Adolescent Strategy.

<sup>326</sup> Ahmed, *Amar Achhey Jol*, 1985.

<sup>327</sup> Zafar Iqbal, *Amar Bondhu Rashed*, 1994; *Amar Naam Topu*, 2005; *Rasha*, 2016. We also remember *Nuliachhorir Sonar Pahar* (1995) written by Shahriar Kabir and *Emile er Goenda Bahini* (1929) written by Erich Kastner and translated by Subrata Barua.

### Box 6.1: Adolescence defined

According to the United Nations, adolescence includes persons between 10 and 19 years of age. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines anyone under 18 as a child. Policies/programs of the Government of Bangladesh use different age bars to define children/adolescents depending on the context. Bangladesh National Child Policy (2011) defines all individuals under 18 as children and those aged 14-18 as adolescents. The Children Act, 2013 states that anyone until reaching 18 years of age is to be termed as a child. Moreover, Bangladesh's laws also specify different age bars to define childhood/adolescents for various purposes. The Suppression of Women and Children Act, 2000 (amended in 2003) defines a child as anyone under 16. While the Majority Act, 1875, sets the age of maturity at 18. The Bangladesh Labour Act and the Penal Code 1860 limit childhood to younger ages in specific contexts. By the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, males are considered as adults at the age of 21 and females are adults at 18. A few other laws set other age limits. Though Bangladesh's laws and policies use different age bars to define the term 'adolescents', the recent documents predominantly use the age cohort of 10-19 for adolescents. Following the National Strategy for Adolescent Health (2017-2030) and WHO's framework, this chapter defines individuals aged 10-19 as adolescents with the age cohort of 10-14 as early adolescents and the age cohort of 15-19 as late adolescents.

A dream is often labelled and identified as something equivocal and abstract, but dreams do not come out of the void. It is difficult to capture the unity among all these diversities. The present chapter explores the issues shaping the adolescents' dreams regarding their future, the main challenges and hindrances they foresee, the chances and options influencing their dreams.

In the process, the aims and dreams get mingled with each other. Dreams are prioritized or expressed in the forms of securing a livelihood or an occupation. Maslow's (1943) theory of the Hierarchy of Needs suggests<sup>328</sup> that people are motivated to fulfil basic needs before moving on to other, more advanced needs. Exploration of dreams of adolescents thus becomes meaningless without taking into account the basic needs and survival opportunities of their everyday life like a square meal, employment, job, or occupation. Articulation of higher levels of dreams thus often remains implicit and blended within the layers of basic survival strategies.<sup>329</sup>

The discussion in this chapter is largely based on secondary sources of information, though some primary data has been collected from short questionnaire surveys of adolescents and interviews with experts. Our primary concern is to go beyond statistics, beyond average, and chart the landscape of adolescence amid human emotion,

frustration and anguish, voice and agency, dreams and aspirations and to include the range of issues influencing their life and livelihood in the future. A conceptual framework covering critical aspects of adolescents' dreams has been developed and the discussion is mostly based on that framework. The chapter specifically focuses on health, education and skill development issues.

### Understanding the dreams of adolescents and their well-being: a conceptual framework

Adolescence or teenage is a mysterious period of life, bridging childhood and adulthood. The second decade of life is a time of tremendous opportunity.<sup>330</sup> Adolescence is characterized by rapid social, physical, and emotional changes.<sup>331</sup> The concept of 'dreams' of adolescents is closely linked to the concepts of hope, aspirations, future orientation, resilience, and beliefs in the future.<sup>332</sup> When we inquire about adolescents' dreams regarding future Bangladesh, we try to understand where they wish to place themselves in the future. Their dreams are closely linked to their hopes and beliefs about their own ability to achieve future aspirations, which are again entangled with the present. The hopes and beliefs are linked to their current well-being and the possibility to overcome any challenge that hinders their progress. It has been observed that many adolescents, especially girls, are denied the investments and opportunities that they require to realize their full potentials.<sup>333</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Maslow (1943).

<sup>329</sup> In this chapter the term 'dream' also refers to the term 'aim' because our discussions with adolescents revealed that dream as of adolescents are mingled with their aims in life.

<sup>330</sup> UNICEF 2019.

<sup>331</sup> Dube 2012.

<sup>332</sup> Shek, Wu, and Leung 2017.

<sup>333</sup> UNFPA 2013.

Key dimensions of adolescent well-being could be noted from various global approaches (details in table 7.2 in Chapter 7).<sup>334</sup> Critical areas identified for adolescent development and well-being are multi-dimensional, involving different actors and requiring various actions and interventions at different levels. Issues that were found pertinent for all can be categorized under four broad categories:

- Education (formal or informal) achieving exit competency, learning and skill development, endorsing access to non-exploitative decent work, and sustainable livelihood is an essential element of dream fulfilment.
- Health issues encompassing physical, reproductive health and nutrition, psychosocial well-being, bodily integrity, ensuring freedom from gender-based violence, and child marriage is critical. Knowledge, skills and resilience thus become crucial for a healthy, productive and fulfilling life.
- A sense of security and belongingness under the overarching umbrella of the society itself is essential. Dreams of the adolescents again get imbued in the institutions like family, school, peers, community and the state.
- Rights and sanctions to live and express creative views, voice and agency, ability to change, transform, participate and engage in every field of real and virtual world remains critical.

In a nutshell, creating “a world in which every woman, child and adolescent in every setting realizes their rights to physical and mental health and well-being, has social and economic opportunities and can participate fully in shaping prosperous and sustainable societies”<sup>335</sup> is what needs to be envisioned and planned for.

In every case, the right-based approach calls for equity and inclusion to ensure that no girl or boy is left behind.<sup>336</sup> Well-being needs to be achieved at

individual, family, social and institutional levels, with specific influence from the global contexts. National policies addressing inter-sectoral links are essential to develop a supportive environment for adolescent development. This chapter follows the broad landscape of global issues to local scenarios pertinent to the adolescent's dreams. Based on different approaches, the following conceptual framework for adolescent development in Bangladesh has been considered as central to our discussion (figure 6.1).

### Issues influencing adolescents' wellbeing

Issues affecting adolescents are cross-cutting, and therefore, many policies have a direct or indirect influence on adolescents. As mentioned above, adolescents' well-being encompasses health, nutrition, education, skills, protection, participation, the transition to economic empowerment, etc. Consequently, policies on these issues are relevant to adolescents' well-being.

#### *Education and skills for shaping the dreams of adolescents*

Adolescence is a time of transition involving multi-dimensional changes: biological, psychological, mental and social (UNICEF 2006). The extent and pace of these changes depend on gender, socio-economic background, education and exposure to various other structural and environmental factors (UNICEF 2006). Moreover, extensive and fast changes in information and communication technology (ICT) have appeared as a critical influencing factor on their individual and collective attitudes in recent years. The adolescents of today are working adults of tomorrow. The transition towards work-life is determined by opportunities and obstacles related to education and skills and various social and institutional factors. Bangladesh can expedite economic growth by capturing the anticipated *demographic dividend* through investing in health, education, labour market, and job creation for young people.<sup>337</sup>

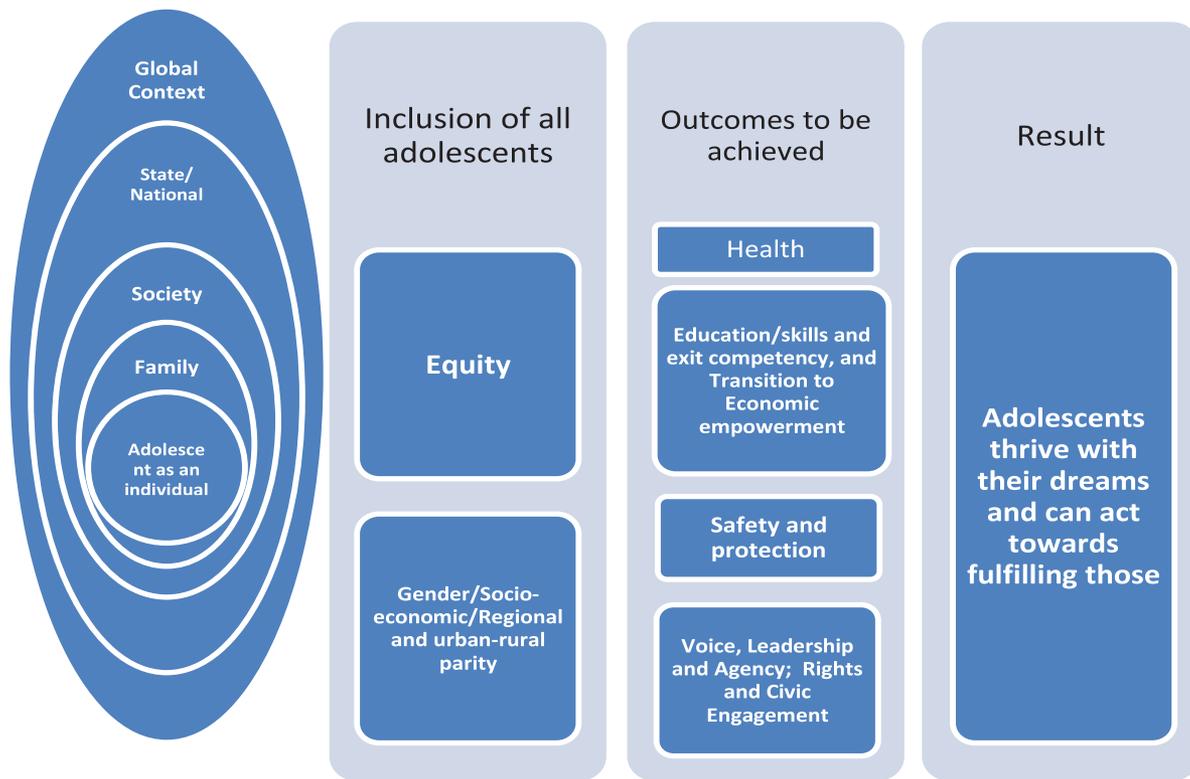
<sup>334</sup> Some such global strategy documents include the UN Strategy “Youth 2030: Working with and For Young People,” and the Generation Unlimited Global Partnership Initiative; UNICEF Adolescent Country Tracker; GAGE conceptual framework; 'UNICEF programming guidance for the second decade: programming with and for adolescents' (UNICEF, 2018); 'UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth Towards realizing the full potential of adolescents and youth' (UNFPA 2013) and The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030) by World Health Organization (WHO 2015). See Table A-1-1 in the Annex 1.

<sup>335</sup> The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030) by WHO.

<sup>336</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality/gender-action-plan-2018-2021>

<sup>337</sup> Sameh El-Saharty (2014).

**Figure 6.1: Conceptual framework for the well-being of adolescents enabling them to dream freely**



It is noted that the proportion of children in secondary schools in Bangladesh is lowest in South Asia, barely 46 per cent of the 95 per cent who pass the primary school level and the secondary school cycle is not completed by 75 per cent of children at that age.<sup>338</sup> While adolescent girls in secondary school have higher enrolment rates than boys, they also have higher dropout rates and are thus less likely to complete secondary school and continue to higher education than boys.<sup>339</sup> This report of the GAGE project has found it necessary to devise more programs to enhance psychosocial well-being in terms of girls' ability to establish some control over their lives, improve their relationships, and enhance their family and community status. Another GAGE project report<sup>340</sup> has noted that aspirations of both the girls and boys centre around education, but girls who wanted to continue

studying were less confident of their family's support than were boys. While moderate advancement to reduce the worst forms of child labour is noted, 8 per cent of children continue to be involved in hazardous work, with boys three times as likely as girls working in dangerous conditions.<sup>341</sup>

In this context, we need to ensure both boys and girls get the opportunity to prepare themselves to contribute to the economy and society. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018-2021 points out the hindrances imposed on adolescent girls that obstruct them from the opportunity to reach their potentials calls for gender equality in access, retention, learning and skill development. Therefore, the empowerment of teenage girls is a key priority for adolescent development.<sup>342</sup>

<sup>338</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/more-opportunities-early-learning/education-adolescents>

<sup>339</sup> Stavropoulou et al. (2017).

<sup>340</sup> Camfield, Rashid and Sultan (2017).

<sup>341</sup> [https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/South%20Asia/Bangladesh/2019/Survey%20findings/Bangladesh%202019%20MICS%20Survey%20Findings\\_English.pdf](https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/South%20Asia/Bangladesh/2019/Survey%20findings/Bangladesh%202019%20MICS%20Survey%20Findings_English.pdf) and [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2018/Bangladesh.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2018/Bangladesh.pdf)

<sup>342</sup> UNICEF (2017).

### *Education system*

The Bangladesh education system is one of the largest globally, with nearly 24 million children in kindergartens and primary schools.<sup>343</sup> Total education spending accounts for about 12 per cent of the national budget 2020-21. There are three central education systems in Bangladesh: general education, *madrassa* or Islamic-religion-based education and vocational education. Moreover, the English medium schools are run in two curriculums – English medium national curriculum and English medium international curriculum. The former teaches books of the national curriculum in the English language, while the latter follows the books mostly written by foreign authors. These different education streams can have far-reaching consequences on adolescents as they study different kinds of books, listens to different types of discussions, and gather diverse perspectives on life from the teachings imparted in these varied classrooms.

The 2010 Education Policy has proposed reforms of *madrassa* education to include more general education subjects (in addition to religious studies) under a uniform curriculum and stronger monitoring to ensure quality education. In most cases, parents sending children to *madrassas* are from the disadvantaged segment of the society.

Education is a prerequisite for ensuring sustainable development. It is important that education system provides enough space for adolescents to dream and to get the right kind of supports to realize these dreams. The curriculum contents, teaching methods, teacher-student ratio, quality of teachers, and school infrastructure are essential factors including library facility, opportunities for various cultural activities, sports, access to good hygiene practices (including separate toilets and menstrual health for girls) and others are all contributing factors towards realizing their dreams. Overall, an enabling environment has to be ensured for the children to think, to innovate, and to engage in activities so that they can give their best at all times.

A UNICEF, Bangladesh study on the Education for Adolescents programme shows that other factors such as gender issues, socioeconomic status, living in hard-to-reach areas may affect adolescent education.<sup>344</sup> The program document also mentions that the reasons for dropout include the distance from school (especially in remote areas), the cost of education, the absence of a child-friendly environment and protection from sexual harassment. Girls often also drop out because they are married early. It is also noted that if the mainstream education system meet all the children's needs and can provide for alternative scopes for skill-based education, a better life and livelihoods is very much possible.

### *Enrolment and dropouts*

Research indicates that girls are more likely to enrol in both primary and secondary schools than boys.<sup>345</sup> However, boys remain more likely to complete secondary school than girls. Boys are also over-represented in both technical/vocational and higher education.

This study has also noted that poverty is a significant driver of school dropouts for girls and boys. However, social norms prioritize girls' reproductive roles. Consequently, as the opportunity costs of their education grow during adolescence, parents increasingly prioritize sons' schooling with girls receiving fewer financial resources and are more involved to do household chores.

Girls receive scholarships under the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme of the Govt of Bangladesh. This support has worked in tandem with NGO efforts to expand non-public schools and *madrassa* efforts to modernize curricula.<sup>346</sup> The Female Secondary Stipend Programme in Bangladesh has resulted in increased completed years of schooling by at least 0.4 years and delayed the age of first marriage and the age of first birth by at least 0.4 and 0.3 years respectively.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> BANBASE (2019).

<sup>344</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/more-opportunities-early-learning/education-adolescents>

<sup>345</sup> Presler-Marshall and Stavropoulou (2017).

<sup>346</sup> MoPME (2015), Badrunnesha (2015), Jahan et al. (2011), as cited in Presler-Marshall and Stavropoulou (2017)).

<sup>347</sup> Sayeed (2016).

### *Quality of education matters for dream building*

Bangladesh has achieved universal enrolment and gender parity in primary and secondary education. The HCI indicates the necessity to minimise the opportunity gaps between rural and urban areas, and the rich and poor. Quality of education and equality in opportunities can increase efficient utilization of human capital potentials. HCI has noted that a child born in Bangladesh today can expect to achieve only 46 per cent of a fully educated adult's productivity potential in optimal health.<sup>348</sup>

The government has given importance to the quality issues in the education policy and is increasingly determined to make qualitative changes in the teaching and learning system. In this connection, the Government of Bangladesh is working towards improving the evaluation system, provide regular and effective training to the teachers, and update the curriculum on a regular basis.

Allocation for education and technology in Bangladesh as a percentage of GDP is 2.7 per cent in the fiscal year 2020-21. The government has plan to further enhance this ratio successively to ensure quality education in the country.

### *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for adolescents*

With the rise of various use of information and communication technology, adolescents have become keen on multiple electronic gadgets such as computers, laptops, smartphones, musical devices, different storage devices, etc. The technological advancement has created new window of opportunities for the adolescents to acquire knowledge, to improve their skills and to communicate better with their peers. However, new area of their short-run aspirations, unhappiness and frustrations centre around whether they possess their desired gadgets or not. The disparity in access to electronic devices has posed new threats to the gap in opportunities

during the COVID-19 pandemic when education is mostly delivered online.

One of the blessings of technology for adolescents is distance learning and online education. Now a person with any internet-enabled device with audio, visual output sitting in a remote area of Bangladesh can access any top-ranked school contents in the world. Several educational sites, such as Coursera, Udemy have helped to study millions of humans. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, online education has become the new normal and helped many kids receive a quality education without the risk of doing physical classes.<sup>349, 350</sup> However, in some cases, poor *wi-fi* facilities in many areas (mainly rural) of Bangladesh and lack of access to electronic gadgets have constrained many students from attending online classes.

An adolescent in an urban city can get easy internet access and other technological amenities at their fingertips. Those who live in urban areas blend with newer technological products and their use, which later enables them to use them to their benefit, but those who live in rural areas struggle to engage with these products with the same ease as urban adolescents. As the manifesto of the government to make this country Digital Bangladesh, internet and other technologies are gradually but surely reaching the remote parts of Bangladesh.

There was a time when people used to go to formal training centres to get access to books, to speak a foreign language and to practice the correct pronunciation. Now an adolescent can learn the same foreign language sitting at her/his home through different apps. Learning a second language at an early age is always faster and easier than learning it at a later stage of life and helps the technology-enabled adolescents to be a truly global citizen. These opportunities may create further disparity between adolescents of rural and urban areas; between adolescents of rich and poor households.

<sup>348</sup> The World Bank (2020).

<sup>349</sup> [unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/home-education-project-reaches-children-remote-parts-bangladesh](https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/home-education-project-reaches-children-remote-parts-bangladesh)

<sup>350</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/students-bangladesh-adjust-remote-learning-national-tv-during-covid-19-lockdown>

Social media has heavily influenced adolescents' perspectives towards life, their priorities, methods of connecting with peers and goals of life. Texts, Facebook, instant messaging and access to the internet have changed how young people understand marriage and relationships<sup>351</sup> friendships and connectivity, response and resistance, creativity and exposure, access to the job market, working from home, buying and selling, eating habits, dress and fashion statement, online readings, learning and skill development, etc. Social media has opened up a terrain of immense possibilities for adolescents with all its pros and cons. Today's *netizens* are a new generation that needs to be understood with empathy.

Due to easy access to technology, adolescents get access to social media at an early age. However, they sometimes go through unwanted trouble by being exposed to harmful strangers (potential harassers) at the social media platform. The children typically do not understand the *netiquette*. Consequently, they may encounter disagreements with strangers and bullies. In a UNICEF study, 70 per cent of the boys and 44 per cent of the girls befriend unknown people online.<sup>352</sup> As per UNICEF, 32 per cent of adolescents in Bangladesh who have access to online, are victims of online violence, cyberbullying, and digital harassment.<sup>353</sup>

#### *Health as the crucial determining factor in shaping the dreams of the adolescents*<sup>354</sup>

The health scenario of the adolescents will be primarily classified under three broad sections here, namely, Physical, Mental and Sexual and

Reproductive Health. Child marriage and child/adolescent maternal health will also be discussed as a cross-cutting issue from the broader perspective of gender, education and health. Before going into details of these subsections, the impact of norms, values and mind-set embedded in the family, community and society at large that perpetuate under a patriarchal setup will be touched upon as an overarching issue.

#### *Physical health*

In terms of physical health, adolescence is a time of rapid physiological, sexual, neurological, and behavioural changes, and special health attention is essential for achieving full growth potential.<sup>355</sup> Prevailing gender roles within the family and community<sup>356</sup> often lead to the excessive burden of physically demanding chores, e.g., fetching water, collection of firewood, household chores and looking after the younger siblings<sup>357</sup> for girls. This, combined with the fact that adolescents have greater nutritional needs than adults, leads adolescent girls in lower-middle-income countries to have poorer dietary profiles.<sup>358</sup>

Girls suffer from malnutrition more than boys, mainly due to social and patriarchal biases, which results in the prevalence of under-weight female adolescents. Studies claim that girls are twice as likely as boys of the same age group to suffer from undernourishment due to gendered lifestyle<sup>359</sup> and food insecurity. Nutritional deficiency is also dependent on geographical locations like hill areas, *haors*, vulnerable zones<sup>360</sup> in terms of 'monga',<sup>361</sup> flood, river erosion, other natural disasters, or

<sup>351</sup> Camfield, Rashid and Sultan (2017).

<sup>352</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/unicef-calls-concerted-action-prevent-bullying-and-harassment-32-cent-children>

<sup>353</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/one-million-school-children-receive-online-safety-certification-next-year>

<sup>354</sup> It is also important to note that according to WHO the average healthcare expenditure in most countries, is 2.3 % of their GDP, while Bangladesh has less than 1.3% and 7.2 % of the total budget in the fiscal year 2020-21 (TBS Report 2020). Despite efforts this COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated the vulnerable scenario of our entire health sector.

<sup>355</sup> Das, et al. (2017).

<sup>356</sup> Oniang'o & Mukudi (2002).

<sup>357</sup> Blackden & Wodon (2006), Dickert & Dodson (2004).

<sup>358</sup> Caleyachetty et al. (2018), Das et. al. (2017), Keat, et al. (2018).

<sup>359</sup> Girls going to sleep hungry, skipping meals, taking smaller meals, and one-and-a-half times more likely to eat only rice, as coping strategies during food insecurity. See Ahmed & Nadia (2020) and GAIN (2018).

<sup>360</sup> The National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030 (2016).

<sup>361</sup> Seasonal deficit at the northern part of Bangladesh.

## COVID-19.

Bangladesh is celebrated as a country that has made considerable progress in nutrition in recent years. Child nutritional status has improved steadily over the past decade. Significant improvements were observed since independence and from recent highs in the mid-1990s, when an estimated 37 per cent of the population was undernourished, to a recently estimated rate of 16.4 per cent of the population in 2015<sup>362</sup>. These signs of progress will invariably show new paths to the adolescents of a new Bangladesh.

### *Impact of gender norms and values on adolescent health*

Although adolescence is a time for promoting individual development, it is also a time when social norms become increasingly influential in determining what young people do and are expected to do.<sup>363</sup> In particular, restrictive gender norms begin to play a greater role in shaping adolescent trajectories during the second decade of life and into early adulthood.<sup>364</sup> Socio-cultural institutions, both formal and informal, embedded in a patriarchal society, often become deciding factors in the path to conceive their dreams.

Adolescents are often misunderstood by the society as arrogant, unruly, rough, and insolent; disregard towards their particular physical and mental need remain a reality in Bangladesh like many other

countries. It is even more contentious for girls with life-threatening consequences. For adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries like Bangladesh, endorsement of gender stereotyping can be particularly salient. Early adolescent years frequently narrow the world that girls inhabit, where they must leave behind their comparatively free childhoods to follow the prevailing gendered adult pathways. This path typically emphasizes domestic and caregiving responsibilities, school dropout and control of female sexuality, child marriage, child maternity, VAW/G, malnutrition and neglect, rape and suicide.<sup>365</sup>

Restrictions on mobility, sports and physical activities push the girls down even further, both in terms of physical and mental health. For boys, by contrast, the world tends to open up during early adolescence, but this is not without its costs. Adolescent boys are more likely to engage in risky criminal activities and experience physical violence,<sup>366</sup> to die from road injuries, interpersonal violence, engage in substance use, and to commit suicide<sup>367</sup> (figure 6.2). All these norms, values and normative discourses around adolescent boys and girls often push them to get involved in unsocial activities with low self-esteem, leading to lack of initiative and often destroying the immense potentials of the young generation of Bangladesh. Sensitive approaches to address these are crucial to the development of the adolescents.

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<sup>362</sup> Nisbett, et al. (2017).

<sup>363</sup> Chung & Rimel (2016).

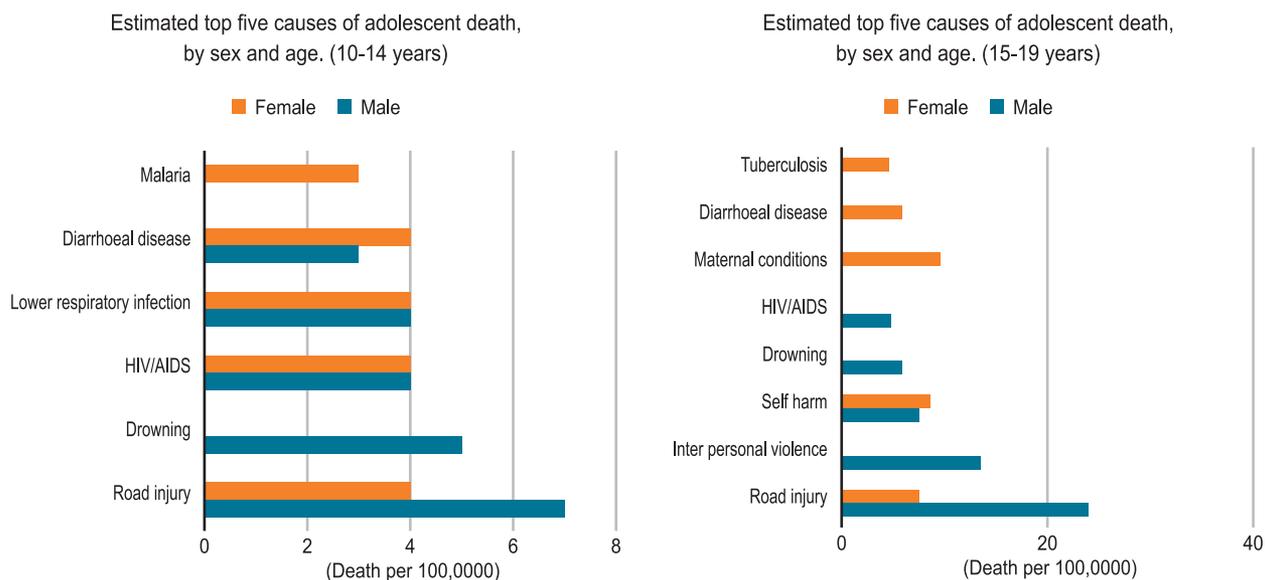
<sup>364</sup> Basu et al. (2016), John et al. (2016), Mmari, et al. (2018).

<sup>365</sup> Harper et al. (2018), Kabeer (2003), Nussbaum (2011).

<sup>366</sup> Betancourt, et al. (2010), Buller (2015).

<sup>367</sup> Blum, Mmari & Moreau (2017), Levitov, et al. (2014).

**Figure 6.2: Estimated top 5 causes of death among adolescents aged 10-14 and 15-19 years in 2016 (death rates per 100,000)**



Source: WHO, 2016, Global Health Estimates (GHE).

*Intra household unequal distribution of food and resources*

Access to nutritious food is one of the major health indicators. An adolescent, irrespective of their gender, need enough calorie intake for proper physical and mental growth. Literature suggests that malnutrition is a risk factor for morbidity and mortality, poor cognitive development and ultimately reduced productivity.<sup>368</sup> In a patriarchal society, households might have enough grains; but not, necessarily, ensures equal allocation of food for everyone.<sup>369</sup> The first group to get excluded from this list is women and girls. The popular belief is parents should invest more in boys than girls because boys are the family's future, while girls are to be married off to other families.<sup>370</sup> This biased assumption triggers various kinds of intra-household disparities between boys and girls, including the unequal distribution of food, access to health and nutrition and access to education. Poor

health status remains a constant challenge for women and girls, particularly in rural areas to lead a quality life by achieving their full potentials.<sup>371</sup>

The interplay of gender has a considerable impact on this disparity. Female socialization involves making sacrifices related to food consumption and distribution. Studies<sup>372</sup> found that many adolescent girls – both married and unmarried-have internalized altruistic gender norms to sacrifice food for their fathers, brothers and husbands. However, it was further underscored<sup>373</sup> that discrimination towards girls is changing, emphasizing that birth order, number of female children, and household size influence how females are valued. It was often considered that parents had dreams for their sons only. This situation has changed over time in Bangladesh. A study by Kabeer et al. (2014) revealed that recently the son preferences are weakening in Bangladesh. More and more parents consider that daughters are

<sup>368</sup> Blössner & Onis (2005), Ijarotimi (2013).  
<sup>369</sup> Banu (2016), Mahtab (2012).  
<sup>370</sup> Behrman (1997), Razzaque & Ahsanuzzaman (2009).  
<sup>371</sup> Ahmed (2013), Ahmed et al. (2012), Center for Research and Information (2018).  
<sup>372</sup> Blum, et al. (2019), Lentz (2018).  
<sup>373</sup> Blum, et al. (2019).

better security for them in old age. Change in the patriarchal mind-set, however meagre, including changing attitudes and expectations from the adolescents indicate an optimistic future for them.

### *Mental health*

Despite the importance of physical health in shaping adolescents' life patterns, it is deeply felt that considerable attention is also required in the arena of mental health. Until very recently, mental health was hardly considered an issue in the broader discourse of health. However, it is important to highlight that the 2017–2030 Bangladesh National Strategy for Adolescent Health recognizes mental health as one of the four priority areas along with sexual and reproductive health, nutrition and violence.

Culturally mental health is stigmatized, often perceived as abnormality and synonymous to being crazy<sup>374</sup> in Bangla. Adolescence is also a time of heightened psychosocial vulnerability. Half of all mental illnesses beginning by age 14 years and neuropsychiatric disorders are now being identified as the leading cause of adolescents in disability and other complexities.<sup>375</sup> The conditions associated with mental health disorder include risky sexual behaviour, violent attitude and self-harming, suicide, depression, oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, anorexia nervosa and bulimia, school dropout, delinquent behaviours – all pose a significant financial and social burden on families and societies in terms of distress, cost of treatment and cases of disability.<sup>376</sup>

Due to the social taboo attached to sexuality, there is often a lack of meaningful dialogue between adolescents and their parents or society at large about pubertal and menstrual changes that impact adolescents' emotional and physical health, especially among girls. Patriarchal gender customs

and norms play a crucial role in girls' greater susceptibility to mental health problems. It was found that girls aged 10-19 suffer a significantly higher psychiatric morbidity than boys of the same age group.<sup>377, 378</sup> However, Government has already started life skill programme to foster better understanding of physical and emotional development challenges of adolescent through dialogue among them at secondary and higher secondary school level throughout the country.

Marriage immensely shapes the mental condition of adolescents. Married adolescent girls frequently reported depression related to age, body and beauty, pregnancy, pre- and post-natal blues, neglect and lack of consent.<sup>379</sup>

### *Sexual health*

Discussing the issue of sexuality is a taboo in many cultures, particularly in Bangladesh. An adolescent's sexual and reproductive health is strongly linked to their particular social, cultural, and economic environment. In addition to regional and locational variation, experiences are diversified by age, sex, marital status, schooling, residence, migration, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, among other factors. The environment in which young people are making decisions related to sexual and reproductive health is also rapidly evolving. Adolescents are not just passive recipients of adult norms and messages around sexuality but also agents who actively construe meanings and navigate between what is expected from them and what they want, need, and feel.

Sexual and reproductive health is a key determinant to address the total well-being of adolescents. It is related to critical issues such as empowerment, gender inequality, sexual violence,

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<sup>374</sup> Crazy.

<sup>375</sup> Patel et al. (2007), WHO (2014).

<sup>376</sup> Busch & Barry (2007), Pecora, Murray & Wartella (2007).

<sup>377</sup> Mohammad et al. (2019).

<sup>378</sup> Based on Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) baseline survey. GAGE is a nine-year (2015-2024) mixed methods longitudinal research and evaluation study. It follows the lives of 20,000 adolescents in six low- and middle-income countries including Bangladesh. This chapter draws information from different policy briefs and publications conducted by various researchers under this study.

<sup>379</sup> UNFPA (2005).

fear and insecurity, discrimination and stigma, not to mention the entire range of silence, taboo, the idea of shame and honour, and discrimination against varied sexual orientations such as *hijra/transgender* who experience double/multiple victimhood.<sup>380</sup>

An essential part of young people's lives encompasses pleasurable aspects of sexuality, e.g., romance, intimate relationships, sexual adventure, and excitement.<sup>381</sup> Young people's sexual behaviours are significantly moulded by their motivation for seeking pleasure, their desire for intimacy and social status, such as respect from the family, peers and community.<sup>382</sup> Denial regarding adolescent sexuality will only complicate the matter.

Being misjudged and rejected by society, failing to handle their sexuality can push them to violent resistance, 'anti-social and criminal' activities, self-harm and suicide. It is time that we seriously start discussing the issue so that it is no longer contentious to address sexuality in the ambiance of the socio-religious, cultural and legal realm. In this regard, it is even more challenging to manage the sexuality issue under the broader umbrella of gender diversity, gender justice and social change.

Addressing the expression of love, desire and passion require a massive transformation in our mind-set, ethical position, policing and judgment towards the adolescents. Issues related to body and sexuality of adolescents thus remain controversial in terms of policy planning. We need to rethink, rephrase and re-plan the sexuality issues, for the sake of their physical and mental well-being, with particular emphasis on gender disparity.

### *Child marriage and child/adolescent maternity*

Culturally and historically, marriage as an institution and practice is seen as a panacea (especially for girls) for all sorts of problems related to boys and men, girls and women and others. Reducing child marriage is a big challenge in Bangladesh. Therefore, the Government has been continuously striving to stop the occurrence of this phenomenon.

The Child marriage scenario in Bangladesh requires interventions from all levels of the society. The BDHS 2017-18 shows that 12.4 per cent of women were married before or at 15, nearly 39 per cent by 18 and 43 per cent by the age of 20.<sup>383</sup>

Child/adolescent marriage and adolescent maternity come with a package of physical, nutritional and socio-emotional challenges, creating a vicious cycle of children born to adolescent mothers who are also more likely to be underweight, undernourished and stunted. Underweight is a red alert for adolescent pregnant women.<sup>384</sup> They are at high risk of miscarriage, premature birth, anaemia, osteoporosis, having a low-birth-weight infant, obstructed delivery, high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia, eclampsia etc. Teenage mothers are twice as likely as adult mothers to die from pregnancy and childbirth-related complications.<sup>385</sup>

Bangladesh is committed to eliminate child marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>386</sup> and has formulated the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017.

The 'violence against women report 2015', the government addresses forced sexual act in any

<sup>380</sup> This section is based on discussion with Imtiaz Pavel Neel, Gender, Diversity Justice and Social Change analyst, a trainer and a film maker through a zoom meeting on 16 August 2020 as the entire LGBT community has gone underground after the killing of Xulhas Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy in 2016. See more: Sexuality Policy Watch (2016) *Two LGBT activists murdered in Bangladesh*.

<sup>381</sup> Cornwall (2006).

<sup>382</sup> Ott et al. (2006).

<sup>383</sup> NIPORT & ICF (2019).

<sup>384</sup> The prevalence of thinness/underweight among married-adolescents of 15-19 years old is 31percent, BDHS (2016), NIPORT, Mitra and Associates & ICF International (2016); (DGFP, UNFPA & UNICEF (2016).

<sup>385</sup> Akhter (2013).

<sup>386</sup> The government has signed a charter committing to end child marriage by 2020 at the 2014 Girl Summit as well.

marital relation as sexual violence against women and shows an age-specific data about the age cohort 15-19<sup>387</sup>. But it also demonstrates that many adolescents don't consider it as violence against them<sup>388</sup>. Child marriage thus becomes an extremely pertinent area of attention as this cross-cutting issue moulds and forms the entire patterns of physical, mental, sexual, and educational opportunities and constructs the dream and aspiration of the adolescents of future Bangladesh.

### **Gender-based violence: a cross cutting issue**

It is important to note that Bangladesh has seen a decreasing trend in the prevalence of violence against girls and women in the recent past, but violence and its consequences remain a concern for the country. Detailed data from BBS (2015) suggests that adolescent girls, regardless of their marital status<sup>389</sup>, continue to be vulnerable to all forms of violence, making it imperative to put in place preventive mechanisms, from both the socioeconomic and health perspective (table 6.1).

Violence against adolescents, both boys and girls, is a pertinent social issue for Bangladesh and its aspirations to meet the SDGs by 2030: if one-fifth of the population is at risk of experiencing GBV, it will affect the country's possibility of reaping the demographic dividend. Moreover, experiences of and exposure to violence often lead to both mental and physical consequences such as low self-esteem, depression, and self-harm.

The economic cost associated with violence against adolescents goes beyond the immediate costs that the health sector has to bear because adolescents who experience and witness prolonged violence may also not be able to contribute to the society. It becomes crucial for the health and other social sectors to prevent the practice and the acceptance/legitimization of violence through

innovative, educational and awareness-raising interventions. The Multi-sectoral Programme on Violence against Women of the GoB<sup>390</sup> has undertaken a series of initiatives to address Gender Based Violence. All these programs need to emphasize more on identifying the specific needs of adolescent boys and girls. The programmes should also ensure the availability of information and services to cater to their needs. Adolescents need to be engaged in formulating and implementing various strategies and ways to address the issues related to their choices and security.

### **Adolescent's voice and agency: associated factors**

There is little research on agency and voice on adolescents' entity. A study by GAGE (2017) found that voice and agency comprise mobility, access to information, and participating in decision-making. Adolescents' ability to exercise voice and agency relates to their capabilities, socio-cultural context, economic participation, and families' social status and political connections.<sup>391</sup> How far an adolescent can raise his/her voice as a future citizen is indeed an area of great concern. They may have their dream and aspiration, opinion and knowledge and information of the new world. Still, they are allowed little or no space to articulate or share their views, let alone place it to any formal/policy body. The issue of gender disparity has again come out as critical to research conducted on adolescent voice and agency.

While there are recent shifts towards more gender-equitable attitudes, especially for younger cohorts, adolescent girls' voice and agency are tightly restricted by social norms that see their roles as biologically and religiously ordained – and confined mainly to reproductive tasks. Throughout childhood, girls' voices are silenced as they are

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<sup>387</sup> Parishamkhyana Byuro (2016).

<sup>388</sup> This can be identified as marital rape, which is an unaddressed area in Bangladesh.

<sup>389</sup> The Violence against Women Survey (BBS 2015), highlighted that both ever married and unmarried adolescent (aged 15-19) suffer brutally from physical violence (42.8 per cent and 30.9 per cent) whereas married girls experience sexual violence (28.4 per cent) more than unmarried girls (3.4 per cent).

<sup>390</sup> (Affairs n.d.).

<sup>391</sup> Mitu et al. (2019).

socialized to be pure, virgin, domestic, submissive and obedient.<sup>392</sup> Girls' agency becomes even more limited at puberty, as parents see it as their responsibility to protect the virginity and chastity of their daughters by restricting their mobility and arranging marriage for them.<sup>393</sup> Restrictions on mobility are also gendered. While 74 per cent of 12-year-old girls can visit friends and 43 per cent can play outdoor games, only 35 per cent and 7 per cent of 19-year-old girls can do the same.<sup>394</sup> Girls' lack of agency is most evident in marriage decisions and girls are less likely than boys to make a range of important decisions, particularly in family matters.<sup>395</sup>

The internalization of patriarchal values and norms by adolescents is another area of concern about raising transformative voices and decisions. Studies<sup>396</sup> showed that both girls and boys think that household decision-making should be done mostly by the men of the family and women should always obey their husbands.<sup>397</sup>

There is, however, significant evidence of slow generational change.<sup>398</sup> Evidence suggests that girls' access to school and paid employment is driving this change, as girls who go to school not only have the skills to help their families to exit poverty but also enjoy better social status and learn new modes of social behaviour associated with public life and citizenship.<sup>399</sup> The secondary school appears to be especially important, as it improves girls' self-confidence, nurtures their aspirations and helps them learn to 'stand on their own feet'.<sup>400</sup> Adolescents who are earning money and are exposed to media have a more significant say in household decision-making among low-income settlements in Dhaka slum areas.<sup>401</sup>

Adolescents' dreams, particularly in the middle and upper strata of educated elites, are determined mainly by their parents' expectations to perform and conform, starting from getting a golden GPA to getting access to government jobs via BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service). This trend is not new. Such expectations create huge pressure on a child's tender mind. The course of job expectations labelled as 'successful' has changed and evolved with the country's socio-economic progress, along with its development in terms of GDP, political stability, and elevation from less developed to a developing country.

Adolescent's dream as shaped and pursued by the family and the broader society has also gradually progressed from working in a garment factory at the lower end to become a doctor, engineer or lawyer to working in NGOs to INGOs and finally to become a government official at the upper end. This pressure of 'ghettoized expectations'<sup>402</sup> from their parents can be detrimental to realizing adolescents' creative desires. So-called 'non-conventional' agency of an adolescent to become a scientist, singer, artist, football player, photographer, or astronaut has often been criticized and suppressed as impractical and unrealistic and a source of embarrassment for the family.

The culture of non-understanding and pressure to conform to parent's expectations and traditional normative ideals can sometimes destroy the brilliant yearnings at the very beginning of their life to dream a dream and strive to fulfil the 'unusual', 'real/true dreams' of the adolescents and can push them into despair, sense of failure and inadequacy.<sup>403</sup> On the other hand, adolescents from the poorer background may not have the luxury to

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<sup>392</sup> Khan & Uddin (2014).

<sup>393</sup> Camellia, Khan & Naved (2012), Heissler (2008).

<sup>394</sup> Amin, Ainula, et al. (2014).

<sup>395</sup> Mitu et al. (2019).

<sup>396</sup> Amin (2015), Plan International (2016).

<sup>397</sup> Amin (2015). 95 per cent of urban adolescent boys and 87 per cent of adolescent girls in the aforementioned Population Council survey agreed that women should always obey their husbands (Amin 2015) girls are expected to do as they are told by both their husbands and their in-laws and have very little access to decision-making at the household or community level. The lesser agency of adolescent girls is also reflected in the higher rates of domestic violence they face (BBS 2017).

<sup>398</sup> Amin (2015), CARE (2016), Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneem (2011).

<sup>399</sup> Das 2007, and Hossain 2010.

<sup>400</sup> Del Franco 2010.

<sup>401</sup> Mahmud and Amin 2006.

<sup>402</sup> as formulated by an adolescent.

<sup>403</sup> Insights have been drawn from informal discussion with early and late adolescent belonging from middle economic strata.

dream of securing one square meal a day and that alone might be the prime concern for them.

Providing recreational and sports and cultural activities, strengthening family ties, creating extracurricular activities, more playgrounds, library, regulated access to internet may help realizing their dreams due to poverty and economic pressure might be silently feeding into the deviant behaviours of the adolescents in the country like many other counties in the world. Special attention is required to address these deviant activities to divert their energy towards more meaningful and productive engagement with society.

Adolescence is a time when they tend to drift apart from their parents and friends become more important in their lives. Most adolescents survive this phase without much ado. But for some, it may not be so easy. The juvenile who is undergoing hormonal and psycho-social transformation, coming from a background without much hope for upward mobility, may become too sensitive about his/her status in the world S/he lives in. Lack of care often leads them to find refuge in a group with a fake sense of being powerful, formidable and gaining *respect*.<sup>404</sup> Group violence allows young men at the brink of adulthood to act out the established role of the 'tough' and 'daring man' and thus to acquire attention and peer-group recognition.<sup>405</sup> Such activities and masculine values and behaviours of these boys are in fact, embedded in the broader structure of gendered power relations in society.<sup>406</sup>

The dreams of the adolescents are not homogeneous; neither is their material and ideological situation. Adolescents across age, geo and spatial location, socio-economic stratification, religion, sexual orientation, and ability are the deciding factors in sketching their dreams, aspirations and passions. Revisiting the entire range of possibilities in this new era is crucial to opening up all the possible doors to the next generation.

There is no other alternative but to create an environment where the next generation of future Bangladesh can raise their voice, make them heard and exercise their agency. Where they are able to articulate their desires and aspirations – free from any institutional, socio-economic and political pressure and obligation, this is the key to the future trajectory of the adolescents in Bangladesh.

### **Adolescents with their dreams: findings from a quick explorative research**

To get an understanding of the adolescents' minds regarding their dreams about future, we conducted a brief explorative research among the adolescents of different parts of Bangladesh. All 8 divisions of Bangladesh and different types of educational systems were covered in this quick and short questionnaire-based survey on 145 adolescents. This is not a representative survey, instead, this was conducted to get some first-hand information to complement the secondary data on which the analysis of this chapter is based. The survey population includes students from Bangla medium, English medium, and Madrasa (Qawmi and Alia). Out of the 145 respondents, 74 were girls and 71 were boys. Again, there were 45 young adolescents (age 10-14), and 100 late adolescents (age 15-19). The survey covered adolescents from both rural (41) and urban (104) areas. The quick survey was conducted during August-September 2020 when the COVID-19 (including the deteriorating flood condition) situation was at its peak. The sample was chosen randomly, sometimes purposively, based on availability, access and willingness to talk and share (by the adolescents). In addition, we conducted 6 in-depth case studies of adolescents (3 young adolescents and 3 late adolescents). The survey and case studies were conducted online or over the phone to avoid COVID-19 induced health risks.

A total of 259 dreams were mentioned by 145 adolescents. This indicates that almost all of them have more than one dream. Table 6.2 presents a summary of results on adolescents' dreams derived from the survey.

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<sup>404</sup> Khan 2017.

<sup>405</sup> Davis 1998.

<sup>406</sup> Hagedorn 1998.

**Table 6.1: Dreams of adolescents at a glance (multiple answers allowed) Dreams of the respondents Frequency (number of responses)**

Dreams of the respondents	Frequency (number of responses )	
	Boy	Girl
Armed Forces	3	6
Become successful	15	13
Business owner	11	6
Doctor	4	21
Educator/ Teacher	3	12
Engineer	11	2
Higher study abroad	4	4
Helping people	15	22
Higher education in country	5	4
Traveller	4	8
Others	46	40
Total	121	138

Source: Brief explorative research under the current study.

A wide range of diversity is noticed in the dreams of the adolescents. The survey revealed ranges of dreams draped with many colours, expressed in multifaceted layers, all distinctive from each other. It is immensely difficult to arrange them in a neat pile or a box and can only be visualized under a large spectrum of ideas. It ranges from dreaming of being a happy person to just completing his/her studies. The dreams differed across the medium of instruction and types of schools, urban/rural and geographical locations. It was also intertwined with the economic and social status and education level

of their parents. Although it is a big challenge to grasp the entire scenario, some thought-provoking findings came out from the survey when categorized under some common threads across groups according to their gender (boys/girls) and age cohort (early/late). Narrations of the dreams are presented below beyond statistical significance or quantitative measures under a few broad subheadings highlighting dimensions of gender, age, types of schools, parents' aspirations, obstacles and enabling factors in fulfilling their dreams.

### Box 6.2: Findings from in-depth case studies

Out of the 6 case studies conducted under this initiative, 3 were with younger adolescents and 3 were with older adolescents. They were all from Dhaka. They wanted to be biotechnologists, archaeologists, computer scientists, artists, architects and musicians, a model and a fashion designer or a content creator, a graphic designer, a voice-over artist, etc. Yet they were trapped in the traditional classroom-learning structure, which has little or no significant role in fulfilling their dreams. They expressed their desire to study specific subjects that can serve their purpose to pursue their dreams like fine arts and painting, content creation, and social media growth or ICT. Some were even ready to quit from this traditional mainstream schooling system that is not modern and unable to accommodate the arrays of dreams and goals of their lives. "I am even ready to leave studies and do business for the rest of my life," says a 15-year-old girl. They were profoundly serious about their studies and their goals in life and very keen to learn. There were 3 girls who wanted to move beyond being just a homemaker and pursue a career. They wanted to be professionals or freelancers or work hard to learn and fulfil their dreams and make an impression on society.

Romantic relationships, desires and sexual passions are part of the growing up process, but adolescents reacted to this issue differently. Some wanted to avoid romantic relationships like many of their friends and thought it was best to push it back, for the time being, considering the fact that they were too young for such involvement. When it comes to intimacy, a girl of 13 thought it was not right to have a boyfriend. "I mean ... sure, later in life, I'll think about it, but for now, I need to concentrate more on my studies." A 13-year-old boy echoed the same 'pragmatic' concerns: "I think it is indeed silly to make girlfriends now. Probably the girl's parents will never accept it and the relationship will end up in break up anyway."

On the other hand, older adolescents were quite at ease with the opposite sex and thought that intimate relationships can be quite beneficial and enriching. Simultaneously, some were with shame, fear, hatred, and a feeling of disgust towards the opposite sex and wanted to avoid any intimate relationship with boys. This feeling might be due to Bangladesh's gendered socialization process, where 'sexual purity' plays a critical role for girls and inhibit free and friendly mixing of boys and girls of the same age groups. "I will never do this; I will only mix with those boys who are endorsed by my parents," said a 15-year-old girl.

Desire to be alone, feelings of detachment, isolation, and inability to make friends, not communicating with their own age group, leading a secluded life – are other areas of great concern that needs to be explored and addressed from a socio-medical perspective. "Since the early days of school, I had no friends, I only talk to some girls about homework, but other than that I have no friends. I push away anyone who tries to become my friend; I like to be alone" – the voice of a 15-year-old girl.

Table 6.2 and box 6.2 demonstrate a mixture of responses on dreams ranging from getting a job or pursuing higher education to help people or be a globe trotter. As mentioned earlier, the dreams of adolescents are found to be moulded by their everyday life and broader socio-economic conditions where dreams get entangled with 'aims' of life or towards ensuring simple survival strategies. Transition to a higher level of articulation is seen only on rare occasions.

### **Nature of Dreams and common strands**

#### *'I Dream a Dream'*

In general, most of the respondents narrated their dreams, focusing on themselves, their family, and their society and country. They wanted to make their family happy and proud and eager to contribute to their family's financial solvency. This represents their desire to see themselves as an independent earning member when grown up. However, not to mention that the scenario is somewhat gendered and differs across age groups. In most cases, they wanted to follow all the mainstream professions like doctor, engineer, teacher, banker, lawyer, *Mawlana* (religious preachers) etc.

Interestingly there are some 'off-track,' unconventional and unique desires and dreams that some of the respondents were focusing on. Those include newly emerging ideas of professions like Youtuber, professional gamer, content creator, voice actor, philanthropists, cricketer, graphic designer etc. Another significant area of their dreams and aspirations are related to the prosperity of society and the country. Their enthusiasm to engage in the humanitarian cause

and to work for the disadvantaged people is widely apparent. As a 14 years old boy, Ali Imran said, '*I want to give employment to many people so that no one remains jobless.*'

- *I want to build up my own identity':*

Creating a self-identity and being popular, being unique and different from others is common across all adolescents. Whatever they want to do, they are full of passion and eagerness to leave their footmarks in that line of work. They want to try and invent something new in life, keen to be independent and free; they are passionate about building their life differently. Whether it is the dream to become famous through significant good work or to become the idol of the future generation, their will to find their own individualism is clearly reflected through their responses. For example, a 14-year-old girl said, '*I want to do something so that I can live on my own and I don't have to depend on anyone.*'

- *I want to see the world':*

Traveling is another area of great interest among most adolescents. They want to travel all over the world and visit as many countries as possible. They want to experience the unknown, gain new skills and knowledge by visiting new and unique places. Their enthusiasm to engage in adventure and excitement in life knows no bound. '*I want to travel so much that every time I close my eyes, I can see the whole world*' (responses from a 17-year-old boy)

- *I want to be successful in life':*

Finding success and happiness is another common feature among adolescents that was primarily found in the responses. The aspiration to become a

successful businessman or to sing or perform in a big stage or be a philanthropist echoed in their dreams for the future for themselves. The desire to own a big house and a car was also expressed. Simultaneously, to be a happy person, a good student and to enjoy a peaceful married life came out as equally crucial for them. It is to be noted again that gender plays a significant role in shaping the idea of the future for adolescents. The dreams of a boy are found to be different from the girls. Dreams are often abstract and hard to define but often emanate from the everyday life experiences of a person

- *Choosing the 'right' profession: I want to be a doctor, a teacher ...*

The traditional understanding of 'suitable' profession in shaping adolescents' life aspiration is evident across both the gender and age cohort. Girls are more aimed at becoming doctors and teachers, while boys mainly focus on becoming Engineers and Politicians. Business is another sector where gender segregation of dreams is noticeable. Especially from the late age cohort, boys are highly interested in business and entrepreneurship, which is nearly absent from the girl's dream and aspiration. Even uncommon and distinctive career choices are mostly associated with boys. Girls are also interested in 'alternative' career options like calligraphy or professional gamer, but the range is much limited than that of boys. Boys have a more wide-ranging dreams, for instance becoming a drummer, cricketer, corporate leader, music director, founding a sports academy, etc.

- *Armed forces and Gender: Crossing the boundary*

Interestingly, girls from both age cohorts are much more interested in joining the armed forces, such as becoming an Army officer or a Pilot. But boys, on the other hand, are not so keen to join armed forces. Traditionally it is regarded that boys will be fit for the armed forces, idealizing their heroism than girls. This shift in the adolescents' mind-set is critical from a gender perspective and needs more in-depth analysis and intervention.

- *"... want to make our parents happy and proud ..."*

To make their parents proud is a relatively common dream, particularly among young female

adolescents. A significant number of them want their parents to feel happy and satisfied with them. However, interestingly, girls from the age cohort of 14-19 hardly mentioned the dream to make their family proud of them. Boys from both the age cohort expressed their families' satisfaction as a priority concern in their responses and the number is nearly similar in both the age cohort. This shift among the older adolescent girls from the age group of 14-19 asks for more research. It is possible that as they grow up, girls tend to focus on their own identity and independence and want to break away from the traditional gendered expectations of their parents and family.

- *"Want to take care of my family when I grow up:"*

Boys from both age cohorts showed greater interest in becoming established and contributed financially to their families. This dream is slightly less noticeable from the responses of the girls of both the age cohort. Especially boys from the late adolescent cohort significantly mentioned their willingness to bring happiness and ease their family's financial burden. This adheres to their understanding of the perceived responsibility that they must take in the future. The notion of 'breadwinner' is apparent from this response of the adolescents. Girls and young boys do not necessarily feel the need to take up the responsibility to earn for the family whilst boys from the late age cohort have perceived the role and responsibility of a 'grown-up-man'.

- *"I want to build a new Bangladesh:"*

Interest and desire to engage in humanitarian causes occupy a noticeable space among young adolescent girls and late adolescent boys. To get involved in humanitarian work and contributing to the well-being of the disadvantaged section of their country are often mentioned with deep passion. However, there is some disparity across age and gender. The section of the adolescents that is most interested in working for the people is girls from the late age cohort. They want to work towards establishing justice to build a corruption-free Bangladesh. They dream of building old homes, schools for disadvantaged kids, charitable organizations for the poor.

*'I dream of doing something great to make my nation and the world proud of me, which will again help me achieve my goals in life to remove all negative attitudes and barriers that a young mind faces while working to achieve their dreams. That is the reason I want to work in the United Nations as the representative of Bangladesh to fulfil my target and make Bangladesh a better country'* (responses from a 15-year-old girl).

Helping the people in need, working in NGOs to promote education, ensuring social justice, and building mosques are some of the dreams that these sections of respondents mentioned. Interestingly the young boys are the least in number who want to engage in social work. This desire to contribute to humanity evolves only at a later stage. However, some of them mentioned working in NGOs to help young girls in rural areas to get better access to education and generate employment. The most critical aspect in this regard is that more or less all the adolescents felt that they owe something to their country, and they should return it to the society and make it a better place for all.

#### *The intersection of age in dreams*

The dreams are not static, not unitary. Dreams of adolescents traverse many paths, shift and hop from one branch to another over the years. The dreams of young adolescents can thus be identified as somewhat 'impractical and unattainable,' while the late adolescents seem to become more mature with age; hence their dreams are more 'practical and attainable' in terms of traditional understandings. For example, while a young adolescent girl is dreaming of staying beside her mother throughout her life or becoming a Youtuber with million subscribers, the late adolescent girls dream of providing a luxurious and comfortable life to her children or publishing her storybooks. On the other hand, young adolescent boys want to be professional gamers or study abroad. Still, late adolescent boys dream of becoming a foreign service cadre or a corporate leader, heading towards more 'practical' and 'plausible' dreams.

#### *Contextualizing Dream*

Context played a big role in shaping the dreams of adolescents. Their dreams are formulated from the dearth/deprivation they experienced in their life. For example, girls of both the age cohorts were talking about ensuring better menstruation health and facilities for women. On the other hand, one late adolescent boy wanted to establish a sports academy. Another young adolescent boy wanted to help young girls in rural areas to get access to school. Lack of sports facilities, unaddressed menstrual health or gender deprivation has shaped their aspiration to overcome the barriers in their everyday lives.

#### *Dreams of the Madrasa-going-adolescents*

This section was isolated to understand whether religious organizations shape the dream differently for adolescents going to the madrasa. It is to be mentioned that the survey includes only ten students from Madrasa and they are predominantly from a poor economic background, and parents are mostly without any formal schooling. Madrasa-going adolescents have a diverse range of dreams, just like every other adolescent. Many of them want their future to be constructed around their academic knowledge like becoming Madrasa teacher, Mawlana, attaining higher degrees, joining the religious universities aboard, or writing about Islam. Simultaneously, some of them are focused on dreams like becoming doctors, and so on. Moreover, engaging in humanitarian work like building a mosque, becoming a social worker, or engaging in NGOs are also some of the dreams they harbour.

#### *Dreams of parents regarding the adolescents*

While asked whether the adolescents know about their parents' dreams, most of the respondents said that their parents want them to "become successful" or become doctors or engineers, bankers, or lawyers. Parents having their children in Madrasa education, who are from the lowest income group, have no traditional aspirations like seeing their children as professionals like doctors, engineers, or lawyers. The most common dream for them is to see their children in teaching or to get into a government job. Dreams thus get fractured, reflecting the disparity entrenched in the society, shaping the 'capacity' to dream the future, which is

often uncertain, elusive and unobtainable.

#### *Obstacles and hindrances to fulfilling dreams: perception of adolescents*

It is evident from the responses that the shaping of the dream, hurdles, and obstacles, including the enabling factors, is linked with the parents' family income, education and socioeconomic position, and urban-rural location. Irrespective of boys and girls, financial problem is the biggest hurdle (19 boys out of 71 boy respondents and 18 of girls out of 74 girl respondents). The adolescents have also mentioned many other issues, equally critical in shaping their dream, i.e., social and cultural attitudes and taboos, conservative family outlook, the burden of household and other works, including lack of freedom and restriction on mobility, gender discrimination, the pressure to get married, people making fun of their dream, mental health and depression, etc. The list denotes a gendered reality for adolescent girls. Lack of opportunities, personal attributes, lack of proper guidance and skilled teachers, political unrest, addiction to cell phones, infra-structural problems were also mentioned as stumbling blocks to realize their dreams. Nevertheless, a few who experience little or no obstacles to fulfil their dreams- are mostly from relatively affluent sections of society.

#### *Adolescents' perception of sources of supports and enabling factors to fulfil dreams*

As expected, irrespective of gender, the medium of schooling, urban-rural location, or income groups, most adolescents think that their family members and relatives will help them fulfil their dreams. Girls are found to be more dependent on their families. The supportive role of relatives is more visible, especially for boys from middle-income groups of rural areas. A few from English medium schools also mentioned the role of education, training and financing as enabling factors in realizing their dreams. The family's income has been identified as one of the determining factors for adolescents' dependency and self-confidence. Percentage of adolescents dependence on family increases with

income. A much higher rate of adolescents from the lower-income groups believe in themselves and their capabilities to realize their dreams (24 adolescents out of 145) compared to adolescents from the high-income groups (16 adolescents out of 145).

#### **Impact of COVID-19**

The covid-19 pandemic has generated profound health concerns and has posed challenges to the landscape of almost every aspect of our life. Critical dimensions of the adolescents' well-being mentioned in the conceptual framework (health, education and skills, safety concerns and leadership) are going through various challenges. Adjusting to the *new normal* has compelled adolescents to adapt to their everyday life with the possibility of long-term implications on their dreams.

#### *Health and protection concern for COVID-19*

The overall COVID-19 scenario in Bangladesh depicts that the adolescent population is less susceptible to COVID-19 illness. Yet, the pandemic causes considerable threats to adolescents' health, education and well-being. It was also found that men have been hit harder by COVID in all age groups. Among the confirmed cases, 0.8 per cent of both men and women belong to the age group of 10-14, while 1.7 per cent of men belong to the age group of 15-19 and 1.4 per cent of women belong to the same age group. Moreover, for the age group of 11-20, the male fatality rate is 0.4 per cent and the female fatality rate is 0.3 per cent.<sup>407</sup>

Gender disparities have been discovered in response to covid-19. Experts<sup>408</sup> opine that men tend to engage in riskier behaviour such as going out for livelihood, ignoring physical distancing, frequent hand washing or wearing a mask, not taking the symptoms as seriously etc. A large part of this difference is caused by gender behaviour (lifestyle), i.e., higher levels of smoking and drinking among men compared to women. Women have been found to show more responsible attitudes toward the COVID-19 pandemic than

<sup>407</sup> WHO Bangladesh (2020).

<sup>408</sup> Anton Gollwitzer, a researcher at Yale University, and Gabriele Oettingen, a professor in NYU's Department of Psychology, compared women and men in endorsing preventive health practices during the peak period of the pandemic in the U.S.

men. Men's higher mobility in public space compared to women and girls and earlier involvements with paid work are a few social norms increasing their susceptibility towards COVID.<sup>409</sup>

Though initially, the adolescent population was found to be less susceptible to the virus, at the onset of the new variant of coronavirus VUI-202012/01, it has been estimated that the adolescents might get infected in greater proportions.<sup>410</sup> This new variant has emerged in different countries of the world, including UK, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Bangladesh, creating alarm among experts. Dr Sayeeda Anwar, Head of the Paediatric Department at the DMCH of Bangladesh said the rate of coronavirus infection among children was nominal at the beginning. But, the rate of infection has gone up significantly later on.<sup>411</sup> However, the broader landscape in terms of fatality depicts a different scenario. According to the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), the fatality rate was never really high among the age group of 11-20. In fact, it has decreased from 1.13 in July to 0.75 in December for this age group (as of December 27, 2020 by WHO, 2020).<sup>412</sup>

Due to COVID-19, educational institutions have been closed down and classes are taken online. Such disruption in daily routine has led adolescents and young people into a sedentary lifestyle, depression, idleness, sleep disorders, and physical inactivity, which may increase the incidence of obesity and other chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, and some types of cancers.<sup>413</sup> The lack of social contact, loss of parents' income, continuous media coverage, and

anxiety of uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic may have adverse psychological effects leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>414</sup> Adolescents can also be highly addicted to social media, pornography websites, and video games, adversely affecting their mental development.

Online classes due to COVID-19 lead to extra pressure on students from low-income families who cannot afford the medium (e.g., electronic devices and internet connections) to regularly connect to the classes. Adolescents from socio-economically disadvantaged families are at higher risk of poor physical and mental health. A GAGE study has explored that adolescents living in the slums of Dhaka city facing physical, emotional and cognitive transitions are particularly vulnerable during this pandemic.<sup>415</sup>

Due to the pre-existing gender disparities, there has been a disproportionate impact on adolescent girls' lives. The complex nature of the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing gender inequalities across multiple aspects of life including access to food and nutrition, access to health, WASH services, distribution of care and domestic work, domestic violence and accessibility to menstrual health and hygiene practices. Hunger, starvation and isolation and deprivation create such terrible psychological impacts that it can also lead one towards suicidal behaviour.<sup>417</sup>

Moreover, many adolescent girls face an increase in care-burden and household work, leaving them with a severe psychosocial impact of stress and isolation. A Population Council (2020, 4) study conducted with adolescent girls in Bangladesh

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<sup>409</sup> Devitt (2020).

<sup>410</sup> On December 14, authorities of the United Kingdom reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) that a new SARS-CoV-2 variant, identified through viral genomic sequencing, is spreading more rapidly between people. Further mutation of the variant (VUI 202012/01) created havoc in London and Southern Britain which accounted for nearly 60% of all cases in London by mid-December, is thought to be 70% more transmissible than earlier versions of the coronavirus. According to experts, this variant is causing concern because it is mostly infecting children as more than 4 per cent of secondary school children in London had tested positive for coronavirus.

<sup>411</sup> Bangladesh Observer 26 December 2020, Sujon 25 December 2020.

<sup>412</sup> WHO Bangladesh (2020).

<sup>413</sup> Chakravarthy, Joyner and Booth (2002).

<sup>414</sup> Douglas et al. (2020).

<sup>415</sup> Ria et al. (2020).

<sup>416</sup> WaterAid (2020).

<sup>417</sup> Bhuiyan, et al. (2020).

reports that 18 per cent of the respondents faced violence (rebuke, scolding, beating) in the previous two weeks of the study. Also, 28% of the adolescent girls reported increased cases of violence in their surroundings. Child marriage is also likely to rise in Bangladesh due to increased poverty, long closure of schools, and escalated social insecurity.

A study by WaterAid Bangladesh (2020, 16) found that existing barriers to accessing proper Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) for Bangladeshi women and adolescent girls have been heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *Impact of COVID-19 on adolescent education and skills development*

The closure of educational institutes for COVID-19 has disrupted the regular learning activities of nearly 40 million students of Bangladesh. Unequal access to educational resources creates barriers to their learning process. On top of loss in learning, school closures have far-reaching impacts on social and economic issues, such as school dropouts, digital divide, food insecurity and malnutrition, childcare, and disability services.<sup>418</sup> A survey on 5,000 students from urban slums and rural areas across Bangladesh indicate that study hours of students have declined by 80 per cent due to school closures.<sup>419</sup> However, students watched educational programmes like “*Ghore Boshe Shikhi*”<sup>420</sup> and “*Amar Ghorey Amar School*” on television.

A study<sup>421</sup> of GAGE on adolescents found that studying with support from school and teachers is significantly different from studying at home by themselves as adolescents need guidance, instructions, and notes from experienced instructors that they no longer have access to.

The absence or slow internet connection is hampering the educational attainment of adolescents. Moreover, 12.70 per cent of poor households do not have a single mobile phone. With such a high digital divide, going online for all would

only widen the existing gap in learning inequality.<sup>422</sup>

#### *Findings from the quick explorative research under the current study*

Further to the above findings from secondary sources, 145 respondents of our quick survey revealed various challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is to be mentioned that the survey and case studies with the adolescents took place when the country had ended lockdown for COVID-19. However, the country was under various restrictions; educational institutions were closed, students were attending online classes either through national television or the internet. Adolescents from low-income families could not participate in online classes due to a lack of smartphones/laptops/desktops or other smart devices. Some of them were attending classes on rented smart devices. As an added constraint in rural areas was the lack of Wi-Fi connections and or the prolonged interrupted network. Many working adolescents were out of work as businesses, markets, and different organizations where they used to work were still closed or operating at a low scale.

The main problems reported by the adolescents during the pandemic are difficulties with education, health and sanitation and psychological issues (table 6.3). Restrictions on mobility, communication problems, and inability to attend classes are the next major problems adolescents face during COVID-19. The flood was an added disaster in 2020 for the adolescents and their families, pushing them into financial crisis and uncertainty. Lack of concentration, negative thoughts, lack of access to technology and necessary materials to attend classes, feeling of social isolation and distancing, life without fun and recreation, panic and procrastination, no work for those who used to be employed – all combined are creating an acute sense of frustration and uncertainty amongst them.

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<sup>418</sup> Eusuf & Rabiul (2020).

<sup>419</sup> Asadullah (2020).

<sup>420</sup> Education from home.

<sup>421</sup> Ria et al. (2020).

<sup>422</sup> Uddin (2020).

**Table 6.2: Problems faced by adolescents due to COVID-19 (multiple responses allowed)**

Problems faced	Number of responses
No problem	8
Cannot attend class	12
Difficulty with education	32
Difficulty with life	9
Health issues	11
Problems with water and sanitation	8
Psychological problems	21
Restricted mobility	14
No sports activity	8
Others	54
Total	177

Source: Brief explorative research under the current study.

It is important to note that the schools had already been closed for seven months (March to September 2020) when the survey took place. Some of the respondents anticipated that they might not go back to school due to poverty, child marriage and displacement (reverse migration from urban to rural areas because of COVID-19). Frustration, claustrophobia, forced to remain at home, sense of isolation, detachment during this pandemic situation was critical for almost all the age groups.

Adolescents need an enabling environment to dream their dreams. However, it is nevertheless evident that while they are narrating their dreams and desires, they are also aware that there is often little scope to realize these dreams. The enabling environment for dreaming about their future is scattered. Adolescents from low-income families

have limited opportunities and more responsibilities. Their dreams are mostly shaped by poverty. Yet, dreams have no boundaries. The most inconceivable dreams can hold the most unimaginable possibilities and outcomes.

The nexuses between opportunities and vulnerabilities call for the right policies and well-functioning institutions as the adolescents become young adults. All we need to do is to move beyond disparity and inequality, beyond averages, beyond pure GDP-induced growth, and create the milieu to incubate and nurture the dreams of adolescents to enrich our nation. Adolescence is the “best of times and the worst of times,”<sup>423</sup> and it's our responsibility to bring the best out of them for the sake of the future of Bangladesh.

<sup>423</sup> *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens (1859).

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# Chapter 7

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A Peaceful and  
Prosperous  
Bangladesh:  
Strategies and  
Institutions



# Chapter 7

## A Peaceful and Prosperous Bangladesh: Strategies and Institutions

The ultimate objective of human development is to create a peaceful and prosperous society, where every person with enhanced capabilities and expanded opportunities is free to make choices that he or she values. The goal of such choices is to lead a long, happy and creative life enjoying fundamental human rights in a secure environment. It is thus clear that peace and prosperity are critical for human development, not only for the present generation, but for future generations as well. Societies can accumulate physical wealth and can achieve material gains, but in the absence of peace and stability, they cannot enjoy the fruits of that wealth and gains. Peace is thus not only an ethical or political issue, but it is also a developmental issue. In the ultimate analysis, as has been highlighted in Chapter 2, peace and prosperity are a means to human development and its outcome as well.

This is precisely why the issue of peace has been included as a goal in SDGs. Goal 16 is all about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing justice for all and building accountable and inclusive institutions. In fact, SDG 16 is important not only in its own right, but also as a driver and catalyst towards achieving other SDGs as well. For example, in the absence of peace and stability, SDG 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth will not be attained. Therefore, SDG 16 and all other SDGs are mutually reinforcing.

Bangladesh came into being with the aspiration of building a society where people would be emancipated in every aspect of life – political, economic, social, and cultural. The development objective of the country has always been building a peaceful and prosperous society for its people. It has also highlighted regional and global peace and committed itself towards building a peaceful world. It also believes that prosperity is not the only goal of

development; a peaceful world is also a necessity for achieving that. But the path of peace and prosperity is not a smooth one. It has got internal challenges as well as external constraints for future human development of Bangladesh.

The challenges to peace, prosperity and human development have been amplified immensely by the advent of COVID-19. Like the rest of the world, it has adversely impacted not only the life of people at the micro-level, but it has had socio-economic implications at the macro-level as well. And it seems that COVID-19 is going to be around for quite some time and this adds new uncertainties and vulnerabilities to human lives. All of these would also impact the future human development journey of Bangladesh.

Overcoming these challenges would require both strategies and institutions, not only for today, but also for tomorrow. It has already set its aspirations for being a developed country by 2041. The future generations of this country will live in a new world with new realities. The challenges are great, and so are the opportunities. The strategies and institutions would have to seize those opportunities while minimizing the constraints. We have to dream big and gear ourselves to realize those dreams.

With that context, the present chapter first assesses the achievements as well as challenges that Bangladesh faces in the area of peace and prosperity. The next section would be devoted to spelling out the strategy-options for future human development of Bangladesh with the goal of realizing a peaceful and prosperous society. But the implementation and monitoring of the strategies require institutions and development actors – an issue that would be addressed in the next section. The chapter would come to an end with a proposed five-point action plan.

## Peace and prosperity: the Bangladesh landscape

For centuries, Bangladesh has been a land where people of different faith and ethnicity have been living in peace and harmony. People of different faith – Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists as well as people of different ethnicities lived on this land as friends and relatives. Peaceful co-existence has been a hallmark of this nation, where notions of tolerance, mutual respect, human dignity comes first. The Bengalis are peace-loving people. Social diversities were the strength of Bangladesh, not its weakness. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord signed in 1997 bears testimony to Bangladesh's commitment to ensure ethnic peace and harmony in the country. The Bangladeshi society has always upheld humanitarian values.

The pursuit of peace by Bangladesh was not limited only within its own borders, but it went to its neighbouring countries as well as the world at large. With the motto of '*Friendship to all and malice to none*', Bangladesh has always been active in having a cordial relation with all its neighbours as well as other nations. The country has also been a critical actor in driving global peace through its participation in global forums, representations in global institutions, and voices in global conferences. But one of the best testimonies of Bangladesh's commitment to peace is its contribution in global peace keeping operations. Bangladeshis has served in 58 UN peacekeeping missions in 40 countries and in 2019, Bangladesh has been the third top country with most troops sent for peacekeeping operations.<sup>424</sup> The role and contribution of Bangladeshi troops in peacekeeping operations have been lauded all over the world.

Over the years, the social peaceful cohesion of Bangladesh, coupled with the hard work, innovation and creativity of its people support from its development partners, and prudent economic and social policies by the state, have put Bangladesh on a path of prosperity. In fact, Bangladesh has become, as illustrated in Chapter 1, a development

model for the world. The country has been maintaining an economic growth rate of more than 7 per cent per annum. But more importantly, the country has been able to successfully translate its economic growth into enhancing the well-being of its people. Thus in 2018, even though its per capita income was less than that of India or Pakistan, its life expectancy at birth was 73 years, compared to 69 years in India and 67 years in Pakistan. The under-five mortality rate in 2017 was 34 per 1,000 live births in Bangladesh, compared to India's 43 and Pakistan's 79 respectively, both measured per 1,000 live births.

In terms of gender equality and women's empowerment, in 2018, the ratio of women's HDI and men's HDI in Bangladesh stood at 0.895, compared to 0.829 for India and 0.747 for Pakistan. About 44 per cent of female population (ages 25 and older) has had at least some secondary education, which was slightly below the number of 48 per cent for men. The female youth literacy rate at 94 per cent was better than the male youth literacy rate at 91 per cent. In 2018, 20 per cent of parliamentarians in Bangladesh were female.<sup>425</sup> All these figures confirm that Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the last 20 years in improving the lives of women and girls.

To end violence against women, the Government has adopted many initiatives, (e.g., Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2010 and Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Rules 2013). But preventing violence, protecting those at-risk, supporting victims and making the perpetrators more accountable requires timely reporting of the issues to the appropriate authority. The importance of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect is rightly emphasized in Bangladesh.

### *Peace and prosperity of Bangladesh and COVID-19*

The preceding chapters have indicated the probable overall impacts of COVID-19 (Chapter 2) and on specific issues such as human development and inequalities (Chapter 3), climate change

<sup>424</sup> Jahan (2015).

<sup>425</sup> All the above statistics are from Chapter 1.

(Chapter 4), youth employment (Chapter 5) and dreams of adolescents (Chapter 6). Chapter 1 has also assessed the possible impacts of COVID-19 on future human development progress of Bangladesh. All these are related to the effects of COVID-19 on prosperity. The question now is how COVID-19 is expected to impact on peace.

One of the routes through which COVID-19 may impact on peace is enhanced inequalities, as poor and marginalized groups of people would be affected more by the pandemic. With inequalities increasing, there might be more concentration of wealth, more privatization of social services as well as natural resources. As a result, with limited scarce resources, the access of poorer people to common natural resources, such as common forest, water sources, grazing lands might be curtailed.

The second route through which COVID-19 may impact on social peace and stability is through contraction of jobs and income opportunities of people, particularly poorer and marginalized groups of people. Job losses would result in losses in income. For people, who are poor and marginalized, survival would then become a serious problem. There may be drainage of meagre savings and distress sales on their part. Under such circumstances, the standard of living of many households, representing both poor and middle-class households, would decline. The deepening of poverty and inequalities may thus have adverse impacts.

One of the groups which would be asymmetrically affected due to COVID-19 are girls and women. During the lockdown restrictions, the burden of household chores and care work for women has increased tremendously. Furthermore, with the lockdown, because of frictions within the households, the incidence of domestic violence is on the rise in every country.

COVID-19 now has a vaccine, which is now available in Bangladesh. Starting as of 28 January 2021, the programme has been so successful that it has received widespread appreciation. Implemented according to already set priority lists and selected age-cohorts, the vaccination was administered in a well-disciplined way with minimum waiting time. Each vaccination centre followed health protocols

and they were amply supported by actions of people. In fact, there is an eagerness and excitement among people to take the vaccine. The efficiency of the programme has become a model for the rest of the world.

As COVID-19 is a global phenomenon, which has adversely affected all nations, inward-looking protectionist policies might be pursued by many countries. Countries would impose increased tariff, non-tariff restrictions to protect their own markets. Furthermore, in the developing world, foreign investments may be reduced, foreign aid may dry up. In fact, some of these things are already happening. Protective tariffs have already been imposed. Movements of people have been restricted. The dynamic of the post-Brexit scenario is making the situation even more complex.

In a nutshell, COVID-19 has created unforeseen economic uncertainties and vulnerabilities. The world is still grappling with the phenomenon as there are lots of unknowns. The knowledge of humanity regarding the impact of the pandemic – whether medical or health wise or in terms of economic and social impacts – is still evolves. But with human ingenuity, the world will surely overcome all these crisis and uncertainties.

All these challenges would require necessary strategies and institutions to ensure peace and prosperity in Bangladesh so that human development is enhanced for future generations. Before getting into the identification of such strategies and institutions, it is necessary and worthwhile to focus on the principles of such strategies.

### **Principles for strategies**

Strategies are most effective when they are based on certain principles. Strategies for future human development of Bangladesh are no exception. Seven specific principles may be critical and should be considered while formulating the relevant strategies.

- *Strategies must be right and equity-based:* Human development is right-based and universal. Equality including gender and inter-generational equality is at the heart of human development. Therefore, strategies for human development must be

anchored in human rights, human dignity and equality, particularly gender-equality and women's empowerment.

- *Strategies must consider not only the outcomes, but also the processes and, not only the present, but also the future:* Strategies should not exclusively be geared towards *outcomes*, but they must also consider *processes* through which those outcomes are achieved. Processes are as important as outcomes. Desired outcomes achieved through undesired processes are not acceptable. Similarly, strategies should not only focus on the present, but also anticipate the future development challenged and prioritize those in view of their ramifications for human development.
- *Strategies that have multiple impacts should be prioritized:* Policy makers should not go for a singular one-to-one objective-strategy approach. Rather, strategies which impact multiple goals should be given priority in the strategy matrix. For example, if a strategy for girls' education is pursued, it would have multiple impacts. It would lead to better educated girls, but it would also impact children's nutrition, child mortality. The goal thus should be *minimum number of strategies with maximum effects*.
- *Strategies must be coordinated and mutually reinforcing:* Strategies should be efficiently coordinated, substantively and organizationally. Thus, there should be strong alignments between the five-year plans, the medium-term budgetary framework and annual budgets. One set of strategies should not contradict another set. Local level strategies must be consistent with the national ones. Strategies should be selected in such a way so that they contribute to each other. For example, strategies for tackling climate change would also contribute to poverty reduction strategies, measures to end hunger, policies for economic growth etc. If

there is synergy between the policies, achieving win-win situations are possible.

- *Strategies must follow five A:* Formulation of strategies should adhere to 5 A – *availability, accessibility, affordability, adaptability, adoptability*. The kind of goods and services a strategy matrix intends to provide to people must be *available* and *accessible* to them. People should also be able to *afford* them. Policies must be *adapted* to the context concerned. They must align with the norms, values and culture of the society. Such issues are important in health and education arenas, as well as in economic growth and participation. Policies must be culture sensitive. Policies must be *adopted* consistently at all levels of government.
- *Strategies must be based on what worked and on hard facts:* Bangladesh by now has ample development experiences which may guide the strategy formulation for its future human development. At the same time, there have been many development experiments undertaken by countries in the South. So, Bangladesh must also learn through South-South collaboration. Furthermore, strategies must be based on solid data, time-series information, preferably disaggregated on different planes – gender, socio-economic groups, rural-urban divide, regions etc.
- *Strategies must be formulated in transparent and participatory ways:* Strategies must be owned by people. In order to ensure that, strategies must be formulated in a transparent and participatory way so the citizens take part in their discussions and exactly know what measures would be pursued. This also helps the implementation of the strategies and their monitoring.

Given the context highlighted in the preceding sections and the challenges analysed in previous chapters, the relevant critical question is then – what strategy matrix can be undertaken to overcome the challenges. In answering that

question, three issues are important: *First*, on many of those areas, there have been policy responses over the years. Those must be recognized, appreciated, and taken into account. *Second*, even though lots have been done, there are scopes for doing more. *Third*, given the present pandemic, all policies and strategies will be influenced and shaped by COVID-19 concerns. But it should be remembered that the future human development policies will have to be COVID-19-sensitive, but not necessarily COVID-19-centric.

### **Highlights of government policies in five areas**

Bangladesh is committed to sustainable human development. Twenty years ago, the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was a signatory, along with 189 Heads of States and Governments, to the Millennium Declaration, which resulted in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Bangladesh has also integrated the SDGs in its five-year development plans and is committed to the motto of the SDGs – *leaving no one behind*.

Bangladesh not only integrated the MDGs in its national development plans but has also achieved most of its major goals. The country is equally committed to the SDGs, which were integrated into the Eighth Five-Year Plan of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the National Sustainable Development Strategy of Bangladesh provides a detailed outline on pursuing sustainable development. Measures like the National Food Policy, National Agricultural Policy are measures towards food security and ending hunger.

Human Development continues to remain the central point in the development agenda of Bangladesh. The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh (2021-2041) and its Eighth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) put great emphasis on human resource development. The Government puts a strong emphasis in the plan document on improving human development both as means to supporting GDP growth through a healthy and skilled labour force as well as to reduce poverty through productive employment. The programme for human development is driven by the core growth and poverty targets to achieve high-income status and mostly eliminate poverty. Specifically, the programme comprises the following: institution of

a knowledge-based economy, a full health insurance schemes for all workers in the organized sector; ensuring medical facilities for all at affordable costs and ensuring food safety and nutrition for all.

### *Building capabilities – health, education and youth employment*

Bangladesh has made good progress in health outcomes due to the adoption of low-cost solutions such as the use of oral rehydration saline (ORS) for diarrhoea treatment, and due to increased awareness created by effective social mobilisation campaigns, such as those for child immunisation, contraceptive adoption, and girls' schooling. The Bangladesh National Health Policy (NHP) is a guiding principle for the country to identify the priority of health-care needs, resource allocations according to prioritization, and to achieve specific health-care goals. In addition, NHP is usually a wide-ranging, all-inclusive plan that pursues to put each and every person on the road to better health. NHP targets to achieve universal health coverage and delivering quality health-care services to all at inexpensive cost, through a pre-emptive, protective, and prophylactic health-care program in all national and international developmental policy and planning. The Eighth Five-Year Plan indicated the need for promoting mental health and well-being to be included and be accessible as an integral part of essential care.

The key objective of the National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation (NPSWSS) Policy, 1998 was to improve the standard of public health and to ensure improved environment. The policy lays out steps for facilitating access of all citizens to the basic level of services in water supply and sanitation as well as influencing behavioural changes in water and sanitation use. The Policy mentions that the national goal is to ensure that all people have access to safe water and sanitation services at an affordable cost and aims to bring about changes in the traditional service delivery arrangement and to increase the capacity of the sector. It also recognizes the important roles of the NGOs and private sector in service development and delivery. The National Sanitation Strategy 2005 was prepared to guide and coordinate the National Sanitation Campaign promoted by the Government

and other stakeholders in the light of the policy principles stated in the NPSWSS 1998. The Pro-Poor Strategy for Water and Sanitation Sector 2005 was formulated to provide a safety net to the poor.

In areas of education and employment, the National Education Policy of 2010 plans to refurbish the existing system to make available an education which is pro-people, easily available, uniform, universal, well planned, science-oriented and of a high standard. It aims to expand the technical and vocational education to ensure that the youth population of Bangladesh is moulded into skilled professionals. The policy also aims to extend the use of information and communication technology (ICT) at every level and also enable students to acquire skills in vocational education to facilitate self-employment, irrespective of their levels of education.

The Non-formal Education Act, 2014, created an alternative to education opportunities for the deprived sections of the people, creating livelihood opportunities through technical and vocational training, making skilled human resources, creating self-employment capabilities, and teaching children, who are out of school. The Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust Act 2012 is a trust fund under the Ministry of Education responsible for providing scholarships to underprivileged students based on merit. It is managed by an advisory council headed by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The Government has undertaken a project to establish an academy aiming at ensuring quality education for children with special needs. The project intends to integrate children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Neuro-development Disorders (NDD) in the mainstream society.

The National Agricultural Policy of 2018 is devoted to human resource development – giving more focus on upholding professional skills through training for agricultural researchers, extension experts, extension workers and private sectors etc. Employment generation, motivation and incentives, education and innovation are the key strategies for human resource development in the agricultural sector.

The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 had been the immediate outcome and response from the Government of Bangladesh since the ratification of International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990 (ICRMW 1990). Considering both as a worker and a human being, the migrant rights have been defined as human rights and both the host and source countries must ensure the rights of all migrants irrespective of gender, race and ethnicity. Besides protecting the rights of migrants at workplace and with wages, the ICRMW also proposed to control the trafficking of workers in the name of migration and promote the regular channel of migration. For youth employment abroad, in order to increase migration accessibility of the youth and to reduce migration costs and irregular migration, the Government has launched G2G and G2G+ migration with Malaysia, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

The 2011 National Skills Development Policy was aimed at improving the coordination and delivery of skills in Bangladesh. It extends and builds on other major government policies such as the Education Policy of 2010, the Non-Formal Education Policy of 2006 and the Youth Policy of 2017. The document provides the vision and direction for skills development over the coming years, setting out reforms that the Government will implement in partnership with industry, workers and the civil society. The major objectives, among others, of the policy is: to provide a clear statement of the reform agenda and strategy for skills development in Bangladesh; to improve the quality and relevance of such skills development; and to establish more flexible and responsive delivery mechanisms.

#### *Tackling inequality*

Tackling inequality has been one of the major goals of the country's Five-Year Plans. Yet, strategies for tackling inequalities are less visible in overall macroeconomic policy framework, such as monetary or trade policies, rather they are more targeted interventions, e.g., stipend programmes for students coming from lower income groups, social protection measures for marginalized and vulnerable groups etc.

The Government of Bangladesh has formulated the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh to address Bangladesh's triple problems of poverty, vulnerability and marginalization to pave the way for implementing the Eighth Five Year Plan and the Vision-2021. The vision of NSSS is to build an inclusive social security system for all deserving Bangladeshis that effectively tackles and prevents and contributes to broader human development, employment and economic growth. The core of the strategy is a lifecycle approach covering people's need over their entire life. Social inclusion of marginalized groups is a central principle of NSSS, with an expansion of programmes for the extreme poor and the most vulnerable people. The process of drafting the NSSS was initiated in 2012 with an action plan (2016-21) which is under implementation with remarkable progress. The second phase of the NSSS Action Plan (2021-26) is under preparation. The mission of the NSSS is to 'reform the national social security system by ensuring more efficient and effective use of resources, guarantee a strengthened delivery system and progress towards a more inclusive form of Social Security that effectively tackles lifecycle risks, prioritizing the poorest and most vulnerable members of society'.

The protection of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 was passed with a view to ensuring the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The latest law abolished the former 'Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001'. The aim of the 2013 act is to guarantee the educational, physical and mental improvement of persons with disabilities and to support their participation in social and state activities by removing all sorts of discrimination. Bangladesh has enacted this legislation to comply with the United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, of which Bangladesh is a party to. Therefore, persons with disabilities should have the accessibility to premises, to educational and health services, employment opportunities with the necessary infrastructural facilities (e.g., ramps at buildings, proper door handles, books for blinds, appropriate computers etc.)

### *Combatting climate change and ensuring environmental sustainability*

The Government of Bangladesh has recognised climate change as a crucial challenge to the development of the country, and a notable barrier to achieving the status of developed country according to Vision 2041. The most recent national policy documents have covered the issues of climate change and environmental degradation, and the government's intended measures to reverse their adversities. Some important policy and programme documents have been formulated to assess and address the adversities of climate change. These include National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2005 and updated in June 2009, Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) in 2009, Climate Fiscal Framework (CFF) in 2014, submission of the Nationally Determined Contribution of Bangladesh (NDC 2015) in 2015, development of Roadmap for Developing a National Adaptation Plan for Bangladesh in 2015, Inclusion of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in the Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) in December 2015., conducting Stocktaking for National Adaptation Planning (SNAP) Process in March 2017, The Government of Bangladesh is currently formulating the second BCCSAP.

The SDGs, Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 (BDP2100), the Second Perspective Plan 2041 (PP2041), and the Eighth Five Year Plan (2021-2025) have contextualised the issues of climate change adaptation from the medium to long term. Bangladesh has received funding from Green Climate Fund (GCF) in 2018 for clean cooking programme, enhancing adaptive capacities of coastal communities, and mainstreaming climate-resilient infrastructure to develop capacity for improving climate change-related planning and management.

### *Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment*

The constitution of Bangladesh establishes equal rights of women and men and the Government is committed to gender equality and women's empowerment. All the Five-Year Development Plans, particularly the Seventh and the Eighth Five-

Year Plan addressed gender gaps and challenges that remain in crucial areas. The National Women Development Policy of 2011 focuses, among other objectives, two major goals: *first*, to establish equal rights of men and women in areas of the state and public life in the light of the constitution of Bangladesh; *second*, remove existing male-female disparities as well as to eliminate all forms of abuse of women and female children; *third*, to ensure security and safety of women in all areas of state, social and family life including the widowed, aged, guardian less, divorced, unmarried and childless women.

In 2013, the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children, 2013-2015, was adopted to implement the National Women Development Policy 2019. Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 was passed for establishing equal rights of women and children as prescribed in the constitution of Bangladesh for ensuring the protection of women and children from family violence.

#### *Addressing concerns of the young and the adolescents*

Issues affecting adolescents are cross-cutting, and therefore, many policies have a direct or indirect influence on adolescents. As mentioned above, adolescents' well-being encompasses health, nutrition, education, skills, protection, participation, the transition to economic empowerment, etc. Consequently, policies on these issues are relevant to adolescents' well-being (table 7.1).

National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030 provides a comprehensive agenda to deal with adolescents' health-related issues. This policy document has identified four priority thematic

areas of intervention: adolescent sexual and reproductive health, violence against adolescents, adolescent nutrition, and mental health of adolescents. This is the only policy that solely addresses the well-being of adolescents. To manage all types of welfare concerns of adolescents, the government is currently formulating a National Adolescent Strategy that will provide tools and approaches to create an environment for the adolescents to have a decent life, utilize their potentials, and realize their dreams of life.

Apart from the National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030, the other policies mentioned above are mostly comprehensive and cover many concerns of the adolescents' physical, mental, social and skills development. As a part of the implementation of these policies, we observe new institutionalized opportunities for adolescents, such as Adolescent Clubs and School Cabinets, Digital classrooms, increasing accessibility to digital contents etc.

Despite many challenges, Bangladesh is moving ahead to plan and implement various innovative interventions in the area of adolescents' health and provides an excellent example of governmental–nongovernmental collaboration. It is to be noted that the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare provides the nutritional supplement programmes for pregnant adolescent mothers, skilled birth attendants and the expansion of Emergency Obstetric Care (EmOC) services including 24/7 delivery centres, immunization programmes for adolescent girls and established referral linkages between school health clinics and other health facilities – are few of the initiatives which directly contribute to improving the overall health and wellbeing of the adolescents.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> National Strategy for Adolescent Health (2017-2030).

**Table 7.1: Policies and research outcomes relevant to key dimensions of adolescent well-being**

Key dimensions of adolescent well-being	Relevant Policies
Health and nutrition	The National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030 (NAHS)
	The Adolescent Reproductive Health Strategy (ARHS)-2006
	The National Nutrition Policy 2015
	National Mental Health Policy 2019
	Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017
Education and skills and transition to work of economic empowerment	National Education Policy-2010
	National Children Policy-2011
	Compulsory Primary Education Act – 1990
	The Children Act 2013
	National Skills Development Policy 2011
	National ICT Policy 2018
	National Youth Policy 2017 (draft)
Working adolescents or transition of adolescents towards economic empowerment	National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010
	Child Labour National Plan of Action (2012-2016)
	Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006
	Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy
Safety and Protection	National-Social-Security-Strategy-NSSS-of-Bangladesh
	Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010
	Right to Information Act 2009
	Bangladesh Population Policy 2012

The Mother and Child Health Services Unit of the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) provides Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) from 127 service delivery points (MCWCs<sup>427</sup> & UH&FWCs<sup>428</sup>) in 13 districts with the support of UNFPA, UNICEF, Plan International Bangladesh, and Save the Children. In 2015, DGFP developed an Operational Manual for Adolescent Friendly Health Services for ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and equitability from its service centres. A booklet series (*Nijeke Jano*) and a website for adolescents ([www.adolescent-mchdgpbd.org](http://www.adolescent-mchdgpbd.org)) were also developed through GO-NGO collaboration which is crucial in combatting the socio-cultural norms and challenges around body

and sexuality issues and in ensuring access to quality information and services on sexual and reproductive health and rights. All these initiatives have the potential to bring the desired changes in the lives of adolescents in future Bangladesh.

Apart from the National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030, the other policies mentioned above are mostly comprehensive and cover many concerns of the adolescents' physical, mental, social and skills development. As a part of the implementation of these policies, new institutionalized opportunities for adolescents, such as Adolescent Clubs and School Cabinets, Digital classrooms, increasing accessibility to digital contents etc. are also created.

<sup>427</sup> Mother and Child Welfare Centers.

<sup>428</sup> Union Health and Family Welfare Centers.

### *Ensuring peace and security*

With regard to peace and security, under the leadership of the then Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord was signed about 25 years ago in 1997. The accord allowed for the recognition of the rights of the people and tribes of the CHT region. The agreement recognized the distinct ethnicity and special status of the tribes and the ethnic minorities of CHT. The Seventh Five-Year Plan emphasized the full implementation of the accord.

The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2019-2022 has the objectives of *prevention* – strengthening social cohesion and raise awareness to prevent all forms of conflicts, violent extremism and gender discrimination; *participation* – increase women's meaningful participation in decision making on peace and security, including peacebuilding; and *protection, relief and recovery* – protecting women's safety and well-being as well as their rights. The National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children, 2013-2015 and Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 aim at tackling violence, including domestic violence, against women and children. In 2018 Road Transport Act was introduced to bring discipline and security to the transport sector.

### *Responding to COVID-19*

The Government's response to COVID-19 took place at several levels. With the detection of the first case on March 8, 2020 the Government of Bangladesh imposed a nationwide lockdown. Much of the economy came to a standstill resulting in an unprecedented economic crisis. To meet the incipient challenge the Government rolled out its first assistance package on March 25, 2020 to minimize the trade impact of the COVID-19 crisis. It was meant to assist only the exporters, essentially ready-made garment (RMG) manufacturers who contribute 85 per cent of the total export of the country. The package involved giving exporting firms wage bill support of TK 50.0 billion in credit at an interest rate of 2.0 per cent implying a subsidy of 7.0 per cent from the market rate of 9.0 per cent that was scheduled to come into operation on April 1, 2020.

A large assistance programme of four packages totalling Tk 677.50 billion was announced by the Honourable Prime Minister on April 5. The first package of Tk 300.00 billion was meant for the larger business enterprises affected by the crisis. The relatively smaller business enterprises will be able to access Tk 200.00 billion in credit. Finally, Import Refinancing Scheme of Tk 50.0 billion was devoted for import relief. A few days later the Honourable Prime Minister added another Tk 50.0 billion credit package for the agricultural sector. Thus, the entire assistance programme amounted to Tk 727.50 billion.

On May 14, The Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the initiative of providing 5 million families with Tk 2500 each totalling to a fund of Tk 12.5 billion. *Nagad, Rocket, Bkash* and *SureCash* were to distribute the cash to the families. The list of people to receive the support included people from the low-income group, including day labourers, rickshaw and van pullers, hawkers, construction workers, agriculture workers, poultry farm workers, bus and truck workers, and restaurant workers.

Alongside the cash assistance, the food ministry has also distributed 20 kilograms of rice to each of the listed 50 lakh families. The Government has initially decided to introduce the ration card facilities for 50 lakh extreme poor and distressed people who would get rice at Tk10 per kg, but then 50 lakh more such people were brought in, under the facilities. There were further instructions to prepare accurate lists of families who are in dire need of the assistance and thus ensure that the food and cash reach those in need.

In July 2020, the Health Services Division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare published the 'Bangladesh Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 in line WHO's overall strategic objectives for the COVID-19 response. The plan gave a detailed outline of the Ministry's plans to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 and help reduce the impact of the pandemic the health, wellbeing and economy of the country.

The Government of Bangladesh has come up with 21 stimulus packages worth about Taka 1.21 trillion (US\$ 14.3 billion), equivalent to about 4.3 per cent of country's GDP.

### Strategy options for tackling the challenges

As described in the preceding section, different policies have been undertaken by the Government in addressing the challenges in five areas which are crucial for future human development of Bangladesh. But more should be and can be done – there are further strategy options for future human development of Bangladesh. Such a strategy matrix is presented in figure 7.1. The ultimate objective of the policy matrix is – *leaving no one behind* – the motto of the SDGs. The poor and the marginalized groups need the policy support more, for their well-being and their voice and autonomy.

### Tackling poverty, inequality and disparity

Although there has been impressive progress made in reducing poverty in Bangladesh, Chapter 1 indicates, there still remains a substantial number of people who live in extreme poverty. According to the country's Eighth Five-Year Plan (2021-25), inequality remains a major developmental issue in Bangladesh. Even though as the preceding discussion points out, stimulus and support packages have been rolled out and 24 million people have been added to the social protection schemes, yet the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to create new poverty and new inequality. Given this context, the following strategy options can be considered.

**Figure 7.1: Strategy matrix for future human development of Bangladesh**



### Making macroeconomic policies pro-poor

Traditionally, macroeconomic policies, are more geared towards getting macroeconomic fundamentals right and ensuring economic growth. But tackling inequalities must start with making macroeconomic policies pro-poor. A two-pronged approach may be useful.

- *Reorient the hard-core macro policies.* Such hard-core policies as monetary policy, fiscal policy is reviewed through a pro-poor lens and reoriented towards ensuring that they are poor-friendly. Targeted interventions are necessary.
- *Invest in human development priorities.* It is not enough to increase social spending, but it is necessary to invest in basic social services if inequalities are to be reduced. For example, as Chapter 1 indicates, the current public health spending may be increased to around 5 per cent of total public spending (figure 7.2). Furthermore, attention should be given to the absorption capacity for the allocated budget and the utilization of the budgetary allocation.

Even within this resource allocation, there are four policy considerations – effective services require affordability and adaptability; the services must be quality

services. Non-governmental organizations are also major actors in service-provisioning, they can also come up with innovative low-cost services for poor people, as they are the ones who need them the most. The ultimate goal of all these actions is to provide universal access to health and education to all, which is essential for reducing inequalities.

- *Redistribute assets.* Redistributive policies are needed for reducing inequalities in outcome, such as income. Such policies can bring those left out, back into the growth process so that they can benefit from it. Progressive taxation, land legislation and subsidizing inputs can result in redistribution in favour of the poor.

### Formulating an employment-led growth strategy

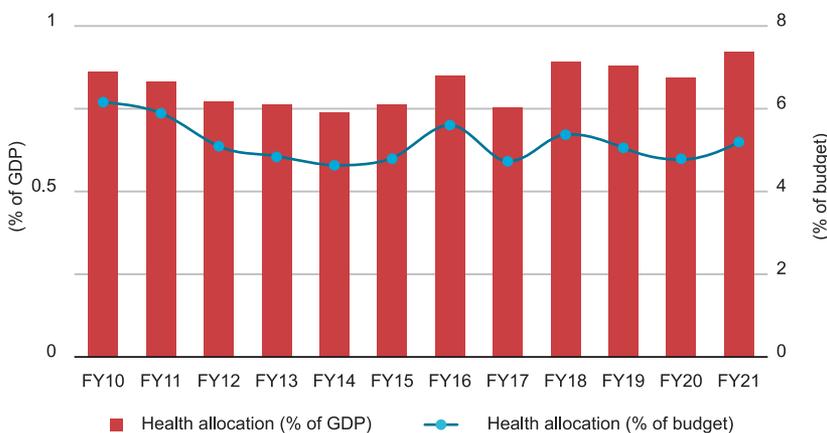
Globally, the growth-led employment strategy sometime gives rise to *jobless growth*, as there is no automatic link between economic growth and job creation. So instead of a *growth-led employment strategy*, if an *employment-led growth strategy* is followed, it may simultaneously create job opportunities and accelerate the economic growth. The major elements of an employment-led growth strategy are:

- *Remove barriers to employment-led development.* Through multiple layers of support in areas of market entry and access

to credit, access to information and marketing skills to small- and medium-sized enterprises, their productivity and income can be improved.

- *Design and implement a conducive legal and regulatory framework to tackle informal work.* As Informal workers are among the most vulnerable and insecure, a conducive legal and

**Figure 7.2: Allocation in health sector in Bangladesh (as % of budget & GDP)**



Source: Ministry of Finance.

regulatory framework can provide protection to such workers, which would enhance their productivity, income and job security.

- *Strengthen the links between large firms (typically capital intensive) and small and medium-sized enterprises (typically labour intensive).* Industrial clusters supported by public investment can increase access to capital and technology and promote transfers of skills. Those actions can shift resources to sectors with greater potential for creating jobs and adding value for the poor. Such backward and forward linkages would create new dynamics for labour-intensive small enterprises.
- *Focus on sectors where poor people live and work, especially in rural areas.* Policy measures to sustain and generate jobs in agriculture can improve productivity (without displacing jobs) through intensive cultivation, regular changes in cropping patterns, integrated input packages and better marketing. Low-cost, sustainable technologies are available in agriculture. Modernization, diversification and commercialization of agriculture (by using an appropriate technology – partly mechanical, partly knowledge intensive-partly biochemical) led by the rural tenant operators or small peasant households (not by Agro Business Complex or absentee landlords) to reduce inequality because of its inbuilt advantages of high employment generation and of high value addition per unit of land.
- *Adjust the distribution of capital and labour in public spending to create jobs.* Public spending can support job creation by favouring technologies and sectors that enhance human development. It can also have a demonstration effect, signalling to the rest of the economy the many ways of using more labour-intensive technologies.
- *Build rural infrastructure.* Building rural roads reduces transport costs, connects rural farmers to markets, allows workers to

move more freely and promotes access to schools and health care clinics. Better infrastructure also has a gender dimension.

#### *Enhancing financial inclusion*

Easy access to the financial sector creates equitable growth. New innovative employment opportunities for the youth can unleash their potentials. Lack of access to finance has been identified as a major constraint to overcoming inequalities and ensuring an inclusive growth process.

- *Expand banking services to disadvantaged and marginalized groups.* Opening bank branches in rural areas, offering easy banking services, using group solidarity as collateral (as with the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh) and having simple procedures that can be followed by people with low literacy so that it can reach all the people who are still unbanked.
- *Undertake specific credit and interest interventions.* With expanding banking services to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, credit must be steered towards unserved remote areas and sectors and it must be ensured that interest rates are reduced, and credit-guarantee and subsidized credits are provided to small and medium-sized enterprises.
- *Harness modern technology to promote financial inclusion.* BKash, a mobile banking system in Bangladesh, has changed the way poor people transfer money, including remittances by garment workers, bill payments and the purchase of daily necessities. M-Pesa in Kenya is a prime example of how mobile phone technology can reach the unbanked. Such technologies must be harnessed.

#### *Targeted interventions*

Even with pro-poor macroeconomic framework, employment-led growth, financial inclusion, some of the vulnerable, e.g., persons with disabilities may not take advantage of them. Targeted interventions would be needed to capture those people.

- *Promote social protection.* Pursuing well-designed, well targeted and well implemented social protection programmes are proven tools for combatting poverty and inequality. Combining social protection with appropriate employment strategies can be quite effective. The Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets Programme (REOPA) is a prime example.
- *Provide support to school-going children from poor households.* This includes school feeding programmes, providing school uniform and stipends to poor students. School feeding programmes provide multiple benefits – helping poor families educate their children, protecting their children's food security and nutrition. All these assume important dimensions during a pandemic like COVID-19.
- *Prioritize local actions.* Providing autonomy to local actions better reflect local demands and aspirations, tailoring programmes to local contexts make targeted interventions more effective. Apart from better implementation, they can be better monitored, which is essential if a course change is needed.

### ***Combatting climate change***

Even though the death toll is reducing over time, the economic cost of climate-induced disasters is becoming significant. The cost of abnormal monsoon flooding in 2007 was estimated to be US\$1.1 billion while the direct cost of Cyclone Sidr was US\$1.7 billion.<sup>429</sup> Economic loss due to extreme weather events was US\$762 million in 2016 and US\$1.07 billion in 2017.<sup>430, 431</sup> The COVID-19 situation will have significant implications on climate change and on the people living in climate-risk areas – for example, on children's education and nutrition.

Thus, the future human development requires that there have to appropriate strategies to address climate change as human development is intrinsically linked to it. Figure 7.3 identifies the factors that impact climate change and understanding their mutual linkages guide the policy making better.

### ***Advocacy and awareness raising***

There are still lots of misconceptions about climate change and its impacts on human development. Climate change is still seen by many as an environmental issue, and not as a development challenge. So, there is need for advocacy and awareness building.

- *Raise the human development concerns in climate change discussions.* As climate change adversely affects human development, raising the aspects of human development in climate negotiations is imperative. It has been estimated by using a hydrodynamic model that cyclone exposed areas in Bangladesh would increase by 26 per cent while affected population would rise to 122 per cent by 2050.<sup>432</sup> The consequences of climate change are needed to be raised in the international climate negotiations like Conference of Parties (COP) and Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) among others, in order to sensitise the international community towards curbing the GHG emissions and keeping the rise of global temperature within 1.5°C in line with the Paris Agreement.
- *Build awareness among vulnerable population.* It is important to raise awareness among coastal communities on regular maintenance of polders to reduce the devastating impacts of salinity intrusion. At the same time, coastal farmers should be sensitised to adapt saline-tolerant varieties.

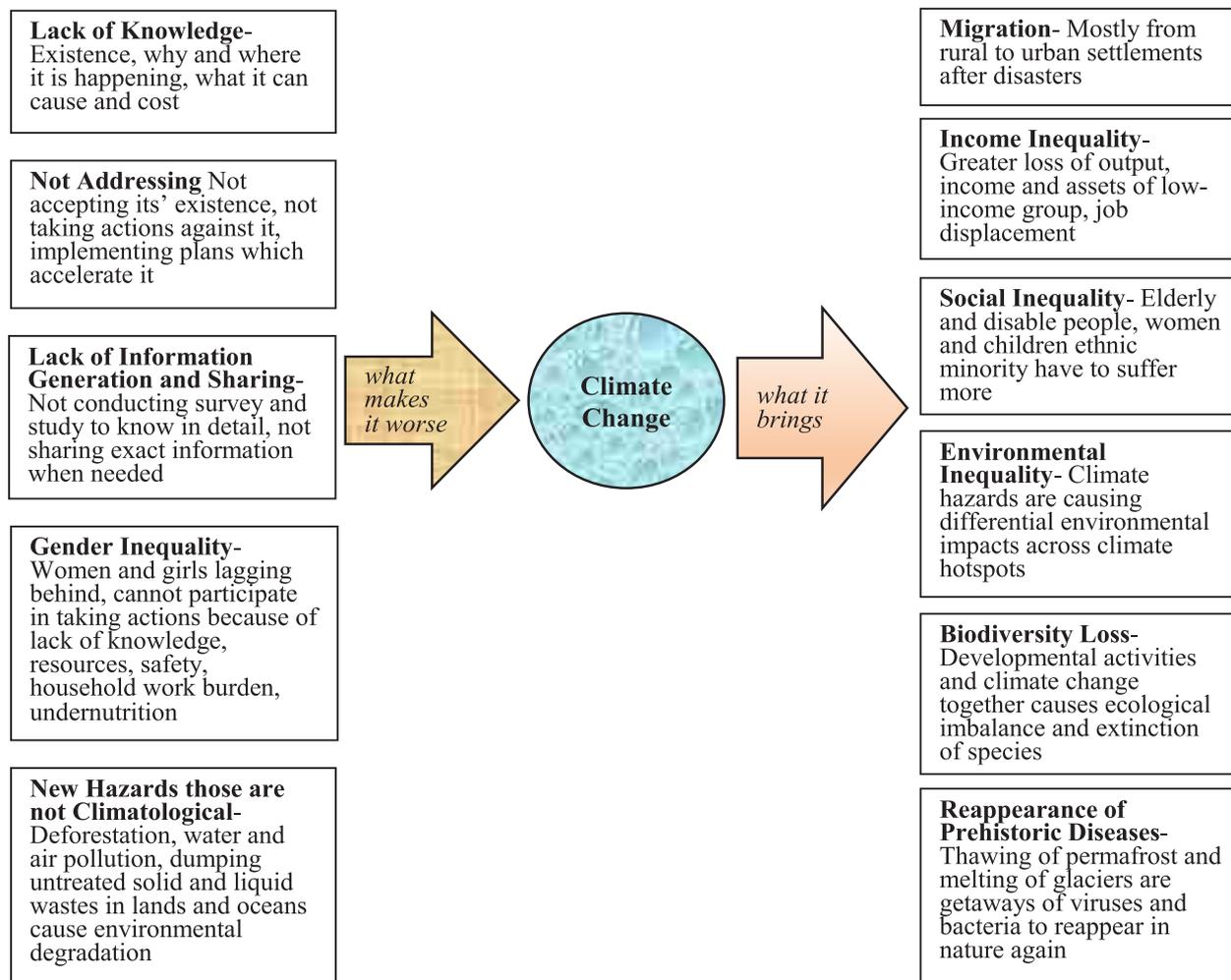
<sup>429</sup> GoB 2008.

<sup>430</sup> Eckstein et.al. 2017.

<sup>431</sup> Eckstein et al. 2018.

<sup>432</sup> Dasgupta et al., 2010.

**Figure 7.3: Factors affecting the impacts of climate change**



*Provisioning of basic public services to climate vulnerable people*

Human development for people living on climate-fragile lands requires access to affordable quality public services. The need is even greater for people who live on extremely fragile lands, such as coastal islands (*chars*).

- *Design effective public investment programmes.* Effective public investment programmes can help people at risk in the climate-vulnerable zones to protect their education, health and nutrition, and sanitation. Establishing climate-resilient schools, health services and micro-nutrient support packages should be designed to reach the most affected groups. It would help improve their standard of living, which

will ultimately translate into higher spending on their children's education and nutrition and in turn will ensure health care and improved sanitation.

- *Enhance public investment for climate hotspots.* Considerable public investment has gone into adaptation programmes. Yet, more investment can be made for households living in marginal lands and islands through new innovative programmes. Disadvantaged groups, the hardest hit of various single and multiple climate hazards, can be the main focus of such programme.
- *Promote basic public services in riverine and coastal islands.* Inhabitants of riverine and coastal islands (*chars*), would benefit from

access to education, healthcare, information and finance. Their access to such services is sometimes limited due to geographical remoteness. Local adaptation strategies ease their access to formal credit, education, healthcare, and nutritional services, access to markets and communication. Adaptive livelihoods and early warning and providing skills training for job market and self-employment as well as climate change adaptation can all be useful for them. And in all these areas, women should get special attention.

#### *Promoting livelihood options*

One of the major survival issues in climate disaster-prone areas is that of sustainable livelihood. It needs diversification and alternative options, innovation, social protection and ecosystem maintenance. Some of the policy measures can be:

- *Promote occupational diversification and viable alternative livelihood options.* This can be done through public-private-social partnership. The main occupation of the households living in the climate-stressed zones is related to agriculture and allied sub-sectors, which are heavily sensitive to climate hazards. Most agricultural labourers and small farmers migrate temporarily to nearby urban areas during and after disasters, but again return to old occupations, thereby retaining them under manifold climatic risks and uncertainties. Therefore, it is important to support these households for occupational diversification and opting for viable alternative livelihood options through soft loan and training.
- *Pursue innovative farming practices.* Such practices include sack gardening, hydroponics, floating garden, high value crop farming (such as, capsicum and broccoli) should be promoted among climate-stressed households. Sensitization programmes should be initiated among interested farmers and women about local viable options keeping in mind the nature and frequency of hazards in a specific zone to cope with the adverse impacts of climate

change. There is a need for establishing linkage between the farmers producing high-valued crops and crab cultivators with the urban markets, super shops and exporters so that they can get fair price of their produces. It will help diversify agriculture and occupation in climate-stressed zones.

- *Introducing Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) programmes.* Such programmes are introduced in the climate hotspots through introducing adaptation components in the ongoing social protection, especially the workfare schemes. Customisation, improvement and reform of social protection in terms of zone-specific climate hazards is required in developing the ASP. Workfare programmes should be strengthened and expanded along with the adaptation components in order to address the multifaceted impacts of climate change in the age of COVID-19. Child nutrition should be at the heart of such programmes as nutritional security is at stake at climate-stressed regions and among impoverished strata of the population.
- *Protect the ecosystem and food chain.* Plastic pollution problem needs to be addressed immediately to protect the ecosystem and food chain, which has been creating serious public health hazards. In addition, protection of ecosystem and biodiversity, combatting deforestation, reducing environmental degradation, and promoting access to clean energy should all be looked into simultaneously. These will combinedly reduce climate hazards and help improve human development.

#### *Cross-cutting initiatives*

- *Build on mutual synergies between climate change and public health.* There are considerable public health issues which can be addressed through climate change adaptation. These include training on improving public health, developing effective surveillance and emergency response mechanisms, and sustainable

disease prevention and control programmes<sup>433</sup>. Greater attention should be paid to marginal lands, impoverished regions, and locations inhabited by ethnic minorities which are the most vulnerable to climate change. Intervention programmes should be led by public sector and supported by the NGOs and international agencies through protection of public health and social security to improve resilience of this population in order to include them in human development. At the same time, women, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities should be paid more attention in the adaptation programmes. School-based education and awareness programmes should be initiated to develop capacity of the future generation on climate related health hazards.

- *Integrate climate change issues into development strategies.* Climate change issues are still seen in many quarters as environmental issues. Climate change is a development challenge. It is, therefore, imperative that climate issues are integrated into development strategies, e.g. the Eighth Five-Year Plan. Only a stand-alone climate change strategy will not do the trick.
- *Implement the mitigation measures.* Bangladesh aims at implementing the mitigation measures included in the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) and National Short-Lived Climate Pollutant (NSLCP) Action Plan in order to substantially reduce emission of CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, and air pollutants emissions (primary particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) and nitrogen dioxides). It will help reduce health hazards related to ambient air pollution. The relevant departments of the government and other stakeholders in the water and public health sectors should design and implement apposite intervention programmes to

address the issues of air quality in Bangladesh.

### ***Expanding youth employment***

Bangladesh has a large young population, with almost a third of its population being young (18-35 years). Productive employment is central to leveraging the power of youth in achieving meaningful human development. To secure the full productive potential, the challenges that remain in the path of youth development like economic status, gender, location and religion ought to be overcome.

However, the current challenges of employment generation can also be regarded as an opportunity for Bangladesh to review the linkages between work and human development and to consider policy options for reorienting, reinventing and reorganizing work in a way that would let human capabilities to flourish. Along with expanding manufacturing and modern services, transforming social sectors (such as health and education) to generate productive employment constitutes an important option.

Yet, the challenges of youth employment can largely be three-fold: constraints to capability, availability of and access to opportunities and ensuring jobs for young people during COVID-19. The strategy matrix must encompass all three.

### ***Enhancing capabilities of the young people***

Since 2010, a positive development observed in case of building capabilities of young people in diversified fields. Many youths have been receiving different types of professional training which is an indication of enhancement of capability of the youth, thus making them knowledgeable and quality workers for future. In that context, many male youths are taking training on IT issues (for example, how to operate a computer), and their share has increased over the years in the rural areas as well. Female youth are more interested in getting training on handicraft mostly in rural areas, while youth in urban areas took training on office management, beautician and hairdressing and

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<sup>433</sup> IPCC (2014).

RMG related activities in order to explore their choices and options in the changing time and the nature of work. Since youth are more adaptive to use in technology, it is time to work with special skills and quality education to create and capture the values through technology.<sup>434</sup>

- *Prepare for new opportunities.* The future of work will bring new opportunities for younger people, and the young people of Bangladesh will have to compete at a global level. More than one-third of the skills important in today's economy will be changed by 2020. Acquiring skills for the 21st century has to be part of lifelong learning of the five C's – *critical thinking, collaborating, creating, communicating and connectedness* (figure 7.4).

Unbridling young people's creativity and entrepreneurship requires policy support for sectors and enterprises in new areas of the economy, for young entrepreneurs involved in start-ups or crowdsourcing, for instance, and for social entrepreneurs.

- *Acquire digital competency.* Preparing youth for productive employment will require universal digital literacy and competency. This includes upgrading teacher and trainer skills, integrating IT education at all levels and providing more specialised IT training. The Skill for Employment Investment Programme of the Government of Bangladesh is a good example of a holistic

approach to demand-led training for youth. 'Bari Boshe Borolok' project is also a good example of training female youth in IT (BASIS, 2018).

As the world is getting digital, the more job opportunities for the young people will be in the IT sector. So, the digital competency is something that needs to be embedded at primary and secondary education levels so that graduating students are capable of attending higher-level IT training. This requires training teachers and trainers at all levels on the use of IT in classrooms (figure 7.5). This would require bringing down internet tariffs, which is rather high in Bangladesh compared to other developing nations.

- *Impart quality education and training.* Ensuring quality of education and training particularly relevant to the job market are the most important instruments for addressing the capability constraints. When it comes to youth employment, technological knowledge is going to be one of the most sought-after qualifications, on one hand, and technology can play a crucial role in the education and skill-building of the youth, on the other hand. For example, the internet has made it possible to acquire world-class knowledge and skills, especially in the area of STEM. Higher education institutes and independent educators around the world are providing the opportunity of world-class

**Figure 7.4: 21<sup>st</sup> century skills**

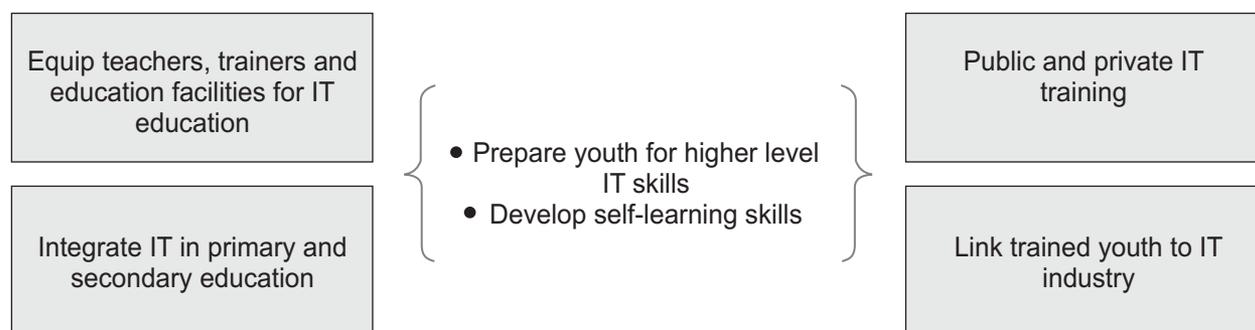
**21st century skills**

<b>Ways of thinking</b>	<b>Tools for working</b>	<b>Ways of working</b>	<b>Skills for living in the world</b>
Creativity Critical thinking Problem solving Decision making Learning	Information and communication technology Information literacy	Communication Collaboration	Citizenship Life and career Personal and social responsibility

Source: Human Development Report Office, 2017.

<sup>434</sup> UNDP (2015).

**Figure 7.5: Preparing the youth for productive employment in IT Industry**



Source: Prepared by authors based on different reports.

tertiary level education for free or at a nominal cost to everyone. Internet has basically opened the world of knowledge to the world. How to use the power of information technology to facilitate youth's skill-building, thus, can be an innovative public policy.

- *Emphasize vocational training.* Vocational training is more effective when provided by private sector providers and when the target group is marginalized youth. Evidence also shows that training outcomes are likely to be more impactful in programmes conducted for longer time periods, where financial incentives are provided to trainees and where activity-oriented training is more prevalent.<sup>435</sup>

Vocational training mainly focuses on technical skills. But as discussed earlier, employers are looking for soft skills such as cognitive skills and independent thinking, which can be developed through need-based training on soft skills. Soft skills are also necessary for developing entrepreneurship among young people, which can be a major source of employment for the youth themselves as well as others. Like education, training should also have a clear focus on information technology. Specific information technology skills training should be developed and provided based on need. To

improve the quality and reliability of training, exploring, in collaboration with the private sector, the possibilities of developing training programmes to be certified by international authorities or providing certified standard training could be another effective policy.

The public-private partnership in vocational training can be quite effective. The use of Government technical education infrastructure by business associations for dedicated training programmes can be very useful. The collaborative programmes between the Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association for incentivizing apprenticeship are prime examples.

- *Enhance capabilities for migrant work.* Bangladesh has been implementing several public and private pre-departure orientation training programmes/skill development training programmes, and data show that participation, as well as passing rates in housekeeping and orientation courses, seemed to be on the rise across several training centres. Contrarily, low-capacity building prevails amid migrants due to low uptake rates of skill development/occupational training programmes.<sup>436</sup> Mainly stemming from seeking a quicker migration process, as well as a lower

<sup>435</sup> <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/cid/publications/faculty-working-papers/labor-market-policies>

<sup>436</sup> BBS (2014).

overseas demand of trained migrant workers,<sup>437</sup> Migrant training programmes in Bangladesh needs to incorporate the changing skill requirements and job demands of destination countries along with a comprehensive technical syllabus into their training curricula.<sup>438</sup> There needs to be course-change.

To reduce the costs of migration, Bangladesh may thus need to adopt policies that would reduce the roles of middlemen/intermediaries. Some steps have already been taken in this direction, yet there is a need to strengthen the enforcement of those policies. There could be more inter-governmental arrangements on migration, rather than through recruiting agencies. Investment in human capital development of unskilled female youth through soft skills training on the English Language, and/or cultural etiquettes can potentially boost their outflow from Bangladesh, thereby further contributing to their human development through gender equity and better living standard.

- *Focus on marginal youths.* There should be a clear focus on the underprivileged and marginal youth. The challenges faced by marginal youth, such as women can often be very different in nature and thus require a different type of policy measure. Many young women stay at home as they often do not have any alternative to working themselves for important care work such as childcare. Creating a viable alternative for care work can free women of the burden of unpaid care work and enable her to participate in the labour market.

#### *Creating job opportunities for the youth*

Enhancing capabilities is just one side of the equation. It must be matched by required opportunities. Enhanced capabilities without

necessary opportunities would result in human frustration. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate policies for creating work opportunities for the youth.

- *Develop labour-intensive manufacturing.* A major focus should be creating job opportunities so that youth can find employment according to their skills and expectations. It is important to develop industries with high potentials for creating employment, for example, labour-intensive manufacturing. A special focus must be given to Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), which are known to increase employment opportunities and labour productivity in the developing country context, particularly for skilled employment.<sup>439</sup> To attract local and foreign investment and to use this opportunity to create employment in disadvantaged regions, the government has taken an ambitious plan to develop 100 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across the county, which has a strong potential to create employment for marginalised youth including women in regions that are lagging behind and to greater demand for labour from a small farm, non-farm and lower-skilled workers.<sup>440</sup>
- *Provide a set support-matrix to young entrepreneurs.* It is important to provide different types of support such as technical, business and entrepreneurship training, and access to finance to self-employed youth and microentrepreneurs. These interventions may change immediate aspects such as management practice but may fail to deliver higher productivity and the resultant growth in the job. A meta-analysis of these types of interventions (including finance and training programs) show that they often have a positive impact on business outcomes mainly improving knowledge and practice and sometimes income, but effects on a

<sup>437</sup> Overseas companies on practical work experience in various trades rather than the training certificates obtained by migrant workers.

<sup>438</sup> ILO (2015).

<sup>439</sup> <https://www.frbsf.org/economic-research/files/wp2016-25.pdf>

<sup>440</sup> <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/EDIG-Promoting-inclusive-growth-in-Bangladesh-through-special-economic-zones.pdf>

general set of labour market activities are usually quite weak and insignificant.<sup>441</sup>

The youth should be given priority in providing financial aid. The government can consider an additional special stimulus package for the youth entrepreneurs. The ongoing projects that will likely generate employment in the future should be completed at the earliest. Additional budget can be allocated in order to ensure larger access to the internet and smooth digital environment for the youth.

- *Seize outsourced opportunities.* Various sectors in developed economies are outsourcing a lot of their work in medical field, in printing and publication, in IT calling services. For example, in publishing business, various desk topping work is being outsourced to other countries including the final printing of them. Doctors are taking the patient history and proving diagnosis and treatment in Dictaphone, and sending them to developing countries for transcription. These are promising work opportunities for the Bangladeshi youth.
- *Professionalize the care work.* It is necessary to professionalize the care work sector, which is currently a largely informal/unpaid area of work dominated by women. Creating policies for the development of effective care industries, such as the care for children, elderly and disabled people can not only create new employment opportunities, particularly for female youth but also ensure better care for these vulnerable groups. In the aftermath of COVID-19 care work has assumed a new dimension.
- *Develop 'search and matching assistance'.* The type of measures under the broad category of 'search and matching assistance', which includes job fairs, job portals, assistance in writing resumes, and connecting them with employers, have been proven mostly

ineffective. This was also observed in Philippines, the implementation of a national youth employment bridging program did increase the likelihood of being currently employed, but no discernible improvement was found for education outcomes or youth employability in particular.

- *Formulate internship opportunities.* Internship created opportunities for inexperienced youth. In a randomized control trial conducted on a training programme for the underprivileged youth, the researchers found that apprenticeship training (a combination of on the job and classroom training) increased their labour market participation rate by 59 per cent.<sup>442</sup> For youth with tertiary education, evidence from developed countries, including the UK and Germany, suggest that study-related internship can significantly increase employment and reduced the duration of unemployment after graduation.<sup>443</sup>

#### *Exploring youth job opportunities in the context of COVID-19*

The general stimulus support for different types of firms is likely to have a positive impact on the overall employment scenario of the country. A subsidy may prevent them from firing these workers in the first place and hasten the recovery of these firms if hiring and firing are costly. Another aspect of the COVID-19 period which can be considered as a positive outcome is the increase in the number of enrolments of the youth in different online courses. This could help them in facing the post COVID-19 skill matching challenges.

- *Respond to changed demand for skills.* With the change in the mode of work owing to COVID-19, the demand for skill from the labour market is also changing. Although the progress of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the pre COVID-19 periods was already inducing the change in the type of demand

<sup>441</sup> Grimm & Paffhausen (2015).

<sup>442</sup> Das (2021).

<sup>443</sup> See [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_637362.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_637362.pdf)

for skill in the labour market, the advent of the pandemic could shape it more towards certain directions. In order to face the probable upcoming recession owing to COVID-19, firms will likely try to be more productive and cost-effective at the same time. As a result of this, the usage of technology for the production process could rise. This could increase the need for workers with technical knowledge as well.<sup>444</sup>

- *Go for e-commerce.* The most anticipating sector that could create new opportunities for the youth at the post-COVID-19 is e-commerce. Although the e-commerce sector, in general, went through a financial crisis during the lockdown, grocer-based online shopping has seen spikes in their revenue. A well-known online grocery shop “Chaldal” for example, had to recruit 300 new employees in order to maintain and complete their daily demands of around 5000 orders. Along with online-based grocer shops, the number of orders for virtual medical shop increased to almost seven times during the lockdown.<sup>445</sup> Given the longer persistence of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, the e-Commerce industry could be expected to grow at a faster rate<sup>446</sup>. On the other hand, a huge job loss might inspire the youth to be an entrepreneur in the post COVID-19 era.
- *Pursue innovation and creativity.* Creativity and innovation will also play a crucial part in addressing the upcoming challenges of the business world. The role of ICT and digitalisation will be crucial in this regard. Finally, in order to set future pathways at post COVID-19 era, the Government could increase their allocation for R&D section. Hence, the demand for skill-related with R&D could increase, which could also create some new opportunities. The outbreak of

COVID-19 has come as a blessing to some business where new opportunities might be created. The pharmaceutical industry is projected to grow to \$5.11 billion by 2023, which could create a huge opportunity for the Bangladeshi youth.<sup>447</sup> In addition, due to the change of way of working, many new industries (such as, software industries including cybersecurity, telemedicine industry, e-learning industry etc.) could emerge which did not exist strongly during pre COVID-19 period in Bangladesh.

### ***Realizing teenagers' dreams***

Teenagers' dreams in Bangladesh have both opportunities and positive dimensions as they have obstacles and barriers. It is critical to identify the enabling factors that adorn adolescent dreams and also the barriers that need to be overcome. The shaping of a dream is invariably structured and influenced by the everyday reality of an adolescent. As has been highlighted earlier, there have been a number of policies that the Government has taken over the years for the development of the teenagers. Yet there remains needs for further actions.

### ***Pursuing knowledge-related activities***

Knowledge has many dimensions. Education is one part of it, extra-curricular activities are its other aspects. Sports, literary activities, social activism are part of extra-curricular activities.

- *Build the foundation of childhood education.* Childhood education builds the foundation on which youth build their future skills. So, improving the quality of education should be targeted for school-level education. In terms of children's education, “across the reviews, three classes of programmes that are recommended with some consistencies (albeit under different names) have emerged: *first*, pedagogical interventions that match teaching to students' learning, employ adaptive instruction, and teacher

<sup>444</sup> See details at <https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/views/post-pandemic-job-market-outlook-1589210806>

<sup>445</sup> Light Castle (2020).

<sup>446</sup> See details at <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/bangladeshis-adopting-e-commerce-faster-ever-amid-pandemic-1890688>.

<sup>447</sup> Light Castle (2020a).

coaching techniques are particularly effective, the use of computer technology is particularly effective in this type of adaptive learning; *second*, repeated teacher training intervention. However general guidance to teachers is not effective, tailored training based on the skill level of the teacher tends to be more effective; and *third*, improving accountability through performance incentives, for example, at least in certain contexts.<sup>448</sup>

- *Ensure quality education for retaining teenagers at schools.* Quality education for today's teenagers would provide them with means to address tomorrow's challenges. Part of the quality education would reflect creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, connectedness and cooperation – the new dimensions of education for 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Early introduction to technology can help the youth to be familiar with technology and have at least the basic level of technical expertise that will facilitate their future learning and skills development in technology and their ability to utilize information technology in developing their skills. So, hands-on IT training must be integrated with mainstream education, at least from the junior-high-school level. Considering how the world of technology is changing, the IT training curriculum must be upgraded on a regular basis.

Considering the increasingly technology-dependent global nature of the modern economy, special attention must be given to the 'so-called' STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) along with English language, which is the de-facto language of communication and education in the modern-day world.

But it should be remembered that about 46 per cent of the 95 per cent who pass the primary school level and the secondary

school cycle is not completed by 75 per cent of children at that age.<sup>449</sup> While adolescent girls in secondary school have higher enrolment rates than boys, they also have higher dropout rates and are thus less likely to complete secondary school and continue to higher education than boys.<sup>450</sup> Therefore, the retention of teenagers in school is critical. School feeding, provision of school uniforms and stipends, separate toilets for girls have been found critical for reducing dropouts. It has also been noted that only 38 per cent of households have access to the internet at home. This reality has implications for the opportunities of adolescents living in those households.

- *Undertake extra-curricular activities.* Class education is only one way of learning. It must be complemented with activities in arts and literature. Taking part in plays and debates, singing and dances expand the thinking horizon of the teenagers. It also entertains them and develops collective identity. Sports help physical development of boys and girls and at the same time impart some critical values in the mind of the teenagers. Teenagers should also involve themselves in voluntary work with the motto, 'giving back to the society'.

#### *Maintaining physical and mental health*

The issue of physical and mental health is of significant importance for the adolescents. These contribute to their transition to their youth and beyond. The closure of schools and home confinement during COVID-19 has made the issue of physical and mental health even more important to the teenagers. Tensions, worries and uncertainties due to COVID-19 are having their toll of the adolescents.

- *Focus on mental health.* A report of the GAGE project has noted that evidence in adolescents' psychological well-being, especially girls, is fragile. It is essential to

<sup>448</sup> Evans (2015).

<sup>449</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/more-opportunities-early-learning/education-adolescents>

<sup>450</sup> Stavropoulou et.al. (2017).

devise more programmes to enhance psychosocial well-being in terms of girls' ability to establish some control over their lives, improve their relationships, and enhance their family and community status. Another GAGE project report<sup>451</sup> has noted that aspirations of both the girls and boys centre on education, but girls who wanted to continue studying were less confident of their family's support than were boys.

Lack of reliable data on mental health, particularly for young people, is a challenge. Especially there is not enough literature on the mental health situation of adolescents in rural Bangladesh. Mental health conditions can be a determining factor in shaping an adolescent's life and opportunity patterns at the very beginning of his/her growth and development. Recognition of mental health as a priority concern is a global demand in the contemporary world. More research and sex-disaggregated data would only pave the path to a healthy, happy and able group of young people to realize their dreams. An enabling situation with sensitive approaches to age, gender and diversity are essential for any sort of transformation for the future of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh also does not have a specific mental health act<sup>452</sup>. However, the government co-sponsors two large-scale programs to address violence against women and domestic violence, including One-Stop Crisis Centres in public hospitals, where victims receive medical, psychosocial and legal assistance.

- *Undertake more care-work.* Teenagers must involve themselves more in household work as well as care work within families. There are two positive impacts of it – *first*, it would

keep the teenagers physically agile and flexible, *second*, it would divert their mind away from mental worries and anxieties, and *third*, they would appreciate the household and care work that women do and help them become more gender-sensitive.

- *Counsel and open helplines.* In many cases, adolescents are better served if third parties, beyond their parents, counsel them to address their emotional concerns. Active helplines or hotlines should be established so that teenagers can seek help when in distress. There is a National Trauma Counselling Centre and Helpline,<sup>453</sup> but there is no data available on whether adolescents access these services. According to the National Institute of Mental health (NIMH), girls tend to seek less professional help than boys.<sup>454</sup> A separate Directorate for mental health<sup>455</sup> and online services during COVID-19 and other disasters like flood, cyclone and tidal waves are equally important.

#### *Protecting the adolescents*

Adolescents face a lot of specific vulnerabilities in life and as a result, many adolescents in Bangladesh cannot dream about their life because of different social, familial, health and institutional constraints. They also get involved in adverse situations.

- *Secure the rights of Children.* Bangladesh is a signatory to the UN Convention to the Rights of the Child, which details out the various kinds of children's rights. With its commitment to rights of children, Bangladesh has been undertaking initiatives to the implementation of the charters of the Convention and its periodic monitoring.
- *Protect the teenagers from adverse situations.* Protecting the children from various adverse situations is a collective responsibility of the family, the society and the State. Sometimes, sub-regional or regional initiatives are

<sup>451</sup> Camfiled, Rashid & Sultan (2017).

<sup>452</sup> Hossain, et al. (2014).

<sup>453</sup> OHCHR (2014).

<sup>454</sup> Uddin & Khan (2014).

<sup>455</sup> Like Thailand, Eprothom Alo dated August 23, 2020, pg 5, by Dr Ahmed Helal "Corona r dushto Chokre moner koshto". Retrieved from: <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/vicious-cycle-of-mental-stress>

needed to tackle the adverse situations faced by children. Through concerted efforts, at various levels, solutions must be found.

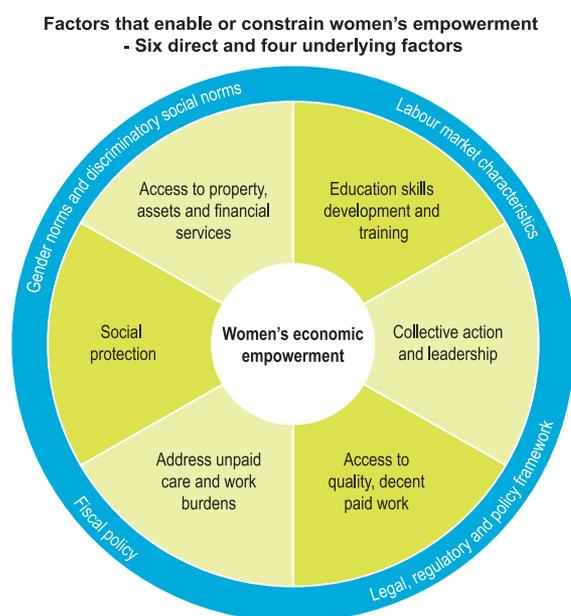
Apart from national strategies, efforts are going on at the global level for adolescents' well-being, the key dimensions of which are given in table 7.2.

### Empowering women

Empowering women is a cross-cutting issue, which goes through all the five dimensions of future human development of Bangladesh. Building capabilities of women and creating opportunities for them requires women's empowerment in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Figure 7.6 identifies the factors that enable or constraint women's empowerment. Strategies have to focus on these factors.

- *Ensure more women's access to assets:* Women are visionary entrepreneurial, and prudent. With improved access to assets and financial services, women-friendly legal framework, their potentials can be more effectively used for the advancement of the society. So, policies, legislation and administration must be geared towards creating an environment where women can fully use their capabilities.

**Figure 7.6: Factor behind women's empowerment**



Source: Hunt and Samman 2016.

- *Foster women's higher education.* More women should pursue higher education and more women should be in STEM, where much future demand for high level work will be. Increasing women's enrolment in tertiary education and in STEM requires such incentives as scholarships, admission quotas and internships with research institutions and technology firm. Investing in girls and women has multidimensional benefits – for example if girls complete secondary education, the under-five mortality rate would be halved.
- *Support to work.* Women juggle paid employment outside the home and unpaid care work inside the home. Flexible working arrangements, including telecommunicating, can allow women to return to work after giving birth. Reducing the burden of unpaid care work among women can also give women more choice. Enlarging care options, including day care centres, could help.
- *Strengthen social protection.* Women – particularly single mothers and older women – require social assistance. Social assistance provides these women with a safety net. The Rural Employment Opportunities through Public Assets (REOPA) is a classic example of such an approach.
- *Break the glass ceiling.* Even though the glass ceiling in Bangladesh is cracked in many places, it is not broken yet. The representation of women has gone up in public service senior positions, but not in senior business leadership. Women's representation at senior levels can be increased through affirmative action, such as quotas. In the political arena, particularly in local level politics and administration, women should engage more.

**Table 7.2: Key dimensions in adolescent well-being according to selected global approaches**

Strategy/ Policy document	Key areas of focus for the well-being of adolescents
Youth 2030: Working with and For Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement, Participation and Advocacy: Amplify youth voices for the promotion of a peaceful, just and sustainable world;</li> <li>• Informed and Healthy Foundations - Support young people's greater access to quality education and health services;</li> <li>• Economic Empowerment through Decent Work - Support young people's greater access to decent work and productive employment;</li> <li>• Youth and Human Rights – Protect and promote the rights of young people and support their civic and political engagement;</li> <li>• Peace and Resilience Building – Support young people as catalysts for Peace and Security &amp; Humanitarian Action.</li> </ul>
Generation Unlimited global partnership initiative	<p>This is a global multisector partnership created to meet the urgent need for expanded education, skill development, employment, and engagement opportunities for young people aged 10–24. This programme brings together the private sector, governments, international and local organizations and young people to identify and scale up the best solutions for three major challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to secondary age education,</li> <li>• acquisition of employability skills and</li> <li>• empowerment, especially of girls.</li> </ul>
UNICEF Adolescent Country Tracker	<p>The adolescent country tracker aims to support and stimulate a rights-based and intersectoral approach to adolescent policies and programmes. This highlights the following five domains of adolescent well-being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adolescents attain their highest physical health and mental well-being,</li> <li>• Adolescents are actively engaged in learning through formal or non-formal education initiatives,</li> <li>• Adolescents feel safe and supported in their families, among their peers, and in their schools and social/ virtual environments,</li> <li>• Adolescents participate in non-exploitative and sustainable livelihoods and/or entrepreneurship, and</li> <li>• Adolescent girls and boys engage with opportunities to form and express their views and influence matters that concern them.</li> </ul>
Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)	<p>This project aims to understand the programmes that are most effective in transforming adolescent girls' lives at specific points during their teens. GAGE's conceptual framework focuses on the following three broad areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adolescent capabilities</i>: young people's individual and collective well-being in terms of six broad domains: i) education and learning, ii) bodily integrity (including freedom from sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage), iii) physical and reproductive health and nutrition, iv) psychosocial well-being, v) voice and agency, and vi) economic empowerment.</li> <li>• <i>Change strategies</i>: to explore how programme impacts could be maximized for adolescents by simultaneously intervening at individual, family, community, service and systems levels.</li> <li>• <i>Contexts</i>: an investigation of how adolescents' local, national and international environments shape their lives and development trajectories.</li> </ul>
The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030) by WHO	<p>The WHO strategy envisions "a world in which every woman, child and adolescent in every setting realizes their rights to physical and mental health and well-being, has social and economic opportunities and is able to participate fully in shaping prosperous and sustainable societies."</p> <p>It has the following three objectives of development: i) survive (to end preventable deaths), ii) Thrive (to ensure health and well-being) and iii) transform (to expand enabling environments).</p>

Strategy/ Policy document	Key areas of focus for the well-being of adolescents
'UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth Towards realizing the full potential of adolescents and youth'	<p>UNFPA considers that a safe and successful passage from adolescence into adulthood is the right of every child and this can only be fulfilled if families and societies make focused investments and provide opportunities to ensure that adolescents and youth progressively develop the <i>knowledge, skills</i> and <i>resilience</i> needed for a healthy, productive and fulfilling life. This document considers investment in adolescents to be a responsibility of all, including families, community leaders, non-governmental organizations, governments, the private sector, the international community. The five strategic actions by which UNFPA contributes to the advancement of adolescents and youth are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable Evidence-Based Advocacy for Comprehensive Policy and Program Development, Investment and Implementation</li> <li>• Promote Comprehensive Sexuality Education</li> <li>• Build Capacity for Sexual and Reproductive Health Service Delivery (including HIV prevention, treatment and care)</li> <li>• Take Bold Initiatives to Reach Marginalized and Disadvantaged Adolescents and Youth, especially Girls</li> <li>• Promote Youth Leadership and Participation</li> </ul>

### ***Ensuring peace and security***

No development can be sustained, nor can it be sustainable unless there is peace and security in the society. Instability and insecurity retard and derail the progress of a society through breeding conflicts and terror among various groups. Ensuring peace and security is not only a policy concern, but also an issue of reorienting values and outlooks in a society.

- *Commit to peace and security.* The State commitment to peace and security *is sine qua non* for a peaceful and secure society. The State must uphold the values of tolerance, mutual respect, human dignity in its words, but also in action. It should also ensure the rights of those who are weak, vulnerable, marginalized and protect them. Such groups would include religious and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, older people and so on. If the State deviates from those values, that opens doors for tensions and conflicts among different groups.
- *Ensure religious and ethnic harmony.* The right of every group in the society to practise their faith according to their belief must be respected and both the State and the society must create a conducive environment for that. The same goes for the rights of ethnic minorities.
- *Respect and accept diverse views.* Democracy cannot flourish and human development

cannot progress in monolithic situation. Diversity is a strength of a society and not a weakness.

- *Provide voice and autonomy to vulnerable groups.* If voice and autonomy are provided to groups, who are voiceless, they become able to express their aspirations, priorities and needs. This removes pent-up frustrations on the part of those groups and conflicts can be avoided.
- *Implement the existing policies and formulate new ones.* Bangladesh has well-defined Nation Action Plan to prevent Violence against women and Children 2013-2015, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010. Those acts need appropriate objective implementation and require constant monitoring. There has to be more public discussion on this issue and the Government must come up with required social policies and an action plan.
- *Prevent environment-related tensions.* Sometime, tensions arise over scarce community commons, such as community forests or community water sources. In most of the cases, issues are related to legal ownership of those commons. Thus, the legal framework of these community commons must be well-defined.

## Addressing the evolving COVID-19 situation

In the preceding chapters and discussions, a lot has been said how Bangladesh has addressed the COVID-19 situation and how people and societies have coped with the pandemic. The discussion also focused on what can be done in five areas relevant for future human development of Bangladesh.

- *Mobilize data and incentivize more research:* Information and data would be key to develop measures and strategies for combatting COVID-19. Data transparency would be useful not only for policy formulation, but also for credibility and confidence building about the administration. Encouraging more research would bring out more ways and options for dealing with this huge challenge.
- *Strengthen the existing measures.* Whether in social assistance or in education, there have been many interventions. Some of those measures must be strengthened. For example, activities like open market sale (OMS) of food at selected urban areas, and vulnerable group feeding (VGF) and test relief (TR) for disadvantaged groups can be made more comprehensive.

Similarly, in education, learning is now pursued through the use of ICT. As of October, 2020 a total of around 203,200 classes were conducted involving more than 9.2 million attendees and 10,200 faculty members (World Bank, 2020). The mechanisms must be strengthened to extend the reach of it, keeping in mind the limited access to ICT by the poor households.

- *Moving from social safety net to social security:* Social safety net is often put forward to address structural challenges, from poverty, to emergencies such as pandemics. While social safety net has its relevance, Bangladesh should now move more to social security — for example, introducing universal health schemes, universal pension schemes, and so on. The need for such a move has been emphasized in the Eighth Five-year Plan of Bangladesh.

- *Reorient the stimulus package.* As the need of support changes with changes in COVID-19 dynamics, it is necessary to review the package regularly, do some course changes as and when necessary. There may be a need for restructuring the package and strategies must be flexible enough to do that. There has to be specific focus on women, youth and marginalized groups.

## Reorienting governance and institutions: a critical need

Governance and institutions are as critical as policies and strategies in advancing future human development of Bangladesh. As global experiences show, even well-intended and well-formulated strategies require well-functioning and appropriate institution for implementing those strategies.

## Highlights of governance and institutional reforms by the Government

Over the years, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken a series of important institutional and public administrative reforms. The Government has always recognized the importance of institutions for human development, honestly identified the bottlenecks and did not shy away from undertaking the necessary measures. The National Integrity Strategy (NSS), adopted in 2012, is a prime example of the Government's commitment to reforms. Speaking quite boldly, the Strategy states that Bangladesh is known for unequal power balance among the legislature, the judiciary, and the public administration; politicization of the judiciary and the public administration has been damaging the national integrity of the country.

With a view to improving the efficiency and the effectiveness of institutions and public administration as well as enhancing transparency and accountability of the system, some of the salient areas where reforms were undertaken in Bangladesh are as follows.

### *Efficiency and effectiveness of institutions*

Public Administration Reform (2004) was a measure to improve the efficiency of public administration in Bangladesh. But the Local

Government Act of 2009 was an effective move to bring administration to the doorsteps of poor and marginalized people. As of 2014-15, the Government of Bangladesh has introduced an Annual Performance Agreement (APA), which provides a summary of the most important results that a ministry or a division expects to achieve during a financial year. The agreement contains not only the agreed objectives, but also performance indicators to monitor the implementation process. This new performance appraisal can also be used to appraise the role and function of public sector employees on the basis of mutually agreed on performance indicators. Such frameworks can provide objective assessments of performances of both individuals and organizations.

The Citizens' Charter (CC) in 2000 has gone into the 2nd Generation starting in 2010, with the objective of providing a platform for civil servants and citizens to discuss the services needed by citizens. To enhance financial accountability, an initiative called the "Strengthening Public Expenditure Management Programme" (SPEMP) has also been undertaken with the aim of building a more strategic and performance-oriented budget management process.

The Government is committed to introduce such measures as the appointment of Ombudsmen, strengthening the Election Commission, and a mutually agreed performance appraisal for public employees. In fact, a new performance appraisal system has been launched on a pilot basis to appraise the role and function of public sector employees based on mutually agreed upon performance indicators.

#### *Transparency and accountability*

The Grievance Redress System is an online system for submission and redressing of both public and official grievances. This web-based online system offers end-to-end tracking of grievances which anyone can post as registered or anonymous user.

The Anti-corruption Commission (ACC), came into being in 2004. After its reconstitution in February 2007, the ACC began working with renewed vigour duly acceding to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in Bangladesh. Using its accession to the United Nations Convention against

Corruption as an impetus, the Government of Bangladesh formulated its National Integrity Strategy (NIS) in 2012. The NIS aims to unite Bangladeshi society to achieve the integrity of the nation by enhancing awareness of government institutions as well as of the entire nation. The Government of Bangladesh considered it essential to improve governance, and particularly eradicate corruption. The initiative NIS is not only a cluster of policies, but also a *de facto* social movement, with the slogan of *integrity for all, by all*.

In 2008, the Government promulgated the Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance to facilitate international cooperation in battling money laundering, including working to recover funds illegally transferred to and from foreign countries. It was followed by the Bangladesh Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012 to consolidate the whole initiative. The Act went through further amendment in 2015. For example, in that amendment, the definition of human trafficking is extended. From then on, receiving money by giving fraudulent promise to send abroad was considered as crime under the money laundering act.

#### *Rights of people and the issue of security*

The Right to Information Act (2009) was a groundbreaking decision on the part of the Bangladesh Government and paved the way for all citizens to get information from public authority as a right. The Right to Information Act plays an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability. The act simplified the fees required to access information, overrode existing secrecy legislation and granted greater independence to the Information Commission, tasked with overseeing and promoting the law. The 2009 Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, among other things, introduced provisions for ward meetings and the right to information.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act of 2006 was enacted to prevent cybercrimes and regulate e-commerce. The purpose of this Act is to guarantee the legal security of documentary communications between persons, partnerships and the State, irrespective of the medium used; the consistency of legal rules and their application to documentary communications using information technology-based media,

whether electronic, magnetic, optical, wireless or otherwise, or based on technology combinations. The Digital Security Act 2018 is enacted to ensure National Digital Security and enact laws regarding Digital Crime Identification, Prevention, Suppression, Trial and other related matters.

The Anti-terrorism Act of 2009 was given retrospective effect from 11 June 2008. The law was designed to target terrorists and financial institution involved in terrorist activities. In 2012, the Act was amended and the highest punishment under the Act was raised to death penalty. In 2013, another amendment allowed for social media content to be entered as evidence. All these indicate Government's firmness in combatting terrorism in the country.

For future human development of Bangladesh, the governance and institutional constraints can be bundled into three groups: *efficiency and effectiveness, corruption and leakages, and participation and voice*. Even though in the discussion, these three broader issues are treated separately, it is to be mentioned that they are inter-linked. For example, inefficiency and ineffectiveness often lead to corruption, or lack of public discourse on critical issues may help breeding inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

### ***Efficiency and effectiveness of institutions***

Some institutions are more linked to *economic governance* (e.g., National Board of revenue) and some are to *political governance* (e.g., Election Commission). But irrespective of the nature of the institutions, future human development of Bangladesh demands that they are efficient and effective. It is to be remembered that efficiency does not necessarily mean effectiveness — an institution can be internally very efficient but may not be effective in providing the required services. Part of the problem may be in how people perceive that institution, part of it may be related to affordability, adoptability and adaptability of people of the services provided by the institution.

- *Strengthen the data system.* Data have different roles in a country and a society. *First*, it is a great tool for advocacy and awareness building. *Second*, it allows the

monitoring of progress as well as identification of shortfalls. *Third*, it is an essential tool for informed policy-making.

The data collection, analysis and dissemination system must be strengthened. The scope of the relevant agency should be extended. Emphasis should be on robust data as well as time-series data. Disaggregated data on different planes, particularly regional and gender disaggregated data should be collected as much as possible. The capacity of data collection agency should be beefed up through allocation of more financial resources and human resources. There is a need for data literacy of the policy makers.

- *Ensure the rule of law.* A strong legal framework is a major strength of governance and institutions. The independence of the legal system is *sine qua non* for the protection and the promotion of the rights of people. With existence of a good legal framework, attention should be given to its proper implementation. Adequate technical resources should be provided to the judicial system for a timely settlement of disputes.
- *Make institutions transparent and accountable.* Transparency and accountability are not only intrinsically valuable, but they represent two core elements of good governance and efficient and effective institutions. Transparency and accountability make institutions credible and trustworthy vis-a-vis people. A weak tax administrative infrastructure makes for collusion and leaves space for discrepancy in granting benefits to the targeted groups of taxpayers, both in terms of tax policy and administration.
- *Decentralize public administration effectively.* With the commitment of the Government to local-level development, progress in decentralization of public administration results in efficient utilization of resources and effective public service delivery. This would also improve transparency and accountability.

- *Enhance institutional capacity.* Institutional capacity can be enhanced through proper human resources, adequate resources, installing of modern information and communication technology facilities.

### **Transparency and accountability**

Institutional transparency and accountability but it is also economically unjustifiable. Lack of transparency and accountability represents ensures efficiency.

- *Improve the oversight function.* Strong oversight functions can help overcome non-accountability and corruption. Beyond public administration, there are bodies, whose role can be used to strengthen the oversight function in a country. The Parliamentary Standing Bodies represent such institutions. This on one hand will not only improve the transparency and accountability in the affairs of the Government, but on the other hand, will also strengthen the relationship between the executive and the legislative branch of the Government.
- *Ensure judicial independence.* The Government is keen to protect the independence of judiciary, which is essential to ensure the transparency and accountability of public administration. With the independence of the judicial system, any dispute regarding transparency and accountability of the system can be resolved in a fair way.
- *Making society aware of need for transparency and accountability.* Transparency and accountability are important at every level – individual, family, society and state. That is why the issue of integrity of the nation as a whole is crucial. The National Integrity Strategy (2012) of Bangladesh is aimed at enhancing awareness of government institutions as well as of the entire nation on the issue of integrity. Its objective is also to improve governance, and particularly eradicate corruption.

### **Participation and voice**

Development is neither linear nor monolithic. It is dynamic, not static. It also needs to reflect the needs of the masses and the aspirations of the people. Given these, development trajectories from time to time require revisiting. As such, there must be discussions and development discourses among citizens and people should actively participate in processes that affect their lives. Democratic space and voice are thus, two most important dimensions of human development.

Democracy is invaluable in its own rights too. It is not the perfect system, but the best one that is available. Democracy is not about elections only, it is about participation, and it is about voice. It is about human rights, mutual respect, tolerance and human dignity. Democracy is a culture which needs to be nurtured through constant practices at all levels of life. In the ultimate analysis, relentless fight for democracy is democracy.

Voice and autonomy are something that people intrinsically value. Voice is even more important for voiceless people, who are poor, marginalized and vulnerable. Often their voices are ignored or there may not be effective means to transmit their voices. Since they are weak and vulnerable, it is the responsibility of the rest of the society to facilitate their participation and listen to their voices. Such participation must not be futile, where these people are mobilized so that they can have their voices heard, can inform or influence the ultimate outcome.

- *Create an environment for diverse political approaches.* Democracy can flourish in an effective environment of pluralism. Development is a goal with various options to reach. So, different political ideology – so long those ideologies do not oppose the fundamental principles on which the country was born, are not in conflict with human rights and human dignity, do not encourage hate and violence – can advocate different options to choose. It is for the people to go for one, rather than the other.

There should be an atmosphere of cordiality, decency, and mutual respect among various political approaches and institutions.

- *Facilitate freedom of expression.* In a democratic society, freedom of expression is not only a right, but also a treasured virtue. Diverse views strengthen democracy and human development and creates an environment with necessary checks and balances.
- *Protect citizens' right to information.* A meaningful public discourse on development and governance issues can take place when citizens have adequate information to issues that affect their lives. With access to information people can hold the government accountable.
- *Provide and protect space for civil society.* Over the years, Bangladesh has become a vibrant polity for the participation of various institutions in the development paradigm and governance structure. These institutions have also served the role of engaging people in dialogue.

The civil society could be more engaged as a development partner in the human development journey. Thus, different acts and laws should be used to manage their work. Similarly, the civil society should also remember that its role in the development work is that of a partner and a catalyst.

The media plays a crucial role in ensuring good governance and effective institutional framework. Objective investigative journalism helps governments to appreciate and acknowledge the development problems and look for appropriate solutions. The media can play this important role in a conducive environment.

### **Reforms in global institutions**

We live in a globalized world where human development outcomes are determined not only by actions at the national level, but also by the structures, events and work at the global level. The shortcomings in the current architecture of global systems pose challenges for human development

on three fronts. The distribution — all consequences of inequitable globalization have promoted the progress of some segments of the population, leaving poor and vulnerable people out. Globalization is also making those left out economically insecure.

Global institutional reforms should encompass the broader areas of regulation of global markets, the governance of multilateral institutions and the strengthening of global civil society with each area reflecting specific actions. The issue of reforms in global institutions has assumed even greater importance in the face of the global crisis out of COVID-19 pandemic.

- *Stabilizing the global economy*

Stabilization of the global economy is crucial for future human development of Bangladesh. The global pandemic of COVID-19 has indicated the importance of such stabilization even more. Reforms should focus on regulating currency transactions and capital flows and coordinating macroeconomic policies and regulations.

- *Applying fair trade and investment rules*

The international agenda should be to set rules to expand trade in goods, services and knowledge to favour human development and the SDGs. The key reforms to advance this agenda include finalizing the World Trade Organization's Doha Round, reforming the global intellectual property rights regime and reforming the global investor protection regime.

- *Adopting a fair system of migration*

Measures are needed to strengthen strategies that protect the rights of and promote the opportunities for migrants, to establish a global mechanism to coordinate economic (voluntary) migration and to facilitate guaranteed asylum for forcibly displaced people.

- *Assuring greater equity and legitimacy of multilateral institutions*

The time has come to examine the representation, transparency and

accountability of multilateral institutions. Some policy options to move these institutions towards greater equity and legitimacy are increasing the voice of developing countries in multilateral organizations, and increasing coordination and effectiveness to achieve people-centred goals.

- *Coordinating taxes and monitoring finance globally*

A move towards a global automatic exchange of information (such as a global financial register) would facilitate the work of tax and regulatory authorities tracking income and detecting illicit financial flows, which may be mobilized for human development. This would require increasing technical capacity of countries to process information and implement active policies against tax evasion, tax avoidance and illicit flows.

- *Making the global economy sustainable*

Sustainable development activities at the national level must be complemented with global actions. Curbing global warming is possible. Coordinated global action has worked well in the past, as in moves to halt ozone depletion in the 1990s. Continuing advocacy and communication on the need to address climate change and protect the environment are essential to gather support from various stakeholders (including multilateral development banks).

- *Ensuring well-funded multilateralism and cooperation*

Multilateral and regional development banks can do more to address several challenges of globalization. Increasing official development assistance from traditional donors, expanding the participation of developing countries through South-South and triangular cooperation, and exploring innovative options for financing would be useful.

- *Globally defending people's security*

From a human development perspective, assistance in human emergencies and crises is an ethical obligation. In such cases, proposed solutions include restructuring current mechanisms towards prevention in addition to short-term responses to shocks, prioritizing field operations and coordinating better internally and externally with civil society and the private sector.

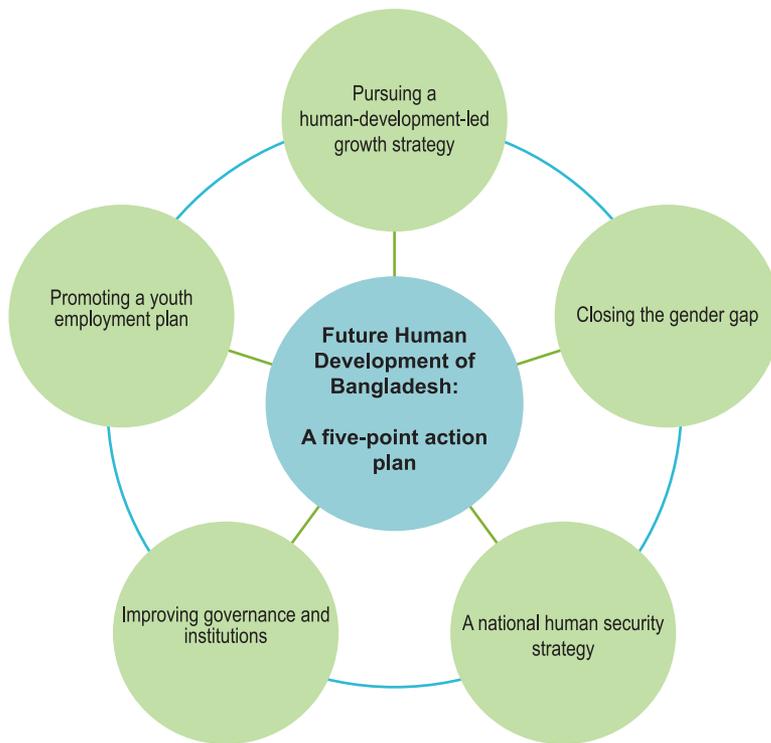
- *Ensuring a globally responsive COVID-19 combatting plan*

Since COVID-19 is a global crisis, it would require a globally coordinated action plan. Part of it is the vaccine roll-out. As COVID-19 vaccine is a global public good, the global community must ensure the equity aspect of it, i.e., equitable access to vaccines to developing and particularly poor countries. But in order to recover economically and socially, the developing countries would require strong support from the developed world in terms of rolling out a stimulus package, and cooperation from the latter in trade and finance. National efforts by poor countries must be complemented with strong collaboration from rich nations.

### **A five-point action plan**

The present report identifies five issues that the future of human development, in Bangladesh, is critically dependent upon. These issues are of significance to SDGs as well. The preceding discussion has outlined the strategy options that can be considered in each of the identified areas and beyond. It is important to recognize that the country has to act fast and decisively in regard to addressing these issues. In that context, a well-defined concrete action plan can be of crucial importance. Figure 7.7 presents a five-point action plan.

**Figure 7.7: A five-point action plan**



*Pursuing a human development-led growth strategy*  
Traditionally, economic growth is seen as a critical means of human development. That being said, the problem is that the link between the two is not automatic. As a result, growth has been observed to take place where it has been *jobless*, rather than job-creating; *ruthless*, rather than poverty reducing; *voiceless*, rather than participatory; *rootless*, rather than culturally enshrined, *futureless*, rather than environment-friendly. We, therefore, will have to focus on a growth strategy which will be driven by enhanced human development.

The challenge here would be to reorient traditional growth into equitable growth. Figure 7.8 outlines the major blocks of such a transition.

*Pursuing a youth employment plan*  
Work for younger generations is not only intrinsically valuable to them but work is also an important ingredient for the future human development of Bangladesh. The time has come to have a comprehensive plan on this issue.

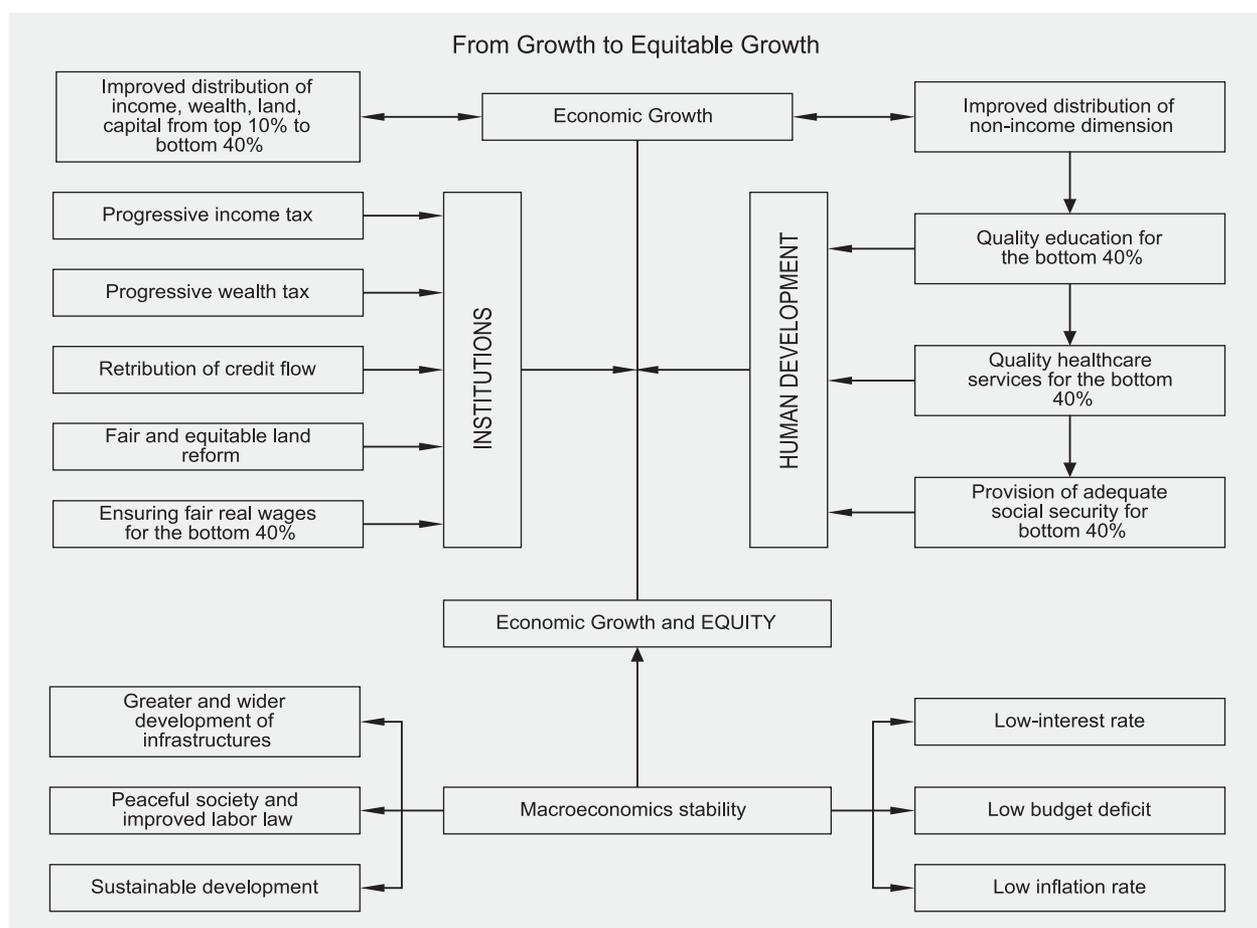
Some of the salient features of the proposed plan would be: *first*, the notion of work would not be limited to traditional employment; rather it should be extended to include voluntary work, care work, creative work, and other forms of informal labour. *Second*, such a strategy should not stand all by itself; rather it should be integrated into broader national development plans, such as the Government's Five-Year Plans. *Third*, a youth employment strategy of Bangladesh would focus on both the capabilities and opportunities side. *Fourth*, a major focus of such a strategy would be work by women, both paid and unpaid work, and work inside the household and outside the household. And *finally*, an ideal youth employment strategy should look at the global scenario and explore the opportunities

of work for young Bangladeshi people.

*Implementing a comprehensive COVID-19 strategy*  
The future human development trajectory of Bangladesh will be informed and influenced by COVID-19. Therefore, human development strategies must integrate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 in its longer-term development plans, such as Five-Year Development Plans. For example, in the long-term, the impacts of COVID-19 may be reflected in such issues as food security, if agricultural production is adversely affected. The longer-term development strategy of Bangladesh should actively account for COVID-19.

In terms of medium to longer-term planning, three issues have to be addressed. *First*, Bangladesh should consider developing longer-term well-formulated COVID-19 vaccination strategy with concrete plans and measures. *Second*, a COVID-19 recovery plan, including domestic economic stimulus and external economic response, should be formulated and rolled out without further delay.

**Figure 7.8: The pathway from growth to equitable growth**



This plan can build on the existing measures undertaken so far. Through South-South collaboration, Bangladesh could exchange diverse experiences in its fight against COVID-19.

#### *A national human security strategy*

There is no denying the fact that like any other society, human security is highly valued in the Bangladeshi society. People are at ease with personal security. Similarly, sometimes the preoccupation with individual wellbeing has posed questions for collective security. Environmental degradation may lead to environmental insecurity.

Under such circumstances, the need for a national human security strategy can hardly be overemphasized. Such a strategy can be part of the bigger human development plan as human security is a pre-requisite for sustained human development. Tolerances, mutual respect, human

dignity, acceptance of diversity are major ingredients of human security.

#### *Improving governance and institutions*

Over the years, there have been a number of administrative reforms in Bangladesh. It is imperative that institutions must be efficient and effective to move forward the strategies for future human development of Bangladesh. In the context the focus of the strategies and the institutions should not only be on people who are “just behind and visible,” but also on those who are “far behind and invisible.” This is critical for *leaving no one behind* as stipulated in SDG.

In conclusion, every human being counts, and every human life is equally valuable. That universalism is at the core of the future human development of Bangladesh. Human development for everyone is not a dream, but a reality. In January 1972, while

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was returning from his captivity to an independent Bangladesh, he described his homecoming as a

journey *from darkness to light, from captivity to freedom, from desolation to hope*. Today, hopes are within our reach to realize.

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