

Youth of Bangladesh

Agents of Change?

Youth Survey 2018



Inspiring Excellence

Research Team:

**BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD),
BRAC University**

Dr. Imran Matin
Anindita Bhattacharjee
Md. Shakil Ahmed
Dr. Narayan C Das
Nusrat Jahan

Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC

K A M Morshed
Mohammad Azad Rahman
Md. Mazedul Islam
Nimmi Nusrat Hamid

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Youth Survey 2018

Foreword:

Since 2007, Bangladesh has been going through the demographic dividend with more people in the working age population. It is expected that this window of opportunity will start to close by 2040. If this period can be utilized efficiently, it can prove to be highly significant for the country to achieve a higher economic growth. However, failing to establish appropriate policies, make substantial investments in youth and take relevant steps to shape them into competent human resources will obstruct the route to achieving the potential economic advancement the country is capable of attaining. Therefore, it is essential that we understand the dynamics of youth perception and their preferences to establish national policies and frame our actions that can facilitate an environment where youth are able to lead the development of Bangladesh.

BRAC, as the largest development organization regularly undertake studies on the key change areas for the country. Considering one third of the total population of Bangladesh is youth and their role in the progress of our society is imperative, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) of BRAC University conducted its nationally representative studies on youth in 2011 and then in 2018. We are pleased to release the 2018 youth survey report with the hope that it will be used to inform the development of policies, services and programs that have the needs of young people at their core.

Young people are our future and they should be supported, nurtured and encouraged as they make their journey into adulthood and independence. Families, educators, policymakers and the broader community all have an important role to play. If we better understand the aspirations, fears and choices of our young people, we will be better equipped to nurture their dreams and ensure they can achieve their full potential.

In the 2018 youth survey, we looked at the self-identities and life-goals of the youth. Then we looked at their readiness in terms of education and skills, followed by their involvement in earning activities. Then we looked at the status of their perceived freedom of choice. Finally, we analysed their political outlook. The findings were disaggregated based on the economic status, educational attainment and geography. The investigation found out that our youth are driven and want to actively partake in the development of Bangladesh. However, they do not know exactly what to do or how to do it? Overall, our assessment is that the youth of Bangladesh are far from ready to take the opportunities offered by the 21st century and their potential remains vastly unrealized. This is especially true for female youth and youth from poor socio-economic background. Finally, we see a deep divide among the youths regarding their views, which may hinder the future growth of the country and increase intolerance.

I would like to thank the colleagues of BIGD of the BRAC University and Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC who led the research and worked hard for the successful launch of the report. I look forward to continuation of such research to establish a longitudinal view of the youth for better understanding their realities.

K A M Morshed

Director,

Advocacy for Social Change, Technology, and Partnership Strengthening Unit, BRAC

Executive summary

Youth constitute a third of Bangladeshi population. Also, currently the share of working-age population (15-59) is larger than non-working age population (>15 and 60+) in Bangladesh, that has a potential to fuel our economic growth with our youth at the forefront. Although there is widespread interest in the youth of Bangladesh, there is very limited comprehensive information on their status. BRAC, along with BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University, initiated The Youth Survey 2018, a nationally representative, comprehensive survey of the youth, to provide valuable insights about our youth.

To do the survey, we divided the country in five regions and randomly selected 30 upazillas/thanas from each region. Then we randomly selected two unions/wards in each upazilla/thana, from which we randomly selected one union/ward per upazilla/thana and one village/moholla per union/ward. Finally, we surveyed 14 randomly selected youth (seven males, seven females) aged 15-35 in each village/moholla, 4,200 youth in total.

First, we look at the self-identities and life-goals of the youth. Then we look at their readiness in terms of education and skills, followed by their involvement in earning activities. Then we look the status of their perceived freedom of choice. Finally, we analyse their political outlook.

Nationality and religion were the top two identities of the youth. Female and less-educated, poorer youth were more likely to choose religious identity. Other than education (those who chose religious identity were less educated and had more madrasa education, on average), we did not find any association of identities with the other aspects of the youth.

Ensuring bright future for the children and asset accumulation are two most important life-goals for the poorer youth with limited education. For the richer, educated youth, it is quality education, government job and establishing their own business. For the female youth, ensuring children's bright future is most important; for the male youth, it is getting a government job. Overwhelming majority of the students, both male and female, mentioned government job. Almost no one mentioned any other type of job.

Though very few youths have no formal education, very few also have higher education – seven percent male and four percent female youth. Only 14% overall have any kind of vocational education. Very few youths are confident about their English language and computer skills; female youth and youth with limited education are even less confident. Only 40% have access to internet; female and rural youth have much less access compared to male and urban youth. Only about a fifth believe that their education would help them get a job.

For male youth who are not students, engagement in earning activities is about 90% with education level HSC and below; it goes down considerably with higher education. For female youth, engagement in earning activities is lowest among those with education between class 5 and HSC, which is more than twice as much with those with higher education. Ninety-percent of the youth who are neither in Education, in Earning or in Training (NEET) are female.

About 20% of the youth, mostly male, are interested to work overseas and a third of them are actively planning. Even though their average education level, vocational training, English and computer skills are better than the overall rates, these are still quite low.

In terms of perceived freedom of choice, male youth reported enjoying consistently high freedom of choice across different domains: choosing educational institution, friends and occupation, moving freely and spending money. Female youth reported far lower levels of freedom in all these areas, particularly in choosing occupation, moving freely and spending money. Only 40% women reported freedom to move freely, half that of male youth.

The youth believe high-quality and job-oriented education are the two most important drivers of the country's development, followed by political issues such as stability and governance. And, the youth are primarily concerned about two issues – gender-based violence (e.g. child marriage, dowry, sexual harassment and rape) and drug issues (drug use and drug business).

As already described, we see a wide gap between male and female youth in all aspects – skills and education, income earning activities and freedom of choice. We also see a deep divide between poorer and richer youth. Youth from poorer socio-economic status have much lower level of skills – education including vocational training, English and computer skills. Even if poorer youth are interested to migrate, they are much less likely to actively plan for migration and have much lower levels of skills. They have much lower access to internet. Their goals and aspirations are also not related to personal development. All these indicate an existence of a strong poverty trap.

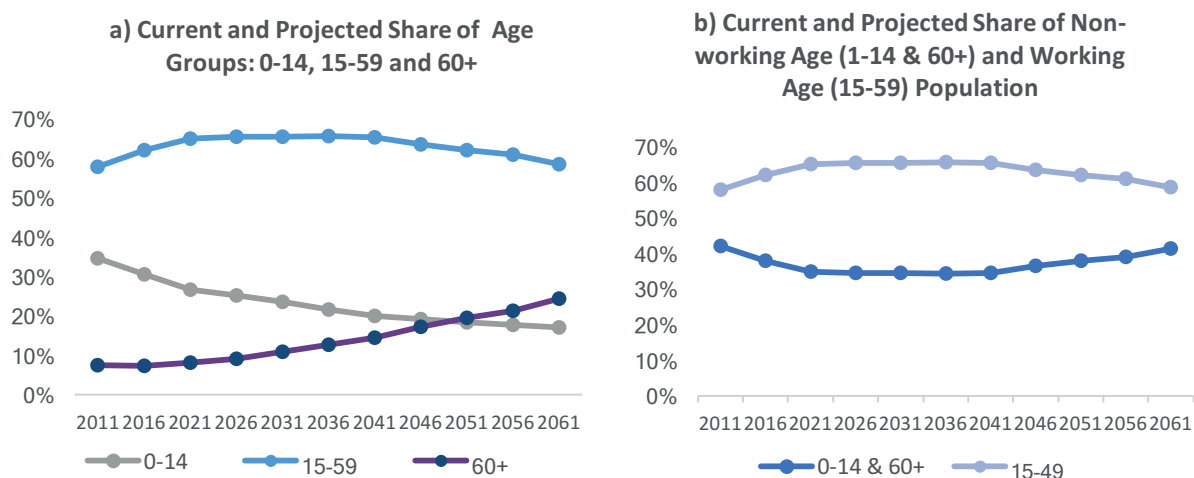
Most of the youth do not believe that they can be actively involved in different aspects of development – education, employment and overall development. Those who believe they can, do not have a clear idea about how they can be involved.

Our assessment is that the youth of Bangladesh are far from ready to take the opportunities offered by the 21st century and their potential remains vastly unrealised. This is especially true for female youth and youth from poor socio-economic background.

Finally, we see a deep polarisation in the political optimism of the youth. Majority of the youth are Pure Optimists, who believe both current and future political situation to be good or very good. About a third, are Pure Pessimists, who believe the complete opposite. very few youths are in-between. This indicates that our youth may not be able to take a critical and constructive approach in analysing the ongoing socio-political issues of the country. It may also be an indicator of a more divided society in future, which we do not want. So, further research on the political thought process of the youth, what shapes their thoughts and how it is manifested in their behaviour, would provide valuable insights.

Introduction: why youth survey

One-third of Bangladeshis are youth between 15 and 35 years.¹ The reason of this bulging young population is the change in the fertility rate. Fertility rate was very high in Bangladesh prior to 1980s that started plummeting since then. This trend has been causing a steady decline in the proportion of population below 15 and an increase in the proportion of population above 15 (Figure 1 a). This trend has given rise to our demographic dividend (Figure 1 b), which means we have more people of working age (15-59) than non-working, a phenomenon that can fuel economic growth.



Source: Population Projection of Bangladesh - Dynamics and Trends 2011-2061, BBS

Figure 1: a) Current and Projected Share of Age Groups: 0-14, 15-59 and 60+, b) Current and Projected Share of Non-working Age (1-14 & 60+) and Working Age (15-59) Population

Indeed, there is a positive correlation between economic growth and the size of working age population.^{2,3} But whether a country can take advantage of the demographic dividend depends on the effectiveness of the social, economic and political institutions in place and the types of policies taken.⁴

Countries such as Thailand, South Korea and Ireland managed to accelerate economic growth by investing heavily in education, incentivising foreign investment and domestic industries and creating right conditions for businesses while going through this crucial phase of demographic transition.⁵

But many countries are struggling to use their demographic dividend. The Commonwealth measures a Global Youth Development Index (YDI) using 18 indicators across five domains: education, health and well-being, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation. Most worse performing countries in YDI 2016 also have a large young population⁶, which means that these countries are unable to use their demographic dividend. Bangladesh is also one of the worst performing countries as per YDI, with a large share of young population. It is noteworthy, most of the worst performers in YDI 2016 are also struggling economically.⁷

But demographic dividend seems to be a one-time opportunity. In many of the countries that once took advantage of demographic dividend – Japan, a glaring example – high life-expectancy resulting from growth is already shrinking the share of young population and, consequently, growth. In Bangladesh too, increasing life expectancy, in commensurate with economic growth, is also increasing the share of 60+ population (Figure 1 a). This will eventually reduce the share of working age population, closing this one-time window of opportunity, as can be seen from Figure 1 b. We must make the most of demographic dividend for as long as it lasts.

So, youth issues have rightly become central amongst development actors. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledge youth as one of the key target groups. Several SDGs have specific targets for youth development, such as relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (SDG 4.4) and full and productive employment and decent work (SDG 8.5). Bangladesh government is committed to develop the youth. The government wants to ensure the fulfilment of the youth potential and youth empowerment to develop a moral, humane and forward-looking youth, capable of boosting the prosperity and the glory of Bangladesh, as per the Bangladesh Youth Policy 2017.

But much of the discussion about youth in Bangladesh has been around sectoral interests and often limited to specific segments of the youth. There was no nationally representative and a more comprehensive survey of the youth, which is necessary to develop effective ways to unleash their power. So, BRAC initiated the Youth Survey to meet this gap. The first Youth Survey was conducted in 2011. In this report, we present the key findings of your second Youth Survey conducted in 2018.

Report structure

We first provide our survey methodology. We start our analysis by exploring the self-identities, role models, concerns and the life-goals of the youth, as these can affect the attitudes, motivations and actions of the youth. Then we look at how ready the youth are to take advantage of the opportunities of the 21st century; in this section, we look at their education including vocational education, their English and computer skills and their access to and use of internet. In the next section, we explore their involvement in economic activities including overseas employment. Then we explore to what extent the youth enjoy freedom of choice in different crucial aspects of life as freedom of choice is not just a human right but can also be an important motivating factor. Finally, we look at their civic and political ideas and engagement as youth are meant to be our future leaders. Finally, we synthesise our key findings.

Methodology

Sampling method

The survey followed multistage random sampling technique to collect necessary information from selected youths by dividing Bangladesh into five distinct regions. The regions are: North (Rangpur & Rajshahi divisions), South (Khulna & Barishal divisions), North-East (Sylhet division), South-East (Chattogram division) and Central (Dhaka & Mymensingh divisions).

Initially, from each region, we randomly selected 30 sub-districts (upazillas/thanas). Then, two unions/wards were randomly selected from each sub-district. And finally, one village/moholla from each selected union/ward was selected randomly. Fourteen youth (seven males, seven females) were surveyed in each selected village/moholla, following systematic random sampling technique.

In total, the survey covered 150 upazillas/thanas, 300 unions/wards and 300 villages/mohollas and 4,200 youth, distributed equally across the five regions (i.e. 840 youths from each region).

Consideration of the difference in the size of population across regions

It is worth noting that the overall distribution of youth is not equal in these five regions of Bangladesh. Given that the survey sample is equally distributed across the five regions, appropriate sample weight has been assigned during analysis while calculating pooled national estimates.

Consideration of the rural-urban population proportions

Even though we are additionally interested in exploring rural/urban differences, this has not been considered during sample calculation. But that should not be a problem. According to the 2011 census data, there are 544 upazillas in Bangladesh. So, the survey covered about 28% of these. Also, according to BBS, about 28% of Bangladesh's total population live in the urban areas (BBS 2016). Since ours is a nationally representative sample, we anticipated to have a nationally representative rural/urban breakdown of the sample as well, allowing us to explore differences in status/opinions of the rural/urban youth.

Socio-economic status of the youth

In the report, we report the socio-economic status of the youth in the following five categories: ultra-poor, poor, lower-middle class, middle-class, higher-middle class and rich. The respondents were asked to choose their socio-economic status from the five categories.

We also asked the youth about their household income and the number of household members. In Figure 2, we can see that there is a very strong correlation between their reported socio-economic status and their average per capita household income. As the reported per capita household income of the youth increases, reported status also improves from ultra-poor to rich.

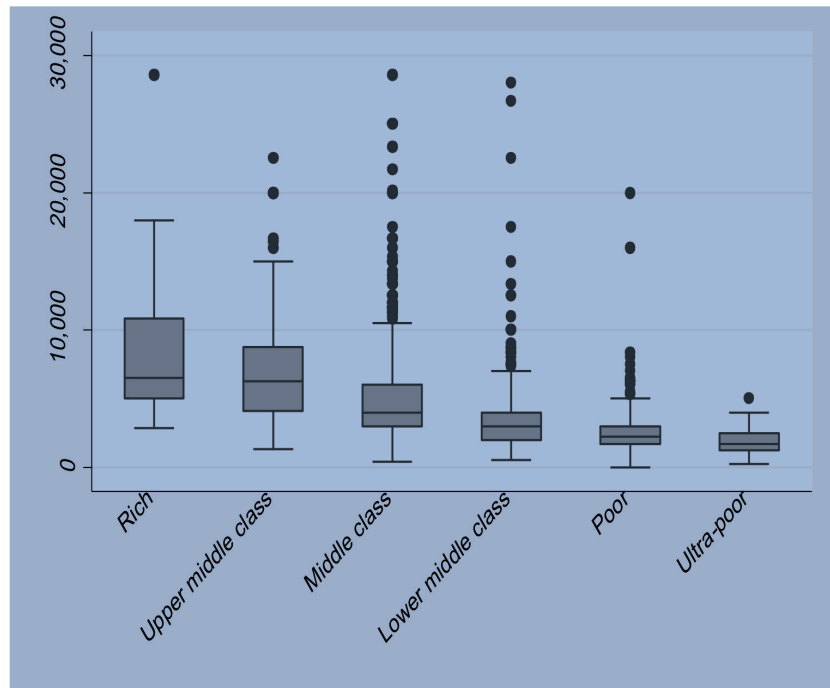


Figure 2: Boxplot of Per Capita Monthly Income by Reported Socioeconomic Status of the Youth

Also, 22% youth in our sample said that they are poor or ultra-poor, which is consistent with the findings of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016. In our analysis, we use the categories of socio-economic status reported by the youth.

The age range of the youth used in this survey

Various countries, organizations and institutions use different age ranges to define the youth. The National Youth Policy 2017 of Bangladesh defines youth as individuals aged 18-35 years, while the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics considers individuals aged 15-29 years as youth for its Bangladesh Labour Force Survey.^{viii} Looking outside Bangladesh, the United Nations identifies the youth as individuals aged 15-24 years. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also follows the same age range to define the youth. There are many other agencies/institutions that define the age range of the youth slightly differently. For example, the European Union refer to individuals aged 15-29 years as youth, while the age range used by the African Union is 15-35 years.^{ix} To make our age-based definition of the youth for the Youth Survey 2018 all-inclusive, we decided to define youth as individuals aged 15-35 years.

Profile of surveyed youth: snapshot

Gender Distribution



Figure 3: Gender Distribution

Age Distribution

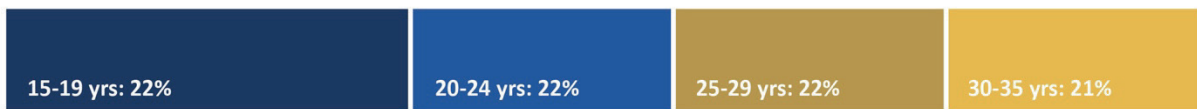


Figure 4: Age Distribution

Regional Distribution



Figure 5: Regional Distribution

Self-reported socio-economic status of the surveyed youth

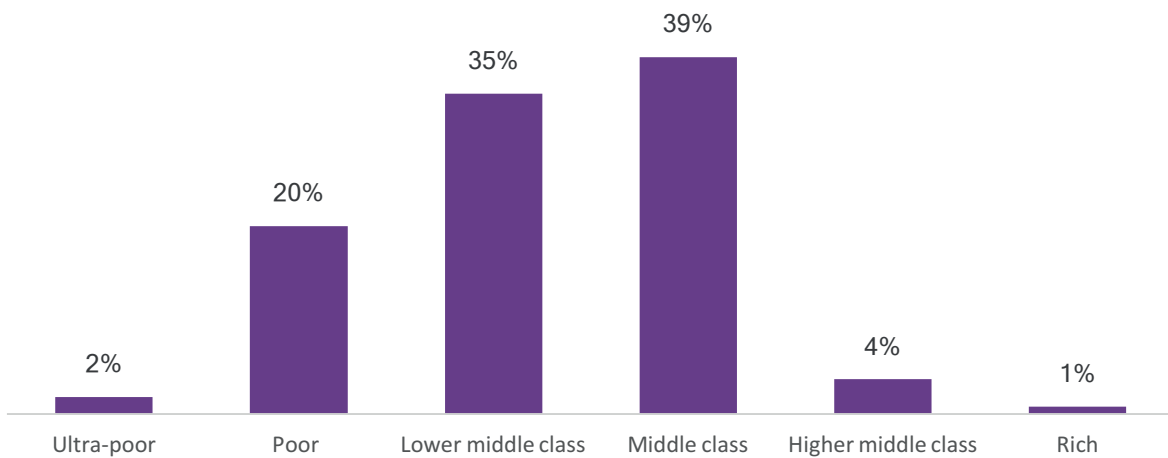


Figure 6: Self-reported socio-economic status of the youth

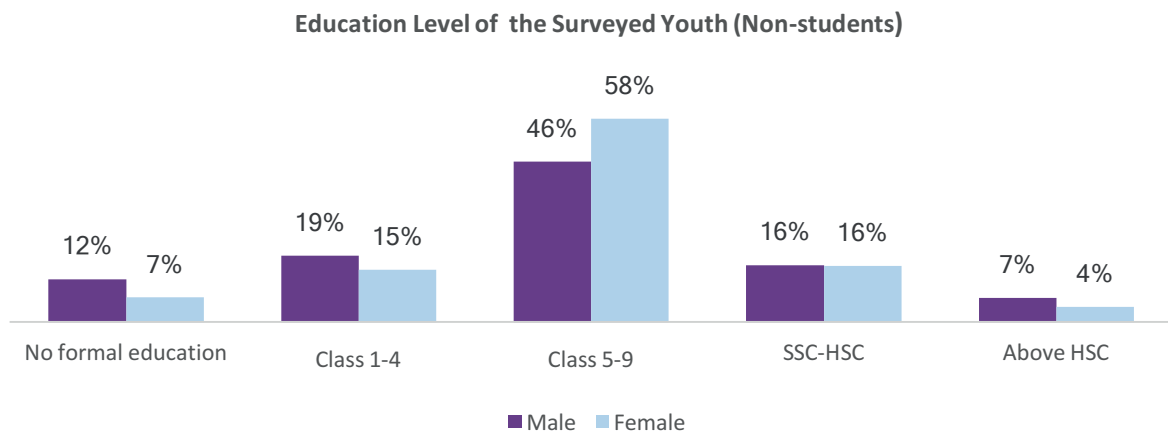


Figure 7: Level of Education of the Youth

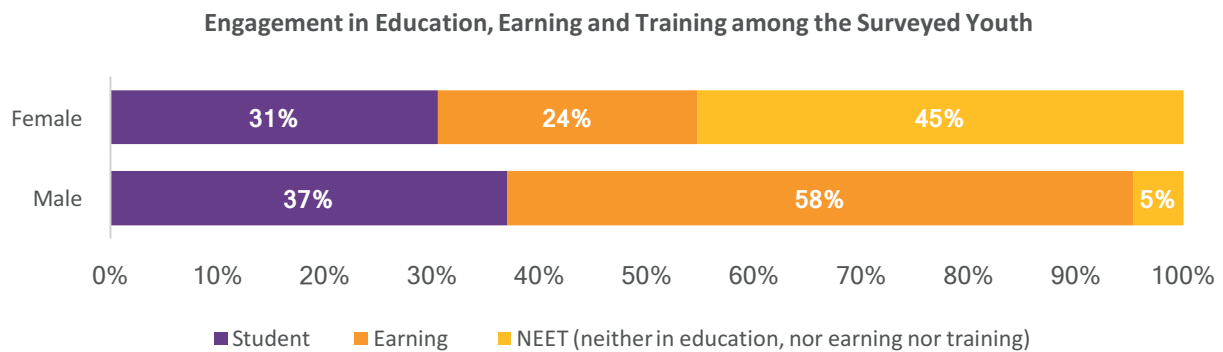


Figure 8: Engagement of Youth in Economic Activities

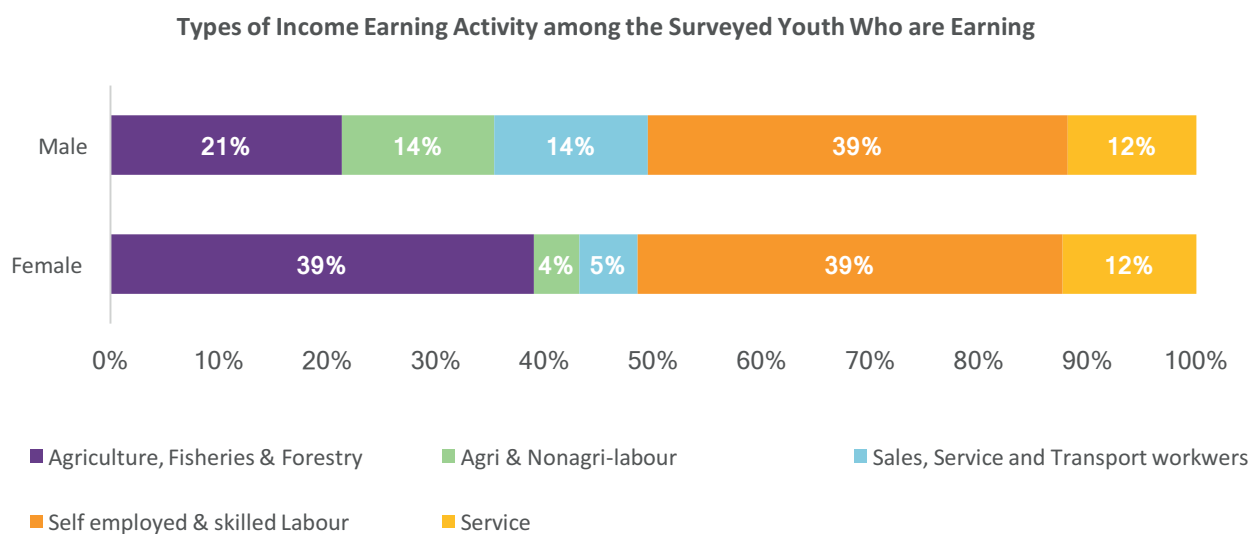


Figure 9: Types of Earning Activities among those who are Earning

Self-identity and aspirations of the youth

Self-identity

Self-identities reflect the ‘salient and enduring aspects of one’s self-perception’¹⁰. It defines who someone is, was and want to become, and it is ‘used to make sense of the world, focus attention on one’s goals, and protect one’s sense of basic worth’.¹¹ Studies have shown that self-identities are correlated with behavioural intentions¹² as well as actual behaviour¹³. Thus, identifying the predominant self-identities of the youth is useful for understanding their motivations, attitude and behaviours.

A dominant aspect of self-identity is the label people attach to themselves based on their socio-cultural, philosophical or spiritual experience. During the survey, we asked ‘**How do you most prefer to identify yourself?**’.

Nationality and religion are the top two self-identities preferred by the youth. Overall, close to half of the youth (47%), both male and female, chose nationality as their predominant self-identity. Religion was chosen by 20% of the youth. 14% chose educational qualification and 10% chose occupation. In a recent survey on the youth, Bangla Tribune had very similar findings.¹⁴

Gender and self-identity: There are some notable gender differences. 17% young men chose religious identity, but close to a quarter of the young women did. Compared to young men, young women were more likely to choose gender and less likely to choose occupation and educational attainments as their identity, as we see in **Figure 10**.

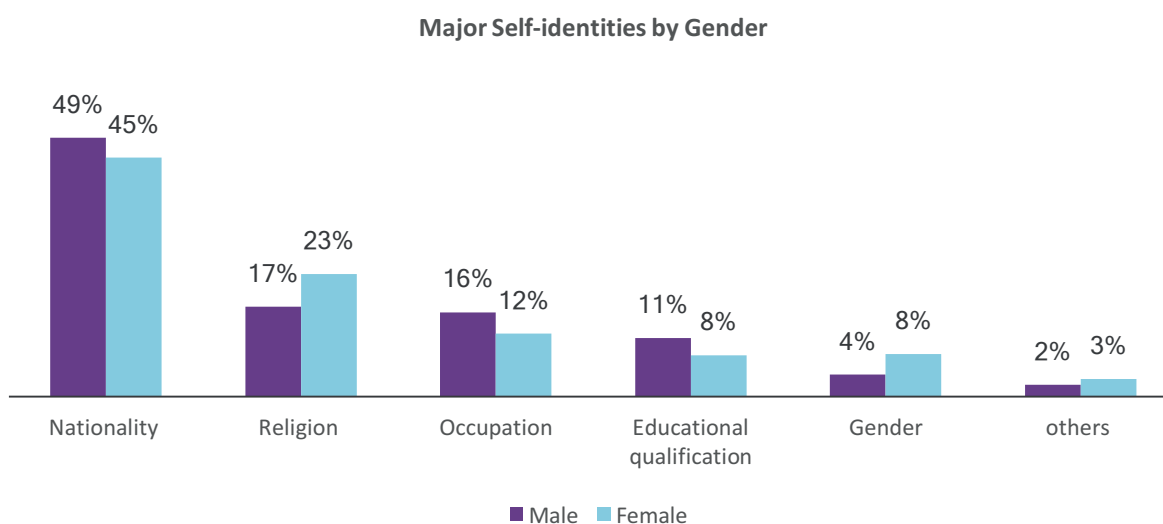


Figure 10: Major Self-identities by Gender

Age and self-identity: We find that nationality as a predominant self-identity is consistent across age groups. But religion as a preferred identity increases with the age of the youth.

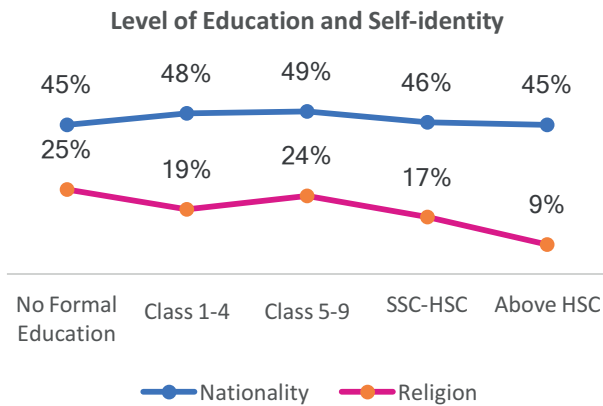


Figure 11: Levels of Education and Self-identity

poorer youth compared to the richer. Not surprisingly, we see a more diverse pattern of preferred self-identities among the richer youth, many of whom chose gender and educational qualification. These were mentioned by only a few youths from poorer backgrounds.

Gender, socio economic status and education, as we shall see below, remain to be persistently salient factors of difference for the youth in Bangladesh across most measures.

Self-identity by levels of education and socio-economic status: In Figure 11, we see that the choice of religious identity sharply declines after the SSC-HSC level. We also find that significantly larger share, 30% of those who studied in madrasas, also chose religion as their preferred identity.

When we look at self-identities by their socio-economic status, we see that ultra-poor youth are more likely to choose nationality as their dominant identity than any other group, almost twice as likely as their richest counterpart. The choice of religious identity is also higher among the

Who are the role models of the youth?

Role models, specially at a younger age, can shape the perceptions, motivations and behaviors of a person. Studies indicate that role models can influence a person's aspirations and motivation for education, their product choice¹⁵, self-efficacy, career choice,¹⁶ entrepreneurship¹⁷ and performance¹⁸. Or, in other words, role models can shape the self-identity of a person.

Youth with and without a Role Model

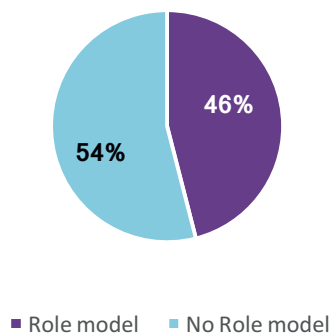


Figure 12: Youth with and without Role Models

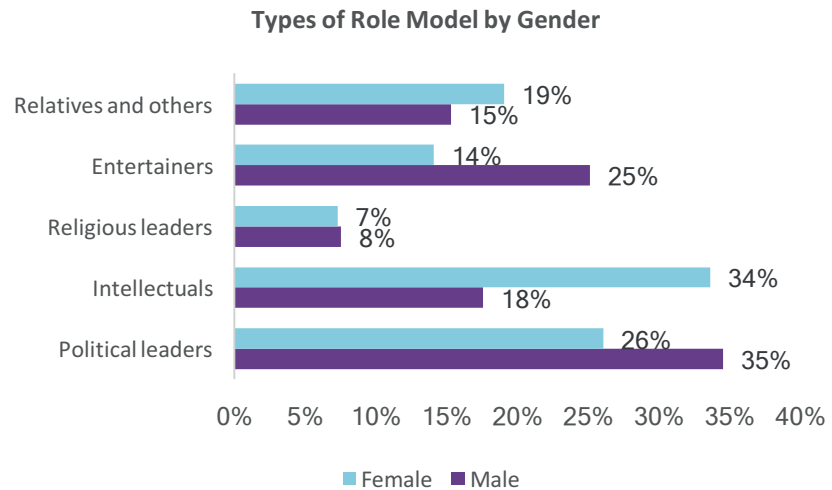
When asked to **name a person at national and international levels who they follow as a role model**, 54% of youth said that they have none. Only 46% overall mentioned a role model.

Young women are 13 percentage-point more likely to have reported not having a role model than the young men. Youth without a role model is more likely to be rural than urban. More than 70% youth with no formal or limited education (up to class four) could not mention a role model; the rate is 32% among the youth with education beyond HSC level.

Of those who have a role model, overall, about a third (31%) mentioned a political leader and a quarter (24%) mentioned intellectuals (e.g. writers, poets, philosophers and scientists). 17% mentioned relatives and friends and a small minority mentioned religious leaders.

Role model and gender:

From **Figure 13**, we see that there is a significant difference between male and female youth in their choice of role model. Male youth are about ten percentage-point more likely than female youth in choosing a political leader or entertainers, whereas female youth are almost twice as likely to choose intellectuals such as writers and scientists.



Role model, education level and socio-economic status:

Figure 13: Type of Role Model by Gender

From **Figure 14 a and 14 b**, we

see that with increasing education and socio-economic status, youth are more likely to choose intellectuals (e.g. writers and poets) and less likely to choose religious leaders. Compared to their educated, wealthier counterpart, significantly larger share of youth with limited or no education from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds chose religious leaders. Richer and more educated youth are also more likely to choose someone from friends and family as their role model. It means that these youths are more likely to have someone close that they can look up to, who can motivate and influence the youth. These youths are also more likely to be exposed to intellectuals, who may inspire them to pursue higher education and an intellectual career.

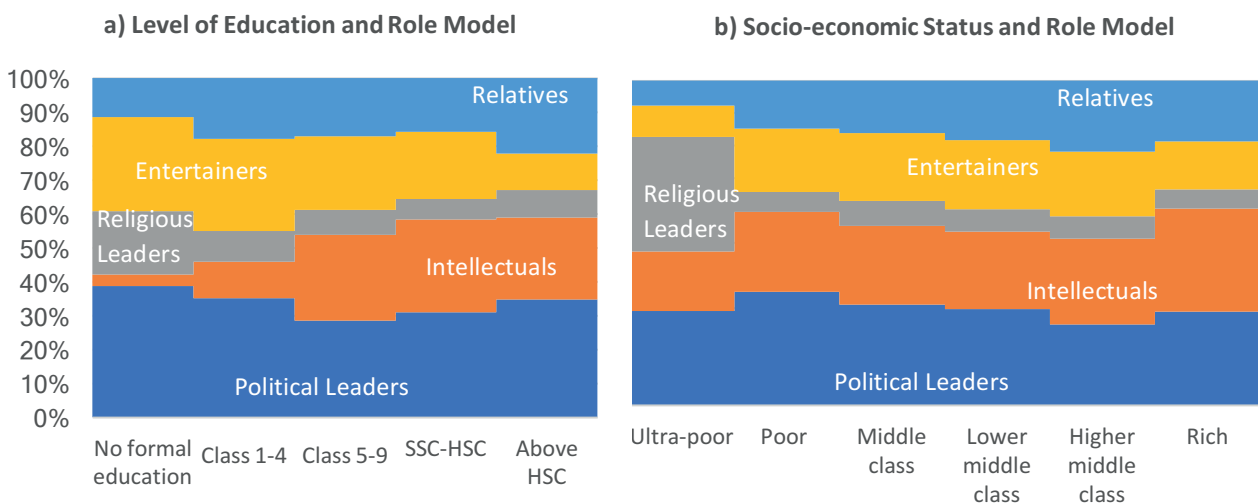


Figure 14: Types of Role Model by a) Level of Education, and, b) Socio-economic Status of the Youth

Life-goals and concerns of the youth

Life-goals are influenced by self-identities and role models are shaped by diverse socioeconomic factors such as age, gender, personality, experience, society and environment.¹⁹ 'Pursuit and attainment of life-goals affect the sense of wellbeing.'²⁰ So, we were interested to learn about the life-goals of the youth. We asked, "**Among the different things that you want to achieve in life, what is the single most important one?**". As this was an open-ended question, the range of responses were quite large; however, some goals emerged as dominant among the youth: ensuring a bright future for the children followed by securing a government job, attaining higher education and accumulating assets.

It is worth noting that all the goals frequently mentioned by the youth in Bangladesh are extrinsic or material. Ensuring a bright future was mentioned by 29% of the youth. Getting a government job and higher education, both were mentioned by 18% and asset accumulation was mentioned by another 14% of the youth. Only nine percent mentioned owning their own business. Nine percent said that they do not think about their life-goals.

Overall, only about 9% of the youth we interviewed reported 'not thinking about their future' and this shows an interesting inverse-U pattern with the youth from the richest and the poorest background reporting the lowest on this, indicating both the survival pressure of the youth from the poorest households and the opportunities that the richest see in the future.

Studies indicate²¹, placing importance on extrinsic life-goals (e.g. wealth, job) as opposed to intrinsic goals (e.g. spiritual, personal relationship, health) lowers well-being and life-satisfaction. But most of these studies were done in developed country context and may not be relevant to poorer countries or poorer people as attaining some levels of material success is the prerequisite for ensuring basic human dignity²². Our findings suggest the youth of Bangladesh, in general, are overwhelmed by worldly concerns as shown in **figure 16 a**, which may partially explain the extrinsic nature of their life-goals. When asked to mention **three things that they are most concerned about considering their daily life**, the top most concerns mentioned by the youth also came out to be extrinsic – unemployment (27%), family welfare (26%), children's wellbeing (22%) and quality education (15%).

But it is worth noting, even among the richest youth, extrinsic goals and concerns remain prominent though there are differences in the specific types of goals chosen across socio-economic classes as discussed in a following section.

Gender difference in concerns and life goals of the youth

We observe a stark difference between young men and women in their life-goals and concerns about their daily life. Ensuring a bright future for their children is the most common goal among the young women. Most frequently, men mentioned getting a government job, closely followed by attaining higher education, acquiring asset and owning a business. These are important to women as well, but to a much lesser degree. 16% young men want to own a business, less than 2% women do.

Similarly, unemployment is high on the list of concerns for young men while children's wellbeing tops the list of young women's concern. 45% young women prioritise children's wellbeing, the rate is just 13% among young men.

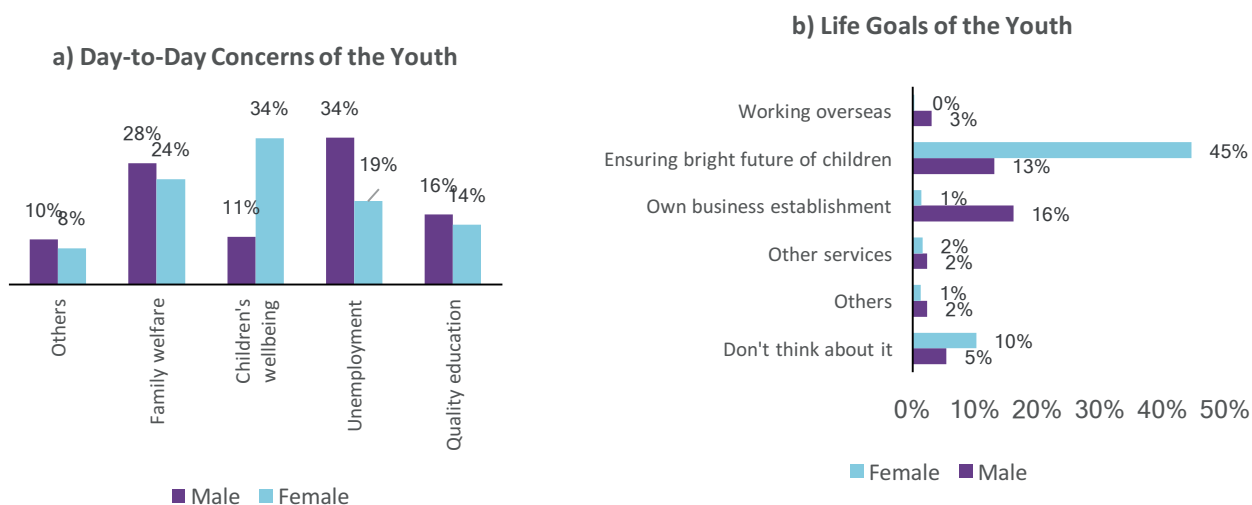


Figure 15 :a) Major Concerns, and, b) Life Goals of the Youth

Difference in life-goals and concerns between married and unmarried female youth: We looked at the concerns of life-goals of female youth by their marital status. Predictably, family and children's welfare are the two main concerns for married women, while unemployment and quality education are the concerns of the unmarried women.

Similarly, higher education and government jobs are the key life-goals for the unmarried female youth. Very few married females mentioned these two goals, their main goal is their children's bright future. This pattern is also true between married and unmarried men, but to a much lesser extent.

Difference in life-goals across female youth with different education levels: in Table 1, we see that life-goals of women change significantly with increasing education. Ensuring bright future of the children is the most prominent life goal for women with no or limited education. For women with SSC/HSC and higher level of education, government job and higher education becomes most prominent. Life-goals and Potential Poverty Trap

When we look at the life-goals of young men and women (Table 1) by their education level, we see that ensuring children's bright future is a major life-goal at education level below SSC. Beyond that, their top life-goals are replaced by higher education and the desire to land a government job.

Education Level/Life Goals	No Education		Formal Below SSC		SSC-HSC		Above HSC	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ensuring bright future of children	31%	45%	17%	57%	4%	23%	9%	21%
Asset accumulation	34%	28%	24%	11%	8%	3%	5%	0%
Government Job	1%	2%	12%	6%	33%	31%	42%	57%
Higher Education	6%	1%	13%	11%	33%	30%	20%	9%

Table 1: Life-goals of the Youth by Gender and Education

On the other hand, future of their children and asset accumulation, both are high priority among young men and women with no formal or limited education, while very few of them hope to get higher education or a government job. As youth with limited education are more likely to be from poorer socio-economic backgrounds (**Figure 16**), we also observe a similar pattern in the choice of life-goals between poorer and richer youth.

So, children's bright future and asset accumulation are understandably high on the agenda of poorer youth with limited education. On the other hand, life-goals such as higher education, government jobs and owning a business are prioritised by better-educated, richer youth. This pattern may indicate to a potential poverty trap. Uneducated or poorly-educated youth from lower socioeconomic background are likely to be overwhelmed by the immediate demands of life and unsure about their ability to attain lofty goals such as higher education and a well-paid job, and thus may not invest in their own skill development. In fact, a study by Abhijit Banarjee and Esther Duflo, in which they analysed the data on poverty from several countries, makes similar assertions.²³

For the poor, one of the most attainable pathways out of poverty may be to ensure a better future for their next generation. In the same study, Banarjee and Duflo showed that poorer people invest much less in education. But, even if they invest in their children's education, their future prospect may not be bright. It is well-established that the education that poorer children get is also of poorer quality, in general, creating a poverty trap.²⁴ On the other hand, richer youth can focus on maintaining and improving their high socio-economic status – indirectly through improving human capital and directly through obtaining high quality jobs and investing in own businesses. Their children are also more likely to get better quality education.

Life-goal of students – implication of overemphasis on government service

Only among the current students, obtaining higher education and getting a government job are the two most common life-goals, irrespective of gender. It is reasonable for students to aim for higher education or employment. But what is interesting, almost everyone who mentioned employment referred to a government job. While a government job has always had a special appeal because of job-security and other benefits, recent revisions in the salary of the government employees have made these jobs more desirable, and consequently, more competitive.

Though government must attract young talents by offering competitive compensation, overwhelming emphasis on government jobs can be detrimental. Maximum age restriction to applying for government jobs means that students often start preparing for the entry examinations of government jobs long before they complete their regular study. As the number of youths vying for the limited number of government jobs is increasing, majority of them are unlikely to be successful. But, without proper education and other skill development, which may result from investing time to prepare for government jobs while they are studying, they are likely to be ill-prepared for other types of occupations and even to perform the duties while they are in the government.

Preparedness for life ahead

Bangladesh has not yet been able to capitalise on the demographic dividend; more than a fifth of employed labour force in Bangladesh have no education and the share of employed labour force with secondary education and beyond is only 36.7%.²⁵ Yet, an analysis using data from 1980 to 2014, both labour force participation and increase in labour productivity had a significant impact on the Total Factor Productivity and economic growth since the 1980s.²⁶ The same study argues, after achieving middle-income status, many countries fail to move further as they do not have technical and managerial capacities needed for a high-performing economy; so to avoid falling into this 'middle-income trap', Bangladesh needs to invest heavily in education for developing necessary skills and expertise.

Education

As mentioned earlier, poorer children are less likely to have quality education compared to their richer counterpart. But proper education is also the foundation to achieving higher level skills, higher productivity and eventually employment offering better pay. We find that only a few youths (six percent) have no formal education but a vast majority (57%), both male and female youth, are stuck with education below SSC level. Thirty-eight percent youth overall have education levels SSC and higher. Only about five percent of the youth have higher education (above HSC). If we consider the youth aged 25 and above, the rate is nine percent; nationally about the same rate of 25+ people have higher education.²⁷

Gender, early marriage and education: We find a clear difference between male and female youths who are non-students. While female youths are ahead of the male youth up to class nine, they are no more likely than the male youths to complete SSC and HSC. Very few young men (7%) study beyond HSC level but this rate is even lower (four percent) among young women.

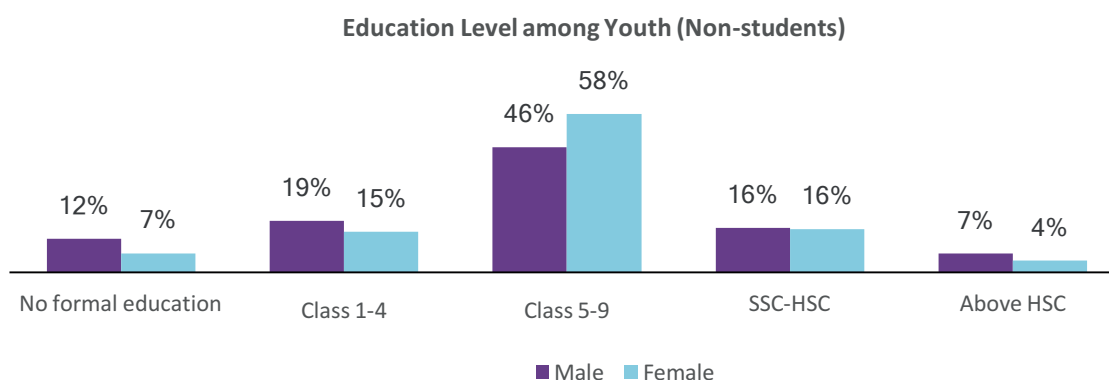


Figure 16: Level of Education among the Youth who are not Student

As female students are provided with financial incentives (e.g. stipend) as well as free education up to HSC level, we see that their completion rates are better or at par with the male youth. Lack of incentive after HSC may be a reason for lower rate of education beyond HSC among the female youth. Early marriage may be another potential reason as women may stop studying after getting married. We see that 62% of the married female youth were married before turning 18 and less than one percent of them studied beyond HSC level. Indeed, a large-scale experiment in Bangladesh suggests that there is a correlation between age of marriage and the level of education.²⁸

Education and socio-economic status: We find a clear pattern in the level of education across socio-economic classes. Level of education increases with higher socio-economic status. Whereas a few ultra-poor and poor studied beyond class nine and many are uneducated, among the richer counterpart, education below the primary level is almost non-existent and the concentration of higher education above HSC is the highest. As discussed earlier, low education levels among the poorest may result in a poverty trap.

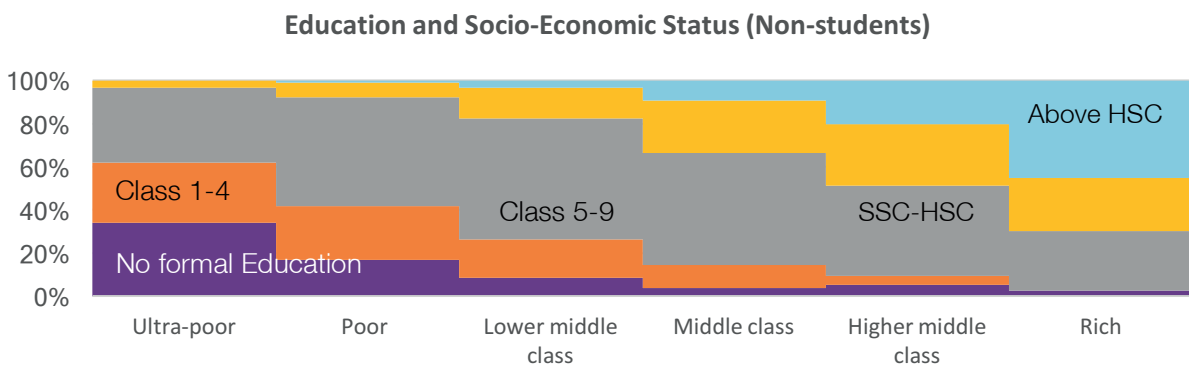


Figure 17: Socio-economic Status and the Level of Education among Youth (non-Student)

Level of education and self-identities

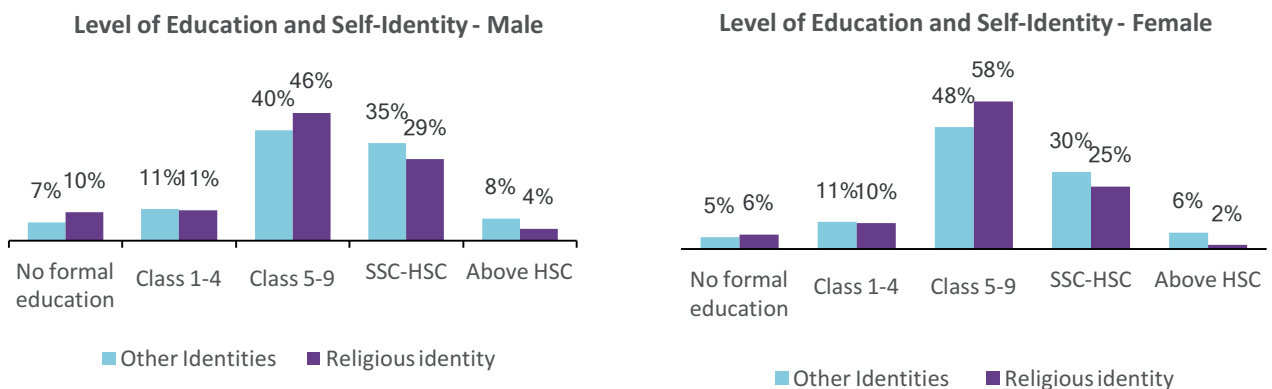


Figure 18: Level of Education and Self-Identity, Male and Female Youth

We find that there is a correlation between the identities the youth chose and their level of education. Youth, both male and female, who chose religion as their preferred identity are less likely to have

higher education, SSC-HSC and beyond, compared to those who chose other identities. The rate of education beyond HSC is twice as high among young men and three times as high among young women who chose other identities compared to those who chose religious identity. In fact, another study on the opinion about the role of religious leaders in political governance process, education was found to be negatively associated with the support for religious leaders.²⁹ Our findings are also in similar line.

Religious education by socio-economic status and by self-identities

Overall, less than 6% youth report having religious (madrasa) education with no significant difference between male and female youth. But 11% ultra-poor have religious education, almost four times higher than their richest counterpart. In addition to that, rural youth are more than twice as likely to have religious education compared to the urban youth.

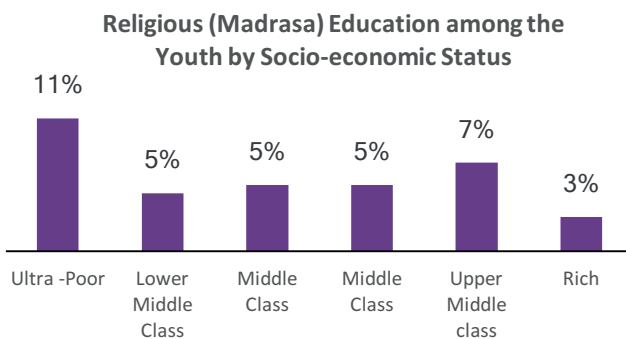


Figure 19: Religious Education by Socio-economic Status

We also find that those who mentioned religion as their preferred identity are almost twice as likely (nine percent) to have religious education compared to those who mentioned other identities (five percent).

Vocational education

Attitude towards vocational education

As the country is moving away from primarily agricultural to manufacturing and service economy, vocational training for the youth has emerged as a viable strategy for creating a productive labour pool for these sectors. But there is a general apathy for vocational education in Bangladesh; often it is believed to be meant for the poor or those with poor academic records. For example, in our survey we find that almost a quarter of the respondents believe that vocational training is for uneducated people. In fact, larger share of people with no or limited education and from poorer background believe so (Figure 20).

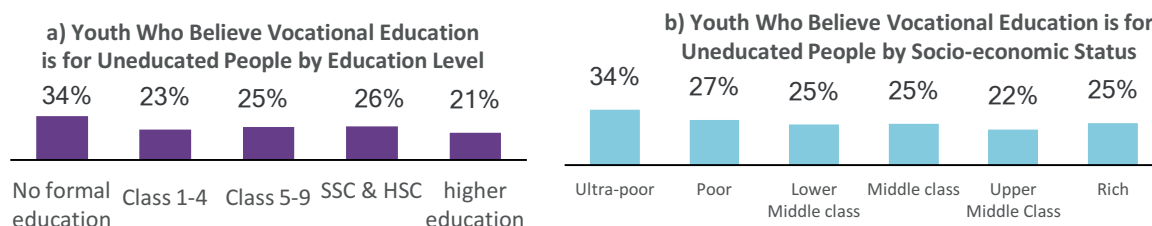


Figure 20: Youth Who Believe Vocational Training is for Uneducated People by a) Education Level and, b) Socio-economic Status

Although, we find that much fewer youths, less than 10% on average, agreed with the statement that vocational training is disgraceful. But, among certain groups, this belief is more widespread, for example, 12% youth with no formal education and 23% from the richest socio-economic background.

Government and non-government agencies are taking large-scale programmes such as Skills for Employment Program (SEIP) to promote vocational education among the youth. And there is some success. For example, BRAC's skills development program equipped almost 34,000 people with skills of whom 95% secured jobs after graduation.³⁰ Yet, it is just a start.

Who receive vocational education?

In our survey, only about 14% reported receiving some type of vocational training, indicating that it is not yet popular among the youth. Gender and locational differences are both quite small in this regard. A 2011 survey found the proportion of youths receiving vocational training to be only 7%,³¹ which indicates that the situation is getting better, albeit slowly.

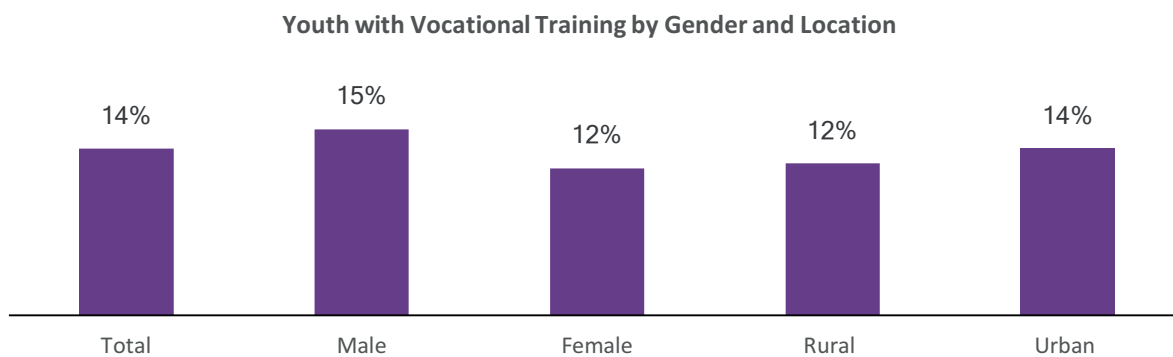


Figure 21: Youth with Vocational Training by Gender and Location

Among current students, 16% reported receiving vocational training. Youth with higher levels of education are more likely to receive vocational training than their counterparts with no or lower levels of education (Figure 22 a). Less than 5% of those with no or below primary education received

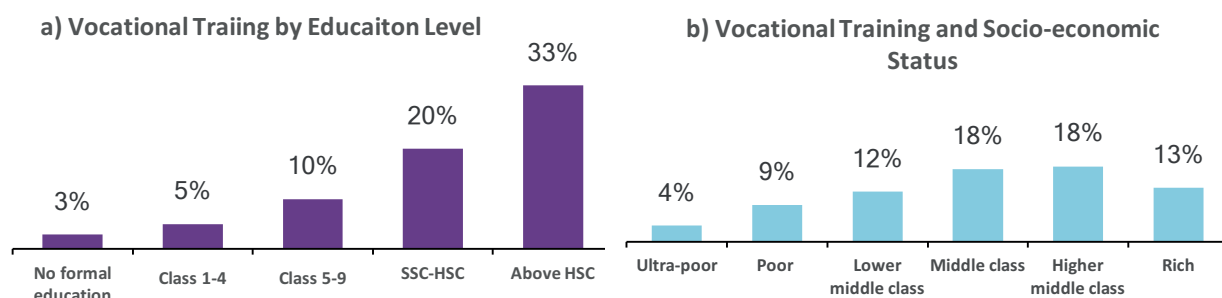


Figure 22: Vocational training by a) Education Level and b) Socio-economic Status

training compared to a third among those with education level HSC and above. It is also positively correlated to the socioeconomic status of the youth (Figure 22 b).

Though youth with no formal education and from ultra-poor and poor backgrounds are more likely to have a negative attitude towards vocational training, it is not possible to ascertain whether this attitude is responsible for their low participation rate in vocational education.

We know that most formal vocational trainings are offered only to individuals with at least SSC/HSC degrees. But this affect the poor and ultra-poor who are far less educated than the richer youth. So, very few of them get a chance to have vocational training.

It is true that educated youth may better grasp and retain the training lessons but it is important to come up with innovative policies for better inclusion, particularly those with limited education from lower economic backgrounds to offer them an avenue out of poverty. For example, BRAC is offering technical skill training to the ultra-poor along with soft loans, business grant and mentoring support.³² Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds might be restricted to some extent by the costs associated with receiving vocational training. If that is in fact the case, subsidising the costs, at least partially, might increase their likelihood to receive vocational training.

English language and computer skills

While vocational skills are useful for developing a high-performing blue-collar workforce, English language and computer skills are crucial for transitioning from a middle-income to high-income country. Both these skills open the door of worldwide learning and skill development opportunities, through traditional and online methods, and are mandatory for high-skilled professions. So, we asked the youth to assess their English language and computer literacy skills.

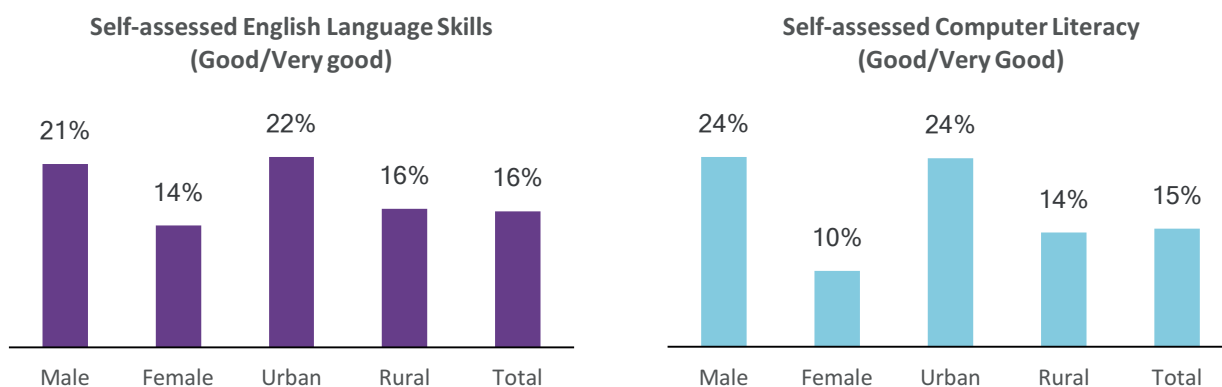


Figure 23: Self-assessed English Language and Computer Literacy Skill Level

The results are not encouraging. Overall, only about 15%-16% of the youth assessed their English language and computer skills as good or very good. Large gender and locational differences exist; male and urban youth are more likely to be satisfied with their English and computer skills. It is also worth noting that both gender and locational gaps are larger for computer skills than for English language skills.

Self-assessed English Language Skills and Computer Literacy Skills (Good/Very Good) by Socio-Economic Status

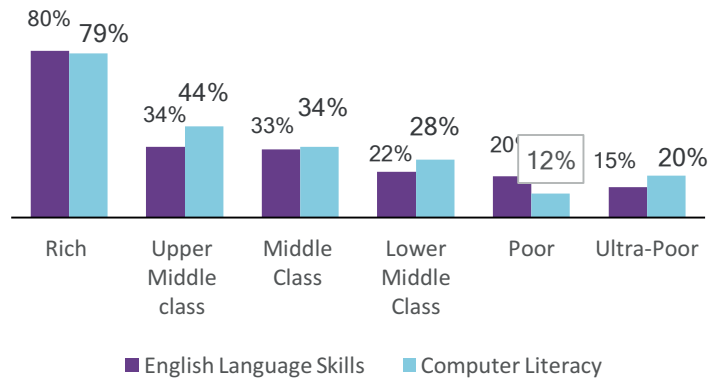


Figure 24: Self-assessed English Language Skills and Computer Literacy Skills (Good/Very Good) by Socio-Economic Status

English and computer skills by education and socio-economic status: Further analysis indicate that these two skills are also strongly and positively correlated with the youths' level of education and their socio-economic status, as expected (Figure 24).

Access to the worldwide web

To fulfil the vision of 'Digital Bangladesh', the government has been heavily investing in improving digital infrastructure and digitizing public services. So, it is worth investigating how integrated the youth are with the worldwide web. We find that 40% of the youth overall have access to internet. Earlier, we saw that only 15% youth are satisfied with their computer literacy. But access to internet may happen through smart phone with no or limited exposure to computer.

We also see clear differences across, gender and location. Less than a quarter of the young women use internet; the rate is 56% among the young men. Significantly smaller share of rural youth use internet compared to their urban counterpart.

Access to Internet by Gender and Location

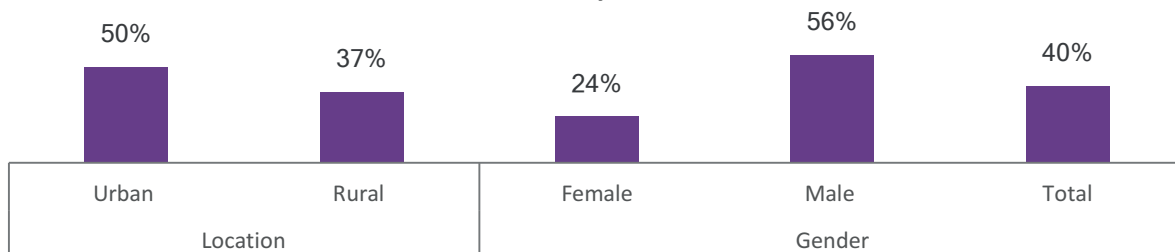


Figure 25: Access to Internet by Gender and Location

Internet access by education and socio-economic status: Access to internet is many times greater among the educated and wealthier youth compared to their less educated and poorer counterpart. Improving IT infrastructure in rural areas may close the gap between the rural and urban youth. But improving access among women and the youth with limited education and from poorer socio-economic backgrounds may be more challenging. But it is necessary to create equal access to internet for equitable growth.

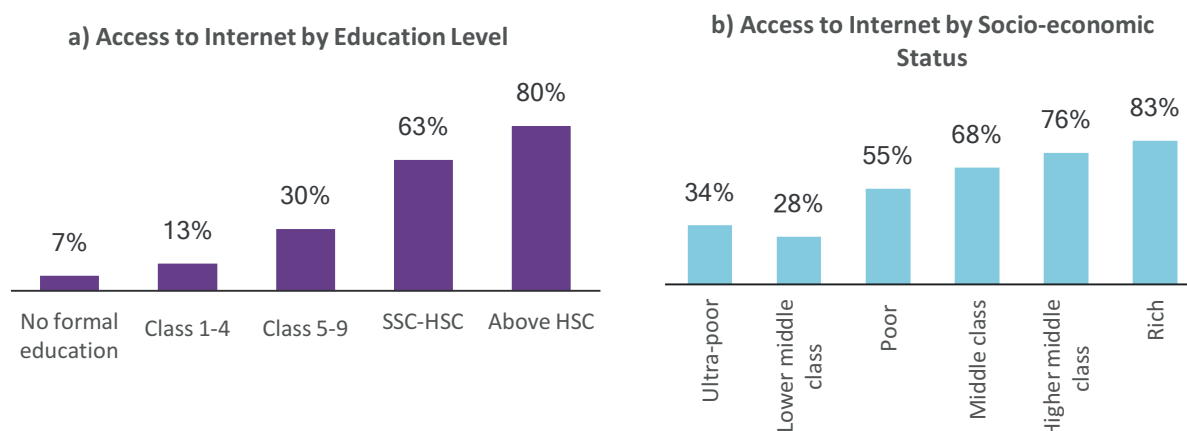


Figure 26: Access to Internet by a) Education Level, and b) Socio-economic Status

Purpose of using internet

We also asked the youth about their purpose of using internet. While the most common purposes of using internet for male youths were entertainment, followed by education and information, for females, this was education, followed by entertainment and communication.

There is an indication that youth with higher levels of education and from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to use internet for educational purposes, while those with no or lower levels of education and lower socio-economic backgrounds mainly use it for entertainment and communication purposes.

However, self-reported information on such topics should be interpreted with care as social acceptance of internet usage widely varies by the type of usage (e.g. education, entertainment).

Youth and social media

About 90% of the youth using internet use social media and there is no difference between men and women or across education levels or socio-economic classes. But the use of social media as a platform for income generation (e.g. small business) is almost non-existent among the surveyed youth, though using social media for business and freelancing has enormous potential. Even though many social-media, particularly Facebook-based businesses are emerging in recent years, there is no study on the size of the businesses or the number of people employed.

But how much do the youth trust the information they get from social media?³³ Only 30% and 28% of the male and female youths, 35% urban and 31% rural youth, respectively reported that they trust the information from social media. On average, about 71% of the surveyed youth do not trust information obtained from social media. A recent study conducted in Asia, Africa and DIRSI (Latin America) cited that 66% of Bangladeshi citizens aged 15-65 years do not trust social media information³⁴, which is consistent with our findings.

Further analysis reveals that older youths are even less likely to trust such information than younger youths. But there is no difference in their trust level based in education or socio-economic status.

Perceived preparedness of the youth

Preparedness to achieve life goals

Most surveyed youth seem to know their desired life-goals; but are they prepared for these goals or their life ahead? We asked the youth, “**How prepared do you think you are to achieve the life-goal you mentioned?**”. The responses were coded as very poor/poor/well/very well. Overall, 60% of the youth, both male and female, consider themselves very well or at least well prepared for achieving their goals.

Gender and preparedness: We do not see much difference between male and female youth in their perceived preparedness. Lack of gender difference in this case may seem surprising. But this may result from lower expectations or goals of female youth to start with. However, only case of substantial gender difference exists for those with no formal education; while half of the male with no formal education considered themselves prepared or well-prepared, only a quarter of their female counterpart reported the same.

Education, socio-economic status and preparedness: Preparedness of the youth seems to be positively correlated with their socio-economic status. As level of education is also strongly correlated with socio-economic status, poorer and less-educated youth are much less likely to feel prepared to achieve their life-goals compared to their educated, wealthier counterpart, which is not unsurprising.

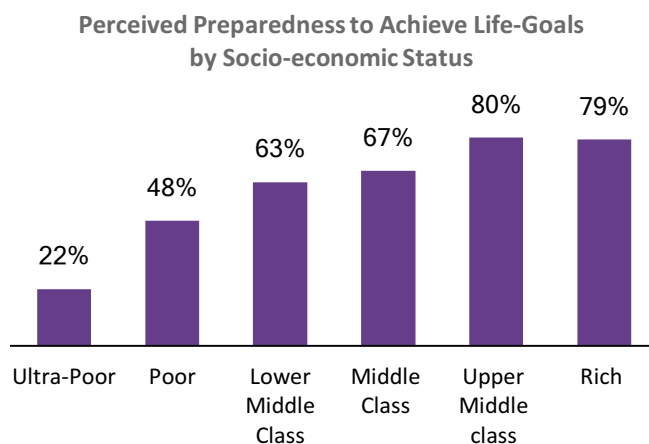


Figure 27: Perceived Preparedness to Achieve Life-Goals by Socio-economic Status

Is education helpful to have a job?

According to popular belief, education system in Bangladesh does not adequately equip students for employment. So, we asked the youth whether they **think their education (received/receiving) would help them get a job?**

Overall, only 22% youth who have some level of education but are not students answered in affirmative.

Gender disaggregated results shows that only about 22% young men and 17% young women believed in the efficacy of their education. It means that 78% young men and 83% young women do not trust the quality and relevance of the education they are receiving.

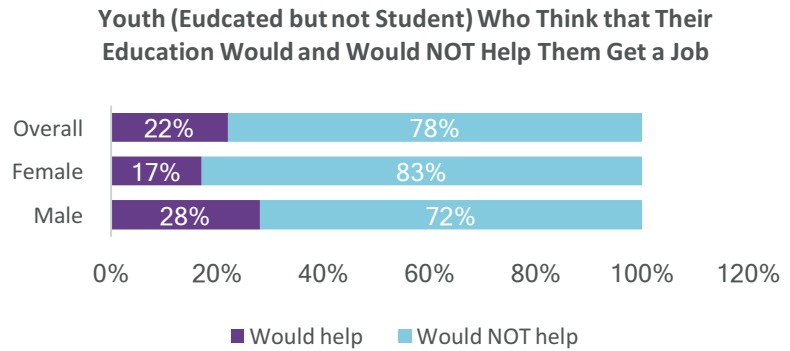


Figure 29: Youth (educated but not student) who think that their education would and would NOT help them get a job

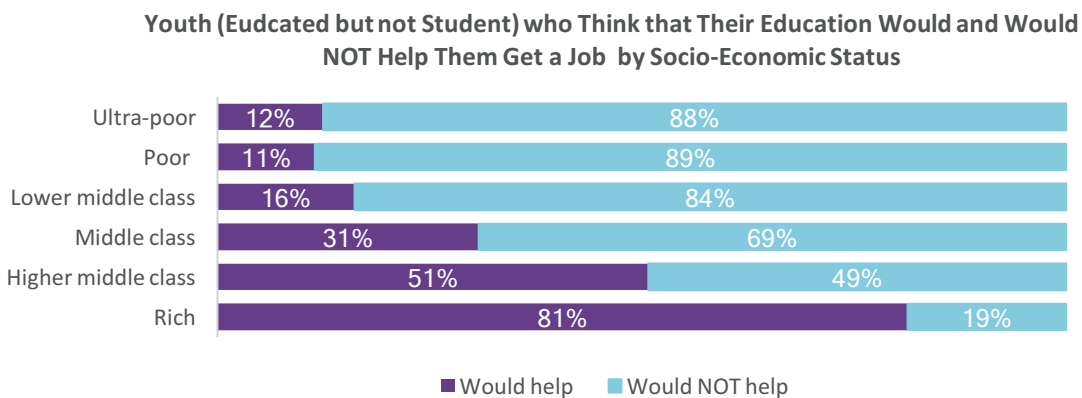


Figure 30: Youth (Educated but not Student) who Think that Their Education Would and Would NOT Help Them Get a Job by Socio-Economic Status

When we look at the belief in the perceived effectiveness of education by the socio-economic status, we see an extremely strong correlation. In contrast to their richer counterpart, as poorer youth are also more likely to have lower quality, lower-level education, the pattern is understandable.

Youth engagement in the economy

Income earning activities of the youth

We looked at the rates of engagement with any kind of earning activity; we did not attempt to find the unemployment rate among the youth. So, our data will not be comparable with the findings on unemployment in other surveys. We wanted to look at the extent of youth engagement in the economy.

In the following table, we can see that a quarter of the youth are in the NEET category, which means that they are neither in education, nor earning, nor trained (vocational education).

Table 2: Education and Income Earning Status of the Youth

Education and Income Earning Status of the Youth	% of Youth
Students (including Vocational Training)	34%
Students who are Earning	5%
Earning Youth who are not Student	36%
Neither Student, nor Earning nor Trained (Vocational) - NEET	25%

34% of our surveyed youth are students, and of them, 15% are involved in income-earning activities. The rate is 17% and 12% respectively among male and female students. 61% of the youth are not students. Of them, 68% of those with no formal education are involved in income earning activities; the rate is lower among youth with at least some education, 55%.

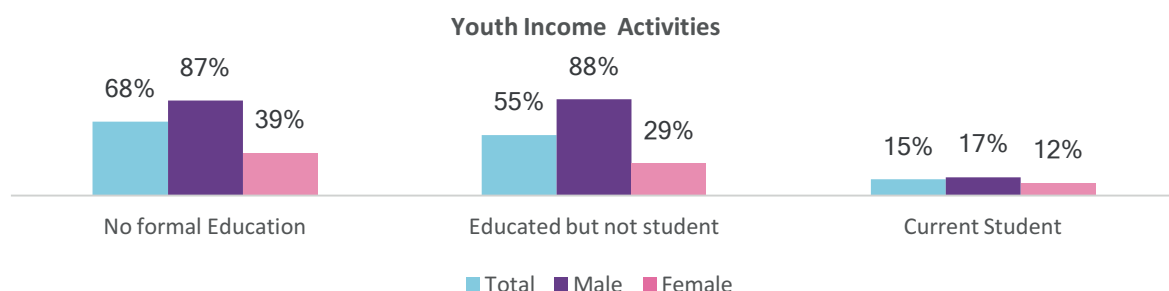


Figure 31: Youth Income Activities

Gender, education, and earning activity: When we look at the gender desegregated earning status across different levels of education (among those who are not students), we see several patterns. First, female youth are far behind their male counterpart in their engagement in earning activities.

Who are the NEET youths? We find that most of them are from lower economic status, predictably. We also find that 91% of them are female. Of the female NEET, 93% are married and 92% are engaged in doing household chores.

Second, women with education levels between primary and HSC have the lowest rate of earning activities among all other groups. Beyond HSC level, female involvement in earning activities catches up with that of male involvement, even though it is still nine percentage point lower.

What is worrisome, earning activity among the male youth with education beyond HSC level is at least 15% lower than male youth with lower levels of education. This is consistent with the findings from national surveys by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics; youth with higher education are struggling the most.³⁵ There is an indication that one of the main causes of such a trend may be the gap in skills demanded and offered by higher education and training institute.³⁶

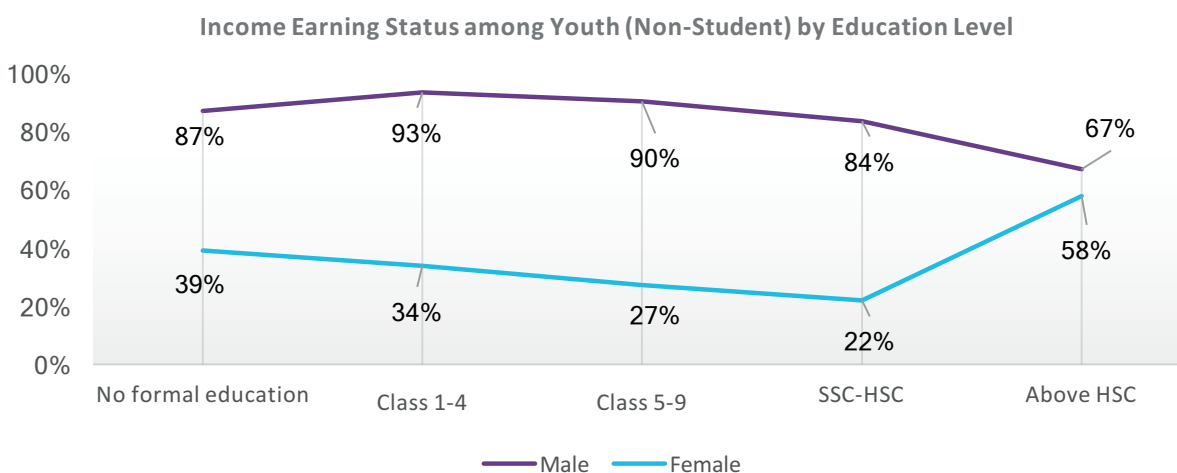
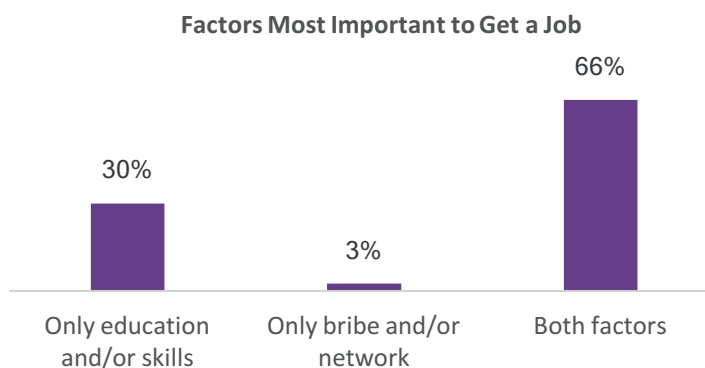


Figure 32: Income Earning Status among Youth (Non-Student) by Education Level

For women, it follows a somewhat predictable pattern, higher employment with higher education above HSC. However, we have seen that only 4% women have education beyond HSC. There is also an indication that many women get married and drop off the labour market. So, it is possible women who study beyond HSC are much more selective (e.g. with good educational record, higher socio-economic background)

We asked the youth (Non-students and students who work), **what are the things that are most important in getting a job.** This was a multiple-choice question. Most of them agreed that educational qualification is important and more than a third also mentioned technical skills. As we saw earlier, very few youths believe that their education will be helpful in getting a job, which seems contradictory.



But, further analysis shows that only 30% said only education

Figure 33: Factors Most Important to Get a Job

and/or skills are important; two-thirds said they need both education/skills and good network or bribing to get a job. This may partially explain their contradictory view stated above – they may believe that education is important but not without a network or bribing.

When asked “How do you think the employment situation will change in the next 10 years?”, majority of the youths (59%-68%), irrespective of gender, location, level of education, employment status, believed that the situation will get more difficult. Results disaggregated by the youths’ level of education indicated that those with higher levels of education were more likely to think that the employment situation will get more difficult.

Overseas employment and the youth

Overseas employment is one of the most important contributors to our economic growth and youth employment. By 2015, the number of Bangladeshi migrant workers reached almost 10 million,³⁷ and every year an estimated 400,000 people are joining the migrant workforce. Bangladesh was the ninth highest recipient of remittances last year with \$15.9 billion.³⁸

So, we asked the youth **whether they were interested in working overseas and where they would like to work**. Like the pattern observed, there is a sharp gender difference in this case. Compared to 31% male youths expressing an interest in working overseas, share of young women expressing their interest is just seven percent. Very few women mentioned overseas migration as their main life-goal but many are interested to go abroad.

Significantly larger share of the urban youth are interested to migrate compared to the rural youth. It is quite interesting to note that the interest to work overseas is quite strongly correlated with the youths’ age; younger youth are more likely to express their interest in working overseas than the older youth. Interest to migrate also increases with education level, except those with no formal education, who are more likely to be interested than those completing grades 1-4.

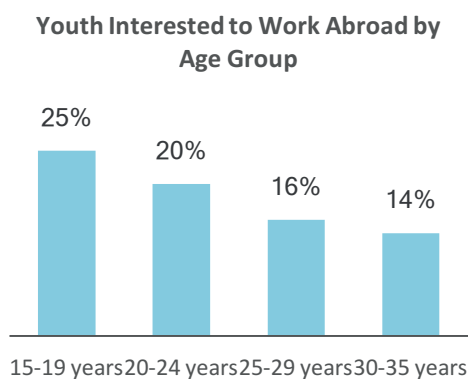


Figure 34: Youth Interested to Work Abroad by Age Group

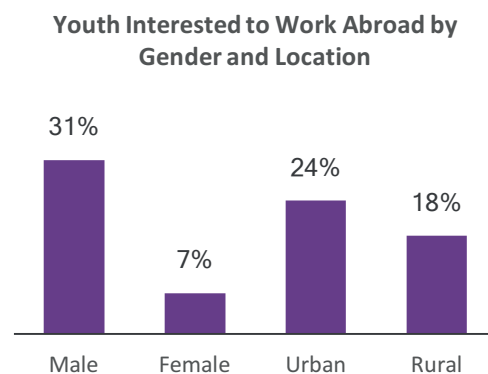


Figure 35: Youth Interested to Work Abroad by Gender and Location

Desired destinations

The youths' desired destinations for working overseas also vary by gender and location. While for the male youths the most common choice is the Middle East, for the female youth, it is U.S.A. Urban youth are relatively more selective in their choice of destination; most are interested to migrate to USA and Australia whereas rural youth showed interest in diverse destinations including EU, GCC, Asia, USA and Australia.

The most common choices for the youngest group (15-19 years) are U.S.A. followed by the Middle East; for the older groups, the most popular choices are the Middle East followed by various Asian countries.

The desired destinations also vary quite strongly by the youths' level of education and socio-economic backgrounds. The Middle East countries are most favoured by youths with no/lower levels of education from poorer background, while the higher educated, richer youths commonly prefer U.S.A. or various European countries.

How skilled are the potential young migrants?

Even though Bangladesh is one of the largest source countries for international migration, most Bangladeshi migrants are involved in low-skilled or semi-skilled professions abroad.³⁹ On the other hand, migration costs are much higher in Bangladesh and, with the income from low-skilled and semi-skilled jobs, it takes about three years for a male migrant to cover his cost of migration.⁴⁰ International Organization for Migration also points out that these unskilled or low-skilled migrants from Bangladesh are very likely to be exposed to exploitative working conditions, and suggests skill development as a way out of such exploitation and bring greater benefit to the migrant workers, their families and the economy.⁴¹

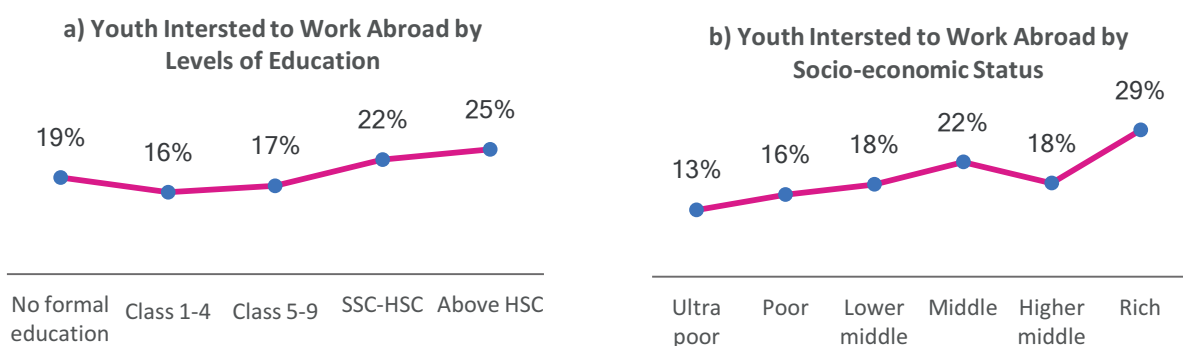


Figure 36: % of Youth Interested to Work Abroad by a) Levels of education, and, b) Socio-economic Status

We first look at the socioeconomic profile and the education of those who are interested to work abroad. From **Figure 36**, we see, even though the desire to work abroad increases with higher socio-economic status, many from ultra-poor and poor background and with no or limited education are interested to migrate.

We also asked the youth whether they are actively planning to migrate (ex. Training for migration, processing, etc.). We see, from the following figures, among those who are interested to work abroad, the wealthier and more educated are more likely to be engaged in active planning for migration compared to those from poorer background with limited education.

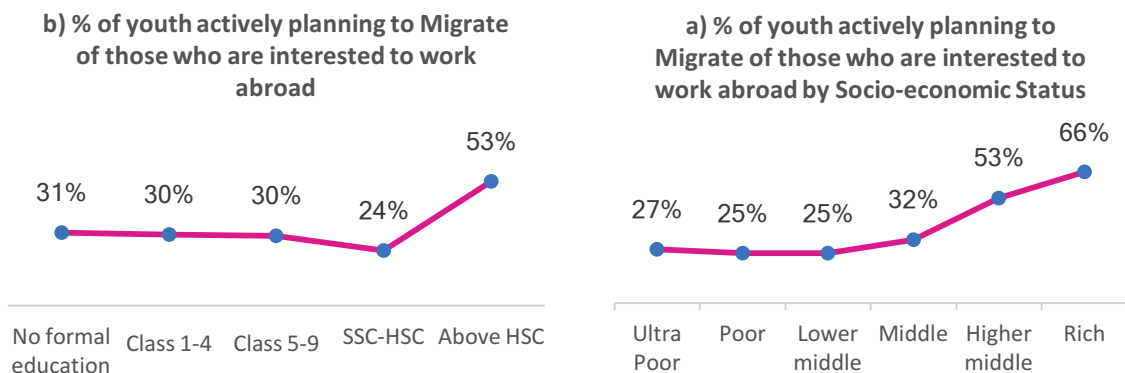


Figure 37: Percentage of youth actively planning to migrate of those who are interested to migrate by Socio-economic Class and Level of Education

Since larger share of those who are interested to go and are actively planning have higher education and are from higher socio-economic background, it is not surprising that self-assessment of their English language and computer skills are better than average, 29% and 31% respectively against the average of 16% and 15%. 23% of them have also received vocational training compared to 14% among the youth in general. Internet usage among them is also very high, 75% compared to 40% among general population.

As larger share of wealthier and educated youth are interested and actively planning to migrate, they are better prepared in terms of education, vocational training, computer literacy and English language skills, on average. However, a large number of youths with no or limited education are also interested and planning to migrate. We have seen that this group are least prepared in terms of skills and education.

Youth's freedom of choice

Freedom of choice is a human right. Freedom of choice is closely related to the sense of agency, which 'refers to the subjective experience of controlling one's action, and, through them, external events^{xiii}'. So, lack of freedom of choice may be detrimental to individual agency. Research has found that when people are not given a choice, they may lose their agency, not only in essence but also in action.

In our survey, we asked the youth to rate their freedom of choice on some critical areas as very low/low/high/very high. We find, overall, 70%-80% youth reported enjoying high and very high level of freedom in case of selecting educational institute, occupation and friends. Fewer youth enjoy high or very high levels of freedom in terms of physical movement and spending money. The lowest level of freedom is reported on selecting spouse.

Age and freedom of choice: It is likely that younger youth may enjoy less freedom of choice. But we find that, in case of our sample, it is true only in case of spending money and selecting spouse. In other cases, the younger cohort reported as much or even more freedom than the older youth. But we find that with increasing education level, reported freedom of choice consistently increases across all the major aspects, particularly for the youth with education level of HSC and above.

Gender inequality in freedom of choice

From the below figure, we see that there is a clear difference in the level of freedom enjoyed by the female and male youth in all aspects of freedom. In case of freedom of choice in occupation selection, this difference is 30-percentage point and in spending money, the difference is more than 25 percentage point. We see the starkest difference in case of physical mobility. Percentage of women reporting freedom of physical mobility is half that of male youth, 40% vs 83%.

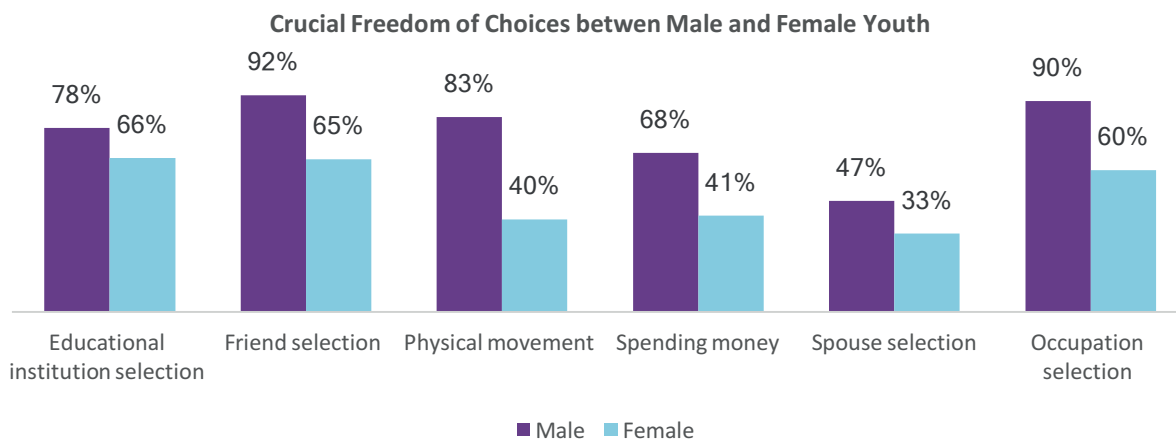


Figure 38: Crucial Freedom of Choices by Gender

We created an index of Freedom of Choice* by combining the responses on each types of freedom. The following figure shows the percentage of youth who scored high in the freedom of choice index by their education. We see two things. First, young women’s perceived freedom of choice is strongly correlated with their level of education. Second, in each cohort, the difference between male and female youth is still very high but the difference seem to narrow with higher education.

Overall, only 10% male youth had low freedom of choice index whereas the rate is 45% for female youth.

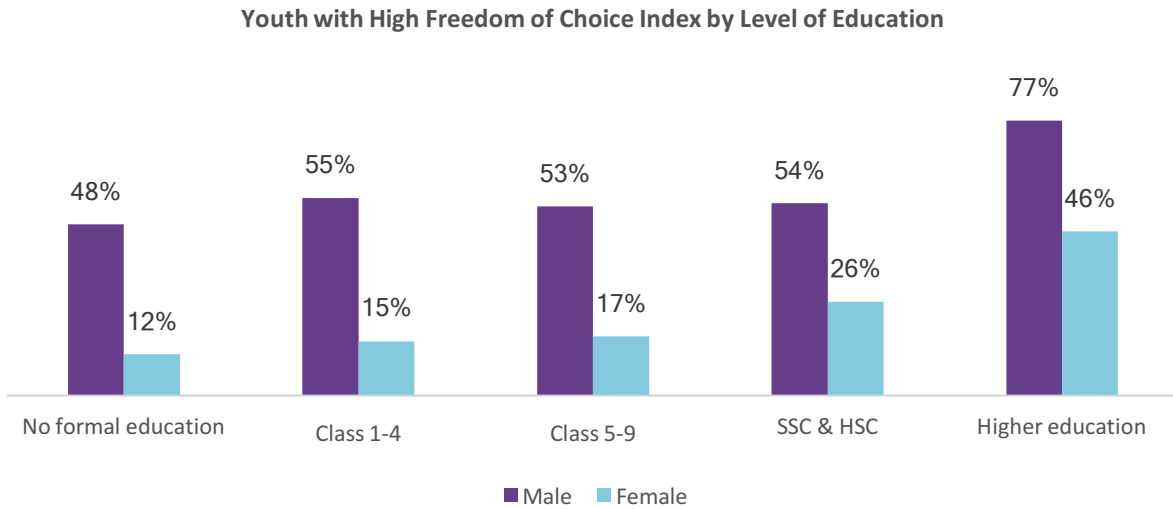


Figure 39: Youth Reporting High Freedom of Choice by Level of Education

**This variable has been constructed by summing up the variables indicating freedom of the youth. For example, educational institution selection, friend selection, freedom of movement, spending money, spouse selection and occupation selection. If the value is 5 and 6 it indicates “Higher freedom” accordingly if it is 0 1 and 2 then “Low /No freedom”*

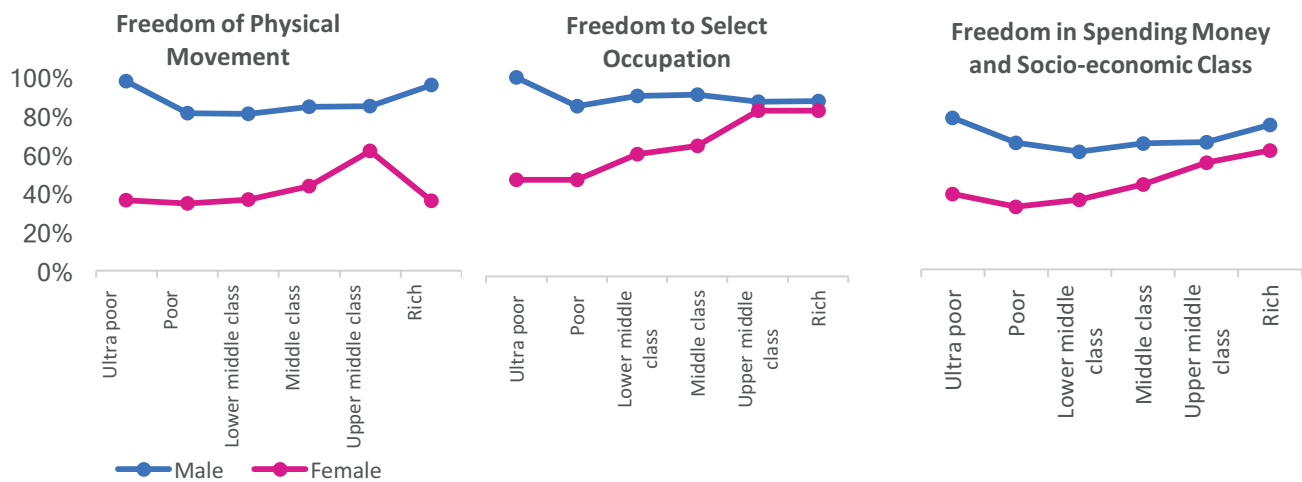


Figure 40: Freedom of a) Physical Movement, b) Selecting Occupation, and, c) Spending Money

We tried to identify whether freedom of choice varies by the socio-economic background across three aspects – freedom of movement, freedom to spend money and freedom to select an occupation. We see, from the above figures, freedom of choice is quite consistent and high for young men across socio-economic classes. But women from lower socio-economic classes enjoy the least amount of freedom in all three aspects. With improving socio-economic status, more female youths reported enjoying these rights. But even among the richest young women, perceived freedom of choice in these aspects is lower than that of young males from any socio-economic class. Again, we can see the starkest difference in physical movement.

Then we look at whether working makes a difference in young women’s perceived freedom of choice. We do see that young women who are engaged in earning activities are more likely to feel freer than those who do not, particularly in physical movement, spending money and friends and occupation selection.

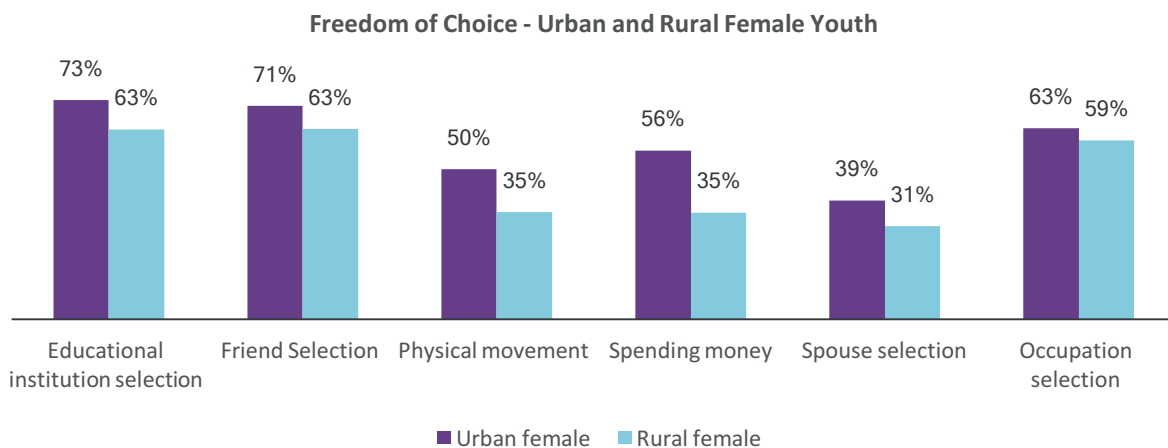


Figure 41: Freedom of Choice between Urban and Rural Female Youth

From the above figure, we see that rural young women reported having lower freedom of choice in every aspect compared to the urban young women. Only a third of the rural women mentioned enjoying freedom of physical movement, spending money and spouse selection. These rates are 50%, 56% and 39% respectively for urban young women.

The lack of physical mobility for young women is of grave concern. As we have seen in the earlier sections, young women are falling far behind young men in most important aspects of life – education, skills, participation in the domestic economy and international labor market. Being able to move freely is a precondition for women to access education, training, social network and employment. And mobility is exactly where young women are struggling the most.

Youth's civic engagement

In a parliamentary democracy like Bangladesh, citizen's attitude towards and involvement in civic engagement including political engagement is important. The youth have historically been an important part of Bangladeshi politics and have contributed to many crucial socio-cultural movements that have shaped the country, for example, the language movement in 1852 and the movement against autocracy in the 80s. The youth today are also supposed to lead the country in future. Therefore, we wanted to know about their perception about the important issues of our country and their views of and actual civic engagement.

Drivers and constraints of development as per the youth

In responding to “Which factors you consider to be the most important for the country's socio-economic development?”, majority of the youth mentioned effective education – job-oriented and high-quality. The next important drivers mentioned by the youth are related to effective state – security, political stability and effective governance.

When asked about what the youth considered major obstacles in achieving socio-economic development of the country, overwhelming majority mentioned corruption. About a quarter of the youth also mentioned obstacles such as security, moral decay, which are also related to corruption, weak infrastructure and economic inequality.

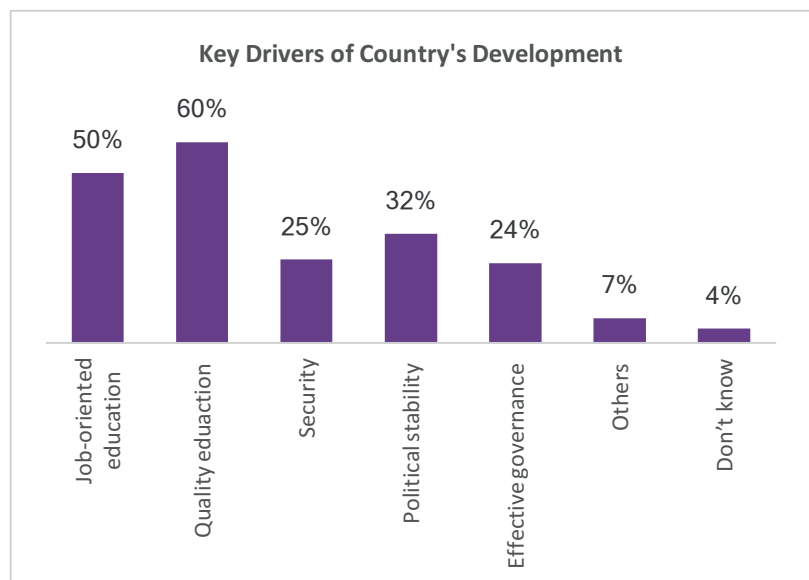


Figure 42: Key Drivers of Country's Development

Major law and order problems facing the country

We asked the youth about the most pressing law and order problem in Bangladesh. It was an open-ended question, but issues related to gender and drugs, as well as theft/robbery/hijacking emerged as the pressing law and order problems as per the youth.

We see a clear gender difference (Figure 44). Female youth are more concerned about child marriage, dowry and sexual harassment than the male youth, who are more concerned about drugs

related issues. However, large share of male youth also raised concern about dowry and child marriage. Theft, robbery and hijacking were also mentioned by about 15% of the youth.

In this case, we find some rural-urban difference. For example, more rural than urban female youth reported dowry and child marriage as major problems, indicating the prevalence of child-marriage and the custom of dowry in the rural areas. In fact, more rural compared to urban male also mentioned child-marriage. Theft, robbery and hijacking were also mentioned by more rural young youth. We also find that significantly larger share of younger youth reported sexual harassment as a major law and order problem and the proportions steadily declines with the age of the youth.

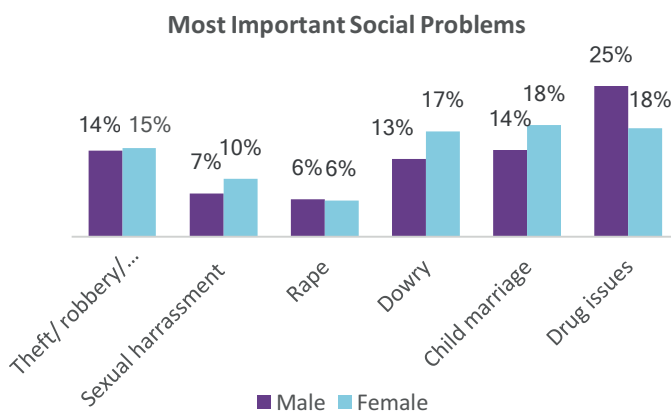


Figure 43: Most Important Social Problems

Youth and politics

Youth's assessment of current and future politics

First, we wanted to know whether the youth are optimistic about the current and future political situation in Bangladesh. The following figure shows the youths' assessment (as good/very good) of the current and future political situation, disaggregated by their education level. We see, youth across all socio-economic statuses are much more optimistic (at least 14 percentage point) about the future than the current political situation. We also see that optimism about current and future political situation is higher among youth with no or limited education and lower among youth with higher education levels.

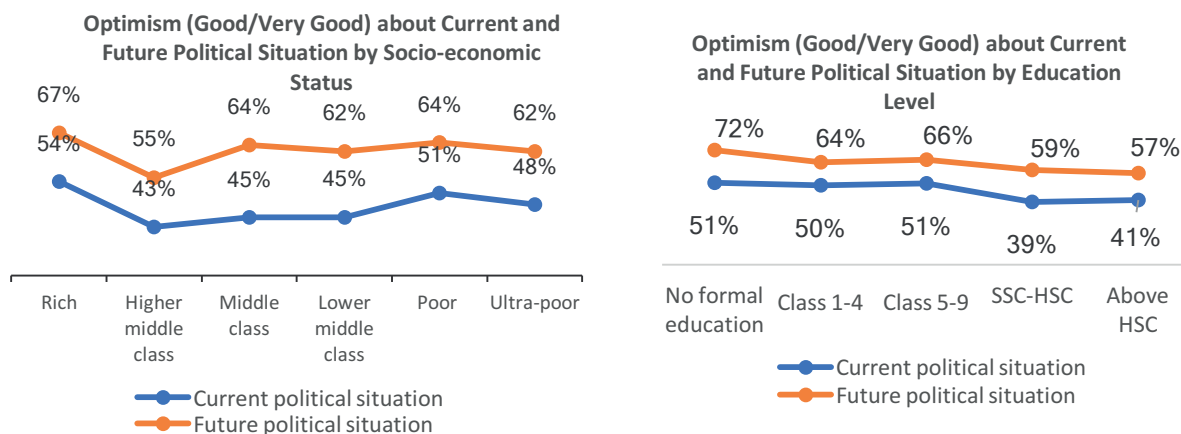


Figure 44: Optimism (Good/Very Good) about Current and Future Political Situation by Education Level

A 2017 survey found that 55% of youth aged 18-22 were optimist about their future, which goes down with age.^{xiii}

Forty-seven percent of the youth are Pure Optimists, who believe the current as well as the future political situation to be good or very good. About a third of the youth are Pure Pessimists, who think both current and future of politics to be bad. Perhaps unsurprisingly, only four percent are Future Pessimists, which implies that most of those who are optimistic about the current political situation are likely to be optimistic about the future.

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Table 3: Youth and their optimism about politics

		Assessing current political situation as ...	
		Very good/good	Very bad/bad
Predicting future political situation to be ...	Very good/good	(Pure Optimist) 47%	(Future Optimist) 18%
	Very bad/bad	(Future Pessimist) 4%	(Pure Pessimist) 31%

Youth's political participation

Predictability Pure Optimists are more likely to think that the youth should participate in politics than any other groups; likewise, higher percentage of Future Optimists also reported the same. But interestingly a third of Pure Pessimists also opined that the youth should participate in politics.

Table 4: Youth Who Think that Youth Should Participate in Politics

Think that youths should participate in politics	
52% of 'Pure Optimists'	42% of 'Future Optimists'
52% of 'Future Pessimists' <i>*should be disregarded for small sample size</i>	35% of 'Pure Pessimists'

We find a clear difference in opinion about political participation between male and female youth. More male than female youths responded that the youth should participate in politics (49% of males

vs.35% of females). The positive attitude towards youth's political participation is also found to have a positive correlation with their level of education (except for the case of male youths with no formal education).

We also find a large gap between the youth's perception and actual involvement in politics. Only about three percent of our surveyed youth reported being involved with political organizations, while much higher percentage believe that the youth should participate in politics. This finding indicates that youth's political participation remains consistently poor, as a 2011 survey conducted by the Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), BRAC University found that only two percent youth were engaged in politics.^{xiv} The same study asserts that self-reported political participation of the youth is more likely to be under-reported and rarely over-reported. Even if that is the case in our survey, political participation of the youth is minimal.

To ensure the future of an effective democracy, youth should be encouraged in politics. Our data indicates that a large proportion of the youth feel left out as even among Pure and Future Optimists, about a half do not think that the youth should participate in politics. This is something that the policymakers, political leaders and those working with youth should be aware of.

Youth as agents of change?

Youth engagement in national planning

As youth are the majority and the future of the country, their voices should be heard, and their concerns need to be addressed. **We asked the youth about their perceptions of the importance of youth engagement in national planning as well as the importance they receive.** In our survey, although majority, about 85%, believe that youth's engagement in national planning is important, less than 50% believe that youth engagement receives the due importance.

Youth's belief in their effectiveness as change agents

We wanted to know whether the youth believe that they can be the agents of change and in what ways. Specifically, we asked them how they could involve in: i) improving the education sector, ii) improving the employment situation, iii) fighting the constraints to country's development, and iv) achieving the Bangladesh of their dreams.

The most important finding in this section is this: about 60% youth do not know how the youth, as a group, can be a change agent in the development of the country.

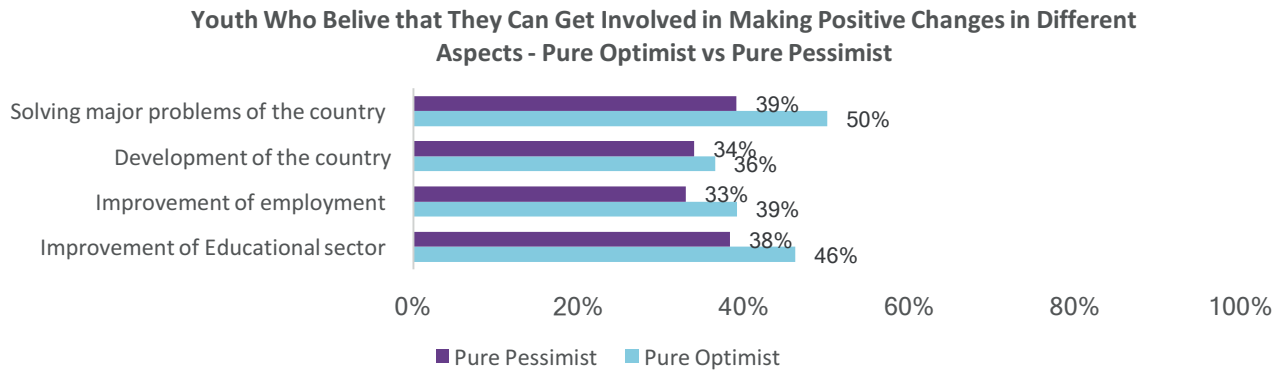


Figure 45: Youth Who Believe that They Can Get Involved in Making Positive Changes in Different Aspects - Pure Optimist vs Pure Pessimist

We see that there is a clear difference between those who are politically Pure Optimist and Pure Pessimist. Pure optimists are much more likely to believe that they can be involved in some ways in the development of Bangladesh in different sectors. But even among the optimists, the rates are discouraging.

Following is a summary of responses of those who provided some answer to this question.

According to majority of the youths, for improving the education sector, the youths can encourage people towards education by helping them understand the benefits of education. Working unitedly for ensuring quality education was another common response, followed by the suggestion that youth can educate disadvantaged groups.

The youths think that being self-dependent and receiving job-oriented education are the two best options for the youth to improve the employment situation. Some other suggestions included organizing movements against various social problems (e.g. corruption, stigma associated with vocational training) that complicate getting employed, working hard, receiving higher education and getting involved in agriculture instead of waiting for a job.

In fighting the obstacles of our country's development, the youth thought they could help solve social problems such as corruption and moral decay by raising awareness, taking active steps for necessary and timely social change, capacity building, etc. The responses reported here were given in relation to the constraints they mentioned earlier and would make more sense in the appropriate context.

When asked what role they can play to achieve the Bangladesh that they wish to see, majority emphasised the need for being self-motivated and doing good deeds. Working hard and developing capabilities, solving existing social problems that are making dream Bangladesh unattainable, engaging in political activities and movements, working actively and carefully to protect the environment are some of the ways the youth can engage themselves on achieving the Bangladesh of their dreams.

Key findings

How ready are the youth to take the opportunities of the 21st century?

In 2015, Bangladesh has been elevated to the category of lower-middle income countries; we aspire to become an upper middle income by 2021 and eventually a high-income country by 2041. To achieve this goal, we must use our demographic dividend.

But in the 21st century, the world is going through the so-called 4th industrial revolution – defined by the new and unpredictable ways technology will be embedded deeply in economy, society and human life. On one hand, technological revolution offers unlimited opportunities for those who know how to use the technologies. On the other hand, as many prominent economists are raising concerns, technology will continue to eliminate a swathe of low-skilled jobs across the world. So, our youth must be ready to take the opportunities offered by technology and weather the storms created by it to fulfil our national aspiration; they must be highly skilled, specially in science and technology. But how ready are the Bangladeshi youth?

Overall, only about 15% youth rated their English language and computer literacy skills as satisfactory – two most important skills for high-skilled professions and taking advantage of new opportunities opened up by technology. Sixty percent youth do not have access to internet. Only 15% have any kind of vocational training. There rates are significantly better for youth with education above HSC level. But, only about 5% of our youth have education above higher-secondary levels.

Also, these are just some primary indicators of their capabilities. It is possible that actual effectiveness of their education and skills are even lower. We see that, youth with higher education, particularly the male youth, have much lower involvement in earning activities compared to their lesser educated counterpart. Our data shows that youth with higher education are also more likely to think that the employment situation will get more difficult. So, it is reasonable to question the relevance and quality of their higher education. That is why, job-oriented and quality education were by far the top most answers to the question on the factors that the youth consider as most important to the country's development.

We also feel a general lack of agency among the youth. Overwhelming interest in government job, lack of interest in starting their own business and low rate (23%) of vocational education even among those who are actively planning to migrate, along with the widespread belief that their employment situation will become more difficult in future are some indications of their low agency. Majority of the youth also do not believe that they can be a change agent in any form in the development of our country.

In the Global Youth Development Index (YDI) 2016, Bangladesh ranks among the worst performing countries; in the YDI domain of employment and opportunity, Bangladesh ranks 177 out of 183 countries. Though our findings are not directly comparable with the index, it reveals the underlying challenges and draws attention to the need for much greater and strategic investment to unleash the potential of the demographic dividend.

Young women falling behind

Over the last few decades Bangladeshi women have come a very long way, we have seen impressive progress in women's education, employment and political empowerment. Bangladesh ranked 48th in the overall 2018 Global Gender Gap Index ranking across the spectrum of economic, educational, health and political empowerment, just above USA and way ahead of other South Asian and most African nations.

Yet, we find that young women in Bangladesh are still lagging far behind the men. Beyond Higher-secondary level, their participation rate in education is half that of their male counterpart. Vast majority of those not studying further are getting married and dropping out of the labour market. Even among those with higher education, engagement in earning activities are much lower than their male counterpart. They are far less confident about their English and computer skills and have far less access to the internet.

In our survey, we find that women enjoy much less freedom of choice in all crucial aspects in life – choosing education institution, occupation, friend and spouse, moving freely and spending money. And, we see the starkest difference in case of freedom to move freely. Only 40% young women believe they can move freely, half as much as young men. Being able to move freely is essential for women to access education, training, social network and employment. And physical mobility is exactly where young women are struggling the most.

We said that we must make the best use of our demographic dividend for national development; this should be driven by young men, and equally by young women. We also discussed how Bangladeshi youth in general are far away from being prepared to make the best of the 21st century opportunities. We see that our young women are even less prepared. Additionally, young women's physical mobility is restricted, further limiting their opportunity to be prepared. With half of the young population (young women) remaining so far behind, we will not be able to get closer to our national goal.

Persistent lack of social mobility for the youth

A clear and large difference emerged between the youth from different socio-economic classes across all the measures that we looked at. The poorer youth are far less educated. They are far less confident about the efficacy of their education, their English and computer competencies. They are also far less likely to get vocational education and far more likely to receive religious education. Consequently, they are much less likely to get well-paid productive jobs to improve their lot.

Their aspirations are not related to personal growth (e.g. higher education) but related to day to day survival (e.g. asset accumulation). Majority of the poorer youth also aspire to ensure a brighter future for their children, which they are less likely to achieve.

All this indicate a severe lack of social economic mobility among the youth in Bangladesh. Like the gender gap, lack of social mobility must be addressed to maximize our demographic dividend.

Some emerging questions: self-identities and polarisation

Of political optimism

We looked at how the youth like to identify themselves and we tried to find how their self-identities are correlated to other aspects of their lives. Other than education (those with religious identity are more likely to be less educated and have religious education), we did not find any significant difference between those who hold different identities, not even in their political optimism. This is somewhat contrary to common belief that identities, particularly religious identity, have an impact on different aspects of life. Though religion was chosen by half the number of those who chose nationality, both emerged as topmost identities. At a time when the entire world including Bangladesh is going through a crisis between two narrow and polarising identities of religion and nationalism, it would be important to understand how these identities of the youth evolve and what impact it has, if any.

We also find a deep polarisation among the youth in terms of their political optimism. Vast majority of the youth are either 'pure optimists', believing both current and future political situation to be good or very good, or 'pure pessimist', believing exactly the opposite. This indicates that our youth may not be able to take a critical and constructive approach in analysing the ongoing socio-political issues of the country. It may also be an indicator of a more divided society in future, which we do not want. So, further research on the political thought process of the youth, what shapes their thoughts and how it is manifested in their behaviour, would provide valuable insights to develop healthy citizenry.

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BRAC
BRAC Centre
75 Mohakhali
Dhaka 1212
Bangladesh

T : +88 02 9881265
F : +88 02 8823542
E : info@brac.net
W : www.brac.net

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