

INFORMATION
TO
EMPOWER
YOUTH

Survey Report 2020



INFORMATION TO EMPOWER YOUTH

Survey Report 2020



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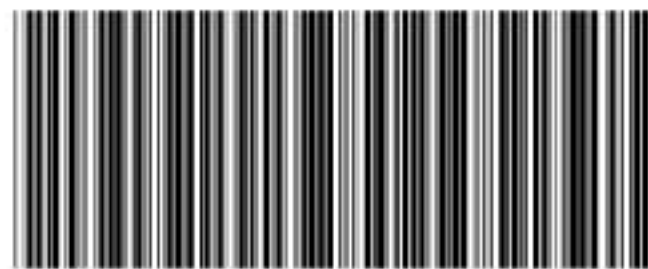
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Foreword

Bangladesh population is characterized by prominent presence of youth segment. Young people aged between 18 and 35 years constitute 33% of the total population of the country. Prominence of young, energetic and enthusiastic people in the population pyramid is a big opportunity and a challenge as well. Opportunity, because youth is the most potential group to shape their lives in a different way compatible to global trend, make changes in the society, build a prosperous nation and lead its people to proper direction. Challenge, because environment and options have to be created to facilitate them apply the potentials.

Young people need support to translate their potentials into actions. Support, not in the form of assistance, rather in the form of empowerment. A properly empowered youth group can make incredible changes in their families, the society and the country as a whole. Evidences of this potential are there in the political and social history of the country.

Side by side with education and technical skills they need sufficient information which is a vital component of empowerment. Information empowers. So, access to information has to be ensured. It has been more than 10 years since Bangladesh enacted the Right to Information Act 2009 to promote people's right of access to information. But a recent national survey jointly conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), MRDI and ORG-Quest, basic awareness level of people about the act is as low as 7.7 percent of the population. The level of awareness is relatively high among the youth and educated people of urban area.

Keeping the importance of youth perception of RTI in mind, MRDI conducted a survey to assess the knowledge of RTIA among the youth, and their perception about its use to access information required to solve their individual problems and those of the country. MJF, a pioneering civil society organization in promotion of RTI, extended support in conducting this important national survey through its project 'Excluded People's Rights (EPR)' with the funding support of UKAid. MRDI expresses its heartfelt gratitude and thanks to UKAid and MJF for the support. MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam deserves special gratitude for inspiring us to find how the strength youth can be properly used to popularize RTI and make public service delivery accountable to people.

We extend our thanks to Mostafizur Rahman and his team for conducting the survey with care including questionnaire designing, data collection and data analysis. The team did a wonderful job.

Special thanks to Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, Head of Programme and Communication, MRDI who made the study plan, compiled data and generated the report with objective analysis of findings and recommendations. Project team members deserve thanks for their untiring efforts in producing the survey report.

Key informants of high profile who have the biggest stake in youth programme and promotion of RTI Act played a vital role in translating quantitative data collected from field survey into qualitative narratives of the issue. Our thanks and gratitude to them for their valuable inputs. We are also thankful to the survey respondents and the participants of FGD.

We are hopeful, findings and recommendations of this national survey will facilitate planners and decision makers chalk out programmes and policies to support young people access information and use those for resolving their concerns. The report may also be used by researchers as a reference material for conducting further studies on the issue.



Executive Summary



From the independence to emergence as a tiger economy - youth has been the major force behind every notable social, political and economic achievement in Bangladesh. The country is enjoying a unique demographic dividend, meaning the population has more youths and working people to produce goods and services for the economy. This dividend can be utilized to its full potential, only when the youth have the opportunity to contribute.

This survey looks at the concerns of the youth that they think affect their potential as a person, as a social being and as a citizen of a nation. It also explores the role of information in addressing the concerns of the youth and offers some solutions from the recommendations of the youth and experts who work in this field.

Although different institution uses different definitions, this survey considered the age range of 18 to 35 years to define youth, following the National Youth Policy. A total of 706 young people from eight divisions across Bangladesh participated in this survey. According to the results, unemployment is the biggest of their concerns in personal life, while law and order situation emerged as the top problem in community level. Corruption is found to be the biggest concern for the country as a whole.

There is overwhelming similarity in their responses to identify the topmost concerns irrespective of gender, age, occupational status and region. It is also found, half of their top concerns are related with public services like health, education, roads, gas, and electricity - that are also to a great extent related with corruption and lack of governance.

The UN says, "For young people, access to information means better access to capital, markets and training needed to pursue a career or studies; increased participation in political processes, and recognition of youth as responsible citizens in today's society." However, the survey reveals a great lack of awareness among the youth on, not only how to get information but also whom to ask for it. Around 19% of the youth find the process of getting information troublesome, 14% finds it complicated, and 11.4% have fear of being harassed or threatened.

It is also observed that the youth have interests in having information on job opportunities, related qualifications and application process; expenditure of funds in development projects to see if there is any irregularity or corruption; and sources of fund and management of budgets. They also want to make the authority accountable by asking about the reasons of problems in public services delivery, why they are not taking any action, and how long it may take to resolve it. And they listed more than 40 offices which they think are relevant considering their personal or community level concerns.

We combined those offices in 10 major groups and found that local government organization tops the list as both urban and rural youth think that respective city corporations, pourshavas, and district, upazila and union councils can resolve most of their problems and also provide them necessary information. When experts recommend using RTI to access the information, the survey finds, only 22.2% of them are aware about the Right to Information Act 2009.

Youths widely agree that the act can be very effective in accessing the necessary information. But they clearly identified some barriers in using it, and that includes not knowing the process of requesting information and limited idea about the authority, where they can request. Most of them preferred internet and social media platforms as a medium to learn about RTI. But the importance of trainings, workshops and mainstream media campaigns are also urged by the experts to make RTI meaningful for the youth.



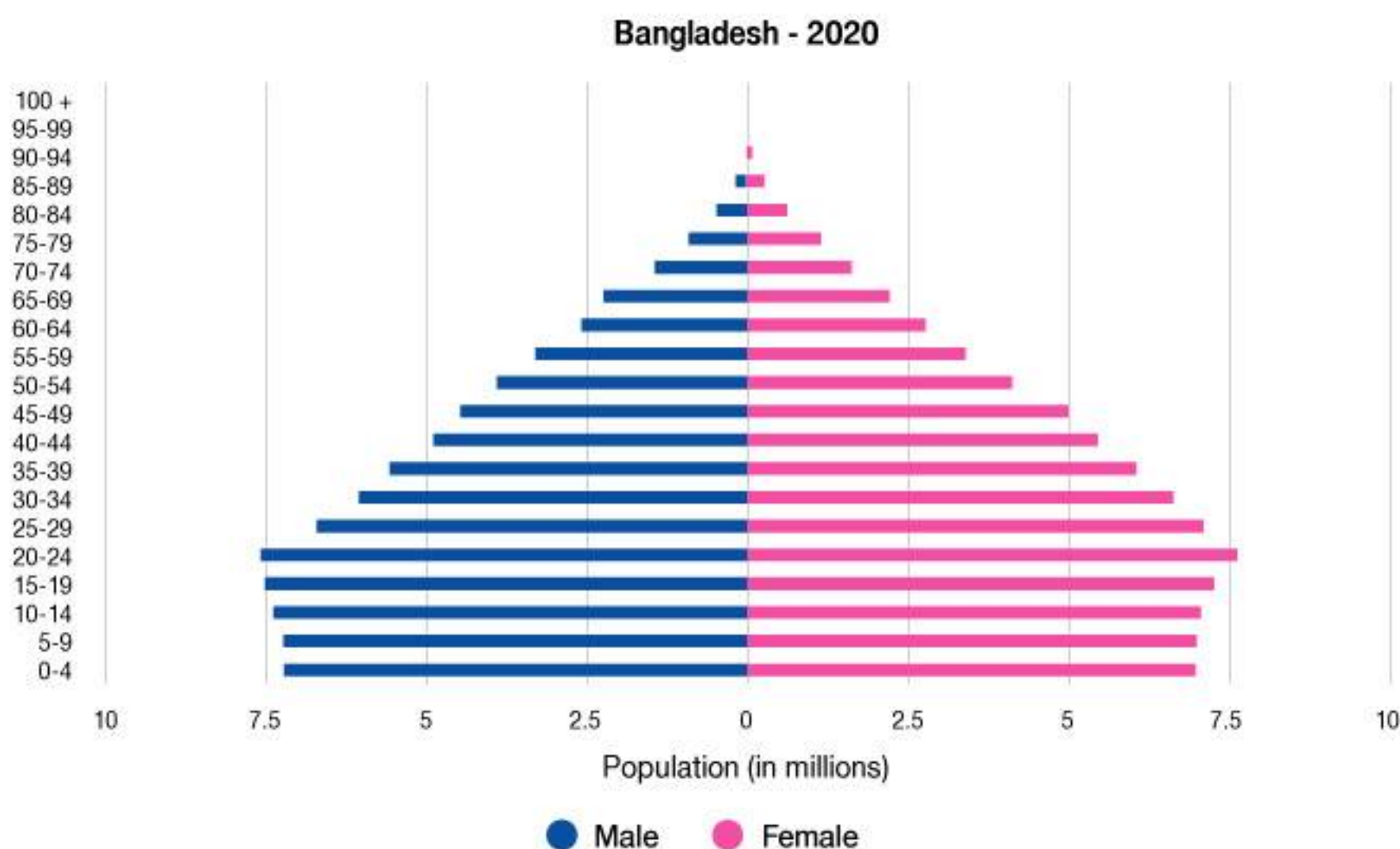
To address the information need of the youth, the survey and the experts suggested -strengthening local governments to proactively disclose public interest information, develop a government job portal where youth can find and apply for all government jobs, and get results accordingly, using the Union Digital Centers so that the youth who do not have access to the internet, can access job related disclosures, digitalizing the RTI application process and also strong commitment from the government and the civil society to make the youth apply the RTI act to make the authority accountable. Experts demanded measures to reduce corruption so that all youth have the equal access to the opportunities that the nation can offer.

The Background

From the war of independence to the fights for democracy; from a basket case to the emerging tiger of global economy - every social, political and economic success Bangladesh has achieved since its birth is also a chronicle of its youth. The language movement in the 50s, the Liberation War of 1971, and in the struggle for the restoration of democracy in 1990 - it is them who were in the forefront. The younger generation has always made an immense contribution in thinking towards free, secular, democratic politics, social equality and been active in the fight for an independent country.¹

Youth consists 33% of the total population of Bangladesh who are aged between 18 to 35 years.² They are the largest and the most productive group of population, providing Bangladesh, the unique advantage of demographic dividend. It is a situation when a large number of people in the economy are highly productive. Take the case of the contemporary economic growth of Bangladesh. It is attributed to two main forces among many - the RMG export and the remittances. Data suggests that more than 55% of the work force in ready-made garment industries is youth³ ; and around 60% of the labour migrants are in the same age group,⁴ implying the contribution of the youth in this growth.

Figure 1: Bangladesh population by age, CIA Fact book



¹ Bangladesh: The Next Generation, 2010, British Council, Dhaka

² Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2017

³ European Scientific Journal March 2015 edition vol.11, No.7

⁴ Labour Migration trends and Patterns: Bangladesh, India, and Nepal 2013

However, according to a policy brief by South Asian Network of Economic Modeling (SANEM) and Action Aid Bangladesh "utilising the potentials of youth population remains a big challenge. The country, being at the middle of the period of demographic transition, is yet to reap the benefits of its demographic profile. The demographic dividend is not an induced phenomenon rather it is a structurally given time bound phase, which requires 'quality' human resources endowed in terms of education, health and skill. Given the gap in policy efforts to prioritise public spending for human capital development with youths being in the forefront, the country must prioritise youth development in its national plans and policies as well as in resource allocation to reap the benefits of demographic dividend in coming years."⁵

Given the contribution of large youth population in social and economic development, it will not be an exaggeration to say that, where Bangladesh is now, is mostly for its youth, and where it is going to position itself in the future, will also depend on what the nation can do to enable them to use their full potential.

The demographic dividend does not last for ever. Bangladesh has entered into this unique economic advantage in 1990 and there have been several studies to project how long the benefit of this situation can be reaped. Data suggests that this window of opportunity will remain only until 2031 as the share of youth population decrease and ageing increase.⁶ It makes the next decade crucial to unlock the potential of the youth through proper policies, initiatives and investments, for the ultimate development of the country.

There have been many surveys and researches in Bangladesh to identify the needs, aspirations, problems and prospects of youth by organizations like British Council, BRAC, Daily Prothom Alo, Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and other academic and civil society organizations. This study by MRDI aims not only to examine the major problems of youth in Bangladesh in their personal, social and national life, but also attempts to find solutions to their problems through better access to information.

In this study, youths in Bangladesh self-identify their concerns, locate the key public and private institutions relevant to resolve those, list the information they need mostly and also recommends what can be done to get better access to those information. It also suggests - how youth can be educated on importance of information and using available tools like Right to Information Act in accessing that.

The link between the right to information and transparency is undeniable. Having access to information held by public authorities does not only empower the citizen, but also improves public service delivery, makes the public institutions more accountable and strengthens governance, which is key for any functional democracy. The study also looks at this relationship between information, governance and services from a youth perspective.

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⁵Policy brief, Realising the Demographic Dividend through Investing on Young People in Bangladesh, SANEM, August 2019

⁶Population Projection of Bangladesh: Dynamics and Trends (2011-2061), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, November 2015;



MRDI developed a survey instrument in English designed to capture the study objectives which was translated later into Bangla for final use at field level. For quantitative data collection, a structured questionnaire was used that contained mostly close-ended questions. Once drafted, the questionnaire has been pre-tested and the feedbacks have been used in the finalization of the draft. After finalization of the questionnaire, the survey was conducted by 20 interviewers between 30th March 2020 and 20th April 2020. The interviewers were professionally trained by MRDI and in compliance with the code of social research ethics.

Survey Method and Sampling Strategy: Considering the nature and objective of the study, MRDI conducted face-to-face interviews with 706 youths; age range of 18 to 35 in Bangladesh, using a multistage stratified random sampling method. From each stratum, Primary Sampling Units (PSU) were selected randomly using Probability Proportional to Population Size (PPS) method. The Census blocks or enumeration areas (EA) were treated as PSUs. A fixed number of five households in each PSU were randomly selected using the Systematic Random Sampling (SRS) method. In each selected household, a list of youth (18 to 35 years) member/s was listed out. Finally, one such HH member was randomly selected using the KISH Grid method⁷.

Bangladesh has eight administrative divisions, and each division was considered as a separate cluster. Within each division, based on population the study locations were stratified into two types: divisional headquarter (HQ), as urban and District, as rural. Considering this, a total of 16 study locations/districts by division and urban and rural type were identified for this survey (See Table 2).

In this study, youths in Bangladesh self-identify their concerns, locate the key public and private institutions relevant to resolve those, list the information they need mostly and also recommends what can be done to get better access to those information.

Table 1: Division-wise population and proportion in Bangladesh

Division	Population	Proportion
Barishal	8,489,476	6.1%
Chattogram (CTG)	27,163,631	19.5%
Dhaka	45,568,835	32.7%
Khulna	15,386,663	11.0%
Rajshahi	18,027,522	12.9%
Rangpur	15,434,619	11.1%
Sylhet	9,181,937	6.6%
Total	139,252,683	100%

(Note: The newly created Mymensingh division was with Dhaka)⁸

The census enumeration areas (EA), broadly, termed as Mohalla or Mouza, were considered as PSU. In each PSU, a random starting point was selected, and every 3rd household was selected. In a selected household, if no 18+ year's member was found, the immediate next household was contacted until a target respondent was found. At least three re-visits were made to interview the selected respondent if s/he was not available during the time of visit. Once a respondent was found, a fixed gap of three households was maintained for subsequent sample selection. As an eligible respondent was selected randomly within a sample household, male and female representation was in proportion to that existing ratio (49:51).

⁷ The Kish grid or Kish selection grid is a method for selecting members within a household to be interviewed. It uses a pre-assigned table of random numbers to find the person to be interviewed. It was developed by statistician Leslie Kish in 1949.

⁸ Population and Housing Census 2011, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Table 2: Study locations

Division	Divisional HQ/Urban	District/Rural	Total (Districts)
Dhaka	City Corporation	Gazipur	2
Chattogram	City Corporation	Rangamati	2
Rajshahi	City Corporation	Natore	2
Khulna	City Corporation	Bagerhat	2
Sylhet	City Corporation	Moulvibazar	2
Barishal	City Corporation	Jhalokathi	2
Rangpur	City Corporation	Gaibandha	2
Mymensingh	City Corporation	Sherpur	2
Total	8	8	16

(Note: While selecting the PSUs within these areas, military areas (cantonment, army officer's residential areas, security restricted areas etc.) were excluded, as surveys are not allowed in these areas.)

Sample size: To determine a statistically reliable sample size to render an estimate high degree of precision, and certainty, the following formula was used:

$$n = \frac{p(1 - P)z_{\alpha/2}^2}{d^2} \times \text{DEF}$$

Z = value from standard normal distribution corresponding to the desired confidence level (Z.025=1.96 for 95% CI)

P is the expected true proportion. We have assumed it to be 0.5 as at this level the sample size is highest

d is desired precision and calculated assuming 5% allowable error range

DEF is design effect due to stratification (considering a design effect of 1.5)

Accordingly, the minimum required sample calculated was 576.

However, a nationally representative sample may also require carrying out analysis for various sub-segments of the sample like division, age, sex, or education-based, etc. For that reason, a higher number of samples (700 sample) were determined and finally, 706 interviews were conducted successfully (See Table 3). After confirming the age, and gender based on the allocated quota, the respondent was interviewed at the home.

Table 3: Sample Distribution

Division	Divisional HQ/Urban	District/Rural	Total
Dhaka	150	28	178
Chattogram	98	39	137
Rajshahi	62	29	91
Khulna	51	26	77
Sylhet	23	27	50
Barishal	29	14	43
Rangpur	59	19	78
Mymensingh	17	35	52
Total	489	217	706

A consent form was shown on the first page of the beginning of each survey. Respondents were read the consent form and instructed to return the survey to the researcher if they declined to participate. The consent form informed respondents about (a) the title of the research project, (b) the nature and purpose of the research, (c) the name of the organization, (d) approximated time it would take to complete the survey, (e) a statement that participation is voluntary, and (f) a description of steps taken to ensure subject confidentiality. After getting the respondent's consent form, the interviewer started the interview.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents: The survey was conducted among 706 youths all over Bangladesh. Among them 357 (51%) were female youth and 349 (49%) were male. It can be seen from figure 2 that almost an equal number of female and male were interviewed which represents the gender balance of the respondents. The sex composition of the respondents does not vary markedly by urban-rural residence (See Table 4).

Figure 2:
Gender distribution
of the youth

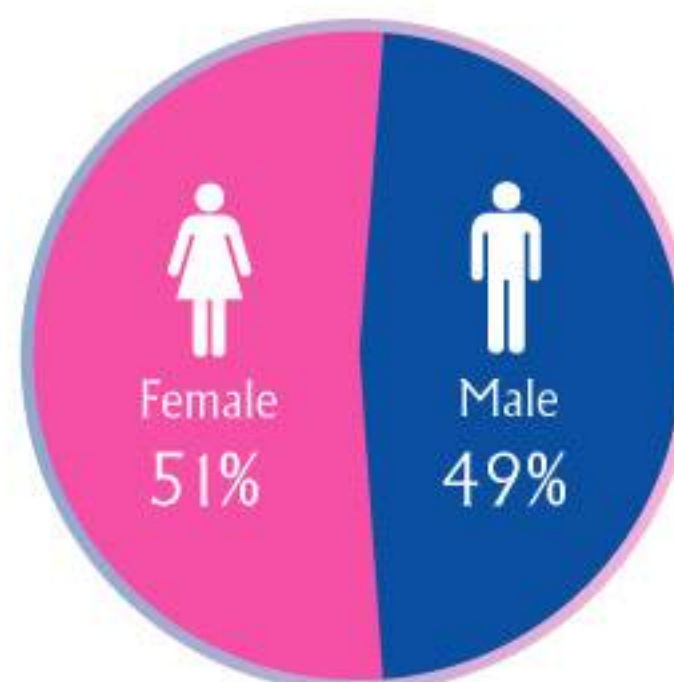


Table 4: Gender distribution of the respondents

	Urban		Rural		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	250	51.1	99	45.6	349	49.4
Female	239	48.9	118	54.4	357	50.6
Total	489	100	217	100	706	100

Table 5 depicts that only youth was considered as the subject for this survey. The total respondents were classified by four different age groups. Of the 706 samples, around 40% was from the age group of 22-25 years, followed by 31.2% from 18-21 years, 16.3% from 26-30 years and 12.6% from 31-35 years old.

Table 5: Respondents by age group

Age	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
18-21	97	123	220	31.2
22-25	154	128	282	39.9
26-30	53	62	115	16.3
31-35	45	44	89	12.6
Total	349	357	706	100

Table 6: Area-wise respondents by age group

Age	Urban	Rural	Percentage
18-21	150	70	31.2
22-25	184	98	39.9
26-30	88	27	16.3
31-35	67	22	12.6
Total	489	217	100

In addition to the field survey, MRDI also conducted 10 focus group discussions (FGD) and 6 key informant interviews to better understand how people respond to the types of questions.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): A team of MRDI conducted 10 FGD sessions with 103 (62 male and 41 female) youths of diverse groups - including students, professionals, youth leaders, indigenous people, and cultural activists - to assess their concerns, to learn their experiences and to know their understanding of Right to Information. The main purpose of the FGDs was to corroborate the findings of the survey and get qualitative explanations in favour of their responses. The FGDs were held between 21 December 2019 and 09 January 2020 in the districts of Dhaka, Chattogram, Khagrachari, Barishal, Khulna, Jashore, Bogura, Rangpur, Kishoreganj and Moulvibazar.

Key Informant interviews (KII): Six eminent personalities and experts who work in the field of youth development, access to information and technology have been interviewed for this study. Objective of these KII was to get recommendations and explanations on the major findings of the study. The KIIs were conducted by a team of MRDI in May and June 2020.

Limitations: Though interesting, this was a very challenging study. The study covered 706 youth from all over the country. Since the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, respondents were stressful and their mobility was restricted in many cases. To overcome this challenge, we had to deploy local surveyors in most of the cases, so that they can visit respondents HHs maintaining health safety measures without any difficulty. As a result, getting appointment and fixing time were a big challenge. Due to this unprecedented condition, the survey has more shares of urban and semi-urban youth than the rural, despite the fact that concentration of youth population is higher in the rural areas. This is mainly because mobility of the surveyors has been affected much due to reported COVID-19 pandemic. More focus towards urban youth has made some biasness in demographic data of employment, income and education status of the samples.

There were some non-responses, because of either COVID-19 pandemic or occupied with business issues. However, all of these non-responses were addressed by frequent visit to respondents in reaching the final estimated sample size. All steps were taken to ensure quality of data at all the levels and stages of the survey. Senior researchers monitored the quality of data collection and processing, meeting the strict deadline. It can be assured that the findings are representative, unbiased and well addressed; and therefore, this information can be used for further purposes.

Defining the Youth



Youth at Curzon Hall in Dhaka University. Photo: Pixabay

The definition of youth may vary socially, culturally and regionally. Different organizations and countries also set different age to define the term. Mostly, youth is defined as "the passage from a dependant childhood to independent adulthood" when young people are in transition between a world of rather secure development to a world of choice and risk.⁹

The United Nations defines "youth" as persons aged between 15 and 24. However, this definition is flexible. According to the World Youth Report (2018), there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 per cent of the global population. The experience of being young can vary substantially across the world, between countries and regions, and 'youth' is therefore often a fluid and changing category. As such, context is always an important guide in UNESCO's definition of youth.¹⁰ As there is no universal definition, their Youth Strategy also considers other definitions in use by agencies, programmes and member states without prejudice.

In Bangladesh as well, various 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 BBS considered aged 15-29 years as youth for its Bangladesh Labour Force Survey. In its Youth Survey 2019, Daily Prothom Alo spoke to the young people about this distance between them and their families. The survey was carried out among 1,200 young people aged between 15 and 29.¹¹ BRAC, the largest NGO in its Youth Survey 2018 defined youth as individuals aged 15-35 years.¹² However, this survey considered the age range 18-35 years to define youth as mentioned in the National Youth Policy 2017.

⁹Defining Youth in Contemporary National Legal and Policy Frameworks across Europe, Bojana Perovic, 2016

¹⁰UNESCO, <https://en.unesco.org/youth>

¹¹ <https://en.prothomalo.com/youth/78pc-of-youth-anxious-as-distance-with-family>

¹²Youth of Bangladesh Agents of Change?, BRAC, 2018

Snapshot

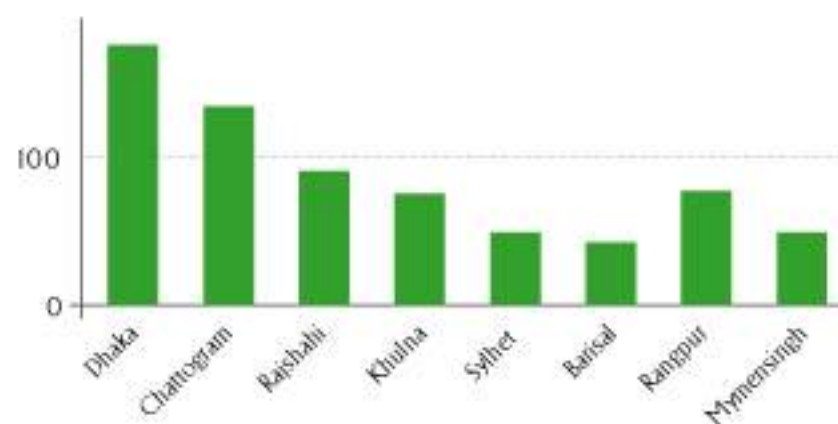
Distribution by Age

Mean Age

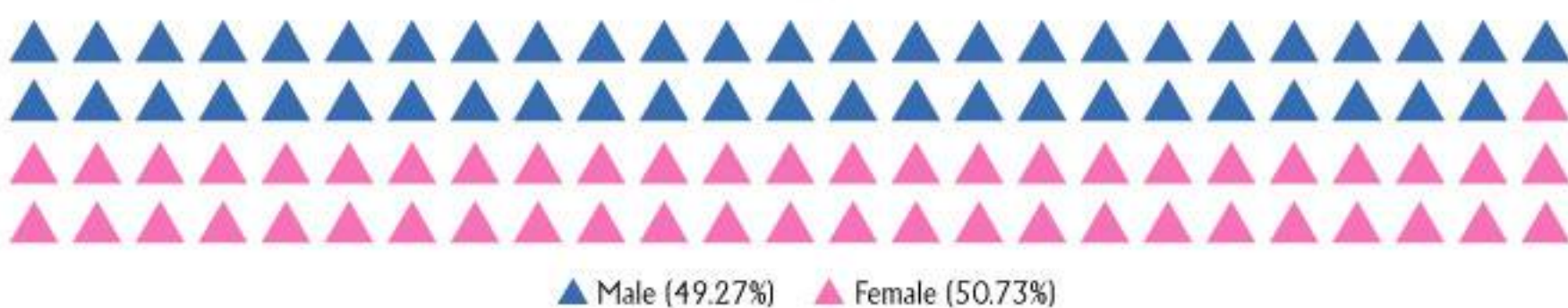
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Regional distribution



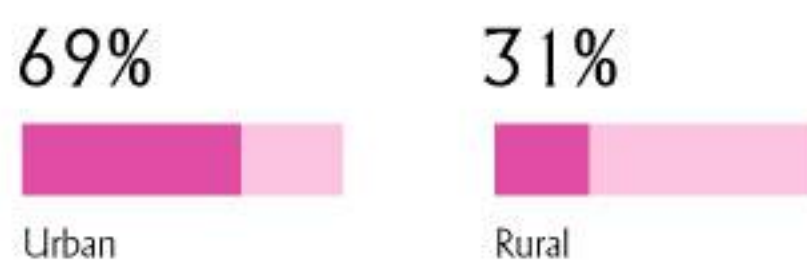
Distribution by Gender



Marital Status

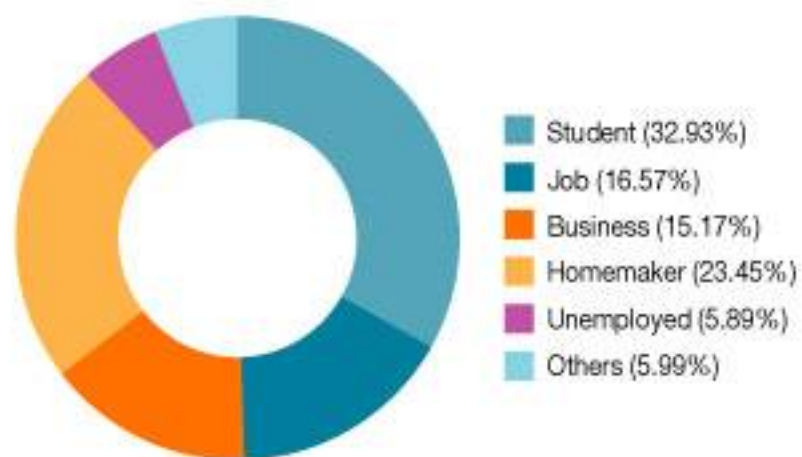


Where do they live



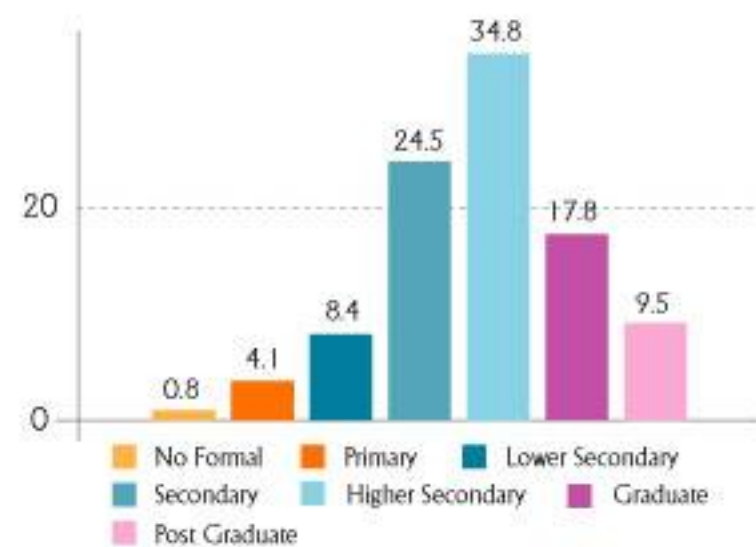
Occupation

Mean Age

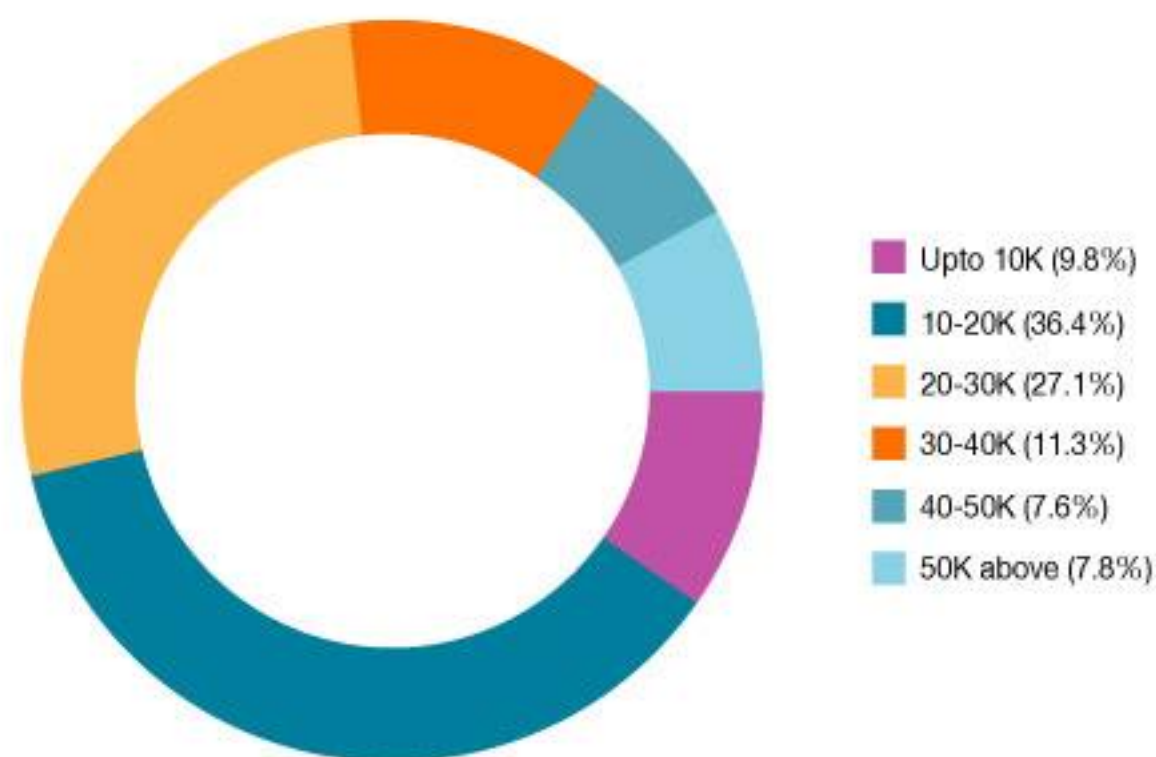


Level of education

Above HSC : 72.7%



Household income status



Identifying the youth concerns

This study examined the concerns of youth in Bangladesh from three different aspects: as a person that impacts their individual growth, as a member of the community that impacts their social wellbeing, and as a citizen of the country that they think structurally impacts the nation as a whole. When asked which is the biggest problem they think that affects their life, they self identified the problems in each category. According to the survey, **unemployment** (33.4%) is the biggest of their concern in personal life, **law and order** (53.3%) situation emerged as the top problem in the community level and they think that **corruption and abuse of power** (36.8%) is the biggest concern for the country.

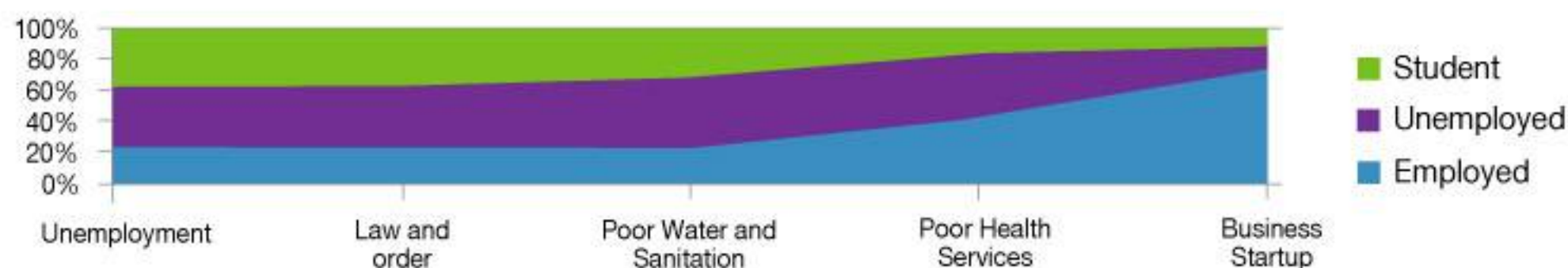
There is similarity in their responses to identify the topmost concerns irrespective of gender, age, occupational status and region. Overall, the youth who participated in the survey listed down around 30 problems that affect their lives most and overlap in three categories. The table below shows the top five problems of the youth in each category.

Table 7: Top 5 concerns of the youth in personal, community and national level

Personal level	Total (%)	Community level	Total (%)	National level	Total (%)
Unemployment	33.4	Law and Order	53.3	Corruption and Abuse of Power	36.8
Law and order	13.5	Unemployment	36.7	Unemployment	28.3
Poor Water and Sanitation	8.5	Poor Health Services	29.9	Politics	9.2
Poor Health Services	7.6	Bad Roads and Transport	22.9	Price Hike	7.4
Business Startup	7.5	Poor Education System	22.9	Environment & Climate	4.1

Although there is overwhelming similarity in the biggest concerns in three categories, the disaggregated data reveals significant differences in the pattern of other problems if analyzed by gender, region or employment status. For example, and as expected, students and unemployed group of the youth identified unemployment as the major problem, where as the employed group finds starting up a business in Bangladesh is a bigger problem than unemployment, and which is the least of the concerns among the first two groups. When the employed and the upper age group are more conscious about public services like health and sanitation, the students are found least bothered about these.

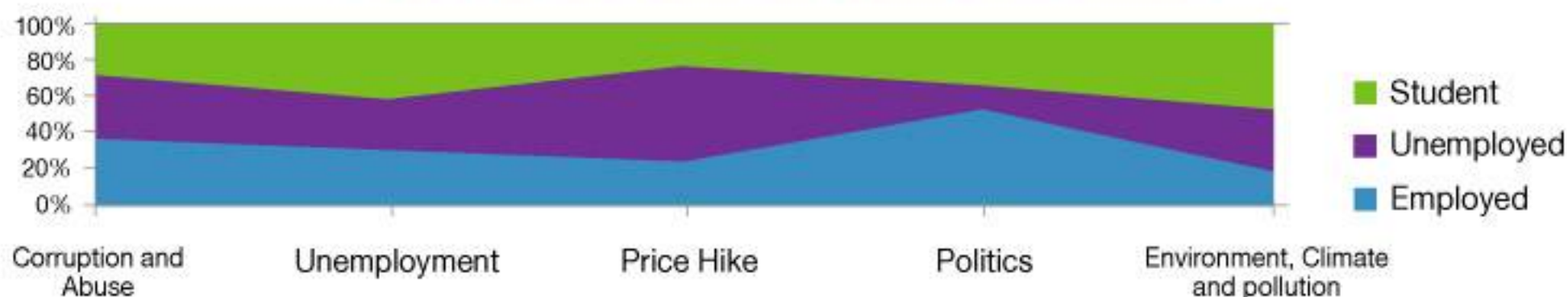
Figure 3: List of top personal problems by occupation



Variation by economic status: The respondents of the survey have been proved to be very clear about the concerns around them. They could strongly differentiate between the natures of the categories and identify how each problem impacts their life. For example, in the personal concerns they talked more about job, bank loans and starting up a business; their community concerns evolved around public services including security, health and road transport; and at the national level they identified more structural problems like corruption, price hike and environment.

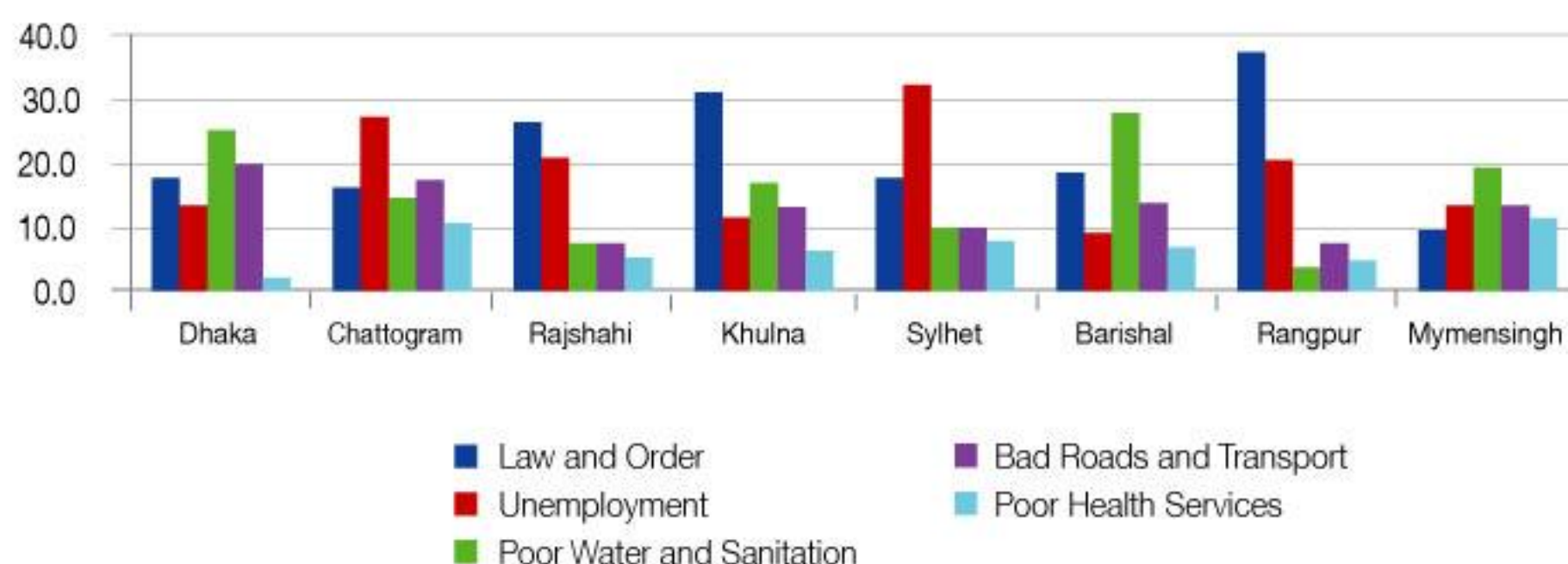
In the national category, almost all groups find corruption as the biggest problem. However, according to the data, political environment is a bigger concern for the employed than the price hike of essentials. Interestingly, the unemployed are more conscious about market prices than they are of, politics. Another revelation is that, the students are more concerned about the pollution, environment and climate change than the employed group among the youth.

Figure 4: List of top national problems by occupation



Regional variation: Personal level concerns of youth are quite similar in 8 regions/divisions of Bangladesh; where unemployment tops the list followed by the law and order situation and other public services. At the national level as well, the list is dominated by corruption and unemployment mostly if analyzed by region, where Khulna and Rajshahi marked poor water and sanitation system as their second biggest concern, and Mymensingh identified politics after corruption. However, community-wise, poor water and sanitation emerged as the biggest problem in Dhaka, Barishal and Mymensingh, and bad roads and transport system followed. Study finds, youth are unhappy about the public services delivery including health facilities at the community they belong to.

Figure 5: List of top community concerns by region



Gender Variation: The gender specific identification of concerns also reveals a significant pattern. For example, law and order is identified as the problem of the highest concern to the female respondents. At the personal level, 9.7% of the male respondents said that the law and order is a problem, making it the third in their priority; whereas it was the second biggest problem of the females in the same category with 17% responses in favor of that.

Even at the community level, 25.8% women said that it is their biggest concern, comparing to only 17.5% among the men. When talking about community women want roads to be fixed after safety; and for men it at the fourth in priority. Unemployment is more of a community concern of men than the women, who listed it at fourth among their problems.

At the national level, female respondents identified violence against women and children as one of the top five problems, which could not manage a place in the male's list. Even, women seem more conscious about environment, climate change and pollution than the men.

Table 8: Concerns of Men in all category

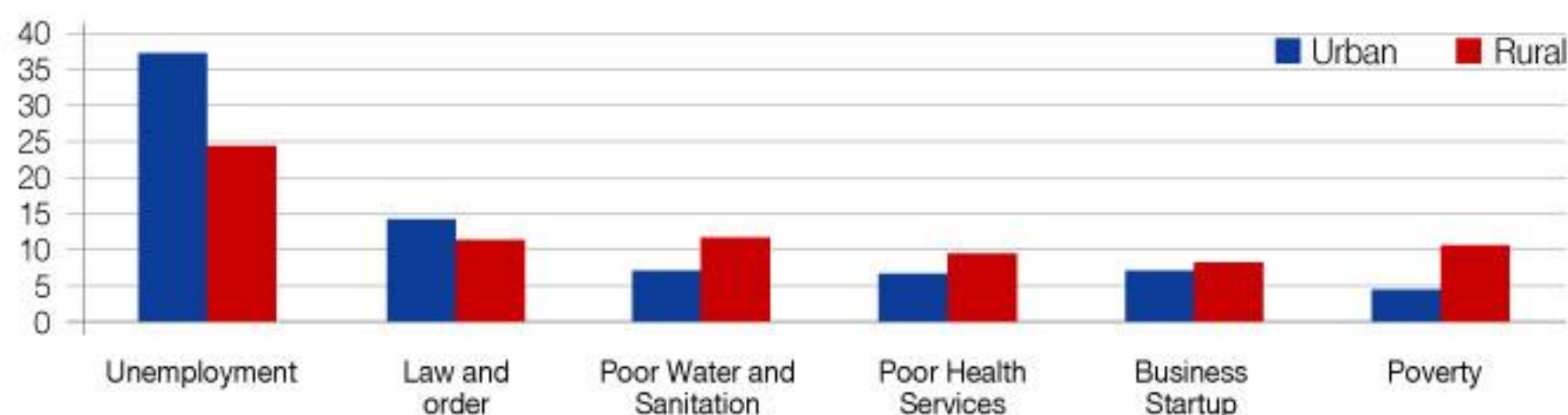
Personal level	Male (%)	Community level	Male (%)	National level	Male (%)
Unemployment	35.5	Unemployment	23.2	Corruption and Abuse of Power	39.0
Business Startup	12.0	Law and Order	17.5	Unemployment	30.7
Law and Order	9.7	Poor Water and Sanitation	17.2	Politics	9.7
Poor Water and Sanitation	6.6	Bad Roads and Transport	11.2	Price Hike	6.9
Poverty	6.6	Poor Education System	6.6	Environment, Climate and Pollution	2.3

Table 9: Concerns of Women in all category

Personal level	Female	Community level	Female	National level	Female
Unemployment	31.4	Law and Order	25.8	Corruption and Abuse of Power	34.7
Law and Order	17.1	Bad Roads and Transport	17.4	Unemployment	26.1
Poor Water and Sanitation	10.4	Poor Water and Sanitation	15.4	Price Hike	11.5
Poor Health Services	10.1	Unemployment	14.3	Violence against Women and Children	6.4
Bad Roads and Transport	6.7	Poor Health Services	8.1	Environment, Climate and Pollution	5.9

Urban concentration: This study was more focused on urban and semi-urban groups of the youth with 69% of respondents living in cities and towns and rest of the 31% mostly in upazila and union levels. The problems identified by the respondents also reflect the more urban nature of the survey. However, poverty is listed as a major personal problem among rural youth with 10.7% response, in comparison to 4.5% in the urban areas which could not make it in the top 5 concerns (Figure: 6).

Figure 6: Top personal concerns by urban-rural response



At the community level, it is found that rural youths are less concerned about unemployment (15.7%) than the urban (20%). Moreover, rural youths are more worried about water and sanitation (18%) than their city counterparts (15.5%). At the national level, the rural seemed less concerned about corruption than the urban respondents.

Concerns as identified in the FGDs

- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Drug addiction
- ▶ Quality education
- ▶ Corruption
- ▶ Abuse of political power
- ▶ Early marriage
- ▶ Sexual harassment
- ▶ Gender discrimination
- ▶ Lack of awareness
- ▶ Environment pollution
- ▶ Water logging
- ▶ Early marriage
- ▶ Over Population
- ▶ Price hike of consumer goods
- ▶ Social media addiction

Access to information in addressing the concerns

Sumi Akhter is educated, completed her graduation lately and has been looking for a job. She tried hard but ultimately could not find any and then decided to start a small business of her own. One needs capital to be an entrepreneur that she did not have. Neither had she any idea about how to get a loan or grant to start the business. It was then, the youth in her mid-twenties, come to know about the Youth Development Office in her town. She heard that they support the youth to be self-reliant and also provide trainings and supports to start up a business.

One fine morning, she went to the district youth development office to enquire about possible cash grants or loans. But the response from the officials had been something she never expected. They did not provide her any kind of information, misbehaved, and threatened her when she asked how to get funds and who are eligible to get such support from them. Since then, Sumi Akhter fears government offices and she believes that they do not care about the problems of the people they are supposed to serve. She was describing this experience in one of the focus group discussions held in the district of Kishoreganj.

It is not about Sumi or her small town alone. The fear about government offices, lack of knowledge on whom or how to approach them to resolve the problems, and little awareness about the process of accessing relevant information - are some of the striking findings that are revealed in the survey as well. Although the youths are in wide consensus in FGDs that proper information can help them to solve their problems, only 29.4% of the survey respondents tried to get the information they need from the public offices. However, a majority of them are either refused or given partial information.

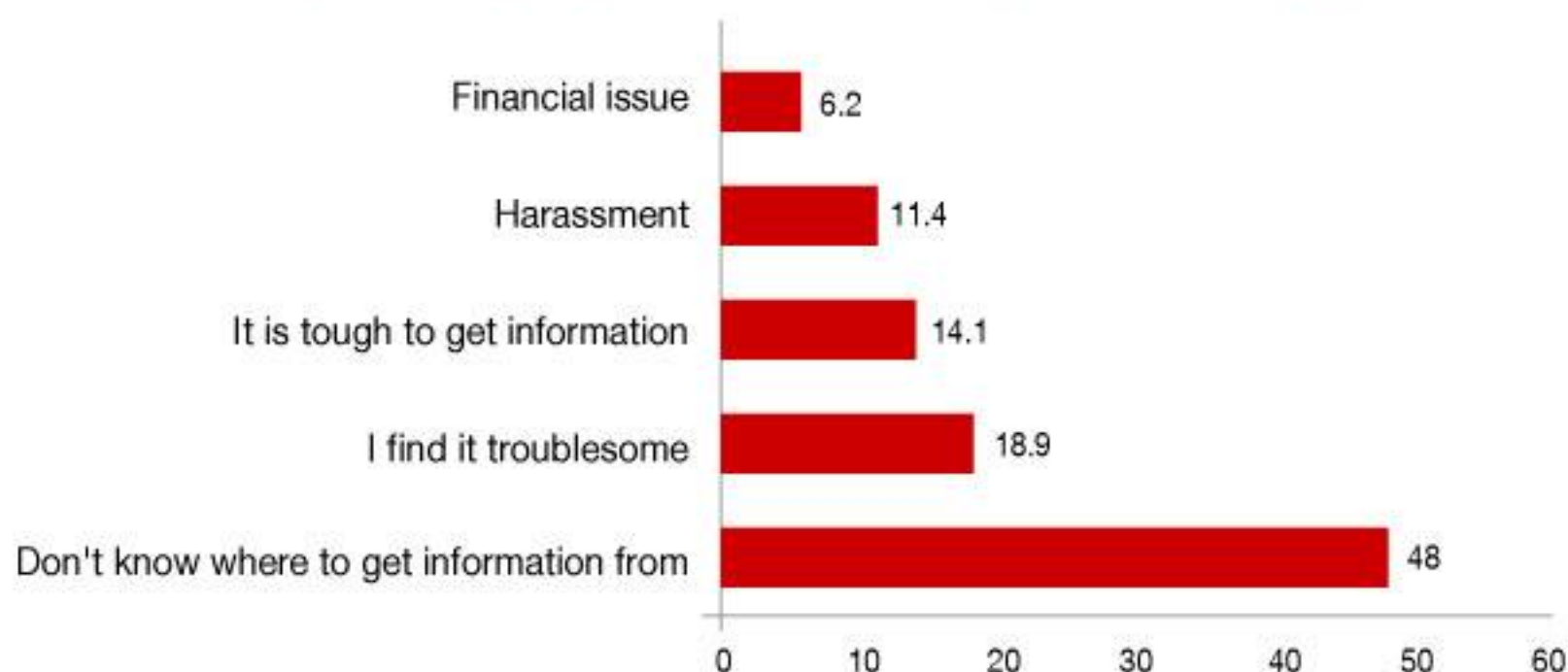
Table 10 : List of key information the youth seek

Description	Total (%)
Who is responsible to solve my problems	69.83
Where and How to communicate with the authority	53.12
To ask why the problem is happening	46.32
What steps are being taken to solve the problem	43.06
Transparency in development project expenditure	32.01
Government's action and policy decisions	28.61
How much time will be needed for the whole process	27.34
Job opportunity, qualification and application related information	26.35
What welfare activities can be found in my ward	19.97
Accessibility of health services	18.13
Education, training and admission related information	17.99
Legal Information	16.43
Agriculture, Business and loan related information	12.18
Voter list, national ID and Passport	9.63
Government budget and expenditure	7.08

When in problem, an overwhelming 70% of the respondents preferred to go to government or private offices to get further information. They were asked, to list the information they wanted to seek from the authority. The list of around 60 of their queries reveals a great lack of awareness about not only how to get information but also whom to ask for it. It is observed that the youth have interests in having information on job opportunities, related qualifications and application process; expenditure of funds in development projects to see if there is any irregularity or corruption; sources of fund and management of budgets; and they also want to make the authority accountable by asking about the reasons of problems in public services delivery, why they are not taking any action, and how long it may take to resolve it.

There is also fear, lack of knowledge and unwillingness among the youth to seek information from the authority. Around 19% of the youth find the process of getting information troublesome. As it takes lot of time and the process is bureaucratic, it discourages them to go to an office to seek information. More than 14% of them think it is very hard to get information and some of them (11.4%) have fear of being harassed or threatened. Financial insolvency appeared as another reason in the top 5 list, as it requires money to travel to offices in the cities and towns to get the information. Some of them are just not willing to do so, as they do not have that much time to spare and they find it meaningless to invest such efforts as they are sure that the authority will not provide information.

Figure 7: Top 5 problems in accessing information (%)



The importance of youths having access to the information they need is a well understood matter in global policies. Recognizing its value for the society, the UN says, "For young people, access to information means better access to capital, markets and training needed to pursue a career or studies; increased participation in political processes, and recognition of youth as responsible citizens in today's society."¹³

However, the respondents in the survey were asked: how availability of information can help them to resolve their problems. Their answer is accumulated here in a descending order:

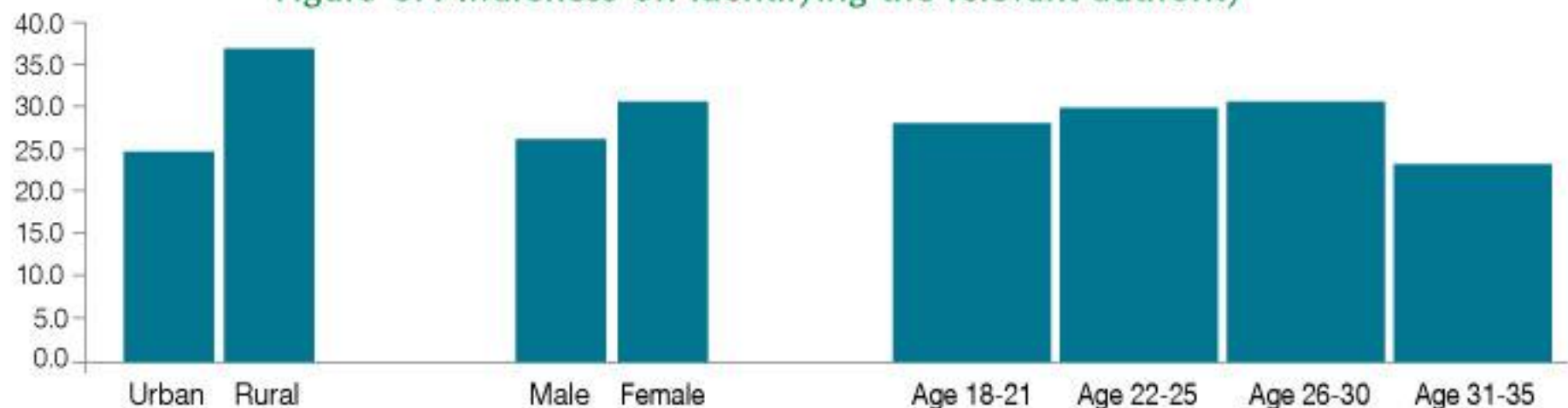
- ▶ People in the community will be benefitted
- ▶ The problem will be solved
- ▶ People will have more faith in the government
- ▶ It will be identified, what is needed to be done in the future
- ▶ People will be aware
- ▶ It will be easier to solve the problem
- ▶ There is notmuch benefit
- ▶ Unemployment will be reduced

¹³ Factsheet: Youth and ICT, United Nations

Identifying key organizations for information

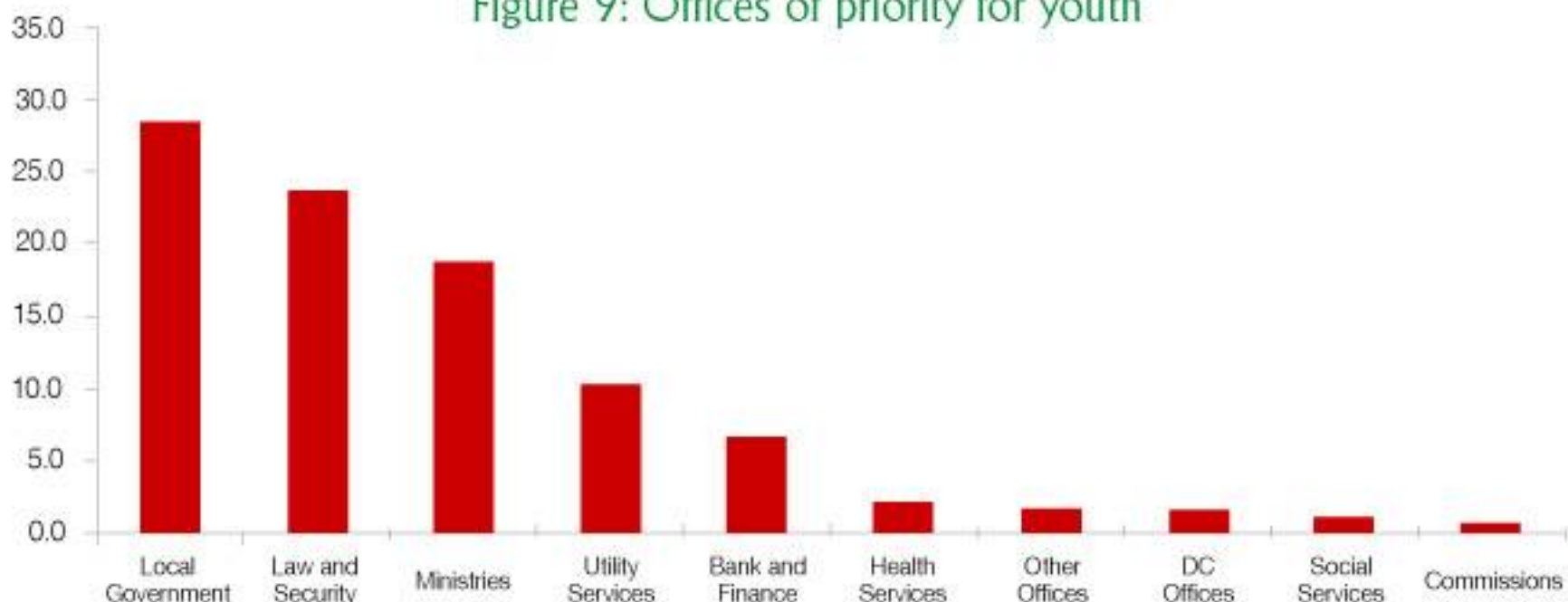
This study also intended to look at whether the youth are aware not only about their problems, but also who can solve it. They were asked if they know which organization/s public or private can address their concern. Only 28.8% of the respondents said that they are not aware about it. Data shows that the level of awareness or ability to identify the offices of priority is higher among the male than the female. Similarly, awareness of the urban youth is better than that of the rural. It is also observed that there is insignificant variation if analyzed by age, region or income level.

Figure 8: Awareness on identifying the relevant authority



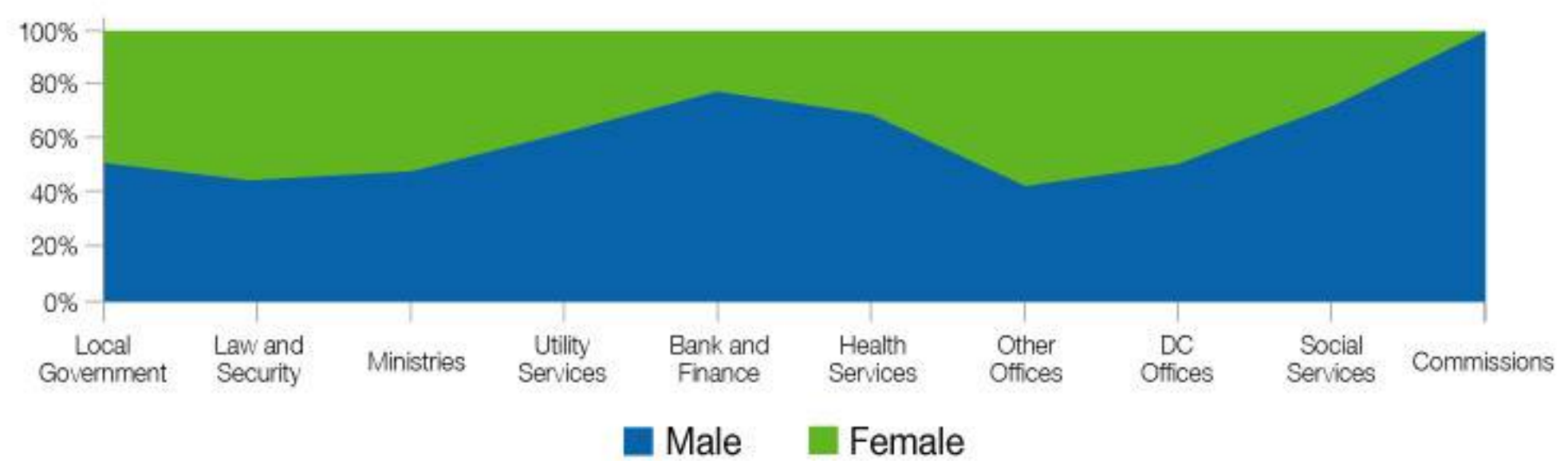
Data suggests, a majority of the youth can precisely identify which organization can solve their problems. The survey respondents listed more than 40 offices which they think are relevant considering their personal or community level concerns. We have combined those offices into 10 major groups and found that local government organization tops the list as both urban and rural youth think that respective city corporation, pourshavas, and district, upazila and union parishads can resolve most of their problems and also provide them necessary information. They find that those Local Government institutions are more accessible than many other government and private offices.

Figure 9: Offices of priority for youth



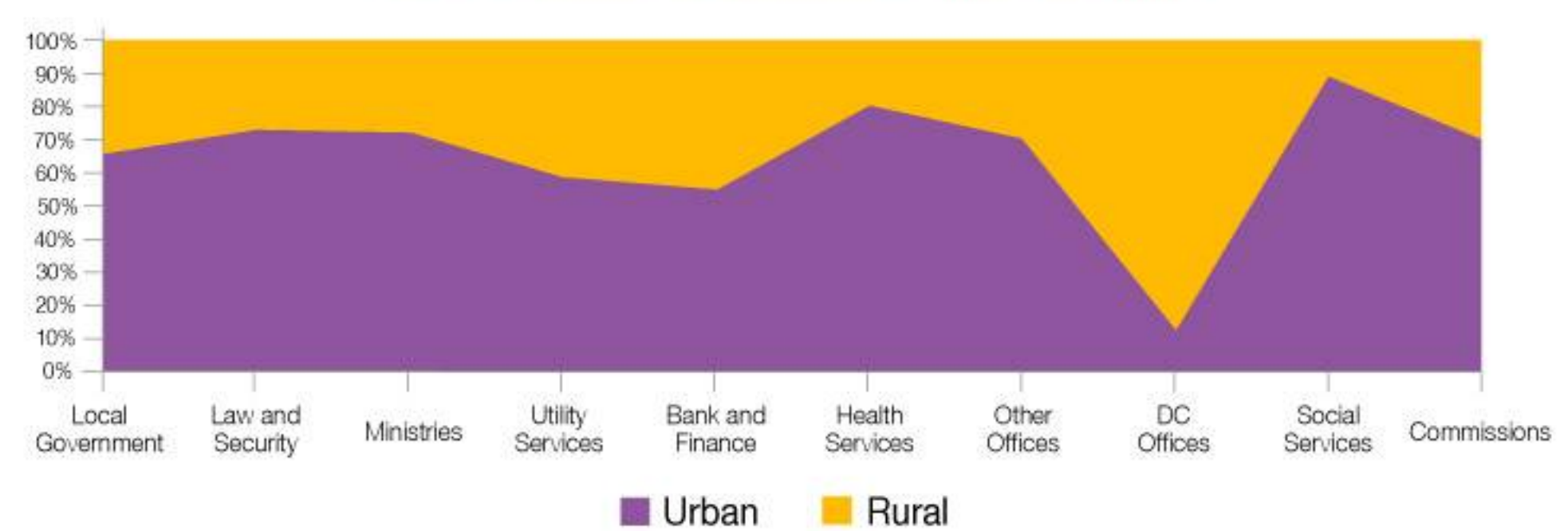
The youth - as they identified law and order as one of the top concerns - naturally mentioned the name of police stations overwhelmingly as an office of priority. There are few responses in favor of courts, navy and army offices that are also included in this law and security group. Government ministries are third in the priority and the youths identified 11 ministries for this group including public administration, health, education, energy and power, roads, railways and agriculture. Government offices that provide utility services, for example, WASA, Titas Gas, PDB and BRTA have been the next in their priority list.

Figure 10: Gender variation in offices of priority



Data suggest, there is little gender or urban-rural variation in the responses when it is about the top three groups of offices like local government, police stations and ministries. However, among other priorities women have less interest in banks, financial institutions or statutory body like commissions, as the men have. In a distribution of responses by urban and rural youth, a significant difference is observed when they mentioned about the DC office. The chart shows that rural youth finds DC office far more important than their urban counterparts.

Figure 11: Urban-Rural variation in offices of priority



Addressing the unemployment question

Unemployment has always been the major concern of the youth in Bangladesh. It affects all sphere of their life; be it personal, social or national as they mentioned in the survey. It is not a surprise that the MRDI survey also identifies it as the biggest of their problem. Almost all the respondents in the FGDs said that after completing the study they have struggled to get a job. According to them, "due to unemployment youth are being involved in terrorism, drug addiction and anti-social activities." They urged that the government must take initiatives to ensure, youth have the skills and trainings required for the job market.

The Youth survey by the leading Bangla Daily Prothom Alo finds that "Despite growing economy and stable political situation, about 74.5 per cent of the youth, three in every four young people to be precise, are concerned and anxious about their career due to poor education quality and lack of future employment in the country. Prothom Alo conducted the previous survey two years ago in 2017, when the rate was 63.1%."¹⁴

The National Youth Survey 2018 by BRAC suggests, "Most Bangladeshi youths (57% female; 42% male) see government jobs as the most viable career. Many educated young people from well-off families want to establish their own businesses. On the other hand, youths with no or less institutional education want to find work abroad to secure better earning. Moreover, only 5% of the respondents believe that their educational qualification will help them secure employment."¹⁵

Job information they seek: There is no doubt that improving education system to make the youth fit for the changing job market is a key solution in addressing the problem. Yet, sometimes having the information of job opportunities and application process is even a bigger problem for the youths who are looking at government jobs. When asked what kind of information they want on employment, the respondents listed these:

- ▶ Authentic information about vacancies
- ▶ What qualifications are needed for the job
- ▶ The detail of application process
- ▶ Recruitment and selection criteria
- ▶ What kind of papers need to be submitted
- ▶ Actual time and date of recruitment
- ▶ Employment facilities for youth

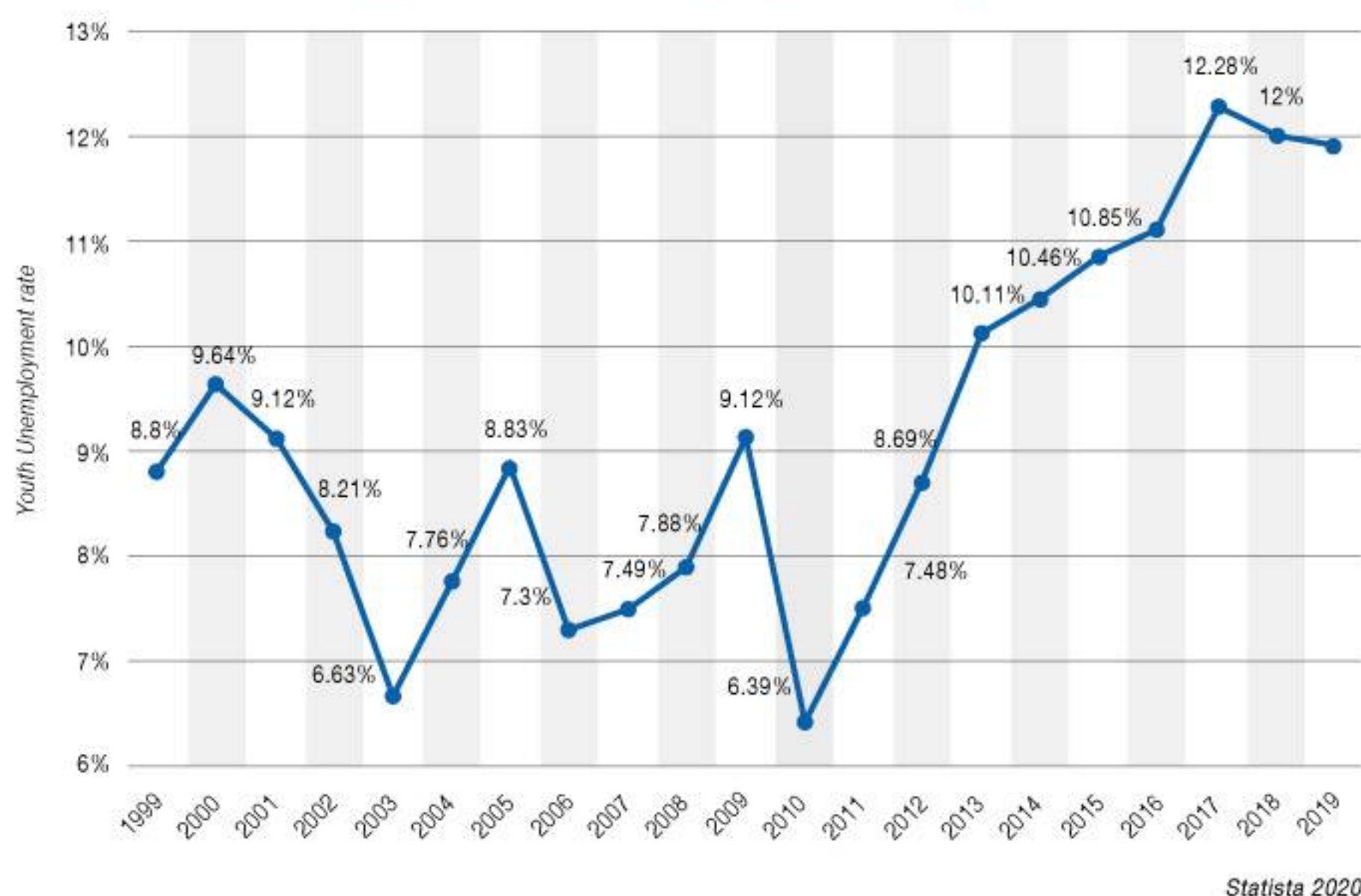
Traditionally, the recruiting agencies advertise their vacancies or openings in the newspapers. In a country like Bangladesh, a very small number of households subscribe them. According to various estimations, the total Bengali newspaper circulation is around 1.5 million copies.¹⁶ Ten leading national newspapers have over 90 percent of the circulation. It is one of the main reasons, why most of the openings remain unknown to the youth. The problem is even more acute in the rural areas.

¹⁴ Youth Survey, Prothom Alo, 2019 (<https://en.prothomalo.com/youth/One-in-every-five-youths-anxious-about-career>)

¹⁵ Youth of Bangladesh Agents of Change?, BRAC, 2018

¹⁶ Media Landscapes (<https://medialandscapes.org/country/bangladesh/media/print>)

Figure 12 : Youth Unemployment in Bangladesh



Economist Fahmida Khatun and Syed Yusuf Sadat argued in a recent report that "a large number of job-seekers do not have information on job opportunities in various sectors. Job opportunities and vacancies should be announced through various types of media, including newspapers, local radio, notice boards, websites and social media. There should be more information centers in the remotest parts of the country. Job-seekers should also be guided through career counseling services."¹⁷

Can a government job portal be a part of the solution?

On 20th July, 2015, Government of India launched the National Career Service (NCS). It is a one-stop solution that provides a wide array of employment and career related services to the citizens of India. It works towards bridging the gap between jobseekers and employers, candidates seeking training and career guidance, agencies providing training and career counseling.

According to the NCS website, among other supporting activities, "the digital centralized portal provides a wide range of career related services including job search, job matching, rich career content, career counseling, information on Job Fairs, services of local service providers like drivers, plumbers, etc. for households and various other services. It facilitates registration of Job Seekers, Employers, Skill Providers, Career Counselors, Local Service Providers (LSP's), Career Centers, Placement Organisations, Households (for availing the services of the LSP's) and Government Departments." ¹⁸

¹⁷ The Ignored Generation: Exploring the dynamics of youth employment in Bangladesh, CPD, 2018

¹⁸ National Career Service website, (<https://www.ncs.gov.in/pages/about-us.aspx>)

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Andaman and Nicobar Islands (413 Vacancies)	Andhra Pradesh (8636 Vacancies)	Arunachal Pradesh (83 Vacancies)
Chandigarh (274 Vacancies)	Chhattisgarh (979 Vacancies)	Assam (2205 Vacancies)
Goa (204 Vacancies)	Gujarat (6186 Vacancies)	Bihar (2614 Vacancies)
Jharkhand (2612 Vacancies)	Karnataka (23003 Vacancies)	Dadra and Nagar Haveli (2 Vacancies)
Maharashtra (11370 Vacancies)	Manipur (516 Vacancies)	Daman and Diu (6 Vacancies)
	Meghalaya (2 Vacancies)	Delhi (8406 Vacancies)
	Mizoram (4 Vacancies)	Himachal Pradesh (443 Vacancies)
		Jammu and Kashmir (421 Vacancies)
		Lakshadweep (2 Vacancies)
		Madhya Pradesh (4934 Vacancies)
		Nagaland (15 Vacancies)

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NCS Users Login Here

Registration Help - Videos

IMPORTANT NOTICE **Caution Against Fraud**

Toll Free Helpline
1800-425-1514
Timing: Tue-Sun 08:00 AM to 08:00 PM

Photo: Screenshot of NCS web portal

As many as 1.05 crores active job seekers and 7797 active employers are on the portal as on 23rd September, 2019.¹⁹ It is also providing free employment services like counseling, vocational guidance, job fairs, and internships during the Covid-19 Pandemic.²⁰

Government job portals are not a new concept. They exist in many countries in Asia, Europe and America, for example "usajobs.gov" in the United States. The site says, "USAJOBS connects job seekers with federal employment opportunities across the United States and around the world. As the Federal Government's official employment site, it provides resources to help the right people find the right jobs. It serves as the central location to find job openings within hundreds of federal agencies and organizations."²¹ There are similar government portals like "jobsmalaysia.gov.my" in Malaysia or "jobplacement.gov.pk" in Pakistan.

¹⁹ Research Note on SDG 8: Achieving Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All, Lokshabha Secretariate, 2019

²⁰ Opengovasia.com, 2020, (<https://www.opengovasia.com/india-offers-online-employment-services-during-covid-19/>)

²¹ usajobs.gov

What experts say

Can such a portal be a solution for job related information for Bangladeshi youth, where they can find national and local level vacancies, apply online, see the results, receive skill development trainings and find all necessary information as they need? MRDI has asked six leading experts who work with the youth development and access to information. They welcomed the idea with cautiousness, saying that such portals can certainly address the information gap, but it can only be effective when we can ensure transparency and accountability in the government recruiting process. And the success also depends on ensuring low cost internet for the youth even in the rural level.

"It will only work when the process is transparent. Better if it says how many applied for the job, who got appointed, if they can see the results; otherwise it will create hype only at the beginning, and then fade away. Just like the online sales of rail tickets. It was a hit when started, but later people lost interest. We need to ensure a minimum level of accountability," said Korvi Rakhshand, founder of Jaago foundation.

"Let it be social media or a job portal - chances are very little that they will work in the case of government jobs," said Dr. Ananya Raihan, CEO of iSocial who has long been working to bridge technology and development. "It is because, the youth already know that the recruitment process in both cadre and non-cadre services is highly corrupt and they will not get any job following the advertisement."

Badiul Alam Majumdar, Global Vice President and Country Director of Hunger Project Bangladesh, an organization that works both with the youth and access to information, welcomed the idea of a government job portal. "Young people do not read newspapers, they read news online, so there is no alternative to the internet," he said.

"The quality of good things also deteriorates because the government itself is corrupt. There is no benefit from the job site if it is not user friendly, and access to internet and proper speed is not ensured. Job sites need to be monitored regularly so that all the information is updated. Otherwise it will not be of any use to the youth," added Mr. Majumdar.



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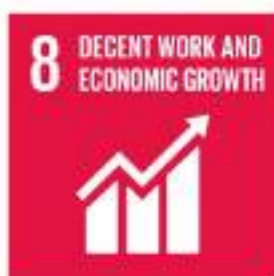
Badiul Alam Majumdar

Global Vice President and Country Director
Hunger Project Bangladesh

SDG Targets related to Youth Employment



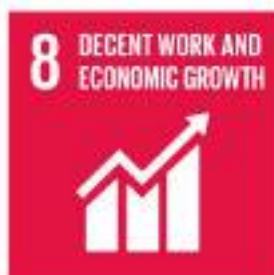
4.4 By 2030, increase by x% the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship



8.5 By 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value



8.6 By 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training



8.12 By 2020 develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment



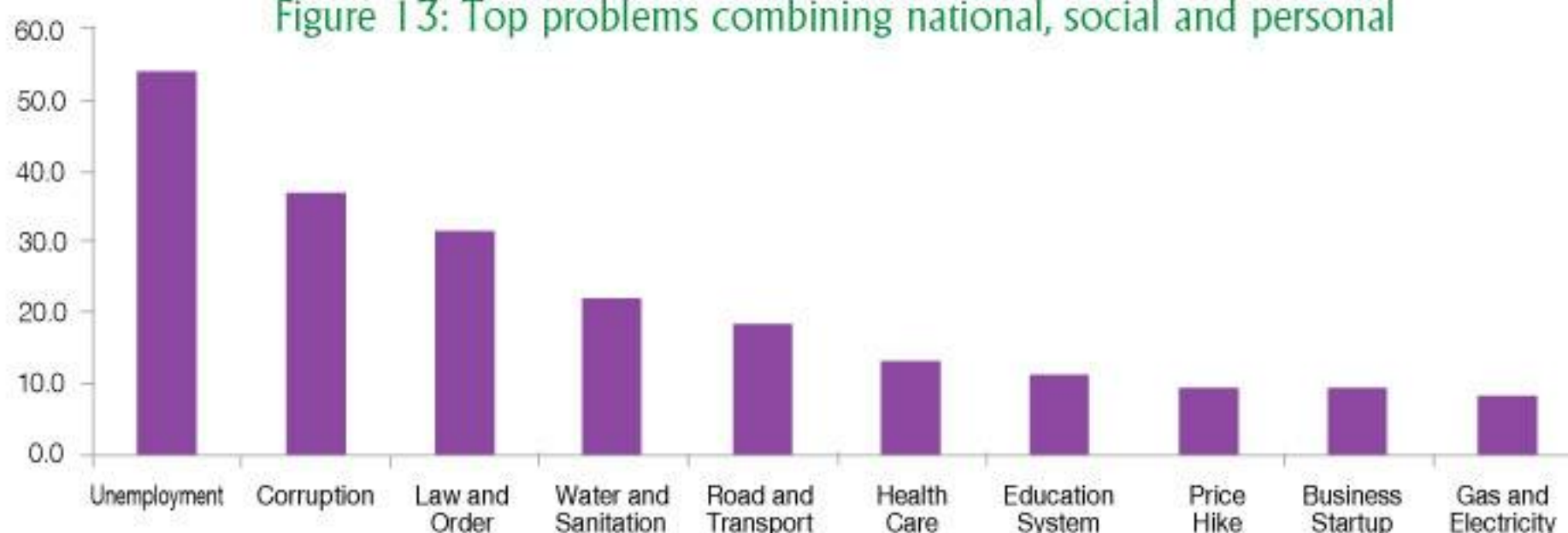
Corruption, accountability and public services



In the year 2015, British Council in Bangladesh conducted a national survey on the aspirations of the youth in Bangladesh. While political stability remained at the top of their concern in that time, others in the top list as identified by the youth were political instability, poor transport system, electricity crisis, inflation, increasing corruption and lack of job opportunity. The youth, as mentioned in the report, hoped that "in 15 years the country will be a more prosperous one than it is now."²²

Five years down the line, the economy of Bangladesh has certainly progressed, and can hope to achieve more than 8% of growth in a year rattled by Covid-19; but their concerns remained the same as revealed in this survey. Other than the political instability the top list of problems is identical revealing frustration of youth on corruption and access to basic services delivery. The chart below combines the personal, social and national concerns provide a list of top problems identified by the youth in the year 2020. It says, half of their top concerns are related with public services like health, education, roads, gas, and electricity - those are also to a great extent related with corruption and lack of governance and accountability.

Figure 13: Top problems combining national, social and personal



According to a policy research working paper by the World Bank, "Corruption acts as a regressive tax and that quality of governance is linked to access to public services." It adds that, "The quality of public sector institutions plays a critical role in the access and the costs of the public services provided by a government to its citizens. Poor governance can affect greatly public service delivery, both directly through higher price, and indirectly through lower quality or quantity available. When seeking a public service, some users may be discriminated against and pay more than the official price (because of corruption). Consequently, some users may get discouraged and choose not to seek the service needed due to the higher price imposed by the bribery."²³

²² Next Generation Bangladesh: 2015 and beyond, British Council, 2015.

²³ Kaufmann, Daniel; Montoriol-Garriga, Judit; Recanatini, Francesca. 2008. How Does Bribery Affect Public Service Delivery? Micro-Evidence from Service Users and Public Officials in Peru. Policy Research Working Paper, No. 4492. World Bank, Washington, DC.



When to ask for information?
In cases where you don't get required service from the concerned departments or offices. Whenever you submit a request for information from any authority, it indirectly creates a pressure on that office for being transparent and accountable to the applicant and in general to the people, as the RTI Act obligates every authority to provide requested information, except a very few, within a specified period of time. More-over, all the ministries and departments developed websites as a means of proactive disclosure and made Citizen Charter prescribing a set of time line to ensure better delivery of services to the people matching it with the grievance redress system. Any member of the youth community as a citizen of this country has the scope to be benefitted, if they apply the law.



Nepal Chandra Sarker
Former Information
Commissioner

Ejaj Ahmad, Founder of Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center said, they find similar results in their surveys as well. "Corruption is a problem, but what youth says most in our surveys is that rules are not equal for all, in Bangladesh. It makes the new generation very frustrated. When there is no rule of law, no justice in the society - it disturbs and frustrates the youth," he added.

The key informants in this study identified this corruption and lack of accountability as the root of all problems that affects not only employment opportunities, but also almost all sphere of youth life. Ruhi Naz who is an expert on RTI and now working with Research Initiatives, Bangladesh said that even in their programs, "lack of governance, lack of accountability and mis-management" come as major concerns of the youth. Referring to the lack of information during the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, Ruhi said, if I do not have information on what is going on with our health system, I'll never be able to bring the change it needs. When there is open flow of information, you can touch the area of transparency; you can work further on accountability."

In a presentation on slum-dwelling youths, think tank organization CPD said, "Three issues need to put emphasis in order to ensure effective public service delivery for the youth living in slums. These are - access to public services, availability of information on those services and effective coordination between GOs and NGOs for facilitating those services to the urban slum youth."²⁴ Ruhi recommends, using RTI to access information when the youths feel they are deprived and discriminated. She considers it as a great tool for transparency, when any information is hidden. "It's all about information which is kept away from the public. Information that is not being disclosed to the public, I am in favour of using RTI for that," she said.

Nepal Chandra Sarker, former Information Commissioner of Bangladesh also believes RTI can play an important role in ensuring services delivery. "When to ask for information? In cases where you don't get required service from the concerned departments or offices. Whenever you submit a request for information from any authority, it indirectly creates a pressure on that office for being transparent and accountable to the applicant and in general to the people, as the RTI Act obligates every authority to provide requested information, except a very few, within a specified period of time. More-over, all the ministries and departments developed websites as a means of proactive disclosure and made Citizen Charter prescribing a set of time line to ensure better delivery of services to the people matching it with the grievance redress system. Any member of the youth community as a citizen of this country has the scope to be benefitted, if they apply the law." he said.

²⁴ <https://cpd.org.bd/access-information-coordination-essential-to-ensure-public-services-for-youth-in-slums/>



Using RTI : Perception of youth and way forward

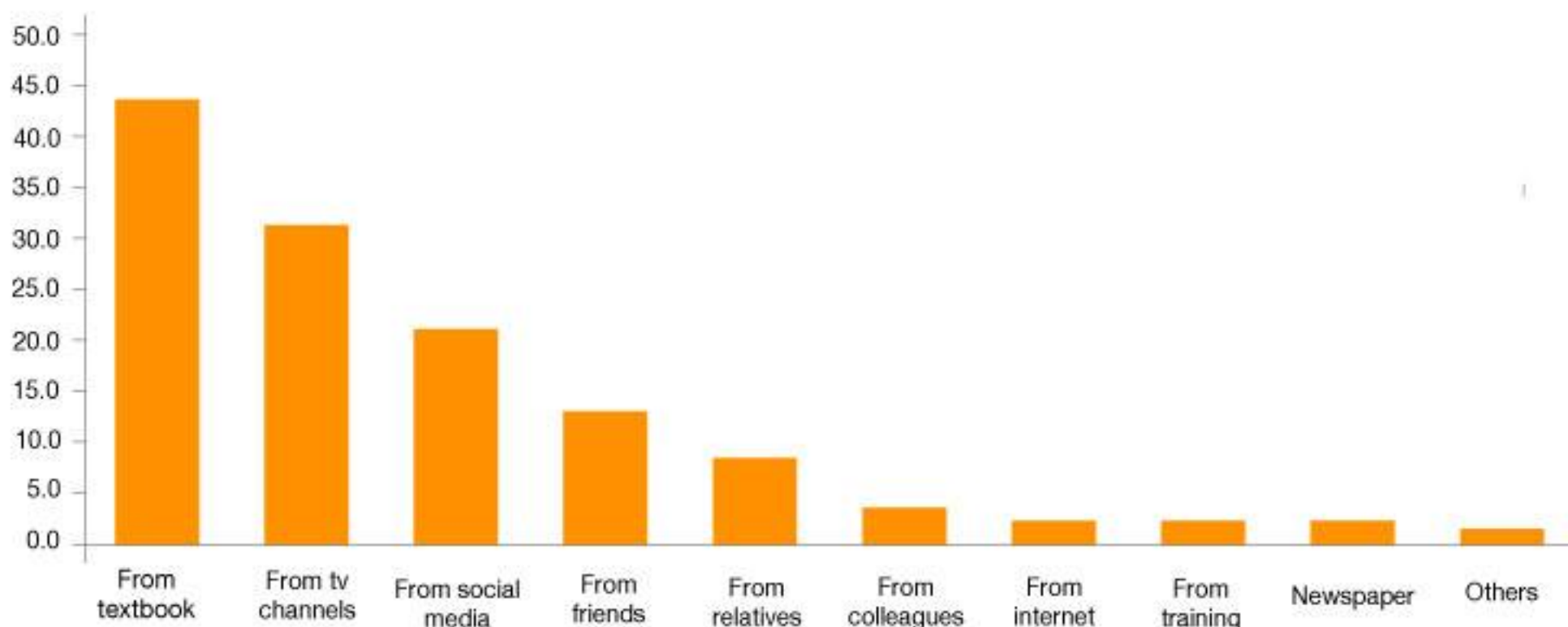


Referring to the Right to Information as a major legal and political document in Europe and abroad, the European Youth Information and Counseling Agency says, "In the course of their transition to adulthood, young people have to make certain decisions that will have a significant impact on their lives. Therefore, having equal access to quality and free information is a prerequisite for them to make use of their rights, to make responsible decisions and to participate in society in its social, economic and political dimensions." ²⁵

It has been more than 10 years since Bangladesh adopted the Right to Information Act. Manusher Jonno Foundation, MRDI and ORG-Quest jointly conducted a national survey to assess the awareness about Right to Information act among the people. The survey found, only 7.7 percent of the population somewhat knows about the act, and the level of awareness is relatively high among the youth and the educated of urban area. ²⁶

This particular study wanted to examine the knowledge of RTIA among the youth, and to assess their perception, if it can be an effective tool for them to access the information that is required to resolve their concerns. The survey found only 178 of the 706 participants know that there is an act that allows the citizens to access public information from government and non-government organizations. However, a little more than 90% of those could somewhat mention the name of the law. The survey data implies that only 22.2% of the total respondents are aware about the name of Right to Information Act in Bangladesh.

Figure 14: How did they know about the law?



²⁵ European Youth Information and Counseling Agency, (<https://www.eryica.org/what-is-youth-information>)

²⁶ Bangladesh Right to Information Survey, 2019

When asked how they know about the act, most of the participants mentioned their school textbook as a source, followed by television channels, social media and friends. There was option to select multiple answers. Only a few of them heard about the act from trainings by NGOs.

It is not only that only one out of five know about the act, but also only a few could tell, how to use it in practical life. Half of the respondents who are aware of the RTIA said that they only heard about it; 17% somewhat knows the procedure of accessing information from the authority. It implies that only 4.4% of the youth have idea about how to use the RTI act.

Only 2.5% of the respondents said that they have used the RTI act to access the information they need. They were asked about their experience about using the act, and the response is listed in the table below.

Table 11: Experience of using RTI act (%)

Description	Total (%)
They did not want to provide information	27.8
Took long time to answer	27.8
Incomplete information provided	22.2
Gave information in right time	16.7
Did not get any answer	11.1
Got complete information	11.1
Designated officer was helpful	11.1
Officials did not know much about my queries	5.6
Asked for unreasonable fee and took it by force	5.6

Youths widely agree that the act can be very effective in accessing the necessary information. But they clearly identified three barriers in using it more: 1) Not knowing the process of requesting information, 2) limited idea about the authority, where they can request, and 3) where application forms are available. Some of them also expressed fear of harassment by the officials. They also perceive the process to be complicated.

The FGDs revealed another dimension of problem in using the RTI act. Some of the participants mentioned that one need to know what kind of information they can seek from the authority before using this act. And sometimes it is difficult to have clarity on how to frame the questions and what to ask for. As an FGD participant from the district of Khagrachhari said, "Information is power, but if anyone is not aware about what is needed he cannot utilize the power."

Yet, there is optimism among the youth, and they believe that it can significantly contribute to improve their life. Here is what the survey says about their perception on the act:

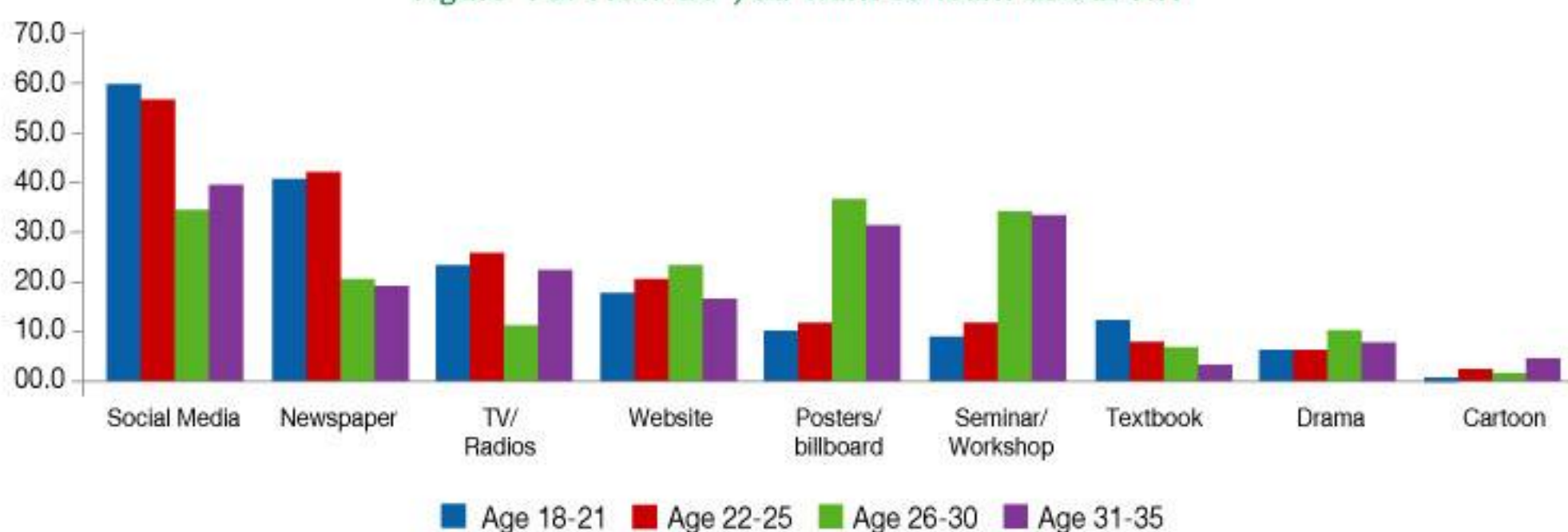
- ▶ It can reduce corruption and increase accountability;
- ▶ It can make people more aware about their rights;
- ▶ It can ensure better services from the public offices;
- ▶ It will help to get better behaviors from the officials.

"It is imperative that the empowerment and pervasive development of the huge young population is implemented to achieve 'equality, human dignity and social justice' as stated in the Proclamation of Independence issued on 10 April 1971," says the National Youth Policy 2017 of Bangladesh. It also mentions to

"Educate youth in the Right to Information Act" as one of the priority areas for youth development, to ensure good governance.²⁷

This study - in all its survey, FGDs and KIs - find that youth in Bangladesh are very conscious about their rights and good governance. They are also eager to explore the potential of RTI Act in making the authority accountable and ensure better services to their community. Despite the fact that, they have limited idea on the use of the act, a majority of them said that they want to learn about RTI.

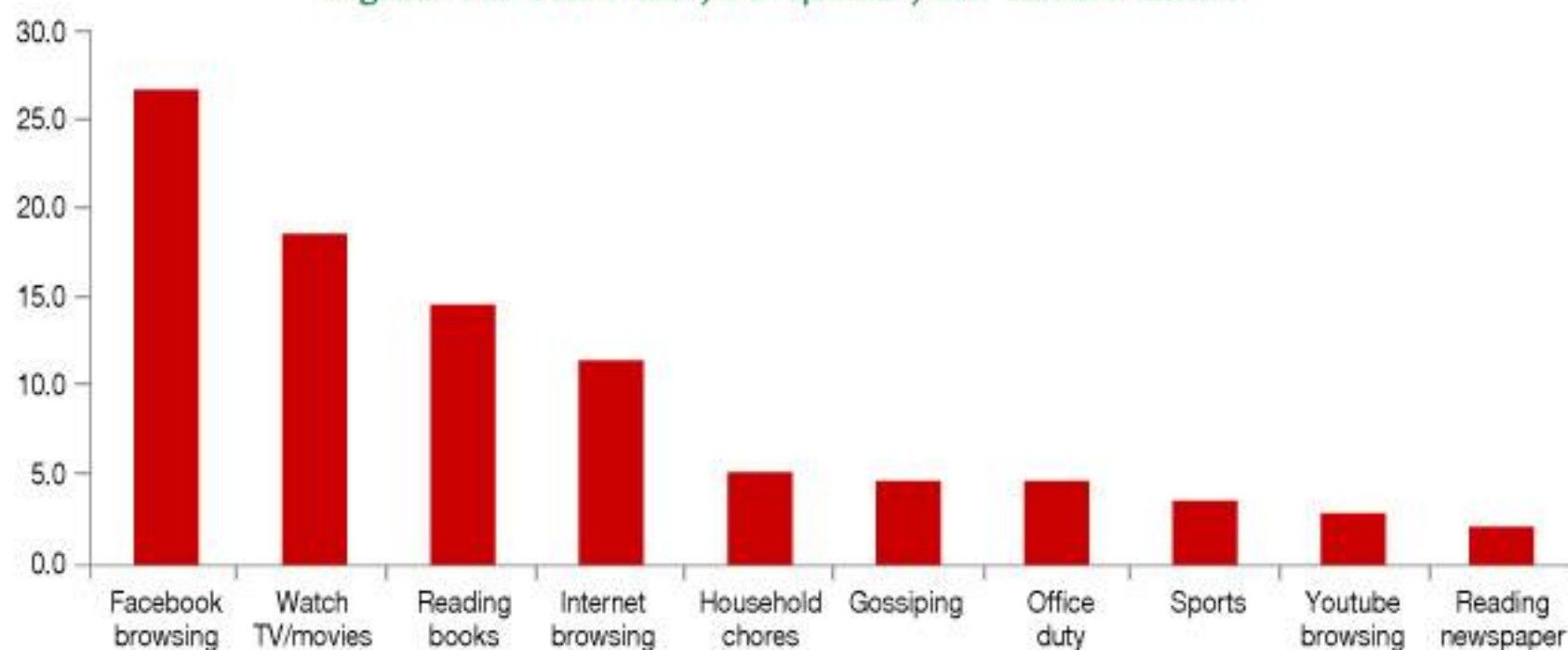
Figure 15: How do you want to learn about RTI



How to seek information by using this law, what to do if they don't want to provide information, what type of information can you get or not get, who are bound to provide information, what is the punishments of violating the law, and why is this law important - these are some fundamental questions they are seeking answer of.

When asked how they want to learn it - most of them preferred social media platforms as a medium. It is evident from the table above, that the younger the age, the more they are inclined to use social media as tool for learning. Broadcast mediums - like television and radio - appear to be their second choice, followed by newspaper, websites and other traditional communication tools. It is also observed that youths of higher age group also prefer posters, billboards, seminars and workshops as effective method of learning.

Figure 16: How do you spend your leisure time?



²⁷ National Youth Policy 2017, Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The survey asked them, if they want to find any information on something, where they go first. Overwhelmingly around 70% of them said, "Internet." The survey also reveals that other than work or study, the most of the youth spend their time in Facebook, watching TV, reading books and browsing internet. The finding implies the necessity of producing online contents on RTI in social media and other platforms, so that whenever they search they find it in their preferred platforms. The KIs also emphasized on easy, understandable and accessible RTI contents for the youth.

FGD recommendations in popularizing the RTI Act

- ▶ Awareness in school/colleges
- ▶ Arrange Debate
- ▶ Success stories sharing among different group/age
- ▶ Using welfare organizations/Voluntary organizations
- ▶ Cultural activities
- ▶ Training and workshop
- ▶ Street drama
- ▶ Arrange workshops and campaigns through government initiative
- ▶ Scout, girls guide, school/college-based organizations can play a role
- ▶ Social media, online campaign, Miking
- ▶ Influence village people through Courtyard meeting

However, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Global Vice President and Country Director of Hunger project said, only social media contents or trainings may not prove enough to educate the youth on RTI. "They have to apply with a pen in hand, and follow up constantly. Including in education curriculum doesn't always work, because we don't always get to realize what we read in books. That is why motivation is important. It has to be turned into a social movement," he added.



An interview with

Dr. Ananya Raihan

Chief Executive Officer at iSocial

Q: How do you see the role of open flow of information regarding jobs, public services and development works in addressing the concerns of youth?

A: Free flow of information is important in every aspect of life and without it there will be no relation of trust. If you see the Covid -19 situation in our country, it is creating fear amongst people. They do not want to go to the hospitals, they are trying to hide when infected by the virus, and the reason is fear; and another reason is, lack of confidence on (health) services. This is true for other sectors as well, and to get rid of this fear and mistrust, we need information. Trust, let it be on the management of an organization, or a government within a state - all depends on the rule of law and free flow of information. There is no alternative.

Q: So if we want to ensure that the youth have the access to public information, what channel would be more effective?

A: For youth I would say that channels of information dissemination have been changed in past decade. Now we are dependent on social media, particularly the youth. I think digital media is the best way. If we follow trend in our country, Facebook is the most popular amongst youth rather than twitter, Instagram and Snapchat in other countries. And if we talk about private channel of information then WhatsApp and Imo is more popular, and to reach youth, these could play a vital role.

Q: How do you see the effectiveness of RTI as a tool to address the information need of the youth?

A: I think RTI has become more important than before. If we explore the use of this act, we will see that the use is mainly focused on social security's impact at the elementary level, and in some cases, journalists are using it for revealing big corruptions. Other than these, once in a while, we have seen it to be used in cases when someone was frustrated over a recruitment process. But, because of the outburst that I was talking about, the change we want to bring, the way we want to get over with the society without the freedom of speech - we need legal strength like this. RTI can play a big role here. When government or non-governmental organizations are not giving information or are not willing to provide information, in both cases application of RTI is very important than before; and this kind of tool can be used as weapon for the people who want to bring changes, precisely for the youth.

Q: What are the best options to educate them on use of RTI?

A: In the year 2009, when the law was enacted, the government itself wanted to ensure free flow of information. But during the past 10 years they have changed their position. Now they do not want to promote this or practice this. If not the whole, a section of the government is certainly against it. So I am not sure if we can include more

about RTI in curriculum, and even if we do what should be the level. But I think that right based issues should be mentioned in the curriculum, and laws like RTI can be included in the secondary or higher secondary curriculum which can influence young learners to protest. Youth learns protesting from family first. We can include these in curriculums at an early age, it could be beneficial. Other than that social media based, YouTube channels will be more effective. Online training will be effective as well, if we can promote that in social media.

Q: How important it is to make this process digitally effective and accessible to the youth?

A: I think the whole process should be digitalized. Banks are now providing loans through online banking, using EKIC and we can pay through mobile banking. And we already use some app where we can order services and can make payment as well, especially, the e-commerce sites like DARAZ, or Amazon. So I think if individual payment system can be included in the Information Commission's app, or we can remove the payment system totally then people will file more application.

Q: Can you elaborate?

A: If we can make small changes in the rules, not only people can file an application online, but they will also be able to call at call centers for filing it properly. This is how, people without Smartphone access can also file applications. If they can provide their NID and it matched with the database, then (the call center) can accept it and submit their application online. I think we can do this.

Q: What do you suggest government and CSOs should do to ensure the open access of information?

A: Government is the most responsible for this. They made the law, they made the

regulations, they made the information commission, they are recruiting designated officers in their offices, they are making proactive information disclosures online as well. So now what else they can do, they can cancel the laws that are against freedom of speech. There is no other way. This should be the first concern for the government and here the civil society and the youth can pressurize them in this process.

Unfortunately, we see that civil society is also divided in many groups and if one group is affected, others remain silent, and vice versa. Voice is very important, we shouldn't stay calm, we need to talk. This is civil society's role. The strategy can be, promoting RTI further as a tool for change.

Q: How do you see the role information in making the life of youths, better?

I will say that information is an ingredient. If we can convert it to communication, that can bring change in social behavior. If we talk about the theory of behavioral change, information is converted into communication. Communication is for behavioral change. So, there is no alternative to youth's behavioral change without information. But we need to know how to cook it; convert it into information messages that they will listen to, and make them think about a change. Behavioral change does not happen overnight. This is a process. Many of us who work in RTI are frustrated or losing faith and working less. But this is time to be more careful than ever. And CSO's should rather be more active. Because, Information is the ultimate solution for the society.

Recommendations

Open access for transparency and better services

1. Strengthen local government offices as information hub for the citizens where they proactively disclose information relevant for the community with a special focus on services delivery, grievances redress and financial transparency.
2. Government ministries and departments develop a mechanism to disclose essential and public information in their websites and update them regularly. Cabinet division can develop a monitoring system to see if the offices are disclosing and updating information in their websites according to the goals set at the Annual Performance Agreement.
3. Organizations that are responsible for public services delivery must implement second generation citizen charter and disclose price, fees, procurement, contracts, progress of development activities, budget, expenditure and other relevant information in their websites.
4. Government offices can take initiatives to popularize and mainstream the grievances redress mechanism to ensure that the concerns of youths can be reported and addressed properly.
5. Filing complains, certification and other services provided by police station should be digitalized so that the youth can use those services online. The digital police service may also integrate reporting of crimes in the communities immediately and make it possible by mobile apps.

Making job information accessible

1. Develop a government job portal where youth can look for every local and national government job opportunity, find information of eligibility and requirements, apply online, see the result and get updates on skill development training. The portal has to be updated regularly.
2. Take initiatives to make internet available all over the country and at an affordable price, so that even the marginalized rural youth can access it to get the information.
3. Although proactively disclosing the results of the public job exams are not mandatory in the RTI act, authority must ensure that every job-related information is disclosed in their websites and ensure transparency in the recruitment process.
4. Use the Union Digital Centers so that the youth who do not have access to the internet, can access job related disclosures, skill development opportunities and relevant career information.

Digitalizing the RTI application process

1. The RTI application process should be made easy and digital. It is the most effective way to make it relevant for the youth. It will reduce the time of application and burden of travelling to the offices.
2. The digitalization is still at the experimental stage. Government should identify the problems from the lessons of the piloting, and take measures to implement the digital application system nationwide.
3. A mobile app can be developed so that the youth can apply for information with their mobile phone and limited internet use.

Educating the youth on accessing information

1. Targeted social media campaigns can be run to educate youth on importance of information and how to use RTI to seek information from the authority.
2. RTI is already there in the school curriculum, but not proved to be very effective. It should be updated with more creative examples, and there should be practical use of the learning so that the students can apply it to address their problems.
3. Advocacy and media campaign to build awareness among the youth on using right to informationshould be designed in a way so that youths are motivated to use RTI for their life and livelihood. Without motivations, training or education will not work.
4. Trainings are important and always effective for small groups of youth. Online trainings can be useful for youths, but they should be designed interestingly, as there is less in-person interaction. Otherwise there is risk of youths getting bored.
5. Engage community level organizations in trainings and practical applications of RTI knowledge. Community based organizations understand the problems of the participants better and it can make the trainings more effective.
6. Only traditional TV or print media is not enough for campaigning. The same message can be delivered through SMS, apps, and social media as well so that it reaches wider group of people. Advocacy campaigns like drama and miking can also be very effective.

Strong commitment from the government and the civil society

1. Appoint those individuals in the Information Commission who are committed to the cause of promoting the access to information for the citizen. The commission must be strong enough to ensure that in any case of harassment of any applicant, there will be tough action against the officials involved. It will encourage the youth to use the act more.
2. A changed mindset is necessary. If anyone is asking questions or demanding information, that does not mean they are enemies. Rather they need to consider it as a matter of accountability.
3. There should be increased communication between the government and the public. Without open communication, it will be very difficult to ensure open flow of information. Civil Society Organizations can initiate advocacy programs to increase the interaction between authority and citizens.
4. Civil society needs to play a role of watchdog. They should educate the youth to make the government accountable and ask questions whether the public fund is properly utilized. It will automatically reduce the corruption.
5. NGOs and CSOs must play the role of RTI Champions. They need to start disclosing all the public information proactively. They can play a role of facilitator in providing others with hands-on trainings and encourage them to use the RTI act.

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Keeping the importance of youth perception of RTI in mind, MRDI conducted this survey to assess the knowledge of RTIA among the youth, and their perception about its use to access information required to solve their individual problems and those of the country.

