

Policy Brief Rajshahi District

March, 2021

Youth-led Digital Engagement Project

1. Introduction and Background

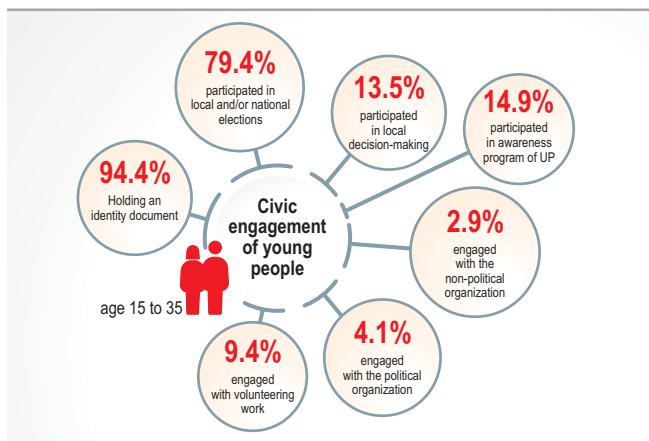
Like the rest of the world, Bangladesh has also been hit hard on several dimensions by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the pandemic's havoc on health and healthcare facilities, poverty, inequality and livelihood, education, violence against women, and several economic and social aspects were vividly visible. These fallouts have brought in a new set of challenges, both social and economical, in Bangladesh.

So, in addition to the short-term economic recovery, strategic changes will be needed in several areas relating to healthcare, social protection, education, gender-based violence, and social cohesion, etc. Though the government of Bangladesh has demonstrated active policies to resolve the challenges emerging from COVID-19, it is still important to understand how much of these policies have benefitted at the grassroots level.

Thus, to address the impact of COVID 19 and enhancing the response and recovery-related interventions at the grassroots, ActionAid Bangladesh has launched Youth-led Digital Engagement (YDE) project. Using digital, information, and communications technologies (ICT), the Youth-led Digital Engagement (YDE) project of ActionAid Bangladesh has aimed for young people to generate evidence from the grassroots and facilitate advocacy from the grassroots to the national level on COVID-19 response and recovery on few selective issues through various online and offline tools. SANEM has partnered with ActionAid Bangladesh in this endeavour.

As part of the project, to generate evidence from the grassroots, a survey was conducted in four selected districts: Kurigram, Satkhira, Rajshahi, and Barguna. Four youth organizations from the four districts were the implementing partner of the survey and were intensively engaged with the survey's data collection process. This policy brief presents the findings of the survey for the Rajshahi district.

2. Civic Engagement of Youth



3. Climate Justice

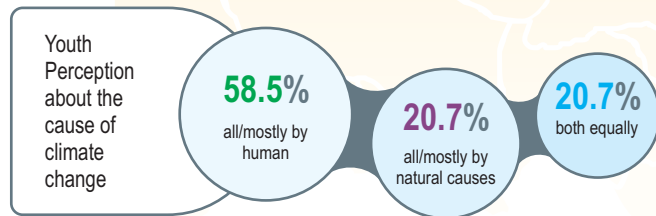
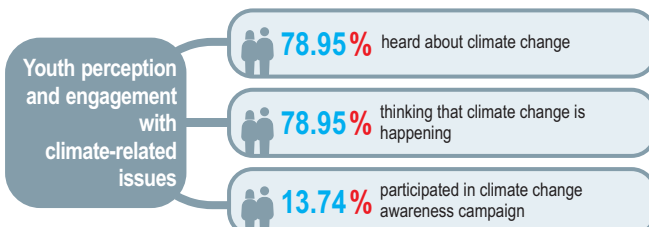
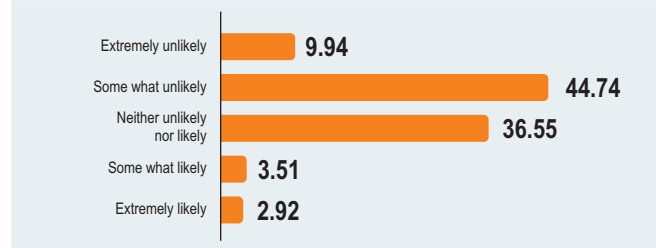


Figure 4 Youth's perception on the possibility of climate-induced harm for their community (%)



Local governments taking action to protect your community against harm caused by climate change

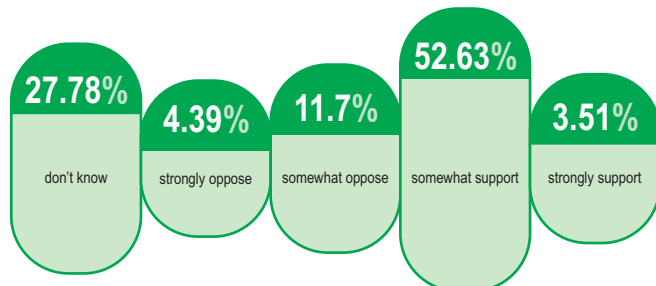


Table Youth knowledge and perception on environmental issues

Issues	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	No idea
We can all do our best to reduce the effects of climate change	71.6	11.1	0.3	17.0
The government should provide incentives for people to look after the environment	64.0	17.8	0.0	18.1
People should be made to reduce their energy consumption if it reduces climate	63.2	16.4	0.9	19.6
People are too selfish to do anything about climate change	62.0	16.7	1.8	19.6
Pollution from industry is the main cause of climate change	62.0	17.8	1.5	18.7
Recent floods in this country are due to climate change	58.2	17.3	0.3	24.3
Climate change is inevitable because of the way modern society works	58.2	20.2	2.9	18.7
It is already too late to do anything about climate change	56.4	15.2	6.7	21.6
Climate change is just a natural fluctuation in earth's temperatures	49.4	17.5	2.3	30.7
Human activities have no significant impact on global temperatures	34.5	21.4	8.2	36.0

4. Education

Percentage of student attend in the online classes

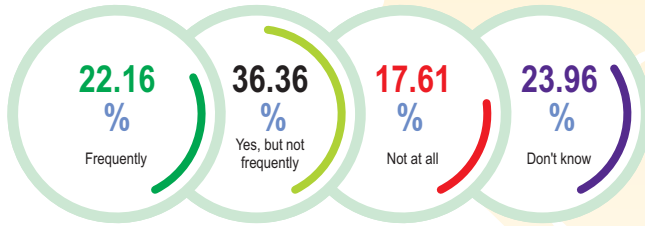
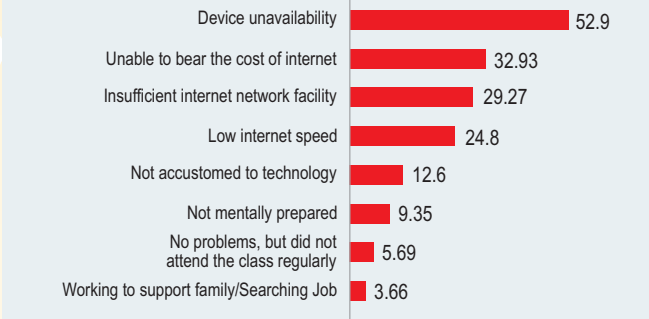


Figure 9 Reasons for not participating in the online classes



5. Health

Disruption of health supply during pandemic

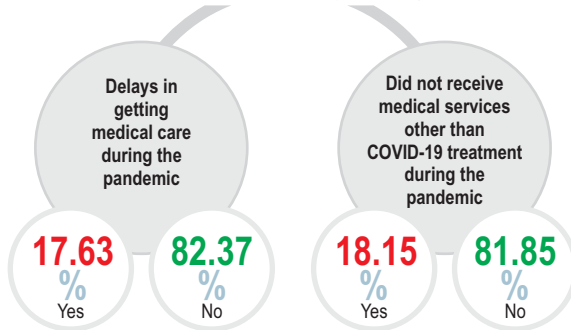
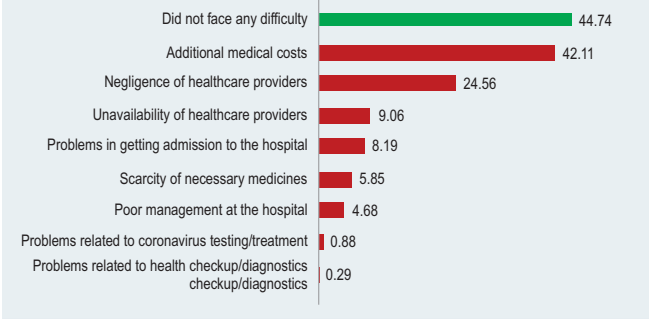
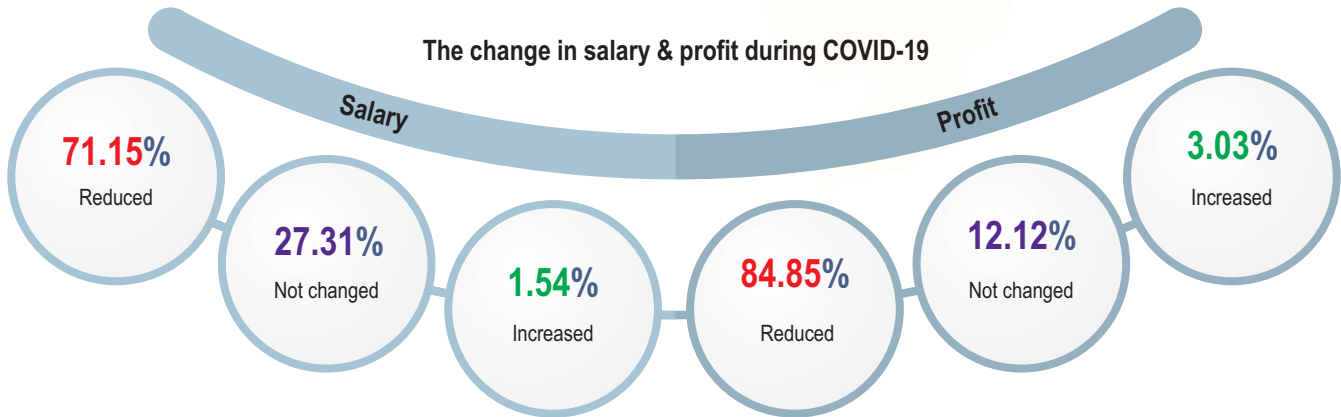


Figure 11 Problem face getting healthcare during COVID-19



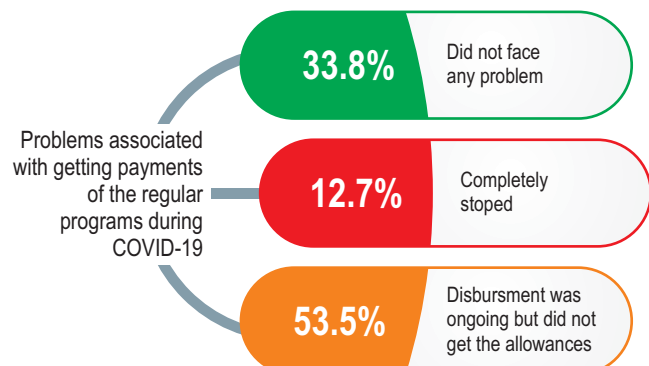
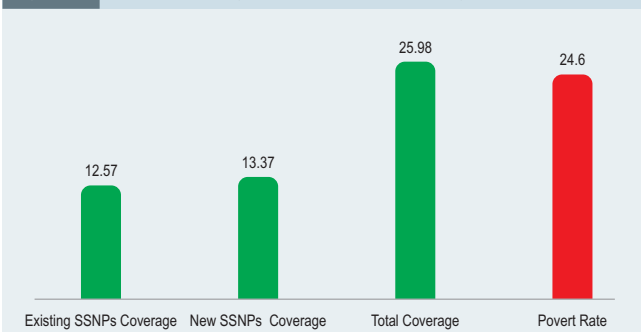
6. Economic Activities

The change in salary & profit during COVID-19

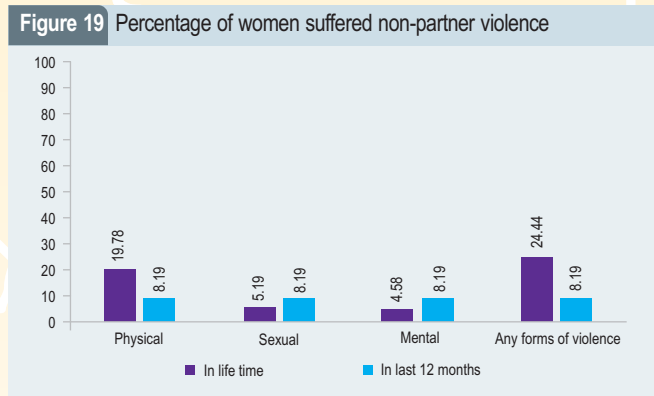
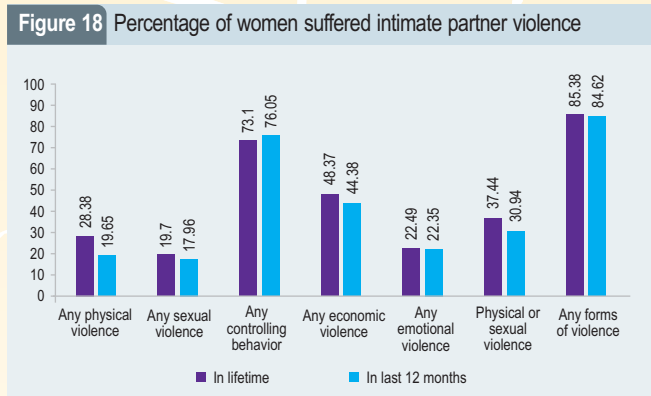


7. Social Safety Net

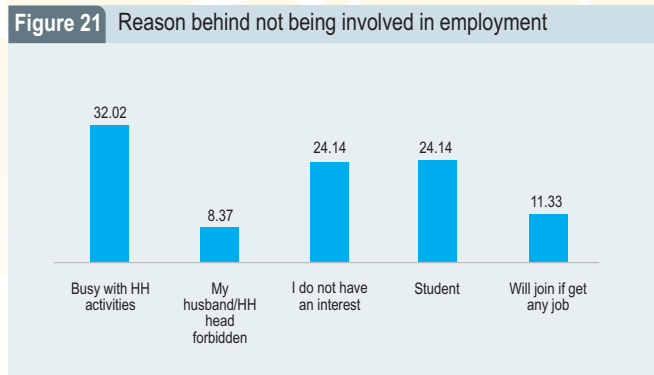
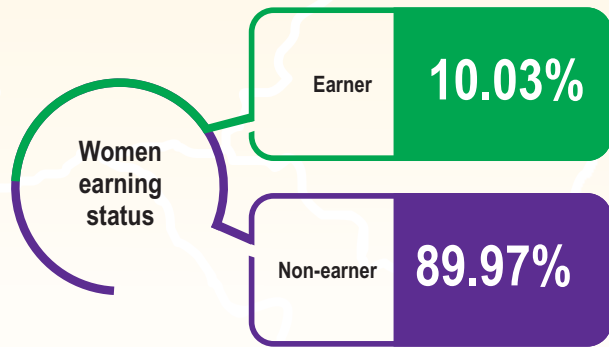
Figure 15 SSNPs coverage rate compare to poverty rate



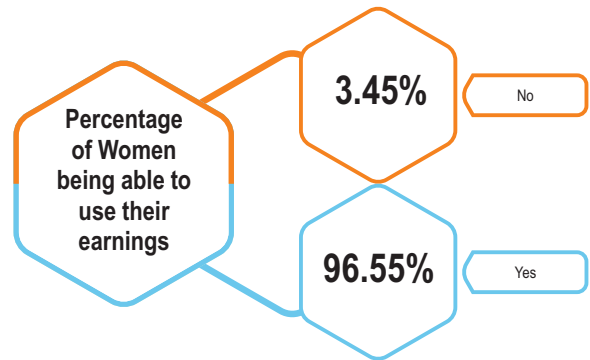
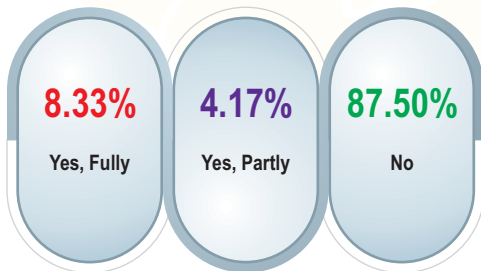
8. Violence Against Women (VAW)



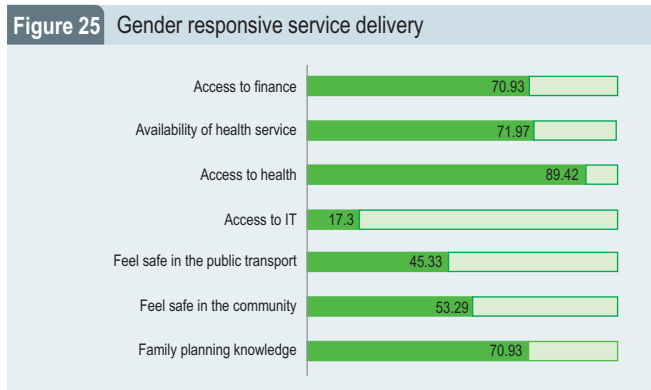
9. Women Employment and Economic Empowerment



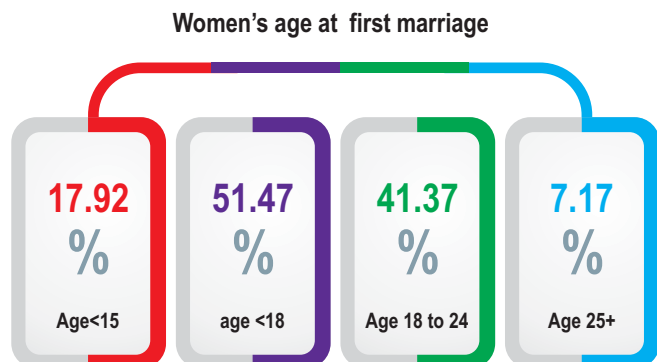
Does the husband/HH head forcefully take the earnings?



10. Gender Responsive Public Service Delivery



11. Child Marriage



12. Summary of the Key Findings

Narrowing focus on the indicators for civic engagement youth participation in local decision-making (13.5%), participation in awareness programs organized by Union Parishad (14.9%), engagement with political (2.9%) and non-political organization (4.1%), and engagement with volunteering work (9.4%) are minimal.

In terms of youth awareness and perception on climate change, overall, 78.95 percent of youths agree that climate change is currently happening but the majority (58.5%) believe that the main cause is human. Moreover, almost 55 percent of youths count that climate change will harm their community over the next several years. However, youth engagement with climate justice and their mobilization of climatic actions is yet a far-fetched concept as depicted by the analysis. Only around 13.74 percent youths engaged in any climate change awareness campaigns. Furthermore, figure 6 provides that a significant number of youths have a huge lack of knowledge on environmental and climate-related issues.

As educational institutions remain closed, the supply-side statistics reveal that only 37.81 percent of the institutions conduct regular online classes whereas 15.92 percent do not take any online classes, and 23.38% of respondents do not know whether their institutions take an online class or not. On the demand side, a large proportion of students are unable to attend online classes due to device unavailability (52.9%), insufficient internet network facility (29.27%), inability to bear the cost of the internet (32.93%), low internet speed (24.8%) and not accustomed to technology (12.6%) etc.

From the perspective of the health havoc caused by the pandemic, the survey reveals slight disruptions in health care supply. For instance, 17.63 percent experienced delays in getting medical care and 18.15 percent did not receive medical services other than COVID-19 treatment during the pandemic. Moreover, 42.41 percent experienced higher medical costs, 24.56 percent faced medical negligence, 8.19 percent experienced problems in getting admission to the hospital, 5.58 percent could not purchase essential medicine due to supply constraints and 4.68 percent experienced poor management at the hospital.

Besides the health hazard, the pandemic has led to an unprecedented economic crisis as well, that has disproportionately affected people with job and income losses, business closures and resulting loss of sales and profits for the entrepreneurs. The survey reveals that more than 71 percent of the wage employed experienced wage reductions, 84.86 percent of the self-employed experienced decline in profit due to decrease in sale, production and business shutdown led by lockdowns and demand shortfalls.

These challenges and dire conditions require governments to design and implement the right set of social protection policies and ensure adequate coverage. However, only 25.98 percent of households (including 13.37% recipients from new programs initiated to tackle COVID-19 induced shock) came under any kind of social protection from the government when the estimated poverty rate for the district is 24.6. The new programs were also associated with inclusion-exclusion problems.

Narrowing focus on violence against women, it is observed that nearly 86.38 percent of ever-married women have experienced some forms of partner

violence in their lifetime while that rate stands at 84.62 percent during the last 12 months. Moreover, in terms of non-partner violence, 24.44 percent of women have experienced any form of non-partner violence in their lifetime while that rate stands at 8.19 percent during the last 12 months. However, despite the high prevalence of violence, only one percent of victim women took legal action.

In terms of women economic empowerment, the findings indicate that only 10.03 percent of young women are earners. This low percentage is a result of the burden of household chores, restriction by partner and disinterest in working. However, a positive scenario emerges among the working females as 96.55 percent of them can use their earnings according to their will and 87.5 percent did not experience seizure of earnings by their husbands or household head.

Statistics for gender-responsive service delivery provide that, 7.093 percent of the young women do not have the access to finance, almost 82.7% do not have access to IT and 29 percent do not have knowledge of family planning. Moreover, majority of the women revealed that they do not feel safe in their community and in public transport implies public safety scenario of females in the district is grim.

13. Recommendations

Considering the aforementioned scenario, to improve the situation of the Rajshahi district in the mentioned aspects, the following recommendations could be taken into consideration.

1. Social protection mechanism should be strengthened and comprehensive to reduce incidence of child marriage, while local government and school should play the key role;
2. Local administration, public service institutions and local government bodies should plan and allocate resource for enhancing employment opportunity for young people;
3. Local Department of Education, both primary and secondary, should take specific plan for the dropped-out students and address the challenge of any emergency such as COVID 19 pandemic and other disaster to continue with their education following education in emergency framework;
4. Ensure citizen's participation including the young people in planning, implementation and monitoring of the public services;
5. Local administration to take initiative supporting the MSMEs, particularly for the women and the young entrepreneurs, to have access in government COVID 19 stimulus package;
6. Department of Agriculture Extension and Department of Agriculture Marketing support young people to develop agro-business and link them with the various financial institutions for financing;
7. Engage young people in the various decision-making processes primarily at local government as well as other government and non-government structures.



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