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Converging Trajectories: Gender and Technology Perspective for Youth Development

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Converging Trajectories: Gender and Technology Perspective for Youth Development¹

BACKGROUND

Investment in the youth resource of a nation is considered as one of the key instruments for economic and social progress along with sustainable development. Proper utilization of youths through investments in education, health, human rights and overall welfare will enable the economies to experience rapid growth rates. Currently, Bangladesh is undergoing this privileged economic status since, according to LFS 2016, more than half of the population is below 24 years old. To harness the demographic dividend and pave the way towards sustainable development, there needs to be planned investment to equip the working-age population with the right set of skills so that they can benefit from productive opportunities they encounter. Ensuring quality education and heightening the level of health awareness are also pre-requisites in this regard. The youth needs to be oriented with the ideals and morals of inclusivity, gender equality and equity, as well. As is widely accredited, technological diffusion and inclusivity could allow youths to reach their full potential as leaders, change-makers and entrepreneurs.

Yet, youths in developing countries like Bangladesh are exposed to multifaceted bottlenecks that threaten their development as well as eco-

nomie, social and civic engagement through multiple channels. Accordingly, the Youth Budget Framework (YBF) identifies six such transmission mechanisms that restrict youth's potential and national capacity to harness the economic opportunities offered by the youth population. Specifically, the channels are health, education, poverty, income, employment and domestic violence. As is widely acknowledged, human capital development in Bangladesh is constrained by youth's limited access to essential healthcare services such as lack of awareness and availability of sexual and reproductive healthcare; a less industry-responsive educational system and COVID-19 induced disruptions coupled with delimited female participation in productive activities due to child marriage, excessive care burden and gender-based violence. Hence, the long-term consequences together with exacerbations by the ongoing pandemic will be in terms of fewer formal employment opportunities, youth entrepreneurship and a greater proportion of youths in poverty.

Such persistent challenges have been further deepened by the existing limited technological inclusiveness and widening gendered digital divide in Bangladesh although technological innovation and gender inclusiveness is one of the key policy tools to enhance equality and

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- a) Raihan, S., Sharmin, E., Haque, S., Hossen, Z., Khan, F.B., and Nahar, M.A. (2020). Youth Budget Framework in Bangladesh: An Appraisal. SANEM and ActionAid Bangladesh.
- b) Raihan, S., Uddin, M., Ahmmed, S., (2020). Policy Brief on Gender and Youth Inclusiveness in Technology: Context Analysis in Bangladesh.

improve the quality and sustainability of economic growth. This incidence of technological disparity is evident in the youth and gender technological inclusivity analysis by Raihan, Uddin and Ahmmed (2020) wherein technological inclusiveness is proxied by access to technology such as mobile phones on the demand side and technical training opportunities for youths on the supply side. The digital divide, however, is proxied by the status of mobile holding by gender across regions and income groups.

ANALYSIS

As is evident in the figures below that are representative of the digital divide in terms of mobile ownership by gender, location and income, there are regional and gender differences in technological inclusivity with the disparities being more prominent for youths belonging to poorer households, less economically active regions and female youths in general. For instance, as displayed in Figure 1, on average, mobile holding per capita for male youth in a household is 33 percentage points higher than the female counterpart. Moreover, there is a stark positive correlation between household income and gender parity in terms of technology inclusiveness (Figure 2).

Alongside the gendered digital divide in Bangladesh, the paper provides an in-depth critical assessment through the calculation of an intra-household technology parity score in case of per capita mobile holding. The intra-household gender parity in technology is higher in urban households compared to rural households. A score of 0.41 for rural areas indicate that on an average, if male youth members in a rural household own a mobile phone, compared to them only 41 per cent of the female youth members will have a mobile phone in that household (Figure 3). Similarly, the gender gap in technological inclusivity is also apparent by the income and poverty status of household as

displayed by Figures 4 and 5 respectively. Thus, as depicted by the figures, the intra-household gender parity score improves as the total per capita spending of the household increases and poverty decreases.

However, in all the cases, female youth's inclusiveness to technology has been found to be significantly lower than the male youth's inclusiveness. The paper undertakes The Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition analysis to identify the possibility of a gender discriminatory component in influencing the technological inclusiveness of young females. The analysis, therefore, shows that a significant part of the gender differences observed in terms of mobile holding originates from discriminatory behaviour towards female youth. The issue of discrimination is further amplified for young females living in smaller towns and rural regions and belonging to households headed by males.

Such disparities are also apparent on the supply-side aspect of technological inclusiveness. According to the Labour Force Survey of Bangladesh (2017), it is observed that only 4 per cent of youths have received technical training with female recipients significantly lagging behind males especially for middle-aged and late youth categories. And along with gender differences, youth participation in training also varies across regions. Youths from the urban area on an average have higher training participation rates (6%) compared to those of rural areas (2%). Despite government commitments and actions, challenges of TVET sector in Bangladesh have continues to exist due to: (i) low quality of training and trainers (ii) gender and regional disparity in participation (iii) a mismatch between demand and supply (iv) lack of awareness of training programmes (v) bleaker job market prospect of the trained (vi) lack of credibility and international accreditation of the training programmes and (vii) lack of governance in the TVET operation.

Figure 1: Average per capita Mobile Holding of youth by gender and location

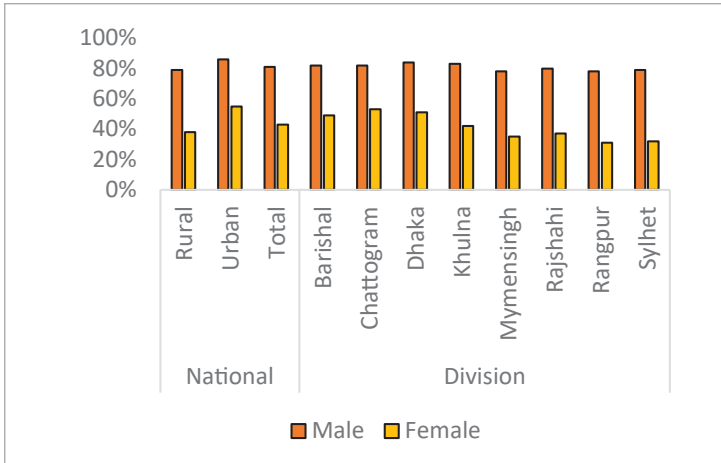


Figure 2: Average per capita Mobile Holding of youth by expenditure decile (% of total, by gender)

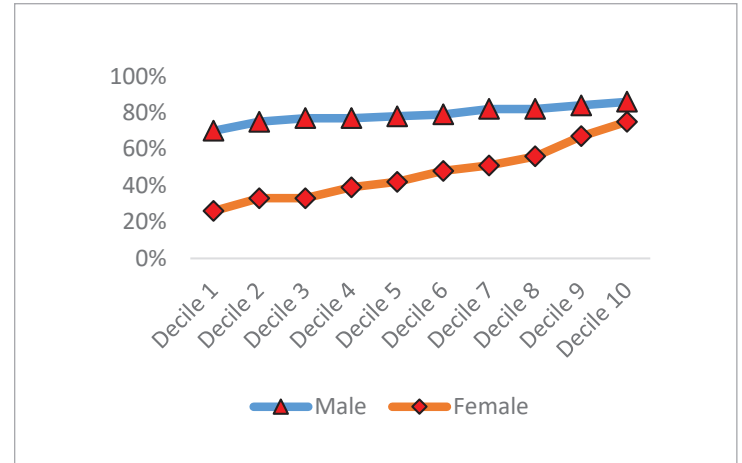


Figure 3: Intra-household gender parity in mobile holding by location

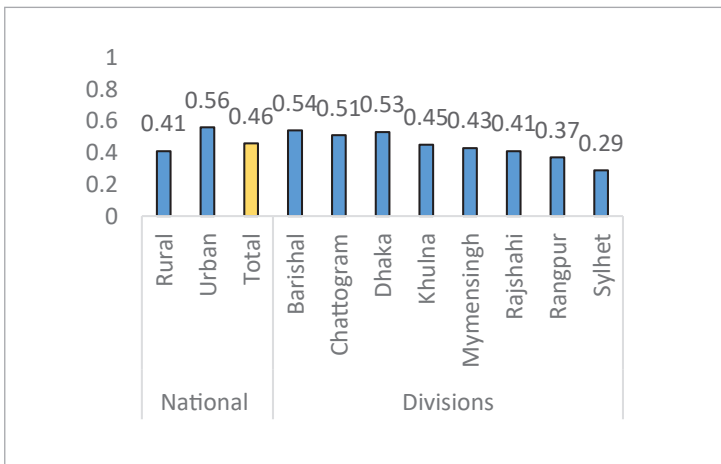


Figure 4: Intra-household inequality in mobile holding by income decile

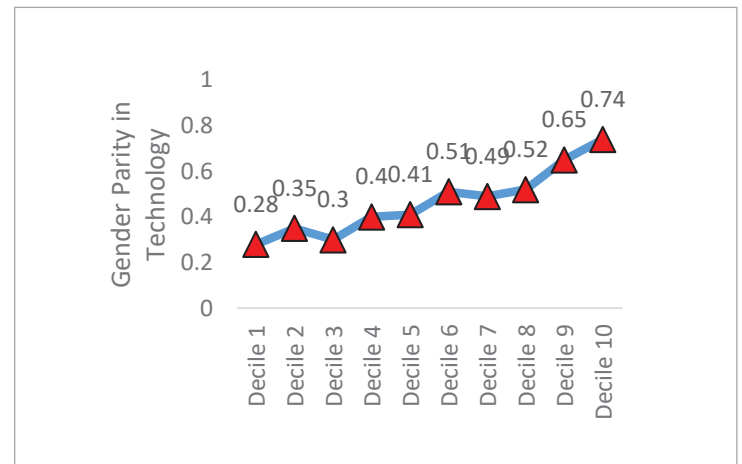
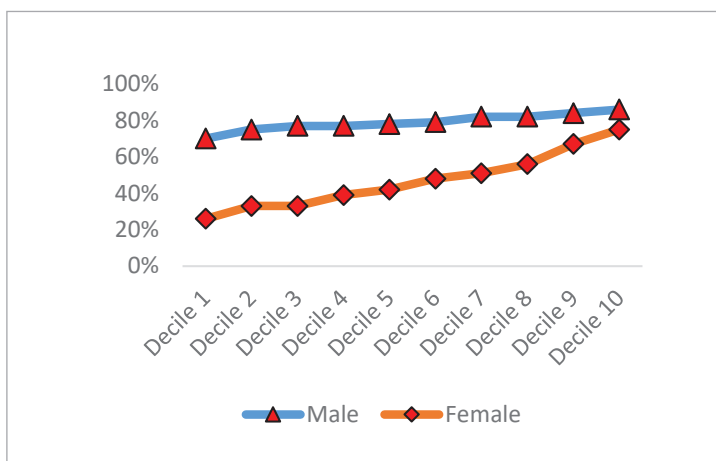


Figure 5: Intra-household inequality in mobile holding by poverty

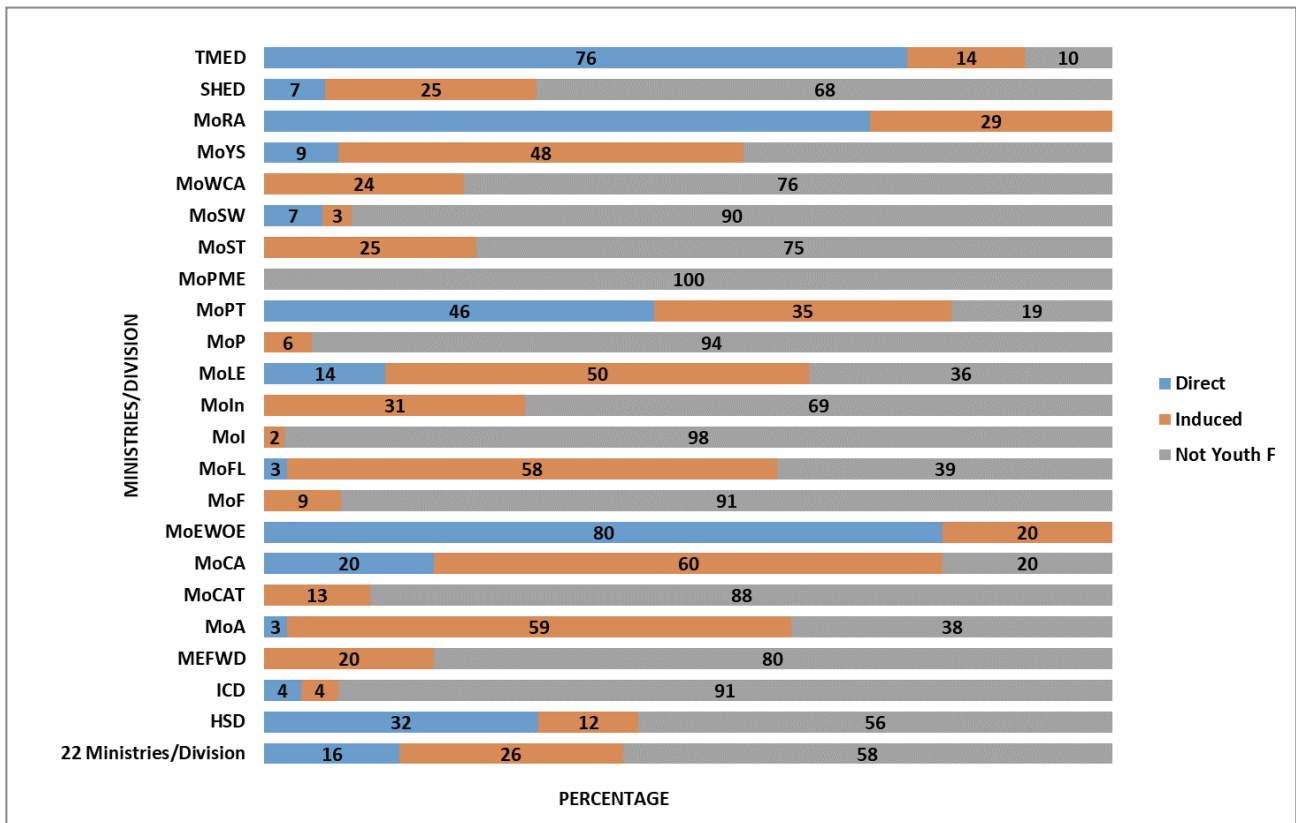


In essence, the technological disparity and gendered digital divide have circumscribed youth's potential in contributing to sustainable economic progress of the nation. This discrepancy has led youths belonging to disadvantaged backgrounds and female youths in particular to be involuntarily pushed into vicious cycles of poor educational and training attainments, informal work engagements, lack of opportunities to invest and cash in on their interests as well as the continuing growth of the NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) youth population and incidence of poverty. On top, this phenomenon is worsened by lack of structured and dedicated monetary allocations in national financial budgets directed towards youth development and mitigating the aforesaid challenges.

The current ad hoc and inadequate budgetary

allocations for youths have been represented through a graphical analysis in the "Youth Budget Framework in Bangladesh: An Appraisal". Among the ministries, 22 ministries and divisions have youth focused programs in their ADP allocation. Therefore, as shown in Figure 6, the authors have undertaken a sensitivity analysis of the ADP of the 22 ministries for budget of FY 2020-21. The sensitivity analysis indicates that more than half of the total budget (58 percent) is not youth focused together with merely 16 percent of the 596 ADP projects under these ministries and divisions which could be termed as directly youth focused. In addition, a comparative analysis between FY 2019-20 and 2020-21, reveals that the directly youth focused allocations have increased by only 7 percentage points while the indirectly youth focused programs have decreased from 34 percent to 26 percent in respective fiscal years.

Figure 6: Youth sensitivity analysis of ADP allocation in FY2020-21



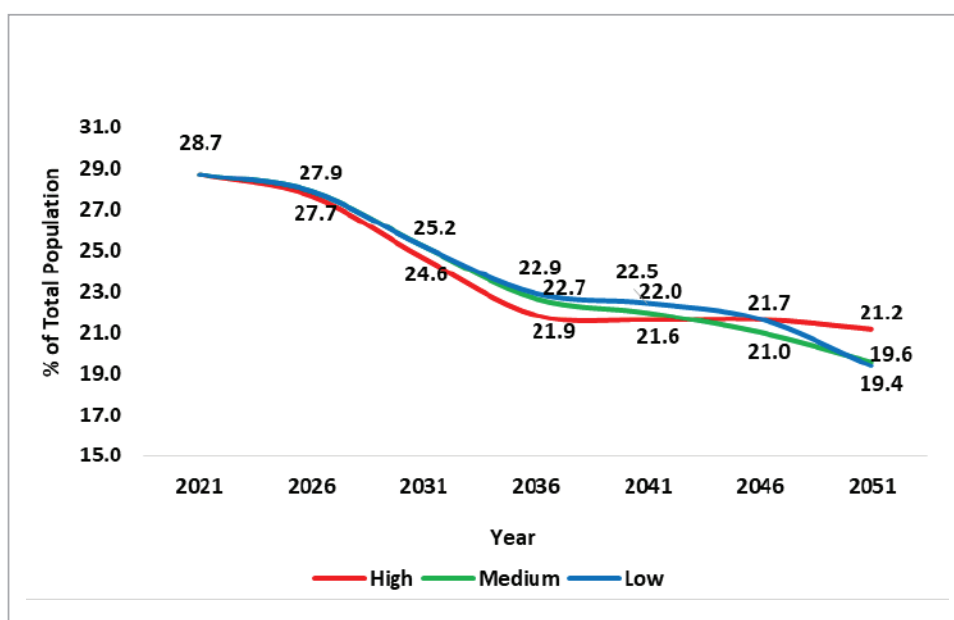
Nonetheless, given the importance of harnessing youth potential and the factors that fuel the barriers to their effective economic participation, this case now deserves utmost policy focus and political willingness to utilize the youth human capital of the nation that will aid to fully reap the benefits of demographic dividend. The demographic dividend is a positive driver related to the age composition of the population which occurs when proportion of the working-age population is higher than other age groups. However, it is a one-time “window of opportunity”, for investing heavily in human resource development to accelerate economic growth and social development. This is because when the size of the working-age population exceeds that of the dependent segment, opportunity to reap the demographic divi-

dend provides an economic boom wherein households are better resourced to save and invest and economies are more productive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is noteworthy that Bangladesh has entered into the first phase of demographic dividend in the early nineties. Moreover, there are few years remaining to utilize the demographic advantage as this transitory event is expected to start to close by 2040. It is observed from Figure 7 that youths aged 15-29 years will comprise 28.7 percent of the total population in the year 2021 and it will be 21.2 percent, 19.6 percent, 19.4 percent respectively following high, medium and low Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for the year 2051.

Figure 7: Projection of youth population aged 15-29 years



Thus, as population ages and the dividend gradually nears the termination phase, concerted effort is required from the government and relevant stakeholders such as private entities, civil societies and non-government organizations to realize the intended benefits. As such, one of the fundamental means is to ensure an

equal distribution of the dividends of technology across gender, income status and regions that will necessitate equipping youths with modern information and telecommunication technology. This can be attained through awareness enhancing initiatives on benefits of technology and training to overcome social stigma,

improvement of internet service quality, proper delivery of practical ICT lessons in secondary and higher secondary education and upgrading and strengthening of training modules and capacities at the training centers.

As a whole, these policy initiatives will serve to narrow the gendered digital divide as well as existing gender inequalities in employment, wage and several other fields. Firstly, enabling youths to engage in ICT education and training will enable them to develop the right set of employable skills as demanded by industry. Such transferable knowledge and skills will aid them to secure employment in formal sectors with decent levels of income and working conditions. Secondly, wider and faster internet connectivity will allow youths specifically females and those from marginalized societies to access educational materials and other vital information that will raise their access to health services and prevent cases of violence. Thirdly, combined with ICT-friendly fiscal policies and government schemes that address COVID-19 induced challenges, youths from disadvantaged backgrounds can prevent educational disruptions and participate in online training programs, survive in the job market in the present era of work-from-home and secure jobs in future competitive markets through developing relevant skills by engaging in the multitude of training opportunities available online.

This calls for a revamped focus in formulating a Gender Inclusive ICT Policy and Gender Inclusive ICT Action Plan along with other specific plans and policies such as expenditure in social sectors and relevant projects and programs to create opportunities for youth training and employment as well as cater to the needs of the marginalized segments of youth population and raise their representation in national economic engagements. The well-intended policies could be efficiently implemented through a structured and holistic approach that will facilitate sufficient allocations, inter-ministry coordination, monitoring and evaluation of ministries of proj-

ects and thus faster rates of implementation. In other words, this advocates for a 'youth budget' that will mandate coordination among all the plans and policies related to youths and adoption of concise approach to address youth's needs and challenges.

A youth centric budget is basically a framework of objectives and visions to empower youths economically and socially. The designated monetary allocations in the budget will be analyzed through a youth centric lens to equip the evidence-based policymaking process. It is a framework for provision of resources, support and services to empower youths and more actively engage them in society. In the context of Bangladesh, achieving equitable and inclusive growth and minimizing jobless growth require investing in youths through a planned mechanism. Hence, youth budget will smoothen the transition to a highly productive economy by developing skills and adopting technology which is a high-priority objective of the 7th FYP. Plus, this framework will be a means of generating youth responsive qualitative public expenditure, amalgamation of statutory, legal and other policy commitments with youth aspects and realization of youth's socio-economic rights. The youth budget framework is in line with the aims and goals set by the government in its National Youth Policy 2017 where the government has clarified its vision for the pathway of human capital development with regards to the specific needs of the youth. To materialize the targets of the National Youth Policy the government has also designed the National Plan of Action for Implementation of National Youth Policy 2017 which serves as a cornerstone for coordination among responsible ministries/divisions and relevant stakeholders. In this regard, the youth budget framework has the element of compliment as it further formulates the pathway for the National Plan of Action in terms of defining financing mechanisms, specifying organizational roles and more importantly, translating the youth's aspiration into definite parameters.

The template of the youth budget framework (YBF) is displayed below. The template is constructed through five distinct and concise steps. Firstly, the transmission channels as discussed above are identified. Secondly, the programmes and projects under different government ministries and departments are identified according to their relevance to youth. Thirdly, the allocated budget of ADP of the ministries are inspected to decide youth sensitivity. The budget will be differentiated in three categories namely direct, induced and not youth focused. Fourthly, the operating budget is measured by the Key Productivity Indicators of the respective ministry. The average score will be computed to assign the final sensitivity score. Finally, the summary of the youth budget is provided in the summary table mentioned in the template of YBF. The manner of construction of the template is thus representative of the government's commitment to prioritize youth's needs. The budget aims to incorporate youth's needs within the available fiscal space as well as resource gaps for allocative efficiency. Plus, in times of the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis that has exacerbated the challenges for youths, it is imperative to have an evidence-based budget with an equitable coverage of proven, cost effective interventions for youth's development and their ability to overcome the current bottlenecks.

In conclusion, by means of a participatory approach, the youth budget framework will serve to be an efficient tool to invest in youth development particularly in areas of education, health care, skill development, employment generation and reduced gender gaps in every policy and program undertaken by the government. Each of these areas could be effectively addressed with policies focusing on greater technological inclusivity coupled with a narrowed gendered digital divide. In other words, the structured and coordinated youth budget will facilitate higher diffusion and adop-

tion of technology by youths that is necessary to attain the demographic dividend and in turn achieve social and economic advancement, sustainable development as well as progression towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR) without expanding the gender gaps in various socio-economic frontiers.

Template of Youth Budget Framework

Name of the Ministry

1. Background and major functions
2. Ministry-specific national policy directives in relation to youth development (general)
3. Strategic objectives and activities of the Ministry in relation to youth development

Longterm Objectives	Medium Term Objectives	Activities

4. Youth participation in the activities in accordance with the transmission mechanisms of Youth Budget Framework
5. Achievements of KPIs in accordance with youth development
6. Achievements in accordance with national and international youth related policy framework

Policy/strategy	Activities	Progress

7. Obstacles to achieve KPIs

KPI	Obstacle	Remark

8. Progress on recommendations in the previous year

Sl. No.	The Recommendations of Previous YBF	Progress

9. Recommendation for future

Sl. No.	Recommendations	KPIs to measure Progress

10. Good Practice
11. Youth Budget Summary of Ministry

Table: Summary of Youth Budget of Ministry X – a template

Descriptio	FY2020-21			
	Budget (crore BDT)	Share of Youth (%)		
		Direct	Induced	Not related
Total Budget				
Ministry Budget				
Development				
Operating				