

# SHAMIR SHEHAB

## The champion of a youth environmental movement

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One of Bangladesh's greatest gifts from nature is its climate and geographical features which make it one of the most fertile and productive countries in the world. Unfortunately very few initiatives are there to preserve our precious environment.

Unlike many of us, Shehab realised this years ago when he was a university student. He says, "We often discuss about the unabated environmental degradation and criticise the government, policymakers, and others for it. But how can we contribute and create a

narrative of solution for this crisis? This question triggered me to engage youngsters in a movement to protect our environment."

To do so, Shehab visited several universities in 2009 to have dialogues with the students on environmental issues. He soon realised that our young people are enthusiastic about conservation of nature but they need a dedicated platform. This prompted Shehab to start the Bangladesh Youth Environmental Initiative (BYEI), the most active youth platform dedicated to create a new generation of environmental activists.



Training youth on environmental issues is Shehab's passion.

One of the most impact making initiatives of BYEI is its Earth Champions Program (ECP), a youth environmental leadership programme, where 30 students of grade nine to twelve from all over the country are selected to participate in a five day long fully funded residential camp titled Earth Camp. In this camp these students participate in various kinds of fields and community activities where they get practical experience on conservation of nature. The participants also design various types of community-based projects. All the 30 participants also form an Earth Club in their own institutions to educate and raise awareness among their peers. Throughout the year, activists of BYEI guide these youth and provide them with all kinds of support so that they can run their club and implement their projects smoothly.

Shehab says, "Our ECP fellows implement a range of projects such as Pond Sand Filter, Bottle Light Project, Rainwater harvesting project etc. By implementing Pond Sand Filter project in Khulna, 8,000 villagers are getting access to safe drinking water. At this stage these youngsters are working according to their capacity besides their studies. But we believe that when they will lead our country, they will show what they can do to save our environment."

Besides ECP, another groundbreaking programme of the BYEI is National Earth Olympiad which is the first of its kind in Bangladesh. On this day long



Dialogue sharing during Earth Champions Programme.

activism hundreds of students participate in different kinds of activities and dialogue sessions with environmental experts and social leaders. In 2014, 1,800 students from different parts of the country participated in National Earth Olympiad.

Currently the BYEI is working in 16 districts involving hundreds of youth in a movement to protect our environment.

*Shamir Shehab is currently pursuing his Masters in Public Administration with a specialisation in Environmental Policy at Cornell University.*