

# UNFPA and BDC organise Bangladesh Youth Dialogue 2019

NAZIFA RAIDAH

From November 12-14, 2019, the Government of Kenya, the Government of Denmark, and UNFPA are convening the Nairobi Summit, a high-level conference to advance the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. The conference will offer an inclusive platform, bringing together governments, UN agencies, civil society, private sector organisations, women's groups and youth networks to discuss and agree on actions to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

On September 6, 2019, UNFPA Bangladesh in collaboration with Bangladesh Debating Council (BDC) launched a two-day debate tournament at the premises of Independent

Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Chattogram were invited to participate in this competition, along with 22 most reputed judges in the debate circuit. The teams had four preliminary rounds of debate that were carried out on September 6. All the teams faced off against each other where the top four teams at the end of the preliminary rounds qualified for the finals held on September 7, 2019.

The championship went to Independent University, Bangladesh Debate Club (IUBDC) with the runners-up award going to IBA, University of Dhaka.

The debates were followed by a youth-centric plenary session opened by Dr. Asa Torkelson, representative of UNFPA whose opening remarks echoed the vision of the UNFPA. She said, "UNFPA has been working with and for young people since our inception. Our



University, Bangladesh (IUB).

The tournament was organised with an objective to engage the youth, where the participants from universities – both public and private – can engage in an extensive discussion on how the realisation of the ICPD Agenda is intrinsic to sustainable economic growth for Bangladesh. Their voices echoed through the debates on a range of topics that are close to UNFPA's agenda. The ideas and recommendations of the participants will be presented to the stakeholders of national and international development to the Summit.

The debate tournament addressed real world issues and brought out the voice of the youth on problems like disseminating messages on specific ICPD themes: sexual reproductive health and rights, maternal health, prevent violence against women and child marriage. To empower and involve them to disseminate these issue-based messages to their peers and to bring the attention of policymakers about the needs of youth-based SRHR services: prevention of child marriage, maternal mortality and violence against women. To build awareness among adolescents and youth about the opportunities and challenges associated with them.

To mark the Summit, 16 teams from reputed public and private universities from Dhaka,

partnerships with young people are, and must always be, based on their active and meaningful participation. In order to achieve the ICPD Agenda from 25 years ago, we need to take account of your experiences, concerns and stories to shape an inclusive future for you, who will also help us achieve the SDGs."

The speech was followed by a presentation on the topic by UNFPA Deputy Representative, Eiko Narita. Following that Sakib Bin Rashid, Instructor at 10 Minute School, Ashreen Mridha, Bangladesh Women's National Basketball Team Player, and Umama Zillur, Founder of Kotha, led an interactive session covering youth leadership, women empowerment and sexual violence.

Fardeen Ameen, the Chair of Bangladesh Debating Council said, "On behalf of the entire English debating community of Bangladesh I am honoured that the UNFPA entrusted us to help crowdsource important ideas to be taken into consideration at Nairobi, this validates that the time the youth spend behind researching and generating discourse on these crucial ideas do indeed matter and has encouraged us all to keep the discourse going so that our ideas and voices can play a role in the ever changing global landscape."

SHOUT was the Youth Engagement Partner of the event.



## International symposium on higher education at IUB

SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

On September 6, 2019, Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) hosted a global symposium titled "Re-envisioning Higher Education in an Era of Technology Convergence" with Dr. Vistasp M. Karbhari, President, University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) as the keynote speaker. Zunaid Ahmed Palak MP, State Minister for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) had graced the event with his presence as the guest of honour. The event discussed the need for change in the traditional opportunities for higher education based on the evolution of modern society and the possible initiatives that could be taken collaboratively.

The event began with a speech by the acting Vice Chancellor of IUB, Prof. Milan Pagon, who spoke about the importance of pursuing higher education in an accredited university and enabling research. Prof. Pagon ended his speech by saying, "We should not wait for the best to come; we should create it."

The guest of honour was then invited on stage to share his ideas about the given topic. He first spoke about the IT sector in Bangladesh. He further explained and requested the universities to join forces with the ministry and facilitate Bangladesh to be a centre for the fourth industrial revolution. He then talked about the need to teach the students of our nation to be taught how to learn through collaboratively designed courses and opportunities by utilising online education.

Moreover, he requested that a tri-patriotic memorandum of understanding be created among IUB, UTA and the ICT Division to solve the problem of proper mentoring and abundance of workspaces available to utilise the "intellectual property" that the country holds.

Next, A. Matin Chowdury, Chairman, Board of Trustees, IUB, gave a short speech about Bangladesh being a centre for investment as it has great potential and has always given back. He urges the universities to work together before inviting Dr. Karbhari to take the stage and begin his talk.

Dr. Karbhari began by talking about the major transformation the world has observed in the past 30 years and how technology has converged due to increased global competition, the need for information on demand, the rapidly changing workforce and increasing societal needs. However, the delivery and modality of education has remained relatively constant. He believes that traditional universities still facilitate the structure for an agrarian society in a world of "digital natives".

This conflict therefore, leads to certain implications on the students. Thus, it is required for universities to allow for diversity, innovation and a focus on interdisciplinary research to enable learning through discovery and enquiry, along with providing an entrepreneurial ecosystem by growing to meet the needs of the students. He urged the learning must occur at a continuum and that we must "democratise education".

The talk was followed by an invigorating question and answer session by Dr. Karbhari and a presentation by Dr. Pranesh Aswath, Vice Provost for Academic Planning & Policy of UTA, to explain the curriculum followed by UTA. After which, Mustaque Ahmed, Alumnus, UTA put an end to the event with a closing speech.

We asked Dr. Karbhari about the ambitious vision he shared through his presentation, and how he thought the process of the shift from a traditional education system could be streamlined, to which he replied, "The faculty and students would need to be enabled to play their parts, by providing opportunities to create the change possible and the support from administrative bodies and the government, such a transformation could be possible."