

Translating 8th Five Year Plan into Fiscal Year Budget 2021-22: Youth Perspective

The Daily Star and ActionAid Bangladesh jointly organised an online discussion titled "Translating Eighth Five Year Plan into Fiscal Year Budget 2021-22: Youth Perspective" on May 31, 2021. The primary objective of the roundtable was to have a conversation with important stakeholders and experts to determine how the upcoming national budget can accommodate the needs of the youth. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh
As we approach the announcement of the upcoming budget, the most important question that we should keep in mind is how the National Budget can accommodate the Eighth Five Year Plan on the issue of young people.

We started with a concern regarding the feasibility of the rollout of the Eighth Five Year Plan in the middle of a pandemic. Before developing the 2021-2022 budget, it was imperative to keep the COVID-19 situation in mind. Our response should not only be about creating more hospital beds and facilities but also focusing on health, education, farming and employment issues through a holistic approach.

We have seen a reverse migration during this pandemic. People have migrated back to villages from Dhaka. Healthcare systems are very poor at the rural level. We need to ensure necessary health care services are available at the rural level as the pandemic is not restricted to just the urban areas. Recently it has spiked in the border areas.

We should conduct a survey to identify the demand of the youth, the transgender community and marginalised people, and then create a shadow budget. This will enable youth to undertake advocacy and lobbying effectively.

Iqbal Hossain, Deputy Manager- QAPS, ActionAid Bangladesh

It is time to integrate young people into political, economic, and social aspects of society and enable them to share in the benefits of development. This will involve guaranteeing quality education, providing decent work opportunities and addressing the myriad of other challenges young people face. Thus, the youth demographic landscape should be a central part of the fiscal year budget 2021-2022. Though there are national plans and programmes, such as the national youth action plan, in place which deal with some of these issues, we must make separate allowances under the national budget and the Eighth Five Year Plan to bring these plans and programmes to fruition.

Sheikh Imran, President, Rising Star Youth Group
I think one aspect that can be extremely useful for the youth, is access to good vocational education. Not many students opt for vocational or technical education and, as a result, end up being unemployed. If we



normalise and popularise vocational education amongst students, then students can gain entry into a lot of jobs instead of being unemployed.

Marjana Khatun, President, Agnibina Youth Group

In our country, a lot of women are married off at a young age or after they finish school. This results in them becoming homemakers instead of being economically active. The upcoming budget should include some measures to empower these women so that they can engage in economic activities while also running their households so that they can become independent income earners.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Member, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Board of Trustees and Distinguished Fellow

One of the primary problems we face is a lack of data. Whether it is the population of the youth or the number of youth in the job market, we are still using data from five to six years back. The current Eighth Five Year Plan has been made taking into account past data, and this weakens the effectiveness of the plan.

Another key issue is that while the national budget is prepared by the finance ministry, the Eighth Five Year Plan is established by the planning ministry. This leaves a disconnect between the two plans, thus preventing them from working in cohesion successfully.

We need private sector investment and quality government services. If the fundamental elements of education are not improved, youth-related support services will be futile. This has been recognised in the Eighth Five Year Plan as well. The only time government

services improve is when the local youth speak up. We must shift our approach from supply to demand-driven so that youth voices are highlighted.

Rizwan Rahman, President, DCCI

School closures prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many students to drop out as their families fell below the poverty line. Many young girls have also been married off. We need more national budget allocation to digitise education, so schools don't need to shut down. Although the private sector will implement 81 percent of the Eighth Five-Year Plan, it is the government that is responsible for improving education.

There are around two lakh new unemployed graduates every year. We need to bridge the gap between the industry and academia by incentivising industries and letting them have a say in the curriculum.

Jahangir Alam, Joint Secretary, Department of Youth and Development

The mandate of the Department of Youth and Development is based on self-employment. There are over five crore unemployed youths in the country. It is impossible to provide jobs for all of them; hence the government is focusing on entrepreneurship. Our primary function is to give people aged between 18 and 35 years formal and informal training on 82 different trades in various districts. After the completion of training, they are given loans worth a maximum of one lakh taka. Many of them become self-made entrepreneurs and are awarded by the government.

Kamrul Hossain Shuvo, HERProject Country Coordinator, Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, garments factory owners will increasingly switch to automation, which means the industry will require the work of fewer RMG workers. The people losing jobs will primarily be female workers. The proportion of female workers has already dropped from 82 to 58 percent. The only solution is to train them, for which budget allocation is required.

In the Ease of Doing Business Index, Bangladesh ranked 168th, the lowest in South Asia. To improve, we must focus on creating young entrepreneurs. We must support them with payment gateways, product delivery, and inventory systems through budget allocation and planning, even beyond 2025.

Dr Mahbubul Mokaddem, Professor & Chairman, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka

The Eighth Five Year Plan considers data from 2016-2017 as the benchmark. It aims to reduce youth unemployment from 10.6 percent to five percent and the NEET population from 29 percent to 15 percent by 2025. It also promises to increase the population in secondary schools from 75 percent to 85 percent. Therefore, we can't say that there is no data available.

A plan requires a roadmap with annual budgets. There needs to be a list of projects under annual plans and their projections. This disaggregation must be available to the youth, and they must follow the roadmap and protest wherever there is corruption.

The government has promised to reduce the unemployment rate and they are taking necessary steps to achieve the goal. The government may not disclose the plan as a whole, but they will surely follow the annual projects. Our youth is also accounted for. The youth should follow the roadmap accordingly and identify failures and corruption.

Kashfia Feroz, Director - Girls' Rights, Plan International

The number of child marriages has increased throughout the pandemic. Domestic violence has increased too. We want specific allocation in the budget to reduce child marriage and unwanted pregnancy. Also, we must ensure the safety of our women and girls. Access to health services for young girls and women is a must.

Munmun Akter, Member, Brihonnola

A new budget is on its way but I want to know how many people are thinking about us, the transgender community. Everyone is talking about men, women, girls and boys. Only a few students and organisations are working for the transgender community. We want more accountability from the government for our communities because we are citizens of the country too.

Md Hozzatul Islam, Deputy Programme Manager- Civic Engagement, Transparency International Bangladesh

The Eighth Five Year Plan is a 900-page document and the first clause of this document is the creation of jobs for youth. But 56 percent of our youth are not in the job market. This is a tremendous failure for society. We have not been able to involve the majority of our youth at work. The Seventh Five Year Plan was not a major success itself and there are contradictions between the documents, achievements, and agendas. These contradictions divert us from our goal. So we must ensure proper access and flow of information.

Dr Atiur Rahman, Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka

I think this upcoming budget will mostly reflect upon COVID-19. The previous plan to reduce unemployment is no longer valid as the unemployment rate skyrocketed during the pandemic. Therefore, we should plan around how our youth can recover economically from this pandemic. Some of our youth returned to their village after losing their job during the pandemic. We need to find ways for them to be employed. Digital marketing companies are playing an important role in creating employment and this sector is anticipated to expand even more. We should look into how they can be assisted to increase the number of available jobs for our youth.

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