



BANGLADESH



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EMPOWER YOUTH FOR WORK

Empowering youth socially and economically

CONTEXT

Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries, with around 158.5 million people. More than 20.8 million people are aged 15–29, and three-quarters of the population live in rural areas. The country is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters – a situation which has been worsened by climate change and associated sea-level rise. The Empower Youth for Work (EYW) program in Bangladesh is aimed at rural youth in Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna and Barishal. Only 17.8% of young women are part of the labor force, compared to 41.8% of young men. The program aims to reach 57,998 youth aged 15–29 (70% female). This five-year, multi-country program is designed around three long-term objectives: strengthening agency and skills, increasing economic opportunities and creating an enabling environment.

VISION

Our overall goal is to improve economic and social opportunities for young women and men living in rural climate change affected areas. Together with our partners CODEC, RDRS, WAVE Foundation and UCEP, we aim to empower youth as change agents. By identifying the major challenges and opportunities in the local area, partners support young people to develop influencing strategies and pave the way for successful outcomes.

STRATEGIES

EYW has formed well-functioning, sustainable youth groups and provides quality training on soft, technical and entrepreneurship skills in line with market demand. It focuses on promoting climate-resilient and youth-friendly microenterprises, and facilitating access to finance to improve employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. To create an enabling environment, EYW is working to reduce gender-based violence and gender discrimination; promote redistribution, recognition and reduction of young women's unpaid care workload; address issues around sexual and reproductive health rights; and influence the government to adopt policies or practices in support of young women and men's social and economic empowerment.



Beneficiaries of soft skill training EYW Bangladesh



RUPALI'S STORY: "I'VE PROVED MY WORTH"

Rupali (27) lives in Puthia, Rajshahi, and has overcome many barriers to become a successful entrepreneur. As a young girl, she was forced to drop out of education due to poverty and child marriage. Her unhappy experience in marriage made Rupali determined to become economically independent and in control of her own future. So when she heard about the EYW program from a neighbor, she was keen to get involved.

Rupali took part in the soft skills and entrepreneurship training, and was inspired to start her own business. EYW linked her with a local bank, where she took out a loan of 30,000 BDT (about €315) to start a food business, which she runs from a cycle van in Puthia. As well as selling food on the street, Rupali provides catering services to offices and social events. Initially she faced several challenges – including that some people could not accept her as an entrepreneur because she is a woman. But through her hard work and determination, Rupali has overcome these difficulties. Her business has gained a good reputation for providing high-quality food at a reasonable price.

Last year, Rupali's efforts paid off when she received the 'Joyeeta' award from the government in recognition of her success as an entrepreneur. Rupali says, "I always heard people say that girls are worthless, so let them marry as soon as possible. But I've proved myself how worthy I am."



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS - YEAR 3

In year 3, the EYW program in Bangladesh has reached 20,282 youth through soft skills training. This has boosted young people's self-confidence, assertiveness and communication skills, enabling them to express their opinions, speak out in public, and work together to lobby their local government. Almost 68% of the EYW youth are young women. 1,362 youth received market-driven technical and vocational skills training and 1,229 received training on entrepreneurship to start or improve an existing business. 165 youth group members played a role as change agents, by extending their representation in Youth Advisory Boards from union to district and national level.

The program has helped to place 710 youth in various formal and informal sector jobs. 728 youth have become self-employed, while 372 youth received cash support along with credit and market linkage for their start-up under the program. Young people have demonstrated how much they have built their influencing skills by taking part in various youth-led initiatives at local and regional level

involving multi-stakeholders, including the local government administration. Work to challenge harmful social norms has paved the way for young women to take part in non-traditional training and entrepreneurship, although still in small numbers. EYW has signed an MoU with the Department of Youth Development to form a National Youth Council – a national platform for youth.

INNOVATION AND PILOTS

A study was conducted to gain an insight into the perceptions of employers in a range of informal sectors on decent work practices. The findings have guided EYW's work to influence the informal sector and to raise awareness among youth about decent work. A Climate-Smart Village has been initiated as model of youth-led actions; this will be used to develop youth skills, business cases and policy-influencing capacity to ensure food and livelihood security, and to promote climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience. The Rural Hub is engaging youth to operate goods and services businesses as well as to manage the hub themselves.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

It took time to discontinue the partnership with one partner and to induct a new partner, which delayed implementation. Though the program was able to reach 70% females through soft skills training and membership of youth groups, ensuring young women's meaningful participation was a challenge. We are mitigating this by focusing more on family and community-level discussion and engaging more young women in youth-led initiatives. Many young people preferred to wait to compete for government jobs or higher salary private jobs rather than becoming an entrepreneur, which they see as risky. Youth are therefore being encouraged to start up small businesses that will be nurtured over time with the support of a Business Incubator. Inspiring young people to become an active citizen was a challenge; however, the fact that youths' leadership role was acknowledged by the government stakeholders and the wider community was motivating for all.

For more information, please visit:
www.empoweryouthforwork.org

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