



BANGLADESH



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EMPOWER YOUTH FOR WORK

Letting youth drive the change

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, and this has been worsened by climate change and associated sea-level rise. Only 17.8% of young women are part of the labor force, compared to 41.8% of young men. The Empower Youth for Work (EYW) program in Bangladesh is aimed at rural youth in Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna and Barishal. 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. The program aims to reach 57,998 youth aged 15-29 (70% female).

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 forms 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 micro-enterprises, 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 and practices in support of young women and men's social and economic empowerment.



Direct beneficiaries EYW Bangladesh



MIRA'S STORY: A RAY OF HOPE

Mira Bibi (27), from Puthia, Rajshahi married at 14 and was content with her life. But after she had four children, it became difficult to make ends meet. Mira's father gave her a cow, but it wasn't enough to overcome the family's financial problems.

Luckily, Mira heard about the EYW project. She took part in the soft skills and entrepreneurship training, which helped her to develop a business plan on cow rearing and vegetable cultivation. Mira was able to secure a loan from the Department of Youth Development to take out a five-year lease on a plot of land. She started growing crops to sell at the local market.

With her earnings, Mira started making vermi-compost and was able to fund her own poultry and livestock business. She says: "Hard work and support from my family and the EYW project changed my life. People now call me 'Lady Farmer', which I really love! My two sisters are also inspired by me and doing home-based business."



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS - YEAR 4

In year 4, a total of eight Union Youth Apex Bodies supported by the EYW program achieved recognition for their efforts to drive change for youth and their communities, by registering as formal youth organizations under government regulations. During the year:

- 15,255 youths (68% young women) took part in soft skills training.
- 2,317 young people, including 1,253 young women, took part in technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills training – clearly demonstrating young women's determination to build their own skills and ability in the face of strong social norms that restrict their mobility and independence.
- 1,135 youths became economically active through wage work and self-employment.

Many young people face barriers because financial regulations demand collateral, and there is no access to finance for people who don't have a prior relationship with banks. Thanks to EYW networking and influencing initiatives, 179 youths received loans from formal and informal lending institutions in year 4; most of them now

also have a bank account and a valid trade license. This is not very common in rural Bangladesh, especially for micro-scale rural entrepreneurs. Business incubation support has created backward and forward market linkages through purchasing on credit from large companies and access to small-scale investment, following a profit-sharing model.

During year 4, youth from all project locations started to set up their own Youth Hubs following the Human-Centered Design (HCD) process. This involved co-creation with various government and non-government stakeholders to align needs and services. The young people used their increased influencing skills and ability to secure the physical space for the Hubs, which will follow the sustainable business model of the existing Hubs.

INNOVATION

During year 4, youth worked with the community, local government administration and partner organizations to realize the vision of making Gangarampur village in Khulna district a Climate Smart Village, building on a pilot model.

Renovation of an existing pond sand filter with a solar energy driven motor has given 250 households access to fresh water, in an area where water salinity is the key risk.

RISK AND CHALLENGES

Opportunities for young people to grow as entrepreneurs and find decent employment in rural areas are still very limited. Even though the government is fully committed to youth development, the challenge remains to make resources and services available to rural youth.

In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic is a potential risk that could leave many youth without jobs. The team plans to distribute hygiene kits to youth households and families, and youth trainers will provide online training on response activities (following WHO and Bangladesh government guidelines) to youth peers.

For more information, visit: www.empoweryouthforwork.org

Edition: June 2020

