



SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS
ON

YOUNG LEADERS SUSTAINABLE FUTURES: ADVANCING THE SDGS TOGETHER

09 June 2026

Jointly Organised by



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)



United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Bangladesh



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Proceedings

Seminar on

“Young Leaders, Sustainable Futures: Advancing the SDGs Together”

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Bangladesh jointly organised a seminar titled “**Young Leaders, Sustainable Futures: Advancing the SDGs Together**” at the BIISS auditorium on 09 June 2026. **Major General A S M Ridwanur Rahman, awc, afwc, psc, G**, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address and chaired the session. **Mr Sudhir Muralidharan**, Country Manager, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Bangladesh, delivered the welcome remarks. **H E Indra Mani Pandey**, Secretary General, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) gave the opening address. The seminar brought together young leaders, researchers, academicians and professionals to discuss the critical role of youth engagement in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The seminar featured speakers **Md Rafid Abrar Miah**, Research Fellow, BIISS, and **Professor Dr Kazi Maruful Islam**, Department of Development Studies and Director, Centre on Budget and Policy, University of Dhaka. **Professor Dr SM Abdul-Awal**, Principal Coordinator for SDGs in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), attended the programme as the Special Guest and delivered his address.

Senior government officials, representatives from international organisations, academicians, researchers, development practitioners, students and young professionals attended the seminar and enriched the discussion with their valuable opinions, comments, suggestions and observations during the interactive question-and-answer session.



Welcome Address



Major General A S M Ridwanur Rahman, awc, afwc, psc, G
Director General, BISS

Major General A S M Ridwanur Rahman, awc, afwc, psc, G delivered the welcome address at the seminar titled “*Young Leaders, Sustainable Futures: Advancing the SDGs Together*” jointly organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Bangladesh. He observed that the discussion was taking place at a crucial moment as the international community moved closer to the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The international development landscape had become increasingly complex, characterised by climate uncertainty,

economic pressures, technological disruptions, geopolitical tensions and widening inequalities. These challenges were particularly significant for developing countries such as Bangladesh, where the pursuit of sustainable development had to proceed alongside efforts to ensure economic resilience, social cohesion, and environmental safeguarding.

Highlighting Bangladesh’s achievements, he stated that over the past decade, the country had earned international recognition for its commitment to the SDGs and for integrating the goals into its national planning frameworks. Referring to the 2025 SDG Progress Report, he noted Bangladesh had made commendable progress in many domains. However, a stark dichotomy continued to exist between macro-level indicators, or the progress claimed in official assessments, and the lived realities at the grassroots level. He therefore emphasised that substantial challenges remained for the new government in attaining the SDGs within the stipulated timeframe.

The emerging socio-economic realities required innovative approaches and renewed commitment. At the centre of this challenge, and indeed at the centre of the solution, stood the young people of Bangladesh, who constituted one-third of the country’s total population. Bangladesh was fortunate to possess a vibrant and dynamic youth population that was educated, well connected, and more globally aware. Their energy, creativity, and resilience represented one of the country’s most valuable strategic assets. Nevertheless, full potential of the country’s youth remained underutilised. Many young people continued to face barriers related to employment opportunities, skills development, access to technology, participation in decision-making processes and social inclusion. Addressing these challenges was not simply a matter of social welfare but a strategic imperative for achieving sustainable development and ensuring long-term national prosperity.

Referring to the concept note of the seminar, General Rahman emphasised that youth must be viewed not as passive recipients of development outcomes but as active architects of sustainable futures. The theme of the seminar reflected precisely this understanding. Advancing the SDGs would require more than government action alone. In order to fully institutionalise the claimed whole-of-society approach, he stressed the need of bringing together public institutions, development partners, academia, the private sector, and, most importantly, the youth themselves. Sustainable development could only be achieved when those who would inherit the future were empowered to shape it. In recent years Bangladesh witnessed remarkable examples of youth leadership across the country. Young entrepreneurs were creating innovative business models that generated employment while addressing local development challenges. Similarly, young climate activists were developing community-based adaptation solutions in vulnerable regions, and youth-led organisations were promoting gender equality, digital inclusion, social innovation, and civic engagement. These initiatives clearly demonstrated that when young people were provided with opportunities and support, they could become powerful drivers of transformative change.

However, isolated success stories were not enough. The challenge before policymakers and stakeholders was how to scale up these initiatives, institutionalise meaningful youth participation, and create enabling ecosystems where youth-led innovation could thrive. This required effective policies, adequate financing, strong partnerships, and sustained dialogue among all stakeholders. Highlighting the role of BIISS, he reaffirmed that, as a premier policy research institution, BIISS remained committed to facilitating evidence-based discussions on issues of both national and international importance. He expressed belief that strategic research and inclusive dialogue could contribute significantly to policy formulation and implementation. In this regard, he described the seminar as a valuable platform for exploring practical pathways to strengthen youth engagement in SDG localisation and implementation; the event offered an opportunity to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and grassroots realities.

Reflecting on broader significance of sustainable development, General Rahman said the story of sustainable development was ultimately a story about people, their aspirations, opportunities, and ability to shape a better future. If the promise of the 2030 Agenda was to be realised, he argued, investment must be made not only in infrastructure and institutions but also in the creativity, leadership, and potential of young people. The future of Bangladesh would be determined by the decisions made today and by the opportunities created for the next generation. By empowering youth as partners, innovators, and leaders, Bangladesh could transform challenges into opportunities and ensure sustainable development became a reality for all.

Expressing satisfaction with the diverse composition of participants gathered at the seminar, General Rahman conveyed his confidence that the exchange of ideas and experiences throughout the day would generate valuable insights and actionable recommendations. He concluded the address by expressing sincere gratitude to the Special Guest, distinguished speakers, and all other resource persons for generously sharing their time, expertise, and perspectives; their valuable contributions would undoubtedly enrich the discussions and help illuminate pathways towards a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future.

Welcome Remarks



Sudhir Muralidharan

UNOPS Country Manager, Bangladesh

Mr Sudhir Muralidharan began by stating that Bangladesh's development journey had been truly remarkable. Few nations progressed so decisively from vulnerability to ambition. Yet, with 2030 approaching, the gap between promise and delivery was narrowing in time while widening in complexity. Climate shocks, shifting labour markets, deepening inequalities were no longer distant concerns, but present realities. These challenges were felt most acutely by the very generation this seminar sought to champion.

Young people should not be viewed merely as a target group. They are a strategic asset. Bangladesh's demographic dividend was real, and not some fiction; nevertheless, demographic dividends would not last indefinitely. The question was not whether young people would shape the country's future, they already were doing that. Rather, the question was whether relevant institutions were moving quickly enough to support them and meet them halfway.

Evidence of youth leadership was visible everywhere. Young entrepreneurs are creating businesses where none previously existed. Young climate advocates are pioneering adaptation strategies that often advance ahead of formal policy responses. A recent design competition (07 April-27 April 2026) jointly organised by UNOPS and Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK) on carbon-conscious public space design received 144 outstanding submissions from students across universities in Bangladesh. This showed the talent, creativity, and commitment to the SDGs already existed among young people. These were not isolated success stories. They were indicators of what became possible when young people were entrusted with responsibility rather than merely offered rhetoric. But potential without enabling infrastructure remained unrealised. Young people would need access to quality education that reflects contemporary economic realities. They require skills that align with the jobs of tomorrow, rather than curricula designed for demands of yesterday. They would need access to finance, digital tools, and meaningful participation in decision-making platforms, not as afterthoughts, but as foundational elements of development.

In this regard, Mr Muralidharan said of his feeling encouraged by the current government's commitment to promoting entrepreneurship and startup ecosystems. He recently learnt about several innovative initiatives aimed at supporting startups, and believed these measures had the potential to create lasting impact. By equipping young people with necessary skills, resources, and capital, Bangladesh could empower them to build competitive enterprises and engage successfully in the global innovation economy. This was precisely why partnership was not optional; it was the mechanism through which ambition would become

implementation. Government provides with direction, academia generates evidence, civil society promotes accountability, and the private sector creates pathways for opportunity. Development partners such as UNOPS and BIMSTEC contribute the connective tissue through infrastructure, procurement systems, and institutional capacity that help transform commitments into measurable outcomes. At UNOPS, it was learnt sustainable development succeeded only when it was locally owned and responsive to people's lived realities. This was not merely a principle they advocated, but an approach they actively practiced. While supporting the Office of SDG Affairs in developing an SDG communication strategy, they engaged extensively with young people across Bangladesh. Through these interactions, they discovered many young people were eager to contribute to nation-building but were uncertain about how their actions would connect with the SDGs. For many, the SDGs appeared to be abstract concepts: either the responsibility of governments or international organisations such as the UN to further the SDG agenda.

What many did not realise was, their everyday actions contributed already to sustainable development. Simple practices, e.g., conserving water by closing taps after using, switching off lights when not in use, reducing waste, and making environmentally conscious choices all contribute to achieving the SDGs. When young people came to understand this connection, they become excited and felt empowered by the realisation of already being part of the solution. Hence, one of UNOPS' most vital tasks was to strengthen the connection between young people and the SDGs, connecting their everyday activities with those goals. There was also the need of demystifying the SDGs and present them not as disconnected or abstract ideas, but principles embedded in daily life and individual responsibility.



In his conclusion, he suggested, instead of taking only inspiration, the focus and pledge should be to have a clearer understanding of the remaining barriers, the enabling conditions that must be created, and the actions all could individually take onwards. In his view, young people were not merely the leaders of tomorrow, but the drivers of change at present. Nature of response to this reality would play a defining role in shaping Bangladesh's contribution to the *2030 Agenda* and in determining its place in the global sustainable development story.

Opening Address



H E Indra Mani Pandey

*Secretary General
Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral
Technical and Economic Cooperation
(BIMSTEC)*

H E Indra Mani Pandey opened his address by reflecting on historical background of the UN SDSN (Sustainable Development Solutions Network) since their inception in 2015; while member state-led multilateral initiatives consistently prioritised these targets, the current global landscape had grown increasingly volatile. The international community was currently confronting a multitude of interconnected crises, which he characterised as “crumbling of the international rules-based order”. He particularly pointed to the ongoing conflict in the Persian Gulf as a major driver of disruptions in global trade and essential supplies such as oil, which endangered energy and food security globally, including in Bangladesh. Beyond geopolitical tensions, he highlighted a myriad of structural challenges facing the BIMSTEC region’s developmental agenda, spanning climate change, environmental degradation, widening AI and the digital divide, persistent unemployment, structural inequality and social exclusion. Addressing the profound disarrays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent geopolitical shocks since 2019–2020, he candidly observed it remained highly unlikely that the international community would fully achieve the set SDG targets by the end of 2030 deadline.

In light of these global institutional struggles, where larger multilateral and UN bodies were facing acute financial restraints and diminishing capacity, Ambassador Pandey strongly advocated for revitalisation of regional cooperation. Smaller, consolidated regional organisations were better positioned to build solid consensus, delineate action plans, projects, and ensure their swift, collective implementation regardless of the erratic global environment.

Highlighting the immense demographic asset of BIMSTEC, which spans across seven members (e.g. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) and is home to nearly 1.8 billion people, the Secretary General emphasised the young generation must not be viewed merely as passive stakeholders but as essential contributors, innovators, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. He recalled BIMSTEC’s foundational roots in 1997, established under the leadership of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand to bridge South and Southeast Asia. He reaffirmed BIMSTEC’s longstanding commitment to fostering tangible, ground-level cooperation cuts across transnational security and development spheres closely aligning with the SDGs.

Ambassador Pandey particularly encouraged the seminar’s focus on the “localisation

of the SDGs”, which requires translating global objectives into grassroots actions involving local communities, along with government, academic institutions, and development partners. In conclusion, he called upon regional policymakers to create meaningful avenues for youth to actively participate in decision-making, steer policy discussions and build their own collective futures. He further urged young participants to relentlessly challenge conventional thinking, embrace innovation, and collaborate across borders and sectors. He expressed that by embedding youth into the core of BIMSTEC’s regional framework, the region could shape a more resilient, prosperous, and sustainably secure future, even as it looks beyond the 2030 horizon. He closed by wishing the seminar success and looking forward to the pragmatic recommendations and fruitful exchanges following the dialogue.

Speaker 1



Md Rafid Abrar Miah

Research Fellow, BISS

Md Rafid Abrar Miah opened his presentation by posing a provocative question on demographic dividend. He noted whilst Bangladesh's demographic dividend, with nearly 47 per cent of the population under 30, was often cited as the country's greatest asset, the reality on the ground told a different story. He shared the example of a 24-year-old smart and educated woman named Aisha from Khulna who had developed an innovative idea to train women in digital literacy and connecting them to global freelancing opportunities. He also added that the initiative addressed SDGs 1, 4, and 5, that is poverty, quality education, and gender equality simultaneously; despite the strength of her idea, Aisha had been unable to proceed due to a lack of training spaces, no access to finance, and uncertainty about where to begin.

This was the real picture of Bangladesh, not the statistics celebrated at international fora. While the country had nearly 1,200 active startups, youth unemployment stood at 11.46 per cent almost double the national average, and 40 per cent of young people fell into the NEET category, neither employed nor in education or training. He described a paradox whereby 75 per cent of youth possessed smartphones and access to global knowledge, yet remained structurally barred from producing high-value work, a phenomenon he termed the "glass screen generation." He warned that without urgent action, the demographic dividend would become a liability, especially with less than five years remaining to achieve the 2030 agenda.

Mr Miah further illustrated a structural problem where in spite of having 1,200 active startups, 75 per cent of entrepreneurs like Alvi, who built an SMS-based maternal health tracking system but encountered legal obstacles to scaling it, and Rumana, who developed a localised solid waste management system but lacked access to specialised training for expansion. He stressed that the problem was not a lack of capability among youth but rather systemic exclusions. Despite these constraints, young people across Bangladesh were already localising the SDGs in every sector, building digital marketplaces connecting artisans directly to buyers, developing grassroots health-tech platforms, and running circular economy startups that converted agricultural waste into eco-friendly packaging. He praised these initiatives highly where youth were acting as architects of solutions rather than passive recipients of

top-down mandates and tokenistic consultations. However, he also expressed concern as the innovations remained fragmented, underfunded, and disconnected from the national SDG framework.

He pointed out some systemic barriers including restrictive legal frameworks, financing gaps tied to collateral requirements from microfinance institutions, academic inflexibility forcing students to choose between studies and entrepreneurship, and policy structures that expected ideas to prove themselves over five years before being adopted, a timeline he said young entrepreneurs could not afford. Situating this within a global context, he referenced UNDP's youth engagement platforms and whole-of-society localisation strategies, asserting youth engagement was increasingly recognised worldwide as a structural necessity. Bangladesh welcomed international collaboration and partnership in support of its youth-led sustainable development efforts. Mr Abrar outlined four pathways toward the localisation of ambition. First, the importance of strengthening youth-centred governance by ensuring youth participation in union-level SDG planning as decision-makers rather than observers. Second, establishing dedicated financing mechanisms for youth-led enterprises such as a National Youth Innovation Fund. Third, embedding entrepreneurial mindsets into core curricula through green and SDG-focused skills education. Finally, operationalising meaningful policy participation for young people across all stages of decision-making and implementation. He cited existing successful models, including Youth Co: Lab Bangladesh and union-level SDG localisation exercises where local people determined their own priorities deliberately and transparently. Hence, he was positive about these approaches, believed they were replicable and required political will to scale rather than reinvention.

He called on government officials to integrate youth into union-level planning, reform legal frameworks, and urged development partners to provide technical assistance to scale successful models. These efforts were investments in the future rather than charity, would encourage youth leaders present to keep up building solutions, engage in policy advocacy, and demand meaningful participation rather than tokenism; they were engine of transformation, and Mr Abrar encouraged the society to recognise them. He concluded by stating Bangladesh's demographic dividend was not lost, but was waiting to be unlocked through the right choices.

Speaker 2



Dr Kazi Maruful Islam

*Professor, Department of Development Studies
University of Dhaka (DU), and Director Centre
on Budget and Policy, DU*

Dr Kazi Maruful Islam said Bangladesh's 114th position in terms of SDG attainment showed severe inefficacy and left no room to be proud of. Taking stimulation and inspiration from Mr Md Rafid Abrar Miah, he believed the demographic dividend was not lost and Bangladesh still had some opportunity to work on. He acknowledged the country had a lot to do within just four years and it was unsure how far it could catch up. At this point, he said, instead of arguing, Bangladeshi policymakers

would require to accept this was what Bangladesh was, where it stood and they had to work with it, and take it forward. In this regard, he made his reflections on particularly the part of “*what Bangladesh can do*”.

Dr Islam defined the very term ‘SDG localisation’. Acknowledging there was a growing amount of literature with many different definitions, he defined SDG localisation as a way to localise the means to develop the region or locality as per its needs. Development, he thereby defined as a comprehension of four dimensions: decentralisation, deconcentration, delegation and devolution. For him, localisation of SDG referred precisely to the devolution. It referred particularly to giving the capacity and authority to local communities to make decisions, not only on what they were supposed to do, but also on how they would want to do it. It also provided autonomy to identify their priorities and make decisions regarding the resource distribution in order to attain those priorities. Thus, it was more about empowering local communities and local government institutions. Taking queue from Mr Miah's case studies, he reiterated how the youth were practically making sense of SDG through their lived experience at the local level. He firmly believed there was no lack of brilliance among those wonderful boys and girls working out in rural places of Bangladesh. In many places, there were some untapped resources and still there was potential to utilise which they were unable to utilise due to some significant barriers. To understand the entire gamut of this, he identified three aspects important to discuss.

Firstly, he talked about rationalisation of SDG localisation. For him, localisation is a devolution's most liberal form of decentralisation. Though the youth have both brilliance and resources, they are not given adequate autonomy and opportunity to utilise the resources and brilliance at the local level. This reason was acknowledged across the world: local communities

should be engaged in attaining SDG.

Secondly, he talked about the places where this localisation could take place. A country had to have some institutional space where this localisation could take place. He tried to answer some vital questions about where this localisation would take place: was it the local administration or the union parishad? the village level or the ward level? the public health office at the hospital or union health centre? the veterinary centre? Or was it the local bazaar or local school? Where was the place? Where to start with this localisation?

Thirdly, Dr Islam talked about the most important question: how to do it. Here he brought the previous speakers' example and asked the audience: the girl Mr Miah mentioned who wanted to start a cooperative through which she would organise local young boys and girls to train them in freelancing skills, but could anyone specifically say from where she needed to start it? Was there any specific framework that would guide her towards the pathway? Was it only the capacity she could receive and then start? If she would invite people that "please join me for the training", would the young in the community join her? Why or why not? What was the particular process of localising these SDGs at this local level by the youth? In order to answer all three questions, he developed a simple model which he applied in other research works and received some degree of acknowledgement. In that model, the first thing was where and how to start. These questions could be answered from this four-dimension model for SDG localisation.



He then delved into detailed discussion on these aspects and said the answer for first question was institution. What he referred to was, institution meant policies, rules, regulations, and more precisely at local level, about rules of the game. He brought an example of SDG 4: quality education and mentioned that for the youth, there was a need for updated curriculum and proper-updated-smart education. Here, the very decision of quality of education was determined by the curriculum where those rules in the curriculum making process were whether the youth were a part of it. Being a university teacher, he confirmed students were not part of the curriculum making process. He identified this as a gap where Bangladesh was in need of working with the institution part and work out rules of the game that would

facilitate youth participation.

About the second question, Dr Islam said it dealt with ‘capacity’. In this context, he said there was definitely no confusion that Bangladesh’s youth needed capacity which did not necessarily refer to the formal education capacity. Rather, it was about one’s particular ability to make, use own knowledge and information to solve real life problems. Bangladesh’s current education and schooling system were more into delivering information and knowledge, nothing wrong with that, but it was not enough. There remained the need of redesigning the pedagogy, classroom process, laboratory process in a way that would actually help students convert their knowledge and information into a problem-solving ability. When teachers teach students a particular theory, they should also redesign the pedagogy and learning method in a way that students could really use that particular theory in solving real life problems. The capacity must involve informal education instead of remaining confined with formal education; students could learn from other ways and there are a lot of online programmes and courses they could learn from. The point here was, policymakers would require to facilitate that process in a way so that the youth could access those online resources easily with a very minimum cost or no cost.

The third aspect was about opportunities which would have to be open and inclusive. To delineate on opportunity, he referred to SDG 3: good health and wellbeing, brought the recent measles outbreak and a fast-approaching new season of dengue in Bangladesh. In such a public health situation, youth could do a lot, e.g., these crises, particularly dengue, a vector-borne disease, youth could undertake community cleaning campaigns. Problem here was, they were not allowed to do it. Even if they would organise a campaign, he pondered if existing powerful leaders and the institution would support them. To substantiate, he spoke of recent personal experience from Khulna where he observed how the young people were doing a great job in terms of solid waste management in that City Corporation. When he asked them about the problems, they said, once they wanted to clean a big community pond which was the source of all kinds of mosquito, but were not allowed. Authorities wanted them to seek permission from the city corporation. Despite wishes to perform good, noble, voluntary work, it was hard for them to get the necessary permission. Here, he opined, instead of stopping them, institutions would require to create the opportunity for the youth to apply their brilliance and resources.

Dr Islam then delved into his last point about the very fact that Bangladesh was now extremely politically polarised. Though it was far less discussed there, he strongly said this was factual and should have to be acknowledged. This political polarisation went from the top to all the way down to the community level, grassroot level. Thus, any sort of voluntary initiative at the grassroot or even at the centre level was not seen politically neutral, because mostly of political rivalry. This rivalry actually was eating up the benefit of this dividend. Against this backdrop, he urged the government and audience present to facilitate a very democratic politics in Bangladesh. Very democratic politics meant it was just not about elections or having a parliament functioning. It was more about tolerance, coexistence and allowing others, particularly those who were minority in terms of beliefs, culture, gender, ethnicity or lifestyle. Such practices of allowing others, having respect for the minority in terms of all these categories really could create a sort of political space at local level, which could be helpful for nurturing the brilliance, the and great ideas among the youth. This was

something Bangladesh needed to create: a kind of a coherent workforce at both the grassroots and national levels.

Dr Islam brought two examples to make the audience understand the power of youth. He referred to *Jubo Shova*, unlike the *Ward Shova* that was designed by a mere UP chairman of a remote union of Bagerhat district. That chairman initiated this council in his union; he was doing nothing but mobilising the youth for many different UP projects. Simple work, but that gives him a huge energy and resources to solve the local problems. That, he argued, was one simple instance of utilising youth for localising SDGs. SDGs were all about people's problems involving health, environment and every other thing that could ever be thought of. Whenever a UP would address any of the problems, that basically would contribute to SDG. Another example Dr Islam brought was from Nilphamari district. What he found there was a young UNO who convened an annual youth convention. It was just a two-day event, a kind of competition and exhibition. Finally, two projects were rewarded: the champion and runners-up were given around 15,000 and 10,000 takas respectively. It was just a kind of token inspiration, but the exhibition showcased more than 60 wonderful ideas through which they could solve local problems. It was a very small and sporadic initiative, but these high-impact initiatives would not necessarily demand a lot of things to do.

He summed up saying those were like very sporadic examples but worked. He admitted Bangladesh was going through a lot of challenges internally; this current geopolitical tension created a lot of pressure on its economy and governance. Thus, the country's space for choice was shrinking. Still, as it is a democracy and in the process of rebuilding democracy, people could hope this democratic rebuilding phase might also allow the youth, most significant part of the population to take part in all processes including, but not limited to SDG localisation.

Open Discussion



Afroza Khatun Tanzi

*Innovation and Entrepreneurship Office
Youth Collab and Country Focal Youth from
Collab, UNDP,*

Afroza Khatun Tanzi spoke on Youth Collab, a regional initiative. Right after the SDGs were declared by the UN, the UNDP Bangkok office regional hub co-designed a programme called Youth Collab from support with the City Foundation. The whole objective of that programme was quite similar what had been discussed so far in the seminar itself: empowering young people to drive sustainable development through entrepreneurship, innovation and policy engagement. She said, they were way ahead of time to think of this back in 2018, at the start of SDG declaration and design such a project which ended in December 2025. She thought they were standing where they actually started from, i.e. they began by talking how the youth were in need of being at the centre and the same thing was being still talked about, which in her view, was an unfortunate reality and posed the question: what was being done? She mentioned three points they were doing with UNDP and as Youth Collab for some years: a) there was the need of an ecosystem building. A lot of work was being done at local, regional and national levels, but those works were pretty much fragmented. The proposed ecosystem would help bring everyone together, e.g., like in the seminar, with the hope of bringing more concrete outcomes. Without strengthened policies and support systems, mere discussions would eventually not matter. When young people were being thought about, that mostly focused on students, entrepreneurs, but it must be acknowledged that for mobilising the youth at their best capacity, entrepreneurship was the way forward for providing more jobs, finance to the youth and help them build more capacity; b) create a sustainable financing mechanism. Financing in Bangladesh was a different issue that could be discussed for long, she said. As per her, dedicated financing windows, innovation funds, blended financing models were the only way which could help youth led entrepreneurship and the SDG localisation through it. There were lots of young people in Bangladesh coming out from universities. They were entrepreneurial, wanted to do their own business and become job givers instead of being job seekers. It might sound nice: they would work tirelessly for one or two years and then give up to ultimately join the job market. The reason was lack of supportive policies and then regulatory affairs: very difficult for young people to navigate through. About regulatory affairs, she explained, a young person operating a business in Bangladesh as a startup or as a small innovation, would have to go through the same scrutiny as big corporate entities would: double taxation, same kinds of multifarious permissions, regulations, approval from different ministries, etc. Hence, for a fresh graduate,

this would be immensely tough to perform these tasks alongside running a business, amid lack of a viable financial backup. It all would come down what the Youth Collab was doing for a policy. She opined, barely holding discussions would not be helpful for the youth in mobilising SDGs and advance the localisation, without policy support. In terms of what policies should be in place first, she said, young business owners or entrepreneurs should be considered in and as a different category, because they would not be able to pay huge taxes unlike big corporates, e.g., Unilever or Grameen Phone could afford for themselves. She furthermore, proposed exemptions from double taxation while buying or selling products, giving or drawing salaries for themselves and that would be the hardest thing in her opinion.



Sheikh Azmain

*Student, Department of International Relations,
DU*

Sheikh Azmain inquired how, in alignment with the respected code of Bangladesh, the country could scale up achievements already made by Youth collaboration; whilst it seemed to be a great initiative, it was to reach even a fraction of the total potential the country possessed yet.

Farzana Fahima Adrita

*Student, Department of Development Studies,
Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)*

Farzana Fahima Adrita raised question regarding cultural perceptions surrounding female-led organisations. While there were suggestions focusing on providing opportunities and capacity building, another nuance existed in the local context, where young women leading organisations often faced stigma and negative perceptions. Consequently, she enquired how there were plans to address these factors within upcoming initiatives.





Rakibul Hasan Rana

Senior Reporter, Independent Television

Rakibul Hasan Rana highlighted decentralisation as a crucial and vital term previously mentioned by the Professor Kazi Maruful Islam. He questioned why there was a lack of focus on this approach, given its potential to help achieve the SDGs, and re-emphasised decentralisation as of fundamental importance for Bangladesh itself.

Fahim Shahriar

*Chief Executive Officer (CEO),
SustainLaunch Labs*

Fahim Shahriar addressed two primary points to the panel. His first question was to Dr Islam on the educational curriculum. While the global landscape was shifting heavily towards deep tech such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, drone technology, renewable energy, and attracting significant global funding, Bangladeshi youth were to develop deep-tech solutions yet. He attributed this lag to the fact that the current curriculum was failing to incorporate these advanced technologies. Consequently, he enquired whether there were long-term plans to upgrade the national curriculum so that students could effectively compete on a global scale.



Secondly, drawing from his extensive experience in the sector, he offered a recommendation regarding youth entrepreneurship. While acknowledging the value of success stories shared earlier, he disagreed that access to funding, mentorship, or partnerships were primary barriers. He noted that ample funding opportunities existed, sharing that his own organisation raised substantial funds. International organisations, such as the UNDP, tremendously supported young entrepreneurs, even providing senior representatives to judge flagship programmes. The core issue lay in mindset and early-stage preparation. He explained that from childhood, students were trained merely to write answers rather than develop entrepreneurial skills or solve real-world problems. By the time they would reach university,

it was often too little, too late to foster these capabilities; he shared an example of a youth collaboration team he had mentored in Bangkok that grew into a million-dollar enterprise within three years, not because their idea was inherently superior, but because they had been prepared from an early stage to get things done. He concluded that if the nation truly wishes to develop a prosperous future, investments must be hanneled into building problem-solving and entrepreneurial capacities of the youth from a much earlier stage.



Towrim Sannan

Architect

Towrim Sannan shared insights drawing from both her professional background and personal identity as a member of the Manipuri small ethnic community in Bangladesh. Regarding women's empowerment, she suggested that discussions must extend beyond women merely sharing their own struggles. She argued that because challenges women faced often stemmed from systemic and gendered dynamics, active presence and engagement of men in these dialogues were vital to achieving genuine progress.

Turning to the issue of localisation raised earlier by Professor Islam, she highlighted the unique challenges faced by marginalised and small ethnic communities. Standard, centralised training or schooling centers were frequently ineffective at reaching small ethnic community youth. Because these communities are already self-reliant, possessing localised knowledge of cultivation and survival, and young people would not feel compelled to visit centralised institutions. Instead, she recommended that development programmes must actively meet these communities at household level. She emphasised the critical role of “reference points” in enabling young people to dream big. She pointed out that a young girl from an small ethnic or marginalised background could not aspire to become an entrepreneur or an architect if she was completely unaware that those professions existed. Without early exposure to what the world offers, marginalised youth discover these global competitive realities too late, which often leads to intimidation and withdrawal. Therefore, she advocated for introducing diverse professional references to marginalised children at a very early age within their home environments.

She also noted a distinct lack of awareness regarding entrepreneurial resources, funds, and peer networks during her own university years. To prevent talented youth from reluctantly entering the corporate sector solely for financial survival, she recommended that university-level conferences and resource-sharing hubs be established to foster future leaders and entrepreneurs. She then addressed the integration of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). Higher education institutions often focus narrowly on teaching specific software skills to make students employable, rather than training them to be well-rounded leaders. While the younger generation understands how AI can optimise workflows and

increase efficiency, older decision-makers and established institutions often display a lack of tolerance or understanding toward adopting these new technologies due to the perceived complexity of implementation. A mutual sense of tolerance and open-mindedness is required between the generations to bridge this technological divide.



Nayeem Shahriar
Swiss Contact

Nayeem Shahriar spoke on the scalability of youth-led innovations in Bangladesh. Reflecting on various local examples and initiatives presented during the first half of the programme, e.g., the waste management project highlighted in Khulna, Mr Shahriar observed that many of these successful solutions remained confined to their local communities and failed to grow beyond.

Consequently, he enquired about the primary barriers preventing these youth-led solutions from scaling up nationally. He specifically questioned whether the stagnation is caused by a lack of funding, limited policy support, or structural challenges within

existing institutions. Most importantly, he sought insights into the practical steps that both the government and development partners could take to ensure successful youth initiatives were effectively identified, supported, and replicated across the nation.

Student

*Department of Environmental Science,
North South University (NSU)*

Student A student from the Department of Environmental Science, NSU expressed strong agreement with the panel's discussion regarding Bangladesh's large youth population and its vast potential for innovative, entrepreneurial ideas. However, drawing from personal experience, she noted that the primary challenge was rarely the generation of ideas, but significant gap between conceptualisation and actual implementation. While students are frequently encouraged to devise solutions, many struggle to progress beyond business competitions or initial concept stages. This stagnation was attributed to limited access to funding, mentorship, industry connections, and strategic guidance on how to scale solutions. Consequently, she enquired about practical mechanisms that could be established to help young people transition from having ideas to effectively



implementing and sustaining them. She also questioned how institutions, government bodies, NGOs, and the private sector could collaborate to build more robust support systems, ensuring that promising youth-led initiatives do not stall at the concept stage.



Obhijit Saha

Student, DU

Obhijit Saha, highlighted a pressing paradox facing young Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and innovators. While these individuals were increasingly earning recognition on the global stage, securing full scholarships from world-class institutions, including Ivy League universities, to advance their knowledge and drive SDG-aligned solutions back home, they frequently faced visa denials. These rejections were not due to a lack of merit, but stemmed from the limited global credibility of Bangladeshi passport. He asked what strategic role the Bangladeshi government should play in removing this structural barrier, how young leaders themselves could collectively advocate

for passport reform, bilateral student visa agreements, and return-bound scholarship frameworks that signalled a clear commitment to national development, ensuring no future innovator lose their seat at global table just because of their passport. If Bangladesh were serious about building a pipeline of globally educated, locally committed entrepreneurs to advance its SDG targets, this visa-scholarship gap should be treated as a national development emergency. He sought insights into specific public-private partnerships, diaspora networks, or regional cooperation mechanisms that could be used to fast-track a solution.

Student

Mon-Torongo

A **Student**, representing Mon-Torongo, a non-profit organisation dedicated to mental health, raised a question on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Over the past year, their organisation had been delivering both online and offline counseling sessions, utilised a personalised AI model, and completely self-funded, or “boosted up,” its operations without any assistance from the government or external organisations. The state of physical health services in government hospitals with severe neglect of



mental health in Bangladesh; the topic was highly taboo and socially unacceptable to discuss. He enquired how the government planned to intervene and implement effective measures within the mental health sector, e.g., what steps the government should undertake to address mental health needs of the youth generation and the wider population, given the total lack of institutional support currently experienced by grassroots initiatives.



Dr Shaikh Mohammad Jobayed Hossain
Joint Secretary (Youth Wing)
Ministry of Youth and Sports, Bangladesh

Dr Shaikh Mohammad Jobayed Hossain outlined the government's current initiatives, policies, and financial provisions aimed at advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering human development. Youth development was a cross-cutting issue that could not be confined to a single ministry or isolated within a single SDG; rather, would it span all 17 goals, with critical focus areas being education, employment, equality, and civic participation. Drawing on his extensive experience in both policy and practice, Dr Hossain acknowledged existing legal mechanisms for civic engagement, e.g., annual ward-level workshops and participatory budgeting at UP level, but focused mainly on upcoming structural reforms. The Ministry was currently revising the rules of the Youth Council (promulgated in 2021) after the councils across all 64 districts were dissolved by the previous interim government due to politicisation. He anticipated these councils would be reformulated within the next couple of months. Additionally, he highlighted that the Department of Youth actively works with 8,328 registered youth organisations across the country. To encourage grassroots civic engagement, the Ministry oversaw youth volunteer activities and was preparing to honour 16 young individuals with the annual Youth Volunteer Award.

Addressing audience's concerns regarding financing and entrepreneurship, he detailed several available avenues. On project grants, the Ministry provides a one-time incentive/personal donation ranging from 100,000 BDT to 500,000 BDT to over a thousand young people annually, based on project categories. On the *Youth Entrepreneurship Development Policy 2025*, this recently promulgated policy encompasses mentorship, incubation, and strategic support. The Ministry is currently formulating its National Plan of Action, with public participation scheduled to begin on Sunday, 14 June. On low-interest loans, under this new entrepreneurship policy, provisions had been made to offer loans up to 10 lakh Taka. These loans are effectively interest-free, requiring only a 4–5 per cent service charge. On alternative funds, he urged youth to explore additional resources, such as the National Human Rights Development Fund under the Ministry of Finance, the government's Shonkolpo project, and the ongoing EARN project. While acknowledging the success of Bangladeshi youth nationally and globally, Dr Hossain shared observations on domestic start-up landscape. He cautioned

that too many initiatives focused merely on basic buying and selling, whereas the government expected impactful entrepreneurship driven by genuine innovation, employment generation, and sustainable economic contributions.

He then addressed specific target groups and modern sectors. The Ministry was heavily focused on the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population, which constituted over 40 per cent of the youth demographic primarily through the implementation of the EARN project. Regarding capacity building in technology and climate resilience, he highlighted a recently launched AI project and a countrywide green development initiative called the IMPACT project, which trains and finances youth to develop biogas plants for household and commercial use. While substantial training, skill development, and loan opportunities existed within the agricultural sector, there was low level of interest among young people to enter this field, urging them to take advantage of these available resources.



Ambassador Shahed Akter

Chairman

Center for Science-Tech, Policy & Diplomacy (CSTDP)

Ambassador Shahed Akter recalled a visit to China during his tenure as Principal of the Foreign Service Academy. He shared an anecdote about a young girl in the Chinese diplomatic service who, when asked about career goals, did not aspire to be an ambassador but expressed desire to travel to the moon so that she could view the Great Wall of China from outer space.

Turning to domestic context, he expressed concern about the massive scale of youth unemployment in Bangladesh, describing the current trajectory of young leaders as disjointed; due to a lack of viable employment opportunities, smart young individuals were increasingly drifting into internet gambling and other social vices, a critical issue he felt was currently being ignored by society. Addressing Dr Awal and the panel, he urged authorities to refrain from interfering with the private sector, which he described as highly enterprising. Drawing from his diplomatic and administrative career, he noted that many entrepreneurs often felt excessively disrupted by government departments and regulatory authorities, leading them to abandon their business ventures in the country. He concluded by stating the youth were already highly qualified and fully capable of navigating their own paths if left undisturbed. While acknowledging the new government designed specific plans and programmes, he said systemic bottlenecks continued to restrict opportunities for the younger generation, leaving this observation for consideration of the chief coordinator, professors, and audience.

Response by Panellists

Dr Kazi Maruful Islam

Dr Kazi Maruful Islam while acknowledging the Principal Coordinator for SDGs' points, cautioned that viewing everything from a party political standpoint could lead to a flawed understanding. He argued that culture is distinctly nuanced, and initiatives like *Notun Kuri*, while commendable for discovering new talent, are insufficient to overcome deep-rooted cultural barriers. He defined culture as one's perspective towards others, influenced by dynamics such as male dominance, religious identity, or socioeconomic status. The true challenge lay at the grassroots and community levels, where a young woman faced severe backlash when attempting to sell her products in the market, or struggled to find institutional support for her leadership. To address these profound issues, he stated a top-down approach was not enough. Instead, he identified democratic politics, specifically the politics of tolerance and coexistence as the essential force that nourished societal values. Space for women had shrunk significantly in recent years, pointing to daily occurrence of online and offline bullying and backlash from various sectors of society, which the state had done almost nothing to curb. To dismantle these parochial perspectives towards women, he concluded that work must begin within the education system, religious institutions, and the very texture of society itself, including both the formal and informal networks of local communities (samaj).



In response to Mr Fahim Shahriar's question on educational curriculum, Dr Islam clarified that whilst he works within the Social Science Faculty, his colleagues in the Science Faculty, particularly within departments like Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE), Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), Applied Physics, had already incorporated artificial intelligence (AI) and deep-tech technologies into their curricula; this integration had been progressing over the last four to five years to catch up with technological updates. Consequently, whilst these updated graduates had not yet fully entered the job market, they would do so shortly. He also confirmed that the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) had precisely updated its curriculum to incorporate these elements.

Addressing Mr Nayeem Shahriar's question on main barriers to scaling up youth-led initiatives, Dr Islam referenced a model he developed based on these exact constraints, categorising them into institutional, capacity, and opportunity barriers.

Firstly, on institutional barriers, he pointed out the lack of adequate rules to facilitate youth initiatives within existing state bodies. He cited an example involving a city corporation, explaining that rigid bureaucratic frameworks and contracting processes prevented municipalities from officially allowing voluntary organisations to utilise public resources, such as a local pond, even when it is a non-typical, non-commercial venture. These small regulatory hurdles ultimately create significant obstacles for institutional youth engagement.

Secondly, regarding capacity, he agreed that while common dialogues often focused on access to finance, mentorship, and incubation, the core issue was youth's ability to navigate and manoeuvre through these challenges; educational institutions bore the primary responsibility for building this capacity, such as training students to deliver smart business pitches to potential investors through repetitive university presentations. He noted with regret that there was currently a genuine shortage of such practical skills amongst the youth.

Finally, he discussed the barrier of opportunity, emphasising even if young graduates possessed exceptional entrepreneurial skills and ideas, their success would depend on the growth of the real economy; if the economy faced a recession and market demand was absent, new businesses would not thrive. He concluded that the state must lead initiatives, in close partnership with the private sector, to stimulate the real economy and create the necessary market opportunities for the youth to actively participate.

Speech by Special Guest



Professor Dr SM Abdul-Awal

*Principal Coordinator for SDGs
Prime Minister's Office (PMO)*

Professor Dr SM Abdul-Awal began by extending his greetings to the distinguished guests, including representatives from Vilsack, UNOPS, academia, media, and participating students. Reflecting on the discussions throughout the programme, he acknowledged that many challenges facing Bangladesh had been highlighted. As a citizen of a developing country, he recognised that Bangladesh continued to face numerous social, economic, and institutional problems. However, central challenge lay not merely in identifying these problems, but in developing practical and sustainable solutions to address them.

Drawing upon his experience as a researcher and academic, Dr Awal argued that effective identification and analysis of problems constituted the first step towards developing appropriate solutions. In this regard, he referred to the government's electoral manifesto, which, according to him, provided a comprehensive framework for transforming society and addressing long-standing challenges. He encouraged the younger generation to study the manifesto carefully in order to understand the government's vision and strategic priorities; over the past 17-18 years, extensive studies had been conducted to identify structural deficiencies across multiple sectors. Among the most pressing concerns were shortcomings in the education system, limitations in employment opportunities, and various governance-related challenges. Based on these assessments, the government developed a policy agenda aimed at addressing these issues systematically. At the same time, he stressed that deeply entrenched societal problems could not be resolved overnight. Social inequalities and structural disparities accumulated over decades, and meaningful transformation would require time, persistence, and sustained commitment. Nevertheless, he assured the audience the government possessed a clear roadmap and remained committed to implementing long-term solutions.

Turning to the education sector, he addressed a question regarding deep technology education and specialised training in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. Bangladesh currently was lacking dedicated departments focusing exclusively on machine learning and AI in many public universities. However, plans were underway to introduce specialised academic programmes in these disciplines within a relatively short timeframe. Such initiatives, he argued, were essential if Bangladesh was to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Reflecting on his own academic experiences abroad, particularly during postdoctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley, he contrasted educational cultures of developed countries with those prevalent in Bangladesh; the country's education system would require comprehensive reform, extending beyond technical knowledge to encompass broader developmental skills. Recalling earlier educational traditions in Bangladesh, he said public recognition of academic excellence once served as a powerful source of motivation for students. Today, however, educational success was often reduced to examination scores and grade point averages. Consequently, he emphasised the need of addressing deeper structural issues within the educational system and redesign curricula in ways that would promote holistic development. In this context, he highlighted the importance of incorporating soft skills and personal development into educational programmes. Referring to observations made by Dr Maruf earlier, he underscored the significance of team-building, leadership development, case-study analysis, communication skills, and storytelling. Many students completed their university education without receiving formal training in public speaking, presentation skills, or effective communication. To address these shortcomings, the government was planning to introduce such competencies progressively across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education.

Dr Awal also addressed the issue of mental health, raised by a participant. Drawing on his experience as a vice-chancellor during the interim period at a university, he recounted observing a significant number of students experiencing mental health difficulties, including severe stress, emotional distress, and in some cases, suicidal tendencies. Due to institutional limitations and absence of sanctioned positions, he was unable to appoint full-time psychiatrists. As an alternative, he arranged for professional psychiatrists to visit the university twice a month to provide counselling services. Based on these experiences, he emphasised the urgent need of strengthening mental health support systems across educational institutions. The government had plans to expand access to mental health professionals, particularly within universities, while also extending such services to district and subdistrict levels in the future.

In addition to mental health initiatives, he outlined plans to establish career centres within universities to support students in career planning, professional development, and employment preparation. He further highlighted the government's intention to promote science fairs, innovation competitions, and related educational activities. Recalling his doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge, he described how science fairs regularly brought together students from schools and universities, creating opportunities to foster scientific curiosity and innovation. Such programmes, he argued, play a critical role in inspiring young people to pursue careers in science and technology. According to him, similar initiatives had already been incorporated into the government's policy framework and were expected to be implemented across universities in the near future.

Drawing further from his experiences in Berkeley and Silicon Valley, he discussed the importance of innovation-driven entrepreneurship. Many successful companies in advanced economies emerged from innovative ideas supported by investors willing to finance entrepreneurial ventures. In contrast, he argued that aspiring entrepreneurs in Bangladesh often faced various difficulties in securing investment and commercialising their ideas. To address this challenge, he called for greater utilisation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) resources to support entrepreneurship development and innovation ecosystems. Referring to

discussions held during the event, he noted that entrepreneurship seed funding could provide critical support to young innovators; government representatives had already announced plans to provide seed loans of up to one million takas for promising entrepreneurial projects, thereby creating opportunities for youth-led innovation and enterprise development.

Dr Awal highlighted the government's broader commitment to social protection and human development. Using the Family Card programme as an example, he opined the initiative was designed not merely as a welfare mechanism, but as an investment in human capital too. He recounted a personal experience from a field visit where he spoke with a woman receiving benefits under the programme. When asked how she intended to use the financial assistance, she said she was investing it in her children's education by purchasing educational materials and paying tuition fees. For Dr Awal, this showed how targeted social protection programmes could contribute to long-term societal transformation by empowering families to invest in future generations.

He further emphasised that his party's political philosophy was fundamentally centred on people-oriented development. The objective of public policy should be the welfare and empowerment of citizens. He cited the readymade garments (RMG) sector and remittance inflows as examples of transformative policy successes that played a crucial role in shaping Bangladesh's economic development. Building upon these achievements, the government was actively exploring new sectors capable of generating foreign exchange earnings and strengthening the country's economic resilience. Addressing concerns about cyberbullying and harmful online behaviour, Dr Awal expressed concern himself over the rising prevalence of such phenomena on social media platforms. These trends were partly rooted in deeper deficiencies within the educational system. Based on his experiences at leading international institutions, including Cambridge, Berkeley, and Lowell, he observed the scale and intensity of such behaviour in Bangladesh had become particularly noticeable in recent years. To counter these trends, he advocated a more comprehensive educational approach that would combine academic learning with character development, civic values, and extracurricular engagement.



In this regard, he highlighted the importance of sports and recreational activities as tools for youth development. By encouraging young people to participate actively in sports and other constructive pursuits, he argued, society could help reduce excessive engagement with harmful online content while simultaneously promoting discipline, teamwork, and physical well-being. Such initiatives would form part of a broader philosophy aimed at fostering healthier lifestyles and creating more positive social environments for young people. He concluded by reiterating that the government possessed a comprehensive vision for addressing the country's developmental challenges. While acknowledging meaningful reforms required time and patience, he expressed confidence the planned initiatives in education, mental health, entrepreneurship, social protection, and youth development would contribute significantly to national progress.

In response to the questions raised from the floor, Professor Awal acknowledged the initiative had not yet fully flourished in the country. Young women leading organisations faced significant challenges, and there were numerous obstacles at both the policy level and within regulatory frameworks. The current government, formed just a few months prior, maintained a specific plan to establish and promote entrepreneurship, firmly believing that job creation relied heavily on such promotion; the party manifesto explicitly included provisions for these approaches, such as offering seed loans to entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, he drew a comparison to world-class institutions like Cambridge, Oxford, UC Berkeley, and Stanford, which utilise science parks to foster entrepreneurship directly from the university level. As young people were the future of the nation, providing university or government-allocated spaces alongside seed loans would allow individuals with fantastic ideas to turn them into reality. He confirmed this strategy was already in their manifesto and work on it had commenced. Addressing the question on cultural factors, he referenced the revival of the *Notun Kuri* talent-hunt programmes and sports initiatives under the current government; the government firmly believed in protecting local, small ethnic, and tribal cultures. As evidence of this commitment to inclusivity and Bangladeshi nationalism, he pointed to the diverse representation within the current female Members of Parliament, which includes Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and tribal individuals.

Concluding Remarks



Major General A S M Ridwanur Rahman, awc, afwc, psc, G
Director General, BISS

Major General A S M Ridwanur Rahman, awc, afwc, psc, G started this concluding remarks by conveying sincere appreciation to all participants for their valuable contributions to the discussions. A clear and consistent message had emerged throughout the session which was, the future of sustainable development in Bangladesh would significantly depend on the ability to empower, engage, and trust young people as genuine partners in development. The youth were not mere stakeholders in the SDGs, but indispensable drivers behind innovation, resilience, and social transformation.

He stressed three critical realities emerging from the deliberations. First, sustainable development was not attainable through top-down approaches alone, as localised solutions, community engagement, and inclusive participation were crucial at the same time. Second, meaningful youth participation must extend beyond consultation to encompass a genuine engagement in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring processes. Third, effective partnerships among government institutions, development partners, academia, civil society, and the private sector remained crucial for translating innovative ideas into sustainable outcomes. Bangladesh possessed tremendous potential in its young population and pointed at young entrepreneurs, climate advocates, innovators, researchers, social activists who were already demonstrating leadership in addressing local challenges. The task ahead was to create enabling environments where such initiatives could flourish, scale, and be synergised with the national SDG framework. He expressed exquisite encouragement on the practical recommendations that merged from the seminar's exchange, noting these insights would contribute to future policy discussions, strengthen efforts towards localising the SDGs in ways responsive to the needs and aspirations of communities.

The SDGs represented not a mere set of global targets, but a collective commitment to create a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable future for future generation; hence continued action, collaboration, and confidence in the capacity of young people to lead positive change would be necessary. He concluded by expressing hope the day's conversations would inspire ongoing partnerships, policy innovations, and concrete actions in days ahead.

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