



## IGS Giving a voice to Bangladeshi youth

With its *Bangladesh Youth Survey*, the *Institute of Governance Studies* (IGS) set out to learn about the country's youth and to share this knowledge with policymakers.

**SETTING THE SCENE** —With a median age of 24, Bangladesh has one of Asia's youngest populations. Despite the country's young demographic, until recently its policymakers have paid little attention to youth. Although a national youth policy was drafted 10 years ago, it has yet to be approved. In addition, the Department of Youth Development, tasked with overseeing services for youth, receives a very small share of the national budget.

Similarly, youth issues have not received adequate attention in academic or policy research. Thus, knowledge about the expectations of Bangladeshi youth, as well as their economic potential, is lacking. The Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), a research, training, and teaching institute at BRAC University in Dhaka, therefore identified a need for research on the country's young population and set out to learn more about this demographic.

**WHAT IGS DID** —In 2011, IGS initiated the *Bangladesh Youth Survey: Giving Youth a Voice*,

which aimed to provide policymakers and development partners with in-depth knowledge about Bangladeshi youth. This project was funded through support from the Think Tank Initiative, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Bangladesh, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Dhaka.

The survey aimed to learn more about Bangladeshi youth's perceptions of and aspirations on a host of issues. It assessed more than 6,500 respondents aged 15 to 30 years in all 64 districts of Bangladesh. IGS collected information on topics such as how young people see their roles in relation to the state, society/community, and their families. The institution also solicited their views on government policies affecting their age group, such as education, skills development, access to labour markets, and political perspectives.

The main outputs of the survey include a detailed report, a series of academic papers, and two public events. Before launching the survey, IGS



held a regional planning workshop in Colombo in November 2011 that brought together 40 South Asian participants, the majority of whom were academics. Following the study, IGS organized an international conference in March 2012 that convened a large number of international and regional scholars, as well as policymakers and development partners with an interest in learning about youth.

**THE OUTCOME** —The youth survey and subsequent report have been highly successful in meeting their objectives. IGS has already formed a national network that includes Bangladeshi ministries engaged in activities that involve youth, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (particularly the Department for Youth Development), and development partners including the UNDP Democratic Governance Cluster and SDC. Other organizations that are very active in youth issues - notably BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division, the British Council, and Action Aid - have also joined

the network. Through this network, IGS plans to pursue follow-up discussions and negotiations based on the findings of the survey. As one example, this network conducted a regional conference on youth issues, held in Nepal in March 2013. The institute is also preparing briefs that address policy areas of particular relevance to youth, and will be discussing these in an upcoming series of policy dialogues. As a sign of how this initiative might inspire others, a similar study to Bangladesh' youth survey has also been undertaken in Nepal in order to learn more about the country's youth.

Broadly speaking, the *Bangladesh Youth Survey* offers a clear means of strengthening the position of young people by documenting their views on crucial policies related to health, education and employment, among other issues. The findings are likely to contribute to the design of further action plans and policies concerning Bangladeshi youth, through IGS' partnerships with the Bangladeshi government and development partners.

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