**UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law**

Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making

**Submission By:** **Center for Social Activism (CSA), Bangladesh**

**Youth in the center of Power:**

52% of the total population of Bangladesh is under 24 years of age. Most of them have got their voter ID cards in past ten years. Needful to mention that, apart from the hardcore supporters of the major political parties, a huge number of youth are not inclined to any specific political party. As a result, this portion is always considered to be the power making portion as they can put their neutral mind while casting votes. Their swinging role is a key to establish rule of law and good governance if they could cast their votes in a free and fair election.

Therefore, the youth are the extreme important force who could shape the future of the country. Following issues are important to look into to engage the youth in a constructive way:

 **Freedom of Choice, Right to Vote**

For the youth of Bangladesh the space to take part in free and fare election is vital. This is also very important for the stability of the country. However, the last election was not an inclusive multiparty election as the main opposition party boycotted the election. Thus, it is important to create a democratic space for the huge number of youth so that they could exercise their right to vote in a free, fair and participatory election.

 **Women Empowerment, Gender Justice**

The last few years Bangladesh has seen a huge number of young women been involved in the economic field, specially in the readymade garment sector. It’s been also noted that in the last five-ten years, girl’s enrollment in the schools has been largely increased. Therefore, in the next ten years a huge number of youth women would emerge with relatively higher education. This portion of women would neither be accommodated in the garments sector nor in the government service sector.

Therefore, a proper planning for their employment is to be envisaged and implemented. Also, space should be kept open for them to exercise and realize their other rights.

 **Social Cohesion, Eradicating Hatred**

Millions of male workers work in the Middle Eastern countries as a migrant worker. They live there in different kind deprivation, which psycho-socially affects them and shocks their cultural identity. When they return to Bangladesh, not only they bring along some petro-dollars but also carry back certain values or practices, which do not match with the values and culture of Bangladesh. Coming back after 10-15 years of deprivation, they start imposing newly learned values and trends onto the family members. As a result, the youth of those families are forced to change their living pattern, for example, the children are forced to leave school and join Madrasa and girls are forced to wear Hizab and so on. This newly imposed practices play strong role in spreading religious hatred, religious extremism, which largely affects the social cohesion. And this affects mostly the young population.

**Right to Work, Right to have decent life**

A huge number of youth is living in the Middle East and other countries as migrant workers. However, the number of annual outgoing is decreasing. If this decreasing trend remains continued, it can be assumed that in next few years, a huge number of male youth will neither be able to go abroad as labor force, nor be able to get suitable job in Bangladesh. Moreover, if the democratic and human rights space is not available for them, they would easily be targeted by the extremist or terrorist groups.

Therefore, a proper planning is needed for the youth in future to provide them opportunities to find employment, and to get engaged in social entrepreneurship. Otherwise they might turn out to be an easy prey of the extremists.

 **Terrorism may decrease employment**

Recent terrorism and religious extremism may dip the RMG business. RMG buyers may withdraw their interest from the RMG sector. This will tremendously affect a huge number of youth in Bangladesh. So, proper planning should be taken to stop terrorism and let the business run in full rhythm.

 **Youth and voluntarism**

The number of open lands, play grounds and sports opportunities along with volunteer activities through small scale community based organizations are decreasing. Instead, the trend of using electronic equipments (laptop, cell phone, tab etc.) is increasing. As a result, the physical and psycho social development of the youth is being hampered. This is very much needed for the development of their body and mind. Therefore, opportunities that enhance physical activities and social involvement should be increased. Otherwise, depression, self-centered mind, drug addiction etc. may seize their potential.

 **Civil and Political rights**

The youth of Bangladesh has always played a prominent role in progressive development of the country, for example, the liberation war, movement against military rulers, reinstating democracy etc. The professional groups like trade union, journalists, have never been so prominent in the history of change making. The very recent Gonojagoron movement in Shahbag was an example of youth uprising in the country. Though the notion of the movement was somewhat critical, as many of them were demanding death sentence, but it had a tremendous influence to establish justice through eradication of the culture of impunity.

Therefore, youth’s peaceful assembly, demonstration and voice raising should be protected in Bangladesh for the smooth running of democracy and establishing rule of law.

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**About CSA:** Center for Social Activism (CSA) is a non-partisan citizen’s initiative in Bangladesh committed to promote Human Rights and Social Activism.