Youth-led Action Research

Empowering Marginalized Youth through Action Research: Understanding Barriers to Education Access and Continuation at the Community Level

CAMPAIGN FOR POPULAR EDUCATION

EDUCATION**OUTLOUD**
advocacy & social accountability

GPE Transforming Education

Youth-led Action Research

Empowering Marginalized Youth through Action Research: Understanding Barriers to Education Access and Continuation at the Community Level

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In Cooperation with:

Education OutLoud -Advocacy & Social Accountability

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Contributors

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Supported by:

Preface

Campaign for popular education has coordinated this Youth-led Action-oriented Research (YAR) in seven area involving existing member of Youth Forum through its member organizations from different parts of Bangladesh namely MUK, GJUS, Bikoshito Bangladesh Foundation, National Development Program (NDP), ASED, SERAA and Ashroy Foundation. The active involvement of youths, both girls and boys, have contributed to capability enhancement in terms of local development, right to education, access to information, adequate healthcare services, and self-development to realize their potentials.

Youth have an enormous opportunity in terms of human capability enhancement, and their participation is indivisible at every stage of development. A successful youth development initiative could improve the quality of human resources and open the opportunity for the world of work as well as foster the development initiatives. Therefore, engagement of youth as important programs of CAMPE to prepare the youth to meet the 21st-century challenges.

This action research has provided some food for thoughts to understand the impact of the youth facing adversity in their regular life and post covid-19 pandemic situation also. It has tried to provide collected some information through some questions. It has emphasized on the importance education as well as technical and vocational education and training as part of lifelong learning. The engagement of both boys and girls feel proud and confident after joining this program as a young researcher from the community. They also feel encourage to engage with the local government institution and other duty bearers to proclaim their right to education and better living.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all the young researchers and partner organizations for their dedication and participation. Notably, no external resource persons or professional researchers were involved at any stage; the entire research process was carried out by youth participants many of whom had limited prior experience with research methodologies. For most, this was their first exposure to action research, which they conducted part-time alongside their education and livelihood activities.

We hope this youth-led research initiative will inspire others to undertake similar grassroots efforts and discover innovative solutions to local challenges.

Rasheda K. Choudhury
Executive Director, CAMPE

Acronyms

AF	:	Ashroy Foundation – an NGO
ASPBAE	:	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education – the Asia Pacific regional education coalition
CAMPE	:	Campaign for Popular Education – the national coalition for education
MUK	:	Manab Unnayan Kendra
NEET	:	(Youths) Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NDP	:	National Development Programme
NEP	:	National Education Policy
SMC	:	School Management Committee
SLIP	:	School Level Improvement Plan
TVET	:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

Youth represent a vital segment of Bangladesh's population, comprising nearly one-third of the country's total population. Every year around 2.1 million youths are supposed to enter into the job market in Bangladesh. As a nation with a median age of around 27 years, Bangladesh is experiencing a demographic dividend that presents both immense opportunities and significant challenges. The youth are playing an increasingly important role in shaping the country's social, economic, and political landscapes.
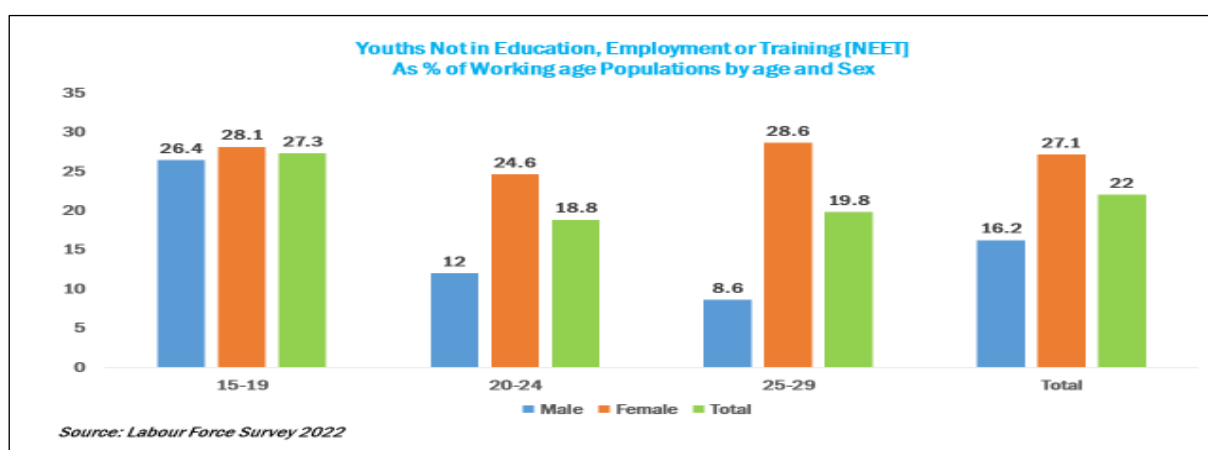
Recognizing the potential of youth as agents of change, the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) launched the Youth-led Action Research (YAR) initiative to strengthen school accountability through community-driven efforts. This initiative empowers young people in seven selected communities across Bangladesh to take a leading role in identifying issues within the education system, gathering evidence, amplifying community voices, and advocating for responsive and inclusive educational practices.

This report presents the objectives, methodology, key findings, and recommendations from the YAR process. It highlights how youth-led community research can enhance school accountability and ensure that education systems are more responsive to the needs and rights of students and their communities.

Background

Over the past decade, young people in Bangladesh have demonstrated significant potential in areas such as technology, entrepreneurship, education, and activism. Youth-led initiatives in startups, digital platforms, and social movements have showcased their creativity, resilience, and commitment to driving social change.

However, this potential continues to be challenged by several systemic issues. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, the July Revolution, student-people uprisings, and growing concerns about youth mental health and well-being highlight the critical need for youth engagement in policy and practice. One of the major concerns is the inadequate linkage between school and work, often referred to as the school-to-work transition gap. The NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) status has emerged as a global concern, threatening youth inclusion in productive economic and social activities. According to the Sample Vital Statistics Report (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics - BBS), 40.7% of youth aged 15–24 in Bangladesh are considered NEET amounting to approximately 12.9 million young people.

Youths Not in Education, Employment or Training [NEET]
As % of Working age Populations by age and Sex

	15-19	20-24	25-29	Total
Male	26.4	12	8.6	16.2
Female	28.1	24.6	28.6	27.1
Total	27.3	18.8	19.8	22

Source: Labour Force Survey 2022

In this context, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) is serous concerned with the challenges faced by the youths from marginalized community. Considering the issues, CAMPE formed 7 youth forum in 7 locations to strengthen youth voice and develop leadership in education sector.

As part of ensuring social accountability this group working together with Community Education Watch Group to enhance community voice for making the school more responsive to the rights holders' needs. They also engage in social mobilization and take advocacy initiatives to facilitate engagement between governments, improve the state of attendance and reduce absenteeism and dropouts. The initiatives aims to mobilize the concerned members of community, SMC, Union Standing Committee, SLIP, and other related bodies/groups e.g. teachers associations, local government, public and private as well as national and international agencies to contribute achieving quality education. It attempts to form and activate youth forums in selected locations in Bangladesh, enabling youth engagement in the school-level education system, generation of evidence, and strengthened evidence-based youth-led advocacy at national, regional, and global levels. The specific objective of the initiative is to:
   i)   Build capacity of the youths in seven selected communities under seven districts through CAMPE's member organizations.
   ii)   Empower youth with knowledge on SDG 4, the right to education, gender-transformative education, human rights-based approaches, and social accountability in education, while nurturing their leadership skills.
   iii)   Train youth in Youth-led Action Research (YAR) methodologies and provide follow-up support to implement YAR in their communities.
   iv)   Encourage youth to lead local advocacy efforts and participate selected youth in national and regional advocacy platforms.

Objective of the Youth-led Action Research

The main objective Youth-led Action Research of CAMPE is to identify, analyze, and generate evidence on the barriers affecting access to and continuation of education for marginalized youth at the community level, through a youth-led participatory action research approach.

Methodology

The Youth-led Action Research (YAR) adopted qualitative research methods to explore the challenges and opportunities related to youth education and engagement in Bangladesh. A total of 75 respondents were reached through qualitative interviews, with 51% of them being girls, ensuring gender inclusivity.

The core participants of the 2025 YAR were youth aged 15 to 25 years. Over half of the participants came from marginalized backgrounds, selected based on criteria such as gender, ethnicity, household economic status, social exclusion, geographical barriers, and personal abilities or disabilities. Youth who were out of school, engaged in child labour, or were victims of early marriage were also intentionally included to ensure the research addressed the most vulnerable groups.

Prior to data collection, CAMPE conducted a comprehensive capacity-building initiative to strengthen the selected youths' understanding of:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education)
- The right to education
- A human rights-based approach to education
- Leadership and communication skills

Following the training, the youth researchers expanded outreach by engaging more youth from their communities, conducting community mapping, and identifying the key educational concerns faced by their peers. The process focused on understanding issues related to education access, youth livelihoods, and the school-to-work transition, all framed through the lens of the right to education.

Limitations and Challenges

This research was conducted using a small, qualitative sample, which may not fully represent the broader population of youth across Bangladesh. The findings are therefore context-specific and should be interpreted with this in mind.

Additionally, no external resource persons or professional researchers were involved at any stage of the process. The research was led entirely by youth participants, many of whom had limited prior experience with research methodologies. For most of them, this was their first exposure to action research, and their engagement was part-time, alongside other educational or livelihood responsibilities.

While these factors may have affected the depth and rigor of the data collection and analysis, the participatory and youth-led nature of the research remains a core strength. The study offers authentic, grassroots insights into the educational challenges faced by marginalized youth perspectives that are often overlooked in formal education policy discussions.

These limitations should be carefully considered when interpreting the results. However, they do not diminish the value of youth perspectives in identifying critical gaps and opportunities for policy and practice improvement.

Findings

1. **Challenges in Continuing and Improving the Quality of Education**
Youth participants identified multiple, interconnected challenges that hinder educational access and quality, particularly for marginalized communities:
- Financial hardship affecting the ability to afford school-related expenses.
- Weak and inflexible education system that fails to address the realities of climate-vulnerable areas (e.g., haor, char, tea gardens), and marginalized groups such as youth with disabilities and ethnic communities.
- Unsafe school environments and inadequate infrastructure, including classrooms, sanitation, and safety measures.

- Low parental awareness and motivation, contributing to poor attendance and dropouts.
- Long distances between home and school, especially in rural or remote areas.
- Eve-teasing and lack of gender-sensitive protective measures.
- High costs of educational materials (e.g., guidebooks, tuition, private tutoring).
- Political instability affecting school functioning and access.
- Drug addiction among youth.
- Limited access to digital devices and unreliable internet.
- Shortage of trained teachers and lack of inclusive learning materials.
- Low prioritization of girls' education in some communities.

2. Youth-Identified Solutions to Overcome Challenges
Participants proposed several practical and community-based solutions:
- Develop a comprehensive plan reflecting the specific needs of marginalized youth.
- Promote informal peer study groups and community-supported tutoring.
- Encourage online learning using apps and free digital content.
- Improve security for girls, particularly during their commute to school.
- Link education to income-generating opportunities and provide trade-based training in schools.
- Recruit more trained, gender-sensitive, and inclusive teachers.
- Provide ICT equipment and enhance digital infrastructure in rural schools.
- Establish community learning hubs led by youth volunteers.
- Involve multiple stakeholders (government, NGOs, private sector) to support education material distribution.

3. Reasons for Dropouts and Absenteeism
Key factors contributing to school dropouts and irregular attendance include:
Child labor and early marriage.
- Household responsibilities pulling youth out of school.
- Parental unawareness about the value of long-term education.
- Limited access to secondary or higher education institutions nearby.
- Political interference in school operations.
- Family migration due to work or displacement.
- Absence of mid-day meals, especially for low-income families.

4. Desired Changes to Support School-to-Work Transition
Youth expressed the need for targeted support to facilitate successful career pathways:
Stipends or scholarships for marginalized youth.
- Align education with job market needs.
- Provide vocational and skills training tailored to local employment opportunities.
- Introduce career counseling services in schools.
- Facilitate internships and apprenticeships through partnerships with NGOs and government.
- Offer flexible loans for starting small businesses and pursuing further education.

5. Impact of post COVID-19 on Youth Education

The pandemic had a profound and lingering impact on youth learning and well-being:
Increased mental health issues such as stress and anxiety.

- Severe learning loss and weakening of foundational academic skills.
- Household income loss leading to school dropouts.
- Rising mobile phone dependency and digital distractions.
- Increase in child labor and early marriages.
- Health issues and education system disruptions.
- Long-term disengagement from formal education.

6. Role of Youth Organizations in Addressing Education Challenges

Youth organizations are playing a critical role in driving community-led education reform:

- Organizing mentorship and peer education programs.
- Hosting courtyard meetings and mothers' meetings to raise awareness.
- Conducting street dramas (Potho Natok) to engage communities.
- Collaborating with local enforcement agencies to address issues like harassment and safety.
- Leading campaigns on the right to education.
- Facilitating dialogues with school authorities and management committees.
- Offering skill development training for local youth.
- Strengthening the activities and leadership of youth forums.
- Promoting civic education and encouraging youth participation in community development.

Analysis

1. Challenges in continuing and improving quality of education

Marginalized youth, especially in climate-vulnerable and remote areas such as haor, char, and tea gardens, face multi-dimensional barriers in accessing and continuing quality education. Financial hardship, long distances to school, and high cost of educational materials hinder regular attendance. The education system often fails to accommodate diverse needs, especially of ethnic communities and children with disabilities. Other serious concerns include eve-teasing, drug addiction, political instability, and unsafe or inadequate school infrastructure. The lack of trained teachers, digital devices, internet access, and parental awareness further deepens the crisis particularly for girls, who are affected.

2. Ways to overcome the challenges

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, inclusive, and locally contextualized approach. Solutions include community-based learning initiatives such as peer study groups and informal tuition hubs. Digital learning support, including free apps and content, must be expanded. Safe transportation and protection, especially for girls, are critical. Enhancing vocational training and integrating trade-based skills in school can improve relevance. More trained, inclusive teachers and digital infrastructure are vital. Collaboration with communities and other stakeholders to provide materials and learning support is essential to bridge equity gaps.

3. Reasons for dropouts and absenteeism

Dropouts are largely driven by economic and socio-cultural factors, including child labor, early marriage, and family responsibilities. Migration and a lack of nearby secondary schools also contribute significantly. In some areas, political interference disrupts school functioning, while the absence of incentives like mid-day meals affects attendance. Most importantly, low parental awareness of the long-term benefits of education keeps many children, especially girls, out of school.

4. Desired changes or support for career transition

To enable a smooth school-to-work transition, youths demand targeted interventions such as stipends, education linked to job markets, and vocational training. Career counseling, internships, and apprenticeships facilitated by government and NGOs, can bridge the gap between learning and employment. Financial support through flexible loans for education or entrepreneurship can empower youth to pursue their aspirations independently.

5. Impact of COVID-19

It is widely accepted that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing educational inequalities, leading to learning loss, weakened foundational skills, and increased dropout rates due to reduced family incomes. Mental health issues like stress and anxiety surged, while many youths turned to mobile phone overuse and were pushed into child labor or early marriage. Educational disruptions were severe, especially in areas lacking digital access or support systems, highlighting the urgent need for recovery strategies.

6. Role of youth organizations

Youth organizations have a pivotal role in educational resilience and community empowerment. They can lead mentorship programs, organize courtyard and mothers' meetings, and raise awareness through street dramas. By partnering with local authorities, they can advocate for educational rights, organize dialogues with school management, and facilitate skills training. Strengthening youth forums and promoting civic education can increase community engagement and accountability in education.

Recommendations

For Community and School:
- Strengthen local education support groups (e.g. community learning centers, parent groups, youth networks) to regularly engage with out-of-school and at-risk youth.
- Encourage local authorities and school management committees to identify and respond to barriers specific to marginalized youth (e.g. poverty, early marriage, migration).
- Organize awareness sessions for students, parents, and teachers on gender-based violence and girls' rights to education.
- Facilitate regular Mother's Meetings and courtyard sessions to engage parents in supporting children's education.

For Local NGO:

Local NGOs are working at community level where they can capitalize the youth power in terms of engaging them in voluntary services, community building and providing life skills under different programmes.

- To strengthen youth capacity and leadership
- Linkage with relevant local authority to flexible learning strategies for quality formal and non-formal education, technical and vocational education and training, and skills development for decent work and livelihood
- Engage in social work including the disaster response like maintaining embankments and polder, relief distribution, flood recovery programmes, data collection, social mobilization

For civil society

- Form district-level youth education coalitions
- Document success stories and local solutions for national advocacy
- Collaborate with media to highlight dropout issues and gender disparities
- Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder engagement and policy advocacy
- Contribute to curriculum development for vocational education programs, encourage member organization to promote gender transformative TVET Promote youth engagement in policy advocacy including Youth-led Action Research (YAR).

For policymakers and government

- Affirmative actions and create special provision to excluded groups including girls, ethnic communities, persons with disabilities and people living in urban slums, remote difficult to access areas, and rural areas.
- Strengthening Social safety Net programmes including local government initiatives, stipends, school meals, etc.
- Institutionalize youth representation in school management committees.

Special attention is needed for addressing gender issues and particularly combating gender-based violence and early marriage. Girls' early marriage is critical for realizing the girls' full potential, enhancing employability, and reducing fertility. Ensuring the safety of girls in school and on the way is essential to regular courses. Still it is crucial to protect them from any form of home-based violence, sexual harassment, and early marriage during the pandemic. A massive awareness-raising campaign followed by a one-stop support service at the community level is critical for protecting the girls' rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights. Another essential mindset change is required about the girls' continuity of education who become early marriage victims.

Conclusion

The Youth-led Action Research initiative by CAMPE has shown that youth are eager and capable of influencing educational transformation. Their experiences and grassroots insights are invaluable in shaping inclusive and responsive education policies. Strengthening these platforms will not only advance SDG4 in Bangladesh but also ensure the meaningful participation of youth in shaping their futures.

গণসাক্ষরতা অভিযান
যুবদের দ্বারা পরিচালিত গবেষণা ২০২৫
Education OutLoud -Advocacy & Social Accountability

তরুণদের সাক্ষাৎকারের প্রশ্নপত্র

(নাম):
(বয়স):
(লিঙ্গ):
(এলাকা/সম্পদ্রায়):
(শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা):

1. বর্তমান সময়ে পড়ালেখা চালিয়ে যেতে কী ধরনের চ্যালেঞ্জের মুখোমুখি হয়েছো?

2. উপর্যুক্ত চ্যালেঞ্জসমূহের সঙ্গে খাপখাওয়ানো বা টিকে থাকার জন্য তুমি কি কি পদক্ষেপ নিয়েছো?

৩. আপনার মতে শিক্ষার মান উন্নয়নে সবচেয়ে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ কী?

৪. শিক্ষার মান উন্নয়নে চ্যালেঞ্জসমুহ কিভাবে উত্তরন করা যায?

৫. কোভিড মহামারীর পরে মানুষের শারীরিক ও মানসিক স্বা˙্য, জীবন-জীবিকার এবং শিক্ষার ওপর কি ধরনের প্রভাব পড়েছে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?

৬. কী কারণে শিক্ষার্থীরা আপনার এলাকায় পড়াশোনা ছেড়ে দেয় বা ঝরে পড়ে (ড্রপআউট) হয়?

৭. বিদ্যালয়ে অনুপস্থিতির প্রধান প্রধান কারণসমুহ উল্লেখ্য করুন

৮. আপনার মতে যুব সংগঠনগুলোর এই পরিস্থিতিতে কি ধরনের ভূমিকা পালন করা উচিত।

৯. আপনি কী ধরনের পরিবর্তন বা সহায়তা চাইবেন যেন তরুণরা সহজে শিক্ষা ও কর্মজীবনে প্রবেশ করতে পারে?

১০. আপনার মতামত/ পরামর্শ/মন্তব্য?

Annexure: 2. Links

1. https://cpd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CPD-Working-Paper-132-Challenges-for-the-Marginalised-Youth-in-Accessing-Jobs.pdf

2. file:///E:/ASA%202025%20&%20others%20projects/Youth-led%20Action%20Research/YAR/Picture/2024-11-10-04-59-2707652f59f6ae16f497115ef1195f76.pdf

Annexure: 3. List of Participants (data collector)

Sl no	Name	Name of the organisation	District	Sex
1.	Shemo Akther	Bikoshito Bangladesh Foundation	Panchaghar	F
2.	Md. Fahim Islam	Bikoshito Bangladesh Foundation	Panchaghar	M
3.	Sajidulislam	Grameen Jano Unnayan Sangshta	Bhola	M
4.	Halima Akther Mim	Grameen Jano Unnayan Sangshta	Bhola	F
5.	Asiq Billah	MUK	Maherpur	M
6.	Yesmin Ara	MUK	Maherpur	F
7.	Chand Tara	MUK	Maherpur	F
8.	Afroza Akter	SERAA	Netrokona	F
9.	Kamrul Islam	SERAA	Netrokona	M
10.	Yesmin Chowdhury panna	ASED	Habigonj	F
11.	S.M shamsiatun noor Nubha	ASED	Habigonj	F
12.	Medul Kanti Sen	NDP	Sirajgonj	M
13.	Tasfia Khatun	NDP	Sirajgonj	F
14.	Loknath Bisawas	Ashroy Foundation	Khulna	M
15.	Kaniz Suborna Pakhi	Ashroy Foundation	Khulna	F

Annexure: 4. Photo Gallery
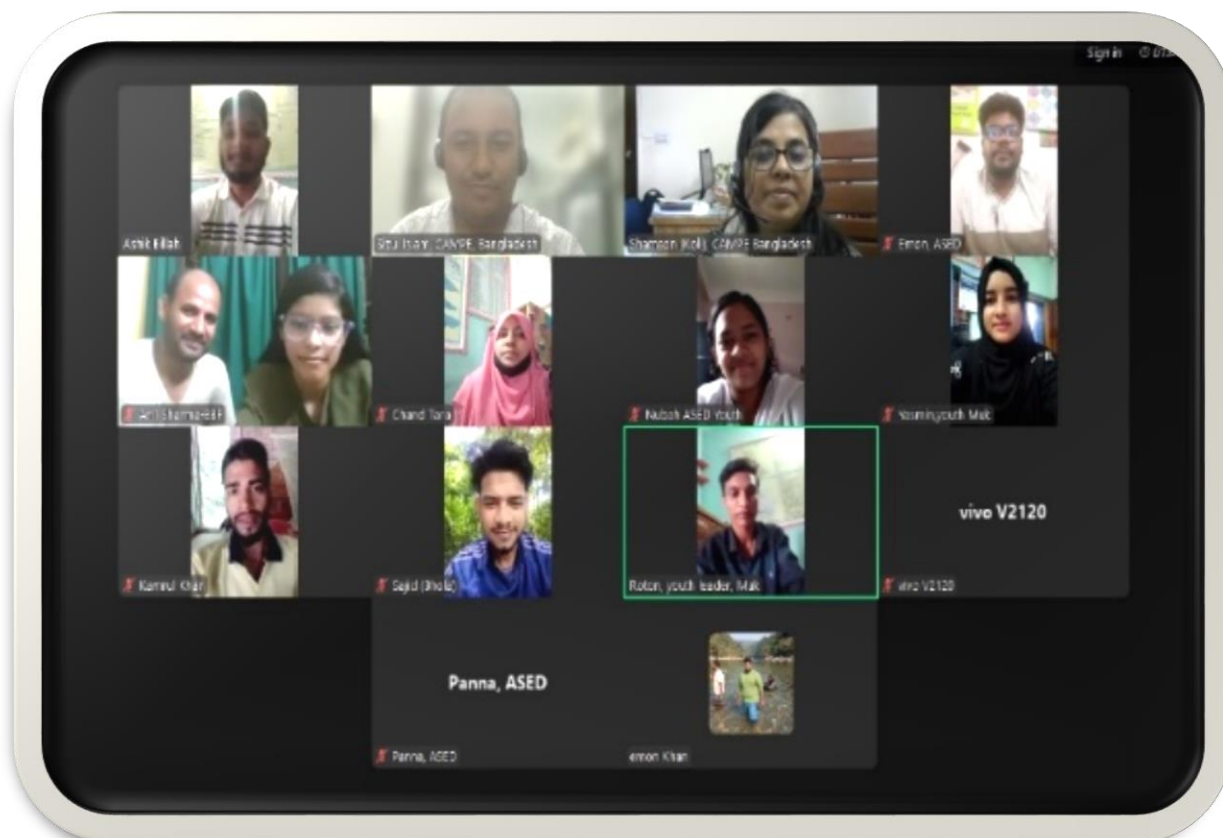
Capacity Buildign Workshop with Youth

Youths are Collecting Data

Youths are Collecting Data

Youths Participated in Learning Collaborative Workshop

Youth Raised Voice in front of Policy Maker

Blood grouping initiatives taken by Youth Forum

Youth are Preparing Deyaliak

Youth Forum Meeting

By the Leadership of Youth Forum Tree Plantation Program