

নতুন সরকার, জাতীয় বাজেট

ও

জনমানুষের প্রত্যাশা

**New Government, National Budget
and
Citizens' Aspirations**

05 May 2024 | Dhaka

In collaboration with



[Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh](#)

এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

Research and Analysis Team

- *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Convenor, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh
- *Mr Towfiqul Islam Khan*, Senior Research Fellow, CPD
- *Ms Najeeba Mohammed Altaf*, Research Associate, CPD
- *Ms Mamtajul Jannat*, Research Associate, CPD
- *Ms Shourza Talukdar*, Research Associate, CPD
- *Ms Naima Jahan*, Programme Associate, CPD
- *Mr Rushabun Nazrul Yaanamu*, Programme Associate, CPD
- *Mr Arman Shaid*, Programme Associate, CPD

Networking, Communication and Outreach Team

- *Mr Avra Bhattacharjee*, Joint Director, Communication and Outreach, CPD
- *Ms Tarannum Jinan*, Senior Administrative Associate, CPD
- *Mr Md. Rifat Bin Aowlad*, Dialogue Associate, Dialogue and Communication, CPD
- *Ms Fabiha Idris*, Programme Associate, CPD
- *Ms Afra Nawmi*, Programme Associate, Dialogue and Communication, CPD

The present document is prepared under CPD's ongoing programme titled 'Towards People-centric Public Finance Management in Bangladesh', in collaboration with Citizen's Platform. The programme is supported by the European Union. The team alone remains responsible for the analyses, interpretations and conclusions presented in this report.

Acknowledgment

In preparing this document, 65 partner organisations collaborated in various capacities including submission of budget proposals based on stakeholder consultations and background research, supporting online and social media surveys conducted under this initiative and mobilising various disadvantaged population groups. The team would like to extend gratitude to these collaborating organisations for their valuable support. The collaborating partner organisations includes:

1. Access Bangladesh Foundation
2. Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF)
3. Action for Social Development
4. ActionAid Bangladesh
5. ADD International
6. Article19
7. Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD)
8. Bandhu Social Welfare Society
9. Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA)
10. Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)
11. Bangladesh Labour Foundation (BLF)
12. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
13. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF)
14. BRAC
15. Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD)
16. Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)
17. CARE Bangladesh
18. Caritas Bangladesh
19. CBM Global Disability Inclusion
20. Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)
21. Community Development Association (CDA)
22. Concern Worldwide
23. Dak Diye Jai
24. Dhaka Ahsania Mission
25. Dhruvotara Youth Development Foundation (DYDF)
26. Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO)
27. Educo Bangladesh
28. Enfants Du Monde
29. GHASHFUL
30. Harmony Trust
31. HEKS/EPER
32. JAAGO Foundation
33. Kapaeeng Foundation (KF)
34. Light House Bangladesh
35. Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA)
36. Manab Unnayan Kendra (MUK)
37. Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF)
38. Nagorik Uddyog
39. Naripokkho
40. NGO Forum for Public Health
41. Pollisree
42. RDRS Bangladesh
43. Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB)
44. Resource Integration Center (RIC)
45. SAJIDA Foundation
46. Save the Children
47. SERAC Bangladesh
48. Shushilan
49. Sightsavers
50. Society for Development Initiative (SDI)
51. Solidarity
52. SOS Children's Bangladesh
53. Spreeha Foundation Bangladesh
54. SUPRO
55. The Hunger Project (THP)
56. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)
57. United Nations Youth and Students Association of Bangladesh (UNYSAB)
58. Unnayan Shangha
59. WARBE Development Foundation
60. WaterAid Bangladesh
61. Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)
62. World Vision Bangladesh
63. Youth Engagement for Sustainability (YES), Bangladesh
64. Youth Policy Forum (YPF)
65. YouthNet Global

Acknowledgment (Contd.)

The team would like to register its gratitude to *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Chairman, CPD for his inspiration and advice for the initiative.

Sincere thanks to *Dr Fahmida Khatun*, Executive Director, CPD and *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD for their guidance and support to the team.

The team gratefully acknowledges the valuable support provided by the Dialogue and Communication Division, CPD, in preparing this document. The contribution of the Administration and Finance Division is also appreciated.

The team is grateful to the representatives of various Partner Organisations and other personalities who attended the stakeholder discussions held on 18 January 2024, 11 March 2024 and 20 March 2024.

Table of Content

I.	Introduction	6
II.	Methodology	6
III.	Survey Responses	6
IV.	Sectoral aspirations.....	11
V.	Community Aspirations.....	20
VI.	Closure.....	35

New Government, National Budget and Citizen's Aspirations

I. Introduction

Integrating the perspectives of left-behind communities (LNOBs) in the budget-making process is crucial for ensuring that the budget is equitable and responsive to the needs of all citizens of the country. This may involve consultation with these communities to understand their priorities, needs and specific challenges these groups face so that targeted budget allocations can be made. In this spirit, the present document is prepared by assimilating budget proposals from various population groups belonging to the various population groups. Regrettably, the traditional budget preparation process in the country can extend a limited scope for people belonging to disadvantaged groups to reflect their perspectives. The current exercise is undertaken by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in collaboration with the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh and supported by the European Union. The exercise involves various methods to collect perspectives of citizens belonging to several disadvantaged communities where 65 Partner Organisations of the Citizen's Platform contributed in various capacities. It is expected that the policymakers will take note of these aspirations in view of the national budget and reflect their demands in the forthcoming policymaking.

The following section of the document explains the methodology applied to preparing the document. Section 3 presents the findings from the online and social media survey conducted under the initiative. Section 4 reports the citizen's aspirations clustered under various sectors. Section 5 highlights the aspirations of various disadvantaged population groups. Section 6 highlights the concluding remarks.

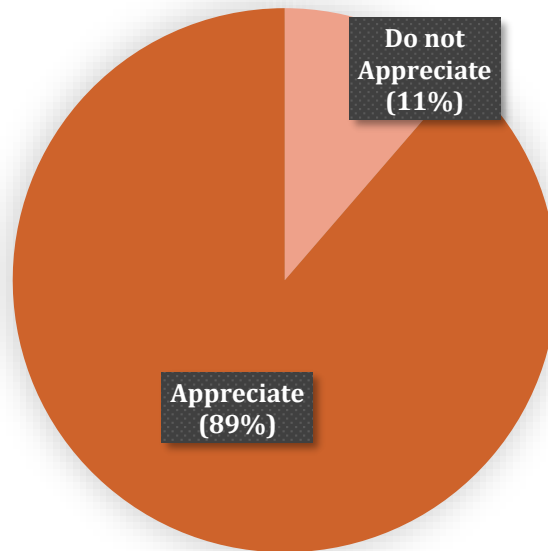
II. Methodology

The present document is prepared using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. It incorporates both primary and secondary data extracted from three sources. First, secondary data from official sources has been analysed while the Awami League's election manifesto for 2024 has been reviewed. Second, an online and social media survey is conducted through Google Forms and Facebook to gather insights from a diverse range of citizens of Bangladesh. This survey seeks to identify recommendations for prominent issues and communities/groups to enrich the understanding of public priorities. Also, perspectives were sought to understand how to involve general citizens in the national budget process. Third, 39 Partner Organisations were engaged to derive the citizens' aspirations and recommendations for Budget FY2025 from the sectoral and LNOB population groups' perspectives. The structured analytical process employed for the analysis involves three stages: a) scanning/filtering, b) consolidation, and c) integration. This method is applied not only in the selection of issues and groups but also in the disaggregation of sub-issues.

III. Survey Responses

The online and social survey collected 2,249 responses through the Google form and 8,048 social media responses and comments. Overall, social media observations indicated that the majority (89%) appreciated the initiative (Figure 1). Here, "appreciate" refers to Like and Love reactions, while "do not appreciate" refers to Angry and Haha reactions on Facebook.

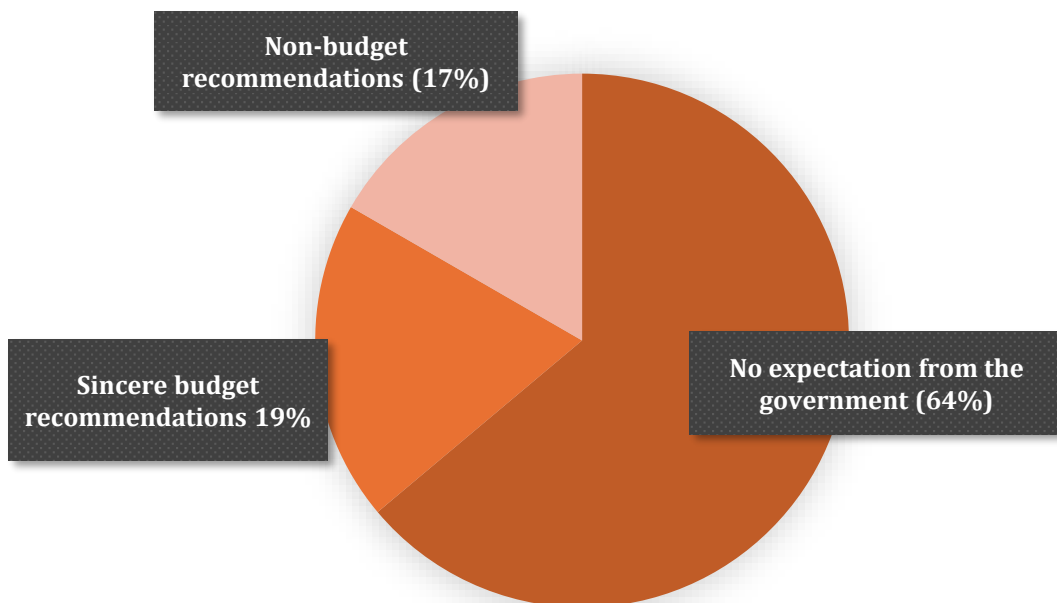
Figure 1: Social Media Response: Reactions to Citizen's Budget Initiative



Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

By clustering their expectations based on the comments received from citizens on Facebook, as can be seen in Figure 2, 64% showed 'zero' expectations from the government regarding the budget, while only 36% had expectations (among which 19% provided sincere budget recommendations and 17% provided non-budget recommendations).

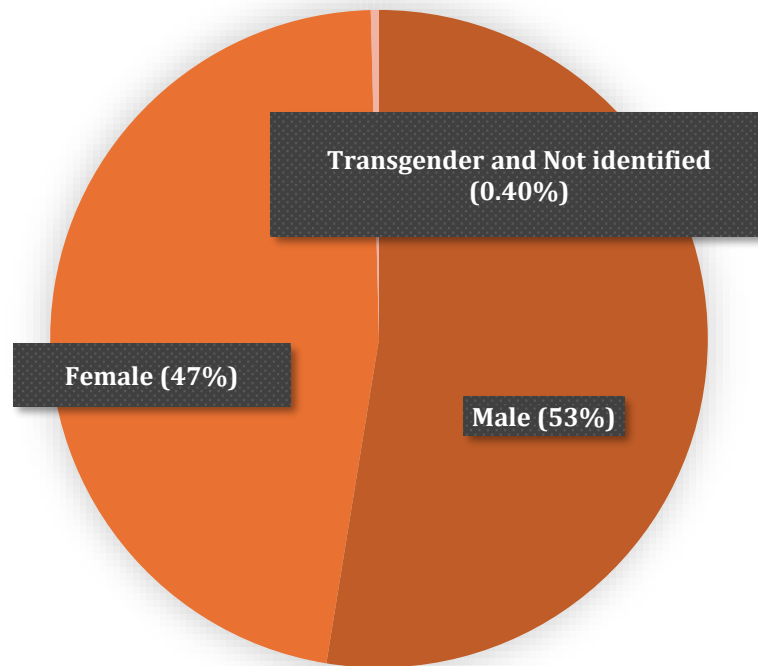
Figure 2: Budget Expectations: Comments received from Citizens on Facebook



Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

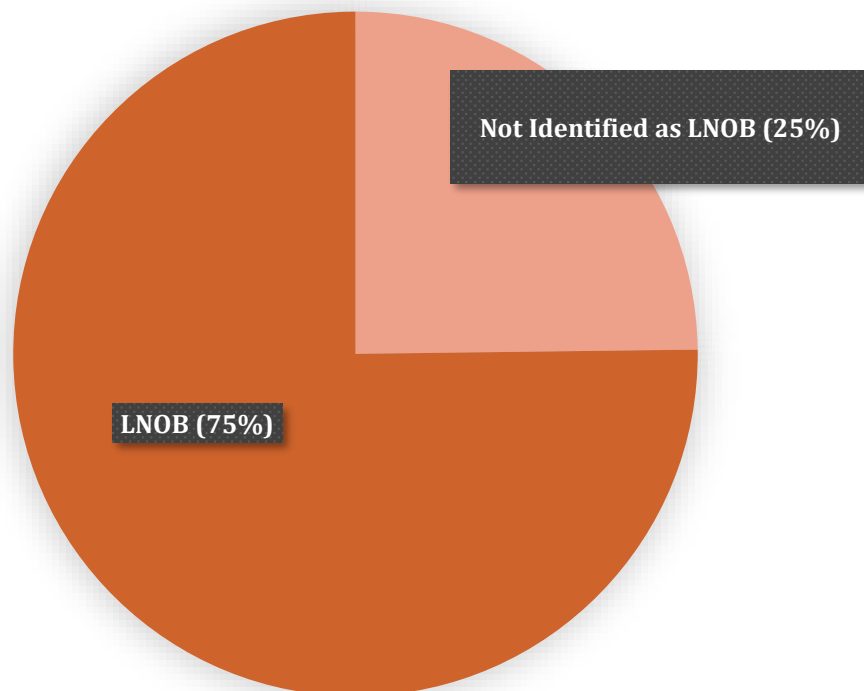
The gender disaggregation of Google form respondents is shown in Figure 3, while Figure 4 shows that most respondents belong to the various LNOB groups.

Figure 3: Gender-based profile



Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

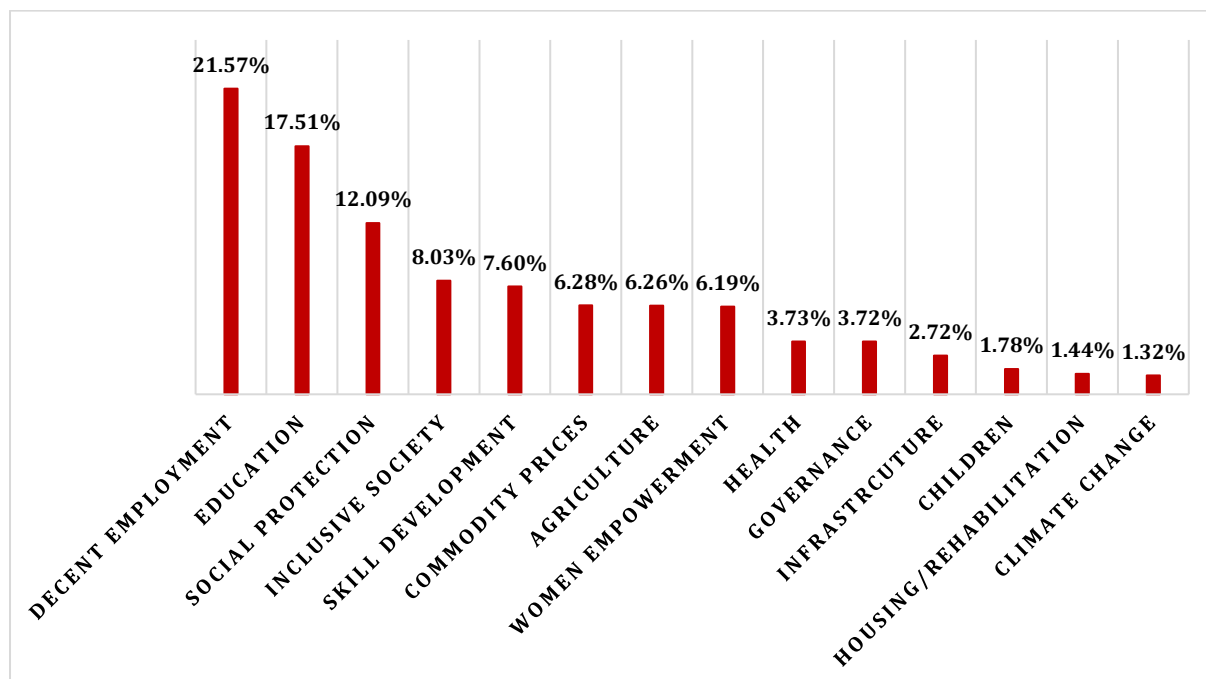
Figure 4: Community wise respondents



Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

The online and social media survey highlights 14 priority areas (i.e., decent employment, education, social protection, inclusive society, skill development, commodity prices, agriculture, women empowerment, health, governance, infrastructure, children, housing/rehabilitation and climate change). Among the identified major issues, as can be seen from Figure 5, the top five issues highlighted by all the citizens are decent employment (21.57%), education (17.51%), social protection (12.09%), inclusive society (8.03%) and skill development (7.60%).

Figure 5: Issues identified through online and social media survey



Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

Table 1 below presents the top priority sub-issues that were highlighted by the survey respondents.

Table 1: Top priority sub-issues identified by the survey respondents

Top Issues	Sub-Issues
1. Decent Employment	Reduce unemployment (44.49%), Increase job opportunities (36.44%), Allowances for unemployed (11.02%), Youth employment (8.05%)
2. Education	Ensure quality of education (49.72%), Provide stipend/scholarship (28.53%), Prioritise inclusivity (12.15%), Subsidy for educational materials (6.50%)
3. Social Protection	Food security (33.25%), Increase budgetary allocation (26.55%), Assurance of group specific demands (24.74%), Arrange social welfare programme (15.46%)
4. Inclusive society	Voice of citizens (49.64%), Representation of citizens (44.07%), Consultations with grassroots communities (6.30%)
5. Skill Development	Increase training programme (72.36%), Increase number of TTCs (15.04%), Accessibility of training (9.76%), Increase allocation (2.85%)
6. Commodity prices	Reduction of commodity prices (88.92%), Subsidise essential commodities (5.38%), Inflation (4.11%), Reducing import duties on essential goods (1.58%)
7. Agriculture	Increase subsidy/incentives (46.36%), Increase budgetary allocation (41.36%), Concessional loans (12.27%)

Top Issues	Sub-Issues
8. Women Empowerment	Emphasise women's education (38.59%), Ensure women's rights (34.02%), Increase budgetary allocation (11.62%), Reduce inequality (7.88%), Ensure safety (5.39%)
9. Health	Low-cost medical treatment (47.06%), Increase budgetary allocation (41.63%), Availability of medical facilities (11.31%)
10. Governance	Access to basic rights (76.57%), Curbing corruption (18.83%), Access to quality government services (4.60%)
11. Infrastructure	Development of communication infrastructure (83.01%), Disaster resilience infrastructure (15.69%), Accessibility of infrastructure (1.31%)
12. Children	Prioritise child education (53.93%), Increase allocation (40.45%), Eradicate child labour (5.62%)
13. Housing/ Rehabilitation	Increase budgetary allocation (58.43%), Ensure housing for all (41.57%)
14. Climate Change	Environmental protection (60.71%), Support during natural disaster (33.93%), Promote afforestation (5.36%)

Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

Table 2 below presents the top priority issues for disadvantaged population groups that were highlighted by the survey respondents.

Table 2: Top priority sub-issues identified by the survey respondents from the LNOB perspectives

Top Issues	Sub-Issues
Char	Employment (17.16%), Education (15.38%), Inclusive society (13.91%), Social protection (10.65%)
Children	Employment (60%), Commodity prices (20%), Child health (20%)
Haor	Commodity prices (35.71%), Education (14.29%), Employment (14.29%), Skill development (7.14%), Inclusion (7.14%)
Indigenous- CHT	Agriculture (38.78%), Inclusive society (24.02%), Education (21.05%), Employment (5.26%)
Indigenous- Plainland	Education (18.41%), Employment (18.24%), Social protection (15.03%), Commodity prices (11.99%)
Person with Disabilities (PWD)	Education (35%), Employment (30%), Social protection (20%), Skill development (15%)
Religious Minority (including Dalit)	Education (30.23%), Employment (27.33%), Inclusive society (13.95%), Agriculture (12.79%)
Returning Migrant Workers	Education (36.36%), Inclusive society (27.27%), Housing/Rehabilitation (18.08%), Social protection (9.19%)
Senior Citizen	Education (24.05%), Commodity prices (16.46%), Social protection (15.19%), Health (13.92%)
Slum	Commodity prices (27.27%), Social protection (20.45%), Health (15.91%), Education (11.36%), Employment (9.09%)
Transgender	Inclusive society (57.14%), Employment (28.57%), Education (14.29%)
Women	Women empowerment (20.35%), Education (15.62%), Employment (15.24%), Social protection (9.93%), Skill development (9.26%)
Youth	Employment (26.11%), Education (23.33%), Price Regulation (14.26%), Health (9.44%)

Source: CPD-Citizen's Platform Budget Survey (2024)

The online and social media survey also received respondents' perspectives regarding how the involvement of disadvantaged communities in the national budget formulation process can be enhanced. To this end, the following issues were largely highlighted.

- *Prepare and report LNOB sensitive budget.* Develop budgets concerning LNOB communities, to ensure inclusivity and equitable resource distribution to support the disadvantaged groups and their needs
- *Decentralise both budget preparation and implementation.* Empower local authorities by decentralising budget preparation and implementation to enhance responsiveness and tailor spending to local needs
- *Ensure regular monitoring involving non-state actors/citizens.* Implement systematic monitoring by engaging non-state actors and citizens in oversight roles to ensure transparency and accountability in governance.
- *Provide local government with the authority to encourage engagement.* Provide local government organisations, such as Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad, the authority to encourage engagement at the grassroots level.
- *Engage communities in the budget process at the local level.* Engage communities directly at the local level to prepare the budget through meetings and discussions, which helps identify disadvantaged people’s specific priorities and monitor budget implementation.
- *Disseminate more accessible disaggregated budget data in real-time.* Provide real-time access to disaggregated budget data to improve public understanding and facilitate informed decision-making by stakeholders.
- *Utilise media coverage and awareness.* Utilise mass and social media platforms as well as the influence of journalists, to highlight challenges that disadvantaged groups experience and increase their engagement.
- *Use online platforms for citizen’s engagement.* Utilise online and social media platforms for collecting feedback.

IV. Sectoral aspirations

As mentioned earlier, the Citizens Platform clustered the budget recommendations collected from its partner organisations into two broad categories: sectors and groups/communities. The first category prioritises eight (8) major sectors for the budget recommendations – 1. Agriculture, 2. Climate, 3. Education, 4. Employment, 5. Health, 6. Poverty alleviation and inequality reduction, 7. Social Security Programmes, and 8. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

1. Agriculture

Bangladesh grapples with persistent food security challenges despite efforts to achieve food sufficiency. As of December 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that 15% of the population of Bangladesh remained food insecure, with conditions deteriorating. The Food Security Assessment Survey 2023 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) revealed that 0.82% of households were severely food insecure, and significant proportions (21.92%) were moderately insecure. Despite claims of rice sufficiency by the government, 33.96 lakh people still lack rice stocks for subsistence. Bangladesh's status as the third largest food-importing country and rising food inflation which reached 9.87% in March 2024, accentuates the ongoing struggle for food security.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League’s Election Manifesto 2024

“Food for all” is the main goal of the Awami League. (p.50)

- *The Awami League government is already implementing the policy of bringing all lands under cultivation with the aim of further increasing agricultural production.*
- *Easy-to-use agricultural machinery will be made available to address labour shortage and increase productivity in agriculture. Subsidies on agricultural machinery will continue. Emphasis will be given to integrated farming.*

Recommendations

- Increase allocation in the agriculture sector to stabilise the commodity price and provide duty exemptions to keep inflation under control along with price control of daily necessities.
- Provide subsidies and incentives in the agricultural sector to reduce the prices of agricultural products.
- Increase allocation to reduce commodity prices, agricultural machinery, and the price of seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides, and monitor properly to control low-quality seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides from entering the market.
- Allocate the budget to establish vegetable cold storage to ensure the proper price of vegetables produced.
- Create market hubs at the village level to facilitate the sale of produce to farmers so that they can sell their produce at fair prices.
- Implement strict regulations to monitor brokers, middlemen, and syndicates.
- Ensure the distribution of agricultural loans on simple terms. Implement policies to provide compensation for any crop damage on the farmer's land and provide compensation.
- Revitalise the agricultural system, eliminate the middlemen and make the procurement system dynamic and demand-oriented.
- Reform the budget allocation by separating all large categories of sectors and sub-sectors related to agriculture-land-water.
- Formulate monitoring cells to supervise the activities of agriculture-land-water sector institutions and allocate the necessary budget for its functioning. Allocate a specific budget for the recovery of government Khas land.

2. Climate

Bangladesh ranked 7th climate-vulnerable country in the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 and among the top 25 Least Developed Countries highly vulnerable to climate change as of April 2024 ND-Gain Index. The climate budget allocation declined in FY24 (4.86% of the total budget and 0.74% of GDP) compared to RFY23 (5.63% of the total budget and 0.84% of GDP). Moreover, the previous climate budget lacked the focus on climate change impacts; it only focused on ongoing and future investments for adaptation and mitigation measures. The recent effects of heatwaves amplify weak environmental governance and raise concerns about climate budget management. Concurrently, despite the sufficient capacity for electricity production, the ongoing energy crisis persists, and concern arises over power supply deficits and the government's rising electricity bill, now totalling Tk. 41,000 crore.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"We want to protect Bangladesh from the effects of climate change and global warming to create a pollution-free environment and to protect water resources". (p.96)

"The following programmes will continue to be implemented to address climate change risks: a) productive/social forestry increased to 20 percent; b) improvement of air quality in Dhaka and other major cities; c) promotion of zero-emission/disposal in industrial waste; d) conservation, restoration and protection of water bodies in various cities according to law; e) construction of 500 meters wide permanent green belt in sea-coastal areas". (p.96)

"Stronger efforts will be undertaken to achieve a 20% share of renewable energy in the country's total energy by 2041". (p.96)

- *In order to control the negative impact of plastic products on the environment, the use of environmentally friendly and biodegradable plastic will be made mandatory in the use of plastic products.*
- *Effective measures will continue to protect the country's forest resources, forest creation, wild animals, guest birds and other biodiversity with a priority on forest conservation of Sundarbans and Chattogram Hill Tracts.*
- *Short- and long-term projects will be undertaken to protect the natural environment of the vast Haor and Bhati regions of the country.*
- *Efforts will be made to get Bangladesh's fair share in the Saptakoshi project with Nepal and India.*

Recommendations

- Prioritise the climate budget and increase allocation to invest in climate change adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage as per the global standard.
- Increase budget allocation for climate crisis projects as well as undertake new and expand existing programmes and projects. At the same time, a new scheme should be undertaken to address the vulnerability affected by the climate crisis.
- Implement the allocated climate budget based on the needs of the areas affected by climate change and distribute it district-wise.
- Allocate sufficient funding for ADP projects focusing on environment, climate change and disaster hotspots to ensure higher policy priority in the climate sector. Moreover, prioritise various projects and programmes related to climate change and disaster resilience, including Disaster Risk Communication and Enhancing Social Engagement (RCCE), Disaster WASH, Monitoring safely managed on-site sanitation (SMOSS) and Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) while formulating ADP to address emerging challenges in the respective sectors.
- Ensure transparency and accountability through the participation of the community people in the planning and implementation phase of the climate projects.
- Increase the Early Warning and Anticipatory Action budget to reduce climate change effects, especially in disaster-prone, climate-vulnerable and urban areas. Moreover, special budget allocation should be allocated, and initiatives should be taken to reduce heat stress.
- Allocate budget for construction and renovation of durable and permanent embankments.

Clean Energy

- Prioritise fiscal and financial measures for enhancing clean energy use with a view to lessening the fiscal pressure as well as addressing climate vulnerabilities.
- Reduce the budget for fossil fuel and increase renewable energy to promote energy transition and justice.
Invest more in green energy generation and ensure quality energy access for remote areas and marginalised communities.

3. Education

The budget allocation in education showed a decline in BFY24 (11.60% of the total budget) compared to BFY23 (12% of the total budget). Moreover, ADP allocation in the education sector decreased from 11.36% (BFY24) to 7.03% (RFY24). Despite a decrease in dropout rates from 2022 to 2023, a concerning percentage of 9.36% of students aged 5-24 years are still out of school as of Sample Vital Statistics 2023. Notably, students are shifting to madrasahs, especially from the primary level, which also raises concerns.

Stipends for primary, secondary, and higher secondary students, madrasah, technical/vocational institutions, and persons with disabilities are only Tk. 150, 194, 452, and 940 per month, respectively; however, for undergraduate and postgraduate students, they are only Tk. 22 per month.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is working to develop skill-based human resources who are inspired by the spirit of liberation war and have human qualities with rich knowledge of science and technology to meet the challenges of 4IR" (p.70)

- *The govt will provide reasonable allocation in the education sector and ensure its effective use.*
- *Ratio of women teachers both in primary and secondary will continue to increase gradually.*
- *Appropriate laboratories for science education will be extended at the village level.*
- *Stipend will continue to increase in line with the expansion of women's education.*
- *Children of poor and weaker sections will have more access to higher education.*

Recommendations

- Increase the allocation of the national budget to the education sector to retain all the achievements in the field of education and advance the quality of education.
- Allocate sufficient funds to provide basic subject-based training for teachers, develop physical infrastructure including adequate digital classrooms, safe water and WASH facilities in order to implement the new curriculum, spread the blended learning method and comprehensively develop the teaching-learning process.
- Exempt all types of taxes and VAT to all educational aids and equipment, especially computers, laptops, printers, pens, and pencils.
- Address disparities in both government and non-government educational institutions at the secondary level and improve the quality of education through allocated funds.
- Establish a separate "Teacher Recruitment Commission" following the directives of the National Education Policy 2010 to ensure the recruitment of competent and skilled teachers for quality education. Teachers' salaries and allowances need to be reassessed.
- Approve and allocate sufficient funds in the budget for enacting and implementing the proposed "Integrated Education Act" based on the National Education Policy 2010.
- Allocate additional funds in the budget for expanding science education, higher education, vocational and technical education, acquiring employable skills for employment abroad, and improving the quality of language training and short-term courses.
- Allocate adequate funding for educational research to encourage government, non-government, and relevant skilled institutions and create a "Special Fund" to enhance collaboration with NGOs for joint ventures.
- Ensure high-speed internet connectivity in all schools and provide accessible devices for both teachers and students to access necessary data either free of cost or at nominal charges.
- Increase the stipend for the students provided at various levels and initiate special scholarship schemes for girls and boys to reduce dropout and discontinuation of education.

- Initiate the "School Feeding Programme" free of charge in all mainstream primary schools to ensure food and nutrition security for all students, especially those from rural communities.
- Prioritise digital literacy and access to marginal youth, especially women, to address digital deviance.
- Provide special allocation in education considering the needs of all the underprivileged students, including poor people, minorities and PWDs.
- Allocate budget for area-based vocational education and necessary training provisions.
- Develop an improved mechanism for monitoring the implementation of budget allocation and evaluating its impact on the education sector.
- Take appropriate actions for bringing children under the education system, especially slum-dwelling children, children living in the streets, children in hard-to-reach areas and children who are out of school.
- Bring all eligible children under the mainstream pre-primary education programme and take a planning programme to enhance pre-primary education under the Education Ministry.
- Engage parents in school management to decentralise educational equipment distributions.
- Focus on providing incentives in the form of scholarships, including free preventive health examinations and tiffins for students from poor families.

4. Employment

The Labour Force Survey of 2022 indicated a rising trend in the employed population primarily employed in agriculture (45.40%), services (37.60%), and industry (17%). However, the percentage of rural workers exceeded that of urban workers (75% and 25%, respectively). Despite a decline in unemployment rates from 2010 to 2022, recent LFS quarterly data from October to December 2023 revealed a surge in unemployed individuals to 23 lakhs. Moreover, the increasing trend in the percentage of NEET youth, which was reported at 39.88% in 2023, according to Sample Vital Registration System (SVRS) 2023, raises concern.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"More than 2 million people join the labour force in the country every year. One of the main goals of the Awami League is to create employment opportunities for each of them." (p.57)

Reducing the rate of young individuals outside education, training, and employment (NEET) programmes to 7%. (p.49)

- Cottage, small and medium industries are most likely to generate employment. The sector will be made stronger, well-organised and dynamic by removing barriers, providing training in management skills, and reducing dependence on foreign human resources. (p.57)
- Employment opportunities will be created through the development of the industrial sector and the establishment of new industries. (p.57)
- Small, medium and cottage industries, handloom and silk industries will be preserved, and competitiveness enabled to expand employment. Banarasi and Jamdani crafts will be encouraged. (p.57)
- Employing an additional 1.5 crore people by 2030 to reduce the unemployment rate to 3% by 2028. (p.48)
- Establishing youth training and employment centres in all upazilas to strengthen grassroots programmes. (p.48)

Recommendations

- Allocate budget to ensure job opportunities for the unemployed population on the basis of merit.
- Allocate budget to formulate relevant policies and increase budget allocation for creating job opportunities for those who become jobless during the COVID-19.
- Increase the budget for the creation of suitable alternative employment opportunities at the local level.
- Increase allocation to provide interest-free loans to small entrepreneurs and provide government incentives to expand the investment sector of micro-entrepreneurs.
- Allocate budget for decentralising the garment industry since the majority of the export income comes from this industry. It will help boost the country's overall economic development by increasing employment opportunities.
- Increase allowance to expand awareness about budget discussions in every village through the local administration.
- Expand the budget allocation to increase the skill development programmes to develop human resources efficiently and provide job-market-oriented training.
- Implement practical projects aimed at utilising the skills of migrant workers.
- Increase incentives for all the organisations working in the preparation of a skilled workforce and skill development.
- Invest more in technical skills development in terms of sustainable blue economy to enhance young people's participation and access to this new industry and trade.
- Increase the budget to establish separate marketing centres or markets for marketing the products produced by women entrepreneurs.
- Increase the incentives and subsidise young people-centric banking and loan schemes for young entrepreneurs and freelancers, especially women, to promote entrepreneurship.
- Allocate a specific budget for ensuring the intellectual property (IP) rights of Bangladeshi products and a special budget for improving the quality of life of weavers.
- Increase budgetary allocation for the development of the textile industry and increase research initiatives on the textile industry.

5. Health

According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022, health expenditure ranks among the top three largest spending sectors for households, with rural households spending more than urban ones (7.10% and 6.20%, respectively). However, despite its importance, budget allocations for the health sector have consistently decreased (5% of the total budget in BFY24 and 5.40% of the total budget in BFY23), remaining below 1% of GDP for the past two decades. ADP allocations also decreased significantly in BFY24, reflecting underinvestment in the sector.

Concerns are raised by WHO regarding rising out-of-pocket expenditures in health, while reports from SVRS highlight alarming increases in child mortality rates, cost of delivery and adolescent pregnancies.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Ensuring universal health and nutrition services- In continuation of Vision 2021, the programme of Vision 2041 will improve and expand basic health and family welfare services" (p.72)

- *Unique health ID will be issued and hospital automation management will be introduced.*
- *Universal healthcare system will be introduced to ensure equal healthcare for all citizens and Super specialised hospitals of international standards will be established.*
- *A public health university will be established.*
- *Health insurance will be introduced to ease health expenditure.*
- *Centres for non-communicable diseases treatment and rehabilitation of seniors will be set-up under the Health Aging Scheme.*
- *The healthcare institutions will be kept ready with the equipment and manpower to deal with the possible epidemic/pandemic. Quality laboratories will be set-up in the divisional cities.*
- *A vaccine research centre of international standard will be set-up to achieve self-sufficiency in vaccine production.*
- *Joint initiative of NRB scientists and research institutions will be highly encouraged for vaccine invention.*
- *The API (Active pharmaceutical ingredient) industry will be encouraged and the use of domestic API will be encouraged to overcome challenges related to intellectual property rights for the pharmaceutical industry.*
- *Mental health and autism healthcare service delivery will be made more effective.*

Recommendations

- Provide subsidies to the health sector to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure in favour of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
- Increase allocations to bolster inclusive primary healthcare programmes, community healthcare endeavours, community-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programmes etc.
- Provide significant incentives to the service providers for health, vaccination, nutrition, etc., working in remote places.
- Increase overall budget allocation for the health and nutrition sector along with mental health in a separate segment to adequately address the diverse health needs of the population with a specific focus on disadvantaged communities.
- Strengthen investment in nutrition-specific programmes, including maternal and child nutrition interventions, micronutrient supplementation, and breastfeeding promotion.
- Increase investment in monitoring and evaluating activities to assess programme effectiveness, track progress, and inform evidence-based decision-making to provide quality health services.
- Promote transparency and accountability in budget allocation and utilisation to ensure efficient and effective use of resources in the health sector.
- Strengthen collaboration with development partners, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders to leverage additional resources and expertise for health and nutrition.
- Allocate budget at the upazila and district levels to address the challenges (e.g., insufficient doctors and staff, the need for modern equipment and skilled personnel, etc.) of the government hospitals, particularly those with 100 and 250 beds.

- Allocate budget for the introduction of a universal health care system to ensure health care at the community level and free supply of all types of necessary medicine at the community clinic.
- Allocate necessary budget for physical education in educational institutions to support physical and mental development.
- Implement health schemes within the national budget to provide access to medical facilities, preventive measures and rehabilitation programmes, safeguarding workers' physical and mental health in high-risk occupations.
- Increase the allocation for conducting research in the health sector to enhance the efficiency of the concerned institutions.
- Increase Health Development Surcharge on cigarettes and other tobacco products from 1% to 5%, and the VAT on cigarettes and other tobacco products to be increased from 15% to 20% in FY2025 and specific excise duty of BDT 0.10 per ml or BDT 100 per litre on carbonated drinks.

6. Poverty alleviation and inequality reduction

According to the HIES 2022 by BBS, the national poverty rate reached 18.70%, with rural areas bearing a heavier burden than urban regions (20.50% and 14.70%, respectively). The extreme poverty rate stood at 5.60%, with the rural area experiencing a rate of 6.50% and urban areas at 3.80%. The Gini coefficient has steadily increased over the years, reaching 0.499 in 2022, highlighting income inequalities. Additionally, access to banking services remains low, with only 14.15% of households having bank accounts in 2022, underscoring challenges in financial inclusion.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

Alleviate poverty and bring smiles to the faces of the suffering people. (p.45)

The party has set targets to reduce the poverty rate to 11 per cent by 2028 and 3 per cent by 2041. (p.46)

End extreme poverty by 2031. (p.46)

- Ensure the equitable distribution of resources along with the highest growth and bring down the increasing income inequality in the society to a tolerable level.
- The ongoing process of ensuring social security of the poor, distressed and marginalised people will be strengthened.
- Transform the rural agrarian economy into an industrial and digital economy with the help of the future service sector.
- Eliminate all forms of inequality by connecting all to the mainstream of the economy through financial and digital inclusion.

Recommendations

- Allocate location-specific and targeted budgets to address the needs of marginalised communities with high concentrations of poverty, such as remote and non-reach areas including haor, chars, climate-vulnerable regions, and hill tracts to bridge existing gaps, promote inclusive development and leave no one behind.
- Increase allocation for the adoption of a resettlement plan in case of eviction.
- Allocate an adequate budget for the rehabilitation of marginalised rural landless, distressed women engaged in farming, cottage industries and small non-agricultural activities.

7. Social Security Programmes

The allocation for social security programmes in FY2024 showed a decline and fell short of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) target of 3% of GDP. This shortfall raises concerns, particularly as the projected cost for FY25 (2.85% of GDP) also fails to meet this target (Source: NSSS Action Plan-Phase II). Additionally, a significant portion of the Social Security budget is allocated to items not typically categorised as social safety net items (59%), reducing the share available for vulnerable citizens. However, a significant increase in the declining trend in actual allocation in FY2023 and FY2024 raises concern (18% and 23%, respectively). Moreover, the beneficiary selection process was reported to face an inclusion error, and as a result, the actual deserving beneficiaries were not receiving the benefits.

Recommendations

- Increase the coverage of the social safety net programmes. Modernise all allowances and ensure equitable distribution with harassment-free service delivery.
- Ensure fair distribution of social security assistance to the right person and verify the beneficiary profile accurately.
- Expand the monthly allowances concentrated on the disadvantaged communities, considering the living costs and skyrocketing inflation that the country is experiencing.
- Expand coverage for programmes designed for destitute, orphan and street children and include orphaned children in the beneficiary coverage for growing up in alternative care.
- Increase social safety-net allowances proportionately for programmes such as maternity benefits, widow allowances, old-age allowances, transgender allowances, fishers' allowances during fishing ban periods, etc. and introduce special ration cards.
- Any further increase in the Freedom Fighters' allowance should be discouraged as it has already been raised from Tk. 12,000 to 20,000 per month.
- Introduce a guideline in the social safety net to ensure inclusion of the right beneficiaries from disadvantaged communities and social empowerment.
- Provide increased budget allocation for the empowerment and protection of the rights of marginalised communities and disabled women (Dalit, Harijan, Pathabashi, labourers, hijra and transgender).
- Increase budget allocation under food security programmes and provide subsidies on other food items in the upcoming budget to tackle the burden of inflationary pressure.
- Establish daycare centres in urban low-income communities and safe housing for the children.

8. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

In Bangladesh, while overall access to drinking water and sanitation has improved (limited access to drinking water was at 83.70%, and open defecation practices were almost zero (0.94%) as of 2023), significant disparities persist, particularly among poorer communities, disadvantaged groups and minority indigenous populations. For example, despite high access to basic sanitation facilities (77%), it largely lacked inclusive features such as wheelchair-friendly entry paths, height-adjustable pan/commode, and easily accessible water.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"We want to protect Bangladesh from the effects of climate change and global warming to create a pollution-free environment and to protect water resources". (p.96)

"The following programmes will continue to be implemented to address climate change risks: a) productive/social forestry increased to 20 per cent; b) improvement of air quality in Dhaka and other major cities; c) promotion of zero-emission/disposal in industrial waste; d) conservation, restoration and protection of water bodies in various cities according to law; e) construction of 500 meters wide permanent green belt in sea-coastal areas". (p.96)

- *Rational use of surface water will be ensured.*
- *Expansion of irrigation facilities and measures to curb salinity and alleviate freshwater scarcity in the Sundarbans and other basin areas will be enhanced.*

Recommendations

- Increase ADP budget for Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) funding to address newly created WASH challenges in peri-urban, growing areas and villages undergoing the urbanisation process.
- Increase allocation to expand inter-sectoral hygiene campaigns, build up a multi-agency policy approach, and implement the Ministry of Local Government's 'Hand Hygiene for All Roadmap'.
- Allocate ADP prioritising sectors such as environment, climate change and disaster hotspots to ensure higher policy priority in the WASH sector.
- Increase the budget to improve WASH to reduce diseases and mortality, improve productivity, reduce healthcare expenditure, and increase educational attainment.
- Allocate budget for targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to WASH services for all segments of the population.
- Increase allocation to provide incentives to the identified crisis districts to prevent the escalating water crisis in the hills and to enhance the supply of fresh water.

V. Community Aspirations

The budget recommendations collected from the partner organisations represent a diverse range of disadvantaged communities and reflect their aspirations. These disadvantaged communities are - Acid survivors, Children, Climate vulnerable people, Dalit, Farmers, Hijra and Transgender, Indigenous people, Persons with Disabilities, Senior citizens, Urban poor, Workers, Women and Youth.

1. Acid Survivors

Acid survivors require long-term surgical care and bio-psychosocial rehabilitation addressing physical, mental and social needs. They face significant challenges in getting timely treatment due to inadequate medical facilities. The increasing number of burn patients at the Dhaka Medical College and Sheikh Hasina Burn Institute lead to long waiting times for acid victims. This delays treatment and worsens the survivors' injuries. Survivors from rural areas often leave without receiving treatment. There is no SSNP targeting the acid survivors in particular. Few have received allowances under the disability category. Strong social stigma makes it very difficult for people in this community to find jobs as well.

Recommendations

- Bring acid survivors under the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) card facility.
- Ensure employment for acid survivors by reserving quotas in government jobs or implementing tax rebates for employers hiring acid survivors.
- Provide treatment facilities for acid-burnt patients at the Sadar hospitals.
- Prepare skilled manpower to ensure proper treatment of the survivors in the public health facilities.

2. Children

Recent national surveys and on-the-ground experiences evince distressing regression in many child-focused development experiences. Child mortality has risen, with an overall infant mortality rate estimated at 23.97 per 1000 live births. Crucial nutrition indicators are stagnating or deteriorating, including an increase in wasting and severe acute malnutrition. Learning outcomes have declined, and stipends for children with different needs have decreased in real terms and coverage. Child marriage rates have increased, and instances of violence against children are on the rise. Programmes related to reducing dropouts (secondary school stipend programmes, School Feeding Programme), and improved health and nutrition services (maternal and child health and nutrition programmes) received significantly lower allocations than planned and are not realising the expected results. Spending by child-focused ministries remains below the national average, and programme implementation faces challenges due to resource shortages and ineffective utilisation. A reintroduction of the child budget report could provide an important planning tool to address these issues.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Efforts will continue to develop them as patriots and capable good citizens by providing proper development and security to the children and adolescent," (p.80)

- The programme will continue to create suitable opportunities for nutrition, education and entertainment for proper physical and mental development of children and adolescents.
- Rehabilitation and safe housing for street children, establishment of orphanages for destitute and deprived children, primary and vocational education programme will be implemented and expanded.
- To stop child labour, a programme of building a child security system will be undertaken.
- Necessary measures will be taken to prevent children and teenagers' involvement in politics and their use of political activities.
- Discrimination against girl children, torture will be stopped, and their safety will be ensured.
- Globally recognised policies and actions required for autistic students will be pursued and implemented.
- Empowerment of the young adult programme will be continued by providing bicycles to all school-going girls.
- Playgrounds and children's parks will be developed in the public and private sectors to expand recreational facilities for children and adolescents.
- Effective measures will be taken to ensure safe social media and safe internet for children and adolescents.
- Special initiatives will be undertaken to address malnutrition among children under 5 years.
- Additional 6,000 social service workers will be recruited for child protection.

Recommendations

- Revitalise the child module within the Integrated Budget and Accounting System (IBAS++) and develop a systematic approach to publish a "Child Statement" in the national budget on a regular basis.
- Consider allocating funds to develop an inclusive databank of children (including the children who are out-of-school and subject to disabilities and remoteness) for better targeting and to serve more efficient programme delivery.
- Establish a Child Benefit Contingency Fund in addition to the existing Child Welfare Trust Fund, which will provide vital support for maintaining essential child-focused projects, particularly in instances of funding shortages or emergencies.
- Engage parents in school management, including decentralisation of educational equipment distributions.
- Increase funding for the expansion of government schools in regions with high instances of child labour, aiming to enhance access to quality education.
- Make special allocations for technical training, easy loans and business incentives for the employment of parents of child labourers.
- Recruit more teachers, para-teachers (to address teacher absenteeism), and social workers at the community level, and offer attractive incentives to the existing workforce.
- Focus on providing incentives, including free preventive health examinations for students from poor families.
- Increase allocations in primary healthcare initiatives, community healthcare endeavours, and community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programmes for children.
- Bring all eligible children under the mainstream pre-primary education programme and take a planning programme to enhance pre-primary education.
- Strengthen investment in nutrition-specific programs, including maternal and child nutrition interventions, micronutrient supplementation, and breastfeeding promotion.
- Make the largest child-focused programme, primary student stipends, more inclusive by redesigning it to be demand-driven, where most marginalised students will receive a higher share of stipends.
- Expand the scope of the government-provided capitation grant to include non-registered orphanages and private organisations providing alternative care to orphans and abandoned children.

3. Climate Vulnerable People

The Government of Bangladesh has allocated a climate budget under different ministries, 25 ministries to be specific, for the implementation of various projects. However, a larger portion of this budget is spent on salary and other expenses. Furthermore, all the projects under the climate budget allocation are not fully aligned with climate change, and the allocated budget is not usually fully spent. Besides, the community is also not aware of this funding. Allocation of Flood Management and Livelihood Improvement Project in the Char and Haor area has been reduced to Tk. 44.07 crore in BFY2023-24 from Tk. 84.52 crore in RFY2022-23. Allocation of Relief Works (Flood, Drought, Cyclone and Others) has been reduced to Tk. 80.20 crore in BFY2023-24 from Tk. 82 crore in RFY2022-23. Allocation of Infrastructure and livelihood Improvement in Haor and Coastal Area have been reduced to Tk. 16.86 crore in BFY2023-24 from Tk. 30.96 crore in RFY2022-23. Climate change seriously threatens agricultural land and productivity, with extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and changing precipitation patterns affecting crop yields and livelihoods. Farmers often lack

adequate insurance or compensation to protect their crops from natural disasters or other unforeseen events. Many climate-vulnerable communities continue to face acute shortages of clean and safe drinking water. The high salinity levels in coastal water have a negative impact on women's reproductive health, particularly increasing the risk of cervical problems. The absence of proper embankments and coastal protection measures leaves communities vulnerable.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

Balanced development of all the backward areas of the country including slums, char, haor, baor and coastal areas will be ensured and the quality of livelihood of the people of those areas will be prioritised (p.96)

- To protect Bangladesh from the effects of climate change and global warming to create a pollution-free environment and to protect water resources.
- To continue implementing all the plans already adopted by the government.
- To increase productive/ social forestry by 20 per cent.
- To improve the air quality of Dhaka and other major cities.
- To promote zero-emission/ disposal of industrial waste.
- To conserve, restore and protect water bodies in various cities according to the law.
- To construct 500 meters-wide permanent green belt sea-coastal areas.
- To make the use of environment-friendly and biodegradable plastic mandatory.
- To undertake efforts to achieve a 20 per cent share of renewable energy in the country's total energy by 2041.
- To ensure rational use of surface water.
- To continue effective measures to protect the country's forest resources, forest creation, wild animals, guest birds and other biodiversity with priority in forest conservation of Sundarbans and Chittagong Hill tracts.

Recommendations

- Formulate an effective district-wise budget based on the needs of the areas affected by climate change.
- Allocate special funds in the budget for the development of salt-tolerant cultivation methods to address the acute salinity of coastal areas.
- Strengthen the management of sluice gates to prevent the illegal intrusion of saline water.
- Conduct a thorough assessment to determine the economic value of the damages caused by climate change.
- Create a national climate fund to assist and rehabilitate those affected by climate change.
- Support local innovation and resilience-building efforts to enhance the adaptive capacity of communities, mitigate risks, and foster sustainable development pathways.
- Develop special projects and allocate funds to protect the Sundarbans' biodiversity through sustainable planning and prevent destruction and loss.
- Allocate funds for repairing and reconstructing resources and infrastructure (roads, bridges, culverts, shelters, bridges, etc.) damaged by disasters.
- Allocate an adequate budget for creating employment opportunities for the people of the Char and flood-prone areas.
- Increase fishers' allowances during fishing ban periods.
- Prioritise ADP allocation in various climate change and disaster resilience-related projects and programs, including Disaster Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), WASH in emergencies, SMS-based WASH, and Fecal Sludge Management (FSM) to address emerging challenges in the WASH sector and ensure equitable access to WASH services.

- Allocate funds in the budget for the implementation of effective projects (such as setting up reverse osmosis (RO) plants, building Pond Sand Filters (PSF), harvesting rainwater, excavating ponds and canals, etc.) to address the acute shortage of drinking water in coastal areas.

4. Dalit

Dalit issues and the practice of untouchables are regrettably still prevalent in the society. There are employment challenges for the sweeper communities when entering the mainstream workforce. Dalits have less access to social safety nets rather than the mainstream people in Bangladesh. The government-allocated land for the housing of Dalits is inadequate. They earn very low wages. Child labour is still prevalent among the children of Dalit families. Workers receive only two months of maternity leave, and government regulations are not followed. Although the allocation for the Program for Improving the Livelihood of Transgender, Bede and Disadvantaged Community increased, from Tk. 39.94 crore in BFY24 (0.03% of the total SSNP) to Tk. 32.06 crore in RFY23 (0.03% of the total SSNP), the percentage of allocation remained unchanged. Similarly, the allocation amount for the stipend of Transgender, Bede and Disadvantaged Communities increased from Tk. 30 crore in BFY24 (0.02% of the total SSNP) to Tk. 26.51 crore (0.02% of the total SSNP) in RFY24, the percentage of allocation remained unchanged.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Bangladesh Awami league is committed to implementing programmes to improve the quality of life of Dalit and Marginalised (Harijans and Bede) communities and bring them to the mainstream" (p.88)

- To continue social security programmes to improve the livelihood quality of poor and underprivileged communities.
- To provide vocational training to enhance the skills of disadvantaged and underprivileged communities. The purpose is to ensure that they can join mainstream society by engaging themselves in income-generating activities.
- To expand cash assistance and accommodation programmes for underprivileged communities.

Recommendations

- Give special subsidies to increase Dalit's accessibility to the healthcare system.
- Ensure education facilities for the children of the Dalit communities.
- Allocate khas land for the housing of the tea garden workers.
- Allocate budget for technical training, easy loans and business incentives for alternative employment for Dalit and marginalised workers.
- Increase the wages of tea garden workers.
- Keep allocation higher for TCB cards for the marginalised Dalits.
- Introduce a special security service card for people from the Dalit community.
- Guarantee better inclusion of the Dalit communities in the social safety net programmes by ensuring that the employees working at the Union Digital Center (UDC) cooperate with this disadvantaged population in the case of online application (UDC).
- Increase the representation of Dalits and other marginalised communities at the local government level and service sector committee management.

5. Farmers

In Bangladesh, forests and farmlands are being occupied for various projects and infrastructure development, leading to a decline in essential land resources. Rising sea levels,

salinity, river erosion, and drought resulting from climate change displace agricultural workers, forcing them into internal migration for survival. Marginal and landless farmers face numerous obstacles in accessing agricultural benefits and loans. Landowners charge exorbitant lease fees and increase rents annually due to the lack of fixed barga (sharecropping) rates. During cultivation season, marginal farmers face water scarcity and high fuel costs for operating shallow tube wells. The weak monitoring by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) allows dealers to charge excessive prices for providing agricultural services to the farmers. Farmers are deceived or harmed by adulterated seeds and fertilisers and unfair pricing due to inadequate monitoring by field-level officials. Mobile courts established to address farmers' grievances have limited impact, leaving farmers at a disadvantage. Moreover, agricultural labourers' wages are lower than those of non-agricultural labourers, causing further hardship for farmers during cultivation, harvesting, and post-harvest activities.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

The sustainable development strategy will continue to be followed based on the perspective plan made for the development of agriculture, farmer's livelihood and rural economy, (Manifesto 2024, pp. 50)

- To continue to give agricultural loans at a subsidised rate of 4 per cent with a view to making agricultural loans accessible and affordable.
- To continue aid and subsidies for agriculture as well as investment support in agricultural inputs with the aim of increasing agricultural production.
- Easy to use agricultural machinery will be made available to address labor shortage and increase productivity in agriculture.
- Subsidies on agricultural machinery will continue.
- Emphasis will be given on integrated farming.
- Installation of multipurpose cold storage and crop processing initiatives at local level will be encouraged.
- In the context of globalisation, appropriate strategies will be formulated to protect the interest of Bangladesh's agriculture and the farmers and to counter the negative effect of globalisation.

Recommendations

- Allocate several grants in the budget for developing and researching agricultural technology. This can be for technology upgrades, seed improvement, production of healthy agricultural products, and fertiliser impact control.
- Allocate subsidies and incentives in the agriculture sector that will help indirectly lower the prices of agricultural products by reducing farmers' production costs.
- Allocate and disburse agricultural loans at zero or small interest to all landless, small farmers and sharecroppers, with special attention to the women agricultural workers.
- Increase the amount of crop buying by the government, considering natural disasters and possible food crises.
- Allocate a budget for building new storage and leasing the privately owned storage.
- Allocate necessary budget to investigate the issues of low-quality pesticides and fertilisers, which usually occur due to a lack of supervision and regulation and the negligence of the concerned authorities.
- Allocated subsidies to the farmers for organic farming.
- Allocate budget for arranging free health checkups and providing health insurance for farmers affected by exposure to harmful chemical fertilisers and pesticides.
- Control the middlemen to rejuvenate the agricultural system and make the arrangement of buying crops directly from the farmers more active and consistent with the demand.

- Implement strict measures to control cartels to protect farmers and consumers from exploitation.
- Establish market hubs at the village level to facilitate the sale of agricultural produce, enabling farmers to sell their products at fair prices.
- Create facilities for farmers to sell agricultural products abroad.
- Allocate budget for forest-dependent people and those engaged in agriculture and adversely affected by various infrastructural development projects.
- Show all major categories and subcategories related to agricultural land and waterbodies in the budget as separate line items with allocations.
- Establish monitoring cells in the agriculture-land-water sector to monitor the activities of the institutions and allocate a necessary budget for its implementation.
- Make a specific allocation in the budget to recover government khas land and water bodies according to the CS record.
- Distribute khas land and waterbodies among poor and marginalised farmers and fishermen.
- Allocate a budget for destitute women who are marginalised, rural and landless or are engaged in cottage industry or small non-agricultural activities.
- Provide Universal Pension and Universal Rationing for all poor and marginalised people in the country, including those engaged in family farming, rural women, and indigenous people, under social security.

6. Hijra and Transgender

Hijra and transgender people are more susceptible to economic and social discrimination. A large section of these communities are missed out to receive the basic human rights. Government of Bangladesh recognised the Hijra community as the third gender in 2014. However, legislation to protect their rights is still missing in Bangladesh. The proposed Anti-discrimination Law that incorporates the challenges of the Hijra community is currently under review.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League’s Election Manifesto 2024 *“The Awami League government has taken various welfare programmes aimed at preserving the fundamental rights of the Hijra community, ensuring social justice and involving them in mainstream society” (Manifesto, 2024, p.89)*

- Hijras will be included in the mainstream and their fundamental rights will be preserved, social justice ensured, and their education, housing, quality of life, social protection will be ensured.
- Cash assistance and accommodation programmes for the hijra community will be expanded.

Recommendations

- Ensure expansion of accommodation programmes (Ekti Bari, Ekti Khamar) for the Hijra Community across the country.
- Allocate the necessary budget to ensure a positive atmosphere, environment and opportunities for this community to help them get the highest level of education.
- Implement free or subsidised education, perhaps in a 60:40 ratio, and increase the provision of stipends for this group.
- Allocate the budget for providing free or subsidiary treatment facilities and creating a safe environment for the Hijra community.
- Increase incentives in employment, like the recent tax rebate for organisations offering opportunities to the Gender Diverse Population.

- Create employment opportunities for 750 Hijra people. Allocate funds to ensure livelihood restoration through alternative livelihoods for gender and occupationally-diverse groups.
- Allocate the necessary budget for a well-documented need assessment for this community facilitated through public-private partnership to understand the nature and extent of the need for vocational training.
- Allocate the budget for providing a sufficient number of this population with need-based vocational training, integrating them into mainstream employment options, placement in government institutions, and financial allowances for entrepreneurial endeavours for the Hijra community.
- Allocate to ensure equal treatment and services for Hijra and transgender in getting loans and banking facilities.
- Utilise government partnership and linkage with experienced and relevant stakeholders (i.e. NGOs and Private sectors, etc.) for smart planning and proper monitoring of the resources in favour of Hijra and transgender community.
- Monitor the cash assistance programme available for Hijra community as many people from their community are not getting the cash themselves.
- Increase the allowances provided by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) to strengthen the safety net for this vulnerable population.
- Revisit the stipend of old age and education allowance for Hijra community.

7. Indigenous People

Indigenous communities face significant challenges in education, culture, and land rights. Indigenous students lack targeted support or special allocations in educational systems. The lack of opportunities to study in their own language is also a major barrier. Indigenous communities face challenges related to land ownership and proper documentation. Lack of clear understanding of land documents, registration processes, land tax, and non-cancellation can lead to disputes and loss of ancestral lands. Despite being eligible, indigenous families living in the union often struggle to access government services due to their inexperience with online applications.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Bangladesh Awami league wants to mitigate all kinds of discriminatory behaviour towards ethnic minorities" (Manifesto, 2024, p.86)

- Efforts will continue to protect Article 23 (A) of the Constitution.
- Obstacles to the enforcement of the "Property Act" law will be removed.
- To protect the interests of minorities, National Commission for minorities will be constituted and "Special Protection of Minorities Act" will be enacted.
- Awami league will continue to take necessary steps to ensure the security of life and livelihoods of religious minorities, small ethnic groups and backward communities.
- Awami league will not allow inhuman incidents to be repeated towards ethnic and religious minorities.
- Bangladesh Awami League upholds the policy of ending tourism, discriminatory treatment and human rights violations against religious minorities, small ethnic groups and people working in tea plantations, protecting their lives, property, dignity and ensuring equal rights in all aspects of state and social life.

Recommendations

- Establish a separate ministry with a dedicated budget allocation to effectively address the unique needs and challenges faced by the indigenous minorities.

- Involve indigenous people in the decision-making process of the Special Affairs Division (SAD) under the Prime Minister's Office.
- Recognise ethnic minorities as Adibashi in various government gazettes and circulars to ensure better access to government services.
- Allocate funds for indigenous people with line items for all relevant sectors and subsectors; display the allocation separately for 'hill' and 'plainland' indigenous people to bring transparency.
- Increase the budget of the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, CHT Regional Councils and Hill District Councils.
- Allocate an adequate budget for the proper implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tract Agreement 1997 and make Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Dispute Settlement Commission functional.
- Develop a CHT Perspective Development Plan as promised in the 8th Five Year Plan and allocate an adequate budget for it.
- Include a line item titled 'Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord' and allocate funds accordingly.
- Increase allocation in Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) to expand agricultural irrigation canals and ensure water supply for the indigenous of the plains.
- Allocate the budget exclusively for adaptation funding for building the adaptive capacity of the plainland ethnic minorities.
- Establish Upazila Tribal Cultural Academy for the preservation of tribal language and culture and keep special allocation for the festivals of the tribals of the plains.
- Increase allotment for the "Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institutions."
- Allocate sufficient budget for the implementation of education in the mother tongue of indigenous children, including adequate textbooks, materials, hostels, teacher recruitment, and training.
- Allocate funds for the promotion of primary education in indigenous languages.
- Increase the amount of stipends at the primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels and provide monthly education assistance to higher secondary students in indigenous communities.
- Allocate more budget to improve healthcare services in the CHT, considering the remoteness and underdevelopment of the region.
- Keep allocation in the housing sector for Adibashi, who are homeless, in the government shelter programme.
- Allocate necessary budget for the development of the living standards of indigenous and religious minority communities and for the repair of institutions damaged by communal attacks.
- Allocate budget to ensure an accurate population census of indigenous people, disaggregated by group.
- Establish a separate Land Commission for plainland indigenous people recognising and upholding the customary laws of indigenous people in matters of land rights.
- Ensure proper management for the protection of the land rights of indigenous peoples.
- Allocate an adequate budget for the resettlement of Bengali settlers from the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the plains.
- Set up export-oriented industries at the local/district level and employ ethnic minority communities.
- Promote community-based eco-tourism in the indigenous inhabited regions.
- Increase allocation for technical training, easy loans and business incentives for alternative employment.
- Introduce a special security service card for indigenous beneficiaries in the Social Safety Net Programmes.

- Provide to Jhum cultivators during the three months (April to June) of their unemployment.
- Provide universal pension, universal rationing, and healthcare and security for indigenous people, under social security.
- Keep allocation higher for Adibashi TCB card.

8. People with Disabilities

Infrastructure, public transportation, buildings, and public spaces often lack essential accessibility features, such as ramps, elevators, clear signages, and alarms with visual cues. These shortcomings make it challenging for people with disabilities to live independently and access essential services. Additionally, there is a critical shortage of assistive technologies specifically tailored to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. The digital divide further exacerbates the exclusion. Different types of disabilities limit their ability to interact with standard devices and infrastructure, including computers, smartphones, and the Internet. As a result, persons with disabilities face barriers when accessing digital platforms, online services, and e-commerce platforms. Without urgent action, they risk being left out of government initiatives aimed at building a SMART Bangladesh. Discrimination persists, hindering access to education, training, and employment opportunities. Moreover, the lack of appropriate and flexible recruitment processes in different sectors further hinders employment prospects. The current process and mode of the General Certificate of Competency (GCC) are not machine-readable and can only be used or applicable in the location from where it was issued. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive and reliable data on persons with disabilities in Bangladesh poses significant challenges to effectively address their needs and ensure their inclusion in the mainstream of society. Furthermore, the allocation for the stipend of persons with disabilities (PWD) has decreased from the Revised Fiscal Year 2023 to the Budget Fiscal Year 2024.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Bangladesh Awami League is determined to integrate disabled people at all levels of society by ensuring their rights and dignity" (Manifesto, 2024, p.82).

- Opportunities for inclusion of PWDs in national capacity building and national action plans will be expanded.
- Measures and steps will be taken to make disable friendly environment (education, employment, mobility, communication and treatment easier) and government services will also be disable-friendly.
- Disabled persons will be provided with govt grants and loans on easier terms and suitable employment opportunities will be made.
- Special measures will be extended to make education, employment, mobility, communication and treatment easier for PWDs and to establish their social status.
- 422 more disability service and assistance centres will be set up in two phases.
- Eight (8) treatment and education and rehabilitation centres will be established in eight (80 divisions for NDD (Neuro development disabilities).
- Legal complexities will be removed in the implementation of Directorate of Development of PWDs.
- Efforts will continue to formulate a uniform national scribe policy in education and job recruitment exams.
- Efforts will continue to ensure proper implementation of quota in all govt recruitments including BCS for PWDs.
- To empower politically, PWDs will be encouraged in political parties and casting their votes.

Recommendations

- Make the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disability Committees functional and hold meetings as per the guidelines of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disability Act-2013.
- Introduce a 'disability budget' given that disability is a high-pressing cross-cutting agenda.
- Allocate budget not only for the Ministry of Social Welfare but also for the Ministry of Education, Primary, Mass Education, Technical Education, Youth Development and Sports, Women and Child Affairs, Agricultural Extension, ICT, and Vocational Training to make infrastructures accessible for all persons with all types of disabilities.
- Allocate a dedicated budget for the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Disability.
- Allocate a designated budget to undertake a coordinated national household survey on persons with disabilities, as data discrepancy on disability is known to be one of the biggest setbacks for the country.
- Ensure mitigation of climate vulnerabilities that is inclusive of PWDs.
- Allocate a budget to achieve the goals of SMART Bangladesh by making the government's websites, e-services, union information centres, etc., accessible to people with all types of disabilities.
- Allocate an adequate budget to make teaching and assessment systems accessible for learners with disabilities, particularly teaching-learning materials such as braille books, e-books, and assistive technology devices.
- Allocate budget for making all the teachers' training modules with disability contents, including sign language, and arrange special training for teachers on disability inclusion, disability identification and disability-friendly learning curriculum and pedagogy.
- Allocate budget to ensure holistic accessible infrastructure (ramps, elevators, etc.) of educational and technical education institutions and to ensure access to information for students with disabilities in education, in alignment with the Primary Education Development Program (PDEP) 5 development process, the RPPD 2013, and the National Action Plan on Disability 2019.
- Spend budget allocation for the School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) fund for each school for children with disabilities and secure a disability-inclusive environment in schools.
- Allocate a budget to make the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes accessible, train instructors on disability inclusion, and make their curriculum more disability inclusive.
- Initiate separate scholarship programmes for PWDs receiving TVET.
- Integrate sign language in the national curriculum.
- Allocate budget for establishment of Bengali sign language institution.
- Withdraw any taxation (VAT and taxes) on the assistive devices.
- Allow duty-free import of good quality aid instruments such as wheelchairs, tricycles, specialised scooters, walkers, manual and digital white cane, crutches, hearing aids, carrying ramps, magnifying glasses, prosthetic-orthotic, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, accessible mobile apps, braille printer, keyboard, head pointer, joystick, large print material, screen reading software to facilitate the movement and communication of PWD.
- Undertake projects to provide counselling and mental support to PWD.
- Allocate necessary budget to equip government hospitals, disability support and services centres, and community clinics with specialised health services, such as therapeutic services, that would help minimise the medical costs for many people with disabilities.
- Allocate a budget for special livelihood schemes for persons with disabilities.
- Allocate budget for skill development of PWDs and ensure jobs for them once they acquire those skills.

- Make the provision of tax rebates more flexible for employing persons with disabilities so that employers can employ candidates with disabilities.
- Reserve quotas in government job recruitment for PWD.
- Take the initiative to create employment opportunities for at least 1000 persons with disabilities in the upcoming budget 2024-25.
- Adopt a special initiative to make the PWDs, who are also ethnic minorities, self-dependent by engaging them in household-based work aligning their choice and type of disability.
- Hold community scorecards and public hearings on a regular basis and make persons with disabilities an integral part of the community.
- Allocate the required amount to establish at least 100 disability service centres targeting the sub-district areas.
- Increase the allowance for the PWD, considering the living costs and skyrocketing inflation that the country is experiencing.
- Segregate the allowance into different categories based on the severity of the disabilities, such as people with severe, moderate, and mild disabilities along with multiple disabilities. People with severe and multiple disabilities should receive higher amounts of allowance.
- Provide allowance for the caregivers of PWD.
- Set aside a portion of sector-specific allocation of social protection such as allocation for skill development, entrepreneur development and employment for PWD.
- Include PWD women when selecting the beneficiaries of social protection programmes for skill development, entrepreneur development, and empowerment of women.
- Expand the scope of Bangabandhu Protibondhi Surokkha Bima. Include persons with physical and sensory disabilities under this insurance provision.
- Allocate necessary budget for the accommodation of homeless PWD.
- Ensure infrastructural and information accessibility for PWD in all public and private sectors by importing and building power or manual ramp-attached buses, accessible shelters, and making use of signage.
- Public spaces such as recreational parks and sports grounds must be made accessible so that people with disabilities can use them.
- Withdraw VAT and tax on savings certificates, deposits, Fixed Deposit Receipts (FDR), and Deposit Pension Schemes (DPS) for persons with disabilities and initiate interest-free or low-interest easy loan systems.
- Allocate a budget for strengthening the grassroots organisations of PWDs to increase PWD participation and reduce violence against them.

9. Senior Citizens

Senior citizens in Bangladesh face numerous challenges, particularly due to inadequate social protection and healthcare services. Despite initiatives like pensions and Social Safety Net (SSN) programmes, many elderly individuals, especially those from the private sector or migrant workers, do not receive pension benefits, leaving them financially vulnerable. Moreover, significant gaps in public infrastructure affect the elderly, such as a lack of dedicated facilities in public transport and healthcare at the grassroots level. Social isolation, exacerbated by the urban-rural divide, also significantly affects their quality of life as family structures change and younger generations move to urban areas for work.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League's Election Manifesto 2024

"Awami league govt. is taking concerted steps to keep the elderly active, increase their contribution to the progress of society and the state and protect them" (p.85)

- Initiatives will be taken to bring senior citizens under social insurance on a priority basis.
- Steps will be taken to intensify education and public awareness with a view to building intergenerational relations, solidarity and partnership and creating family ties, solidarity and unity between generations.
- Initiatives will be taken to introduce loans under easy conditions.
- Introduce a ration system for income-generating activities for senior citizens.
- Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure access for senior citizens to all facilities
- Equality of digital technology and use of advanced and modern technology will be ensured for senior citizens' welfare
- New initiatives will be undertaken to introduce special courses, degrees and treatment services related to Geriatric Medicine related to health and care of the elderly) in hospitals. In order to simplify and modernise geriatric health services, steps will be taken to create separate degrees in medical colleges.
- There is a hospital for the elderly, Probin Hospital in the Agargaon area of Dhaka. Geriatric services have already started in Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Effective steps will be taken to introduce geriatric services in all government hospitals in the country.

Recommendations

- Develop and allocate resources for a pilot programme focused on geriatric care at the community level, reflecting the commitment to the welfare of senior citizens as stated in the Election Manifesto. Provide financial incentives for attaining training in geriatric care.
- Allocate budget for the treatment of non-communicable diseases of the elderly for marginalised elderly at all levels, from community clinics to specialised hospitals.
- Allocate budget for the rehabilitation of homeless elderly.
- Allocate budget to ensure legal aid for abused and neglected elderly.
- Grant easy loans and introduce a ration system to enable income-generating activities of the elderly.
- Allocate the necessary budget to improve the digital skills of the elderly.
- Provide grants to the NGOs for raising public awareness about the elderly.
- Increase old age allowance in the upcoming budget.

10. Urban Poor

The urban poor in Bangladesh face several challenges due to rapid urbanisation and unplanned growth. The transition from rural to urban life brings about imbalanced lifestyle changes, malnutrition, and exposure to environmental hazards. As a result, the urban poor are increasingly affected by non-communicable diseases, substance misuse, and mental health problems. Additionally, their vulnerability to climate-related risks further exacerbates their plight. Most of these rural migrants lack the resources to meet their basic needs, including housing and healthcare. The urban poor face complex health needs, with insufficient access to medical services and high out-of-pocket expenditures. The lack of stable employment opportunities and financial insecurity further exacerbate the challenges the urban poor faces. Rapid urbanisation often disrupts social networks and community ties, leaving the urban poor isolated and struggling to build supportive relationships.

Pledges in the election manifesto

“Awami League’s one of the most important and prioritised goals is to alleviate poverty and bring smiles to the faces of suffering people” (p.45)

Recommendations

- Allocate a budget to continue the primary health care services for the urban extreme poor.
- Adopt a planned rehabilitation programme for slum dwellers and increase budget allocation for this purpose.
- Expand cash assistance and housing programmes for marginalised communities throughout the country to discourage floating and marginalised people from migrating to cities.
- Establish daycare centres in urban low-income communities and safe housing for the children.
- Introduce collateral-free or alternative methods for bank loans to ensure access to the urban poor.
- Initiate widow allowance in the urban areas.
- Increase coverage of maternity allowance and other social safety net programmes for the urban poor people.
- Increase the scope of open market sale (OMS) rice sales to low-income groups under food-friendly programs.
- The upcoming ADP budget should allocate increased funding to address new WASH challenges arising in semi-urban areas, growing regions, and villages undergoing urbanisation.
- Increase budget allocation and ensure proper implementation of the "Pro-Poor Strategy for Water and Sanitation" to address the rising costs of safe water and sanitation for slum dwellers.

11. Youth

Youth in Bangladesh face a complex array of challenges that affect their development and participation in society. Unemployment rates persist despite educational achievements, with a skill gap that does not meet the current job market's demands. The educational system often fails to provide practical skills, leading to a workforce unprepared for emerging industries. Young people also experience a lack of engagement in political and decision-making processes, feeling disconnected from societal change. Moreover, rapid urbanisation and environmental vulnerabilities disproportionately affect them, compounding their difficulties in both urban and rural settings.

Pledges in the Bangladesh Awami League’s Election Manifesto 2024

“The party aims to harness the demographic advantage and address 21st century challenges for socio-economic development” (p.47)

- Integrating the young force into the mission of transforming and developing Bangladesh.
- Widening employability for skilled youth and providing training to 31 lakh individuals for self-reliance.
- Employing an additional 1.5 crore people by 2030 to reduce unemployment rate to 3% by 2028.
- Initiating vocational training for illiterate individuals and increasing provisions for easy loans for self-employment projects.
- Creating more opportunities in the online job market and adding new jobs in various sectors.

- Gradually extending youth empowerment programs under national services to upazilas.
- Establishing youth training and employment centers in all upazilas to strengthen grassroots programs.
- Reducing the rate of young individuals outside education, training and employment programs to 7%.
- Disbursing a youth loan of 750 crore taka among 2,50,000 young people and making 2,50,000 people self-employed.
- Redesigning Polytechnic and vocational institutes for technological advancements and creating Smart Youth Hubs for holistic youth development.
- Installing libraries in each upazila and creating special cells to assist young entrepreneurs in accessing financial services.
- Ensuring education, training, or treatment schemes for young people with disabilities and hardships.
- Implementing plans to integrate drug addicts and radicalized youth into mainstream society.
- Infrastructure growth for Sheikh Hasina Youth Institute to accommodate more manpower.

Recommendations

- Introduce allowance for unemployed youths.
- Allocate a separate budget for the youth and sports sector, as well as for the National Youth Council's infrastructure development and capacity-building programmes.
- Increase incentives for institutions that work on skill development for youth.
- Allocate loans and subsidies for young farmers, especially women working on locally-led agro-interventions and adaptations.
- Allocate adequate budgets and resources for youth from disaster-prone and hard-to-reach areas to address climate-induced vulnerabilities, e.g., internal migration, climate change-induced disasters, resilience, livelihood, health, education, mental health, social peace and cohesion, sexual and reproductive health, and so on.
- Increase allocation to mitigate the digital divide among the youth from most marginalised and hard-to-reach areas by prioritising digital literacy and access to digital space, especially for women.
- Allocate budget to raise awareness widely, at both government and non-government levels, to prevent drug addiction among the youth and provide them with necessary recreation and employment opportunities and skill training programmes.
- Increase the education budget, including vocational and skill development, as per the global standard by considering the 27.39 per cent of the NEET youth population (World Bank 2017), especially women, as a national priority. In addition to vocational education, allocate a budget for adolescents to acquire knowledge in any trade, especially weaving activities, according to their desire or interest.
- Ensure provision of education scholarships for orphans and youth raised in alternative care to pursue higher education. Provide stipend or financial support for students especially for women to reduce drop out and discontinuation of education as well as offering market demand oriented vocational training.
- Invest more in technical skills development in terms of sustainable blue economy to enhance young people's participation and access to this new industry and trade. Allocate special funds for providing area-based vocational education and necessary training to increase job skills.
- Invest in designing and implementing different programmes for youth including market-oriented and technology-based soft and hard skill development to reap the benefit of demographic dividend by transforming them into quality human resources.

- Allocate funds to create alternative employment opportunities suitable for the local areas at the grassroots level to address the widespread shortage of employment.
- Increase the incentives and subsidise young people-centric banking and loan schemes for young entrepreneurs, freelancers, especially women, to promote entrepreneurship.
- Include and prioritise the interests of young people working in the informal sector in the national budget to ensure protection, safety, decent employment, and sustainable livelihoods for marginalised young people and ensure their transition from the informal to the formal sector.
- Introduce special youth credit card with government guarantee.
- Form an independent wing of the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB), especially for youth organisations for approval and other functions.

VI. Closure

The proposed budget recommendations aim to address various socio-economic challenges in Bangladesh. The priority of the government must be to ensure equitable and fair distribution of budget allocations and proper service delivery with a special focus on disadvantaged communities by establishing good governance. Structural reforms need to be emphasised to bring accountability, transparency and efficiency in resource management across sectors. Moreover, decentralisation of budget and administrative powers is proposed to foster rapid progress and combat corruption at the grassroots level.

Collaborating Partners

