

**PERCEPTION OF YOUTHS ON CHALLENGES AND
PROSPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH**

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions, challenges, and prospects of sustainable rural development in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on the role of youth as active contributors to rural transformation. Using a mixed-methods approach, data has been collected from 200 respondents across Dhaka and Mymensingh through surveys and in-depth interviews. The quantitative findings reveal that while a majority recognize the importance of youth involvement, significant barriers such as poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and governance issues hinder rural progress.

Qualitative insights further emphasize the multifaceted understanding of sustainable rural development among young people, highlighting the balance between agricultural productivity, environmental protection, and social equity. Participants expressed optimism about youth entrepreneurship, innovation, and community

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activism as critical drivers of rural revitalization, but also identified the urgent need for enhanced education, skill development, and government support. The study concludes that integrated policy interventions, combined with targeted capacity-building and financial facilitation, are essential to empower youth and achieve sustainable rural growth in Bangladesh. This paper recommends incorporating stakeholders including policymakers, educational institutions, and community organizations to collaborate in creating an enabling environment for youth-led rural development.

Keywords: Sustainable Rural Development, Youth Participation, Rural Challenges, Bangladesh, Entrepreneurship, Skill Development, Rural Infrastructure, Community Engagement.

1. Introduction and Objective

Rural Development becomes crucial in the present age of globalization, open market, economy, sustainable livelihood, agriculture, environment, and to name but a few. Side by side, sustainable development not only attracts the attention of global leaders, but it also motivates local leaders to contribute to society. In the present context of Bangladesh, sustainable development turns into talk of the town due to some global goals of sustainable development which emphasizes on inclusive development and growth. It is worth noting that Bangladesh is a densely populated country where most of the people live in villages (Ahmed et al., 2022). Several attempts have been made to ensure rural development in different regimes. However, most of the initiatives failed to see the face of light in the long run for improper planning in policies and implementation. Consequently, it is quite impossible to achieve the goal of sustainable development without ensuring balanced and equal development in rural Bangladesh (Baker et al., 2013).

Moreover, it is important to note that some goals of sustainable development like eradicating poverty and hunger, ensuring good health and well-being, providing quality education, achieving gender equality and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, peace, justice, and strong institutions, partnerships for the goal clearly demonstrate significances of sustainable rural development (UNDP, 2022). Thereafter, in Bangladesh, there is no alternative to ensure sustainable rural development with the active engagement of youth in policy formulating and implementation as they are going to lead the country from the forefront (Bhuiyan, 2017). Keeping everything into deep and perusal consideration, the present study aims at exploring the perception of youth on challenges and prospects of sustainable rural development in Bangladesh

Research Objectives

- To explore the perceptions of youth regarding the current state of rural development in Bangladesh.
- To identify the major challenges to sustainable rural development as viewed from the youth perspective.
- To assess the prospects and opportunities for youth engagement in sustainable rural development.

2. Literature Review

Sustainable rural development remains one of the most pressing and complex challenges facing Bangladesh, a nation where approximately 62% of the population continues to reside in rural areas and depends heavily on agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihoods (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Despite rapid economic growth and urbanization over the past decades, rural regions face

persistent structural problems including inadequate infrastructure, poor access to quality education and healthcare, insufficient employment opportunities, environmental degradation, and a widening rural-urban divide (Rahman & Hossain, 2021; World Bank, 2022). These challenges constrain the overall goal of achieving inclusive and sustainable development, as outlined by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty alleviation, food security, clean water and sanitation, decent work, and climate action (United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

According to the Bangladesh Young Policy 2019, persons having age between 18 to 35 years old are considered as youth and they could revolutionize the socioeconomic structure and revitalize rural communities. Their role in development is becoming more frequently recognized as a beneficiary of development programs and active actors who can influence and establish pathways to sustainable development (Islam et al., 2020). Various studies revealed that youth are struggling with lack of quality education and skill development program, decent work opportunities, financial resources, and involvement in political platforms and social participation (Hasan & Karim, 2023; Chowdhury & Sarker, 2024). Youth are often migrating from rural areas to cities in search of better jobs which resulted in depopulating rural areas and reducing human capital (Sultana et al., 2023). The mismatch between young people's expectations and realities can lead to disillusionment and disengagement, which threaten sustainability of rural communities.

Despite extensive macroeconomic and policy research on rural development in Bangladesh (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2022; Karim & Uddin, 2023), there is a little research on youth's subjective perceptions, attitudes, and aspirations for sustainable rural development. Since development is not only a top-down economic process but

also a socially and culturally rooted phenomenon, it is important to include youth's voices to ensure that policies and programs reflect their reality (Khan et al., 2024). Moreover, youth can raise concern over social marginalization, gender inequality, environmental issues, and the effects of globalization and digital technologies on rural livelihoods which are overlooked by traditional systems (Rahman et al., 2024).

In recent times, the growing interest of youth in engaging state affairs can foster innovative solutions for sustainable rural development by entrepreneurship, digital inclusion, sustainable agriculture, and community leadership (Sultana et al., 2023; Hasan & Karim, 2023). Islam et al. (2022) stated that the uses of digital platforms and social media can lead youth people to get information, build networks, and mobilize for social change which make positive impact on rural development. However, little research has explored how youth in various contexts perceive and use these chances.

This research fills these gaps by investigating young people's perceptions of sustainable rural development in Bangladesh, identifying their major challenges, and assessing their future development prospects. Based on the research purpose, this research focusses on Mymensingh, a semi-urban region with rural experience, and Dhaka, a metropolitan city with rural linkages. The socio-economic and geographical characteristics of both places were considered before choosing them. The study combines multiple perspectives to show the complexity of young people's experiences in various circumstances.

This study explicitly analyses how youth people see key rural development concerns including limited infrastructure, education, healthcare, employment, migration, environmental sustainability, governance, and social inclusion. It also explores hopes and aspirations of

youth for sustainable livelihoods and how technological innovation, community participation, and policy aid help achieve them. Finally, this research illuminates the relationship between youth agencies and sustainable rural development. These findings can be used to create policies and programs in Bangladesh that are more responsive to youth's needs and more inclusive to their participation.

3. Method

This research follows a mixed-methods research design, including both qualitative and quantitative method, to explore youth's perceptions about the challenges and prospects of sustainable rural development in Bangladesh. Mixed-methods research is known for capturing social complexity, emphasizing quantitative breadth and qualitative depth. In this context, it has made researchers capable of identifying patterns and trends in youth's ideas and to explore the causes, sentiments, and contextual aspects (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Mixed methods offered a platform for a comprehensive investigation of youth perspectives and experiences about multidimensional rural development, including social, economic, environmental, and governance concerns.

The study was conducted in Dhaka and Mymensingh for their strategic importance. Dhaka is the capital and a major metropolitan city where a large and diverse number of youths live. Dhaka has been selected because of the ideas of youth are shaped by both urban and rural surroundings since young people are often related to rural places through family or school. On the other hand, Mymensingh has been selected for its semi-urban and rural areas which give youth a different perspective on rural development. Due to the disparity between the two settings, the research was able to gather different perspectives, resulting in increasing the findings' generalizability and

depth. The target demographic participants were 18–35-year-olds which reflect the most active and socially involved in rural development policies and practices. This age group is also more likely to have access to education, the media, and social networks, which might influence their perceptions on development and sustainability.

Structured surveys and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were used to obtain primary data. For quantitative data, a total of 200 youth respondents provided their perception on rural development status, major challenges like infrastructure deficits, employment scarcity, migration pressures, and environmental concerns, and sustainable growth and youth empowerment opportunities identified during data collection. A random sampling technique was used to choose survey participants to ensure representative results and reduce selection bias. The survey participants are selected from educational institutions, community centers, youth organizations, and local events in both divisions.

For qualitative data, 20 In-depth Interviews were performed to supplement survey data and investigate young people's attitudes. Purposive sampling was employed for selecting IDI participants who were picked for their active involvement in rural development issues or acquaintance with them. The participants included young leaders, community development students, non-governmental organization volunteers, and local activists. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to get rich and complete narratives from youth's viewpoints and experiences on policy and rural change, subjective experiences, challenges, aspirations, and thoughts. For fieldwork, 11 trained data collectors worked together. The team had a complete training session on ethical research, communication techniques for youth participation, and rapport-building and trust-building before starting data collecting. Information

collectors introduced themselves and explained the aim of the study, emphasizing voluntary participation and anonymity. Participants were assured that their opinions would remain anonymous and utilized for academic reasons and given the chance to sign informed consent. To ensure participants' comfort and openness to the process, they were interviewed and surveyed in university campuses, NGO offices, or community halls at their convenience that. The average interview lasted 30-40 minutes, giving enough time to examine tough and sensitive topics. About 80 people, who demonstrated 25% non-response rate, were approached for 20 IDIs. Relevant literature was reviewed on rural development, youth involvement, and sustainability for developing the survey questionnaire and interview guides. To ensure accuracy and reliability, both items underwent face and content validity testing via professional appraisal and pilot testing with a few youths before data collection.

Data have been collected allowing enough time to reach prospective respondents and perform in-depth interviews while reducing temporal bias. Transcription and thematic analysis were used to analyze qualitative interview material. Coding, categorizing meaning units, and synthesizing overarching themes that capture participants' major concerns were done according to established methodologies. This strategy helped to identify major issues like-governance and infrastructural gaps, youth migration, educational barriers, and environmental concerns. It also helped to identify opportunities like improving digital technology access, encouraging youth entrepreneurship, and changing laws. SPSS software was used to analyze quantitative survey results, along with descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and mean. This analysis examined the two research locations to find similarities and differences.

Secondary data sources are also collected from government papers, policy documents, scholarly articles, and trusted resources like Google Scholar, Scopus, and JSTOR. These sources provided context and benchmarked to analyze the study's findings against national and international trends in rural development and young participation which improve its breadth and validity. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study such as informed consent, respondent anonymity, voluntary involvement, and data confidentiality and so on. Although the study followed rigorous design and methodology, few limitations exist. Such as, firstly, only two divisions were studied, lessening the generalizability of the findings to diverse youth population & socio-cultural landscapes in Bangladesh. Secondly, the cross-sectional design may not fully reflect long-term changes. Lastly, self-reported data may be impacted by social desirability or recall bias. However, the use of several methods, data triangulation, and rigor reduced these limits and improved the outcomes.

4. Findings

This section incorporates quantitative and qualitative findings of the study that it has collected with survey questionnaire and interview guidelines.

4.1 Quantitative Findings of the Study:

4.1.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE (%)
AGE DISTRIBUTION	18–22	25%
	23–27	40%
GENDER	28–32	22%
	33–35	13%
	Male	56%
	Female	43%
	Other	0.5%
EDUCATION LEVEL	Prefer not to say	0.5%
	Secondary	12%
	Higher	22%
	Secondary	
	Undergraduate	38%
RESIDENCE	Graduate/Postgraduate	28%
	Rural	30%
	Urban	45%
	Semi-urban	25%
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Student	48%
	Employed	27%
	Unemployed	10%
	Self-employed	11%
	Other	4%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study participants (N=200), comprising individuals aged between 18 and 35 years from both Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions. The age distribution reveals that most

respondents (40%) fall within the 23–27 age bracket, followed by 25% aged 18–22, 22% aged 28–32, and a smaller segment (13%) in the 33–35 age group. The gender composition indicates a slight male predominance, with 56% identifying as male and 43% as female, while 0.5% identified as “Other” and another 0.5% preferred not to disclose their gender.

The educational background of the respondents shows a balanced academic distribution: 12% had completed secondary education, 22% higher secondary, 38% were pursuing or had completed undergraduate studies, and 28% held graduate or postgraduate degrees. Regarding place of residence, 45% were from urban areas, 30% from rural regions, and 25% from semi-urban localities, ensuring geographical diversity in the dataset. In terms of occupation, nearly half of the participants (48%) were students, followed by 27% employed individuals, 11% self-employed, 10% unemployed, and 4% in other occupations. This occupational composition highlights a strong representation of the youth demographic currently in education or transitioning into the workforce. This varied socio-demographic background contributes to the richness and depth of the study, ensuring that findings are reflective of diverse perspectives from both urban and rural youth across two major divisions of Bangladesh.

4.1.2 Perceptions of youth on the current state of rural development in Bangladesh:

Table 2: Youth perceptions on the current state of rural development

Question	Response Options	Percentage (%)
<i>Do you think that rural areas in Bangladesh are developing sustainably?</i>	Yes	29%
	No	51%
	Not Sure	20%
<i>What does sustainable rural development mean to you? (Multiple responses allowed)</i>	Improved agriculture	71%
	Access to quality education and healthcare	82%
	Job opportunities	77%
	Infrastructure development	68%
	Environmental protection	54%
<i>How important is youth involvement in rural development?</i>	Social equality	49%
	Very important	61%
	Important	28%
	Moderately important	9%
	Not important	2%

Table 2 illustrates the perceptions of youth regarding the state and priorities of sustainable rural development in Bangladesh. When asked whether they believed rural areas in Bangladesh are developing sustainably, most respondents (51%) expressed skepticism, stating “No,” while only 29% answered affirmatively, and 20% remained unsure. This indicates a significant level of concern or uncertainty among youth about the current trajectory of rural development. Regarding the definition of sustainable rural development, respondents were allowed to select multiple indicators. The

most cited components were access to quality education and healthcare (82%), followed by job opportunities (77%) and improved agriculture (71%). Other important aspects included infrastructure development (68%), environmental protection (54%), and social equality (49%). This highlights a broad and multi-dimensional understanding among youth, where economic, social, and environmental pillars are all valued. In terms of youth involvement in rural development, a strong majority of respondents (61%) considered it “very important,” and an additional 28% marked it as “important.” Only a small fraction (2%) believed it was “not important.” This strong consensus suggests a high level of awareness among youth regarding their potential role as active agents in shaping the future of rural areas in Bangladesh. Collectively, the findings from this section suggest that while young people possess a nuanced understanding of what sustainable rural development entails and recognize their critical role in the process, there remains a perceived gap between the ideal and the current reality. These insights underscore the need for more inclusive, youth-driven rural development strategies.

4.1.3 Perceived Challenges to Sustainable Rural Development:

Table 3: Main Challenges to Rural Development

Challenges	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Poverty	68%
Unemployment	64%
Poor infrastructure	60%
Poor education facilities	52%
Inadequate healthcare	46%
Corruption	41%
Political instability	38%
Environmental degradation	24%

Table 3 outlines the most identified challenges to sustainable rural development in Bangladesh, as perceived by the youth participants. Respondents were allowed to select the top three challenges. The majority highlighted poverty (68%) as the foremost barrier to rural development, followed by unemployment (64%), emphasizing the scarcity of economic opportunities for rural youth. Poor infrastructure (60%), including inadequate transport, energy, and digital access, was another pressing concern that hinders connectivity and access to services.

Educational deficiencies (52%) and inadequate healthcare (46%) reflect major gaps in human development, limiting the long-term potential of rural populations. Corruption (41%) and political instability (38%) reveal significant governance challenges, while environmental degradation (24%), though cited less frequently, points to an emerging awareness of sustainability issues. Overall, the findings suggest that youth view rural underdevelopment as a multidimensional issue requiring holistic interventions.

4.1.4 Youth Agreement with Key Rural Development Statements

Table 4: Mean score of Agreement of youth rural development

Statement	Mean Score (Out of 5)
a. Rural development is neglected by policymakers	4.1
b. Lack of job opportunities pushes youth away from rural areas	4.4
c. Environmental issues are not addressed in rural development plans	3.9
d. Corruption is a major obstacle to rural progress	4.2

Table 4 presents the average levels of agreement with key statements related to the structural and systemic challenges facing rural development in Bangladesh. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree), the highest agreement was observed with the statement “Lack of job opportunities pushes youth away from rural areas” (mean=4.4), signifying widespread concern over employment scarcity as a root cause of rural stagnation and migration. The statement “Corruption is a major obstacle to rural progress” received a high mean score of 4.2, indicating a strong belief among youth that transparency and accountability are lacking in rural governance. Similarly, “Rural development is neglected by policy makers” was rated at 4.1, suggesting perceived policy neglect or urban-centric development priorities. The comparatively lower mean score of 3.9 for “Environmental issues are not addressed in rural development plans” still reflects moderate agreement, highlighting a growing environmental awareness among youth, though perhaps not yet as urgent as economic and governance issues. These insights underscore the youth’s multidimensional understanding of rural development barriers, emphasizing both structural and policy-level reforms.

4.1.5 Prospects and Youth Contributions to Sustainable Rural Development

Table 5: Youth Involvement and Prospects in Sustainable Rural Development

Category	Option	Percentage (%)
Promising Opportunities	Agricultural modernization	66%
	Digital and mobile technology	59%
	Entrepreneurship	73%
	Tourism development	33%
	Education and skills training	79%
	Local governance and participation	45%
Youth Contributions	Entrepreneurship	65%
	Volunteerism	49%
	Community awareness and activism	54%
	Participating in local government	28%
	Innovation and technology	61%
Interest in Participation	Yes	58%
	No	18%
	Maybe	24%
Support Needed by Youth	Training and skill development	76%
	Access to finance	67%
	Government support	72%
	Networking and mentorship	55%
	Policy reforms	48%

Table 5 highlights the youth’s perceptions of promising opportunities for sustainable rural development and their potential roles in contributing to these processes. Among the various opportunities, education and skills training (79%) and entrepreneurship (73%) were identified as the most promising avenues, indicating strong youth belief in capacity-building and economic empowerment. Agricultural modernization (66%) and digital and mobile technology (59%) were also viewed as significant growth areas, reflecting an appreciation of innovation and modernization as key drivers of rural progress. Less emphasis was placed on tourism development (33%) and local governance and participation (45%), which, while still important, appear secondary to economic and educational priorities. Regarding how youth can contribute, entrepreneurship (65%) and innovation and technology (61%) were seen as primary avenues, followed by community awareness and activism (54%) and volunteerism (49%). Only 28% believed active participation in local government to be a key role, suggesting either limited access or interest in formal governance channels. Most respondents expressed a strong interest in engaging with rural development initiatives, with 58% indicating “Yes” and 24% “Maybe,” highlighting a substantial willingness to participate. To effectively support youth engagement, respondents emphasized the need for training and skill development (76%), government support (72%), and access to finance (67%), pointing to critical enablers for youth empowerment. Networking and mentorship (55%) and policy reforms (48%) were also viewed as important, signaling a recognition that systemic support and guidance are vital for sustained youth involvement. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that youth in Bangladesh are optimistic about rural development prospects, value education and entrepreneurship highly, and identify clear areas where support is necessary to transform their potential contributions into tangible outcomes.

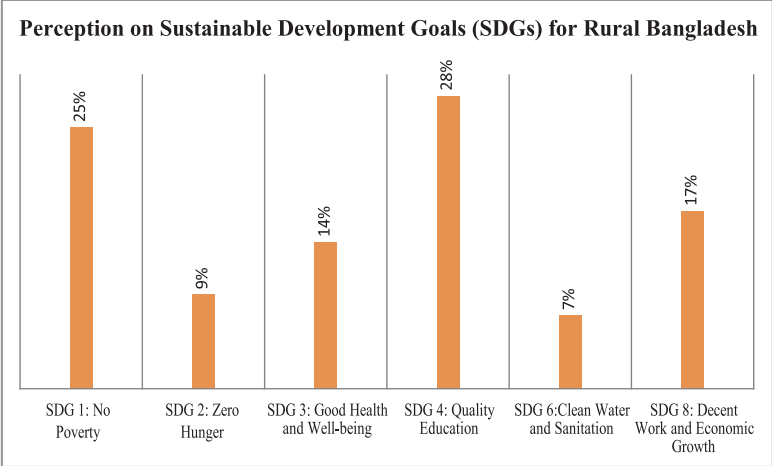


Figure 1: Perception on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Rural Bangladesh

4.1.6 Prioritization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Rural Bangladesh

Figure 1 presents the youth’s views on the most important Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to prioritize in rural Bangladesh. The highest priority was given to Quality Education (SDG 4), with 28% of respondents emphasizing the crucial role of education in fostering sustainable rural development. This was closely followed by No Poverty (SDG 1) at 25%, indicating a significant concern for reducing economic deprivation to improve rural livelihoods. Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) also received considerable attention, with 17% of participants highlighting the need for employment creation and economic opportunities to support rural communities. The importance of Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) was recognized by 14%, underscoring healthcare as an essential development pillar.

While Zero Hunger (SDG 2) was selected by 9% of respondents, Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6) received

7%, pointing to the recognition of basic health and hygiene needs in rural areas. Overall, the results reflect a youth perspective focused primarily on strengthening human capital and economic conditions as foundations for sustainable rural growth.

4.2 Qualitative Findings of the Study:

Table 6: Themes Derived from Interviews

Theme	Sub-themes	Illustrative Quotations
Theme 1: Understanding of Sustainable Rural Development	Definition and awareness of sustainability	“Sustainable rural development means improving farming while ensuring our natural resources are protected.” (IDI 3)
	Role of youth in development	“Youth should actively participate because they bring new ideas and energy to the rural areas.” (IDI 12)
Theme 2: Challenges to Rural Development	Poverty and unemployment	“Poverty is the biggest hurdle; without jobs, young people keep leaving villages.” (IDI 7)
	Lack of infrastructure and services	“Roads, electricity, healthcare, everything is insufficient which slows down progress.” (IDI 19)
	Corruption and political instability	“Corruption at local levels makes it hard to get any real development done.” (IDI 15)

Theme	Sub-themes	Illustrative Quotations
Theme 3: Youth Involvement and Contribution	Entrepreneurship and innovation	“Young people can start small businesses to create jobs and promote local products.” (IDI 4)
	Community awareness and activism	“Awareness campaigns are needed to encourage people to protect the environment and use resources wisely.” (IDI 11)
Theme 4: Prospects and Support Needs	Education and skill development	“If we get proper training, we can contribute much more to rural development.” (IDI 9)
	Need for government and financial support	“Without financial help and good policies, it is difficult for youth to participate fully.” (IDI 14)

4.2.1 Theme 1: Understanding of Sustainable Rural Development

Participants generally demonstrated a thoughtful and multi-dimensional understanding of sustainable rural development. Rather than limiting the concept to agricultural activities, many viewed it holistically as a process that ensures long-term economic growth, environmental conservation, and social well-being. They connect sustainability with community welfare, education, health, and access to essential services. Youth participants were particularly reflective about the importance of integrating modern techniques with traditional practices

and emphasized that sustainability should be people-centered, inclusive, and future-oriented. They also highlighted the role of community participation and knowledge-sharing in fostering development that does not harm the environment or exclude vulnerable groups. The voices of the youth indicated a growing awareness of their role not only as beneficiaries but also as active agents of sustainable change.

To me, sustainable rural development means more than just growing crops. It is about protecting our environment, making sure that children get proper education, and that families have access to healthcare and clean water. It also means using our traditional farming knowledge alongside modern tools to create a better life for everyone in the village (IDI 3, Personal Communication, July 13, 2025).

4.2.2 Theme 2: Challenges to Rural Development

A recurring issue raised during the interviews was the multitude of structural and socio-economic challenges facing rural development. Respondents cited poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare as persistent barriers. These hardships not only hinder the progress of rural communities but also lead to the migration of young people to urban areas in search of better opportunities, thus weakening the rural labor force. The lack of political accountability and corruption at the local level was also mentioned as a critical issue, leading to the mismanagement of resources and lack of trust in institutions. Such barriers create a cycle of underdevelopment and dependency that participants felt could only be broken through a combination of strategic policy intervention, investment in rural infrastructure, and community empowerment.

In my village, young people don't stay because there are no jobs. Roads are broken, schools don't have enough teachers, and there are no hospitals nearby. When you live like that, you can't dream big. Without fixing these basic problems, how can we talk about sustainable development? (IDI 7, Personal Communication, July 18, 2025).

4.2.3 Theme 3: Youth Involvement and Contribution

Participants spoke passionately about the role of youth in driving sustainable rural development. They viewed young people as dynamic, tech-savvy, and innovative problem solvers who are ready to take responsibility for improving their communities. Many emphasized that rural youth possess untapped potential that could be leveraged through targeted programs and platforms that support entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and social activism. Their suggestions included starting local businesses, promoting eco-friendly farming, organizing community awareness campaigns, and developing digital solutions for rural challenges. Youth involvement was also tied to a sense of ownership and belonging, where young people could lead local initiatives, influence decision-making, and act as role models. However, the participants also recognized that youth engagement requires encouragement, opportunities, and recognition from both government and civil society.

Our generation is ready to work for the village. We are educated and we understand the challenges. If we are given the right platform, we can start businesses, use digital tools, and create awareness about farming, health, and education. But we need a chance to lead and show what we can do (IDI 11, Personal Communication, July 20, 2025).

4.2.4 Theme 4: Prospects and Support Needs

While the discussions reflected a great deal of optimism about the prospects for rural transformation, there was a strong consensus that meaningful change depends on institutional support and targeted investment. Most participants agreed that training programs tailored to the specific needs of rural youth, such as in agriculture, digital technology, leadership, and marketing, could unlock new economic opportunities and reduce rural-urban migration. They also called for increased access to financial resources, such as grants or low-interest loans, and the creation of youth-friendly policies that remove bureaucratic obstacles and encourage innovation. Many felt that current policies were either insufficient or not effectively implemented, leaving motivated youth without the tools they need to succeed. Participants consistently pointed out that unless the government actively invests in the capacity-building of rural youth, the development process would remain incomplete and unsustainable.

I believe that we can change our villages, but we can't do it alone. We need proper training, startup funds, and government programs that understand our problems. Right now, many young people are interested in doing something but give up because they don't have guidance or support. That must change (IDI 14, Personal Communication, July 20, 2025).

5. Discussion

The perspectives, issues, and prospects of sustainable rural development from the standpoint of young people in Bangladesh are comprehensively covered in this research. Qualitative and quantitative data provide a comprehensive knowledge of how young people view rural development and their possible role in shaping its future. Most

respondents agreed that sustainable rural development is difficult, also stated in Rahman and Alam (2019) and Siddique et al. (2021). They prioritized agricultural progress, social justice, and environmental protection, supports prior research on rural development. The quantitative poll emphasizes access to quality education and healthcare 82% of the time and job prospects 77% of the time, reflecting the qualitative theme of young people realising the need for holistic methods beyond economic growth, shows the need for holistic solutions beyond economic growth. Our findings meet the requirements and align with global development frameworks that emphasize social, economic, and environmental interdependence (UNDP, 2020).

In quantitative study sixty-one percent of youth view in case of rural development as 'very important,' indicating a growing awareness of their role as change agents and their developing recognition. Qualitative study also shows that young people are hopeful and passionate about entrepreneurship, innovation, and community action, shows that youth want to change their neighborhoods. Some recent studies highlighted the role of young people in rural development through new technology and social networks (FAO, 2017; World Bank, 2018). The study also shows that systemic issues limit young people's involvement. Poverty, unemployment, and poor infrastructure have been consistently cited as major obstacles to rural development.

This analysis found that rural Bangladesh's primary concerns are reminiscent of long-standing structural issues. According to Hossain and Bayes (2019), poverty (68%) and unemployment (64%) continue to drive young people to cities, worrying the government. Thus, rural areas lose residents faster and local communities stop growing. Previous policy studies found governance and resource allocation issues (Ahmed et al., 2017). Inadequate infrastructure and healthcare access are major issues. In

2020, Chowdhury et al. found that corruption and political instability, highlighted by 41% and 38% of respondents, worsens these development issues and erode faith in institutions responsible for rural improvement.

The research project on youth assistance showed the importance of specialist education and skill development programs. The International Labour Organisation (2019) found that over 79% of respondents deemed education and skill training crucial to enable future generations to contribute. This confirms past findings that capacity building is crucial to rural youth potential. The need for easily available financing, government aid, and policy reforms means institutional enablers are essential to complement individual efforts to ensure long-term commitment (Khan et al., 2021), supports the preceding point.

Despite hurdles, rural development prospects are bright, applies notably to promoting entrepreneurship (73%) and improving agricultural practices (66%). Rural youth are open to innovation and market-oriented solutions, reflecting a global trend towards youth-led agribusiness and rural digital technology adoption (IFAD, 2020). This optimism shows that rural youth are open to innovation and market-oriented solutions. Moderate interest in tourism development (33%) and local governance (45%) show that young people have several options beyond established sectors.

The focus given to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) supports the integrated approach to rural development. High-quality education (28%) and poverty elimination (25%) were the top priority for rural transformation, emphasizing human capital development and poverty reduction, supporting international development goals like the UN 2030 Agenda, which prioritises education and equitable, sustainable growth (UN, 2015).

However, the analysis found limitations in awareness and program accessibility, which may restrict the impact of rural development initiatives. However, 51% of respondents said rural development is not realistic, casting doubt on current strategies. These attitudes require more inclusive and participatory government models that incorporate youth in decision-making, also stated by Chandra and Bhatnagar (2019).

Young people in Bangladesh desire to participate in sustainable rural development, but institutional barriers prevent them from doing so. This study shows that young Bangladeshis want to participate in sustainable rural development. Policymakers must embrace comprehensive programs that incorporate talent development, financial support, governance reform, and technical inventiveness to maximize this potential. These plans must work together. In a subsequent study, specific treatments to empower rural children will be evaluated and tracked longitudinally.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

These findings shed light on Bangladeshi youth views, challenges, and opportunities for sustainable rural development. Even though a large percentage of young people understand sustainable rural development, which includes agricultural progress, environmental protection, and social equity, the findings show that there are still many challenges. Rural communities must overcome several challenges to progress, including poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and governance concerns like rampant corruption and political instability. Youth are keen to participate in rural development activities despite their challenges, especially true for entrepreneurship, innovation, and community involvement. However, their lack of knowledge, skills, financial resources, and institutional aid makes it difficult for them to engage effectively. To maximise the potential of rural youth

as agents of sustainable development, these deficiencies must be filled comprehensively. Overall, this study shows how important it is to foster youth participation and support integrated rural development plans that align with national and global sustainable development goals. Urgent action is needed.

Recommendations:

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance youth participation in sustainable rural development in Bangladesh:

- i. To empower rural youth effectively and efficiently, education and skill development initiatives must be improved. Specifically for rural populations, these projects should be created. Customised vocational training in sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship, and digital technology will give young people the skills to actively contribute to rural development, enable them to actively improve rural areas. These programs should be developed and implemented in collaboration with NGOs, vocational institutes, and educational ministries.
- ii. Government support is essential for creating a youth-friendly environment. The relevant ministries and local authorities must ensure that policies are well-designed and well-implemented, with a focus on reducing bureaucratic barriers and preventing corruption. Young individuals interested in beginning their own firms will invest and innovate in their communities provided they have financial resources and streamlined regulations.
- iii. Financial institutions, youth organisations, and government agencies must work together to promote youth-led entrepreneurship, needed to reach the goal.

Mentorship, incubation centres, and easier access to capital can help young people turn their ideas into sustainable enterprises that boost their communities' economies.

- iv. Enhancing rural infrastructure is a top priority. Infrastructure improvements in roads, power, healthcare, and internet access will enable sustained growth. These activities will also improve rural residents' quality of life. These developments must be prioritised by infrastructure and health ministries.
- v. Awareness campaigns and community engagement are essential to teaching youth participation and responsibility. Civil society, educational institutions, and media outlets can work together to promote young participation in environmentally responsible rural development and encourage them to manage their communities and protect the environment.
- vi. Integrated development efforts require government, NGOs, the commercial sector, and international development partners to work together. Such undertakings cannot proceed without their help. Rural development can be comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable by aligning with national and global Sustainable Development Goals.

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