

Youth Volunteering in Bangladesh

This is a text written by Dulal Biswas a member, Bangladesh National Committee on IYV 2001 and Secretary General for the National Federation of Youth Organisations in Bangladesh (NFYOB).

In all over Bangladesh, today, a volunteer based self-reliant development movement is growing fast under the umbrella of National Federation of Youth Organizations in Bangladesh (NFYOB) and under the active guidance of the Department of Youth Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Bangladesh. This is different from the donor driven, dependent development approach.

The NFYOB envisions creating a self-reliant Bangladesh and thus focuses on the young people of the country. The young people account for one third of the total population. Youth of a nation has always been considered an 'untapped resource' which, if used, a miracle could happen. The NFYOB's ultimate goal is to generate a voluntary social development movement by youth. The methodology is strategic, participatory and different from traditional top-down, bureaucratic poverty alleviation program.

Bangladesh with a land mass of 147,570 square Km, is inhabited by a population of 130 million (in 1999) and has one of the highest population densities in the world:

A small band of indigenous middle class dominates the society of Bangladesh. Modernization introduced by the increasing of Radio, Television, satellite TV, Mobile phone and other mass media as well as cross-cultural contact. The Government's commitment to the development of youth has recently been focused in policy statements.

Bangladesh has a low-income economy and its human development index is also low. According to UN Human Development Report 2000, the HDI (Human Development Index) rank of Bangladesh was 146 out of 174 countries in the world. The estimated per capita GNP is \$ 270 and the GDP annual growth rate was 4.3% in the 1990's.

Rural lives are bounded by dependency; on the elders of the family, on the employer or village patron, or on some other authority figure. Loyalty to the group is an essential culture value. At the heart of things, people are warm and at times described as simple and inarticulate, but at the same time they are polite, courteous and hospitable.

Traditionally we hold a culture of voluntarism, what we consider today as voluntarism is actually the basic practices of our culture. In the past, helping others needed no definition or new terminology. It was considered as a part of life. Besides these, there are other forms of volunteering, such as, within the circle of the community, there are specific practices in which friends and members of the family aid one another during special events, such as weddings, funerals or birthdays.

There are social workers - they are the individuals who benevolently help the poor, widows, and who could not afford to take care of themselves. There are systems, the community would help the people who are not in a position to afford even the basic necessities of life. During the time of natural calamity and disaster, the community volunteers and social workers

even the people from all level act first to help the victims and they play a key role in facing the disaster and rehabilitation works for the victims.

Voluntarism has been described as the non-profit, non-wage and non-career action that individuals make for the well-being of their neighbor, community or society at large, it takes many forms from traditional customs of mutual self-help to community responses in times of crisis and effort for relief, conflict resolution and the eradication of poverty. Volunteering is also the basis of much of the activity of non-governmental organizations, professional associations, trade unions and civic organizations. Many campaigns in areas such as literacy, immunization and protection of the environment are crucially dependent upon volunteer effort.

According to the above conceptual background we found four tracks of volunteering present in Bangladesh.

1) Volunteering in GO/NGO: This type of volunteering is dominant in policy level. Though they are getting paid but they are often working from their vision, voluntarily for achieving the goals.

2) Volunteering in Community based organization: These are not NGO (not receiving funds from donors) rather they might be called as self help group. We usually recognize them as club, foundation, etc. In fact most of the volunteers in the country belongs to these group. NFYOB is a national network of these type of community based organization.

3) Volunteering through non-formal group: This group called 'non-formal' because they formed / emerged occasionally. For example, during natural disaster, political crisis, for setting up institutions (school, mosque, etc.). Their job is not recognized formally but they are making a great contribution in the society.

4) Individual volunteering: Thousands of volunteers are contributing to the society in Bangladesh. They are sometime not distinguished but they are active. In fact they are the real path creators for all other volunteers. They are volunteering their time, money and sometime their other resources too. We must say here that the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 was a result of thousands of volunteers who have dedicated their lives for the independence of Bangladesh.

There are other types of volunteering too. Scouts, Girls Guide, Bangladesh National Cadet Core, Ansar, Village Defense Party, Red Crescent Volunteers, Local Youth Clubs and few other organized volunteer organizations.

However, the definition of volunteering is yet to be resolved. Volunteering means different things to different people but most of the people consider volunteering the service given by an individual without any financial or materialistic gain or reward.

The National Federation of Youth Organisations in Bangladesh is a Partner organization of IYV2001 and a member of the National Committee on IYV2001. As the partner agency, we have distributed the information materials amongst the youth organizations, arranged meetings with the leaders of the youth organizations affiliated with our organization to disseminate the spirit of Youth Volunteering.

NFYOB has organized several programmes, such as: Youth fair, Discussion, Cultural Show on Global Youth Service Day, Youth Workshop, Training on

Youth Leadership Development , Workshop on Youth Changing the World and published Souvenir and Poster.

NFYOB has also been supporting the youth organizations in the area of planning and connecting them with government and non-government agencies in the country, so that they could smoothly run their community development and volunteer activities. Youth Federation is also providing help and cooperation to the youth and youth related organizations to plan and highlight community service projects on IYV.

It is to be mentioned that there are 5000 voluntary youth organizations affiliated under the Ministry of Youth. These organizations are engaged in various development activities voluntarily.

As special activities, NFYOB will award 10 youth leaders and organizers who have remarkable volunteer contributions towards the community and organize a Youth Symposium on Empowerment of Youth Volunteering. The symposium will be organized by the Federation as a closing event of the IYV 2001 on 5th December 2001.

We intend that these events will build insights on 'importance of youth volunteer activity to create a world free from poverty and deprivations'. It would be difficult to measure the intended success with any single indicator. We think the spill over benefit of inspiring and awakening youth and other people will create a great impact on our nation and us. We think, the news coverage and comments from intellectuals will express the success of the event on IYV. Also, another accomplishment will be that youth organizations and volunteers will be more interested in taking activity from the global perspectives. It is very important and you can see them by keeping in touch on a regular basis.

As it is mentioned above that IYV will create a spill over effect on our national youth movement and volunteering. It will inspire and empower the activists. After the event NFYOB will meet and formulate a follow up action plans, for example celebrating IV Day every year in Bangladesh with a colorful manner. Concrete actions will be taken like Road, Pool and Culvert Repairing, Slum Cleaning, Plantation, Environment Protection, Providing training on income generating activities, etc. throughout the year and beyond.