

# Policy Recommendations - Bangladesh



**Violent Extremism (VE) threatens the security and fundamental rights of peaceful living.** Youth are essential actors in contributing to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and peacebuilding work. Youth are not only highly affected by VE, but they also play an important role as positive change agents. The way youth resilience manifests is very much dependent on social, political, and economic factors. ALLY intends to amplify young people's constructive voices and agency in addressing diverse factors of violent extremist narratives in South Asia. The recommendations herein were produced by the ALLY youth researchers through an eight months long participatory research with multiple stakeholders, and with further contributions from ALLY staff and fellows.

The following recommendations for the government of Bangladesh would, if implemented, facilitate the increased engagement and impact of youth in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism in Bangladesh:

## Collaboration for Prevention of Violent Extremism

The government must collaborate with other stakeholders to conduct mass awareness campaigns and re-orient the public on peacebuilding, VE and de-radicalization, freedom of religion and belief, gender, and youth involvement. Special attention should be given to more remote and rural regions. Workshops, trainings, and orientation dialogues with government officials and trusted political and religious leaders would help increase understanding and efficacy of YPB initiatives and efforts. This would facilitate paths by which stakeholders may provide better administrative, financial, and moral support for peacebuilding initiatives.

## Amplifying Involvement of Cultural Activists and Artists

Cultural personnel (including musicians, singers, actors, models, and painters/artists) have an incredible influence on the public. Their actions, statements, and affiliations with social initiatives naturally draw more public attention and interest. Government agencies and celebrated non-profits have championed a few national peace programs, with promotions by public figures reaching millions at a time. Active involvement of such influencers in youth-led peacebuilding would enhance visibility and impact beyond the limited beneficiary community. In addition, it could also encourage greater collaboration between peacebuilders in different working areas, government organizations, and civil society actors.

## Integration of Peacebuilding related Content into Academic Curricula

Integration of peace, tolerance, inclusion, diversity, and global citizenship in the existing education curriculum would greatly facilitate peace and development programs in the long run. Applying a behavioral change approach to curricula by incorporating educational content on mutual understanding, empathy, and compassion would enhance PVE and peacebuilding efforts.

## Establishment of Government Database Containing Registration and Sector Specific Information

As youth-led organizations find legal registration difficult and confusing, a well-documented and updated, accessible framework with all necessary information on documents, links, and connections by the Bangladeshi NGO Affairs Bureau would help streamline the registration process.

## Creation of Local Funding Mechanism

With the diversion of international funding to battle the COVID-19 pandemic and the Rohingya Refugee crises, additional and sustainable local funding opportunities for PVE should be created. Besides fund-disbursing organizations, the private sector could contribute by assigning a part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) fund to the peace and development sector. The government database could help monitor transparent and neutral selection, disbursement, and usage mechanisms.



### Initiation of Investment into Joint Peace, Gender and Development Research

Peacebuilding initiatives should not be one-size fits all. Applying measures from another country will not suffice in Bangladesh. Local ownership is an essential feature of any feasible and sustainable PVE program. Evidence-based research is the most effective way to find local contexts and situations to target. While peace research exploring Bangladesh's local context has been building up slowly over decades, academic and organizational PVE research and practices must still be solidified. Moreover, even within the limited research conducted, gender-based analyses are still missing and the potential interlinkages between PVE and gender based violence could be further explored. Therefore, investing in collaborative research between YPBs, academia, and the national government would assist PVE programming and efficiency.

### Revision, Integration and Development of National Policy on Youth, Peace and Security

Lastly, having an inclusive national policy and national action plan on YPS reflecting the recommendations, opinions, and experience of YPBs would be a formal and dependable guideline for youth-led organizations and sustainable, successful programming.

#### Primary Enablers

- One of the key enablers for successful PVE work is young peacebuilders' high motivation and commitment to the work. However, in order to ensure sustainability for such programming there is need for **sufficient funding and strategic collaborations**.
- **Moral support** from peers, family, and faculty members is also crucial for the continuation of any peace program. VE is a sensitive and challenging issue.
- YPBs must receive moral, administrative, or financial support from their community, as well as religious and political leaders.
- **Recognition** from any government organization, senior official, or media house greatly improves and facilitates on-the-ground program implementation.
- Thus, **networking and collaboration** with political parties in power, influential or renowned CSOs, INGOs, media houses and public figures help reach broader stakeholders, especially for peacebuilders who work in rural areas.
- **Fellowships** and other learning exchanges and resources also enhance YPBs' organizational capacity.

#### Primary Barriers

- **Lack of initial funds** has been a significant barrier to PVE programs. With almost non-existent local sponsorship, youth-led organizations must be legally registered as NGOs to qualify for available international funds. This registration process, however, is bureaucratically complex, with incoherent and/or insufficient instructions available to YPBs on how to complete the registration process. Often, NGOs working on human rights, freedom of expression, and/or social and religious harmony, find it the most difficult to assist with the registration process.
- Thus, **most peace projects are run by volunteers**, exacerbating the common misconceptions that the peace and development sectors are risky and fruitless.
- **Stronger professional peacebuilders' networks**, improved access to resources, as well as greater support from local administrations and agencies are needed to enable youth-led peacebuilding. Other barriers to youth-led peacebuilding for PVE include distrust from local communities and leaders, gender-based prejudice, and threats from radical groups.