

Putting ideas to work

Youth design their own futures



design

act:onaid



Young people learn about social innovations to tackle youth unemployment in Uganda and Bangladesh
PHOTOS: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA / TAPASH PAUL

Youth courage:

The search for equality, dignified employment and social justice

Posted August 2015 by Sarah Huxley,
International Youth Policy Advisor

A young participant designs a security consultancy prototype for unemployed graduates.

PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA



data from the Afrobarometer collected across 34 African countries stated that there was little change in poverty at the grassroots after a decade of growth. Furthermore, the ILO data show that SSA has the highest rate of vulnerable employment in the world (77.4 percent in 2013). Vulnerable employment is defined as unpaid family workers and own-account workers as a percentage of total employment.¹

Big multinationals are creating growth for themselves and their shareholders only.

Youth unemployment is **one of the biggest social injustices of our time.**

It affects young people from all walks of life – informal street sellers on the streets of Lagos to recent graduates in Europe. Youth unemployment is an everyday drudging reality for 73 million plus young men and women worldwide (International Labour Organisation, 2013). It has an impact on health, education, family, resilience, and quality of life. It is a man-made disaster, which has ramifications not just for the young men and women

directly affected, but also their families who they support, and in the long term - their community and national development.

At the core of structural issues perpetuating and exacerbating youth unemployment (economic, social and political disempowerment) is the phenomenon of **jobless growth**. Economists define this as a prolonged period where the economy (macro economy) as a whole improves, but the unemployment rate remains high or continues to increase. There is no mythical neo-liberal trickle down. This is particularly evident in sub Saharan Africa (SSA), where “in 2013, survey

Greed, fear, a lack of vision on collective growth are a few reasons for this. Concepts of social obligations/ protection and respect for human rights might as well be a foreign language. But it is not enough to simply provide a job², they must be **‘decent jobs’**. Many young citizens we support are demanding social protection, raising welfare issues and lack of benefits and future training, need for ombudsmen, open data, **accountability forums** for youth unemployment funds etc. They are fed up with being pushed back, short term contracts, poor education, cronyism, patriarchy, patronage systems and not being heard.

1. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/africa-in-focus/posts/2014/01/30-jobless-growth-africa-sy> Since 2004 in SSA the economy (GDP) grew by 5 percent per year, but this rapid rate of growth did not benefit the largest share of the population, and in particular did not benefit youth – some of the largest sub populations.
2. ILO is often challenged for an over focus on NEET amongst youth employment statistics.

The alternative path is a human rights based approach to economics, the environment, politics and society.

Many young people already have such a vision in which a holistic education matches the skills needed in an evolving world: whereby they have a dignified job that they have the skills to maintain, and continue to fight for. And beyond their own environment they can connect; collectivise and support the livelihood rights of other young people. Youth

cannot really be “empowered” unless we challenge the power of those who are shutting their eyes, ears and minds to youth rights, and instead allow new ideas, solutions and humanity to be offered and brought to the fore.

Not only is this a moral obligation, but a long term development necessity. Not “only can poverty experienced in youth have implications across the life course of the young person, it can hinder the capacity of a young person to bounce back from deprivation suffered in childhood, and affect the long-term life chances of any dependents, including and

especially the young person’s own children.”³ Inequality breeds more deprivation, poverty and disenchantment. A long term strategy and vision built with young people needs to go beyond the short termism of corporate culture based on appeasing shareholders.

We have created a platform for some of our young partners to begin to present their alternative visions ...

They are not to blame: they are not idle, incapable nor passive. But they are questioning, provocative, courageous and keen to contribute, build and re-imagine.



Unemployment in Bangladesh



Female garment workers attend ActionAid supported Rights Cafe march to call for action and respect of the labour laws. PHOTO: NICOLA BAILEY/ACTIONAID

In Bangladesh more than half the population are unemployed. 8.6 million Bangladeshis have left the country in search of new opportunities abroad. The jobless generation is being fuelled by sustained poverty and the gap between education and work. There is a mismatch between the skills that young people offer and the ones that employees need. New technologies and start-ups are bridging the gap but the government must provide incentives for youth to stem the dramatic rate of unemployment.

Unemployment in Uganda



Ugandans wear black clothes to show their distaste for widespread corruption. PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Uganda has the youngest population in the world with young people under 30 making up 78% of the population.⁴ Youth unemployment is one of the highest in Africa with unemployment figures soaring to 62% while others place the figure nearer 83%. The growth in GDP has not boosted the labour market and severe poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities are forcing young people to seek work abroad. But the young unemployed in Uganda are so much more than statistics. Young mothers, bright graduates with no jobs, landless migrants, are increasingly and understandably frustrated.



3. http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/57Moore.pdf
4. According to national statistics from the Status of the Uganda Population Report 2012

Freda's story - "I fear for the future"

Freda Masse, age 27, arts graduate

"I can't provide for myself, my home and my family. Every morning, I wake up and worry about the day. What shall we eat?"

Before I know it my relatives, who associate education and prosperity, are calling for help. Once I visited my aunt to talk with her about a project. The entire household looked at me like I had gone to beg from them.

The Ugandan employment situation is alarming! So many youths have lost hope and passion. If the situation is not addressed then the country will never grow and develop.

"We need affirmative action on youth. Young people must be included in all government programming to improve their representation."



Freda Masse
takes part in
Design-a-Thon in
Kampala, Uganda'
PHOTO: EMMANUEL
MUSERUKA



Conrad takes part in Social Design a-Thon in Kampala, Uganda
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA

Conrad's story - "I am tired of my situation"

Conrad Abaho, age 23, accounting graduate from Western Uganda

"I can't afford accommodation, clothing, and food. Look at my shoe, it's worn out and I can't even afford the cost of mending it, let alone replacing it. I'm really tired of my situation!"

"It's a time bomb! If the Government does not address the situation, the hopelessness and suffering will increase. People will resort to stealing to make ends meet. The country is breeding thugs, if it does not address the unemployment problem."

"This training is good. I have come up with this brilliant idea of setting up a salon as a solution to unemployment. But the idea will stop in this conference room. There are no finances. How I wish we would not stop in this boardroom but move on to be supported to transform these ideas into reality."

Designing



ways out of complex social challenges ...

By Emer Beamer from Unexpect

The Design-a-Thon is a method for young people to **tackle social issues creatively** and come up with new insights and ideas.

Together with ActionAid International we worked with young people from the ActionAid networks in Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Kampala (Uganda) to tackle the issue of 'Work and employment opportunities for young people'.

In Bangladesh, young people make up 34% of the population, that is 55 million youth and in Uganda a staggering 78% of the population is under 35 years, the highest percentage in the world. Combine this with some of the highest unemployment rates in the world, especially in Uganda and you will appreciate that the social challenge at hand was highly complex.

Zap to Dhaka, June 2015 and Kampala July 2015, where teams of young people are developing their own unique persona. The personas we used were representative of the groups that ActionAid already work with in each country respectively. In Dhaka for example we had a persona called Jorina, who represented girls forced into early marriage. Jorina, now aged 20 has two children and her dream is to set up her own farming business. In Uganda we worked with personas such as Don Bosco, who



Prototype development of a sustainable irrigation system for North Uganda farmers.
PHOTO: EMMANUAL MUSERUKA

represented young male IDP's from the war in Northern Uganda, people who have often missed out on getting an education. Each persona had their own particular challenges and per persona we had a team who set out to understand their situation and their dreams and then come up with an innovative way for them to achieve that dream.

Interestingly the solutions the teams created in Dhaka and Kampala, while equally innovative, were both very different in terms of their innovations. In Dhaka there were a number of digital communication inventions in order to help young people overcome risks of failure and to more easily access work opportunities. For example one team created a mobile app for Lota's

persona which depicts the situation of a young woman who wished to move from a rural area into the city of Dhaka in order to get a job in the growing Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry. Typically such a young woman would face dangers such as harassment, low wages, and not knowing her rights. Through the mobile app she would find out information and be connected to and mentored by another young female who had already made this transition from a rural area to the city and worked in the garment industry.

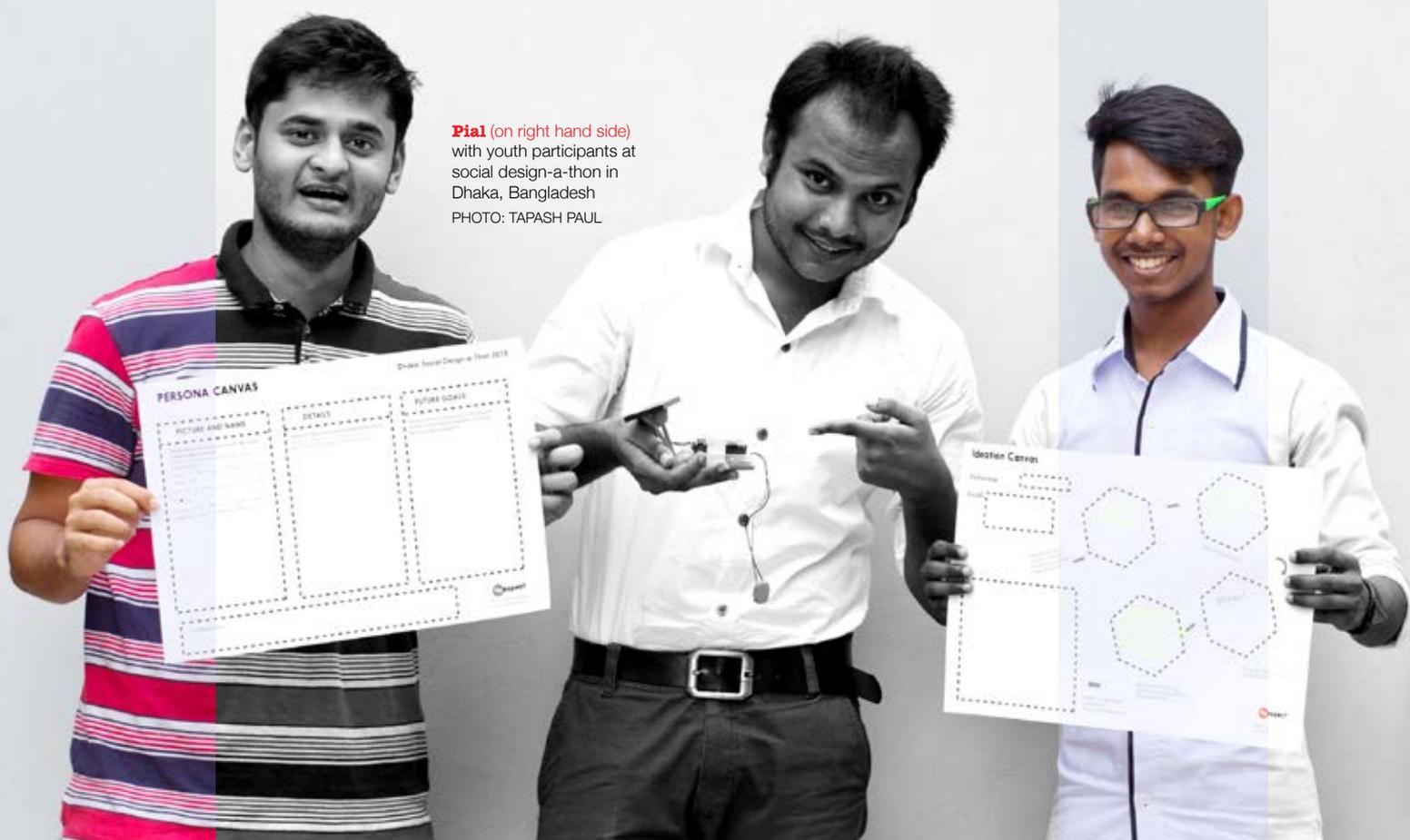
Meantime in Uganda a number of the innovations were systemic solutions and aimed to solve the persona's challenges from a number of perspectives. The team dealing

with the persona of IDP Don Bosco proposed that this person could only fulfil his dream of farming if the whole region were to prosper through an irrigation system, which would make use of the numerous lakes in Uganda. Through a series of dams, windmills, pumps and solar energy they devised a system, which could provide water to all small farmers in the region.

Yet again young people showed their creative capacity to both understand the lives of their counterparts and **devise innovative ways of improving their lives.**



A persona designed by youth participants at social design-a-thon in Kampala, Uganda
PHOTO: EMMANUAL MUSERUKA



Pial (on right hand side) with youth participants at social design-a-thon in Dhaka, Bangladesh
PHOTO: TAPASH PAUL

Pial's story - "I dream about doing something that can benefit me and society."

Pial Kanu Dey, Grade 10 Student, age 17, from Sutrapur-Ghuntighor Urban Slum (Dhaka), Bangladesh

"I dream about doing something that can benefit me and society. In the future, I'd like to create a mobile phone social enterprise. In Bangladesh, mobile phones are an essential part of people's lives but unfortunately many electronic parts are unavailable in the local market. I want to produce mobile phone software and microelectronic hardware in Bangladesh so we don't have to import these from outside the country. I think the government should provide skills and training to help young people like me."



Reflections:

“Creating employment opportunities for the next generation”

By Sesheeni Joud Selvaratnam, Youth Advisor for ActionAid Bangladesh

In early June, more than 20 enthusiastic youth joined a Social Design-a-Thon focused on **sharing, learning and creating employment and livelihoods opportunities for young people.**

The participants were provided with scenarios based on existing realities for young people both in rural and urban communities. These focused on issues of migration, working in the garment sector, managing a household and exploring opportunities for indigenous and people with disabilities. Innovative solutions included a

mini-bus utilising solar power, having a cold storage to facilitate the sale of agricultural produce, the use of mobile apps where customers could share information on new social enterprises, and creating a lucrative livestock enterprise in the country which can export meat to the region. The participants focused on the need to build the capacity at local levels so that more young women and men could be supported. They felt that the private sector could also provide professional training, skills development and facilitate loans for those interested in starting their own enterprises. Given the large number of young women and men keen to seek employment opportunities in East Asia and the Middle East, participants were keen to highlight the need to

provide information to not only urban but also rural locations.

Many of the youth participants took the opportunity to establish networks with others and also learn about the existing services of other organisations. Going forward, I foresee ActionAid having a stronger role in connecting and establishing networks between young partners and organisations who are already working in the country. These networks could be a source of inspiration, guidance and also mentoring and coaching. I hope this workshop will be replicated in other areas of the country in order to establish priorities for youth employment in Bangladesh.

[Link to videos](#)

“Space to innovate, create and think”

By Andrew Karamagi, young lawyer, Uganda

These workshops enabled young people to innovate, create and think. They were given the space to come up with enduring solutions to questions on unemployment.

Advancements in technology present inexhaustible opportunities, and can help provide solutions to unemployment. Technology in Uganda offers a gateway to national, regional and global networks which young people can tap into.

Youth unemployment is driven by unequal power relations within the

family but it's also fuelled by the lack of confidence and will from young people to succeed. To alleviate the unemployment problem in Uganda the government needs to create a sense of civic duty and build young people's self-esteem to unlock their potential.

The structural bottlenecks such as an unfair taxation regime can always be tackled through activism, and lobbying state institutions but it's important to

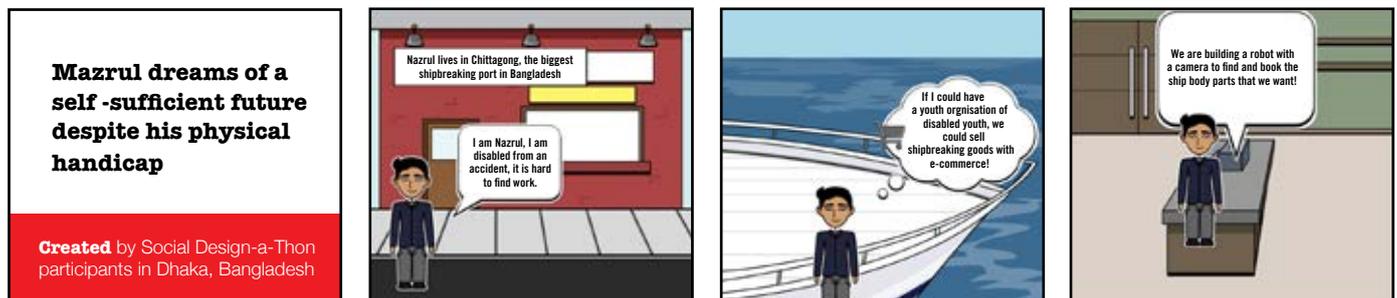
develop young people so that they are able to achieve their goals.

ActionAid needs to help nurture, develop and sustain the solutions generated in these workshops. We need to help connect these brilliant young minds and ideas with other potential partners and sectors, and help turn these ideas into a reality.

Link to video: [TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT IN UGANDA](#)

Link to website: [HTTP://WWW.UYONET.OR.UG/](http://www.uyonet.or.ug/)

Storyboarding ideas to tackle youth unemployment



Illustrations showing different youth personas'



Persona illustrating an unemployed graduate who establishes a security consultancy.
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA



Persona illustrating refugees who were able to marry following the success of his irrigation system.
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA

Rashedul's story - "More action is needed to tackle unemployment"

Md. Rashedul Hassan, Employment Support Officer (ESO),
Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs, Bangladesh

"After I graduated, I struggled to find work. I was lucky to find a role at UCEP Bangladesh providing young people with the skills and knowledge to get a job. As a result, some youth have gone on to set up their own small businesses. However more action is needed from the government to help tackle unemployment. In Bangladesh more than half the population are unemployed. If these young people were able to get jobs then our gross national product would increase."

Rashedul with youth participants at social design-a-thon in Dhaka, Bangladesh
PHOTO: TAPASH PAUL



Agatha's story - "Even with an Agriculture degree, I am jobless"

Agatha Akankunda, age 26, agriculture graduate

"I've been unemployed since I graduated nearly three years ago. Back in school, our teachers told us to aim for science courses as they were more marketable in the job market. It turns out that this is a myth!"

The greatest challenge I face being unemployed is that I'm now a disappointment to my family. They invested everything they had in my education, hoping that I would grow up, get a job and support my siblings. Today, I'm still at home and my parents are struggling to support my siblings in school."

Agatha Akankunda presents employment ideas at the Social Design-a-Thon in Kampala, Uganda
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA



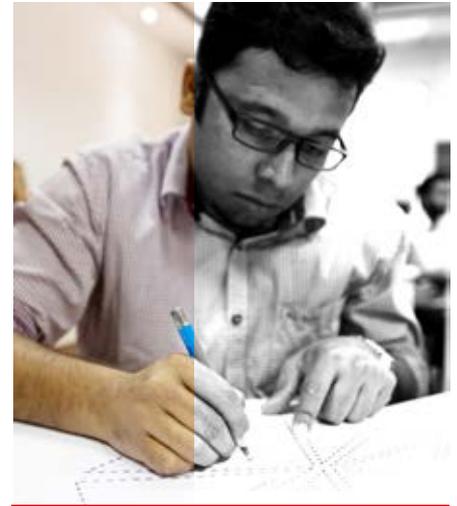
Conclusion



Laboni Kanto Bak, Indigenous Youth Volunteer, age 22, from Joypurhat, Bangladesh
PHOTO: TAPASH PAUL



Conrad, participant of the workshop in Kampala, Uganda
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA



Khaled Mahmood, Senior Manager, Youth Program, JAAGO Foundation, Bangladesh
PHOTO: TAPASH PAUL

“Who could have thought that an ordinary indigenous girl would be able to produce both woven material and electricity in the same handloom enterprise? Such social enterprises will be helpful in employing even more girls in the future. At the moment the community is held back due to the lack of education and financial resources but these enterprises offer a new solution. Even young men can participate since they have no jobs or sources of income.”

Laboni Kanto Bak, Indigenous Youth Volunteer, age 22, from Joypurhat, Bangladesh



“I’ve learnt that I need to change my environment and create my own opportunities rather than waiting for others or the government to make changes. I’ve become innovative and inventive and learnt skills to help set up new small scale businesses. With collective efforts we are able to realise our dreams and work together towards achieving them.”

Conrad, participant of the workshop in Kampala, Uganda

“From my point of view, the issue of unemployment has been tackled because I learnt to task my mind, be creative, innovative and think critically. I have come up with great ideas which I believe and know will bring an end to unemployment. The only thing left to do is to implement these ideas!”

Freda Masse, participant of the workshop in Kampala, Uganda

“In Bangladesh, young people are disconnected from decision making, and half of the population remain unemployed. It’s time that we tackled the situation and valued young people for their innovation. Otherwise in the long term the country will not be able to produce good indicators of development.”

Khaled Mahmood, Senior Manager, Youth Program, JAAGO Foundation, Bangladesh

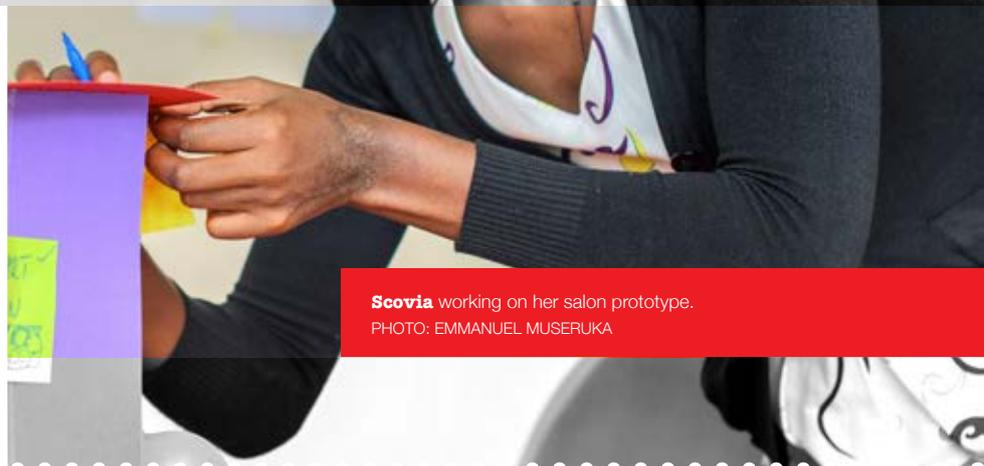


Young refugee persona from the Uganda workshop
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA

Scovia's story - "How can we be more enterprising?"

Scovia, unemployed mother from Kampala, Uganda

"I graduated 5 years ago but I'm still unemployed. I am constantly told to 'go and rear animals – go and dig, but where? I wanted to apply for the 5 million [referring to the Youth Venture capital Fund] but I had to have 3 referees and a bank account. You must have a registered company but to get a company you need to pay somebody. If we are to help ourselves then we need to be objective. The government should support us more. On top of everything there is tax, rent, electricity etc and these are not regulated. How else do you want us to be more enterprising?"



Scovia working on her salon prototype.
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA

What next?

In ActionAid we are beginning our international analysis of how we can meaningfully contribute to the pain and injustices of youth unemployment.

These two experimental workshops were the beginning for us to listen to, support and begin to understand what our framing on youth unemployment in the context of a creative and human rights based approach should be. It was captivating to learn of suggestions on how to take a human rights lens to employment - one that goes beyond the 'decent work agenda': there were ideas of collective fundraising (via the saloon prototype), employment and refugee rights (the irrigation model), and the role of the state and how young people can make national funds more effective and usable.

A huge thank you to all the co-facilitators, participants, Emer Beamer from Unexpect - a Design-a-Thon consultancy and the young photographers for their time, energy and commitment. Our national offices commit to furthering their work on youth livelihoods and economic empowerment.

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More Storyboarding ideas ...

This is a story of Jorina, who is a married farmer with two children in the North of Bangladesh, her dream is to have a meat and milk business.

Created by Social Design-a-Thon participants in Dhaka, Bangladesh



A young woman learns city skills to build her rural community

Created by Social Design-a-Thon participants in Dhaka, Bangladesh

