



Graduate School of Development Studies

FOR WHOM IT MATTERS? :
Theory of youth development and Information &
Communication Technologies,
And voices of rural youth in Bangladesh

A Research Paper presented by:

Kanako Ohara
(Japan)

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialisation:
Children and Youth Studies
(CYS)

Members of the examining committee:

Dr. Linda Herrera
Dr. Anirban Dasgupta

The Hague, The Netherlands
November, 2008

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Inquiries:

Postal address: Institute of Social Studies
 P.O. Box 29776
 2502 LT The Hague
 The Netherlands

Location: Kortenaerkade 12
 2518 AX The Hague
 The Netherlands

Telephone: +31 70 426 0460

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

Acknowledgements

First and foremost my profound gratitude goes for Linda, my supervisor who has guided me through the entire research process. Her encouragement and support, especially at the time of difficulties and challenges, have given me a lot of strength in conducting this research. I am also grateful for Anirban for precious comments that have inspired me.

I appreciate all my interviewees who have shared their life experiences. I would like to thank my friend Vashkar for supporting me during my stay in Chittagong, and all the cheerful staffs from YPSA who have welcomed me and helped me have pleasant stay in Sitakund. Special thanks for Sanjoy, who was my interpreter for the interviews, Harun Bhai for hospitality and Arifur bhai for allowing me the opportunity to conduct this research. My gratitude also extends to my friend Imam and his wife Saida, for hosting me during my stay in Chittagong and sharing priceless moments.

The journey of research would not have been completed without warm friendship of CYS family; Ana, Eugene, Grace, and Nurman for teaching me joy of sharing, Lara for encouragement and useful advice, Gerald for sharing life views and Rediet, Taro and Lucie for bringing laughter and support. I am also grateful for Amrita for always giving me love and care.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my ninety year old grandfather who has always encouraged me from far away, my grandmother, my father, mother and brother for constant encouragement for me to achieve my goal.

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List of Acronyms

Acronyms	Name	Category
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics	Government
HDI	Human Development Indicators	
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies	
MDG	Millennium Development Goals	Publication
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations	Development Organization
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	International Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	International Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations	International Organization
WDR	World Development Report	Publication
WYR	World Youth Report	Publication
YCMC	YPSA Community Multimedia Centre	Grassroot Organization
YPSA	Young Power in Social Actions	Grassroot Organization

Abstract

The growing number of today's youth worldwide, and proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have been the subject of development discourses in recent years. Much of the debate has revolved on how the diffusion of technologies would best serve the development of a society. Recognizing youths' inclination to engage in the use of new technological devices such as internet or mobile phones, it has pushed development agencies to bring ICTs to deprived areas of the world in an effort to incorporate young people into its development agendas. In some cases however, development strategies by donor agencies do not coincide with young people's expectations, especially in rural settings where bulk of the donor funding is funnelled. Failing to capture young people's own perspective in the specific context may cause serious mismatch with conceptualization of youth and ICT put forward by the international agencies. Based on case study of an NGO in rural Bangladesh, this research tries to bring in the voices of young people. The lives of youth in a rural setting still governed by traditional norms and values, with regard to ICTs as well as other spheres of everyday lives then, have uncovered certain changes that youths seem to be going through in remote areas of Bangladesh today. It is an entry point to rethink youth development, and lived experiences of young people in rural Bangladesh.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background : Youth and Technology in 21st century

There has been a growing attention on youth as one of the focal points in current development agenda, due to the sheer large proportions of youth in the developing world. There are 1.6 billion young people (between the ages of 12-24), of which 1.3 billion live in developing countries (WDR 2007). They represent the “youth bulge”, an indication of the demographic characteristic of the large number of young people in the world today. According to the *World Development Report 2007*, the number is said to be at its peak now or will reach the peak in the next 10 years in many parts of the world (*Ibid.*).

Parallel to the emerging focus on the cohort of youth today, there has been an explosion of information and communication technology (ICT) since the 1990's (WDR 2007:62) Young people are said to be engaging with using media devices in various innovative ways that was perhaps not possible were it not for the proliferation of ICT (Bell 2005: 12; Pleyers 2005:140; WYR 2005). While great emphasis has been placed on ICT as a new arena for youth participation and/ or a source of enhancing skills needed for attaining jobs, there is also the emerging problem of a digital divide¹ in the world, among those who have access to new media and those who do not (Keniston 2004; Saith and Vijayabaskar 2008). For example, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007 indicates that over half of the population in industrialized nations has access to internet while only 9 per cent do in the developing countries, and only 1 percent of population among 50 least

¹ There are three level of digital divide; 1) between the rich, educated and the powerful and those who are not within every nation 2) linguistic and cultural differences within nations 3) between the rich nations and the developing nations (Keniston ,2004, 13-14).

developing countries (MDG Report 2007: 32). Due to lack of resource mobilization power of the state, some local NGOs have been directly accepting funding from donor agencies in an effort to bring about changes by implementing ICT infrastructures. As a result, globalization spurred by ICTs has been starting to reach the most remote areas and the people, through interventions mediated by various private, public and non-governmental organizations along with commercial oriented ICT media market expansion (SIDA 2005).

It needs to be clear however, that while there has been a growing number of evidences especially of how Western and urban youth have been engaging with new technological tools, young people in rural area of Bangladesh for instance are also experiencing this global trend and transitions however invisible it is on the surface. Traditional social structure that is sometime attributed to social inequality among gender or disability, ethnic minority and other diversifying socio-economic differences among people in rural Bangladesh needs to be taken on board when considering different patterns of interaction between young people and ICTs. It helps understand the diversifying experiences of youth especially in rural context which seems to be under-focused regardless of the fact that many youths still reside in rural area in a country like Bangladesh, and perhaps in many other less industrialized countries as well. The purpose of this research paper therefore, is to capture the evolving debates on young people and ICT, and to better understand the felt life experiences of rural youth in a specific context, within framework of theory and practice.

In this paper, the first chapter introduces to readers broad background of the issue, and proceeds to narrowing down the problems, leading to main research questions and methodologies necessary to achieve the objective of the research. Analytical frameworks on exploring the problem and approaches constructed upon concepts of

young people today will be presented in Chapter two, followed by in-depth analysis of youth development issue with a focus on current debate and trends, in Chapter three. Chapter four introduces a more detailed background of social and geographical factors in the researched area. Chapter five then aims to interpret the voice of young people, with careful attention on their interaction with technological tools and spaces that they gain access to, including issues surrounding gender. As conclusion, Chapter six aims to juxtapose theory and reality in an effort to answer the main driving question of the research.

1.2 Bangladesh at a glance

Bangladesh has 140 million people, as one of the most densely populated countries in the world. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the rural population was 104 million in 2004 while 99 million in 2000, and urban population was 32 million in 2004, risen from 30 million in 2000. The statistics shows that nearly one third of the total population are aged from 15 to 29 (BBS 2007). From this we could infer that Bangladesh has a relatively large number of young people living in rural area, correlating with the world youth trend and possible involvement in ICTs.

Despite rising GDPs in recent years, Bangladesh is facing rapid urbanization and an increasing number of people living under the poverty line. This is partly due to the exacerbation of political and economic instability especially accelerated in recent years. Moreover, traditional norms and values based on religious views are still deeply embedded in the everyday lives of Bangladeshis, resulting in yet still high gender inequality in terms of mobility and decision-makings. (HDR2000 ; Balk 1997)

In terms of ICT related infrastructure, households with electricity remains at 44% and internet is even more scarce in remote areas, while telephone lines and mobile phone centres have reached much of rural areas of the country (BBS, 2007). As national policy suggests, introduction of ICT has been put as one of the primary visions as key driving element for socioeconomic development of the country. However, in Bangladesh only 3 people per 1,000 of the population has access to the internet in 2005 (HDI Bangladesh 2007/2008). According to UNESCO Dhaka, there is about 1100 telecentres throughout Bangladesh, most of which established by Grameen group ². These mostly business-oriented telecentres, aim to promote business enterprise, youth entrepreneurship, computer skills training, and access to information. Considering the flow of funding and investment especially in rural Bangladesh, it requires us to take a careful look at its implication onto young people, and the youth bulge in Bangladesh.

1.3 Case Study, Young Power in Social Action

Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), a local-based Non Governmental Organization, was established in 1985 with young people working towards establishing more equitable society in Chittagong regions. It envisions a society without poverty where everyone's basic needs and rights are ensured (YPSA, 2008).

The Youth Led Community Multimedia Centre (YCMC) was established in 2003 through UNESCO crosscutting theme initiative on ICT for poverty reduction (UNESCO, 2006, 116). It was followed by the establishment of the similar centres at two other areas outside of Sitakund; Alekdir and Shahetkalhi. In 2005, UNESCO Delhi office has

² Grameen telecentres have been mainly established by Grameen Cyber Society, a not-for profit organization geared towards income generation and lifelong learning through ICTs in rural Bangladesh.

supported YPSA to build infrastructure and production system, especially focusing on computer skills training, innovative approaches such as documentary film creation and street theatre to promote participation and capacity of local young people. YPSA's vision on its centre is;

This project aims to reduce poverty through ensuring digital opportunities for the rural poor especially disadvantaged youths and adolescents. It intends to innovate and research combined technological and social strategies to place information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the hands of the poor and to create ICT-based employment opportunities for disadvantaged youths through skill development on the use of digital tools.(YPSA homepage)

Centred on this vision, it tries to reach rural youth in Sitakund area, focusing on its development vision as it will be discussed more in the coming chapters.

1.4 Process of problematization and Approach

Being Japanese, conducting a research on Bangladesh was a challenge as I may be less familiar with various contextual factors from the country. Yet my interest in Bangladesh derives from my half a year stay working for a local NGO in South of Bangladesh in 2003. This opportunity has allowed me to work in rural areas mostly with children and young people. Following the experience, I had worked on different development projects in and out of Japan, mainly with donors in Japan while keeping in close contact with local partners or NGOs in implementing projects.

Having such background, at the beginning of research process, I had a personal interest in looking into the use of documentary film contents creation by youth. The NGO of my case study, YPSA had been working on this project as one of their innovative approaches to rural youth development. While not being an expert of ICT as such, I felt

the need to explore the new technological tools that seem to contain great potential for enhancing people's capacity with its multi-functionality. ICT and media govern our daily lives, be it in Japan or Bangladesh, shaping our knowledge and behaviours in multitude of modes. Being eager to know more about the documentary films made by rural youth, I was ready to begin the research to explore the prospective of innovative use of ICT in rural setting. However, as I try to gain more knowledge on their activities before going to the field research, I have come to learn that this documentary film activity had been halted for some reasons and the project was not taking place any longer. Not knowing the precise reason, I have then become aware of certain dilemmas in the scene. On one hand, there is a hype of bringing technological devices especially to rural areas where even basic infrastructure is scarce, and on the other hand, there seems to be contextual reality that may hinder to bring about prospects and the changes that these ICT tools are said to bring to rural youth. Manuel Castells asserts that technology is a tool interwoven in the society, but that technology alone does not determine the society, as interaction between people and other factors bring about outcomes in social change. (1996,5). It helped myself to carefully rethink on different levels and actors in pursuing the issue of ICT and youth, as they have direct implication to felt experiences of young people. Many say "Of course theory is one thing, and reality is another thing". Unfortunately in many cases it is true, but I problematize the fact that the duality of theory and reality embedded within development is often taken for granted and not questioned further. Having realized that in the early process of research, I have decided to set out my research based on an assumption that there is certain disparity between what has been conceptualized in regard to youth and ICT on a policy level in development agendas, and what is actually going on in the reality on the ground.

1.5 Objective of the research

The research aims to explore three levels of perceptions in regard to youth and ICT; that of international development agencies on top policy levels, an NGO as an intermediary actor, and youths themselves. It looks into how current youth development and ICT are conceptualized and put forward by influential development agencies, namely UNESCO, World Bank, and UNDP, in comparison with existing “reality” in rural setting of Bangladesh, with a special focus on young people’s everyday life experiences and role that an NGO is playing in the scene. Young people’s lived experiences would be analyzed through the lenses of “ICTs” in relation to society surrounding them. In doing so, the research aims to better understand the relevance of mainstream conceptualization of youth and ICT to rural youth in Bangladesh.

1.6 Research Questions

Main Question

How relevant are the current debates on youth and information and communication technology (ICT) in International development agenda, for young people in rural Bangladesh?

Sub-Research Questions:

- What are the underlining assumptions and approaches set by international Agencies towards ICT and young people?
- What are the interests in regard to ICTs by different actors? (Donors, NGO, market and youth themselves)

- Is ICT likely to bring about skills and knowledge necessary for employment and participation?
- What are the expectations of local youth in participating in this NGO activity?
- What factors determine youth participation and autonomy in rural setting especially with regard to gender differences?

1.7 Primary Data

- Semi-structured, small focus group discussion

I have interviewed eighteen youths who participate at three different multimedia centres of YPSA; ten participants (six girls, four boys) aged 16-27, at Sitakund Youth led Community Multimedia Centre, four members (two girls, two boys) from Shahetkali community centre, and four (two girls, two boys) from Alekdir multipurpose cyclone shelter.

Initially I was planning to have one-to-one semi-structured interview. However the participants did not have enough time before and after the PC course they were attending. Additionally, shyness was common especially with girls when they face with a foreigner as well as an interpreter who was male. I therefore decided to take small focus-group discussions to facilitate them to speak. Bringing in the voice of youths and their own perspective is important as UNESCO 2003 notes, “Regrettably, in the dialogue on digital culture and bridging the digital divide, the perspectives and opinions of children and young people are often disregarded, and efforts are rarely made to observe these phenomena from within the context of their living environment” (317). In the analysis part, pseudonym is applied to protect their anonymity. (Please see Annex for list of questions)

- **Participant observation**

I have spent one week at YCMC in Sitakund. During my stay, while I was not conducting any interview, I had done participant observation of computer lessons that the youth were attending, to see interaction patterns between the members. Subtle socialization pattern could this way be analyzed, as some of the sensitive issues that pertain to social and cultural taboo or norms may not be openly expressed by young individuals especially girls. As Laws suggests that the presence of observer may influence the setting and the way people's behave, observation was carried out not to disturb their computer course as much as possible (2003: 304). Combined with focus group discussions, it helped for cross-cutting analysis in regard to their behaviours related to ICT, especially in space provided by an NGO.

- **Semi-structured Interviews with YPSA staff**

Interview with NGO staffs was aimed at exploring aspects of how they try to incorporate conceptualization of youth and ICT in their activities, and what are the elements that have been hinder them / or making them successful in the project in the village. Interview was made on one-to-one basis, to a Programme manager of Sitakund YCMC field office, one staff who is conducting the computer trainings for the participants, and one field officer of Development Initiative for Social Change programme in Sitakund. It was done so in order to gain broader view on the issue from NGO perspective, which may be in struggle to accommodate donor ideology as well as existing needs of young people.

- **Semi-structured interview with a staff of UNESCO-Dhaka office**

I have discussed with one Information and communication officer from UNESCO Dhaka office, a Bangladeshi national. Historically, many NGOs in Bangladesh have been nurturing strong partnership with international donor agencies and they are regarded as central players in carrying forward its broad goals (Feldman 2003:13). The interview analysis of a staff does not mean to represent whole ideology and approach by UNESCO, but more as to gain cross-cutting perspectives on the issues from different levels.

1.8 Secondary Data

In regard to youth and ICT, some of the most influential actors of development have been UNESCO and the World Bank, followed by numerous official development agencies. The way in which youth and ICT are captured and conceptualized in current development agenda would be critically analyzed using World Youth Report 2003, 2005, and 2007 by UNESCO, as well as World Development Report 2007 by the World Bank, which especially highlights the growing number of young people in the world today. In addition, the UNDP publication on “Access to Information (2003)” will be also used to better understand how ICT is positioned in development.

The importance of looking at the Reports as an analysis tool of rural youth and ICT is because trends in youth discourse strongly influence the way in which the development practitioners, such as local NGOs adopt the notion and approach articulated in the international agendas, contextualizing it in their own manner under their capacity. Translated in such a way through different levels by different actors, how “ICT” is introduced on the ground may not necessarily coincide with the interest, demands or

practicability in the eyes of rural youth themselves. In order to explore the discrepancy as well as compatibility between conceptualization of youth and the reality of rural youth, it is crucial to correctly capture the set agendas constructed by these international agencies.

1.9 Limitations

Language is one of the major limitations at the time of my field research, as I speak very little of local language and required an interpreter for all the interviews. To overcome this limitation, I have had meetings and discussion over the issue with the interpreter prior to and after the interviews. Being a foreigner may have hindered my understanding and ability to analyse local cultural norms and values. However, it could be the advantage to see the environment and how people interact with each other in more objective manner, without being barred by cultural biases of the locality. Moreover, it was also not easy to have girls talk openly as my interpreter was male. To overcome some of the limitations, I had engaged in participant observation to gain alternative perspectives in this regard.

Another limitation is that as it is the case study and limited number of interviewees was involved so that generalization could not be made. The findings therefore may not be sufficient to justify representing all the “rural youth” or UNESCO approach per se. However, precisely because the issue is less discussed and researched through the eyes of youth, it is the aim and strength of this research to bring new perspectives on youth development and ICTs.

Chapter 2 Analytical frameworks

Centered on the concepts of youth, and Information and Communication Technology, the analysis of the rural youth in relation to new media tools as well as its global perspectives would be explored on the basis of a discussion on Human Capital theory and Citizenship of young people.

2.1 Conceptualizing “Youth and ICT”

In the discourse, *youth*³ as a category has often been regarded in relation to the category of adulthood, supposing that they would eventually reach adulthood (Wyn 1997: 11). Many of the contemporary theories of youth derive from Social Darwinism, referring to the changes young people are said to go through according to age strata, likened to Darwin’s biological adaptation of people (2005 Tyyska: 4). One of the perspectives that emerged from Social Darwinism is the Functionalist point of view, in which youth are regarded as a stage to learn to function properly in conformity with a given society, thereby stressing the mechanism of control over young people especially through social institutions such as schools (*Ibid*). Furthermore, a life-course perspective developed during the 1980’s is also rooted to social Darwinism, placing young people in a transition to adulthood in relation to further stages of work and family (6). As a result, youth are often seen as requiring guidance and expert attention to instruct them to become “proper” adults, hence denying

³ While the United Nations defined youth as aged 15-25, The World Development Report notes that 12-24 years as the relevant age range to cover the transitions from puberty to economic independence, implying this period would be considered “youth” (Tyyska 2005, WDR 2007)

their agency, with which one autonomously acts upon decisions made by one's own will (*Ibid.*).

Others assert that youth is a social process in which age is socially constructed, stressing the need to pay careful attention on diversifying cultural or social backgrounds and institutions that affect how "youth" is viewed, treated, and constructed in a given context rather than following the Western centred notion of age strata and life stage theories (Bucholtz 2002: 526; Tyyska 2005: 4; Wyn&White 1997) Based on this argument, there has been a new attempt to look at youth as currently "being" focusing on present state, rather than "becoming" focusing on the future (Ansell 2005 :21).

Drawing on an example of drastic change in young people's social positionality in colonial Africa, Tyyska asserts that the social position of youth is a comprehensible result of important social changes, which inevitably have an impact on the role of young people (2005:9). Today, globalization could be best described as a force that is transforming the positionality and roles of world's youths. ICT, spurred by globalization, has also been restructuring forms of production and consumption, identities and citizenships across the world (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 25). While globalization does seem to leave large impact on the role of young people across the globe, what needs to be recognized is that young people are not only the social product of globalization, but that young people themselves actively take part in the process of going beyond conventional space/ time boundaries, creating novel pathways for change in their own society.

Before moving on to youth and ICT as a basis of analytical framework, there is a caution to be made when talking about "ICT". The word "ICT" is often used as a fuzzy word without much clarification of what it actually is. How ICT is captured, especially related to youth, by scholars and development actors alike often tends to be associated with

“computer and internet”. This comes from an unbalanced proliferation of ICT devices as well as the amount of research done in the West, although youth from larger parts of the world still do not have access to such means of communication. Having noted that, in this analytical framework, ICT is yet used in general and broader sense.⁴ This includes all the digitalized information and communication technologies such as computers and internet, as well as other modes of information dissemination devices such as TV, Radio, and mobile phones. In the field analysis in chapter 4, what is “ICT” for young people would be narrowed down, such as mobile phones and computers, giving more weight on contextuality and diversifying meanings that young people experience.

Availability of ICTs and new media technologies are said to have helped shape young people’s activism and political participation which differs from conventional political activities such as voting and youth parliament (Kovacheva 2005; WYR 2005:122). SIDA, Swedish international development Cooperation Agency considers sphere of culture and media as one that allows for self-expression, participation and knowledge sharing that may lead to realising human rights, aiming at poverty alleviation (SIDA 2006). Media contents provided through ICT devices such as TV or internet is regarded as a force to forge our identities, values, sense of selfhood and beliefs, sometimes having pedagogical force, sometime perpetuating inequality with controlled influences (Kellner 1995: 5). Having noted such views, some argue that today’s “global media culture” strongly characterized by ICT could be a positive tool for development to alleviate poverty, while others negatively regard it as influencing individuals especially youth to become passive consumers in the growing media culture (UNESCO 2006: 2). Paul Willis criticizes such “production oriented

⁴ SIDA has defined ICT into three categories; 1-new ICTs (computers, mobiles etc), 2 Old ICTs (Radio, landline phones etc.), 3 Really Old ICTs (newspapers, books etc.)(SIDA, 2005,16).

pessimists” that they dismiss “the process and activities whereby human beings actively and creatively take up the objects and symbols around them for their own situated purposes of meaning-making” (2003:516). He then exemplifies how young people actively appropriate the new ICT related products and messages, not just passively consuming them (*Ibid*). Such approach to youth weighs more on the on-going process of cultural and political elements of change than quantified socio-economic growth in the future (Herrera 2006: 1426). In sum, today, media-driven consumer culture is a resource of youth identity formation and arena for youth to exercise their participation in larger world, while also being targeted as consumers of their commodities by market economy (Kenway and Bullen 2001:524; WYR 2005).

Having noted that, it is also important to be reminded of flow of investment in “deprived” areas to promote youth participation in new media. Here I lay out two forces working towards young people- one is *donor-driven* ICT interventions mediated especially through donors and NGOs, and another is *market-driven* ICT introduction, both especially aimed for young people but emerging with different packages of motives as well as conceptualization of young people. Thus it is of importance to carefully distinguish the experiences and expectations of young people through activities and spaces surrounding these new technological tools, placed before them with varying packages, as will be discussed in the coming chapters.

2.2 Youth as Human Capital

As one of the concepts that seem to dominate today’s view on young people, the human capital approach is crucial especially in understanding the government policy or donor

interventions. Human capital refers to the knowledge, information, skills and health of individuals (Becker 2006: 292). To invest in young people as Human Capital means to ensure their health and education that leads to successful employment, successful citizenship and / or healthy family life, and it is regarded as indispensable form of capital in modern economics (WDR 2007; Becker 2006: 293). Pointing out the growing number of primary education achievement in the world, the World Development Report asserts now the need for young people to be “equipped with advanced skills beyond literacy” to survive through competitive global economy, as well as to avoid “social unrest that could dampen the investment climate and growth” (WDR 2007: 4). ICT is said to be one of the important components of education in this respect, as skills to utilize ICT are required as the economy becomes more globalized and speedy (Becker 2006: 293; UNESCO 2007). In this manner, government and policy makers are pressed to make sure of the investments and efforts to build the basis that could maximize the capability of young people.

As part of criticism of human capital theory, it is useful to bring in the notion of human development. It denies assumption that economic growth will automatically translate into human progress, which promotes enlargement of people’s choices (Ul Haque, 1998: 14). In this theory, economic growth is regarded essential but not sufficient, as growth may not necessarily lead to equal distribution of wealth, leaving existing structural inequalities intact. Equity in access to certain opportunity by marginalized people for instance, is essential part of human development, and such process may not be reflected in the end results of economic growth. As human capital is criticized of the way in which it treats young people as a means to development, human development sees people, whether young or old, to be the ends of development itself thereby people are seen as agents of

change in society, not just beneficiaries of economic growth which human capital theory seems to vigorously assert (23).

Investing in education and health for young people should certainly be a priority to promote their wellbeing for now and for the future. However, taking note of human development theory, I argue that some of the specific aspects of the human capital approach raise questions when it places more emphasis on future economic growth rather than the cultural and political changes made possible through agencies of people, especially the youth. The following concepts of youth citizenship and multiculturalism awareness in turn, give us another perspective of conceptualizing young people which I assert as essential in youth participation as a protagonist in the development process of and within their own society.

2.3 Youth citizenship and multiculturalism

In the history of social science, children and young people had been excluded from the debates on socio-political participation that has been characterized as “adult” citizenship strongly based on legal, political and territorial considerations, while much of recent youth and child researchers focus on “how children and youth incorporate elements of citizenship into their lives” (Weller 2003; Bell 2005: 4). While the former emphasized how opinions and activities of children and youth would affect them as future citizens regarding them as “not-yet-finished human beings” (Bucholtz 2002: 529), the latter places more importance on how they interpret and participate in political and civic activities in their daily lives (Bell 2005: 5). Such child-centred approach to capturing citizenship of young people focus on their own voices, which helps one recognize that “youth” are not a

homogenous category of citizens, and that different categories of youth experience citizenship and civic participations in different ways (Beauvais, McKay & Seddon 2001, cited in Bell 2005: 5). Taking their own voice into consideration in analyzing youth citizenship not as an “end product” of adulthood but more the process through which young people experience access to various rights of citizenship, provides us an entry point in analyzing inequalities in social structure which contains differences such as gender, disability and race (Jones and Wallace 1992 cited in Bell 2005: 6).

Torres’s analysis of citizenship and multiculturalism gives us yet another approach to youth citizenship as a responsible and active agent in a society (1998: 538). Popular debates on multiculturalism often pertain to issues of integration / exclusion of ethnic minorities or immigrants within a national boundary or community (Kymlicka 2003: 212). Torres’s understanding of multiculturalism takes different perspective, as he defines it as any specific sense of identity that affects individuals’ “participation, representation and checks and balances of power” that promotes “solidarity beyond particular interests of specific forms of identity” (1998: 538). Furthermore, encouraging “ability and desire to participate in the political process of promoting the public good and accountability” is also product of multicultural awareness (*Ibid*). In this manner, multiculturalism awareness and citizenship formation may enhance mobility, life opportunity, and political participation not only of individuals, but also collective movement for social cause that may contribute to socio-economic and cultural development of a community or region as a whole. Analysing multiculturalism awareness and citizenship among youth would help us better understand how they themselves conceptualize their identities, position or inequality within specific community (Bell 2005: 6).

In terms of citizenship and youth engagement in social-cultural and political spheres, new technological tools are often said to have changed the socialization pattern and young people's position in social cultural status (UNESCO 2005:81). In sociological view, socialization is "a process in which a younger member of a society or community adopts the values, norms and moral order of his or her group" (82). In effect, socialization is linked to forming an identity in relation to the people and environment surrounding them. Thus emerging socialization patterns among youth, especially spurred by growing technological tools and media seem to have greater implication to youth citizenship less in terms of conventional legalistic and territorial consideration, but more of an identity formation in relation to one's community and sense of belonging which I define as "youth citizenship". To look at socialization pattern of young people means to look at the process of forming identities as part of acquiring active citizenship in a society. Therefore in this research, there would also be an emphasis on how young people socialize in everyday lives. It needs to be highlighted here, that ICT tools is only one of the mediums available to encourage multiculturalism understanding and citizenship of young people. The focus and priority should not be the promotion of innovative ICT products, but should be of what the young people are capable of and interested in, under specific contexts in a given society or community.

2.4 Beyond ICTs

When talking about ICTs, media and youth participation, one should be aware that research on positive and innovative use of new media by youth, has been largely focused on the North and / or the urban setting equipped with more readily available resources and opportunities. In regard to "bridging the digital divide" however, Keniston warns us not to

simply assume that extending ICTs to the larger population is an end in itself. He asserts that it could be rather a means to an end, being instrumental in meeting human needs such as health, food, job, or education. (2004: 20).

Furthermore, simple access to ICTs would not automatically bring empowerment but it is the effective usage of ICT that matters (Saith 2001: 3). In this sense, considering ICT as a means to bridge the “digital gap” is even more questionable in rural settings where there is far less infrastructure available for this technological tool. As Keniston has argued, we should not take it for granted that providing ICT and its infrastructure itself may be sufficient for bringing in change to meet certain development goals. This is not to say that ICT itself is not meaningful in rural settings or poor communities. There is numerous evidences that reveal enhanced youth employment, autonomy and participation through new media enabled through ICT, not only restricted to urban youth (Asthana 2006; SIDA 2006; WYR 2005). In this research however, the question of youth experience in rural setting would go beyond the focus from what ICTs could bring about but to other surrounding physical spaces in a community, where conventional face-to-face communication and socialization is still prevalent and people’s behaviour is governed by traditional social norms and values.

For instance, in looking at citizenship formation of young people, Weller cited by Bell places importance to hear youth and children’s voices and experiences. In doing so, he illustrates the case of skate parks as a “hidden geography of citizenship space” for certain group of youth in the United States. In terms of identity and belonging, he found the skate parks more important for them than just practical participation in conventional political activities (Weller 2003: 168, Bell 2005: 5). Regarding the issue of such “space”, I will focus on space provided by an NGO. They are often said to be able to capture the needs of

people within specific contexts, often working towards eliminating barriers that hinder participations of various categories of people, such as girls constrained by social norms and values, or groups of physically challenged people. Donor pressure, organizational and financial limitation, accountability and effectiveness is called into questions today as NGOs have become ever stronger development agent for service provisioning over the state in some countries, and not all NGOs are capable to reach the most needed (Sutton and Arnove 2004;Wazir 2000:23). Nevertheless, it is of importance to look at spaces provided by NGO in a rural area especially where social institutions may be less diverse, to grasp both limitations and prospective that it may bring, to the eyes of young people themselves.

Having the concepts of youth, ICT and surrounding debate in mind, the research would explore how “ICT” has been appropriated into lives of young people in rural Bangladesh, in order to scrutinize the relevancy of current debate of youth development to the lived experience of young people in the context.

Chapter 3 Global view on Young people and ICT today

I will now discuss the current trend and the conceptualization of youth and ICT as discussed in the Reports by UNESCO, the World Bank and UNDP as they tackle the issue from different perspectives. There appears to be a trend and similarity among these three large international agencies, which seem to promote a certain common international agendas although with different means. The analysis of these reports aims to answer one of my sub-questions directed to investigate underlining assumptions, motivations and approaches by these development actors, as part of an effort to clarify the relevance to the specific context of rural youth in Bangladesh.

3.1 Investing in Youth:

Views from WYR 2007, WDR 2007, UNDP Report on ICT 2003

In the WYR2007 by UNESCO, under the heading “Asian youth in the context of rapid Globalization”, the cohort of young people in Asia are depicted as strong force in the development of their societies on the social and economic level, which is made possible with growing number of youth population as well as advancement of technology in the region. The Report asserts;

One of the most important factors influencing whether and how Asian economies benefit from their sizeable youth population is how much of an opportunity young people have to participate in development, which include strengthening their capacities through education, improved health care and productive employment (WYR 2007, 4).

As articulated in this line, large part of the Report discusses the importance of education, especially the secondary and vocational trainings which would prepare young people to

become a readily available and capable work force. It also vigorously asserts the need to invest in the large cohort of youth, the human capital, to “accelerate growth and reduce poverty” because “labour is the main asset of the poor, making it more productive is the best way to reduce poverty” (2). The knowledge and skills on the use of new technological tools and foreign language are said to be essential because “without access to ICT, young people are effectively isolated from the global market and unable to take advantage of an immense network of informational and educational resources” (40). The World Bank asserts the need for the government to focus on investment climate in order to stimulate the private companies to answer to the demands of ICT, provide skills on both media interpretation skills and content creation, and to set up cyber-cafes or telecentres for greater access by young and old people alike in the remote areas (WDR 2007: 207). In the Reports, inflexible markets and education systems are given caution as a hindrance to successful “transition of youth to adulthood”, which may make youth to be more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, eventually leading to rising crime rate or at-risk behaviours such as alcoholism, drug abuse or early pregnancy(25). Recognizing the problems that may arise if successful investment on young people fail, the Reports seem to position today’s young people as in need of instructions and control so as not to go astray from contributing to growth.

Although I do agree that young people deserve good education and health, one needs to be cautious not to focus too much on economic growth as the objective of development which is expected to reduce poverty by the way of the trickle down effect. I argue that the human capital perspective on youth embraces a sense of Social Darwinism viewing youth period of turbulence as period before entering another stage of life, such as work or having a family. In this perspective, there is a risk to perpetuate invisibility of

young people's agency, instead of focusing on what young people are actually capable of being as active agents of change in a given society *now*.

Furthermore, a strong emphasis on the government and private sector investment in various sectors to ensure youth to enter successful work also takes attention away from other actors such as civil society groups and non-governmental agencies as well as young people themselves in promoting their own welfare. Moreover, whether young people are actually getting a return, which Human Capital perspective asserts to achieve, is still questionable and requires investigation. Lastly, functionalist are often criticized for failing to take into consideration of individual's expectation and interests, and rather focuses on how it could better and best serve the proper functioning and development of a society. The Human capital approach to young people asserted in the Reports by UNESCO and the World Bank likewise seem to devoid the voice of young people themselves, assuming that successful investment in young people and economic growth will benefit all the people in a society, both old and young, regardless of socio-cultural and economic differences, including differences between urban and rural, and within specific society itself.

3.2 ICT market, youth, and Economic growth

Parallel to the growing focus on young people as an asset for growth, ICT is likewise argued as an important component to accelerate not only economic growth but also human development as a whole, such as equity of access to basic rights. According to the Human Development Report on ICT by UNDP, ICT has three main "promises" for human development. One is that the market, expanded through explosion of ICT would increase the employment opportunities, including informal sectors in the developing countries.

Secondly, the rapid growth of information and technology will trigger higher productivity of both commodities and services especially in remote areas. These two points are specifically the contributing factors of the economic growth of a society and of individuals as the poorer people acquire jobs through new employment thereby increasing their income. The third and most significant aspect of ICT, according to the Report, is that it would directly expand people's choices through access to information, knowledge and skills that it entails, all of which would enhance their ability to pursue one's own interest for the betterment of their lives.(UNDP 2005: 61-63)

Besides these prospects of development brought about by a result of ICT, the UNDP Report also notes that newly emerging labour market through expansion of ICT is still greatly concentrated in the developed countries and the English speaking urban middle class in the developing countries (61,112). It also notes that the cost of ICT investment may even outweigh its return especially in developing countries (61). These are fatal points in considering validity of ICT as a development tool to bring substantial benefit for the real marginalized people. However, throughout the Report it maintains an yet obviously optimistic tone on the expansion of ICT market by repeatedly asserting its prospective for creating employment that would directly benefit the poor and the marginalized, even though the existing evidences as such is presented as limited.

Such economic terms of development and growth that it emphasizes also have implication to the human capital view on young people. The way in which it articulates that the returns from economic activities undertaken by poor people through the diffusion of technology into poor rural and urban areas, implies the need for more investment in ICT related firms and markets, as well as skills training. It is evident that the ICT expands the scope of information and service provisioning, with connectivity to media devices such as

internet, mobile phones or radios lower the barriers in accessing certain information. However, it is also problematic that the Report firstly homogenizes the “beneficiaries” of ICTs while the young, women or the disabled people for instance, may not have same interests or condition in accessibility to the benefits said to be brought by ICTs and its underlining factors for such inequality. Secondly, the report assumes that the poor or the marginalized would automatically be able to interpret, utilize and optimize the knowledge and information gained through ICTs and develop capacities, without referring to how different categories of people would gain access to, and how they may maximize its use for their own interest.

In this regard, I would argue that it is not necessarily the end results of economic gain or increases in productivity that matters, but the process in which different people interact and benefit from available ICT devices that may contribute to their knowledge and capabilities to enhance their choices in life in more democratic manner. The problem may lie where the Report focuses on Millennium Development Goals that set specific numerical targets in achieving human development. It is not the use of ICT and poverty alleviation per se that is the focus of this research, but how UNDP places development discourse in relation to MDG is noteworthy. As Saith argues, the weakness of MDG is that it focuses too much on its end results centered around the absolute poverty line set forth by the World Bank as one-dollar a day income as well as other numerical target placed as solid indicators in achieving goals(Saith 2006:172). For instance, in the UNDP report under the section of ICT’s achievement in targeting the vulnerable groups, it presents the increasing percentage of women among professional and technical workers in ICT related firms or public access to internet (UNDP 2003: 87). The number or the percentage itself is not enough to explain how and to what extent the structural gender inequality has been

addressed. What is more crucial is to monitor the existing inequality in the societies and its process of change (Saith 2006:184).

Therefore in terms of equity, participation and citizenship among others, placing more emphasis on economic value as well as numerical criteria through ICT takes one's attention away from its process in which the young and other under-focused categories of people are involved with ICTs in their everyday-lives, and underlining social factors that affect access, autonomy and utility. This point will be especially pertinent to youth in rural Bangladesh, living under traditional norms and values that may include certain groups of young people to participate in social, cultural or political activities while excluding others, with underlining social inequalities that may not be reflected in growing GDP of the country.

3.3 Rural youth and ICT

Before discussing reports in relation to the citizenship perspective, it is important to note how three development agencies define "rural area" as lacking basic infrastructure and quality services from the government. They also give the impression that "rural area" in general is a sort of homogenous entity especially with agriculture as main economic activities. The UNDP also focuses on information provisioning through ICTs especially targeting agricultural workers in rural area to expand their business hence achieving economic advancement (UNDP 2003: 110) There is very small portion of sections dedicated to rural youth in all the Reports. Moreover, what is striking here is that the texts presuppose that the majority of people in the "rural" area are associated with agriculture – as it asserts;

[...]as rural incomes are often seasonal, poorer rural families may have to sacrifice their children's schooling for the family's sustenance- and low education make the transition into youth and young adulthood with very limited job prospects as they would remain unskilled and unprotected labourers (WYR 2007, 18)

This seems to be a gross generalization of what "rural" and who "rural youth" or children represent. Although in many cases a rural livelihood is dependent on labour intensive agriculture, homogenization of "rural youth" in this manner blurs the contextuality within which different young people live. How the development actors seem to perceive necessary for "youth in rural area" as polarized from "urban youth", stress a lack of quality services and infrastructure in the rural setting. It may overlook existing social structure, differing economic modes and available commercial products in the context. This underlining assumption and simplification as regard to the "rural youth" discussed in the Reports may also be one of the crucial points when it comes to actual interventions channelled through the development agencies and NGOs in rural Bangladesh, as it could cause some conflict in terms of relevancy for young people, which in number is conspicuously high in Bangladesh than those in urban areas.

3.4 Youth citizenship and multiculturalism

Now I will leave from the debate of ICT and youth for a while, by looking at different aspect of youth development. In addition to issues discussed in previous sections, World Development Report 2007 also focuses on citizenship and civic engagement as one of the indispensable components of youth development as a part of human capital (160).

While conventional notion of citizenship places an emphasis more on legal and political engagement, the Report also asserts the importance of promoting collective action

that may lead to shared growth, and incorporating different socio-economic groups of people into the development process. As a consequence of socializing with others, young people would learn how other people regard them, and “with or against which they begin to identify themselves” (WDR 2007:173). This may lead young people to turn to social organizations that provide “spaces for young people to develop a sense of belonging”, facilitating them to act upon autonomous collective movement for shared purposes (*Ibid*). According to the Report, while such realization may lead them to turn to civil society groups or NGOs, there is a potential for them to join extremists groups and gang membership that enforces the opposition to formal institutions in the society (*Ibid*). Although I believe such is true to certain contexts, this characterizes how young people are regarded as in need to be correctly guided to avoid causing social unrest. This could be again related to the functionalist approach to youth culture seen as results of inadequate socialization into their expected position in a society (Blackman cited in Tyyska 2005: 5). On the other hand, notion of delinquent and at-risk behaviours of youth seen as hindrance to smooth functioning of society could be rather regarded as manifestation of youth agency, as resistance towards hegemonic ideology imposed upon them. Giroux asserts that such “relative autonomy” should not be misunderstood as necessarily oppositional behaviour or response against domination, but should be analyzed carefully to capture their motivation to overcome social inequality (2006: 31).

The World Bank in its World Development Report also seems to lack consideration of how to encourage understanding for multiculturalism among youth, noting only school as an arena for citizenship education to create the foundation for young people to become solid citizenship as they enter the adult world, noting school is not sufficient to fulfil citizenship awareness (WDR 2007: 174). While WDR 2007 does not

further note how and what kind of “alternative” space could function as an arena for more youth participation and active learning for citizenship, World Youth Report 2005 suggests alternative approaches to providing a natural setting such as public, civic and other organizations, where young people could socialize not only with one another, but with people of different socio-economic backgrounds. These spaces would then gradually promote their awareness and their sense of being and belonging hence having more opportunity of citizenship awareness and learning (2005: 85).

Seeking alternative space that could nurture young people’s citizenship in relation to locality would also mean to looking at young people’s agency with “relative autonomy” as Giroux has put it (2006, 31). The issue has been scrutinized in much of recent literature especially in regard to formal citizenship education at school, although the attempts seem to have been made mostly only in the West and more urbanized societies, thus further investigation is required in consideration to young people in rural areas, as well as institution other than schools.

3.5 youth and media culture: YWR 2003 and 2005

While human capital views young people as an asset for growth, World Youth Report 2005 especially focus on youth and ICT in terms of their socialization pattern, also sometimes referred to as youth culture, and their political and cultural participation in the society at large.

To see the changing views of youth as active agents of change made possible through various ICT tools, it would be of great use to highlight a point made in WYR 2003, before analyzing WYR 2005. In the Report 2003, it gives a cautious view on the market

force in “power relations at work in commercial media”, that the media programmes conveyed through new ICT devices are made by small number of related companies that may lead to “stereotyping and simplification of the global culture”, and “general homogenization of values” (323). What is striking about WYR 2003 is that it positions youth clearly more as passive being who needs guidance and proper care, as articulated in the following line;

[...] children and young people are unable to manage their everyday lives totally on their own. They need to be loved, supported and understood by adults who will also provide them with limits and advice. It does not seem likely that a global predatory media culture can cater to these needs (WYR 2003:315)

Although the Report takes note of positive pedagogical influence, it seems to view the rapidly expanding media and ICT as a given, pushed by market forces for its profit and targeting youth just as its potential consumers.

In the World Youth Report 2005, the media market is no longer seen as a one-way force that targets young people as its prays on consumerism, but as “being at the forefront of change”(93). Young people are seen as capable of contents creation through new ICT tools such as internet, “which means they are able to exercise some control over the very process that are influencing their socialization”(83). Furthermore, ICT creates youth culture which is young people’s “own free space, which offers an alternative to the adult world as one develops, questions, and assume roles in one’s society”(81). The Report 2005 also notes as, “the peer interaction has a surreptitious impact on socialization as young people experiment and test” the prevalent customs and habits of adult culture outside the reach of adult influence (85). Without being judgemental whether the declining authority of parents and adults has a positive or negative impact on youth, one needs to recognize this evolving position of young people today. This helps us scrutinize their roles and position in a society with regard to youth citizenship and civic engagement, nurtured through gradual awareness

for working towards collective good in a community as discussed by Torres's notion of multiculturalism. It would also be a crucial point to look at when analyzing traditional rural setting in Bangladesh, where parental authority and cultural norms still prevail.

Having the media and ICT market's amorphous influence over the growing number of young people today, it is important to keep in mind as the Report asserts that the global media marketers today try to adapt their products and services to local cultures in order to be successful in local market as competition in media market rises (86). This means that media market is trying to reach young people in wide ranged areas; rural, urban and possibly every corner of the world. The human capital perspective captured this trend as a possible driver for productivity and economic growth, although it lacks focus on the other face of ICT; evolving media culture among young people today. As a consequence, the expectation by young people themselves towards ICTs may greatly differ from the perspectives articulated by the World Bank and other international agencies, as emerging youth socialization patterns and constructed meanings through ICTs, may have stronger implication for social change now than predicted future economic growth through the proliferation of ICTs.

Again, it is important to keep distinction between donor/NGO-led ICT interventions especially dedicated for young people, and purely commercially driven ICT and media dissemination. Both have prospects and limitations regarding promoting youth cultural and political participation. For instance, while market driven ICT may try to exploit young people to pursue its economic gain, it may leave space for young people themselves to tactfully appropriate the knowledge and experiences gained through available ICT tools. Donor driven ICT intervention on the other hand, may be able to flexibly diversify the delivery mode targeting specific categories of youth to meet their expectations, however, if

given resource and conceptualization of local youth fail to match what is expected by young people themselves, it may not only hinder sustainability of the activities but also the participation of young people itself.

Thus far we have scrutinized the main conceptualization of youth and ICT with its underlining assumptions, put forward by several large international development agencies. Having noted some of the critical points that I have argued, I will now examine the reality on the ground, exploring what is expressed by young people as well as other people involved in promoting youth development issue in rural Bangladesh. A clear-cut comparison of the two realms would then be briefly presented in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 4

Scenes in the Context

4.1 YPSA Community Multimedia Centres

The three YPSA multimedia Centres, Sitakund Youth Led Community Multimedia Centre (YCMC), Alekdir Rural Knowledge Centre, Shahetkalhi community multimedia centre, had computer courses that include typing practice of English and Bangla, Microsoft Word, Excel, Powerpoint and Photoshop. The cost of participation for three months course was tk.1000 for Sitakund YCMC, and tk. 600 for the latter two. Classes were held three days per week, and each lesson lasts one hour and a half. All centres also run as self-sustaining community centre that provides business services such as printing out, photo copying or lamination, varying in scale depending on the equipments at the centre. Some centres also conducted several different projects as shown in the table 1.



Figure 1 "Area around Alekdir Centre"



Figure 2 "Shahetkalhi Centre"

	Sitakund Youth led Multimedia Centre (YCMC)	Alekdir Rural Knowledge Centre	Shahetkalhi Community Multimedia Centre
Location uniqueness	37km Northwest of Chittagong	20km West of Sitakund, 1km to Bay of Bengal	18km Northwest of Sitakund
Population	298,528	15,000-20,000	16,000
Function of centre	Computer training, disability awareness group, multimedia services, microcredit and savings for women	Computer training, Micro credit and Savings for women, Adolescent awareness/ reproductive health	Compter Training, Microcredit savings for women
Date of establishment	2003	2003	2007
Number of students (at the time of research)	30	25	18
Age of students	17-26	17-27	16-23
Sex ratio	boy 60% girl 40%	boy 60%, girl 40%	boy 80%, girl 20%
Number of computer	4	4	4
Electricity	yes	Yes	Yes
Internet	No	No	Yes

Table 1 "YPSA multimedia centres and its surrounding areas"

As you can see from the Table, Sitakund city has a relatively large number of populations, due to its location by the largest highway that connects Chittagong and Dhaka, two largest cities in Bangladesh. The average literacy rate in the overall area is male 49.3% and female 30.6%. 65% of total households in Sitakund region have electricity supply. It is also a multi-religious and multi-cultural region with Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists co-exists. As the name Sitakund indicates a Hindu goddess called Sita, it is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Hindus. The location is unique as it is close from Bay of Bengal, while to the east of the town one can gaze at a range of beautiful hills.

Although the downtown of the city consists only of some 200 meter main street with various shops, in the outskirts, numerous retail shops, workshops and factories are scattered due to nearby ship deconstruction sites, one of the largest in Asia. Main occupations by industry are service (29%), commerce (22%), and agriculture (24%),

indicating that only quarter of population's occupation pertains to agriculture, on the contrary to the general understanding of rural area as dominantly agricultural (Banglapedia 2008). In Sitakund city, there is one internet cafe. Computer skills courses are given at three centres including YPSA multimedia centre, and two another ones in town.

In Bangladesh, there is no clear definition that defines a “village” or “rural area”, due to different approaches and criteria that exist (Khan 2001: 27). However in a simple relative comparison, considering its proximity to large cities and population size, in this research paper I would define Sitakund as “semi-rural area” and the latter two areas as “rural areas”. While Sitakund is a commercial hub of the region, Alekdir and Shaherkalhi are surrounded by paddy fields with scattered houses in the traditional style, mostly made of mud with tin roofs. Except for few roads that connect to the main road that leads to Sitakund, pathways within these two communities were mostly not well paved. Two communities showed similarities in the environment; only major difference was that Alekdir is cyclone prone area. In both communities, children are running around joyfully on the streets around houses, some half naked. Ducks and hens were walking around the street here and there, and large cows relaxing in front of houses. The communities were not overly poor, compare to the area close to the beach where some of poor fishing communities live in crowding small shacks. Students both at the centre as well as many others I have encountered on the streets were all well dressed in clean neat school uniforms, or in traditional Bangladeshi dresses.



Figure 3 "Sitakund Downtown"

4.2 Power and authority in the context

Lastly, it would be noteworthy to briefly discuss some of the social characteristics in the context. In Bangladesh, villages could be described as having traditional patron-client characteristics. Within the household, boys are favoured over girls, wives are subordinate to husbands, and village elders dominate village men (Chowdhury 1996: 44-45). Such structure is reinforced and legitimized by power holders within villages, such as police, the rich and religious leaders (Stiles 2002: 38). Moreover, Bangladesh is “predominantly rural, highly stratified, staunchly patriarchal society” (Balk, 1997: 153). Although there is a lack of empirical data on young people’s position as well as gender norms and values that influences especially girls’ mobility, Balk’s research helps us understand girls’ position in a society. First, women are often discouraged from occupying any space where men are present, even inside the home while given heavy responsibility over household chores and childcare. Failing to conform to norms means social sanctions although such measure is said to be especially directed at unmarried young women (154). Noting that the degree of norms varies from community to community, it is of importance to keep these contextual

characteristics in mind as the lives of young people in rural Bangladesh would be discussed in next chapter.

Moreover, I assert that it is not only young girls who are governed by power inequalities, but also young boys are often influenced from strong age hierarchal social structure, although certainly with different degree from girls. In the research, the positionality of both young boys and girls would be under careful scrutiny as in terms of how they interact with emerging technological tools and the spaces surrounding them that may surpass traditional norms and values.

Chapter 5 Youths' lives and "ICT"

5.1 Who are the Youth?

All respondents are either attaining or have attained education, together with all their siblings. All respondents' fathers except for one, who has retired, work in business and services sectors while their mothers are all housewives except for one who is a tailor. As the course fee is not inexpensive in the local context, the fact that they could afford the course means their family have financial capacity for such extra study costs since most of the respondents were not working except for few who have already finished higher education. From these socio-economic factors, I could infer that most of them are of relatively well-off upbringing both in semi rural and rural areas.

All participants were simply yet well dressed; wearing three piece dresses called Salwar kameez for girls, and neatly ironed shirt and pants for most boys. Recently in Bangladesh, girls' dress has been largely influenced by modern Indian fashion which used to be considered less discreet in Bangladesh. Girls have started to wear shorter kameese; a top that used to go below knees is worn above knees recently in the cities. Such fashion was very rare only a few years ago. Salwar, very wide trousers which effectively concealed the shape of legs, have become tighter, fitting to the legs following Indian trend as well. Although it has become more prominent and trendy in Chittagong or other bigger cities, I could hardly see girls with such fashion in all the studied areas. It explains still the importance of modesty and traditional attitudes towards the manner of dress, of which also applied to all the interviewees, both boys and girls.

5.2 “ICT” needed; but for what?



Figure 4 "Computer training in progress at Shahetkalhi centre"

To my question regarding one of my sub-questions on their initial expectation for coming to the centre, motivation of majority derives from recommendation by friends from school, or tutors they meet for extra study outside schools. Initially, most identified the reasons to come to the centre as “just because people said the computer course here was nice”, and “learning computer we did not have a chance to touch at school”. From this we could infer that at the outset the participants did not have much idea of the computer course per se, but after they came, many related acquisition of computer skills to their job prospective and visions for the future.

First of all, all interviewees, boys and girls regardless of whether the setting was semi-rural or rural area, have demonstrated an eagerness to work in the future especially with an occupation or positions that allow them to use computer skill. Many responded to my question about whether they would have increased opportunity to get a better salary because of their computer skills however, most said that it is not necessarily so. While only one 20 year old boy from Sitakund centre has emphasized the importance of computer skill

as, “Without computer skills, our lives will be in darkness.”, others expressed that they want to utilize their newly acquired skills for their work knowing it is not the utter most importance to get a job, nor it would not give them greater advantage than those who do not have computer skill.

In relation to the job prospective, my assumption was that the young people coming to the centre to learn computer skills may strongly wish to go to bigger cities nearby or far, to look for a job where they could use their new skills and earn more than what may be offered in the locality. In the reviewed Report, it was also articulated quite often that globalization is pressing firms and individuals to be able to cope with rapidly emerging ICT economy and that opportunity is concentrated in large cities especially in developing countries. Among those who showed interest in going to cities said;

“Well, there’s no particular reason nor there’s something special I want to do there.. but Dhaka sounds very nice, so that’s why I want to work there”.(Rashed, boy, 19, Sitakund)

My assumption was that majority would have such attitude, with idealization of big cities as it may offer larger world they had a glimpse through the use of computer and other ICT tools. However, all except few boys from semi-rural area showed interest in going to Chittagong or Dhaka to seek work, while the rest was happily asserting that they prefer their area since the environment is much more pleasant than that of cities;

“There are many job available here as well...even though there are not many jobs that I can use computer skills.. it’s still really nice here, less crowded, we have beautiful hills and beach nearby.”
(Poppy, girl, 18, Sitakund)

The location was giving them a sense of pride and attachment to their locality, particularly the largest natural eco-park in Bangladesh, and the historical Hindu temples or the beach. The uniqueness of the geographical attraction cannot be underestimated as a fact that keeps the rural youth attached to the locality. This partly provides an answer to the

question why many of them thus clearly said “No” to leaving their places and going to bigger city in search of jobs, even though it means they may not be able to get a job which allow them to use computers.

Another point that was clarified in the course of interview was that most of them could not give any specificity to the description of job they want to do. Some would say “any business job with computer work”, or “I want to work at a hospital, not as a nurse but in the office as anything I can use computer”. From this it could be inferred that what they lack is the information itself on job availability. Some asserted they need internet to find job vacancies although it would be difficult too, considering the fact that in Bangladesh still few companies have fully established website to post job vacancies.

In regard to the activities at the centre and the challenges they are facing, the programme manager of Sitakund YCMC and their field staffs, mostly expressed similar concerns. Media production using various ICT tools that they have obtained from UNESCO funding in 2005 became difficult to continue, as training the youth and producing documentary films, with specific professionals to train and conduct the projects all of which require financial support which they could not sustain after the funding is terminated. Consequently, their current focus is more on self-sustainability with income generation activities rather than promoting the participation of rural young people in media contents production or greater access to information. The staffs expressed hopefulness at the tremendous potentials for the innovative use of new media tools such as internet, or documentary film making for enhancing youth’s problem solving capacities, interacting with other people from the community and expressing their concerns in their own ways. There was sense of lamentation over the fact that currently they could only offer computer trainings.

It should be stressed however that from the perspective of young people themselves, what seemed to be more important was not to achieve successful employment with competitive salaries, or to go to big cities to utilize their new skills. Being able to utilize computers, which none of them had the opportunity at schools to even touch, seem to have given them sense of confidence, pride and delight. All youth eagerly expressed how their parents are satisfied about the fact that they are learning computer skills and do encourage them to further their learning. It could be inferred that trust and positive expectation that they receive from their parents also played large role on building their self-esteem and active participation. In relation to this aspect, it may be useful to consider how several participants answered in similar manner, to my question to know who has a power in decision making about important issues such as education and marriage. One participant has said;

“ I decide about education and work, and it is not my parents’ decision. I decide on my own, and they would support. As for marriage.. that’s another thing. It’s not for me to talk about.” (Rashed, male, 19, Alekdir)

Quite a few of them, both boys and girls, strongly asserted that they are the one with decision power with regard to education and work. For marriage however, as traditionally parents decide with whom to their son/ daughter will marry, they seemed perplexed by the question as marriage is often decided as given, if not due to modesty that hindered them to speak out on this issue. Even so, as discussed by Asthana, acquiring new skills especially related to new technological tools, seem to enhance their opportunities for making decisions, exercising choice and become active agents for their own life within household and the community (2006: 7).

Acquiring PC skills may have a larger implication to their future when ICTs would proliferate more in Bangladesh. However, as discussed by Willis, that individuals especially

young people when they interact with new ICT tools, he or she would actively take up what these devices and opportunities seem to offer and construct their own meaning (2003: 516). In this context, learning computer does not seem to necessarily bring them the promised return of employment and to take part in the globalized economy. On the other hand however, young people, in their own limited resource and mobility in rural setting, do seem to build not only knowledge but perhaps more importantly, build confidence, self-esteem, and capability for decision making which directly affects their active participation and citizenship.

5.3 Alternative Space for participation and socialization

While focus group discussions were centred on the topic of computer skills training and job opportunities, I have also tried to go deeper into their everyday lives and their socialization pattern, especially in relation to the centre as a unique space of participation. My research has set out in finding discrepancy between development theory on youth and ICT, and reality of rural youth without giving solid assumption for possible variables. In this regard, the interviews with youth and NGO/ UNESCO staffs have revealed several points about YCMC which did not seem to be reflected in any of the Reports.

5.3.1 Everyday lives of young people; leisure and participation

In gaining knowledge of their social lives and the sphere of socialization and experience, we have discussed how they normally spend their time apart from schools that they attend. The majority of the youth spend their bulk of free time at home, watching TV, listening to music, reading books or visiting friend's houses. In Alekdir and Shahetkalhi, the more rural

area, boys had more opportunities to go outside of the village to hang out with other male friends, such as in nearby Sitakund or in Chittagong. But the majority of girls rarely left the village for meeting friends, as they all live close by and are happy staying in the vicinity. They would only go to bigger cities with all the family members, if there is a relative's wedding or any special occasions. This is partly because there is almost nowhere comfortable to go in the community in women's perspective, and especially unmarried young female rarely go to local tea stalls due to cultural norm. For instance, the tea stalls in Sitakund were usually very simple, and from the pavement one could see the whole interior as there is no wall at the front. In bigger cities, public restaurants and cafes often have small spaces with curtain to draw, so that women could sit without being seen by males. Cafes with compartments did not exist in Sitakund and thus female customer seemed to be rare. In more rural areas, Alekdir and Shaherkalhi, even tea stalls hardly existed.

The space provided at YPSA's media centre is different in nature from the more traditional rural setting that governs the way they spend their free time. Consequently they will spend more time physically away from parents, while gaining more autonomy and away from the parents' surveillance. The uniqueness of the centre as socialization space will be further discussed in the following sections especially with focus on gender issues of young people in Sitakund regions.

5.3.2 Boy meets girl, girl meets boy

Up until high school in the local area, they all attend or have attended sex segregated schools. All interviewees said that at school, there is almost no space for boys and girls to sit together and to casually interact with one another. In large cities, girls and boys more

openly associate in public. Such interaction is not so open in Sitakund areas although the interviewees informed that they do speak to each other casually to certain degree in colleges. To my question of how they feel the difference at the centre, where boy and girl are all mixed to work together in a small space, a boy responded,

“I do not feel anything strange about it- nor do we misbehave towards them (to the opposite sex). Because it is like brother and sister kind of relationship we have here”

(Rahi,boy,21, Sitakund)

As open discussion about relationships between different sexes is still avoided or many feel extremely shy to talk about, it was not easy to get a straight impression from the interviewees especially from girls as my interpreter was male. To gain insights of how they normally interact, I conducted extensive participant observation while they were attending the training courses.

Participant observation illuminated tendency to sit together and talk with the same sex, but the interaction among different sex was certainly taking place, seemingly modest and discreet but natural and no awkwardness or hesitation was felt in the air. Even the girls with extremely conservative attire, with entire body covered except for their eyes, did not seem to mind much to sit closer to the boys when they needed to.

It might be too simplistic to say that this is one of the main reasons or interests for them to come to the centre in search of a space to meet other youth, especially opposite sex. This has been inferred, as none of the respondents meet other participants outside the centre unless they are from the same school and know each other from before. But considering their discreetness in talking about such issue, due to the cultural and religious norms, it is still noteworthy that the centre is offering a space where boys and girls would naturally mix with each other in a “healthy manner” (Asthana 2006 : 69).

It would be useful to note here that there is a substantial debate surrounding formal schooling, often discussed as a site of reproducing existing structural inequalities and /or as a site of resistance to hegemonic ideology internalized at schools (Farrell 1999:151; Hoppers 2000). While such debate is not central to this research, it is of significance to note that the space provided by YPSA does seem to give an alternative arena apart from formal schooling, for learning and socialization, allowing both boys and girls to participate more on equal ground.

5.3.3 Space for Girls' participation

To see the space from yet another angle especially for girls' participation, the NGO led ICT centre is not just a public place with new ICT devices. While one girl's father strongly disapproves her to go to the cyber café insisting that he would accompany her if she needs to go, he willingly allowed her to go to YCMC. This says about relative acceptance towards NGO and trust in its supervision while suggesting that cybercafé may lack surveillance of more reliable authority even though it may offer similar or even more opportunity related to ICT tools. Although the girl was not really sure why her father does not want her to go to cybercafé alone, informal conversations with some Bangladeshi adults implied that cyber cafes are usually full of boys using internet for games, or to watch porn sites. My observation at cybercafé in town was that certainly majority was boys many were playing games sometime two or three of them crowding together at one computer, although I could not identify anyone watching porn sites. The inappropriate use of internet at public cyber café can not be generalized, but the relative distrust towards the safety of girls at local cybercafé is prevalent. This clearly shows the difference between NGO-led ICT centre and

commercial based ICT space, namely cybercafés, in that there are differences in access and participation by young girls.

It is interesting to draw some concern expressed by UNESCO Dhaka officer in regard to the girls' participation. He articulated that community-led multimedia centre often meets difficulty of sustainability, not only due to issues of financial and human resource capacity, but the real challenge is its community mobilization in running for the centre. According to him, the nature of such NGO multimedia centre in Bangladesh, is that they are often more "NGO-led" than "people-led". A local NGO may come up with the new idea of introducing ICT tools in the rural setting where the whole issue is so foreign to the people that it may meet with scepticism and even hostility. The communication officer has given an example of one of the community multimedia centres in Dangalhi area which is under direct supervision of UNESCO Dhaka, unlike YPSA multimedia centre funded and supervised by UNESCO Delhi regional office but solely operated by YPSA initiative. In Dangalhi community centre in 2004, out of 34 young participants coming to the centre, only 2 were girls. Field staffs found it very difficult to motivate them to come to the centre or to convince their parents or religious leaders, who were afraid that the girls would be indoctrinated and may go against their religious beliefs.

In the case of YPSA on the other hand, YCMC and its other centres in rural areas are gaining far higher attendance of girls since inception. Even though the figure says that average participation is 60 to 70 % boys and girls for the rest, girls are nonetheless gaining more opportunity to autonomously and independently participate in the activities than before, when they only had limited places to go for socializations or learning had it not been for YPSA multimedia centre.

So what is the difference between YPSA centre and UNESCO-led multimedia centre in Dangalhi? Geographical and social differences may be there, but it may be interesting to note that the UNESCO-led community multimedia centre does not target only young people but wider public in general. The ultimate purpose is to create employment opportunity for local people in running the multimedia centre, while providing necessary information through internet and libraries. This very much correlates to the ideology of ICT and economic development through employment creation articulated by the World Bank and the UNDP alike, hoping that equipping people with ICTs will contribute to poor people's income generation. In this regard, firstly the uniqueness of YPSA is that it specifically targets young people by trying to meet the demands and needs of youth in NGO's perspective. Secondly, YCMC's location at the heart of Sitakund, which is not large town at all in terms of numbers of shops and tea stalls, may have also created proximity to the community reducing the possible hostility. As for other centres in more rural settings, girls' participation was less than Sitakund city centre and may require longer time for more girls to participate, but every year the figure of girls attendance is increasing. Moreover, although in principle anyone is welcomed but given the analysis of participants at the centre, there is relative homogeneity among their socio-economic status and the upbringing, as I could see this from the way they dress and speak as well. Although it could also be said as one of the limitations, as it may be failing to open the door for poorer and more marginalized, this seems to be one of the reasons which parents allow girls to come to the centre.

The scale is yet too small however, to generalize that small youths attending YPSA YCMC has a visible impact on community by uplifting increasing equity among gender and participation. What is more crucial here is that the need for distinction between commercial

base cyber cafes / computer courses and NGO-led space, in considering the consequences for participation. Where equity for girls' participation in social activities is concerned, it becomes clear that extending "ICT access for everyone" overlooking contextual gender issue and other social factors may result in further exclusion of certain categories of people. As Sutton asserts, access, benefit, barriers to education and participation among girls have to be placed in specific context (Sutton 1998). He rightly points out also that context itself is not static, which I believe is essential factor to be considered in the era of rapidly expanding information and communication technology (*Ibid*).

In sum, even though it may face difficulty of income generation and human resources, the environment that suits local young people's interest and the NGO's position in a community could contribute much to create an alternative space for young people's participation, especially easing the barriers for girls' mobility, which tends to be more prominent in traditional rural areas.

5.4 Mobile phone; new exploratory tool

Apart from what is offered at YPSA multimedia centre, the interview has also illuminated one of the "ICT" tools seemingly prevalent among rural youth; mobile phones. Although rural area are often regarded as being left out of diffusion of technologies, a commercially based communication tool, a mobile phone, seems to have been shaping certain meaning and experiences in their every day lives, possibly much more than what access to computers at the media centre or cybercafé could offer. In development agenda and policies, mobile phones are often discussed as a means for entrepreneurs to get access to the market and information to expand business so as to contribute for poverty alleviation

(SIDA 2005; UNDP 2007). However, in regard to young people, mobile phones tend to be regarded more as source of entertainment and communication as passive consumer of the product. Topic discussed in the interviews, however, has provided deeper insight into the use of mobile phones in rural settings.

5.4.1 “Mobile is like my best friend”

While they were aware of a lack of access to computers as well as internet, many interviewees equally felt less need for a computer and internet, since mobile phones, although smaller in scale, can also provide necessary functions similar to internet in their view. There seems to be some variation in the use of mobile phones, as in some household there is only one mobile per family. In such case, it is the male members who get priority of use; father and brothers over wife and sisters. In fact, there were many more boys who had his own mobiles than girls and the tendency became even more conspicuous in rural area as most of their friends at school also do not have mobile phones, according to the interviewees. Even so, if we compare with the access to the use of computers and internet, which was close to none in the given context, there is greater access to this new ICT tool among youth in general. Several interviewees said that it has become especially accessible since 2006 when some major mobile companies have lowered the price of calls and instant messaging due to the competition among mobile companies. Consequently, in semi-rural to urban setting, the use of mobiles is becoming much the part of young people’s lives.

“Mobile phone is like best friend for me these days- I always want to be together with it and it is very important and useful to keep in touch with friends.”(Neli, girl, 16, Sitakund)

It shows the proximity and importance of mobile phones for them as elsewhere in the world today. They could be physically more detached from family centred life as

communication with friends become easier than before. Salowar, one of the male interviewees, 21 year old, has asserted that the good point about the mobile is that his parents would always be able to locate him by calling him or, they could also contact his friends to find out where he might be - assuring his parents that he is still under supervision even though he might be out of their sight.

It is too early and beyond the scope of this research to say, whether the presence of mobiles is changing the interaction pattern between youth and their parents, either positively or negatively. Some assert that peer relationship and youth autonomy strengthened through new ICT devices may create conflict with parental authority or traditional social power holders (WYR 2005: 85). However, youths' account did not indicate prominent conflict, as young people still give space for parental authority through mobile phones while keeping their privacy and autonomy. As we have seen, while a unique space for young people to socialize is at the centre, the use of mobile phone seems to offer them yet another arena to socialize and create their own meaning-making, especially under limited scope of mobility in rural setting.

5.4.2 Pop culture and participation

Apart from the use of mobile phones as a communication tool, those lucky few who can afford them, can also listen to local FM Radio and news, or download music. Those who have phones with radio functions even expressed less need to go to costly internet cafe, as they feel that they could get most of what they want from mobile phones.

The radio programme is covering the entire Chittagong region, and especially targeting young people. One boy identified an example of pop culture side of FM Radio. A

boy would send a message to a girl (or vice versa) through the Radio FM from their mobiles, such as “I miss you” or “I am sorry I have made you angry”. The DJ of the radio then would read the message with pseudonyms so that the sender would not be identified although the receiver may recognize the sender. Although it is not possible to identify exactly who are these youth, this seems to be a popular entertainment for the listeners as well as participants as such obvious exchange of sweet words are largely avoided especially in public in Bangladesh due to cultural and religious norms.

Another anecdote regarding the use of mobiles was how girls would receive messages and miss calls from unknown numbers, usually boys who are complete strangers and not from their schools. A female interviewee said that she often receives such miss calls that she usually ignores. If the call continues, her mother would answer the phone and scare off the caller, she said. I have informally talked to some young people in the cities and they said there are some girls who would answer the calls, and may even develop a kind of friendship to share the thoughts over the phone. Considering the nature of interview and the focus group discussion that I had, it was predicted that a girl would not openly speak out whether she has actually in contact with such strange miss-call giver or at least had interest in answering, as it is still taboo and done in hiding.

These anecdotes delineated how youth are engaged in new technological tools, circumventing the control of traditional norms and rules. I would still be cautious to jump to the conclusion that mobile phones are bringing any drastic and acute change in their lifestyles and way of thinking, as currently not many of rural youth have a mobile phone with high quality, and many do not even have mobile at all. We also have to keep in mind that mobile companies aim to promote more expensive and new models of mobile phones, or to make the mobile holders spend more money on instant messages / call in order to

keep up with the trend. Having that in mind, we could see the data by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics as it shows an increasing number of mobile users in Bangladesh every year, implying that gradually it would increase in rural areas in the coming years. There has been evidences in which many young people in the world are shifting to “flexible modes of participatory microstructures” that better suit their interest especially in the arena of novel technological tools such as mobile phones and internet, not just passively consuming them (Kovacheva 2005:25). It then may reinforce changing attitude among and towards different sex, gaining more autonomy from traditional authority, and more participation and free expression of their feelings through technological devices.

It is not the proliferation of mobile phones in the rural area that is the central focus, but it is more the fact that, without any outside intervention such as NGO or development agencies, youth are finding their own means and approaches to engage in active socialization with the use of available technological devices, appropriating it in a way that suits their interest and needs, whether for surreptitious and adventurous purposes, or just to communicate with friends. Moreover, hearing other peers express themselves over the Radio or giving signals through mobile phones would inform them of evolving new socialization patterns in everyday lives. Giroux’s notion of “public pedagogy” explains such active interaction within realm of media space and how it allows one to capture the evolving society and the world around them, not merely learning but assuming active roles in its process of change (2006: 190).

In fact, among large number of youth, their general interest in participatory aspect of mobile phones and Radio FM are raising their awareness of importance of giving their voices and to being heard in simple and accessible manner. For instance, the fact that many of the interviewees were very keen on the use of Community Radio seems to be much

related to proliferation of mobile based FM radio, which they identify as more interesting than the national radio which hardly any young people listen to these days even in remote areas. During small focus group discussions, as one of the ICT tools, what they had eagerly talked about was community radio which does not exist yet in anywhere in Bangladesh as the government had been refusing to give licence.⁵ Inspired by FM Radio, they had discussed several prospects and hopes they have for the community radio. One of the interviewees responded,

“It would be so great to have local news in our own language!! The problem here is that we cannot get almost any local news... who has passed away, traffic accident, and cyclone information which we fear every time, but there is no way to get proper information on these”.
(Salowar, male, 21, Alekdir)

The implication placed here is that young people themselves are being aware of their own limitations, problems and prospects with the use of new media tools. The fact that many interviewees said they want the radio in their local language explains their sense of belonging to the locality, and their consideration to “access” by not only young people themselves but larger categories of people in the rural areas; the old ones, the disabled, the illiterate- all would benefit greatly from the information provision through the different tool of “ICT”, especially community radio. Interestingly, they did not mention much about internet as source of information as they are well aware that websites on internet would not be in their local language, and less likely to have any local news of such small communities.

As Torres has argued that multiculturalism awareness is “form(s) of sociability that will promote the ability of individuals to tolerate and work together with people who

⁵ Bangladeshi government has just given licence for the first time to several civil society organizations in June 2008, but the actual implementation will not be realized till early 2009 largely due to technical, financial and legal matters.

are different from themselves”, mobiles as well as multimedia centres does seem to provide an arena for youth to autonomously learn not only differences among people in locality but also structural inequality embedded within a society and the ways to overcome the constraints (Torres 1998: 538). While main projects of YPSA centre mainly focus on youth issues and participation, they have several other activities funded through different sources taking place at the centre, targeting differing social groups, such as visually impaired panhandlers to form self-help groups for advocacy to the local government. Furthermore, the fact that YPSA often welcomes foreign volunteers in the 20’s, to work as a physiotherapist and other issues also seem to create a natural environment for youth to recognize multiplicity of people in a community and in the larger world. Although they are usually not given opportunities to interact with foreign volunteers or other participants at the centre and some feel shy to talk with them, awareness for working towards issues in their community have been manifested through their interest in disseminating information on disabilities, adolescent relationships and health issues through Community Radio in the future.

As repeatedly indicated in the international ICT discourse, the disparity and the inequality of access to ICT tools, including mobile phones, is still drastic both in urban and rural areas, and within communities. Those who could attend YCMC and afford mobile phones are of small portion of better-off youths in the rural areas. Even so, access to NGO centre and the use of commercial based ICT tools seem to have significance to their every day lives regarding political and cultural participation, however limited. The interviews have illuminated the role that young people can play, when they would actively seek to engage and take initiative to maximize the use of different means of ICTs as well as created spaces,

that may benefit their community and environment, if, given proper attention and support to encourage them, and to help them pursue the development goals that they envision.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Thus far we have explored conceptualization and perception of youth and ICT in the eyes of international development agencies on its agenda-setting level, and that of young people themselves. Recognizing other crucial actors and spheres in the picture, that is; NGOs and market economy that also play a big role in constructing youth experiences, I hope that the readers have gained insight on what it is to live in rural Bangladesh with surrounding debates on ICT in mind.

In conclusion I will lay out some of the points in answering the main driving question of this research; how relevant are the current debates on youth and ICT in International development agenda, for young people in rural Bangladesh?

Firstly, while great emphasis is placed by the development agencies on economic growth, service and information provisioning through ICT in recent years, extra skills acquired through computer course does not seem to bring them to the promised return of increased job with better salaries. A lack of information itself hinders youth from entering “global market” that human capital proponents assert, but the disparity is not only limited to the expected return. Satisfaction was expressed by young people in locality due to their attachment to beautiful geographical location, available jobs even without ICT equipments, and sense of self-esteem with positive support from parents. It might have been a rather surprise to human capital proponents, who seem to capture rural youth only as being left out of advancement of technologies and globalization, and anticipate youth frustration and at-risk behaviours if successful investment have failed.

Young people in the researched area were less connected to agriculture-based household and life styles as opposed to the popular notion of agriculture-based “Rural Youth” disregarding differing categories of young people in the picture. Although the focus was only on small group of relatively well-off youths in the area, their perspectives of life in and out of the NGO centre had informed us of their positionality in relation to other people in the communities, especially shedding light on gender inequality and scope of young people’s mobility in everyday lives. This juxtaposition and polarity of “rural” and “urban” seems to oversimplify the people under focus, which may have fatal consequence when considering policy measure on the issues as it fails to correctly capture young people they are focusing on.

In regard to youth citizenship, the Reports rightly pointed out the importance of promoting young people’s collective action for shared growth, and incorporating different people into the process of community development. Socialization is regarded as a crucial aspect of citizenship formation, although the Reports fail to give alternative options for spaces that may provide young people opportunities to enhance such abilities and perspectives. School, discussed in the report as one of the sites for citizenship education, may not be the only and best arena as some argue that school may reproduce already existing cultural norms and social inequality. Findings from field research show that spaces offered at NGO multimedia centre, both in semi-rural and rural areas seem to offer alternative arena for youth participation and socialization under natural settings. If certain conditions are met, facilitating young people’s active and autonomous participation, especially girls, it will result in greater mobility for them expanding their opportunity for taking part in activities and learning that would not have been possible without the existence of such space.

Considering the issue of “site of participation”, it is important for us to distinguish commercially driven ICT centre like cyber café, which often the human capital and ICT expansion proponents stress for investment in for greater accessibility to information and services. It is not the number of such commercially based ICT centre that matters, but to give consideration of the existing cultural inequality based on the norms and social structure that may hinder mobility of girls’ or other groups of marginalized people. Moreover, as asserted repeatedly, it is not the expansion of ICT per se that is essential to multiculturalism awareness. It is young people themselves who could bring the change through socialization with people of different socio-cultural or economic background recognizing differences and inequality in their living environment.

Such potentials seemed to have been overlooked by implementing actors, as NGO and UNESCO field office placed much concern on its financial and human resource constraints to carry out successful learning, participation and employment through the centres as to meet the expectation put forward by international agencies. It overlooks the fact that young people are capable of actively constructing multicultural awareness and citizenship in however subtle a manner and that encouraging these aspects may not necessarily require costly activities or ICT devices, but requires more careful attention and support.

Lastly, as articulated in WYR 2005, it would be of great use to consider how young people can take active participation in commercial media, creatively constructing their own space and means of socialization, and assuming roles in a given local context. Without being judgemental on whether it gives positive and/ or negative impact on young people today in relation to traditional authoritative figures, we are required to see how young people increase independence and mobility through the use of new ICT devices

such as mobile phones. As the market stretches its arm to every corner of the world due to global competition, it is important to realize how the use of ICTs and media are interpreted in different ways as young people try to appropriate it in their own way. Interviews revealed that young people do not only passively consume the media products, but showed great potential for giving voice and being heard, increasing autonomy and participation as they become aware of possibilities and constraints within their living environment.

Due to the fact that the centre is only accessible by already better-off youths with family's financial support while excluding the poorer and marginalized youth, one may criticise that such ICT centre may further perpetuate existing inequalities among youth in rural area as the more fortunate get even more mobility and opportunities, leaving out the more marginalized. I do agree to the fact that the whole idea of multimedia centre could be irrelevant for many youths in the context. However, I assert the great potential for even those small numbers of young people, as they may indirectly or directly take initiative in contributing to the development of their surrounding society as they take on active citizenship. This is exemplified in their interest in taking initiative and lead in establishing Community Radio contents creation, which may allow them participation not only for their interest but for the welfare of larger community.

In exploration of relevance of development theory surrounding youth and ICT in relationship to the reality of rural youth in Bangladesh, the voices of young people themselves have made it clear that ICT could be one of means that may accelerate development; development not only in terms of economic growth, but also as a process of social change incorporating young people as active citizen within its path, and promoting their political and cultural participation in a society. But it is not the ICT that solely enables people but the young people themselves who take control of, appropriate it in whatever

necessary and creative manner in the specific context. In the globalizing world today, multiculturalism is becoming ever-more diverse, reinforcing multiplicity of identities that determine the extent of solidarity and collective action for a social cause. Due to expanding technologies which create communication and participation going beyond space and time, young people, even in some of the remote areas of Bangladesh, are also able to identify themselves with evolving positionality within their environment, revealing and experiencing social inequality that they have potential to overcome collaborating collectively. Such potentiality of young people in some of the under-focused regions, especially rural areas elsewhere in the world as well, deserve more attention within youth development discourse. In doing so, young people's voice and the lived experience must be taken into serious consideration, to allow large cohort of youth to take leading role in pursuing equitable society in their living environment.

Theories are often found incompatible with realities. However, questioning what underlies such disparities is essential yet often neglected in the course of actual implementation of policies, programmes or projects. When synthesized with the notions derived from lived experiences of young people, a broader notion of youth development in global perspective will have a real significance to the young people of the world today.

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Annex

1. Interview questions for participants

General:

- How old are you?
- Have you been or finished attending schools? Up until which level?
- Do you work?
- What do your parents do for living? And your siblings?
- What would you like to do in the future?
- Are your parents supportive of your dreams?

Regarding the Centre

- What has made you come to the centre?
- What has been most interesting to you at the centre?
- What did your parents/ friends say about you coming to the centre?
- Is there any opportunity to use the acquired skill outside the centre? If yes, where and how? If no, why not?
- What kind of job would you like to have?
- Would skills learned at the centre be helpful for you to have a good job?
- Do you use internet? Do you go to cyber café?
- Did you meet new friends through the centre?
- How do you feel about the atmosphere at the centre (especially interaction with opposite sex)

Daily lives

- What is your day's schedule – especially after school?
- What do you enjoy during your free time?
- Do you go out of the town / village to hang out with friends?
- Tell me about your community – what you find nice and that you like?
- Would you feel like living in the big cities outside Sitakund/Alekdir/ Shahetkalhi?
Why, why not?
- Who decides about your education and marriage?

ICT

- Do you have mobile phone? Do your friends have mobile phone?
- What do you do with your mobile phone?
- (for those who do not have mobiles) Do you want mobile? Why or why not?
- Do you go to cyber café? Why or why not?
- Are you interested in internet? If yes, for what purpose?
- If there is a community radio programming opportunity, how would you like to take part in?
- If there is a community radio, what kind of content would you be interested to make?

2. Interview questions for YPSA staffs

- In his opinion, what has been the success of YCMC?
- What have been the challenges of YCMC in regard to expanding activities especially related to innovative use of ICT tools?
- What do you think is necessary for successful implementation of projects for young people and ICT?
- In your opinion, what are some of the priorities for the local youth for community participation?
- What is your opinion about community radio?
- For community Radio, what are needed for successful application?

3. Interview questions for UNICEF Dhaka officer

- Tell me about the role of UNICEF Dhaka office.
- What is the broad situation of ICT and young people in Bangladesh?
- What is your opinion (as UNESCO country office) about ICT in regard to young people?
- What has been the relationship of UNICEF with government especially on ICT and youth issues?
- What has been the success and challenges of multimedia centres in Bangladesh?
- What do you think is required for successful implementation of the youth related projects in Bangladesh?
- What do you think of the roles and position of local NGOs?