<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author/Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health matters to us all</td>
<td>UNV</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELLO YOUTH!</td>
<td>Muhammad Al-Amin</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing In Youth Promises a Brighter Tomorrow</td>
<td>Onchita Shadman, UNHCR</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power of Social Media</td>
<td>Rakibul Hasan, University of Dhaka</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Abuse by Young People</td>
<td>Md. Shahnawaz Khan Chandan, UNYSAB</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi Youth Movement on Road Safety and UN decade on action for Road safety 2011-2020</td>
<td>Shahid Shipon, Youth Movement for Road Safety (YMRS)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FK Norway Exchange Program: A New Learning Window</td>
<td>Rowshon Akhter Urmee, Center for Human Rights</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project IT For Differently Abled: Yes! We Can”</td>
<td>Natasha Israt Kabir, BRIDGE Foundation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health of Youth: Perfection or Pretence?</td>
<td>Maitraee Mistry, S.F.X. Greenherald international School</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMP-Youth Cooperation Series: Road towards Better Mutual Understanding</td>
<td>Sharmin Akhter Shakila, University of Dhaka</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Labor Has to Stop</td>
<td>Serajus Salekin, Bangladesh Medical College and Hospital</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Activists and Volunteers Commit to Uphold the Spirit of Humanity: World Humanitarian Day 2014 Celebrated</td>
<td>M. Moniruzzaman, UNIC Dhaka</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inclusion and Participation are important concepts when it comes to development work in general and especially for the work of the UN. The theme for this year’s International Youth Day - \textit{Mental Health Matters} - is therefore an important signal. It not only highlights the importance of ensuring adequate mental health service provision to young people, but also reminds us that we all have the responsibility to fight marginalization and discrimination in all forms.

Volunteering can play an especially important role in achieving broad participation and inclusion of a diverse range of people in development efforts. Volunteers around the world are persons from a vast variety of countries and socio-economic backgrounds. Volunteering is also especially important for young people, as it gives those with little or no professional work experience an opportunity to develop skills, which later play a key role in finding a decent job. It also gives the people directly affected by development work the chance to get involved in shaping their own future. It is important to recognize all these efforts, especially the work done by Humanitarian workers and volunteers in some of the most unstable places in the world, which is why we mark World Humanitarian Day each year and also in this issue of the newsletter.

The UN system in Bangladesh has recognized the crucial role young people play in development efforts and the innovative solutions they can bring in to tackle certain issues. It is an exciting time right now as the new UN Youth Advisory Panel has just been set up in Bangladesh and will commence its work providing an insider perspective on youth issues to all UN agencies in the country. This newsletter presents some of the thoughts and ideas young people from around Bangladesh have and I hope you enjoy reading about it as much as I do.

\textbf{Miriam Ebner}
\textbf{UNV Programme Officer}
HELLO YOUTH!

**Mental Health matters to us all**

International Youth Day is marked annually in order to raise awareness about issues surrounding youth.

This year, the UN’s theme of International Youth Day 2014 is “Youth and Mental Health” under the slogan ‘Mental Health Matters’. Due to poverty, violence and post-conflict trauma, gender, identity or disability, millions of youth worldwide are suffering from marginalization and exclusion, and these youth are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues. A new UN publication shows that up to 20% of young people worldwide suffer from a mental health condition each year. Volunteerism has the power to transform the lives of young people, as it inspires and engages, builds confidence, teaches new skills and expands our horizons.

For this Youth Day, UNV is therefore drawing special attention to those young people who, through volunteerism, are enjoying the mental health benefits, sense of accomplishment and inclusion that volunteering brings.

UNV Bangladesh, UNFPA and UNIC Dhaka partnered with the Bangladesh Prothibondi Foundation, an organization working with autistic children and youth, to commemorate International Youth Day in Dhaka. The day was marked by a discussion and cultural programme at the Prothibondi Foundation, as well as an art exhibition consisting of drawings and paintings by children and youth living with mental health conditions. The speeches given during the event highlighted the importance of investing in all youth, disregarding mental or physical health challenges they face. The speakers drew attention to the fact that when it comes to mental health issues patients and their families and friends often have to deal with fear and shame.

Ms. Argentina Matavel Piccin, head of the UN Theme Group on Adolescents and Youth, directed an appeal towards policy-makers and the wider society to face mental health challenges, but also to invest resources into mental healthcare facilities, such as the Prothibondi Foundation.

Because as the UN Secretary General remarked on his message for International Youth Day: “Mental health is how we feel; it is our emotions and well-being. We all need to take care of our mental health so that we lead satisfying lives. Let us begin to talk about our mental health in the same way we talk about our overall health. As we mark International Youth Day 2014, let us enable youth with mental health conditions to realize their full potential, and let us show that mental health matters to us all.”

Volunteering has effects, which are not apparent immediately. But, youth action matters. The activities of young people around the world are “inspiring changes”.

Different leading global initiatives organized by a number of local and international organizations are connecting youth and communities. They provide volunteers, and especially youth with the opportunity to get engaged in various fields, ranging from working towards the achievement of Development Goals, assisting in disaster and humanitarian relief, social service, economic and social empowerment, and human rights. Surprisingly, these experiences are frequently becoming life changing ones for them. Similar programs and projects, running across the world, target the integrated development of young people and society, creating collective opportunities for all. Now, inspired Bangladeshi youth have bags full of stories to tell and more are waiting to be heard. So, it is your time to open up the chances and get involved.

**Muhammad Al-Amin**

Stepping out of their comfort zones they are making development interventions to support the causes of the Millenium Development Goals, disaster and humanitarian relief, social service, economic and social empowerment, and human rights. Surprisingly, these experiences are frequently becoming life changing ones for them. Similar programs and projects, running across the world, target the integrated development of young people and society, creating collective opportunities for all. Now, inspired Bangladeshi youth have bags full of stories to tell and more are waiting to be heard. So, it is your time to open up the chances and get involved.
A warm bright sun and 21 children lit up a brilliantly painted eight feet by ten feet classroom.

The nine-year-olds were engrossed in matching pictures on their books with suitable phrases written in English. Their teacher, Ali Zoher Shameem strolled in between the two columns of benches, helping students who raised their hands. This was like any other ordinary classroom in Bangladesh. But the students and the teacher are Rohingya refugees – a group of people without citizenship of any country. Long Beach Primary School was one of the 12 primary schools situated inside Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhiya, Cox’s Bazar. These schools are the only means of formal education for children born in the official refugee camps.

Among the pupils, two girls in blue caps stood out. With serious attention, they intently filled up the pages of their notebooks. When the final bell rang, a sad-looking *Meena and a happy *Yanu joined four other students in a stretched verandah. These children in blue caps are the ‘Little Doctors’ – volunteers who sensitized their community about hygiene and cleanliness. The self-reliance building program was launched in 2013 by an aid organization, Action Against Hunger (ACF) with the support of UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Every Thursday, after school, the ‘Little Doctors’ go around the neighborhood with a mission to CLEAN.

After an initial discussion on the verandah, the children split into groups of two and spread over the area. Meena and Yanu headed towards the toilet situated at the far end of the playground. While one girl poured water from a can, the other swept the floor of the toilet.

The children then ran around the ground collecting rubbish which they piled up in a corner. The remains are later sorted, burnt and disposed of.

Meena and Yanu were hardly seen apart during this exercise. Cousins and best friends, both the girls dream of becoming ‘real’ doctors when they grow up. Shameem, himself a father of two daughters, has set an example of determination for these refugee children.

In 1991, Shameem lost his father who was picked up by the Myanmar military. A year later, his family came to Bangladesh in search of a safe refuge. Shameem studied until grade 5 in a camp-school and persevered to learn further by collecting textbooks of secondary level. He now spreads his knowledge among the young refugees.

“We see more and more parents from our community becoming interested in sending their children to school”, said a cheerful Shameem confidently.

“They sacrifice their own comfort to make sure their children are literate. Because they know that investing in these youth today will lead to a brighter future.”

Onchita Shadman, UNHCR

UNHCR 2014: A school for refugee children

*Names of the children have been changed to protect their privacy.
The Power of Social Media

Rakibul Hasan, University of Dhaka

Many young people nowadays spend more time in a virtual world of social media rather than living in the real world, it seems difficult for a lot of us to leave our computer or smartphones behind.

Social media websites a, fulfilling different purposes, from video calls and voice chats and uploading images or one’s latest whereabouts, everything is now possible on the internet. There are so many instances where relationships are formed and broken on social media without any real human contact.

Due to the popularity of social media it doesn’t come as a surprise that these for a are largely influencing the way we behave, socialize and see the world. The news of students in England using emoticon signs to express different emotions on their exam paper is indeed a sign how a younger generations’ behavior is being shaped by their activities on social media.

The access to complete freedom on social media websites, which is very difficult to come by in the real world, has arguably made it so popular. One’s account on Facebook or any other social media is someone’s own kingdom where he or she can do virtually anything. As a result, the people who have difficulties in expressing themselves now have a new platform to express their views and talents to the world. And it is absolutely free. It was the YouTube videos which helped young musical talents like Justin Bieber come into spotlight, and many young performers followed suit.

However, having a virtual identity can also put one into trouble as you are very open to the public; the danger of harassment by complete strangers is always there. No matter how many privacy checks one has put into one’s social media account, the person is always to a certain degree vulnerable to getting unexpected comments or getting tagged in offensive images from his or her ‘friends.’

In November 2013, a 14-year old girl in Mumbai, India allegedly committed suicide after being stalked by a friend on Facebook. Incident like this proves how being too open on social media can put one into real troubles.

It therefore goes without saying that young people’s fascination for social media has both its pros and cons. However, the real problem arises when it turns into addiction as it has been the case for many youth around the world. But, if managed carefully, one’s talent can meet opportunity on the social media and things can change overnight.
Drug Abuse by Young People

The number of young people across different geographical locations of the world, and also in Bangladesh, is changing fast. 30% of Bangladesh’s total population (around 50 million) is between 18 and 30 years. But like many other developing and least developed countries there is no healthy policy specifically for this large group.

A sound policy for youth is a crying need for any country, since its future relies largely on them. One of the reasons for slow progress in the least developed world is the lack of investment in youth and the lack of support provided to youth. Unfortunately, among the most serious threats for today’s youth is the proliferation of prohibited drugs and narcotics which is the root of countless physical, mental and social problems including HIV infection, interpersonal and social violence.

According to World Health Organization the average age of drug addicts is 22.

I visited several hot spots of drug peddling (mainly slum areas of Dhaka) in Bangladesh. The slums exists as signs of humanity’s failure: teenagers lying stiff and numb after inhaling fatal heroin, mothers and sons taking drugs together, prostitution to earn money for the drugs and dying youths helplessly suffering from withdrawal syndrome are some common features of these places. And these features of substance abuse are common all over the world.

In developing countries like Bangladesh a lot of street children are also falling victim to substance abuse.

Street children are using adhesive solvents as narcotics that cause fatal health hazards. Even breast feeding mothers battling with drug addiction are passing their addiction on to their infants.

Even the developed countries are not successful enough to tackle this threat. In the USA over 600,000 heroin addicts are between 18 to 25 years of age. In a government survey of the USA it has been shown that drug-related illness, death, and crime cost the nation approximately $66.9 billion.

These addicted groups of youth are at a higher risk of contracting certain diseases. Tendency of HIV infection among substance abusers is higher than any other people.

Drug addicted mothers are giving birth to premature children. It leads to different levels of disability and even early death. Substance abuse and drug trafficking are the cause of severe social violence around the world. From 2006 to 2012, 60,000 people have been killed alone in Mexico due to drug related violence.

Providing support to youth fighting their battle against drugs and most importantly preventing youth from substance abuse is a necessity here as it is across the world. Taking time to look out for our friends and family and recognizing any difficulties, which may make them more susceptible to drug abuse is vital, something we should always keep in mind and use this year’s theme for the International Youth Day as a wakeup call.

“Mothers, battling with a drug addiction, are giving birth to premature children. It leads to different levels of disability and even early death.”
Bangladesh is a nation with many challenges and opportunities. Road safety is one of the grave concerns in our society. Nearly all Bangladeshi families have had their fair share of calamity associated with road accident.

Road accidents become an enormous social setback in Bangladesh and the problem is worsening. Every year we are losing 2 to 3 percent of the GDP due to road disasters. Each year, there are at least 4500 fatalities and 5500 serious injuries occurred according to 4500 police reported road accident in our roads and highways. However, other sources point out that road accident fatalities could be as high as 15000 to 22000 each year. Road safety standards in Bangladesh are next to zero. The Accident Research Institute of BUET found that the international standard is 25 fatalities per 100000 vehicles, whereas in Bangladesh it is as high as 200-250 per vehicles.

Bangladeshi youth are engaged with addressing many social problems. Yet, road safety is not one of the issues which tops their list. Many of us are not informed about the ongoing UN road safety Decade 2011-2020 which targets a 50 percent cut in road crashes by the year 2020. However, what is most alarming is that 55% of road disasters in Bangladesh occurs due to jaywalking and pedestrian’s ignorance whereas only 10 % of accidents happen due to the negligence of drivers.

Young people can work with or without the help of GO and NGO to make people aware of the importance of adhering to traffic rules, pedestrians safety, safe driving, and the dangers of jaywalking. Before doing that the youths themselves have to commit to stop Jay-walking (instead using footpaths, bridges, underpasses, Zebra crossings, etc.), using seat belts while traveling, wearing helmets on a motorcycle, not using mobile phones while driving, driving at a safe speed, knowing and abiding by the highway code, not driver under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and only operating vehicles with appropriate license and training, as well as keeping vehicles in good condition.

Stay safe on our roads and make others aware. I hope we can make this country less traffic accident prone by keeping up our efforts and hard work.

Source: UNYNET
FK Norway Exchange Program: A New Learning Window

Rowshon Akhter Urmee, Center for Human Rights

Exchanging knowledge, information and skills can make the world more connected, foster mutual understanding and boost expertise through diversification and adaptation. This lies at heart of the FK Norway’s learning and with this belief I started my journey on the 28th of July, 2013.

FK Norway is a part of the national development policy based in Norway which gives young people in Norway and other developing countries the opportunity to experience each other’s realities and cultures. About 400 partner organizations and institutions exchange young people in collaboration with FK Norway. I was sent on this exchange program from the Centre for Human Rights (CHRS), Bangladesh to the Asian Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) in Bangkok, Thailand where I spent almost ten months. This opened up a new window of exotic experience that helped me to see the beauty of life at every moment.

During my stay in Bangkok, I was assigned to develop a human rights based curriculum and make a Bengali booklet on basic human rights. The office environment in Bangkok was very comfortable as all my colleagues were kind and caring though they did maintain a strong hierarchy. I was supervised by Kalpalata Dutta, an Indian woman, whom I found one of the most devoted and responsible individuals not only for her professionalism but also the way she guided and supported me throughout my time there.

It was amazing to observe the people, life-style and culture of Bangkok. It appeared to me that Bangkok provides top quality security to its citizens especially to women. It was a great feeling to walk in the streets at midnight without any anxiety or fear. I found Thai people are great in every aspect of their behavior and the motivation behind such practice could be the influence of Buddhism.

For shopping-lovers, Bangkok is a heaven with full of diverse and interesting stuffs. Most of my weekend activities involved visiting such places and my favorite shopping destinations were Chatuchak Weekend Market and Chinatown.

Attending seminars, joining office trips and engaging in voluntary activities enabled me to visit all the corners of Thailand and gather a lot of new experiences. At Yasothon Province in North-east Thailand, I attended a program with a volunteer group consisting of AIDS afflicted children. The orphanage which is known as ‘Home Hug’ accommodates approximately 70 children between the age of two months and the late teens, where they are taught to become independent and promote strategies to live with self-dignity. This humanitarian center is run by an AIDS afflicted woman. Interacting with this wonderfully inspiring lady and the kids made me understand how some people are dedicating their lives for the sake of good deeds. Further adding to my tally of experience, I worked as an organizer and facilitator from AIHR to celebrate Human Rights Week at Thaksin University in South Thailand. Debriefing in May 2014 marked the ending of my fellowship period in Bangkok and I returned to Bangladesh. My time at Bangkok was one of the most enriching experiences that broadened my horizon, enhanced my skills and paved a way for attaining my full potential.
Natasha Israt Kabir, BRIDGE Foundation

Project IT For Differently Abled: Yes! We Can”

At the age of twenty, I watched ‘Forrest Gump’ and it left a lasting impression with me. A few years later, I came across ‘My Left Foot’ and read autobiographies of Helen Keller and Stephen Hawking. These inspiring stories developed a sense of responsibility in me to work for the habitually uncared-for marginalized group of our society – those with ‘disabilities’ whom I prefer to call ‘differently abled.’ Because I believe there should not be norm in the way things are done, but there should always be opportunities to do things differently.

In 2005, I started serving as a volunteer and worked closely with this vulnerable and excluded group of people; as I found out that our society is not flexible and supportive towards this marginalized community. It also made me understand that achieving sustainable development won’t become a reality without the social inclusion and empowerment people living with disabilities. So, I searched for ways to help these people.

Visiting the USA on a ‘US Study Initiative’ supported by the US Department of State, in 2007, was a life-changing experience for me as the idea of community service I found there moved me. After returning to Bangladesh, I was looking for opportunities to make an impact on the lives of these challenged people and came up with a plan to empower them with IT (Information Technology) skills. The year 2013 was the time when I initiated ‘Project IT for Differently Abled’ with a grant from the US Department of State and turned my dream into reality. The project aims to pass on technological education and skills to people with disabilities. I believe technology will give them a voice, help them connect with the world and become independent.

Falguny is one of the physically challenged participants from the southern part of Bangladesh, who has developed fast computer operating skills without having her two wrists. She hopes to receive admission in a university soon.

Ryad, a student suffering from deafness attains all objectives when given a task and is very responsive. Saydeur’s determination has never made him late for classes though he travels from outside Dhaka every single day. Rajon is another great example of courage who attends classes with the support of his crutches. These people are the source of my strength and inspiration now. I strongly believe – ‘If you have the idea and vision to change the world, yes! You can.’
Bangladesh is well known for its emerging young population. Investing in the full potential of youth can place Bangladesh as a fore-runner towards sustainable development.

Youth need to have knowledge and good understanding of their country’s constitution, legislative, executive and administrative systems, judiciary services and government agencies to serve it better. Unfortunately, it is common in Bangladesh to keep away from the Police rather than seeking their help or cooperating with them in a time of crisis. A big gap exists in communication and friendliness between the community and the Police Force. To address this issue, The Asia Foundation (TAF) has undertaken an initiative titled “DMP-Youth Cooperation Series (DYCS).” The project aims at strengthening public security in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area through greater cooperation between the law enforcement agency DMP (Dhaka Metropolitan Police) and young people.

As a part of this project, a training named “Training of Trainers from Bangladesh Police and Youth Leaders” was held over the span of six days at the Police Staff College in Mirpur, Dhaka. Six enthusiastic young volunteers from University of Dhaka and North South University were trained along with some police personnel from Rajshahi and Rangpur range. Furthermore, a workshop and a visit to Kamna Model Police Station took place. It was an eye-opener experience that made me realize that police personnel are human-beings just like us with all their emotions, friendliness, helpful attitude and many more inspiring attributes. We can entrust them with the massive responsibility of safeguarding us as they are very skilled and capable professionals, who deserve our respect and cooperation.

Mental Health of Youth: Perfection or Pretence?

Youth are considered to be at the prime of their lives, full of energy and void of any worries. Everything seems to be perfect. However, their seemingly ideal world is often plagued by mental illness.

Mental illness is not easy to define. In general, it is a mental or behavioral irregularity that causes either suffering or an impaired ability to function in ordinary life. Common conditions may include depression, anxiety disorders, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, mood disturbances, substance abuse, suicidal behavior; aggressive behavior. It is estimated that as many as 1 in 5 young people suffer from mental illness. About 90 percent of suicide victims suffer from a mental illness, making it the foremost cause of suicide amongst youth.

Maitraee Mistry, S.F.X. Greenherald international school

Having a mental illness is not a choice or moral failing. It is different for everyone. There may be a combination of reasons, amongst which the leading causes may be bullying, discrimination, low self-esteem, physical health problems, biological factors, sexual abuse, family pressure, academic failing, social exclusion, stress or absence of proper guidance. It might begin with some feelings of sadness, distress or anxiety. Over time, these symptoms become more intense and overwhelming, affecting relationships and every-day life. Mental illness makes one lose all hope leaving one feeling isolated and misunderstood. It can effect even strongest amongst us; the ones who smile through silent pain, cry behind closed doors and fight battles that no one knows about.

Sharmin Akhter Shakila, University of Dhaka

Youth are considered to be at the prime of their lives, full of energy and void of any worries. Everything seems to be perfect. However, their seemingly ideal world is often plagued by mental illness.

Mental illness is not easy to define. In general, it is a mental or behavioral irregularity that causes either suffering or an impaired ability to function in ordinary life. Common conditions may include depression, anxiety disorders, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, mood disturbances, substance abuse, suicidal behavior; aggressive behavior. It is estimated that as many as 1 in 5 young people suffer from mental illness. About 90 percent of suicide victims suffer from a mental illness, making it the foremost cause of suicide amongst youth.

Maitraee Mistry, S.F.X. Greenherald international school

Having a mental illness is not a choice or moral failing. It is different for everyone. There may be a combination of reasons, amongst which the leading causes may be bullying, discrimination, low self-esteem, physical health problems, biological factors, sexual abuse, family pressure, academic failing, social exclusion, stress or absence of proper guidance. It might begin with some feelings of sadness, distress or anxiety. Over time, these symptoms become more intense and overwhelming, affecting relationships and every-day life. Mental illness makes one lose all hope leaving one feeling isolated and misunderstood. It can effect even strongest amongst us; the ones who smile through silent pain, cry behind closed doors and fight battles that no one knows about.

Sharmin Akhter Shakila, University of Dhaka

Youth are considered to be at the prime of their lives, full of energy and void of any worries. Everything seems to be perfect. However, their seemingly ideal world is often plagued by mental illness.

Mental illness is not easy to define. In general, it is a mental or behavioral irregularity that causes either suffering or an impaired ability to function in ordinary life. Common conditions may include depression, anxiety disorders, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, mood disturbances, substance abuse, suicidal behavior; aggressive behavior. It is estimated that as many as 1 in 5 young people suffer from mental illness. About 90 percent of suicide victims suffer from a mental illness, making it the foremost cause of suicide amongst youth.
Surprise awaited me during a recent walk. A little child of about seven years old came up to me. He had a bundle of notes and asked if I could count it for him. It amounted to 330 taka. The boy seemed quite happy with himself. I asked what the money was for. He said his name was Saber, that he worked at a plastic factory and he had nearly saved enough to get his mother a saree for Eid.

Saber is a child laborer and like many other children in this country, suffering from poverty. Child labor is a growing concern in developing nations like Bangladesh. This does not come as a surprise to us considering the fact that over 50% of the country’s population live below the poverty line.

Although Bangladesh is on track when it comes to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with many of the MDGs directly related to children and their welfare child labour has not ceased to exist. Let’s think of it as a sequence of events – with the continuance of child labor, we cannot expect universal primary education and without the proper education, these children will continue to live in poverty. In the long run, all the problems associated with poverty that we have been working so hard to eradicate will surface.

Changes can be effected. Investment in the proper locations for setting up of schools away from the capital and teaching children free of cost can be one of the steps. These schools could also focus on educating and providing skills to young people to work in the leading business sectors of Bangladesh such as agriculture or textiles.

Youth graduating from these schools not only end up graduating, but they will support the agricultural sector, increasing the efficiency of the workforce and the output of crops and that would mean playing to our countries strengths.

Bangladesh is a developing country that has come far over the past years but then again, a saturation point will soon come. One cannot think treatment forever, it is time to think “Prevention” – and that begins at the origin, at our roots, with the countries’ children.

“A person is person, no matter how small”, said Dr. Suess. So, the continuous presence of children working on the streets has to stop if we are to survive. Turn to the children before it is too late for them to turn back.
Mental health conditions affect an estimated 450 million people worldwide. The National Survey on Mental Health in Bangladesh found that 16.1% of the adult population has a mental health condition that requires immediate care. Shockingly though, with the exception of autism, there is a dearth of information on the mental health of adolescents and youth, revealing a huge gap in awareness.

That is why it was so important that the theme of this year’s International Youth Day was “Mental Health Matters”. It provided an opportunity for people around the world to show their support to the one fifth of young people between the ages of 15-24 who experience mental health conditions. While exact figures on the youth of Bangladesh are not available, if we simply apply global proportions to this country, almost nine million young Bangladeshis are estimated to have mental health conditions.

Adolescence is a time of rapid and significant physical, mental and social change; for some, this transition from childhood to adulthood can trigger mental health difficulties. Plus the physical changes that occur during adolescence increase the vulnerability of females to early and forced marriage, unintended pregnancy, along with gender-based violence – all of which are risk factors for mental health conditions.

Given the strong links between mental health and sexual and reproductive health, this is a relatively neglected area worthy of more attention in Bangladesh. For example, globally 10-15% of women experience depression during pregnancy or just after childbirth and rates are
higher in developing countries than developed ones. Unintended pregnancy, intimate partner violence, miscarriage and abortion also have potentially deleterious psychological effects.

Mothers and pregnant women and girls with mental health conditions are more likely to be of poor physical health, suffer from obstetric complications and experience preterm labour. They are also less likely to seek antenatal or postnatal care.

Maternal depression combined with lower economic status is directly linked to lower infant birth weight, higher rates of malnutrition and stunting, and higher rates of diarrheal disease and infectious illness. Suffice to say that current and expectant mothers with untreated mental health conditions are at a clear disadvantage in terms of providing care for themselves and to their children. This disadvantage is compounded when such a mother is a youth or adolescent.

Often unwarranted social stigma prevents individuals with mental health conditions from seeking treatment, and as such, their suffering goes undiagnosed and unabated. To compound this issue, there is a lack of mental health care providers in Bangladesh: only 0.4% of all physicians are psychiatrists. Some estimates show that there are as few as 120 psychiatrists in all of Bangladesh. Psychologists and social workers are also in short supply.

A mere 0.5% of the government health care budget is spent on mental health care and only two of the 50 outpatient facilities treat children and adolescents. Incorporating mental health care into existing and planned basic health care initiatives would be one way to greatly improve the status quo.

It is important to ensure accessibility and affordability of high-quality mental health services to all Bangladeshis, including youth and other groups generally left out of mental health debates. Considering that one-third of Bangladeshi females between 15 to 19 years old are currently pregnant or have already given birth, the linkages between adolescent sexual reproductive health and adolescent mental health should be neglected no longer.


World Humanitarian Day is an opportunity to celebrate the spirit that inspires humanitarian work around the globe. Thousands of people across the world are doing a noble job every day. Unfortunately some of them pay the ultimate price. World Humanitarian Day was designated by the UN General Assembly to coincide with the anniversary of the 2003 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq. It is a Day to remember the heroes who lost their lives and persons who were affected while doing humanitarian work. This year the UN and its humanitarian partners continue their groundbreaking campaign called The World Needs More #Humanitarian Heroes, which is a first-of-its-kind project that turns words into aid.

In commemoration of World Humanitarian Day, UNIC Dhaka, OCHA and ASA University Bangladesh jointly organized an interactive seminar and learning session at the University auditorium on 19 August 2014. Senior Humanitarian Affairs Advisor of UN OCHA Mr. Gerson Brandao spoke as Chief Guest while Vice-Chancellor of ASA University Prof. Dr. Dalem Chandra Barman presided over the session. Officer-in-Charge of UNIC Dhaka M. Moniruzzaman delivered a speech focusing on the importance of the Day, he also read-out UN Secretary-General’s message on the Day.

The representatives of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, Fire Service & Civil Defense and OXFAM took part in the programme. They spoke on humanitarian issues including their involvement during disaster and natural calamity. They also invited youth present and beyond to become active as volunteers.

Two youth volunteers shared their working experience and contribution during the Rana Plaza collapse. The fallen heroes including UN Under-Secretary-General Sergio de Mello were also remembered on this occasion.