

**Terms of Reference (ToR)**  
**Consultancy to lead research**  
**On**  
**Understanding the Realities and Aspirations of Urban Poor Youth in Bangladesh: Challenges, Opportunities, and Pathways for Inclusive Development**

**A. About ALRD**

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) is a national rights-based, single-focused advocacy and networking organization that was established in January 1991. It aims to promote and strengthen land rights and agrarian reform in Bangladesh for the poor and marginalized communities. ALRD was formally registered with the Joint Stock Company under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and with the NGO Affairs Bureau in 1991. Since its formation, ALRD has been pivotal in mobilizing grassroots actors and promoting advocacy and networking to establish the rights of the poor and marginalized communities, including women, over land and natural resources. Its network is spread over more than 200 NGOs, covering the entire Bangladesh. The main focus of its activities includes policy advocacy on land rights of the poor people over natural resources for effecting appropriate agrarian and land reforms in Bangladesh and capacity building of the partners and stakeholders.

**B. Context**

Approximately thirty percent of the population currently lives in cities, a figure that is projected to rise to more than half around the mid-21st century. A large section of it lives in slum or quasi-slum-like conditions, devoid of any urban amenities, in a perpetual spiral of poverty. Dhaka, the country's capital city, is already among the largest megalopolis in the world and is projected to be among the 10 most populated urban conurbations around the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. However, along with its exploding population, a significant percentage will be urban poor. The overall growth of urbanization will expose Bangladesh to further confronting this conundrum.

The principal driving factors are influenced both by the urban pull factor (that includes expanding employment opportunities in cities and towns) and by the rural push factors (such as rural poverty, a surplus of rural labor, climate change, and environmental disasters like river erosion and food) have been contributing to increase of urban population growth since independence in 1971. This growing concern has led to the rise of urgent worries about the land and human rights of this section of communities and the socio-economic development of Bangladesh: the **explosion of the urban poor**. This rapid growth of the urban population also hides another ugly reality: a large section of it lives in a slum or quasi-slum-like condition, devoid of any urban amenities, in a perpetual spiral of poverty. As a consequence, the urban poor face unique challenges like low-quality housing, inadequate drinking water, drainage and sewerage facilities, pollution, and traffic congestion in the 500+ cities and towns across Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is experiencing rapid urbanization, with 31.5 percent of its population residing in urban areas as of the 2022 Population and Housing Census. This proportion is projected to rise to 44 percent by 2050. While urbanization is often associated with economic growth and development, the reality for a significant segment of the urban population paints a starkly different picture. Despite official statistics showing a decline in urban poverty to 18.9 percent, emerging estimates and ground realities suggest that the actual incidence may be much higher—potentially over 40 percent. The urban poor, many of whom are rural-to-urban migrants driven by job scarcity, environmental degradation, and landlessness, face multidimensional and intergenerational poverty. They reside primarily in informal settlements or slums without tenure

security or access to basic services. Urban poverty is also strongly interlinked with structural issues—land rights violations, lack of representation in governance, weak access to legal and civic services, and exclusion from social safety nets. These issues highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive, rights-based, and context-sensitive approach to understanding and addressing urban poverty.

On the other hand, Urban youth in Bangladesh, particularly those from low-income and marginalized communities, face complex and interlinked challenges. Rapid urbanization has increased population pressure in cities without proportionate development in infrastructure, services, or employment opportunities. This circumstance disproportionately affects poor urban youth, who are often excluded from mainstream development processes due to poverty, lack of access to education and skills training, and inadequate social protection.

They are often trapped in cycles of informal employment, substandard housing, limited civic participation, and vulnerability to exploitation. Gender inequality, rising crime, environmental hazards, and social isolation further compound these challenges. Despite these adversities, urban youth possess immense potential to contribute to economic development, social progress, and urban innovation if provided with the right opportunities and support structures.

This research aims to explore the lived experiences, needs, aspirations, and resilience strategies of urban poor youth in Bangladesh to inform youth-centered, inclusive, and empowering policies and programs and to explore ways to engage urban poor youth in economic and social activities.

### **C. Rational:**

Bangladesh's rapid urbanization, driven by climate change, river erosion, and shrinking agricultural land, has forced many marginalized farmers into cities as "floating squatters," where no policies secure their access to urban land while the wealthy occupy vast areas unchecked. Poverty responses remain rural-centric, overlooking the rising urban poor who face landlessness, food insecurity, weak financial inclusion, and substandard housing. Official figures underestimate urban poverty, which is rooted in governance failures, exclusion, and insecure tenure, leaving interventions largely palliative. Urban youth, especially from low-income backgrounds, bear the brunt of these challenges—trapped in informal work, poor housing, and social isolation—yet hold immense potential to drive innovation and civic progress if empowered.

This research aims to capture their lived realities and resilience strategies to inform inclusive, rights-based policies and programs that engage youth in shaping a just and sustainable urban future.

### **D. Research Problem**

Despite Bangladesh's rapid urbanization and economic growth, a substantial segment of urban youth—particularly those from poor and marginalized communities—continues to grapple with persistent, multidimensional challenges. These include entrenched poverty, limited access to quality education and skills training, unemployment or precarious low-wage work, inadequate housing, poor health services, and pervasive social exclusion.

Urban poor youth are disproportionately burdened by structural inequalities and governance deficits that define urban poverty. They remain excluded from secure livelihoods, meaningful representation in decision-making, and participation in policy processes. Their voices are underrepresented, and their distinct needs and aspirations are rarely reflected in urban development strategies or poverty alleviation programs.

Yet, urban youth hold immense potential to drive social and economic transformation. However, there is a critical research gap: little is known about their lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and resilience in navigating adversity. Without such insights, designing targeted, inclusive, and effective interventions becomes difficult, leaving their empowerment unrealized.

This research seeks to bridge that gap by critically examining the conditions, challenges, and opportunities facing urban poor youth in Bangladesh. Its ultimate aim is to inform policies and programs that uphold their rights, foster inclusion, and enable their active participation in shaping an equitable urban future.

## **Overall Objective**

To critically examine the socio-economic conditions, lived experiences, and resilience strategies of urban poor youth in Bangladesh, focusing on their challenges, opportunities, and agency, to recommend inclusive, rights-based, and youth-centered urban development strategies.

## **Specific Objectives:**

### **A. Understanding Challenges Faced by Urban Poor Youth**

- **Socio-Economic Deprivation:** Assess youth challenges related to education, employment, housing, healthcare, and access to services.
- **Barriers to Education and Skills:** Explore obstacles such as poor schooling quality, gender gaps, dropout rates, and lack of vocational training.
- **Employment and Livelihoods:** Investigate unemployment issues, underemployment, informal sector dependence, and potential in emerging sectors.

### **B. Exploring Youth Agency and Resilience**

- **Coping Strategies:** Identify resilience mechanisms such as informal income generation, community support systems, and youth networks.
- **Youth Mobilization:** Explore strategies to organize youth for social, economic, and political empowerment.

### **C. Institutional and Policy Analysis**

- **Program Assessment:** Evaluate the effectiveness of government and NGO initiatives in addressing urban poor youth needs.
- **Structural Barriers:** Analyze systemic issues, including insecure tenure, exclusion from governance, and lack of civic representation.

### **D. Recommendations for Inclusive Development**

- **Policy and Programmatic Interventions:** Propose rights-based, youth-centered strategies to enhance education, economic opportunities, civic engagement, and social protection.
- **Urban Development Gaps:** Highlight current urban policies' limitations in meeting marginalized youth's rights and needs.

## **Research Questions:**

- What are the key socio-economic challenges urban poor youth face in Bangladesh regarding education, employment, housing, healthcare, and access to services?
- What are the major barriers to quality education and skill development among urban poor youth, including issues of gender disparity and school dropout?
- To what extent is vocational training accessible and effective for these youths?

- What are the characteristics of the employment landscape for urban poor youth (e.g., informal sector involvement, job security, underemployment)?
- What opportunities exist in emerging sectors that urban youth could tap into?
- How are urban poor youth affected by violence, crime, and social exclusion, especially in informal settlements?
- What are the mental health challenges and social aspirations of urban poor youth, and how do these influence their engagement in society?
- What resilience strategies do poor urban youth adopt to cope with socioeconomic and environmental pressures?
- How do informal networks and community-based support systems help youth navigate hardship?
- What are effective strategies to mobilize and organize urban poor youth for social, political, and economic transformation?
- How effective are current government and NGO programs in addressing the needs of urban poor youth?
- What systemic and institutional obstacles prevent youth from accessing services, land, decent work, and political participation?
- What are the key policy and programmatic gaps in current urban development strategies concerning urban youth?
- What practical, rights-based interventions can empower youth and ensure their inclusion in urban governance and development?

### **Methodology:**

A mixed-method approach will be adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Suggested components include:

- **Literature Review:** Secondary data analysis, program reports, and existing studies.
- **Household Surveys:** Targeting urban poor youth aged 15–29 across selected cities.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** With policymakers, NGOs, employers, educators, and local government officials.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** With male and female youth in low-income urban settlements.
- **Case Studies:** Documenting lived experiences of youth in various urban contexts (e.g. street youth, youth with disabilities, youth leaders).
- **Participatory Tools:** Youth mapping, storytelling, or photovoice approaches to amplify youth voices.

### **Expected Outputs:**

1. A comprehensive research report with analysis, findings, and recommendations.
2. Policy briefs for government and development partners.
3. Infographics or youth-friendly materials summarizing findings.
4. An urban poor youth consultation event to validate findings and gather feedback.
5. Recommendations for future programming and policy advocacy.

### **Target Audience:**

- National and local government agencies (e.g., Ministry of Youth & Sports, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, LGED etc.)
- Development partners and donors
- NGOs and civil society working on youth, urban poverty, and development
- Youth networks and organizations
- Researchers and academics

**Duration:**

4–6 months (depending on geographic coverage and scope)

**Potential Study Locations:**

Areas of Urban Poor Population in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna cities.

**TENTATIVE BUDGET:**

TK. XXXX (XXX only) will be paid by A/C payee cheque. Income Tax will be deducted at source in accordance with the law of the country. However, Necessary VAT will be borne by ALRD. The first installment (30%) will be made upon signing the contract; the second installment (30%) will be paid after fieldwork; and the final installment (40%) will be made upon submission and acceptance of the final report.

**General terms and conditions:**

- ALRD reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal without providing verbal and/or written rationale.
- All reports and documents prepared during the assignment will be treated as the property of ALRD;
- The reports/documents or any part, therefore, cannot be sold, used, or reproduced in any manner without prior written approval of ALRD;
- ALRD reserves the right to monitor the quality and progress of the work during the assignment.

**Submission of Proposal:**

Interested consultant firms/Individuals are requested to submit a technical proposal and a financial proposal addressing to the Executive Director, Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), House-6/6, Block-F, Lalmatia, Dhaka-1207, Email: [alrd@agni.com](mailto:alrd@agni.com) Cc to: [mong@alrd.org](mailto:mong@alrd.org)

**The deadline of proposal submission is on or before 20 December 2025**

Shamsul Huda

Executive Director

Dated: 9 December 2025