



Concept Note

Economy of Tomorrow (EoT) Fellowship for University Graduates and Young Researchers

2026 Theme- *Policies for the future of the fashion industry in Bangladesh*

1. Introduction to the Theme and Research Areas

Bangladesh's fashion industry is one of the key pillars of the national economy. The sector is the country's dominant source of export earnings and wage employment, with a workforce in which women form the majority. Its ecosystem comprises a diverse range of actors: large and medium export-oriented manufacturers, thousands of small and medium subcontractors, buying and merchandizing houses, apparel manufacturers, backward and forward linkages, textile suppliers, and a vast workforce drawn largely from rural Bangladesh. Especially western buyers shape sourcing decisions across the entire value chain, while industry associations, international sustainability bodies, and compliance auditors set standards that ripple through the entire supply chain. Beyond the formal industry, a wide satellite economy of informal traders, thrift and deadstock sellers, and ancillary service providers has also grown around garment clusters, forming an integral part of the broader economic and employment landscape.

The industry's strengths are well established: competitive production costs, timely production and ability to meet demanded quality standards. The number of certified green factories is growing. Yet it remains heavily concentrated in low-value apparel with very partial value chains. Investment in design, innovation, or branding is limited and the downstream sector is in foreign hands. Working conditions have been a persistent concern. Some smaller actors such as subcontractors and ancillary suppliers often operate with very thin margins and even lower standards. At the same time, international actors increasingly make demands on verifiable compliance with environmental and workers' rights standards. Reducing garment waste while increasing recycling of fabrics and fibers is on the agenda of European legislation.

The aim of this year's EoT research projects is to understand how these dynamics are experienced by those most directly embedded in the industry: manufacturers, workers, small-scale entrepreneurs, and suppliers. It is about how they navigate sustainability and compliance pressures, how shifts in global demand shape their livelihoods, and what role innovation plays at different levels of the supply chain. The following questions are intended to provoke thought and offer possible directions. Fellows are

encouraged to explore further relevant aspects of Bangladesh's fashion industry within the fellowship programme 2026.

- What initiatives are there to move up and expand the value chain? What is their potential, what are their successes and obstacles? How are they affected by politics?
- How is Bangladesh responding to international trends demanding greater ecological sustainability and social responsibility? What are political and business responses, and how do they align or interact?
- Why is Bangladesh lagging behind India and Pakistan in garment recycling, despite a larger garment industry?
- What opportunities and barriers do entrepreneurs and manufacturers, young designers face when innovating within the fashion sector?
- How does Bangladesh's textile and craft heritage interact with the contemporary fashion industry?
- How does politics promote or prevent ecological, social and productive development of the fashion industry?

2. Approach

We invite creative approaches that include the political and social environment into the analysis of economic activity. Economic activity is shaped and patterned, enabled or restricted, supported or suppressed, by its political environment. This may include legal regulation, state-created markets, or informal practices that allow or make unattractive economic activities. Past experiences, learned behaviours and socially constructed preferences or taboos condition economic activity as much as the dynamics of profit seeking or supply and demand. We encourage approaches that explore the unconventional, informal patterns, or counterintuitive examples.

3. What is the Economy of Tomorrow (EoT):

Bangladesh is one of the fastest growing economies in Asia but still faces challenges when it comes to transforming its economy and uplifting disadvantaged groups. While enjoying strong growth, vulnerabilities remain high and inequality is increasing.

Against this background, FES has designed the EoT model to conduct research cum dialogue between reform-minded economists/political scientists/etc. and young thinkers in Bangladesh in order to discuss new and innovative ways of economic development, which can be taken into consideration for dynamic growth, social balancing, ecological sustainability and gender equality of the country.

4. About FES Bangladesh and this Fellowship

Since 2015, FES Bangladesh has been offering its flagship programme “Economy of Tomorrow (EoT) Fellowship” for university graduates and young researchers. From the beginning, FES has been engaging with the national academic scene. Its protagonists play a vital role as part of the advisory committee throughout the fellowship process.

This fellowship programme is designed to encourage students and junior researchers to conduct research and to write a policy paper outlining concrete policy reforms for economic growth in a socially just, gender-equal, resilient and sustainable Bangladesh. The EoT Fellowship is an enabling platform for exchanging ideas on the current economic and social policy issues so that the fellows can jointly contribute to creating an inclusive and just society.

With this fellowship for students and young researchers in Bangladesh, FES Bangladesh wants to encourage the development of policy proposals and thereby enable the fellows to play a prominent role in the democratic and socially just transformation of Bangladesh.

4.1 Objective:

- To enable Bangladeshi students and young researchers to gain experience in solution-oriented research and publicly present policy papers outlining concrete policy reforms.
- To encourage students and young researchers to discuss the economics within the spirit of social democracy (freedom, justice and solidarity) and Just Transition.
- To develop a network of young, innovative political-economic thinkers in Bangladesh.

4.2 Eligible Candidates:

- Three categories of applicants are eligible for the Fellowship:
 - Graduate students possessing a Bachelor's degree.
 - Holders of a Master's degree who finished university in the past three years
 - Early career researchers/teachers (up to three years of research experience).
- Maximum age limit of the applicants is 30.
- Residents and citizens with a background in Economics, Politics, International Relations, Sociology, Public Administration, Development Studies, Gender Studies, Environmental Studies and related subjects studied in Bangladesh or abroad.
- Early career researchers should have degrees from Bangladesh or abroad in the above subjects/disciplines.
- The students and researchers must be in Bangladesh during their fellowship programme.
- Applications, along with a concept note/short proposal submitted by an individual or a group (not more than three members in a group) of individuals, will be accepted for further review. Both the individual and groups are encouraged to apply.

4.3 Application Process:

- Eligible candidates have to respond to the "FES EoT Fellowship Announcement" by submitting the filled-up application form within the deadline of submission. (see tentative timetable below)
- Each candidate must submit a concept note (see "description of concept note" in section 5.4).
- An "advisory committee" will be formed to assess the quality of the concept note/proposal on the criteria set by FES Bangladesh.

4.4 Description of Concept Note:

- The concept note has to be concise, short and a well-written document and should not be more than 3 pages.
- **The concept note should include the topics, namely, i) Introduction and Background, ii) Objectives and Research questions, iii) Methodology including timeline, iv) Literature Review (if any), v) Data analysis and vi) Conclusion.**
- The concept note should have a precise argument in line with the theme and guiding questions of the fellowship.
- The concept note should contain the research methodology to be used in the study.
- The concept note should be computer-composed in A4 page, font size 12 in Calibri or Arial. 1.5 line spacing.
- The concept note should include a timeline.
- The concept note should be in English.
- Proper citation and referencing should be done to avoid any kind of plagiarism.

4.5 Advisory Committee:

- Four members Advisory Committee will be formed, consisting of two academics and two staff members from FES Bangladesh.
- The Advisors will be involved throughout the whole process beginning from the selection of the Fellows to the final Seminar.
- During the process of final selection, the committee will meet.

4.6 Selection:

- All the applications along with concept notes submitted within the deadline will be reviewed by the Advisors and FES Bangladesh.
- A shortlist of the candidates will be made after the first primary review by the advisors.
- The shortlisted candidates will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview may take place online or in-person.
- The shortlisted candidates will have to give a short presentation based on the concept note/ proposal they submitted. (5-10 mins maximum)
- Final selection will be made on disciplines, quality and diversity of concepts, gender representation (male, female and gender-diverse), geographic locations of the universities (Dhaka and outside Dhaka), category of universities (public and private) and responses in the interviews.
- Applications received from people with diverse gender identities, differently-abled groups, ethnic communities and religious minorities will be treated with special consideration to promote diversity in the cohort of the fellowships.

4.7 Process of implementing the fellowship programme:

- After selection of the fellows, their concept notes/proposals will be finalised in the first meeting, plus a 1-day orientation. This meeting is the first step to build a network and will allow the organisers to present the general EoT ideas and to bring students and experts of the advisory committee together. The fellows will also have the possibility to share their project ideas with other fellows and will get first feedback from the advisors. And the orientation will focus on:
 - To develop the research questions and methodology in line with the overall objective of the Fellowship
 - To guide the Fellows on how to write policy papers

- The Awardees will submit their progress reports in a short form on monthly basis to FES Bangladesh.
- The fellows can share their progress of the studies in the second meeting and will receive feedback from advisors.
- After 3 months, the fellows will hand in their drafts to the advisors and FES Bangladesh.
- The drafts submitted by the fellows will be reviewed by the advisors for feedback/comments.
- The fellows will then have 2 weeks to incorporate the feedback and finalise their papers. The papers will be sent back to the advisory board.
- The fellows will present their studies or policy papers at a jointly organised seminar by FES Bangladesh. They will receive feedback from the audience and then incorporate those in their final papers.
- As a part of the Seminar, the final papers will be reviewed by two independent reviewers (Academics or Researchers) who will comment in the seminar.
- Selected papers will be considered for publication. The selection will be made based on quality.

The FES Bangladesh will coordinate the whole process.

4.8 Size and Language of the Report

- The Policy Paper must be concise, vivid, and short
- The Paper must be policy-oriented and must not exceed 15 pages.
- The Paper must have a precise argument that builds upon the EoT project.
- The Policy paper should have specific policy recommendations.
- If the awardee has already been preparing an academic dissertation on the subject (this usual size is more than 20 pages), then s/he can take findings from the dissertation to prepare a fifteen-page policy paper for the submission to FES Bangladesh.
- Each policy paper should have 3/4 bullet points on the front page to get a summary of the paper.
- The paper must be written in English.

5. Dissemination of Ideas:

- FES Bangladesh will arrange a public seminar in Dhaka, when the Fellows have finalised their Policy Papers.
- Policy makers, academics, researchers, civil society representatives especially from and for marginalised communities, students, and journalists will be invited to this Seminar.
- Each candidate will prepare a Policy Brief and a Presentation under the supervision of advisors.
- They will share their ideas with the policy makers and others, respond to the questions from the audience, and receive feedback for any further improvements of the study.
- The research reports/findings may be used in different ways of FES communication nationally and internationally.

6. Number of Awards:

Maximum of 5 (Five).

7. Amount of each Award:

- Maximum Tk. 120,000 (One lac twenty thousand taka only)/each (excluding VAT).
- No additional costs for printing, photocopying, field research, etc. will be borne by FES.
- FES Bangladesh will pay transport costs to attend the internal meetings, orientation and final seminars at FES Bangladesh office.

8. Payment Schedules:

- On the day of contract signing: 40%
- On the day of submitting first draft: 30%
- After acceptance of the final paper: 30%

9. Timeline (tentative):

Tasks/Assignments	Tentative Dates
Fellowship Announcement	02 March 2026 (Monday)
Deadline for the Submission of Application	28 March 2026 (Saturday)
Shortlisting of proposals	9 April 2026 (Thursday)
Interview and initial presentation	15-16 April 2026 (Wednesday-Thursday)
Finalisation of the Awardees	19 April 2026 (Sunday)
First meeting and Orientation on Concept note and signing the ToR	24 April 2026 (Friday)
First Round of in-person sharing meeting between Fellows and Advisors	26 April to 25 June 2026 – 2 months (Minimum 02 in person sittings between the fellows and the advisors- one to one/group)
Send the draft version to FES Bangladesh	9 July 2026 (Thursday)
Second meeting on primary findings and updates	15 July 2026 (Wednesday)
Second Round of in-person sharing meeting between Fellows and Advisors	16 July to 1 September 2026 – 1.5 months (Minimum 03 in person sittings between the fellows and the advisors- one to one/group)
Draft submission to the Advisors and FES Bangladesh	15 September 2026 (Tuesday)
Feedback on the Draft by the Advisors	22 September 2026 (Tuesday)
Workshop on Presentation Skill	27 September 2026 (Sunday)
Final Draft Submission by the fellows	01 October 2026 (Thursday)
Final Presentation Submission	05 October 2026 (Monday)
Public Seminar/Workshop in Dhaka	8 October 2026 (Thursday)
Final paper submission (after incorporating feedback from the external reviewers)	29 October 2026 (Thursday)

Note: The fellows will be mentored and supervised by the advisors and FES throughout the period of almost eight months. The organizer has the privilege and authority to change the above timeline.

10. Two Relevant Literature:

- “Technology, Innovations and Work: Policy Options for Bangladesh”, https://bangladesh.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-files/220105_Technology_Innovations_and_Work_EoT_Fellows_FES_Bangladesh.pdf
- Saxer, Marc (2013), “The Economy of Tomorrow How to Produce Socially Just, Resilient, and Green Dynamic Growth for a Good Society.” FES Germany. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/thailand/10000.pdf>

11. Contact Point:

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