



Dear Friend,

I am writing to tell you about how I felt when I was considering applying to Global Young Academy (GYA). I was looking at the website and saw profiles of members from my country, my region, my research area, who would in some way would be similar to me; then I started looking at members who were not like me. The more I looked, the more I felt like – ‘maybe it’s not the time to apply...’. I felt like a dot, insignificant. But my friend encouraged me to try, just to apply, she really believed in me, we planned many ideas together to change the world. I take this chance to thank her: Thank you Charisma! I want to pass that inspiration forward to you today.

When I applied for membership, it had been few years since I finished my PhD in the United States. I came back to my country, Bangladesh, with hopes to make changes. The reality was different. I tried to talk about the problem of sexual harassment, but women were not willing to share the fact that the problem even exists; many would smile and laugh it out and some tried to humiliate me. I had two female students working on this project, they were teased a lot by their friends, which they only shared with me much later. I wanted to help our female students to do better in programming, and so arranged series of workshops only to find out that not many are interested to spend extra time since they will not pursue a career. I was trying to work on big challenges and problems but probably was doing everything wrong.

My academic interest, large-scale distributed systems, did not exist in Bangladesh. I did not have the laboratory where I could do the experiments I did during my PhD. I switched to a new research area and it felt like starting another PhD!

I still remember the night when I was writing my application. My family members were asleep. I opened my laptop and started answering all the questions on the membership form. I shared my status, my dreams and I sent it in. To my delight, I was selected and I joined this team of many others. I want to tell you what was different after I joined GYA.

I wanted to help my female students to do better in programming. In the GYA, I was able to work with women globally. There were problems of different shades – darker and lighter. Any difference I wanted to make, here, it became much easier to approach and make a difference since now there were many more dots and all these dots can make a mark. Ideas that seemed were just running in my head were here, where there is a platform. There are many others to listen to ideas, appreciate them, challenge them, work along with them. Are you thinking about helping displaced people? In the GYA there are actions beyond such ideas to support this community, and the opportunities are countless.

For me, it was much easier to appreciate the privileges I have. I often used to feel cornered as a Muslim female scientist working in Bangladesh. I never realized that I actually represent many more – many who were not able to run the race as far I have – and this gives me a unique opportunity to pave pathways for many others.

Did I tell you about how many friends I have made? I cannot believe that me – that introvert me – now has friends from all around the world.

Are you still thinking whether to apply or not? Please do, because some journeys are worth exploring.

Looking forward to meeting you, our new friends and colleagues,

Nova Ahmed, a happy and passionate GYA member