# Humanity at a Crossroads: Why We Must Invest in Human Intelligence in the Age of Artificial Intelligence[1]

## Executive Context

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is advancing at unprecedented speed. In 2024, global corporate investment in AI rose to US $252 billion, a 45% increase from the previous year. The United States alone accounted for US $109 billion, dwarfing China's US $9.3 billion and the UK's US $4.5 billion. Generative AI, a subfield barely recognized a decade ago, attracted nearly US $34 billion in private capital in 2024.

This explosive growth contrasts sharply with public investments in human capital. Globally, education spending averages 4.4% of GDP and health 6%, but these numbers conceal wide disparities. Dozens of low-income countries spend less than 3% of GDP on education and under 2% on health. The imbalance is widening: AI spending is growing at more than 25% annually, while human capital budgets stagnate.

## Bangladesh: Falling Behind on People

For Bangladesh, the picture is even more stark.

- Education: In FY 2025–26, Bangladesh allocated 1.53% of GDP to education, almost identical to the previous year (1.52%). This is far below UNESCO's recommended 4–6% and well below the regional average. Bangladesh spent 2.49% of GDP on education in 2016–17, meaning education has been on a declining trend relative to GDP.
- Health: Public spending hovers at ~1% of GDP, one of the lowest in South Asia. By comparison, India spends over 2.1% and the global average is close to 6%. Mental health receives less than 0.5% of the health budget.
- Human outcomes: The consequences are evident. 28% of children under five remain stunted, undermining their future learning and earning potential. Health shocks push families into poverty, while skills shortages leave educated youth unemployed.

At the same time, Bangladesh is investing heavily in AI-driven digital transformation—from smart governance systems to AI research hubs. While these are necessary, they risk outpacing the country's human capacity to use, regulate, and benefit from AI.

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## Why Human Intelligence Still Matters

AI can process vast amounts of data, but it cannot create meaning, values, or purpose. Human intelligence—our creativity, empathy, and ethical judgment—remains irreplaceable. Neglecting human investment carries three dangers:

1. Economic irrelevance: Workers without health and education risk being displaced by machines.
2. Social instability: Unequal access to AI could deepen digital divides and fuel unrest.
3. Ethical crises: AI without human guidance will replicate and amplify biases.

In short, societies that underinvest in people risk not only slower growth but also fractured stability.

## The Survival Trilogy: Health, Education, Skills

1. Health – the biological foundation
   Productivity begins with physical and mental well-being. Malnutrition and chronic disease cut into lifetime productivity. Research shows early childhood stunting can reduce lifetime earnings by up to 22%. Bangladesh cannot build a knowledge economy if one-third of its children are cognitively impaired from poor nutrition.
2. Education – the engine of innovation
   Rote learning and rigid curricula fail to prepare youth for the AI era. Countries like Finland emphasize problem-solving and adaptability through phenomenon-based learning. In Bangladesh, systemic reform is overdue: without critical thinking and equity in learning outcomes, education risks entrenching inequality instead of driving innovation.
3. Skills – future-proofing the workforce
   By 2026, 50% of global workers will require reskilling. Informal sector workers—who form 60% of Asia's labor force—are most vulnerable. Bangladesh's Skills for Industrial Competitiveness and Innovation Program (SICIP) is a step in the right direction, but its current scale cannot match the demands of the AI transition.

## Policy Imperatives for Balance

The numbers tell us that while AI investment grows 25% annually, Bangladesh spends less than 3% of GDP combined on health and education. Rebalancing requires decisive action:

1. Increase human capital spending
   - Raise education to ≥ 6% of GDP and health to ≥ 5% of GDP.
   - Prioritize early childhood nutrition, preventive healthcare, and mental health.
2. Reinvent education

    - Introduce AI literacy, ethics, and problem-solving in schools.
    - Align higher education with AI-augmented sectors: agriculture, healthcare, finance, and manufacturing.
3. Institutionalize lifelong learning
    - Build national reskilling platforms with private sector partnerships.
    - Provide tax or financial incentives for adult and mid-career upskilling.
4. Govern AI responsibly
    - Establish a National Commission on AI and Human Capital.
    - Enact strong data protection and transparency laws to ensure trust.
5. Harness AI for development
    - Use AI in telemedicine, personalized education, and agricultural extension.
    - Ensure AI complements rather than replaces human providers.

## Bangladesh's Choice

- If successful: Bangladesh could produce an AI-augmented workforce, reduce rural-urban gaps through AI applications in health and education, and leapfrog into a digitally empowered economy.
- If it fails: The country risks a jobless growth trap, widening inequality, and technological dependence on foreign AI systems.

## Conclusion

The choice is not between AI and human capital, but between imbalance and integration. Nations that invest in healthy, skilled, and educated people while using AI to amplify—not replace—human intelligence will thrive.

For Bangladesh, the message is urgent: invest in people now, or risk being left behind in a world run by machines.