

Seminar on
Implementing SDGs in Bangladesh: Challenges and Policy Options



PROCEEDINGS

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Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

1/46, Old Elephant Road, Eskaton, Dhaka 1000

Seminar on

Implementing SDGs in Bangladesh: Challenges and Policy Options



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a seminar on **“Implementing SDGs in Bangladesh: Challenges and Policy Options”** on 24 August 2016 at BIISS Auditorium. **Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP**, Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest at the Seminar. The seminar was divided into three sessions including two working sessions. **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS, chaired the inaugural and second working session. The first working session was moderated by **Dr KAS Murshid**, Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). Scholars, academicians, policy makers and former and current government officials were present in the seminar.

Inaugural Session

In his Welcome Address, **Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**, Director General of BIISS, highlighted the success of Bangladesh in achieving many of the targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) for 2000 to 2015. According to him, strong commitment of the government of Bangladesh, hard work of all concerned stakeholders and wholehearted support from the people of all strata of the society have brought this success. He added that the commendable progress of Bangladesh in fulfilling different goals of MDGs started to appear much before the deadline the UN had set and it was recognised globally. On that note, Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on behalf of the people of Bangladesh received the “UN MDG AWARD” in 2010.



General Rahman informed that last year, the UN adopted a new holistic development agenda officially known as “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. With a pledge of “No one to be left behind”, the 2030 Agenda is built on MDGs consisting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The goals are keen to transform the society towards an economically growing, socially responsive and just as well as environmentally sound world. The highest emphasis is given on eradication of poverty in all of its forms and dimensions including extreme poverty and hunger.

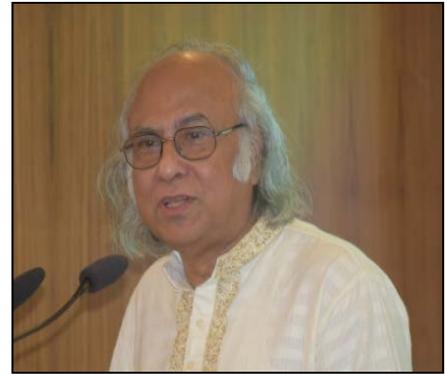
General Rahman concluded his speech by saying that Bangladesh was a top performing country of MDGs. But there is no scope for complacency. Some issues might turn into challenges for Bangladesh before implementing SDGs. He suggested that early preparations, coordinated policy options and effective actions will help offset the challenges.

In the Inaugural Session, **Professor Dr Shamsul Alam**, Member (Senior Secretary), General Economics Division, Planning Commission, Government of Bangladesh made the keynote presentation on “**An Overview of SDGs and Bangladesh**”. He said that the global community has adopted the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, encompassing 17 universal and transformative goals and 169 targets. With the global commitment of leaving no one behind, the 2030 Agenda aimed at ending poverty and hunger, attaining gender equality, fighting inequality and tackling climate change to protect the earth. He informed that out of the 17 goals, the first 7 goals represent the unfinished agenda of MDGs and in this connection Bangladesh did really well. He said that the development approach underlying in the 7th Five Year Plan (FYP) is consistent with these global agenda. As an example, he mentioned that the 7th FYP has targeted 7.4 per cent GDP growth that synchronizes with SDGs, which suggest attaining above 7 per cent growth by the least developed countries (LDCs). He mentioned about few policies that have been emphasised in the implementation process of SDGs in Bangladesh. In this connection he mentioned about the inter-ministerial committee named “SDG Monitoring and Implementation Committee” which has been formed by the Office of the Honourable Prime Minister.



He observed that Official Development Assistance (ODA) as well as domestic resource mobilisation was not up to the mark in MDGs implementation and opined that the decreasing trend of ODA is a major challenge in implementing SDGs. To overcome the challenges the speaker placed a few suggestions which included technical support for preparing and monitoring the reports on SDG implementation process, support for developing the capacity of the civil servants, support for public research on SDG implementation in next 15 years, creation of greater opportunities for on-job training and classroom-based training, advancement of monitoring and evaluation process, institutional reforms for the Ministries/Divisions and implementing agencies to accelerate the SDG initiatives in Bangladesh.

Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Chairman of Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) noted that there is a big difference between MDG and SDG. MDG was picked by an expert group ignoring the Millennium Declaration while most of SDGs have been taken from the Millennium Declaration. Unlike MDG, SDG was a political process. According to SDG nobody can be left behind. He informed that PKSF found the multidimensional poverty rate to be higher than income poverty rate in Bangladesh. He observed that there are certain groups of people who have been left behind, who are not touched by development. They are the *dalits*, women farm worker and people living in hill, *haor*, *baor*. All these people make up a large part of the extreme poor in Bangladesh. He expressed the view that there will be no sustainable development unless these people are also lifted out from extreme poverty. He opined that among the 17 goals, priority should be given on poverty, hunger and inequality. According to him, Bangladesh has the capacity but the country needs to enhance it. Besides, the available capacity should be deployed properly. He emphasised that in the implementation phase, government and other agencies should look for expertise within the country first.



Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP, Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, in his address as the Chief Guest, noted that although SDGs are built on MDGs, they significantly differ from MDGs in terms of nature, quality and substance. He highlighted three points underlining these differences. **First**, the agenda for SDGs is essentially a political declaration, which has given the document an extra-ordinary strength to address issues of security and governance at global, regional and national level. **Second**, SDGs have accommodated key socio-economic issues which are absolutely human centric and development oriented, such as water, migration, inequality etc. **Third**, means of implementation of SDG, which brings into the fold a wide range of stakeholders that include government, private sector, NGOs, Civil Society and individual citizens.



He expressed the view that while the 2030 Agenda has charted out a comprehensive pathway to development, its implementation in a country like Bangladesh is not easy. Notwithstanding the daunting challenges that SDGs present, Bangladesh is well poised to be on track of the sustainable development pathway. This has been possible because of the visionary leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who is leading from the front. The Vision 2021, envisioned long before the adoption of SDGs, reflects economic and social issues that have found references in the 2030 Agenda. To convert this Vision into long-term development targets, the government has formulated several strategies and policies including the 7TH FYP (2016-20). Out of 169 targets of SDGs, 56 targets are well aligned with

Bangladesh's 7th FYP and 103 are identified as partially aligned. Attainment of SDGs calls for larger engagements and participations of institutions and people at all levels. He urged all to be united for the shared prosperity of people and the generations to come. He hoped that with the 2030 Agenda in hand, the global community will deliver the pledges and commitments it made.

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, in his remarks stated that Bangladesh performed very well in meeting several MDGs. Being one of the top performers in respect of MDGs, Bangladesh now looks equally confident to embrace and pursue the SDGs. Most of the SDGs have been taken into consideration in formulation of the 7th FYP. This reflects the government's strong commitment towards the SDGs. While commitment is important, it is only the beginning of the fight. The road ahead is full of challenges. He recommended to enhance public-private partnership (PPP), participation by all stakeholders, capacity building and human resources development, improvement in rule of law, good governance and political stability to achieve the SDGs.



Working Session I: Poverty, Inclusive Growth and Human Development



In the First Working Session, **Dr Ahsan H Mansur**, Executive Director, Policy Research Institute (PRI) of Bangladesh, made a presentation on **“Growth, Jobs and Sustainable Industrialisation”**. He stated that SDG outlines a comprehensive agenda that harmonises economic prosperity, social equity and environmental stewardship. He opined that the industrial sector is a priority area in this regard and will experience substantial growth in the coming years. Growth will help improve most indicators including poverty and job

creation. He mentioned that Bangladesh is already on track for achieving the 7 per cent GDP growth mark for the first time. He expressed the view that sustainable industrialisation entails greater focus on proper adherence to environmental standards, human capital development, infrastructural transformation, serviceable land availability and enforcement of regulatory laws. He added that the 7th FYP and the forthcoming Delta Plan will integrate post-2015 Agenda for Bangladesh. According to him, implementation of the national SDG agenda, supported by an active private sector can elevate Bangladesh's status in the global community. He emphasised that it is essential for the government, private sector and civil society to work together in this regard.

The second presentation of the session was made by **Dr. Mahfuz Kabir**, Senior Research Fellow, BIISS, on “**Poverty and Inequality**”. He focused on various aspects of poverty and inequality in Bangladesh in connection with the implementing the goals of SDG. He said that in terms of Head Count Ratio (HCR) there has been a significant advancement in poverty reduction but there exists noteworthy differences between people of rural and urban areas which will be a challenge for Bangladesh in future. He informed that according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in 2014, there were 41.3 per cent multi dimensional poor people in Bangladesh whereas according to the HCR the rate of poverty was 24.8 per cent. Speaking about different indicators of MPI such as education, health and living standards, he said that Bangladesh is lagging behind from international standard and that will be a challenge in implementing the SDGs. When speaking about regional variation in extreme poverty and deprivation, he told that different areas such as north western part of Bangladesh, depression area, CHT area and some of the coastal areas of Bangladesh face higher rate of deprivation. Then he spoke about Target 1.3 (Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable) and in this regard he opined that though there are different social safety net programmes in Bangladesh, the coverage is so meager in contrast to other countries in South Asia. He concluded his presentation by suggesting some tentative policy options to reduce the existing gaps and overcoming the challenges in implementing the SDGs.



In the Open Discussion which took place after the two presentations, the following observations were made.

- If the marginalised people of Bangladesh can be given some kind of assistance and support to eradicate poverty then these people might come at the centre of development from the periphery of development.
- There lies a concern regarding declining of agricultural land and its relation with food security. More focus on manufacturing will increase dependency on fossil fuel which is one of the main factors behind climate change.
- Focus should be on promotion of different values that are important for development of a society like social values, economic values, cultural values, democratic values etc.
- The issue of protecting land is very vital because illegal grabbing of land does not only decrease the assets of poor people but also it causes a negative impact on biodiversity.
- The disabled people should not be left out in the development process.
- Maritime resources can be utilised to bring the impoverished people of the coastal areas out of poverty.



Dr KAS Murshid, DG, BIDS, Chair of the first working session opined that land is a binding constraint for Bangladesh. He said that land is needed not only for agriculture but also for industries, for attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and it works as the basis of livelihood for millions of people in Bangladesh. In this regard he suggested that property rights and rule of law are vital to ensure proper use of land. He added that absence of property rights and rule of law might impact other aspects of the society. He mentioned that the role of agriculture is always important in the development plan of Bangladesh and since there is more capital investment and labour mobility in agriculture so focus should be kept on it. Regarding manufacturing sector the chair emphasised on higher value addition by manufacturing without harming the environment. He suggested concentrating on higher value adding service sector as well as on generating high skilled labour force. He expected that if production can be increased,



more employment can be generated and environment can be protected then Bangladesh will be able to become a developed country by 2041.



Working Session II: Gender Equality and Social Justice

In the Second Working Session, **Ms Farah Kabir**, Country Director, Action Aid Bangladesh made a presentation on “**Gender Equality and Empowering Women**”. She emphasised on removing gender inequality that persists in the society and stated that implementation of SDGs cannot take place without a future plan of ensuring gender parity, gender equality and removing discrimination. Ms Kabir mentioned that throughout the globe there is still huge disparity and discrimination against women. Violence against women is pandemic and it is affecting all countries of the world. Ms Kabir then highlighted the SDGs in the context of Bangladesh and informed that the 7th FYP has been developed in line with SDGs.



While describing the challenges of Bangladesh, Ms Kabir stated that though enrolment of girls has increased in the primary level, retention and drop out still remains high; whether there is an emphasis on girl child, 60 per cent of them are married at the age of fourteen and become mother at the age of fifteen. Health and nutrition is another big problem along with high population density which also has adverse impact on women. Unpaid care, the pressure of women to look after their family including children and elderly people is very high. When there is a disaster, women suffer most. She stressed that when people talk about poverty, they should also talk about feminsation of poverty. Ms Kabir also highlighted the activities of Action Aid Bangladesh (AAB) and how the organisation is contributing in achieving the goal five of SDG in the country. She stressed on increasing the overall budget allocation to address gender related issues and urged for having specific gender related programmes and policies. She also emphasised on increasing budget allocation for

Ministry of Women and Children. According to her, coordination at different level is also very important which needs to be ensured. She also shed light on the importance of global support in terms of financial and technical assistance to achieve the goals of SDGs.



In the last presentation titled **“Social Justice and Inclusive Institutions”** Ms Sharminde Neelormi, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University argued that SDG 16 is the most important goal, without which none of the other goals can be sustained. She highlighted that the inclusion of a goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies in the new post-2015 development agenda marks the significant awareness that peace and security is critical for poverty eradication and sustainable development. However, the rule of law and development have significant interrelation

and are mutually reinforcing, making those essential for sustainable development at the national and international level. She observed that Goal 16 has the dubious distinction of being the most catalytic goal for sustainable development and the goal is difficult to measure. According to her, while implementing SDGs, focus should be more on the characteristics of crime (not just the counting) and their links with other crimes, on defining quantitative indicators which measure the qualitative aspects of the rule of law and can clearly define progress or setbacks and on better integration of crime and criminal justice into national statistical systems. She emphasised that independent and rigorous statistical standards are highly needed in evaluating qualitative measures.



The observations made in the Open Discussion following the Second Working Session were as follows.

- Goal 5 of SDG to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls is a logical goal. Gender equality is the core of SDGs. The issue of women is crosscutting among all the goals. Without achieving this goal, it is not



- possible to achieve SDGs.
- Women empowerment is not a static concept. It has been changing over time. However, it is possible to measure the targets of Goal 5.
- To implement all the goals of Agenda 2030, is not an easy job; it is also very challenging for Bangladesh which requires internal as well as external resources.
- The issue of elderly people was not emphasised enough in SDGs like women and children issue.



Closing Session



In his Closing Remarks, **Mr Md Shahidul Haque**, Foreign Secretary, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh argued that the success story of Bangladesh in implementing MDGs is not a miracle rather it is the combination of leadership, policy and people which make it happen. Mr Haque said that what makes SDG so distinct is that it is not only a compilation of indicators rather it is a narrative of vision and realities. SDG is a document which is applicable to everybody. Mr Haque opined that Agenda 2030 is a political declaration contrary to MDGs which was a technical declaration. Terming the SDG a value-based document, Mr Haque said that for the first time, the world has adopted a right-based development agenda. He emphasised on the issue

of governance and stated that it was because of the strong position of LDCs, the issue of governance was incorporated into SDG.

While talking about the implementation of SDGs, Mr Haque highlighted three important issues: finance, technology and capacity building. Mr. Haque also emphasised on the issue of inequalities among countries and explained how difficult it is to assess this sort of inequalities. Highlighting the issue of terrorism and violent extremism, Mr Haque mentioned that it was a marginal issue when SDG was negotiated. That is why world leaders missed out this burning issue. There cannot be any development unless there is peace and stability in a country or in the world. He expressed his concern about the conflict-ridden states of the world in this regard. He also talked about unfair trade regime, technology transfer, challenges of universal health security and water resource management. Before concluding his speech, Mr Haque stated that SDG is a very ambitious and very difficult political document. This would remain political and would be a great challenge for global leaders to implement. He further added that the Prime Minister of Bangladesh had made a commitment in 2015 during adoption session of SDG that Bangladesh will lead the implementation of Agenda 2030. That is why the country started implementing SDGs before many of the countries. SDG will remain as a political as well as geopolitical agenda which will determine the relations among states in the future.