

Discussants

Hossain Zillur Rahman
Executive Chairman, PPRC

The focus on Asia is important; because the majority of the world's poor live in the Asia, which also produced better performance and in the international discussions it is a question about getting the focus on performance more clearly in the discussions on aid and development partnerships. Asia is home to the largest number of the poor. Asia has also performed well. A contrary type of signal might go out to the world, because of its performance and because Asia also has some of the most dynamic solutions to the problems of poverty. The micro credit is just one that we aware of. But Asia is host to a number of other solutions, which can benefit the global war on poverty. We are not going to London just to get some resources for Asia, but to tell the world about the successes of Asia and the challenges that remained, which rest of the world can benefit from, particularly Africa itself. We are going there both to focus on our specific needs, but also to engage on the lessons that we have the opportunity to offer. National documents like PRSP have given a good account of it. In terms of the area of challenges and it is true that Bangladesh for many international observers it is paradox and the headlines are starkly different; one is about the news corrupt country and the other is the wonder of the stable growth rate over a fantastic time period. How do you reconcile these paradoxes? One of the challenges in this Asia Conference would be governance. We can easily have a great black and white discussion in governance.

Bangladesh has gained and by current performance is well poised to attain most of the indices by 2015. We are performing in terms of growth. The growth's rate in Asia is absolutely impressive. For Bangladesh and for Asia the issue of governance how we put it up is crucial. The most productive way to put it up is to pose governance as an opportunity for producing a faster and better quality growth process. Governance is an opportunity frontier to produce a better, a faster and higher quality growth process. How was project managed, how was actual disbursements occurred, the formulation of the priorities - is also very important. Resource is absolutely very important because at the end of the day there is a MDG where the responsibility of the international community is very critical. A clear transition is happening. Bangladesh has managed to sort some of its critical problems, but critical areas are emerging. We need assistance to help us to go through these new challenges. It is very important Bangladesh is able to approach these issues of foreign direct investment in a mature manner. There are concrete substantive issues. Bangladesh needs to be well equipped to address new type of challenges in substantive terms.

Nasreen P Huq
Country Director, Actionaid Bangladesh

More people have fallen into poverty in the last 20 years in Asia than anywhere else. A small fraction is enjoying conspicuous wealth than ever before. Inequality has risen and growth has gone down to a trickle. Poverty has declined by about 1 per cent per annum. Bulk of the growth has been captured by the rich and powerful. In 1991-92 the richest 5 per cent was earning 18 times more than the bottom 5 per cent and it is now earning 84 times that. So you can see what were that growth has gone. We have children with unacceptable extreme malnutrition. It is important to recognize that much of the success has been achieved by the people - by the poor, the women against insurmountable odds. Where is the voice of those who contributed to the miracle?

I really like to talk particularly on MDG 8. What are the ideas, that are really need in terms of poverty reduction for a country like Bangladesh. Ideas that we are discussing has been brought by the poverty experts who are mostly in the institutions like World Bank and we need to discuss the merit of these ideas and be honest about those. I work in the health sector and have gone from country to country seeing the same disaster. In Asia each country is different and we need to address development in terms of that and need to invest in better understanding of that. I like to share with you some examples perhaps less known in Bangladesh have been very successful. One issue that has been mentioned is issue of remittance and of the migrant workers. When the migrant workers first started going out intellectual elite did not think much about it. But now there is a project which is actually helping them invest of money. Micro credit which is a big success for Bangladesh, but it did not reach the poorest of the poor. Otherwise they could have spiraled into more poverty. We need to think about micro-enterprises. For Bangladesh and Asia we need to think about debt cancellation as a part of Asia 2015. HIV AIDS has been a major new challenge which will need to think differently for Africa.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed
Managing Director, PKSF

Despite all the successes that we have had poverty still is a major issue in South Asia and Bangladesh. We have grown 5.3 and others have grown 6-7 per cent but still that is not good enough. Accelerating growth rate is going to be at the heart of a faster poverty reduction. An acceleration of the growth rate is needed. Bangladesh has been credited achieving the micro economic stability for many years. The growth in East Asia is much faster than South Asia. There is a difference in investment we make at the national level. The quantum of investment is low. What we get out of that investment is low. We need to raise the efficiency of investment has to increase through additional flow of investment from outside, like inflow of foreign savings. Greater amount of concessional savings can come and fill in the investment gap. There are some constraints which have been mentioned like infrastructure, power, electricity, Chittagong Port - reportedly the most inefficient port of the region, the transport system, the time it takes for goods to travel from one place to another. And governance is part of the total process. Donors have played role which was not very good. At one point of time they said private sector finance is sufficient finance for infrastructure, but they were wrong. So there is a whole issue of predictability of partnership. Donor have to understand the country - which is not necessary to happen in South Asia.

Mahfuz Anam
Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

The London Conference is a great opportunity for a country like Bangladesh to make its presence felt at an international level where we could have some very significant input into international thinking on poverty alleviation. Of the six sessions of the Asia 2015 Conference, Bangladesh has designated as important speakers. In the whole concept of partnership only one group of partners have been focussed a little more, which is the international community. The fundamental actor in this partnership is the national body - the nation, the other partner. Of the nation, the most important component of that partner is the government. So, what and how will the governments of the recipients, the partner country behave look forward, what will they do I think that's a very crucial part of this whole partnership. And a part in which you and I, all of us who are in this table are able to make an impact, let the big people do the London Conference, we the more modest ones let us concentrate on our national leadership, National Government, national NGOs, national institutions, how are we going to develop Bangladesh. And here the most important institution of all is the Government and my humble suggestions is unless the governments of countries, like ours, become visionary unless the increase their own commitments to their own country, unless they are more honest, both intellectually and morally, and unless they are more efficient in running their own countries, I don't think too much will come out of initiatives, like the London Conference. Of course in a democracy, the government is elected by the people. It is the people's representatives which will run our countries, but just being representatives do not qualify them to run governments, running government is a very serious business. It requires expertise, it requires knowledge, it requires experience. To elect, we are of course delighted with the election process, then to have a bunch of people running government, becoming ministers and state ministers, who have really nothing to do with the ministries they head. I think this is not the perfect formula for development. My humble contribution to this very rich discussion would be those of us who are in Bangladesh, which ever position they hold, whatever modest role we can play let us emphasise this one single point that running a country is a serious business. Trade is a very very important thing. WTO is a very complex organisation and then we have people who take it to be a very easy thing. Let us all work together ourselves, excluding ADB, DFID and others. We have a great responsibility to make our own governance visionary, committed, honest and full of expertise.

Open Forum

Taleya Rahman
Executive Director
Democracy Watch



Two things need to be highlighted: one is to endorse mobilisation of English-speaking teachers to teach English. It is very important about quality of education. Teachers training has been an important part of DFID's activities. It has to be enhanced and after training there has to be a monitoring system. One Thana Education Officer cannot go round and maintain the standard.

The second is: Focussing of women's plight. Unless governance is improved, poor will be still poor whatever the investment is and the women will be even poorer. Special skill development programme should be taken for the poor women and more effort should be given in adult education.

Hua Du
Country Director, ADB



Aid should facilitate trade and this is the new partnership to take the developing countries to the driving seat in making policies, for external assistance and aid can be strategically placed to facilitate trade, and for an enabling environment to facilitate private sector investment both domestic and particularly foreign FDI. This is the partnership which exist in some of the bigger developing countries. Bangladesh, used to be greatly aid-dependent. I am very pleased to observe that a new partnership has already or is taking shape in this country. This can be registered into Asia 2015.

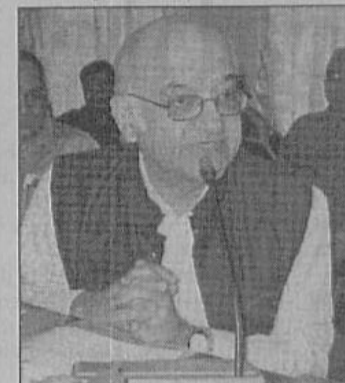
M. A. Rouf Chowdhury
Director, FBCCI



There is a lot that Bangladesh can aspire to achieve from a conference and exposure like the Asia 2015. One of the first issues to pursue under WTO is free movement of natural persons. The UK is a very important platform for a launching point for us to pursue that. The problem is it requires an offer from the country which is going to allow the free movement. Most of the countries in the European Union and outside are extremely reluctant on this issue. In the case of UK we have existing ethnic Bangladeshi population of about half a million, that is a very solid ground for us. These people require labour force, some skilled, some are not for expanding their existing businesses. There are about 15,000 ethnic Bangladeshi restaurants. Although they are called Indian restaurants, 99.5 per cent of those are Bangladeshi. The second or third generation restaurant owners are not getting into the same business, because they want to move up market. Lot of our agro-processing is facing difficulty in terms of entering European market from phyto-sanitary and sanitary condi-

tions. We want cooperation in telling us exactly what the standards needed are and assist in putting up laboratories and training our people to achieve those standards. There are other areas where partnership focus more directly. Infrastructure, generation of electricity are very important issue. Agro-processing can achieve twin objectives of economic growth as well as poverty alleviation. The poverty in the rural areas and if we set up industries in the rural areas we can achieve poverty alleviation.

Rehman Sobhan
Centre for Policy Dialogue



If we want to tackle poverty, the most relevant partnership is to make poor partners in development. Central to it is to give them access to ownership of assets and the resources to do so. There are quite a number of rich people in Bangladesh, with big houses in Gulshan, in Baridhara, who 25 years ago were not that rich. The primary source of the wealth was their access to credit from the macro-financial institutions of this country. Relevant issue is why should not the poor and the dispossessed have similar access to those resources not just to one thousand or five thousand takas from the micro-financing institutions. Up in North Bengal we have been quite successful in fostering small tea garden, small holders have been given resources to get into tea planting. The big problem is there is one unit for processing tea and because it is a monopoly buyer it is in fact buying that tea at well below market prices. I would suggest offer a financial arrangement for enabling all the smallholders to acquire an equity share in that tea company, so that they can share in the value-addition processes created by the tea plantation endeavours.

ADB and World Bank both have invested in Lafarge cement company, it is a huge modern cement company. I would suggest: equitise your loan and you divest all your equity and loan financing to a collective and mutual fund of 100,000 poor people preferably drawn from that particular area. Let them participate and become partners in a major cooperative enterprise in Bangladesh.

Grameen Telecom in theory has one-third ownership from Grameen Bank, which is in practice owned by its three million poor micro-borrowers. I would encourage our Nordic partners, is to encourage the Norwegian investor in that company to progressively divest ownership of that company to 3 million poor women, so eventually the biggest cooperative enterprise in Bangladesh should be owned by poor women scattered along the length and breadth of Bangladesh.

I would like to witness a graduation of our major micro-financing institution into macro-financial banks, so that they are the most solvent and most credit-worthy banks in the country with very few defaulters. They should be able to borrow, accept deposits from the urban sectors and also from the migrants abroad and to channel this resource into both micro enterprises of capital resources saved by better off to the poorest of the poor.

Major investment in upgrading the quality of schools, let all our donors come together to identify to begin with about 60 schools in the poorest upazilas of Bangladesh to then see that they upgraded in terms of their facilities and qualities and their governance particularly to the quality of Viquearunnessa High School. Similar investment be made in rural health care so that we are providing a quality health facilities equivalent to what are available in our private hospitals. So that we do not have two societies divided by

health and education from a narrow ruling elites who are privileged to live long and have the best education

MA Matin
Secretary, FICCI



Foreign bank investment is a pre condition. It is happening in the big countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China. They are attracting more and more foreign bank investment. Like World Bank, Asia Development Bank could come up with some partnership with the private sector as World Bank is going to SCDF Program.

David Humphrey
Programs Director
Save the Children UK



Bangladesh has lot of things that can be made by this type of partnerships. Lots of thousands flowers blooms if you look at the service delivery, social safety nets, education. It is generally accepted that gains can be achieved through regulations. Future gains can be made by a well regulated system of service delivered.

Sylvester Halder
HEED, Bangladesh



Our future market is the world outside and to get outside we must develop our people, in terms of education, technical capacity, so that they can move out and send money inside. We can never be able to move from the primary economy to secondary economy and finally to tertiary economy unless we can send our people out. To address the issue of poverty in the long term, ten, fifteen or twenty years, micro-credit is not the answer. It will give us couple of extra means, but will not address the issues in the long term. One of the focuses should be improving quality of our education all around the country. That will give us sustainable sort of income source and higher mobility around world to earn more revenue and send it here that will help ultimately the capital shortage we have in our country.

Hussain Shahriar
Executive Director, ESDO



We are talking about migration but we do not think about the environmental refugees issue. And that come out serious straight our country. We know every year we have flood, we have drought and many natural calamities in many time of Bangladesh. But we do not have statistics or any information on how many people are distressed from these calamities. Another problem is POPS- Persistent Organic Pollutants. We know

the DDT, we know the Endrine. Despite signing conventions after conventions these continue to be available in the country. We have to think about how they we can work together to conserve our environment. We can think about the partnership between the GO, NGOs, the trade and the business sector to face this problem.

Angela Gomes
Executive Director, Banche Shekha



Bangladesh is agriculture-based country. There is good opportunity in agriculture. Women need to be properly trained in leadership, help in adoption of new technology, marketing and export of their products. There should be quick transfer of technology and development of trade experts.

Qazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed
Member, Planning Commission



The problem from the Planning Commission side, we have been facing is to find out the best institutional mechanism to implement the PRS that has been embedded with in the PRSP also alongside the attainment of MDGs. It's hard to get effective institutional mechanism that will implement PRSP. We have to plug leakages found during implementing projects. We have to address the reason behind the leakages. Then there is the problem of data that many suspect. We do not know who are the poor. If you do not know who are the poor then how do you make policy for the poor. Poverty analysis is extremely complicated and difficult in absence of data.

Ranjon F. Rojarjo
Coordinator, CARITAS



About 7-8 per cent of the total population are disabled. Many of them are potentials and can contribute to the society. These people should get chance to participate in the development sector. Their matter should be taken into account. Ten percent of the population is elderly or more than 60 years old. In rural areas the most of them are ignored in taking participation in the development activities. When we talk about partnership we go for implementation of programme we do not include the primary stake holders.

Mosharraf Hossain
Country Representative, ADD



Absence of trained attendants during birth causes disability. Many disabled babies do not get their second birthday. Disabled people are marginalised in society. Employment of Disabled

people in this country is very elementary. Public Service Commission do not allow the disabled people to sit for their examination. Disability, like poverty and development, should be considered an issue.

Ashraf U Chowdhury
Dhaka University



While we have attained some considerable progress on the macro-economic indicators some basic elements of long-run development of Bangladeshi economy has not yet been solved. That remains tremendous constraint for poverty alleviation. In the early-sixties, some 14 per cent of the investment as percent of GDP would be required for self-sustained growth and also for poverty alleviation. We have actually crossed that long ago and presently we have 23 per cent.

Mehnaz Rabbani
BRAC



Development partnership also include partnership within Asia. And when we talk about capacity building and technology transfer there is a lot we can do if we develop partnerships within Asia. International agencies can support that. There should be innovative, community-based models of partnership. Also local government should be made effective, responsible and capable.

Humayra Ahmed
CPD



If we want to alleviate poverty it is very important that we have to grab each and every tool we can. Development partnership can be built is such a way so that donors and other partner organisations could help us identify those tools which can help us to alleviate poverty keeping in mind that we have a macro-plan so that macro-economy develop in a broader way.

It is said that there is no country which develop only by aid but whenever we face a constraint such as we have supply constraints even you get a trigger by aid then it helps, may be aid per se but aid for trade and aid for other things.

ABM Ziaur Rahman
Research Fellow, BISS



Government has the more responsibility to the people what the services age going rather than the NGOs. NGOs are not that much transparent to the people in a sense. Importance of developing governance is very important and there the thrust should be.