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Social inclusiveness

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agriculture, rural non-form activities including trade and manufacturing, small enterprises, and upgrading of urban informal sectors) in which people with lower skills, even unskilled people, mostly coming from the deprived segments of the population, can be productively employed. But, over time, their skills should be upgraded through on-the-job and formal training. At the same time, economic enterprises should be expanded and technologically upgraded to raise productivities and enhance economic growth prospects. Obviously, the question of demand for the products and services generated should be kept in sharp perspective as emphasis is placed on any particular sector's expansion.

At the same time, potential high-tech manufacturing and service industries including Information Communications Technology (ICT) activities and banking and financial institutions must also be facilitated for their expansion. But, corporate social responsibility must be clearly codified, which should then be observed by the corporate sector under appropriate and effective regulatory watch. The government's role is to adopt policies and guidelines, develop necessary infrastructural facilities, and create an environment of incentives for the private investors to invest in the above mentioned and other similar sectors and in appropriate locations for the inclusive approach to succeed. When the now excluded people are absorbed in economic enterprises, it will not only serve the interest of the those people but will also contribute to national

economic growth as new productions will result from new and more productive employment.

But, the ruling paradigm based on neo-liberalism needs to be reformed to create the basis for the reorientation of the pattern and tone of economic growth as indicated above. For the market to work for all, appropriate and effective regulatory systems must be put in place and properly implemented. These systems should specify the roles and responsibilities of all actors, viz. the private sector (e.g. production and distribution of goods and services in real and financial sectors), the government (e.g. facilitation as appropriate, infrastructure development), the consumers, and so on, which they will carry out under effective legal watch. The government must be responsible for taking steps to protect and enhance the rights and interests of the poor and disadvantaged people and ensure their adequate access to basic services such as quality education and training, primary healthcare services, information, electricity, and water.

Social inclusiveness does not mean that diversity is to be destroyed. On the contrary, diversity has to be celebrated. There is a wide range of cultural and other diversities in the country. One is likely to be more interested and fulfilled in subscribing to and promoting changes being introduced when their cultural and other distinctive aspects of life are respected. What is necessary is to seek out the commonalities and, building on those, establish unity amidst diversity for collective pursuit of common goals.

The final element in the package is

the establishment of people's democracy at all levels of society. Good governance is crucial for good democracy; and, for that, establishment of transparency and accountability and corruption control are essential. Local governance with appropriately devolved powers would provide an effective framework for local mobilisation (economic, social, political) and action. Macro-micro policy congruence is essential for a nationally cohesive, sustainable development pathway to be constructed and implemented at all levels of society for the well-being of all.

To summarise, five key concepts on which the proposed paradigm shift to an inclusive, sustainable development is anchored, as outlined above, are: freedom from the entrenched, debilitating socio-economic-political conditions; empowerment; shared prosperity; unity in diversity; and people's democracy.

The country has just returned to democratic ways. Bangladesh Awami League-led alliance has taken office with an overwhelming majority in the Parliament. The recently held upazila elections are a step in the right direction in the context of democratisation at all levels of society. The upazila parishads are now more independent as MPs are no longer advisers to them. But, unless financial independence is also ensured, administrative freedom further expanded, and powers are properly developed, upazila parishads won't be as effective as they should be for spearheading sustainable development at local spaces. The same comments apply with respect to other tiers

of local governance. At the same time, vertical working relationships between various tiers will also need to be clearly defined.

Awami League has, in its election manifesto, promised a change, with people at large as the focus of attention, for socio-economic advancement of all. The stated goals are by and large consistent with social requirements of sustainable development. It is appreciable that, within the first 10 days or so of taking office, the government adopted some people-focused steps such as those aimed at reducing prices of rice and other consumer essentials, reduction of the prices of non-urea chemical fertilisers by about half, some reduction in the prices of diesel and kerosene with further reductions in prospect, and those announced to improve energy sector's performance and reach. One expects that this process will be strengthened and concerted people-centred policies and actions undertaken. However, an overall framework is essential for properly coordinating actions across sectors in the light of the proposals made in the manifesto and other relevant concerns to bring about the promised people-centred change, which should help ensure social sustainability of development.

The analysis and conceptualisation provided in this paper should be a useful basis to build on towards formulating the necessary framework.

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STYED ZANIR HOSSAIN

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