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# Addressing poverty ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

The other consequence of the pursuit of wealth creation, economic gains, and movements of people and goods based on fossil-fuel-powered ever-advancing carriers is the phenomenon of global warming and the consequent climate change that is now a looming catastrophic threat to humanity.

Another threat that the world faces today is terrorism, which is now raging largely in the Middle-East, but spreading fast across the world. The reason for this also lies, to a large extent, in the greed for power and wealth and, not infrequently, in the inhuman acts undertaken in pursuit of those goals. In fact, when the reasons for the disaffection and taking to terrorism are persisting political, social and economic injustices and subjugation, this terrorism syndrome cannot be controlled through the barrel of gun. The real reasons must be

identified and addressed, through sagacious political leadership, by all concerned countries, particularly the powerful countries, for a lasting solution. However, in this paper, I do not wish to discuss this issue any further. I focus particularly on inequality and climate change.

In the reminder of this paper, therefore, two international documents will be referred to prominently: Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Sustainable Development Agenda), adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015 and The Paris Agreement [on Climate Change] adopted by CoP 21 in Paris in December 2015.

Goal 10 of the 2030 sustainable Development Agenda is: 'Reduce Inequality within and among Countries' and Goal 5 is 'Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all women and Girls'. The international inequality is supposed to be addressed to an extent through the implementation of Goal 17, which is 'Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development'. This has to do with development finance to be provided by the developed countries to the developing countries, technology development and transfer to and capacity enhancement in developing countries, and trade facilitation in favour of developing countries. But, it will all depend on how far partnerships will be formed; and when formed, how

will they be shaped. The past experience in this regard is not very encouraging. However, the Agenda, particularly Goal 17 creates an opportunity for establishing a better world for all, through best possible efforts made by all nations.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda essentially enunciates a human being-centred approach. It has declared that 'No One' will be left behind. That is, every individual, regardless of who they are and where they live, must be included in the sustainable development process. To be sure, sustainable development encompasses three dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. The broad principles and values espoused include: inclusiveness, non-discrimination, equality, human rights, human dignity, rule of law, justice, peace and security, effective institutions, and sustainability.

Indeed, it is a process of development that seeks to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions and create an environment in which all the downtrodden, without exception, can achieve humanly dignified lives. A critical social problem, in this context, is the raging inequality across nations and within nations. A sustainable world cannot be built without addressing inequality adequately. In this context, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda calls for actions involving all citizens of a country at all levels of society in such a manner that everybody has access to necessary space for making best possible contributions to their own and national development as well as to their rightful shares of the country's socio-economic progress and enjoys equality before law and all other human rights.

While Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were to be implemented by the developing countries with financial, technological and capacity enhancement support from the developed countries, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is meant for all the countries of the world, although not all the goals and targets identified are equally important for all the countries. But, there are certain common tasks for all countries to be implemented by them on the basis of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities (CBDR & RC). Thus, a developing country should mobilize as much resources as possible from

within and seek additional resources from developed countries via appropriate global institutions and partnerships. The Goal 17 of the Agenda calls for building global partnerships to facilitate adequate access of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries (LDCs) to financial resources, technologies, and other necessary support to pursue their sustainable development agenda meaningfully. This is surely a good framework to build on. But, experience with respect to MDG Goal 8 on partnerships for development does not inspire much enthusiasm.

In Bangladesh, although income and consumption disparities have not increased over the past few years, both are glaring. Moreover, a number of particularly disadvantaged groups have remained as downtrodden as ever, despite significant socio-economic achievements at the national level. These groups include: people living in coastal areas, haors, baors, chars, and hills; disabled people; agricultural, particularly female agricultural workers; dalits and street cleaners; and tea garden workers. They make up a large proportion of the extremely poor 11% of the population. In addressing poverty and inequality, these groups must feature prominently, along with the various disparities across society such as women's deprivations. Another dimension of inequality viz wealth disparity, perhaps of a much worse nature, appears to be increasing in Bangladesh. Concrete data are not available on this issue. But, what is happening is not only wealth acquisition by some people through legitimate means, but often through grabbing of land, rivers, water bodies, forests, and even banks (by taking large amounts of loans and not paying back). Increased wealth inequality can be a serious impediment to inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. This issue must, therefore, be addressed purposefully through effective legal and administrative means. Moreover, social inequality surely turns out to be much more acute in Bangladesh when the key human capability issues of education, health, and skill training are taken into account. Women and children are often very vulnerable, particularly in the lower income households.

A strong base now exists in Bangladesh to move forward as a nation in an accelerated and sustained fashion. As to the economy of

the country, success stories include sustained annual GDP growth of well over 6% during the past 7-8 years; a vibrant rural economy, in terms of both agricultural (crop, fishery, poultry, livestock) and non-agricultural activities including agro-processing and agro-support; high and increasing export performance, particularly of the RMG; large and increasing remittances; expansion of ICT including mobile banking; increasing employment in rural non-agricultural and other informal sectors, and also in RMG sector, particularly for women; improved access to education and health services; elaborate safety-net programmes (social protection schemes) and women-focused programmes including ministry-wise budget for women's advancement. Areas of progress in the social sector include sharp reduction in poverty and poverty gap; increased life expectancy at birth (now 71 years); sharp reduction in infant, child, and maternal mortality rates; achievement of gender equality in primary and secondary education; and noticeable progress in women's participation in job market and politics; and improvement in primary healthcare and pre- and post-natal health services as well as in controlling HIV and malaria. Obviously, while these achievements are highly encouraging, much more remains to be done to reach levels of full satisfaction.

In the 2015 year-end survey by Gallup International (Gallup Poll), Bangladesh has come out to be the country of most hopeful people in the world. That is, the people of Bangladesh are now in a position, ahead of any other people in the world, to pronounce that they have a better future. This is reflective of the progress registered by the country (exemplified in the previous paragraph) that has instilled hope and courage into people's minds.

Having achieved the major MDG targets, some ahead of time, Bangladesh is now poised to perform similarly, if not better in the implementation of the SDGs. The SDG 1 is 'End poverty in all of its forms everywhere'. One target under this goal is to eradicate extreme income poverty (based on PPP USD 1.25 a day) for all people in that position everywhere by 2030. Another target is to reduce at least by half, the proportion of men, women, and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

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