

Mismatch in fund allocation and utilisation

Why increase allocation for ADP?

EVERY year the government misses the mark in utilising what it allocates into the annual development programme (ADP). Yet, what is disappointing further is that we never get an explanation as to why there is such significant under utilisation of funds and why project completion is continually delayed.

In the current fiscal year, the government managed to spend only 65 percent of their development budget in the first 11 months. It is a 4 percent increase from last year and at this rate it will take the government years to achieve 100 percent implementation. Moreover, despite the improvement, 35 percent of allocation still remains unused. What is the rationality for this mismatch?

As funds often sit idle, we regularly see reckless spending towards the end of fiscal years to bring the amount of unused funds down. This naturally hampers the quality of work and results in mismanagement of funds. And yet the government has again significantly increased ADP allocation for next year. Shouldn't the concerned ministries have to answer for their specific failures to utilise the fund?

And what, if any, direction has the government formulated for better utilisation?

Shouldn't there be comprehensive assessments to find the problems that are holding development programmes back?

What is worse is that the unutilised funds could easily have been used in sectors that are in desperate need of greater budgetary allocation. And if the government is insistent on allocating more funds for ADP, we hope that it will be spent more efficiently and with better results.

Three workers fall to their death

Total disregard for workers' safety

THE horrific death of three construction workers in Siddheswari area on Tuesday when they fell from an under-construction building is a glaring example of the utter negligence with which workers are treated. In this incident, these three young men were working on a bamboo scaffolding to set up a lift. They were on the tenth floor and did not have any kind of safety gear on and no supervisor from the construction company to oversee their work.

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies states that 1,196 construction workers have been killed between 2005 and 2016. The 2014 National Building Code stipulates that everyone working with concrete must wear helmets and gloves. In addition, construction companies are supposed to make sure that any open space that may pose any danger or risk of fall has to be covered or cordoned off.

But all this seems to be on paper only with little effort from the authorities to enforce these basic safety rules. Construction companies meanwhile, couldn't care less what risks the workers they hire, take, as long as the job gets done.

This abhorrent callousness towards human life is unacceptable and must be dealt with very stringently. Building companies cannot treat workers who literally make their buildings, as expendable units of production. They have to be made liable for any death or injury to a worker during work on a site. This includes workers hired for maintenance purposes in high rise buildings.

According to a report in this paper, the police have said a case for 'negligence of supervision' would be filed regarding the Siddheswari incident. We expect that the authorities will properly investigate this case and mete out exemplary punishment to those who are responsible for such negligence and utter disregard for basic safety for workers. The families of the dead workers must also be adequately compensated.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A city choked by traffic and waste

I have been living abroad for the past 35 years. When I come to visit my elderly mother in Dhaka, my heart sinks at the traffic and stench of garbage everywhere. It's difficult to walk through the streets due to the rotting piles of waste and the stray dogs rummaging through them for putrefied food items. I believe that there should be a hefty fine or garbage tax for any illegal dumping.

Regarding traffic, the city needs deployment of more traffic lights and police. This issue can easily be resolved if the city officials give some importance to the woes of the suffering public.

Dr Syed Saifuddin Ahmad,
Mirpur Cantonment

Parent counselling for child development

Playgrounds in the city are decreasing day by day due to ceaseless industrialisation, creating a severe shortage of healthy leisure activities. Although mayors and counselors, before every election, make statements about building playgrounds for each ward, they forget these promises soon afterward. As a result, children aren't able to play football or cricket because there is no free land; these sports are being replaced by mobile apps and games.

How will a child's mind work without proper physical exertion? How will their eyes be protected from prolonged use of devices? I believe that schools should introduce counselling programmes to educate parents about how harmful it is to hook a nine-year-old with a smartphone, and a heavy bag of books for coaching classes. Parents must encourage more healthy physical activities for their children.

Ashraf Uddin Anik,
North South University

What can Bangladesh do to deliver more and better jobs for everyone?



QIMIAO FAN

BANGLADESH has made remarkable progress toward ending poverty and sharing prosperity with more of its people. As recently as 2000, about one in three Bangladeshis lived

in extreme poverty based on the national poverty line; today, this has fallen to 13 percent. The poorest 40 percent of the population also saw positive per person consumption growth. Like in most countries, a key reason was broad-based growth in earnings. With more than 20 million people still living in extreme poverty and many workers with insecure jobs, Bangladesh cannot be complacent. It needs faster economic growth that can deliver more and better jobs for everyone.

The economy has been good for jobs over the past decade. Between 2003 and 2015, job growth outpaced the growth of the working age population. This not only cut unemployment rates but also brought millions of new workers into the labour market. With urbanisation, workers have shifted from agriculture to industry and services. A large share of this new job growth came in formal waged employment, accompanied by strong productivity and wage growth. Large-scale expansion of employment in manufacturing, driven by the readymade garment (RMG) sector, has contributed to this transformation, changing the lives of many for the better.

Despite robust economic growth, the pace of job creation has slowed in recent years, as confirmed by the 2015 Labour Force Survey recently released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The slowdown was particularly sharp in the RMG sector. These developments put at risk many of the labour market gains made over the last decade, placing particular pressure on women and young workers. Unemployment rates among youth, particularly females, have already



Raising the quality of jobs will require increasing productivity and exploiting our growth potential.

SOURCE: CRI.ORG.BD

seen an increase in recent years.

There is still much that is wrong with Bangladesh's labour market. The biggest challenge is job quality, which remains poor with substantial numbers of workers employed in informal, unpaid, or agricultural work. Only one in five workers are in wage work, less than 40 percent of whom have a written contract. This puts the vast majority of workers in jobs they could lose at short notice. There is a big gap in the quality of jobs between men and women: compared to only five percent of working men, one in three working women are not paid for their work.

So what can Bangladesh do? First, to create jobs on a large scale to absorb a growing labour force, Bangladesh must accelerate productivity growth and diversify manufacturing and services sectors, with a focus on expanding exports and foreign direct investment (FDI). Unlocking this potential will require addressing the rapidly rising

congestion costs that restrict growth and hinder the efficiency of firms operating in and around the mega-city of Dhaka. Investing in the economic and social infrastructure to make secondary cities additional engines of growth would be also needed.

Raising the quality of jobs will require increasing productivity and exploiting the growth potential of Bangladesh's vast array of small-sized firms. Microenterprises, as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which account for 98 percent of all firms and half of all jobs, are older and less dynamic than their peers in other countries. Improving the investment climate and increasing firm capabilities, both in the formal and informal sectors, can encourage growth in the micro and SME sectors. This will increase their ability to create more jobs.

Finally, Bangladesh must place a priority on ensuring access to good jobs by vulnerable people. Targeted labour

market programmes that address their problems in finding work offer a reasonable approach. Examples include removing barriers to women getting jobs, supporting school-to-work transitions for youth, and lowering the costs of international migration for lower income workers and those located in areas far from job markets.

Addressing these challenges must be a priority for Bangladesh now. This is not an easy task. Concerted efforts are required in a range of government policies. It is encouraging that key policymakers, academia and think tank researchers, development partners as well as private sector partners are thinking deeply about these challenges. And the availability of jobs – stable, safe, and well-paid – is ultimately how ordinary Bangladeshis will judge the country's development progress.

The writer is World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Trump's Rogue America



JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

DONALD Trump has thrown a hand grenade into the global economic architecture that was so painstakingly constructed in the years after World War II's end. The

attempted destruction of this rules-based system of global governance – now manifested in Trump's withdrawal of the United States from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement – is just the latest aspect of the US president's assault on our basic system of values and institutions.

The world is only slowly coming fully to terms with the malevolence of the Trump administration's agenda. He and his cronies have attacked the US press – a vital institution for preserving

eighteenth century, standards of living stagnated. It was the Enlightenment, with its embrace of reasoned discourse and scientific inquiry, that underpinned the enormous increases in standards of living in the subsequent two and a half centuries.

With the Enlightenment also came a commitment to discover and address our prejudices. As the idea of human equality – and its corollary, basic individual rights for all – quickly spread, societies began struggling to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and, eventually, other aspects of human identity, including disability and sexual orientation.

Trump seeks to reverse all of that. His rejection of science, in particular climate science, threatens technological progress. And his bigotry toward women, Hispanics, and Muslims (except those, like the rulers of Gulf oil sheikhdoms, from whom he and his family can profit), threatens the functioning of

and health-care plans.

Trump's proposed tax reforms, so far as one can see, outdo George W. Bush's in their regressivity (the share of the benefits that go to those at the top of the income distribution). And, in a country where life expectancy is already declining, his health-care overhaul would leave 23 million more Americans without health insurance.

While Trump and his cabinet may know how to make business deals, they haven't the slightest idea how the economic system as a whole works. If the administration's macroeconomic policies are implemented, they will result in a larger trade deficit and a further decline in manufacturing.

America will suffer under Trump. Its global leadership role was being destroyed, even before Trump broke faith with over 190 countries by withdrawing from the Paris accord. At this point, rebuilding that leadership will demand a truly heroic effort. We share a common



PHOTO: EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ/AFP

Many Americans are concerned that the American Health Care Act, also known as Trumpcare, will leave millions uninsured.

Americans' freedoms, rights, and democracy – as an “enemy of the people.” They have attempted to undermine the foundations of our knowledge and beliefs – our epistemology – by labeling as “fake” anything that challenges their aims and arguments, even rejecting science itself. Trump's sham justifications for spurning the Paris Climate Agreement is only the most recent evidence of this.

For millennia before the middle of the

American society and its economy, by undermining people's trust that the system is fair to all.

As a populist, Trump has exploited the justifiable economic discontent that has become so widespread in recent years, as many Americans have become downwardly mobile amid soaring inequality. But his true objective – to enrich himself and other gilded rent-seekers at the expense of those who supported him – is revealed by his tax

planet, and the world has learned the hard way that we have to get along and work together. We have learned, too, that cooperation can benefit all.

So what should the world do with a babyish bully in the sandbox, who wants everything for himself and won't be reasoned with? How can the world manage a “rogue” US?

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel gave the right answer when, after meeting with Trump and other G7

leaders last month, she said that Europe could no longer “fully count on others,” and would have to “fight for our own future ourselves.” This is the time for Europe to pull together, recommit itself to the values of the Enlightenment, and stand up to the US, as France's new president, Emmanuel Macron, did so eloquently with a handshake that stymied Trump's puerile alpha-male approach to asserting power.

Europe can't rely on a Trump-led US for its defense. But, at the same time, it should recognise that the Cold War is over – however unwilling America's industrial-military complex is to acknowledge it. While fighting terrorism is important and costly, building aircraft carriers and super fighter planes is not the answer. Europe needs to decide for itself how much to spend, rather than submit to the dictates of military interests that demand 2 percent of GDP. Political stability may be more surely gained by Europe's recommitment to its social-democratic economic model.

We now also know that the world cannot count on the US in addressing the existential threat posed by climate change. Europe and China did the right thing in deepening their commitment to a green future – right for the planet, and right for the economy. Just as investment in technology and education gave Germany a distinct advantage in advanced manufacturing over a US hamstrung by Republican ideology, so, too, Europe and Asia will achieve an almost insurmountable advantage over the US in the green technologies of the future.

But the rest of the world cannot let a rogue US destroy the planet. Nor can it let a rogue US take advantage of it with unenlightened – indeed anti-Enlightenment – “America first” policies. If Trump wants to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Agreement, the rest of the world should impose a carbon-adjustment tax on US exports that do not comply with global standards.

The good news is that the majority of Americans are not with Trump. Most Americans still believe in Enlightenment values, accept the reality of global warming, and are willing to take action. But, as far as Trump is concerned, it should already be clear that reasoned debate will not work. It is time for action.

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