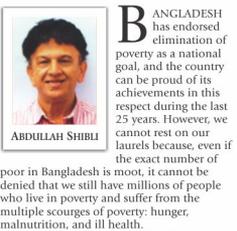


# Running the final mile

## A realistic approach to fighting extreme poverty



**ABDULLAH SHIBLI**

**B**ANGLADESH has endorsed elimination of poverty as a national goal, and the country can be proud of its achievements in this respect during the last 25 years. However, we cannot rest on our laurels because, even if the exact number of people in Bangladesh is moot, it cannot be denied that we still have millions of people who live in poverty and suffer from the multiple scourges of poverty: hunger, malnutrition, and ill health.

Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030. However, while we have embraced this goal, we face a formidable challenge. According to data available in Basic Statistics 2017 published by Asian Development Bank (ADB), 31.5 percent of our population live below the national poverty line in Bangladesh. If this statistic is correct, then more than 51 million people are currently poor. If we lower the bar and use the extreme poverty line of USD 1.25 per day as our yardstick, we still have about 30 million people to serve. When our leaders proclaim that Bangladesh can eliminate poverty by 2030, can we take this seriously? Or is it just another example of electioneering?

As I see it, there are two separate aspects of our SDG programme that we need to tackle: How do we monitor and evaluate poverty consistently over time given the myriad of theory issues that measurement poses? And secondly, do we have the policies and programmes in place to eliminate extreme poverty? On this note, I would like to focus on the inadequacies of our current policy package and programmes but want to add a few words on the need to refine the definition and strengthen the efforts for collection, analysis and interpretation of poverty data. As there are different countries around the globe join forces to eliminate poverty, we learn that there is more to poverty than simply income. Advanced research studies by Professors Bruce D Meyer of University of Chicago and James ID Sullivan of Notre Dame have shown that, even in a formal economy, who is poor and



**GDP growth and job creation alone cannot eliminate extreme poverty. We need policies that create the means, capacity, and opportunities for people to pull out of the "poverty trap".**

who is not depends on how you measure. This sentiment is fortunately echoed in a recent Government of Bangladesh study *Empowering Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing World, Voluntary National Review (VNR), 2017*. This self-study acknowledges the multidimensional nature of poverty and the need for a more comprehensive measure and additional investment necessary "capacity building of its national statistical organisation for tracking the progress of SDG 1".

Turning to policy, Bangladesh has a much tougher task ahead compared to its South Asian neighbours. We need to focus more intently on policies to create the means, capacity, and opportunities for the poor to pull out of the "poverty trap". We are shooting for an eight percent GDP growth rate in the coming years, but even if we succeed, we grow faster than before, do we

know that it will pull the poor out of the poverty trap? The evidence and research give us no reason to be too optimistic. Without being too pedantic, I want to mention some facts and analyses.

Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University and Paul Collier of Oxford have strongly argued that poverty will not disappear of its own accord, especially in countries where it has been consistently high. Bangladesh appears to have relied heavily on job creation to pull the bottom half of the population out of the poverty. While job creation is likely to help, it cannot by itself eliminate extreme poverty. "A change in circumstances (such as the end of conflict in Cambodia) or policies (such as China's household responsibility system) or a well-crafted intervention (such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia cash transfer programme) is required to trigger a turning point in the quest to end poverty."

A recent publication by the Brookings Institution of the US—entitled *How close is the world to ending extreme poverty?*—gives us further reason to question our poverty elimination strategy. The study considered country-level trajectories for six key SDG targets: child mortality (under-5s and neonatal), maternal mortality, access to drinking water, access to sanitation, undernourishment, and primary school completion rates. Taking the first four of these targets, Bangladesh, along with Pakistan and Afghanistan, is unlikely to meet any of these targets by 2030!

So, the bottom line is while we can have a decent GDP growth, we run the risk of "jobless growth" too. Two recent accounts, one by Professor Selim Raihan of Dhaka University, and another by ADB, reveal an ominous trend. Using "employment elasticity" measure, Prof Raihan finds that

two major South Asian countries, India and Bangladesh, experienced a substantial reduction in the employment generation throughout the periods of high economic growth (2001–2015). While between 2001 and 2005, the annual average job creation in Bangladesh was 1.6 million, it declined to 1 million between 2011 and 2015. Against this background, ADB concludes that "even a growth rate of 7.4 percent (the average annual growth projected by the Planning Commission for the Seventh Plan period of 2015–2020) will not be adequate if the aim is to absorb all surplus labour in about 15 years. To achieve that goal, higher GDP growth will be required."

But we already saw that reliance on GDP growth will not do the trick. Transfers play a more important role for those farthest from the poverty line—the extreme poor. A multi-country study of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Romania, and Thailand carried out at the World Bank details that transfers account for a greater share of the decline in "poverty gap" (the distance of the incomes of the poor to the poverty line, as well as in the decline of the "severity of poverty", a measure that gives higher weight to those farthest away from the poverty line). The study also shows that increases in cash transfers and pensions jointly account for a larger share of the decline in extreme poverty than changes in labour income. This finding is consistent with improvements those countries have made in the social protection systems, which are typically targeted to the bottom of the distribution, and which have increased in performance over the last decade.

It is well-known that extreme poverty is "sticky" i.e. the final effort to pull the last few millions out of poverty will demand extraordinary measures. Some have characterised this phase as the "final mile" analogous to the last mile in a marathon. So what do we need to do? Pull hand and push programmes have to work hand in hand, given that it is not a moral challenge but also an existential one. Elimination of poverty in Bangladesh is a top priority of the government, and we need to get all "hands on the deck."

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works in the ICT industry.



**SELINA MOHSIN**

**T**o promote reconciliation and then make it impossible makes violent extremism more likely. These words come to mind as the Rohingyaas flee Myanmar to save their lives while Suu Kyi, state councillor and

NLD leader, first remains silent and now sends order to endorse ethnic cleansing. Oxford educated and an honorary fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Aung San Suu Kyi are family members returned to Burma in 1988 to care for her ailing mother. Burma was tense with mass demonstrations for democracy after General Ne Win had stepped down in August. Suu Kyi addressed a gathering saying, "I could not, as my father's daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on..." While her English husband and her sons returned to Britain she founded the National League for Democracy (NLD).

*Her silence in the face of the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority has turned to open endorsement of the latest military crackdown while denying, as misinformation, its violence and carnage. She appears to accept the real misinformation—that the Rohingya are illegal immigrants.*

oppressed and the isolated in Burma were also a part of the world, they were recognising the oneness of humanity... The prize we were working for was a free, secure and just society where our people might be able to realise their full potential."

When asked after the NLD's 2015 victory what Myanmar she intended to see in dynamic, Suu Kyi replied, "We have many lessons to learn from various places." She would not make changes too soon but would

have been in Buddhist-majority Burma since the 12th century. There are around 11 million Rohingyas in the coastal state of Rakhine. During the British rule (1824–1948) more entered as labourers, but since Burma was a province of India, such migration was considered internal (Human Rights Watch). After independence Rohingyas who could prove residence for at least two generations were allowed to apply for a form of ID card. But the 1982 citizenship law did not recognise

Suu Kyi to help the Rohingyas, but was ignored. To stem international condemnation, Suu Kyi in August 2016 asked for recommendations from an Advisory Commission led by Kofi Annan. Its mandate was to investigate and to review the development, health and education in Rakhine and excluded human rights violations. She claimed to welcome its initial recommendations but made no move to implement them. The final report calling for an end to violence and a review of the basic citizenship issue has been ignored. The government claims the burning of 60 villages was the work of the Rohingya themselves and the Salvation Army (NSA)—a virtual unarmed peasant resistance group—as "terrorists".

She has failed both morally—in terms of the Rohingyas' suffering—and as a national leader in the face of Buddhist nationalist intolerance. For decades Rohingya village elders have tried to restrain their young men but violent military suppression has not only now brought doomed attempts to fight back but has opened the path to Islamist extremism amongst a minority people whose tradition has been more peaceful Sufist Sunni.

According to International Crisis Group, ARSA and its leader, as well as links with Rohingya groups living in Saudi Arabia and Salafist influence is growing. The refugee influx is not only a threat to Bangladesh but also to the world.

Suu Kyi once said, "It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subjected to it." Now that she has seemed to abandon her own ideals, is she now corrupt? Inevitably, politically sharp and ambitious, Suu Kyi has created more problems than solutions.

Selina Mohsin is a former ambassador.

# A failed saint



**Aung San Suu Kyi has abandoned the very ideals that she once fought so hard to defend.**

PHOTO: SANDA JOHANNESSON/NOBEL PEACE CENTER/NOBEL MEDIA AB

Myanmar's de facto leader. So what is this respected woman and active proponent of human rights and democracy really like?

Her Nobel Peace Prize awarded in Oslo on June 16, 2012 was described as the "most remarkable in the entire history of Nobel Prizes." Her acceptance speech stated "...when the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to me, they were recognising that the

aim for reconciliation, like Nelson Mandela. Yet now, her silence in the face of the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority has turned to open endorsement of the latest military crackdown while denying, as misinformation, its violence and carnage. She appears to accept the real misinformation—that the Rohingyas are illegal immigrants.

Some Rohingyas Muslims are recorded to

### A WORD A DAY

**FRUGGING**  
verb

*An unethical fundraising tactic where a telemarketer falsely claims to be a researcher conducting a poll.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

1 Reading aid	27 Changes smoothly	7 Most decorated
5 SOPS	30 Honcho	10lympian
9 Ram in the sky	32 Dangoon doings	8 Fireplace tools
11 Very funny, in slang	34 Lungoria of TV	105 Sacred place
13 Old Testament book	35 Command	12 Lugs
14 Twisted prof	36 Psychiatrist Alfred	17 Green and Gore
15 Fireproof	38 Approaches	19 Tucatan native
16 Toothed wheel	39 Copy for pasteur	22 Towel word
18 It's about 6,000 feet	40 Peaved state	24 Makesh book-mar
20 For two	41 "You there!"	25 Relaystick
21 Penn and Conner		26 Clashes
22 Pianist Myra		27 Soviet space station
23 Caustic chuff		28 Flots in the air
24 Singer Shannon		30 Prop
25 Mexican peninsula		31 Deck off fortunes
		33 Garr of 'tootie
		37 Airport schedule abbr.

### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

ACROSS	DOWN
1 LINER	1 BANNER
2 EVENT	2 BANNER
3 THE GETTO	3 SPANNER
4 UNIVERSE	4 ARK
5 FLOP	5 FLOP
6 BULLDOPE	6 BULLDOPE
7 RAN SALED	7 RAN SALED
8 ALE	8 BANNER
9 PLANNER	9 OLE
10 PIATTI	10 DOLLS
11 EDENS	11 SUSIE
12 RENEE	12 BEST

### BETLE BAILEY

THEY SAY DOGS BELIEVE IN FRIENDS

BUT I'M MORE THAN THAT

GRR

ARF!

### BY MORT WALKER

I HEARD THAT THERE ARE GIBBS ON YOUR BASEBALL TEAM THIS YEAR

I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT

I ALSO HEARD THAT THERE ARE SOME NEW RULES YOU WANT TO LEARN

WHAT?

HOW YOU WANT TO CURFEY BEFORE EIGHT?

WHAT? I WANT TO OFF!

OH, ZEE!

### BABY BLUES

HOW YOU WANT TO CURFEY BEFORE EIGHT?

WHAT? I WANT TO OFF!

OH, ZEE!

### BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

HOW YOU WANT TO CURFEY BEFORE EIGHT?

WHAT? I WANT TO OFF!

OH, ZEE!