

People’s participation in public service delivery key to attaining SDGs

Experts say at Oxfam, CPD national conference



From right, CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan, lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury, CPD Distinguished Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya, and EU Delegation Head Rensje Teerink attend a conference on “Democratic Governance and Development: Role of Grassroots Citizens Organisations” in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Enhancing accountability and widening space for citizen’s participation in the delivery process of public services are vital to realise the Sustainable Development Goals in Bangladesh, speakers said yesterday.

The recommendations came at a national conference on “Democratic governance and development: Role of grassroots citizens organisations” organised by the Oxfam and the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) at the International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka. The conference was organised in partnership with the Citizen’s platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

The speakers said a number of communities across the country are lagging behind when it comes to exercising the rights of access to public services due to critical challenges.

So, the government needs to focus on strengthening coordination among local authorities to ensure smooth implementation of national policies at local levels.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, a renowned economist, raised questions on whether there is a shortage of funds or a problem in allocation for the SDGs.

He said monitoring the funding process, allocation and implementation was essential to achieve the SDGs.

Prof Sobhan, also the chairman of the CPD, emphasised people’s participation in attaining the SDGs as without their participation no development can be sustained and no country can move forward.

He urged lawmakers to come up with the achievement of the SDGs in

their constituencies in parliament.

“Finally, it has to be looked into whether the target groups got the expected benefits, and if not, what the loopholes are and where more attention should be given,” he added.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry of environment, forest and climate change, said the government is committed to ensuring sustainable development.

He said all stakeholders must be engaged to develop the country.

He said the government would continue to take necessary steps to ensure transparency and accountability in the delivery of public services and the implementation of national development policies at all levels.

Hafiz Ahmed Mazumder, a lawmaker and a member of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry of planning, said the crucial target of the SDGs is education and emphasis should be given there.

“If we can achieve the goal of education, other targets will be achieved automatically. We spend only 2 percent of GDP on education but we have to spend 6 percent. We have limitations but we are trying to increase the allocation.”

Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, and the convener of the Citizen’s Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, said that the pledge of the SDGs is to leave no one behind from the development process.

He said it is a must to ensure that the voices of marginalised people of hard-to-reach areas of the country are heard and reflected in the national

development policies.

Rensje Teerink, ambassador and head of delegation of the EU to Bangladesh, said the role of NGOs and civil societies is very important to attain the SDGs.

Referring to the recent Gender Gap Report, she said the progress of Bangladesh is tremendous and is an example to many other countries.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD, said if people are not involved in economic policy-making, economic benefits will not be equally shared among the people.

She said that the marginalised people and the backward population should be included in the journey of development.

Dipankar Datta, country director of the Oxfam Bangladesh, said all people should work together to achieve the SDGs. “We hope we will be able to do so.”

The Oxfam Bangladesh and the CPD are jointly implementing a project titled “Enhancing the participation of community-based organisations and civil society organisations in democratic governance in Bangladesh” with support from the EU.

The project aims to enhance the participation of vulnerable and marginalised communities in democratic governance in order to ensure accountability in public service delivery by the government.

The project is being implemented in 13 sub-districts located in hard-to-reach areas to implement eight SDGs related to poverty, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, and climate change.

Resilient supply chain needed to cut economic losses from disasters

Experts, entrepreneurs say

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh needs to put in place a supply chain that is resilient to natural calamities and the impacts of climate change in order to cut economic losses stemming from disasters, said experts and entrepreneurs yesterday.

They said economic costs of natural disasters are high due to a lack of resilience to climate change and natural calamities, so the time is right to assess the disaster risks in industries and promote business continuity plan in order to minimise the risks.

The floods of 1987, 1988, 1998, 2004, and 2007 inflicted a loss of \$8.4 billion on the economy, while cyclones Sidr, Aila and Bulbul caused a loss of around \$6.5 billion, according to an inception of the study on the supply chain resilience of the RMG sector in Bangladesh.

It was presented at a workshop at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka. The programming division of the planning commission is carrying out the study under the National Resilience Programme (NRP) of Programming Division of the Planning Commission.

The study will cover the present status of disasters and climate risks in the garment sector supply chain, impact of disaster risks in supply chain, and how the risks can be minimised.

A supply chain includes facilities, function and activities that are involved in producing and delivering a product.

Speaking at the event, Planning Minister MA Mannan said not only garments but pharmaceuticals and agricultural sectors also need a strong supply chain to post higher growth.

“However, we have resource constraints and other challenges. We need adequate infrastructure to maintain a good supply chain.”

He said the government has built many infrastructures and is thinking of building an expressway as alternative to single-road Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

Reza Md Shehab Uddin Sharawardi, vice-president of the Bangladesh Supply Chain Management Society, said there is only one road that connects Dhaka with the Chattogram port and the reliance on a single road is risky.

“We need more ports to meet higher export and import within a short time. These play a vital role in reducing lead time of exports,” he said, adding Bangladesh needs to emphasise on building human capital.

Bangladesh’s export lead time is 90 to 120 days, opposed to 19-45 days in Sri Lanka, 40-50 days in China, and 50-70 days in India, according to the inception of the study.

Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said supply chain management and resilience needs in all sectors, not only in the garment sector.

Moreover, the garment sector has taken many steps in the last few years. However, small and medium

companies are at risk. “So, they should be taken into account,” she added.

Md Mohsin, additional secretary of the disaster management and relief ministry, said Bangladesh has been successful to reduce life-loss in natural disasters. However, economic loss is still a subject of thinking, he said.

Md Nurul Amin, secretary of the Planning Division, said the country is developing its own resilience system to tackle natural disasters.

“In supply chain management, we are trying to ensure more infrastructures,” he said, adding the government has built Payra port, which is very developed.

The government is expanding the capacity of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. A new airport will also be built.

Md Khalilur Rahman Khan, chief of the planning division, said investment, modern technology, institutional capacity, human capital and coordination among all government divisions are necessary to have a sustainable resilience.

The study should recommend a guideline and a monitoring system, he said.

Mohammad Khorshed A Khastagiri, director general of the foreign affairs ministry, Md Khurshid Alam, assistant representative of the UNDP Bangladesh, and Asif Ibrahim, a director of the BGMEA, took part in the discussion.

Nurun Nahar, deputy chief of the programming division and project director of the NRP, also spoke.



Planning Minister MA Mannan speaks at a workshop on supply chain resilience in the RMG sector at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka yesterday.



A man sleeps next to parked “Shikaras” or boats on the banks of Dal Lake in Srinagar.

Kashmir sees more than \$2.4b losses since lockdown: trade body

REUTERS, Srinagar, India

A lockdown in Indian-administered Kashmir has cost its economy more than \$2.4 billion since the government stripped it of its special status, officials of the Himalayan region’s main trade organisation said on Wednesday.

“In the last 120 days we have witnessed how each and every sector has bled ... we fear this crisis will further intensify in 2020,” Sheikh Ashiq Ahmed, president of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), told Reuters.

The government in August revoked the constitutional autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir, India’s only Muslim-majority state, splitting it into two federal territories in a bid to integrate it fully with India and to rein in militancy.

Kashmir is claimed in full by both India and Pakistan, which have gone to war twice over it, and both rule parts of it. India’s portion has been plagued by separatist violence since the late 1980s.

The surprise change in status was accompanied by a security crackdown that included the severing of telecommunications links and curbs on travel and the

deployment of thousands of troops.

Most of the curbs have since been eased but access to the internet is still partly blocked.

Sectors directly dependent on the internet such as information technology and e-commerce had been “ruined” since the lockdown began in early August, the group said in a report.

“The Indian government justified its decision on the pretext of developing Kashmir. The loss borne by locals are a direct result of government’s decision ... the federal government must compensate us,” Ahmed said.

The 85-year-old chamber of commerce includes more than 1,500 large business owners, commodity traders and exporters.

In conducting its survey, it had to send staff out to meet traders and entrepreneurs in person as telephone links were not operating.

Tourism, for decades a mainstay of the scenic region’s economy, has been badly hit.

Yaseen Tuman, whose family has owned hand-carved houseboats for more than a century on a lake in the region’s main city of Srinagar, said more than 2,500 tourists came to stay last year.

Asian business sentiment bounces back, but caution abounds

REUTERS, Sydney

CONFIDENCE among Asian businesses rebounded sharply this quarter to hit an 18-month high with firms reporting a pickup in sales, though most are holding off on hiring as trade war uncertainty weighs, a Thomson Reuters/INSEAD survey found.

The Thomson Reuters/INSEAD Asian Business Sentiment Index tracking firms’ six-month outlook jumped 13 points to 71 for the fourth quarter. That lifted confidence from close to a decade low in the previous quarter to its highest since June last year.

The swing is also the strongest turnaround since the tail end of the eurozone debt crisis in 2011, when China was pouring stimulus into its economy as well.

A reading above 50 means optimistic respondents outnumbered pessimists.

This quarter revealed a noticeable shift from neutral to optimistic, and showed the strongest reading on sales growth in a year. Yet the majority of firms are not yet confident enough to plan hiring.

“Conditions, expectations and some of the uncertainty has improved over the last quarter,” said Antonio Fatas, economics professor at global business school INSEAD in Singapore, pointing to easing tensions between China and the United States.

“But I don’t see this uncertainty disappearing. I think some of these tensions are going to stay with us maybe for years or decades.”

Respondents rated their chief risk as the Sino-US trade war, which has been a regular feature in the survey for much of the past two years as the conflict has weighed on global growth.

A total of 102 companies responded to the survey, conducted in 11 Asia-Pacific countries where 45 percent of the world’s population lives and almost a third of global gross domestic product is generated.

Participants included firms in industries as varied as automaking, tourism and energy, such as Japan’s Suzuki Motor Corp, Thai hotelier Minor International PCL and Australia’s Oil Search Ltd.

The survey was conducted from Nov. 29 to Dec. 13, as Chinese and US negotiators

finalised a “phase-one” deal to reduce some tariff barriers.

The most recent International Monetary Fund global growth projections forecast the trade war will drag the world’s economy to its slowest pace of expansion since the 2008-9 financial crisis.

“Although the external environment remains challenging, Minor is confident that we will be able to withstand such challenges,” said Chaiyapat Pittoon, deputy corporate chief financial officer at Minor International.

The firm has sought to diversify, increasing its stake to control nearly all of Spain’s NH Hotels Group last year, and has grown its food segment with the November purchase of a Korean fried chicken franchise in Thailand.

“We are putting in extra effort to remain at the forefront of consumers’ minds, so we are ready to reap the benefit when the environment becomes more conducive,” Pittoon said.

Elsewhere, there are already green shoots.

After months of weakness, growth in China’s industrial and retail sectors beat expectations in November, as government support propped up demand.

The chipmakers benchmark, the Philadelphia SE Semiconductor Index - seen as a bellwether of the global economy since demand for chips is a reliable proxy for growth and consumption - hit an all-time high this week.

However the headline numbers remain subdued as protectionism bites, with China’s economic growth, for example, at its slowest in about a generation.

“At least as far as next year is concerned, I think the caution is still pretty much warranted,” said Howie Lee, economist at OCBC Bank in Singapore.

“We are not out of the woods yet ... but deeper into the decade I think the dynamics will change a little bit, assuming that this first wave of the trade war has fully blown over.”



People stand near a window overlooking the financial district in Shanghai, China.