

EDITOR'S NOTE

The pandemic has had a severe impact on the global economy just as it has had on ours. Thanks to massive financial assistance in various forms from the government, the economy is back on track somewhat. Our private sector has shown great resilience and creativity by finding new ways to keep the wheels of

factories running and make way for our exports and imports in the world market.

In all economic crises, the poor are hit disproportionately harder than others. Following this global pattern, the poor and the marginalised in our country saw years of progress being wiped out in months. Numerous laudable initiatives were taken up by the government, NGOs, professional bodies, clubs, etc.,

to support these people. One not very well-known outcome to emerge from this struggle was the corporate sector stepping up to help the most needy. Many corporate houses came forward with direct assistance programmes and many tailored their CSR projects to this end.

The Daily Star has long followed these developments and covered them to build

awareness of the role of the corporate sector in this crisis. In furtherance of our goal, we have decided to launch the CSR Awards that will recognise the best CSR project in the country each year. In order to popularise the concept of corporate social responsibility, we have organised 8 regional seminars whose brief description is given below. It is our hope that more and more corporate houses

will establish their own CSR projects and will divert more of their resources to fulfill their CSR. After all, we must prove that our business leaders have truly placed PURPOSE over PROFIT in their business goals to fight and win against this crisis.

Mahfuz Anam
Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

CSR: A pathway to sustainable development

The Daily Star in association with CSR Window launched the initiative "A Better Tomorrow™: CSR Awards" recently.

The nationwide programme aims to instigate dialogue for future development and sustainability solutions, as well as to recognise corporations for their innovative and outstanding corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The eight divisions featured in the programme were – Dhaka, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Barisal, Khulna, Sylhet and Chattogram. The divisional dialogues hosted participants from the government, the corporate sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), volunteer organisations, and media organisations.

A diverse range of recommendations with the potential to be relevant for all stakeholders was put forth by a variety of participants during these dialogues.

One of the most important recommendations was the necessity for establishing a common platform where both the private and public sectors can collaborate on working towards sustainable development. This platform could provide information about the different companies that want to work with CSR, their budgets, what areas they want to work in, how NGOs and civil society organisations can collaborate with the relevant companies, etc.

Fakhru Imam, Member of Parliament from Mymensingh-8, said, "Once the information is available, it will allow NGOs, the corporate sector and the government to make more sustainable plans considering the requirements of the area they work in. There should be a platform through which all CSR-related information can be disseminated among relevant stakeholders."

Facilitating such a platform will allow the government to collaborate with companies that are investing in CSR. A singular platform can also act as a source of reference for other companies.

M A Matin, Member of Parliament, Kurigram-3, Ulipur, said, "The government has tried its best to collaborate with the companies working with CSR, but more companies and social organisations should come forward."

Ensuring that CSR initiatives are focused on sustainable change, rather than short-term results, is another key recommendation of the participants.

"Many of the organisations that work with CSR choose to start their own sister-concern. A few local businesses directly donate instead of working in the framework of CSR. The CSR model helps achieve sustainable development, as the projects that work with such funds are designed with the aim of long-term solutions and development in mind," said Rahima Sultana Kazal, Executive Director, Association of Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS).

Jahangir Alam, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mymensingh District Commissioner's Office, said, "CSR activities should be aligned with our Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The government is working to achieve SDGs, but there are still some limitations. Therefore, we should use CSR funds to support the government to overcome these limitations. This will enable us to achieve our SDGs even quicker. Since the government publicly declares the national budget every year, I think the corporate sector should also disclose a yearly budget for their CSR. They can include district specific allocations along with the type of issues they want to address. This will ensure transparency and smooth collaboration among all the stakeholders."

It was suggested that the government should identify a list of areas and sectors

in which the corporate sector can work through their CSR programmes.

"On the government side, we need to prepare a list of areas and sectors that need urgent attention. Private companies can choose from this list, and partner with relevant organizations. The government can also help to establish this connection," added Fakhru Imam.

A key part of any form of sustainable development is to follow a whole-of-society approach, and this was discussed by the participants as well.

Dr Shamsul Alam, State Minister of Planning, Bangladesh, said, "A whole-of-society approach needs to be adopted where the government, non-government, volunteer and corporate organisations, etc. will work together. If we could establish a singular institution or federation, it would help us go a long way."

In many cases, reputable NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) who have a lot of experience are the ones selected for implementing CSR projects. However, participants of the divisional dialogues recommended leveraging local NGOs and youth organisations to

There are many youth organisations in Chattogram that are also suffering because of this. I hope that the corporate sector will allow them to avail these funds and thereby provide them with an important learning opportunity. YPSA looks forward to helping youth organisations in this regard."

The media can play a vital role in disseminating knowledge about CSR projects to a large audience. Particularly, local media can make local beneficiaries aware of the different CSR initiatives in their districts.

While local media should definitely act as an awareness raising medium for CSR, the companies themselves can also ensure that all media bodies are regularly updated with information about their different CSR activities. Participants suggested formation of a CSR Forum incorporating both local and national media houses.

Tanzina Tarique, Manager-Corporate Communications and CSV, Corporate Affairs at Nestlé Bangladesh, said, "In Nestlé we perform our corporate social responsibilities through creating shared value (CSV) initiatives. As such, visibility of all CSV initiatives under different projects is very much required to foster awareness. To increase this visibility, we feel it is necessary to update journalists regularly through an appropriate communication medium. The idea of creating a CSR Forum in newspapers is a great idea. It will allow all the different companies working with CSR to showcase their work. This type of forum can also encourage companies to participate in CSR activities."

As Bangladesh moves out of being a least developed country (LDC) to a middle-income country, the funds from international donors will reduce over time. With that in mind, participants also recommended encouraging the corporate sector to fill this inevitable vacuum using their CSR funds.

Aroma Dutta, Member of Parliament and Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Welfare, said, "As Bangladesh approaches graduation, it will no longer be in the LDC category. As a result, foreign donors will slowly reduce investment in our development sector. To ensure that we are prepared for this scenario, we need to become self-sufficient. The government should incentivise the corporate sector's CSR activities so that it can become a sustainable form of social investment. They can do so by allowing the corporate sector to use a market systems development approach in their CSR projects. With the participation of the government, corporate sector and civil society, we can establish a self-sufficient development sector that will continue to thrive and strengthen our country."

After the regional dialogues, the "Let's Talk CSR" sessions hosted various organisations that successfully invested in innovative CSR programmes across the country and discussed their good practices and learnings.

Now, with the conclusion of both the regional dialogues and the Let's Talk CSR sessions, all that remains is the grand finale of A Better Tomorrow™: CSR Awards, which will be taking place later today. The CSR Awards will celebrate some of the most remarkable and impactful CSR initiatives undertaken across the country.

One of the most important recommendations was the necessity for establishing a common platform where both the private and public sectors can collaborate on working towards sustainable development.

implement such CSR projects.

These local youth organisations and NGOs are well aware of the problems facing their district at the grassroots level along with the challenges involved when working to overcome them. On the other hand, NGOs from outside the district may need months to conduct the research to recognise the baseline status of the district.

Sharfuddin Bhuiyan Shamol, Head of Marketing, Transcom Beverages Limited added, "Since most of the corporate entities are located in Dhaka, they are not aware of the grassroots problems or who they can reach out to for this information. Hence, I feel that the local administration and NGOs should take the initiative to reach out to the corporate sector. If we are made aware of the problems in areas outside Dhaka, then we will try our best to help them through CSR."

Mohammed Arifur Rahman, Chief Executive, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), said, "Small local organisations struggle to avail CSR funds as their project proposals are usually not up to the mark due to a lack of experience.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE REGIONAL DIALOGUES

KHULNA

1. Md Saifullah Al Azad, Head of CSR, Olympic Industries Ltd.
2. Sheikh Shabab Ahmed, Head of External Affairs, British American Tobacco (BAT) Bangladesh
3. Narayan Chandra Chanda, Member of Parliament, Khulna
4. Saidul Karim Mintu, Mayor, Jhenaidah Municipality
5. Swapan Guha, Executive Director, Rupantar
6. Sadikur Rahman Khan, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Khulna
7. Sanzid Islam, Dhrobotara Youth Development Foundation
8. S M Zahid Hossain, President, Khulna Press Club

BARISHAL

1. Rahima Sultana Kazal, Executive Director, AVAS
2. Kishor Kumar, Dhrobotara Youth Development Foundation (DYDF)
3. Saifur Rahman Miron, President, Journalists' Union of Barishal
4. Jane Alam Romel, Group Chief Marketing Officer, IDLC Finance Ltd.
5. Prashanta Kumar Das, Additional Deputy Commissioner, DC Office, Barishal
6. Prof Dr Md Sadequul Arefin, Vice-Chancellor, University of Barishal
7. Syeda Rubina Mira, MP, Member of Standing Committee on Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism

CHATTOGRAM

1. Aroma Dutta, MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Welfare
2. Antu Kumar Roy, Dhrobotara Youth Development Fund (DYDF)
3. Arifur Rahman, Chief Executive, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA)
4. Khairul Basher, Head of Communication, Grameenphone (GP)
5. Farid Chowdhury, Secretary General, Chattogram Press Club
6. Ruhi Murshid, Advisor, BSRM Ltd.
7. Dr Badiul Alam, Deputy Director Local Government (DDLG), Chattogram DC Office
8. Sazzad Hossain, Head of Leaf, British American Tobacco (BAT) Bangladesh

RAJSHAHI

1. Md Alaaddin Khan, Executive Director, National Development Programme
2. Tareq Islam Shuvo, Head of Strategy, Brand and Corporate Communication, IPDC Finance Ltd.
3. Saidur Rahman, President, Rajshahi Press Club
4. Shamima Akhter, Head of Corporate Affairs, Partnerships & Communications, Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.
5. Dr Md Humayun Kabir, Additional Secretary & Divisional Commissioner, Rajshahi
6. Syed Mahbub Ali, Head of Trade & Planning, British American Tobacco (BAT) Bangladesh
7. Fazle Hossain Badsha, Member of Parliament, Rajshahi Division
8. AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, Honourable Mayor, Rajshahi City Corporation

SYLHET

1. AHM Faisal Ahmed, Chief Executive, Sylhet Jubo Academy
2. Samir Mahmud, General Secretary, Sylhet District Press Club
3. AHM Hasinul Quddus (Rusho), Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Daraz
4. Tanzina Tarique, Manager- Corporate Communications & CSV, Corporate Affairs, Nestlé Bangladesh
5. MD Abdur Rafique, Deputy Director, Department of Social Services, Sylhet Division

RANGPUR

1. K M Ali Samrat, Executive Director, Participatory Advancement Social Service
2. Rafiqul Islam Sarker, General Secretary, Rangpur Press Club
3. Velayet Ali Ahsan, Divisional Leaf Manager, British American Tobacco (BAT) Bangladesh
4. Christabel L. Randolph, Director, Legal & Corporate Affairs, Marico Bangladesh Ltd.
5. Adnan Imtiaz Halim, Co-founder & CEO, Sheba Platform Ltd.
6. M A Matin, Member of Parliament, Kurigram-3, Ulipur

MYMENSINGH

1. Khandoker Faruque Ahamed, Executive Director, Trinamool Unnayan Sangstha
2. Sharfuddin Bhuiyan Shamol, Head of Marketing, Transcom Beverages Ltd.
3. Fakhru Imam, Member of Parliament, Mymensingh-8
4. Afser Nurul, Head of Corporate Brands, Pran-RFL Group
5. Ankit Sureka, Head of Corporate Communications & Sustainability, Banglalink
6. Jahangir Alam, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mymensingh DC Office

DHAKA

1. Dr Shamsul Alam, State Minister, Ministry of Planning
2. Md Zulfiker Haider, Director, Department of Social Services
3. Parveen Mahmud FCA, Chairman, Underprivileged Children's Education Programmes (UCEP)
4. Major General Sheikh Md Monirul Islam (retd), Chief External and Corporate Affairs Officer, bKash Ltd.
5. Mubina Asaf, Head of Legal & External Affairs, British American Tobacco (BAT) Bangladesh
6. Mohammed Showket Iqbal, General Manager, CSR & Admin of Human Resources, Epyllion Group
7. Prohash Amin, Head of News, ATN News

Moderator for all the sessions

Ahsan Rony, Founder, Green Savers