

from previous efforts. Our objective was for the Bangladesh government to adopt this cost-effective and sustainable approach to poverty alleviation.

Since its 2019 launch, with continued funding from FCDO and the European Union, we have seen promising results in terms of sustainability and cost-effectiveness. Now, we need to ensure the model's long-term scalability, particularly in the face of rising climate vulnerabilities. Additionally, close collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders is needed to capitalise on prior learnings and expand the model nationwide.

Prof Munshi Sulaiman, *Research Director, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University*



The keynote presentation depicts the early PPEPP-EU programme landscape and its evolution. In my view, using this to estimate impact is problematic, both methodologically and ethically. Methodologically

it would have been better to use a control group to measure the effectiveness of the programme. We understand that the current observation is based on internal results-based monitoring system. Hopefully, the project will undertake an impact evaluation using an appropriate control group.

We need more rigorous consideration of counterfactuals, and I believe there are approaches that could help. For example, BIDS has survey data from the same period, which could allow for comparative trajectory analysis. Cross-referencing their data with the project data could yield more accurate estimates. Ideally, creating a synthetic control group by closely matching data would further strengthen the analysis.

Prof Dr Md Taufiqul Islam, *Member, Governing & General Body, PKSF*



The research's purpose and the methodology should always be clearly articulated to enhance transparency. The methodology section of the keynote presentation needs further clarification, in my view. If the data used

here was collected from BBS, the methods for data collection and the overarching research methodology should have been explicitly stated. While numerous findings are presented, the basis for these conclusions should be clearer.

Dr Md Abdul Khaleque, *Associate Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka*



PPEPP-EU has many essential features, including credit, grants, training, and focus on area-specific issues, making it a comprehensive project. Extreme poverty eradication is progressing

slowly, and PPEPP-EU engages the lowest 35% of the population within the extremely poor category, as identified by BBS, helping them accumulate more assets. However, a major challenge is sustaining traditional poverty reduction methods, such as livestock rearing and small income-generating activities. Addressing business risks and climate risks is also critical. We should prioritise area-specific regions, like char areas, in our long-term development strategies.

Dr Mustafa K Mujeri, *Executive Director, Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development (InM)*



Many extremely poor households lack land access and thus rely heavily on the non-farm sector for their livelihoods. By connecting them with cottage, micro, small, and medium enterprises (CMSMEs), we can enable them to access loans, promoting sustainable livelihoods. For sustainable poverty reduction, it is crucial to ensure these groups can secure loans from microfinance institutions and banks. Among these marginalised populations are several plainland ethnic minority communities that have largely been left out of development initiatives.

When addressing the needs of these marginalised groups, it is essential to understand their unique characteristics. Our research at the Institute for Inclusive Finance & Development (InM) shows that these communities, often overlooked in mainstream development, need tailored, community-based approaches. Additionally, it is vital to distinguish between poverty and inequality, as each requires distinct policies to foster inclusive and effective poverty reduction.

Dr Md Shahid Uz Zaman, *Executive Director, Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO)*



Accurate tracking of extreme poverty is essential, as is examining the methods used for data collection to identify those most in need in both the northern and the other regions of Bangladesh.

Poverty must be recognised as a deep-seated psycho-social trauma manifesting in different forms. Understanding its

connection to historical colonisation and planning a sustainable route out of it is essential for making meaningful progress.

While microfinance can serve as a tool for sustainability, it must be complemented by assured access to government services. This project has effectively integrated support for nutrition and health by linking vulnerable populations with existing government resources. Significant demographic, ethnic, and regional disparities persist, with our northern districts facing severe damage annually but receiving limited attention in mainstream media. Long-term and substantial investment in these regions, rather than short-term or low-cost solutions, is essential.

S. Amer Ahmed, *Lead Economist and Program Leader – Bangladesh and Bhutan, The World Bank*



Grassroots partner organisations play a crucial role in improving targeting and bringing service providers closer to beneficiaries. Creating a control group is also essential for verifying

project outcomes. Given that overseas development assistance is either declining or stagnant globally, and considering Bangladesh's fiscal constraints, the focus must be on the sustainability and scalability of this programme.

Looking ahead, the challenge is to make the programme more cost-effective under financial pressures. One approach could involve outsourcing certain services and linking with other government services that beneficiaries can access. Identifying early on which services could be separated from the core interventions and delivered through existing government or other providers may help lower implementation costs.

Bidowra Tahmin Khan, *Head of Economic Inclusion, Oxfam Bangladesh*



PPEPP-EU aligns well with Oxfam's goals, especially those focused on SDGs 1, 5, and 13, covering poverty eradication, gender equality, and climate action. In the plains, for example, vulnerable

populations face diverse threats, including climate shocks, necessitating customised approaches. Oxfam partners with local organisations to deliver programmes offering transferable and marketable skills, enhancing opportunities for both wage and self-employment. This strategy not only supports income generation but also strengthens community resilience by connecting individuals to market opportunities.

To ensure sustainable change, we assess community structures and target specific improvements. Oxfam collaborates with various groups, including domestic, RMG, and tea workers, both locally and globally. Access to income opportunities, grants, and loans is challenging due to the diversity of these communities, but our nuanced approach allows us to address their unique needs effectively.

Dr Muhammad Abdul Mazid, *Chairman, Social Development Foundation (SDF)*



To uplift the extremely poor, integrating pre-primary education is vital for sustained progress. Education fosters development that extends beyond financial stability. Our experience shows that

beneficiaries often feel unattended once projects conclude.

To tackle future challenges, such as climate change, a dedicated follow-up system or fund is essential for long-term sustainability. Furthermore, all meetings and communications should be accessible to those directly impacted by the programme. Technical jargon and abbreviations can exclude participants, limiting their ability to engage fully. Using simplified language will enhance community engagement and strengthen ownership. Lastly, the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness emphasizes on the need for regular evaluations between donors and recipients to ensure the efficient use of taxpayers' funds and the achievement of measurable results.

Dr Monzur Hossain, *Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies*



Poverty rates have declined, but estimates vary by source. BBS reported an extreme poverty rate of 6% in 2023, while a BIDS and InM study recorded it at 13% in 2020, down from 22% in 2010. Identifying the

factors driving this reduction and evaluating interventions' effectiveness are essential.

Many projects address poverty, but without rigorous implementation and robust methodologies, their impact remains unclear. For example, the keynote presentation lacked proper impact analysis methods, making it difficult to assess improvements. Among the 2.5 lakh households within the extreme poverty segment showing progress, the specific factors behind this improvement remain unclear.

Our research indicates that engaging households in both farming and off-farming activities is effective in reducing poverty, with off-farm activities playing a larger role. However, cost-benefit analysis, typically used for investment projects, can

be misleading in poverty eradication efforts.

Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, *Chairman, Agrani Bank PLC*



The wealthy grow wealthier while the poor get poorer, and the middle class, especially those on fixed incomes, is gradually disappearing. Their savings are dwindling, limiting their access to funds. PKSF

and EU's poverty eradication programme is commendable, helping individuals in these regions achieve financial stability.

Agrani Bank PLC provides products aimed at supporting these communities. For instance, we offer employment generation projects for the rural poor, loan facilities for individuals with disabilities, and small credit programmes for women. Additional initiatives include poverty alleviation schemes, microcredit programmes, special commercial loans, and crop-intensification projects supporting marginal and small farmers. We also provide training and funding, but there is still much to be done. Many people remain unaware of these opportunities, so educating and training them remains a priority.

Dr M. A. Baqui Khalily, *Professor, University of Asia Pacific*



The extremely poor need not only credit but also non-financial services such as insurance, healthcare, nutrition, and savings. Individuals with multiple income sources are less vulnerable and escape

poverty more quickly. PKSF's initiatives are based on accumulated knowledge, aiming for long-term impact, but a full evaluation will take at least five years. Careful monitoring is essential to track how beneficiaries integrate into open markets and build resilience.

It is important to distinguish Results-Based Monitoring (RBM) from impact assessments. RBM tracks ongoing progress, while impact assessments focus on mid- and long-term outcomes, evaluating success in areas adjacent to markets or in isolated regions, like char areas. Moving forward, integrating small and medium enterprises with wage employment is crucial. Given Bangladesh's recurrent floods, building resilient communities is essential. In this project, savings function as a form of insurance, and there is potential to further integrate this within the microfinance model. Development partners should assess programmes for sustainability and effectiveness to ensure their successful application and replication across Bangladesh.

Mohsin Ali, *Executive Director, WAVE Foundation*



When discussing SDGs 1, 2, and the social safety net programme, we must critically examine the recently formulated National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). Unfortunately, it is not

well-aligned with practical needs and is scarcely applicable in its present form. We must thoroughly review the NSSS to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Concerning PPEPP-EU, I would stress that community validation of the project is crucial, and robust documentation is urgently required. While budgets have increased, it is important to assess if or how much that has positively affected poverty alleviation.

Monitoring remains a key concern, as state-level oversight is often inadequate and needs immediate attention.

Dewan A. H. Alamgir, *Independent Consultant*



It is troubling that 30 to 40 million people still live in poverty, lacking access to healthcare, nutrition, and food security. The primary cause of this is poor governance. Although reports may show a decline

in poverty on paper, field observations suggest the contrary, with climate change posing an additional threat.

Basic rights to food, shelter, and other essentials have barely been considered. Another significant concern is the intergenerational cycle of poverty, which must be addressed. Regions like the coastal belt, the haor areas, and the Barind tract face severe poverty and need serious policy reevaluation. Persistent high inflation exacerbates the situation, pushing already vulnerable populations deeper into hardship. Considering our Muslim-majority demographic, we should explore the use of Zakat, as the poor often do not engage with the credit system.

Murshed Alam Sarker, *Executive Director, People's Oriented Programme Implementation (POPI)*



We know that PKSF primarily targets poverty-prone areas, yet new regions are increasingly grappling with poverty issues, particularly due to climate change. The recent floods in Noakhali

illustrate this point, and we must extend our poverty reduction programmes to cover these affected regions.

As an apex implementing agency, PKSF collaborates with NGOs to execute projects

and programmes, which typically span four to five years. This timeframe often limits the development of sustainable and resilient livelihoods, given our focus on long-term solutions. PKSF has gained recognition for its transparency and is frequently funded by the EU, mainly working with NGOs. However, we must acknowledge that while NGOs provide effective models, they cannot sustain nationwide efforts over time. For more effective poverty reduction, the government must play a proactive role in ensuring coordination.

Dr Sharif Ahmed Chowdhury, *Project Director, PPEPP-EU Project, PKSF*



Regarding the existing recommendations, I wish to underscore that we will conduct a formal midterm evaluation of the project. Our initiatives primarily serve the

extremely poor, employing strategies distinct from conventional approaches. PKSF's efforts in agriculture and microenterprise development have significantly benefited these populations, whereas the service sector remains less developed.

In response to concerns raised about intergenerational poverty, I would emphasise on the critical role of nutrition, which is a fundamental issue that cannot be overlooked.

AQM Golam Mawla, *Deputy Managing Director, PKSF*



The extremely poor people usually do not have a tangible income-generating activities, which severely limits the scope of using their full potential. Through our project, we have increased their engagement with the

local markets at the Union level, enabling them to pursue a stable source of income.

Through coordinated efforts, we have succeeded in alleviating poverty of the targeted households to a substantial extent. It is also essential to note that various government schemes and MFI support are available for these communities. If effectively coordinated, these resources could further contribute to poverty reduction. A key concern remains: there is a need to engage all stakeholders and partners in poverty reduction efforts.

Michal Krejza, *Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh*



Poverty reduction is central to EU development policy, as Article 21 of the EU Treaty mandates fostering sustainable development with a primary focus on eradicating poverty. Despite Bangladesh's progress,

extreme poverty persists, especially in the southern coastal belt, worsened by climate change. Ensuring access to essential services such as healthcare, education, food security, safe drinking water, and sanitation is therefore critical.

Skill development and job creation are crucial for poverty alleviation, particularly among the most impoverished. The EU has contributed 22 million Euros to the PPEPP project, benefiting 215,000 households. In addition, 2,200 households in the coastal and the haor areas now have access to safe water through rainwater harvesting and 17 reverse osmosis plants, thus securing potable water supplies. Our future plans include enhancing climate mitigation and adaptation. Our priorities include enhancing resilience in agriculture, promoting sustainable livelihoods, supporting small farmers, preventing climate-induced migration, and addressing climate change impact on food and nutrition security.

Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury, *Chairman, Sonali Bank PLC*



While leading NGOs have made substantial contributions, Bangladesh still lacks a 'big push' framework. Sustainability essentially means

integration with market forces; otherwise, even five-year projects may not yield effective outcomes. Tying programmes to market dynamics can create greater self-employment opportunities.

PKSF can act as a special-purpose vehicle, but its initiatives must be recognised and legitimised at the national policy level. Over the past two decades, I have observed numerous projects come and go. The safety net programme, for example, serves as a public service but encounters challenges.

Nationally recognised NGOs frequently receive bulk credit from banks such as Sonali Bank and Agrani Bank to support their microfinance programmes. However, if institutions like PKSF establish a structured approach, NGOs can link these credits more effectively to relevant initiatives, ensuring comprehensive outcomes with proper oversight. This approach would be more sustainable, particularly if directed towards CMSMEs in rural or underserved areas.

Establishing market linkages and managing bulk credit flows effectively is crucial. Simply taking on one project after another does not create lasting solutions. We must avoid complacency by focusing solely on certain indicators and pursue sustainable holistic results.

Merely implementing isolated projects falls short; we need sustainable collaborations with local governments and national policies that legitimise these programmes. Without these measures, long-term sustainability will

remain out of reach.

Dr. Zaidi Sattar, *Chairman and Chief Executive Policy Research Institute*



In our discussion, we focused on micro-level issues, overlooking important macro-level perspectives. Macro-economic policies have a major impact on national poverty reduction, as

stability and growth are essential for meaningful progress. Growth is a necessary condition for poverty reduction, though not a sufficient condition; therefore, we must examine macro-level strategies, including market orientation and trade openness. Historical evidence shows that restrictive policies hinder growth and, consequently, poverty reduction. Inclusiveness in growth is vital when addressing poverty reduction.

The Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, rose from 0.39 in 1990 to 0.50 today. Analysts warn that exceeding the 0.50 threshold signals severe income inequality, which can lead to social and political instability.

Institutional factors also play a role; as noted in Daron Acemoglu's Why Nations Fail, our colonial past continues to influence our poverty challenges. The British colonial rule impoverished the region, with Bangladesh's poverty rate peaking at 88% in 1974 during a famine.

While progress has been made—the prevalence of poverty falling from 59% in 1990 to about 18% today, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics—the accuracy of these figures is sometimes questioned. Despite challenges, PKSF's efforts have been remarkable, lifting 25 million people out of poverty over the past 25 years. Although we are no longer seen as a "basket case," there remains substantial work ahead. Institutions like PKSF are dedicated to these goals, and I am optimistic we will achieve them soon.

Zakir Ahmed Khan, *Chairman, PKSF*



Dr. Zaidi Sattar's observations on the interplay between micro and macro levels are essential. Poverty and inequality are distinct issues, and it is essential to avoid conflating the two. At present, we are

more focused on eradicating poverty than ending inequality, as the latter presents a more complex structural challenge. This project has made significant progress, and we have noted its positive impacts.

Poverty is not simply a lack of money; it is closely connected with various political and social factors. Therefore, we must evaluate the project's outcomes with this comprehensive perspective. It should be regarded as a programme rather than a mere project, as the former encompasses a broader scope than the latter does. As Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury noted, such programmes should be steered from the top level to prevent dilution at the micro level. We acknowledge this point and will take steps to address it.

For the time being, we should focus on what we are doing now on extreme poverty eradication. We are encouraged by what PKSF has achieved so far.

Its primary goal is poverty alleviation through employment generation. PKSF maintains continuous communication with its development partners and its partner NGOs, and we are fully committed to achieving this goal.

Mahfuz Anam, *Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star*



The role of journalism in alleviating extreme poverty cannot be underestimated. Although The Daily Star is not currently operating at full capacity in this area, we are dedicated to expanding our contributions in the

future. The Daily Star can play a pivotal role in influencing policy-level discussions.

I encourage PKSF to utilise The Daily Star to bring critical issues to the attention of the policymakers. A significant gap persists between implementers and policymakers, frequently exacerbated by contemporary political dynamics. Breaking this cycle is essential, especially as millions in Bangladesh continue to face poverty.

Moreover, as one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations, Bangladesh faces immense challenges. Our achievements are at risk due to climate issues. Politics, corruption, and misallocated funds further complicate the situation, and journalism has a crucial role in addressing these concerns.

We offer our services to all stakeholders and organisations, providing quality content—interviews, roundtables, and articles—that can fuel meaningful discussions.

Tanjim Ferdous, *In-charge, NGO and Foreign Missions, Business Development Team, The Daily Star (Moderator)*



This event, in line with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, focuses on addressing the ongoing challenges of poverty despite progress. We have discussed

initiatives like PPEPP that empower communities through microcredit and technical support. Our speakers have explored targeted interventions, data-driven approaches, and long-term strategies to end poverty. Thank you for being part of this vital conversation to shape meaningful change.