

Executive Summary of the Review Report on **Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

Anchor

BRAC

Co-Anchor

Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD)

Associate Organisations

Access Bangladesh Foundation

ActionAid Bangladesh

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)

British Council

CARE Bangladesh

Dhaka Ahsania Mission

Gonoshasthaya Kendra

JAAGO Foundation

Plan International

Practical Action in Bangladesh

Save the Children in Bangladesh

SERAC-Bangladesh

VSO Bangladesh

Introduction

The eighth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 8) is about *Decent Work and Economic Growth*; this review report is an effort to understand the progress made, the challenges and the opportunities in realising the stipulated targets of this Goal in Bangladesh. BRAC was the anchor organisation, and Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD) was the co-anchor organisation for the SDG 8 Goal Group that organised the consultation process and prepared the review report. The review emphasises the achievements so far, captures the lessons learned and emerging best practices, and provides considerations for the way forward. The report puts an emphasis on the contribution and intervention of the non-state actors and the central agenda of ‘leaving no one behind’.

Progress and Challenges with the SDG 8

Although Bangladesh continues to maintain impressive economic growth, there are many challenges in effective realisation of the SDG 8. Increasing economic disparity, gender inequity, youth unemployment and lack of decent work opportunities are some of the challenges that require concerted efforts from different actors. In addition, the economy is still struggling to make an inclusive work environment for many disadvantaged and marginalised groups, which ultimately affects both bringing people into the workforce, as well as retaining them. While many progress numbers remain impressive, efforts to understand equity and inclusion should be increased. Some key highlights from the SDG 8 progress assessment include:

Ensuring inclusive economic growth. SDG Targets 8.1 and 8.2 are concerned with the annual economic growth. The economy of Bangladesh has been experiencing sustained growth in the past year, with the annual growth rate of real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita reaching 6.6 per cent in 2018. While the overall economic growth is commendable, there remains scope to ensure that these improvements reach every segment of the country.

Formalising and promoting decent work. Bangladesh continues to face the daunting challenge of ensuring formal jobs for all across the country. In 2016, about 85 per cent of the workforce was employed in the informal economy, almost 78 per cent of whom were in non-agriculture employment. The already existing challenge of securing labour rights and good governance are amplified in the informal sector. Further, the SDG Target 8.8 seeks to protect labour rights and safe work for all, including for economic migrants.

Difficulties in ensuring good governance. Adequate and effective governance remains a concern for Bangladesh. It is not enough to create jobs and promote employment; it must also be ensured that these are decent jobs, and that rights and dignity of workers are secured. While there have been some positive improvements, especially in the garments sector, a lot remains to be done. Further, there is a need for increased dialogue on decent work in the non-garment sectors.

Addressing unemployment rates and bringing youth into NEET. SDG Targets 8.5 and 8.6 call for full and productive employment and reducing down youth not in employment, education and training (NEET), respectively. Youth unemployment rate is about twice as high as the national unemployment rate, reaching to around 10.6 per cent in 2017.

Challenges in monitoring child labour. The latest Child Labour Survey in Bangladesh was conducted in 2013, which makes it difficult to assess the progress made since the commencement of the 2030 Agenda. Anecdotal evidence suggests that child labour has been extensively curbed in the formal sector, but remains rampant in the informal sector. The government and the civil society organisations (CSOs) have an important role in helping bring these children into education and training, while ensuring that their livelihood is not threatened.

Advancing financial institutions and facilities for all. Although there is an increase in the number of bank branches and ATMs between 2016 and 2017, there is a need to develop a more in-depth understanding of clients and disadvantaged groups who may not access such services. It is important to note that, the more non-traditional financial services, such as microfinance and mobile banking services (e.g. bKash), have been able to reach a larger base of people and the marginalised communities across Bangladesh. Increased mobile phone and internet penetration, accompanied by technological innovation, have played an important role in advancing this outreach and inclusion. This should be considered important progress, although it may fall outside the scope of the SDG 8 indicators.

Increasing sustainable production and consumption. Bangladesh still needs to increase its efforts in greening its industries and adopting environment-friendly processes and technologies, especially in the manufacturing sector. More linkages with other SDGs, such as the SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns), should be established to help advance SDG Target 8.4.

CSOs in Advancing and Monitoring the SDG 8

Understanding SDG 8 priorities in the local context. When asked to rank the importance of SDG 8 targets, the largest share of CSOs considered Targets 8.3, 8.7, 8.1 and 8.6 as the top priority areas in Bangladesh's context. These targets include the promotion of development-oriented policies that support productive and decent job creation, actions to eradicate child labour and forced labour, sustaining economic growth, and combating youth unemployment.

Targetting disadvantaged groups for skills development. As the SDGs seek to 'leave no one behind,' many CSOs are implementing targetted interventions that are particularly designed to reach people from different backgrounds and those from marginalised communities. A number of CSOs are specifically targetting disadvantaged groups, and are trying to equip them with the necessary skills for acquiring feasible decent jobs.

Building a skilled and well-informed workforce. CSOs, along with the public and private actors, are working towards developing a skilled workforce in the country. Skill development interventions have focused on building specific technical skills, as well as soft skills. A combination of the two is essential to help job-seekers, especially the youth, particularly in view of the modern changing labour market. In addition to skill trainings, CSOs are also contributing by way of raising awareness about workers' rights and important life skills (such as, personal health and financial literacy); this also helps in advancing the decent work agenda.

Advancing the issue of workplace safety and proper work environment. A number of CSO interventions are focused on the readymade garment (RMG) sector to help improve the overall working environment in the factories. Some organisations are also working with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to support them in promoting good work practices, as well as to improve their businesses.

Considerations in Going Forward

In concluding the present review report, a few key challenges and recommendations are presented from the perspective of the civil society's scope of work and engagement. Selected key recommendations include:

Advancing SDG 8 with a collective voice. There remains a scope to enhance coordination and collaboration between the different actors working to advance the SDG 8 in Bangladesh. The various actors—government representatives, civil society and the private sector—can further enhance their communication to keep each other informed about their activities, and coordinate their programmes, wherever possible. Another area that is highlighted in this regard, is the need for more concerted efforts related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) from the private sector.

Ensuring inclusion at the core of all interventions. CSOs should invest in mapping the ultra-poor and identifying the marginalised groups, and emphasise on disseminating information among them on how best to access the training and placement services that are available from various sectors. The low participation of female labour force remains a concern in Bangladesh, and should be addressed from the perspective of the related cross-cutting themes and advocacy efforts that would help address issues such as violence against women, promote caregiving facilities and ensure safe mobility. Where feasible, state and non-state actors should explore how technology can help in reaching different target groups. Further, as implementing actors, CSOs are well-placed to bring grassroots experiences and evidence to advocate for greater inclusion at the national level.

Targetting and collaborating to streamline skills development efforts. CSOs should increase the consultation process with the private sector prior to designing skill development initiatives and making resource allocation. This will essentially help bridge any demand and supply gaps, and the process of creating an employable workforce with specific skill sets that match the market demands. A robust national

monitoring system can be useful in maintaining a database of participants and their training records, which can help facilitate targeted job placements.

Matching technological advancement and skills development. With the global advancement of technology, including artificial intelligence (AI)-equipped automated systems, the labour market is fast changing, and many traditional jobs are becoming redundant. This ‘fourth industrial revolution’ is making it imperative that countries invest in creating an agile workforce. Here, CSOs in Bangladesh need to work with the government’s National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) to identify strategies on how to bring about the process of innovations and retool a skilled labour force.

Including returnee economic migrants and internal climate-induced migrants. As we seek to ‘leave no one behind’, both cross-border and internal migrants should be effectively included as programme beneficiaries. Some organisations have started working on the reintegration of the returnee migrants, many of whom are affected survivors of violence. CSOs and the government can increase their collaborative efforts in identifying alternative work opportunities for those at risk of environmental hazards and disasters.

Increasing dialogue with the government and the private sector. The consultation process and review report has helped highlight the scope for CSOs to improve its engagement with the private sector. As the private sector has a key role in advancing job creation, civil society can increase their support in developing a skilled workforce and actively promote inclusion. Further, a relatively untapped area of collaboration is the SDG Target 8.9, which calls for the promotion of sustainable tourism. Increased collective efforts of the government, civil society and the private sector is required to collectively promote sustainable tourism that can increase job opportunities at the local level, and thereby benefit the local communities.

Advancing a favourable business climate that attracts more investment and promotes job creation. The business climate is an integral component when discussing economic growth and job creation. When given well-informed incentives, businesses can effectively help advance the agenda for inclusive job creation.

Customising and mainstreaming financial instruments to increase financial inclusion. Although the indicators related to SDG Target 8.10 show advances in the number of bank branches and ATMs, there needs to be a more comprehensive understanding of how these services are reaching the different socio-economic segments of the country. While this makes traditional banking a challenge, it also encourages all actors to explore some innovative financial services, such as intelligent microfinance products and service-providers (e.g. bKash). There needs to be a greater focus on how to further mainstream such financial instruments through innovative policies.