

Event brief on Policy Talk: Social Safety Net

Background

Bangladesh has over the years built a good foundation for social security as a core strategy to deal with the triple problem of poverty, vulnerability and marginalization. However, unplanned growth of the social safety net portfolio has caused fragmented implementation, with 114 programmes under 25 Ministries. The Government of Bangladesh embarked upon the formulation of a comprehensive National Social Security Strategy to coordinate and consolidate the existing programmes to achieve better efficiency and results. The strategy was approved by the Cabinet in 2015.



The Government of Bangladesh allocates significant resources to implement a wide spectrum of social programs. In FY 2019, a budget of approximately BDT 743.67 billion, or equivalent to 2.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), has been allocated for this purpose. Among these, about BDT 372 billion is being used to implement safety net programs as per the globally recognized classification. They are in the form of cash allowances, public works, and education and health incentives for poor and vulnerable households, which aim to contribute to the fight against poverty and improving human capital.

If the NGO contribution is added with the government spending the total social protection spending in terms of GDP ratio will increase remarkably, which may reflect the true picture of social protection in the country. Thus, collaboration with the NGOs is very important to assess the actual scenario of social protection. In order to facilitate them to provide supports through some formal mechanism, a GO NGO collaboration platform has been introduced, where BRAC is the NGO lead for the next one year. As a part of this platform, BRAC has participated in the last International Conference on Social Security. A consolidated presentation were made at the conference which was supported by relevant data and information from all the relevant BRAC programmes.

To conduct effective policy, person-to-person advocacy for BRAC Programmes and create policy appetite and sensitization among BRAC staff on policy advocacy—policy talk plays as a phenomenal instrument to reach maximum number of people in one session. A policy talk on social safety net was arranged on October 6, 2019 at the BRAC centre. The objective of this policy talk was to share knowledge about social safety net—both from Government and donor perspectives. Also, to measure BRAC's contribution in social safety net, BRAC Advocacy for Social Change has created a 5 by 5 matrix based on lifecycle and thematic cluster. The concept of this 5x5 matrix was introduced to the other programmes through this policy talk.

Highlights

Mohammad Azad Rahman, Programme Head of Advocacy for Social Change started the talk stating the objective of policy talk and social safety net. "We are working towards creating footsteps at the Government level. We are also trying to support the other programmes at BRAC about how to involve more at the policy level"- he said. "Government has a consolidated plan on Social Security since 2015, where NGOs will also contribute for better results. A GO-NGO collaboration platform has been formed already" – he added.



Mohammad Khaled Hasan, Social Protection Specialist, SSPS Programme, UNDP and Deputy Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh talked about the background, formulation of National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) and also about the GO- NGO collaboration. "Before the strategy implementation, only the beneficiaries who could be classified as 'poor' could get the benefits. After implementation of strategy, the target is to gradually cover upto 50% of the population, not just the poor"- Mr. Khaled said.

"Lifecycle framework was done to identify the possible beneficiaries, but the Government faces challenges in targeting the beneficiaries. NGOs can play a vital role to minimize this error, thus The GO NGO Collaboration platform under cabinet division is trying to come up with an effective solution to targeting the beneficiaries"- he added.

Mr. Khaled also mentioned about support from NGOs in monitoring and evaluation, grievance redress system and creating MIS for data sharing.

Tim Zahid Hossain, Advisor, Advocacy, Ultra Poor Graduation Programme, BRAC talked about how the programme is playing role eradicate poverty. "The "poor" are defined by the population that has earnings below the poverty line which is at \$1.90/day. In Bangladesh, that is 21% of the total population. The UPG programme targets the ultra-poor population which is the bottom 9% of the population that is poor. This accounts for 1 crore 37 lac people in Bangladesh. Apart from Bangladesh, BRAC's ultra-poor graduation approach is also currently being implemented by over 100 graduation programmes in 40 other countries"- he said.

Md. Mazedul Islam, Programme Coordinator of Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC shared the idea of practicing 5x5 matrix at all the relevant programmes of BRAC. "We have already worked on consolidating data of Sustainable Development Goals attained by different programmes. Similarly, a consolidated 5x5 matrix will share total reach and cost of different programmes under the social safety net"- he said.

A B M Feroz Ahmed, Livelihoods Adviser and Deputy Team Leader, Extreme Poverty, Resilience and Climate Change Team, DFID Bangladesh has addressed how sensitising the relevant stakeholders is of utmost importance and elaborated on the sensitisation process they implement regarding ultra- poor graduation. "Internal knowledge platforms are created wherein a Social Protection Advisor is appointed as the focal point and the platform serves as a place to share local and global learnings. The Platform also organises a "Learning Week" at the end of each year where local and international organisations share their best practices and learnings. Besides that, the learnings are shared on different platforms on a quarterly basis"- Mr. Firoz said. He has also advised that keeping the changing political and economic contexts in mind, we need more on-the-ground needs assessment from DFID in order to better address the issue of extreme poverty in Bangladesh and globally.

Mr. Asif Kashem, Senior Program Manager (Development Cooperation) at Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) was also present at the policy talk as an observer.

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