

# Development Letters

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# About Development Letters

*Development Letters* is a new periodical that aims to promote ideas with important policy and practical implications for a developing country like Bangladesh. This publication provides a platform to introduce thought-provoking ideas on broad development issues through short and concisely-written articles that are comprehensible to policymakers and development practitioners.

*Development Letters* is different from other established academic journals in several respects. First and foremost, it emphasises on communicating the propositions in a manner that can help integrate senior policymakers and other relevant stakeholders into the policy discourse. Disseminating potentially important and timely ideas without being stifled by technical details and unnecessarily long and ambiguous review of other studies is one core objective of this publication.

Furthermore, *Development Letters* will also select and publish ideas that should require full-blown research for gathering evidence. These days, policy-relevant analytical studies are often in short supply given the lack of financial support needed for conducting those. This journal will showcase the underlying ideas that need to be supported to bridge the gap between analytical research and informed policymaking.

*Development Letters* will also offer an opportunity to learn from those who—based on their experience—can share insights into the factors that cause development results to be less than optimal. This can help generate invaluable lessons for future interventions.

Finally, *Development Letters* is about dealing with issues that are topical and demand immediate policy attention. It is a usual phenomenon in social sciences that empirical research can be quite time-consuming, and any evidence gathered may require further verification. This publication will duly acknowledge this challenge while highlighting the promising ideas that need due consideration. To summarise, this periodical focuses on bringing together relevant issues, ideas, and approaches that can be researched, refined, experimented, and investigated further.

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# 1971 Humanitarian Crisis in Flashback

*Rudabeh Shahid & Samuel Jaffe*

In this month of victory in Bangladesh, during which the nation celebrates its triumph over Pakistan's military establishment, it is worthwhile to remember the nine-month humanitarian crisis that folded during that conflict. Also, as the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people of Myanmar occurred adjacent to Bangladesh and is still fresh in our memory, it is useful to juxtapose the two crises.

In August of 1947, more than seven-thousand-kilometre gash was slit through British India. While it gave birth to Pakistan, the socially constructed border still precipitates conflict on either side, and the region's deep wounds have certainly not healed today. British rule in the region is responsible for many refugee crises that have affected South Asia. The nature in which the British left the region not only created a refugee crisis during the Partition of 1947, but it also played a strong role in stimulating further refugee crises during the formation of Bangladesh and the situation that Rohingya refugees face today.

The British exploited India and Burma's cultural milieu to create differences and executed a strategy of 'divide and rule', sowing the seeds of the perpetual disasters where ethnic groups continue to suffer to date. To minimize potential rebellions during their rule, the British practiced a policy to polarize groups within India and Burma, ensuring that no one group became powerful enough to rebel. The British also implemented a census through which they were not only able to locate the populations of majorities and minorities but were also able to divide people further by categorizing them to break up any potential uprisings. Along with the census, in the case of India, the British instituted a communal electorate, where each religious group had at least a small portion of representation in government. Again, this prevented any group from becoming too powerful

and ensured that British rule would last.

In 1947, the partition of British India proceeded based on the "two nations theory" which posited that Hindus and Muslims could not peacefully coexist and thus required their respective majority regions. Any other type of ethnic concerns such as those of a linguistic nature or accommodation of groups in border regions who were away from the power centre was not taken into consideration. Therefore, it can be argued that the partition of India in 1947 not only triggered subsequent long-term conflicts on a macroscale such as Bengali demands for autonomy in East Pakistan (which led to the Bangladesh war of 1971), but that it also laid the seeds for displacing communities who were located away from power centres perpetually, foremost among them being the case of the stateless Rohingyas.

Let us first consider the case of Bangladesh. The identity consciousness of Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan, who had previously overwhelmingly supported the Muslim League in colonial India, took an ethno-linguistic turn when, in response to economic and cultural discrimination from the 1950s onwards, they started demanding greater regional autonomy from West Pakistani authorities. In 1971, intending to suppress dissent and stunt the growth of Bengali nationalism for good, the Pakistan military began a crackdown in its eastern wing which spiralled into the displacement of roughly ten million people, most of whom entered the border-states of India. Initially, India offered its hospitality to these refugees and trained many of the Mukti Bahini combatants, the guerrilla fighters of East Pakistan who waged a nine-month long guerrilla war against the Pakistan army. After this, the Indian army finally intervened militarily by entering the territories of East Pakistan, leading to the surrender of the Pakistani armed forces. India justified this military intervention on

the grounds that allowing the refugee crisis in eastern and north-eastern India to continue risked destabilizing the region further and creating even greater human suffering. Despite backing from the Soviet Union, India's actions did not generate substantial support in the international community as a humanitarian intervention.

In the case of the Rohingyas, as the partition of India gained momentum, the Rohingya population in the neighbouring Arakan province in colonial Burma hoped to join the future Muslim-majority province of East Pakistan but were denied by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the soon to be founder of Pakistan. Perhaps with an expedited timeline and mishandling of the transition of power from Britain to the two countries, India and Pakistan, the daunting process seemed too complicated to create a deal in which this Rohingya population could be accepted into East Pakistan. As Arakan remained part of Burma (which gained independence from Britain in 1948), the attitude of the majority Bamar Buddhists towards the Rohingya Muslims took a turn for the worse. Increased mistreatment towards them culminated in the crackdown by the Burmese military junta in 1978 and the stripping of their Myanmar citizenship in 1982. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh at different stages to seek asylum.

The ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis is like the refugee crisis precipitated by the creation of Bangladesh in several respects. In one sense, both the East Pakistani and Rohingya refugees' situations were partly brought on by weaknesses in the process of Partition and the failures of the "two nations theory", which did not adequately account for the concerns of groups who were not close to the centres of power. In both cases, moreover, the successor states used the might of their armed forces to suppress the political aspirations of those who later became refugees despite external pressure not to do so.

Comparing the two crises also illustrates the ease with which major governments and international institutions can frame refugee crises in ways that limit their liability to act in substantial ways. In the case of Bangladesh, it was apparent only a few months into the conflict that the Pakistan army had committed atrocities of genocide in East Pakistan, yet successive governments largely dismissed the situation, which was the underlying cause of the refugee crisis, as a civil war and an internal matter for Pakistan. As with the Rohingya crisis today, for governments and international organizations to accept that state-sponsored "ethnic cleansing and possible genocide" were occurring, would have obligated more meaningful action.

The essential difference between the plight of the Rohingya today and that of the East Pakistani in 1971, however, is the likelihood of external military intervention to alleviate their situations. While the Indian military stepped in unilaterally to ensure the creation of Bangladesh, there does not appear to be any comparable help on the way for the Rohingyas.

Indifference and inertia on the part of the international community then, as now, also limits the likelihood of any sort of international coalition involving itself militarily. Indeed, that there is no such outstanding intervention waiting to happen for the Rohingyas now is even more pronounced, given that all member states of the United Nations endorsed the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005.

Another critical difference between the two crises concerns the role of humanitarian relief organizations. While the NGO community mobilized in both cases to combat the refugees' suffering, those organizations that have responded to the Rohingya crisis have tended to criticize Myanmar's government more freely than their counterparts did during the Bangladesh crisis in 1971. Indeed, the belief that humanitarian relief was a politically "neutral" practice where "saving strangers" regardless of their allegiances was a defining feature of voluntary humanitarian action for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1971, therefore, major relief providers like the International Committee of the Red Cross remained relatively quiet on the political matters fuelling the refugee crisis - an indifference which younger, more radical NGOs such as Oxfam increasingly called into question as the war continued. By contrast, relief organizations responding to the Rohingya crisis have shown a much greater willingness to engage the political questions underlying the refugee situation, reflecting a broader strengthening of humanitarian NGOs' role in international responses to such crises.

***“The essential difference between the plight of the Rohingya today and that of the East Pakistani in 1971, however, is the likelihood of external military intervention to alleviate their situations.”***



In conclusion, while the two refugee crises in South Asia were triggered by causes and events in the short term, they have roots in the geopolitical history of colonial British India and Burma, and the resulting partition in 1947. The rule of the British in the region and their subsequent departure set into motion a chain of events, such as the conflict surrounding the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 and indirectly the events in Arakan which led to the statelessness of the Rohingyas. While Bangladesh is now an independent country and has gradually prospered to emerge as one of the fastest growing economies in Asia, the condition of the many minority groups in South Asia has worsened after 1947, with the extreme case being that of the Rohingyas for whom there appears to be no end to their troubles in sight

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*"While the two refugee crises in South Asia were triggered by causes and events in the short term, they have roots in the geopolitical history of colonial British India and Burma, and the resulting partition in 1947."*

# Education Budget 2022-23: What needs to be addressed?

*Dr M Abu Eusuf*

The national budget for the fiscal year 2022-23 will be critical to chart the recovery of the education sector that has suffered the adverse impacts of the pandemic manifested through the digital divide, learning loss, dropout, and child marriage, among other factors. The protracted school closure of 61 weeks disrupted the education of about 31 million children and resulted in learning loss due to reduced participation for many. Although the country has stepped into the third year of the pandemic, there is still no official estimate on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the education sector. However, looking at the various studies undertaken by research organisations, think-tanks, and development partners, one can get an idea about how the education sector has been affected.

**Digital Divide:** Despite the measures taken to continue learning through online classes, lack of access to digital devices and the internet has been a challenge for many students, creating a digital divide. A BRAC study revealed that 56% of the surveyed students could not participate in online lessons. This non-participation was more evident among students of ethnic minorities (75%), and those living in rural areas (60 %). Although no official data is available on how many students could not take part in online lessons across the country, the findings mentioned above are alarming, indicating the most disadvantaged population are likely to be left out of online education.

**Dropout:** Even before the pandemic, the dropout rate for primary and upper secondary levels was 34.8 per cent and 19.6 per cent, respectively; the dropout rate was highest in secondary education (37.6 per cent). With the onset of the pandemic containment measures, about 45 per cent of students are likely to have dropped out of secondary school to either support their families in earning or to lessen the economic burden, as suggested by one World Bank study.

**Child Marriage:** Prolonged school closure could have resulted in a spike in child marriage, impacting the girls students most. A report by Manusher Jonno Foundation, UNFPA, Unicef and Plan International Bangladesh revealed that between April–October 2020, at least 13,886 girls from 84 Upazilas of 21 districts were forced into child marriage.

In addition to these factors, the disruption in education at all levels is likely to hamper the students' competency across the lifecycle, hindering their current and future job market participation.

Given this alarming situation, there is a serious need to go beyond the business-as-usual allocation for the education sector in the national budget. The current FY2021-FY2022 education budget is only about 2 per cent of GDP and less than 12 per cent of the total national budget. The education budget as a percentage of the national budget has been hovering between 9 to 11 per cent. As a percentage of GDP, the allocation for education sector has been between 1.87 and 2.21 per cent for almost the last seven years, while the country's 8th five-year plan sets the target to increase allocation to 3.5 per cent by 2025.

The FY2022-23 budget should, therefore, have a clear direction on how the education sector will be supported to recover from the pandemic-induced challenges. There should be a significant increase in the allocation which should then be supported by recovery initiatives.

The recovery initiatives should include a proper assessment of the condition of the education sector and then a formulation of a strategy categorising the interventions into short, medium and long-term measures.

The government now has a good database of millions of students' mothers who receive the stipend money through the digital payment system. One strategy could be utilising this database to identify the affected students and families. Affected families with dropped out students could be incentivised to bring back students to the school.

The capacity to implement the proposed allocation and promised measures should be improved. For instance, The FY2021-22 budget had plans for a new school meal project in July last year and provision of supporting each student with Tk1,000 with "kit allowance" to help them buy a dress, a pair of shoes and a bag. However, the new school meal project was cancelled, and the kit allowance is yet to commence operation. Hence, the capacity to deliver the promises made in the budget is questioned. This practice has to change. Given the challenge, it would be prudent to utilise the vast network of NGOs spread out across the country. A proactive government-NGO collaboration can help address such challenges.

To counter the spillover effect of the COVID-triggered disruption into the job market, there should be suitable initiatives that address the labour market needs in the post-pandemic situation. Mainstreaming technical and vocational education has been emphasised for a long time and should be brought under the spotlight by integrating classroom teaching with industry experience. How such initiatives can be incentivised should be explored and acted upon.

There should be specific allocations to build the capacity of the teachers also. Such capacity-building initiatives should be undertaken based on proper need assessment of the teachers which may vary across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

In fine, the education budget for FY2022-23 should go beyond the traditional allocation mechanism and introduce data-driven and out-of-the-box initiatives to recover from the pandemic-induced bottlenecks.

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*“There should be specific allocations to build the capacity of the teachers also. Such capacity-building initiatives should be undertaken based on proper need assessment of the teachers which may vary across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.”*

# Social Protection for RMG Workers

*Mostafiz Uddin*

After all the talk of "bouncing back better" in the Readymade Garment industry since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, garment workers remain vulnerable to economic shocks. It appears that they will remain prone to economic shocks in future, unless fundamental and binding changes are introduced. The underlying issue here is that there is a lack of social security system for the workers employed in the Bangladesh apparel industry. Unlike in other countries, there is no government furlough for months on end, no large redundancy pay-outs, and no guarantee of long-term social security payments. This means that when an economic shock hits, the only thing workers often have left to rely on is their (usually meagre) savings.

Most garment workers will be lucky if they have enough money put aside to pay their rent and other bills for a month. It has been no surprise to see thousands of workers returning to their families in the villages when job losses/lay-offs have begun to stack up in the garment hubs during the pandemic. Has there been any help for garment workers? At the moment, there is the Workers Welfare Fund in Bangladesh. This is a scheme whereby apparel exporting factories contribute 0.03 per cent of their export value (which is about USD 10 million per year and will increase with the increase of the country's apparel export volumes) and from this fund apparel workers are paid for injury or death coverage.

Pandemic-induced adversities have revealed that this scheme is clearly not enough to provide the safety net which our garment workers need for their broader financial needs. First of all, amount such USD 10 million is not enough; because there are about 4 million garment workers in Bangladesh, and thus in a time of crisis when everyone will be affected, this will mean

only USD 2.5 per worker. Moreover, the current Workers Welfare Fund only covers injury or death schemes. But the safety net will also include support for the workers such as income support during crises/lockdowns, unemployment benefits, severance, etc.

The government in consultation with the manufacturers, buyers and labour leaders can form the safety net for the workers. In agreement with all the stakeholders, the government may allocate around 0.5 percent of total export value to this safety net fund. Such a move would put the amount of money raised to billions of dollars rather than millions and might realistically mean that garment workers were adequately protected from economic shocks.

This money could be completely ring-fenced by the manufacturers where invoicing is concerned so that it was ear-marked specifically for garment workers' protection. That way, the money would be completely protected. I believe most ethical fashion brands would get behind such a safety net, provided it is transparently implemented and monitored with accountability. Moreover, if done properly, it could be sold as a major reason why brands should source from Bangladesh compared to other locations. Brands would also be able to satisfy themselves that they were doing something meaningful and tangible to support garment workers.

Are there any alternatives? In the past year we have seen the International Labour Organization (ILO) establish an initiative which was intended to support garment workers. However, this "call to action" has so far, after 12-months of being launched, failed to achieve anything significant. RMG enterprises also received proposals from NGOs for brands to negotiate

enforceable agreements to support stronger social protections for workers related to unemployment and severance benefits, in line with relevant ILO conventions, through the establishment of a "Severance Guarantee Fund". The purpose of such a fund, we are told, would be to pay severance and outstanding wages in cases where employers have gone insolvent, or otherwise have terminated workers and can't be compelled to pay. The Severance Guarantee Fund would also mitigate the devastating consequences of unemployment for workers in the future by financially supplementing or strengthening government social protection programmes for unemployment or severance benefits.

In fact, there are many crossovers between the proposals for such a fund and the idea I am suggesting. In both cases, there would be binding agreements between brands and their suppliers to ensure that workers were never left destitute and without receiving wages and payments owed.

In the long-term, there is also a serious need for undertaking evidence-based policy action to implement systems and processes which guarantee garment workers are not left high and dry because of adverse events. As an industry, RMG enterprises have a huge responsibility, with buyers themselves having duties under the UN Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights as well as under the OECD Guidelines for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment Sector to respect the human rights of workers in their supply chain. This includes making sure that the workers who are the drivers of this industry are protected.

*A version of this article was published in The Daily Star on 2 August 2021.*

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***“As an industry, RMG enterprises have a huge responsibility, with buyers themselves having duties under the UN Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights as well as under the OECD Guidelines for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment Sector to respect the human rights of workers in their supply chain. ”***

# Proposed EU GSP Scheme for 2024-34: What Bangladesh must do now

*Abdur Razzaque*

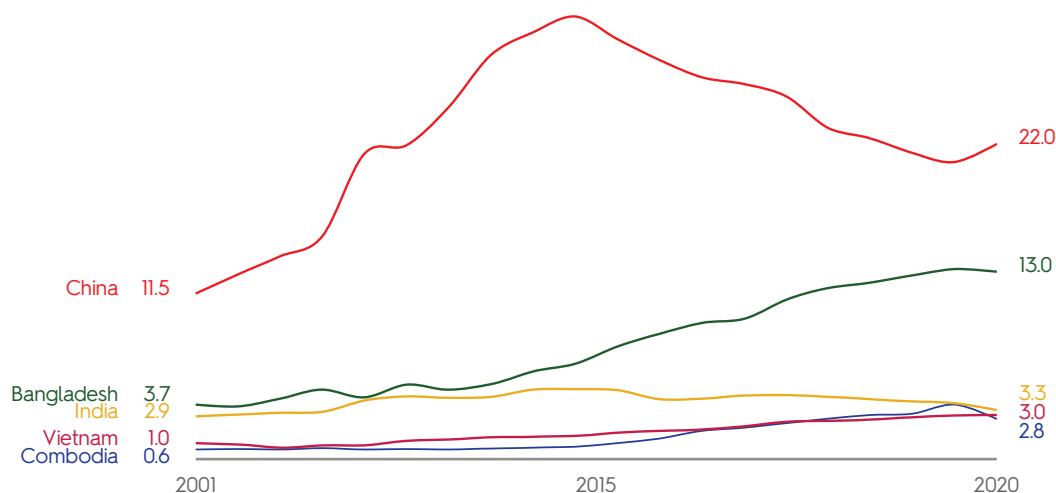
As Bangladesh is set to leave the group of the least developed countries (LDCs) in 2026, the most important change that it is going to face will be associated with preferential market access for exporters. Apparel export from the country has immensely benefited from LDC-specific trade preferences granted by various countries through their respective Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). Of these, none was more instrumental in making Bangladesh an LDC export success story than the EU GSP scheme.

Taking advantage of its Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative – designed for providing unrestricted market access of LDC goods under relaxed rules of origin

(RoO) requirements – Bangladesh's exports to the EU (including the UK) expanded rapidly from \$2.5 billion in 2000-01 to a peak of about \$23 billion in 2018-19 before being hit by Covid-19. The EU and the UK together account for about 60 per cent of Bangladesh's merchandise exports, more than 90 per cent of which comprise textile and clothing items. And almost all of it has benefited from EU duty-free access.

As a result, Bangladesh managed to steadily expand its apparel market share in the EU. During 2010-20, as China's EU apparel market share fell from 30 per cent to 22 per cent, Bangladesh saw its share doubling from 6.5 per cent to 13 per cent (Figure 1).

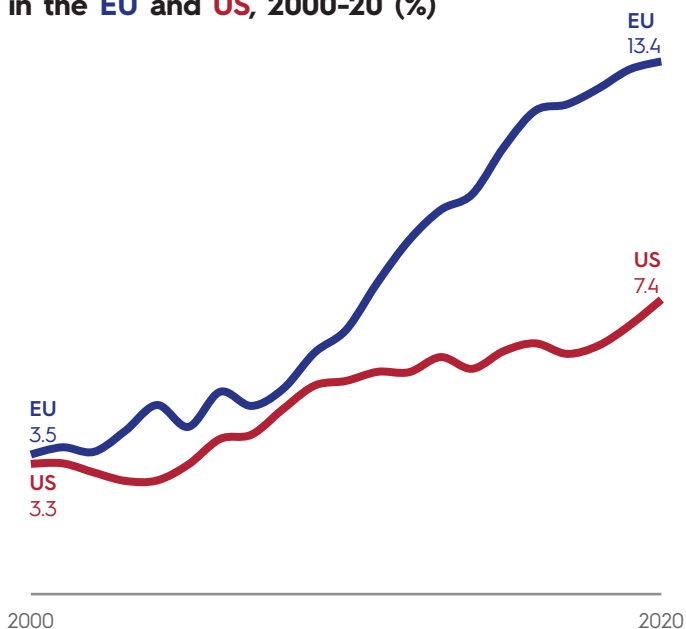
**Figure 1: Apparel Market Share in the EU (including UK): Bangladesh and other Comparators (%)**



The significance of the EU GSP scheme becomes clear when comparison is made with the apparel market in the United States, which never allowed duty-free access for Bangladesh's clothing items.

In 2000, Bangladesh had almost an identical apparel market share (of 3.3 per cent) in the EU and US. A lack of preferential market access has resulted in only a modest growth in Bangladesh's export market share in the US vis-à-vis a much stronger performance in the EU (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Bangladesh's Apparel Market Shares in the EU and US, 2000-20 (%)**



### Proposed EU GSP for 2024-34 and implications for Bangladesh

In September 2021, the EU unveiled its proposed GSP for 2024-2034. Understanding various provisions of the proposed system is critical for assessing preferential market access opportunities for different export products in the post LDC period.

The key implication that can be deciphered from the newly proposed GSP provisions is that Bangladesh is likely to qualify for GSP+ after its LDC graduation but the specified EU 'safeguards' would exclude the country's clothing exports from any tariff preferences .

Given Bangladesh's LDC status until 2026 and the fact that the EU allows for an additional three-year transitional period after graduation, Bangladeshi exporters should expect to enjoy the current duty-free market access until 2029.

The proposed system suggests certain changes to the eligibility criteria. It removes the so-called 'import-share criterion', which, under the current rules, is an obstacle for Bangladesh in qualifying for GSP+.

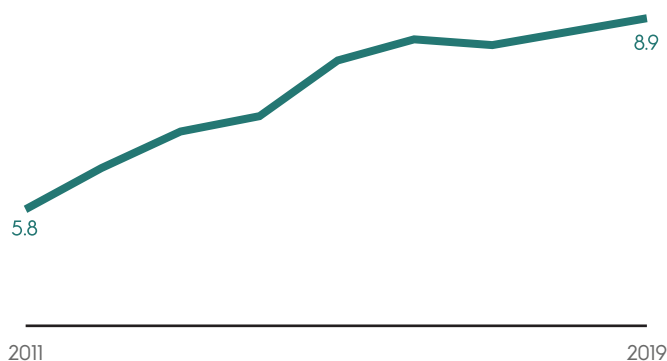
The new proposal expands the list of international

conventions to be ratified and implemented by a recipient country to 32 (from the current list of 27). Bangladesh has already ratified all but one of those conventions, paving the way for fulfilling this criterion, albeit implementation being somewhat challenging in some cases.

Despite those apparently positive alterations, the proposed scheme, quite strikingly, has failed to provide respite to GSP+ beneficiary countries from the EU's safeguard measures against textile and clothing items. According to the stipulated provisions, if the combined share of HS Sections 61, 62, and 63 (comprising knitwear, woven and home textile items and defined as "product group S-11b") from a country exceeds 6 per cent of the total EU imports of the same products, safeguard measures would be triggered to remove duty-free market access for these products.

It is estimated that the combined share of Bangladesh's exports of HS Sections 61, 62, and 63 (S-11b) in total EU imports is close to 9per cent and is thus already above the threshold value of 6 per cent (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Share of Bangladesh's Exports of S-11B (HS61, HS62 and HS63) in EU Imports (%)**



*“The key implication that can be deciphered from the newly proposed GSP provisions is that Bangladesh is likely to qualify for GSP+ after its LDC graduation but the specified EU 'safeguards' would exclude the country's clothing exports from any tariff preferences.”*



Even with this high share it would be possible to obtain GSP preferences if Bangladesh's share of S-IIb products as percentage of all EU GSP-covered imports of the same products were less than 37 per cent. The corresponding Bangladesh share is estimated to be almost 50 per cent.

All this implies that Bangladesh will benefit from GSP+ preferential access, however, its apparel items will face MFN tariff rates in the EU. That is, if the proposed rules remain unchanged, the average tariff rate on apparel exports from Bangladesh to the EU will rise from the currently zero to on average close to 12 per cent. It is true that accessing GSP+ means continued duty-free access in many other items, and it will help obtain less-than-MFN tariff rates in several categories of goods. Leather goods and footwear are examples of such products. However, the current supply-side capacity in these sectors is quite limited. As such, after LDC graduation EU GSP will be a relatively ineffective instrument for supporting exports.

Graduation would also imply more stringent rules of origin to benefit from any preferential treatment. The minimum local value-addition, for all exports other than clothing, would rise from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. This can further constrain the already weak export supply response.

If apparel exporters would not be receiving any duty benefits, complying with rules of origin will not be needed. Otherwise, after graduation (either under GSP+ or Standard GSP), clothing items must go through what is known as 'double transformation', (i.e., domestically produced fabrics to be used in making garments).

## What Bangladesh must do now

The newly proposed GSP regulations will have to be adopted by the European Parliament and this is currently anticipated for the last quarter of 2022. There is thus a limited but potentially invaluable window of opportunity to engage with the EU so that the required changes can be incorporated to keep GSP+ countries (like EBA beneficiaries) out of safeguard provisions, enabling Bangladeshi apparel exporters to continue with duty-free access.

Convincing arguments must be presented in requesting the EC to consider adjustments that will make the new arrangements fair and developmentally impactful.

First and foremost, it must be pointed out that the impact of safeguard measures will be contradictory to the intent of the proposed new regime. In the preamble (paragraph 24) to the new proposal, it is stated that product graduation should not apply to GSP+ and EBA beneficiary countries. But the likely exclusion under safeguards will be tantamount to product graduation.

There is merit in pointing out that Bangladesh's excessive concentration of exports in clothing is widely

regarded as a sign of vulnerability. Letting the duty-free access for this sector to discontinue under GSP+ will only aggravate this vulnerability.

The proposed GSP rules will create a unique circumstance in which Bangladesh qualifies for GSP+ but more than 90 per cent of its exports to the EU face the average tariff rate to rise overnight from the currently zero percent to 12 per cent.

This signal of a forthcoming drastic shift in the EU tariff regime will seriously undermine the medium-to-long term perceived competitiveness of Bangladesh's clothing sector, affecting investment prospects. This will certainly not help Bangladesh's sustainable development, which the EU aspires to achieve through the changes in its GSP regime.

In its submission to the EU, Bangladesh should strongly argue that the provisions in the new GSP rules can be regarded as unfair. There are countries that were never LDCs but still benefit from GSP+ (including their textile and clothing exports). These include Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Even such relatively advanced developing countries, known for their export competitiveness and capacities, as India and Indonesia can access Standard GSP benefits for their apparel exports. Against this, the possibility of a graduating LDC like Bangladesh's forgoing tariff preferences altogether would clearly be contrary to the argument of a GSP regime being development friendly.

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# Research-based Data Localisation Policy

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Since the launch of the Digital Bangladesh initiative in 2010, according to an e-trade readiness report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Bangladesh's information and communication technology (ICT) sector has shown an incredible annual growth rate of 40 per cent. The size of the local ICT market is currently valued at \$1.54 billion. More than three hundred thousand professionals and about 4,500 enterprises are currently involved in the sector. According to the Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services (BASIS), ICT exports over the past five years doubled to \$1.4 billion in 2019-20. More than 400 enterprises have associated themselves with some exporting activities covering around 80 countries in the world.

While the Digital Bangladesh vision was initially crafted for up to the year 2021, the initiative has now been extended further under Vision 2041. Increasing the use of ICT and effective technology use for socio-economic development is at the core of Digital Bangladesh. Considering the potential of the ICT sector, Bangladesh envisages to achieve \$5 billion in export revenue and employ two million professionals by 2025. It endeavours to make the ICT industry as the next engine of growth for the economy of Bangladesh.

As the digital economy and trade gain further ground in Bangladesh, the government is seeking to regulate the ICT sector to protect the interests of various stakeholders such as citizens, government, and law enforcement agencies (LEA), primarily through laws on privacy and data protection. Among other things, such regulatory measures mandate that the data should be collected, transferred, processed, and stored in a manner that ensures privacy of people to whom that data belongs. To this end, many governments around the world consider data localisation as one such

provision, which entails restricting data transfers to other countries while mandating data storage and processing within national boundaries.

In the past few years, the Bangladesh government has been gradually introducing data regulation through laws such as the Digital Security Act, 2018 and ICT Act, 2018. A Data Protection Act (DPA) has been drafted and can appear in an official gazette any time. The Act is intended to safeguard personal data as to life, property, freedom of thought, expression, conscience, with special regard to their right to privacy, secrecy, and personal identity. Importantly, this law will be a formal framework for data protection and privacy in the country. The draft DPA includes data localisation provisions as it requires every data controller to store at least one serving copy of data within the geographic boundary of Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh is also taking initiatives to make its data storage infrastructure robust--such as setting up Tier-3 and Tier-4 National Data Centres in different parts of the country, and Tier-4 Data Disaster Recovery Centre in Jessore.

The need for data protection laws in Bangladesh has been increasingly felt due to a rising number of data breaches, as has been the case globally. Such developments have given impetus to calls for data localisation. Other rationales put forth for data localisation include, amongst others, easier data access for law enforcement agencies (LEAs), preventing surveillance by foreign entities, increasing employment and development of the digital economy.

It is important that Bangladesh thoroughly assess the impact of such data localisation laws, including on economic growth and the country's integration into the global economy. Various research studies suggest that

restricting the flow of data negatively impacts a nation's digital trade volume and productivity, while it increases costs for industries that heavily rely on data. In a recent study of OECD countries, the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF) found that a 1-point increase in a country's restrictiveness on data flow cuts its gross trade output by 7 per cent, slows its productivity by 2.9 per cent, and increases downstream prices by 1.5 per cent over a five-year period. In other words, the costs of data localisation may well outweigh the purported benefits.

The free flow of data tends to facilitate innovation as it builds upon sharing and dissemination of ideas and collaboration between individuals and companies. Restricting the flow of data could be a hindrance in taking full advantage of the rapidly evolving data analytics and techniques, machine learning systems, and fraud prevention mechanisms given that data localisation obstructs the very fuel for their development. Restricted flow could result in limited or slow utilisation of cutting-edge global techniques available to analyse information to find appropriate solutions to various problems. Traditional sectors also stand to benefit from innovation and digitisation which is already happening via smart factories, online ordering etc. Such innovation, for instance, can help Bangladesh's garment manufacturing sector in reinforce its leading position.

Data flows are essential to digitisation as well. Alignment with good practices in cross border data flows are important for established companies and newer tech start-ups to participate in the global digital trade and markets and thus help develop Bangladesh's digital economy.

Any Policy in favour of data localisation and its restrictiveness needs a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis. The rationale of economic and employment growth through the emerging data centres needs more empirical backing, given that long term impact on employment is likely to be minimal. In fact, only 5 to 30 permanent jobs are created by a typical data centre, as per the US based CBRE Data Centre Solutions Group. Lastly, the argument of national security by protecting data of citizens also lies under the scanner since security is more a function of protocols and systems than its physical location. In fact, data localisation potentially jeopardises real time security of data such as in the financial sector, where data flow is essential for global fraud detection and anti-money laundering protocols.

Extensive global research shows data localisation typically increases compliance costs for companies, disrupt global supply chains, act as a non-tariff barrier, and pose roadblocks to the path of digitally enabled growth. While the intent behind data localisation is understandable, its objectives can be achieved without putting high costs on industry and trade.

A research-based pragmatic policy towards data

regulation must be the way forward for Bangladesh, so that it maintains the potential of the industry to grow, bolsters its position as an attractive destination for ICT/ITES sector, and most importantly, achieves the full potential of Digital Bangladesh and Vision 2041.

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***“A research-based pragmatic policy towards data regulation must be the way forward for Bangladesh, so that it maintains the potential of the industry to grow, bolsters its position as an attractive destination for ICT/ITES sector, and most importantly, achieves the full potential of Digital Bangladesh and Vision 2041.”***

# Reflecting on the Implementation of Education Policy 2010

*Humayra Anjumi Nabila*

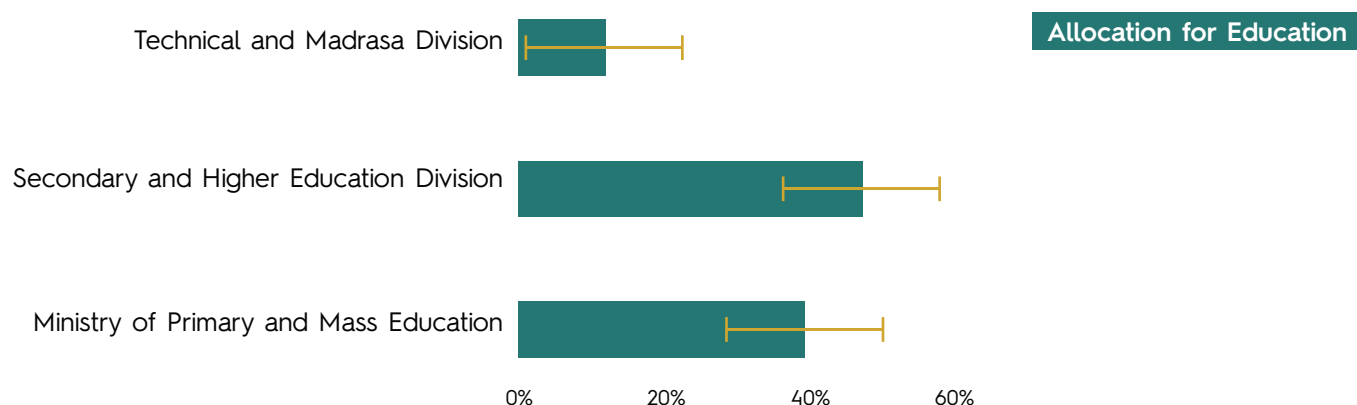
The National Education Policy 2010 is one of the seminal policy documents that aimed for improving the education system. Some salient features of the Education Policy 2010 include: 1) One year of pre-primary education was made required for children under the age of six; 2) Compulsory primary education in all the streams has extended to class eight; 3) Introduction of creative questions in the examination and initiation of two public examination along with the existing board exams; 4) Corporal punishment has been prohibited from all kinds of educational institutions. Other praiseworthy initiatives have been taken, such as increasing scholarships, stipend programs, mid-day meals, and vocational training to ensure quality education.

However, numerous factors have hindered the envisaged implementation of the policy. One such factor is the lack of adequate finance that the sector needs. According to UNICEF, a country is supposed to

allocate 15 per cent to 20 per cent of its total budget in education sector. In Bangladesh, priority in financing the education sector is insufficient. For the fiscal year (FY) 2021-2022 Tk 71,951 crore is allocated for the education sector, which is 11.9 per cent of our national budget. This allocation amounts 2.08 per cent of our GDP which has been reduced compared to FY2020-2021.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has heavily disrupted the educational activities, a manifold increased budget is of utmost importance. But politicization of interest groups, lack of fiscal space, and less power of the education sector of the education sector over policy formulation are the major reasons for insufficient budget in the education sector. Even EP 2010 promises to ensure equal importance in all education divisions (i.e., R&D, TVET), but data shows that that these sectors are less prioritised.

**Figure 4: Allocation for the education sector**



Source: Budget Speech, 2021.

According to EP 2010, the teacher-student ratio at both primary and secondary level has been set at 1:30 and 1:12 in technical education by 2018. Unfortunately, after more than ten years of implementation, the standard teacher-student ratio is not attained yet

In reality, the teacher-student ratio is 1:77 at the primary level and 1:45 at the secondary level. This ratio is 1:144 at government polytechnic institutions (Alamgir, 2018). Due to such a huge imbalance, students need to stay out of the classroom, and teachers can rarely concentrate on the lessons. Consequently, the quality of education is being compromised.

The rising enrolment rates have been long admired at both the primary and secondary levels throughout the years. But there has been a significant gap in the Gross enrolment rate and Net enrolment rate, which indicates that many children do not enrol at schools at the designated ages.

One of the most important objectives of EP 2010 has been to ensure the quality of education and the government has introduced "Srijonshil Poddhoti" as a creative curriculum system. This innovative method was introduced to transition from a traditional memorization-based system to a creative writing method. Unfortunately, this new curricular system did not meet its proper implementation (Alamgir, 2018). "Srijonshil Poddhoti" aimed to discouraging memorization tendency among the students, but students still have to memorize full of their lessons to get good grades. A study found that students' preparation for answering the writing items is based on memorization by 69 per cent and frequency of getting common writing topics is 85 per cent (Sarwar & Haque, 2019). In the rural area, the teachers are not adequately trained to prepare their lessons and exam questions and copy questions directly from the guidebook. The ultimate goal of bringing a change in the methodological pattern is rather adversely affecting the quality of education.

In Bangladesh, students are supposed to complete 11 years of schooling, yet they waste roughly 4.5 years owing to poor quality education. It has been reported that 35 per cent of grade 3 students score below the minimal barrier in comprehensive reading in Bangla, while just 25 per cent of grade 5 students pass the minimum level in mathematics (Yinglun, 2019). It means that lessons taught in the classroom have been failed to create a skilled and competent workforce and approximately four years of schooling education get wasted.

In line with EP 2010, the government of Bangladesh has increased allocation for "Stipend Provision Programme". The primary aim of the programme was to reduce early marriage and the fertility rate through increasing school enrolment. Over these 10 years, the increasing rate of girls' enrolment is evident. But analysis finds little evidence that the Stipend Program improves girls'

quality of life and opportunities, it benefits the rural rich and middle-class family the most (Schurman, 2009).

One of the significant objectives of EP 2010 is the creation of competent human resources of international standard, trained and educated in information technology. The government is putting in a lot of effort in every aspect of education in the direction of ICT-oriented patterns, such as creating multimedia classrooms, computer laboratories, and ICT Training and Resource Centres. The government has established ICT Training and Resource Centre in 125 upazillas and has given training to 5,700 teachers all over Bangladesh. Despite such attempts, disrupted electricity supply, lack of proper logistic support and internet facilities hinder the progress the policy aimed to achieve.

In terms of 10 years of the implementation period of EP 2010, the government could not circulate specific order to maintain pre-primary education. Extension of universal education up to eighth grade has also been halted owing to a lack of infrastructure. The introduction of the creative question pattern "Srijonshil Poddhoti" has not brought the expected outcome yet. It is necessary to undertake a comprehensive assessment of this particular question to examine whether it is actually enhancing the ability of the students or not.

Moreover, it is high time we reflect on the progress and failures of the education policy. It is essential to learn from their errors and attempt to put the policy into action with proper research, preparation, and finances. Furthermore, the advent of COVID-19 has brought about a new set of challenges when educational institutes were closed for prolonged period. Hence, revamping the education policy should be seriously considered.

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# Boosting Resilience of a Vulnerable Community through Floating WASH Centres

*Md Tahsin Samit*

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the face of global climate change, and it is causing enormous losses in the lives and livelihoods of millions of people here. It is a worrying sign that the number of displaced people in the face of various sorts of natural hazards has increased in recent decades. Many people lost their homes due to river erosion, with 10,000 hectares of land lost every year. The displaced are forced to either relocate to chars (river islands) and along embankments, or migrate to the capital, Dhaka and other big cities and live in slums. After losing their homes to floods, river erosion, and other natural disasters, a portion of this community had no choice but to start living on boats. This proportion is widely known as the "Boat Dwelling Community", and they have been living in the country's southern district known as Chandpur since the early 20th century.

These floating communities are nomadic with no influence over land or in local or national politics. Almost none of them are included in the country's voter list. Approximately 98 per cent of this population lives below the poverty line. They are widely considered "low caste" and people look upon them negatively.

In Chandpur, boat dwellers are fishermen and have been in this profession for over a century. They are trapped in a never-ending struggle to be acknowledged as a fishing community. Since they are not recognized as "fishermen", they are not entitled to get the Fisherman Identity Card (FIC) and the assistance and facilities intended for the profession. At the same time, fisherman communities living on the mainland do not acknowledge the boat communities, considering them low caste.

The community remain engaged to overcome such social hurdles each day and they have not been able

to develop any skill or knowledge to improve their present state. The mandatory set of hygiene rules are not even practiced here due to ignorance.

Despite Bangladesh's praiseworthy success in overall coverage of water supply and sanitation services, remote and underprivileged communities like these remain in challenging situations in regard to improve WASH practices due to their spatial settings, livelihoods etc. Recurrent and intensifying impacts of disaster and climate change have made the challenges acute, especially for river dependent boat dwelling communities living in different pocket areas throughout Bangladesh.

To extend support towards the geographically isolated community, Oxfam and CNRS has undertaken unique and innovative approaches with support from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) for the project titled 'Resilience for Boat Resident Communities in Bangladesh'. The objective of the project is to enhance residents' accessibility to Water and Sanitation and improving health practices of boat dwelling community.

In two years, CNRS will be building 34 Floating WASH Centres (FWCs) for about 700 community people. These FWCs will include state of the art water filtration system that will purify river water with dry toilet facility and reduce the cases of water-borne diseases. FWCs will also be considered as a part of disaster preparedness thanks to their water filtration facility and hygienic toilets.

The project is unique in its own approach that targets to empower women through alternative income generation opportunities and, at the same time, spread awareness on WASH activities through women



leadership. Installation of community-based FWCs for the boat resident community is a key component of the project which includes safe water and sanitation facilities and a space for community gathering along with provision of hygiene enterprise led by Women WASH Platform (WWP), a self-motivated organized women group.

## Innovation

To reach a sustainable solution in terms of sanitation and hygiene for the landless community, Oxfam and CNRS looked into the problem from a unique perspective. The soon to be constructed FWCs will house river water filtration system, which is expected to address a long-standing crisis for the community-water borne disease. Powered by solar, the vessel will include a UV sterilizer for purifying water.

## Women WASH Platform (WWP)

The FWCs will have a provision for common space for meeting/training/hygiene session led by Women WASH Platform (WWP). The platform will cover the following areas:

- Raising awareness for using clean, safe water
- Raising awareness for using hygienic toilets
- Maintenance of the boats
- Encourage savings among the boat dwellers
- Generate alternative income (AIG) through small scale production of items like sanitary napkins and masks.

The successful deployment of FWCs is expected to improve the sanitation and hygiene situation of Chandpur's boat residence community. Such innovation can potentially lead to sustainable WASH practices among the landless community. Learning from the experience of FWC's impact on the landless community will be important to design and implement meaningful interventions for the marginalised people.

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# Strengthening Education Services in the Coastal Areas

*Md Aminul Karim*

The context of education status in coastal areas of Bangladesh is much more different than in other regions of Bangladesh. Access to formal education is very much constrained for the children of the coastal areas. Due to frequent natural disasters, the regular classes are interrupted. Communication failure, reduction in family income, damaged school buildings are the key reasons for children not attending the schools (BBS, 2015). 15.9 per cent of children in Barisal division have not attended the school due to communication failure after the disaster (BBS 2015). Poverty becomes very dominant resulting in child labour, school drop-out, child marriage, and un-planned migration. The coastal areas are facing a higher rate of school drop-out both in primary and secondary education than other areas of Bangladesh. Dropout from school is higher in remote coastal areas due to different socio-economic reasons. Economic hardship, geographical isolation, insufficient secondary schools, parents' education, poor physical condition, lack of quality resources are the key barriers to ensure the quality of education in coastal areas. A report by UNICEF (2014) on Bagerhat District reveals that educational institutions available for the population of Bagerhat appear adequate, but the facilities and quality of services within the school and at the remote upazillas do not meet the minimum requirement, and children's drop-out rate is higher (16.19 per cent), and they are engaged in child labour. The report reveals that effective monitoring and supervision by the relevant government authorities is absent in these areas. Academic supervision to improve the quality of education became null. TEOs and ATEOs are more interested in monitoring administrative issues rather than pedagogy and academic achievement. This report also mentions that in government primary schools, 146 teacher positions have been vacant for a long time, and 110 teachers have not received training. Another report by UNICEF (2014) on Satkhira district raises some major

concerns about the education status in that area. The drop rate for primary education is 13.79 per cent and the quality of education is poor. Lack of coordination among education service providers was also addressed by this report. This indicates our poor education services in coastal areas.

Education quality is not only a process of incorporating systematic syllabuses into the curriculum, but it is also a matter of students' soft skills development. For reducing students' vulnerabilities and improving their interpersonal skills, extra-curricular activities are popular in urban schools, but the students of coastal rural areas are not familiar with extracurricular activities. As a result, a student doesn't enjoy their learning and they don't have an opportunity to grow soft skills in themselves. The aftermath is less resiliency and vulnerability among them. In addition to the existing problem, Covid -19 has become a new challenge in implementing education services. School closure for a long time has accelerated the dropout problems of children and especially leading to child marriage and child labour. Islam et al., (2016) found that Khulna Barisal & Barisal had more likelihood of child marriage rate than Sylhet. A recent report by BRAC (2020) has found that the rate of child marriage has increased by up to 220 per cent over the period of July-September during the ongoing pandemic. Unfortunately, there are no adequate online service facilities for education in remote rural coastal areas and it makes them out of track. This falling behind will lead to a huge knowledge gap among students. Schools are off, nationwide Covid crisis is persisting, and frequent natural disasters is fuelling the existing problems resulting in high dropout children in upcoming days. Lack of WASH facilities and less knowledge of hygiene and sanitation practices among children will be a problem in the fight against COVID-19 as schools reopen in remote areas. Frequent natural disasters and



adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will impose a dual challenge on education in coastal areas.

Around 35 million people in 19 coastal districts of Bangladesh represent 29 per cent of the total population (Ahmad, 2019). Leaving the huge population in darkness will impede achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Considering the upcoming challenges of climate change, global economic trends, and the Covid-19 situation, Bangladesh must prioritize strengthening education services for inclusive development. To improve the education status of children in coastal areas, an integrated approach is needed. Potential interventions can include the following:

1. Our social safety net programs in the education sector must be restructured considering the upcoming challenges of COVID-19. Public works and humanitarian relief programs must be inclusive and transparent in nature. To ensure equitable participation in education, the government must budget for distance learning facilities for students.

2. The reopening of schools had a positive impact on students. They are back to learning, but students who have been out of school for a long time, especially students from rural coastal areas, will not catch up due to these combined adverse impacts. Hence, we must focus on accessibility, participation, and inclusion in all forms to reintegrate into this catch-up initiative.

3. We should also focus on strengthening the health and sanitation services & facilities at the school level and must prioritize health education at the very root level of schooling.

4. Finally, to strengthen education services in the long run, we must focus on the following: providing adequate school facilities; developing the capacity of teachers and education service providers; developing child-friendly and innovative teaching approaches; combining the efforts of local authorities, parents, and teachers; grooming students in scientific fields; promoting socio-cultural issues; communication campaigning; developing the capacity of local communities in climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) methodologies.

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# Public empowerment to ensure socio-economic development of landless people

*Rasheda Begum*

Public empowerment is a new model for developing Bangladesh's underprivileged people, particularly those who are unaware of their rights from the state and society. Public empowerment is the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. It is a set of ways in which people gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their standard of living (Labonté et al., 2008). Through this process, people increase their assets and attributes and build capacities to gain access, networks, and/or voice, allowing them to gain control. Public empowerment, therefore, is more than the involvement, participation, or engagement of communities. It is a vital and important model to develop poverty-affected people in a certain area of a country, and it focuses on those who are unaware of their rights and values in the country as well as society.

**Why focus on landless people:** Public empowerment in Bangladesh is a slow process and so many people are working in this field to improve the situation, especially in the rural areas like the coastal region. There is a lack of credible data on landless people. According to the Journal of Social Science, the causes of landlessness and near-landlessness are numerous, including a dearth of land, rapid population growth, low productivity in agriculture, a lack of effective government policies, colonial legacies, etc. Due to these circumstances, land-oriented poverty, and rural-to-urban migration without any expansion in housing and utility services leads to the expansion of the slump with all its affiliated social problems. On the other hand, it has been found that landlessness diminishes the rate of land-fragmentation, which facilitates automation in the production process through both extensive and intensive directions. Due to this phenomenon, there is an absolute increase in the number of asset-less people who cannot meet their livelihood requirements on their own. This leads to the

expansion of the slump with all its concomitant social problems. In fact, landlessness, which is a function of economic, demographic, and environmental factors, is the major determinant of rural poverty. All these factors have a definite impact on the country's economy and destabilize the macroeconomic environment to a great extent (JSS, 2006).

In the context of Bangladesh, landless people are almost synonymous with asset-less people in rural society, as land is the dominant productive asset of the rural people. Bangladesh has a per capita operated area of only 0.17 acres (BBS, 2008). Without land, rural people, who are uneducated and unaware of their rights, remain unemployed, and their only asset is physical labor. According to Mahbub et al., the rate of growth of landless households was 3.1 percent per annum, compared to the population growth of 2.5 percent per annum. These ratios and statistics are higher than the older ones and even worse than before in context with the population growth of Bangladesh. If it comes to the point of coastal areas, the number of landless people increases a lot, because coastal Bangladesh experiences significant poverty and hazards and is highly vulnerable to climate and environmental change. Coastal stakeholders are demanding information to assist in the decision-making processes and to explore how different interventions, under different plausible future socio-economic and environmental scenarios, could promote development. However, not much work has been done focusing on this area, and specific literature is hard to come by, but it should be started and discussed. This is the main inspiration for the study that we want to show and talk about. These landless people of Bangladesh need attention and proper empowerment training to achieve a sustainable living standard.

## Research Purpose and Objectives

The ultimate objective of this study is to show the real phase of socio-economic development in Bangladesh due to the public empowerment process. This work can focus on the concepts of empowerment and participation within a development context by examining empowerment as a form of development, definitions of empowerment, and the adoption of "empowerment" by the people. It can provide supporting data and can help policymakers in evaluating the influence of public empowerment on poverty reduction and determining the development process. Through the public empowerment process, a basic conclusion can be drawn consisting of helping the rural development situation in a bigger frame.

Precisely, the objectives of this work can be pointed out as follows:

1. To clarify the concept of public empowerment
2. Assessing four components of empowerment and evaluating their effectiveness on development in the study area.
3. To find out whether these components caused any effective form of development or not

## Conceptual Model

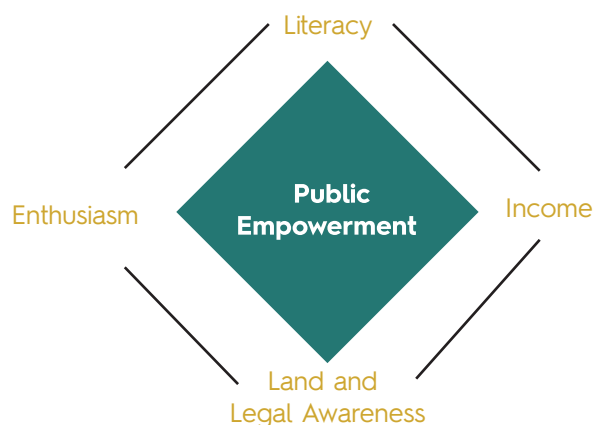
The process of empowerment can be conceptualized based on a framework developed by Kabeer et al., 1999. This framework depicts empowerment as a dynamic process in which members of a society, particularly women, acquire resources that allow them to develop voice - the ability to articulate preferences - and agency - the ability to make decisions - to achieve their own goals. These resources include human resources such as schooling attainment, skill development, and self-efficacy; social resources such as participation in organizations, access to peer networks, and access to role models outside the family; and economic resources or material assets such as earnings, property, and land. The aim of this research could be to show that, over time, improving some specific indicators of empowerment has a positive impact on the socio-economic development of landless people.

## Indicators of Empowerment

The relationship between empowerment and development can be seen through analyzing some specific indicators of empowerment. This will be helpful to understand the scenario. Empowerment is both a process and an outcome and choosing indicators of empowerment will depend on how empowerment is defined. In this instance, we can define empowerment as the "involvement" of the people, which can lead them to improve their socio-economic condition. Even after defining, it remains a complex problem to measure empowerment at a project level because it is difficult to measure changes in states of mind. However, choosing some quantitative indicators can infer the ongoing

empowerment process, and that is the reason we chose four indicators for our projects. The figure below depicts the four indicators of empowerment that were examined in the study. Sorting different indicators made it convenient to prepare a structured resource for study. Their meanings and how they are related to empowerment and development are discussed below:

Figure 1: Indicators of public empowerment



**Literacy:** Literacy is an important indicator of empowerment because it is obvious that education is the key element in developing a sense of self-respect and self-efficacy. It is also important to acquire resources that enable them to develop their voice and agency. In the work of Kabeer [4], education is viewed as an element in the development of human resources, and our framework followed the same view.

**Income performance:** The monthly income performance of the people in the study area can be an indicator of their economic empowerment. To show economic empowerment, other indicators, such as the change in employment rate or changes in ownership of property, could also be chosen. However, this study focused solely on income performance because economic efficiency begins with earnings and increasing monthly income performance can reflect economic independence for people living below the poverty line.

**Land and legal right awareness:** This parameter is selected as an indicator of empowerment because a major number of local people in the study area are landless farmers. So, to measure the development in the knowledge of land ownership laws, distribution laws of unused lands owned by the government and legal help in case of forced entry.

**Enthusiasm:** This indicator would reflect the local people's sense of self-confidence and self-worth. As the sense of "knowledge," "self-respect," and other

elements may be culture-specific and in an under-developed area, the insight of these words may be different. Therefore, the development of this indicator may reflect perceived knowledge about sorting out preferences and options.

For long-term change and societal transformation, public empowerment must be pursued because it forms the basis for challenging the existing power structure. Education, employment opportunities, and the self-independence of landless people are therefore regarded as powerful means of empowerment. The proposed idea is to work with the landless people and to better understand their living standards. If additional data and research are collected, this study could be a useful documentation that has a significant impact on the economic development of landless people in the coastal region through the empowerment process.

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*“For long-term change and societal transformation, public empowerment must be pursued because it forms the basis for challenging the existing power structure.”*

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# Development Letters

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