



# CPD

**Working Paper**

**105**

**Revisiting the PRSP  
Experience in Bangladesh**  
*Perspectives on Representation,  
Accountability and Inclusiveness*

Fahmida Khatun  
Debapriya Bhattacharya  
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CENTRE FOR POLICY DIALOGUE (CPD)  
B A N G L A D E S H  
a civil society think tank

**REVISITING THE PRSP  
EXPERIENCE IN BANGLADESH**

***Perspectives on Representation, Accountability and Inclusiveness\****

*CPD Working Paper 105*

*Fahmida Khatun  
Debapriya Bhattacharya  
Mustafizur Rahman*

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The **Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)** was established in 1993 as a civil society initiative to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. Over the past 20 years the Centre has emerged as a globally reputed independent think tank with local roots and global outreach. At present, CPD's two major activities relate to dialogues and research which work in a mutually reinforcing manner.

CPD dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. In doing so, CPD involves all important cross sections of the society, including public representatives, government officials, business leaders, activists of grassroots organisations, academics, development partners and other relevant interest groups. CPD focuses on frontier issues which are critical to the development process of Bangladesh, South Asia and LDCs in the present context, and those that are expected to shape and influence country's development prospects from the mid-term perspectives. CPD seeks to provide voice to the interests and concerns of the low-income economies in the global development discourse. With a view to influencing policies CPD deploys both research and dialogue which draw synergy from one another.

CPD's research programmes are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of CPD include: *Macroeconomic Performance Analysis; Fiscal Policy and Domestic Resource Mobilisation; Poverty, Inequality and Social Justice; Agriculture and Rural Development; Trade, Regional Cooperation and Global Integration; Investment Promotion, Infrastructure and Enterprise Development; Climate Change and Environment; Human Development and Social Protection; and Development Governance, Policies and Institutions.*

CPD also conducts periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and issues of developmental concerns. With a view to promote vision and policy awareness amongst the young people of the country, CPD is also implementing a *Youth Leadership Programme*. CPD maintains an active network with institutions that have similar interests, and regularly participates in various regional and international fora. At present CPD is spearheading two global initiatives. *LDC IV Monitor* is an independent global partnership for monitoring the outcome of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (UN LDC IV). *Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals* is a network of 48 think tanks from the developing South which seeks to contribute to the ongoing global discourses on post-MDGs. In recognition of its track record in research, dialogue and policy influencing, CPD was selected as one of the awardees of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) through a globally competitive selection process.

Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. Pursuant to this CPD maintains an active publication programme, both in Bangla and in English. As part of its dissemination programme, CPD has been bringing out CPD Occasional Paper Series on a regular basis. It may be noted in this connection that since November 2011, the Series has been re-introduced as **CPD Working Paper Series**. Dialogue background papers, investigative reports and results of perception surveys which relate to issues of high public interest are published under this series.

The present paper titled **Revisiting the PRSP Experience in Bangladesh: Perspectives on Representation, Accountability and Inclusiveness** has been prepared by *Dr Fahmida Khatun*, Research Director, CPD; *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD and *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, Executive Director, CPD.

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Given its political history and economic performance, Bangladesh emerges as an interesting case to study the nature of representation, extent of inclusiveness and degree of accountability of various actors in the process of designing and implementation of national development plans. While a number of country studies on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process are available, literature and information on the above mentioned subject are rather scarce in Bangladesh, particularly from the perspectives of representation, accountability and inclusiveness. Based on structured interviews with a select group of relevant stakeholders including policymakers, members of the civil society and the development partners to generate the required additional information, the paper presents insights into the nature and extent of participation of the civil society organisations in the Bangladesh PRS exercise, and analyses the degrees of representation, accountability and inclusiveness achieved in the country's PRS process.

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# Acronyms

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ADB	Asian Development Bank
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BWI	Bretton Woods Institution
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTG	Caretaker Government
DFID	Department for International Development
ECNEC	Executive Committee of National Economic Council
ERD	Economic Relations Division
ESAF	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility
FBCCI	Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Economics Division
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT	Information Technology
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MP	Member of Parliament
MTBF	Medium Term Budgetary Framework
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RMG	Readymade Garments
SAF	Structural Adjustment Facility
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SoE	State-Owned Enterprise
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
USD	United States Dollar
WTO	World Trade Organization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh<sup>1</sup> came into being in December 1971 following a nine-month long bloody war of independence with Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh's emergence as an independent country was the culmination of a protracted movement for emancipation from economic, political and cultural subjugation by West Pakistan of its eastern wing (Sobhan 1992). The ethos of the liberation war was influenced by a determination on the part of political leadership to establish a country where progress, equity and justice would inform developmental philosophy. Bangladesh Awami League, the party which led the liberation war in 1971, attempted to accommodate these aspirations of the people in the 'Six-Points Programme of Autonomy' which was the basis of its election manifesto in 1970.

However, Bangladesh's post-independence journey was not smooth as the country went through a long period of turmoil, characterised by assassinations, coups, counter-coups and military rule. This instability started with the assassination of the Prime Minister '*Bangabandhu*'<sup>3</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members in August 1975 by a group of junior army officers who planned a coup to overthrow the incumbent government. Thereafter, a sharp division in political ideology started to take root in the country. General Ziaur Rahman, who played a crucial role in the war of independence took power in 1976, and introduced a military-turned-civilian regime for about five years till he was assassinated in 1981. After a short spell of a weak civilian government following General Zia's killing, the then Army Chief General Ershad took power through a bloodless coup in 1982 and ruled the country till 1990. The regime of General Ershad witnessed massive corruption and malgovernance and the government quickly lost its credibility. In the face of overwhelming unpopularity and following violent protests on the street, General Ershad had to quit power in December 1990. This paved the way for a democratic transition through parliamentary elections, the first ever of its kind in Bangladesh after the coup of 1975. Since 1991, the country had seen four democratically elected governments, including the current one.

Notwithstanding above, parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh is yet to take a mature institutional shape and the polity remains highly confrontational. The country is yet to see a mature political system where the two major parties<sup>4</sup> play their respective roles in the parliament and in running other affairs of the state in a responsible manner. During its five-year long tenure, the party in power tends to behave in the same way as its predecessor, squeezing the space for the opposition party to conduct its democratic activities. The political opposition, on the other hand, prefers to wage movement against the government of the day on the streets instead of being engaged in constructive policy debates in the parliament.

Bitter hostility between the two dominant parties, Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), went to destructive level when elections to be held in end-2006 became uncertain in the face of mammoth opposition movement which feared manipulation and rigging in the forthcoming election. In this context, a military backed non-partisan Caretaker Government (CTG) assumed power with the promise to hold a free and fair election. In contrast to earlier non-party CTGs<sup>5</sup>, which used to be headed by the immediate past Chief Justice and stayed in the office for ninety days to hold national parliamentary elections, the head of the CTG in 2007 was a former Governor of the

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<sup>1</sup>Previously part of Pakistan and used to be known as East Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup>Former West Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup>'*Bangabandhu*' means 'The Friend of Bengal', a name bestowed upon him because of his leadership before and during the independence of Bangladesh.

<sup>4</sup>Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

<sup>5</sup>The Caretaker Government system was instituted in Bangladesh through a constitutional amendment in 1996. The mandate of this government, formed of civilian advisors under the last retiring Chief Justice, was to ensure holding of a free and fair national elections.



central bank, apparently chosen by the army. This government remained in the office for two years, and following national elections held in December 2008 (which was perceived to be the most free and fair in Bangladesh's history), Bangladesh Awami League came to power in December 2008 with an overwhelming majority. However, soon after the elections, the parliament became quite dysfunctional as the opposition opted for street agitation instead of engaging with the government in the parliament. On the other hand, the ruling party started to demonstrate all pervasive control and intolerance squeezing the democratic space of the political opposition, and often that of the civil society.

In the backdrop of such confrontational politics that characterised the policy environment and governance in Bangladesh, developmental efforts and economic activities pursued in the country suffer in a significant way. Given the acrimonious nature of politics and the fragile state of public institutions, policy making process in the country over the last four decades, has deprived the larger section of stakeholders in the society from fuller participation in constructive discussions and debates on the priorities and strategies presented in various national policy documents. Because of lack of entry points and space, participation of such actors as civil society organisations (CSOs), non-government organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and activist groups has remained limited in the process of formulation and implementation of development plans and programmes. Often arrogating the exclusive role of representativeness, the political elites from both sides of the barricade have prevented the non-state actors from promoting public agenda. The state of entrenched bipolar politics also often spilled over on the non-state actors. This in turn has kept the democratic foundations of the public institutions quite weak due to lack of broad-based scrutiny and accountability.

### **Objectives and Layout of the Paper**

Given its political history and economic performance (see later), Bangladesh emerges as an interesting case to study the nature of representation, extent of inclusiveness and degree of accountability of various actors in the process of designing and implementation of national development plans. From this perspective, the present paper takes an analytical look at the experience of preparation and delivery of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in Bangladesh.

While a number of country studies on the PRSP process is available, literature and information on the above mentioned subject are rather scarce in Bangladesh, particularly from the perspectives of representation, accountability and inclusiveness. One such study was conducted by Bhattacharya and Ahamed (2006); so to generate the required additional information, the paper has relied on structured interviews with a select group of relevant stakeholders including policymakers, members of the civil society and development partners to have insights of the nature and extent of CSO participation in the Bangladesh Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) exercise, and elicit information on the degree of representation, accountability and inclusiveness achieved in the country's PRS process.<sup>6</sup>

The present paper has six sections. Following the introduction, Section 2 contextualises the discourse by discussing the emergence of PRSP in Bangladesh by presenting a short account of the economic background of the country. Section 3 analyses the varying role played by different key actors in the PRS process and highlights the specific nature of their democratic engagements. Section 4 presents the strategy and modality of CSO engagement in the PRS process. The outcome and effectiveness of policy engagements by different actors are analysed in Section 5. The paper concludes in Section 6 with a few important lessons learnt from Bangladesh's PRSP experience.

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<sup>6</sup>Among the interviewees, 20 were CSO members, 10 were officials of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), and five were officials of development partners. Five out of 20 CSO members were non-participants of the PRSP exercise who were interviewed to understand their views as an outsider.

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE PRSP EXERCISE IN BANGLADESH

### 2.1 Socio-Economic Context

Bangladesh is a least developed country (LDC) with a per capita income of USD 755 and a population of about 148 million (GoB 2011; BBS 2011a). Though Bangladesh inherited a devastated economy with high incidence of poverty and scant resource at the time of its independence, over the last four decades it has managed to attain significant success in terms of a number of macroeconomic performance indicators including attaining a steadily increasing growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) (an overview of the evolution of Bangladesh economy since independence is discussed in detail in Bhattacharya and Misha (2011)). This has resulted in an increase in per capita income by a factor of eight and significant reduction in poverty level since 1972 (BBS 2011b). The historical predominance of the agriculture sector in the economy has declined over the years and shifted to services sector, followed by the industrial sector. The improved macroeconomic performance, however, was not accompanied by fairness in income distribution. As a matter of fact, income inequality rose steadily during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s; it is only recently that the economy has witnessed a marginal reduction in income inequality (BBS 2011b and Table 1).

**Table 1: Changes in Economic and Social Indicators**

Macroeconomic Indicator	1973	2000	2005	2010
Real GDP growth (%)	3.30	5.90	6.00	6.10
Per capita GDP (at current prices, in USD)	90	368	441	687
<b>Sectoral share in GDP (%)</b>				
Agriculture	-	24.60	21.40	19.60
Industry	-	24.70	27.20	28.90
Services	-	50.70	51.50	51.50
Export	-	12.20	14.30	16.10
Import	-	17.80	21.80	23.70
Remittances	-	4.10	6.40	10.90
Official Development Assistance (ODA)	3.80	3.40	2.50	2.20
<b>Social Indicators</b>				
Life expectancy (in years)	46.20 <sup>a</sup>	63.60	65.20	67.20 <sup>b</sup>
Literacy rate (7 years and over)	-	48.40	52.10	56.70
Maternal mortality ratio per thousand live births	-	3.18	3.48	2.59 <sup>b</sup>
Under-5 mortality rate per thousand live births	-	84	68	50 <sup>b</sup>
Population below poverty line	-	34.30	25.10	17.60
Gini Coefficient	-	0.393	0.467	0.458

**Note:** a: 1974; b: 2009.

**Source:** Various issues of Economic Review, Government of Bangladesh (GoB).

Over the years, Bangladesh has been able to reduce its dependency on foreign aid, and has integrated into the global economy through expanded merchandise trade and increased overseas remittances. Effective market access for Bangladeshi exports (particularly for the readymade garments (RMG)) to major overseas markets has become an important determinant of the growth process in Bangladesh (Rahman *et al.* 2011; Rahman and Shadat 2005). The country made a transition from being a predominantly aid-recipient country to a trading nation.

However, although share of foreign aid in GDP has declined from about 6 per cent of the GDP in the early 1990s to less than 2 per cent in 2011, foreign aid continues to play a critical role in financing public investment programmes in Bangladesh. The role of aid remains particularly important in dealing with

issues such as health and education which are critical to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In FY2010-11, one-third of the budget deficit (including grants) was programmed to be met by external financing (GoB 2012a). Thus, preparation of the national budget becomes difficult without explicit pledges by the development partners.

In spite of Bangladesh's demonstrated success, lack of adequate gainful employment opportunities coupled with erosion in purchasing power has meant that success in reducing (income) poverty and inequality has remained lower than the potential (BBS 2011b). The labour force faces an unemployment plus underemployment rate of about 24.8 per cent. Agriculture still being the major source of employment (more than 47 per cent), a large number of people remains underemployed due to seasonality of agricultural production (BBS 2011a). At the same time, wages and returns in the vast informal sector of the country have tended to remain at very low levels. Enhancing the labour productivity through technological upgradation is a major development challenge in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the country has been able to achieve significant social progress, particularly in achieving universal primary education (MDG 2), reduction in child mortality (MDG 4), and improvement in maternal mortality (MDG 5) (GoB 2012b).

## 2.2 Development Policy Shifts

Bangladesh has experienced a paradigm shift in its developmental policies over the past years. This has happened in tandem with the significant ideological departures that came with changes in various political (and non-political) regimes. The objective of achieving a 'planned economic growth' within a socialist framework, as envisaged in the First Five Year Plan (1973-78), was subsequently replaced by a market-oriented economy, and given effect through various reforms aimed at privatisation and deregulation of the economy, often as a part of donor conditionalities. During 1975-85, the emphasis on promoting private sector through reforms in the areas of industry, trade, exchange rate, fiscal and monetary policies became prominent. The next decade (1985-95) experienced further consolidation of the private sector development with privatisation of the state-owned enterprises (SoEs). These policy changes were adopted in line with the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) espoused by the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs). The idea was to stabilise the macroeconomic situation by bringing discipline in the fiscal and monetary sectors coupled with further opening up of the economy. Bangladesh received support under the Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) and the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) as soon as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) initiated these programmes in 1986 and 1987 respectively. Under these two programmes Bangladesh had to work towards a number of macroeconomic and sectoral targets. Conditionalities of the SAP, the so called *Washington Consensus*, were based on SAF and ESAF arrangements. Additionally, Bangladesh had to follow the guidelines of the Policy Framework Paper prepared by the BWIs to achieve the targets set in this paper.

Despite flow of foreign aid and privatisation momentum, none of Bangladesh's Five Year Plans were able to achieve the targeted growth rates.<sup>7</sup> Donors blamed slow pace of reforms for lower growth and emphasised on regenerating the momentum in reform measures. Attention was drawn by donors to the issue of governance in areas such as decentralisation of the public administration and reform of the judiciary.

Following the largely unsuccessful experience of SAP across the world in reducing poverty and achieving long-term sustainable growth in the aid-recipient poor countries (see details in SAPRIN (2004)), some

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<sup>7</sup>Average GDP growth was 3.8 per cent against the target of 5.4 per cent during the Third Five Year Plan (1985-90), and 4.2 per cent against the target of 5.0 per cent during the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95) (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), various issues).

of the development partners, including the BWIs came to recognise that reforms would not make headway without the commitment of the domestic constituencies to the changes and establishment of domestic ownership over these efforts. Global experience revealed that many countries became Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) during the implementation of SAPs. These countries failed to service their debt and needed a new modality of support for coming out of their indebtedness and abject poverty. This gave rise to a new thinking about the course to be followed in low-income countries. The BWIs devised 'nationally owned' participatory PRS which would be the basis of providing concessional loans to these countries. This was also considered for determining the eligibility for debt relief under the HIPC initiative. Thus, the newly conceived PRS was more about process, and less about the policy designs of the World Bank and IMF.

It is, however, a matter of record that Bangladesh had been a better performer in terms of debt servicing compared to many African countries as it never defaulted. The debt-GDP ratio and external debt servicing ratio as percentage of GDP has been declining over the years in Bangladesh (BBS, various years), and the country was never included in the HIPC category. However, it had to accept the conditionality of preparing a PRSP to avail the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) of the IMF (which had replaced the ESAF in 1999) and Development Support Credit of the World Bank.

### **2.3 Evolution of the PRSP Process in Bangladesh and Institutional Interactions**

Bangladesh had prepared four medium-term (five year) and one short-term (two year) plan documents before it entered into the PRS phase. The First Five Year Plan was implemented during 1973-78 which was followed by a two year plan (1978-80), and three consecutive five year plans over the period of 1981-95. With a 'plan holiday' of two years during FY1995-97, Bangladesh prepared its Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002). Following the Fifth Plan period, with no guidelines for mid-term resource allocation and with no physical targets in different sectors, Bangladesh in FY2002-03 moved towards preparing a PRSP along the guidelines provided by the BWIs.

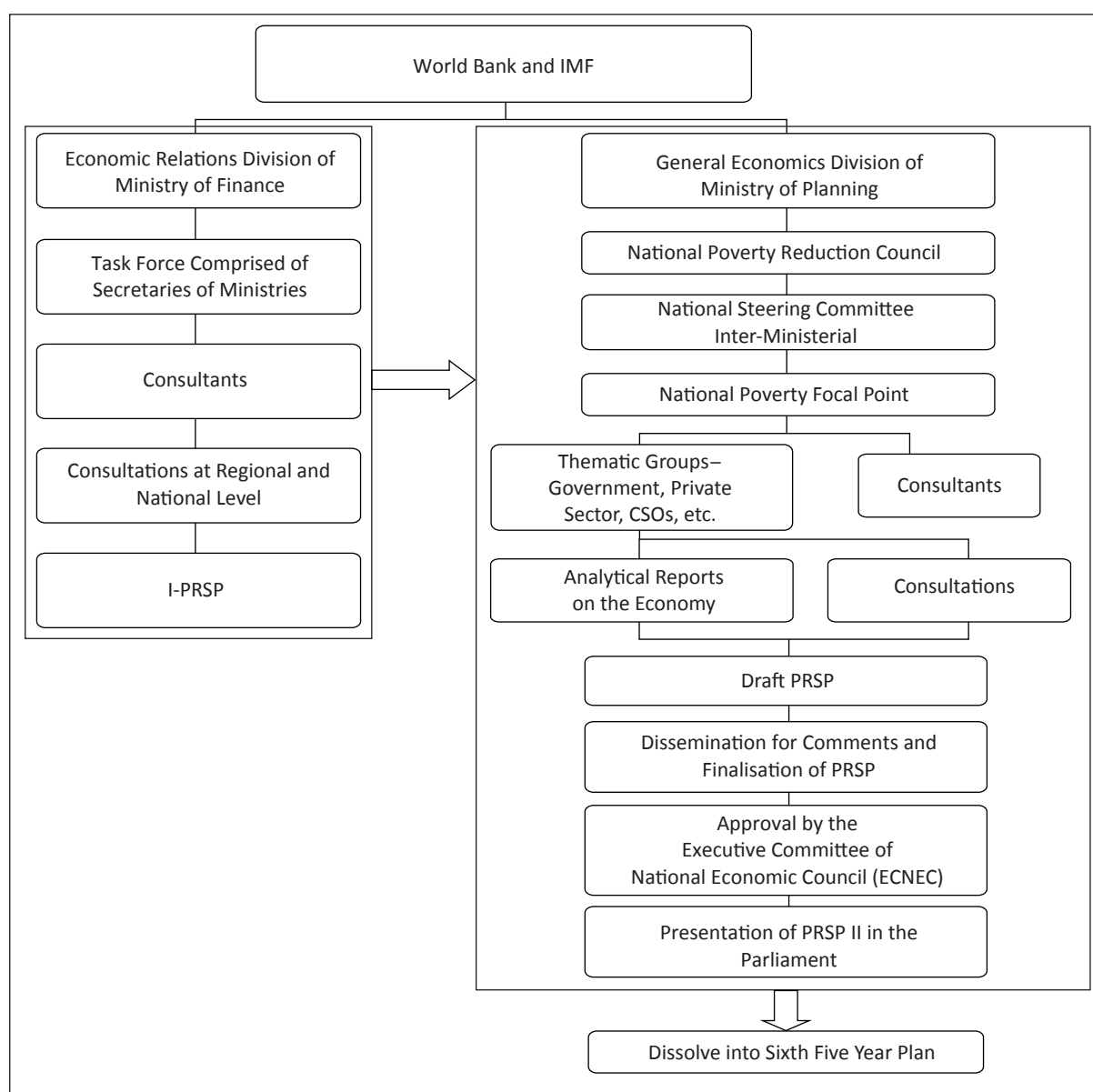
Drawing upon a paper on the Comprehensive Development Framework and the Sector Wide Approach Program of the World Bank, the Interim PRSP (I-PRSP) of Bangladesh styled as *A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development* was ready in March 2003, and was slated for implementation during 2003-05. The first full blown PRSP of Bangladesh was prepared in 2005. The document titled *Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction* (popularly known as PRSP-I) was implemented during 2005-07. It was extended for another year as the preparation of the PRSP-II got somewhat delayed. This was followed by the second PRSP titled *Moving Ahead: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (2009-2011)*. This document was revised by the newly elected government which took office in January 2009 and renamed as *Steps Towards Change: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction*.

#### ***Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2003-05)***

The formulation of the I-PRSP in Bangladesh involved participation of a number of policymakers, experts and stakeholder representatives at various levels and of different capacities. Headed by the Secretary, Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF), an eleven-member Task Force was set up in late November 2000 to oversee the preparation of the Bangladesh PRSP. The Task Force did not include any representative from CSOs or the private sector. A number of consultants were appointed to prepare the I-PRSP as there was lack of capacity within the concerned section of the government.

General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission of Bangladesh in collaboration with the BRAC<sup>8</sup>, the largest NGO in Bangladesh and in the world, organised consultative meetings both at the national and regional levels with various stakeholders before and after the completion of the draft I-PRSP. The consultations at the national level included meetings with the development partners, government officials and the CSO leaders. At the regional level, local people including those from the poorer sections and the CSO members participated in the consultations. The urban poor from a slum in Dhaka, the capital city were also invited to participate in dedicated meetings. Before finalisation of the draft I-PRSP, an international seminar was held in the capital. The seminar did not circulate any document among the participants, and was limited only to the discussion on the framework of the Bangladesh PRS rather than on the content of the document. Figure 1 elaborates the institutional process of PRS and Table 2 depicts the PRSP consultation process in terms of participation of various groups at national and regional meetings.

**Figure 1: Institutional Process of PRS in Bangladesh**



Source: Prepared by the authors based on various PRSP-related documents.

<sup>8</sup>Established in 1972, BRAC is currently present in all 64 districts of Bangladesh, with over 7 million microfinance group members, 37,500 non-formal primary schools, more than 70,000 health volunteers and over 120,000 staff. BRAC operates various programmes in the area of microfinance and education in nine countries across Asia and Africa, reaching more than 110 million people (for details: [www.brac.net](http://www.brac.net)).

**Table 2: Summary of Consultations during PRSP Preparation Process in Bangladesh**

Level/Region (Number of Meetings)	Participants	Number of Participants	Comments
<b>I-PRSP (2003-2005)</b>			
National (2)	Government officials	53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No separate meetings with the Members of Parliament (MPs) and members of trade bodies</li> <li>• ERD (MoF) was the coordinator</li> <li>• Not discussed in the cabinet or national parliament</li> </ul>
	NGOs and civil society	33	
Donors (1)	Almost all donors in the country	20-25	
Regional in divisional towns (5)		209	
Upazila*	Poor women and men	153	
	Civil society and NGO representatives	140	
Slum	Urban poor	29	
<b>PRSP-I (2005-08)</b>			
National (1)	Members of organisations such as assetless people, human rights organisations, environmental organisations, representatives of CSOs, women's forum and women's development co-operatives, journalists, research institutions, professional groups, distinguished individuals, locally-funded NGOs, private investors and government agencies	200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GED (Planning Commission) was the coordinator</li> <li>• Divisional level consultations were convened by the respective divisional commissioners</li> <li>• Not discussed in the cabinet or national parliament</li> </ul>
Regional (6), in divisional towns – Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal	Similar to the national level participants	150-200	
<b>PRSP-II (2009-11)</b>			
National (2), before and after the draft thematic reports	Representatives from concerned ministries, academics, researchers, CBOs, NGOs, trade bodies	150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated by ERD (MoF)</li> <li>• Facilitated by district administration</li> <li>• Revised PRSP-II was discussed and approved by the national parliament</li> </ul>
Development partners	All development partners working in the country	20-25	
Regional (4) in Dhaka, Barisal, Rangamati and Rajshahi	Local government officials, representatives from chambers of commerce and industry, professional organisations, NGOs, media, different occupational groups and thematic experts	150	

**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on various PRSP documents of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and interviews with government officials, CSO representatives and development partners.

**Note:** Upazila is the local government unit in Bangladesh at the sub-district level. There are seven divisions, 64 districts and 481 upazilas in Bangladesh.

### ***National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction I (2005-2008)***

During the preparation of PRSP-I, a National Steering Committee comprising 22 members and chaired by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister was responsible to guide the National Poverty Focal Point of the GED of the Planning Commission. With involvement of the Prime Minister's Office, the PRSP-I improved its profile in comparison to that of the I-PRSP. The National Steering Committee was



an inter-ministerial committee and did not include any member from the non-state sector. However, the thematic groups covering 12 core issues included members from the private sector and CSOs. The Planning Commission appointed national consultants to prepare the documents. Apart from thematic groups, the PRSP preparation process received inputs from the implementation report of the I-PRSP as well as from the national and regional level consultations with stakeholders organised by the GED of the Planning Commission (Table 2).

During the formulation of PRSP-I, consultations were conducted during March-April 2004. Participants included members of organisations dealing with assetless people, microcredit, human rights and environmental issues. Representatives of development NGOs, CBOs, women's organisations, and women's development co-operatives, journalists, research institutions, professional groups, distinguished individuals, private investors and government agencies were also invited to the consultations. Compared to the I-PRSP experience, consultations during PRSP-I were more organised and structured. There was an attempt to include people from all walks of life in the consultations at the divisional level. These included among others garment workers, street children, housemaids, river gypsies, fishermen, sweepers, potters and tea garden workers.

### ***National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (2009-2011)***

As was the case before, national and regional level discussions on the thematic groups were organised by the government to receive inputs for the finalisation of 18 thematic reports which were used for formulation of the draft PRSP-II. Academics, researchers, government officials and members of NGOs and CBOs offered their views in the consultation meetings. Consultations during the preparation of the PRSP-II were much more limited compared to the consultations during the formulation of the PRSP-I. Consultations held in the capital were participated beyond the aforementioned groups, by media persons, government officials and development partners. Regional consultations were participated by representatives of the local government, members of trade bodies, media persons, government officials and NGO/CBO leaders. One exclusive consultation was held with the international development partners. Some NGOs, various ministries and development partners also submitted written observations on various issues to the poverty focal point of the government.

### ***Revised National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (2009-2011)***

The necessity to revise the PRSP-II emerged with the new government taking the seat in 2009. Curiously, while the title of the PRSP-II document was changed because of political compulsion, the substantive content remained the same except for its added emphasis on development of information technology (IT). It can be noted here that the election manifesto of the newly elected Awami League government, viz. 'Charter of Change' committed to transform the country into a *Digital Bangladesh* to achieve its developmental objectives. However, there was no consultation meeting before the adoption of the revised PRSP-II, but it was presented at and approved by the national parliament for the first time in the history of the country.

## **3. ENGAGEMENT OF KEY ACTORS IN THE PRSP PROCESS**

The PRSP initiative, seemingly a positive departure from the previous planning exercises in terms of its emphasis on a participatory process, cannot claim full representation and inclusiveness of domestic actors in any manner as it was largely a token proforma exercise. Contrary to the claim of the policymakers, the participation of CSOs in Bangladesh's PRSP preparation fell short of expectations

both in terms of 'depth and width'.<sup>9</sup> The participation of CSOs can best be termed as 'narrow and shallow'<sup>10</sup>, which involved participation only in the consultation, rather than in decision making in partnership with the government. More importantly, the suggestions and concerns expressed by the non-state actors even within the 'narrow and shallow' confines of the consultations hardly were reflected in the final document. Absence of any structured validation process did not allow the participating representatives to point this shortcoming out.

### **3.1 Representation and Inclusiveness**

As it was, representatives of NGOs, lawyers, media persons, religious leaders, school teachers, local traders, chair and members of union parishads<sup>11</sup> and political activists were consulted under the category of CSO participants. However, neither the MPs and other public representatives, nor the representatives of the trade and industries' bodies were included in the meetings as a distinctive group. Some MPs and business leaders participated in a few consultations and meetings along with others.

The published PRSPs were disseminated among a large number of individuals and institutions including members of CSOs and other stakeholders. They were also made available on the website of the central bank of the country. During the post-draft consultation period, GED of the Planning Commission organised meetings with different professional groups, environmental activists, health professionals, trade union leaders, business bodies, NGOs, academics, researchers and development partners. MPs or other public representatives were not consulted separately as a group at this stage either. Only a few political leaders and MPs received the draft PRSP.

There is no doubt that given the importance of MPs (and other elected officials) in terms of representativeness and also accountability at the level of their own constituencies and to the nation as a whole, they remain the key players in implementation of the PRSPs. When the revised PRSP was introduced to the parliament, the discussion on the document was quite scanty. This exclusion and marginalisation of MPs in consultations of PRSP was a serious weakness.

### **3.2 Scope of Participation**

Representatives from CSOs and the private sector were not included in the National Steering Committee which was formed to provide guidelines towards the implementation of the I-PRSP and to formulate a work plan for preparing a full PRSP. Participation of CSOs was somewhat symbolic and of diminished nature for a number of reasons. First, the participants were mostly hand-picked by the National Steering Committee of PRSP, mostly on the basis of their ideological and political inclinations and views. Thus, with the change of political regimes some CSOs were dropped, while some others, excluded previously, made their way to the consultation process. Regrettably, many of these CSO participants lacked the professional competence to discuss issues put on the table. Second, representatives of CSOs have not been involved in the designing stage of the PRSP exercise, and consequently, were constrained to provide inputs in shaping the PRSP process. Third, there was no mechanism to know, if not to ensure, that the suggestions made by the participating representatives of various interest groups have been reasonably reflected in the final document. Fourth, participants were not given any resource material and enough time to prepare before the consultation meetings. Due to non-availability of documents, the exercise became a frustrating experience for those who were conversant with the issues under discussion.

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<sup>9</sup>Farrington and Bebbington (1993) coined the terms 'breadth' and 'width' while discussing the agricultural development in Latin America.

<sup>10</sup>Following Stewart and Wang (2003).

<sup>11</sup>Union parishad is the local administrative body of the government.



### **3.3 Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of PRS**

The objectives laid out in the PRS documents were expected to be achieved through efficient and effective public expenditure. To this end, a Medium Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) process was put in place in line with the priorities of the PRSP. Lead ministries, their agencies and other associate bodies were given the responsibility of formulation, supervision, coordination, implementation and monitoring of the activities set out in the PRSPs. However, there was no institutional framework for CSOs and the private sector to play any role in the delivery of the PRSPs – though many CSOs implemented programmes having direct relevance for the PRS, e.g. microcredit, literacy, health and sanitation, and empowerment.

For monitoring the implementation of PRSP-I, the GED of the Planning Commission constituted an independent monitoring committee comprising of CSO representatives. Its mandate was to provide a balanced and impartial assessment of the progress towards the PRSP-I targets, and provide appropriate guidance for performance improvement. However, the monitoring process at the ministries and their agencies failed to make much progress due to lack of interest and deficiency in monitoring capacity of the concerned thematic groups in the ministries. Besides, there was no relevant and real time data to monitor the progress. Research organisations, the private sector and CSOs did not have the adequate financial resources to collect data on a large scale to examine the implementation status of activities undertaken as per the PRS. Thus the overall implementation, monitoring and evaluation remained weak which led to high degree of non-transparency in the PRS delivery process. This in turn weakened the scope of accountability of the PRS exercise.

## **4. STRATEGIES AND MODALITIES OF CSO ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRSP PROCESS**

### **4.1 Characteristics of the CSOs**

Though traditionally CSOs in Bangladesh were comprised of mostly professional bodies engaged in vocational interest, over the years the gamut of CSOs has expanded to include a wide range of organisations. These include private development organisations, issue-based advocacy groups, voluntary community-based associations and policy-oriented think tanks. The CSOs are non-government, not-for-profit and non-partisan. However, in Bangladesh the business community also tends to play the role of CSOs, from time to time, and participates in activities orchestrated by NGOs and professional bodies. Each CSO, however, has its exclusive agenda and mandate which guide them to secure their objectives.

Conversely, the professional associations such as those of doctors, economists, engineers, lawyers, bankers and teachers which had the potential to raise their voices on issues of public interest have regrettably lost their legitimacy as many of them have become politicised. In many cases their existence is dependent on favour from the government of the day (even when these bodies are elected by their membership). On several occasions their leaders thrive on seeking favour from the political parties and the government. The partisan character is also reflected in the manner the representatives of some of these associations are elected.

A large number of NGOs in Bangladesh are foreign donor-funded. Dependence on foreign funds has been both a boon and a bane for CSOs. While it created unpredictability of resource flow and made them vulnerable to government intervention, it also allowed them to scale up their activities. Many of the NGOs are involved in providing social services to the poor at the grassroots level and giving voice to the people on public issues. The voluntary advocacy groups which focus on specific issues, on the other hand, are small in number and suffer from lack of resources. The business community, which

has a stronger voice, is dependent on the government for many regulatory decisions which limits their willingness and capacity to challenge the policymakers on issues of national interest. Besides, business leaders are also prone to lose the non-partisan image, which becomes obvious at the time of elections of various apex bodies, such as the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). Divisions along party affiliation weaken their strength to play the role of an influential pressure group (the role of CSOs in Bangladesh is further discussed in Sobhan (2009)).

Activism of CSOs in Bangladesh in the policy field has traditionally been prominent in areas such as health, education, environment, gender and human rights, anti-corruption and good governance. Economic issues received relatively less attention from CSOs often due to their limited intellectual capacity in the area. However, in the backdrop of persistent poverty and negative fallouts of some of the developmental policies, a few CSOs have shown interest in identifying incoherent donor-supported development policies that promoted a private sector-led growth without a pro-poor focus. Issues such as employment implications of foreign direct investment (FDI) and privatisation, withdrawal of subsidy in agriculture and energy products, expansion of social safety net, export-oriented growth, tax reforms and financing of the public expenditure programmes have come under the scrutiny of CSOs in the country. Policy conditionalities of foreign loans, distributive impact of foreign aid along with implications of participation in the international trading system including the World Trade Organization (WTO), regional and bilateral trade agreements have also come to the fore in CSOs' policy discussions.

Modalities of engagement of CSOs in policy debates in Bangladesh are quite diverse. These include issue-based lobbying, research, analysis and preparation of policy briefs, organisation of dialogues, seminars and workshops, networking and alliance building, media briefing and publication of op-eds and dissemination of publications. In the process they involve people from different walks of life such as government officials, public representatives, political leaders, experts, activists and media persons. The underlying objective is to raise awareness and influence designing, management and implementation of public policies and programmes. The focus of a large part of this tends to be in favour of promoting the cause of higher growth and faster poverty alleviation in the country.

Such involvement in policy debates is, however, not always appreciated by the government of the day, particularly when government policies are put under criticism. A number of CSOs, through their constructive engagements, have achieved success and gained credibility in terms of putting under scrutiny and advocating issues of public interest and concern. Some of these include Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) on corruption, Ain o Salish Kendra on legal and human rights, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad<sup>12</sup> on gender issues, Manusher Jonno Foundation on right to information, SHUJAN<sup>13</sup> on fair elections, Nijera Kori on land rights, BRAC on health and education, and Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) on economic policies. Besides, the electronic and print media play an important role in promoting good governance through readership groups. Social activism of the *Bondhusova* of the Daily Prothom Alo, a national newspaper, is one such example.

Several initiatives geared towards strengthening the analytical and outreach capacity of CSOs have enhanced their effectiveness of intervention. This has subsequently contributed to an informed discourse by CSOs with regard to the process and substance of the PRSP exercise. Examples of CSOs' policy advocacy initiatives and their interface with the policymakers are presented in the following discussion. This would indicate that CSOs' advocacy for participatory policy making predates the PRSP approach. Indeed, if this is kept in mind, one will appreciate that PRSP exercise was not a novelty gifted by the international development partners, at least, in Bangladesh.

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<sup>12</sup>Bangladesh Women's Assembly.

<sup>13</sup>Citizens for Good Governance.

## 4.2 CSOs' Contribution to Policy Activism

### 4.2.1 Policy Activism for Accountable Development by the Centre for Policy Dialogue

The first major intellectual input of CSOs on the national policy making in the area of economic issues was in 1991 when more than 250 development experts were assembled in a number of Task Forces by a civil society member of the then non-partisan CTG of Bangladesh to design a detail development plan for the country. This later led to the establishment of a civil society think tank, namely the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) with the objective of preparing home-grown solution to the development challenges of the country. The Task Force comprised of experts belonging to think tanks, academics and members of NGOs who prepared a number of reports that involved various areas of developmental interest to Bangladesh (Table 3). Reports of the Task Force emphasised the idea of building grassroots organisations of the poor and marginalised, strengthening the voice of the local community, and increasing their access to public resources. These reports were formally presented to the newly elected Prime Minister of the country in 1991.

Ironically, the Task Force Reports failed to attract the attention of those that mattered. The reports were shelved and no effort was made by the government to make use of them. CSOs, however,

**Table 3: Chronology of CPD's Major Country-wide Policy Activism**

Initiative	Partners/Contributors	Themes/Issues of the Report	Consultations	Number of Participants
1991: Preparation of Task Force Report	250 contributors	Task Force Reports 1992	In-house	-
2000-2001: Formation of Sixteen (16) Task Forces who prepared Policy Briefs for the new government	Two (2) leading dailies of the country, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo	Sixteen (16) thematic issues	Six (6) regional multi-stakeholder consultation before formation of Task Forces to identify issues; Draft policy briefs prepared by 16 Task Forces were validated and finalised through a series of dialogues in a National Policy Forum held in August 2001	More than 2,000
2003: Reconvening Task Forces of 2001 for mid-term review of the government	Two (2) leading dailies of the country, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo	Seventeen (17) thematic issues	Eight (8) sub-national and one (1) national level consultation between April and June 2003	More than 5,000
2006: National Election Campaign for Accountable Development	Two (2) leading dailies of the country, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo; One (1) private television channel, Channel i	Citizen's Aspirations; Amendments to the Representation of People's Order 1972; Bangladesh: Vision 2021; Proceedings of the dialogues/town hall meetings	Fifteen (15) town hall style regional dialogues; Eight (8) expert group meetings during March to December 2006; National Launching and Concluding sessions of Citizen's Forum 2006	Regional dialogues were attended by more than 8,000 participants who represent local political leaders, members of NGOs, students, business leaders, academics and other professionals

Source: Prepared by the authors.

continued their efforts in the area of policy activism, particularly since the mid-nineties when they started to demand greater accountability of public expenditures as well as raised their voices against corruption and deterioration of the law and order situation in the country. Thus, another similar exercise to prepare policy briefs through a highly interactive process was undertaken in 2000-2001 by CPD with the objective of suggesting an actionable agenda for the new government which was to be elected in 2001.

This time CPD organised regional consultations and dialogues and National Policy Forum in collaboration with two national dailies.<sup>14</sup> Representatives of political parties and member of CSOs made effective use of this non-partisan platform to express their opinions on development priorities and suggest policy alternatives. The National Policy Forum held in August 2001 was inaugurated by the then President of Bangladesh.

In April 2003, CPD reconvened the Task Forces of 2001 in continuation of its efforts to scrutinise the implementation status of the suggestions made by them. To this end, Task Force members prepared reports on thematic issues which were presented at the National Review Forum organised in June 2003.

Civil society initiatives in terms of undertaking dedicated policy advocacy were further strengthened when in 2006 CPD undertook a programme to conduct a national campaign in pursuit of an accountable development process in Bangladesh. A Citizen's Committee was formed which include luminaries like the founder of the Grameen Bank and Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder Chairman of BRAC Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, former Advisors to the President, business leaders, policy activists, distinguished professionals and academics.<sup>15</sup> One major objective of the campaign was to influence public opinion to encourage political parties to make parliament more effective by nominating "Clean and Competent Candidates" to contest in the national elections. The Citizen's Committee prepared a vision document styled *Vision 2021* through a broad-based participatory process involving 8,000 stakeholders and covering 15 regions of the country. Thematic Expert Groups were formed engaging more than 200 people who included academics, researchers, members of business community, former high level government officials, Advisors (Ministers) of the CTGs and media personalities to prepare policy inputs from the Vision document. In addition to *Vision 2021*, CPD also prepared two other documents titled *Priorities for the Caretaker Government* and *Immediate Action Plan for the Next Elected Government* following the consultation process. These were presented to the then President and Chief of the CTG and to the high officials of two major political parties of the country. Reports of the Task Forces and the Vision document were also published in English and Bangla, and were widely disseminated through the internet, electronic and print media by CPD.

The response to the above mentioned civil society initiative in 2006 was largely positive amongst the policymakers of the country. The CTG (2006-2008) addressed some of the demands of the CSOs through, inter alia, the enactment of the Right to Information bill, and strengthening of the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Election Commission. Indeed, some of the goals and reform agendas contained in the Vision document were included in the election manifesto (2008) of the Bangladesh Awami League. This was not to say that the major political parties looked kindly at the civil society campaign conducted in 2006. However, the need to address issues of good governance, transparency and accountability could not be ignored in view of the heightened awareness among citizens brought about also by the CPD campaign. On the other hand, major political parties tended to see the campaign for 'Clean and Competent Candidates' by CSOs as a ploy to undermine the

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<sup>14</sup>Details are in Table 3.

<sup>15</sup>It may be mentioned that 11 members of the Citizen's Committee held ministerial positions in the previously elected or caretaker governments.

political parties and subvert the electoral process. When the army-backed CTG took power in January 2007 and pursued anti-corruption drive, and put several political leaders, businessmen and others behind bar on allegations of corruption, this led to deepening of suspicion about the role of the CSOs in this regard. However, CSO campaign has left its footprint, and the call for honest and competent candidates to be nominated by political parties found overwhelming popular support. The election manifesto of the Bangladesh Awami League was a reflection of many of the demands put forward by the CSOs, although their implementation remained a far cry. Hence there is a broad consensus among the civil society activists that these agendas have to be kept alive in public domain and continued to be pursued with renewed vigor.

#### **4.2.2 Movement against Corruption by Transparency International Bangladesh**

Since 1996 Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has been involved in strengthening social movement against corruption in Bangladesh and establishing more transparency and accountability in all aspects of public life. As part of its grassroots movement to combat corruption, TIB organises various platforms and mechanisms through which citizens can voice their opposition to abuse of public resources. The most notable initiative of TIB is the establishment local Committee of Concerned Citizens, which is a network of local watchdog groups run by volunteers. These committees raise awareness and promote public actions in a range of areas including improvement of health and education service delivery.

In addition to civic engagement, TIB also conducts research to gauge the extent of corruption in Bangladesh and put forward recommendations to bring about institutional and policy changes. TIB's Corruption Database Report and Diagnostic Studies are two such initiatives. Contents of the Corruption Database are drawn from reports in leading daily news papers. The information is then validated, analysed and presented to the public through roundtable conferences attended by key stakeholders. In 2002, TIB's Corruption Database Report identified high incidence of corruption in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. This contributed to the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee to fight corruption within the ministry.

Diagnostic studies of TIB shed light on the extent of corruption in a particular sector or institution and make specific recommendations for policy or institutional changes. Some of the recommendations made in a study on police stations have been implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs. A report on the Bureau of Anti-Corruption had contributed towards the formation of the Anti-Corruption Commission in November 2004. In response to a report on the Chittagong Port, the government formed a high-level committee to improve state of affairs in the port.

TIB also monitors various activities of the parliament, a major component of the national integrity system, through a series called 'Parliament Watch'. The objective of the programme is to assess the degree of accountability in the functioning and proceedings of the parliament. Since the inception of Parliament Watch in 2001, TIB monitored all 23 sessions of the Eighth Parliament of Bangladesh and published four reports on the first fourteen sessions. The organisation continues to monitor proceedings of the ongoing Ninth Parliament elected in 2008. The programme has resulted in significant policy changes, including the introduction of a Private Member's Bill into the Code of Conduct for MPs. The Secretariat of the Transparency International has adopted Parliament Watch as an anti-corruption tool. Recently, TIB has also initiated similar series involving the Supreme Court. TIB has also been engaged in monitoring the Climate Fund to ensure transparency and accountability of funds at the disposal of the Bangladesh government dedicated to various activities towards climate change adaptation and mitigation.



However, the journey of TIB has never been smooth. The organisation has been under constant scrutiny and often subjected to bitter criticism by the government of the day. Incidentally, when in the opposition, both the major political parties expansively use TIB's findings to criticise the performance of the government of the day.

Given the nature of its work, TIB risks antagonising influentials and established individuals and institutions. For example, TIB's National Household Survey (2010), based on a sample of 6,000 families, found that 88 per cent of those who approached the judiciary for legal service encountered corruption, and around 11 per cent paid bribes. Subsequently, individuals affiliated with the judiciary and the party in power filed three defamation cases against TIB executives. TIB was eventually absolved of the charges, which the organisation argues was due to the scientific robustness of the Household Survey. While the highly publicised trial was a period of crisis for TIB, it also led to the formation of a new provision requiring lower court judges to submit their wealth statements to the Supreme Court (The Daily Sun 2010).

#### **4.2.3 Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's Movement for Women's Rights**

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a prominent women's rights organisation in Bangladesh, founded in 1970 with the objective "to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and establish a democratic, secular society." Major activities of the organisation include conscientisation, legal aid, advocacy and welfare activities.

In view of increased occurrence of violence against women, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad undertakes legal aid programme to assist the victims and conscientise women about their rights. In-house lawyers of the organisation offer services such as counselling, mediation and filing of law suits. Legal aid includes providing strong social support and access to shelters for the victims of violence. The organisation's work in legal matters extends to the national policy level debates. During 1976-77, the Mahila Parishad organised a mass signature campaign against the dowry system which contributed towards passing of a law by the government in 1980 banning this social vice. In keeping with the UN Conventions on affirmative action, the Parishad has been lobbying to increase reserve seats for women in the parliament to one-third of the total as well as to introduce direct election in those seats. The organisation has also campaigned for change in the inheritance law which is currently discriminatory against girl child.<sup>16</sup>

The dynamics between Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and the government has changed over the years, mainly due to the organisation's reputation as one of the oldest home-grown civil society groups in the country. In the past, The Parishad would run public and media campaigns to draw the attention of the parliament, but now the government voluntarily confers with the organisation when drafting policies relating to women. The Parishad has contributed to passing of *Family Courts Ordinance 1985*, *Women and Children Repression Act 2000*, *Domestic Violence (Resistance and Protection) Bill 2010*, and most recently, *Human Trafficking Prevention and Control Act 2012*.

However, activities of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad in the area of establishing equal rights for women have been challenged and opposed by various sections in the society, particularly by the religious fundamentalist groups. The demand for equal share of parental wealth for the daughter has been criticised and challenged even by a section of the educated male members of the society, indicating the level of resistance to such social reforms. Orthodox Hindus have resisted Mahila Parishad's efforts

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<sup>16</sup>According to the Muslim *Shariah* law a girl gets half of what the male child gets from parental wealth (Chowdhury 1995).

to introduce the provision of registration in their marriages. Similarly, Muslims have vehemently opposed the Uniform Family Code proposed by Mahila Parishad.

### **4.3 Democracy-CSO Relationship Paradox**

One of the reasons for referring to the above activities of selected CSOs was to point out that their engagements involving broader policy issues have been more prominent when compared to the limited economic concerns that tended to dominate the PRSP exercise. On the other hand, the above case studies vividly illustrate how CSOs in Bangladesh have made significant progress as an effective social force, mainly since the 1990s, in spite of various bottlenecks (e.g. resource constraints) and resistance (e.g. affected interest groups).

However, one has to take note of the fact that CSOs in Bangladesh do not constitute a homogeneous group. Though these organisations are not formally connected to any political parties, they are also not value neutral. The mainstream CSOs in the country stand on three pillars, namely democracy, secularism and economic empowerment (including gender empowerment) which draw on the ethos of the liberation war in 1971. However, Islamist parties are never comfortable with these national entities. For example, when rural women increasingly joined the labour market with the support of microfinance disbursing NGOs, they often met with resistance and confrontation from these conservative groups.

In the recent past, some of the groups with strong religious undertone have entered the scene with activities and interventions similar to that of the mainstream NGOs. A part of this group has used this cover for pursuing violent militant activities which went against the democratic values of the country. However, there has not been any ban on Islamist groups by the government. Paradoxically, in some instances, the threat from extremists has been used to squeeze the space of the CSOs as a whole. The government has imposed rigid regulatory measures, including stringent oversight on funding of CSOs. Indeed further highlighting of the regulatory framework for the NGOs is under consideration (The Financial Express 2012).

As has been mentioned earlier, political parties in power often tend to look at CSOs with a sense of contestation, whereas some parties during democratic struggle consider CSOs as their strategic partners. The political elites also question the legitimacy of the civil society elites as the latter lacks electoral representation. However, when these parties act as political opposition, they consider CSOs as their fellow travellers and provide tacit support to CSOs' activism. When they are in power, political parties tolerate CSOs only if they praise the government, and oppose CSOs when they are critical of the government. Unfortunately, under pressure, a number of members of the CSO community become politically partisans resulting in their diminished credibility. This leads to a lack of pluralism in the democratic process. The government of the day, under the guise of enhancing accountability of the CSOs with a view to enhance its control over the activities of the organisations, put their funds under close scrutiny. Curiously, there exists multiple authorities to ensure NGO accountability in Bangladesh, such as the NGO Bureau, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Home Affairs, the central bank, tax authorities and law enforcement agencies. They all vigilantly keep an eye on NGO activities, particularly with regard to those involved in policy advocacy and protection of rights. Moreover, the threat perception on the part of the government stems from the fact that a number of these non-state institutions (e.g. BRAC and Grameen Bank) with their millions of grassroots level members and substantive programme budget often dwarf the activities of the government's ministries, particularly in the areas of health and education.

The hostile fallout of the present Awami League government with Nobel Laureate Professor Yunus in 2011 is a vivid case in point. The government used its regulatory mechanism to remove Professor Yunus on the ground of age from the Grameen Bank<sup>17</sup>, the organisation which he had founded in 1976. The government felt compelled enough to undercut him even at the risk of jeopardising its poverty alleviation programme as well as losing support of the international community.

Thus, in order to fully appreciate the PRSP process one has to situate the PRSP experience in the broader CSO milieu of Bangladesh. CSOs' involvement in the PRSP process has taken place in the backdrop of this culture and practice (the environment and the praxis) which is often characterised by the opposing trend of contestation and complementarity.

## **5. OUTCOME AND EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY ENGAGEMENTS BY ACTORS**

### **5.1 Level of Government's Commitment**

In 2003, when PRSP was introduced in Bangladesh, it was not clear why the medium-term (five year) planning format was being abandoned and replaced by a shorter (two-three years) term plan which essentially did not have radically different objectives than those of its predecessors. Attempts to establish 'domestic ownership' over the PRSP process was viewed by many as a conditionality of donors that just needed to be complied with. Thus, PRSP acquired the image of a donor-sponsored initiative, and was not perceived as a home-grown development planning exercise. As the I-PRSP and PRSP-I were neither discussed in the cabinet nor were endorsed by the parliament, national ownership of these documents remained ambiguous. However, PRSP-II was presented before the national parliament by the incumbent government for discussion in August 2009, although subsequent programmatic follow-ups of the document remained unclear.

PRSP in Bangladesh evolved from a closed and reserved process to a more open and informal one as it made the journey through its various phases. Initially, reactions towards PRSP were mixed among political leaders. The document faced publicly expressed wrath of an important minister of the government of BNP, which during its tenure (2001-2006) twice undertook the exercise of preparing PRSP – once in 2002, and again in 2005. The Minister for Science and Technology of the then government termed it as 'worthless' which carried no value to him and threw it on the floor during a public discussion on 5 August 2006 in presence of stakeholders including development partners such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (The Daily Star 2006; The Financial Express 2006).

Interestingly, the interviews of government officials, CSOs and development partners taken for the purpose of the present study, reveal that a significant number (about one-third) of the government officials maintained that the national government had no feeling of ownership concerning the PRSP. The corresponding share for the CSO response was higher (i.e. 40 per cent). The donor community, however, differed on this. Half of them viewed that the GoB enjoyed full ownership, and the other half felt that the government had partial ownership of the PRSP (Table 4). All of the interviewed members of the donor community, however, tended to agree that though PRSP agenda was initially donor-driven, GoB came forward to adopt it in full earnest.

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<sup>17</sup>The primary function of the Grameen Bank, an institution which also received the Nobel Prize along with Professor Yunus, is to provide microcredit to the poor and marginalised sections of the population and undertake various programmes for their economic and social empowerment (for details: [www.grameen.com](http://www.grameen.com)).



**Table 4: Perception of Respondents on Ownership and Participant Selection**

*(in Per cent)*

Perception	CSOs	Government	Donor
Full ownership	00.0	50.0	50.0
Partial ownership	60.0	16.7	50.0
No ownership	40.0	33.3	00.0

Source: Interviews by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in 2010.

The diversity in the response among the three groups of respondents was dictated by their role in the PRSP process. The donors' perspective was very much driven by the belief that PRSP was the right conduit for the government to agree to their policy prescription. The government acquiesced because it needed investible resources from foreign sources. Thus, the government did not go with the PRSP with full conviction, rather looked at it as a functional necessity. Though the CSOs criticised the PRSP as an externally driven top-down initiative, they also wanted to engage themselves in the consultation process, as they share the espoused goals of PRSPs, e.g. poverty alleviation. Nonetheless, CSOs looked at the process with suspicion and reckoned that even if the intentions of the donors are right, the tools deployed by them are not appropriate.

Notwithstanding its ambiguous attitude, the GoB continued to adopt various socio-economic measures to achieve poverty reduction in line with its PRSP commitments. The ministries formed thematic groups for major cross-cutting and sectoral issues to review their policies from PRSP perspective. The government in its important policy statements including in the budget presentations referred to PRSP targets. The public investment programme of the country reflected the PRSP thrust. The government gradually brought 33 ministries under the three-year MTBF to link the budgetary allocations with policy objectives set out in the PRSP. In contrast, during I-PRSP, only four ministries introduced MTBF to plan their expenditures as per the objectives mentioned in the PRSP. The current Awami League government used PRSP-II as a complementary and bridging document as it moved towards the Sixth Five Year Plan (2010-15) and the Perspective Plan (2010-2021). In fact, the ownership claim by the present government became prominent in the course of preparation of these plan documents when they accepted the PRSP agenda as a central plank of the planning exercise.

## 5.2 Effectiveness of CSOs in Influencing the Process

At the beginning, the PRSP process was not self-evident for most CSOs and they did not have fuller understanding of the modality of their participation. Thus, a number of CSOs engaged themselves independently in scrutinising the PRSP concept and practice. Some of these CSOs were working on sectoral issues, e.g. health and education, while some others were focusing on global concerns, e.g. climate change. Their activities were not coordinated and focused in a manner which could act as a pressure on the government and donors towards making PRSP preparation more representative, accountable and inclusive. CSOs, however, at a later stage came together and raised a number of issues related to PRSP under a common platform. As soon as the draft I-PRSP was released in April 2002, a CSO named Shushanoner Jonno Procharabhijan (SUPRO)<sup>18</sup>, translated it in Bangla for wider dissemination and organised a national level seminar to receive views of people from various sections of the society. Another CSO called People's Empowerment Trust organised six dialogues with stakeholders on the I-PRSP. Other organisations such as ActionAid, Bangladesh Unnoyan Parishad<sup>19</sup>,

<sup>18</sup>Campaign for Good Governance.

<sup>19</sup>Bangladesh Development Assembly.

Bangladesh Left Front, Adibashi Forum<sup>20</sup>, Economic Practice Centre of the Dhaka University, National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Steps Towards Development and Nari Progoti Songho<sup>21</sup> also publicly expressed their views regarding PRSPs. These organisations critically examined particular issues of their interest, identified the missing elements, and urged for a credible and participatory PRSP which would be free of donor conditionalities. They organised discussions, commented in the print and electronic media, and published position papers. Their involvement in the PRSP exercise led to an improved understanding and awareness on the need for a home-grown policy to address the poverty challenge.

The success of CSOs, in a sense, lies in their contribution towards mainstreaming the poverty concern in the development and political discourse of the country, and creating a domestic consensus as regards the need for demand-driven PRSP. Additionally, taking advantage of the PRSP, CSOs expressed their opinion on a national policy document for the first time, in a comprehensive and structured fashion. As Table 5 reports, about 87 per cent CSO representatives interviewed in the present study thought their participation in the consultation process was useful in one way or other, and they had some enriching experiences through this process.

**Table 5: CSOs' Assessment about Participation in PRSP Consultation Process**

Criteria	Per cent of Respondents
<b>How useful was the consultation?</b>	
Highly useful	6.7
Useful	53.3
Somewhat useful	26.7
Not useful	13.3
<b>What was the most enriching experience for you in the PRSP consultation process?</b>	
Ability to project your views	34.8
Learned about the functioning of government machineries	8.7
Got to know thoughts of the government	21.7
Got to know thoughts of the donors	13.0
Got to know thoughts of other CSOs and participants	13.0
Any other reasons	8.7

**Source:** Interviews by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in 2010.

However, CSOs never owned the PRSP as they always felt that PRSP was an extension of donor conditionality, albeit, in a different form. CSOs maintained that they were hardly successful in influencing PRSP policy process, and the development partners agreed with them (Table 6). CSOs and other stakeholders had to be reactive, giving response to what PRSPs proposed, rather than proactive, setting the agenda. The perceptions of CSO participants presented in Table 6 indicate that discussions and recommendations made during consultations were not reflected in the final PRSP, though government officials did not agree with CSOs' perception on this.

Table 7 indicates that the CSOs provided a more modest assessment of the PRSP process as a whole in comparison to the respondents from the national government and international development community. They further maintained that successive governments have maintained continuity in the PRSP policy process.

<sup>20</sup>Forum for Indigenous People.

<sup>21</sup>Women's Development Association.

**Table 6: Stakeholders' Response on PRSP Consultation Process**

Criteria	Average Score		
	CSOs	Government	Development Partners
Though PRSP agenda was initially donor-driven, the GoB owned it afterwards	3.1	3.3	3.0
Participation of CSOs, private sector representatives and other stakeholders had been sufficient and well represented	2.4	3.5	2.0
CSOs have been successful in influencing the PRSP policy process	1.3	3.0	2.0
Ability of CSOs were limited only to specific issues, rather than macroeconomic issues	3.1	3.9	4.0
Final PRSP document reflected the discussions of the consultations and implemented	2.1	2.8	3.0
Policy focus and goals of PRSP will be changed due to introduction of Five Year Plan and Perspective Plan	2.8	2.8	1.0

**Source:** Interviews by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in 2010.

**Note:** Scores 1-5: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree; 5 = do not know.

**Table 7: Stakeholders' Perception on PRSP Process***(in Per cent)*

Criteria	CSOs		Government		Development Partners	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Did national politics influence the selection of the participation in the consultation?	81.3	18.7	66.7	33.3	10.0	100.0
Were your suggestions accepted during the consultation process?	87.5	12.5	-	-	-	-
Did the final PRSP document reflect the suggestions made by the stakeholders?	40.0	60.0	80.0	20.0	100.0	0.0
Do you think the successive governments have maintained continuity in the PRSP policy process?	93.3	6.7	83.3	16.7	100.0	0.0
Do you think the policy coherence on the poverty issue in Bangladesh has increased due to PRSP?	35.7	64.3	83.3	16.7	50.0	50.0
Do you think there were adequate coordination for implementation and monitoring of PRSP-related works among the various ministries?	42.9	57.1	83.3	16.7	-	-
Do you think PRSP is somewhat successful in alleviating poverty situation in Bangladesh?	26.7	73.3	83.3	16.7	50.0	50.0

**Source:** Interviews by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in 2010.

The role of the CSOs in the PRSP process was also limited by a number of other factors. For example, there is no institutional mechanism for CSOs in Bangladesh to play the oversight role and monitor development plans. This limits the sense of ownership of policies and programmes by CSOs. Additionally, the lack of access to information maintained by the government and lack of transparency in government initiatives also lead to low level of CSO commitments in development activities. In fact, CSOs' involvement in policy advocacy receives mixed reactions from policymakers and political elites in Bangladesh. While governments in power are prone not to be receptive even to constructive criticisms of their policies and programmes, political parties in opposition also do not consider CSOs as allies in advancing issues of public interest. Civil society rather tends to be seen as a threat by the political elites, although the political opposition excitingly use CSO platform to vent its criticism of the government.

It needs to be mentioned that absence of adequate intellectual and organisational capacity has often posed on the CSOs in undertaking the oversight functions. Most of the CSOs in Bangladesh have a very good understanding of the poverty dynamics, and this has made significant contribution to the improvement in poverty diagnostics. However, their capacities in terms of understanding more technical aspects such as the macroeconomic framework, real sector policies and public expenditure management are quite scanty. Thus CSOs' contribution to policy analyses in the context of the PRSP was rather limited. This was confirmed in the observations received from across the managements (Table 4).

Moreover, PRSP-related activities of CSOs were mostly concentrated in the capital city, and not implemented through country-wide programmes. This was due to limited institutional capacity of CSOs which constrained them to mobilise stakeholders across the country to articulate development demands and make the development process more accountable and transparent. Furthermore, the organisational capacity of CSOs, and the nature and extent of activities are also underpinned by availability of financial resources. In Bangladesh, there is hardly any scope to access institutional sources of funds from within the country to underwrite the core organisational activities of CSOs. Consequently, CSOs had to depend on donor funds to carry out their activities including civic activism. This, to a large extent, takes away the independence of CSOs in choosing their agendas and priorities. As a result, the credibility of CSOs in public eye also gets eroded. Yet there are CSOs which would not go for any compromise with their principles notwithstanding their dependence on external funds. Transparency of activities and quality of interval, largely determine the degree of autonomy a CSO may enjoy in relation to the external funders.

Finally, effectiveness of CSOs gets diminished if their non-partisan characteristic is either lost or questioned. CSOs which are directly or indirectly linked to political parties lose moral high ground to criticise the PRSP or any public document for that matter. Indeed, due to divisiveness and fragmentations within the CSOs community itself – either for ideological or personality conflicts – voice of CSOs in the PRSP process has tended to remain rather weak, and as such they were unable to exercise significant influence in either shaping sectoral policies in the PRSP or making allocations for the stated objectives.

### **5.3 Changes in the Commitment and Attitude of Development Partners**

Even though PRSP was prepared with the intention of accessing foreign aid, there was hardly any serious attempt on the part of development partners to scrutinise the details involving the formulation and implementation of the document. This often gave an impression that the development partners looked at the document as a functional requirement to disburse aid on the basis of some broad policy agenda. The field (country) offices of the development agencies felt that being on the ground they knew the realities more, and sometimes the perspective of their head office and country office also tended to differ.

The objectives laid out in the PRSPs were not complemented by adequate resource flow from development partners (Table 8). The reason for such a shortfall in the foreign aid targets is partly due to lack of utilisation capacity of foreign aid by the government, and partly due to lack of timely release of funds by development partners. The demand for predictability of foreign resources, which has now been included in one of the five pillars of the Paris Declaration<sup>22</sup> on aid effectiveness, has been voiced by Bangladesh for some time. Though aid predictability through multi-year assistance strategies of

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<sup>22</sup>The Paris Declaration 2005 contains a set of 12 monitorable targets under five pillars to increase aid effectiveness. These pillars are ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results, and mutual accountability. One of the 12 targets under the pillar on 'alignment' of aid is about the predictability of aid in the receiving countries. The Paris Declaration sets a target to halve the proportion of aid not disbursed within the fiscal year for which it was scheduled by 2010 (OECD 2005).

**Table 8: Achievements of PRS Targets on External Resources**

Fiscal Year	Real GDP Growth (%)		External Financing (% of GDP)	
	I-PRS/PRS Target	Achieved	I-PRS/PRS Target	Achieved
2002-03	5.2	5.3	1.6	2.1
2003-04	5.5	6.3	2.1	1.1
2004-05	6.0	5.5	2.0	1.6
2005-06	6.5	6.6	2.5	1.9
2006-07	6.8	6.4	2.5	1.0
2007-08	7.0	6.2	2.6	1.6
2008-09	7.0	5.9	2.6	0.6
2009-10	6.7	6.0*	2.3	2.4*
2010-11	7.2	-	2.2	-

**Source:** Various issues of Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS); Bangladesh Economic Review 2010, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh.

**Note:** \*Revised data of FY2009-10.

development partners is reported to have increased<sup>23</sup> (OECD 2007; OECD 2008), the rate of aid disbursement against commitments has not improved in Bangladesh (Khatun 2008).

There was also a lack of coordination among development partners. For example, in 2005 four big donors, i.e. The World Bank, ADB, Department for International Development (DFID) and Japan, which contribute an overwhelming share of foreign aid in Bangladesh<sup>24</sup>, prepared a Joint Strategic Framework for supporting the PRSP of Bangladesh. Though this joint strategy was open to other donors, there was a sense of differentiation between the major four and other smaller bilateral donors operating in Bangladesh. On the part of the government, coordination with a large number of development partners working in Bangladesh proved to be difficult. During fiscal years 2000-2004, there were 20 development partners with numerous projects, indicating fragmentation of the aid scenario and the challenge in coordinating their activities.<sup>25</sup>

A sense of indifference among development partners with regard to the real outcome of PRSPs was also evident from their unwillingness to involve CSOs in monitoring of implementation and impact evaluation of the PRSP. Since institutional capacity is the key to sustainable progress, development partners were expected to commit on long-term support to building capacity of CSOs in working at the grassroots and national level policy analysis and advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation of public expenditures. Though donors' commitment to PRSP was apparently expressed through initial enthusiasm, but it subsided immediately after the development plan has been prepared. What is more important for the development partners, is that the strategy of using the PRSP as their main document for deciding on their allocative priorities soon fell back on their respective country strategy paper to plan their activities in Bangladesh.

## 6. LESSONS LEARNT

The PRSP – a short to medium-term document – has presently ceased to exist in Bangladesh as the country has now reverted back to the traditional medium-term (five year) and perspective (ten year) planning format. Though PRSP was introduced by the international development community which

<sup>23</sup>Surveys on implementation of the Paris Declaration conducted by OECD in 2006 shows that aid predictability has increased from 91 per cent in 2005 to 98 per cent in 2007 in Bangladesh (OECD 2007).

<sup>24</sup>During fiscal years 2005-2009 the contribution of these four donors was 70.5 per cent in total foreign aid flow in the country (GoB 2010).

<sup>25</sup>This number declined marginally to 17 during fiscal years 2005-2009.

encouraged abandonment of the traditional planning process, yet thanks to the PRSP experience, the agenda of poverty alleviation and inclusive growth has now become core objectives of the reincarnated planning process. Moreover, the PRSP exercise in Bangladesh was educative in terms of drawing attention to the need for establishing domestic ownership over national policy agenda. In this sense, it has left a lasting footprint in the minds of all stakeholders in Bangladesh. Both these issues greatly informed the preparatory process of the Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-2015).

The PRSP exercise in Bangladesh, including its evolution from I-PRSP to revised PRSP-II, did undergo some changes with regard to representation, accountability and inclusiveness. However, as the study findings evince, in terms of all the aforesaid three indicators, there were significant limitations in the entire PRSP exercise. As it progressed through various phases, inclusiveness did somewhat increase. However, a large part of the participatory process was perceived to be a mere proforma exercise on the part of the Bangladesh government, and the development partners had little means to improve the situation. Even the overarching donor conditionalities could not precipitate a meaningful participation and contribution by CSOs in the process. Abandoning the PRSP exercise and reverting back to the medium-term planning process in Bangladesh may be seen as a final indictment in this regard.

International development partners failed to impress that PRSP was anything different from other policy planning experiences in Bangladesh. PRSP could not come out of the long shadow of the 'Washington Consensus' framework with its liberalisation and deregulation agenda, as these were very much at the core of the successive PRSPs. In the backdrop of the less than satisfactory outcome of the SAPs across the low-income countries, the international development agencies possibly looked for a mechanism which would be sensitive to the contextual reality of the recipient countries. Donors' effort was also geared to bring on board the national political, bureaucratic and academic elites regarding their policy agenda.

The acceptance of the idea of preparing the PRSP by the GoB epitomises the typical donor-recipient relationship where the recipient country, due to its paucity of resources and circumscribed representativeness, is constrained to assert its policy independence in the face of donor-funded policy agenda. Foreign aid still remains an important source of Bangladesh's developmental financing. The history of foreign aid in Bangladesh shows that donor conditionalities ranged from economic issues to political issues (Sobhan 1985; Sobhan 2004). The PRSP turned out to be a new variant of 'good conditionality' with mixed manifestation.

Notwithstanding above, the PRSP exercise in Bangladesh has left behind a number of lessons of enduring relevance regarding the policy making regime of Bangladesh. Some of these lessons are discussed below.

- i. The first and foremost lesson which could be drawn from the PRSP exercise in Bangladesh is that, without sustained political ownership and representation, no development programme can see fruition. Well-meaning, but externally-driven policies do not work – even when there is attempt to formulate it in a participatory manner. Policies need to organically evolve in the democratic context, even when they are similar to those that are advocated by donors. Perception is a key consideration here. The PRSP emerged as a rich policy document which included detailed sectoral policies with targets for macroeconomic variables and projections of required resources to achieve those targets. However, in the end, this exercise turned out to be a mere technical exercise geared to availing foreign aid instead of gearing up the development administration in achieving these lofty goals and ambitious targets. Though CSOs engaged themselves in various stages of the PRSP exercise, key players such as the public representatives and political leaders did not show any interest in the exercise. Without the political ownership of the PRSP, there was no clear vision as to how this model would sustain and form a part of the medium-term development plans.



- ii. The ownership of the PRSP, however, was resolved to a great extent once the government of the day revisited the documents, incorporated their priorities in line with their electoral commitment to the people. Thus, the PRSP became a convenient base for moving towards drafting of the Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-15) and the Perspective Plan (2010-21). However, the design of the new national plans did not provide for increased local decision making and control over resources for basic service delivery at the grassroots. Sectoral policies in Bangladesh still remain, to a large extent, dependent on inputs of key external funders involved in a particular sector. This relates to the second lesson learnt from the PRSP experience which concerns the total absence of engagement of CSOs in the design as well as implementation phases of the plan exercise. No mechanism was conceived by the government to deepen the inclusiveness of CSOs in the process in a continuous basis. Admittedly, without public oversight of implementation, outcome of any plan can hardly be improved. However, inclusion of CSO voices and representation presupposes the availability of capacity and degree of accountability of CSOs themselves. Their participation cannot be effective if they are partisan and external funding influences their stance. The government was not ready to fully integrate CSOs in the development planning process as it questioned not only their representativeness and accountability, but also their legitimacy.
- iii. Third, the PRS has shown the limits of CSO engagement in national policy making process. Notwithstanding the leading role of CSOs in commenting on PRSP at the preparatory stage, the contribution of CSOs in the area of substantive issues was not significant. This was not only due to the unwillingness of the policymakers to involve CSOs in the process of preparation of the PRS documents, but also due to the fact that CSOs could not go beyond a general approach to the issues concerned, and get involved in concrete and specific policy issues. With some exceptions, limited analytical capacity of most CSOs with regard to addressing macroeconomic policy and other technical issues, constrained their meaningful participation even when such opportunities were available. So, institutional capacity building of CSOs remained a critically important factor for realising representation and ensuring accountability.
- iv. The fourth lesson relates to the attitude and thought process of development partners themselves who introduced the concept of PRS. Over the years, donors have changed their approach regarding poverty alleviation by recognising the importance of stakeholders' participation in preparing nationally important anti-poverty documents. The realisation that without a home-grown policy document, poverty reduction efforts will largely remain unsuccessful resulting in waste of scarce resources, had been the source of donors' enthusiasm for an effective PRS. This also led to a change from the donors' usual rigid instrumentalist approach to a more accommodative participatory approach. That is, instead of imposing a strategy document underwritten by fund commitment, they realised the importance of putting emphasis on a demand-driven and domestically-owned PRS, which is prepared by the national government enjoying broad-based representativeness and inclusiveness. This lesson continues to remain important even when PRS process has apparently exhausted itself in Bangladesh.
- v. The fifth lesson of the PRS in Bangladesh is that a successful implementation of any development plan requires a well-designed monitoring and evaluation system, which in turn depends on reliable information on the outcome indicators at the macro, sectoral, programme and project levels. Enhanced capacity of concerned ministries, departments and organisations to generate the required data and information is essential for effective assessment of programmes on the basis of which future programmes can be undertaken. In other words, the functions of representation, inclusiveness and accountability cannot be fully discharged without availability of real time credible information. Indeed, legitimacy of the actors may also come under fire if communication is inhibited by lack of relevant information. Thus, in the future, efforts have to be intensified to strengthen the information base for strengthening representative, inclusiveness and accountability roles in the development process.

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