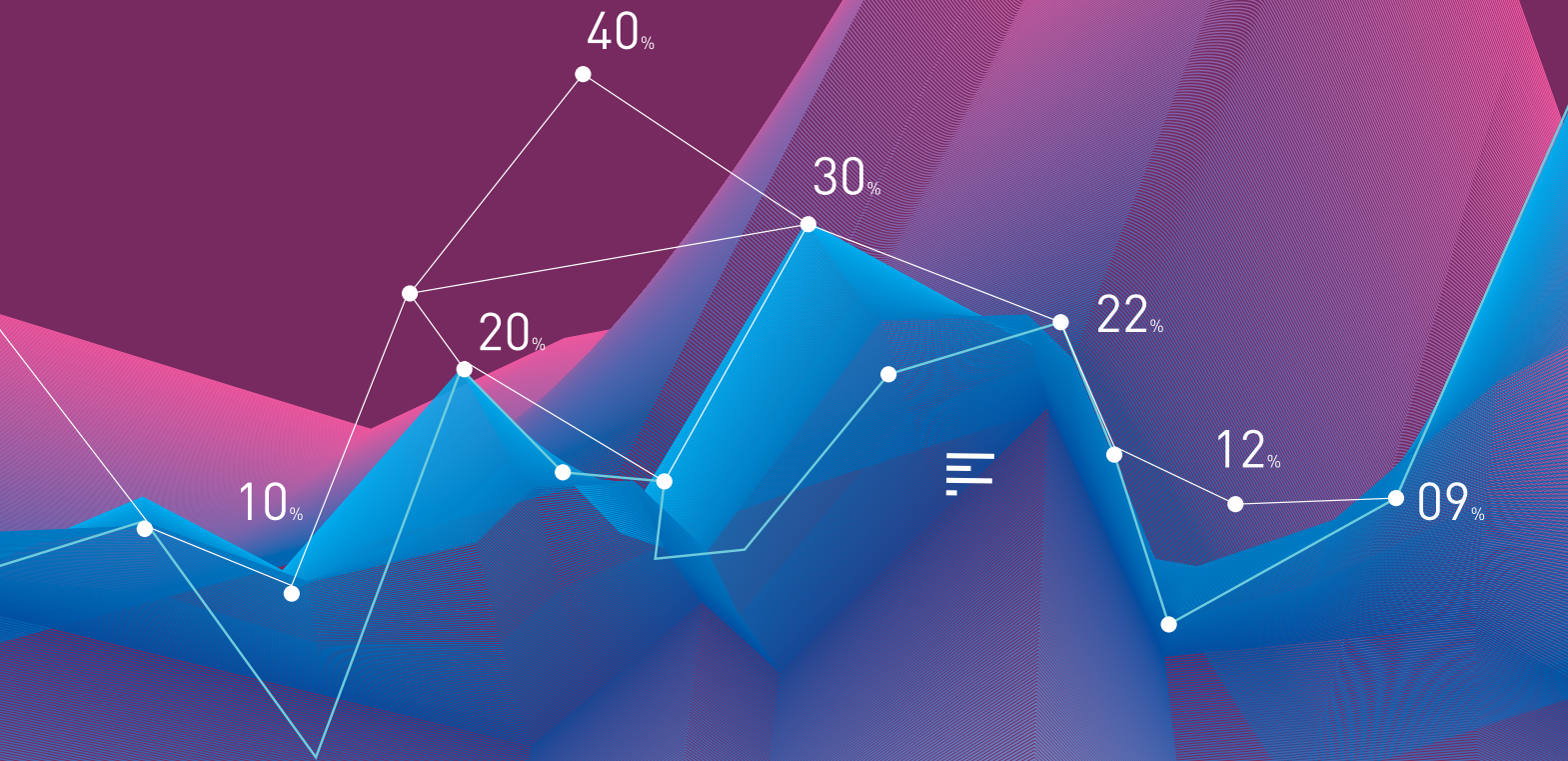# Improved
FISCAL DATA
in Bangladesh
for a transparent and accountable public sector

Debapriya Bhattacharya
Towfiqul Islam Khan
Muntaseer Kamal
Rakshanda Khan

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সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়লগ (সিপিডি)
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

The Asia Foundation

Improved Fiscal Data in Bangladesh for a Transparent and Accountable Public Sector

Debapriya Bhattacharya[*]
Towfiqul Islam Khan
Muntaseer Kamal
Rakshanda Khan

[*]*Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); *Mr Towfiqul Islam Khan*, Senior Research Fellow, CPD; *Mr Muntaseer Kamal*, Research Fellow, CPD; and *Ms Rakshanda Khan*, former Research Associate, CPD.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and The Asia Foundation.

Acknowledgement

Content

List of Tables and Figures

Acronyms

ADP	Annual Development Programme
AFS	Annual Financial Statement
BB	Bangladesh Bank
BDHS	Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria
CBSL	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
CDG	Combined Demand for Grants
CFR	Consolidated Fund Receipts
CGA	Controller General of Accounts
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSV	Comma-separated Values
DPPs	Development Project Proforma/proposals
EPB	Export Promotion Bureau
ERD	Economic Relations Division
FD	Finance Division
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FTE	Fiscal Transparency Evaluation
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
iBAS++	Integrated Budget and Accounting System
IBP	International Budget Partnership
IMED	Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
LDC	Least Developed Country
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MFR	Monthly Fiscal Report
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoSPI	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
MP	Members of Parliament
MRFP	Monthly Report on Fiscal-Macro Position

MS	Microsoft
MTBF	Medium Term Budget Framework
MTMPS	Medium Term Macroeconomic Policy Statement
NAS	National Account Statistics
NBR	National Board of Revenue
NBS	Nigeria Bureau of Statistics
NCS	Nigeria Customs Service
NDP	Nigeran Open Data Portal
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NSC	National Savings Certificate
OBI	Open Budget Index
OBS	Open Budget Survey
PDF	Portable Document Format
PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
PFM	Public Finance Management
RADP	Revised Annual Development Plan
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RTI	Right to Information
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRO	Statutory Regulatory Order
UBS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
URA	Uganda Revenue Authority
VAT	Value Added Tax

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Fiscal transparency and accountability can help attain a number of macroeconomic objectives. It is essential for fostering better macroeconomic stability, improving credit ratings, lowering public debt and deficits, decreasing corruption levels and catalysing high levels of economic growth (Trenovski, 2018). *Kopits and Craig (1998)* argued that fiscal transparency could impact macroeconomic outcomes through financial markets. Transparent and accountable fiscal policy leads to efficient public resource mobilisation and enhanced macroeconomic growth and stability (Okunroumu, 2000). Fiscal transparency can also be helpful in strengthening the credibility of a country's fiscal plans. It can help ensure that the government has an accurate and detailed picture of its finances while making economic decisions, including the costs and benefits of policy changes and potential risks to public finances (IMF, n.d.).

Fiscal transparency and accountability are essential prerequisites for establishing good governance. Indeed, transparency and dissemination of information are critical for different social groups to participate in the budgetary process (Trenovski, 2018). It provides legislatures, markets, and citizens with the necessary information to hold governments accountable (IMF, n.d.). It can also incentivise policymakers to adopt better policies by enhancing public debates on intended policies and establishing accountability as regards their implementation (Arbatli and Escolano, 2015).

Through spotlighting risks to fiscal positions and the fiscal outlook, fiscal transparency can stimulate timely and smooth policy responses to changing economic dynamics and thereby reduce the incidence and severity of crises. Transparency results in enhanced and more plausible policies, a stable policy environment and a quicker reaction during emerging economic downturns, ultimately leading to enhanced economic outcomes (Kopits and Craig, 1998). In fine, fiscal transparency, i.e., full disclosure and timely reporting of fiscal data, is key to maintaining budgetary integrity, effective financial monitoring, promoting participatory debates around fiscal policies, and endorsing accountability in macroeconomic management.

Bangladesh's fiscal reporting system is constrained by a number of challenges, making the performance of key indicators difficult to measure and impeding fiscal transparency. In this connection, it must be mentioned that poor resource mobilisation has seriously hindered the provision of quality services in Bangladesh's public sector (World Bank, 2021). Indeed, the total revenue-GDP ratio and total public expenditure-GDP ratio have been historically low in Bangladesh (CPD, 2021). The divergence between fiscal data provided by the key data suppliers makes the situation more difficult to gauge. The practices of these agencies in terms of methodology, data collection tools, and accounting practices are highlighted as the major causes of this data divergence.

The consistency of accounting practices has been raised as an issue in terms of fiscal data transparency. This issue is evinced in the case of both revenue and expenditure sides of the fiscal framework. Such instances raise questions regarding the reliability, accuracy and harmonisation of the reported data and cause considerable hindrances in the cases of economic projection and planning (See, for example, CPD, 2018). The key players have consistently struggled in data reporting, which poses a serious challenge by increasing time lag in fiscal data and reporting frequency. Current reporting of indicators only includes broadheads pertaining to the sources, but basic breakdowns of these indicators are not readily available. The absence of detailed and disaggregated fiscal data in the public domain could result in a waste of public money and provides opportunities for corruption.

This calls for the mitigation of these challenges to promote fiscal transparency and accountability through a robust public financial management system.

In view of a weak fiscal reporting system[1], Bangladesh's institutional shortcomings interrupt the attainment of fiscal transparency. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made the already complicated situation even more complex. Bangladesh's dual transition via graduation to World Bank's lower middle-income status and upcoming graduation from the least developed country (LDC) group has implications in terms of a higher cost of borrowing for financing development and more difficult conditions for market access. In view of the formidable financing requirement to achieve the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the issues of domestic resource mobilisation and optimal use of resources have re-emerged with greater urgency. Given this context, timely disclosure and delivery of fiscal data in order to ensure and improve public sector transparency and accountability in Bangladesh has become an exigency. Reinforcing current budget transparency laws and improving fiscal institution accountability through a robust public finance reporting system in Bangladesh can tackle issues related to revenue mobilisation, efficient public expenditure and proper allocation of funds.

1.2 Objectives and Scope

In the aforementioned context, the overarching objective of the study is to promote existing budgetary transparency laws and/or practices, open data policies and data for evidence-based decision-making towards improved fiscal institutional accountability and better fiscal governance. Under the overarching objectives, the specific objectives of the study are as below:

i.   To provide an assessment of the state of affairs with regard to the fiscal data ecosystem of Bangladesh
ii. To identify the challenges in the fiscal data ecosystem of Bangladesh, deciphering both the demand side and supply sides issues of the problematique
iii. To contribute toward informed decision-making for promoting openness and transparency of fiscal data

For the purpose of the present study, fiscal data provided by the central government will be focused upon. This study will not evaluate fiscal data provided by the local government in rural or urban areas. The study will focus on the core fiscal data domains, viz. revenue, expenditure, budget deficit, and its financing. Additionally, pseudo-fiscal indicators such as contingent liabilities and public debt will also be discussed. This study will evaluate the fiscal indicators provided by key players such as the Finance Division (FD) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) and the National Board of Revenue (NBR). Among the four pillars[2] of the IMF's fiscal transparency framework, the first pillar of fiscal reporting and the associated components

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[1] In 2015, Bangladesh's score on Open Budget Index was 56, which declined to 41 in 2017 and 36 in 2019. Bangladesh's 2019 score is even lower than the global average of 45.

[2] The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Fiscal Transparency Code consists of four pillars: - Fiscal Reporting, Fiscal Forecasting and Budgeting, Fiscal Risk Analysis and Management and Resource Revenue Management. The fiscal reporting component is associated with the coverage, timeliness, quality and integrity of the fiscal reports such that fiscal reports are provided in a comprehensive, relevant and timely manner. The second pillar of fiscal forecasting and budgeting deals with comprehensiveness, orderliness, policy-orientation and credibility such that government budgetary forecasting is credible and comprehensive. The pillar of fiscal risk analysis and management ensures that governments must disclose, analyse and manage risks to ensure effective coordination of the fiscal actors. The fourth pillar of resource revenue management assures that the collected government revenue is managed and distributed in an open manner (IMF, 2018).

of coverage, timeliness, quality and integrity provides a basis for the analytical framework employed in this study.

1.3 Analytical Framework and Methods

Fiscal transparency comprises accuracy, comprehensiveness, and reliability of government budgets (Alt, Lassen and Skilling, 2002). The government must provide clear information about all aspects of its fiscal policy through a transparent budget process. Publicly accessible and consolidated budgets, as well as those that present consolidated information, make a budget transparent (James and Jargen, 1999). *Kopits and Craigs (1998)* highlighted three dimensions of fiscal transparency. The first dimension relates to the availability of reliable information about the government's fiscal policy intentions and forecasts. The second dimension involves detailed data and information requirements about government operations. The third dimension includes measures that hold officials responsible for their decisions. *Alesina and Perotti (1996)* distinguished the characteristics of a non-transparent reporting system as predicting optimistic outcomes and, forecasting key economic variables and new policy, the tactical decision on which components to add and remove from budget and budget projections. It is difficult to capture all of the dimensions of fiscal transparency with a single indicator, as it involves judgement and perception.

Over the years, assessment frameworks have been developed by various agencies to measure fiscal transparency and accountability. IMF developed an assessment toolkit called the Fiscal Transparency Evaluation (FTE) and a guiding set of principles called the Fiscal Transparency Code to evaluate fiscal transparency and accountability (IMF, 2018). The U.S. Department of State uses a congressionally mandated Fiscal Transparency Reporting tool which states that budgetary documents should be publicly available, substantially complete and reliable (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability's (PEFA) framework for measuring transparency and accountability is based on seven pillars of public financial management (PEFA, 2018). The International Budget Partnership (IBP) issued a budget toolkit called the Open Budget Survey, which assesses the timely release of budgetary information and public engagement over the budgetary process (IBP, 2019).

Among many measures of fiscal transparency, the present study focuses on four dimensions encompassing multiple elements mentioned in the above discussion. These four dimensions, derived from other frameworks, were selected because they are able to adequately capture the complexity of transparency in the case of fiscal reporting. The demand side and supply side of the fiscal data ecosystem will be evaluated based on four 'A's: data availability, accessibility, agility (promptness) and accuracy. These four dimensions will encapsulate the prevailing challenges in the fiscal data ecosystem. A brief description of these four dimensions is provided below:

> ***Availability:*** This dimension will look at whether the variable of interest exists or not. In the case where data is available, the disaggregation of data will be focused upon. PEFA's dimension of "Performance Information of Service Delivery" focuses on the availability, coverage and timeliness of information publication, such that the key performance indicators, outcomes and output are disaggregated by program or function (PEFA, 2018).

> ***Accessibility:*** The data should be available in the public domain. In the scenario where the data is not available in the public domain, the data should be reachable through government agencies or in accordance with the Right to Information (RTI) act. The OBS defines "publicly available" as a document published on the relevant government website in a timely fashion

and is available free of charge. The OBS requires all budget documents to be publicly available as an integral criterion of the transparency index (IBP, 2019). The US Department of State's transparency framework assesses budget documents on the "Publicly Available" dimension. This criterion is defined as completed budget documents being widely available in the public domain, such as government offices or libraries, government publications or mass media channels (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Agility **(Timeliness):** The data should be reported in a timely manner. This involves data reporting frequency and data reporting time lag. FTE's first pillar of fiscal reporting has a "Frequency and Timeliness" dimension, which indicates that all fiscal reports should be published in a frequent, regular and timely manner (IMF, 2018).

Accuracy: The fiscal data should be harmonised across various sources. The data available from a specific source should be congruent to other macroeconomic indicators. FTE has a "Comparability of Fiscal Data" dimension which states that fiscal data, forecasts and budgets should be presented on a comparable basis with any deviations explained in an appropriate manner (IMF, 2018). PEFA's framework highlights a robust classification system where accounting and budget classifications must be consistently applied such that data users can be confident that information recorded against one classification will appear in other reports under the same classification (PEFA, 2018).

The present study attempts to capture the abovementioned four dimensions by considering a number of components and sub-components. Each component can be described through the use of a question and can be related to one or more sub-components. These interconnections have been presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Components and Sub-components of the 4A Framework

Dimension	Components	Sub-components
Availability	*Existence* Main question: Does the variable of interest exist?	• Available through website search or via contact with relevant authorities
	Recognisability Main question: Is the user able to "recognise" or "identify" the dataset?	• Availability of metadata, titles, glossary, resource description etc.
	Disaggregation Main question: What is the adequacy of disaggregated data?	• Disaggregation by components, sub-components, income status, gender, ministry/sector, economic classification etc.
	Use of proxy indicators Main question: In the absence of required data, can users use proxy indicators to meet the user's needs?	• Availability of proxy indicators
Accessibility	*Degree of access to data* Main question: Once a data set is found, does the user have physical access to it?	• Open access • Restricted access but access granted after registration • Restricted access (but access can be requested but not always granted)

(Table 1.1 contd.)

(Table 1.1 contd.)

Dimension	Components	Sub-components
	In the case of restricted data Main question: If there is restricted access, what the is the degree of accessibility?	• No access to downloadable data • Affordability of data fees
	Sorting of data Main question: Can the data be sorted by dimensions?	• An interactive user interface that can accommodate various sorting functions
	Functionality of data Main question: How clearly are the data presented to all users?	• Statistics presented in a clear and understandable manner • Format of the document (scanned images/pdf) • Use of generic data tables vs data visualisation • Multilinguality of the data
	Reproducibility of the data Main question: Is the user able to copy the data?	• Whether the data can be copied easily
Agility (Timeliness)	*Timeliness* Main question: Is the data released in a timely manner?	• Timeline targets set by the institutions
	Frequency Main question: Is the data up to date?	• Reporting frequency of the dataset
	Long term availability Main question: Is there continuous availability of the data set (recent as well as historical versions)?	• Whether historical datasets have been uploaded in a timely manner
	Content accuracy Main question: Is the content confirmed by other independent sources? *Data harmonisation* Main question: Is the data harmonised between sources?	• Evaluate the same data published by different sources (data discrepancy between sources)
Accuracy	*Standardisation* Main question: Are the data produced using common standards with respect to definitions, classification and units?	• Evaluate the same data published by different sources • Common standards or procedures used for statistical comparability • National and International Standards
	Comparability Main question: How comparable are the data over time?	• Extent to which statistics derived from the same source and different periodicities are comparable • Extent to which statistics derived from different sources over time are comparable • Explanation for methodological changes

Source: Author's elaboration.

With regards to the current study, the supply side of the problematique covers the policies, practices and performance of Bangladesh's fiscal data suppliers. The key actors include the MoF, Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), and the National Board of Revenue (NBR). The demand side consists of major users of fiscal data, including public representatives, policy experts, development partners and media personnel.

The supply side of the fiscal data ecosystem is assessed through a review of secondary literature and cross-country analysis. Mapping of fiscal indicators from key players is an essential unit of analysis to evaluate the practices and performance of key actors [e.g., MoF, IMED, NBR). On the demand side, collective and individual interviews of fiscal data users are carried out in the form of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The analytical framework, connecting the objectives of the study, methods to attain them and outputs are presented in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2: Analytical Framework of the Study

Objective	Methodology	Output
1. To assess the state of affairs with regards to the fiscal data ecosystem in Bangladesh	*Supply Side* Mapping of fiscal indicators available from key players (MoF, IMED and NBR) through secondary literature reviews	Detecting the existing state of fiscal indicators (revenue, public expenditure and deficit financing) as available from the key players using the 4A framework
	Demand Side FGD and KII of fiscal data users and producers	Understanding stakeholders' use of fiscal data Assessing their opinions regarding the current state of affairs
2. To identify the challenges in the fiscal data ecosystem of Bangladesh deciphering both the demand side and supply sides issues of the problematique	*Supply Side* Mapping of fiscal indicators available from key players (MoF, IMED and NBR) through secondary literature reviews	Detecting and understanding changes in trends related to fiscal indicators with respect to the 4As, viz. accuracy, accessibility, agility and availability
	Supply Side Cross country analysis using the Open Budget Index (OBI) Countries to be assessed - India, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda	Comparison of data transparency and accountability in countries with similar institutions as Bangladesh
	Demand Side FGD and KII of fiscal data users and producers	Consolidate the perception of stakeholders regarding the challenges of the fiscal data ecosystem
3. To contribute towards informed decision making for promoting openness and transparency of fiscal data	Findings from objective (i) and (ii) will be clustered according to the '4A's in order to offer policy recommendations and suggestions	Policy recommendations and suggestions for key players in the data reporting stage

Source: Authors' elaboration.

1.4 Layout of the Paper

Following the introductory section, Section 2 covers the state of the fiscal data in Bangladesh through a mapping exercise. The three domains of fiscal indicators (viz. revenue, public expenditure) as well as pseudo fiscal indicators (e.g., contingent liabilities and public debt) will be mapped using the 4A framework. Section 3 will apply the 4A framework to the fiscal data sources of India, Nigeria, Uganda and Sri Lanka and provide a cross-country comparison taking Bangladesh as the benchmark. Furthermore, this section will analyse the Open Budget Survey (OBS) performance of the aforementioned countries to compare their financial transparency and accountability scenario. Section 4 will highlight the issues and challenges concerning fiscal data in terms of data availability, accessibility, agility and accuracy. This section will also explore the issue of data use in policymaking. Finally, Section 5 will conclude with a summary of observations and recommendations.

SECTION 2: STATE OF AFFAIRS OF FISCAL DATA IN BANGLADESH

The fiscal data ecosystem consists of the supply side and the demand side. The supply side of the ecosystem generally provides fiscal data at an aggregate level, which is collected at regular intervals. Regular and standardised reporting facilitates both cross-sectional and intertemporal comparison (Ardic, Imboden and Latortue, 2013). The public availability of fiscal data instigates greater accountability in enhancing public understanding of the government's utilisation of public resources. The release of easily accessible and regularly updated data decreases the cost of finding the data for the various stakeholders, viz. private sector, citizens, and academicians (World Bank, 2020). The supply side sources may vary in terms of the period of reporting, disaggregation of components, and availability of data in critical areas.

In the case of Bangladesh, the key sources of fiscal data include the MoF, National Board of Revenue (NBR), Bangladesh Bank (BB) and Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED). Some fiscal data can also be obtained from Economic Relations Division (ERD), Offices of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and Controller General of Accounts (CGA). In this section, the fiscal data available from the aforementioned sources have been divided into two groups: core fiscal indicators and pseudo fiscal indicators. The core fiscal indicators relate to revenue earnings, public expenditure, budget deficit and its financing. While the term 'pseudo fiscal indicator' is not widely used, for the purpose of this study, it has been applied to encompass indicators which can indirectly capture the fiscal status of a country. Such indicators may include contingent liabilities and public debt. A comprehensive mapping exercise involving the aforementioned government agencies and indicators has been carried out to assess the supply side of the fiscal data ecosystem in Bangladesh.

2.1 Mapping of Core Fiscal Indicators in Bangladesh

A mapping exercise was conducted to assess the availability, accessibility, agility and accuracy of the core fiscal indicators of Bangladesh. A brief overview of these indicators under the three main domains, viz. revenue, public expenditure and deficit financing, has been presented in Figure 2.1. The main sources of data for the three domains include the Finance Division (FD) of the MoF, NBR, IMED and Bangladesh Bank (BB). While the FD of the MoF reports data on all three domains, NBR provides data on revenue mobilisation (by the NBR), IMED reports on development expenditure, and BB provides some on revenue mobilisation and deficit financing. The websites of these agencies were thoroughly examined to review all available relevant documents.

Figure 2.1: The Core Fiscal Data Domains

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │  Core fiscal data domains │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
           ┌────────────────────┬──────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
│ Revenue earnings │  │ Public expenditure │  │  Budget deficit  │
│                  │  │                    │  │  and financing   │
└──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
   ┌────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
   │ Tax revenue│        │Operating expenditure│  │Domestic source│
   └────────────┘        └──────────────────┘    └──────────────┘
   ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
   │Non-tax revenue│     │   Development     │    │ Foreign source│
   └──────────────┘      │   expenditure     │    └──────────────┘
                         └──────────────────┘
                         ┌──────────────────┐
                         │ Other expenditure │
                         └──────────────────┘
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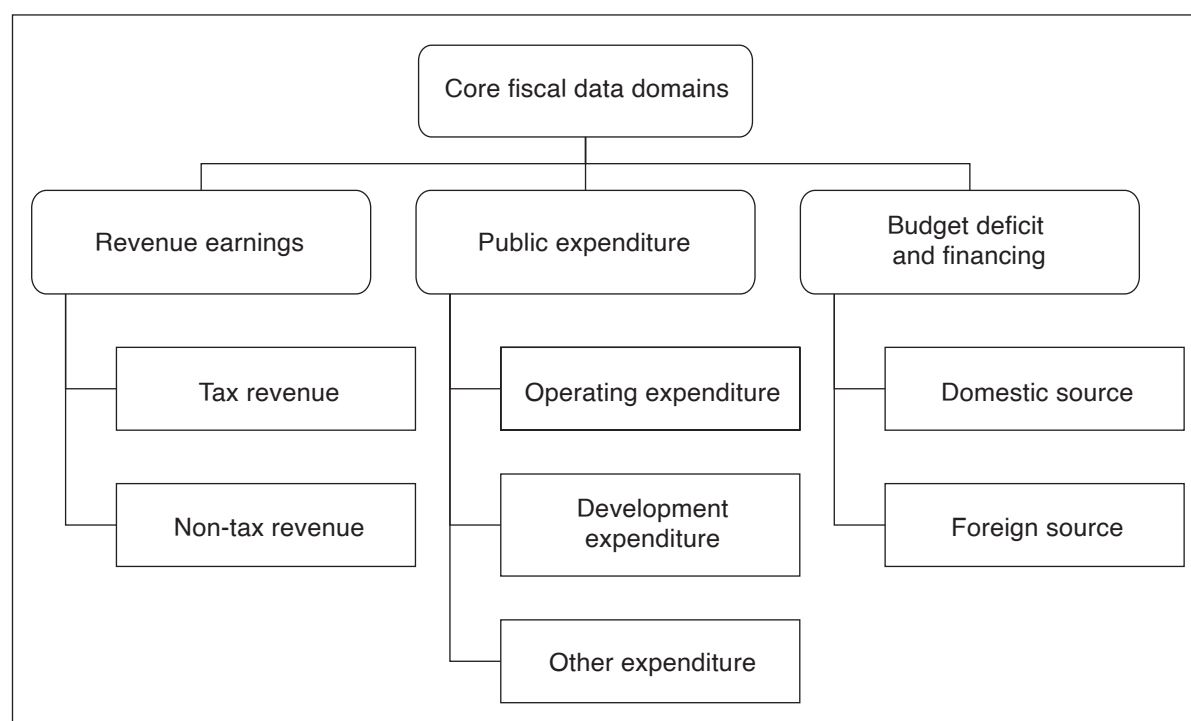
Source: Authors' elaboration.

2.1.1 Availability

The core fiscal data available for Bangladesh can be classified into four broad categories, which include (i) medium-term targets, (ii) budgetary targets, (iii) revised budgetary targets, and (iv) actual attainments. Amongst the documents reviewed as part of this study, only two viz. Medium Term Budget Framework (MTBF) and Medium Term Macroeconomic Policy Statement (MTMPS) provide medium-term targets (three years) related to public finance. Both of these documents are published during the announcement of the national budget in Bangladesh. Besides these two documents, medium-term targets can also be found in the national five-year plans. The practice of providing three-year targets was initiated during the era of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as part of the Public Finance Management (PFM) reform program. The budgetary targets for the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY) and the revised budgetary targets for the ongoing FY are also announced and made public during the budget session in the parliament - typically held during the first week of June. The aforementioned three categories of data are usually available on an annual basis. The actual attainments related to fiscal data can be available on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

In the cases of fiscal data available for Bangladesh, disaggregation may differ by reporting sources, within sources, reporting frequency and lenses used for disaggregation. Fiscal data is oftentimes disaggregated according to the ministries/divisions of the government which are involved with a particular domain of public finance. The second lens of disaggregation relates to economic classification or purpose. Geographical disaggregation is mostly unavailable apart from the annual report produced by NBR. Some budgetary data disaggregated by poverty, gender, climate, child etc. are also available. However, their availability may vary over time. Comprehensive budget allocation estimates for other marginalised groups are not available. The highest level of disaggregation for revenue-related data can be found in terms of location and is available on an annual basis. In

the case of expenditure related data, the highest level of disaggregation is available in terms of ministries/divisions and can be found on a monthly basis. Deficit financing is generally reported according to the economic classification.

The fiscal indicators related to the revenue domain are available from MoF, NBR, BB and CGA. Revenue related indicators can be broadly divided into two categories, viz. tax and non-tax revenue. These categories can be further disaggregated to their constituting components (Figure 2.2).

The MoF, being the natural lead agency in terms of providing fiscal data, produces several documents related to the revenue domain. The budget documents published by the MoF mostly illustrate the budgetary and medium-term targets in the area of revenue. The budgetary documents titled "Consolidated Fund Receipts (CFR)" and "Annual Financial Statement (AFS)" are the only sources that provide revenue related data disaggregated by both economic classification and ministries/ divisions in charge of the collection. The MoF publishes two monthly documents for monitoring the implementation of the budget, viz. the Monthly Fiscal Report (MFR) and the Monthly Report on

Figure 2.2: Classification of Revenue Related Indicators in Bangladesh
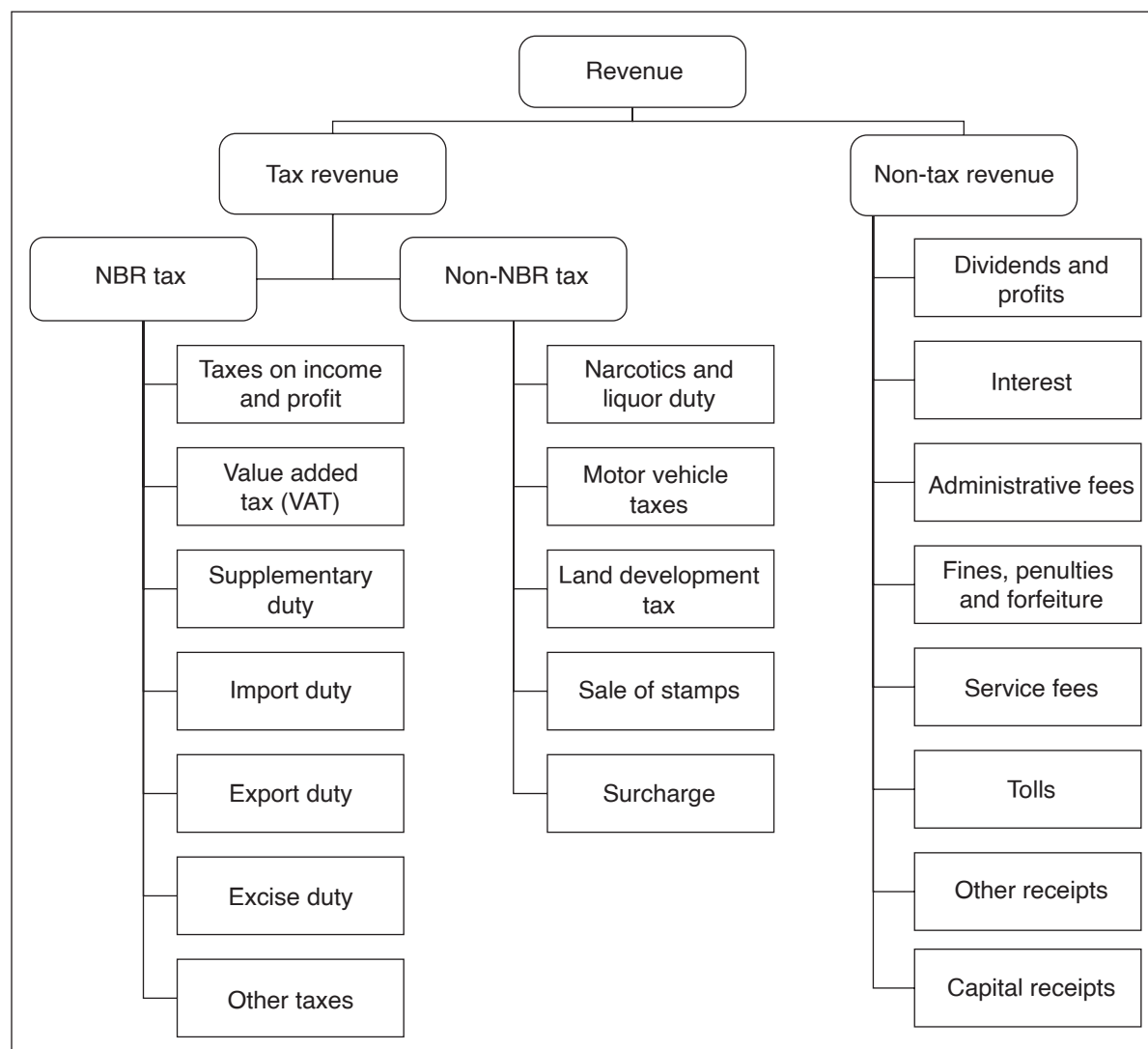
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Fiscal-Macro Position (MRFP). While the MFR disaggregates the revenue related data as per the classification shown in Figure 2.2, the MRFP only reports aggregated data under three broad heads, viz. NBR tax, non-NBR tax and non-tax revenue. The MoF has started to publish a Quarterly Budget Execution Report from FY2020–21. This document provides aggregated revenue data under three broad heads (NBR tax, non-NBR tax and non-tax revenue) alongside reporting an agency-wise breakdown of the collected revenue.

NBR produces two documents as regards the revenue mobilised by the Board itself. The monthly report provides revenue collection data according to the broad heads illustrated in Figure 2.2. The annual report contains data in a more disaggregated form, particularly in terms of geographical location, as it reports data by tax zones, customs points and commissionerates. For instance, revenue collected through supplementary duty, VAT, excise duty and turn-over taxes are geographically segmented according to customs points and commissionerates along with their respective budgetary targets, actual implementation and rate of implementation shown in monthly increments. Besides reporting revenue mobilised by NBR, the annual report also provides aggregated data on non-NBR tax and non-tax revenue.

BB publishes five documents that provide public finance data, including revenue mobilisation. The frequency of these publications varies from weekly to annual basis. However, no weekly data on public finance is reported. The weekly publication titled "Selected Indicators" presents monthly tax revenue collection data. The monthly reports titled "Monthly Economic Trends and Major Economic Indicators" present revenue data in a somewhat concise version of the classification shown in Figure 2.2 (i.e., some elements are aggregated while others remain as they were). The Bangladesh Bank Quarterly exhibits the trends in revenue mobilisation through graphs only. The annual report of BB follows the disaggregation presented in Figure 2.2.

The fiscal data pertaining to public expenditure can be found from MoF, IMED of the Ministry of Planning (MoP), BB and CGA. These can be divided into three broad categories, viz. operating expenditure, development expenditure and other expenditure. All these categories are comprised of a number of elements. A summary picture of these is presented in Figure 2.3.

MoF, once again, is the primary source of information when it comes to public expenditure data. The budget documents provide medium-term and budgetary targets related to public expenditure, which are generally disaggregated by economic classification and government agencies. The budget documents titled "Budget in Brief", Combined Demand for Grants (CDG) and Annual financial Statement (AFS) provide data related to public expenditure, which are disaggregated by both economic classification and government agencies due to spending the budgetary allocations. In fact, all government agencies are involved with the expenditure block. Amongst the two monthly reports produced by the MoF, the MFR presents public expenditure data as per the classification shown in Figure 2.3. The MFR also reports both operating and development expenditures by sectors and ministries/divisions of the government. On the other hand, the MRFP reports data on a somewhat abridged version of the aforementioned classification system. The Quarterly Budget Execution Report by MoF also follows an abridged classification system besides reporting government agency-wise data. It has to be noted that only the MFR provides granular details pertaining to the operating side of public expenditure.

The Ministry of Planning (MoP) formulates the ADP and the Revised ADP (RADP), while the MoP's IMED produces the implementation status reports of the ADP. The ADP document is in fact a budget document, while the RADP document can be considered a revised budget document. The ADP

Figure 2.3: Classification of Public Expenditure Indicators in Bangladesh

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                          ┌─────────────────────┐
                          │ Public expenditure  │
                          └─────────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────────┬──────────────────────────┬────────────────────┐
┌───────────────┐      ┌───────────────────┐      ┌───────────────────┐
│   Operating   │      │   Development     │      │      Other        │
│  expenditure  │      │   expenditure     │      │   expenditure     │
└───────────────┘      └───────────────────┘      └───────────────────┘
```

Recurrent expenditure	Capital expenditure

Development expenditure branches:
- Development programme financed from revenue budget
- Non-ADP project
- Annual Development Programme (ADP)
- Non-ADP FFW and transfer

Recurrent expenditure branches:
- Pay and allowances
- Goods and services
- Interest payments
- Subsidies and incentives and current transfers
- Block allocation

Capital expenditure branches:
- Acquisition of assets and works
- Investments in shares and equities

Other expenditure branches:
- Net outlay for food account operation
- Loans and advances

Source: Authors' elaboration.

document reports the resource allocation for various development projects taken by the government under 15 sectors, which, in turn, are comprised of several government agencies. The ADP document also mentions the sources of funds for these projects, which include the government's own allocation in local currency, project aid received from development partners and self-financing by autonomous bodies. The RADP document provides the revised resource allocations with the same levels of disaggregation. The Monthly Progress Report produced by the IMED presents ministry/division-wise allocation, actual expenditure and implementation rate on a monthly basis. The Annual Progress Report by IMED provides ADP implementation rates at the sector, ministry/division, and project levels. This report also provides lists of government agencies which are underutilising the APD resources allocated for them. Furthermore, it also presents lists of projects with zero financial progress and zero physical progress.

Amongst the reports produced by BB, the Bangladesh Bank Quarterly presents trends of public expenditure in a graphical manner using three broad level indicators, viz. operating expenditure, ADP expenditure and other expenditure. Besides mentioning these three indicators, the annual report by BB also publishes data on sectoral share in ADP expenditure and the composition of

Figure 2.4: Classification of Deficit Financing Related Indicators in Bangladesh
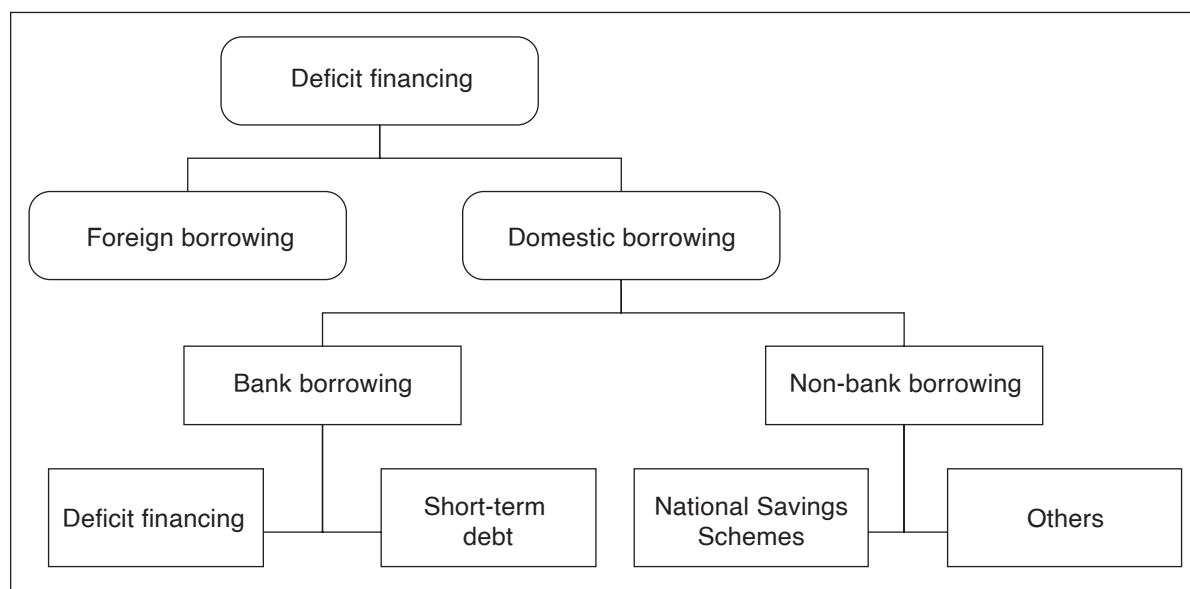
Source: Authors' elaboration.

revenue expenditure. The high-frequency reports by BB do not provide any data related to public expenditure.

The MoF and BB are the two sources that provide data related to the deficit financing domain of public finance. The related documents provide data on sources of deficit financing and repayment. The sources can be divided into two broad categories, viz. foreign and domestic, which, in turn, can be disaggregated according to Figure 2.4.

The budget documents by MoF provide annual and medium-term targets related to deficit financing and sources of financing. The MFR by MoF presents deficit financing data according to the classification in Figure 2.4 on a monthly basis. The MRFP records deficit financing data in broad heads such as foreign borrowing and domestic borrowing (including bank and non-bank borrowing). It also provides data on the sale of National Savings Certificates (NSCs). The Quarterly Budget Execution Report by MoF displays deficit financing data as per Figure 2.4.

The BB document titled "Major Economic Indicators" publishes data on deficit financing according to the disaggregation shown in Figure 2.4. Besides, it provides data on the net sale of NSCs and outstanding domestic debt. The Bangladesh Bank Quarterly provides a graphical representation of sources of deficit financing. The annual report of BB publishes deficit financing related data in both graphical and tabular format. The data in this report is provided in a more aggregated manner using only the broad heads.

2.1.2 Accessibility

As discussed in Section 1, the present study attempts to assess 'accessibility' of fiscal data in terms of users' ease of access, ability to sort, ability to recognise, and ability to reproduce the desired data. All of the reports produced by the provider agencies are available in PDF format, which hinders the general user's ability to reproduce (i.e., copy-paste) any information. A certain level of technical skill, along with a specific type of software, becomes essential in this regard. The monthly reports

produced by NBR and IMED are often provided in a script that cannot be reproduced. Sometimes the reports provided by MoF exhibit the same problem. In such cases, the user must go through a time-consuming manual data entry process that could be prone to errors. Among the reports reviewed as part of this study, only BB's Monthly Economic Trends is published in both PDF and Excel formats. Regrettably, the only fiscal data provided by this source is related to revenue.

A major commonality exits amongst all the sources such that the searchability of data within their website is limited. For instance, the MoF website returns a blank page when searching for the core data domains (i.e., revenue, expenditure, and deficit). All the sources exhibit similarity in terms of the websites having a non-interactive web interface such that the data cannot be sorted.

The monthly reports from NBR and IMED are available in Bangla only. Certain reports produced by the MoF are in English only. Selected budget documents by MoF and the annual report by BB belong to a handful of documents which are available in both Bangla and English. It is quite obvious that multilingual documents increase the ability of various stakeholders to use them.

Some reports published by the MoF and BB have various forms of data visualisation, including graphs, bar charts and pie charts, which increases a user's understandability of the data. For example, the annual report published by the BB uses a pie chart to show the composition of tax revenue, while MRFP by MoF uses a bar graph along with trend lines to show revenue mobilisation growth over time. Thus, other data providers such as IMED and NBR could invest in resources that could incorporate data visualisation aspects into their reports to increase user-friendliness.

2.1.3 Agility

A transparent and accountable fiscal data ecosystem requires timely reporting and publication of fiscal data as prerequisites. In terms of agility, the expenditure domain is performing the worst. A source-wise comparison reveals that the BB reported the most updated monthly data while MoF had the least updated monthly data pertaining to FY2021–22 (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Timeliness of Key Documents

Agency	Document name	Frequency	Related domain(s)	Availability on Web as of 20 February 2022	Comment
MoF	Monthly Fiscal Report	Monthly	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	June 2021	Time lag of seven months
	Monthly Report on Fiscal-Macro Position	Monthly	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	June 2021	Time lag of seven months
	Quarterly Budget Execution Report	Quarterly	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	December 2021	Updated
	Year End Fiscal Report	Annual	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	FY2014–15	Time lag of six years
	Bangladesh Economic Review	Annual	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	FY2020–21	Updated

(Table 2.1 contd.)

(Table 2.1 contd.)

Agency	Document name	Frequency	Related domain(s)	Availability on Web as of 20 February 2022	Comment
	Budget documents	Annual	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	FY2021–22	Updated
NBR	Monthly Report on Revenue Collection	Monthly	Revenue	December 2021	Time lag of one month
	Annual Report	Annual	Revenue	FY2019–20	Time lag of one year
IMED	Monthly Progress Report	Monthly	Expenditure	December 2021	Time lag of one month
	Annual Progress Report	Annual	Expenditure	FY2019–20	Time lag of one year
BB	Selected Economic Indicators	Weekly	Revenue	Report has been published timely but with December 2021 data	Time lag of one month
	Monthly Economic Trends	Monthly	Revenue	Report has been published timely but with November 2021 data	Time lag of two months
	Major Economic Indicators	Monthly	Revenue and deficit financing	Report has been published timely but with November 2021 data	Time lag of two months
	Bangladesh Bank Quarterly	Quarterly	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	Report has been published timely but with September 2021 data	Time lag of four months
	Annual Report	Annual	Revenue, expenditure and deficit financing	FY2019–20	Time lag of one year

Source: Authors' compilation based on documents from MoF, NBR, IMED and BB.

As can be seen from the above table, the monthly reports produced by the MoF (i.e., MFR and MRFP) are performing the worst in terms of agility. At the time of writing this report (February 2022), MoF had no monthly report corresponding to the ongoing FY2021–22—indicating a time lag of seven months. While the earliest available issue of the MFR on the MoF website is from March 2008, the earliest MRFP is from July 2008. One major problem that is faced in the case of long-term availability is that older monthly reports are often removed from the MoF website. On a positive note, the Quarterly Budget Execution Report by MoF is available for the latest possible period, i.e. the second quarter of FY2021–22. Amongst the yearly reports, the Bangladesh Economic Review is also available for the latest possible period. The long-term availability of this document is also

impressive, from 2005 to 2021, barring 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the contrary, the Year End Fiscal Report is only available for the FY2011–12 to FY2014–15 period, which implies a whopping six-year time lag for the latest available report. The budget documents are published online in due time. These documents are generally uploaded to the MoF website on the day the national budget is presented in front of the parliament.

For both NBR and IMED, the latest monthly report was from December 2021, indicating a time lag of one month. These two agencies are somewhat punctual when it comes to reporting fiscal data. However, it must be kept in mind that both these agencies only report data on parts of the fiscal framework. The annual reports by both NBR and IMED is from FY2019–20, indicating a time lag of one year. BB has generally been punctual when it comes to the publication of their reports of various frequencies. However, the fiscal data reported in these documents generally involve some time lag. For instance, the January 2022 issue of the Major Economic Indicators report provides NBR tax collection and deficit financing data for November 2021. The annual report published by BB involves a time lag of one year.

It must be noted that the publication date is not generally mentioned in these reports. This is also true for the web upload date within the websites of the data providers. This poses a challenge in the case of quantifying time lag in publishing reports.

2.1.4 Accuracy

The accuracy of fiscal data in Bangladesh has been repeatedly brought under scrutiny as different sources published mismatching figures for the same indicator for a particular time and the same source published different figures for the same indicator over time. This is particularly prevalent in the cases of providing year-end values for fiscal indicators. Medina (2015) states that such inconsistencies induce uncertainties in fiscal policymaking and hinder transparency and accountability. Indeed, the government's Public Financial Management (PFM) Action Plan 2018-2023 correctly identifies that inaccurate data makes macro-modelling less dependable, resulting in spending and income shortages relative to the budgetary targets (MoF, 2018).

Data discrepancy related to the core fiscal data domains has been illustrated using the following examples (Tables 2.2–2.4). Data on revenue collected by the NBR is reported independently by the NBR itself and MoF. As can be seen from Table 2.2, data discrepancy has been a recurring phenomenon for the periods under consideration.

Table 2.2: NBR Tax Collection: Data Discrepancy between Sources

Year	MoF	NBR	Difference	Departure (in %) from MoF
	In crore Tk.			
FY17	171,639	171,656	17	0.01
FY18	187,103	202,313	15,210	8.13
FY19	218,622	223,462	4,840	2.21
FY20	216,037	216,452	415	0.19
FY21	263,872	259,867	-4,005	-1.52

Source: Compiled and calculated using data from MoF and NBR.

Data on ADP expenditure is reported by both IMED and MoF. A similar trend of data discrepancy is noticed within the expenditure domain, where there are data mismatches between sources (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: ADP Expenditure: Data Discrepancy between Sources

Year	MoF	IMED	Difference	Departure (in %) from MoF
	In crore Tk.			
FY17	83,500	100,414	16,914	20.26
FY18	119,538	139,234	19,696	16.48
FY19	147,287	158,269	10,982	7.46
FY20	155,421	154,977	-444	-0.29
FY21	159,648	164,440	4,792	3.00

Source: Compiled and calculated using data from MoF and IMED.

The budget deficit data domain experiences similar data discrepancies as the other data domains (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Deficit Financing: Data Discrepancy between Sources

Year	MoF	BB	Difference	Departure (in %) from MoF
	In crore Tk.			
FY17	66,003	57,084	-8,919	-13.51
FY18	104,624	87,540	-17,084	-16.33
FY19	138,170	114,282	-23,888	-17.29
FY20	151,402	140,893	-10,509	-6.94
FY21	122,501	83,984	-38,517	-31.44

Source: Compiled and calculated using data from MoF and BB.

The possible reasons behind data discrepancy may include differences in data collection methodology and sources, differences in the definitions of indicators, and differences in time lag in reporting. For instance, the discrepancy in NBR tax collection could be attributed to factors such as duplication in the recording of the same 'chalan' (treasury receipt) by several commissionerates, as well as counting collections twice: once on the basis of an estimated amount from a taxpayer, and then again after receiving the actual chalan. Oftentimes, tax collected at the source is not properly deposited in the exchequer (The Daily Star, 2018; Mala, 2018). As was revealed during the debriefings with fiscal data experts, sometimes ADP related expenditures which have been directly incurred by the international development partners are reported late. This creates some discrepancies between the figures provided by MoF and IMED. It was also found during the debriefings that the definitions of deficit financing used by MoF and BB are different. This results in data mismatches, as reported in Table 2.4 above.

Such discrepancies may create confusion while taking policy actions. Stakeholders often opt for more readily available data and forgo the accuracy and credibility aspects. In the past, it has been observed that when the relevant government agencies come together and reconcile their data, the data mismatches can be minimised. For example, after a large discrepancy in the NBR tax collection data for FY2016–17 was found between NBR and MoF, a joint working group was formed comprising

NBR and MoF officials to resolve the issue. A coordination meeting with the FD of MoF and CGA was proposed by NBR. These, perhaps, ultimately resulted in the somewhat lower discrepancy found in the FY2016–17 data, as can be seen in Table 2.2.

Given that the Integrated Budget and Accounting System (iBAS++) of the MoF is based on an accounting mechanism, there is limited scope for any type of double counting and misreporting within this system. Hence, the data reported through this system should be more accurate. If iBAS++ data can be made available more widely and in a timely manner, the quality of public finance data can be improved.

2.2 Selected Pseudo Fiscal Indicators in Bangladesh

The pseudo fiscal considered for this study include public debt and contingent liability. Two government agencies viz. FD and the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the MoF are the main sources of these data.

2.2.1 Availability

The MTMPS produced by the FD of MoF reports public debt under two broad heads, viz. domestic debt and external debt. This document provides actual figures, budgetary targets and medium-term projections (three years) for the aforementioned two broad heads, both as monetary value and as a percentage of GDP. ERD is one of the four divisions of the MoF that deals with external resources for budget deficit financing. The ERD publication titled "Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh" provides yearly time series data on foreign grants, loans, amortisations, and interest payments. Data on external debt position and debt service liabilities are also available from this document. However, project-specific information is not available from this source.

Data pertaining to contingent liability is briefly mentioned in the MTMPS. In this document, the face value of government guarantees/counter guarantees and the outstanding amount of loan against these guarantees are mentioned. This loan amount is mentioned both as a percentage of the projected GDP and the expected public expenditure in the upcoming fiscal year. A brief sectoral breakdown of contingent liabilities is also provided in the MTMPS. A detailed list of the government guarantees can be found in Statement VI of the Budget in Brief document. This document lists the individual guarantees under different sectors and provides information pertaining to purpose, recipient, issue date, extension date, and outstanding amount of the guarantees.

2.2.2 Accessibility

The MTMPS document is uploaded on the MoF website in PDF format. The data embedded in the document has to be copied according to the format provided in the report. This hinders the ability of the users to sort and reproduce the data according to their convenience. The document provides some data visualisation, e.g., a graph showing medium-term outlook of debt stock as per cent of GDP. The aforesaid list of government guarantees from the Budget in Brief document is available in PDF format. However, oftentimes this list can be difficult to find without prior knowledge as it is hosted inside Statement VI, which is titled "Loans & Advances and Other Operating Expenditure". The aforementioned ERD document is also uploaded in PDF format. The data on this report is presented in a tabular format.

2.2.3 Agility

The MTMPS, being an annual publication, is provided during the announcement of the national budget. Barring the issues for FY2021–22 and FY2014–15, this document is not available for other years on the MoF website. The ERD publication Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh is generally uploaded once every year on the ERD website. Unfortunately, when the latest issue is uploaded, the older issue gets taken down from the ERD website. The unavailability of reports across years somewhat hinders the ability for intertemporal comparison in the case of both aforementioned documents.

2.2.4 Accuracy

The unavailability of reports across time and sources diminishes the ability of users to compare the data presented in these reports. It is also hard to compare data as audited data is not readily available in this context.

SECTION 3: BANGLADESH'S FISCAL DATA SITUATION ON A CROSS-COUNTRY SCALE

A cross-country comparison can be a useful tool for assessing a country's performance on a relative scale. For the purpose of the present study, four countries besides Bangladesh have been selected based on their development status (e.g., per capita income), geographical locations, statistical capacity and institutional similarity. The countries include India, Nigeria, Sri-Lanka and Uganda. The information pertaining to the state of fiscal data in these countries has been clustered using the '4A' framework. Also, data and information from the Open Budget Survey (OBS) have been analysed to focus on issues pertaining to transparency and public participation.

3.1 Mapping of Fiscal Indicators

For this subsection, the official government sources which provide fiscal data in the aforementioned countries will be reviewed while considering data sources from Bangladesh as benchmarks. It must be noted that this review process will not exhaustively examine each and every document, as it might prove to be an unwieldy exercise. For India, fiscal data sources for the central government will be considered. Such sources include the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) of India, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Indian MoF's Union Budget documents and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Nigeria's primary sources of fiscal data include the Nigeran Open Data Portal (NDP) - a subsidiary website of the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigerian budget documents and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Nigerian fiscal data is available at the federal, state and local levels. For the purpose of this study, only the federal sources will be considered. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) and sub-divisions under the Sri Lankan MoF are the main sources of fiscal data and the budgetary documents which will be considered for this study. For Uganda, central government data provided by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBS), Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development will be considered.

3.1.1 Availability

If yearly reporting is considered, it can be observed from the cross-country mapping that Bangladesh's performance is lagging that of India, Sri Lanka and Uganda in terms of the availability of revenue-related indicators.

Both Indian and Sri Lankan sources use a state/province-wise breakdown of the revenue component. Indian sources usually present revenue-related data under two broad heads, viz. revenue receipts and capital receipts, while Bangladeshi sources disaggregate revenue by taxes and non-taxes. Compared to Bangladeshi sources, Indian yearly sources use a higher number and variety of components for disaggregation under each broad head. The annual reports by the Indian CGA provide data on capital and revenue receipts using sub-headers such as goods and services tax (GST); taxes on property, capital and other transactions; taxes on commodities and services other than GST; and non-tax revenue. These are further disaggregated into their constituting components. For instance, taxes on property, capital and other transactions contain components such as land revenue, stamp and registration fees, taxes on wealth etc. The revenue collection data is further disaggregated using minor heads and economic purposes of the mentioned components. For example, the land revenue component contains minor heads such as rates and cesses on land, receipts on account of survey and settle operations etc. (CGA India, n.d.a.). Such disaggregation is largely absent in Bangladeshi sources. The Indian CGA and Indian budget documents also report yearly department and ministry-wise breakdown of revenue receipts using the capital and revenue receipt disaggregation lens. The Indian budget documents also contain the revenue impact of major tax incentives (e.g., deduction of export profits of units located in special economic zones, deduction of profits of undertakings engaged in providing telecommunication services etc.) for corporate, non-corporate and individual taxpayers, revenue impact on account of export promotion schemes (e.g., advanced license schemes, service export incentive scheme etc.). Notably, such impact analysis is not available in any Bangladeshi sources. Indian budget documents contain metadata in the form of a glossary of definitions, while Bangladeshi sources lack this aspect.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Lanka also provides geographic distribution of revenue receipts. The annual report by CBSL disaggregates the tax revenue earnings by both location and type of taxes (e.g., income taxes, VAT, excise taxes, import duties etc.). CBSL's yearly publication, titled "Economic and Social Statistics of Sri-Lanka", is the only report that disaggregates non-tax revenue into components such as current revenue, property income, fees and charges, capital revenue etc. (CBSL, n.d.a.). The Fiscal Management Report published by the treasury department of Sri Lanka provides a variance analysis besides reporting the generic fiscal data. This variance analysis primarily exhibits the gaps between the revenue mobilisation targets and actual attainments. Furthermore, this analysis provides explanations pertaining to the variances.

Ugandan sources contain commodity-wise disaggregation of the revenue component. Uganda disaggregates excise duty by the taxed elements (e.g., cigarettes, bottled water, international calls etc.), VAT by the taxed elements and sectors (cigarettes, insurance services, agriculture etc.) and non-tax revenues by fee types (passport fees, migration fees etc.) (UBS, n.d.a.). The commodity-wise detailed disaggregation of NBR receipts is performed on a smaller scale in Bangladesh compared to the Ugandan sources.

Disaggregation of revenue earnings in Nigeria varies considerably compared to the Bangladeshi sources. NBS disaggregates revenue by oil and non-oil tax revenue when the annual collection is reported. The oil-related revenue is disaggregated using several sub-components such as crude oil export, domestic crude oil sales, oil and gas royalties etc. The non-oil revenue sub-component is further disaggregated into components such as customs duty, excise tax, special levies, corporate tax etc. The variance between budgetary targets and actual revenue collection is also mentioned (NBS, n.d.a.).

In terms of monthly availability of the revenue-related data, Bangladesh is performing worse than India but better than Sri Lanka, Uganda and Nigeria.

The Indian CGA reports monthly revenue receipts under broad heads such as tax revenue, non-tax revenue, non-debt capital receipts and other receipts. Monthly data is also available for components under those specific broad heads. For example, tax revenue is disaggregated into corporation tax, personal income tax, central goods and services tax, goods and services tax compensation cases etc. (CGA India, n.d.b.). This shows that the disaggregation of the tax revenue component differs between Bangladeshi and Indian sources. Bangladeshi sources show high disaggregation in terms of the NBR revenue collection component, whilst the other sources are often reported in a more aggregated manner. Compared to Sri Lankan monthly sources, Bangladeshi sources have higher availability and disaggregation of the revenue component. This can be observed from the fact that CBSL's Monthly Economic Indicators report provides half-yearly data for revenue collection (CBSL, n.d.b.). For example, the Monthly Economic Indicator report of September 2021 shows revenue collection data for the January-June period of 2021. Monthly reporting of the revenue receipts, along with agency-wise breakdown, is missing from the Nigerian sources.

In terms of the yearly availability of indicators related to public expenditure, Bangladesh is doing worse than India, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

Indian sources use the broad heads of capital expenditure and revenue expenditure to provide public expenditure data on an annual basis. The annual report of the RBI disaggregates public expenditure into revenue expenditure and capital expenditure (RBI, n.d.a.). It also provides a ministry-wise breakdown of the capital expenditure component in a graphical format. Indian budget documents present ministry-wise allocations through a capital expenditure and revenue expenditure lens. Each ministry-wise allocation is further disaggregated according to central sector schemes/ projects, centrally sponsored schemes, establishment expenditure of the centre, and other central sector expenditures. The Indian CGA also uses the aforementioned broad heads to disaggregate public expenditure in their annual report. This agency breaks revenue expenditure into, inter alia, interest payments and prepayment premiums, defence services, subsidies, pensions, social services (education, health, broadcasting etc.), economic services (agriculture, industry, power, transport, communications, science & technology etc.), and grants to foreign governments. The capital expenditure component is broken down into general services, including defence, social services, economic services, loans and advances etc. The Indian CGA also provides data on actual expenditure in subsidies for food, fertiliser, petroleum, interest, and other public schemes related to price support, transportation, sugar and jute mills. Such data on expenditures owing to subsidies are not available in Bangladesh.

The CBSL disaggregates annual public expenditure using two broad heads, viz. recurrent and capital expenditure. Recurrent expenditure is further disaggregated into salaries and wages, expenses on goods and services, interest payments, and current transfers and subsidies etc. Capital expenditure is disaggregated into the acquisition of real assets and capital transfers etc. CBSL reports monthly data under the revenue expenditure and capital expenditure broad heads.

Similar to Sri Lanka, Uganda divides public expenditure into two major broad heads, viz., recurrent expenditure and development expenditure. In addition, the development expenditure component includes two major subheads, viz. central government development expenditure and donor-funded development expenditure. The recurrent expenditure broad head and the two sub-heads under development expenditure are further broken down sector-wise (e.g., general public services, defence,

public order and safety, economic affairs, environment protection, housing and community amenities, health, education, social protection etc.) and economic classification wise (e.g., compensation of employees, social contributions, interest, subsidies, grants, social benefits etc.).

Nigeria presents public expenditure data under three broad heads, viz. statutory transfers, recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure. The recurrent expenditure broad head includes two major subheads, viz. non-debt recurrent expenditure and debt service. Within non-debt recurrent expenditure, distinctions are made between government agencies (i.e., ministries, divisions) and government-owned enterprises in terms of personnel costs and overheads.

In terms of annual reporting of budget deficit financing data, Bangladesh is performing similarly to the other countries under comparison. The Indian CGA reports financing of deficit using two broad heads viz. internal debt and external debt, including revolving fund. The internal debt component is further disaggregated into market loans, treasury bills, compensation and other bonds etc. The RBI presents the sources of deficit financing in a pictorial manner where the disaggregated components include net market borrowings, net treasury bills, securities against small savings, external assistance etc. Besides the aforementioned two broad heads, the CBSL also provides a third head titled "Privatisation Proceeds" when it comes to reporting deficit financing. Nigerian budget documents list the deficit financing elements as sales of government property, privatisation proceeds, multi-lateral / bilateral project-tied loans, restructured loans, foreign aid/grant (in cash), and new borrowings, including domestic and foreign borrowing.

3.1.2 Accessibility

It needs to be noted that the documents pertaining to the three domains of fiscal data, which have been reviewed as part of this study, were obtained from the same sources within the respective countries. Hence, there is no domain-specific differentiation within a country in terms of accessibility. Thus, the current sub-section presents a source-wise analysis by considering Bangladesh as the benchmark.

From the review, it was found that Indian sources pertaining to all three domains of fiscal data offer better sorting facilities compared to the sources from Bangladesh. Bangladesh provides higher sorting facilities in the deficit domain compared to Sri Lanka. Bangladesh is considerably lagging behind Nigeria in all three domains and Uganda in the expenditure domain when it comes to sorting facilities.

The Indian CGA website has an interactive interface which allows date-wise sorting of reports. The reports are presented in chronological order for better findability. However, there is no scope to sort by indicators or dimensions. The Indian budget documents exhibit better sorting compared to the budget documents of Bangladesh. The Indian union budget website allows the documents pertaining to expenditure and revenue receipts to be sorted by ministries. It has to be mentioned that both Indian and Bangladeshi sources exhibit a similar pattern of data embedded in the reports themselves rather than indicator-wise or measure-wise data available through any interactive interface. The Indian government's Open Data Portal provides better accessibility compared to other Indian sources, as this website allows data to be searched by the core data domains. The data search function can be further fine-tuned to sort data by indicators, ministry/department and location. However, this website requires users to register before providing access to data. This somewhat undermines the users' right to information, as access to data is hindered by the registration process.

The Nigerian Open Data Portal allows users to sort data by locations, indicators, measures (e.g., growth rate, share in GDP etc.), and time. As mentioned, such sorting is mostly absent from Bangladeshi sources. The website of Sri Lanka's Department of Census and Statistics offers sorting of data according to indicators, time period and frequency. Within the Ugandan budgetary documents, those related to expenditure can be sorted by fiscal year, approved budget, cumulative disbursements and cumulative expenditures.

In terms of the reproducibility of data, Bangladesh is lagging behind the four other countries considered for this study. A critical area of divergence between the fiscal data sources of Bangladesh and the comparators is that most of the Bangladeshi sources provide data in PDF format, whereas the other countries under consideration utilise a variety of formats.

The budget documents of India and the reports by RBI are released in both PDF and Excel formats. Similarly, the MoSPI allows for reports to be downloaded in both of the aforementioned formats. Furthermore, the ministry's website provides data visualisation using selected indicators. These data visualisation tools include pie charts, bar charts, stacked bar charts, column charts, and area charts, among others. The data can be reproduced in various formats as the website allows for exporting/downloading in Powerpoint and Tableau formats. These aspects are missing from the websites of Bangladeshi fiscal data sources.

The Nigerian central bank website allows for data frequency and indicators to be chosen and the data to be downloaded in Excel format. The website containing Ugandan budget documents embeds a Tableau workbook. This enables using the selected indicators for generating different types of data visualisations. Sri Lanka's CBSL also offers data download facilities in different formats (e.g., Excel, CSV) along with different analyses (e.g., growth rate, share etc.) and data visualisations. The documents published by the Sri Lankan MoF are available in PDF format and published in three languages, viz. English, Tamil and Sinhala. The multilingualism of the published reports could aid in increasing the user-friendliness of the documents published by Bangladeshi sources.

Three important observations pertaining to the accessibility dimension have emerged from the discussion so far. First, the incorporation of data sorting features is largely unexplored in the Bangladeshi fiscal data web sources. Second, built-in data analysis features are not present in the data sources of Bangladesh. Third, data exporting in various formats is missing from the Bangladeshi sources that have been examined in this study.

3.1.3 Agility

In terms of timeliness, Bangladesh is performing better than the other countries under comparison when it comes to reporting monthly revenue-related data. This performance does not hold true for yearly data, as India outperforms Bangladesh by providing more updated annual figures. However, it must also be mentioned that while Bangladesh's NBR is more timely in terms of monthly reporting, the same cannot be said about MoF. As is known, NBR mobilises the overwhelming majority of the revenue in Bangladesh. Hence, the overall movement in revenue collection can be anticipated by observing the trends in NBR revenue mobilisation. Up-to-date, monthly data is largely unavailable through Nigerian and Ugandan sources. Surprisingly, Sri Lankan CBSL provides half-yearly revenue collection figures in its monthly reports. Quarterly reporting of revenue-related data is also available from Sri Lankan CBSL and Ugandan URA.

Bangladesh only reports a fraction of public expenditure-related data on a timely basis. The monthly reports produced by IMED provide ADP expenditure data in a somewhat punctual manner. However, the majority of public expenditure, which includes non-development and other development components, is only reported by MoF with a considerable time lag. Indian CGA provides the monthly account of public expenditure on a timely basis. Regrettably, Sri Lankan, Ugandan and Nigerian sources do not distribute updated expenditure data on a monthly basis. Similar to their reporting of revenue-related data, CBSL provides half-yearly public expenditure data in their monthly reports. Bangladesh's competence in reporting up-to-date information with regard to the deficit and the revenue domain is quite similar.

In terms of the historical availability of data in all three domains, Bangladesh is lagging behind India and Sri Lanka. However, the country is performing better than Nigeria and Uganda in this particular aspect. Indian and Sri Lankan sources provide reports which date back to 2001 and 1990, respectively. Nigerian sources have infrequent reporting of yearly fiscal data such that only a few reports are available on the web.

3.1.4 Accuracy

Similar to Bangladesh, the issue of discrepancy in the same fiscal data across different government sources can be observed in the other countries under consideration. For example, a report by the National Statistics Commission of India mentioned data discrepancy as a key issue in the management of fiscal data (NSC, 2018). This report states that central government fiscal data provided by various sources such as the Indian CGA, CAG and National Account Statistics (NAS) of the MoSPI and the Indian MoF suffer from discrepancy. It was mentioned that there are inconsistencies with regard to data on inter-governmental transactions such as inter-governmental grants. The aforementioned report noted that fiscal aggregates often contain a mix of actual data and estimates. It was also mentioned that the budget allotted by the Centre and that received by the states differ (NSC, 2018). Another example of Nigeria shows that there were discrepancies between the figures reported by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the central government. NNPC reported that it transferred a total of Naira 1.27 trillion to the central government in 2019. However, the central government statistics showed that only Naira 608.71 billion was received. Similar discrepancies were also found in the case of revenue mobilisation data reported by the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) and the books of the central government (Amata, 2021).

3.2 Bangladesh's Performance in the Open Budget Survey

In this sub-section, the data and information pertaining to the Open Budget Survey (OBS) will be utilised to compare the extent of transparency and accountability in the budgetary system of Bangladesh with India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Uganda. The OBS considers three components to assess the accountability of a budgetary system which include i) the availability of budget information to the public, ii) opportunities for public participation in the budgetary process, and iii) the role of formal oversights institutions, including the legislative and national audit office (IBP, 2020). The components used in the OBS are based on accountability and transparency criterion developed by multilateral agencies such as the IMF's Code of Good Practices on Fiscal Transparency. The OBS, which is typically conducted biennially, has undergone several methodological changes over the years. The latest round of OBS was conducted in 2019, which included 117 countries. The 2019 OBS assesses the online availability, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of eight key budget documents using 109 equally weighted indicators, 18 questions to evaluate the opportunities for

Table 3.1: Cross-country Comparison of OBS Score and Ranking Over Time

Country	Indicator	2006	2008	2010	2012	2015	2017	2019
Bangladesh	Score	39	42	48	58	56	41	36
	Rank	38	44	46	28	31	66	79
India	Score	53	60	67	68	46	48	49
	Rank	17	20	14	14	53	53	53
Sri Lanka	Score	47	64	67	46	39	44	47
	Rank	26	13	13	53	70	60	54
Nigeria	Score	20	19	18	16	24	17	21
	Rank	52	61	73	80	85	90	97
Uganda	Score	32	51	55	65	62	60	58
	Rank	43	32	32	18	24	29	36
No of surveyed countries		**40**	**77**	**93**	**100**	**102**	**115**	**117**

0–20	21–40	41–60	61–80	81–100
Scant or none	**Minimal**	**Limited**	**Substantial**	**Extensive**
Insufficient			**Sufficient**	

Source: Open Budget Survey (various issues).

public participation and 18 questions to comprehend the role of the legislative and audit institutions. In addition to these, 83 questions pertaining to background information regarding public finance management of the surveyed countries are asked. The civil society representatives and the academic researchers taking part in the survey rated the questions on a provided alphabetical scale, which was later converted to a numerical scale. The scores are reported in a 0-100 scale index, where 100 is the best score (IBP, 2020).

In the 2019 OBS, the average global score was 45 for the 117 surveyed countries. This indicates that, on average, the surveyed countries provide limited information pertaining to the budget. For South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the average score of 2019 OBS was 46 and 25, respectively. As can be seen from Table 3.1, Bangladesh's score in 2019 was regrettably lower than both the global and the South Asian average – indicating the government releases minimal budgetary information. Among the countries studied in this section, Bangladesh managed to perform better than only Nigeria in a consistent manner.

As can be observed from Table 3.1, Bangladesh's performance on the OBS was on an upward trajectory during the 2006-2012 period. Bangladesh's performance jump in 2012 was attributable to the publication of two budget documents – the Citizens Budget and the Year-End Report. Nearly 50 per cent of the budgetary documents were publicly available for OBS 2012 compared to only 38 per cent for OBS 2010. Even though 75 per cent of the documents were publicly available for OBS 2015, Bangladesh's score for OBS 2012 and OBS 2015 has been identical. This was due to a methodological change in OBS 2015, which involved the addition of new questions aimed towards measuring transparency. The largest drop in scores over the years was for OBS 2017 - thanks to another methodological change which relates to a redefinition of publicly available documents. As per the new definition, only documents published on the relevant government websites should be considered publicly available. For OBS 2017, Bangladesh failed to publish the In-Year reports,

Citizens budget and audit reports, while the Pre-Budget statement was not made available to the public. Bangladesh's low score for OBS 2019 can be attributed to almost 60 per cent of all budgetary documents either not being produced or published late, not published online or produced for internal use only. Failure to publish the Year-End report on budget implementation by the MoF online in a timely manner has been particularly mentioned in the OBS in this regard. Furthermore, the Executive's Budget Proposal lacked information regarding critical areas of financial risk such as contingent liabilities, expenditure arrears and extra-budgetary funds.

Uganda's performance in the OBS perhaps deserves a careful examination. The country fared worse than Bangladesh in the first round of OBS in 2006. However, Uganda has consistently outperformed Bangladesh in the subsequent rounds of the survey. Between 2006 and 2012, Uganda's score in the OBS rose from 32 to 65. This improvement can be primarily attributed to an increase in the number of documents produced and published. Uganda has made considerable headway in terms of providing more information on budget execution and its impacts via publishing additional and more detailed implementation reports, viz. the In-Year Reports, Mid-Year Review, and Year-End reports (Pinnington, 2017). These positive developments were brought forth by a new performance agenda within the government of Uganda, which resulted in a number of technical reforms. Such reforms included, inter alia, the formation of a Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit, the introduction of output-based budgeting, development of the Output Budgeting Tool. The aforementioned reforms made the budget reporting and monitoring process more efficient by improving and scaling up automated systems. However, the progress has been slightly offset in recent years, owing to a reduction in the comprehensiveness of the Executive's Budget Proposal and the audit report (Pinnington, 2017).

Bangladesh's deteriorating performance in the OBS can be connected to the unavailability of a number of key budget documents (Table 3.2). For instance, over the years, Bangladesh's pre-budget statement has been largely missing, published late, not published online or produced for internal use only. The pre-budget statement encompasses the government's economic forecast, predicted revenue, public expenditure and debt. It is released prior to the Executive's Budget Proposal and outlines the basic parameters of fiscal policies. As per OBS 2019, Bangladesh's pre-budget statement was a working paper which contained the summary of the possible contents of the

Table 3.2: Availability of Key Budget Documents Over Time in Bangladesh

Document	2006	2008	2010	2012	2015	2017	2019
Pre-budget statement	□	✘	✘	✘	□	□	□
Executive's budget proposal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enacted budget	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Citizens budget	✘	✘	✘	✘	✓	✘	✓
In-year reports	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□
Mid-year review	□	✘	✘	✓	✓	□	✘
Year-end report	✘	✘	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘
Audit report	□	□	□	✘	✘	✘	✘

Source: Open Budget Survey (various issues).

Note: ✓ Indicates 'available to the public', □ Indicates 'published late, or not published online, or produced for internal use only' and ✘ Indicates 'not produced'.

Executive's Budget Proposal. This document was produced for internal use during the pre-budget coordination meeting conducted by the FD of MoF. According to IBP, the pre-budget statement should be released at least one month before the Executive's Budget Proposal is submitted to the legislature for consideration.

For all the survey years following OBS 2010, the audit reports have not been produced in Bangladesh (Table 3.2). There are three types of audit reports conducted by the CAG of Bangladesh, viz. financial audit, performance audit and compliance audit. As of January FY2021–22, there are no Financial Audit Reports available online. The availability of performance audit reports and compliance audit reports are random, such that reports pertaining to some ministries and time periods are available. As per IBP, Financial Audit Reports should be published online no later than 18 months after the end of a fiscal year.

The mid-year review is a comprehensive document which includes a complete update on the budget's execution as of the middle of the fiscal year, as well as a review of economic assumptions and a revised prediction of budgetary outcomes. The mid-year review, known as the Budget Implementation Status Report, has only been available to the public for OBS 2012 and OBS 2015. Notably, for OBS 2019, the report was published late (more than three months after the reporting period)

The year-end report summarises the government's financial position at the end of the fiscal year and, ideally, provides an assessment of success toward the budget's policy objectives. The year-end report has only been available for OBS 2015 and OBS 2017, and for all the other survey years, the reports have not been produced in Bangladesh. According to the recommendation of IBP, the year-end report should be published no later than 12 months after the end of the fiscal year by the MoF.

Bangladesh's OBS score in public participation has been consistently low compared to Nigeria and Uganda (Figure 3.1). For OBS 2019, the global average public participation score was 14. Both

Figure 3.1: Public Participation Scores (Cross-country comparison)
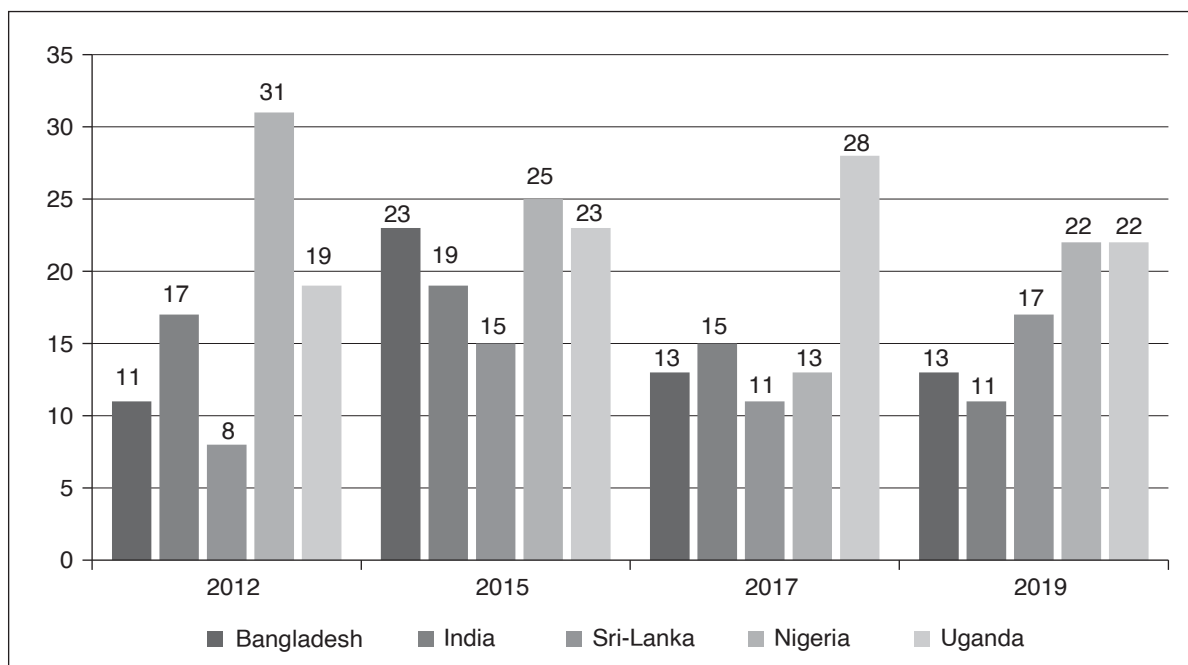
Source: Open Budget Survey (various issues).

Bangladesh and India scored lower than the global average. Bangladesh scored the same for OBS 2017 and OBS 2019 – indicating no improvement in the situation. It needs to be noted that the MoF has conducted pre-budget consultations during the budget formulation over the years. However, it still lacks mechanisms to actively include and engage civil society members and vulnerable and underrepresented communities who are willing to participate in the budget formulation process. Interestingly, although Nigeria performed poorly in terms of transparency scores and rankings, it has performed relatively better in terms of public participation in the budgetary process. Nigeria provides higher public participation opportunities through public e-consultations during budget formulation, and the Nigerian National Assembly held public hearings related to the approval of the annual budget.

The oversight element of OBS can be broken down into two components viz. legislative oversight and audit oversight. For OBS 2019, Bangladesh scored lower than the countries considered for comparison. In the 2019 OBS, Bangladesh's legislative oversight was considered to be 'limited' while audit oversight was mentioned to be 'weak'.

SECTION 4: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

A number of observations emerge from the deliberations in Sections 2 and 3. These observations have been clustered under the elements of the '4A' framework applied throughout the course of the present study. Besides, the issue pertaining to use of data in policymaking will also be discussed in this section.

4.1 Availability

In several instances, variables or documents of interest are completely absent

This phenomenon is persistent, particularly in the revenue and expenditure domains of fiscal data. While providing an exhaustive list could become an unwieldy exercise, some noteworthy examples can be mentioned to support this statement. For instance, on the resource mobilisation side, data on forgone revenue on account of various tax exemptions are never formally reported by either NBR or MoF. In most cases, this information can only be availed through informal sources such as newspaper articles. On the other hand, the expected amount of revenue to be mobilised from newly introduced tax measures is also not reported by any government agency. On the expenditure side, a number of variables of interest simply do not exist. For example, although the allocations and revised allocations for social safety net programmes are provided during the national budget, actual expenditure in this sector is never reported. A similar observation can be made as regards the development project proforma/proposals (DPPs) of ADP projects which contain detailed cost-related information. Also, project-wise ADP expenditure data can only be obtained from the ADP and RADP books. Although this can be obtained via request, currently, there is no monthly reporting of such information. Documents related to the national budget, such as pre-budget statements, citizens' budgets, mid-year reviews, and year-end reports, are generally not available. It can be unequivocally said that, in the absence of such data and information, it becomes difficult to assess the policy steps taken in the form of fiscal measures by the government.

The required level of disaggregation is rarely present

Within the fiscal data that is available, disaggregation at the required level often goes wanting. A number of major fiscal indicators are not disaggregated by location, sources/sector, gender, marginalised groups, project etc. For instance, on the revenue side, income tax mobilised from

individuals and corporate sources is not reported by MoF. The tax collected from special provisions is also not reported. On the expenditure side, data on public spending owing to subsidies exhibits an interesting trend. While the MFR by MoF reports monthly expenditure on subsidies, the provided data is only available under some broad heads and is not disaggregated by the recipient sectors or agencies. The only source of such data is the MTMPS published by MoF during the national budget. Curiously, since the FY2020–21 budget, the MTMPS stopped providing the data pertaining to the sector-wise allocation of subsidies. Information related to subsidies available from other budget documents only allows for a partial assessment of the government's sectoral priorities.

As has been mentioned in Section 2, Combined Demand for Grants, and Consolidated Fund Receipts are the only two documents which respectively provide budget and revised budget targets of expenditures and receipts at a more disaggregated level (agency/ministry-wise-economic purpose-wise). Unfortunately, a similar exercise is absent in the case of actual attainments. Since the data presented in these two documents are organised according to iBAS++ codes, it may not be difficult to produce the actual figures in a similar manner. It needs to be taken into cognisance that data which are provided at disaggregated levels can be aggregated as per users' requirements.

Geographic location-wise disaggregated data appears to be the weakest part of Bangladesh's fiscal data inventory. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in demand for public finance data, on account of both policymakers and academia, to be presented on a geographically disaggregated basis. Given that the iBAS++ system allows geocodes for the different upazilas in Bangladesh, it can be presumed that this system can be utilised to generate more data, such as actual expenditures, at a geographically disaggregated level. The availability of such data is particularly important for the indicators such as social safety net. Keeping the spatial dynamics of poverty in mind, particularly those related to poverty pockets, geographic location-wise disaggregated data of poverty-reducing expenditures, including those for safety net programmes, could result in better policy effectiveness.

Analysis of data is almost non-existent

The available documents that contain fiscal data have severe shortcomings in terms of providing analyses and adequate explanations. The publications which bear public finance data are usually produced in a tabular format without many interpretations or inferences. Only a handful of publications even attempt to explain such data. Regrettably, most of the time, such efforts are insufficient. This phenomenon is prevalent for all types of public finance data, viz. medium-term targets, budget targets, revised budget targets and actual attainments. The underlying assumptions related to the medium-term targets are usually not disclosed while providing the targets. Similarly, it appears that the programmed budget targets are isolated from fiscal policies. Although a number of fiscal measures are altered between the proposed budget and the budget passed by the parliament, the initially proposed fiscal framework continues to be so. Similar to this, the justifications for the revised budget targets remain inadequate. In the case of data on actual attainment, the explanations given in the publications are not connected to other macroeconomic correlates and policies.

4.2 Accessibility

Some indicators/reports are not accessible via public domains

According to Article 15.4 of the Public Money and Budget Management Act-2009, the Finance Minister is supposed to report the status of budget implementation to the National Parliament at the end of each quarter. However, since its inception, a number of such reports were not presented.

Particularly, the third-quarter reports and the year-end reports were largely missing. While the regularity in which this report was prepared and presented has been haphazard, it was, at the very least, published on the MoF website. Regrettably, this practice was later discontinued. MoF stopped publishing the budget implementation reports on its website despite the Hon'ble Minister presenting them before the National Parliament. The only way to obtain this report was to apply to the MoF or directly communicate with MoF officials. A similar instance can be observed when it comes to project-specific ADP implementation data. While the IMED produces monthly progress reports on agency-wise ADP expenditure, project-level data can only be obtained by submitting an application to IMED. As mentioned earlier, the only other sources for this data are the ADP and RADP books published once a year. In this connection, it may be recalled that an interactive database for project-wise ADP data was initiated back in 2008. However, it was later discontinued. The significant time gap between a request for fiscal data and actually getting the data often discourages interested parties from applying for such data.

Some indicators/reports are not provided in an easily usable/retrievable format

As mentioned in Section 2, nearly all publications related to fiscal data are accessible on the numerous websites of the relevant organisations. However, the overwhelming majority of these documents are provided in PDF format. The documents in PDF format have two types. The first type includes those from which data can be directly copied and used for further analysis. The Monthly Fiscal Report produced by MoF is such a document. The second type of document is basically scanned images of earlier printed documents. It is almost impossible to copy data from such documents. The monthly reporting by NBR and IMED is often riddled with this problem. From the users' perspective, it would have been more helpful if the data were available in MS Excel format. Particularly, large datasets, like those for ADP, need to be provided in MS Excel format. It needs to be mentioned that providing data sets in excel formats does not involve any additional cost and complexities. The government agencies in charge of providing fiscal data can follow the example of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The various websites containing fiscal data do not offer much in terms of searching and sorting

Although most of the available fiscal data can be found on the websites of different government agencies, these online platforms do not usually allow data to be found through the search option. Also, since the data is provided inside various reports, which are uploaded as PDF documents, there is actually no way to sort the data as per users' requirements. This severely limits the accessibility of fiscal data from a user perspective. The limited ability to search for and sort data also poses additional challenges for new users since a certain level of prior knowledge becomes necessary to find the required data.

4.3 Agility

The key players have consistently struggled in timely data reporting

The timeliness in producing fiscal data is a prerequisite in order to instigate an effective policy debate and transparent development planning. In Bangladesh, public finance data often loses its relevance due to substantial time lag. Indeed, within the major macroeconomic indicators of Bangladesh, those related to public finance continue to have the highest time lag. On a positive note, a number of monthly publications, including from NBR and IMED, are produced in a somewhat timely manner with about one month lag. Regrettably, the Monthly Fiscal Report, which provides the most comprehensive picture regarding the government's budget implementation, comes with an enormous time lag. As

of February 2022, MoF was yet to publish a single monthly report for FY2021–22—indicating a time lag of seven months. It has been observed that the annual reports by various government agencies usually require more than a year to prepare. In some instances, a shortage of time also becomes an issue. For instance, the time between the publication of budget documents and the passing of the Finance Bill does not offer much time for discussion by the different stakeholders.

The complex bureaucratic process associated with the audit reports creates a time lag

As has been mentioned in Section 3, the timely availability of audit reports is one of the key reasons behind Bangladesh's low scores in successive OBSs. While a certain level of time lag is inevitable, given the nature and complexity of audit reports, the associated bureaucratic process adds to the overall time requirement. After the finance and appropriation accounts are prepared by the Principal Accounting Officer (i.e., the Secretary) of the ministry/division, these are then sent to the concerned agency's audit office. Following scrutiny, the reports are then handed over to the Civil Audit Directorate. After this, the reports are sent to CGA, which, in turn, submits them to the CAG. After finalising their scrutiny, the CAG sends the reports to the MoF, which ultimately submits them to the Parliament for final approval. In this connection, it must also be mentioned that each stage of scrutiny involves several rounds of queries and their response. This complex bureaucratic process is often the reason behind the time lag associated with audit reports.

Sources of long-time series fiscal data are extremely limited

There is no comprehensive source of long-time series data on fiscal indicators. Although NBR's annual report can be a good source for NBR revenue data, the discrepancy between NBR and MoF data often limits its usability. The Bangladesh Economic Review, published by the MoF, is a source of long-time series data for a number of socio-economic indicators, including those for public finance. This document can be used a create a historical time series database for fiscal data in MS Excel format. The FD of MoF can be the final gatekeeper for this database. In this connection, it must be mentioned that Bangladesh Bank has already taken such an initiative where an MS Excel file contains historical data on major macroeconomic indicators from 1972.

4.4 Accuracy

Discrepancies between fiscal data provided by the key data suppliers make the situation more challenging

In Bangladesh, the reliability of fiscal data has repeatedly come under scrutiny as different agencies reported different figures on the same indicator for the same period. As was demonstrated in Section 2, such incidences are neither new nor limited to any particular domain of public finance. Furthermore, it needs to be taken into cognisance that the indicators of the fiscal framework are interrelated, and any misreporting may compromise the reliability of other indicators. Similarly, reported data which is revised by a large margin at a later date is likely to face questions regarding its credibility and accuracy. Such discrepancy and unreliable data create doubts in the minds of the analysts and citizens of the country regarding the state of public finance in Bangladesh. Often policymakers in Bangladesh end up considering less accurate data only because it is more readily available. Any policy decision based on less accurate data might backfire in the immediate to medium term.

Analysis of the consistency of fiscal data with other macro and micro level data and information is completely absent

Fiscal data should be consistent with other macroeconomic variables, especially those related to the monetary sector, national accounts, international trade, and balance of payments. As has been mentioned during the stakeholder consultations, the officials of the FD of MoF received training on IMF's macro accounting consistency framework. This framework is an Excel-based system which looks at the consistency amongst fiscal, monetary, national accounts and external sector-related indicators. It needs to be mentioned that these indicators are all available through public domains and the consistency check can be performed independently using basic identities originating from macroeconomic theory. However, as the FD is already conducting this exercise, simply sharing the results in the public domain can go a long way in assessing fiscal data accuracy. On the other hand, there is scope to check the consistency of fiscal data using various micro-level data. This is particularly pertinent for public expenditure data related to various social safety net programmes. As the intended beneficiaries of such programmes are the vulnerable and marginalised sections of the population, whether they are actually receiving the benefits can be checked using the data from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). This gives an opportunity to check the consistency of fiscal data from the demand side. Regrettably, no such effort is evident on the part of the government to provide such analyses.

The various sources of fiscal data are not accompanied by related definitions and metadata

The array of websites and reports presenting fiscal data does not offer much when it comes to associated definitions and metadata. In most instances, key definitions and details about the data itself, including collection process, frequency, sources etc., are not provided. This makes the interpretation and application of data extremely challenging for the users. One needs to have a certain degree of prior knowledge or practical experience if one wants to understand the concept behind or the interrelations amongst the components and subcomponents of fiscal data. The absence of definitions becomes more problematic when data is reported in broad heads instead of the constituent elements. The data discrepancy issue, repeatedly mentioned throughout this study, could have been better understood if metadata had been provided alongside the reported data and indicators.

Lack of inter and intra-agency coordination compounds the data inconsistency problem

As mentioned in Section 2, data inconsistency can be observed in the documents produced by MoF, NBR, IMED and BB. Differences in definition, data collection methodology and sources, and time lag in reporting by the various agencies can be attributed to this challenge. However, as has been observed, inconsistency can be found in data provided by the same agency at different points in time. When enquired about these issues during the debriefing sessions, a lack of coordination among and within various agencies was pointed out. Oftentimes the data generation and reporting process is perceived as an added burden on top of the regular duties of the responsible officials. Hence, the lack of proactive efforts on the part of the officials plays a major role in the coordination problem.

4.5 Use in Policymaking

The current state of availability (and accessibility) of public finance data does not adequately meet the demands for policymaking and ensuring transparency and accountability. The glaring example

of this is the unavailability of constituency-wise data. The policymakers, for obvious reasons, are very keen to monitor the public expenditure scenario in their respective constituencies – especially those related to ADP project implementation and social safety net programmes. However, the present state of affairs within the fiscal data ecosystem does not allow them to do so in a very comprehensive manner. Fiscal measures are often taken without any impact analysis, either ex-ante or ex-post, in the absence of timely and relevant data. Stakeholder consultation is often overlooked, and decisions are taken on an ad hoc basis. This is particularly prevalent in the cases of announcing statutory regulatory orders (SROs), including new projects as part of the ADP and formulating the supplementary budget. All of the aforementioned issues impede effective policymaking in a transparent and accountable manner. These also limit the capacity for better use of public money.

The adverse impact of shortcomings in fiscal data on policymaking can be illustrated through a recent example. In FY2020–21, the budget deficit (excluding grants) was programmed to be Tk. 189,997 crore, which is equivalent to 6.58 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP. According to the June 2021 issue of MoF's MFR, the actual budget deficit was Tk. 129,593 crore - equivalent to 4.49 per cent of GDP. This amount is less than the budget deficit prevailing in FY2019–20, both in absolute value (Tk. 156,035 crore) or as a share of GDP (6.14 per cent). This implies that the government could have spent an additional Tk. 60,404 crore if it maintained the programmed level of the budget deficit. This figure is equivalent to about 83.2 per cent of the total social protection budget (excluding 'pension for retired government employees and their families) and more than double the budgetary allocations for the health sector in FY2020–21. This analysis means that the government could have directed substantial resources in major social sectors amid the COVID-19 pandemic if it had access to fiscal data in a timely manner. Also, according to the 'Quarterly Budget Execution' report for the second quarter of FY2021–22, the government has a budget surplus (excluding grants) to the tune of Tk. 1,357 crore. Curiously, the government has shown a relatively conservative attitude in extending budgetary allocations for cash transfers and subsidies to combat the recent COVID-19 pandemic and rising commodity prices. It could very well be the fact that this decision was driven by the government's economic and political vision or lack of fiscal space. However, an alternative hypothesis could be that such an undesirable situation emerged because the policymakers were not fully aware of fiscal position (data-wise) of the country in real-time. If the latter is indeed the case, then it once again reinforces the necessity of the timely availability of accurate data.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

The fiscal data ecosystem of Bangladesh has undoubtedly made notable progress over the last decade or so. However, its prospective evolution is encumbered by several long-standing and emerging issues. On the one hand, these present substantial structural challenges for the structures, processes and techniques to deal with. On the other, these also point towards possible institutional and policy pathways to improve and enhance the existing fiscal data ecosystem. The forward movement needs to be designed and delivered in terms of the ecosystem's availability, accessibility, agility, and accuracy.

As has been mentioned earlier in this study, the supply of fiscal data is relatively lacking vis-à-vis its demand. This is particularly pertinent for the public expenditure domain as adequately disaggregated, and real-time figures for a large number of variables are unavailable. It is expected that actual expenditure figures pertaining to social safety net programmes, transfers and subsidies should be reported monthly. For subsidy-related expenditures, a more detailed sectoral and/or utilisation-based breakdown will be necessary. Similarly, project-wise ADP expenditure figures should be published

every month. Moreover, indicators such as revenue forgone due to various tax exemptions and benefits are extremely important when it comes to fiscal planning.

There is also a need to have data on budgetary allocations and actual expenditure (e.g., for social protection programmes) at the sub-national administrative and/or electoral constituency level. This will enable the Members of Parliament to make informed budgetary decisions as well as regularly monitor public expenditures in the respective constituencies. Impact analysis of various fiscal measures, both ex-ante and ex-post, needs to be conducted by the relevant government agencies (and/or by a contracted party) and published in public domains.

To facilitate regular reporting of public finance-related data, a number of measures may prove to be helpful. For instance, fuller use of existing resources, such as the iBAS++, could be a way forward. In other words, it is possible to exploit the system to provide more disaggregated and detailed fiscal data. The iBAS++ system specifically should be used more comprehensively – both horizontally and vertically to report data on a regular basis. The budget documents such as "Combined Demand for Grants" and "Consolidated Fund Receipts" should include actual expenditure and receipt figures, respectively. Further, monthly reports of budget implementation, based on the mentioned two documents, should be prepared using the data from the iBAS++ system.

It has been observed that there is a trade-off between timely (early) reporting of data and data accuracy. Thus, one has to be mindful that focusing on only one of the assessment criteria, viz. availability, accessibility, agility and accuracy, allows less-than-ideal situations for the others.

It has been suggested earlier that a number of documents containing critical information and analyses need to be made available by the government for public consumption. This may support the public finance management process in a number of ways. For instance, providing a pre-budget statement will enhance the opportunity for the public, including policy analysts and activists, to effectively engage in the discussion before the announcement of the National Budget. Similarly, timely provision of in-year, mid-year and year-end budget reports will facilitate establishing benchmark conditions as well as undertaking mid-course corrections.

The impact evaluation reports of the ADP projects should be produced regularly within three months of the completion of the fiscal year. The Audit Reports produced by CAG of Bangladesh should be prepared and published within 18 months of the completion of a fiscal year. It needs to be ensured that all the reports that the concerned government agencies are mandated to publish are available in public domains, desirably online.

As discussed earlier, a large part of the fiscal data can be accessed in Bangladesh through online portals. However, these sources do not offer much in terms of searching and sorting facilities. The government websites containing fiscal data need to be equipped with better searching and sorting mechanisms. Moreover, most of the fiscal data are provided in PDF format, which limits the users' ability to manipulate the data purposefully. It is highly desirable that the major fiscal data-providing agencies, viz. MoF, NBR and IMED should release all datasets in Excel or any other easily reproducible format. Such datasets should supplement the various reports that are already in the public domain.

Time series of fiscal data is not available from a singular source. This makes any analysis of time trend an arduous task. Thus, the government should take the initiative to develop a comprehensive

database which will provide consistent and coherent long-term data series in excel or any other easily reproducible format. This would require serious efforts to harmonise data as various official sources report different numbers for the same indicators and for the same reference periods.

The government must also consider providing public access to the iBAS++ system on a limited scale. This public access needs to adopt a system where the users may register themselves to only view and download data. To facilitate these data-related activities, the concerned government agencies would need to deploy dedicated and skilled personnel.

The providers of fiscal data must follow a specific timeline regarding the release of their respective data. To this end, the government could consider coming up with a pre-announced 'data release calendar'. Timely release of fiscal data as per the calendar can be included as a key performance indicator of the relevant government agencies in their respective Annual Performance Agreements (APA) with the government.

The same indicators are reported by different agencies in Bangladesh, following varying estimation methodologies, in different time periods. Thus, some discrepancy in the data, at least at a point in time, may be unavoidable. Effective resolution of this problem will require an established mechanism. First, there should be a protocol on when to use data from which sources. Second, a data revision schedule has to be formulated that will identify the agency which would provide the final figures for an indicator in which period of a calendar. The Finance Division of MoF may take the lead in this matter. Inter-and intra-agency coordination must be strengthened in order to ensure data harmonisation and consistency.

Identification of accurate data requires prior knowledge regarding the data collection process and estimation methodology on the part of the relevant agencies. To address this issue, metadata and definitions for all indicators should be provided by the relevant government entities. It has to be ensured that different agencies follow the same definition while reporting the same indicator.

Regrettably, the data producers appear to be quite ambivalent regarding the present status of fiscal data in Bangladesh. The MoF, being the nodal agency for producing and disseminating fiscal data, must play a more proactive organising role. However, for this to happen, there is a need for a big push from the demand side (e.g., users' side), particularly on the part of policymakers, including the elected public representatives. At present, this drive is fuelled by data analysts from research and academia. The high-level policymakers, including the public representatives, need to realise that, in the end, the unavailability of disaggregated quality fiscal data in a timely manner undercuts their ability to deliver their political and development commitments to the public. At the same time, other non-state actors, including the media, also need to maintain their demand for real-time quality data.

Finally, improvement in the area of fiscal data would require considerable political will and a change in the mindset of core actors, viz., the data providers and disseminators. It needs to be recognised by these actors that timely disclosure of accurate fiscal data can immensely contribute towards improving the overall development performance of the political regime as well as improve social cohesion through the deepening of transparency and accountability of the delivery agents.

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Reinforcing transparency and accountability through a robust public finance data system can tackle issues related to revenue mobilisation, efficient public expenditure and proper allocation of funds

Focusing on just one of availability, accessibility, agility or accuracy of fiscal data may result in less-than-ideal circumstances for the others

The data producers appear to be quite ambivalent regarding the present status of fiscal data. A significant push from the demand side is required for this scenario to improve, especially from policymakers, including the elected public representatives

The improvement of fiscal data would necessitate strong political will and a shift in the perspectives of core actors, viz. the data producers and disseminators. It must be recognised that timely disclosure of accurate fiscal data can immensely contribute towards improving the overall development performance of the country