OVERVIEW: ENGAGEMENT ON POST-2015

Compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), engagement of key stakeholders in Bangladesh have been, relatively speaking, more proactive in the context of the discourse on the post-2015 international goals, targets and indicators. A number of subnational and national consultations on the post-2015 agenda were held which provided major stakeholders with an opportunity to reflect on Bangladesh's rich experience in terms of implementing the MDGs and the post-2015 framework and its content. Through these efforts and also through participation in various global fora, Bangladesh has contributed to global debates and discussions on the post-2015 agendas with an emphasis on specific country perspectives and priorities.

In comparison to the development of the MDGs, stakeholders are more aware of the need to contribute to shaping the global discourse, both at the government and civil society levels. Issues of generation, availability, accessibility and use of data in the context of calls for a 'data revolution' have also received heightened attention in this discourse. Indeed, the Southern Voice initiative could claim some credit in this regard. The following sections highlight some of the key findings emerging from the Post-2015 Data Test related work carried out in Bangladesh under the aegis of the Southern Voice.

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL POST-2015 PRIORITIES

The targets identified for Bangladesh under the country study overlap with the targets proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development (OWG) to a significant extent. About 77 percent of the targets and indicators identified by the Bangladesh team are reflected in the OWG proposal. Nevertheless, trend analysis undertaken for this study indicates that the aim of a 'global minimum' for a number of key areas, as suggested by the OWG, including ending extreme poverty by 2030 will be difficult to attain unless the needed measures are put in place. Indeed, their realization will call for significant resource allocation.

DATA AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

Although data availability has improved in Bangladesh, the study identified that data are not available for a large number of candidate indicators. Out of 120 indicators selected for the Bangladesh country study, data is readily available for only 67 indicators (56 percent). For the 75 national level indicators selected by the team, 46 indicators (61 percent) have the required data available. For the 45 indicators which are examined by all eight country studies under the Post-2015 Data Test, data were available for 22 (47 percent) indicators.

It was also observed that data for a number of important indicators are also not available at the level of disaggregation needed. Goal areas related to energy, infrastructure, governance, and the environment are areas which particularly suffer from paucity of data in this regard. Dearth of data is likely to make it difficult to establish baselines for measuring Bangladesh's progress towards attainment of post-2015 goals.

Available data in Bangladesh also often suffers from a lack of accuracy and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, and, coherence and comparability. This is particularly true for the goal areas in which little data is readily available, namely energy and infrastructure, governance, environment and global partnership. Issues regarding accessibility and affordability also need to be addressed on an urgent basis.

The study identifies key data gaps and highlights a number of challenges in three key areas: 1) policies and legal frameworks, 2) institutional arrangements and capacity, and 3) political economy dimensions of data generation in Bangladesh.

Outdated and inadequate legislation is an important challenge. There is a need to update legislation to better reflect the increasing demands for more and better quality data, including on issues related to data accessibility. A number of policies are also needed to ensure effective documentation of survey methodologies and metadata, reduce duplication of sources, and disseminate data. There is also an absence of

transparency and quality control efforts. Finally, the country lacks a coherent approach towards validation of non-official data, which could be used to support the monitoring of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

The national statistical system also suffers from weak infrastructure, lack of human resources and insufficient financial resources. Furthermore, coordination among stakeholders, including data users, analysts and producers, is poor. Technological improvements are also needed. For example, storage of data is not digitized.

In terms of the political economy of data generation and use in Bangladesh, data dissemination and poor access to data producers is a major problem. There is also a lack of awareness about the importance of statistics among policy designers and decision makers. The study found that development partners' commitments have been inadequate to support the improvements needed in the national statistical system.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to design an action agenda on an urgent basis to address the challenges listed above. A number of key issues need to be considered in the design of such an agenda.

Consideration for data availability and quality will have implications for the number, scope and frequency of existing survey mechanism in Bangladesh. *First*, there is a need to standardize and bring coherence to relevant concepts and definitions used in surveys through consultation among major stakeholders. *Second*, new surveys for generating data on a number of important indicators are needed. This is particularly important for governance and institutional strengthening related indicators under the post-2015 agenda. *Third*, there is a need to consolidate existing surveys and data collection procedures to improve efficiencies and reduce duplication of efforts. *Fourth*, in many cases the frequency of surveys needs to be raised. *Fifth*, data should be made available in a timely manner to enable real time decision making. *Sixth*, demand for disaggregated data (spatial, gender, age-group, ethnicity, etc.) is growing. Data producers will need to take additional steps to address the growing demands in this respect.

In addition to improving the availability of data, the Bangladesh case study reveals that data relating to measuring progress only may not be adequate for decision making purposes. Policymakers will also need to identify the variables which can positively influence attainment of better results. To respond to this demand, generating data on variables associated with outcomes will also be important.

Enhanced and adequate funding for strengthening institutional capacity and undertaking new activities needs to be ensured. Such efforts should be in keeping with the medium term demands arising from monitoring demands of the post-2015 agenda. Development partners, together with the government of Bangladesh, will need to plan on how to address institutional capacity upfront. Further, better coordination among data producers and data users is needed. Capacity of the non-government sector to produce data and support national level monitoring should be harnessed in a coordinated manner.

Concerted efforts need to be taken towards enhancing quality of the data generated through use of advanced technology. Further, ensuring transparency in data production and access should be a core agenda of the 'data revolution' in Bangladesh.

Finally, the data revolution in the context of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda requires a new set of institutional arrangements. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will represent the Government of Bangladesh at the United Nations where the post-2015 agenda will be finalized. At the same time, the General Economics Division is expected to play the key role in planning and coordinating the implementation process. The Local Consultative Groups may coordinate the initiatives of development partners while the Ministry of Finance including the Economic Relations Division ought to coordinate the financing needs. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics which will continue to serve as the key data generator under the new agenda will need to be significantly strengthened. Civil society and other stakeholder groups will play the roles of both generators and users of some of the key data. Analysts, experts and researchers will make use of the data to measure progress and assess outcomes. Taking cognisance of the aforesaid emerging demands, a comprehensive plan will need to be designed to articulate concrete tasks for specific institutions and stakeholders to ensure coherence and coordination in the implementation of the post-2015 agenda. Data will need to serve not only the purpose of measuring progress but also to ensure accountability in the process of implementing the post-MDGs.