

Effective Engagement of CSOs in Development

Bangladesh. 17 June, 2021

SUMMARY REPORT

On 17 June 2021, the Government of Bangladesh, through the Economic Relations Division of the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with; The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Dhaka, COAST Foundation, and the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment (Task Team), organized a virtual multi-stakeholder workshop titled "Effective Engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Development"

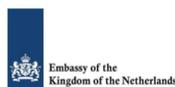
The workshop formed part of a 3-phased approach towards effective engagement of civil society in Bangladesh and was organized under the umbrella of Action Area 2.4 on Civil Society Partnerships of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), of which Bangladesh is currently a Co-chair.

Preceding the virtual workshop, participants were encouraged to complete an online course (Phase I) on Effective Engagement of Civil Society in Development, available on Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/learn/effective-engagement-of-civil-society-in-development>). The course takes participants through a history of the international commitments on effective engagement of civil society; what this means in practice for different development actors; and the benefits that can ensue through means of good practice examples. This virtual workshop formed Phase II and focused on cementing

what was learned in the online course in Phase I, by actively discussing this in a virtual setting and creating a common reference point between stakeholders for issues requiring deeper exploration in a face-to-face setting. Following the virtual workshop, participants will come together in an in-person workshop in Phase III (timing to be confirmed) for deeper discussion on effective CSO engagement in Bangladesh.

This virtual workshop also aimed to contribute to SDG 17 (multi-stakeholder partnerships) by providing an opportunity to reinforce ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue and a greater understanding of stakeholders' varied roles in advancing CSO engagement to achieve the SDGs.

The workshop was targeted at key development actors in Bangladesh from Government, civil society, and



development partners. In total 54 individuals participated in the workshop, including 12 government officials, 19 CSO representatives, and 16 representatives from development partners. Through the promotion of this workshop and the underlying three-phased approach, 43 individuals from Bangladesh enrolled in the online course on *Effective Engagement of Civil Society in Development*, of whom 30 have completed the course.

The workshop was moderated by Dr. Atiur Rahman, Chair of Unnayan Shamannay, Bangabandhu Chair Professor at Dhaka University, and former Governor of the Bangladesh Bank. With his diverse background and affiliation with different segments of the development landscape, Dr. Atiur was able to navigate between the different stakeholder groups and made for an excellent moderator.

Opening remarks were provided by three distinguished members from the co-organizing parties, including; Mr. Farid Aziz, Development Effectiveness Wing Chief at the Economic Relations Division of the Ministry of Finance; H.E. Harry Verweij, Ambassador at the Embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands; and Mr. M. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of the COAST Foundation. During the opening remarks, the speakers set the tone for a constructive discussion and emphasized this opportunity to further strengthen the multi-stakeholder approaches and inclusive development effectiveness dialogue in Bangladesh. In doing so, the importance of inclusive and transparent engagement was highlighted in order to understand different needs and perspectives for more effective collaboration.

Following this, the Task Team Secretariat facilitated an interactive session on the International Commitments on CSO participation in development processes, which formed the background and context to the focus of the workshop. The Task Team Secretariat presented a history of the international commitments, the origins of which lie in the period when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formulated in 2000, and which are still relevant today as CSOs are key to the implementation and monitoring of Agenda 2030's Sustainable Development Goals. Through means of a few quiz questions, participants proved their knowledge of the international commitments on the CSO enabling environment and CSO development effectiveness.

Having set the scene for the workshop, participants then split into multi-stakeholder break-out groups to discuss a practical four-part framework towards advancing the CSO enabling environment and CSO development effectiveness, in the context of Bangladesh. Each group discussed one of the elements of the framework: Group 1 – Multi-stakeholder dialogue; Group 2 – CSO Development Effectiveness, Accountability, and Transparency; Group 3 – Official development cooperation with CSOs; and Group 4 – Enabling Laws, regulations, policies, and practice. The break-out groups were facilitated by the Task Team Secretariat and the GPEDC. Country level actors were appointed as rapporteurs to reported back on the main issues emerging from their group discussions.

The main discussion issues from each group were:

- Group 1: Multi-stakeholder dialogue – Bangladesh has mechanisms for multi-stakeholder dialogue, but these need to be strengthened. Dialogues are not always inclusive, and the most marginalized are faced with language barriers, insufficient information on how to access national dialogues, and capacity issues. Strong monitoring of development programs is needed to inform dialogue.
- Group 2: CSO Development Effectiveness, Accountability, and Transparency – Local CSOs in Bangladesh spend the majority of their time on project implementation. More (financial) support is needed for development of CSOs' internal systems. There is also a lack of coordination and information sharing amongst CSOs. This is further challenged by bidding processes for donor funding.
- Group 3: Official development cooperation with CSOs – Local CSOs, particularly those outside of the capital, lack access to information from donors, which means they miss funding opportunities. CSOs also raised questions pertaining to donor accountability to citizens in their home countries. The role of donors in combating shrinking civic space was also emphasized, donors have a key role to play here.
- Group 4: The legal and regulatory environment – The registration process for CSOs in Bangladesh is difficult, this needs to be made easier. In addition, there are many different laws that regulate the CSO registration process. There is also a gap between research and policy, research findings need to inform policy processes. Government does conduct periodic consultations with CSOs, the private sector and development partners, such as for the VNRs, Bangladesh Development Forum, or through the Local Consultative Mechanism. However, these consultations need to be more inclusive and should also engage CSOs at the peripheries and in remote areas.

Following the break-out groups, participants shared their main take-aways from the workshop and issues requiring further discussion through Mentimeter. The key word coming out of the take-aways was 'partnership'. Participants identified inclusiveness, dialogue, transparency and accountability as main aspects of meaningful partnerships. Some of the key issues requiring deeper exploration included coordination, information sharing, funding for CSOs and ownership.

The workshop then came to a close with closing remarks by Mr. Abdul Baki, World Bank Wing Chief at the Economics Relation Division of the Ministry of Finance. Mr. Baki reiterated the key issues and emphasized the vital role of CSOs in Bangladesh' development journey. Participants then posed for a group picture and gave a 'thumbs-up' to demonstrate their commitment to carry forward these discussions in Phase III, in which a physical workshop in Bangladesh is envisioned.