



Report on
National Consultation on LDC Graduation and Sustainable Development:
Bangladesh's Perspective

A national consultation on LDC Graduation and Sustainable Development of Bangladesh took place on 27 February 2018 at the CIRDARP auditorium, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The programme was organized by LDC Watch in collaboration with the National Focal Point in Bangladesh – COAST. Rd. Quiz Khaliqzaman Ahmed, Chairman PKSf was the Chair of the seminar. Dr. Shamsul Alam, Senior Secretary of GED and member of planning commission as special guest, Md. Anwar Hossain, Additional Secretary of ERD and Md. Hafizur Rahman, Deputy Secretary and Director of WTO Cell were in the panel of speakers.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, the Chief Moderator of EquityBD has moderated the seminar while Syed Aminul Hoque presented the keynote paper. Around 25 civil society organizations participated in the seminar. The civil societies recommended government to take preparation sustainable graduating from LDCs (Least Development Countries). They also urged to adopt appropriate measures in tackling the current inequality in this regard.

In the keynote paper presented by the Deputy Director of COAST Trust, Syed Aminul Hoque raised the official recommendations of EquityBD and LDC Watch for Bangladesh including (1) Increase domestic resource mobilization through stopping of tax dodging and illicit financial outflow that would support the government to increase her own investment capacity. (2) Expedite pro-poor budgetary allocation for health and education to develop skilled human asset to face the challenges of LDC graduation. (3) Focus climate resilient critical infrastructure to save coastal people and asset. (4) Effective governance to improve development effectiveness.

In his speech Dr. Quazi Khaliqzaman Ahmed said, the most important issue of this graduation is the dignity of our nation. We deserve this status and it is not anyone's kindness for us. We have achieved this based on our hard work and performance. We might lose some facilities and advantages that LDCs enjoy in the world's economic activities. But, we need to look ahead as we can do better by ourselves. Dr. Shamsul Alam, the Senior Secretary of Bangladesh Government said, Quality Education could be the key focus to face the upcoming challenge for Bangladesh while graduating the LDC status as the current way of Education is not meeting the need of Development challenges. We really are not looking for ODA anymore as an LDC when Bangladesh is expecting to be an investing country after this graduation.

Md. Hafizur Rahman, Director of the WTO cell under the Ministry of Commerce said, as a LDC we are not fully enjoying the Special and Differential Preference neither from the Developed Countries like USA, Russia etc. nor from some Developing Countries like India and China. We are looking forward to the greater opportunities as a middle income country.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, the Chief Moderator of EquityBD said, biggest challenge toward the sustainability in LDC graduation are climate disaster and inequalities, we need to develop climate resilient infrastructure.



Mr. Anwar Hossain, Additional Secretary of External Resource Division of Bangladesh Government said, while we will be graduating we might lose some LDC facilities but there are opportunities for us too, we have to develop our competitiveness through quality education.

Mr. Gauri Pradhan of Nepal, the International Coordinator of LDC Watch delivered a statement expressing his and LDC Watch's solidarity (Attached in Annex 3)

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Programme Schedule

Title	Bangladesh Graduation from LDC: Way forward for Sustainable Approach
Date, time and place	17 February 2018 at 10.30 am-1.00 pm at CIRDAP Auditorium [Old], Dhaka.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To place the overview of current economic scenario of Bangladesh ii. Introduce discussion on government poverty reduction approach in view of SDGs and economic sustainability. iii. To draw CSO opinion towards a sustainable graduation strategies for BD from LDC to LMDC (Lower Middle Income Country).
Chairman	Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Prominent Economist and Civil Society Think Tank and Chairman PKSF (Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation).
Chief Guest	Mr. Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud-MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Environment and Forest
Special Guest	Mr. MA Mannan MP, State Minister, Ministry of Finance and Planning.
Moderator	Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Chief Moderator, EquityBD
Key note	Syed Aminul Hoque, EquityBD.
Organized by	EquityBD and LDC Watch
Honorable Expert guest	Dr. Shamsul Alam, Member, (Senior Secretary) General Economics Division, Planning Commission , Bangladesh.
Guest Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Mr. Monwar Ahmed, Additional Secretary, ERD (Economic Relation Division, Ministry of Finance and Planning). iii. Mr. Sahadat Hossen, Director General (Acting), NGO affairs Bureau, Bangladesh. iv. Md. Munir Chowdhury Director General (DG- WTO) v. Mr. Rezaul Hoque, Milon, Director, FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry). vi. Md. Abu Naser, Director-FBCCI vii. Mr. Assjaul Kibria, Member, Bangladesh Economic Association.

Journalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Mr. Sahidul Islam Chowdhury, New Age ii. Salauddin Bablu, Chief Reporter- SA TV iii. Md. Mainul Hossen, Daily Ittfaq iv. Mr. Mohsinul Karim, Daily Observer
Guest Participants [CSOs]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abdul Awal-NRDS 2. Rafiqul Islam – DUS 3. A K M Jashim Uddin – ADAB 4. Mr. Rafiqul Islam – FNB 5. Dr. Salim Rayhan - DU 6. A HM Bazlur Rahaman - BNNRC 7. Dr. Mesbauddin Ahmed – J. S. Juot 8. Mr. Sayed Sultan Ahmed – J. Sromik Nirapatta Juot 9. Mr. Hafizul Islam –P.S.i 10. Mr. Aminur Rasul – UD Trust . 11. Mr. Monour Mostafa- S.B 12. Mr. Prodip Kumer Sarker 13. Mr. Shahidullah – Consultant 14. Mr. A.S.M Badrul Anam – K.F 15. Mr. Subal Sarker - BBS 16. Mr. Jayed Iqbal Khan- K.F 17. Mr. Golam Saruare – BALF 18. Mr. Shiblee Anwer –LRC 19. Mr. Mihir Bisahas 20. Mr. Eng.Md. Liton Miah – APCD 21. Mr. Syed Arifuzzaman –Arban
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Annex 2: List of Participants

Guests

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Annex 3:

**Solidarity Message by Mr. Gauri Pradhan, Global Coordinator, LDC Watch at
National Consultation on
Bangladesh Graduation from LDC: Way Forward for Sustainable Approach
Dhaka, Bangladesh**

Respected Chair,

Honourable Chief Guest

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen!

In the struggle of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), it is a matter of pride that Bangladesh is making a significant stride towards graduation. Bangladesh is having a robust and stable economic growth with considerable reduction in poverty. Bangladesh has been achieving above 7 per cent economic growth since past two fiscal years¹. Poverty has been massively decreased in last one decade. Bangladesh is one of the few LDCs that have achieved the economic growth target set by Istanbul Programme of LDCs for the decade 2011-2020 (IPoA) and Goal 8.1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The growth is led by the contribution of the export of ready-made garments (RMG).

A recent mission by the Secretariat of the UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP) to Dhaka confirmed that the country is likely for the first time meet the three criteria for graduation at the 2018 triennial review. If everything goes well, Bangladesh would graduate in 2024 becoming the first LDC to graduate into a middle income country by meeting all the three criteria for graduation: Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, Human Asset Index (HAI) and Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI). On graduation, the IPoA has set the goal to enable half of the LDCs to graduate from the LDC category by achieving at least 7 per cent of sustained economic growth per annum, strengthening productive capacity, reducing economic vulnerability, increasing access to finance and maintaining good governance at all levels (Paragraph 28, IPoA). Bangladesh is on the path to make remarkable achievement in this regard.

Graduation would indeed be a major milestone in the history of Bangladesh. However, the path after graduation is not easy and accompanied with post-graduation challenges. There are several economic

¹ Gross Domestic Product of Bangladesh 2013-14 to 2016-17, Retrieved from:
http://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/057b0f3b_a9e8_4fde_b3a6_6daec3853586/Rev3_GDP_2016_17_Website.pdf



implications of graduation. International Support Measures (ISMs) would be stopped for Bangladesh in three years after graduation. This means that preferential trade treatments such as Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), General System of Preferences (GSP) provided by the European Union and Canada, and duty free quota free (DFQF) market access will no longer be available to Bangladesh after 2027. Due to this, Bangladesh is like to face competitive pressure on export products on withdrawal of international support measures. However, after 2027, provided that it ratifies 27 conventions on human and labour rights, environment and governance, Bangladesh may be expected to gain access to the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+), giving it dedicated preferential tariff rates. Also, it is expected that the improvement to Bangladesh's image on the world stage from graduation would give it a better credit rating, allowing it to borrow more cheaply on world markets. Nevertheless, graduation will have impact on the receipt of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from developed countries and will nearly double Bangladesh's contribution to UN organisations.

According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), many LDCs are likely to face one or more of three major challenges beyond graduation: persistence of commodity dependence; a risk of reversion to LDC status; and the middle income trap. Every graduation is accompanied with the risk of reversion, mainly due to exogenous shocks such as climate-induced disasters and trade shocks which are the major threats to the economy of Bangladesh as well. The export of ready-made garments occupies a major share of industrial contribution to GDP contributing almost 14.07 per cent to the GDP of Bangladesh. However, the export basket is little diversified contributing almost 81 per cent of the total export earnings². Bangladesh is already facing a major challenge on how to raise wages for the working poor without losing international competitiveness. Moreover, the impacts of climate change are already seen in South Asia with the massive flood in that impacted lives in Bangladesh, Nepal and India in 2017. Like other developing countries, LDCs in the process of graduation like Bangladesh may face challenges in sustaining economic growth sufficiently to progress from low to middle income and from middle to high income, rather than being caught in the middle-income trap. Middle income trap can be due to persistence of structural vulnerabilities, infrastructural gap, low levels of human capital, among many other problems. Hence, the coming decade will be a defining period for Bangladesh with both opportunities and challenges as it navigates from an LDC into a developing country towards becoming a middle income country.

As a result, smooth and sustainable transition is crucial for a graduating LDC. The concept of smooth transition embodies the principle that LDC-specific support should be phased out in a gradual and predictable manner following graduation, so as not to disrupt the development process of the graduating country, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 59/209, 66/213 and 67/221. The Government of Bangladesh needs to take a lead role in making graduation smooth and sustainable by preparing a transition strategy. For Bangladesh, the implementation of various policies in the field of technological advancement, climate finance, tax base improvement, ODA, investment, remittance, productivity and good governance should be effectively put into enforcement. The Government needs to build its productive capacity, expand its export base, diversify its economy, and make serious efforts towards poverty alleviation to sustain its graduation in the long run. LDC Watch would like to appreciate the effort by Government of Bangladesh to form a National Task Force comprising high level relevant stakeholders to provide guidance for conducting the Impact Assessment Study on

² Ready-made Garments Sector of Bangladesh: Its Contribution and Challenges towards Development. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309702078_Ready-Made_Garments_Sector_of_Bangladesh_Its_Contribution_and_Challenges_towards_Development



graduation and identifying priorities for implementing the sustainable graduation³. Now, the Government should take along the private sector, civil society and international community while it pursues the agenda of sustainable graduation. Development and trading partners, including the United Nations system, should continue to support the implementation of the transition strategy and avoid any abrupt reductions in financial and technical assistance and should consider extending trade preferences to the graduated country, on a bilateral basis (Paragraph 142; IPoA). The international community needs to extend the LDC-specific support measures to the currently graduated countries keeping in mind that the graduated countries will have not yet built productive capacity to have a sustained development. The General Assembly in its resolution on smooth transition strategy also urges all development partners to support the implementation of transition strategy and to avoid any reductions in either ODA or technical assistance provided to the graduated country. In addition, the WTO should extend to a graduated country the existing special and differential treatment and exemptions available to LDCs for a period appropriate to the development situation. We also call on the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) under World Trade Organisation (WTO) to support graduating LDCs in developing trade-related capacities. Global partnerships including North-South, South-South and Triangular partnership needs to be strengthened. Building synergies between fight against poverty, increasing inequalities and social cohesion, local economic development and civil society partnership needs to be reinforced. Equally important is for LDCs to negotiate with UN agencies, multilateral and regional trading bodies, and other international community, seeking appropriate support for sustainable graduation.

Finally, graduation doesn't automatically lead to a continued development progress. Therefore, it is essential for graduating countries to grasp the concept of smooth transition that includes avoiding a reversal of development progress. In the case of Bangladesh if there is further progress in climate finance, tax base, OD, investment, productivity, remittance and good governance, its journey towards a sustainable middle country will be a success.

On behalf of LDC CSOs, we express our solidarity and wish the very best to Bangladesh for a successful path to graduation.

Thank you.

Annex 4: Photos

³ Sustainable Graduation: Bangladesh Case. Retrieved from <http://unohrlls.org/custom-content/uploads/2017/11/Dr.-Md-Rezaul-Bashar-Siddique.pdf>



