

Bangladesh Development Forum 2010
Opening Remarks by Isabel Guerrero Vice President, South Asia Region, The World Bank

Progress since the last Forum held in 2005:

1. Peace and stability were maintained, avoiding prolonged internal conflict seen in other countries in the region. Orderly return to democratic government.
2. Macroeconomic stability has been maintained and economic growth averaged 5-6 percent per annum resulting in declining poverty. Bangladesh is on track to meet the MDG on halving extreme poverty by 2015.
3. Human development shows measurable improvements in most areas. On track to meet MDGs for infant and child mortality and school enrollments.
4. And, this past 2 years, resilience to global crises has been remarkable, buoyed by private industry and private remittances.

There are four Challenges going forward:

1. Accelerating growth. Growth of eight percent per annum to achieve its targets for poverty reduction and to reach Middle Income Country Status by 2021.
2. Infrastructure gaps. Energy shortage has become the biggest obstacle to growth, and urban congestion discouraging investment and reducing quality of life
3. Vulnerability to natural disasters. Bangladesh is a most-affected nation on climate change.
4. Growing labor force requires strategies for youth employment, skills development and labor mobility.

Five priorities for addressing these challenges:

1. Strong Governance and Better Public Service Delivery. More revenues to finance public investment in health services, nutrition programs and rural electrification. Better services for strong public management at all levels of government and empowering communities to improve accountability at local levels.
2. Attracting private investment. The public - private sector dialogue helped improve the climate for doing business. Massive investment needs from multiple sources in infrastructure, particularly the power sector. A clear framework for public-private partnerships and expanding current initiatives will further help.
3. Tackling urban planning. Improved urban planning as an investment destination; Dhaka as a livable city and for secondary cities as growth poles for Bangladesh's rural areas.
4. Adapting to climate change. Bangladesh has demonstrated pro-active global leadership, including adopting a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan and establishing a Climate Change Trust Fund to spur innovative programs.
5. Fostering regional cooperation. Greater collaboration among South Asian nations, could accelerate growth by an additional 2 percent per annum through increased trade in goods and services and reduced input costs. Initial steps like cross-border power transmission line are significant. The Government has succeeded in leading on historic overture to India and it will have the support from partners like the World Bank with regional presence.
6. Conclusion: Working together , under the government's leadership, we can support development results in Bangladesh.

Three examples of success are already there for us to see:

1. Girl's school: MDG for gender parity in primary and secondary schooling has been achieved in Bangladesh ahead of time. For Bangladeshi women in their fifties today, less than 20 percent completed primary school. For teenage girls, the comparable figure is over 80%.
2. Reliable energy: Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Development project connected around 600,000 consumers to the electricity grid and provided about 320,000 rural households with Solar Home Systems.

3. Private investment: There has been a reduction in the time taken to register most businesses from over a month in the past to now less than a day using online registration immediately doubling the number of firms registered.

Closing: So, this means that many more results are well within our grasp if we work together under country leadership with:

1. The country and its development partners;
2. Public and private sectors;
3. Government and civil society;
4. Central and local government--working across political, social and institutional divides to improve the lives of millions of Bangladeshis.