

PFIM SESSION II EMPOWERING THE POOR
POINT 1: INEQUALITY & OFF TRACK MDGS
(Nutrition, Maternal Mortality, Tuberculosis and Water)

Why inequality matters

- § If the growth of the 1990s had been equitably distributed, rural poverty reduction would have been 2.4% instead of the 0.9% achieved.
- § Bangladesh has moved from a situation of lower growth with equity having a smaller impact on poverty reduction in the eighties to a situation of higher growth with inequality having a larger impact on poverty reduction in the nineties. (PRSP 2.13)
- § Inequality is rising in Bangladesh – it is not just a sign of a dynamic economy, but has severely damaging effects on the economy and society.
- § Rising inequality continues to prevent the full impact of growth from registering on poverty reduction. (PRSP 2.28)
- § Inequality refers not just to income -inequality. It also covers restrictions on access to health, education, information and mobility resources.
- § This is one of the reasons why off -track MDGs are important. Getting them back on-track will help to reduce inequality.
- § Spatial inequality is also a serious issue, with some parts of the country being cut off from development benefit.
- § Failure to address inequality can lead to increasing disaffection, social unrest and instability.

Problems of growth led development

The PRSP recognises that growth without improved equality will not lead the country to its full poverty-reducing potential.

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Thus the growth experience of the recent past suggests that most of the dynamic sectors, including the non -farm sector, generate inequality. (PRSP 2.28)

PRSP approach

The development goals of Bangladesh include eliminating absolute poverty and reducing income inequality; achieving economic growth; and ensuring social justice. (PRSP 5.373)

Adoption of a “pro-poor” growth strategy is thus favoured over “growth maximization” as a means of achieving faster decline of poverty (PRSP para 2.25)

This is to be achieved through:

- § increased labour productivity and returns in all sectors.
- § upgrading the skill levels of the unskilled workers through greater investment in education and skill development
- § improved infrastructure and greater access to infrastructures.
- § expand the asset base, encompassing the human, physical and financial capital of the poor.

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However, such an approach poses problems:

- § Major population growth pressures focus in metropolitan areas – threatening to force a replay of past experience
- § The poorest are still at risk of not being reached by economic growth processes. Targeted poverty reduction interventions are essential.

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Next 12 months

- § Implement HNPSP commitment to allocate additional health funds to poorest Districts
- § Conduct rigorous evaluation of existing social protection and safety net programmes and develop more appropriately targeted ones.
- § Increase agricultural allocations in ADP in support of National Agricultural Plan of Action to increase incomes of poor farmers and ensure effective implementation.

On off-track MDGs:

Nutrition: nutrition levels in Bangladesh particularly among women and children are worse than in sub-Saharan Africa and birth weights are the lowest in the world. The National nutrition programmes have failed to deliver their potential. Poor nutrition of mothers leads to small babies whose health and development is compromised and who in turn, as they become mothers, continue the vicious cycle of low birth weight babies.

Action for next 12 months: Given the intergenerational implications of the nutrition problem, particularly as it exacerbates disease prevalence and reduces economic productivity, government needs to develop cross sectoral programmes specifically

targeted at (i) increasing incomes of the poor for long term improvement in nutrition and (ii) addressing the immediate growth and nutritional needs of female adolescents and children, who will become future mothers , with special focus to Monga areas.

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Maternal mortality : (UNICEF and UNFPA can further elaborate the point); action recommended: Launch maternal care voucher scheme ; allocate sufficient resources to all upazilla level implementation
Provide sufficient funds to train community based sill birth attendants for safe home deliveries and referrals

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Tuberculosis : Tuberculosis is essentially a disease of the poor and over 80,000 people die annually in Bangladesh from TB. While achievement of the MDG target for TB cure rate is improving, the main problem is that there are over 300,000 new TB cases each year of which less than one third are detected for treatment.

Action for next 12 months: Develop a strategic plan, based on lessons learned in communities and involving the private sector, to reduce both TB prevalence as well as TB mortality.

Water : (UNICEF best placed to elaborate on the point); Action for next 12 months: Complete and launch Sector Development Plan for water

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