

Challenges Ahead to Sustainable Development in Bangladesh: A Concern for Future Generation

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Abstract: ‘Sustainable Development’ is such a desiring reality, unquestionably, which costs much at the same time it returns back with fuller. The durability of any establishment, project or development undertaking makes human life easy and speedy. The country is now looking forward to accelerating its overall development modules. ‘Sustainable development’ as a legitimate expectation on the part of the common people deserves overriding importance to be perceived by the highest executive body of the country. It should have been the state’s responsibility whereby the state will be holding a non-compromising approach towards negligence, corruption, manipulations or anything like these in any development projects of the country. Any Sustainable development of today will make the life and living standards secured for the upcoming generations tomorrow and that has been an unconditional obligation of the present generation as well. This research paper has been designed to explore the sustainable development plan of the country and the challenges ahead thereto. Sincerity, accountability, transparency, and effectiveness on the part of various departments of the government is still a dream than a reality. The concerted effort may change the entire scenario and bring everything to light. The durability of current development works in different parts of the country is highly questionable due to the poor work plan, acute corruption and absence of accountability. Moreover, the common people are not satisfied with the quality of the various infrastructural developments across the country. Ensuring quality works in the development process is a big challenge for a newly developing country like Bangladesh.

Keywords: Sustainability, Development, Infrastructure, Plan, Good Governance, Goal, Project

1. Introduction

‘People’ likes to improve them through development work every moment. There is a random chase among ‘nation states’ to beat each other in development parameters. Bangladesh has been taking so many steps to improve the overall picture of the country facade for the last three decades where in the last decade is comparatively considerable and visible. The people of the country is now witnessing some rapid changes in almost every department of the country through development works like making multifunctional bridges, flyover, over bridges in road transport sector, giving study materials and other incentives in the education sector, providing mother and child health facilities in the health sector, bridging to access to information through digitalization over public offices etc. The public treasury is almost open for doing

every development work across the country. Notably, people do not take any work plan for shorter period of time rather people look forward to some quality works by paying maximum to ensure sustainability and durability of every development work. Likewise, whenever state undertakes any sort of development projects for the wellbeing of the common people it must give the highest emphasis to the sustainability and durability of the development works so that the interest of the future generation remains intact. Social sustainable development, economic sustainable development and environmental sustainable development all together is a well branded concept for the day but we must not forget another imperative development sector i.e infrastructural development which itself deserves sustainability by virtue

of its nature. Though sustainable development is a newly evolved concept, it has been adopted and well applied by many developed states in their regular state affairs even before the origination of the concept of 'sustainable development'. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015. It is underpinned by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets [9].

National policy-makers now face the challenge of implementing this indivisible agenda and achieving progress across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development world-wide [10]. As the process moves towards implementation, there is a need to address the scope and systemic nature of the 2030 Agenda and the urgency of the challenges [9]. This requires a wide range of tools and science-based analysis to navigate that complexity and to realize the ambition [9]. This paper is an attempt to find the challenges out in achieving the sustainable development goals by the year 2030 and also an attempt to propose some actions to overcome the challenges.

2. Sustainable Development

The United Nations decided to set up the Brundtland Commission in 1983 to unite countries to pursue sustainable development together. The concept Sustainable Development is a recently conceived idea by a scientist namely Gro Harlem Brundtland in 1987, former Norway Prime Minister [3]. The Chairperson of the Commission, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General in December 1983. Ms. Brundtland for the first time has given a precise definition of 'sustainable development' into the Brundtland report which is commonly known as 'Our Common Future' [3]. Sustainable Development refers to mean the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [3]. It is worth mentioning that the definition of sustainable development reported in the Brundtland report is all about the sustainable development of environmental components, nevertheless, it reflects the ultimate essence of sustainable development what it could have been. Sustainable development is a wide concept that covers almost every aspect of development activities of a country. There is a never-ending connection between sustainability and durability of development works of a country in one side and the life and living standards of the native of that particular country on the other side. From its origins until today the concept of sustainable development has been faced with different interpretations and criticisms [14, 21]. The Brundtland report stated how concept of sustainable development had different meanings and referred to holistic planning and adoption of strategies, ecology, heritage protection and biodiversity and long-term sustainable development [14, 21].

3. What About Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The global community, after dedicated and consistent efforts over the last year, has developed an agenda that promises to address the concerns of human development for all, while ensuring the health of the planet and its ecosystems [1]. The Post 2015 UN Development Agenda is a unique participatory exercise that has led to the design of a Sustainable Development framework consisting of 17 Goals that address the key concerns of humanity and 169 interlinked Targets within these Goals that reflect the complex and interrelated nature of social, economic and ecological well-being parameters [1]. In September 2015, the post 2015 UN Development Agenda, comprising of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted, replacing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These ambitious and aspirational SDGs call for significant rethinking in development processes across the world. They also call for significant resources to be dedicated and invested in priority areas as identified in the framework of Goals and Targets for each member state [1]. The Sustainable Development Goals (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015) run from 2016 to 2030 and are formally the goals of the United Nations' 'Transforming our world [9]; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', an agenda which sets out the vision, principles and commitments to a fairer and more sustainable world for all [8, 9]. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a set of objectives within a universal agreement to end poverty, protect all that makes the planet habitable, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, now and in the future [8, 16]. The Goals were adopted by all member states of United Nations formally in 2015, for the period 2016–30 to address the overwhelming empirical and scientific evidence that the world needs a radically more sustainable approach [9]. Sustainable development is a term coined to ensure that development takes place in such a way that natural resources are sustained and passed on to the future generation unimpaired [7, 17]. Seventeen (17) 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) aimed at to build a more prosperous, more equal and more secure world by the year 2030 have been developed [8]. They have been adopted by 193 member states at the UN General Assembly summit in September 2015 as a part of their agenda for sustainable development [8]. Bangladesh is a signatory to this summit and is strongly committed to the 2030 agenda [7, 18, 19]. A list of 17 Sustainable Development goals has been given below into a chart;

The goals set out in the chart above are easily achievable by developed states because they do not have any fund crisis. But the same thing is near to impossible for under developed countries including some developing countries as well. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals mainly depends on the availability of funds, international cooperation and integration etc.

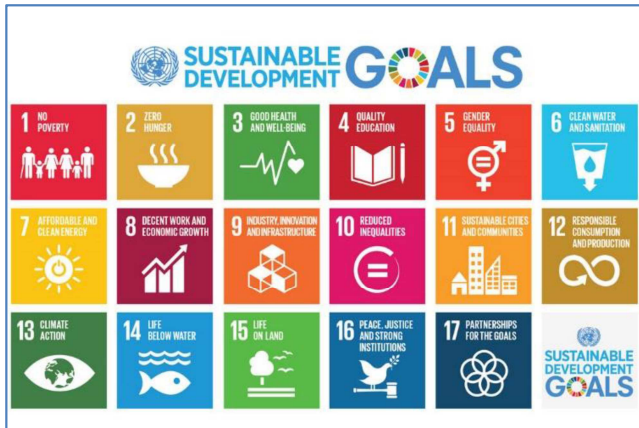


Figure 1. 17 SDGs at a glance [2].

4. Significance of Sustainable Development

As it is mentioned earlier that people's life becomes easy and smooth when they enjoy the benefit of the development works undertaken by the government across the country.

A development works of poor quality causes multifarious damage to the common people; it is just like missing both pen and penny on the same occasion. The most alarming thing is that the development project cost is too high in Bangladesh but the quality of the said works, in many cases, is highly questionable. The government takes development project for almost every sector and it cuts the pocket of the common people accordingly. The financial condition of the people of this country is not so strong wherefrom it can pay more and more money in the public exchequer every moment, at the same time most of the development works become useless even before the expected longevity. Lack of expected Longevity of the development work is the point objection on the part of common people in Bangladesh. The common people carry the adverse impact of poor development works and it causes economic disaster in their life. In this situation the concern project operation authority can play important role to reduce corruptions otherwise these people may never turn their life around of the aforesaid disaster. Development works gains the highest importance in almost every developed country because they reckon the value of sustainability and longevity of each and every development works.

5. Sustainable Development in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the highest development policy making and program/project approving institution is National Economic Council (NEC), which is headed by the Prime Minister. After the NEC, the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) headed by the Finance Minister reviews the plans and programs sent by various ministries and

endorse them. All projects/programmes under the Annual Development Plan (ADP) have to be cleared by NEC /ECNEC [5, 10, 11]. Thus policies and actions for 'sustainable development' come under the purview of NEC /ECNEC for endorsement and approval too [5]. Protection & Improvement of Environment and Biodiversity; in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh states that [6, 12, 13], The state shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to preserve and safe-guard the natural resources, biodiversity, wetlands, forest and wildlife for the present and future citizens [5]. The pursuit of sustainable development is, therefore, a Constitutional obligation in Bangladesh [5]. In recognition of the long term development challenge [5], the government has set development targets in its Vision 2021 which are aimed at achieving a transformation in the socio-economic and environmental areas that will help Bangladesh to graduate to a middle income country by 2021 [5]. The revenue (including both direct and indirect tax) levied on the common people is the ultimate source of income of Bangladesh Government. The Government has been undertaking every development project by paying from public exchequer as a result it makes people responsive to their right to development and development means definitely sustainable development. No one can deny that the government is duty bound to ensure the welfare of the common people and it can only be ensured by the government when transparency, sincerity and accountability will be the guiding principles of the development works of the government. Eventually, it is very difficult, for a newly developing country like Bangladesh, to ensure hundred percent transparency and accountability in their development projects due to poor administration and absence of skilled man power. In many cases government has to depend on layman to serve its purposes in every sector which put down the quality of the entire works as well. It makes common people disappointed with the government's activities.

6. Necessity of Sector Based Sustainable Development in Bangladesh

I would like to mention some sectors especially for which sustainable development is a must needed component, without which prosperity of a country will remain a dream, like education sector, service sector, agriculture sector, infrastructural development sector, health sector, environment and natural resource sector, power sector, business sector, maritime and admiralty sector, water sector, energy sector etc. Goal 4 of the sustainable development goals deals with quality education that is my first sector; this sector has been struggling since our independence in 1971. As we all know that quality education is the precondition for a prosperous country. Perhaps government is trying its level best to set up a quality education system in the country but unfortunately periodical experimentation on education system has become a routine work of the concern authority.

Hence, we must put highest emphasis on setting up a quality education system as soon as possible. Goal 16 deals with the second sector that is service sector; service sector of the country is one of the most vulnerable sectors ever. The service sector of the country is highly affected by unrestricted corruption everywhere. There is no alternative to a stable service sector to become a developed country. Goal 3 deals with third sector that is health sector; it is one of the poor sectors in the country, more importantly; Covid-19 makes the picture clear before all. Goals 13, 14 and 15 altogether deals with the fourth sector that is Environment sector; this is another vulnerable sector in the country, as we all know that Dhaka is the second highest polluted city in the world. We must take care of our environment and must make sure the reasonable use of natural resources. We like to believe that natural resources are unlimited but it is quite limited. One can not overlook the importance of power sector in this modern world. Our government has taken lots of initiative to improve the power sector across the country last fifteen years. But still sustainable power sector is a dream for us. Goal 9 deals with Business and industrial sector which is one of the important pillars for sustainable economy of a country. Bangladesh government should hold positive approach towards business and trade policy so that a conducive environment can be created for the sector. Goal 14 deals with marine fisheries sector; 'marine fisheries' is designated to be the most valuable natural resource globally. The Bay of Bengal is a blessing for Bangladesh because it is abound with some precious marine fishes like hilsa fish, tuna fish etc. Bangladesh government has to formulate some effective strategy for maximum exploitation of these valuable fishes like Norway. Goal 6 deals with Water sector; no one can refute the impact of water on human life. Pure water is a name of great concern; tentative water crisis is one of the upcoming threats for the world. Hence, government must take necessary steps to preserve our ground water reserves at any cost. We must not kill our aquifers. The most alarming thing procures that the level of ground water has been getting down since last 30 years. As a result drought season in our country lasts longer than usual. Goal 2 deals with the agricultural sector; the agriculture sector deserves paramount importance because survival of human being mainly depends on this sector. If we look twenty years back we may find a different Bangladesh where around 80% people were cultivator. Recently, European countries have made revolutionary improvement in this sector. We must not forget that agricultural land is getting reduced rapidly in our country. Fast urbanization and industrialization is ultimately responsible for this reduction. From now government must consider agricultural sector as the most important one otherwise we must have to suffer for this unconscious overlooking. Goal 7 deals with energy sector which another crucial sector for modern world. Energy is the key to smooth industrial development of a country. One cannot envision an industrially developed country without a strong energy sector. Bangladesh government has been trying to put up its energy sector to facilitate the industry and other energy based

sector. In this sector we have many more to go and many things remains undone to build up a strong energy sector. Rapid economic growth coupled with a rising population is putting a high toll on the environment, ecology and natural resources in Bangladesh [5, 15]. In order to ensure the best possible opportunities for a productive and healthy life for the people while maintaining the balance in nature and ensuring sustainability for future generations, the country has to have human centered sustainable development [5].

7. Sustainable Development and Its Provinces

Sustainable development covers the following provinces e.g. nature (environment), society and economy. It is a simple and effective way to describe what sustainability is. Sustainability means longevity of any components like social components, environmental components or economic components. We must consider these three components as a whole to ensure a balance sustainable development. This connection allows finding new ways of development that will tend to preserve the living conditions and thus enable the benefits for all parties involved. In broader sense sustainable development covers three aspects like;

- a. Social sustainability;
- b. Environmental sustainability and
- c. Economic sustainability.

These three aspects of sustainability are closely connected to each other; social sustainability includes sustainable social relations, social transactions, and human dealings in society. Social sustainability largely depends on environmental sustainability as well. Let's see what environmental sustainability covers indeed; it covers sustainable ecological balance, climate change, various pollutions, impact of environment on food production, conserving biodiversity etc. surprisingly both social and environmental sustainability predominantly depends on economic sustainability. Now we would like to see what elements constitute economic sustainability; economic sustainability comprises sustainable financial condition, availability of resources, availability of funds, smooth transformation of resources, strong financial institution, smooth food production and reasonable consumption etc. Emphasis will be put on increasing productive labour, creating more labor-intensive industries and promoting small enterprises in order to increase jobs [6]. Increasing exports, regional connectivity and import of energy from neighboring countries is also an important means of enhancing economic growth in the Plan [6]. Raising productivity in all areas including agriculture, manufacturing and service will be given special focus [5]. Bangladesh, as a signatory of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is engaged in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the last four years, and has also been playing an active role in the global discourse on the SDGs. Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has involved various stakeholders in implementing the SDGs within a 'whole

society approach' to this end. Non-state actors have also been playing important roles in carrying out activities towards implementation of the SDGs [5]. Raising productivity in all areas including agriculture, manufacturing and service will be given special focus [5]. Bangladesh, as a signatory of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is engaged in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the last four years, and has also been playing an active role in the global discourse on the SDGs. Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has involved various stakeholders in implementing the SDGs within a 'whole society approach' to this end. Non-state actors have also been playing important roles in carrying out activities towards implementation of the SDGs [4].

8. Challenges That Bangladesh Will Have to Face

Bangladesh will have to face with lots of challenges in the journey of ensuring sustainable development due to have some potential impediments like financial constraints, absence of effective policies and their implementation, lack of coordination among different departments of the government, shortage of research fund, shortage of skilled manpower, access to information etc. Apart from above challenges the government must not forget the following issues to ensure sustainable development in every sector of the country e.g. ensuring transparency and accountability in the public affairs, controlling unrestricted corruption, building coordination among various government sectors, minimizing system loss in development projects, enhancing the area of social security etc. I would like to classify the challenges mentioned above into the following heads:

8.1. Economic Challenges

Financial stability is the major precondition for sustainable development wherever it is. Achieving sustainable development is near to impossible for least developed countries and even for many developing countries due to lack of financial stability. Here Bangladesh carries the same threat and only the global aid may ease the situation for the countries like Bangladesh.

8.2. Environmental Challenges

Deforestation, in the name of industrial development, has become a great concern for Bangladesh today. Apart from that the common people are not at all caring about importance of forest; unrestricted deforestation by common people is another big challenge for Bangladesh as well. Although Bangladesh is not a high CFC emission country, Bangladesh is adversely affected by climate change which is the ultimate result of excessive CFC emission by some developed countries including the USA, Russia etc. Bangladesh needs fund, to be received from developed countries as promised, to mitigate the damage caused by climate change. Biodiversity is highly threatened in

Bangladesh too, as we have been missing some important species since last thirty years.

8.3. Challenges Regarding Policy Making and Related Issues

Another important thing is policy making and their implementation; no doubt that poor policy making can make everything ruined. Bangladesh government claims that they have sound policy making bodies but the real scenario does not reveal their statement genuine. Hence, here is no alternative to build up a strong policy making system to ensure sustainable development. Inter departmental coordination of the government is a must needed factor for sustainable development. Every development project should be taken into hand after settling down a bonded coordination among the departments concerned. Bangladesh government has to improve radically on this point otherwise sustainable development will remain a dream. Transparency and accountability in the public affairs is another precondition for ensuring sustainable development across the country. This issue is not a big problem for developed countries but the same thing is a huge concern for the countries like Bangladesh. This is high time for Bangladesh to practice transparency and accountability in every sector. Corruption everywhere has been a great threat and an unbeatable barrier for overall development of the country. Government has to take some severe actions to prevent corruptions for building up a prosperous Bangladesh which is a dream of 17 (around) crore people and which is also a precondition for sustainable development as well.

8.4. Social Challenges

A well branded social security is a dream for common people; of course social security is a right of the common people in developed countries. But Bangladesh has been struggling on this matter since its independence. The government is trying to expand the area of social security for the common people but it could have been more extensive.

8.5. Other Challenges

Research based policy making is very popular in the developed countries. Every development projects in the developed countries are guided by research work that makes their development sustainable. On the other hand the countries belong to third world hardly likes to invest in research sector that makes our development works less sustainable in almost every case. Another challenge for Bangladesh is shortage of skilled manpower. In many cases Bangladesh has to form development project operation team with laymen, in-fact government could have no more options in hand due to lack of available manpower in the relevant fields. It is true that system loss is a common phenomenon for any development projects but excessive system loss is not desirable. Bangladesh has to take special cautions on this issue and government should strive to its level best to reduce system loss as much as reasonable.

9. Measures Taken by the Government to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The government has taken some strategies for the following fields to achieve SDGs such as:

1. Faster, inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic growth,
2. Coverage and effectiveness of Social Safety Net Programs,
3. Migration and remittance: Remittance has been a key driver of economic growth, economic transformation of less well-off households, poverty reduction through positive impact on rural wages and entrepreneurship development in rural areas [6],
4. Gender discrimination,
5. Micro-credit programs,
6. One House, One Farm project: A model for poverty alleviation,
7. Addressing Nutrition Issues [6],
8. Quality health services,
9. Primary Education Development Program and Secondary Education Development Program,
10. Creating an enabling environment for women's advancement and gender responsive budget,
11. Light house initiative,
12. Development of wash blocks at school [6],
13. Increase power generation capacity to 23,000 MW by FY2020 (end of Seventh Plan); to 24,000 MW by 2021; and to 40,000 MW by 2030,
14. Well maintained transport and communication,
15. Improved information communication technologies [6],
16. Employment generation and enhancing labour productivity,
17. Housing, slum housing and road infrastructure,
18. Sustainable production in agriculture, sustainable production in manufacturing and sustainable energy and power sector,
19. Protection for hilsa,
20. Special Biosphere Reserve [6] etc.

10. Plans with SDGs and Actions to Be Taken

Bangladesh experienced a fortuitous combination of two simultaneous processes which significantly facilitated integration of SDGs into the national development agenda. While the Government was participating in the 2030 Agenda process at the global level, it was also preparing the 7th Five Year Plan at the national level [6]. Accordingly, the sustainable development goals proposed by the UN Open Working Group (OWG) received serious consideration for integration into the national plan [6]. The goals were also given emphasis while setting the priority areas of the 7FYP [6]. The 7th Plan being the guiding document that would be implemented in five years, achievement of Plan objectives

and targets will contribute towards achievement of SDGs. All the 17 goals have been integrated into the plan [6]. Of these goals Goal 14, Goal 16 and Goal 17 of the SDGs (18%) are partially aligned with the 7FYP while the rest 14 goals (82%) are thematically fully aligned with it. A Development Results Framework (DRF) has been embedded in the Plan for monitoring the 7FYP [6]. The outcomes and targets in the DRF which are aligned with the SDGs focus on macroeconomic development, poverty reduction, employment, education, health, water and sanitation, transport and communication, power, energy and mineral resources, gender and inequality, environment, climate change and disaster management, ICT, urban development, governance, and international cooperation and partnership [6]. The DRF was prepared in a consultative process in order to address the views of different actors and develop a robust and rigorous result based monitoring and evaluation framework [6]. There is no controversy that sustainable development is a well established concept which works as a guiding principle of state affairs in many countries. Bangladesh has also accepted 'sustainable development' as one of the guiding principles of state affairs. Actions, that Bangladesh can resort to overcome the 'challenges mentioned earlier', are as follows; firstly, Bangladesh has to learn how to gain financial stability first; it would not be wise to undertake many projects with your limited resources. More resources more financial stability and more financial stability more sustainable development can be a very good motto for Bangladesh. We must take care of our resources both natural and manmade. Secondly, Bangladesh may take more cautions before framing any development policy and it must finalize every policy after exhausting thorough feasibility test. We must improve our policy implementation process by bringing transparency and accountability from top to bottom. Thirdly, we must ensure a well organized coordination among various departments of the government, we believe that it's easy to say but difficult to implement in a least developed country like Bangladesh. Nevertheless we can find the way out to ensure inter-departmental coordination by framing a common annual schedule for the concern departments. Fourthly, we must put our concentration in building a strong human resource department by which we will have desired level of skilled manpower, expecting sustainable development without skilled manpower is nothing but a fools dream. Fifthly, Research sector in Bangladesh is a neglected sector ever; it lacks both public and private funding. Government funding in this sector is not adequate, government should take special care of this valuable sector. Every development policy or project must be taken into hand after evaluating the research work on the concern field otherwise outcome of the development work can never be extracted by the stakeholders. Sixth, Right to information is a statutory right of the countrymen guaranteed by the Right to Information Act 2009 but access to information is not easy at all, this is due to lack of manpower, lack of technology, lack of regular practice etc. Setting up a country wide database of

information may turn the problem solved. Access to information is very much necessary for sustainable development because lack of access to information may hamper the coordination among various department concerned. Seventh, Social security is developed state's concept; there is a close connection between social security and availability of resources of the state concerned. In USA the department of social security takes the entire responsibility of US citizens and in many cases non citizen too in the matter of basic needs and many more. Whereas our social security department is an infant one and very few people is afforded by this department. Of course this is not a fault on the part of the government as the government lacks adequate resources for large number of population. The government may enhance the area of social security gradually for all.

11. Conclusion

Although Bangladesh has adopted many policies and strategies to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030, these may not be sufficient to ensure sustainable development across the country unless we can overcome the challenges mentioned above. Bangladesh has to build up pro sustainable development governance with skilled, efficient and dependable man power. Undertaking development project is a routine work of a developing country like Bangladesh accordingly many development projects is undertaken countrywide and will also be undertaking more development projects near future, so the government must take utmost care and cautions to ensure sustainability of all the development projects what so ever. If the trend of temporary development continues the future generation will suffer severely. As it is mentioned earlier that our resources are limited thus we must make sure the proper use of the resources we have. The government must endeavor to remove sufferings of the common people by ensuring longevity of the development works. At the same time government must not waste the public money in the name of so called development. There is no doubt that the intention of the government is clear regarding the consistency of development works across the country. Moreover, Government must not forget to formulate timely policy to regulate high population density in the country, otherwise poverty alleviation will remain a dream for the government. Bangladesh must draw special attention for the conservation of biodiversity by adopting long term strategies. Achieving sustainable development goals by the year 2030 is a difficult one but not impossible. Planned working strategy, effective policy making, available fund, transparent and accountable governance all together may bring our dream (a beautiful Bangladesh with sustainable development everywhere) into light.

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