



BANGLADESH

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGS

#HLPF2023

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO MULTIPLE CRISES

The Bangladeshi government has introduced specific measures to tackle the multiple crises, giving priority to food security, climate change and mitigating the impact of COVID-19. On food security, in 2020, a National Food and Nutrition Security Policy Plan of Action for 2021-2030 was introduced. The plan introduced incentives, legislation and regulation to encourage welfare, food safety, healthy diets and nutritional improvement in the population.

To address the public health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the government formulated Health Guidelines on Covid-19 and a National Preparedness and Response Plan. To combat its economic consequences, initiatives such as subsidising the cost of purchasing rice for vulnerable citizens were introduced.

Bangladesh is one of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries. At the 2022 COP26 summit, it displayed international solidarity by pledging to cut its carbon emissions by 22% by 2030. To reach the target, 96% of Bangladeshi emissions cuts will come from sectors such as energy production, transport, industry, households, commercial and agriculture, brick kilns and fugitive emissions. The rest will be cut from agriculture and livestock, forestry, and municipal solid waste and wastewater.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government of Bangladesh has integrated the SDGs into its eighth Five-Year Plan (2020-2025). The Ministry of Planning coordinates SDG integration and implementation, alongside the SDG coordinator in the office of the Prime Minister. The government has developed national-level SDG trackers and publishes progress reports on the implementation of Agenda 2030, based on information provided by line ministries and government agencies to the Ministry of Planning. A financing plan for the implementation of Agenda 2030 has been developed drawing on budgetary resources, donor and private sector funding.

Information on the process of SDG implementation is published in the form of the SDG Progress Report and is accessible to all. However, trade unions state that the reporting lacks detailed data on progress on individual targets for specific goals.

Trade unions and civil society are partially consulted on the design and implementation of national SDG plans. However, a strong and functional multi-stakeholder platform on the SDGs is missing. Civil society and trade unions have formed the Citizen Platform for SDGs, which provides a broad platform for discussions, including, occasionally, government representatives.

There have been instances where social partners have been engaged in discussions on SDG implementation within the framework of the tripartite dialogue. However, trade unions report that the government prioritises the input of employers and that trade unions and workers' representatives have not been visibly and effectively involved in the overall implementation of the SDGs.

TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Information sessions but a lack of interaction

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Individual contributions from social partners to the national government



Jatio Sramik League (JSL)
Bangladesh Labour Federation (BLF)
Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal (BJSJ)

Bangladesh Mukto Sramik Federation (BMSF)
Bangladesh Sanjukta Sramik Federation (BSSF)
Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress (BFTUC)



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

With regards to **SDG 1**, indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)** show that in 2020, 20.5% of the population lived below the international poverty line, including 4% of workers. A further 30% of the population are defined as "vulnerable", having incomes slightly above the poverty threshold. With a human development index of 0.661, Bangladesh falls into the medium human development category and performs better than the South Asia regional average. However, trade unions warn that rising inequalities risk undermining this progress. With regards to **target 1.3 (nationally appropriate social protection systems)**, in 2021, 22.5% of the population benefitted from at least one type of social security benefit. The proportion of the population above statutory pensionable age receiving a pension increased from 6.0% in 2002 to 39.0% in 2020. In addition, the government recently announced the creation of a Universal Pension Scheme. However, on **target 1.a (essential services)**, government spending on essential education services declined from 20.5% in 2000 to 14.6% in 2018.

On **SDG 5**, significant efforts still need to be made to reach the objective set by **target 5.4 (recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, as women in Bangladesh spend eight times as much time (11.7 hours per day) as men (1.6 hours per day) on domestic and care work. With regards to **target 5.5 (women's full and effective participation)**, the proportion of seats held by women in parliament increased from 9.1% in 2000 to 20.9% in 2020.

On **SDG 8**, progress on **target 8.3 (support decent job creation)** is needed urgently, as the proportion of informal employment increased from 87.9% in 2010 to 94.7% in 2017. In addition, in 2019, 54% of work was categorised as precarious. On **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, the unemployment rate grew from 3.3% in 2000 to 4.4% in 2017. In addition, underemployment stood at 6.9% in 2019 (5.8% for men and 9.6% for women). The situation for young people aged between 15 and 24 was particularly dire, as 15.9% were underemployed in 2019.

While NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** reduced somewhat from 31.0% in 2005 to 27.4% in 2017, they remain high. Indicators for **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour)** show that 5.9% of children aged 5-17 engaged in economic activity in 2019 (8.7% for boys and 3% for girls). With regards to **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**, in 2020, the level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) stood at 7.5, a decline from 7.85 in 2019.

On **SDG 10** and **target 10.4 (progressively achieve greater equality)**, in 2016, 10% of the highest income earners controlled 26.8% of GDP, while the lowest 20% controlled 8.6% of GDP. The labour share of GDP stood at 42.2% in 2020, a decrease from 44.7% in 2010.

On **SDG 13** and **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, the 2010-2021 National Strategy for Sustainable Development formally integrates environmental management into broader planning objectives and a National Environment Policy was adopted in 2018. However, trade unions are not engaged in a dialogue on the design and implementation of these policies.

There are grave concerns in relation to **SDG 16**. Reaching **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** is far off, as in 2022, Bangladesh was one of the world's ten worst countries for workers, whose rights continue to be severely curtailed.

TRADE UNIONS ASK THAT NO-ONE IS LEFT BEHIND

Trade unions call on the government of Bangladesh to:

- Adopt a clear national policy on engagement and coordination with non-state actors on SDG planning and implementation.
- Ensure effective social dialogue and increase the involvement of trade unions in the tripartite social dialogue on the implementation of the SDGs.
- Ensure freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, formalise informal workers and guarantee their fundamental rights. Reduce the barriers for the formation of trade unions and for workers joining a trade union.
- Ensure a living wage, at least at the level of BDT 25,000.
- Ensure universal social protection.
- Ensure the implementation of the Universal Pension Act by including a workers' representative on the governing board of the National Pension Authority.
- Reduce workplace injuries and death by promoting proper health and safety at work. Improve the operations of the Employment Injury Scheme and worker representation within it.
- Ensure and enhance universal social protection for all workers and vulnerable populations.
- Eliminate all forms of violence and harassment against women, ensure equal pay in all workplaces and women-friendly workplaces.



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