

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: DFID's work on Bangladesh, Burma and the Rohingya crisis, HC 504

Tuesday 23 January 2018

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; James Duddridge; Mrs Pauline Latham; Mr Ivan Lewis; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Henry Smith.

Questions 106-146

Witnesses

I: Dr Joe Devine, Head of Department, Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath; Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director, Human Rights Watch; and Dr Ipshita Basu, University of Westminster.

II: Asif Saleh, Senior Director, Strategy, Communication and Empowerment, BRAC and BRAC International; and Farah Kabir, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Joe Devine, Meenakshi Ganguly and Dr Ipshita Basu.

Q106 Chair: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to this public evidence session as part of our inquiry on Burma and Bangladesh. We completed the first stage of our inquiry and published our report on the Rohingya crisis last week. We are now moving to look more specifically at DFID's wider programmes in both countries, and today we are focusing on DFID's programmes in Bangladesh. We have two panels. Can I welcome our first panel? We have 45 minutes with you, and then we move on to the second panel. We are seeking with you to cover eight question areas. There is a big premium on nice concise questions from our side and nice concise answers from yours. I will kick off. I will ask you to introduce yourselves the first time that you answer a question.

My first question is to each of you, which is really about economic growth in Bangladesh. How far has economic growth reduced poverty, and what has its impact been on inequality?

Dr Basu: That is probably the big story. Before I get to the answer, I am Ipshita Basu, senior lecturer in international relations at the University of Westminster. I worked with BRAC for two years between 2010 and 2012 when I was living in Dhaka. Bangladesh lately has been held up as a development success story. Reports suggest it has just crossed over from the 6% growth rate to 7%. Of this growth rate, the main contribution is from the silver sector, followed by manufacturing, with the ready-made garment sector being a big component of that, and marginally from agriculture, which is just 0.5%.

A big contribution to the economy comes from remittances. In the last year, 750,000 Bangladeshis migrated mainly to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman, and also to Singapore and Malaysia. Does this contribute to poverty reduction? Yes and no. Yes, if you look at the figures, poverty has fallen if you go by the \$1.90 per day line. Between 2010 and 2016, it has fallen from 30% to 24%, although at the same time, the incidence of urban poverty has increased. This goes to show that the early investment made since 1974 towards social development and increasing the resilience of Bangladeshi people to natural disasters has paid dividends. Therefore, social development has been an important foundation for more inclusive growth, whereas in the urban areas, where most of the jobs are, especially in the service sector, it has not.

Meenakshi Ganguly: Good morning. My name is Meenakshi Ganguly. I am the South Asia Director for Human Rights Watch. Picking up from Dr Basu, yes, of course, Bangladesh has done much more. It has developed from a time that it was called the basket case of the world to where it is now. It has made enormous and very significant progress, but what is the cost of it? If we start unpacking it, on remittances for instance, yes,



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a huge number of migrant Bangladeshi workers are working in the Gulf. Bangladesh has the poorest record in trying to protect these workers. We have been trying to do this for quite a long time with migrant workers. We say the embassies in these countries need to set up protection mechanisms and helplines. Bangladesh has been doing none of that. Bangladesh is pretty much competing with other countries to undercut the wages for these people to travel. Yes, it is significant and it is something that Bangladesh wants to do. It has to be more rights-respecting.

The garment industry—

Chair: We are going to come specifically to the garment industry question in a moment.

Meenakshi Ganguly: Okay, I will skip that. Lastly, on social development, which I will talk about later, Bangladesh's growth, in a large part, is BRAC, Grameen and these civil society initiatives. Right now, we find that those civil society initiatives are really being hampered by Bangladesh's tendency to clamp down on free speech and the way civil society functions.

Dr Devine: My name is Joe Devine. I am head of social policy sciences at the University of Bath and I have been working in Bangladesh since about 1989. I do not have anything further to add to what has been said on that. Let me take the point about who is benefiting and the inequality. Bangladesh is probably unique in the world, in that, especially through NGO activity, the development activity has been pervasive and widespread throughout the country in a way that you will not find in many other countries. It is the size of the sector and the fact that the sector has reached out.

The question is then that the consumption levels of poor people have certainly increased in Bangladesh. That is no doubt reflecting growth, but that consumption level depends on labour. The consumption level increase of poor people is very much tied to agriculture. That has not kept pace with GDP growth. It has been sluggish. That raises the question of where the GDP growth is going. The most recent research shows that you have a bifurcation. The top 10% of the country have sped away. They are really benefiting, big time. When we talk about the top 10% in Bangladesh, we are talking about luxury lifestyles that most of us cannot imagine. The bottom 40% have dropped significantly. The middle class, around 50%, is more or less retaining its consumption from before. You have a real inequality brewing and increasing. It is increasing because that income consumption of the poor still depends on labour, which is not keeping pace with the GDP growth.

Q107 **James Duddridge:** In relation to labour and growth, while it is welcome that all jobs come, how many of the jobs are really low quality with poor conditions? Can you give us an idea of where in the growth those new jobs are coming from?



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Dr Devine: A lot of the new jobs have come through the service sector. In the service sector, you have things like banking, health and hospitals that at one level give quite a high value-added per person. The service sector is ambiguous, because a lot of it is people peddling, rickshaw driving and selling things on the streets. There the income levels are very, very low. The service sector is one area where it has grown.

Q108 **James Duddridge:** Can you give us an idea of annual wages for those types of jobs? I have no idea.

Dr Devine: Annual?

Q109 **James Duddridge:** Daily or whatever.

Dr Devine: It will depend on location and it will also depend on urban/rural. I do not know. A daily labourer, for example, in an agricultural setting in a rural context of Bangladesh might make 100 taka a day, which is a pound and a bit. In urban settings, you would certainly need more, especially in Dhaka, just to survive. Garment workers would get some sort of minimum wage. I do not know; it would be around four or five thousand taka for basic entry.

Q110 **James Duddridge:** How much is that in US?

Dr Devine: Divide it by a hundred: \$50 or in that region. There is a lot of job creation there. There has been a lot of job creation in the garment sector. Again, in that value chain, they are really low-productivity jobs. One of the challenges of Bangladesh as it moves towards a middle-income country is to get up the value chain. That is the challenge. Right now, it is at the very bottom. It is the second biggest exporter of ready-made garments. That is creating a huge amount of jobs, but they are really low in the value chain in terms of productivity.

Q111 **James Duddridge:** Can I come to other panel members? Please give any comments you have on the garment sector and what the Government can do to protect workers. We hear some real horror stories over and above the level of pay, in terms of safety and so forth. What role is there for the Government and for our Government to influence?

Dr Basu: Very little. It has been more knee-jerk. In 2013, the Bangladeshi Government introduced some new changes to their labour laws in order to have more inspections on health and safety in the garment factories. They also introduced in that labour Act some amendments for compensation. There is death and injury at work. There is also a kind of coalition of the EU, the Government and the lobby of garment factory owners to look into health and safety. All this is happening in the absence of any kind of national social security scheme. Given, as Joe was saying, most of the jobs are informal without protection, this is a problem.

Meenakshi Ganguly: Post-2013, after the Rana Plaza, which has its fifth anniversary in April, there have been more platitudes. There has been



much more said, from the brands, the sourcing companies as well as factory owners. We are finding on the ground that, for instance, union busting is one of the most common practices. Either they will threaten workers who become union leaders or join unions, or they will set up a friendly, yellow union. Then creating another union becomes really hard. That is one problem. The reason we focus so much on this is because, at Rana Plaza, there was no union. The workers saw the cracks. They said, "We do not want to go into this building." If they had had a union, they would not have walked in. They were forced to walk into this building that fell down. For that kind of thing, it needs to get more specific.

The last thing on garment workers is that the supply chain includes subcontractors. Those factories are literally backroom factories, and therefore do not come under the same level of scrutiny and inspection as the big factories in the SEZs do.

Dr Devine: Bangladesh has "Vision 2021". A bit part of that is trying to change the structure of its GDP away from agriculture to industry and manufacturing. It is a huge challenge, because part of that will be creating higher-productivity jobs. That is a huge challenge, if it is going to keep this growth going.

Q112 **Mrs Latham:** I do not know who would like to answer this initially. What do you think about the priorities of the Bangladeshi Government? Do you think the political situation in Bangladesh helps or hinders the reduction of poverty? Where do you see corruption fitting in?

Dr Basu: I will take the part on what the priorities are; the others can take the second bit. In terms of priorities, one is definitely to get Bangladesh into middle-income status. That is what the strategy document showed. The current seventh five-year plan is also very clear: they want to jump to the 7% growth rate. In order to achieve that, the Government have committed to investing in major infrastructure projects, mainly for power and transportation.

More controversially, however, some of these projects are happening when donor funding has stopped. For example, in the big project, the Padma Bridge project, which connects the northern to the southern part of the country, the World Bank found conclusive evidence of corruption and decided to withdraw funding. It is going ahead, entirely with the Government's money. Those would be the big priority areas, alongside job creation; through that, poverty reduction; and through that, some commitment to environmental sustainability. Growth, growth and growth is their focus.

Dr Devine: In every single indicator that exists in terms of corruption, Bangladesh does poorly. There has been slight change over the years, but it is still very, very poor. One of the interesting things about "Vision 2021", apart from it being a very neat document laying out the trajectory for the future of growth, is that it starts off with a commitment to institutional improvements. It mentions corruption again. There is a



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sense in Bangladesh in which formally there is quite a lot of, "We are going to curb and reduce corruption". In practice, and for someone like me who has been going in and out for many years, I suspect that, in the everyday informal mechanisms and processes that people are involved with in their lives, corruption is increasing. There are multiple reports about huge percentages of businesses that have to pay every single day in order to continue. There are reports of people who have to pay even for small things: to have garbage collected and all that kind of stuff. It is endemic.

"Corruption" is a loaded term. You have different kinds of corruption going on, from low-level informal, everyday corruption up to huge multimillion dollar companies and enterprises. There has been a crisis over the last year in banks, with loans not getting paid and resettlement issues. For me, it is a very complicated question. The question then is what impact that has on growth. There is an interesting, curious set of observations that academics, researchers and policymakers are making, as to whether the growth has come about because of the political settlement in Bangladesh. There are many people who would say yes.

In the last six to seven years, there has been a shift, with Awami League in particular, to becoming a de-facto one-party state. Is that going to put the growth at risk, if it continues down that one-party state pathway? That is an unknown question, but my gut tells me it would be a dangerous move and could jeopardise growth, because there are sets of rents and rent distributions that are not taking place because one party is holding all the power.

Q113 Mrs Latham: You talked about the top 10% being in luxury that we cannot possibly imagine. Is that where the money is going, through these multimillion pound corruption problems?

Dr Devine: It is endemic. In the big contracts that go on, there are a huge amount of reports about money that has been siphoned and paid off. Banks are involved in it. I am not saying all politicians are, but when you go into the Bangladesh Parliament and they give you their name card, you have "right honourable" or whatever on the one hand and at the back end you have the business. The connection between business elites and political elites is very, very tight. That opens up a whole series of questions about how contracts are given and how bids are made.

Q114 Mrs Latham: Does the political situation in Bangladesh help or hinder the decrease or increase in poverty?

Meenakshi Ganguly: They are linked. Sheikh Hasina, who has now been in power almost two terms, wants growth. That is what her legacy is. She wants to pull Bangladesh up. This is her father's legacy. There is no question but that that is a priority for her.



Her methods are problematic. That is where we have to focus. As Joe said, there has been a single party since the 2014 elections, which means there is no effective opposition. Her dealing with the opposition has been extremely problematic, because it quickly shifts from being the opposition, to being a supporter of Islamist ideology, to being a terrorist. The leap happens very quickly. If you are going to deem your entire opposition as most likely linked to terrorism, it is a huge challenge. That means that half of her political opponents are in jail or have charges coming up. That bit of it is problematic, and it creates an environment that will, in the end, hurt the economy. This whole process needs to be rectified.

Q115 Mr Lewis: Is the risk of terrorism affecting political dialogue in Bangladesh, and is it having an impact on donors' capacity to function? The other related question is about the so-called disappearances. Is terrorism used as a reason for disappearances, or is there no official recognition in Bangladesh that such a thing is taking place?

Dr Basu: With regards to terrorism, it is interesting that there was this terrorist attack in Dhaka recently, and the Government have been very clear that incidences of radical Islamic-related terrorism are home-grown and have no international connections, even though there were reports that they were somehow linked to the international network. They are very clear on that: it is home-grown and they are very well equipped to deal with it. The counter-terrorist measures that the Government are using are quite strong on that front.

In that sense, therefore, it would be apparently a kind of place where business can continue as usual despite this, because they are in a position to deal with it. You can invest in Bangladesh and you can continue political dialogue. If anything, Sheikh Hasina has been appreciated for the way she is dealing with it. The problems are of course, as you mentioned, the enforced disappearance and the human rights violations that are taking place, because these counter-terrorist measures have become a permanent feature of day-to-day politics.

Meenakshi Ganguly: On terrorism, I will take you back very briefly. After 9/11, there was a huge fear that Bangladesh would become the new Afghanistan. At that point in time, the UK and the US invested in something called the Rapid Action Battalion to create a counter-terrorism force, because the Bangladesh police were clearly not going to be capable of doing this. Bangladesh did not become the new Afghanistan. It has managed to keep, to a large part, its own identity, which is what led to its breaking away from Pakistan. It is a Bengali society. That is its primary identity. But the Rapid Action Battalion became a nightmare for most Bangladeshis. They have these black uniforms, they drive around and they are really terrifying.

When we first started highlighting problems with the Rapid Action Battalion, the UK withdrew support from RAB because of the human rights violations that were associated with it. The US continues to



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support some initiatives with RAB. The human rights violations that RAB was engaged in have transferred to the police, because RAB basically brings the military into civilian law enforcement, and then there are the police. The police that circled through the RAB units have now exported those practices, so the detective branch of the police is also involved in what they call crime or counter-terror operations.

The disappearances are not only linked to terrorism allegations. A large number of the people who have been picked up and held in secret detention have been political opponents. It is both. There is a group of people, certainly after Gulshan, who were picked up, and then they died in these crossfires or gunfights. A lot of them were terror suspects linked to the JMB, which is the group that Bangladesh says has been responsible for the Gulshan attack. Also, there are political opponents, including the sons of senior political leaders who have been hanged for war crimes. Their sons were held. One of them was released. That is the other thing: some of them are released when there are deals done, with clear warnings that they will not speak about what happened, so we do not know. After six months of secret detention, the ones who are lucky get out and the others are still missing.

Q116 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: On what you were saying there, I am aware of course that a number of the military have threatened to seize food ration cards and smash down some of the camps if the Burmese Rohingya do not return. There have been disturbances in camps. Should we be worried that those practices will continue over to the treatment of some of the refugees, and maybe some of the refugees who are refusing to be sent back to, potentially, their deaths?

Meenakshi Ganguly: We should unpack that. Bangladesh probably did not have a choice, considering the scale of people that arrived. In those early days, there were tens of thousands streaming in. Still, Bangladesh should be given credit. It is now hosting a million refugees, since October. We should accept that this is a challenge for any country, certainly one with limited resources like Bangladesh. It has tried its best to do what is right.

Q117 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: The language of the military seemed rather threatening. You were just talking about that. I wondered whether that was something we should be worried about or not at all.

Meenakshi Ganguly: No, we should be worried. That is the first stage. The next stage is that Bangladesh wants these people to go back. Yes, it is saying it wants to do that in the right way and so on, but it wants them to go back. We have to be very worried about it. These protests have been really small, holding up banners saying that the EU, the US, the UN and even Human Rights Watch should all monitor their returns. It has not been very significant. It is a bunch of people. These are desperate people who have suffered the worst sort of brutalities ever. Because they want a safe return or security if they go back, which Burma has not in any way ensured, they are going to protest.



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What are we going to be worried about? We do have to worry. We have to worry about the military intelligence. There is the sinister DGFI. Are we going to be worried about that? Are we going to be worried about police? Are we going to be worried about an attempt to force these people back?

The third part of it is the ARSA side of things, which is the militant group that was responsible for attacks. Bangladesh has always said that it does not want to be a haven for these groups that are responsible for attacks in Burma. With that group, again, some people have been picked up. We have to be very worried about whether they are going to be returned to Burma, how they are going to be prosecuted and what the process is going to be, because rule of law is not Bangladesh's forte. It does not seem to have a process of arrest, going to the police station, registering a case file and charging. Those normal things do not happen, so we do not know who will be accused and what will happen to them. Yes, acknowledging that it was good to the refugees to begin with, we have to be really worried about how they are going to be treated now.

Q118 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: You are describing a situation where the refugees are between a rock and a hard place. To some extent, that is where the media also are in Bangladesh. Freedom House now says Bangladesh is not free in terms of its media. We have seen bloggers attacked by Islamic militants, et cetera. Are civil society and the media under threat in Bangladesh? How independently are they able to operate in Bangladesh?

Meenakshi Ganguly: Mine is a simple answer. No, they are under extreme threat. There are NGOs that are not able to operate in Bangladesh because their funding has been cut off, and therefore they do not have a way of helping people: women who have been raped, children who are traumatised. Bangladeshi NGOs have the capacity to do these things, but they do not have the money because the funding has been cut off. Journalists are under extreme threat. The ICT law, section 57, has still not been repealed. You can basically like something on Facebook that says something rude about the Prime Minister, and you can end up in jail. That is my short answer.

Dr Devine: There is a quote attributed to one of the Ministers in Bangladesh that civil society is like a cancer in society and has to be removed. In the 1990 post-democratic era, civil society is perhaps now facing its biggest challenge, in terms of freedom of expression and holding to account. However, there is a subtle narrative that has to be thought through in this. The groups that we would traditionally associate with civil society—the press, trade unions and even NGOs—practically all follow party lines. They are split. The media is split between the ruling party and the opposition. The trade unions are split, so there is not that collective horizontal alliance, because everyone is looking vertically.

That means that, if I say something against an opponent, it does not matter if I am in an NGO, a trade union or a teacher's union. It is exactly



the same: if I say something against a particular party, I become their enemy. There is not the public-good space generally in Bangladesh for that. Everything is two-party. It does not matter which civil society form you have. At one level, of course, they are victims of a reduction and a real tightening in space. At another level, they are playing the same game, because for many of them their survival depends on being properly aligned with X party or Y party. That makes it really difficult to see how you take this thing forward.

Q119 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Is there anything that the international community or particularly DFID in their development work could be doing to try to reduce that? I am assuming that the lack of freedom of media reduces the ability to have proper development of some of the poorest. Is there anything that DFID or the international community should be doing to prevent this trend?

Dr Devine: If DFID wanted to get involved in this kind of stuff, it needs to be looking at those groups in Bangladesh—and some are very, very good—like think tanks. How do we build up the capacity of places like the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, which are close to Government, but have a distance? Building up that capacity is the first step to creating the public intellectuals who can start to nurture the kind of debate that the media, teachers or trade unions might pick up on. That would be my entry point, but I do not see that as a priority right now. It is where I would prioritise, because that is longer term, it is thinking strategically, it is thinking about local ownership and it is thinking about supporting the Bangladeshis to have that debate. The question really is: where is the entry point? There are these think tanks, which could be a very good entry point to that, but they are also under fire at the moment.

Q120 Paul Scully: Earlier, you talked about the one-party state and the corruption in elections. I was in Bangladesh in September, and I always go and meet BNP and Awami League. Some of the senior members of BNP had charges levied against them, which may affect their ability to stand for election. There is still the question of whether BNP will stand in the election. In the past, you had a situation where BNP came in, arrested members of Awami League, and vice versa. What do you see the elections doing in terms of any sense of change, should it be a free and fair election, fully contested?

Dr Devine: Should it be free and fair? Yes.

Q121 Paul Scully: Not “should it be”: if it is; in the event that it is.

Dr Devine: It is really uncertain, because the support base of both Awami League and BNP has got smaller. It goes back to the previous point. I do not use the word “extremism”. There is a lot of political violence being used to manage opposition. That will increase. That is not going to go away. We have had city corporation elections recently. Again, there is the usual violence and all that kind of stuff involved in



that. BNP will definitely go into the next election, because there are enough of the heavyweights in BNP who felt that their refusal to participate the last time was a big mistake. I think they will go in. As to whether it can muster enough support to fight against a tsunami of Awami League, which has had a decade to attack and take away the roots from BNP, it has a long way to go. The cards are in favour of Awami League, it seems to me at the moment, but they are not definite.

Q122 Paul Scully: What do you think the Rohingya crisis has done for the perception of Sheikh Hasina?

Dr Devine: It has magnified it.

Q123 Paul Scully: When I was in the Cox's Bazar, they had a load of posters up: "Sheikh Hasina, the mother of humanity". All the posters seemed to be piled up outside our hotel, so it seemed to be the centre. I know BNP had also had a truck of aid rejected. Whether that was because of BNP having gone in at short notice or whether it was Awami League politics, I will never know. Do you get a sense of party politics being played out in that crisis at all?

Dr Devine: BNP for years was not allowed to take part or be too involved in the Rohingya thing. Then it went down with a whole load of trucks, and it made it by road as opposed to by flight, deliberately to showcase. That area, the Chittagong area and the whole of that region, is a very politically volatile area. It is a region where we have a strong Islamic social movement. It is a region where we have the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Someone asked earlier about the military. The answer to that would be: look at the experience of the military in the Chittagong Hill Tracts with those ethnic minorities, and you will get a sense of what is going to happen in Cox's Bazar. It is extraordinarily volatile.

Even within Awami League, there are signs of unrest, because the centre is parachuting and making decisions about who is going to get the ticket. Locally, of course, people have deep resentment around it. If Awami League, for example, as it has been doing, is making some sort of attempt to talk to the Islamic movement, that particularly hurts local Awami League activists, who see that as a betrayal of the founding father, as it were.

Q124 Paul Scully: It was wall to wall with the Rohingya situation in the media when I was there in September, as it was starting to escalate. What do you think civil society and the media have been doing? How do you think they have been working on the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh, given the perceptions and the movement for change?

Meenakshi Ganguly: To go back, a large part of Bangladesh responded to the Rohingya crisis as play-off of what happened in 1971. It was a very emotional response. At that point, I do not think politics was part of it. Politicians will play into what people feel because it gets them votes, but those initial truckloads that you saw going in, which were highly disorganised but very well-meaning, were because people were reacting.



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Yes, both parties would probably want to capitalise on it. That said, it is a million people in Bangladesh and at some point it turns. The generosity changes to the host community getting more and more anxious. That is what Sheikh Hasina will have to manage. It goes back to the question that was asked earlier: how will they manage it and will they be rights-respecting when they do so?

Q125 Paul Scully: Why do you think the Bangladesh Government have been reluctant, in some instances, to issue permits for international NGOs in the camps?

Dr Basu: It has been just three NGOs so far, two of which are international. It is Islamic Relief and two others; I cannot recall the names. It was mainly because there were some accusations—alleged—that they were trying to preach Islam to the Rohingya refugees and use the relief work to build mosques. That is what the Foreign Ministry official says. Those are the three NGOs. This feeds into the domestic politics, because a main concern for Sheikh Hasina in her tenure has been to somehow have a hold over the religious political leaders. This would be a continuation of that.

Q126 Henry Smith: Welcome. I am interested to get your perspective on how you think development funding can influence politics and governance in Bangladesh and how you see that evolving.

Dr Basu: Where should development funding go to help Bangladesh?

Q127 Henry Smith: What influence do you think development funding is having on governance and politics in the country?

Dr Basu: I am going to answer this briefly and pass it on. DFID has been doing some work on this area. The question of more local ownership of this is important because, over time, somehow the development funding has tended to pass on to the very big NGOs. For instance, DFID's main strategic partner is BRAC. Half of the funding goes directly to BRAC, which is in a way problematic because it means that a giant NGO, which is almost a social business, captures most of the funding. What happens to the whole host of other NGOs that have played a big role in the democratic transition of Bangladesh? They are somewhat side-lined. The manner of funding is an important concern.

Dr Devine: ODA generally in Bangladesh has become over the years less and less significant as part of the GDP. It is now miniscule in comparison to say 10, 15 or 20 years ago. Donors have to really think carefully about what they want to do. A lot of them have gone down what I would call formal corruption/governance-type processes. That is fine, but to a great extent we have them written. The question is how you get to the underlying process, and how we do not fall into a situation where we are doing a lot of organisation-level work but no institutional work. I do not think there is any choice but to think medium term, which again means going back to your think tanks, your civil servants and your politicians. You say, "That is where we want to spend our money because, unless we



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start changing there, the rest of it is oil and water.” That is difficult. I understand it is difficult, but I do not see any choice but to do it.

Having said that, there is another big area that DFID and others should be thinking about. There are some really good human rights and governance-focused NGOs. DFID has been supporting them for a number of years. They have been involved in a lot of grassroots, local-level work. Of course there are many disappointments and failures in it, but the work they do is incredibly valuable.

Q128 Chair: Are they NGOs that transcend the divide you were describing previously in terms of alignment, or might some of them be aligned but a bit more pluralist in their approach?

Dr Devine: They probably have to bounce their alignments off both to survive. One of the other things—someone asked about it, and I did say this last time—is that in Bangladesh smaller NGOs, for example, work constantly with a threat that if they are “blacklisted”, which just means someone is accusing them of doing something, their registration will be cancelled. In order for that not to happen, NGOs have to work very hard. Local-level grassroots interventions to support rights and governance are needed on the one hand, but the missing bit is about the think tanks and civil servants. We have capacity and technical expertise; we just need to work a lot longer with them in order to try to change that public-good mentality and nurture an environment where people can talk about these things. That is the bit that is missing.

Q129 Richard Burden: How would you think that the UK is seen in Bangladesh these days? Who would you say the other big players are there? What is the relative influence between the UK and other foreign players?

Dr Basu: The UK is still an important player in Bangladesh. It is an important trade partner and investor, but China is also a big player. In many of the infrastructure projects, China has stepped in. China is a bigger supplier of, for instance, military technology infrastructure projects. The UK would be third after the US and Germany in terms of an export destination, but still a very important player.

Meenakshi Ganguly: Emotionally, the UK is huge. The UK has a very big Bangladesh expatriate community. There are MPs of Bangladeshi origin. Of course, there is the whole colonial history. The UK still has a very significant voice and one that should be deployed, as Joe said, for institution building and strengthening institutions.

Bangladesh has a strong intellectual culture. There are writers. There are lawyers. These are people who need to be supported. Unfortunately, this Government have managed to terrify everybody into a bit of a silence. That needs to change, and we hope that will happen.

Q130 Richard Burden: Do you get the impression that the UK’s own priorities in Bangladesh are changing at all? If so, how do you think they are changing?



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Dr Devine: The UK priorities are caught up in overseas development as part of our national interest. Things around terrorism and Islam are there and they come up occasionally. It has been at the forefront of some discussions. It has been at the forefront, for example, of discussions around violence against women. It has been at the forefront of some important governance discussions. The way I would have tried to answer the previous question is that UK aid is still hugely influential among the donor community because it is seen as good on ideas; it has capacity, and can organise, mobilise and respond. In that sense, it still has it.

The change I have seen is in places like DFID offices. There is a churning of staff, which has not done DFID in Bangladesh many favours. It is not that they are not good; it is that we are getting different specialisms coming in. I remember 20 years ago, when the boundaries between people working with DFID and Bangladeshi society were much more porous. There was much more dialogue. There was a different level of engagement. That has disappeared slightly. Other expertise has come in. In my view, given the challenges I mentioned about trying to deal with think tanks, the political elite and civil servants, we really need to strengthen the capacity of DFID in that area: people who are interested and capable when engaging with that kind of work.

Setting up shelters, managing programmes with NGOs, et cetera, we have done. We are good at that. How do we move our focus and strategic attention to this area? That requires a different form of expertise, it seems to me. That is the change I would like to see happening.

Q131 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. We are out of time for the first panel, but we have covered a lot of ground in 45 minutes. I am very grateful to the three of you for your evidence here today, which will really help us as we move forward with this inquiry. Please feel free to stay if you wish to watch the second panel. Can I invite our second panel of witnesses to join us now? Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Asif Saleh and Farah Kabir.

Q132 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel. Thank you very much indeed for joining us here today. We have about 45 minutes, and I think we have nine questions that we are seeking to cover with the two of you. Let me start and, as with the first panel, when answering for the first time, please introduce yourself. What do you see as the biggest development challenges that currently face Bangladesh?

Farah Kabir: Good morning. I am Farah Kabir. I am the country director of ActionAid in Bangladesh. The biggest challenge in Bangladesh



is the paradox that we live in. The previous panel talked about growth, and that is definitely visible, but at the same time we have poverty. Even though it has been reduced to 25%, 25% of 163 million people is still a huge number. Challenges remain the discrimination and inequality of the 1%, but also along the lines of gender: girls and women. We have not been able, despite civil society advocacy, lobbying and campaigns, to change that situation in some cases. We have had interesting legislation. We have policies. We have been advocating for investment, so we see certain change, but there are major pieces of work to be done there. Unless the scenario changes in terms of the right to property or movement, we will not get that balance.

We are celebrating the dividend of young people—the demographic dividend—but we do not have a clear-cut plan as to how to engage young people. There are ad-hoc arrangements, policies and programmes being taken up. We are talking about ICT being one way, and setting up the ICT parks or digitalisation, but we do not have a full understanding. To enable us to go down that path, you need trained people, and at the same time you need assessments of whether this is effective. Without the participation of young women and men in developing a programme, it is still coming out from the desk of a bureaucrat or a Member of Parliament. I am not in any way undermining that, but there should be an arrangement whereby we can hear the young people. Bangladesh has potential beyond our imagination. Young people are going into e-business. They are using any platform, social or otherwise, to spread their potential.

Asif Saleh: My name is Asif Saleh. I am a senior director at BRAC. To add to what Farah has been saying, Bangladesh is at a very interesting transition point. There is push towards becoming a middle-income country. The biggest challenge is a lack of inclusive growth, and the latest data shows that the inequity is increasing.

At the same time, to add to the point, Bangladesh is a very young country—48% of the country is aged under 26. That means that, among these groups of people, every year 2.2 million young people are entering the job market. There are simply not enough jobs being created. It is a dividend, but you are sitting on a time bomb as well, because without the proper skills and proper opportunity they are going to be exploited. Bangladesh is at such an interesting point in geopolitics right now that that is bound to happen. We need to address the skills gap. We need to address how to engage the young people and, at the same time, closely monitor this huge inequality that is being created by the growth. The growth has been infrastructure-focused. The implication for society has to be looked at very, very closely.

Q133 **Richard Burden:** If you look at DFID's main areas of focus in Bangladesh and proportions of spending in different areas, 39% goes to economic development, 34% to human development including health and education, and governance and security is 15%. Do you think that is



roughly the right balance?

Asif Saleh: DFID's priority aligns with the Bangladeshi Government's priority, which is the seventh five-year plan that has come about. Although Bangladesh has done really well in terms of reducing poverty, in terms of sheer numbers, a huge amount of people are still extremely poor: about 20 million people. DFID's focus is there, which is very important: to leave no one behind. That is a very important part of the DFID story in Bangladesh and has always been.

The focus on governance, and empowering grassroots organisations and human rights organisations through intermediary organisations like Manusher Jonno, has also been quite effective. Increasingly, it is switching gears, in terms of focusing more and more on skills issues and engaging the private sector. It is on the right track.

Farah Kabir: The intentions are definitely right, but there are details that need to be worked out. If you look at DFID's track record, when the community policing was supported, the intentions were to support the community's access to justice. Along the line, it has not necessarily served the purpose. There are issues of violations. There are issues of trust. Whether a community or citizens will trust the law enforcement agency remains a big issue. Particularly if you are looking at women and girls, that becomes a central issue. I know there has been investment in the economic development of women.

In an earlier question, you were asking about the RMG sector and women. Wages are gender-biased. A daily wage for a man could be 400 taka; for a woman, it is still 200 taka, for the same piece of work. In the RMG sector, a greater number of women are working. Since Rana Plaza, there has been a shift in labour laws and wages have gone up, so it is 5,500. If you work overtime, you take home 15,000. At the same time, inflation has escalated. How much of what you take home is used for food, healthcare and education? There is a need to review some of the partnerships and their outcome or ultimate impact. While we have seen investment in the education sector, investment in quality education and quality teachers is absolutely critical. With the emphasis of this Government on quickly going into vocational training, we are missing big gaps. People are going to suffer.

Q134 **Chair:** We are going to purpose some of those questions in a moment. Thank you very much indeed. Asif, can I ask a specific question about BRAC? Can you explain to the Committee the strategic partnership that you have with DFID and how it works?

Asif Saleh: BRAC's relationship with DFID has been going on since 1985. It is an old, trusted relationship. Historically, the relationship with BRAC has been very project driven. Around 2010, we talked about the fact that we have a number of projects on education, the ultra-poor and human rights. There are a lot of additional transactional costs attached to that.



At the same time, there is a growing confidence in BRAC's capacity and ability to deliver at scale.

Australia and the UK, together with BRAC, came up with the strategic partnership agreement, which is a consortium that gives BRAC core funding, and BRAC is supposed to deliver on a strategy that it creates. It gives BRAC a lot of independence on how it comes up with its strategy and how it can deliver over a five-year period, with a focus on its organisational ability and strengthening over time.

We realise that the story of Bangladesh is changing. It is becoming more and more self-reliant over time. DFID is looking over a much longer timeframe at slowly reducing its aid and balance sheet dependency. BRAC is looking at organisationally being self-reliant, so it can continue to deliver on bigger social challenges, and continuously tweak and change as it goes along, to strengthen the organisation.

The SPA arrangement so far has delivered very well. It is in the second phase right now. For the first round of funding, which ended in 2015, we got an A+ rating from DFID in terms of evaluation. The numbers we have submitted in the written submission have been quite big. Compared to the total global DFID spending, BRAC gets about 0.5% of that. In terms of food security, BRAC's numbers account for 17% of the global numbers that DFID attributes to it. In terms of sustainable access to sanitation, about 15% of the global number is delivered by BRAC in Bangladesh. It has clearly given BRAC a lot of ability to tweak and move into newer challenges.

In the second phase of the SPA that started in 2016, we are testing different kinds of longer-term programming, which depend more on cost sharing by the participants of the programmes. At the same time—the previous panel talked about urban poverty—we have started a new programme around urban property and skills development in the second phase. We are expecting to deliver big numbers in this phase as well.

Q135 Mrs Latham: What are the main challenges facing women and girls in Bangladesh? Has that improved with the growing economy?

Farah Kabir: Some of the old practices remain. We have found that child marriage is still in practice, even though there is legislation and a campaign by the Government to take it on. There was controversy around the recent legislation to ban it, with a specific clause being introduced. We are very concerned around that.

The other major thing is the issue of safety and security: sexual harassment en route to school and in the public space. Domestic violence remains high. Perhaps there is more reporting, which is also a reason why we see the numbers have escalated, or perhaps more people are coming out. Whatever the reason, this is major. This has psychological, social and economic implications for women.



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In terms of Bangladesh being very prone to disasters and climate change, that also puts girls and women in a difficult position in the coastal areas or anywhere now. In 2017, we had four major disasters: flood, landslide, waterlogging and then of course, from August, we have had the Rohingya refugees.

Asif Saleh: Patriarchy is alive and well in Bangladesh, but the changes in the last 20 to 30 years have been dramatic, in terms of women getting more educated. We have more girls in school than boys in Bangladesh, which was not the case 20 years ago. We have more women coming into our workforce. Interestingly, on the flipside, violence against women has gone up. That is also because women are asserting themselves more. The power struggle is very strong. That is going to be the big issue in the coming years: how do we address the issue of violence against women? That is increasing. These are the issues that middle-income-status countries deal with, around breaking up of the social structure, mental health issues and domestic violence issues. These are the newer challenges Bangladesh is facing. Civil society, NGOs and Government all need to come together, to try to solve these issues.

Q136 **Mrs Latham:** Sheikh Hasina talked at the Girl Summit about removing the minimum age of marriage for girls. How are child marriage and child labour being tackled in Bangladesh?

Farah Kabir: The legislation says that child marriage is banned. Even before, that was there. Now we have the Act. Below the age of 18 or 21 for boys, you cannot get married. However, there was a clause introduced in this legislation that said, in special circumstances, parents have the prerogative. That kind of nullifies this whole Act and the legislation. We raised a whole lot of concerns about it and the Government are trying to convince us that this is not going to be the case, because it has to go through the process of the magistrate and so on. Hopefully, this will not happen, but we know that it is still in practice.

One of the reasons for child marriage is the inability to provide safety and security for your girls. Asif mentioned that there has been a greater number of girls in school. That is enrolment. Retention remains a major issue. En route to school or within school premises, there are cases of violation. Safety and security remains an issue. We still have the unwritten practice of dowry. This causes the social problem, and then there is the violence around it.

Unfortunately, there is a huge generation of girls who got married at the age of 12 or 14 and are not under any scheme of education or skills development. Perhaps this is where DFID could invest in a special scheme for adolescent girls who became wives and mothers by the time they were 12 or 13, and who do not factor into any of the other planning, to enable them to get some skills, learn them and impart them.

Q137 **Mrs Latham:** What about child labour?



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Farah Kabir: The difficulty is that we still have the Factories Act, which says anyone above 14 can work. We have been lobbying, and the Government are saying that, if you change it to 18, you will have more girls in the sex trade and so on. That has not been amended. We are a signatory to the UNCRC, which says that anyone under 18 is a child. Poverty is a major reason for the continuation of child labour.

Q138 **Mrs Latham:** For the girls who are married at 12 or 14, is it primarily the case that they then have children very young? Do they get married at that age and wait until they are 16 or 18? Are they likely to have children very young as well?

Farah Kabir: Yes. That is why we have serious issues of intergenerational malnutrition, stunting and other problems because, by the time you are 13 or 14, you are a mother of one. We have found the same thing with the Rohingya refugees. By the age of 24, some have six children.

Q139 **Paul Scully:** Thank you very much for coming from Bangladesh to speak to us. I must congratulate BRAC on the work it does. I have been around a number of projects, in both Sylhet and Dhaka, that BRAC has done. It does excellent work. One of the projects I went to in the Sylhet tea gardens, not by BRAC but by Sylhet Tigers, which I think is now in receipt of DFID money, hosts football matches for girls around 14, in order to give them the message not to get married early, to stay in school and these kinds of things. I wonder what more you can say about the importance of secondary education for girls, what role the Bangladeshi Government are playing in this and what more we can do to influence that.

Asif Saleh: The role of secondary education now is extremely important. As Farah mentioned, the quality of education first has to be addressed. We are now seeing, for girls, a rate of drop-out from secondary school close to 50%. For boys, it is about 41%. They do not find secondary education relevant. The teachers do not come and often the quality of the teachers is bad. It is not necessarily just a problem with girls; it is across the board. This is probably the No. 1 challenge that we have: the human resources we are producing from the education system will not be able to cater for the growing needs of the middle-income country that Bangladesh is striving to be.

At the same time, the Bangladesh Government are incentivising. They are providing stipends and stuff to girls. Education is completely free up until 12th grade. However, the reality is that families invest in one or two children, and oftentimes it happens to be the boy or the eldest one who gets in there. With the rise of the RMG sector and all that, the tendency is to put them into the labour market quickly, after primary education.

Things are going to change in terms of improved skills. With the newer kinds of skills that will be required, there is going to be a need for



secondary education, coupled with more relevant vocational education. One big thread looming on Bangladesh's horizon is that automation is going to come to the RMG sector. When that happens—it is not about "if"; it is just going to happen—we are going to see a lot of job losses in the country. That is going to mostly affect these women. We have seen and studies have shown that families who are near the RMG belt or near factories tend to marry off their girls later. They do not see them as liabilities or threats; they basically see them as an asset, because they are also going to the market.

Jobless growth is an interesting challenge. Particularly in the RMG sector, these women are going to be affected, so we need to invest in these newer kinds of skill sets, whether in IT or in the newer sectors that Bangladesh is trying to promote. The recent survey has shown that there is a huge skills gap in nine booming sectors in Bangladesh, whether in construction, tourism or the IT sector. There are a number of them where we are suffering because there are not trained workers. We need to focus and bring women into these jobs that are not traditionally seen as a woman's job. We need to move some of these women into these kinds of jobs after their secondary education.

Q140 Paul Scully: The girls I met in Bangladesh at school do not lack ambition. They all say they want to be judges, lawyers, doctors and nurses. Some say film stars, but you know what I mean. Farah, how do you square that with reality? You talked about child labour and the counter-argument that changes might drive people to the sex trade. Part of that counter-argument is that, if you put the age up to 18, the families as a whole are going to be losing income. Is there a halfway house? Is there any sense of movement towards a long-term sustainable solution, but a gradual thing that does not affect family incomes too much, so that they can buy into that change?

Farah Kabir: We need to take a two-pronged approach. One is in the areas outside the urban, where the people are migrating from because of lack of opportunities. We need to ensure that, along with the education we are going to be offering the young boys and girls, there is vocational training with the stipend, so that there is some money coming into the family and they are not too strapped for cash or have some security. That group will then not necessarily migrate. They will still migrate because of climate change or opportunities. When we talk about a village in Bangladesh, we are talking about 150,000 to 250,000, which is the population of a town in Europe. We now need to try to develop the infrastructure and opportunities there.

The other important thing is that, along with the education that we have, because DFID and the UK have supported Bangladesh for years on curriculum development, it is high time to now say that we will again come back, but we want to have a component where there is serious vocational training. There is "knock down": we get things from China and assemble them, and then they go back to China and sell to the rest of the



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world. Locally, a company called Walton has come up and it is producing all kinds of electronics. It has just launched the first computer-producing company. There are new opportunities and we need to train girls.

I want to come back, if I may, Paul, to your earlier suggestion of sports. We really want to celebrate our women's cricket team. The football team has come back from winning matches. There is the kabaddi team. When the male cricket team wins, it is a public holiday. They all get a car and a flat. The women's team comes back and we are happy. Sport is a brilliant way of encouraging. That is one of the ways we are working, both with Bangladeshis and now in the Rohingya camp, and encouraging the girls to come and speak, because you cannot just go in and ask them, "Okay, tell me how you were violated." Sport encourages them in that woman-friendly space to take on something, whether it is Ludo or painting. That is just one way of doing it.

Q141 Paul Scully: The 14-year-old girls we played at football were very competitive. We only just managed to beat them. There is a good future there.

Asif Saleh: The prediction is that the women's team is going to play the World Cup before the men's team.

Q142 Mr Lewis: This is a question specifically for Asif, because it is regarding BRAC. In terms of the targeting the ultra-poor programme, can you explain how that differs from more conventional cash-transfer programmes?

Asif Saleh: BRAC looks at poverty as a multidimensional issue. It is not just about income or wages. In the way we set up the ultra-poor programme, one of the key parts is the targeting: identifying who are the most invisible within a village. That is being identified by the villagers themselves. We then do a wealth ranking. The key part of that is that, once they are identified and targeted, we give them a small asset. That is just a small part of it, because the real work happens after that. Our staff go and do home visits every week. This constant coaching and mentoring, which slowly rebuilds confidence that they can change their own fortune, is what makes the big difference. It is almost like, as our founder says, a lightbulb going on. They believe in themselves.

That intervention goes on for about two years, so the assets are given, which turn into an income-generating activity for them. We provide them with a monthly stipend so they do not sell off their asset for their need. Then, in two years, we look at a number of criteria. Are there multiple sources of income? Are they sending their children to school? Has there been a child marriage? There are about nine indicators. If they tick all the boxes, we say they have graduated to the next level. As you probably already know, this is one of the most successful flagship programmes, which BRAC originally coined in 2002, in partnership with DFID. It has been evaluated by LSE. Even after seven years, we see people stay in that trajectory. Once they are on that ladder, they do not



come down. That makes it a very sustainable intervention. That model has been replicated in almost 50 countries. It has been tested through RCT by J-PAL in six countries, and has been called a gold standard programme for extreme poverty eradication.

We got motivated by that. We have now launched a global ultra-poor initiative. As a global team, we are supporting various Governments around the world and providing them technical assistance, to see how they can include the learning from the graduation programme into their own social safety net activities.

Q143 Henry Smith: In your assessments, what importance and priority do the people in Bangladesh, the Government and DFID place on education?

Farah Kabir: There was a great emphasis on, firstly, enrolment and ensuring access to education. Now that enrolment and access to education have been established, it is important to bring in the quality education. Even last month, in the assessment of literacy and numeracy, they remain way below the standard. You have four teachers for 250 students in any public school. BRAC and other private initiatives might be different, but in the public sphere, which is catering to the majority of our population of young people, there are 250 students with four teachers. On top of that, they are asked to do a lot of administrative work. The ratio is problematic.

There are examples that DFID can pick up, like UCEP, which is a school for underprivileged children, which has been supported for many years. That has an education component as well as a vocational component. This could be something that it might want to replicate. Unfortunately, after 40 years, it still remains one big programme. It has satellite programmes and local donations. Local philanthropists have contributed and set it up in Chittagong, Rampur and Dinajpur. It is a model that you can look into.

It is critical that the curriculum is catered to today's reality and young people can find the connection, the opportunity and be relevant. We are a country with more than, I believe, 400,000 people, at the mid-manager level, from India or other parts of south Asia. Why? Because we did not have the quality education. It is for no other reason. These are not experts; I am talking about basic management. Unfortunately, it is because they have better education, or they completed education and have BBAs, MBAs and so on. They are taking on jobs that should have gone to Bangladeshis. There are many young people and their skills do not match the employment sector. This is where we need to invest. The Bangladeshi Government's priority is: in the eighth grade, get everybody a certificate and push them into vocational or the overseas market. Even if it is the eighth grade certificate, how can we make it quality education?

Asif Saleh: Even 25 years ago, we had to push people to send their kids to school. There was a concerted effort; that has changed. People now understand that they have to send their kids to school. But their notion



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of quality education has been about numbers, mark sheets and whether you get GPA 5, and not so much the substance and what they are really learning. Unfortunately, the Government are not trying to change that or their notion of quality. They are investing. There is quite a large allocation in the budget for education, but that is mostly going on infrastructure.

If you look at the numbers, in terms of improving teacher quality and investing in the curriculum, as Farah has been saying, that has not really happened. The new kinds of skill sets are analytical skill sets for how to break down a problem, because the jobs are changing. More and more, as an employer, I see that. When people come for interviews, the quality has dropped dramatically. There are a number of inequities being set up. People who are going into good schools in Dhaka and urban cities tend to do better. Some of these young kids are set for failure from the very beginning because of the lack of good public schools in Bangladesh. The Government are spending, but they are spending on the wrong things. Here, DFID can play a catalytic role in terms of nudging to invest in the right areas.

Q144 Mr Lewis: You have already touched on some of this, but what would you say is the primary cause of the skills gap in Bangladesh? How far is the lack of skills inhibiting growth in terms of the ambitious growth targets that the country has? What difference is the UK programme making in this specific area?

Asif Saleh: That is a very important question because, as I was saying, the survey shows that there is a huge gap in terms of trained workers in these growth areas. There are big construction projects happening in Bangladesh. There is a big boom in the hospitality and tourism sectors. There is the middle management area that Farah mentioned. All these areas are lacking trained people. It is not that the Government have not prioritised; the Government have prioritised, but it is not linked with the private sector enough. It is not demand-driven. We are teaching in vocational areas that are not in high demand. We are asking students to come and get into vocational training for three or six months, and students do not want to come because there is a huge opportunity cost for them. You have to get them a stipend and bring them over, as opposed to the private sector, where demands are perhaps more specific and targeted.

You need to cater and tailor curriculums based on the specific needs of the sector. You need to understand the sector and involve the private sector much more closely. SDG gives us that platform. The crucial difference from MDG to SDG is that we need to involve the private sector more and more. For example, in BRAC's skills programme we are going to the employers and asking what kind of workers they need. We are looking at the growth areas, and building up institutes where we provide exactly those kinds of skills. On the other side, we are trying to influence the Government. The Government are very good at providing



infrastructure—the buildings and equipment—but can we come in and provide the software, which is the modules, the training and the teachers, and make it very, very demand driven so that, as soon as the training is over, the person gets a job and the job placement happens? No one is going to come and get training unless a job placement is ensured.

We also need to be realistic. No matter how much we train, there are simply not going to be enough jobs created in Bangladesh—2.2 million people coming into the job market every year is a big number. We also need to train them on entrepreneurship so that they can start their own small businesses. There are a lot of informal businesses. About 95% of the young people in Bangladesh are now in the informal sector. That is a sector that needs a lot of attention, perhaps bringing in technology to link them with the consumers much more effectively. That is an area where lots of innovation, linkage and working in partnership are required.

Farah Kabir: The linkage with the market is critical for these entrepreneurs. Recently, Caledonian and Professor Yunus set up the Nursing Institute. There are initiatives that are going to bring some change.

Q145 **Chair:** For the final question, can I ask you both to address the issue of climate change, both generally and in particular how climate change might affect some of the challenges around poverty and inequality in Bangladesh that we have been addressing today? What is being done about it and what more can be done about it?

Farah Kabir: I made a reference earlier to how in 2017 we suffered four different kinds of disaster. There was waterlogging, floods and landslides. We are very prone to cyclones. We are still in the cyclone period between January and March. Amazing advances and changes have come to Bangladesh in terms of preparedness. We are a model in many countries. We brought a million people to safety during Cyclone Mora, but the fact is that we are still getting frequent and intense climate extremes. We would definitely like greater investment in preparedness.

In ActionAid, we did a study about the Government's annual development planning and investment. Is it covering the aspect of climate change and its impact? Of all the projects, we found that roughly 100 could be brought into disaster preparedness and DRR; the others could not. Then we have been speaking to the private sector. Do the businesses understand the risk involved? The dialogue is on. I do not think they have prepared either. Right now, we are engaging in a major campaign called sustainable consumption and production: SDG 12. This is with the Government, its planning commission, its external agency and the UNDP. We are doing research on the existing pattern of our consumption and production, which used to be much more organic and recycle-based, but we have also moved up the ladder into plastics and not recycling, especially phones, computers and so on. We are trying to campaign on that.



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This is where DFID could also play a major role in terms of supporting sustainable consumption and production, bringing in the private sector and showing them how it is useful not to go for the typical infrastructure, but be more green and look at different kinds of energy. In the RMG sector, there is a huge concern about the water that is being used, how infected it is and the damage it causes. We have serious problems about medical disposal. This is an area where we could use support in terms of both ideas and technology. We still do not have a proper understanding or policies around IT equipment and its disposal. Again, that is a sector where we need investment. There is huge potential to work there.

Climate financing is another one. Bangladesh has been applying for green climate finance. We have our own Bangladeshi pot of finance, which we have taken on. It has its issues. There has been corruption, but at least it has started and climate change-related projects are being funded. Green climate finance has been a major challenge because there are very strict requirements. You have to meet those. Finally, after much back and forth, one private sector company and the PKSF have managed to get some private financing. I know the UK puts into the climate fund. Perhaps that is an area in which you can support as well.

Asif Saleh: We are already seeing the effects of climate change in terms of migration. In Dhaka, 400,000 people come every year, migrating from areas. There is no conclusive research that has happened to show this, but a recent IOM study showed that 70% of this is related to environmental shocks. We see a lot of these coastal districts, in cities like Barisal, where their population has gone down in the last 10 years, which is completely unusual. That is mostly related to their being affected by climate change. One thing is building resilience, investing in these newer kinds of adaptation models and building new portable skills, so that, when they move, they can come and get different kinds of jobs.

If people come to the nearest coastal cities, we can also invest in different kinds of housing. We are still investing in the old kinds of housing. We are looking at the temperature in Bangladesh going up by 2 degrees centigrade in the next 20 or 30 years, and by 2080 an average rise of about 2 feet in the sea level. A lot of these coastal cities are going to be submerged. Bangladesh is such a densely populated country, and these people are going to come to the cities for sure. We need to invest in building that resilience, whether in terms of infrastructure or housing, and their skills and livelihood. That already has to happen.

We need to look at agriculture, because a lot of land is increasing in salinity because of this. What kinds of crop will work better in those kinds of land? What kind of salinity proofing is there? There is research to be done in those areas. Investment needs to happen on that front.

Q146 **Paul Scully:** This is more of an environmental issue than climate change itself. On the south coast, you have a lot of shipbreaking and those kinds of thing. I am wondering what the Government and maybe DFID can do



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to help make that a safer industry and stop pollution, which is obviously seeping into the sea and into shellfish and prawns, which I know that Bangladesh exported a lot of in the past, although the market has tended to move away, partly because of the pollution. I am wondering if you have anything to say about that.

Asif Saleh: That sector needs to be much more strongly regulated. It happened in the RMG sector, for example, with this entire supply chain that was completely unregulated before. That sector is still unregulated because those are poor areas and these are livelihood issues. There is a “don’t ask; don’t tell” policy of the Government. Unless strict regulation comes in and there is that forced child labour situation, that will happen.

Chair: Can I thank you both so much, to echo what Paul said earlier, in particular for making the journey to be with us? You have given us a lot of evidence that will massively inform our inquiry. Thank you very much indeed.