

Strengthening Citizen's Engagement in Delivering SDGs in view of COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is expected to leave a permanent mark on the trajectory of delivering SDGs both at country and global levels. Recent analyses by the Platform in the context of Bangladesh evinced that the country needed to fine tune and accelerate its development journey in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030 even before the emergence of COVID-19. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will, on one hand, dent the progress achieved so far; on the other hand, will provide an opportunity to reshape the development strategies in favour of the *marginalised groups including the poor, women, children, senior citizens, youth, indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, residents of hard-to-reach areas, etc.* It is the right time to comprehend how post-COVID-19 uncertainties will affect SDG delivery, particularly favouring the left behind communities, in the specific country context.

Within the country, marginalised and vulnerable populations face bigger challenges to safeguard their lives and livelihood during the pandemic. *Two challenges are pertinent from the perspective of structural disadvantages affecting these people – pre-existing vulnerabilities that may get accentuated due to the pandemic, and new vulnerabilities that may push these citizens further behind.* It is expected that these usually left-behind groups are likely to be in dire need of policy support for resumption and recovery of their economic activities and social development.

The core objective of the proposed engagements is *to contribute to improving public policy intervention outcomes towards mitigating the COVID-19-induced economic, social, environmental and governance-related vulnerabilities* faced by the marginalised citizens in Bangladesh. Besides, the engagements also intend *to support devising macroeconomic, monetary and public finance policies* in attainment of SDGs by 2030 in Bangladesh. The knowledge products under the programme will also provide *inputs to the strategies of international development partners and other CSOs.* Overall, it is expected that these engagements from the largest network of non-state actors in Bangladesh will *contribute towards building social cohesion and democratic governance* in the country. This initiative will also provide an opportunity to *promote new, effective and innovate ways of generating data and evidence; build learning networks and virtual forums, and use the tested knowledge and good practices for responses* to crisis by the non-state actors in Bangladesh. This experience can also bring forth lessons for other Southern countries.

Taking note of the realities on the ground and building on their own experience, the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh along with its Partner Organisations seeks to prepare a set of evidence-based and policy-oriented knowledge products under its new programme engaging a wide range of non-state actors with structured participation designed for political actors, media, youth and non-state actors including representation from the private sector. In this context, three streams will be explored: (i) *dealing with lives and livelihood during the pandemic - new benchmark for the "new normal"* which will record the benchmark situation and examine the adjustment, and adaptation responses at individual, household and social group levels; (ii) *assessing effectiveness of public policy for resumption and recovery in the context of "new normal"* which will appraise expanded and new public policy interventions in favour of LNOB groups and examine progress towards attainment of resilience; and (iii) *tackling the pandemic induced new challenges*



concerning SDG delivery which will assess the consequences of the pandemic for achieving selected SDGs at disaggregated level and identify the required structural changes in the medium term policies. A set of communication and outreach activities are designed under the proposed engagements which include (i) *support for generating of the knowledge products*; (ii) *documenting experience and setting up a mapping mechanism*; (iii) *dissemination of outputs of the initiative*; and (iv) *strengthening of networking and organisational capacity*.

The outputs of the initiative include: (i) Three (3) knowledge products to be published as three working papers; (ii) Ten (10) meetings with stakeholders, including policymakers, international development partners, private sector, media and CSOs, including Partner Organisations of the Platform; (iii) One (1) online public discussion; (iv) Two (2) national dialogues; (v) One (1) edited volume; (vi) One (1) web-based platform on COVID-19 for Platform's Partner Organisations; (vii) Social media engagements.

The Partner Organisations will be actively engaged in delivery of the activities. One of the key inputs from the Partner Organisations will be to generate information from grassroots level through rapid survey and discussions with marginalised social groups. The Secretariat will also engage a strong group of professionals to carry out the activities. A "Consultative Group" will be formed comprising selected government officials, non-state actors, Partner Organisation representatives and programme funders. The group will advise on the design of the project, mid-term review and improvement, and outreach activities.