

Bangladesh's Development Narrative and the Parallel Realities

Keynote Presentation

by

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এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

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- The Process
- Key Messages
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1. The Context



1.1 The Narrative

- Bangladesh's journey since 1971 is a remarkable transformation story, evolving from a war-ravaged nation into an **exemplar of economic and social development**.
- The past five decades have witnessed spectacular growth in **income, poverty alleviation, global transactions and advancements in human development indicators**.
- Bangladesh came out of the **Low and Middle-Income Country (LMIC) category in 2015** and aspires to graduate from the **Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026** and deliver the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030**.



1.2 The Realities We Confront

However, this journey bears the imprints of growing socio-economic inequalities and locational and group-specific vulnerabilities, coupled with diminishing citizen voices.

- While poverty declined significantly, income and consumption inequalities are increasing, according to Household Income and Expenditure Survey.
- Absolute poverty dropped from **31.5% in 2010** to **18.7% in 2022**, and extreme poverty decreased **even more rapidly**, from **17.6% in 2010** to **5.6% in 2022**.
- Income inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient) rose by **9%** from 2010 to 2022, increasing **more in urban** areas while remaining **stable in rural**.
- In 2022, the **wealthiest 10% held 41% of income**, leaving only **1.31% for the poorest 10%**. Whereas in 2016 share of top 10% was 38.09% leaving only **1.02% for the poorest 10%**.
- Consumption inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient) also rose by **4%** from 2010 to 2022. Notably, it increased **more in rural areas from 2010-16** but **reversed the trend**, rising **more in urban areas from 2016-22**.
- These disparities are exacerbated by ongoing challenges stemming from the **COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine**, further marginalising vulnerable populations.

1.2 The Realities We Confront

Income Status Defining Other Performances



According to Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2022:

- **36.4%** of women (aged 20-24) marrying before age 16 and **64%** of women marrying before age 18 come from the **lowest 20% wealth quintile**
- **Nearly half (49%)** of women marrying before 16 and the **majority (69%)** marrying before 18 had **no formal education**
- **29.1%** of teenagers (aged 15-19) with pregnancies belong to the **lowest 20% wealth quintile**
- For children under five years, **34.5% of stunted**, **13.1% of wasted**, and **32.4% of underweight** children belonged to the **lowest 20% wealth quintile**



According to National Survey on Children's Education 2021:

- As the reasons for not attending school or Early Childhood Education programmes during the 2021 school year -
 - **23.6%** of respondents cited a **decrease in family income**
 - **19.3%** cited the **inability to afford education expenses**
 - **17.8%** cited **child marriage**
 - **10.9%** cited the **need to work for income**



1.2 The Realities We Confront



Stagnant Private Investment

- Private investment to GDP ratio has remained stagnant at **around 23% for the last decade**, well below the **average of 30% for LMICs**.



Insufficient Allocation in Health & Education

- Public expenditure for education was **less than 2% of GDP**; and **less than 1% of GDP for health**, which are among the lowest in the world.



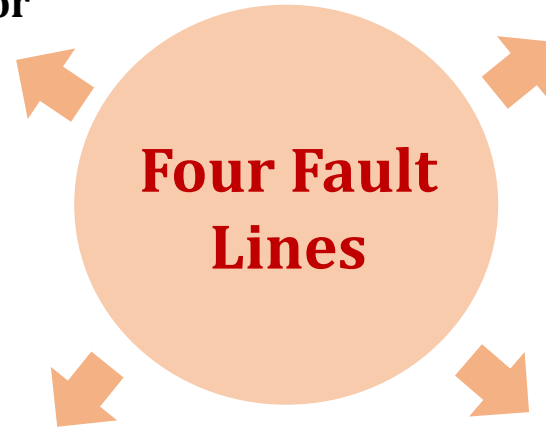
Weak Revenue Collection

- **Revenue-GDP ratio in FY22 was 9.8%**, based on Fitch's metric, which is one-third of the median seen in countries with the same credit rating.
- Bangladesh has the lowest tax-GDP ratio in South Asia.



Distorted Distribution of Social Safety Net

- Despite increasing allocation to safety nets over time, the intended beneficiaries are **not reaping the benefits**.
- In FY24, safety net allocations stood at **2.52% of GDP**, falling short of the **National Social Security Strategy target of 3% of GDP**.



Four Fault Lines

1.3 Correcting the Course Ahead



We need a better understanding of development outcomes, particularly regarding their distribution.



To accomplish this, we must attain a nuanced understanding of local realities.



This imperative led us to initiate a series of public consultations at the sub-national level engaging local communities, with a special focus on marginalised groups, along with local media.



These consultations aimed to unveil ground-level insights across four dimensions: **cross-cutting**, **sectoral**, **population-specific**, and **area-specific** issues.



Additionally, our efforts extend to subsequent actions, encompassing advocacy, partnerships, and outreach, as part of our commitment to effectively address the needs and aspirations of local and marginalised communities.

2. The Process

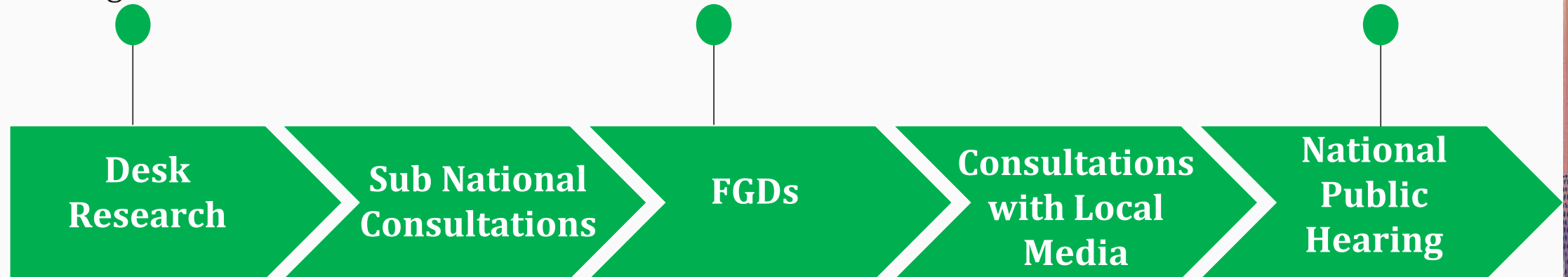


2. The Process (2022)

Identification of issues (area-specific and LNOB perspectives) and development of **conceptual framework** leading to the consultations

Gathering **additional insights from local LNOB groups** to determine grassroots challenges

Validation of the outcomes of sub-national consultations involving **400 participants from 25 districts**



Seven sub-national consultations (**Rangpur, Tangail, Khulna, Thakurgaon, Sylhet, Chattogram and Rangamati**) with 500 leading and engaged local personalities

Engaging in **district-level consultations with local media** professionals to uncover their perspectives on development

3. Key Messages

- **Cross-Cutting**
- **Sectoral**
- **Population Specific**
- **Area Specific**



3.1 Key Messages - Cross-cutting Issues

Components

Current Challenges

Challenges in Decent Job Creation

- Scarcity of suitable job opportunities, impacting **youth, women, persons with disabilities, cleaners, and indigenous people.**
- Rampant **corruption, nepotism, and bribery** in government job selections.
- Limited access to **essential job information** for seekers.
- Obstacles for indigenous people due to reservation system.
- Unemployment **worsened by COVID-19**, particularly affecting **educated youth and women.**
- Lack of **decentralised industrialisation.**
- **Export challenges for women** entrepreneurs.

Regional Disparities in Infrastructure

- **Imbalanced infrastructural development** with a strong focus on **urban areas.**
- Enhanced connectivity **not uniformly benefiting all regions.**
- Positive advancements in **IT and transportation infrastructure.**

Gender Rights and Violence

- Despite greater female economic participation, **gender rights violations are on the rise.**
- Child marriage, **worsened by COVID-19**, remains a pressing issue.
- Escalating **insecurity and violence against women**, including abuse, harassment, and sexual violence.
- Neglect of **women's legal rights** and **inadequate enforcement.**

3.1 Key Messages - Cross-cutting Issues

Components

Current Challenges

Climate-Related Challenges

- Widespread climate adversity, including **floods, droughts, and more.**
- Environmental damage from **pollution, stone extraction, and deforestation.**
- Lack of government **monitoring and prevention** measures.
- **Insufficient rehabilitation support** for climate vulnerable areas
- **River Dams** affecting agriculture

Issues with Public Institutions

- Challenges in **information dissemination** and **biased allocation.**
- Limited access to public services for **disadvantaged groups.**
- **Inefficiency, coordination failures, and corruption** within government agencies.
- Concerns related to **land recovery, financial assistance, and rehabilitation efforts**
- **Local government institutions not being responsive to citizen's demand**

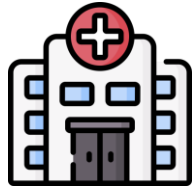
Cultural Values and Traditions

- Erosion of **cultural values**, especially concerning **indigenous and minority** communities.
- Neglect of **art, culture and traditional practices and values.**
- **Middle class abandoning cultural activities and social activism**

Democratic Accountability and Voice

- **Corruption** as a major barrier to development and equitable distribution.
- **Power play affecting distribution and utilisation of national resources.**
- **Shrinking space** for civil society and youth participation.
- **Decline in collective action** among sub-indigenous groups

3.2 Key Messages – Sectoral Issues



Health

- Limited access to public health services, **shortages in health clinics**, and **community clinics' ineffectiveness**.
- Lack of access due to **weak road infrastructure** and the **need for higher allocation** for upazila health centers.

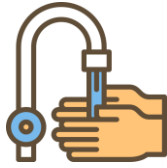


Education

- Concerns over **quality education**, **reliance on coaching centers**, and financial constraints leading to **dropouts**.
- Discrimination in **school admissions**, inadequate **transportation infrastructure**, and lack of **monitoring mechanisms**.
- Malpractices in educational institutions, corruption in **stipend distribution**, and **unequal access** to education by **left-behind groups**.
- **High dropout** rates among **female students**, inequality in **teacher salaries**, and **learning loss** due to the digital divide and COVID-19.



3.2 Key Messages – Sectoral Issues



Water and Sanitation

- Uneven access to **water and sanitation**, scarcity of facilities, and **political biases** in service distribution.
- **Deforestation** and **stone extraction** leading to **drinking water shortages**.



Transport and Communication

- **Fragile road** conditions, lack of maintenance, and **corruption** affecting infrastructure.
- **Corruption in fund utilisation** for road construction, leading to **maintenance issues**.



Social Protection

- Gaps in implementing social security programs, **corruption**, **inefficiencies**, and **inadequate coverage**.
- Programs not meeting beneficiaries' needs and demands, resulting in **widening income inequality**.

3.3 Key Messages – Population Specific Issues



Broad Identity Groups

- **Women:** Limited mobility, gender-based discrimination, labor issues, and inadequate representation.
- **Youth:** Limited job opportunities, youth disengagement, and social issues like drug abuse.
- **Senior Citizens:** Economic security issues and the need for community engagement

Specific Identity Groups

- **Indigenous:** Land conflicts, inadequate government support, lack of political representation, cultural preservation challenges, and self-identity denial.
- **Dalit:** Housing discrimination, limited access to higher education, lack of political representation, and economic challenges.
- **Climate Vulnerable:** Underdeveloped infrastructure, affecting economic, educational, and healthcare development.
- **Persons with Disabilities:** Financial constraints, limited access to education, and ineffective policies.
- **Transgender:** Social stigma, economic vulnerabilities, and the need for rehabilitation.

Employment-specific Groups

- **Farmers:** Economic losses, limited access to resources, corruption, and high inflation.
- **Fishermen:** Fishing bans, inadequate food support, and economic challenges.
- **Tea Workers:** Low wages, limited social mobility, and high inflation.
- **Internal and External Migrants:** Reverse migration, job creation challenges, and workplace safety concerns.

3.4 Key Messages – Area Specific Issues

Rangpur

- Substantial population **living below poverty line**
- **River erosion, flooding and drought**
- Insufficient access to **sanitation, healthcare and cleaning services**
- High **youth unemployment**
- Lack of investments including **special government projects**
- **Limited engagement of local organisations** in policy implementation
- **Disproportionate development in indigenous areas**

Khulna

- Widening **income disparity**
- Declining **jute industry**
- Persistent **waterlogging**
- **Salinity** issues
- Absence of **heavy industries**
- Inadequate access to **safe drinking water**
- Insufficient **housing for Dalits and Harijans**
- Increase in **violence against women**

Tangail

- Lack of **quality education**
- Inadequate **sanitation and safe drinking water** in Char areas
- **Indigenous land grabbing**
- **River erosion**
- **Child malnutrition**
- **Social insecurity**
- Rising **divorce rates**
- **Dowry-related issues**
- **Urban migration** for income
- Erosion of **cultural harmony** and **peaceful coexistence of different religions**

3.4 Key Messages – Area Specific Issues

Thakurgaon

- Lack of **proper education and training** for employment
- **Drug addiction**
- Inadequate **investment**
- Corruption in **accessing service**
- Student **dropouts**
- Unutilised potential in **agriculture-based industries**
- Insufficient **cold storage** facilities
- Lack of **industrial factories**
- Defunct **sugar mills**
- **Land encroachment** issues
- **Limited space** for sports and recreational activities

Sylhet

- Insufficient **communication infrastructure**
- Safe **drinking water and sanitation** scarcity
- Severe **poverty** in slum areas
- Healthcare inadequacies in **Haor region**
- Rampant **unemployment**
- High **child marriage** rates
- **Encroachment** on natural water bodies
- Excessive **rain and flooding**
- Illegal **stone extraction**
- Unregulated **waste disposal**
- Harsh conditions for **tea workers**
- Erosion of **cultural heritage**

3.4 Key Messages – Area Specific Issues

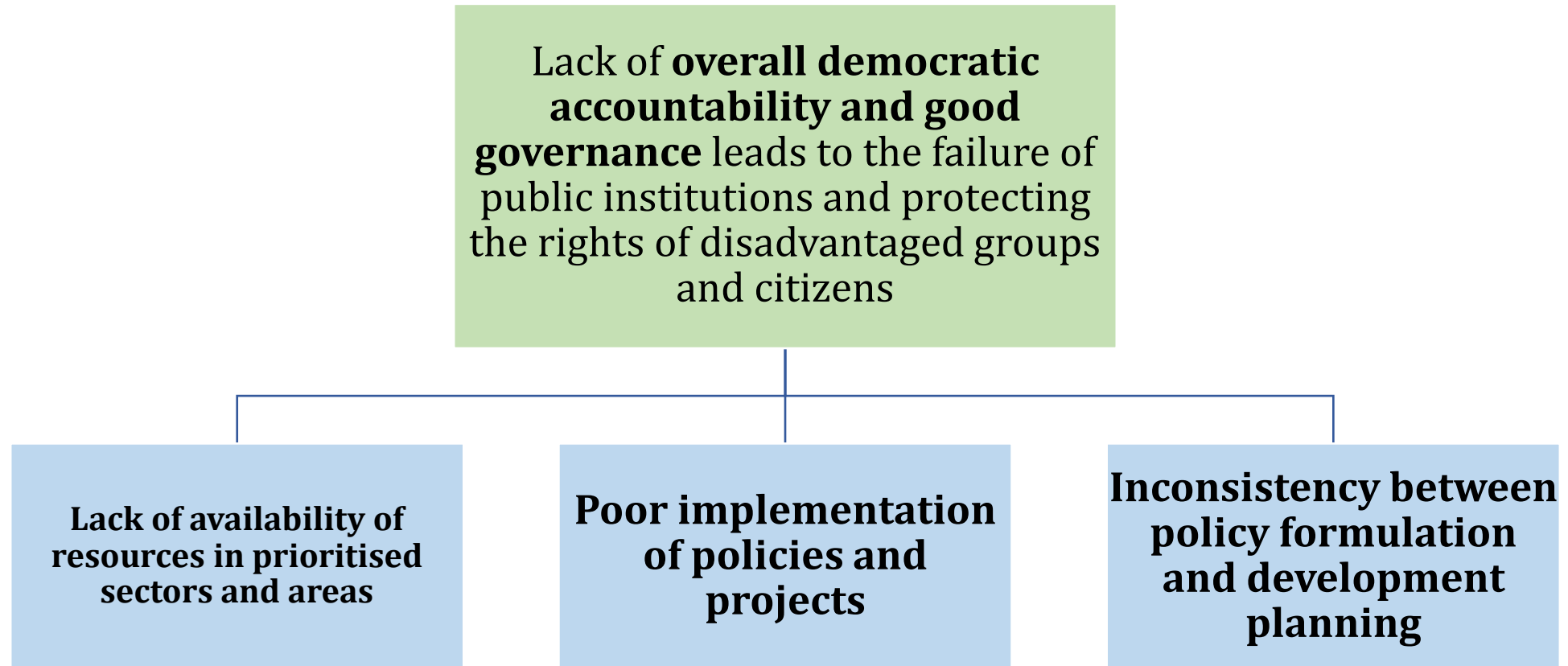
Rangamati

- Non-implementation of **peace agreements**
- Limited **healthcare** services
- **Job quota** discontinuation for indigenous people
- **Land** intrusion
- Excessive **child marriages**
- Lack of **quality educational institutions**
- Inconsistent **electricity supply**
- Small ethnic **languages at risk**
- Severe **water scarcity**
- **Deforestation**
- Influence of **Specific tribal groups**
- Difficulties in accessing government benefits for **jhum farmers**
- **Security issues** for tribal women
- Worsening **hill tribe-Bengali relations**
- Insufficient **coordinated development efforts**

Chattogram

- Excessive **waterlogging**
- **Canal** encroachment
- Rising **child marriages**
- Commercialisation of **school admissions**
- Expensive education programs
- **Coaching** industry
- Student **smartphone addiction**
- **Drug abuse**
- Inadequate **rural healthcare**
- Restricted navigation in the **Karnaphuli River**
- Limited opportunities for **intellectual discourse and research**
- **Insufficient disability information**
- **Social media** misuse
- **Politically influential figures** on school committees

3.5 Three Underlying Causes



A democratic transition has emerged as a prerequisite for an inclusive and sustainable economy.

4. Follow-up



4. Follow Up

Identification of 11 Themes

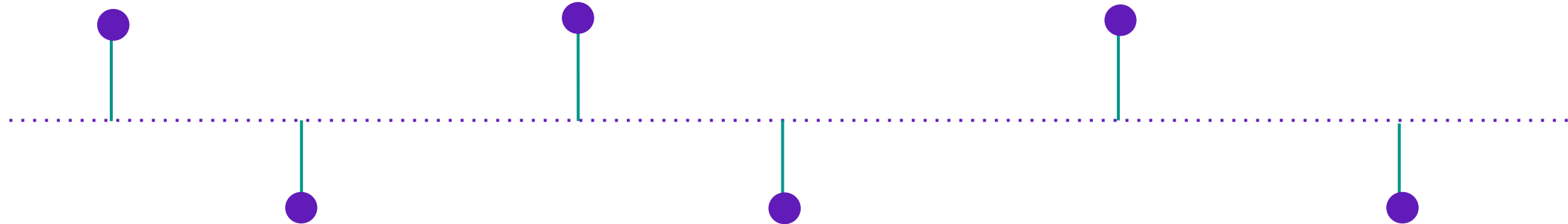
*from left-behind perspectives based on the aforesaid public consultations **and Setting Up 11 Expert Groups** with the leading experts on the issues*

Media Briefings

to present the recommendations to the wider audience with the Policy Briefs to be clustered into three groups - Economic, Social and Governance

Lobbying with Political Parties

to present of the recommendations at meetings with major political parties, to inform electoral discourse and as inputs to election manifestos



Preparation of 11 Policy Briefs

to come up with a set of recommendations in each of the identified areas by a dedicated team of experts.

Agenda Setting Document

including a set of concrete recommendations based on 11 Policy Briefs pertaining to the 11 identified themes

Democracy Conference

on recommended actions, with the participation of disadvantaged groups, civil society activists, opinion builders and media, in the presence of high-level policymakers

4. Follow Up

Economic

- Transforming **agriculture** for an inclusive and diversified economy
- Providing **decent employment for youth** in view of domestic and overseas market
- Providing **public utilities and services** in the backdrop of unplanned urbanisation
- Affordable and clean **energy for all**

Social

- Reducing **out-of-pocket expenditure** to improve the quality and affordability of national health care system
- Triggers to ensuring **quality education skills at primary level**
- Dealing with the manifestation of **localised vulnerabilities** of climate change
- Promoting **universal social protection system** and the need for targeting disadvantaged groups

Governance

- Effective **implementation of laws** and judicial process for eradicating **gender-based violence** and discrimination
- Access and justice for **ethnic and religious minorities**
- Giving voice to the 'silent' and establishing **democratic accountability**



**Issues for
11 Policy
Briefs**

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