

Citizen's Conference 2024

People-centric Reform for Good Governance

Aspirations of Disadvantaged Communities

Date: 8-9 December 2024

*Venue: Carnival Hall, Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC)
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Agargaon*

Concept Note

1. Context

Bangladesh is at a critical juncture where strengthening democratic governance and accountability has become essential to address long-standing issues of institutional effectiveness and inclusivity. Recent governance challenges have highlighted the need for comprehensive reform, particularly in ensuring that the voices of marginalised communities, including women and LNOB (Leave No One Behind) groups, are represented at all levels of governance. There is an urgent demand for institutional change to empower citizens and create a people-centric governance model that promotes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

As Bangladesh approaches upcoming local and national elections, this conference seeks to influence the evolving electoral debate by emphasising the role of citizens, particularly those from marginalised groups, in governance processes. The focus will be on establishing accountability mechanisms across the design, implementation, and delivery of policies and services. By linking LNOB communities with public service delivery systems—such as health, education, social protection, and security—the conference aims to develop strategies for a governance model that reflects the perspectives and needs of the entire population.

The Citizen's Conference 2024, organised by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation aims to initiate a dialogue on institutional change and political empowerment. This event will bring together experts, policymakers, and civil society representatives to explore ways to strengthen the agency of LNOBs from local government to the national policymaking process. The ultimate goal is to foster a governance ecosystem that supports citizen empowerment, accountability, and the resilience of Bangladesh's governance structures in achieving sustainable, inclusive, and corruption-free development.

2. Objectives

In light of the above context, the Citizen's Conference 2024, titled "*People-centric Reform for Good Governance: Aspirations of Disadvantaged Communities*" seeks to:

1. **Consolidate an Understanding of People-Centric Governance:** Develop a shared understanding of the principles and practices of people-centric governance and accountability, informed by ground-level experiences and perspectives from LNOB communities.
2. **Amplify Left-Behind Community Perspectives in Governance:** Facilitate the exchange of these perspectives with key government actors to promote policy discourses that support greater inclusivity, transparency, and responsiveness to marginalised communities.

3. **Strengthen Citizen Engagement and Voice in Governance Reform:** Engage in dialogue with policymakers to advocate for a governance framework that incorporates citizen oversight, enforces accountability, and supports institutional reforms, especially as Bangladesh prepares for upcoming elections.

3. Conference Focus and Technical Sessions

The Citizen's Conference 2024 will centre on three interrelated streams, each contributing to a comprehensive framework for public actions that showcase the strength of community engagement. These streams address essential aspects of people-centric governance and accountability in Bangladesh. Through dedicated technical sessions, experts, policymakers, and civil society representatives will come together to engage in targeted dialogues. The discussions aim to generate actionable strategies and recommendations that strengthen the role of citizens—particularly women and left-behind groups—in shaping governance processes.

The three streams that the technical sessions will focus on are:

(i) Ensure Citizen's (Including Women and Other Relevant Left-Behind Groups) Participation and Agency in Local Government Functions

This session will explore how local government structures can be made more inclusive, enabling greater participation from marginalised groups. Discussions will focus on enhancing transparency and accountability in local governance and identifying ways for women and left-behind communities to have a stronger voice and influence in decision-making processes. Specific examples may include examining the roles of local government in social protection, resource allocation, and community-level services like water supply and waste management.

(ii) Establish a Citizen-Led Oversight and Accountability Process to Improve Public Service Deliveries (Particularly Those for Women and Other Left-Behind Groups)

In this session, participants will discuss the development of citizen-led frameworks for monitoring and holding accountable public service providers, particularly in the primary education and healthcare sectors. The goal is to address service quality, accessibility, and transparency issues that disproportionately affect women and left-behind communities. The session will also explore potential mechanisms for integrating citizen feedback into service delivery improvement efforts, ensuring that public services meet the needs of all community members.

(iii) Strengthen the Voice, Participation, and Agency of Women and Left-Behind Groups in the National Policymaking Process

This session will examine how national policymaking processes can become more inclusive, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of women and LNOB groups are effectively represented. Topics will include institutional reforms to enhance accountability, strategies for reducing corruption, and ways to create formal channels for citizen input in policy discussions. The session will highlight the importance of citizen agency in shaping policies that impact their lives, with a focus on equity and transparency.

Through these sessions, the conference aims to establish a consolidated understanding of people-centric governance, frame future interventions, and outline actions from a citizen's perspective. Each

session will be led by distinguished speakers and will include presentations by issue experts, input from discussants as well as moderated floor discussions, concluding with takeaways and recommendations that will inform Bangladesh's broader governance reforms.

4. Expected Conference Outcomes

The Citizen's Conference 2024 is expected to deliver the following outcomes:

- **Consolidated Understanding:** Establishing a shared understanding of the current challenges and opportunities within Bangladesh's governance structures, particularly regarding LNOB representation and institutional accountability.
- **Framework for Future Interventions:** Creating a framework for interventions that will support institutional change and citizen empowerment in the governance landscape, with an emphasis on transparency and accountability.
- **Elements of Future Actions:** Developing actionable insights and ideas from a citizen's perspective that will guide future governance initiatives and influence the electoral debate, aligning with Bangladesh's sustainable development goals.

The knowledge products and discussions from the conference will be fed into Bangladesh's Voluntary National Review (VNR) and support preparations for LDC graduation, aligning with broader goals of institutional resilience and citizen empowerment.

5. Follow-Up Actions

To ensure the outcomes of the Citizen's Conference 2024 lead to impactful, lasting change, the following follow-up actions will be undertaken:

- **Publication and Dissemination:** Finalisation and publication of the three knowledge products, followed by extensive dissemination to policymakers, civil society organisations, and development partners to inform future governance strategies.
- **Public Action Programme:** Building on the broad framework and the action-oriented knowledge products, a Public Action Programme will be launched to mobilise public support and foster community engagement around key governance goals. This programme will empower citizens to advocate for an inclusive policy outlook and reinforce the accountability mechanisms emphasised in the conference outcomes.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Monitoring:** Ongoing collaboration with relevant stakeholders—including local governments, ministries, and community representatives—to support the implementation of recommendations, track progress, and assess the impact of governance practices on LNOB communities.
- **Advocacy and Policy Influence:** Sustained advocacy to integrate the conference's recommendations into Bangladesh's governance reform initiatives, particularly as the nation prepares for upcoming local and national elections, supporting an electoral debate that prioritises people-centric governance.
- **Feedback and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Establishment of robust feedback channels to assess the effectiveness of implemented recommendations, collect insights, and inform future governance interventions.