

Human Rights Programme (HRP), UNDP
Minutes of the Seventh Programme Advisory Board (PAB) Meeting
09 July 2020, Virtual Meeting

Introduction:

The 7th Programme Advisory Board (PAB) meeting of the Human Rights Programme (HRP), UNDP was held on 09 July 2020 at 11.00am - 01.00pm virtually. The meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Nasima Begum, ndc, Hon'ble Chairman, National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh.

Ms. Nasima Begum, the Hon'ble Chairman, NHRC welcomed all the board members to the meeting and delivered her opening speech. acknowledged

- She stated that NHRC is the watchdog and statutory apex body for promotion and protection of human rights of citizens of Bangladesh. Therefore, the Human Rights Programme of UNDP bears a prime importance in institutional capacity building of NHRC. She informed that this Commission after taking the charge in September 2019 has been addressing some serious human rights issues including the brutal killing of a BUET student. Also during this pandemic, NHRC has been monitoring the human rights violations and has asked the relevant government authorities to take necessary actions.
- She appreciated the project's support in celebrating the Human Rights Day 2019. For the first time in the history of Bangladesh, the Hon'ble Prime Minister attended the Human Rights Day and for the first time the Day was celebrated across all 64 districts with the funding from the government and of the 64 districts 8 were supported by the project.
- The Hon'ble Chairman mentioned about the introduction of digital management system in NHRC and acknowledged HRP's support to commence Commission's regular works including thematic committees' meetings during the pandemic.
- Finally, she concluded by acknowledging the strong partnership with UNDP, SIDA and SDC and anticipated to continue this partnership.

Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, RR, UNDP in his speech thanked all the stakeholders including NHRC, Law Enforcements Agencies, CSOs for the partnership and for working together for four and half years from 2016 to 2020 with the Human Rights Programme, UNDP.

- He expressed his gratitude particularly to the Commission for taking the joint initiative with UNDP to respond to the crisis by providing aid to the most vulnerable people in the COVID 19 pandemic situation and appreciated its work in monitoring the human rights situation.
- Regarding the work with police, he said that UNDP's work is intended to make the force more compliance with human rights standards and obligations through imparting human rights training with front line responders.
- He mentioned about HRP's work on promoting women's rights and empowerment issues involving marginalized women.
- He also mentioned about the challenges created by COVID 19 situation regarding implementation of planned activities and UNDP's work for the vulnerable people to respond to the crisis.
- He emphasised on the cost extension of the project so that the planned activities for 2020 are completed as per target set by the Programme and reach the goal successfully.
- He expressed sincere appreciation for the leadership and camaraderie demonstrated by Ms. Sharmeela Rassool throughout her time with the Human Right Projects and congratulated her

on her new assignment as the UN Women Representative in Pakistan. He sincerely hopes that Sharmeela will continue to remain intellectually engaged with the work in Bangladesh.

The meeting then proceeded as per the following agenda:

SI No.	Agenda
1.	Confirmation of minutes of the Sixth PAB meeting and follow up
2.	Key results achieved in 2019
3.	Highlights of 2020 planned activities and budget
4.	Project extension (January - December 2021)
5.	AOB

Mr. Kazi Arfan Ashik, Director (Admin & Finance), NHRC presented a PowerPoint on the decisions taken in the previous PAB meeting and their follow ups, highlighted the key results achieved by the project in 2019.

Ms. Sharmeela Rassool, Chief Technical Adviser, HRP presented the planned activities of 2020 as per the Annual Work Plan along with the budget. She drew attention of the Board to the COVID19 rapid response by the Project and highlighted the different activities undertaken jointly by NHRC and project during the pandemic with a need to work further to recover the situation. She shared the lessons learnt as well as feedback from stakeholders and people's perception on human rights. Considering the present pandemic situation and the delay of the starting of the project in 2016 by 8 months, she urged the members to consider an extension of the Project for one year till 31 December 2021 integrating selected justice interventions to ensure better enforcement of human rights.

Open Discussion by PAB members:

During the discussion **Ms. Suzanne Mueller, Counsellor, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** wanted to know about the experience of HRP regarding the community radio programmes and how useful such initiative is for the youths.

In response, **Ms. Sharmeela Rassool** said that the Community Radio Programmes are designed and developed by youths themselves in which there is a huge participation from rural areas. However, in the city the scenario is a bit different. The community radio programmes have given them an additional interest not only to just participate in the programme but also to spread the message to their communities. While Bangladesh Betar covers Dhaka city and reaches to the people of city including the whole country, the 17 community radios are used to reach the rural people.

Based on the experience on community radio activities under HRP in Cox's Bazar district **Ms. Sabina Yasmein Lubna, Sr. Programme Officer, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** added that the community radios have also some early warning system during disaster and few programs on human rights awareness are designed in ethnic minority language of the community which she found very interesting.

Mr. Md. Golam Rasul, MDS, Police Staff College Bangladesh, Dhaka informed that the Police Staff College has received the consent of the Ministry of Home Affairs to sign a Letter of Agreement (LoA) with HRP, UNDP. He assured that with the help of NHRC and UNDP, the Staff College will be able to accomplish all the planned activities once the LoA is signed and thus contribute in protecting human rights in the country.

Regarding the support to build the capacity of CSOs under the Challenge Fund initiative, **Ms. Sabina Yasmein Lubna, Sr. Programme Officer, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** opined that the 18 months project duration is not adequate in terms of capacity building of CSOs as well as support for the beneficiaries. Therefore, the project duration needs to be increased more. In

response Ms. Sharmeela Rassool stated that, as per discussion with the development partners, the project duration of CSOs under challenge fund could be considered for at least 03 years in future.

Dr. Fauzia Moslem, Acting President, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) suggested to develop a monitoring system to track the progress in human rights programmatic actions and to conduct advocacy work for recruitment of the migrant workers and women workers in new jobs who have lost their jobs due to COVID 19 situation. Also, she advised to advocate for inclusion of gender budget in the national budget which is unfortunately missing in the current national budget and work with Women Parliamentary Caucus to promote women rights. She emphasized on the need for women disaggregated data to monitor the progress in women's advancement,

Mr. Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum (BIPF) suggested to conduct advocacy with policy makers by NHRC for the adoption of Bangladesh Ethnic Minority Rights Act (BEMRA). He also suggested to include Minority rights (Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities) and indigenous rights issues (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) in the Police training as well as in Business and Human rights related activities of the project. In response, **Ms. Sharmeela Rassool** responded that, the issues of minorities and indigenous peoples as well women, children, sexual minorities are already included in the online training modules for police and they would be also included in the business and human rights related activities.

Regarding UPR Action Plan, **Md Faruk Hossain, Director (UN) MoFA** mentioned that there is need to strengthen the capacity of the relevant GoB authorities to build better understanding of their obligation, UPR implementation process and reporting responsibilities. MoFA is keen to see NHRC's participation in monitoring the UPR Action Plan once it is adopted. In response, **Ms. Sharmeela Rassool** informed that though UNDP undertook the UPR related activities initially, currently, the UPR Action Plan and its implementation process is led by UN Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) instead of UNDP. However, NHRC's role in monitoring the UPR Action Plan is essential in order to expedite the process as well as to ensure unbiased monitoring process.

Mr. Amal Krishna Mandal, Joint Secretary, ERD supported the project's request of extension for one-year and assured that ERD will take necessary measures for the extension of the Human Rights Programme once it receives formal request from UNDP in this regard.

Ms. Suzanne Mueller, SDC and Ms. Rehana Khan, Programme Officer, Democracy, Human Rights and Gender Equality, SIDA opined that NHRC's programmatic actions should be more publicized and communicated. In their views, the project can support NHRC in finding innovative ways to scale up the visibility of NHRC's programmatic actions. Both the development partners agreed for a cost extension of the project for one year, i.e. from January – December, 2021.

Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, Full-Time Member, National Human Rights Commission appreciated the collaborative supports of NHRC, UNDP and CSOs for the venerable people in COVID 19 situation. He also appreciated the works with human rights journalists and suggested to continue and extend supports to the human rights journalists' network, since the supports from CSOs and CBOs are important for the outreach. He suggested to organize project implementation committee (PIC) meeting in near future so that the activity progress can be monitored based on indicators and organize PAB twice in a year. He said that NHRC is trying to develop linkage with the government ministries and departments for proper implementation of SDGs based on a document prepared by HRP for taking actions. He informed that the thematic committee on migrant workers' rights has organized meeting and will send recommendation to government for the promotion of migrant workers' rights who have lost their jobs in the COVID 19 pandemic situation and to address the issues of human rights violations against migrant workers abroad. Regarding the recent verdict of high court on NHRC, Dr. Kamal Uddin

Ahmed said that despite the fact that the court verdict was about performance of the past commissions, the present commission is ready to take responsibility and work more effectively so that it can play important role to promote human rights. He said that while the business community play an important role for national economy, they must be "human" toward their employees. NHRC has been working for developing a National Action Plan and would be lobbying with government for proper legal framework, corporate responsibilities in business sector and access to remedies for the affected people by the business activities.

The meeting ended with vote of thanks by **Ms. Jesmin Ara Begum, Hon'ble Member, National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh,**

Summary of Key Decisions and Recommendations:

Key Decisions:

1. The 6th PAB meeting minutes was approved.
2. Having reviewed the key activities and achievements of 2019 presented by NHRC, the Board appreciated the results and requested to share with the members the report of the Perception survey carried out in 2019.
3. Highlights of 2020 planned activities and budget was shared by the Project as per the Annual Work Plan and the same was approved by the Board members.
4. Considering the present pandemic situation and the delay of the starting of the project in 2016 by 8 months, the Board unanimously agreed and decided for a cost extension of the Project for one year till 31 December 2021 integrating selected justice interventions to ensure better enforcement of human rights. ERD assured every possible assistance for the extension once it receives formal request from UNDP.
5. The project board conceded the request made by SDC to expand the base of donors/development partners while designing the 2nd phase of the project beyond 2021.
6. PIC to be organized in near future and PAB twice in a year.

Key Recommendations:

1. The challenge fund support initiative has been successful to bring rural CSOs to the policy table and linking them better with NHRC. The Project was recommended for longer engagement with CSOs in future.
2. NHRC to involve and include partner CSOs in its field missions and fact-finding missions to bring better results as and when required.
3. Regarding UPR Action Plan, MoFA mentioned that there is need to strengthen the capacity of the relevant GoB authorities to build better understanding of their obligation, UPR implementation process and reporting responsibilities. MoFA is keen to see NHRC's participation in monitoring the UPR Action Plan once it is adopted.
4. NHRC's programmatic actions should be more publicized and communicated. The project can support NHRC in finding innovative ways to scale up the visibility of NHRC's programmatic actions.

Co- Chair



Nasima Begum

Co-Chair



Sudipto Mukerjee

Participants (not in order of seniority):

1. Ms. Nasima Begum, ndc, Chairman, National Human Rights Commission
2. Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, UNDP
3. Ms. Van Nguyen, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, UNDP
4. Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, Full-Time Member, National Human Rights Commission
5. Ms. Jesmin Ara Begum, Hon'ble Member, National Human Rights Commission
6. Mr. Md Faruk Hossain, Director (UN Director (UN), Ministry of Foreign Affairs
7. Mr. Amal Krishna Mandal, Joint Secretary, ERD Economic Relations Division
8. Mr. Md. Asaduzzaman Nur, Deputy Secretary, Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, Ministry of Law
9. Mr. Md. Golam Rasul, MDS, Police Staff College Bangladesh, Dhaka
10. Ms. Suzanne Mueller, Counsellor, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
11. Ms. Sabina Yasmin Lubna, Senior Programme Officer, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
12. Ms. Rehana Khan, Senior Programme Officer, Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA)
13. Mr. Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum (BIPF)
14. Dr. Fauzia Moslem, Acting President, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)
15. Mr. Mahbulul Huq, Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum
16. Ms. Mahmuda Afroz, Portfolio Manager, Democratic Governance Cluster, UNDP
17. Mr. Md Mozammel Haque, Policy Specialist, Democratic Governance, UNDP
18. Mr. Kazi Arfan Ashik, Director, Admin & Finance, NHRC
19. Ms. Sharmeela Rassool, Chief Technical Adviser, HRP, UNDP
20. Ms. Taslima Islam, National Programme Coordinator, HRP, UNDP

Observers:

1. Mr. Shankor Paul, Ethnic Minority and Vulnerable Communities Expert; HRP, UNDP
2. Mr. Nikar Chandra Howladar, Monitoring & Evaluation Expert, HRP, UNDP
3. Mr. Md. Mahbulul Haque, Data Analysis Expert, HRP, UNDP
4. Mr. Mong Sing Neo, Programme Officer, HRP, UNDP
5. Ms. Bithika Hasan, Gender Expert, HRP, UNDP
6. Ms. Lubna Yasin, Investigation & Human Rights Expert, HRP, UNDP
7. Ms. Shahreen Srabon Tilottoma, Project Officer, Engaging with Institutions (EI) Project, UNDP
8. Mr. Nondon Chandra Paul, Programme Assistant, HRP, UNDP