



Report

Inaugural Meeting of Eminent Persons' Group

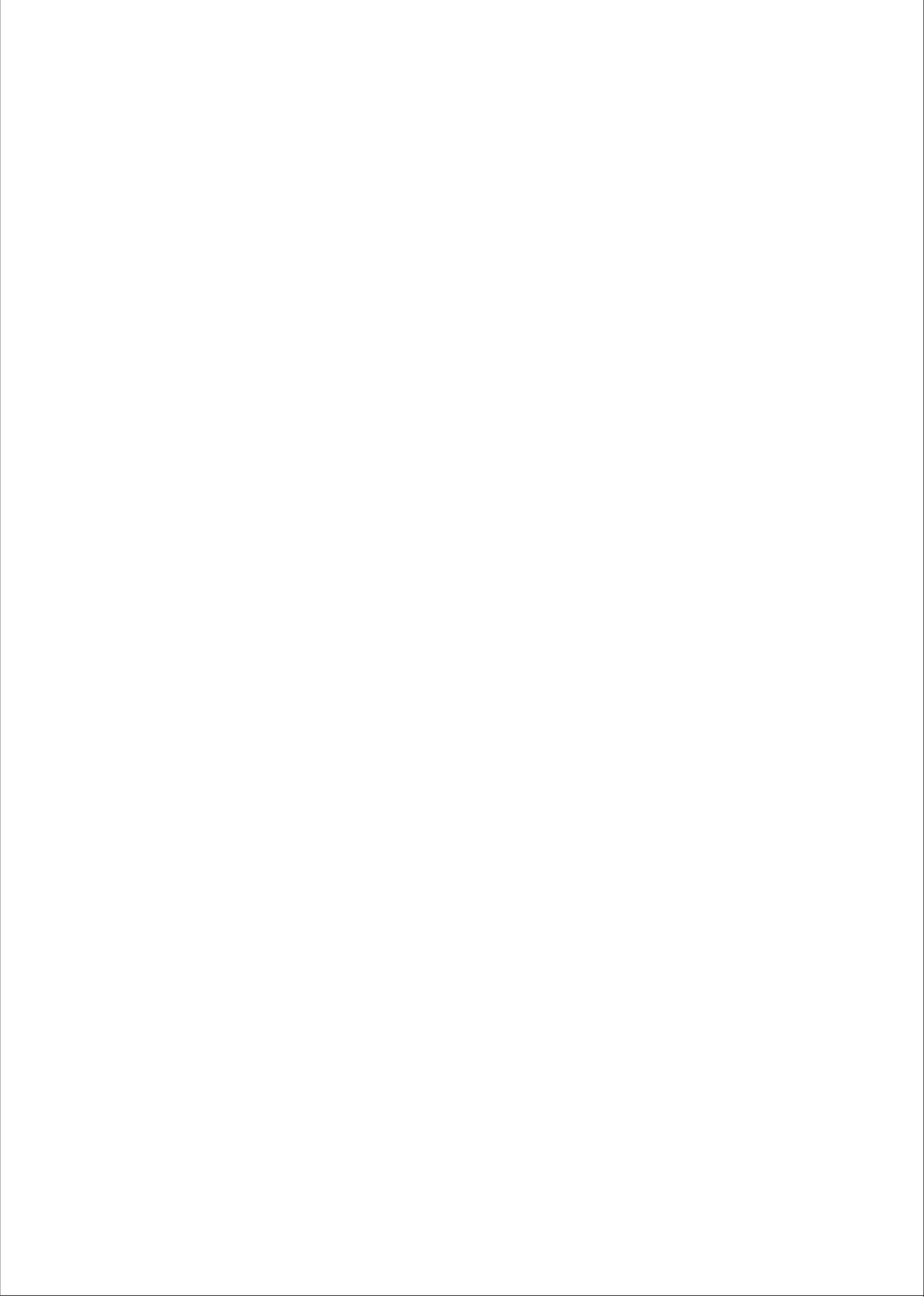
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organized by

Economic Relations Division

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Knowledge for Development Management (K4DM) Project



Inaugural Session

Inaugural meeting of Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) was held on June 04, 2017 at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC) in Dhaka with Kazi Shofiqul Azam, Secretary, ERD in the chair. A total of 22 eminent persons as well as GoB officials from different ministries/divisions and representatives from UNDP took part in the meeting. (List of eminent persons' is attached in Annex -A.)

The meeting started with welcome address by Ms. Shamima Nargis, Additional Secretary, ERD and National Project Director of K4DM Project. In her welcome address, Ms. Shamima Nargis expressed her gratitude to the eminent persons for their consent to join the group and also for



their kind presence in the meeting. She mentioned that, Government of Bangladesh already has a practice of consulting with stakeholders on emerging issues, and this initiative will further strengthen the practice of participatory knowledge sharing. She informed that upon an invitation from the former Senior Secretary, ERD has received positive

response from a number of eminent persons conveying their willingness to remain engaged with the Government through this Eminent Persons' Group. Some of them could not attend the first meeting due to their prescheduled engagement elsewhere.

Ms. Shamima further added that, under the context of global and national situation, Bangladesh has to face different development challenges, and this platform of eminent persons will contribute to decide the future pathways to address the challenges.

She mentioned that, the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of this group has already been shared with the group members, and the ToR will be finalized based on feedback from the members. She acknowledged several suggestions received so far from some members related to formation of the thematic groups. She assured that ERD will facilitate regular consultation of thematic groups with different ministries and divisions.

Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, UNDP Country Director congratulated Government of Bangladesh for engaging the eminent persons under institutional arrangement and thanked the eminent persons for joining the group. He mentioned that eminent persons will generate new ideas and contribute to formulation of new policy which will add further value to the work undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh. He expected that wider views of the people will be communicated through the eminent persons, as they have more interactions with different sections of people. He

further added that from experience of the grassroots, the eminent persons can suggest what is more important for Bangladesh.

He referred to bicameral parliaments in some other countries, where representatives from different professional groups are elected as members of parliament. The Governments of those countries take the opportunity to hear from diversified groups in the parliament.

Mr. Mukerjee suggested further diversity in the Group in terms of gender, private sector, youth community and other professionals. He emphasized on engagement of EPG members in research and study to get in depth view on aspects of development. He assured that UNDP can assist such kind of research work through Knowledge for Development Management (K4DM) Project.



Mr. Monowar Ahmed, Additional Secretary of ERD, in his opening remarks, outlined that the Government officials are keenly interested to learn from the eminent persons in different areas. Their experience and cooperation can be an added strength for the Government.

He added that the Government of Bangladesh has started the process of engaging

with eminent persons for addressing the development challenges for quite some time. Bangladesh Development Cooperation Policy has been developed by ERD through consultation with the relevant experts. He informed that ERD has, therefore, the culture of learning from different communities including the grassroots people.

Presentation of ToR

Mr. Aftab Ahmad, Joint Secretary, ERD presented the Terms of Reference for Eminent Persons Group. At the beginning of his presentation, he acknowledged that public service has some limitations; they are used to hear the public reaction from indirect sources such as newspapers, TV talk shows, but they hardly talk to the people directly. In spite of this reality, Government of Bangladesh is trying to institutionalize the culture of consultation, promoting dialogues with private sector and think tanks. Consultation took place for developing the 6th and 7th Five Year Plans and the Ministry of Finance has a well-established practice of pre-budget discussion with different groups. He further mentioned that the Government has learned from the MDGs and for achieving SDGs, the Government needs to capture knowledge from other actors including the eminent persons.

In his presentation, Mr. Aftab Ahmad mentioned that, ERD is flexible to accommodate suggestions from eminent persons in finalizing the ToR and to incorporate the ideas for formation of thematic groups.

He mentioned that, key thrust of the group is to establish knowledge partnership with the eminent persons. He also mentioned the specific objectives of formation of the group which include:



- a. enhancing knowledge base and understanding of officials on the development issues;
- b. identifying emerging development challenges and suitable solutions to address the challenges;
- c. enhancing quality of decision making within the Government organizations through debates and dialogue and the participatory process on the policy issues; and
- d. enhancing capacity of Government officials in policy implementation.

He detailed out the possible modalities of engagement with the eminent persons where the areas of cooperation might be to -

- ▣ participate and contribute in the consultation sessions in the ERD's intervention areas and the thematic areas
- ▣ guide in holding of policy dialogue with key stakeholders on relevant policy issues;
- ▣ contribute to policy review and context analysis;
- ▣ guide and advise commissioning of policy and action research;
- ▣ provide policy advice/guidance in attaining development targets of the Government/ERD;
- ▣ support ERD in capturing knowledge and experience and feed it into policy;
- ▣ support in publication of periodic report on summary of recommendations and dialogue;

Regarding establishment of thematic groups, Mr. Aftab Ahmad mentioned that, the EPG will conduct discussion/dialogue and sessions on a number of thematic areas which are emerging in national development and for achievement of the SDGs and the 7th Five Year Plan. The membership of thematic group can be 10-15 persons.

The thematic areas will include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Poverty, inequality and inclusive growth
2. Economy, public investment and finance
3. Public administration, public institutions and governance
4. Quality education
5. Health, nutrition and population development
6. Agriculture and rural development
7. Environment and climate change
8. Urbanization, housing and community amenities
9. Industrialization and decent work
10. Gender
11. Information and communication technology
12. Partnership for development



Open Discussion

During the open discussions, the eminent persons expressed their views on the ToR and formation of thematic groups. They also shared ideas for their engagement modalities and knowledge sharing mechanism.

Taking part in discussion, Mr. Saleemul Huq, Director of the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), Independent University said that, under thematic area of Environment and Climate Change, there is a need for regular interaction between ERD and Academics and Research Groups.

He mentioned that, ICCCAD has formed a research platform, named *Gobeshana*, engaging 13 organizations working in similar areas. The research findings can help the GoB in taking policy and programme related to environment and climate change. He underscored the need for sharing and use of relevant information in an effective manner.

Barrister Manzoor Hasan, Executive Director of South Asia Institute of Advanced Legal and Human Rights Studies, BRAC University said that the ToR is wide and its composition is good. He suggested to include a thematic group on Peace and Justice. He also suggested to consider the area of youth development. He emphasized for a Focal Point on every thematic group, who will maintain regular communications with the group members.

Mr. A H M Noman Khan, Executive Director of Center for Disability in Development suggested to have separate thematic areas on Disability, if the group on 'Poverty, inequality and inclusive growth' does not cover it.

Mr. Biru Pakha Paul, former Chief Economist of Bangladesh Bank emphasized on diversity



in eminent persons' group. Referring his experience from the USA, Mr. Paul said that diversity saved the American economy. He appreciated ERD's initiative to engage with the Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRB) in national development. He suggested for enhancing global connectivity for ensuring sustainability of the national economy. He also suggested to include Economic Growth, Finance, Banking and Capital Market as separate thematic areas.

Dr. Nazneen Ahmed, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) requested to rethink the name and membership of the groups, as there are other eminent persons who are not included in the group. She suggested to include gender issue separately as a thematic area. She underscored the need for quality education and quality health.

Dr. Nazneen proposed that, ERD can send mail to eminent persons to ascertain their interests in specific thematic group and to collect names of other relevant persons to be included in sub groups. ERD's support will be required to continue the thematic discussion after the end of the project.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, Executive Director, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) also agreed on renaming of the group and suggested renaming of the thematic area 'Industrialization and Decent Work' as 'Employment, Trade and Decent Work'.

Mr. Bazlul Huq Khandaker, Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka emphasized on quality education and skills development. He drew the attention of the Government of Bangladesh to consider these two issues as priority development agenda and suggested ERD to consider the issues in thematic areas.

Dr. Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Research Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) suggested for an institutional mechanism for engaging other ministries in the consultation process.

Mr. Anir Chowdhury, Policy Adviser, a2i Program, Prime Minister's Office mentioned that, the group should work on those areas where others are not working. He referred to the Malaysian experience of setting the priority agenda and collective efforts to achieve that. He also underscored the need for measurement of successes of this consultation process and suggested to set KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

Mr. C Q K Mustaq, former Senior Secretary also suggested engagement of Planning Commission in this consultation process. He suggested to rename the group as Consultative Group of ERD or Expert Group of ERD. He emphasised on access to legal service and access to police service and on rule of law in the real sense. He further suggested to establish a google group with participation of the eminent persons so that information can be shared mutually with each other. This can help them remain updated on the latest developments.

Prof. Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow of CPD emphasized on Regional Integration and suggested to make clusters of the thematic groups in line with 17 SDGs. He appreciated ERD for its interests in working with the diaspora.

Professor Rahman proposed engagement of eminent persons in policy making process, such as the next 8th Five Year Plan. He proposed to consider the outcomes of these consultations as public documents and emphasized on accountability of this process.

Professor M M Akash from the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka said that, this consultation is taken under UNDP supported K4DM project. Details of the project needs to

be disclosed so that, the eminent persons can think how they are fit with and what can be their future roles. He said that the political persons should also join in such platform. He also emphasized on the engagement of Planning Commission in this consultation process.

Prof. Zaidi Sattar, in his remarks, endorsed most of the ideas mentioned in the ToR. He expressed his interest to know which line ministries will be involved in the sub-Groups as most of the decisions will be implemented by the line ministries. He mentioned that the initiative is laudable, but how to get things done need to be more clear and concrete.

Dr. Kazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, former member of General Economic Division (GED) said that formation of an Eminent Persons' Group driven by development partners might not be sustainable, unless the Government has its strong ownership. ERD needs to have its sustainability mechanism in place. He suggested to work in line with the Rules of Business in deciding ERD's priority areas before going for consultation on the structural issues. Regarding knowledge partnership, he said frequent transfer of GoB officials is a challenge in transformation of knowledge and its implication.

Recommendations

- ❑ The name of 'Eminent Persons' Group' needs to be changed. The alternative name may be 'Consultative Group of ERD (CGE)' or 'Expert Group of ERD (EGE)' or any other suitable name;
- ❑ New thematic areas such as Peace and Justice, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, Economic Growth, Capital Market, Banking, Quality Education and Skill Development may be considered for incorporation in future;
- ❑ The thematic area - Industrialization and Decent Work - may be renamed as Employment, Trade and Decent Work;
- ❑ Engagement of Planning Commission needs to be increased in the consultation process;
- ❑ A google group may be established with participation of the eminent persons to keep them updated on the latest development and to facilitate mutual sharing;
- ❑ Eminent persons' group may be engaged in research or study or in preparation of policy documents for the upcoming 8th Five-Year Plan;
- ❑ The outputs of the consultation sessions need to be made public documents;
- ❑ Key Performance Indicator (KPI) may be set to measure the performance of the groups.
- ❑ Institutional mechanism needs to be developed for engaging line ministries in the consultation process;
- ❑ A sustainability mechanism may be drawn up to continue the work of the Group beyond the current Project supporting the Group.
- ❑ The Project Document on which this initiative was based on may be distributed to the Members of the Group.
- ❑ Additional names for the Membership of different Groups can be considered for inclusion in future.

Remarks by the Chair, Secretary, ERD

Kazi Shofiqul Azam, Secretary, Economic Relations Division conveyed thanks to the eminent persons for their positive response regarding establishment of Eminent Persons' Group which would create a platform where ERD along with other Government ministries and divisions can engage into knowledge partnership with this expert group of professionals.

He appreciated the discussions and suggestions coming from the group on how to make the platform an effective and inclusive one. While thanking UNDP for extending their all-out cooperation in the process of establishing this platform. Secretary also assures that ERD would like to continue with this group in future with necessary support from GoB, if required. Finally, he looks forward to meet on future occasions on various thematic areas which are important for national development.



List of eminent persons joined inaugural meeting on 4th June 2017

(not in order of seniority)

Sl.	Name of EPG members
1	Dr. Zaidi Sattar <i>Chairman, Policy Research Institute (PRI)</i>
2	Dr. Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed <i>Former member, Planning Commission</i>
3	Dr. Mostafa Kamal Mujeri <i>Former DG, BIDS</i>
4	Mr. AHM Moazzem Hossain <i>Editor, The Financial Express</i>
5	Mr. CQK Mustaq Ahmed <i>Former Senior Secretary</i>
6	Dr. Saleemul Huq <i>Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD)</i>
7	Professor Dr. Mustafizur Rahman <i>Distinguished Fellow Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)</i>
8	Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam <i>Former Secretary Permanent Member, National Human Rights Commission</i>
9	Prof. Dr. Akhter Hussain <i>Member, National Human Rights Commission</i>
10	Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam <i>Professor, Department of Public Administration University of Dhaka</i>

Sl.	Name of EPG members
11	Dr. Bazlul Haque Khandker <i>Professor, Department of Economics University of Dhaka</i>
12	Dr. M M Akash <i>Professor, Department of Economics University of Dhaka</i>
13	Dr. Niaz Ahmed Khan <i>Professor, Department of Development Studies University of Dhaka</i>
14	Dr. Sultan Hafeez Rahman <i>Executive Director Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)</i>
15	Mr. Anir Chowdhury <i>Policy Advisor, A2I Programme Prime Minister's Office</i>
16	Barrister Manzoor Hasan <i>Executive Director South Asian Institute of Advanced Legal and Human Rights Studies, BRAC University</i>
17	Dr. Khondaker Golam Moazzem <i>Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)</i>
18	Dr. Biru Paksha Paul <i>Former Chief economist, Bangladesh Bank Visiting Fellow, BIDS</i>
19	Mr. AHM Noman Khan <i>Executive Director Centre for Disabilities in Development (CDD)</i>
20	Mr. Mukit Majumder Babu <i>Chairman, Prokriti O Jibon Foundation</i>
21	Dr. Nazneen Ahmed <i>Senior Research Fellow, BIDS</i>
22	Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed <i>Executive Director Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)</i>