

## Mainstreaming CSR for accelerating efforts to alleviate poverty



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The principal goal of our economic policy is to reduce poverty so as to gradually lift the vast majority of the people above the poverty line and improve the quality of life for the average citizen. Poverty is so insidious that a million preferences will not exhaust the agenda but to get the drive going, policy and popular energies have to be stimulated around a few catalytic aspects of the agenda built on the policy triangle of growth, human development and good governance.

The 2009 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Progress Report of Bangladesh cites that overall improvements in poverty and hunger have been accompanied by rising regional and social disparities including persistent pockets of extreme poverty. Although Bangladesh is on track to achieve the Net School Enrolment target, the drop-out rates are high; enrolling the last 10% hard-to-reach population, remains yet a major challenge. In addition, achieving full and productive employment for all, including women and young people, is behind the target.

Yet another challenge that Bangladesh faces is in the areas of addressing certain pockets of poverty that are lagging far behind with respect to the national averages and where the benefits of achievements, in terms of MDGs, will need to reach the target groups. These areas include the urban slums, the hill tracts, coastal belts and other ecologically vulnerable areas.

Since poverty directly creates many social problems (crimes, low level of education, low productivity, malnutrition etc.), this issue must be solved quickly and strategically especially when the United Nation's MDG has indicated that global poverty should be reduced significantly by 2015. And it is evident that a vibrant non-government sector and private sector bodies, in tandem with the efforts of the common people, must make endeavours, side by side with the government, to achieve the above. CSR is regarded as a medium through which the private sector can contribute to poverty reduction and other social objectives.

Broadly speaking, CSR is not only about protecting the environment; it also aims at eradicating poverty. Enhancing CSR as a means for poverty reduction and sustainable development requires combined initiatives by all stakeholder groups involved: governmental bodies, non-government organisation (NGOs), and corporations. In our country, besides Government and NGOs, the banking community plays the most important role to make use of CSR as a link connecting business and development, and their CSR programme are well recognized in terms of their contribution to development.

Poverty-related deprivations in health, education and asset ownership are major causes of financial and social exclusion. Physical and mental disabilities, discrimination by gender, social disruptions from prolonged conflicts etc., are the causes, among others, of financial and social exclusion. CSR expenditures of banks as both passive one-off donations to voluntary/civil society organisations, and also their continuing active involvement in selection of beneficiaries and disbursements of funds for such schemes as scholarships for facilitating the pursuit of studies (by the beneficiaries), financial aid for healthcare services etc., provide valuable support for efforts to help ease such problems of poverty-related deprivations and social exclusions.

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