

# Human Rights Programme, UNDP

## Minutes of the Ninth Programme Advisory Board Meeting

### 27 March 2022

#### Introduction

The 9<sup>th</sup> Programme Advisory Board (PAB) meeting of UNDP's Human Rights Programme (HRP) was held on 27 March 2022 at Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), Agargaon, Dhaka. The meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Nasima Begum, ndc, Hon'ble Chairman, National Human Rights Commission, and Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh. Also, the Members of the Project Board and the HRP staff joined the meeting.

**Ms. Nasima Begum, ndc, Hon'ble Chairman, National Human Rights Commission**, welcomed all the board members and delivered her speech. Paying tribute to the Father of the Nation, martyrs of the liberation war and the women who sacrificed their lives during the war, she mentioned that,

- The tenure of the present Commission will end in September 2022; hence, wishes to advance the existing tasks in a structured manner so that the transition is smooth and the next Commission could function without any difficulties. NHRC hopes to receive assistance from UNDP for a smooth transition;
- Through its Human Rights Programme, UNDP has been supporting the NHRC to carry out various activities, in particular, conducting a national inquiry on violence against women, focusing on rape. The challenges and recommendations have been identified based on forty-four consultations as well as the executive summary along with recommendations has been shared with the relevant authorities;
- HRP has supported NHRC in developing a digital complaint management system that will go on trial soon. Once the system is up and running, the beneficiaries, including the migrant workers would be able to submit their complaints effectively and efficiently from grassroots levels. The digital complaint handling management system will advance NHRC's functionalities significantly. NHRC also sought support from UNDP to develop an integrated office management system to make the Commission more transparent and accountable ;
- The ethical value and morality need to be developed in the society as they have deteriorated in many aspects, therefore, human rights education and awareness is very important;
- With the support of HRP, NHRC has developed an online human rights course for school students, which includes the basic concepts of human rights. NHRC intends to develop a similar course for college students;
- NHRC organized an essay competition for students on the golden jubilee of independence and the birth centenary of its founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman so that the new generation becomes aware of the history of Bangladesh and its independence. In the first round, NHRC received a total of 52,000 essays and 1,53,000 essays in the second round from the students of grades IX-X to XI-XII. The 100 winners of the competition have been awarded 2000-taka scholarships for two years;
- Recently, NHRC has established a district human rights committee in 64 districts, engaging stakeholders from district administration, CSOs, lawyers, journalists, and teachers to ensure better coordination to address human rights violations and to increase the outreach of NHRC at the local level. UNDP has been providing support in providing orientation to the Committees. NHRC seeks continued support in this regard.

In his speech, Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, thanked all the participants. He stated that,

- The COVID 19 has not only been a public health issue but also has taken the form of a multi-dimensional disaster that has greatly affected people's lives and livelihoods. Despite different measures, poverty increased. It is a great challenge for Bangladesh to fully recover from the COVID -19 pandemic, which has slowed down the last decade's economic progress and achievements. The poverty rate increased to 18.1% in 2020 from 14.4%. There has been an increase in labour rights abuses and violations, gender-based violence during COVID-19, and inequalities deepened;
- Bangladesh government is successful in vaccination campaigns following the leaving No One Behind approach, thus worthy of congratulations;
- At the beginning of the pandemic, access to justice and remedy became a challenge. Due to the lockdown, the courts were not functioning, and people suffered greatly. UNDP supported the Supreme Court to continue with its services to ensure access to justice during the COVID-19 crisis through the operationalization of virtual courts across the country. UNDP's Human Rights and Justice team contributed a lot to making it happen;
- The ' Women's Safety in Public Places' is one of UNDP's significant campaigns which promotes women's rights and aims to reduce violence against women and girls. With NHRC, UNDP launched this campaign to transform perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour towards women and girls to create an enabling and safer world for them. This campaign should be scaled up nationwide;
- UNDP has been part of NHRC's works as well as with the works of CSOs, Police, judiciary, NLASO, ministries, and other relevant authorities. These works must not be halted. 4 to 5 years of engagement through a project is not enough for transformation hence development partners should think of having longer-term projects. In terms of the next steps, UNDP is developing its five years Human Rights, Rule of Law and Access to Justice strategy, and human rights and institutional strengthening remains key components in which Human Rights Programme would be an integral component. The new strategy will be shared soon with the partners;
- Human Rights is a signature programme of UNDP, therefore, UNDP wishes to continue the good practices based on the lessons learned from the Human Rights Programme with multi-partner engagement because it is a multi-partner initiative. Also, UNDP wishes to fill any gaps to continue the human rights interventions before the inception of the upcoming programmes and seek support from all including the development partners so we all can together make a difference by strengthening the human rights architecture in Bangladesh.

The meeting then proceeded with the following agenda:

1)	Adoption of Minutes of the 8th PAB meeting
2)	Progress of activities
3)	Way forward
4)	Miscellaneous

Mr. Kazi Arfan Ashik, Director, National Human Rights Commission, presented the key decisions taken in the previous PAB meeting and provided a follow up on the progress of the decisions. He also presented the progress of activities undertaken during the last 6 months. Notable progress includes - the development of an integrated office management system for NHRC, NHRC's national inquiry on violence against women, capacity building of district human rights committees and panel lawyers, launching of an



online human rights course for school students, completion of partnership with 12 CSOs in district level and the activities on the campaign on Women's Safety in Public Places (WSPP). He informed the board that the partnership with the police staff college is on track - all the planned seminars and consultations have been arranged and the first draft reports of the 3 research studies have been submitted. The online course on human rights for police officials is yet to be completed and will take some time.

**Ms. Taslima Islam, National Programme Coordinator, Human Rights Programme**, highlighted the key results achieved so far under the project, which included capacity development of NHRC, Police, CSOs, human rights defenders and youths from left-behind communities, legal and policy advocacy in particular National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (PWD), the draft law on preventing sexual harassment, anti-discrimination law which has been approved in principle by the Cabinet, draft amendment to NHRC Act (amendment in line with Parris Principles), Child Marriage Restraint Rules 2018, Guideline for Human Rights Defenders and few more. She reported to the board on the financial progress also.

**Dr. Harpreet Kaur, CTA, Human Rights Programme**, presented the way forward which included a strategy framework for UNDP's Human Rights, Rule of Law and Access to Justice Programme. The framework includes five pillars: strengthening effective, accountable, and accessible justice, promoting realization and respect of universally accepted human rights standards, promoting corporate respect for human rights, contributing to just recovery and transition, and Reducing gender-based violence. Under this framework focus will be given to continue supporting human rights work, institutional strengthening of NHRC, civic engagement, strengthening entry points to police, wholesome programmatic approach, resource mobilization so on.

#### Open Discussion by PAB members

In the open discussion **Ms. Sabina Yasmein Lubna, Programme Manager, Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh**, raised concerns about the length of the online course for police officials. She opined that a course spread over 18 modules for police may pose difficulties in engaging with the audience. Therefore, in-person training would be more effective to engage the participants. In response, **Ms. Nasima Begum, Dr. Harpreet Kaur, Dr. Fauzia Moslem, President, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Mr. Md. Golam Rasul, MDS, Police Staff College and Mr. Kazi Arfan Ashik** explained that the online human rights course would be a supplementary course for the police personnel along with the existing in-person basic training programmes and intended to reach a greater audience working in the field levels which would have a positive impact. It was also highlighted that the course is targeted at various levels of the officials and would not be possible to train thousands of people in person. Additionally, the officials can take the course at their own pace and time.

Regarding the future of the programme, **Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee** requested the development partners to extend the programme further beyond June, maybe for 6 months so that there is no gap till a new programme comes in place and a proper transition can take place, given the fact that there have been some unutilized resources though additional resources might be requested from the development partners.

On the other hand, drawing upon her interactions with multiple stakeholders including the development partners and understanding of their expectations **Dr. Harpreet Kaur** requested for extending the programme for one year, instead of six months. She said that, based on the proposed strategy for future programming, the HRP team would like to pilot some of the activities for scaling up a larger programme in future. So, it will be useful to look at how to utilize the time and resources to pilot some interventions.

**Ms. Sabina Yasmein Lubna** inquired into the resources available under the project to make a quick decision on the extension. She appreciated the project for its rapid response during the pandemic. She also

DocuSigned by:  
  
 320D710AF7944B2...

*Handwritten signature* 3



expressed satisfaction regarding NHRC's initiatives on amendment of the NHRC's founding Act while she wanted to know about the update status and follow up plan. She also suggested planning the future programme based on the donor assessment and availability of donor funding so that the plan could be more realistic.

In response, **Ms. Taslima Islam** informed that the total budget of HRP project is 10.5M out of which 8.5M has been raised and the rest 2M is still unfunded. The financial assessment shows that, by the end of June 2022, the programme will have 0.5 million unspent. Therefore, the project wants to continue with some of its ongoing important activities, such as, supporting NHRC district committees, developing an integrated office management system, SDGs monitoring related tasks of NHRC, treaty body and UPR reporting, developing a national action plan on Human Rights, completing the online police course, establish at least one child care centre as per recommendations drawn by the research undertaken by Police Staff College and awareness-raising activities at the local level through youths and CSOs. She said that since UNDP is looking forward to a programmatic approach, it would be helpful to pilot a few initiatives together with the above-mentioned activities. For this, a one-year extension and small support from donors would be useful.

**Ms. Nasima Begum** said that the tenure of the current Commission will expire in September 2022 and a new commission will commence. If the programme is continued further to December 2022 and beyond it will be useful for the new Commission in smooth transitioning. **Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed**, Full-Time Member, National Human Rights Commission said that there is a question about the sustainability of the human rights works and opined that if resources are available the project should be extended for another one year which would be very conducive.

**Ms. Saeida Tamanna, representative of the Economic Relations Division** suggested submitting the proposal so that ERD could take measures regarding the extension. In this regard, **Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee** stated that, since the programme is not exceeding the total budget, any revision would not be applicable. **Ms. Nasima Begum** said that the continuation is required so that the new upcoming Commission could work smoothly. The duration of the extension should be set accordingly. During the extended period, NHRC would like to train the members of the thematic committees and the district human rights protection committees as well as provide orientation for the focal desks of the government ministries.

**Ms. Paola Castro Neiderstam, Second Secretary, Democracy, Human Rights and Gender Equality, Embassy of Sweden in Dhaka** said Embassy of Sweden has high expectations for the upcoming evaluation of the programme which will guide the future works based on the results achieved by the project so far. To determine the duration of the extension, she asked for a detailed plan. She said that rather than continuing the usual work, they want to see the value addition of the new activities. She also mentioned that they look forward to seeing a different scenario in six months or one year. She said that she encourages this kind of joint analysis and looks into the different institutional approaches to add the most sensible and the most value to the collaboration.

#### Key Decisions:

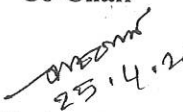
1. The 8th meeting minutes have been confirmed by the PAB.
2. The board reviewed the progress of activities and advised the project to complete all pending trainings for District Human Rights Committees, Panel Lawyers, HRDs by September.

DocuSigned by:  
  
 320D710AF7944B2...



3. The board discussed about a possible one year extension of the project - a no-cost extension for six months (July 2022 - December 2022) to complete all pending activities on time; and a costed extension for another six months (January 2023 - June 2023) subject to donor consent and availability of funds to implement activities aligned with UNDP's new Human Rights, Rule of Law & Access to Justice Framework. The costed extension will not exceed the total approved budget of the project mentioned in the Project Document i.e., 10,597,570 USD.
4. The project will submit a concept note/extension proposal along with a detailed work plan to development partners for both the no-cost and with-cost extension propositions mentioned above.
5. Once confirmed, extension request will be sent to ERD and ERD will expedite the process.

**Co-Chair**  
DocuSigned by:  
  
320D710AF7944B2...  
**Sudipto Mukerjee**

**Co-Chair**  
  
23.4.2022  
**Nasima Begum**

**Participants (Not in order of Seniority):**

1. Ms. Nasima Begum Chairman, National Human Rights Commission
2. Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP
3. Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, Full-Time Member, National Human Rights Commission
4. Ms. Jesmin Ara Begum, Honorary Member, National Human Rights Commission
5. Mr. Abu Hena Mostofa Zaman, Joint Secretary, Public Security Division, Ministry of Home Affairs
6. Mr. Md. Asaduzzaman Nur, Joint Secretary (Drafting), Legislative & Parliamentary Affairs Division
7. Mr. Md. Golam Rasul, MDS, MDS (Academic and Research), Police Staff College Bangladesh, Dhaka
8. Mr. Mohammad Shahjahan, PhD, PPM, Director (Research and Publication), Police Staff College Bangladesh, Dhaka
9. Mr. Kazi Arfan Ashik, Director (Admin & Finance), National Human Rights Commission
10. Ms. Saeida Tamanna, Senior Assistant Secretary, Economic Relations Division
11. Mr. Walid Mohammad, AS (UN), United Nations Wing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
12. Mr. Md Mozammel Haque, Programme Analyst, Democratic Governance, UNDP
13. Ms. Sabina Yasmeim Lubna, Programme Manager, Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh
14. Ms. Paola Castro Neiderstam, Second Secretary, Democracy, Human Rights and Gender Equality, Embassy of Sweden, Bangladesh
15. Dr. Fauzia Moslem, President, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)
16. Mr. Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous 'Peoples' Forum
17. Dr. Harpreet Kaur, Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), Human Rights Programme, UNDP
18. Ms. Taslima Islam, National Programme Coordinator, Human Rights Programme, UNDP