

## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—a set of targets to be achieved by the year 2015—were launched at the Millennium Summit in New York in September, 2000. Since then, a broad international consensus has emerged that they are a useful yardstick for efforts by governments, donors and NGOs to promote development. The MDGs include halving poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and gender equality, reducing infant and child mortality by two-thirds and maternal mortality by three-quarters, controlling HIV/AIDS, and increasing access to safe drinking water by 50 percent, compared to their levels in 1990. All the United Nations' member countries and donors, as well as many major international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have now accepted the MDGs as important policy goals.

2. The manner by which the MDGs should be met has become an important crux of many development debates. Answers vary substantially amongst different countries, according to the constraints they face and their levels of development. A recent World Bank report, *Attaining the Millennium Development Goals in Bangladesh*, analyzed the determinants of recent trends in five MDGs in order to shed light on the socio-economic factors driving progress towards their achievement in that country. The report found that Bangladesh has already met the goal on gender parity in primary and secondary schooling, and is likely to meet the goals on consumption-poverty and under-five mortality given plausible levels of economic growth and recent trends in social investment. But the MDGs on child malnutrition and universal enrolment/completion in primary education are unlikely to be met, even assuming future economic growth above recent high levels.

3. Here we take the debate one step further by analyzing the specific policy and institutional measures required for Bangladesh to increase its rate of progress towards the MDGs. Rather than examining each MDG in turn, with the attendant risk of producing a grocery list of piecemeal recommendations, we prefer to operationalize the task by focusing on the deep institutional and social determinants of two MDGs—maternal mortality and child mortality. In doing so, we hope to reach a more coherent and analytical view of why recent progress has varied drastically across Bangladesh's regions, and models of service provision. The reasons for choosing these particular indicators are both obvious and subtle. Maternal and child mortality are, of course, important goals in and of themselves. They are also amongst the most complex of the MDGs in terms of the policy mix required for their attainment, with implications for hunger, education, nutrition, environmental, and water and sanitation policy, to name only a few. Efforts to improve them must necessarily span multiple sectors in rural and urban areas in order to find the most appropriate package of policies and interventions. Improvements here thus imply progress across a broad range of problems and policy fronts, including not least all the other MDGs. The report exploits these characteristics of maternal and child mortality to analyze and emphasize the links that exist between these indicators and other development goals. Another, subtler reason is that maternal and child mortality reveal much about a nation's social and political development, as well as its economic prospects. Both the very young and their mothers are amongst society's most vulnerable. How they are treated—their chances of physical survival—are measures not only of the efficiency of public services, nor of the human rights and opportunities that citizens enjoy, but indeed of the willingness of a society to invest in its own future.

4. This report examines how progress towards meeting the MDGs for maternal and child mortality can be accelerated through a combination of improved economic growth, institutional reform to enhance downwards accountability and hence the quality of services delivered, and a number of specific technical and/or complementary measures. Our approach is empirically led, based on an analysis of specific episodes of reform that led to improvements in MMR and CMR. The emphasis is on operational measures that can catalyze improvements already achieved in the field, but on a national scale. The rest

## Accountability and Institutional Innovation in Bangladesh

of the report proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 examines the question of economic growth and Bangladesh's broad development performance over recent years, and provides recommendations for accelerating growth. Chapter 3 provides descriptive statistics for MMR and CMR, and discusses trends over recent decades and projections to 2015. Chapter 4 turns to other allied issues, such as the special challenges to MDG progress posed by urban areas, the environment, malnutrition, and infrastructure. Chapter 5 examines evidence from areas where service delivery and social outcomes are good, and other areas where they are poor, and attempts to analyze the institutional determinants of this spatial variation.

