

Towards a Strategy for achieving MDG outcomes in Bangladesh
MDG workshop

Closing remark, 6th June 16:30 --- Christine Wallich

It is my pleasure to thank all of you for participating in this workshop and contributing to the agenda for this important discussion. Jean-Paul has already summarized the workshop discussions - I will focus here on some of the recommendations from the workshop and at how I believe that we as donor partners can contribute to helping Bangladesh attain the MDG's.

During the last two days we learnt many things and some key recommendations have emerged. I will just mention a few.

- That the involvement of local government (Union Parishads) in monitoring public services improves quality and outcomes. That's why strengthening local government is going to be so vital. We can't just set up parallel structures if we want to have sustainable solutions. We have to link in with communities and existing structures if we are to ensure that services are delivered on the ground.
- I think the same can be said for the role of NGOs. As we have heard, their role should be scaled up, but there has to be linkage with existing structures. Our speaker talked of a 'strategic compact' with the Government and we need to ensure that the accountability of NGOs to Bangladeshi stakeholders is enhanced.
- We have also heard how the provision of infrastructure increases household's welfare, mainly through higher farm incomes, and it's not just roads but

telephony which has an impact. But we need to increase access to infrastructure, especially electricity in people's homes. We also need to emphasize gender sensitive infrastructure such as tube wells and sanitation.

- I appreciated the attention given to the rapidly swelling urban population that by the MDG target date of 2015 is expected to be almost 35% of the country's population. The problems this group faces in gaining security from eviction, education and sanitation are creating new challenges in a country so used to dealing with the rural environment. Working with the Government we have to design policies and institutional approaches to reach these people.
- In my opinion, the most important lesson from this workshop has been the role of governance, accountability and transparency in reaching MDG outcomes. Various presentations at this workshop have come to this point. We have heard much about the negative side, of the consequences of poor governance, but we have also had examples of where good governance has been able to deliver results. The Gonoshasthaya Kendro area - covering a million people in 600 plus villages in ten districts - has already attained the MDGs in maternal mortality and child mortality through a system that emphasizes accountability and community partnerships. All this success at a unit cost similar to the Government's.

The World Bank, DFID, ADB and Japan have developed a joint country assistance strategy which emphasizes the issue of governance and accountability. In fact many have called the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) – the Governance CAS.

The mainstreaming of governance means that all World Bank interventions will be as much about improving governance as they will be about improving sector performance.

Good governance is not an abstract idea. I think the findings from the past couple of days have shown that. If absenteeism is rife among medical staff, if 'real health care' is provided outside the public health centers in the doctor's private consultations, what access do the poor really have to medical services? If electricity doesn't reach homes or water pumps because of corruption, lack of consultation and poor implementation, then Bangladesh is going to struggle to reach its MDGs.

The World Bank along with other development partners is supporting a stronger role for Union Parishads, which have a primary role to play in improving governance and service delivery at the local level. Bangladesh is one of the most centralized countries in the world, this despite a long history of vibrant civil society at the village level. There needs to be a way of capturing this energy. We want UP's to become more transparent, to consult with communities over how they allocate funds. We need to help the government set up systems of financing that reward good governance and help build the capacity of these organizations.

It is late in the day and many of you must be exhausted after two intense days of discussions. I would like thank you again for your support to this important agenda. We look forward to working together to promote growth and accountability to help Bangladesh achieve its MDGs.