



Is Bangladesh a Success Story?

Overview

This session will look back on the past few decades years of this countries development. In the 40 years since independence, the Bangladesh poverty rate has plummeted from 80% to less than 30% today. While the garment sector contributes to a vital part of the GDP, the sector's safety regulations and protections for garment workers are not sufficient. Bangladesh is also the country most impacted by climate change. This session will explore the positive side of Bangladesh's development, along with the challenges the country has yet to tackle.

Speakers:

Moderator: **Daniel Seidl**, Bangladesh Representative - FTA

- **Runa Khan**, Position - Runa Khan, co-founder of NGO Friendship
- **Tapan Ghosh**, Minister (Commerce) at the Embassy of Bangladesh to Belgium, Luxembourg and Mission to the European Union

Session Highlights

- Bangladesh's economy is growing rapidly. Named one of the next [Four Asian] Tiger states by Goldman Sachs. Over 6% GDP growth in last year. It's central location in Asia and young population (52% under 25) should make it a future hub of the continent.
- China and India are sourcing for their domestic markets in Bangladesh.
- People are focusing on the negative despite positive achievements – such as 2 million fire doors provided in the past two years.
- Youths (between 14-18) are allowed to work 5-6 hours a day and as such should not be considered children.
- Climate change presents one of the country's greatest challenges to date. With a population more than double the size of France's, it could potentially affect huge numbers of people.
- Buyers need to be more conscious – Bangladesh faces the brunt of bad practices, the underserved workers and the communities at risk from which they come.
- Runa Khan's organisation works with 3 hospital ships (running up and down some of the vast number of rivers in Bangladesh), serving 78 primary schools, 5 secondary schools and 70

adult schools. Also provides, disaster preparation, legal aid, human rights, disaster relief, government resources, water and rehousing.

- Impact of NGO work and growth of economy has been positive migration. Women are now earning – meaning husbands will take wives to the city.
- 4 Million women in RMG (Ready-made Garment) industry.
- Rate of immunisation in rural areas was 15%, now 98%
- Simple approaches that have come from the workers and better communication have reduced turnover rates and increased work quality.
- Considering all indicators of quality of life since independence in 1971 – in every sphere there has been visible change and improvement.
- Massive amount of female empowerment.
- Powerful women in politics, female peacekeepers being used by UN.
- Reforms are pushed by three types of people in Bangladesh – women in congress from rural areas, farmers and expatriate workers – who send \$15 billion a year to Bangladesh.
- NGOs had to learn that boycotting Bangladesh is not the solution
- Bangladesh can afford to spend much less on its citizens than other countries, and is therefore unable to meet the challenges of social security.
- “Bad apples“ in Bangladesh had such an outsized effect that they’ve affected the reputation of all.

Quotes

- **Daniel Seidl:** There are two million mobile phones sold per month in Bangladesh and over 70% of female garment workers have mobile phones. This is an indication of the growth of Bangladesh’s economy.
- **Daniel Siedl:** A lot of brands left Bangladesh after Ranaa Plaza but they came back. The quality is good, the price is good, delivery is on time.
- **Runa Khan:** I strongly feel at the end of the whole spiral it’s a question of responsibility. You have the retailer buyer, and at the end of the chain (of wholesale buyers) the sole person making the product, delivering the work. If this group doesn’t collaborate and work in harmony and make conscious driven decisions, the world cannot move.
- **Tapan Ghosh:** If we want to really say we live in a globalised world and we are linked with the Bengali workers – they are like your brothers and sisters, so why not provide them with a dignified life? In a fragile economy and a huge population...entrepreneurs are much more swayed by brands and importers. So the general population has to speak up.
- **Runa Khan:** We are not an old poor country – we are a very new poor country. We don’t have a poor country mentality – the people have immense resilience and dignity, which is not portrayed enough.
- **Runa Khan:** a country like ours, we need understanding – if decisions are made without the deep empathy for each individual who’s working in these factories, we won’t progress. We need understanding that we will make some mistakes. But we’re striving towards improvement.