Unlocking the Potential

National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction

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October 2005

Executive Summary

1 A March of Hope

i. Bangladesh has made important gains in the fight against poverty. Derided as a basket-case only three decades ago, Bangladesh today is definitively out of the shadow of famine. Uniquely for a country facing an extremely vulnerable ecology, Bangladesh has established a credible record of sustained growth within a stable macroeconomic framework. At a comparatively low level of development, it has also earned the distinctions of a major decline in population growth rate and of graduating to the medium human development group of countries by UNDP's ranking. Child mortality was halved during the 1990s, life expectancy has increased to 61 years, net primary enrolment went up significantly as did women's economic participation, gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary education, and, depletion of tree cover has been reversed rising from seven to 15 percent through a focus on social forestry. Infrastructurally, a focus on rural roads has succeeded in substantially banishing the curse of remoteness for the majority of villages. Anti-poverty innovations such as micro-credit have gone on to win world renown. Vibrant non-government sectors as well as private sector bodies have worked side by side with the government to achieve the above. Against all odds, the democratic process has found roots though the road ahead is anything but assured.

ii. Notwithstanding specific areas of progress, however, aggregate poverty rates remain dauntingly high. Pockets of extreme poverty persist. Inequality is a rising concern. Women continue to face entrenched barriers and insecurities in their attempts to consolidate their gains on social and economic fronts. Governance weaknesses stand in the way of an acceleration in the growth process. Judging by current trends, breaking wholly free of the poverty chains remains a distant goal. This is a prospect that is neither necessary nor inevitable.

iii. Bangladesh has not been well served by the imageries associated with it. Too often, the discourse on poverty has been a discourse on the statistics of despair. While the statistics may indeed look frightening, ground realities to make an acceleration in poverty reduction possible already exist. The most important resource Bangladesh brings to this task is its people and their initiative zeal. But a scaled-up attack against poverty will only succeed if it is able to move beyond feel-good prescriptions. In many ways, today's foremost challenge lies in engendering a new agenda-setting language and style whose greater concerns are how to secure results, how to acknowledge and empower initiatives and the need to focus on the small solutions as much as the big ones.

iv. Just as poverty is multi-dimensional, the battle against poverty too has to be waged on many fronts and with unremitting vigour. The challenge is not only one of budgetary targets. It is as importantly a challenge of better understanding of ground realities, of transforming institutional cultures, of building dynamic partnerships, and above all a challenge of political determination.

2 The Process of Policy Ownership

v. The completion of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) titled *A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development,* in March 2003, marked an important milestone in the process of renewing the national goal of policy ownership over the formulation of

poverty reduction strategies (PRSs). While the commitment to poverty reduction since then continued to be pursued through a wide range of concrete actions, Government also undertook specific steps to ensure a comprehensive participatory process by which to deepen policy ownership in the formulation of a full-blown PRS. Four effective participatory strategies were put in place.

vi. *Firstly*, a high-powered National Steering Committee headed by the Principal Secretary to the Honourable Prime Minister and drawing on all the major public sector ministries was established to steer the process of preparing a full-blown poverty reduction strategy. *Secondly*, a National Poverty Focal Point was established within the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission to act as the secretariat for the strategy formulation process. *Thirdly*, nineteen theme areas were identified for which thematic groups were constituted under the relevant ministry for preparation of thematic reports that would feed the final strategy formulation process. The thematic groups effectively functioned as a wide-ranging partnership between public sector ministries and research and professional institutions and agencies. The thematic exercise also played a significant role in motivating the Ministries and Divisions in an intensive process of reviewing and examining their own policy areas for all major cross-cutting, macroeconomic and real sector issues. The process of policy ownership of PRSs in the public sector thus acquired renewed vigour by ensuring full participation of the principal actors in the public sector and obtaining from them outcome-oriented thematic reports. *Fourthly*, regional consultations were undertaken with representation from a wide cross section of society including elected functionaries and grass roots organizations. Over and above the specific steps initiated by the Government, the availability of a Focal Point (i.e. GED of the Planning Commission) also galvanized a secondary process of participation in which active segments of civil society undertook their own consultative exercises, as for example on the issue of disability, and channelled their outputs to the formulation team.

vii. With the completion of the Draft PRSP in December, 2004, a concluding round of consultations were initiated prior to finalization. The most comprehensive of these was with Honourable Members of Parliament both through the medium of the parliamentary standing committees and through three special all-party meetings held at the behest of the Honourable Speaker under the aegis of the Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy Project. In addition, consultations were held with development partners, civil society/academics, NGOs, media representatives, eminent persons, women spokespersons, and adivashi/ethnic minorities' representatives. The final PRS document has incorporated the relevant suggestions emerging from these consultations.

3 Reading the Poverty Balance-Sheet Correctly

viii. Poverty is a broad front. It is about income levels. It is about food security. It is about quality of life. It is about asset bases. It is about human resource capacities. It is about vulnerabilities and coping. It is about gender inequalities. It is about human security. It is about initiative horizons. It is each of these and all of these together.

ix. Given this multi-dimensionality, it makes sense to read the poverty balance-sheet in a holistic way taking cognizance of all credible quantitative and qualitative evidence. Economists usually define poverty as a situation in which a household or a person is unable to satisfy certain needs or groups of needs (nutrition, shelter, education etc) based on an *a priori* yardstick. The income approach as this is popularly referred to an indirect approach to the measurement of poverty but generally enjoys wide acceptance because of its simplicity and comparability. Even here, however, differences in method may yield different estimates.

x. As distinct from the income approach, poverty may also be measured more directly through people's own assessments. While such assessments may suffer from a degree of subjectivity, experience has shown that careful research in this area can bring out a surprisingly robust understanding of the dimensions of poverty that matter most to the poor and the direction of trends on these dimensions.

xi. Beyond income measures and self-assessments, a qualitative understanding of long-term structural and behavioural trends impinging on poverty is also critically important to shape policy responses for accelerated poverty reduction.

3.1 An Overview of Poverty Trends

Trends in Income-Poverty

xii. By most estimates, Bangladesh has witnessed a modest poverty reduction rate of around one percentage point a year since the early nineteen nineties. Two alternative estimates based on the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics show poverty declining from 58.8percent in 1991/92 to 49.8percent in 2000, and alternatively, from 49.7percent in 1991/92 to 40.2percent in 2000 (Table I). The methodology of the former estimate does not permit an assessment of longer-term poverty trends unlike the latter estimate. Consideration of other data sources, notably the BIDS/PPRC 62 village poverty study, tends to support the latter estimate.

Table I: Poverty and Inequality in the 1990s

Indicator	Estimate 1 : BBS/World Bank using 1990s HIES unit-record data		Estimate 2: Sen & Mujeri using HIES longer-term grouped distribution data	
	1991/92	2000	1991/92	2000
Headcount Ratio				
National	58.8	49.8	49.7	40.2
Rural	61.2	53.0	52.9	43.6
Urban	44.9	36.6	33.6	26.4
Gini Index of Inequality				
National	0.259	0.306		
Rural	0.243	0.271	0.255	0.297
Urban	0.307	0.368	0.319	0.379

Sources: 1. For estimate 1," a)BBS, Preliminary Report of Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2000, Dhaka, 2001. b)World Bank, 2002, Poverty in Bangladesh: Building on Progress, Report No. 24299-BD,World Bank, Washington D.C., June 2002"

2. For estimate 2," CBN estimates by Sen, B and Mujeri, M., 2002, Poverty in Bangladesh: Trends, Profiles and Determinants, Background Paper for I-PRSP, using HIES grouped distribution data for comparability with poverty trends in the eighties and using 1983/84 non-food poverty line as the base year non-food poverty line."

xiii. The observed improvement in the poverty situation also holds true for the distributionally sensitive measures of poverty – the poverty gap ratio declined from 17.2percent to 12.9 percent and the squared poverty gap ratio declined from 6.8percent to 4.6percent-indicating that the situation of the poorest also improved during this period. Notwithstanding this improvement, however, the proportion of the poorest as a sub-category (defined through a lower poverty line) remains worryingly high at

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around 20percent of the population in 2000[1]. There is considerable interface between the persistence of chronic poverty and unfavourable agricultural environments (e.g. salinity-prone, flood-prone, river-erosion prone, drought-prone areas).

xiv. While absolute poverty measured by the head-count index declined faster in urban areas compared to rural areas over the nineties, this was associated with a rise in inequality. Consumption expenditure inequality over the nineties increased from 30.7 to 36.8 percent in urban areas and from 24.3 to 27.1 percent in rural areas. Overall, the Gini index of inequality increased from 0.259 to 0.306 during this period.

xv. The growth-poverty link underlying the observed poverty trends shows that Bangladesh has moved from a situation of lower growth with equity having a smaller impact on poverty reduction in the eighties to a situation of higher growth with inequality having a larger impact on poverty reduction in the nineties. The latter clearly is a better alternative than the former but the policy challenge lie in bringing about a sharper pro-poor orientation to the growth process.

Trends in Human-Poverty

xvi. Human-poverty trends have shown faster improvement than income-poverty trends. The human poverty index (based on deprivations in health, education and nutrition) stood at 61 percent in the early eighties (1981/83) but declined to 47 percent in the early nineties (1993/94) and dropped further to 35 percent in the late nineties (1998/00). The index of human poverty declined by 2.54 percent per year compared with 1.45 percent in the national head-count ratio for income-poverty over the last two decades.

xvii. A more detailed look at human poverty trends shows that the infant mortality rate has declined from 153 deaths per 1000 live births in the mid-nineteen seventies to 62 in 2000. Over the same period, the under-five mortality rate declined from 250 deaths per 1000 live births to 83. The rural-urban gap on these improvements has also seen a sharp decline: from a gap of 26.8 percent in the infant mortality rate in 1993/94 to 8.3 percent in 1999/00 and from a 34 percent gap in the under-five mortality rate to 16 percent over the same period. There are, however, considerable differences related to socio-economic status: infant mortality is about 70 percent higher for the poorest quintile than the richest quintile

xviii. Gender discrimination, however, has persisted: in the 1-4 age group, female mortality is about a third higher than male mortality. Maternal mortality rate continues to be very high at 320 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2001.

xix. The gross primary enrolment rate has increased from 75.6 percent in 1991 to 102.30 percent in 2005. Gender parity has been achieved at both primary and secondary levels.

xx. On nutritional indicators, the stunting rate for children in the age group 6-71 months declined from 68.7 percent in 1985/86 to 49 percent in 1999/00. The proportion of underweight children in the same age group has seen a parallel decline from 72 percent to 51 percent. Notwithstanding these improvements, the absolute level of child malnutrition remains a critical developmental challenge.

[1] 33percent by World Bank lower poverty line estimate. World Bank, 2002, op .cit

Additionally, there are considerable rural-urban differences: 47 percent of rural children are stunted compared to 35 percent of urban children. There is also a female disadvantage: female-male gap for the severely stunted has increased from 10 percent in 1996/97 to 16 percent in 1999/00 though the gap is considerably less in the case of moderate malnutrition. Maternal malnutrition (proxied by body-mass index less than the critical value of 18.5) too is high but has seen some improvement: 45 percent of mothers were malnourished in 1999/00 compared to 52 percent in 1996/97.

Poverty Trends as per People's Own Assessments

xxi. While economists tend to measure poverty vis-à-vis a higher yardstick of healthy life, people's own assessments often assess progress vis-à-vis a more minimalist yardstick of extreme deprivation such as hunger. Of significance here is the popular term *khoraki* that is a sociological expression of a poverty yardstick understood as annual food rations for the family. Poverty is then understood in terms of perceptions on deficit vis-à-vis the capacity to fulfill this minimalist yardstick. While newer popular meanings of poverty are seeping in with the transformations underway in social and economic life, the traditional hunger poverty yardstick provides useful insights on changes occurring in the poverty situation at the lowest rung of the scale.

xxii. Trend data on people's self-assessment available from the BIDS/PPRC 62 Village Poverty Studies bring out an aspect of changes in the poverty situation which is not fully brought out in poverty statistics. Specifically in terms of hunger poverty, improvements have been much more dramatic with the proportion of the 'always deficit' category of households dropping from 24 percent in 1989 to 9.9 percent in 2001 (the slight rise to 11.6 percent in 2004 reflects the impact of flood that year). Even within this 'always deficit' category, further differentiation carried out in the 2001 survey shows the stark hunger category to constitute 1.9 percent of households. Though pockets of seasonal hunger – the so-called *monga* areas – persist, even the term 'extreme poverty' today thus no longer signify going without any meals a day for significant parts of the year. In a significant way, the challenge of poverty today has been transformed from that of hunger per se to a larger challenge of poor diets and other basic needs.

Table II: Poverty Self-Assessments (percent of rural households)

Self-Assessment	1989	1995'	2001	2004
Always Deficit	24	18	9.9	11.6
Occasional Deficit	50	32.2	26.3	31.9
Break-even	17.5	30.7	40.8	33.4
Surplus	8.5	19.1	23	23.1

Source: 62 Village Survey and Re-Surveys: 1989, 1995; BIDS *Analysis of Poverty Trends Project*, 2001, 2004; PPRC *State of the Poor Project*

3.2 Longer-Term Changes: the Lesser Told Story

xxiii. Macro statistics tell only a part of the poverty story. From a longer-term process perspective, a more complex story of change emerges.

- *Qualitative change in the experience of poverty*

Though per capita income levels have climbed only so modestly, there has been a qualitative change in the *experience of poverty* itself: i.e. the intensity of seasonal deprivations have marked a significant decline, percentage of population going without three meals a day has been substantially reduced, access to basic clothing has become near-universal, proportion of population living in extreme vulnerable housing has also registered a noticeable decline.

- *Declining Centrality of Land*

Land used to be the source both of wealth and income and of power and status in rural Bangladesh. This centrality has undergone drastic changes. Land is no longer the principal basis of power and status; neither does it serve to limit the livelihood opportunities of the poor. The subsistence orientation of production too has given way to a more complex and fluid livelihood strategy. Land has assumed a new multi-functionality within this multiple livelihood strategy far removed from its earlier connotations of power and dominance.

- *An Emerging Rural – Urban Continuum*

The dramatic expansion of all-weather rural infrastructure which began from the late 1980s has brought about a qualitatively new degree of connectedness between the rural and urban areas. Migration and remittances have emerged as dominant factors in household dynamics. The pattern of migration too is not restricted to uni-directional flows to international or metropolitan centres; migration of varying duration to a variety of destinations both rural and urban as well as near and far is increasingly a critical part of the picture. Initial fears that migration was fuelling an export of poverty from rural to urban areas has now been dispelled by poverty trend statistics; in general urbanisation appears to have been a force for poverty reduction with urban poverty declining much faster than rural poverty. The rural-urban divide is increasingly giving way to a rural-urban continuum.

- *Labour Market Transformations*

Far reaching transformations have also taken place in the labour market. There is a trend towards an occupational hierarchy for the poor in which casual daily labour is the least preferred employment. The competition is for piece-rate labour contracts and fixed-rent tenancies in the farm sector and for non-farm employment in rural construction activities, transport operations and at the lower end of trade and service activities. Within the context of such an occupational hierarchy, the 'capacity to shift' becomes the key livelihood concern for the poor. Correspondingly, there is a great emphasis on the finance access, social networking and human capital factors which generate this 'capacity' at the level of the individual household.

- *A deepening in market orientation*

There has been a far-reaching deepening in *market orientation* among all classes of economic actors, rural and urban, formal and informal, producer and consumer, large players and small players.

- *Poor loosen ties of dependence but little leverage over the political space*

The poverty literature of the 70's was replete with references to analytical categories such as inter-locked markets and personal dependence. These described a situation where the poor households were enmeshed in inter-locking ties of dependence on land, labour and credit

markets. Three decades on, this situation of personal dependence has significantly weakened. The spread of high-yield agriculture and all-weather road infrastructure has largely done away with seasonal dependence. Possibilities of quick migration have greatly expanded the choice horizon of the poor. The lives of women have also been touched: female mobility is a conspicuous phenomenon and women's reproductive burden too has gone down. However, while choice horizons have expanded, the political leverage of the poor over decision-making processes shows little evidence of any significant change.

- *A Personality Revolution?*

Perhaps the most important part of the poverty story is one not found in the statistics at all. The poor of Bangladesh have undergone something of a personality revolution and become more assertive, pro-active towards opportunities, clearer on life-goals. The social reality may not have lost its oppressive features but the poor men and women of rural and urban Bangladesh are new protagonists on the scene and societal outcomes are very much open. With perseverance and determination, they are forging a new ground reality of initiatives and signalling an escalating refusal to remain content with the vagaries of a poverty-laden fate.

4 Key Issues in Building Strategies

xxiv. Policy prescriptions burdened with encyclopedic wish-lists are often a problem rather than an aid in the fight against poverty. Poverty remains so pervasive that a million priorities are unlikely to exhaust the agenda. The challenge is not one of being exhaustive as much as being strategic in the reading of constraints and the search for promise. Key issues which need to inform the construction of today's road-map for accelerated poverty reduction include:

- *Building on Past Achievements*

No road-map is or can be wholly new. Remarkable gains have already been achieved in the areas of seasonal hunger, safety nets, primary schooling, girls' education, immunization, micro-credit, female economic participation, birth control and physical mobility. A critical priority in the new road-map will be to consolidate these gains and move on to the next challenges in each of these areas. Building on past achievements will also imply ensuring coverage of specific sub-categories of the poor who may have been bypassed by generic anti-poverty programmes such as minority ethnic groups, people living in remote and ecologically vulnerable areas, people who have lost their traditional occupations, and people suffering from disabilities.

- *Preventing Slippages*

It is also crucial that there are no slippages in areas where significant gains have already been achieved as for example in the area of population growth. An emerging concern is the plateauing of the total fertility rate (TFR) since the mid 1990s particularly among the poorer strata. Increased importance of temporary methods over permanent methods in family planning, health sector reform in the late 1990s which promoted a one-stop service centre in place of domiciliary (door-to-door) services may have contributed to the observed TFR plateauing. Any reversal in the population frontier clearly stands to weaken the fight against poverty.

- *Addressing Implementation*

Implementation has proved to be the bane of policy and programme initiatives on poverty reduction. A sharper engagement with implementation challenges is a critical necessity for accelerated poverty reduction. Four challenges merit priority attention: freeing the annual development programme (ADP) from the consistent burden of under-completed and under-funded projects; addressing the "incentives and motivation" issue pertaining to the civil service; a mind-set change to ensure a focus on the "little decisions" as much as on the "big decisions"; and, better information flows.

- *Bringing Employment and the Meso-Economy to Centre-Stage*

With nearly a million new members joining the labour force every year and with an employment-GDP elasticity of only 0.34, employment demands the highest strategic attention. Addressing the employment challenge has several facets: i) increase in wage employment, ii) increase in real wages, iii) increase in self-employment opportunities, iv) increase in labour productivity, and v) improved terms of trade for the products of labour particularly in agriculture and the informal sector. These are not either-or policy choices. A policy cue rather has to be taken from the livelihood realities in which the poor are actually operating. Traditional sectoral or integrated approaches to the issue often fail to grasp a silent structural transformation taking place at the base of the economy under the twin impetus of global integration and urbanization. The growth story of the 1990s in many ways signals a coming-of-age of this meso-economy: formal and informal activities in service, trade, construction and small industries proliferating in the rural market centres serving a demand boost coming from agriculture and remittance income among others. Much of this meso-economy dynamics has been bereft of policy attention; bringing it centre-stage to address the multi-faceted employment challenge will be a key priority.

- *Strengthening the Focus on Women's Advancement*

Women in Bangladesh have won important first round victories of visibility and mobility. Female gains in primary and secondary education, access to birth control measures and micro-credit compare favourably with the situation in other developing countries. Social attitudes looking positively on women's economic participation too have become near universal. However, beyond these first-round victories of visibility and mobility lie new constraints and new areas of strategic challenge. Entrenched patriarchal attitudes and insecurities of public spaces effectively inhibit fuller engagement by women with the unfolding opportunities. At issue too are social attitudes which put low priority on maternal health. While women's economic participation has expanded, female labour productivity remains very poor. Addressing these second round challenges will be a priority.

- *Up scaling Micro-Credit*

Micro-credit has rightly come to be seen as the most visible of anti-poverty instruments. Up scaling micro-credit and enhancing its poverty impact will be important factors in realizing the goals of accelerated poverty reduction. This is particularly so in a context in which there is a growing void in rural finance.

- *Strengthening Connectivity*

The question of connectivity is critical to poverty reduction from two angles: banishing the curse of remoteness and empowering the growth process. Key policy concerns to address the connectivity challenge include overcoming the power and port bottlenecks, completion of key infrastructures, effective systems of maintenance, strengthening telecommunications and its reach etc.

- *Bringing the Policy Process into Focus*

Real-life policy-making rarely adheres to linear sequences of optimal choices. Not only do most policies involve trade-offs, and the consequent challenge of making the best judgment on the trade-offs, policy-making is also driven as much by pressures of opinion and action from within and without as also by policy-makers' assessment of the political viability of policy decisions. Ideal solutions innocent of the challenges of grounding policies in political and administrative implementation are thus often off the mark.

- *Making Governance Work for the Poor and Women*

The governance agenda has suffered from being insufficiently grounded in an understanding of where the governance 'needs' of the poor and of vulnerable groups including women lie and of the real-life constraints impinging on the initiative potential of political actors on governance issues. There is also a mind-set challenge wherein the governance agenda is often formulated in the language of "big solutions" while neglecting the window of "small solutions" which can get started right away with much less of a challenge in policy innovation.

- *Bench-marking for Monitoring Progress*

An energized strategy for accelerated poverty reduction cannot but be result-oriented. A crucial need here will be to establish credible and conceptually sound benchmarks against which progress can be regularly monitored. Benchmarks must focus not only on outcome goals but as importantly on process goals.

- *Quality Education*

While the focus on access has brought significant dividends in terms of primary enrolment, gender parity statistics and a comprehensive mind-set shift which values education, field realities increasingly underscore the fact that access achievements are not necessarily translating into quality achievements. A paradigm shift towards a pre-occupation with quality while retaining the focus on equity has thus become an urgent necessity. In a way, such a realization has already been spreading but the sense of strategic urgency remains to be galvanized. It is also important to ensure that the development of the quality agenda at primary, secondary and vocational levels is not driven by top-down expert approaches alone but take its cue equally from an analytically sound reading of the ground realities of school, community and administrative environments in which they are situated.

- *Rational Land Use and Land Administration Reform*

Given the paucity of land, its intense utilization and the predominance of small-holders, classical notions of land reform based on large-scale redistribution of private land do not represent meaningful policy options in the Bangladesh reality. Yet, this is not to deny that land remains important in a variety of ways in the economic and social life of the country. There has been a growing realization that the critical policy issues pertaining to land have to do with land administration reform and a rational land use policy including ensuring better access to *khas* land by the poor and community groups.

- *Urban Poverty*

For a rapidly urbanizing country, urbanization so far has been a factor conducive to poverty reduction. However, growing disparities in living standards within the major cities and the problem of urban poverty in general is emerging as an important policy concern. Unplanned

city growth, illegal encroachments on public land, poor urban governance, and, lack of policy attention to the needs of the informal sector are some of the key factors exacerbating the problem of urban poverty. An effective strategy to address urban poverty is closely linked to an effective urbanization strategy. Critical policy entry points include mitigating public health risks, addressing the service needs of both transient settlements and more stable poor neighbourhoods, strong and effective policy support to the informal sector, and, better utilization of urban khas land for community purposes and for the needs of the poor.

- *Technology*

Policy attention to technology has not been robust and in pace with rapidly transforming social and economic demands. A reluctant mind-set and a bookish approach have been major hindrances to up scaling technology as a policy focus. Critical challenges include overcoming reluctant mind-sets, more effective engagement with application issues and choice of technology which emphasize productivity, low thresholds for entry and high self-dissemination potential. Two priority areas for policy attention are firstly, agriculture technology including technology for related fields such as fisheries, and secondly, ICT.

- *Risk, Vulnerability and Social Protection*

While safety nets have been an integral part of Bangladesh's poverty reduction strategy, changing risk profiles and stronger mitigation demands make the case for a holistic re-thinking on safety nets in particular and social protection in general a compelling one. Social protection includes safety nets, various forms of social insurance, labour market policies as well as process of self-help existing or emerging within society. Policy challenges include sharper profiling of risks, old and new, careful balancing of needs and expectations, streamlining implementation, and, exploring net-and-ladder options in programme design.

5 A Eight-Point Strategic Agenda

xxv. The struggle against poverty will never succeed if it continues to be an encyclopaedic wish list hopelessly bereft of any sense of strategic priority. Poverty is so pervasive that a million priorities will not exhaust the agenda but to get the momentum going, policy and popular energies have to be galvanized around a few catalytic agendas built on the policy triangle of growth, human development and governance. The overriding consideration for choosing such an agenda will be its relevance to ground realities and its potential to unlock the social and economic energies of the nation. From such a perspective, the medium term strategic agenda for Bangladesh for the goal of accelerated poverty reduction is constituted of the following (the list to be read as a whole rather than as a sequence of priorities):

- *Employment*
- *Nutrition*
- *Quality Education (particularly in primary, secondary and vocational levels with strong emphasis on girls' education)*
- *Local Governance*
- *Maternal Health*
- *Sanitation and Safe Water*
- *Criminal Justice*
- *Monitoring*