

Address by H.E. Ambassador Saida Muna Tasneem
On Recognition of Bangladesh's Outstanding Contribution to
South-South Cooperation:
Regional Commemoration on the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation
(UN Conference Centre, Bangkok, 12 September 2018)

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a privilege for me to join you all today to commemorate the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation and celebrate how Southern countries are strengthening mutual cooperation to achieve the ambitious 2030 agenda, and how the Northern, more advanced countries are extending their support in that cooperation.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the UN Office for South-South Cooperation for allowing me this opportunity to share with you all the remarkable story of how Bangladesh is disrupting traditional, linear development models to innovate an alternative pathway to socioeconomic progress, and the crucial role of South-South Cooperation in it.

In his first address at the UN General Assembly in 1974, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spoke passionately about the need for countries to come together to build "...a world where human creativity and the great achievements of our age in science and technology will be able to shape a better future...based upon a sharing of technology and resources on a global scale so that people everywhere can begin to enjoy the minimum conditions of a decent life."

Forty odd years later, the meteoric rise of the Global South, both in terms of trade and human development, is now being accompanied by increased calls for countries facing similar underlying development challenges to learn from, and support one another.

In the last nine and half years, Bangladesh has established a new development paradigm through its strategy of domestic demand generation as it confronted the global financial crisis. Behind this strategy lies the goal of poverty eradication in one of the most populous, least developed countries of the world. Especially a country which has emerged from the ruins of a cruel liberation war.

The objective paid us rich dividends. Macroeconomic stability, improvements in agricultural productivity, job creation through expansion in manufacturing and the service sector, and increased inward remittances, have boosted employment, food security and household income, leading to significant reductions in poverty in Bangladesh. We are now a low middle income country and well on our way to graduate from the LDC status.

We now have close to 150 million mobile phone users, nearly 90 million internet users and 99% geographical coverage in voice and data connectivity. With the recent introduction of 4G services, the country is on the fast lane towards massive digitization. Registered mobile money accounts in Bangladesh are growing faster than in any other country and contributing immensely to the cause of financial inclusion.

The impact of this digitization process on human development is visible already. We have earned international acclamations for our credible success in MDGs implementation, particularly in the areas of food security, primary school enrolment, gender parity in primary and secondary level education, infant and under-five mortality rate, maternal mortality ratio, immunization coverage, and reduction of communicable diseases and of course, poverty alleviation.

Most of the SDGs have already been mainstreamed into our national development plans. And we are now determined to end poverty in the country by 2024 well ahead of the SDG target of 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Countries from the Global South are well-positioned to understand each other's development realities, what works and what does not, and, more importantly, the whys behind the successes and failures.

Bangladesh has benefited immensely from the exchange of experiences with peers facing similar challenges. South-South cooperation has played a key role in Bangladesh's successfully fast-tracking its development rate and emerging as a "development miracle".

Spearheaded by the a2i Programme – which is implemented by the Prime Minister's Office, ICT Ministry and Cabinet Division with support from UNDP – over the last decade, Bangladesh borrowed ideas from other countries, adapted them and scaled up implementation to benefit millions of its 161 million citizens, particularly in the area of public service innovations.

First, turning all 5,000 of our local government offices at the grassroots into one-stop service centres serving millions of underserved with critical public and private services. Each centre features a unique public-private partnership hosted in a government office but run by local entrepreneurs to achieve financial sustainability.

Second, all government agencies now compete to nurture a culture of innovation to become more citizen-friendly. The central driving force of this culture is increased empathy for citizens, and the primary measurement of change is 'reducing TCV', or the time, cost and the number of visits that citizens have to make to access public services. Thousands of civil servants have gone through 'empathy training', designed with curriculum customized from Stanford Design School.

Third, we have realized that digitizing our age-old service delivery processes means amplifying their inherent inefficiencies. Why would we do that? Common sense has prevailed and we've borrowed the corporate methodology of business

process re-engineering, renamed it to Service Process Simplification and ensured that all our agencies now simplify before digitizing.

The combination of one-stop Digital Centres, Empathy Training, Service Process Simplification and digitization have enabled citizens to save over 1.2 billion workdays, 500 million visits and 3 billion dollars in the last few years.

Fourth, in an unprecedented whole-of-society engagement, our citizens are increasingly becoming co-creators of new solutions. Using social media, many social and economic ills such as child marriage, food adulteration, environmental pollution, and endemic corruption are tackled jointly by administration and common people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Bangladesh now realizes that South-South cooperation is an organic process in which a Southern country benefiting from “importing” an innovation from another Southern country reaches a point of maturity to “export” value-added innovations to other Southern countries.

As you know, Bangladesh has been a development laboratory for poverty alleviation, public health improvement and recently, public service innovation. We have started exporting many of our successful solutions to address challenges of Southern countries. However, in every single case, these solutions had to be customized to fit individual needs of the receiving country. There is no simple ‘cut and paste’.

Our South-South publication, jointly developed with the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, captures case studies demonstrating Bangladesh’s readiness and capacity to solve global development problems. Like Kahlil Gibran said, “It was in my heart to help a little because I was helped much.”

Our methodology for South-South Cooperation may prove beneficial to other countries.

In 2015, at the invitation of the Government of the Maldives, Bangladesh began sharing its knowledge and insights to facilitate the adaptation of the Digital Centres model to the island country. And taking advantage of the UNDP global network, in 2017, UNDP Fiji requested our Bangladesh country office to share the a2i Programme's knowledge and insights to develop mobile one-stop shops on boats to make it more convenient for its island-dwelling citizens to access vital government information and services. Similar cooperation is also ongoing with the Bhutan, the Philippines, Somalia, Peru and Paraguay.

Our newest contribution to South-South Cooperation is the SDG Tracker. It is a comprehensive whole-of-government SDG Monitoring framework that allows tracking of SDG progress against pre-set targets, by region, by indicator and across time through integrating data from various agencies using any device in any location. Policy makers who are often lost in reams of data will click a button to find a refreshing paradigm in powerful analytics and data visualization.

The SDG Tracker allows customization for any data environment in any language. We are ready to share this simple but effective tool with nations looking to strengthen their SDG progress monitoring and to unleash competition amongst its agencies and regions. Peru, Paraguay, Tunisia, Brazil, Namibia, Malawi, Nigeria, Colombia, Morocco, Uganda and Ecuador have expressed interest in the SDG Tracker and its user interface has already been translated into English and French.

Acting on our firm belief in the central tenet of South-South cooperation that all countries have something to offer, the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina at a side-event in the 71st session of the UN General

Assembly in 2016, proposed a 'South-South Network for Public Service Innovations' (SSN4PSI) to develop a deeper understanding and broader exchange among countries from the global South. The network was formally launched in collaboration with the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and UNDP at the Global South-South Development Expo in November 2017.

The 'SSN4PSI' (South-South Network for Public Service Innovations) is meant to serve as a platform for global collaborative where governments, private sector organizations, NGOs, experts, academics and distinguished individuals can exchange knowledge, experiences and expertise to harness innovations in public service delivery with the SDGs in focus.

A unique method employed by SSN4PSI is 'Matchmaking' where countries that have successfully tackled public service challenges in the past can effectively "export" solutions to countries that need it the most.

The first international matchmaking workshop of the network was convened in Dhaka, Bangladesh in December 2017. The workshop had participants from 18 countries and generated 38 partnership opportunities on public service innovations.

In June 2018, SSN4PSI hosted its second International matchmaking workshop in Astana, Kazakhstan. The meeting was embedded in the Astana Civil Service Hub's Annual Conference with theme, "Public Service Excellence in the Era of SDGs". At the end of the workshop the SSN4PSI received 13 matches for collaboration among participating country and institution delegates. Furthermore, the Network's prospects for effectiveness was boosted by the promised continued support from the Astana Hub. Following on the heels of the successful collaboration the support is a very positive development for the fledgling Network which also received support from the Asian Association for Public Administration.

I'm sure many of you have heard the African Proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina offers a different take on it. I have often heard her say, "If you want to go far and fast, innovate together." In today's world, individuals, communities, organizations, cities and nations have demonstrated that it is possible to leapfrog and carve out unprecedented development trajectories that combine speed and scope. In fact, that is exactly what nations of the Global South must do to achieve the 2030 goals – together, fast and sustainably! I hope today's event proves to be the launching pad for sincere commitments, deeper engagements and action-oriented approaches among all parties involved.

I thank you all.