

Evidence Dialogue on SME Development in Bangladesh

Co-hosted by the **Access to Information (a2i) Program of the Prime Minister's Office** and **Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)**, a U.S.-based research and policy organization



The SME sector has the potential to be a driving force of economic growth and employment creation in Bangladesh; however, a host of market and firm-level challenges are holding back this sector from achieving its full potential. For decades, the Government of Bangladesh and other sector advocates have worked on various initiatives to help small businesses grow; yet large-scale and transformational growth has been an elusive target.

IPA believes that effective SME development research could make a lasting and significant contribution to economic development and poverty alleviation. In response, IPA's SME Program brings together policymakers and researchers to evaluate innovative solutions to the most binding constraints to SME growth and entrepreneurship. IPA has conducted over 80 studies across the world on many aspects related to SME development, firm productivity and entrepreneurship. In Bangladesh, these projects include rigorous evaluations of consulting services, training programs, and interventions aimed at improving entrepreneurs' well-being.

On the other hand, developing 'Skills for Employment'—a strategy to achieve the Vision 2021 and transform Bangladesh into a middle-income country—is a crucial responsibility of a2i. Within Skills for Employment, a2i has started several skills development, apprenticeship and training programs targeting different segments of the population. Building an inclusive financial ecosystem is another area of focus for a2i, an important pre-condition for equitable economic development.

This Dialogue is the first in a series of collaborations between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to generate and use evidence for promoting SME growth in Bangladesh. At this Dialogue:

- » IPA and affiliated researchers will share key learnings from global and local studies in **Human Capital and Skills** and **Access to Finance**, two key challenge areas for the SME sector in Bangladesh.
- » Policymakers, practitioners and experts will share their views and experience on these issues and related challenges facing SMEs in Bangladesh.
- » Panelists and participants will debate the path forward towards more and better evidence on SME programs for development and growth in Bangladesh.

We hope these engagements will jumpstart new collaborations in this space, to co-create rigorous evidence on SME development and to empower leaders locally to generate and incorporate this knowledge into their decision-making. IPA's aim is to create a culture of evidence-based decision-making in Bangladesh and globally.

Agenda

2:45 - 3:15 PM

Arrival & Registration

3:15 - 3:40 PM

Introduction

Guest Introduction—5 minutes

Welcome Speech by **Mr. Ashraful Haque**, Country Representative, IPA Bangladesh—15 minutes

Welcome Speech by **Mr. Ramiz Uddin, PhD**, Head of Results Management, a2i—5 minutes

3:40 - 4:25 PM

Overview of the SME Sector and Existing Evidence

Overview of existing evidence in SME development and entrepreneurship

Mr. Imran Matin, Chief Research and Policy Officer, IPA—20 minutes

Speech on SME sector in Bangladesh: opportunities and challenges

Mr. Md. Shafiqul Islam, Managing Director, SME Foundation—10 minutes

Open discussion session—15 minutes

4:25 - 4:45 PM

Tea Break

4:45 - 6:00 PM

Human Capital and Skills

Presentation of research findings on human capital and skills development in the RMG sector in Bangladesh

Professor Atonu Rabbani, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka—20 minutes

Discussion on experience with human capital and skills development

Mr. Shotadal Islam, Manager, HR & Ethical Trades, Echotex Limited—10 minutes

Presentation of research findings on stress management program for female SME owners in Bangladesh

Ms. Paula Lopez-Pena, PhD candidate, Warwick University—20 minutes

Discussion on the importance of women entrepreneurs' psychological well-being

Ms. Selima Ahmed, President, Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI)—10 minutes

Open discussion session—15 minutes

6:00 - 6:10 PM

Break

6:10 - 6:55 PM

Access to Finance

Presentation of global research findings on access to finance for SMEs

Ms. Nusrat Jahan, Research Coordinator, IPA—20 minutes

Discussion on the challenges and opportunities in access to finance for the SMEs in Bangladesh

Mr. Syed Abdul Momen, Head of SME Banking, BRAC Bank—10 minutes

Open discussion session—15 minutes

6:55 - 7:00 PM

Closing remark by Mr. Ashraful Haque

7:00 - 8:00 PM

Dinner