

National seminar on Negotiating Trade Agreements: How to make it Pro-Poor



"We have to focus on integrating the poor into the global trade regime and minimising adverse effects of globalisation", said Professor Mustafizur Rahman in a national seminar organised by D.Net. The national seminar on 'Negotiating Trade Agreements: How to Make it Pro-Poor' was held at BRAC Inn between 3pm to 6pm on 06 September, 2008 in cooperation with Oxfam International.

Dr. Shah M Ahsan Habib, Associate Professor, BIBM and Head, Research and Programme, D.Net presented the keynote paper at the seminar. The session was chaired by Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Vice-Chairperson, D.Net and Executive Director, CPD.

Mr. Suhel Ahmed Choudhury, Former Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Chairman, Janata Bank Ltd; Ambassador Muhammad Zamir, Former Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Manzur Ahmed, Advisor, FBCCI; Dr. Toufic Ahmad Choudhury, Professor and Director, BIBM and Chairperson, D.Net and Dr. Mostafa Abid Khan, Former Deputy Chief, Bangladesh Tariff Commission and Fellow, Research, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI) were present at the seminar as guest speakers.

Former foreign secretary Mr. Muhammad Zamir said that the ministries including finance, foreign and commerce must have better coordination amongst themselves so that they can acquire benefit from any form of trade negotiations. The former ambassador also stressed on serious and in-depth research work

and opined that the country prepare itself rigorously prior sitting for any trade talk.

"We have to develop our capabilities in trade negotiation before adapting any pro-poor policy," said Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury, former commerce secretary. He further added that the country must improve its trade negotiation capacity to derive maximum benefits from the global trade regime and attain a pro-poor growth.

The guest speakers commonly felt that the least developed countries like Bangladesh needed to negotiate and bargain harder with the rich trade partners to protect the poor from any adverse impacts of the liberalised global trade.

One of the key participants Mr. Annisul Huq, President, The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FBCCI) delivered his valuable comments on the relevant issues and opined that the country will fail to receive better result from any trade negotiations due to lack of coordination among the stakeholders.



A sound Marketing Information System (MIS) is one of the main preconditions for the success of commodity market in an agriculture dependent country like Bangladesh. The availability of timely, accurate and relevant market information is the key objective of a MIS. Modern MIS uses ICT to collect, process, update and disseminate market information, so that farmers can negotiate for better price in the market place. It should be designed to disseminate market information to link farmers to people in the market chains, including other farmers, commodity traders, exporters and importers.

For designing and implementing an effective MIS, there must be specially tailored database to manage information. These may include rural market information points, mobile phone messaging service, interactive voice response, internet, radio etc. Widespread internet connectivity and ability to access and use information are also crucial for success of the MIS. MIS is expected to disseminate all sorts of relevant information, which may include commodity profile, current prices and price trends, accepted quality standards for commodities, forecasting demand and supply, best practices, information on authorised brokers and warehouses, weather forecast etc.

The Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM) of Bangladesh has launched a website as part of a project called AMIS (Agricultural Marketing Information Improvement Project) with the assistance of FAO to offer price information of agricultural commodities. The DAM database collects price information on 15 different commodities from 42 districts and uploads to the database. The AMIS however is not functioning as expected mainly because of low outreach following inappropriate technology solution and absence of channels for local dissemination. Currently, DAM is experimenting mobile phone based agricultural information dissemination arrangement under a donor funded project. There is no doubt that the country requires more farmer friendly information dissemination system. On the way to achieve this, Department of Agricultural Marketing of the Ministry of Agriculture of Bangladesh may create a network with telecentre operators. Setting up telecentres at Union Parisad building may open a new avenue in this connection. The Union Parisad building can be used as local hub for offering relevant market information to the farmers. For an emerging MIS to be sustainable, the appropriate institutional arrangements need to be in place; governments need to be involved for the 'public goods' aspect of the information; and the private sector should be part of the system.

Refreshers Training on Accessing and Intermediation of Local Language Content

D.Net (Development Research Network) conducted a refreshers training titled 'Local Language Content Development' under PAN Localization project in collaboration with BRAC University. Md. Masum Billah, Head, Knowledge Management Division of D.Net and Coordinator of this project inaugurated the training programme and underlined the importance of creating space for information dissemination to the poor and marginalised people of the community.

A total number of 10 information workers and local community people involved in content development from different telecentre practitioners and government



institutes like Agricultural Information Services, Directorate of Agricultural Marketing, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, World Net, Digonter Dak, Gandhi Ashram Trust, Shariatpur Development Society, Socio Economic Development Association, Participatory Advancement Social Service and D.Net partook in the training as participants.

During the training session, the participants shared and explained the various methods and techniques on how to be a well-organised content developer for the end users. The closing session was followed by creating an email group to share their activities more resourcefully.

Gunijan Goes to School Children

Gunijan organised a school event jointly with the Computer Literacy Programme on 27 August, 2008. The said event was held at Shayestabad Girl's High School in Barisal and the eminent gunijan and a renowned human rights activist Dr. Hameeda Hossain was present as the chief guest in the programme.

All the students of the school congregated in the event with an objective to learn and acquire knowledge about the 'Gunijans' of our country who serve/served their mother land for peace, humanity and social justice with their creativity and talent. The moderators displayed the Gunijan homepage,



different sections of the website, profiles and photos of the gunijans.

The chairman of Shayestabad Girl's High School, Mr. Abdur Rauf; the head master of the school Mr. Abul Kashem Haolader; Head of Institutional Affairs of D.Net Mr. Ajoy Kumar Basu and Mr. Abul Kalam Azad were present at the ceremony. The event turned out to be a very exciting one and liked by all the children of the school. The school was also selected and inaugurated as a 'Computer Literacy Center' under the 'Computer Literacy Programme'.

Dr. Hameeda Hossain appreciated the presentations that were displayed, thanked 'Guniujan' and opined that these sorts of programmes are imperative for the young generation to acquire knowledge about their past and to carve a niche for themselves. The day came to an end with a heart touching cultural programme participated by the school students. Teachers, guardians and other local guests were also present at the programme.

It is to be mentioned that 'Gunijan' is a voluntary programme of D.Net run by financial contributions from individuals and national citizens. If you would like to donate for running this programme, please visit our website www.gunijan.org.bd, send email to info@gunijan.org.bd or call at +88 02 913 14 24/ext. 146.

Memorandum of Understanding between D.Net and Relief International

In order to build a knowledge society, as announced in the national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy of Bangladesh and to reap maximum benefits from the new economy; it is imperative that the younger generation of Bangladesh are adequately educated and acquainted with the state-of-the-art knowledge of ICT. It is also understandable that with the poor resource base, it is not an easy task for the government alone to provide facilities and necessary resources for learning ICT skills throughout the country.

The main objectives of the collaboration are to promote ICT in a basic education setting and improve the general state of education in Bangladesh; to introduce developmental actions such as Global Connection Exchange (GCE) programme activities; to organise Teacher Professional Development (TPD) training, ICT Youth Leadership training and Technology Volunteer Corps training; and to facilitate exchange of international students and teachers. D.Net and Relief International also strive to implement Global Connections and Exchange Program with the help of 20 school based Computer Learning Centers (CLCs) and 27 school based Internet Learning Centers (ILC) in Bangladesh.



To achieve this goal, D.Net (Development Research Network) and Relief International signed a MoU on Saturday, July 26, 2008 with an aim to collaborate the various activities on 'Enhancing Computer Learning Programme along with Internet Connection'.

Mr. Nazrul Islam, Country Director of Relief International, Bangladesh and Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director of D.Net signed the MoU on behalf of their respective organisations. Mr. Ajoy Kumar Bose, Mr. Mahmud Hasan, Mr. Humayan Mustaque, Mr. Moshraff Hossain, Mr. Sheik Masudur Rahaman and Mr. Zahid-Al-Mahadi of D.Net were present in the signing ceremony.

Abolombon II Update

A series of refreshers training and workshop was organised under the project Abolombon II, with the financial support of Majusher Jonno Foundation for the infomediaries, centre managers and chief of Pallitathya Kendras (PK) operating organisations.

Training on Mobile Infomediary: A refreshers training was held for the mobile infomediaries from July 28 to 31, 2008 at Gaibandha under the project



Abolombon II. Mr. M. Abdus Salam, Chief Executive, Gono Unnayan Kendra (GUK) inaugurated the training session and a large number of mobile infomediaries from different PKs participated in the training. Mr. Salam was delighted to instate the prestigious training programme and expressed GUK's interest to operate the EEE-PC/classmate PC in 50 mobile telecentres in Gaibandha district.

In the first day of the training, mobile infomediaries shared the challenges usually faced during the various livelihood helpline operations at the village level; a debate was also organised on the topic – 'Women are not Appropriate as Mobile Infomediaries' to comprehend the current mindset. These mobile infomediaries further enriched their knowledge and concept on how to deliver livelihood information, at the door steps of the community people using ICTs; this greatly helped them to enhance their professional skills and upgrade their proficiency.

In the second day, the participants visited two villages with the aid of a social map which guided them to identify the location of households; available resources; existing sources of information and the existing service providers in the locality.

The third day of the training session focused on delivering livelihood information at the door steps of villagers. Mobile infomediaries moved from door to door with their mobile phones, laptops, Eee-PCs,

internet connectivity and necessary documentation systems. It was seen that the laptops and Eee-PCs played a significant role to deliver information at the door steps of the villagers, using the internet, mobile phone and skype. For example, a mobile infomediary faced a question which was related to an abnormality in the backbone of a girl. The infomediary connected the patient to the doctor via the helpdesk in Dhaka, using skype. The girl received instant suggestion and information from the helpdesk.

Challenges and expectation of mobile infomediaries were addressed in the last day of the training session. D.Net plans to produce a TOT module for the following months which will be based on the success and experiences of the training.

Training on Financial Management for Pallitathya Kendras: A financial management training was held from 04 to 07 August, 2008 at D.Net, Dhaka. PK managers and accounts management staff of PK operating organisations participated in the training programme.

The participants gathered immense knowledge on PK financial management, office management, file management, budget preparation and financial reporting system which helped them to increase their expertise in their related fields. The training session was facilitated by the operations division of D.Net. Mr. Md. Mehedi Hasan from Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) also conducted a session on financial monitoring and reporting.

Training on Social Mobilisation for Pallitathya Kendras: The training was held from August 10 to 13, 2008 at Banchte Shekha Training Venue, Jessore. Mr. Mohammad Zakaria, Chairman, Gonogobeshona Unnayan Foundation (GOUF) and Mr. Md. Razzak Ful, Chairman, Chanchra Union Parishad, Jessore inaugurated the programme.



Infomediaries from 13 PKs participated in the training, where their expectation, PK operation challenges and opportunities were identified and addressed. A debate was organised on the topic - 'Community Participation is Essential for Successful Operation of Pallitathya Kendra' with a view to understand their current knowledge and skills. Various communication and mobilisation tools were shared and new tools were introduced in the training. Health and fisheries camps were also organised by the participants to provide information and face-to-face consultation services. They learned to conduct the van campaign (mobile information service system using ICTs with a van) in the bazar area. Infomediaries moved from door to door with EEE PC, internet connectivity and content database to deliver information as a part of the training programme. Different information delivery channels (offline, online, audio-video, helpline, printed materials etc.) and its use had been addressed in the training. They further identified various ways to develop a networking strategy with the government organisations and existing service providers.

Workshop on Sustainable Pallitathya Kendras:

This workshop was held from 30 to 31 August, 2008 at the Bangladesh Rural Development Academy (BARD) auditorium, Comilla. The main purpose of the workshop was to plan the necessary course of action for achieving the sustainability of 13 PKs under Abolombon II project. Chiefs and centre managers from 13 PKs participated in the workshop.

Collaboration opportunities among 13 PKs were identified; last year performances of the PKs were reviewed and future work plans were formulated



during the first day of the workshop. In the second day, experience sharing session was arranged on 'Amader Gram' and 'e-health' projects. Mr. Reza Selim, Project Director, Amader Gram presented the activities of 'e-health' and proposed for a successful collaboration among the PKs. Mr. Mahmud Hasan, Chief Operating Officer, Bangladesh Telecenter Network discussed about the Mission 2011; progress of Mission 2011 and collaboration opportunities for existing telecentre operating organisations. Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director and the PK management and monitoring team from D.Net were also present in the 2 day long workshop.

It is to be noted that 13 PKs are currently operating under the Abolombon II project. In addition, infomediaries from 4 PKs received infomediary training under this project. A total number of 71,655 people received livelihood information and ancillary services from PKs during May 2007 to September 2008. During the period, the per day cumulative average service recipients were 12.6. By February 2009, 12 new PKs will also be established.

Workshop on Resource Mobilisation

D.Net organised a workshop on Resource Mobilisation (RM) under its Human Resource Capacity Building Programme on September 09 and 10, 2008 at D.Net. The specific objectives of this workshop were to collect information on prospective donors, organisations, individuals who could provide financial support in accomplishing mission 2010; to formulate strategic target oriented RM plan to attract different donors, organisations and individuals; to build capacity of staff and board members for Resource Mobilisation; and to prepare a selected number of proposals for mobilising resources.

Mr. Mahmud Hasan, Head of Theme 5 facilitated the workshop and about twenty D.Net staff participated in the workshop. The facilitator began the programme with a welcome speech, stating that

"Successful completion of a project is not the end rather a beginning of new opportunities". The contents of the workshop covered various topics like, defining RM, why RM is important for D.Net, fundraising sources, relationship with donors and other relevant issues.

An extensive session was held on the 'art of writing a project proposal' that elaborately dealt with important topics like project goals, objectives, fund raising and its implementation.

The workshop was concluded with the identification of a three month work plan covering the submission of project proposal by one week; locating potential donors and establishing communication within a month; and successfully establishing at-least one negotiation by the following two months.

International Literacy Day Celebrated in the Villages at the Initiative of PKs

The International Literacy Day was celebrated around the world on September 08, 2008. Seven Pallitathya Kendras (PKs) at rural Bangladesh celebrated the day in different geographic locations where the infomediaries organised several programmes for women, children and students related to literacy and ICT in their respective working areas.

The PK at Charghat, Rajshahi which has been operating by Tripartite Development Council (TDC), organised a ten day long literacy programme for the illiterate women and children of the area. Necessary reading materials were also distributed among the participants.

The PK at Babrijhar, Nilphamari which is operating by the Local Citizen Committee, organised a five day long literacy programme for 14 mothers. The literacy programme turned out to be very successful and at the end of the programme these mothers decided to use their signature when necessary instead of the usual finger marks. The PK also offered absolutely free health and agricultural information during the learning period.

The PK at Ganna, Jhinaidha operating by Padma Samaj Kallyan Songstha identified the school drop out children within the four adjacent villages of the PK. A meeting was conducted on 8 September, 2008 with an objective to motivate and encourage the targeted children and their parents and to create awareness and inspiration among them. The PK also identified 20 children, who are expected to join school by January, 2009.

The PK at Joyag, Noakhali operating with the support of Gandhi Ashram Trust, arranged ICT learning facilities especially internet browsing and on email account for the 9th and 10th graders. About 70

students from Joyag Bohumukhi High School and Gandhi Memorial Institute participated in the educational programme. During the programme, the PK also provided free internet browsing facility for the participatory students for 2 days. These facilities helped the students a great deal to acquire knowledge about the ICT.

The PK at Mongla, Bagerhat operating by Dhoritry Samaj Kallyan Songha also provided free learning facilities on internet use and opening personal email account for some students. 10 students participated in the programme. After learning the use of internet, they voted Sundarban and Cox's Bazar in order to keep these two destinations in the top list of the 7 wonders of the world.

The PK at Kaligang, Jhenaidah operating with the help of Hunger Free World, organised a rally and discussion meeting jointly with the Upazilla Parisad. A large number of students from various schools and colleges participated in the rally and discussion session.



D.Net Inaugurates another Computer & IT Literacy Centre in Habiganj

A Computer and IT Literacy Centre was inaugurated in Habiganj on August 30, 2008 in collaboration with Dinarpur High School with the support of Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), USA & sponsored by Mr. Abdul Mukit Chowdhury Mukul, New York, USA. It is believed that the students would receive IT skills training on basic computer applications and community people will get access to livelihood

information (education, health, agriculture, law, employment etc.) from the centre.

The centre was set up as part of the VAB-NJ initiated Computer Literacy Programme of D.Net. The background of undertaking the programme was that the students and youths in rural areas rarely get chance to learn about the computer or ICTs and thus do not know how this modern technology can be

utilised for the benefit of rural livelihood. It is also understandable that with the poor resource base, it is not an easy task for the government alone to provide facilities and necessary resources for learning ICT skills throughout the country. Therefore, Volunteers Association for Bangladesh, New Jersey (VAB-NJ), USA, took this initiative which is being implemented by D.Net (www.dnet.org.bd) in Bangladesh.

Inaugurating the centre, Mr. Munir Uddin, Controller, Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, Sylhet, said "This centre has introduced a great opportunity for the students and community people to learn computer at village level" he further added "students will now be able to obtain their SSC examination results using the internet". Mr. Nur Uddin, Chairman, School Management Committee, chaired the inaugural ceremony.

Mr. A.K.M. Fahim Mashroor, Chairman Executive Committee of D.Net and CEO, www.bdjobs.com; Mr. Ajoy Kumar Bose, Project Coordinator, Computer Literacy Program, D.Net; Mr. Kawsar Jamal, Founder, Change Bangladesh, USA; Mr. Ahmed Ashrafuzzaman, Executive Director, Graphic Associates International Limited and Members of



SMC of the school and representatives of civil society attended the event.

Mr. A.K.M. Fahim Mashroor, while delivering his speech requested the teachers and students to encourage Science and Computer Education in future. In order to build a knowledge society, as announced in the national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy, Bangladesh needs a talented new generation with the state-of-the-art knowledge of ICT.

The Ambassador to US Visits a CLC in Manikgonj

The ambassador of Bangladesh to USA, Mr. Humayun Kabir visited a Computer Literacy Center (CLC) at Garpara High School, Manikgonj Sadar, Manikgonj on July 30, 2008. The CLCs are established by D.Net in different parts of the country with the guidance and financial support of Volunteers Association for Bangladesh New Jersey, USA. The ambassador was accompanied by Mr. Ajoy Kumar Bose and Mr. Masum Billah of D.Net and they elucidated Mr. Kabir about the Computer Literacy Program. The ambassador praised the activities of the CLC and commended everybody working on the programme. Appreciating the initiatives, the ambassador opined that D.Net's model was a unique one and possessed a great potentiality to bring forward the rural people in the development process of Bangladesh, by connecting them with the rest of the world.

Mr. Kabir and Mr. Arastoo Khan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance browsed Jeeon-IKB, the livelihood content available at the centre and expressed huge appreciation over the contents. They further opined that since students from different classes are using the content for their academic purpose, the content should be made available to a wider community. Among other guests Mr. Ataur Rahman, Deputy



Commissioner of Manikgonj District; Prof. Muhammad Qamrul Islam, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Economics, Saint Louis University, USA; Ms. Zinnat Ara, Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Manikgonj and Mr. Ajoy Kumar Bose and Mr. Masum Billah of D.Net were present on the auspicious occasion. Members of school management committee, teachers, and students attended the programme.

Launching of the ICT Based Literacy Materials

An ICT based educational material of UNESCO, titled 'Nari O Naksha' was launched on 31 August, 2008, at the BRAC Centre. D.Net prepared the content of this educational material. Mr. M Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Secretary, Ministry of Primary & Mass Education was present as the Chief Guest while Mr. Malama Meleisea, Director and Representative, UNESCO Dhaka chaired the programme. Mr. Mohammad Ali, Team Leader of Practical Action and Ms. Mostan Zida Alnoor, researcher of D.Net were amongst others who attended this programme.



The basic objective of the primer was to introduce functional literacy with Information and Communication Technology (ICT)- based learning materials and reduce literacy gap among the young adult female population, who are involved in economic activities, through life skill course where literacy will be integrated as a part of life skill development.

During the launching of the CD and the book, Mr. M Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan enlightened the audience about the fact that the government of Bangladesh is planning to spread adult literacy programme throughout the country with the support of ICT. Under this work plan it is intended that a pilot project on literacy will be provided to the illiterate women and girls with the aid of laptops and telecentres.

Mr. Malama Meleisea, Director and Representative, UNESCO Dhaka stated that UNESCO has been diligently working for a long time in order to increase education in Bangladesh and 'Nari O Naksha' is one of the results of that persevering task. This educational material has been developed after carrying out a long and assiduous research throughout the villages of Bangladesh. He further opined that UNESCO has

successfully developed this material with the help of the real story, the livelihood activities and also with the aid of the local languages of the inhabitants in many villages. The assistant editor of the CD, Mr. S M Ashraf Abir explained the potential role of the developed material in the expansion of ICT based literacy amongst the poor.

It is hoped that this will play a potential role in the literacy programme and livelihood development of the women and adolescent girls engaged in different economic activities in different rural parts of the country.



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Development Research Network

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