

A N M Zakir Hossain<sup>1</sup> – Mosa Shrabony Sheikh<sup>2</sup>

# Bilateral Cooperation to Promote Sustainable Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Case Study of Hungary and Bangladesh<sup>3</sup>

*The European Union (EU) has increasingly focused on democratising innovation and promoting engagement in research to address policy concerns collectively. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, attaining sustainable development is a global priority, and governments face complex hurdles in meeting their goals. Alone, unilateral initiatives to encourage socio-economic or political progress are inadequate, needing bilateral or multilateral collaborations to bridge gaps between political and economic interests. Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), negotiated since the late 1950s, influence sustainable development aims and share common features despite diverse categorisations. This study, based on secondary data and grey literature, investigates how bilateral relationships shape international cooperation and sectoral priorities in the context of sustainable development goals. Focusing on Bangladesh and Hungary, the study highlights their cooperation in areas like human resource development and energy projects as key milestones towards sustainability. Leveraging a knowledge economy and strategic lessons can contribute to achieving sustainable development, which is particularly crucial in the face of natural disasters. The study's findings have practical implications for policy guidelines to bolster the Bangladesh–Hungary bilateral relationship for advancing long-awaited sustainable development goals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, Hungary, SDGs, bilateral relations, European Union, cooperation

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, Doctoral School of Public Administration Sciences, Faculty of Public Governance and International Studies, University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary; Department of Agricultural Economics, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, Bangladesh, e-mail: [anmzakirhossain@bau.edu.bd](mailto:anmzakirhossain@bau.edu.bd)

<sup>2</sup> PhD Student, Doctoral School of Public Administration Sciences, University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary, e-mail: [shrabonybau@gmail.com](mailto:shrabonybau@gmail.com)

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## Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and has made notable progress in the pathway of development through its steady economic growth and reduction of poverty. It is one of the developing countries in Southeast Asia that has made many bilateral collaborations with other countries in Asia and Europe<sup>4</sup> to promote sustainable development by evaluating the successes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to prioritise the policy settings to achieve the SDGs.<sup>5</sup> It is also an attempt to mobilise governmental agreement and strategic concentration on a wider agenda of global development that requires more robust cooperation between countries.<sup>6</sup> However, the rate of progress was hindered by the extent of native ecological degradation, as well as the consequences and growing threat of climate change vulnerabilities. Besides, as noted by the recent 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, economic growth was ushered by increasing inequality throughout the country.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the effects of Covid-19 have worsened the overall situation due to the diversity of vulnerabilities among the mass population. Notwithstanding, the state has made a remarkable transformation to equip its institutions and bring the administrative units closer to the citizens for decision-making and service delivery. To address the development priorities and mitigate the effects of Covid-19, a shared response is necessary to focus on the challenges of the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and sustainable development goals (SDGs) and to achieve the prospective plan for 2041. The current demography has huge potential among all groups that require an adequate range of investment to unleash them along with effective, goal-oriented and risk-informed interventions to pave the way and harness the equitable and knowledge-based economy for sustainable development. It is obvious to cooperate with others when the country is striving to travel from a developing to a middle-income country and is adamant about changing the landscape for development finance to complement the management of public finance.

There are several strategic priorities that have been chosen to respond to the requirements of shifting development to be organised, shared and diversified to support and hasten the alteration of sustainable development. To this end, the United Nations will assist Bangladesh through its development cooperation framework for rightful, holistic, human capital, socio-economic and environmental development in accordance with the SDGs by 2030. Besides, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) also made diplomatic relations and official cooperation and collaboration with potentially developed economies to expedite the development process to achieve the SDGs and Perspective Plans for 2041.<sup>8</sup>

Collaborative efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development through bilateral cooperation have gained significant importance. By joining forces, countries can address shared challenges and work towards social, economic and environmental progress in a mutually beneficial manner. This approach involves the exchange of knowledge,

<sup>4</sup> SAMARAKOON 2004: 34–44.

<sup>5</sup> ASADULLAH et al. 2020: 165–189.

<sup>6</sup> ASADULLAH et al. 2020: 165–189.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Bangladesh 2021.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Bangladesh 2021.



resources and expertise to create solutions that have a positive impact on both partner nations and the global community.

Bilateral cooperation for sustainable development often focuses on areas such as poverty alleviation, healthcare improvement, education, infrastructure development and environmental conservation. Through strategic partnerships, countries can pool their strengths and resources to implement projects and initiatives that foster long-term growth while minimising negative environmental and social impacts. Furthermore, this form of cooperation requires open dialogue, effective communication and a clear commitment to common goals. Sustainable development is a multifaceted endeavour that requires coordinated actions and continuous monitoring to ensure progress. By sharing experiences, best practices and lessons learned, partner countries can enhance their development strategies and accelerate positive outcomes.

In the context of global partnership, Bangladesh has established a good friendship relationship in different aspects in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with Hungary and other European countries. Both countries are on their way to sustainable development with their cooperation in two different parts of the world; however, the economic and social conditions, to some extent, are more or less similar between these countries. The government-level relationship between these countries is strengthening over time in multiple aspects and contexts to ensure and expedite economic and sustainable development.<sup>9</sup> The study focuses on the various aspects of bilateral relationships and the prospects of attaining sustainable development through the lens of mutual relationships. It aims at the prioritised areas that are given foremost prominence for mutual benefits for both countries to solidify the partnership and to achieve the SDGs within the time frame. The findings of the study can also contribute further to strengthening cooperation between the countries to fabricate bilateral relations to expedite economic growth and development to fuel sustainable development.

## **Background of the study and literature review**

The foreign policy of a country is the key instrument to safeguard the socio-economic and political desires in global politics. The foreign policy of Bangladesh is comprised of the interests of the nation, guided by the constitution of the country, to secure the national interest and fulfil the targets in the global political sphere within the framework of international relations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh is responsible for preparing and implementing plans and policies based on constitutional guidance and navigating them to attain national interests and promote international peace, security and solidarity. Its foreign policy protects the general interests of the state, particularly development plans and programs. In international relations, the national interests of each country manifested the global developments in the cooperation route at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. It is evident for Bangladesh to determine its approach and place on a strong and defined location for future sustainability. There is “power, government, and law” for everyone to implement at their national level,

<sup>9</sup> AHMED 2021: 592–593.



whereas international politics is “a field of power struggle and accommodation”.<sup>10</sup> It is also necessary to define the objectives in long and short terms based on the principles of foreign policy to rationalise the cost and benefits so that they can be measurable and transparent. The fundamental is how to connect national interests through economic development strategies with the steps selected at the global level to create bilateral and multilateral relationships for mutual benefits.

Global politics emphasises the need for an economic activity framework and is always governed by the rule of power. However, economic movements are essential and have a profound influence on the distribution of resources and power internationally, but they always operate in the context of political struggle between groups and nations.

In today’s world, where every nation is somehow related to other nations for globalisation and dependent on their socio-economic and political development, building and sustaining a relationship with others is an unconditional need to be achieved.

#### **Promotion of international peace, security and solidarity**

The fundamental foreign policies of Bangladesh originate from Article 25 of the Constitution of Bangladesh.

The State shall base its international relations on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, peaceful settlements of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter, and on the basis of those principles shall:

- Strive for the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and for general and complete disarmament.
- Uphold the right of every people freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its own free choice.
- Support oppressed peoples throughout the world waging a just struggle against imperialism, colonialism or racialism (GoB 2014).

It is therefore our duty to promote Bangladesh to the rest of the world, particularly the European nations, as its foreign policy and diplomacy have emerged as crucial key drivers in the modern, globalised world. It is needless to state that one needs to understand the current global politics to conceptualise the existing international power games so that nations are not trapped in revolutionary diplomacy and can show nationalism under the rising pressure of internationalism.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of national interest is always interpreted in terms of power; Morgenthau has opined that the state is the only source of power that moulded and shaped the national interest by virtue of its own. So that the state can defend its interests based on the contemporary local and global power position and situation. Scholars advocated for the essence of national interest, as it is the ultimate value for a nation that needs to

<sup>10</sup> WALTZ 1979.

<sup>11</sup> KEOHANE 1984.



be uplifted and described as the aspirations of the state, and used actively while these aspirations transform into policies and anticipated plans.<sup>12</sup> The interests of the state can be created by the statesman and/or others who consider the state merely an instrument in the journey of the attainment of the citizen's needs. Together, they can make the explanation of national interest, as long as the state is authentically responsible for the betterment and encounters the national demands of the citizens.

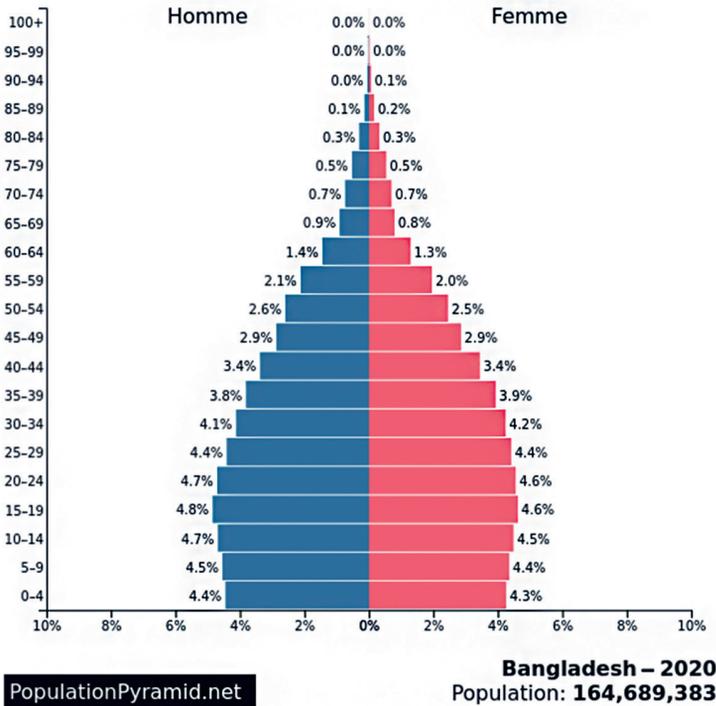


Figure 1: Population Pyramid  
Source: Population de Bangladesh 2020.

The national interest is the central key to foreign policy to attain and defend its interests in global forums. It is the amalgamation of national goals and aspirations with supremacy and abilities. The formal representatives of states and their officials influence the policies, and socio-political and economic forces can influence foreign policy as a pressure and interest group. It is to embody the national interest and convert it into the desire of the state in the future to establish its objectives. The government of a state generally determines the diverse means required to achieve them by applying different actions that signify the presence of needs and goals. Bangladesh is approaching the milestone of being a middle-income country in the coming decades with her blatant young labour force that also needs proper attention for education and engagement in the

<sup>12</sup> MAOZ 1990: 77-110; KEOHANE 1984.



labour market for the national production to increase the growth and development of her economy (Figure 1). It is apparent that modern education with sound technological development can build a knowledge-based generation, which is the national goal for Bangladesh to continue its growth and development in the coming years. Besides, it is vital to provide adequate opportunities for modern and advanced educational facilities for youth at home and abroad. To this end, a bilateral partnership with Western and industrialised countries can help to minimise the cost of equipping this young force and provide additional benefits for both sides. Malaysia performed a terrific job with its look east policy to train and educate her youth in the 20s, encouraging them to jump into the process of development, and the consequences are visible to all. The bilateral relationship with Hungary can help in this respect to increase the quality of knowledge and skills among the youth, and they can subsequently contribute to the home nation for their development.

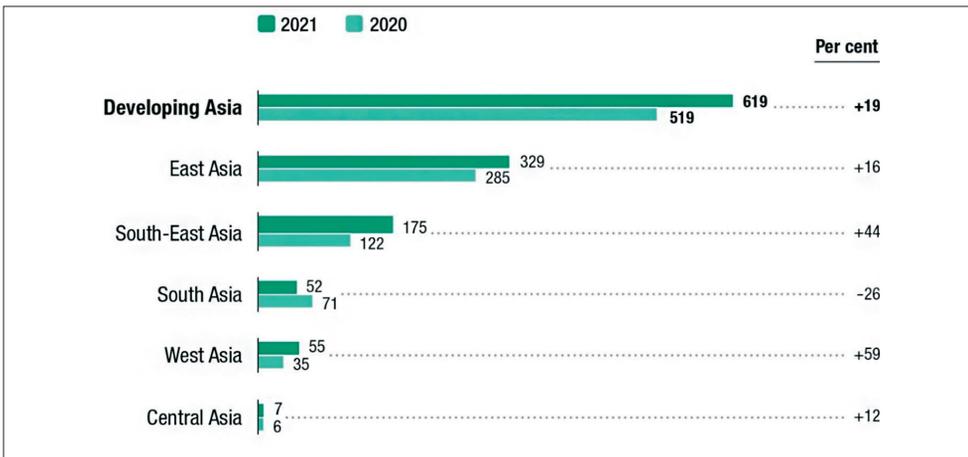


Figure 2: FDI flows to developing countries in Asia and sub-regions, 2020–2021 (billions of dollars)

Source: UNCTAD 2022.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) tides improved robustly in 2021 in every part of the world. The FDI flows in the industrialised economy expanded due to their greater financial mechanisms, while the flow of FDI also significantly increased in developing countries.<sup>13</sup> In 2021, the FDI flow climbed by 30%, which is the highest ever because of the solid increase in Asia, including, at a partial level, in Africa and Latin America (Figure 2). That is why it is suitable for developed countries to invest in Bangladesh, as it has available logistics for the industry along with a cheap and trained labour force to enhance economic development both for the investors and the country. The bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and Hungary can help both sides to minimise the cost of trained and skilled manpower, as it already has a strong connection to promote education and new skills through the bilateral educational program. The brief historical chronology of

<sup>13</sup> UNCTAD 2022.



bilateral interactions between Bangladesh and Hungary is provided below to comprehend the legacy of the alliance since the independence of Bangladesh (Figure 3).

1972	Trade Agreement between Bangladesh and Hungary
1973	Bangladeshi students and scientist
1975	Economic Cooperation Agreement
1982	Cultural and Scientific Cooperation Agreement
2016	Credit line for cooperation between Hungarian and Bangladeshi Companies
	Hungarian Government offers 100 scholarships to young people in Bangladesh to study in Hungarian educational institutions
	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hungary concerning water resources
	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hungary concerning agriculture
2020	The Hungarian Government extended the 100 scholarships to 130 to students from Bangladesh and MoU in the Field of Diplomatic Training and the Exchange of Information and Documentation and Joint Communiqué
2022	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Field of Medical Education and Healthcare between Bangladesh and Hungary

Figure 3: Historical chronology of bilateral relationship

Source: <https://en.bangladesh.hu/relations/>; <https://bangladeshpost.net/posts/bangladesh-hungary-embark-on-new-relation-42024>

Sustainable development, climate change effects, and continuously changing global political features put pressure on establishing stronger relationships with other nations to promote development and tackle use situations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bangladesh and Hungary want to establish a mutually beneficial and healthy relationship spanning across education, health and business, with the goal of advancing these areas as national priorities. Besides the energy sector becoming more crucial for Bangladesh due to a growing economy and global unrest, as a result, Bangladesh and Hungary also agreed to develop and train human resources for the energy sector to expedite the development process and give priority to future goals in the interest of Bangladesh. Hungary is one of those countries that recognised Bangladesh for the very first after its independence and supported it during the war of liberation. The formal relationship was established in January 1972, and Hungary inaugurated its embassy in Dhaka in 1973 as a sign of cordial and friendly relations.



## EU regulatory framework for regional and bilateral cooperation

For many years, European regional policy has played a vital role in enhancing the quality of life for people throughout the continent.<sup>14</sup> Now, a new generation of inter-reg programs will enhance cooperation within the EU by developing joint services and strengthening solidarity. Interreg serves as the Union's tool for territorial cooperation, offering funding for projects and initiatives that involve different regions.<sup>15</sup> The main objectives guiding EU investments until 2027 encompass two aspects: promoting better cooperation governance and establishing a safer, more secure Europe. Under these new objectives, interreg will continue supporting cross-border mobility, environmental protection, emergency services, skilled jobs and access to public services for the upcoming EU generation. The current priorities revolve around cross-border cooperation across all EU land and maritime borders, transnational cooperation encompassing macro-regions and sea basins, the peace plus program dedicated to facilitating reconciliation between the border countries and inter-regional cooperation aimed at fostering networks and allowing leading regions to share their success and experience with other territories.<sup>16</sup> Over 80 measures have been implemented to simplify access to this type of support after 2020, regardless of whether you are a public authority, school, youth organisation, or hospital. These changes include shorter, clearer rules with reduced bureaucracy and streamlined implementation, with a focus on grassroots cooperation to drive a green and digital coronavirus recovery. Interreg enables European regions to learn from one another and address common challenges using shared solutions.

The European Union (EU) framework for bilateral cooperation with third world countries is a comprehensive approach to supporting economic and social development in partner countries. The EU's cooperation framework is based on a set of policies, programs and instruments designed to address a range of development challenges faced by third world countries.<sup>17</sup> One of the key instruments used by the EU to provide development assistance to its partner countries is the European Development Fund (EDF).<sup>18</sup> The EDF is a financial instrument financed by EU member states that provides development assistance to partner countries in areas such as infrastructure, health care, education and governance. The fund has supported a wide range of development projects, including the construction of roads and bridges, the provision of clean water and sanitation and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

In addition to the EDF, the EU also provides support to partner countries through other programs, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). These programs are designed to support partner countries in areas such as democracy, human rights, conflict prevention and economic

<sup>14</sup> HOLLAND-DOIDGE 2012.

<sup>15</sup> BRETHERTON-VOGLER 1999; European Union 2021b.

<sup>16</sup> LISTER 1997.

<sup>17</sup> BRETHERTON-VOGLER 1999; European Union 2021b.

<sup>18</sup> HILL et al. 2017.



development. The EU’s cooperation framework also emphasises the importance of promoting sustainable development in partner countries. To this end, the EU works with partner countries to support the development of sustainable economic growth, improve access to education and health care, and protect the environment. The EU also supports initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and inequality in partner countries.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the EU’s framework for bilateral cooperation with third world countries is aimed at promoting sustainable development, poverty reduction and the protection of human rights. The EU provides support through a range of policies, programs and instruments, and works closely with partner countries to develop tailored solutions to their specific development challenges.<sup>20</sup>

### Conceptual framework

Bangladesh and Hungary have a bilateral partnership that aims to advance, revitalise, and ensure economic sustainability and prosperity through business, education and technology transfer with a particular focus on the future development of a knowledge-based economy. Bangladesh has earned the right to be referred to be one of the world’s fastest-growing and emerging nations in light of its recent progress toward middle-income status.

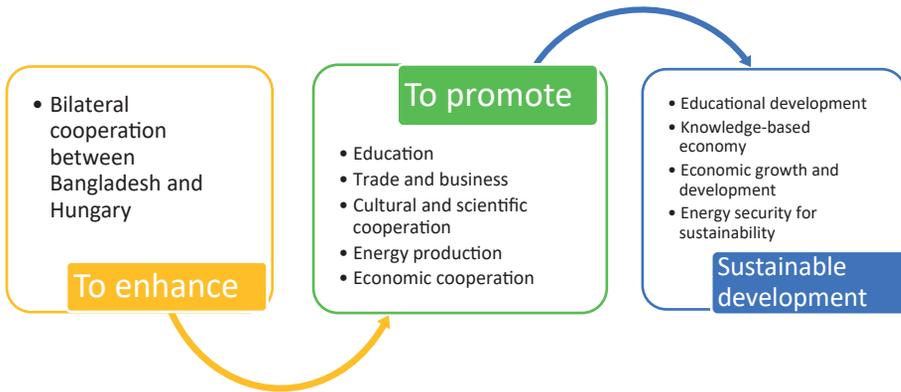


Figure 4: Conceptual framework of bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and Hungary

Source: Compiled by the authors.

As a result, it is necessary to equip the economic and political condition along with manpower that can contribute to the growth and development of the economy for future sustainability. Development is a multifaceted process that requires several forms of assistance to strengthen and speed up a nation. It also necessitates partnerships and cooperation with other nations in order to exchange goods and services, as well as

<sup>19</sup> CARBONE 2010: 13–29; GRILLI 1993; SATTICH et al. 2019: 502–514.

<sup>20</sup> European Union 2011; European Union 2021a.



knowledge and skills, for mutual gain. The national interests of both Bangladesh and Hungary are the foundation of their bilateral cooperation and collaboration, which aims to provide equal benefits in terms of social and economic benefits for sustainable development. These relationships generally shed light on education, energy, trade and business, and cultural and scientific collaboration with economic cooperation for shared advantages. The following conceptual framework addresses the factors and the central aspects of bilateral cooperation between these two nations and how these variables contribute to the sustainable development of a reciprocal basis for both countries in the coming years (Figure 4). These factors can also influence the other sustainable development goals indirectly which can enable both nations to attain their desired objectives based on the relationship.

## Research methodology

The study on bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and Hungary sheds light on sustainable development achievements through the lens of mutual partnership to promote sustainable development. The study followed desk research and collected data from secondary sources to conclude the findings of the research based on the objectives of the study. The research methodology, in a study, is not only a compendium of tools and techniques but also the establishment of values, particularly regarding the philosophy of science, hypotheses, norms and ethics, which become the guidelines to interpret the collected data to conclude, featuring benchmarks to evaluate the quality of the findings of the study. The researcher employed secondary sources to make the data nuanced and authentic, comprising published articles from different journals, grey literature, blogs, different websites, newspaper articles and books. An inductive and rational analysis approach was used to analyse the qualitative data for this research<sup>21</sup> to fulfil the research objectives.

## Findings on bilateral relations and sustainable development

### *Intergovernmental cooperation and poverty reduction (Goal 1)*

Poverty is one of the biggest challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which developing countries are struggling to encounter to elevate themselves into the upper stage of the development process and attain sustainable development goals. The first and prime objective of the SDGs is to reduce poverty for all (Figure 5). However, scholars agree that poverty has dimensions that are relative in various economies and countries as well. It is necessary to comprehend all dimensions of poverty that need to be prioritised by leaders, scholars and development partners to promote sustainable development. For the time being,

<sup>21</sup> MARSHALL–ROSSMAN 1989.



developing countries are trying and planning, since they have started their journey as democratic governments, to reduce their massive poverty and ensure fundamental rights and services for their citizens. To this end, countries were developing their diplomatic relations with other countries to manage the situation and alter their socio-economic and political conditions. Despite the fact that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive strategy to guarantee equitable development for all, individuals with pre-existing socio-political and economic statuses are particularly vulnerable since they are unable to ride the bus to the SDGs.



Figure 5: EU trend of SDG 1 on No Poverty

Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=SDG\\_1\\_-\\_No\\_poverty&oldid=566805](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=SDG_1_-_No_poverty&oldid=566805)

The report of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on “The Role of Trade in Ending Poverty” summarises the ways that fuel economic growth to create new jobs, increase the wages of labourers, reduce the price of necessary goods for the poor, and expand opportunities for the poor to access external markets with their produced goods and services.<sup>22</sup> “Trade has played a critical role in poverty reduction [...] the further integration of developing countries into an open global economy will be essential for achieving the goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030.”<sup>23</sup> Devashish Mitra found a positive correlation and “significant effect” of trade on poverty reduction in an economy.<sup>24</sup> He also found that the increment of one percent in trade is allied with the deterioration of poverty at 0.149%, while a one percent decrease in average tariff is connected with the decline of poverty at 0.4%.

<sup>22</sup> World Trade Organization 2015.

<sup>23</sup> World Bank 2018.

<sup>24</sup> MITRA 2016.



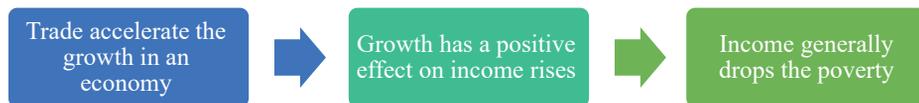


Figure 6: Relationships of trade, growth and poverty

Source: Compiled by the authors.

It is also evident from studies that trade and trade-allied diplomacy have had a strong influence on a recent pragmatic analysis of trade. As a result, trade and diplomatic relations are rigorously connected to strengthen the socioeconomic condition and increase economic growth for both sides,<sup>25</sup> positively affecting poverty (Figure 6). In light of this, political stability is crucial for fostering mutual trust and minimising risks, as is the construction of embassies and consulates to improve information sharing for potential future opportunities and lessen the trade-off between investment and export.<sup>26</sup>

## *Bilateral relations, good health and well-being (Goal 2)*

The world is changing over time due to the advancement of science and technology and the spread of the local economy from a regional to a global level. In the age of globalisation, we are depending on decisions when we are making any social, political and economic decision in response to sustainable development. Sustainable development means to “meet the present needs without compromising the needs for future generations”,<sup>27</sup> where it will balance with the current needs and future demands equally considering society, economy and environment. The population explosion in Bangladesh demands new shelter, new roads, energy and food to complement the standard of living for the people. Climate change and global warming are the key reasons for the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem, and Bangladesh is one of the most severely affected countries in the world and needs cooperation and help to ensure a sustainable livelihood for its vast population.

Public health is endangered due to several challenges that political and geographical boundaries cannot control within their territory, while a partnership with other countries based on mutual interest can only build a convenient situation for them to control and initiate adaptation mechanisms for future sustainability. Expansion and acceleration of global trade, human migration and population explosion intensify the evolution and adaptation of the risk of diseases and virus ecosystems that make the control of diseases very challenging. Besides, the adaptation of zoonotic pathogens to new hosts and ecosystems also poses new challenges to the control of zoonoses.

<sup>25</sup> YAKOP-VAN BERGEIJK 2011: 253–267.

<sup>26</sup> VAN BERGEIJK 2009; YAKOP-VAN BERGEIJK 2011: 253–267.

<sup>27</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development 1987.



In this context, prevention and control of health risks and zoonoses need comprehensive efforts of professionals from medical and health science combined from all parts of the world. However, it is not so easy to build and maintain such partnerships in long-term and critical situations. The Hungarian Government supports Bangladesh in several critical situations and allows doctors to visit Bangladesh and patients from Bangladesh to get proper treatments to place the relationship in a higher position for both of them. Currently, the Hungarian Government has sent a few virologists to conduct research against the Nipa virus that killed a hundred thousand people. Hungarian scientists successfully identified the virus within three hours and discovered the genomic sequence of the Nipa virus within six hours in their indigenous-designed mobile laboratory. This virus is on one of the priority disease lists because it has substantial hitters like Ebola and the current pandemic – owing to SARS-CoV-2 or Covid-19.<sup>28</sup> Despite the financial and public health capacity, Covid-19 badly affects the whole world and it becomes more challenging for those who have a high-density population in their countries. Bangladesh is one of them who were in a perilous situation due to Covid-19 virus infections. The Hungarian Government offered and donated 530,000 AstraZeneca doses of vaccines for the people of Bangladesh based on the “especially good” bilateral economic and political relation, which was the second-highest donation ever from Hungary to other countries.<sup>29</sup> It is needless to emphasise that the support for Bangladesh in this critical moment represents the real friend for their people from afar that Hungary has shown. It can also provide double benefits for all, as many individuals from Bangladesh frequently visit Europe, which helps secure life for both of us.

### *Quality education and bilateral relation (Goal 4)*

Education is the backbone of a nation; thus, quality education is the lifeblood of economic progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Educational collaboration is one of the oldest and most historical forms of cooperation maintained by Western and Northern countries with Southern countries around the world. It is the simplest and best approach to transmit information and technological skills from the developed world to less developed countries to support them and boost their economic growth for sustainable economic development and well-being for all. Bangladesh is one of the most overpopulated countries in the world, where the school-aged population is substantially higher. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), in 2019, there were roughly 23.9 million students enrolled in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Data is the only government institution that is responsible for the collection, compilation and dissemination of the country’s educational data and information. In the wing of the education ministry, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) administer education in Bangladesh; those two ministries are responsible for maintaining the education system

<sup>28</sup> LICSKAY 2022.

<sup>29</sup> The Szoboszló Sun 2021.



in Bangladesh, for example, building curriculum, teachers training, staff requirements, etc. Primary, secondary and higher education, or tertiary are the three primary parts of the Bangladesh education system. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) is responsible for both formal and informal primary education, while the MoE is responsible for the remainder of education. In a case of government schools, primary and secondary education is fully free, and there are no tuition costs. In addition to that, the non-governmental elementary and secondary schools are also run with some aid from the Government of Bangladesh. According to the Compulsory Education Act of 1990, the entry age for primary education is 6 years. The junior secondary, secondary and higher education admission age is accordingly for age groups 11 to 13, 14 to 15 and 16 to 17. Secondary education is followed by higher education such as technical, engineering, agriculture, business studies and medical streams, which require four years to acquire a bachelor's degree and one or two years (depending on institutions) to obtain a master's degree. Medical is special since the completion of a medical undergraduate degree requires five years. Both Bangla and English-medium-based studies are available at every level of Bangladesh's education system, albeit it depends on institutions. For example, most public-sponsored schools use the Bangla medium, whereas private-sponsored schools use the English medium of instruction. On the other hand, at the university level, most universities provide the English language as the medium of instruction. However, the National University offers both Bangla and English for their study curricula, and the medium of instruction is flexible there.

The existing education system in Bangladesh is more or less similar to that of other Asian countries, from the primary level to the university level. At the elementary level, more than a hundred thousand public and private educational institutions in Bangladesh have twenty million pupils and more than seven hundred thousand professors. At the secondary level, over twenty thousand public and private educational institutions in Bangladesh have ten million pupils and more than two hundred thousand teachers. Whereas, at the university level, there are just 148 public and private universities with roughly 1.18 million students and thirty thousand faculties.

Education is a key component of a country's development; it provides the skilled manpower for a country. According to UNDP (2020), Bangladesh's Human Development Index (HDI) ranking is 133 in the world, which is not a very good situation. In this HDI index education is a major component. The HDI Education Index (the average of mean years of schooling of adults and predicted years of schooling of children) for Bangladesh in 2019 is 0.529; however, a very high HDI index linked countries mainly developed countries' average Education Index is 0.858. The most desirable countries for a study are the USA, Canada, the U.K., Australia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Germany and Japan. Those countries' education indexes in 2019 are 0.9, 0.89, 0.93, 0.92, 0.73, 0.91, 0.94 and 0.85, respectively. On the other hand, from 2013 to 2018, government expenditure on education in Bangladesh was barely 2% of the GDP. But the literacy rate in Bangladesh has grown in recent years, from 58.8% in 2011 to 73.9% in 2018. In Bangladesh, the percentage of primary schools having access to the Internet is only 4%, and the percentage



of secondary schools with access to the Internet is 35% from 2010 to 2019, while in industrialised countries it is about 100%. In Australia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, South Korea, Switzerland, Hungary, France, Italy and Norway, the percentage of primary schools with access to the internet is only 100%, 97%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 98%, 70% and 100%. The percentage of secondary schools with access to the internet is 100%, 96%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 99%, 99%, 88% and 100% from 2010 to 2019. Compared with those developed countries, Bangladesh is far behind in the digitalisation of education, which has diminished the country's overall educational value.

Every year, several thousand students leave Bangladesh to study abroad, with or without scholarships. Gradually, the number of outbound internationally mobile tertiary students studying overseas from Bangladesh is increasing. In 2007, this internationally mobile number was only more than sixteen thousand, which was highest at sixty-two thousand in 2016; this students' mobility increased almost four times within 10 years difference, according to the latest data from the World Bank in 2018, where the number of internationally outbound tertiary students enrolled abroad is around five thousand. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh and the Government of Hungary established a bilateral relationship. Every year, Hungary will take 100 potential students from Bangladesh to study at their renowned universities, with 20 students for PhD, 60 students for master's degrees and 20 students for undergraduate studies. In 2019, Bangladeshi students started to come to this scholarship program that is called Stipendium Hungaricum.

Fortunately, this year the Hungarian Foreign Ministry and Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry negotiated another accord and agreed that from 2021 they will receive 30 more students for nuclear engineering studies. This scholarship program provides a tremendous opportunity for Bangladeshi students to visit the European Union zone. Through this partnership, Bangladeshi students can receive the opportunity to gain the education and technical skills that can contribute to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh in the coming days.

### *Clean water, affordable and clean energy through bilateral cooperation (Goal 7)*

Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Hungary concerning water resources. Bangladesh is the land of rivers; however, mismanagement, sudden flash floods, heavy monsoons, and soil and river bank erosion made rivers more complex to manage. Moreover, government oversight and implementation of embankment and river control initiatives were inadequate, which complicated the situation overall and increased the risk to public safety. This was especially problematic from an ecological perspective towards sustainable development.



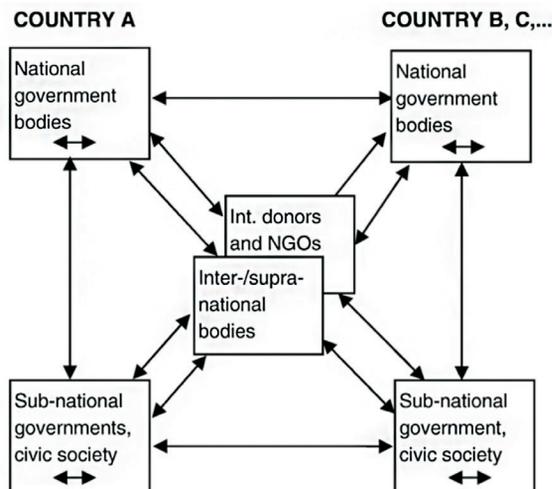


Figure 7: Structural framework for collaborative governance in transboundary water management

Source: PAHL-WOSTL et al. 2008: 490.

Hungary, including other European countries, saved their Danube nicely, and this experience can be beneficial for Bangladesh to save the country from desertification in the future when climate change effects have adversely affected the world and Bangladesh is one of the most affected. Besides, the agricultural production of Bangladesh is largely dependent on irrigation. Rice, wheat, corn, and other vegetable products demand significant water consumption during cultivation, which becomes easier when the river can hold adequate water during and after the monsoon. In addition, water preservation is vital to preserve the groundwater table for safe drinking water and irrigation where planned and conserved water is unavailable.

Integrated water management of local and international rivers and transboundary rivers faces challenges in merging the bureaucratic, legal, cultural, organisational and financial traditions at a variety of scales. It is necessary to involve diverse cultures in the management of water resources when we desire to incorporate wider issues and stakeholders to shift the paradigm of water management (Figure 7). Besides, it is also useful to share the experiences that already drive leading practices in water management.<sup>30</sup> Bangladesh is a small country compared to India, China and Myanmar, which is why cooperation in the management of local and transboundary water is crucial for us due to environmental vulnerability and the adverse effects of climate change.<sup>31</sup> In addition, transboundary water management is directly connected with the planning of the river basin of any riverine country like Bangladesh and it supports sustainable development.

<sup>30</sup> PAHL-WOSTL et al. 2008: 484–495.

<sup>31</sup> KOFF–MAGANDA 2015: 231–250.



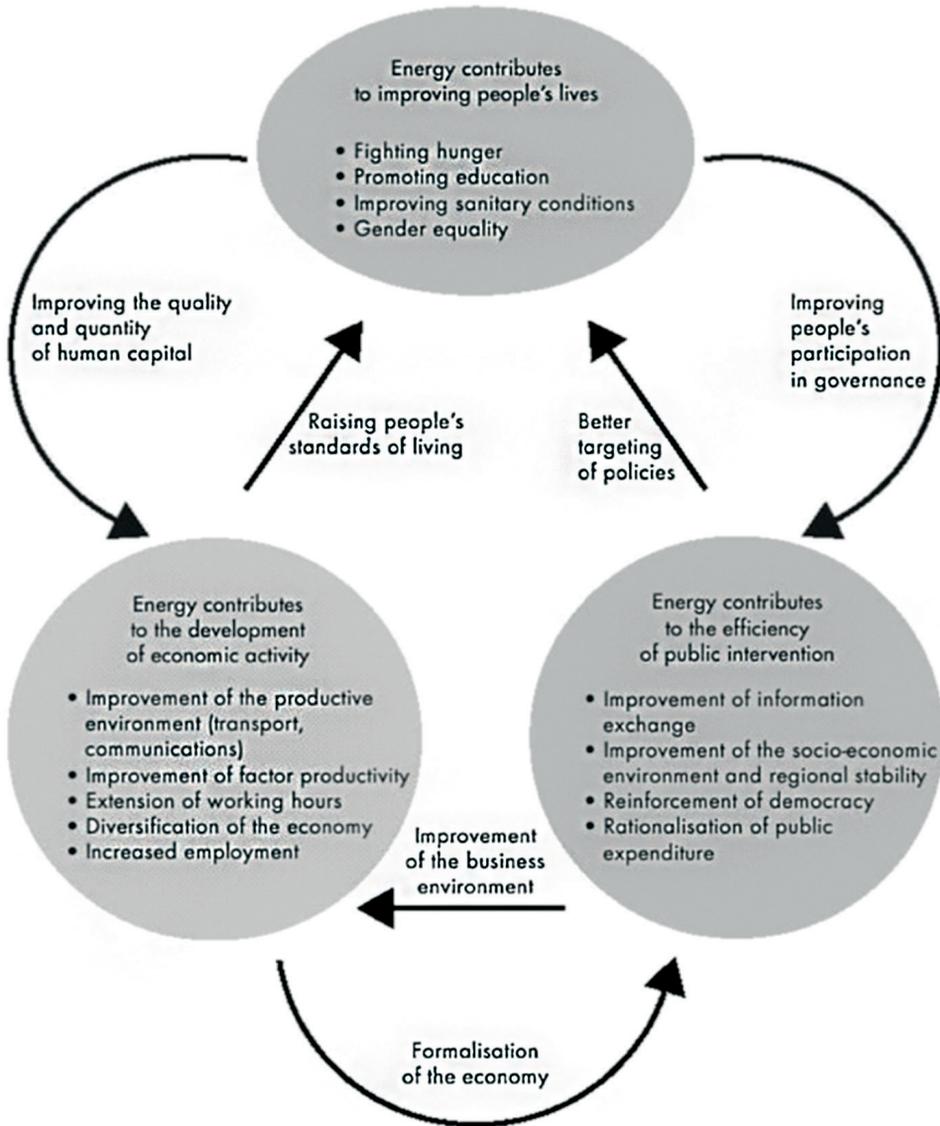


Figure 8: Nexus between energy and human, economic and social development

Source: KAYGUSUZ 2012: 1120.

It also promotes regional and international cooperation for water resources through the mechanisms of governance and shared experiences.<sup>32</sup> As a result, Hungarian experiences will be an excellent pathway for Bangladesh to manage the local and transboundary rivers for sustainable development in the future which might be realistic through

<sup>32</sup> KOFF-MAGANDA 2015: 231-250.



this bilateral collaboration in water management. “Energy is seen not simply as an instrument of influence in itself, but as underpinning other forms of power: military, political, economic, technological, cultural and soft power.”<sup>33</sup> The availability of energy is also crucial for smooth and steady economic development, while countries and global leaders are approaching Industrial Revolution 4. Bilateral relation is of key importance to overcome the challenges Bangladesh faces in the modern financial, organisational and technological context due to the requirement of building capacity to scale up the utilisation of up-to-date services related to energy at the domestic and regional level for sustainable development.<sup>34</sup>

Energy offers a worthy series of socio-economic advancement that is necessary for developing countries for sustainable development.<sup>35</sup> It can contribute to and reduce sustainable development due to the interaction of technical advancement, legal policies, markets, social norms and human behaviours, not only in the energy sector but also in other related sectors (Figure 8). Thus, the correlation between energy and sustainable development is complicated; it can be positive or negative. Therefore, the poverty of energy is widespread in both developed and developing countries which depends on the various interrelated aspects that directly or indirectly push the availability of energy in a certain country or region. For this reason, the bilateral, regional connection with countries is crucial for every nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to overcome energy poverty and accelerate the development process. Bangladesh has a good relationship with the regional and global superpowers as well as the bordering countries in numerous aspects which make them one of the emerging economies of the world. The global media, financial and development partners have also tracked the economic success of Bangladesh and it has earned the right to be called one of the fastest-growing and emergent economies of the world. Hungary, from central Europe, has had a good connection with Bangladesh since its independence, which became stronger over time and strengthened in recent times with different major bilateral development projects and a memorandum of understanding for social and economic development for both countries.

The energy sector receives the spotlight the next time due to local and global energy crises and the expansion of the scale of production for economic development and sustainability. It can only be accomplished by the organisation and deployment of technologies that are efficient and less pricey and can provide adequate cleaner and inexpensive energy. To bear in mind the goals, both countries pledged to support each other and develop the human and technological resources for future sustainability in the energy sector. Bangladesh is going to construct a nuclear power plant in 2023 which was started decades ago with the cooperation of Russia. Hungary has also employed the same technology for its nuclear power plant from the beginning; as a result, it offered Bangladesh to provide technical support and committed to sharing its expertise through human resource development and logistics in energy production.<sup>36</sup> To

<sup>33</sup> PETERSEN–BARYSCH 2011.

<sup>34</sup> KAYGUSUZ 2012: 1116–1126.

<sup>35</sup> ZHAO et al. 2022.

<sup>36</sup> The Budapest Times 2022.



extend the collaboration further the Hungarian Government offered thirty scholarships to study for a bachelor's degree in nuclear energy production and engineering. Recently "Bangladesh has signed two MoUs with Hungary one on cooperation in the field of training and education of atomic industry on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and the other on diplomatic exchange program" and both countries also agreed to strengthen relation "in the economy, health, climate change, water and waste-water management, trade and investment, nuclear energy, and post-Covid recovery".<sup>37</sup> The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh also requested prolonged engagement to marshal greater support to implement the Paris Climate Agreement since Bangladesh is vulnerable to the effects of climate change.<sup>38</sup>

### *Bilateral cooperation for decent work and economic growth*

Educational migration increases all over the world as it generates various benefits for the nation in economic aspects. Students are migrating abroad to search for a better job, better technology, improved lifestyle facilities, etc.,<sup>39</sup> which sometimes can have a negative effect on the sending country if the students do not go back to their home country. In this situation, the home countries of these students will not benefit at all. Developed countries, mainly Europe and America, are initiating a lot of educational schemes that are recruiting overseas students to study there.<sup>40</sup> Bangladesh is suffering an unemployment problem because millions of graduates are looking for decent jobs after their graduation. Every year a significant number of students leave Bangladesh to study abroad with or without scholarships (Figure 9). Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education oversee various scholarship opportunities for Bangladeshi students and send them abroad. However, many of the students are departing for academic purposes without any connection between the ministries and their cooperation. The Hungarian Government scholarship which is managed by Tempus Public Foundation grants 140 scholarships for Bangladeshi students every year. This is to equip the human capital and support to construct a knowledge-based society for economic and social development and to strengthen the pathway to achieving sustainable development goals.

"We can proudly declare that despite the geographical distance between our countries, during the past decades, we built a strong friendship and cooperation based on mutual respect", Péter Szijjártó, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

<sup>37</sup> The Daily Star 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Dhaka Tribune 2022.

<sup>39</sup> HAWTHORNE 2010.

<sup>40</sup> HAWTHORNE 2010.



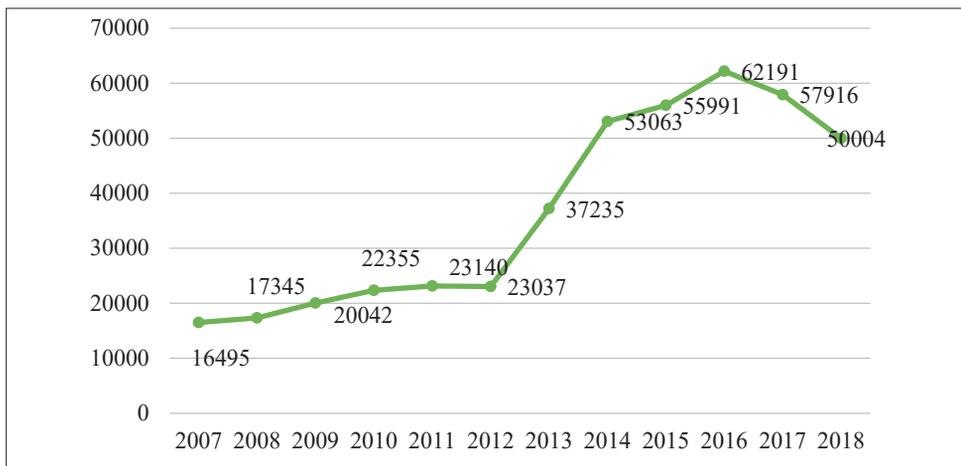


Figure 9: Bangladeshi students studying abroad (tertiary level)

Source: Compiled by the authors based on World bank 2020.

The minister claimed a new world economic order is emerging where a friend or partner like Bangladesh is necessary for success. He further noted that Bangladesh is one of the speediest rising economies in the world where there is ample opportunity for Hungarian companies to invest which directly impacts the labour market and economy. Therefore, it can offer job opportunities for educated graduates and raise the national income by exporting their products to different parts of the world. Besides, the students who are studying in Hungary can gain suitable education and skills that favourably benefit the national and global economy. They can also return to their home and use their knowledge and skills in various fields to boost economic development with the sustainable use of money, resources and energy for future sustainability.

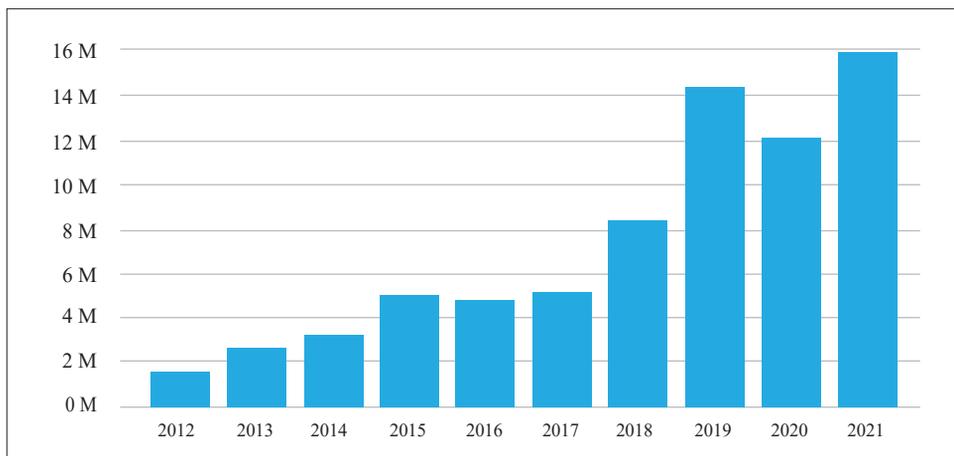


Figure 10: The export value of Bangladeshi products to Hungary 2012–2021

Source: Trading Economics 2022.



Hungary imports apparel, knit, or crocheted products that made the highest volume (\$6.17 million) of export from Bangladesh side, and optical, photo, technological and medical apparatus made the second most in 2021 which is \$4.45M (Figure 10). Besides, Bangladesh exports other textile goods, sets, tobacco and tobacco substitutes, electrical and electronic equipment, footwear, gaiters, vegetable textile fibres, toys, games, sports requisites, rubber, etc. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced that this year the Government of Hungary launched its consular office in Dhaka. Trade cooperation has expanded swiftly in recent times between Bangladesh and Hungary, while trade volume climbed by 40% last year.

### *Cultural cooperation, bilateral relations, and sustainable development*

The importance of culture in achieving sustainable development goals has received cumulative attention but is still underrated. It has also gained mounting attention as a driver of sustainable development goals in the contemporary literature on sustainable development.<sup>41</sup> The Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expression 2005, its article number 13 focuses on the integration of culture in sustainable development policies.<sup>42</sup> Since then, it has become a hot topic among academicians and researchers, why culture is crucial for sustainable development and how they are connected. However, after several discussions and debates, scholars failed to get a specific goal in sustainable development goals.<sup>43</sup> The fight continued to include culture in a specific goal of SDGs, in support of this UNESCO proposed and developed a framework to assess the contribution of culture to the achievement of SDGs and inspire the actions to integrate.<sup>44</sup>

The governments of Bangladesh and Hungary agreed on cultural and scientific cooperation in 1982. There have not been many exchanges for cultural troupes in recent years. However, the Hungarian children participated in an international event in 2009 at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Children Art Biennale Bangladesh which was organised by the Bangladesh Shishu Academy. Besides the honorary ambassador of Bangladesh Dr. Pataki has done a tremendous job for the Bangladeshi children and adults, especially for those who are affected by the fire. He has been offered to work as an honorary ambassador since 2018. He also helped to equip the first burn hospital in Bangladesh – Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, which was established with the support of the Action for Defenceless People Foundation; and it is the biggest plastic surgery institute in the world. As a result, culture is an important source of innovation and identification for cooperation and creativity for the person and community; and is a crucial feature in constructing collective attachment and poverty alleviation, offering economic growth and ownership of development. However, the role of culture depends

<sup>41</sup> ZHENG et al. 2021: 307–319.

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO 2005.

<sup>43</sup> ZHENG et al. 2021: 307–319.

<sup>44</sup> UNESCO 2019.



on the diversity of understandings of cultures in sustainable development – from visible to nonvisible, symbolic to achievement, and values and norms of communities.<sup>45</sup>

## Result discussions

Partnership is essential for the achievement of sustainable development goals for every nation. In this global world, each and every nation is somehow dependent on and connected to other nations for their needs. In recent times, the effect of Covid-19 has slowed down the economic growth of every nation of the world and hampered the development process.<sup>46</sup> It is also proven by the crisis that partnerships in any crisis, like the Covid-19 pandemic, can manage it smartly to overcome the critical situation. Sustainable development is a goal that needs equal partnership at the regional and global levels to share responsibility.<sup>47</sup> The partnership can also help improve collective actions regionally and globally to strengthen the sustainable development process.

The effects and infections of Covid-19 have been managed and saved the lives of the global community so far with the cooperation of all countries, both affected and less affected nations of the world. It is the first time in the history of the world that no pandemic or global crisis has gotten enough priority from researchers, leaders, businessmen and policy-makers to save the lives of the global community. The economic condition of the countries has remarkably slowed down due to Covid-19 which required a mutual partnership to promote the challenges into opportunities for inclusive economic growth for all. The World Bank explained the prospective ways to recover from the contemporary global crisis (Figure 11). In addition to all this, the war between Russia and Ukraine has had a significant impact on global trade and business.

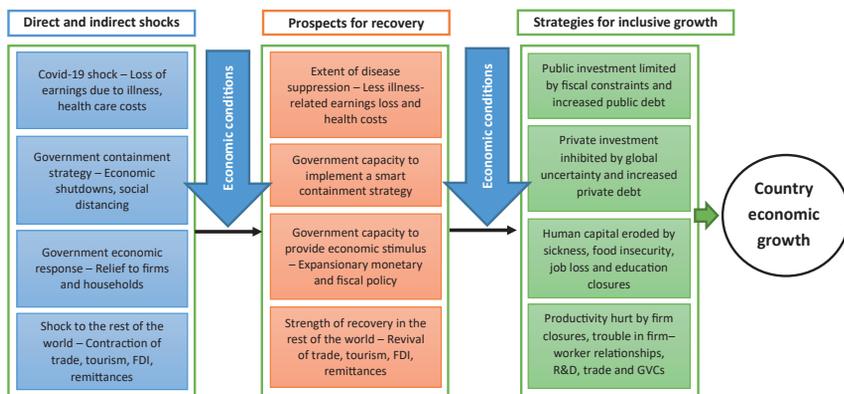


Figure 11: Covid-19 shocks, recovery prospects and strategies for inclusive economic growth

Source: Compiled by the authors based on World Bank 2020.

<sup>45</sup> SOINI–BIRKELAND 2014: 213–223.

<sup>46</sup> CHATTU–CHAMI 2020; GOFFMAN 2020: 48–52; HALBEM et al. 2020: 78–79; HOPMAN et al. 2020: 1549–1550; TRINQUETEL 2020; LEAL FILHO et al. 2021: 85–99.

<sup>47</sup> CHATTERJEE 2019: 171–199; HUDA 2020; KHEMKA–KUMAR 2019; SIEGEL 2016: 713–730; United Nations 2008; United Nations Bangladesh 2021.



The foreign and regional policies become reshaped due to the national interests of the nations to ensure security and promote sustainable development goals during the war. It also increases long-term crises like inflation and slow economic growth for most countries and global food crises for mass populations.

Studies have found that the impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine will extend the suffering in the long run both for developed and developing countries.<sup>48</sup> Amid the recent global crisis, “the rise in inflation has been more pronounced in emerging and developing countries. Inflation affects the poorest and weakest most and contributes to increasing inequalities worldwide”.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the rapid fall in global share prices and the increasing rate of exchange rates of the U.S. dollar increases the inflation in those countries where their currency is depreciating. As a result, this situation has directed the IMF to significantly lower its economic forecasts related to last January, especially for emerging economies like Bangladesh, worsening the loss of growth suffered by the country due to the pandemic (Figure 12).

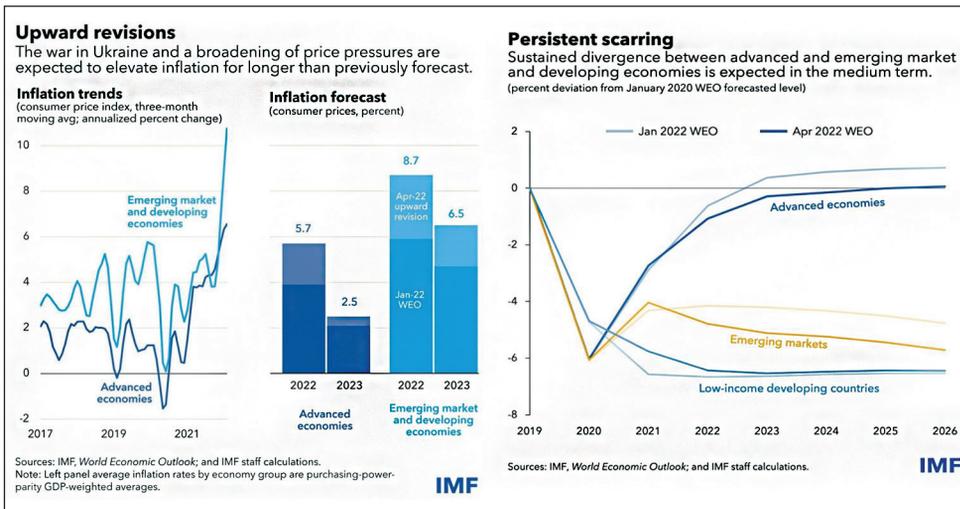


Figure 12: Effects of the Ukraine war on the global economy

Source: BORRELL 2022.

This war has directly affected both Bangladesh and Hungary as they have a good business connection with Russia and Ukraine due to food, energy and other security-related issues. The global bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and Hungary is considered one of the greatest partnerships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when it supersedes the geographical boundaries and distance between them and mutually agreed on their development priorities for sustainable development. The relationship between these two countries also balances the trade-off between them and transfers the development policies and experiences through tickle-down policy from both sides that solidify the bilateral

<sup>48</sup> BORRELL 2022; United Nations 2022; MASTERTSON 2022.

<sup>49</sup> BORRELL 2022.



relationships between them. The political stability in these countries also pushes them to identify their national interest beyond their continental boundaries to come closer and promote mutually beneficial projects and programs and development partnerships. Among the various policies educational, economic and energy-related cooperation has got the highest priority so far between the countries. Trade and business are also sharply increasing and the volume of the trade is rising consecutively.

## Conclusions

The current global landscape is undergoing profound changes driven by scientific, technological and economic advancements, alongside a commitment to sustainable development. This era of globalisation has interconnected nations across social, political and economic spheres. A central focus within this transformation is sustainable development, which aims to meet current needs without compromising the well-being of future generations. This principle seeks to balance present demands with future aspirations, taking into account societal, economic and environmental considerations.

Bangladesh is contending with a growing population and the imperative to establish new infrastructure, secure energy sources and ensure food supply. This challenge is compounded by the looming threat of climate change, which disproportionately affects the country through biodiversity loss and disruptions to ecosystems. Challenges in public health transcend national borders, necessitating cross-border collaboration to manage and adapt to health risks. The complexities of disease transmission are amplified by global trade, human mobility and population growth, particularly concerning diseases originating from animals. Addressing these complexities requires a united global effort involving medical and healthcare professionals. Hungary's invaluable support during critical periods has solidified its relationship with Bangladesh. This collaboration, exemplified by Hungarian medical professionals' visits and treatment of Bangladeshi patients, embodies genuine friendship. This partnership gains even greater significance during global crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. Hungary's contribution to vaccines underscores the mutual benefits of international cooperation. Education stands as a pivotal factor for economic progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Collaborative educational exchanges between developed and developing nations facilitate the transfer of knowledge and technical skills. Bangladesh, with a significant student population, emphasises primary, secondary and higher education. However, challenges like limited internet access hinder progress. Despite these hurdles, Bangladesh's literacy rates have improved over time. Initiatives like the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program offer the potential for Bangladeshi students to contribute to their country's development.

Given Bangladesh's abundant water resources, effective water management is crucial in light of climate change and inadequate river governance. Hungary's expertise in river conservation, particularly the Danube River, offers valuable insights. With agriculture and irrigation central to the country's economy, efficient water management is vital for both economic stability and environmental health. Energy availability plays a pivotal role in economic progress and overall sustainability. The complex interplay between energy and development is influenced by technology, policy, markets and



societal behaviour. Bangladesh's partnership with Hungary in nuclear energy production and engineering provides opportunities for skill development and economic growth, aligning with global trends in sustainable energy sources. While cultural cooperation is acknowledged as a catalyst for sustainable development, its integration into specific Sustainable Development Goals remains a topic of discussion. The role of culture varies, but it contributes to innovation, identity formation, poverty reduction and community growth. Hungary's cultural contributions to Bangladesh and individuals like Dr. Pataki exemplify how culture fosters empathy, understanding and progress.

In summary, the evolving global landscape underscores the significance of international cooperation for sustainable development. Collaborative efforts spanning health, education, water management, energy production and cultural exchange form the bedrock of bilateral relationships between countries like Bangladesh and Hungary. These partnerships not only address immediate challenges but also foster long-term economic prosperity, societal advancement and overall sustainability. As the world grapples with complex challenges such as climate change, pandemic response and technological advancements, effective cooperation remains pivotal for shaping a better future. The study is the first academic research on the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Hungary and it is needless to say that the findings of the study require more empirical research through the primary data that can provide more accurate pros and cons of the relationships that can foster the sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for both countries by the partnership.

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