

### Press Release

## **a2i & Action Aid Bangladesh jointly host policy dialogue on SME's in Covid 19: Response, Recover and Resilience**

**Dhaka: 17 August 2020:** Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme of the ICT Division and the Cabinet Division, supported by UNDP in partnership with the Action Aid Bangladesh jointly hosted a Policy Dialogue on 'SMEs in COVID-19: Response, Recover and Resilience' over the virtual platform. Mr. Md. Mostaque Hassan, ndc, Chairman (Additional Secretary), Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation was the Chief Guest and Ms. Salina Pervez, Joint Project Director (Joint Secretary), a2i, was the Chair of the event. Mr. Anir Chowdhury, Policy Advisor of a2i moderated the policy dialogue.

The event was organized with an aim of holding discussions among policymakers, development experts and panelists on the important issue of challenges faced by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during the Covid-19 crisis, and what responses could be taken to help the sector recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Mr. Asad Uz-Zaman, Head of the Future of Work Lab, a2i, gave a keynote presentation on the hard hit SME industry. With well articulated information and insightful data, he presented the adverse financial strains faced by small and medium enterprises due to the coronavirus, the job losses that took place, the skills gap that persists in the sector and how workers could be reintegrated into new sectors to enable new work opportunities.

Policy Advisor of a2i Mr. Anir Chowdhury conducted a moderated panel discussion to allow experts to voice their opinions and talk about the importance of all stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, development organizations and others in helping the SME sector recover.

Mr. Md. Mostaque Hassan, ndc, Chairman (Additional Secretary), Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, and also the Chief Guest of the event said, "Financing of SMEs is the important step in helping the industry recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic. There should be a recovery fund to help the sector recover. Furthermore, restrictions imposed by banks should be eased to help SME entrepreneurs' access loans."

Mr. Md. Shafiqul Islam, Managing Director, Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation (SMEF) stressed on the importance of bringing SME entrepreneurs in one platform and build their capacity for online based business activities. "We need to expand the market through the use of technology and conduct social campaigns to market our local products and incorporate policies to facilitate an enabling environment for SMEs," he said.

Focusing on the significance of policy reforms, funding, digitization and capacity development for SMEs to recover from the losses brought by the pandemic, Ms. Farah Kabir, Country Director of Action Aid Bangladesh remarked, "The government needs to establish a recovery fund especially for SMEs as they are a very important contributor to our country's economy. Similarly, SME entrepreneurs should be brought under the umbrella of digitization and their capacity should be developed accordingly. Furthermore, women and youth entrepreneurs should be encouraged."

Mr. Mirza Nurul Ghani Shovon, President, National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB) focused on how new entrepreneurs should be provided with an enabling environment for business. "The Bangladesh Bank should implement new schemes to build opportunities for new entrepreneurs and initiatives should be taken by the respective authorities to provide skills based training to them so that they are encouraged to start their business and maintain it."

Mr. Md. Abdur Razzaque, President, Bangladesh Engineering Industry Owners' Association (BEIOA) believes the government has a big role to play to facilitate the turnaround of SMEs following the crisis brought by the pandemic. "The government should facilitate financing of SMEs and at the same time adopt new policies and take key decisions to provide all the support that the small industries may require," he remarked.

A group session was also held during the program. The panelists were divided into 4 groups, with each given a topic to present on. Each group discussed and presented innovative ideas that could be implemented in the following topics: Apprenticeship, Entrepreneurship, Database of SMEs and SME Financing. Mr. Nazmul Ahsan, Manager, Action Aid Bangladesh moderated the group work session.

The Chair of the event, Joint Project Director of a2i Ms. Salina Parvez, who gave the opening remarks of the conference, also gave the closing speech and brought the session to an end. Distinguished panelists of the Policy Dialogue were Mr. Md. Abdur Razzaque, President, Bangladesh Engineering Industry Owner's Association (BEIOA), Mr. Mirza Nurul Ghani Shovon, President, National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB), Mr. Shams Mahmud, President, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Ms. Farah Kabir, Country Director, Action Aid Bangladesh and Mr. Md. Shafiqul Islam, Managing Director, Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation (SMEF).

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