

**CPD Occasional Paper Series**

**CPD'S PRE-ELECTION POLICY BRIEFS  
Results from the Identification Exercise**

**Paper 10**

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**Centre for Policy Dialogue**

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**The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)**, established in 1993, is an innovative initiative to promote an ongoing process of dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. The Centre has already organised a series of such major dialogues at local, regional and national levels. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition front benchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. The expectation of the CPD is to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well being of the country. The CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as some international dialogues.

In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of CPD include **The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), Governance and Development, Population and Sustainable Development, Trade Policy Analysis and Multilateral Trading System and Leadership Programme for the Youth**. The CPD also carries out periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and developmental concerns.

Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. Pursuant to this CPD maintains an active publication programme, both in Bangla and in English. As part of its dissemination programme, CPD has decided to bring out **CPD Occasional Paper Series** on a regular basis. Dialogue background papers, investigative reports and results of perception surveys which relate to issues of high public interest will be published under its cover. The Occasional Paper Series will also include draft research papers and reports which may be subsequently published by the CPD. The present paper published under the CPD Occasional Paper Series is entitled **CPD's Pre-Election Policy Briefs: Results from the Identification Exercise** is a report on the various consultations conducted by CPD during the last quarter of the year 2000 to identify specific issues to be taken up for the purpose of preparing the pre-election policy briefs.

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***CPD's Pre-Election Policy Brief Programme***

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. The Initiative on Policy Briefs

There are popular concerns about consolidating democracy in Bangladesh, setting the course for fostering responsive and responsible governance, improving the functioning of public agencies and authorities, and waging an effective war against poverty. It is therefore of vital importance for the sustainability of the democratic process to focus the attention of the principal political parties on policy agendas that address the well-being of the people. In order to increase awareness and understanding of national issues, the Centre for Policy Dialogue has undertaken an initiative to develop an agenda of critical concerns. *The purpose of this programme is to provide opportunities as well as to improve the capacity of civil society to contribute to the policy debate and formulation in the national political process in the run-up to, and immediately after, the parliamentary elections due in 2001.* This set of *Policy Briefs* is expected to contribute to the goal of strengthening the quality of policy formulation in terms of an indigenously owned and broadly supported pro-poor development agenda. This exercise also seeks, by way of involving a wide array of stakeholders, to enhance the voice of civil society, provide benchmarks for policy implementation, and reduce polarisation in the highly conflict-ridden political environment.

The purpose of the *Policy Briefs* is to focus on issues of urgent public concern where such concrete, implementable policy agendas can be identified within the prevailing political configurations of the country. It is hoped to use the *Policy Briefs* to initiate a process of public dialogues throughout Bangladesh in the period preceding the coming elections. Such dialogues will serve to conscientise the political parties about problems of public concern and to focus their minds on possible policy alternatives to address these issues. It is expected that the policy recommendations emerging out of such dialogues will find their way into the election manifestos of the major political parties, who will, in turn, use the election campaign to build support for such policy reforms throughout the country.

It is also expected that the *Policy Briefs* may be of practical use to a newly elected government coming to power, in guiding executive action. The *Briefs* shall also serve the new parliament in setting agendas for parliamentary debate through access to a body of information, analyses and policy options which would be helpful in inspiring legislation over the life of the next parliament.

Apart from the two major political parties, this process of policy dialogue can also feed into the formulation of policy positions of other political parties. Development partners and NGO workers can also benefit from these *Policy Briefs* in order to make their own development agendas more sensitive to popular concerns. These *Briefs*, enriched with feedback from experts and insights drawn from stakeholder perceptions, can play a major role in establishing domestic ownership over the policy-making process.

The lack of effective policy capacity and development, the increasingly polarised political debate which is in danger of excluding or penalising civil society stakeholders, and the need to improve development performance in terms of governance and pro-poor policy implementation are all problems this programme seeks to address, either directly or indirectly. The project aims to enhance the content and profile of the public policy debate, to strengthen policy literacy right down to the grassroots level, and to raise expectations which the politicians will find more difficult to ignore.

However, CPD recognises that while project outputs may provide the necessary preconditions for changing political incentives, these cannot hope to change such incentives to any great extent. The incentive to develop capacity and campaign on issues, are constrained by the reality of power relations, patron-clientelism, and local hegemonies. Sufficient conditions to effect the necessary changes are likely to include, but not necessarily restricted to, (i) more participatory political party processes, (ii) inclusion of poor people and effective representation of their interests within the parties, (iii) reduced corruption and distortion of resource allocation, and (iv) reduction of inequality, patron-clientelism, and poor people's short-term dependency on elites for their day-to-day livelihood.

The approach proposed by the CPD will follow a four stage, participatory process, supported at key stages by expert task forces to provide inputs, and finalise recommendations emerging from the dialogues.

### ***Identifying and Prioritising Strategic Issues***

Issues are to be identified and prioritised through participatory and gender-sensitive regional consultations, which would ensure the representation of various stakeholder groups. CPD has held six regional consultations in this regard. CPD has tried to ensure that key themes known to be crucial to Bangladesh's development agenda were considered, either as specific issues for *Policy Briefs*, or as cross-cutting themes.

Box 1

CPD's Policy Briefs: Influencing the Pre-Election Debate

**Goal**

- ❑ Strengthened quality of, and capacity for, participatory policy formulation and implementation in Bangladesh.

**Purpose**

- ❑ Improved contribution of the civil society to policy formulation in the (pre-election) national political process.

**Modality**

- ❑ Identification of approximately 15 strategic issues through broad-based participation in gender-sensitive regional consultations.
- ❑ Practical *Policy Briefs* drafted in a consultative manner by specialist task groups.
- ❑ Validation of the *Policy Briefs* through thematic dialogues, primarily at the national level.
- ❑ Dissemination and outreach programmes at national and local levels to raise policy awareness.

***Development of Policy Briefs by Expert Task Forces***

Approximately 15 *Policy Briefs* will be drafted in a consultative manner by specialist task groups. There will be one task force, or “core team” for each issue, led by an expert in the field under consideration. However, some task forces may be allocated more than one issue if this is deemed the most effective use of expert resources. These task forces may hold a number of internal dialogues, drawing on inputs from other experts as well as the designated core team on each issue. The *Policy Briefs* will focus on translating academic and applied research and views of different stakeholders into practical policy recommendations. These will be made available in both Bangla and English to aid dissemination to the various stakeholders.

***Validation of Policy Briefs***

CPD hopes to achieve this through thematic dialogues and other methods such as press briefings etc primarily at the national level. Dialogues will be held at the national level on specific issues which have been derived from the regional consultations, and have been developed through the respective

task forces. Where relevant, closely related *Policy Briefs* will be debated together in dialogues, thereby cutting the number of events down from 15 to a more manageable number. CPD will actively seek media coverage of these events to initiate the dissemination process.

### ***Dissemination and Outreach Programmes***

CPD will hold these at national and local levels to raise policy awareness. This will involve the mass production of practical summaries of the *Policy Briefs* in Bengali. These will be distributed to the media at the national and district levels, and will be provided to all candidates in all constituencies from the three major political parties who are standing in the parliamentary elections. One particular focus of the outreach process will be the distribution of summary briefs to grassroots organisations. In addition, CPD hopes to use its existing working relations with the electronic and print media to develop a series of programmes and coverage of the *Policy Briefs* process and outcomes.

## **1.2. The Present Report**

The present write-up reports on the results of the first of the four phases, namely, *Identifying and Prioritising Strategic Issues*. This phase entailed six consultations – three in Dhaka and one each in Khulna, Rajshahi and Chittagong. The consultations were carried out during October-December 2000. A selected group of 125 citizens took part in the consultative meetings. In the course of the consultations the participants were asked to fill-up a pre-designed standard questionnaire. The questionnaire asked their names, occupations, age, and opinions regarding several socio-economic-political variables within the prevailing situation of Bangladesh. Those variables were carefully chosen by CPD in the hope that they would provide explanations regarding the current scenario and possible remedies. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that elicited both qualitative as well as quantitative responses. The assessment of the government policymaking process was done by putting such issues as, scope of popular participation, most influential actors in the making of the policies, most effective media for planning, popular experience in participating in the process of policy formulation and major policy issues. The answers, reflecting the long felt need of the Bangladeshi people, were diverse, analytical and critical of the present scenario. In prioritising the responses, we interpreted the available data in the following manner: first we evaluated their ratings on the basis of count and then according to priority. Our final conclusion was drawn from a comparative analysis of the different evaluations.

Table 1 Six Consultations for Policy Identification and Prioritisation

Date	Place	Number of Participants
16 October 2000	Khulna, BMA Library	33
22 October 2000	Dhaka (NGO-I), CPD	26
25 October 2000	Rajshahi, Rajshahi General Library	26
20 November 2000	Dhaka (Bureaucrats), CPD	16
30 November 2000	Dhaka (NGO-II), CPD	10
20 December 2000	Chittagong, BITA Auditorium	14

## 2. THE IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITISATION EXERCISE

### 2.1. *Background of the Participants*

As a practice, for all regional and national level dialogues, CPD tries to ensure representation from different groups of the civil society. While it may be expected that there may be some biases towards local elites and middle class participants, CPD actively seeks to involve representatives of marginalized stakeholders, not only by inviting participation by key membership-based NGOs, but also representatives from grassroots organisations. CPD has been pro-active in identifying and encouraging women to participate in both regional and national dialogues.

The purpose of this programme is to improve the contribution of civil society to policy debate and formulation in the national political process. With this objective in mind, CPD enlisted the services of key persons in organising the regional dialogues leading to the identification of the issues and preparation of the *Policy Briefs*. These key individuals were well-acquainted with the various groups in civil society in their area. They were asked to identify and invite such participants who not only fell within the broad spectrum of CPD's representation criteria, but also were keenly aware of current development issues and debates.

Diverse stakeholders were invited to participate in the dialogues. Thus, political activists, government administrators, business leaders (including local and smaller chambers of industry and commerce), the media/press, academics, development workers, and professionals (lawyers, doctors etc.) took part in the consultative meetings. Particular emphasis was placed upon ensuring

participation of private sector and professional groups, so as to broaden the range of views and increase the significance of the policy debate for the political parties.

However, the choice of our respondents reflects an obvious bias towards development workers. We found that development workers not only responded better, but also were more aware of the development and policy-making process in the country.

**Table 2 Breakdown of the Participants by their Occupation and Age groups**

AGEGROUP	OCCUPATION														Total
	Advocate	Journalist	Doctor	Teacher	Business men	Development worker	Researcher	Retired officials	Politician	Artist	Peasant	Banker	Service	Bureaucrats	
21-30	0.9	0.9		0.9	0.9	10.3			0.8						14.5
31-40		1.7	1.7	0.9		10.3	1.7		0.8				2.5		19.7
41-50	1.7	6	2.6	1.7	1.7	17.1	2.5			0.8	1.7	0.8	1.7	8.5	47.0
51-60	1.7					4.3	2.5		0.8				0.8	0.8	11.1
61+	1.7	0.9	0.9			0.9	1.7	1.7							7.7
Total	6	9.4	5.1	3.4	2.6	42.7	8.5	1.7	2.5	0.8	1.7	0.8	5.1	9.4	100

### ***Occupation***

One hundred and twenty five respondents represented 14 categories of occupation in the six dialogues. There were *development workers* (41.1 percent), *bureaucrats* (12.9 percent), *journalists* (8.9 percent), *researchers* (8.1 percent), *advocates* (5.6 percent), *doctors* (5.6 percent), *service-holders* (4.8 percent), *teachers* (3.2 percent), *politicians* (2.4 percent), *businessmen* (2.4 percent), *retired officials* (1.6 percent), *peasants* (1.6 percent), *bankers* (0.8 percent), and *artists* (0.8 percent) represented their respective communities.

### ***Age and Gender***

The respondents belonged to five age groups: 21-30 (14.5 percent), 31-40 (19.7 percent), 41-50 (47 percent), 51-60 (11.1 percent), and 61 and above (7.7 percent). There were 98 males (79 percent) and 26 females (21 percents). While one respondent chose not to be so identified.

## 2.2. Evaluation of the Current Scenario

### ***Opportunity to Participate in Policy Formulation***

The CPD survey made it apparent that the majority of the people believed that for the average citizen of Bangladesh there is either little or no opportunity to participate in national development policy formulation process. However, there still are those who believe that there exists adequate scope for the people in this regard. 44.8 percent of the total respondents were of the opinion that there was *moderate scope* while 43.2 percent argued for *no scope*. Only 12 percent of the 125 respondents said that they saw *adequate opportunity* for the people to participate.

Based on the results of our survey, it may be justifiably claimed that people hold the opinion that open discussions and debates on national development issues can highly influence the preparation of the agenda of the political parties. 105 respondents i.e. 84 percent of the respondents stood in favour of the statement while the rest differed. Of these 105 respondents, 83.5 percent believed that the political parties did consider the opinions and recommendations stemming out of the process of open debate and discussions, albeit indirectly. 9.3 percent believed that the parties considered the outcome directly while the rest spoke of other ways whereby they believed the parties absorbed the outcomes.

Almost half of those who differed (16 percent) believed that the debates and discussions did not influence the agenda of the political parties at all since the opinions and recommendations or the very process of debating was considered unnecessary by the parties. Six respondents (4.8 percent) were of the opinion that the process or the outcome could not have any impact, as even in the rare eventuality of the parties listening to the debates and the outcomes, they considered nothing important therein. Some reasoned that freely held debates would never contribute to the agenda formulation of political parties since even when the latter might consider the outcomes positive and necessary, they found nothing that would match their political interests.

### ***Most Influential Actors***

Respondents were also asked to put weight on influential actors in the making of public policy in Bangladesh among seven given entities: the Bureaucracy, MPs, Local Government, NGOs, Leader/Workers of the Party in Power, the Cabinet, and Leaders of the Private Sector. They were also given the choice to name other bodies extraneous to the aforementioned ones, which they

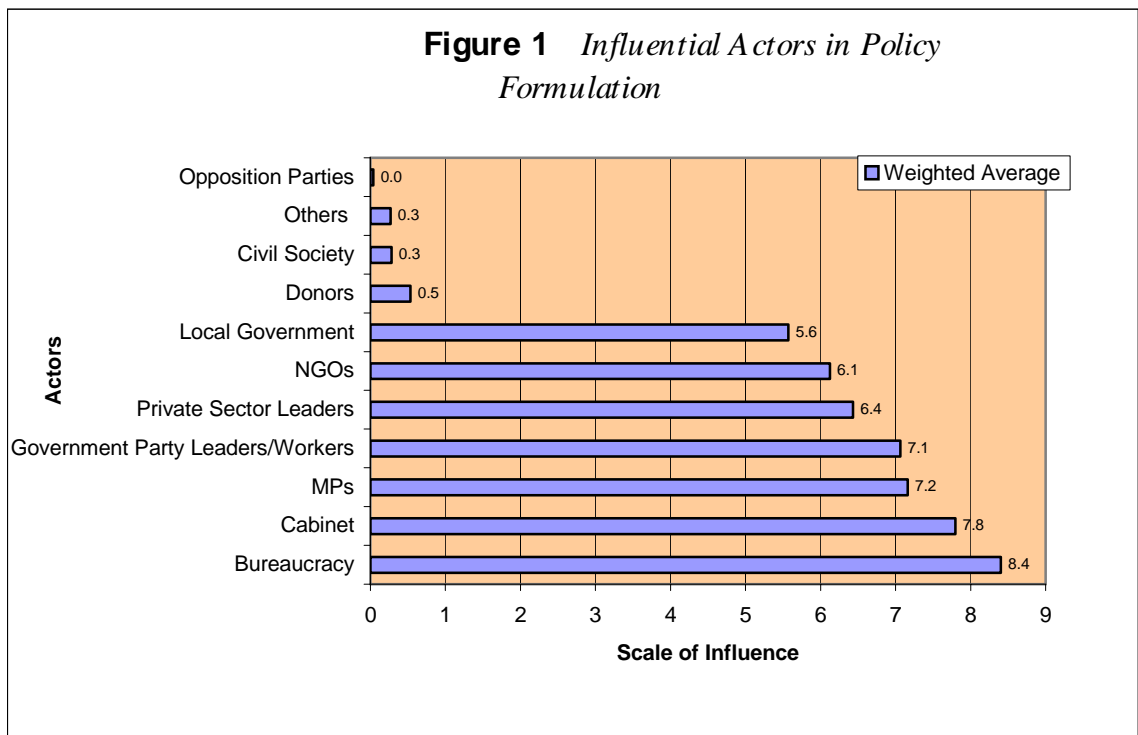
thought important.

## Box 2 Top Actors in Policy-making

<b>Most influential</b>	<b>Least influential</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bureaucracy</li><li>• Cabinet</li><li>• Member of Parliament</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opposition Party</li><li>• Local Government</li><li>• Civil Society</li><li>• Leader/Workers of the Party in Power</li></ul>

Popular opinion holds that policy-making in Bangladesh remains almost entirely within the domain of the *Bureaucracy*. 69.2 percent of our respondents identified it as the most important actor in policy formulation. The *Cabinet*, including the Prime Minister, took second place with *MPs* coming third. The people's belief in the influence of *NGOs* has been reflected with it emerging as the fourth most important actor in policy-formulation. The *Local Government* and *Private Sector Leaders* came fifth and sixth respectively, with *Government Party Leaders/Workers* bringing up the rear.

Respondents were also given the option of naming other agents they believed to be important in policy formulation. Most of those who exercised this option stated that *aid donors* to Bangladesh were core actors in this regard. Some had even named donors as *the most influential actor*. CPD had deliberately left this component of the questionnaire open-ended as it holds the view, based on its own research and policy experience, that the influence of aid donors in policy formulation in Bangladesh is quite obvious. However, it was important for CPD to test its assumptions against the more widely held perceptions of a cross-section of civil society in Bangladesh. Most of these respondents spoke of the World Bank and the IMF as the most influential of the donors. Other donor countries and agencies, as well as various multi-national corporations and American imperialism were also mentioned. It is very interesting to note that in one of our evaluations, donors emerged as the most influential actor in policy-formulation. *Civil society*, including intellectuals and the media, have also been considered to be important, while one of the respondents particularly mentioned CPD as being influential in this regard. On the other hand, it was also stressed that the *opposition parties* have a substantial role to play in the formulation of public policy in Bangladesh. A few other respondents expressed their opinion that there were other actors involved but did not mention any names.



***Most Effective Media***

While considering a medium that can best reflect popular opinion on policy formulation regarding issues of public importance, *national newspapers* were, overwhelmingly, deemed the most influential medium. The news media, thus, emerged as the first choice not only on the basis of priority but also on the basis of head count amongst 108 respondents out of 125 (86.4 percent). *Radio-TV* took second place while *local dialogues* and *national dialogues* took third and fourth place respectively, *institutional and group-based advertisements* was placed in fifth place.

**Box 3 Top Three Effective Media**

- National Newspapers
- Electronic Media
- Local Dialogues

*Free expression of experts’ opinion* took sixth place with *people’s representatives* ranking seventh as sources of policy influence. Amongst other mediums mentioned by the respondents, *NGOs* were specified by a few, although not by a significant number, as a medium for projecting popular opinion with regard to important national policies. *Political rallies, opinions of village-leaders,* and *free expression of public opinion* were other sources of policy influence mentioned.

### 2.3. Prioritisation of Issues

The purpose of the *Policy Briefs* is to focus on issues of urgent public concern. Such concrete policy agendas need to be identified that can be implemented within the prevailing political configurations of the country. Keeping in mind that the envisaged *Policy Briefs* will need to present agendas that are feasible, CPD has identified 18 issues based on its past experience, research feedback and assessment of the current socio-economic and political situation of the country. These issues were placed in front of the dialogue participants, as part of the CPD administered questionnaire, for the purpose of prioritisation. The issues were:

- Budget and Revenue Sector Management
- Reform of SOEs and their Privatisation
- Reform of Banks and other Financial Institutions
- Formulation of an Appropriate Policy for the Development of the Oil and Gas Sectors
- Development of the Power Sector
- Agricultural Development
- Increasing Productivity of the Export Sector
- Increasing Efficiency and Investment in the Industrial Sector
- Developing the Non-agricultural Rural Sector
- Rise in FDI
- Infrastructural Development
- Eradicating Gender Inequality
- Development of the Health and Family Welfare Sectors
- Developing the Standard and Expansion of Education
- Eradicating Poverty and Providing Employment
- Empowering Local Government
- Governance of the Urban Area
- Preservation of the Environment and its Development

The respondents were asked to prioritise five issues out of the 18 chosen by CPD. Keeping in mind that other issues exist which demand immediate address, they were also given the option of specifying any other issue that they considered important.

In our survey, a considerable number of respondents mentioned various other issues that they

considered to be of crucial importance. They expressed grave concern about the *pervasiveness of corruption and lack of accountability, the deteriorating law and order situation of the country, and the need for administrative, judicial and legal reforms. Electoral reform* also emerged as a central concern, as *did preservation of law and order during the pre-election, election and post-election periods*. Intra-party democratic practices and enhancing the educational quality of the political leadership was considered to be of great importance.

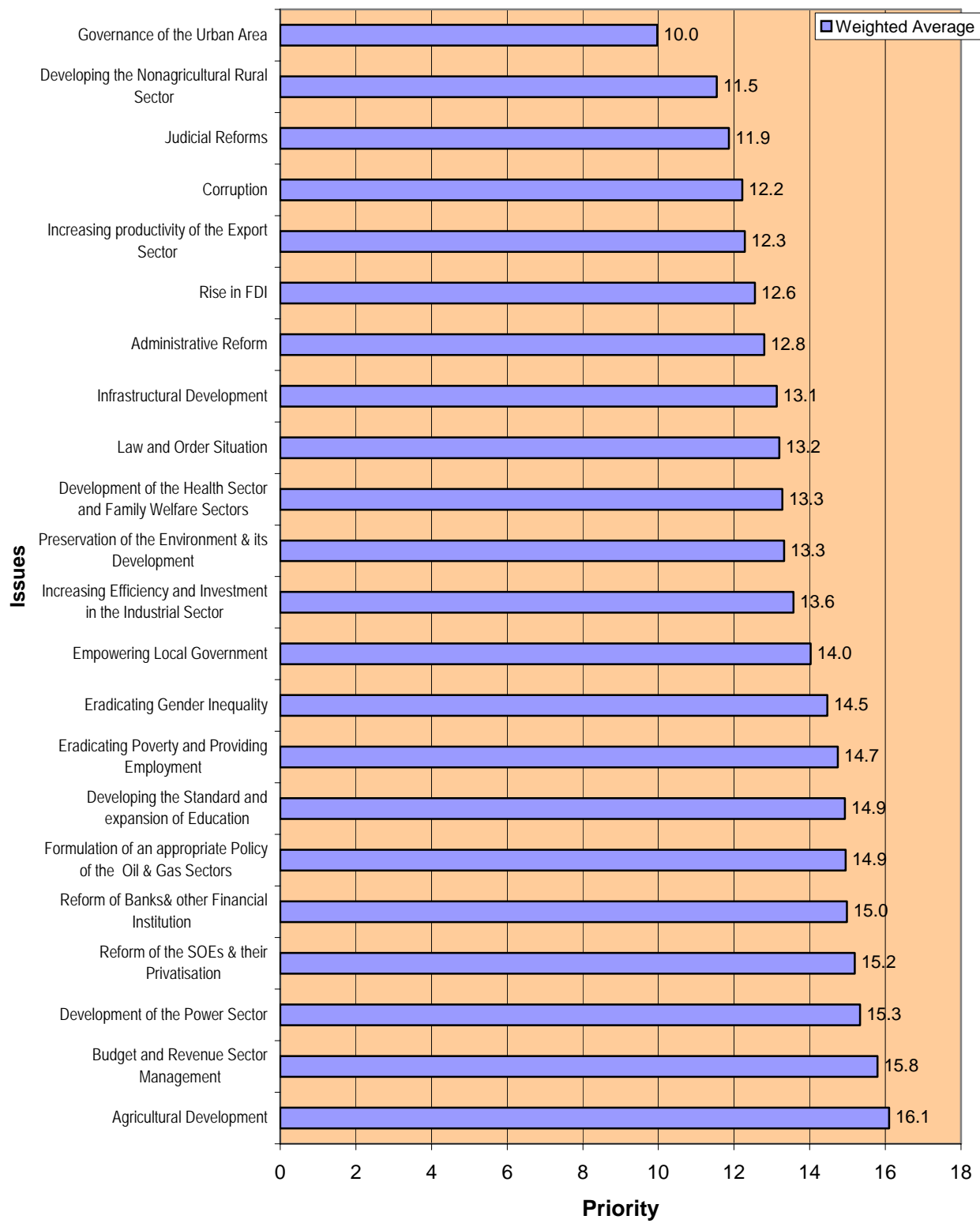
#### Box 4 Top Five Issues from the Floor

- Law and Order Situation
- Administrative Reform
- Corruption
- Judicial Reform
- Electoral and Political Party Reforms

Creation of a non-communal environment, eradicating communalism as well as regional discrimination, and repealing discriminatory laws concerning the religious minority were also considered important issues. Some respondents felt that religious education should be taken out of the general school syllabus and placed entirely within the domain of religion-oriented educational institutions. Amongst other issues mentioned were ensuring human rights and democratic practices, foreign and defence policies of the country, land reform, the freedom of the electronic media, further engagement of NGOs in the process of development, and reaffirmation of social and cultural values.

*Agricultural Development* was identified as the most important issues for the development of the country. *Budget and Revenue Sector Management* was placed in second position. *Development of the Power Sector* was ranked third. *Reform of SOEs and their Privatisation* was chosen as the fourth most important issue. *Reform of Banks and other Financial Institutions* came fifth. *Formulation of an Appropriate Policy for the Development of the Oil and Gas Sectors* as a crucial issue was ranked sixth, while *Developing the Standard and Expansion of Education* came in seventh. *Eradicating Poverty and Providing Employment* took eighth position just ahead of *Eradicating Gender Inequality*. *Empowering Local Government* and *Increasing Efficiency and Investment in the Industrial Sector* took tenth and eleventh positions respectively.

**Figure 3** *Prioritisation of Issues*



The fact that the people of Bangladesh were gradually becoming more environmentally aware was highlighted when *Preservation of the Environment and its Development* was chosen as the twelfth most important issue. *Development of the Health and Family Welfare Sectors* came thirteenth while *Law and Order* issues took fourteenth place. *Infrastructural Development* was placed fifteenth, *Administrative Reform* sixteenth, *Rise in FDI* seventeenth and *Increasing Productivity of the Export Sector* in the eighteenth position. *Prevention of Corruption, Judicial Reforms, Developing the Non-agricultural Rural Sector* and *Governance of the Urban Areas* brought up the rear.

### ***The Task Forces***

The main purpose of this exercise was to develop a new set of prioritised policies. Apart from the inputs that emerged out of the survey, CPD had to take account of other factors based on the above consideration such as pervasiveness of corruption, land reform etc. A list was consequently produced and the following 16 Task Forces formed:

- A. *Budgetary Discipline and Fiscal Programmes*
- B. *Development and Governance of the Energy Sector*
- C. *Financial Sector Policy*
- D. *Sustaining Agricultural Growth and Revitalising the Rural Economy*
- E. *Industrial and Trade Policy*
- F. *Poverty Eradication and Employment Generation*
- G. *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*
- H. *Governance of the Health Care Sector*
- I. *Education Sector Policy*
- J. *Administrative Reform and Strengthening of the Local Government System*
- K. *Urban Governance*
- L. *Containing Environmental Policy*
- M. *Transport and Infrastructure*
- N. *Information and Communication Technology*
- O. *Land Administration*
- P. *Governance*

Each of the Task Forces constitutes of one Chairperson and a Co-Chair, one Member-Secretary and between five to eight Members. The organisation of the Task Forces has been completed at this time and the logistics and format for the proposed *Policy Briefs* have been finalised.

### 3. ON USEFULNESS OF THE EXERCISE

The participants were asked to evaluate CPD's efforts towards the direction of engaging the civil society in the national dialogue on policy formulation in order to make the process more people-oriented. The respondents hailed the effort of CPD as a well-timed attempt. They enthusiastically suggested ways through which CPD's programme can leave a positive impact on policy formulation by influencing various tiers of the society.

The success of the dialogues was deemed to depend on penetrations at various levels of the contemporary society of Bangladesh. According to the respondents, such dialogues must not remain confined to Dhaka and other metropolitan cities, rather they should also be held at Union Parishad, Thana and village levels. As a large number of people in Bangladesh tend to be suffering from a sense of relationship deprivation with regard to the basic necessities of life, a few of the participants suggested practical ways to reach the deprived segments and make them conscious of their relevance to the policy formulation process. Projection of short films, they felt, would be an effective media to further such a process of reaching a broader constituency. NGOs were also named as one of the agents who could share the task of drawing on the masses because of their involvement with people at the grass-root levels. For the social stratas to be involved in the process of policy influence, all participants emphasised upon the need to draw in the middleclass, reach out to the grassroots, and the illiterate segments of the population. Demographically, those people who particularly need to be targeted tend to live outside our cities.

A section of the respondents thought it important to ensure the participation of the political leaders in such dialogues. It was observed that since almost every decision in Bangladesh was ultimately politicised, the inclusion of politicians would only mean recognition of the reality that they are after all the major factor that influences changes in policy and influences its outcomes. Thus, inclusion of political parties in the policy dialogues would make them more responsive to people's concerns both in the design of their manifesto and more accountable to fulfil their electoral commitments. Some respondents, indeed, viewed accountability as a prerequisite for establishing good governance.

#### ***CPD's Role***

Regarding the role that CPD can play, respondents felt that it should analyse and evaluate the consistency between the promises encapsulated in the manifestos of different political parties in the

last general election and their performance in the post-election period. It was expected of CPD that it would critically evaluate the role of the opposition in terms of improving the quality of public policy discourse in Bangladesh.

Interestingly, most participants spoke of mechanisms that would serve to create pressure on any ruling party. Though no such mechanism had been explicitly proposed, they considered that mass political awareness and public participation at formal gatherings such as CPD's dialogues would promote and enhance accountability in the system.

