

# Reconciling the Dichotomy between Developed and Developing Countries via Universality in Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of Italy versus Bangladesh

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## Abstract

*The post-2015 developmental agenda and the SDGs have been formulated to advance holistic global progress and enable the adoption of quantitative targets for all countries by recognizing their respective national realities and capacities. This research examines how global ambitions can guide national policy formulation by selecting the Italian Republic and the People's Republic of Bangladesh as models for analysis and comparison. On the basis of two issues that dominate the current political agenda in both countries, sustaining economic growth (Goal 8) and addressing cross-border migration (Goal 10), quantitative targets were determined via an indicator based framework on the backdrop of historical data and relative performance of their global economic association membership (i.e. OECD for Italy, BRICS for Bangladesh). The results indicated that, interconnectedness of both goals allows the creation of synergistic effects which in turn allows simultaneous fulfilment of both goals through spill over effects. Lastly, by considering the current political agenda, high-priority reforms being debated, new legislations that are underway, we depict a temporal transition pathway for both countries to realize our identified targets.*

## Keywords

*sustainable development, economic growth, indicators, developmental targets, CBRD, BRICS*

## 1 Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formulated during a period of relatively strong economic growth and stability with its developmental lexicon focused largely towards channeling more and better aid to the developing world (Higgins, 2013). Much has changed on the geopolitical map since the turn of the century; a globalized economy and growing international interconnectedness puts the world at a significant risk of synchronized systemic failure than ever before (van der Heijden et al., 2014). The Open Working Group (OWG) proposal on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 developmental framework (See Table 1) calls for defying the business-as-usual approach and managing these complexities through the adoption of universally applicable goals, tailored to different national realities and capacities (UN, 2014).

In this study, to exemplify this paradigmatic shift and to demonstrate how global ambitions can guide national policy formulation, the authors consider two model nations, the Italian Republic and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. With the pursuit of universality being the overarching principle of the SDGs, these countries are good representative samples to test this hypothesis (caveat, GDP per capita is used for differentiation between countries to assess their current economic status). At the outset, although both these countries seem to have stark differences in national circumstances, especially from a historical perspective, a critical analysis presented us with some surprising facts that allow comparability between the two. Specifically, two issues that dominate the current political agenda in both the countries are, sustaining economic growth and addressing cross-border migration.

## 2 The Case Studies: National Issues at Hand

Italy, a member of the OECD and the G7 group of advanced economies has been facing economic stagnation since the late 1990s with the challenge being sustaining market confidence in the Italian debt (Reinhart et al., 2012). With nearly € 2 trillion of debt obligation, it has the highest debt-service ratio in the G7 and the 4th largest public-debt stock in the world. Italy also presents a special case in the OECD to witness an unparalleled migrant

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inflow; foreign born population accounted for 10 % of the Italian working-age population in FY 2011-12 (OECD, 2014a).

**Table 1** Issues, goals and indicators chosen for the model countries

Goals as part of the new post-2015 sustainable development agenda
Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all
<b>Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</b>
Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
<b>Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries</b>
Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Bangladesh, projected as one of the N-11 countries based on its positive economic fundamentals, the issue at hand is to sustain the growth it has experienced in the past decade and to emerge as the next tier of rapidly developing nations to follow the BRICS path (Lawson et al., 2007). However, contrary to the Italian scenario, Bangladesh faces the issue of illegal economic emigration out of the country primarily through the porous international border it shares with its neighbor, India. While in the short term this undocumented exodus bodes well for Dhaka as it eases its land-availability and poverty alleviation pressures, recent developments in India point to the possible deportation of ~20 million Bangladeshi immigrants that have permanently settled down in India (See manifesto, BJP 2014). Corollary to the principle of universality but differentiation in the SDGs, the issue of migration appears to be the common denominator in the high priority agendas that requires to be addressed in both countries. However, building upon the notion of differentiation in universality, the solution to this common problem in both countries would necessarily be shaped by national circumstances; while Italy needs to adopt measures to stem the flow

of immigrants, Bangladesh would need to adopt measures to reduce and stop its flow of undocumented emigration.

### 3 Associating the Issues with SDGs and Indicators

Following the identification of high-priority thematic issues, we associated them with the OWG-SDGs; Goal 8 and Goal 10 were found to best represent and describe these issues (See Table 2). Subsequently, three indicators were chosen to characterize the identified issues; the use of indicators ensures quantification, allows tracking of national progress as well as stakeholder accountability (SDSN, 2015). Gross Domestic Product (GDP), due to its frequency and consistency of measurement through a comprehensive System of National Accounts was preferred in terms of per capita economic growth rate as a traditional parameter. The GINI Index of income inequality and Human Development Index (HDI) as a proxy to emphasize the role of humans as the ultimate criteria for national development were also selected.

**Table 2** Issues, goals and indicators chosen for the model countries

Issue	SD Goal	SDG -Indicator
Issue I: Sustaining economic growth	Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	Per capita economic growth
		GINI index
		Human Development Index (HDI)
Issue II: Cross-border migration	Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries	Next flux of migrants
		Remittance flow
		Remittance and transaction costs

The issue of cross-border migration was associated with Goal 10 which places a significant emphasis on migration policies. Remittance flow represents a substantial amount of money both in terms of support to family income in the origin country and the aggregated fiscal inflows for receiving economies (World Bank, 2014; Shera and Meyer, 2013). Similarly, remittance charges/transaction costs and net flux of migrant workers were used as additional quantifiable parameters.

Subsequently, the data was collected for the selected indicators to analyze the past trends. An examination of the GDP growth rate indicated contrasting national circumstances; for Bangladesh, an emerging economy, an average growth rate of 5 % represents a healthy return on investment (Fig. 1). This growth can be attributed to the high base effect induced by its agricultural sector and substantial growth in industry and service sector (MoF, 2012).

Italy on the other hand, faced with political instability, weak administrative capacity, reduced industrial output and low investment confidence has witnessed poor GDP growth since

the 1990s (OECD, 2015). Moreover, the 2008 financial crisis had a more profound effect on the Italian macroeconomic situation (high debt-to-GDP ratio) than the Bangladeshi one. A stagnating economy has also left Italy behind in many dimension of human development which also has contributed to its poor economic growth (Fig. 2). However, Bangladesh in spite of registering good fiscal growth lags far behind in terms of HDI performance; low public expenditure in health and education are acknowledged as primary factors (Sarkar et al., 2013).

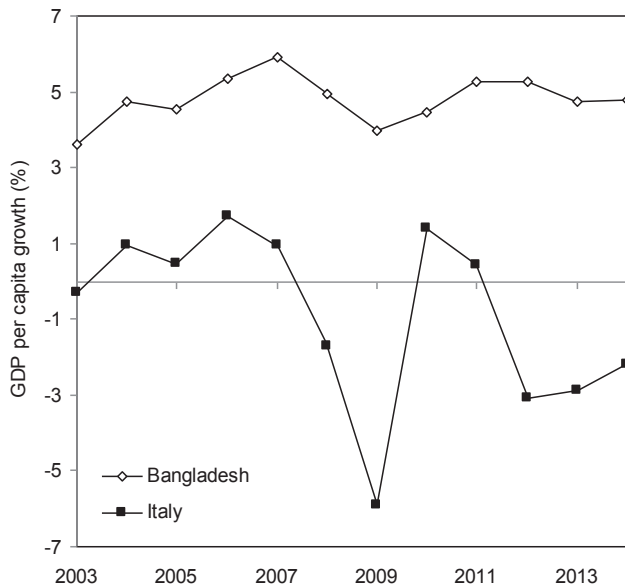


Fig. 1 Per capita GDP growth rate for Italy and Bangladesh (2003-2014)

Data from the population register indicates that permanent immigration to Italy remains high. Romanian and Bulgarian citizens account for most of the new enrollments largely due to unrestricted access to Italian labor markets (OECD, 2014b). In addition, political volatility in Tunisia and Libya has translated into significant rise in illegal landings of migrants (Table 3). On the contrary, for Bangladeshis, India is a preferred destination as migration (legal or otherwise) offers a way out of extreme poverty and secures financial solvency (Asia Foundation, 2013).

Table 3 Net migration and GINI index statistics for the model countries; Data sourced from UNESA (2015) and World Bank (2015)

Country	Net migration*		
	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015
Bangladesh	-400	-714	-408
Italy	371	382	180
GINI index			
Bangladesh	33.2 (2005)	32.1 (2010)	
Italy	37.3 (2004)	35.5 (2010)	

\* Net migration: number of immigrants minus emigrants expressed as thousands

Increasing diplomatic initiatives and exploration of new labor markets have contributed to a growing trend of expatriate

employment and remittance flow into Bangladesh (Fig. 3). A significant challenge to this monetary flow is expected from the fluctuations in foreign exchange rates, financial recessions in the Eurozone economies and increasing political tensions with India. However, for Italy, where immigrant employment exceeds those of the native-born populace, the test is to ensure integration of immigrants into labor markets and facilitate long-term employability (OECD, 2014a).

A substantial risk while addressing the identified issues in this framework could be the interaction between the goals. For instance, migration of people endowed with high level of human capital (or ‘brain drain’) could act as a negative or positive externality, depending on country specific circumstances (Beine et al., 2001).

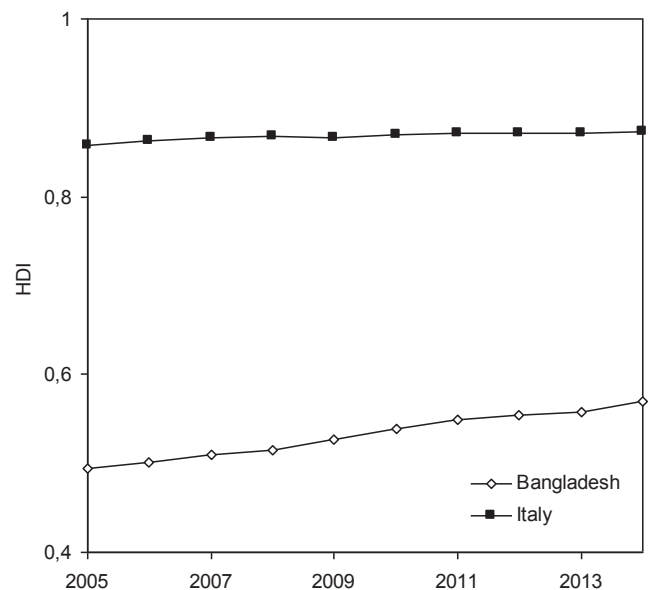


Fig. 2 HDI for Italy and Bangladesh over 2005-2014

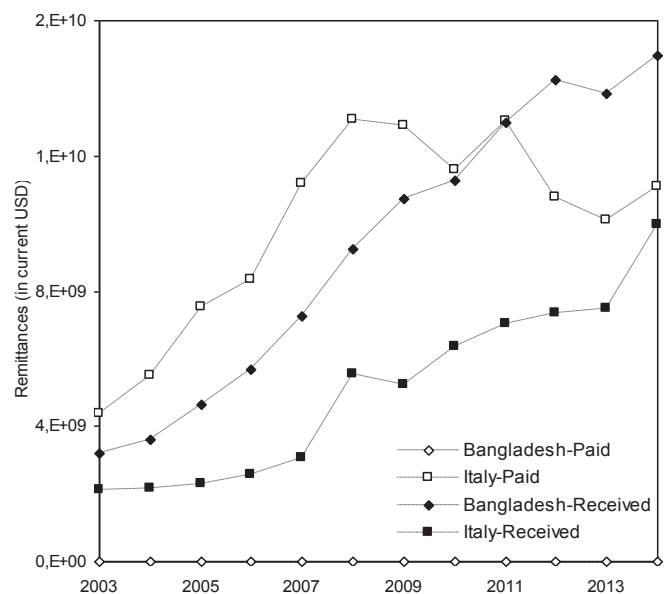


Fig. 3 Remittances paid and received during 2003-2014

Hence, in the following sections, we map the pathway towards realization of these ambitions by taking into account such interrelations; to do this, we recommend unambiguous quantitative targets for both countries through a temporal transition pathway to 2030.

#### 4 SDGs: Setting Quantitative Targets

The SDGs and its framework can be perceived as an attempt to give merit to the rhetoric of universality as it allows national governments to envision their own differentiated transition pathways and simultaneously address both, national and global challenges. Following the identification of indicators to represent the issues at hand for both the studied countries, we now look to set quantitative targets and forecast a temporal transition pathway.

**Table 4** Quantified targets for corresponding indicators in Goal 8 by 2030

Indicators	Italy (OECD)	Bangladesh (BRICS)		
GDP Growth Rate	0.4455 Average (2007-2013)	Brazil	3.656	6.882 (Average 2007-2010)
		China	10.31	
		India	6.683	
GINI Index	0.397 ↑ Average (2005-2011)‡ Alternative: 5 % ↓ from 2010: 0.337	Brazil	0.538	0.433 (Average 2009-2010)
		China	0.424	
		India	0.338	
HDI	0.88 (2013 OECD Average)	Brazil	0.739	0.670 (Average 2008-2013)
		China	0.705	
		India	0.575	

Firstly, to depict the Business As Usual (BAU) scenario, historical data for each indicator was parametrically regressed and extrapolated to the year 2030 using appropriate functional models to predict the most probable and realistic end points. Subsequently, based on these extrapolations, a comparative analysis of the current and predicted situation of both the countries was performed in relation to the realization of their goals. Using the comparison as the criteria, this paper then puts forward measurable targets based on two scenarios, which we term as OECD and BRICS respectively.

Despite being a founding member state, Italy lags behind in the OECD averages for most of the economic and better life indicators (OECD, 2015). Hence, the authors set the Italian SDG targets relative to the most recent 5-year OECD average for each indicator (Table 4 and Table 5). Along similar lines, Bangladesh is projected to be part of the next group of nations (N-11) to effect the same transformative impact on the world economy as the BRICS (Lawson et al., 2007); for that reason, its targets were fixed in relation to the aggregated averages of Brazil, China and India. Russia and South Africa were excluded from the analyses and average computation as the BRICS average computation falls below Bangladesh's current levels for most indicators.

Hence, it is acknowledged that although the acronym 'BRICS' is used for scenario development and used throughout the text, it only refers to Brazil, India and China.

**Table 5** Quantified targets for corresponding indicators in Goal 10 by 2030

Indicators	Italy (OECD)	Bangladesh (BRICS)	
Remittance Flow	Remittance as % of GDP (FY 2011-2012)*	0.4	11.11
	% GDP Growth (BAU) to 2030	-2.75	6.45
	% GDP Growth (Target) to 2030	0.4455	6.8820
	Target - BAU Scenario	0.3416	13.623
	Target - OECD/BRICS	0.65	14.536
Net Flux of Migrants	Target in Thousands	292.5	-533.2
Remittance Cost	Aggregation Formula: Complex; Variance in available data: Substantial	5 % Reduction from Current Levels ‡	

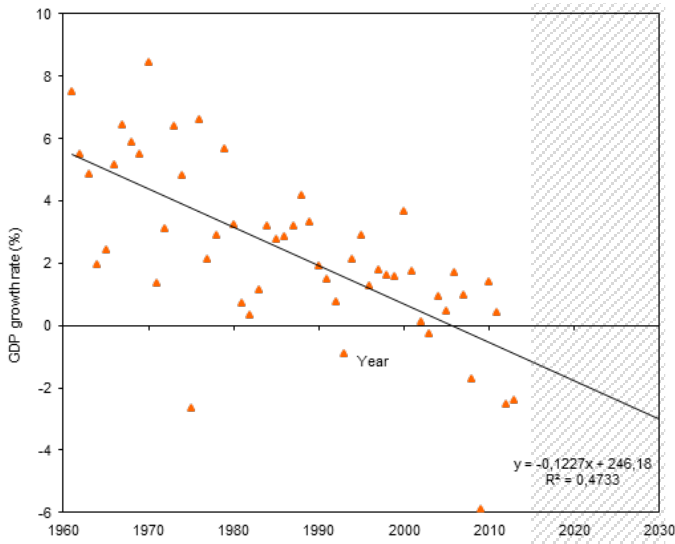
‡ Once national aggregation formula for remittance cost is fixed, 5 % reduction cost is mandated universally

#### 4.1 Goal 8 in the SDG framework

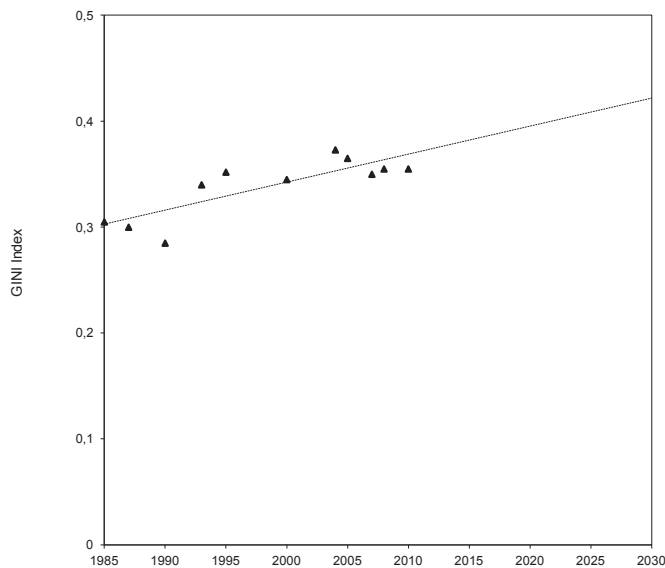
The BAU scenario forecasts a period of economic decline for Italy, a trend that prolongs the economic stagnation that has been the trend since the 1990s (Fig. 4). In light of the Italian demography witnessing sub-replacement fertility, the authors advocate the 2030 economic targets be set at 0.45% GDP growth, which would reflect the current five-year OECD average. To this effect, extending the ongoing ambitious reforms in the political, institutional and judicial regimes will be fundamental (OECD, 2015).

The National Reform Programme also highlights these improvements and fiscal consolidation as part of the strategy to sustain growth, create jobs and contribute to the EU-2020 ambitions (MoEF, 2014). These developments will be critical to overturn the struggling economy towards positive growth and address the issue of substantial domestic debt. However, such an upturn would entail far-reaching policies to be formulated and implemented (MIPEX, 2015); top among the priorities should be further capitalization of the domestic labor markets to improve the country's productivity and competitiveness.

Recent developments have been promising with the government introducing labor market reforms, tax wedge reduction and improved tax treatment of equity investments (OECD, 2015). For instance, the Jobs Act of 2014 gives additional protection to employees and the implementation of active labor market policy through the EU Youth Guarantee scheme increases its competitiveness (Kovacheva, 2014). Moreover, BAU predicts the GINI index and income equality to increase over time (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 4** GDP per capita growth rate (%) – historic and BAU projections to 2030 for *Italy*

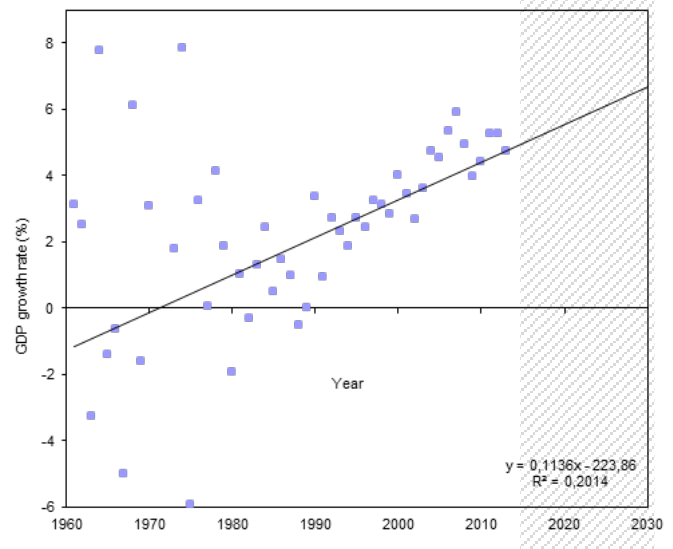


**Fig. 5** GINI index and income equality for *Italy*

The income disparity is anticipated to increase based on the assumption that economic stagnation prolongs over time (Honvári, 2004). However, the coupled effect of labor market reforms and a positive GDP growth could realize the advocated target of 5 % reduction in the current GINI index and achievable.

Similarly, the HDI is expected to witness a nominal decline as we move towards 2030 (Fig. 4); again, the spillover effect from the other two indicators is likely to influence HDI and thus the current OECD average of 0.88 would seem realistic. In contrast, for Bangladesh, a Middle Income Country, the challenge will be to sustain and accelerate the current financial growth. Now, the BAU scenario forecasts the GDP growth to increase to ~6.4 % (Fig. 6), whereas an estimate by the UK DFID predicts an achievable 8 % growth by 2030

(DFID, 2007; Rahmann, 2010). The DFID study of 2007 has so far failed to adequately correlate its projections with current trends; hence, the authors believe that a 6.9 % growth that replicates the current BRICS GDP growth is attainable and more sustainable in the long run. This follows the logic that to enter the BRICS league, Bangladesh needs to imitate the erstwhile patterns of such nations.



**Fig. 6** GDP per capita growth rate (%) – historic and BAU projections to 2030 for *Bangladesh*

The Bangladeshi GDP is driven by exports, remittances and various growth enhancing reforms such as trade liberalization, banking, telecommunications and fiscal responsibility (DCCI, 2010). To further its growth, Bangladesh has identified investment in infrastructure development through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) as a priority (DCCI, 2010). With a PPP Law underway that aims to attract more investors to Bangladesh, it is very likely that the country could attain these targets. Nevertheless, this economic growth has come at the cost of socio-economic inequality (Sarkar, 2013). The GINI Index and GDP growth display an inverse correlation, a trend that is likely to continue under BAU (Fig. 7). However, the rapid economic growth has translated into improved public well-being as seen in its gradually improving HDI (Fig. 8). For development to be truly sustainable in all realms, it is imperative for the country to focus on all aspects of public well-being. A decrease in GINI Index to its 0.433 levels is desirable while HDI should further increase to at least 0.67.



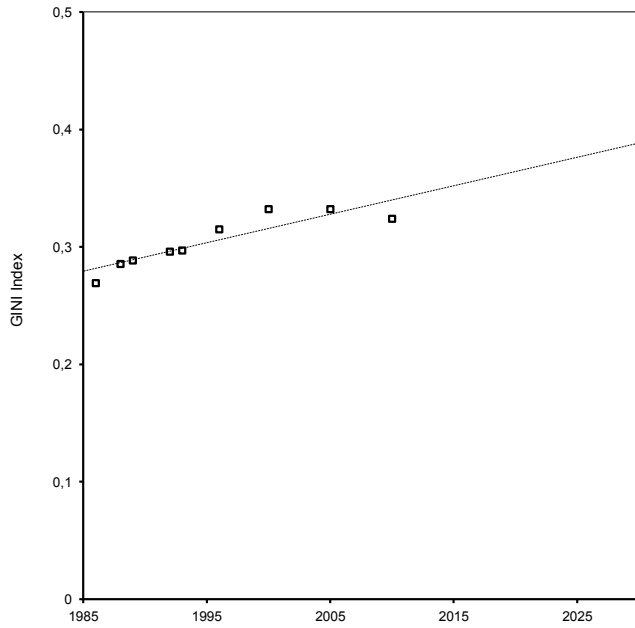


Fig. 7 GINI index and income equality for *Bangladesh*

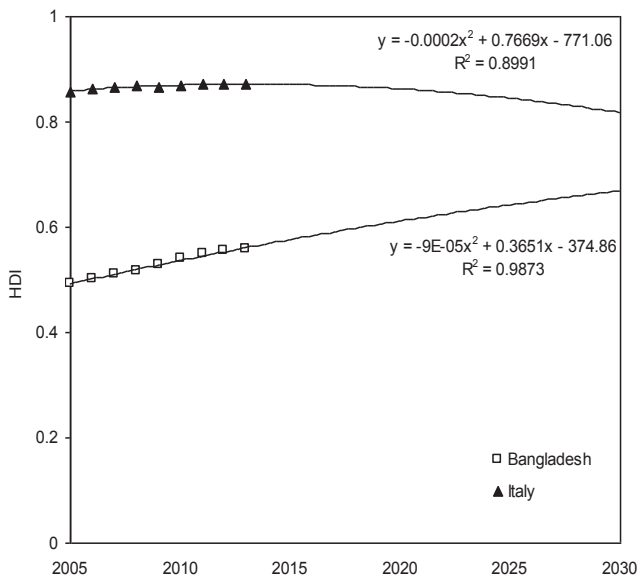


Fig. 8 HDI - historic and BAU projections to 2030 for *Italy* and *Bangladesh*

#### 4.2 Goal 10 in the SDG framework

The dynamics between Goal 8 and Goal 10 are complementary, especially in the case of Italy and Bangladesh. Mobility and exchanges between countries can either aggravate inequality or enhance equality. As seen in Table 5, the targets for remittance flow were set in accordance to the contribution of these monetary exchanges to the national GDP for both countries. Moreover, the target for the desired net flux of migrants though difficult to predict, were set in relation to the contribution of emigrants to the economy. Hence, for 2030, number of emigrants that would be required to meet the national targets for remittance flow provided the net migrant flux. A prediction for the net migrant flux taking into account a number of assumptions and uncertainties has been carried out by UNESA and is depicted in Fig. 9 (UN, 2013).

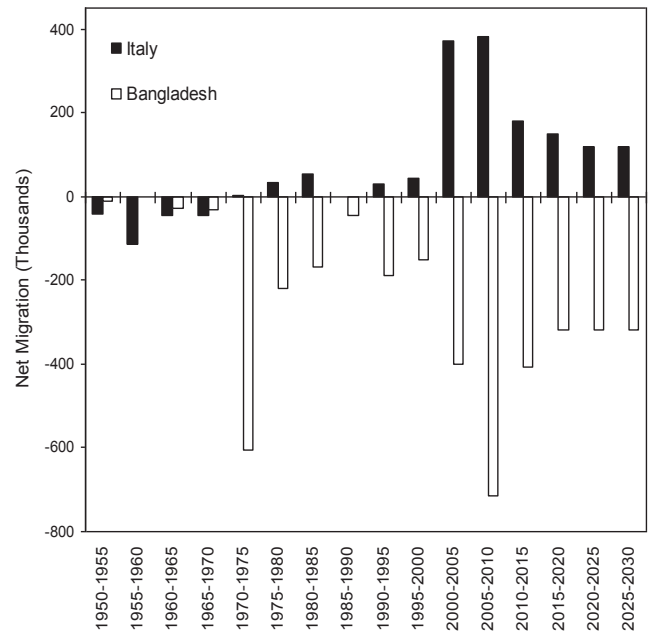


Fig. 9 Net Migration - historic and BAU projections to 2030 for *Italy* and *Bangladesh*

Recent migration trends indicate towards a net decrease in migrant inflow for Italy (Fig. 9). However, due to Italy's large coastline and proximity to other countries, it has been experiencing surges in illegal migration (OECD, 2014). Although measures are being taken to prevent this, the Italian government has been responsive in integrating immigrants into its society as reflected in the decreasing trend of net migration towards 2030 (OECD, 2014a). The projected increasing trend in the BAU scenario towards 2030 for remittances paid from and received by Italy are attributed to the country's competitive and productivity strategy that promotes the development of skilled local and migrant workers (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11).

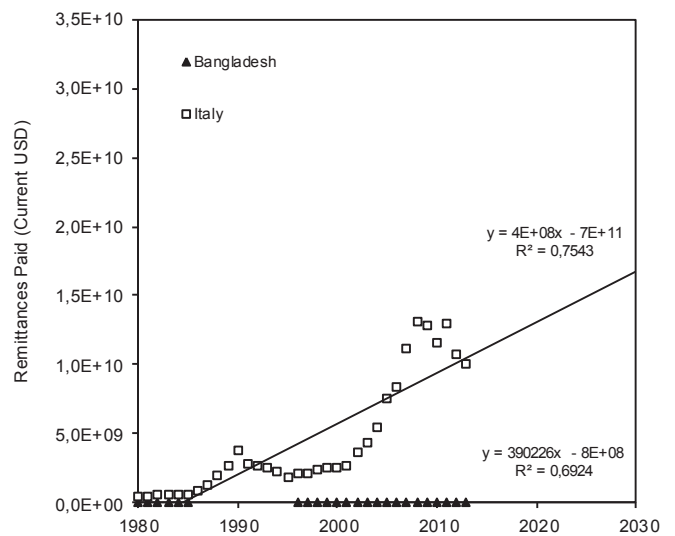


Fig. 10 Remittances paid from *Italy* and *Bangladesh*

Furthermore, to encourage integration of remittances through proper channels and maximize the economic benefits of this, Italy is being proactive by improving transparency and reducing remittance costs (OECD, 2014). This follows the OECD's guidelines 'G20 plan to facilitate remittance flows' which suggest reducing the remittance cost for the purpose of having its members further benefit from remittance received.

In order to sustain the contribution of remittance flows to its growing economy that is significantly influenced by these monetary contributions, Bangladesh requires a 3.4% increase in remittances received to fulfill its GDP targets for 2030. Bangladesh although also a coastal nation, depicts an opposite trend and migrant behavior pattern in comparison to Italy. With better prospects and high demand for skilled workers in other countries coupled with poor domestic demand, human resource exports has been a major driver of economic growth (Asia Foundation, 2013). Moreover, with significant contribution of remittances received to GDP growth, the Bangladesh '2030 Strategy' calls for simplifications in international exchanges, and facilitation of measures for emigrants (DDCI, 2010).

In order to reach its 6.88 % GDP growth rate, a jump from 11 % to 14.5 % share of remittances in GDP is needed. To assist this, programs such as promoting higher standard of education and assistance for migrant workers abroad are underway (Islam, 2010). Hence, a continued upward trend in remittances is expected in 2030.

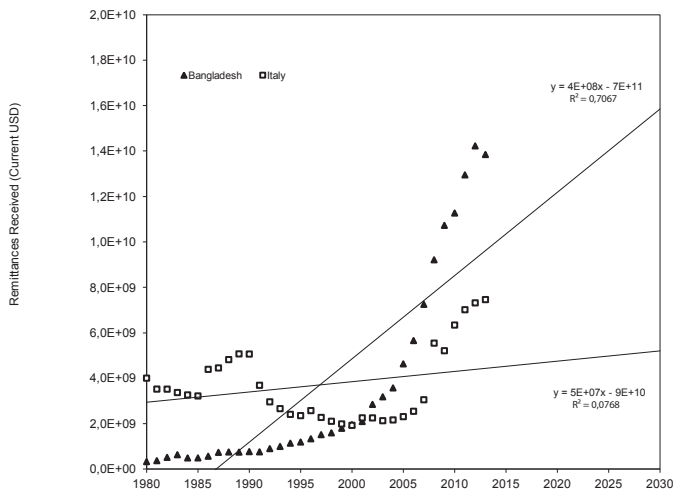


Fig. 11 Remittances received by Italy and Bangladesh

### 5 Conclusion

This report attempts to set quantified targets for the identified indicators in relation to two of the SDG Post-2015 goals for Italy and Bangladesh. Through a BAU scenario, a comparison between the historic and projected trends was depicted per indicator to demonstrate the need for change in current practices for both countries. Subsequently, the authors set the national targets based on the latest 5 year OECD and BRICS average for Italy and Bangladesh, respectively. The rationale

behind this is that, the developmental indicators of both these countries lag behind the economic associations that they either belong to or whose levels it aspires to replicate. Unsurprisingly, economic development is a high-priority issue for both countries as seen in the discussion above, which seeks to justify that the improvement in Goal 10 indicators is very closely related to and in some cases emanates as a spillover effect of improvements in Goal 8 indicators. Instead of suggesting new policy formulations, this paper analyzed the present political agenda, high-priority reforms being debated, new developments and legislations that are underway and the effect of these changes on the identified issues. This has been summarized graphically to depict the temporal transition pathway (Fig. 12). The roadmap template developed illustrates the progress of a country in terms of reaching its 2030 targets vis-à-vis its level of ambition (i.e. low, medium and high). With 2015 as the starting year, a measure that contributes towards the fulfillment of the target is a step diagonally forward while an indirect and uncertain action would merit a horizontal movement. Using the data generated above, it can clearly be seen that Bangladesh's ambitious actions are likely to keep them on track of meeting their targets in comparison to Italy's less ambitious measures for promoting national development.

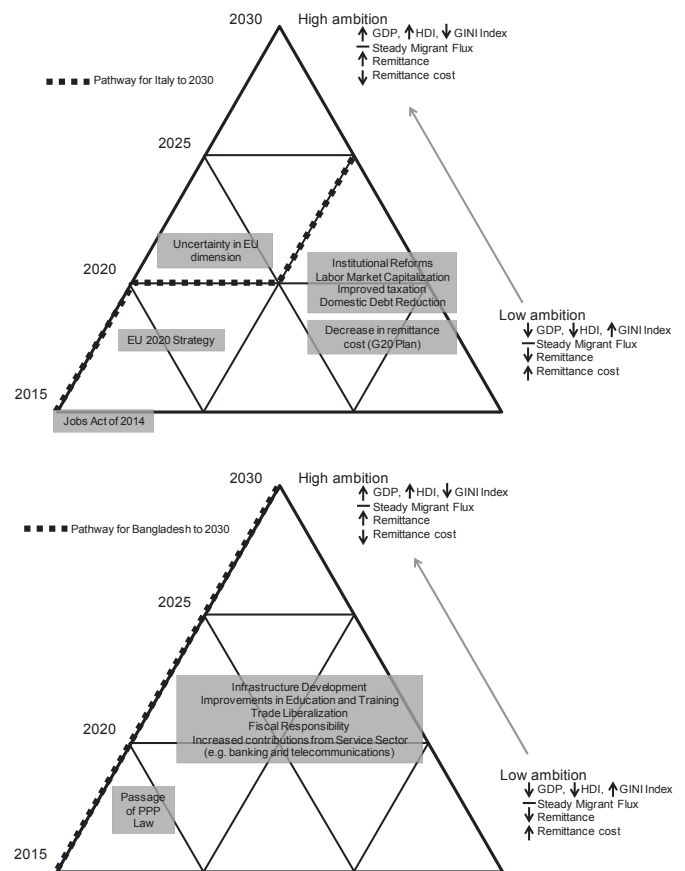


Fig. 12 Temporal transition pathways for Italy and Bangladesh towards 2030

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