

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **USAID and BWCCI hold Seminar on Anti-corruption Reforms**

**Dhaka, June 17, 2012** – The U.S. Government, through USAID, with the Ministry of Commerce, jointly inaugurated a national seminar today that focused on policy reforms to combat corruption faced by Bangladeshi women entrepreneurs. The seminar was organized by the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI) in partnership with USAID’s Democracy and Governance program: Promoting Governance, Accountability, Transparency, and Integrity (PROGATI).

In his remarks today the USAID Democracy & Governance Acting Director Patrick Bowers reiterated the U.S. Government’s commitment to women’s empowerment as an essential element of advancing development and prosperity. He noted that transparency and accountability in government service provision, including trade license issuance and tax collection, are keys to ensuring fair and equal access to economic activities.

Since 2009, The PROGATI program has worked with the BWCCI to empower women entrepreneurs to fight corruption while establishing and managing their businesses. BWCCI established working groups for women entrepreneurs in three divisions: Khulna, Rajshahi, and Rangpur. Today’s seminar provided a platform to present achievements accomplished through the working groups and advocate for national level policy reform. Desired policy reforms included: a Women Entrepreneurs Development Policy established by the government; digitization of the trade license application and renewal process in all city corporations and municipality offices; and the designation of tax, VAT, and customs focal persons specifically assigned to support women entrepreneurs in every district under the National Board of Revenue’s (NBR) jurisdiction.

BWCCI’s program has established committees in each city corporation to supervise and monitor the government’s processing of trade licenses for women entrepreneurs. USAID/PROGATI and BWCCI advocacy efforts have resulted in the assignment of a Deputy Commissioner of Tax as a designated focal person for TIN, VAT and tax issues at each divisional NBR office. Consequently, women entrepreneurs can get timely information and guidance on official procedures without being shuffled among various agencies, thereby reducing opportunities for exploitation.

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The U.S. Government, through USAID, has provided over \$5.8 billion in development assistance to Bangladesh since 1971. In 2011 alone, USAID provided more than \$180 million to improve the lives of people in Bangladesh, including \$17 million in environment and climate change funding. USAID supports programs in Bangladesh that: promote democratic institutions and practices; expand food security and economic opportunity; improve health and education services; and increase resiliency to climate change through adaptation and low carbon development.

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**GR/ 2012**

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