

# A Forum for Regional Development

by S Bari

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**B**ANGLADESH teams with development agencies: walk ten metres and a non-governmental organization is at work. But regional organizations, the result of mutual commitment of a number of nations, tend to have their headquarters in more glamorous capitals of the world. The Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific is one of the few regional agencies based in Bangladesh. Created to fulfill the objective of rural development using community involvement, CIRDAP is celebrating its 12th birthday today.

#### CIRDAP in Dhaka

On 6th July 1979, CIRDAP was established by the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Its driving force was the Food and Agriculture Organization. Bangladesh is the host country of CIRDAP. Initially based in Comilla, on the campus of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, the Centre moved to the capital in January 1985. Not only does a regional organization enhance Dhaka's position in the regional set-up, the economic benefits are not negligible. Seminars, conferences, and training courses take place regularly, drawing participants from around Asia to Dhaka. At the same time, the move to the capital has increased CIRDAP's visibility and therefore its effectiveness.

As Director of CIRDAP Mr A T M Shamsul Huq says, "An intergovernmental organisation takes time to grow roots. When we were at BARD, our visibility as an organization was low, and the decision was made at the ministerial level to shift headquarters to Dhaka. There was some pressure on Bangladesh, as the Philippines and Pakistan would both have welcomed the opportunity to be host country. In Dhaka, we have closer contact with the government, with donor countries and agencies, with the general public." Seminars and courses arranged by CIRDAP in Dhaka on issues such as Disaster Management and Alleviation of Poverty through Agricultural Projects bring scores of participants and experts to the country. This creates a network of people active in development who have been to Dhaka and therefore have some knowledge of and interest in Bangladesh. This can only generate further results in developmental work here.

#### The background

The world's poor are overwhelmingly rural. To stroll through the streets of Third World cities is to witness great urban poverty, but the rural areas lack even many of the basic facilities and rights that city-dwellers manage to get. Necessities such as education, hygiene, drinking water, even any water at all, are virtually non-existent in most of the world's villages. Yet it is on this poorest section of society that the national economy depends, as developing countries revolve around their agriculture and therefore their rural sectors. The majority of the population lives in these areas, and it is their work that runs the nation: their farming, fishing, and related activities.

In spite of the Green Revolution of the '60s, which saw economies boom by 4 and 5 and 6 per cent, in countries like India, it soon became apparent that the benefits were

not quite as widespread as anticipated. The trickle-down theory of economists was not materialising on any massive scale. According to Mr Huq, "The socio-economic conditions of millions of the poor and jobless in the rural areas of this region not only did not improve but actually deteriorated." To top this crisis, the rural poor of the world are concentrated mainly in the Asia-Pacific region.

A World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development was held under the aegis of FAO, with a view to discuss possible measures of national and regional action in the area of rural poverty. At this time, CIRDAP was established as a forum for regional cooperation. The six South-East Asian members of CIRDAP are Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The South Asian members are Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The top is the Governing Council, where we have the political support necessary from the ministerial level. On any issue, we can therefore tap human resources at each of these levels. When a project is to be approved, we can obtain professional, bureaucratic, and political approval.

CIRDAP is essentially a research organization. Topics such as landlessness, the gender dimension in poverty alleviation, monitoring and evaluation techniques, disaster management, social forestry and family planning are studied and analysed by experts from various countries and institutions. Designated "link" institutions provide CIRDAP with a ready-

made corps of professional available upon request for ventures in health, agriculture, education and other developmental fields. In each member country, the Centre has these link institutions; in Bangladesh, Comilla's BARD fulfills this function. This networking approach, Mr Huq considers, is the key to CIRDAP's effectiveness.

Structure and work  
Several divisions take care of CIRDAP work. Of these, the first is Research, since that is the root of the Centre's actions. Theories of rural community planning and of how to enhance individual participation in the development of one's village are elaborated. Suggesting policy options on agrarian reform and socio-economic changes is part of the Research division's job. The division's system for monitoring and evaluation was circulated to member countries, where the governments try to implement the programme. Recently Pakistan has adopted a number of policies which were originally suggestions of the Centre. Infrastructural and institutional change in dealing with agrarian reform is an area of emphasis of the division.

The Training division undertakes to train people both at the professional level of development worker or government officer and at the level of the village, where grass-roots training raises the involvement of the poor in their own progress. Countries which are not members have also profited from the training programmes of CIRDAP, since anyone who can benefit is allowed to attend. The division includes a training for trainers themselves, which makes the entire operation as professional and effective as possible.

Action Research, an attention-grabbing name in itself, is the culmination of the two previous divisions. In it, the results of research and training are put into actual practice, on the micro level. Through this division, CIRDAP is functioning in some 15 Bangladeshi villages, in areas like fishing, literacy, and child welfare. People in the villages are encouraged to test the projects themselves. They collect the data, they manage the outcome. This technique has been dubbed Community Information Planning System by CIRDAP. Mr U S Raghavan, Administrative Officer-Cum-Treasurer, says, "The lacuna in development projects is often in their implementation. By direct involvement of the people, we enable the projects to work better." Citizen participation has seen school attendance in the village of Dorpara

in Sherpur, Bogra, jump to "nearly 100 per cent," Mr Huq says in a gratified tone.

#### In Bangladesh

Research on Bangladesh-related problems has put a priority on water-landlordism, landless farmers, monitoring action and child health. In the action-research field, CIRDAP is involved in kitchen gardening. This project aims to teach

rural women to maximise their homestead space for kitchen gardening. The income generated helps the entire household as well as creating a certain measure of economic independence for women. Through the initiative, women are also trained in food preservation and nutrition best suited to the needs of their families. Collective decision-making and organizational skills are side

benefits of the programme. Among the income-generating activities of the women in the project villages are cattle tending, vegetable production and food-processing.

Since deforestation is a major problem in poor and overcrowded nations, CIRDAP has launched social forestry projects in several countries, of which one is Bangladesh. Rather than hacking away at the forest to earn some money, villagers are taught the value of wooden land.

A regional, intergovernmental and autonomous institution, CIRDAP operates on a staff of some fifteen professionals, from various countries. The areas in which the Centre works are all facets of rural development, and naturally are not all covered with the same diligence. Lack of funding is a chronic problem in any development agency. But the fact that a regional organization has chosen Dhaka as its headquarters is a heartening fact, and an advantage that we should try to keep.

## 'We Have No Fixed Support for Programmes'

### An Interview with CIRDAP Director

**T**HE Director of CIRDAP, Mr A T M Shamsul Huq, spoke with our correspondent on the occasion of the Centre's 12th anniversary. Mr Huq has been with the organization for seven years.

*Daily Star: What distinguishes CIRDAP from other development agencies? What facets would you highlight?*

Mr Huq: In our name, the word "integrated" means a great deal. As a concept, integrated development peaked in the 70s. That each sector of a society was separate was not something accepted then. Development included everything: children, water, irrigation, and women's equality. We operate on that theory. Since the 80s, some quarters have expressed doubts about the effectiveness of integrated development as opposed to sectorial development, where one agency deals with water, another with children, another with health, and so on. Many felt that integrated development could not achieve as much as specialised work. But I believe that development is one whole, and that the issues are all interrelated. Here is where I think CIRDAP is unique. And I am grateful that our member countries still believe in integrated development, and that their support is undiminished despite the change of attitude in many of the Western countries.

*DS: How is Bangladesh rat-*



A.T.M. Shamsul Huq, Director of CIRDAP.

*ing as a host country?*

Mr Huq: The host country has a number of responsibilities. To provide land, buildings, facilities. We have been given the opportunity to move to Dhaka, and the government has given us a beautiful and historical building. [CIRDAP works in Chameli House, a British-period red-brick building near the National Press Club.] However, we do have some problems with the facilities available to us. An intergovernmental agency has to have seminar rooms and an auditorium. Staff accommodation is difficult. The government is not refusing us these things, but we are a country short of funds, and the administration is dragging its feet. On the grounds provided to us I would like to build some permanent structures for training courses and as a

dormitory, but all we have is some tin structures. Other members are putting pressure on Bangladesh to improve the facilities. Though I would like to say that in general the support has been quite solid from our host country.

*DS: What are some of the frustrations of the job? What are your future plans?*

Mr Huq: My main frustration? That's easy. We have no fixed, assured, regular financial support for our programmes. Let me explain. Member countries contribute a fixed regular sum, but their money is solely for administrative purposes, not for our programmes. To implement any project, the funding becomes a hassle. Our donor agencies and countries are the source for programme funding: FAO, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, Japan, the Netherlands. But there is no prior commitment, so we are always kept guessing. FAO has its own financial problems. Country contributions should go at least in part towards programmes. The funding situation keeps me on my toes all the time.

If there is one thing I could wish for, it would be consistent funding. That way we could implement our programmes on a more satisfactory and stable basis.

Division is rice production and sustainability and engineered pest control. In recent years, 3,000 manufacturers worldwide have received plans and blueprints from IIRI Engineering. In a year, half a ton of blueprints are sent out to serious inquiries.



## AIT-IRRI Link up on Rice Technology

**L**OS BANOS, Philippines: One has a job seeder which reduces a farmer's backbreaking task. The other has a hydrotriller which cuts riceland preparation by half.

Both want each other's tools, among other things. And a partnership between the two institutions promises to be a boon to rice farmers.

The Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), based in Bangkok, and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), based here, have agreed to do studies on ways to increase rice production through appropriate technology development.

The AIT and IRRI will collaborate in language training and computer-based information management. To improve information-sharing between rice institutes across Asia, IRRI will connect to the satellite data links of five information centres managed by AIT.

The first joint studies will be in irrigation, the use of satellite data to map rice areas with common ecological characteristics and agricultural mechanisation.

The collaboration was announced by Dr. Klaus Kempe, IRRI director general and Dr. Alistair North, AIT president. Dr. North recently visited IRRI together with Dr. Sarath Ilangantilleke, chairman of AIT's Division of Agricultural and Food Engineering.

"We complement each other," says Dr. Graeme R. Quick, head of IRRI's Agricultural Engineering Department. "AIT can provide the academic studies and IRRI can push through with the

product until its release to manufacturers."

Dr. Quick is thinking of new tools and machines which IRRI hopes to promote to rice farmers. For instance, AIT has developed a job seeder which reduces 23 days of planting a hectare of soybean to a more comfortable 15 days.

In Thailand, soybean is traditionally planted in three steps: making holes in the soil, dropping the seeds by bending or squatting and covering the seeds—all manually.

### The first joint studies will be in irrigation, satellite mapping and agricultural mechanisation

The job seeder does all these in one stroke, while the planter in standing. Where before it took three persons to do it, now it takes only one.

Two Thai manufacturers have made the job seeders at US\$10 each, and together with AIT, have sold them to farmers. The job seeder was developed by AIT in a project funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre.

It is being popularised by AIT because in many Asian countries, soybean is frequently sown following rice harvests in paddy fields which are not prepared for planting.

"We will promote the job seeder because it has potential uses for rice farmers wanting to plant upland maize and beans," says Dr. Quick. He says IRRI will not remodel the job seeder. "It needs no improvement as it is al-

ready a good design," says Dr. Quick.

He says that AIT also has expertise on tillage research and soil implement behaviour. AIT is doing studies on improving farm tools and looking at how they work in the field. For instance, an equipment which IRRI does not have but which AIT has—the soil bin—is useful in farm mechanisation studies. The soil bin tests the performance—like drag—of tillage tools and the traction of small tractors.

"In the future, we will encourage them to work on improvements of the moldboard plow and tillage equipment," Dr. Quick says.

He also sees collaboration on studies in pesticides application technology, especially spray drift. Both institutions could also look on the efficient targeting of chemical sprays—that is Dr. Quick says, "the accurate application of pesticides, with more chemicals on the plant and less on the ground, and thus the environment. They're doing something about it, we're doing some research on it."

Another area of partnership is on grain drying. "AIT is doing good work there and it is interesting to us as one of our interests is post-harvest technology," Dr. Quick says.

The other interest of IRRI's Agricultural Engineering

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According to IRRI, a million machines have been manufactured around the world using IRRI designs. A number of local manufacturers started on their ventures by making IRRI-designed equipment.

IRRI has developed a hydrotriller which reduces wetland ricefield preparation time by three weeks. The hydrotriller, which floats on two pontoons, can also control weeds right to the corner of ricefields. The hydrotriller can till 2 hectares a day while a two-wheel hand tractor can till only 1 hectare.

It costs about the same as a hand tractor (US\$400) but the hydrotriller design is simple and easy to make. Eight Philippine firms have started manufacturing the hydrotriller. One manufacturer here sold 60 units in only two cropping seasons. Designs have been distributed by IRRI to manufacturers in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

A "no-frills," and low-cost, single axle tractor has been designed at one-fourth the price of a similarly powered (7 horsepower) machine from Japan. The engine can be switched from front to rear mounting, a feature not available on more sophisticated and imported trillers.

## Development in Asia, or How to Catch a Wind

**S**eoul: A world of cheap, abundant food, cushioned by surplus stocks, large reserves of forests, fishery ground and cropland—this is now history.

In a paper presented at the recent 47th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) here, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said that "Profligate ways of the past have ensured that our children will inherit a world where scarcities may well be a permanent feature."

The FAO paper said increases in food production in the Asia-Pacific region, while constituting grounds for cautious optimism, do not justify complacency.

It stressed that the temptation "to rest on our laurels" should be resisted because production increases actually mask a harsh fact.

"We are breaching, at many points, the limits of arable land. Ratio of arable land to agricultural population deteriorated to 0.26 hectares per caput in 1988. This is a bleak but direct indicator of land scarcity," it said. Furthermore, the paper warned that this trend will continue.

The latest FAO figures show that cereal production in the Asia-Pacific rose by 2.4 per cent since ESCAP's 46th session. Wheat increased by 5 per cent.

less keep abreast of population growth which added the equivalent of one Pakistan to the world last year.

But the FAO paper said, "Cereals are fed form only a fraction of the food security equation. Surpluses have a nasty history of evaporating overnight from a failed monsoon or drought."

While the region could boast of increased cereal production, it also remained host to "the largest concentrations of ill-fed people, marginalised by poverty." The presence of these ill-fed, malnourished people threatens to prevent the realisation of ESCAP's goal of industrial restructuring in the region.

"These hopes (for industrial restructuring) will remain illusory if malnutrition persists on the scale it does. Although dietary supply increased by 13 per cent, well over 313 million people skirt the brink of starvation daily in the region. Some 115 million children are stunted," FAO said.

"Seeking to build industry on the backs of anemic and listless people, shackled by abbreviated lifespans, is comparable—in the imagery of a Malaysian proverb—to catch the wind with a net," FAO added.

The UN agency also underscored the alarming extent of environmental degradation in the region which can negate

past gains. It noted, "More valuable farmland is buried daily in concrete by factories, and roads, as migrants flee rural poverty for urban slums in historically-unprecedented numbers. This trend will be reinforced by shifts of cultivated area from food to cash crops."

Increasing soil erosion accelerates the decline. FAO estimates that the proportional extent of degraded land ranges from 35 per cent for the Lao People's Democratic Republic to 48.9 per cent for Vietnam.

Waterlogging and salinisation have rendered vast tracks of land unproductive. Desertification is spreading in Asia, desert encroach outwardly yearly by about one million hectares. Fishery and forestry resources have been exploited at similar unsustainable rates.

Deforestation continues at significant rates. FAO said deforestation today is double the rates inflicted a decade ago. Destruction has spiralled to 4.7 million hectares annually.

"This drain is a headlong plunge into environmental suicide—only we plunge ahead at twice the speed clocked earlier," FAO said. It added that the destruction pattern prevails regionwide. While deforestation may level off at four to five million

hectares per year for the remainder of the current century, by then only fragments will remain of rain forests.

FAO said the 1990s is the decade when people have "to choose to either stride purposefully or just drift into the world of the 21st century—a world that will be increasingly crowded, hungry, competitive and badly in need of understanding itself."

A future world of scarcities may be avoided if, in the 1990s, people decisively curb onslaughts against the very systems that support life.

FAO noted that there are already hopeful signs that governments and the international community are now seeking to avert such a future. However, it stressed that the people themselves remain the most important elements in these efforts.

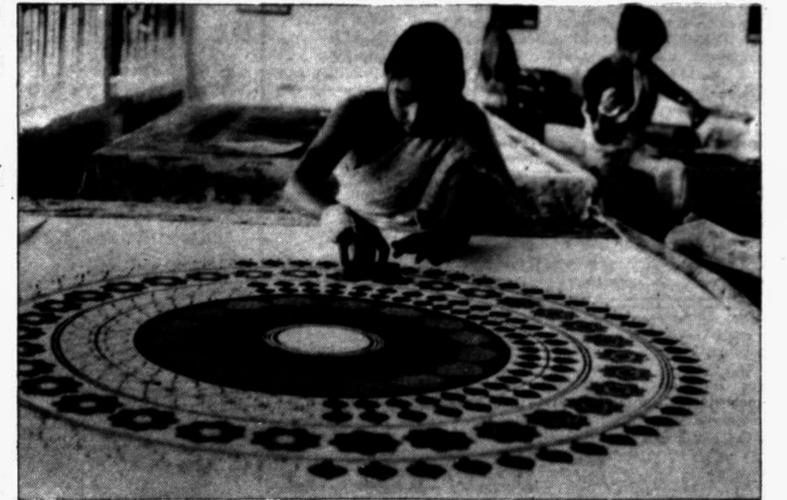
Unjust economic, social and political structures which oppress the people and keep them shackled to a life of penury should be corrected.

Mechanisms have to be set up to enable the people to be heard. With the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), "movements from below" have to be organised.

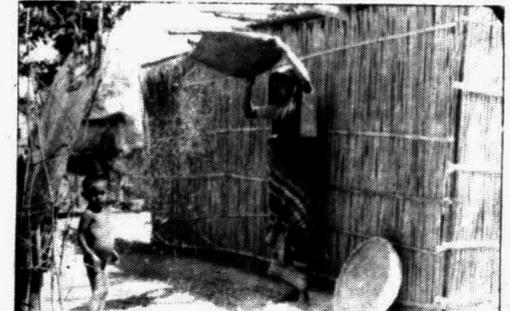
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CIRDAP-ESCAP training workshop on project administration for women in Bangladesh, held in March 1988.



Women in rural industries—a CIRDAP research project in Bangladesh.



Post-harvest loss prevention, a training project for women.

