

Feature Development

Rural Development and Structural Constraints

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BANGLADESH is overwhelmingly a rural society where the majority of her population live below poverty level. Rural development activities can go a long way toward reducing underdevelopment and massive poverty in the rural areas. But the various development measures which have been taken both by government and non-government organizations, are facing numerous problems and fail to attain their goals due to some structural constraints of the village itself.

The reality of Bangladesh, despite the departure of the Hindu Zamindars and the various attempts at land tenure reform, is still one of very wide wealth and power differentials. The government of Bangladesh itself has quite trenchantly criticized the inequalities of the existing system not only on moral grounds, but also because the absence of community cohesion such as system engenders, creates difficulties when introducing co-operative development schemes.

The nature and character of the rural social structure, its organizations and power relations often act as major hindrance on the effective implementation of the rural development programmes aiming at poverty alleviation. What are the main obstacles to this? These are: (i) traditional rural organizations, (ii) power relations in rural structure (iii) factional politics, (iv) interest of the local and governments elites and their bias.

demerit of political power and social influence is exercised by the member of the dominant lineage over the whole community, over the whole village within the lineage the more influential persons are the leaders and they become the headman of the village. All the village functions are influenced and dominated by Headmen's wish and interest.

The rural elites of Bangladesh are apparently distrusted by the urban bureaucratic and political elites. He says that publicly this urban elites call them 'touts'. But privately they have their hands in gloves with them. He goes on to say that 'After all they are their brothers, cousins, uncles or in-laws'.

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Our people or common people expects patronage from the ruling elite, and the peasant expect patronage from the rich farmers, village Mahajan, small traders etc.

These rich farmers, 'mahajans' or small traders in their turn expect patronage from ruling elites as members of the public. Such patron-client relationship is increasingly being spread all over Bangladesh. As a result, the concept of rule of law and

with the system of patronage. The patron-client relationships are therefore important among the village functionaries along with factionalism.

The leaders 'matabbars' and the rich farmers are the patrons. Their leadership depends on the support of their clients, mostly the kinsmen and the poor peasantry. The faction leaders channel them funds and favours to their respective client or faction members to gain constant support.

This factionalism brings about political cleavages. On this context B K Jahangir pointed that political cleavages are often organized not on horizontal lines of class conflict but on vertical ones which run across class lines and in this way different faction leaders through the mechanism of alliances control village and inter village parties to determine their vested interest.

Alau (1973) commented, 'An important aspect of factional politics is that rural factions are in general structurally similar namely that they represent similar configurations of social groups — where that is so — the faction model describes as segmental rather than class conflict.' Such conflict, therefore do not have an ideological expression, because rival faction or faction leaders fight for control over resources, power, status as available with in the existing frame-work of society rather than for the change in the social structure.

In the light of these findings it can be said that any development efforts of the village poor are bound to fail within the existing social structure. Because the rural social organizations are traditional and they have no democratic norms. Neither they are rational nor they are modern. These institutions favour the rich, leaders, not the common people. In fact there is no guarantee of the massive participation of the common people in village development programmes rather they are the victim of the power-relation games of patrons and the leaders. To achieve success in any development programme the existing social structure is to be rebuilt. For planning and implementation of the rural development programmes decentralization of power is required and to ensure the participation of the people in any massive development programme, rural people have to be provided with sufficient knowledge and experience about their own needs and local conditions. For whom the development is needed, they must desire development and their social economic legal and political institutions must be favourable for them.

R. Nicholas, studied on the political structure of village in relation to factions in South



Children — makers of a prosperous rural order

The living and the social life of the rural population in Bangladesh is conditioned and structured by village social organizations. The interaction and relationships among the villagers as member of the kins groups take place within hierarchical setting of the organizations.

The patrilineal kins group which is based on homestead forms of social basis of community organization. Social interaction and solidarity among the members of the kin groups depends on the closeness of homestead.

A village therefore consists of homestead organizations or clusters and each homestead intern comprises a particular lineage. The most important fact is that the relation and lineage system plays an important role in the village organization. As a result the prepon-

democratic values become meaningless. The village organizations often experience chaos and conflicts because of the competition of the leaders. To gain more dominance and influence the village headmen sometime introduce faction politics among different kin groups.

A number of household comprises a para the parts of village. There may be one head of every para. There may be a socio-political and economic understanding among the headman of para. The headmen are the power holders, they have linkage with the local government officials. They are treated as the local elites. The success or the failure of the village development programme largely depends on their wishes and interest. Those leaders take the lion's share of any development allo-

Asia and said village which appear to be the most natural of human community and the most obvious basis for co-operative development organisations, frequently proved to be cockpits of bitter struggle, factionalism and the very opposite of co-operation: no one could show an effective remedy but it is clear that rural development is severely hampered by the prevalence of such conflicts.

Sometime, in rural Bangladesh factional politics is infact reinforced by various rural development programmes initiated by government. Various resources and economic support offered by government agencies leads the leaders of the village to enter into conflict with one another to gain control over resources. The formation of the factions in rural areas is closely linked

WHEN budget restrictions meant a Pakistani high school could not hire a badly-needed teacher, enthusiastic members of a local youth committee stepped in to lend a hand.

They tracked down a replacement for the teacher who had left, drummed up support among villagers and raised enough money to pay her wages. Yet another problem had been solved by one of Pakistan's numerous — and increasingly active — youth organisations.

Shortage of teachers, however, is but one of a host of challenges facing Pakistani youth groups today. Unemployment, illiteracy, drug abuse and a new culture of violence are among the many crises with which they must contend.

Beset with a deepening economic crisis, the Pakistani economy now cannot create the half-million new jobs needed every year as waves of youngsters enter the workforce.

Joblessness had led to a wide range of devastating social problems. Every year, for example, the number of heroin addicts in Pakistan grows by an estimated 100,000. More than three-quarters are between 16 and 30.

Meanwhile, only half the country's children enter primary school. Of those, half drop out before completing their first five years of basic schooling, leaving slim hopes to improve the 26 per cent literacy rate.

People between 15 and 35 make up 29 per cent of Pakistan's population — its second largest demographic group — and are more economically active than any other age group.

Yet colleges are so crowded that high school graduates who wish to continue their studies usually have no choice but to do so privately, outside formal education institutions.

And government youth programmes have been largely ineffective. One, which provides

young people with small-business loans worth \$2,000-\$5,000, has been marred by corruption and use for political ends.

Against this grim background, youth workers are remarkably optimistic. Their faith seems to stem from the determination and community awareness they encounter among young people in the field.

Says Mohammed Zahir Kasi, an experienced youth worker from Quetta, capital of Baluchistan province: 'They know what the problems are and they want to do something about it. They're just searching for solutions.'

The most successful solutions have come in the form of self-help projects devised by community members to respond to pressing community needs.

Abdur Razzak Baloch, a student from a Karachi shantytown and convener of the Karachi Social Welfare Federation, which unites 26 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — proudly explains how the free education centre run by his group has helped more than 5,000 students aged 6 to 16.

From the tribal-dominated mountainous North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to the southern Thar desert, most youth committees run similar tuition centres and adult literacy groups.

Youth committees have also successfully responded to needs more particular to communities, the Afghan war, for instance, brought a flood of weapons into neighbouring Pakistan, infecting the NWFP with what has become known

At a time when the political and economic order which has dominated the twentieth century is visibly dying, the United Nations Children's Fund has published a list of agenda items for the new world order that is struggling to be born. These suggestions stem from forty years experience of working in over a hundred countries with some of humanity's greatest problems', says UNICEF's Executive Director, James Grant.

The suggestions are set out UNICEF's State of the World's Children report for 1992. 'Taken together', says Grant, 'they add up to a proposal that ending the absolute poverty of one quarter of mankind — the more than one billion people who still live and die with preventable hunger, disease, and illiteracy — should rank alongside the related issues of preserving the peace and protecting the environment as priority items on the agenda of that new world order.'

The 10 propositions are:

1. That a new world order should keep the promises of the World Summit for Children.

The goals agreed at the 1990 World Summit for Children included preventing 4 million child deaths a year, halving child malnutrition, ending disease like polio and tetanus, ensuring a basic education for all children, and ensuring that all families have clean water and access to family planning. 'That great promise to the world's children should now be kept', says the report. At present, a quarter of a million young children are dying every week, and millions more are living with malnutrition and almost permanent ill health. Half of this suffering, says UNICEF, is caused by five or six specific illnesses which can now be prevented or treated at very low cost.

2. That the principle of 'first call for children' should become an accepted ethic of a new world order.

Protecting the growing minds and bodies of young children, through the vulnerable early years, should have a first call on societies' resources, says the report. Most of the mental and physical development of the human being occurs at that time. So basic protection — including adequate nutrition, health care, and primary education — should be not just a priority but an absolute. 'Children should be able to depend on that commitment in good times and in bad', says Grant.

3. That improving the health and nutrition of the world's children will help, not hinder, the struggle to slow population growth.

When parents become more confident that their children will survive, says UNICEF, they

are more likely to be interested in family planning. Most of the developing nations are now entering or approaching the stage at which further declines in child deaths are associated with much steeper declines in birth rates. Further improvements in child health should now pay major dividends in falling birth rates.

4. That market economic policies should be accompanied by basic investments in people.

The virtual collapse of the idea of centralized state control of economic life does not mean that governments should leave everything to the markets, says the report. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that virtually all members of society have adequate nutrition, primary health care, clean water, safe sanitation, family planning services, and at least a primary education. These basic investments are essential not only for humanitarian reasons, says UNICEF, but also because they are the foundations for sustained economic growth.

5. That increases in international aid should be based on a commitment to meeting minimum human needs.

More international aid is necessary to defeat poverty, says the report, but there will be little public support for any increase unless aid is seen to be being used primarily for improving the lives of the poor. 'That is the kind of aid which the majority of people in the developing world want to receive and the kind of aid which the majority of people in the industrialized world

want to give', says UNICEF. At present, less than 10% of all international aid is allocated to meeting basic needs for health, primary education, clean water, and family planning.

6. That action on debt, aid, and trade should create an economic environment in which the people of the developing world can earn a decent living.

Although average incomes have risen substantially in Asia, says the report, the 1980s, were nonetheless a disastrous decade for the majority of countries in the poor world. Average incomes fell by approximately 10% in Latin America and by 25% in Africa. One cause is the debt crisis which is still transferring almost \$50 billion a year from poor to rich nations. Another cause is protectionism in the rich world which costs the poor world a further \$50 billion a year in lost exports.

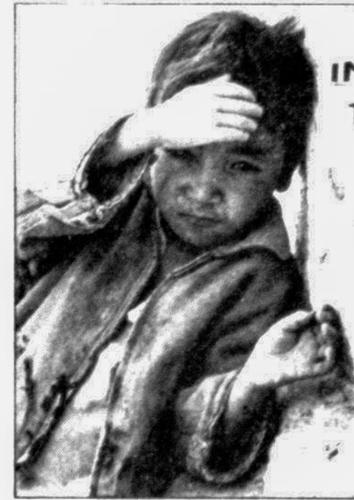
7. That demilitarization should begin in the poor world and that falling arms expenditures in the rich world should be linked to increases in aid for development.

The State of the World's Children report calculates that the amount now spent on the world's military exceeds the combined annual incomes of the poorest half of humanity. The goals of the World Summit for Children — including drastic reductions in malnutrition and disease and a basic education for all children — could be met by reallocating just 10% of military expenditure in the developing world and 1% in the industrialized world.

8. That the chains of Africa's debt be struck off.

Africa is only managing to pay about one third of the interest due on its debts. Even this is absorbing a quarter of

A New Order In The Making



IN THE LAST DECADE

- 1.5 million children killed in wars
- 4 million disabled
- 12 million homeless

all its export earnings and costing the continent, each year, more than its total spending on the health and education of its people. 'If Africa is not to be left behind as the rest of the world struggles towards a new peace and a new prosperity', says UNICEF, 'then the ways and means should now be found to absolve Africa of the great majority of its bilateral and international debts.'

9. That a new world order should oppose the apartheid of gender as vigorously as the apartheid of race.

The women of the developing world do a disproportionate amount of the third world's work but are generally rewarded with less food, less health care, less education, less training, less leisure, less income, less rights and less protection, says the report.

10. That the responsible planning of births is one of the most effective and least expensive ways of improving the quality of life on earth — both now and in the future.

So important is family planning to the health of mothers and children, says the UNICEF reports, that it would be a top priority even if there were no such thing as a population problem. Hundreds of thousands of women and several million children die each year because of births which are too many or too close together, or because mothers were too young or too old to give birth safely.

'For all of these reasons', concludes the State of the World's Children report, 'family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race.' —UNICEF

Huge Challenges Await Pakistan's Youth Groups

Cassandra Balchin from Lahore

Unemployment, illiteracy, drug abuse and a new culture of violence are among the many problems facing Pakistani youth. The Paasban youth programme is the oldest in the country. It claims 50,000 volunteers — Pakistan's largest network of young community leaders. Gemini News Service reports on its training schemes to equip youth with technical and educational skills for community development.

as a 'Kalashnikov culture' — and a steady rise in violent crime.

Traditional blood feuds have spun out of control in the area. Arif Alam Tabassum, a member

of the Mardan Youth Welfare Association, says much of his group's work involves settling disputes between Kalashnikov-toting groups, usually made up of hotheaded youngsters.



Youth groups have also begun to tackle environmental problems. Concern over deforestation prompted Raja Mohammed Arif — a 22-year-old from the Murree hill-station region and until recently and illiterate — to write two pamphlets on the environment, fulfilling a pressing need for educational material on the environment in the Urdu language.

Like Tabassum and Baloch, Arif belongs to a youth committee affiliated with Paasban, the social development wing of the Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP).

The Association of United Youth of Nawakhill, for example, came across considerable opposition from local mullahs to their efforts to increase school attendance. Explains Masoom Khan Kakar: 'We say to them 'Fine, the children should go to your madrassah, but let them also go to school.' The association has built a children's library. Masoom notes with a twinkle that the 'mullahs' children also come to borrow books.'

Barriers to girls' participation in youth groups are coming down slowly, with opposition sometimes coming from brothers who are themselves active members. But Nusrat, a Paasban Supervisor from Tulsipura village near Lahore, is quietly determined. 'It is up to us,' she says, 'to create the right atmosphere for us to be able to get out.'

(British born Cassandra Balchin has written for many Pakistani national newspapers. She now works at Women's Resource Centre Lahore.)