

SEED POLICY

Fighting on Three Fronts

by M Gul Hossain, Ph D

As far as agricultural development vis-a-vis seed business is concerned, the challenge ahead of Bangladesh is a symbiotic development on three fronts: one, how to make the public sector research responsive to the present needs and future demands of how to promote the private sector seed business that can rationally meet the demands of our farmers; and three, how the public sector research and private sector seed business can be mutually helpful to improve the fragile economic conditions of our farming community.

THE National Seed Policy (1993), published by the Government of Bangladesh, states the procedures for Approval and Registration of Varieties as follows: "New varieties of wheat, rice, jute, potato, and sugarcane developed by private or public agencies will be subject to notification by the National Seed Board (NSB) under the Ministry of Agriculture.

This means that a variety of any of these five crops, declared as "Controlled Crops" in the Seed Policy, will be subjected, and rightly, to all seed regulations (description of varietal characteristics, evaluation and testing of a crop variety for quality and/or quantity of its produces, resistance to pests and diseases, special care, if any, needed to grow the variety, etc.). These five notified or controlled crops are those wherein our agricultural research institutes have achieved some notable success in variety development. The Seed Policy also made it binding, and again rightly, for our (public) agricultural research institutes/agencies to follow similar regulations in the release of varieties of all other crops.

However, the perplexing point in the Seed Policy is the statement: "Varieties of crops other than rice, wheat, jute, potato and sugarcane that are imported or locally developed by a private person, company or agency... will not be subjected to any other restrictions" except that the varieties shall simply be registered with the NSB. The only requirement for private seed importers or any other private agencies involved in seed business is to provide the cultivar (i.e. variety) description to the National Seed Board (NSB). This means that for private agencies there is no quality control for whatever is imported, sold, and at whatever price. The Seed Policy reaffirms this potentially dangerous policy when it says: "In the event a variety of seed is found to be harmful or potentially harmful to the country's agriculture, the NSB will prohibit the sale of that variety." The Seed Policy does not talk about compensations to those farmers who may suffer losses from such "harmful or potentially harmful" seed material, nor of any punishment or penalty to the agency that may, knowingly or unknowingly, pose a threat to farmers or to the country's agriculture.

Does this reflect an unquestionable faith of our seed policy

makers on private importers or agencies? Does this at the same time reflect the policy makers' mistrust and contempt for the public sector agricultural research institutes? What more harm can a public sector plant breeder do by releasing a crop variety than a seed trader who is free to import any seed from anywhere and sell it to any farmer at any price? Is there any country in the scientific world which gives such a "blank cheque" to seed dealers?

The "blank cheque" given to any agencies for seed business reminds us of the havoc cre-

but also from the living memory of this generation.

Similarly, the quarantine regulations for the (private sector) seed import which states, (i) "Except for appropriate plant quarantine safeguards, restrictions on import of seeds are to be eliminated", and (ii) "Plant quarantine procedures will be made applicable to crop/plant species and not to specific varieties" — are equally risky. Our seed policy makers apparently had forgotten that susceptibility to diseases and pests can transmit from one variety to another much more easily and quickly than from one species

ity of seeds and continuity of seed supply, farmers and for that matter the country's agriculture, will be at risk.

It is nevertheless important that if quarantine procedures cause undue delay in the port of entry, this can cause a partial or total loss on the part of seed importers. Such delay can even lead to complete damage or death of imported seed material. Similarly if seed certification procedures takes an unduly long time, this will frustrate breeders and seed importers and they will try to find escape routes. The government regulations should, of necessity, address such prob-



Formers innovative technology for water harvesting form under ground

ated by the corn blight disease (caused by the fungus, *Helminthosporium maydis*) on all hybrid maize (carrying T-type cytoplasmic male sterility) in the USA in 1970. It may be noted that import of hybrid maize seed is likely to play an important role in boosting maize production in the country for human consumption as well as for use as feed and fodder for cattle. The Bengal famine of 1943 was due to the downy disease of rice caused by the fungus, *Helminthosporium*. The Citrus Canker disease, caused by *Xanthomonas citri*, introduced in the USA from Japan via the Gulf states, necessitated the destruction of 20 million citrus trees between 1914 and 1934 to eradicate the disease from the USA. Major famines due to the failure to guard against invasion/occurrence of diseases and pests, cannot be erased not only from history

to another. Similarly, one cannot make any sense of the Seed Policy when it says: seed certification for private individuals "will be voluntary", while the public sector "breeder seed" or "foundation seed" will be certified as a matter of policy. Such statements renders the quarantine safeguards, mentioned in Seed Policy, practically meaningless. Such regulations would not only put our farmers at risks but also grossly undermine the public sector research. Such regulations can have a damaging impact on future growth in agricultural research, jeopardizing growth and development of newer technologies. The signs of such damages have already started showing up in the National Agricultural Research System (NARS).

Provisions for continuity of quality seed supply should be an integral part of any seed policy. Without ensuring qual-

ity. Unfortunately the seed policy is silent on such issues too.

As far as agricultural development vis-a-vis seed business is concerned, the challenge ahead of Bangladesh is a symbiotic development on three fronts: one, how to make the public sector research responsive to the present needs and future demands of how to promote the private sector seed business that can rationally meet the demands of our farmers; and three, how the public sector research and private sector seed business can be mutually helpful to improve the fragile economic conditions of our farming community. Efforts to promote a single front at the expense of others can be damaging or even disastrous for the future.

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Social Impact Assessment and Fisheries in Bangladesh

by Prof Md Abul Kashem

and structures span the range of social institutions that make up the social fabric of a community as well as that of society, that is, the political system, the economic base, the family, etc. Because such diverse systems of social relationships can be explored in an SIA, other types of assessment.

This confusion is clearly evident in the literature on SIA as well as in the practice of

governmental agencies and in the development of conservation and management policies.

Governmental agencies also often view SIA as a "leftover" that is, something to do after an economic assessment has been made and, only then if there is any money "leftover" that is being spent at the end of the fiscal year. The consequences are quite serious for both the development and improvement of SIA methodolo-



A happy catch

gies and for the provision of adequate assessment of the impact of policies and actions on communities and social actors. Such a situation is present in the case of fishery conservation and management policy.

The struggle to legitimize and strengthen the SIA enterprise will require a multilevel strategy. First, the nature of SIA must be clarified and a clear notion of what it can and cannot provide to the policy maker must be developed.

Secondly, it requires gathering of baseline data from which adequate projections of impacts can be made. And, finally, governmental agencies must have to know of the cost and difficulties encountered in the practice of SIA.

Social Impact Assessment and Fisheries

Social impact assessments of environmental resource issues are limited by money, personnel, and access to sites. Policy makers often assume that baseline data already exist and all the social impact assessor have to do is to pull data off a shelf in some social impact library. To meet unreasonable deadlines, corners are cut in research design, readily available data are chosen that best fit the case at hand, and the easily quantifiable is selected over the least quantifiable. In addition, there are often problems in establishing the scopes of the study, in sampling procedures, in measuring error, and in constructing indicators for phenomena that are not easily quantifiable. (Schoenberg). These issues raise serious questions about the reliability and validity of social impact assessments.

Cooperation between social scientists and fishery managers is essential for the development of fishery conservation and management.

STW Training: A Way towards Self-reliance

by Jerome Sarkar



Learning how to cope with the situation, when the STW is out of order.

IN most areas of Northern Bangladesh especially in Rangpur-Dinajpur regions, irrigation is a must for a successful crop production. Many of the deep tubewells remain out of order in most part of the year. Rainfalls do come sometimes as blessings but, for a good harvest, one cannot fully rely on the whim of the nature. Shallow tubewells are the only alternative means for timely and adequate irrigation.

Moreover, small and poor farmers are not able to afford irrigation at their individual expenses. The small farmer groups are, therefore, motivated to be self-reliant through acquiring technical skills.

Groups organised under the guidance of Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) are provided with credits from RDRS to substantiate their own savings for income generating projects. With this credit, they jointly purchase shallow tubewells for irrigating their own lands and the irrigation system has borne an unexpected re-

sult through boosted output. Consequently, the number of STWs operating in the RDRS working area is on increase. Presently 57 RDRS Target Groups have their own STWs covering Domar, Jaldhaka & Dimia of Nilphamari District.

They feel comfortable about their crops which they can grow round the year being equipped with the STWs. Often development activities come across unexpected short-comings. When a STW shows the slightest problem, the farmers are very disappointed. Having no knowledge regarding the machine, the completely dependent on the mercy of the mechanics, and in time of troubles, they helplessly look for a mechanic. There is often not a single mechanic available within the radius of 50 kms.

To find a mechanic, they have to travel a distance from 50 to 60 kms. Moreover, one may not be sure if the mechanic is available. On the other hand, carrying the machine to that distance is also not that easy. Road communication is not

good. Besides, transports are not available for carrying the machine. In addition, the carrying cost is very high.

A project has been undertaken covering three thanas — Domar, Jaldhaka & Dimia of Nilphamari District. There is a dearth of mechanics in that vast area.

In order to bring a permanent solution to this problem, RDRS has taken up a plan to train some people of the area to handle the minor problems including repairing of common defects and/or replacing defective parts with new parts etc.

Under the initiative of the RDRS Project in Nilphamari, a pilot project has been recently started by inaugurating a training workshop on STW for a duration of one month. 22 group members with great enthusiasms are attending course with effect from 18th June 1994. They have paid Tk 100 only each as course fee and deposited Tk 500 only each towards their food. RDRS has provided accommodation at

their training centre located at Domar.

The trainer, Bijendranath Roy is a group member and at the same time, the chairman of Union Federation. He has to his credit an experience of 14 years as a mechanic. He worked with BADC on temporary basis and gathered experiences. Now, he owns a workshop of his own in Domar. RDRS will pay him Tk 1500 as one Trainer's Fees for the course.

After completion of the training, each participant will be supplied with one set of tools on credit from RDRS to enable them face the challenge at once.

There is a great demand of mechanics. Once they are out to fields, they will not only repair their own machines but also will be able to render services to others in the area. That will create marketable employment and ensure easy availability of mechanics.

A similar type of training programme was organised in 1993 at Haroa Mission, BLMD. The participants who received the training are now engaged in different jobs. The good result is visible and the present trainer himself was one of the trainees at that course last year.

The main objective of the programme is to help them repair their own machines as well as creation of a marketable employment.

While discussing with the RDRS Project Administrator in Nilphamari, it was learnt that he had the aim to expand the training for motorcycle/cycle also. The use of STW is seasonal. As such, the mechanics will remain idle during the off-season. With the knowledge of motorcycle/cycle repairing, they may tide over the rest of the year.

In view of the above experiences, it may be suggested to identify interested and potential people among the poor and arrange intensive vocational training to make them equipped with the knowledge and skills to handle the difficult situations arising time to time in the fields. This will give them self confidence and self reliance.

Critics Wish Unhappy Birthday to Global Banking twins

by Kevin J Kelley

TWO sharply different assessments of the global economic order are being put forth this year — one by the twin giants that have done much to shape today's world; the other by a small group that wants to cut the giants down to size.

The contrasting views — one essentially affirming the status quo, the other calling for radical changes in it — are both occasioned by an event that took place in 1944.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are celebrating their joint founding a half-century ago at Bretton Woods, in the United States. At the same time, a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is wishing the Bretton Woods institutions an unhappy anniversary, taking as its theme "50 Years Is Enough."

The NGOs argue that the Bank and IMF are largely to blame for the persistence of poverty in much of the developing world.

The IMF's structural adjustment programmes are a particular target of criticism. Campaigners say that imposition of these economic austerity regimens exacerbates poverty and social inequality in many developing countries.

While acknowledging that their policies have sometimes fallen short of expectations, Bretton Woods officials insist that their overall approach has been successful. Countries taking the structural adjustment route experience higher rates of economic growth than those that reject the IMF's prescriptions, officials argue.

The NGOs are also calling for radical reforms in Bank/IMF procedures. The Bretton Woods institutions say they are considering certain modifications. But the path they take into the future is likely to look a lot like the road they have already travelled.

The Bank/IMF are saying little about any contemplated policy revisions. Some suggestions will be publicly offered, however, in Washington in July and again in Madrid in September.

In July, a commission headed by former US Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volker is scheduled to publish a set of recommendations concerning Bank/IMF practices. The report, timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary, was commissioned by a private group known as the Committee for the Bretton Woods Institutions.

Although the committee is not formally linked to the Bank/IMF, its establishment make-up strongly suggests that

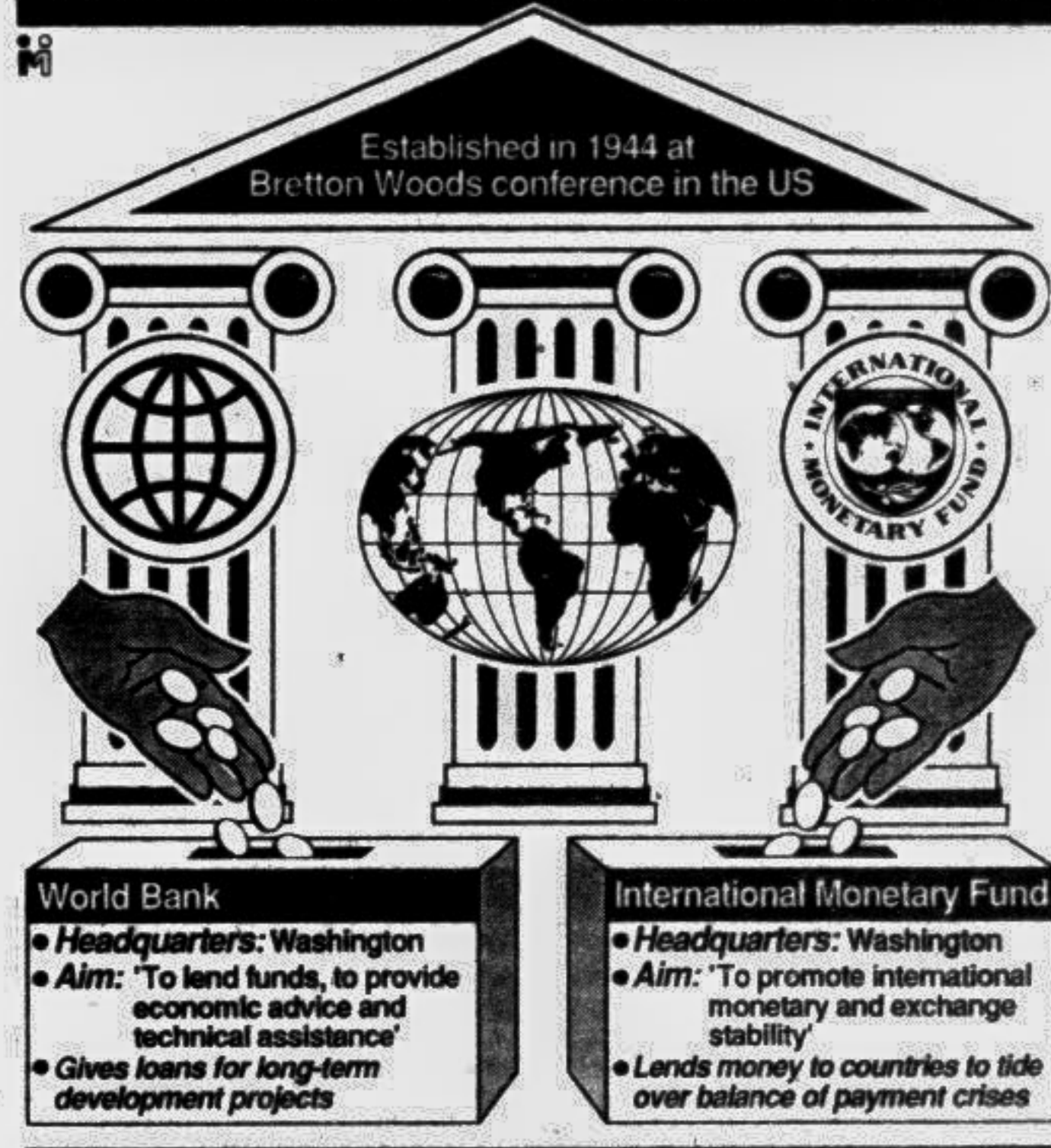
the recommendations will cause little upset at the two institutions.

Volker is also listed among the presenters at a 29-30 September conference in Madrid on the future of the

same sort of "advertorials" — a combination of advertisements and editorial essays — were produced in the 1980s by Herb Scherz, then a publicist for the Mobil Oil corporation and now a consultant to the World Bank.

As a result of the polemical

The Bretton Woods brothers



two institutions. Former World Bank president Tom Clausen and eminent North American and European economists will also attend the conference, which is set to take place just prior to the Bank/IMF annual meeting in the Spanish capital.

The "50 Years Is Enough" campaign is planning to counter the July even in Washington by building a mock shantytown intended to symbolise the effects of Bank/IMF policies on the Third World. A Madrid-based environmental group plans a series of protests in late September and early October against the despoliation wrought by Bank-funded projects.

With the aim of blunting such criticisms, the Bank/IMF are designing a publicity offensive of their own.

Best-selling writer Paul Theroux has reportedly been retained as a contributor to a 50th anniversary supplement that the Bretton Woods institutions plan to purchase in publications such as the US-based Atlantic Monthly and the European edition of Time magazine. This advertising spread is expected to highlight projects that the Bank and IMF regard as particularly beneficial to host nations.

mainstream media outlets in the US to ignore "50 Years Is Enough" initiatives.

But with a combined US membership of about three million individuals, the participating NGOs do have some influence on Capitol Hill. For example, a US Senate subcommittee heard testimony in mid-May from Lori Udall, Washington director of the International Rivers Network.

Speaking on behalf of the "50 Years Is Enough" campaign, Udall proposed a series of reforms for the Bank/IMF:

- greater openness and more public involvement in decision-making
- reorientation of policies in accordance with the views of those directly affected by Bank/IMF action.
- an end to environmentally destructive lending practices.
- a general decrease in Bank/IMF allocations, with the money saved being used for alternative development programmes
- large-scale reduction in debts owed by developing nations to multilateral institutions.

Campaign organisers acknowledge that these proposals should be seen more as long-term goals than as steps likely to be taken soon. The underlying purpose of the campaign, they add is not to bring about an immediate overhaul of the Bank/IMF, but to generate debate in the US about the manner in which the Bretton Woods institutions spend US taxpayers' money.

The US is the single largest contributor to the Bank, and it traditionally names the Bank's president while having the greatest degree of influence over Bank policies.

The campaign is thus focusing its efforts on blocking requests by US President Bill Clinton's administration for \$23 million in new appropriations for the World Bank and a \$100 million contribution to the Fund's structural adjustment facility. The US Congress could prove receptive to arguments that the Bank/IMF do not deserve these additional outlays.

Foreign aid in any form is unpopular among many conservative lawmakers, while a few progressive members of Congress agree with the "50 Years Is Enough" analysis that Bank/IMF policies only serve to perpetuate poverty in the Third World.

A number of centrist legislators have meanwhile expressed dismay over what they regard as the increasing arrogance and unresponsiveness of the Bank/IMF hierarchy.

— GEMINI NEWS

The writer is a US freelance journalist and author of *The Longest War*, a book about Northern Ireland.