

Feature

Development

Why Low Contraceptive Use in Chittagong

by M Kabir, Ph.D

Since the independence of Bangladesh the government has attempted to strengthen family planning programme through increased allocation of resources for family planning activities, community based distribution of family planning methods by grass-root workers, expanded use of a multi-sectoral approach, use of mass media campaigns and promotion of increased participation of non-government organizations (NGOs) in population programs. A gradual process of integrating all vertical health programs, including family planning and MCH, began in the Second Five Year Plan (1975-80). The new system comprises a network of health posts, serving a broad range of curative and preventive health care services including introduction of satellite clinics to offer services at the outreach, the construction of family welfare centres in every union, NGO collaboration and introduction of satellite clinics to provide services at the outreach areas.

Many people are reported to prefer services at the FWCs to satellite clinics. In the opinion of FWCs these are the better educated and higher income women who for reasons of prestige feel that they can go to a neighbour's house to get services specially for fertility regulation. Lack of medicines is seen as a major problem by FWCs. Lack of privacy was another obstacle on the way to well attended satellite clinics. Some people feel hesitant to attend satellite clinics because their neighbours will know what method they are going to use. A major assumption underlying the initiation of their massive family planning programme is that there is a latent demand for birth control in Bangladesh. Several surveys conducted at national level indicate the rising trend in the contraceptive prevalence level. The contraceptive use rate has increased steadily since introduction of the comprehensive family planning services at the doorsteps of eligible clients. Between 1975 and 1991 the current use of contraception increased from 7.7 per cent to about 40 per cent.

The family planning program in Bangladesh is generally considered to be successful. However, the success of the program has not been evenly distributed throughout the country.

The factors which were responsible for failure reaching targets include: — lack of coordination; — inadequate supervision; — lack of proper monitoring; — high workers and clients density; — poor quality of services and a host of administrative problems; — poor service utilization of Family Welfare Centres; — weak co-ordination between different agencies; and — inadequate concern for sustainability and internal inefficiency.

One of the major features of the contraceptive prevalence level is geographical variations. In all the CFSs as well as in the 1989 BFS it was found that contraceptive prevalence rate was, astonishingly low in Chittagong region as opposed to other regions. Chittagong is the largest division in the

country. It comprises 15 districts and has the second largest population. If the Hill Tracts districts are excluded the population density in the rest of the Chittagong division is above the country average. For instance, according to the 1989 BFS the contraceptive prevalence rate was 21 per cent in Chittagong. The comparable figures in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi regions were 32, 35 and 38 per cent respectively. Although contraceptive prevalence levels in Chittagong region have consistently trailed behind national figures but have nevertheless improved gradually over the years. In Chittagong region fertility rates are higher, contraception is lower and the proportion of women wanting more children is higher. Some districts in Chittagong division (such as Chittagong, Rangamati, Bandarban and Sylhet) have different terrain and road communications. Difficulties in communication were important factors affecting program performance. Both staff and client's mobility is affected according to the season because of poor internal communication network. However, very little is known about the large differentials in the current use of contraception among the regions. It is generally believed that Chittagong region is a religiously conservative area and women of this region are predominantly traditional in terms of religious dogmatism. It is likely that long-standing cultural differences between Chittagong region and the rest of the country played an important role in accounting for differences in receptivity to contraceptive and lower fertility. Perhaps, the tardiness of Chittagong region is linked with cultural factors associated with the strong Islamic influence that dates back to the early and more pervasive Islamic penetration of Chittagong region through the Port of Chittagong than in the rest of the country. Greater number of early Sufi messengers (Saints) of Islam in Bangladesh, perhaps, settled in Chittagong region than in the rest of the country as evident in greater number of religious shrines in the division. Between 1975 and 1991 the current use of contraception increased from 7.7 per cent to about 40 per cent.

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poorer access to counselling and family planning services.

Pesides, pragmatic factors are also contributing to low use of contraception in Chittagong division. For example, it is found that in Chittagong division one in five unions do not have an FFW and FWAs vacancies are three times higher than in other divisions. Family Welfare centres have been built in just under half of the unions. The number of non-government organizations (NGOs) working in Chittagong division are surprisingly low than elsewhere. Similarly, satellite clinic activities are also limited in Chittagong division compared to other divisions. This indicates service availability than lack of knowledge about available services.

Multivariate analysis was used to identify the correlates of current contraceptive use in Chittagong division i.e. the extent to which the regional disparity in contraceptive use could be explained by socio-economic, cultural, attitudinal and programmatic variables. The results were disappointing in the sense that controlling for all these factors made little difference to the regional differential. This failure to provide a statistical explanation for the low level of use in Chittagong division should not be allowed to prevent speculation as to the most likely reason. The factors that distinguish Chittagong from other divisions most clearly are cultural in nature. The greater hostility in Chittagong division, revealed in the Bangladesh Fertility Survey data, is probably related to the greater conservatism as reflected by answers to question on women's mobility, decision making power and religiosity. It is likely that this conservatism, acts as a general deterrent to contraceptive adoption at an aggregate or contextual level. If this speculation is correct, what are the policy implications. The first important point is that, despite rather high fertility preferences, there is nevertheless just as much potential demand for family planning in Chittagong as elsewhere. It is estimated that 45 per cent of married women in Chittagong have an unmet need for contraception either for family size limitation or for birth spacing. This estimate is very similar to the figures for the other three divisions.

The problem in Chittagong, therefore, does not appear to be primarily a matter of underlying motivation. Rather, it concerns suspicion or hostility to modern contraception that stems from general conservatism. No doubt, these attitudes will erode gradually. In the short term, the most effective policy measure might be renewed emphasis on information and education directed towards religious and community leaders, as well as to the general population. In addition efforts should be made to increase program inputs to make family planning services available to the clients.

The writer is Professor, Dept of Statistics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.

Banking with the Rural Women

by Anita Aparna Muyeed

value when there are no job markets.

To bring about these necessary changes is to be able to perceive women as valuable members essential for society. This leads to the belief that women should have the opportunity to rightfully take their own lives and that of their community into their own hands. These changes can only come about with the awareness and willingness that mainstream development plans should be re-thought, so that at each step, the capacity of women, of their rights and needs, and also their status and security do not solely depend upon their protective functions but their total contribution to society.

We are practically all aware and agree that we should furnish women better social services. Yet, if we want action in favour of women to become a priority in development, we need to activate a radical change of attitude regarding development not only by those countries directly concerned but also by the financial institutions and donors. We should enhance women's productivity and encourage them to participate in the economy of the world and most importantly give them equal chances.

Professor Muhammad Yunus painstakingly but triumphantly achieve this task. He successfully revolutionized the existing banking system, and created the Grameen Bank which expands banking facilities and loans to landless and assetless men and women. Out of one million borrowers of Grameen Bank, ninety-two per cent are women, and there is an exemplary reason behind this bent. Money directed to households via women proves to be much more fruitful than the same amount of capital directed to household via men. Women yield instantaneous benefits to children and to households and have proven to be more responsible about the repayment of loans. Men, on the other hand, have different priorities and are inclined to place the family amongst the lower ranks of their priorities; they are also more prone to defaulting payments.

Giving priority to women did not come about smoothly. Much resistance manifested from husbands, mullahs, and professional people. Moreover, Professor Yunus had difficulty persuading the women themselves to borrow money, for they believe they could not handle it by themselves. Persuaded by their entire education that they are weak, less useful to their families and society in general, women end up having very low self-esteem, which further marginalize them. But things begin to shift when confidence builds up, and opposition fades when everyone witnesses change and progress. Professor Yunus was able to provide this confidence. He placed women, as agents of change, at the heart of development and succeeded in presenting an irrefutable argument in favour of economic advancement and transformation.

Small Dams, Big Difference

Farmers in arid Pakistan used to depend on the heavens for irrigation. Now, a small dam irrigates their fields. Johanna Son of Inter Press Service reports.

SULTAN Ali and his fellow farmers in this town in central Pakistan used to have little else to do but pray hard while waiting for the brief monsoon downpours.

A little delay in the seasonal rains meant ruined harvests. But the construction of the Kot Raja small dam has allowed the collection of rainwater during Pakistan's heavy monsoon. Says Ali: "The land that was barren has now turned to green fields."

The year-round availability of water, a precious resource in a country that is two-thirds desert, has drastically changed

the lives of farmers who plant crops such as wheat, corn, groundnuts and rice.

Villagers in Chakwal, Punjab province who depended solely on livestock raising can now use mechanical cultivation of crops and rely on rainwater released on demand from the dam through canals, apart from getting drinking water.

Others have gone into raising poultry, selling chicken and eggs to hotels in Islamabad, though there remains little agricultural surplus in the area. Farmers say their yields have risen two to four times.

A number of farmers have ventured into more ambitious territory, using means other than canals to access water in inhospitable territory.

Ex-army captain Hazir Mohammad, for example, is busy preparing to start a fish farm and an orchard — amid arid land.

He has dug out a patch of field to catch rainwater during the past weeks of monsoons, water that would otherwise have been either wasted or caused erosion of fertile soil. Hazir can use collected water to grow fish and to grow fruit trees and vegetables nearby.

"To grow fish in this barren (rain-fed) area, it's a miracle," said a Pakistan official involved in a foreign-funded project for rain-fed areas in Punjab, the country's agricultural heartland. The project, partly funded by the Asian Development Bank, is in places due to the imposition of alien farming methods which resulted in increased availability to those who in need. In Mexico 2/3 of the population is chronically undernourished. Yet the foods consumed by the poor — corn and beans — were overlooked in favour of wheat and sorghum by Green Revolution research.

African governments are realising the error of over exploiting natural resources in order to increase production and export earnings to pay off their vast international debts. If the Green Revolution in Africa can meet these objectives, it may have a chance of success.

However if any lessons are to be learnt from the implementation of the Green Revolution in Asia and Latin America, it would appear that a more eco-friendly and economically viable biotechnology is required in order to successfully deal with the problem of world hunger.

ment Bank (AsDB), involves the construction of small dams and rain reservoirs, lift pumps as well as livestock and agricultural research. There are 27 small dams in areas of Punjab that are not fed by the mighty Indus River's waters, and at least seven more are being built.

Punjab gets 25.4 to 40 centimetres of rain. Other areas of Pakistan get as little as 12.5. Khan says, Some people in fact mine for water, but only big landlords can afford to dig deep for the resource.

But the wonders of irrigation are not without problems. It also raises the prospect of salinity, which occurs when salt deposits from evaporating water are left in the soil and harm crops.

The Punjab government's Small Dams Organisation has cited reports of land becoming waterlogged and saline in areas such as Attock and Jhelum districts.

It is trying to improve surface drainage in Attock, Punjab's most fertile area, and drain water into the Indus to reclaim 10,000 hectares of land. In Jhelum, the government drained water logged areas that were causing heavy loss to cultivable lands.

UN experts estimated in 1991 that some six million hectares of the Indus Valley, or a fourth of the total agriculture area, is affected by salinity.

But the government hopes the expansion of cultivable areas beyond the fertile areas of Punjab and Sind and the use of additional water resources would not just allow village folk to become self-sufficient but to strengthen the country's agricultural sector.

This can happen if the country fulfills present irrigation needs while watching out for its possible effects decades down the road. As one official remarked, "In Pakistan we have everything — except water."

— IPS

Green Revolution: A Critical Perspective

by Rashida Ahmad

the view that if hunger had successfully been alleviated, lower birth rates would have naturally ensued.

But sidestepping that debate, let us examine the facts of food distribution in some of the key Green Revolution countries.

In India, for example, despite a 24m ton grain surplus, per person consumption of grain has not increased over the last two decades. Nearly half the population go hungry.

The Green Revolution in Thailand pushed rice production up by 1/3, but because of a threefold increase in exports, per person consumption has fallen.

More Hunger

Despite the Green Revolution, the number of hungry people increased in the 70's to 700m and since then the number has continued to grow steadily. Only a fifth of the world's hungry reside in Africa, where the Green Revolution has not been extensively implemented. But Asia, where the Green Revolution has produced the greatest increase in yields, accounts for about 2/3 of the world's undernourished.

Is this due to growing population rates? Not entirely for both the absolute number and the proportion of hungry has risen since the 70's. Supporters of the Green Revolution claim that as population keep growing, it has at least stopped hunger from becoming worse, while the root causes of high birth rates are tackled, but it is a matter of controversy whether population explosions cause hunger and poverty, or conversely are a symptom of hunger and poverty. There is

increased from 1/3 to 1/10. So it has been the large-scale industrial farms who have profited by being able to cover the costs needed, in order to reap the greatest benefits from the Green Revolution. And as larger harvests have pushed down crop prices, the smaller farmers lost out on the profit margins they desperately needed.

Conclusion

Despite huge increases in world wide food production, it appears that the Green Revolution has not dramatically reduced worldwide hunger. One billion people go hungry (an increase of 40 per cent in the past 20 years) and two billion people are malnourished.

The surplus grain in the world markets is not helping to feed the hungry. Increased output has not resulted in increased availability to those who in need. In Mexico 2/3 of the population is chronically undernourished. Yet the foods consumed by the poor — corn and beans — were overlooked in favour of wheat and sorghum by Green Revolution research.

Sorghum, which is also one of the crops emphasised in the new African Green Revolution requires little labour and is drought resistant. However the Mexican variety is not for human consumption.

Before the Green Revolution livestock consumed 6 per cent of Mexico's grain — today the figure has risen to between 30-50 per cent.

And yet 25 million Mexicans are too poor to afford to eat meat. Worldwide 40 per cent of all grain output is fed



Net technology has increased food production, yet more people are hungry. — Photo: Yosef Hadar/World Bank

