

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 net-work 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 FWVs these are the better educated and higher income women who for reasons of prestige feel that they can not go to a neighbour's house to get services specially for fertility regulation. Lack of medicines is seen as a major problem by FWVs. 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 door steps 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 co-ordination; — 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 efficiency.

One of the major features of the contraceptive prevalence level is geographical variations. In all the CPSs 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 suit 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. These saints (Saints) were people of considerable personal aura and power. They tended to be venerated and worshipped by more people after their death than during their life time, prolonging the attitude of a conservative society hostile to any innovation, particularly to one that concerned sexuality and family life which were intricately linked up with family honor. The question arises to what extent does religious beliefs influence the prevalence level? What are the factors affecting the use of contraception in Chittagong region? Several reasons have been cited for the failure of the national family planning program to achieve higher levels of contraceptive prevalence than have been achieved to date. The most often cited factors are high desired family size, low worker to population size, sparsely distributed service outlets, poor quality of services and religious barriers. Surveys conducted in a number of Asian countries show that many couples are making child-bearing decisions which are inconsistent with social and physiological considerations. Despite their intentions to delay or avoid child-bearing there are many women who are not using effective means of contraception, either because of lack of knowledge or because it is unavailable or it is against their religious beliefs. Although many studies documented religious opposition as a factor affecting the use of contraception, studies found that it has been overstated in some instances. It is also found that individual religious beliefs and values have significant impact on acceptance of family planning methods and many studies indicated that religiosity was more influential than religious affiliation. This article is designed to understand the reasons for the low performance level of family planning in Chittagong and identify the correlates of low contraceptive use in Chittagong division.

Bangladesh stands out as one of the countries making impressive progress in expanding access to family planning services. According to the Population International the doubling of contraceptive use in Bangladesh from less than 20 per cent of couples in 1981 to 40 per cent in 1991 is a

poorer access to counselling and family planning services. Besides, programmatic 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 FWV 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.

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Banking with the Rural Women

by Anita Aparna Mueyed

WOMEN are at the core of development. They control both the essentials of non financial as well as financial aspects of the economy. The problem is that their work is rarely recognized or valued. To ignore or overlook women's needs is to bring upon society a multitude of other problems: overpopulation, infant mortality, economic recessions, ineffective agriculture, environmental problems and mediocre quality of life.



"We salute thee, Gramscen Women!"

For women in many countries, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh, the viable choice is to get married and bear many children. To initiate them into development plans is to offer them a wide scope of strategies and to allow them to depend less on their children. Family planning represents a considerable amount of liberty which would lead to other investments such as health and education opening new horizons. Yet, it is not sufficient to merely introduce projects such as family planning. If men and women do not get any benefits from it. Plans should be carried out in various ways only if there are incentives at the end. If a woman still has to depend on her children at old age, what good is family planning for her? Similarly, education is of little

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 the 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, mollahs, 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.

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 metres 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 agriculture 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

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 barani (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 part of a

WORLD'S 20 LARGEST URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS, RANKED BY POPULATION SIZE IN MILLIONS

1990					2000				
Rank	Agglomeration	Country	Population (millions)		Rank	Agglomeration	Country	Population (millions)	
1	MEXICO CITY	MEXICO	20.2		1	MEXICO CITY	MEXICO	25.6	
2	TOKYO	JAPAN	18.1		2	SAO PAULO	BRAZIL	22.1	
3	SAO PAULO	BRAZIL	17.4		3	TOKYO	JAPAN	19.0	
4	NEW YORK	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	16.2		4	SHANGHAI	CHINA	17.0	
5	SHANGHAI	CHINA	13.4		5	NEW YORK	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	16.8	
6	LOS ANGELES	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	11.7		6	CALCUTTA	INDIA	15.7	
7	CALCUTTA	INDIA	11.8		7	BOMBAY	INDIA	15.4	
8	BUENOS AIRES	ARGENTINA	11.5		8	BEIJING	CHINA	14.0	
9	BOMBAY	INDIA	11.2		9	LOS ANGELES	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	13.9	
10	SEOUL	REPUBLIC OF KOREA	11.0		10	JAKARTA	INDONESIA	13.7	
11	BEIJING	CHINA	10.8		11	DELHI	INDIA	13.2	
12	RIO DE JANEIRO	BRAZIL	10.7		12	BUENOS AIRES	ARGENTINA	12.9	
13	TIANJIN	CHINA	10.7		13	JAKARTA	INDONESIA	12.9	
14	JAKARTA	INDONESIA	9.3		14	TIANJIN	CHINA	12.7	
15	CAIRO	EGYPT	9.0		15	SEOUL	REPUBLIC OF KOREA	12.5	
16	MOSCOW	USSR	8.8		16	RIO DE JANEIRO	BRAZIL	12.5	
17	DELHI	INDIA	8.8		17	DHAKA	BAHANGDESH	12.2	
18	OSAKA	JAPAN	8.5		18	CAIRO	EGYPT	11.8	
19	PARIS	FRANCE	8.5		19	METRO MANILA	PHILIPPINES	11.8	
20	METRO MANILA	PHILIPPINES	8.5		20	KARACHI	PAKISTAN	11.7	

Green Revolution: A Critical Perspective

by Rashida Ahmad

THE Green Revolution has enabled over 50 million extra tons of grain to be produced in Asia and Latin America worldwide every year since the 70's. Proponents of the Green Revolution are now welcoming its long overdue introduction into Africa. A group of scientists which aims to improve food production in six African countries, stresses the need to show African farmers that their yields can be doubled or even tripled.

However, this article aims to examine critically the success of the Green Revolution in curtailing hunger and famine, and in doing so highlight the views of experts at the Institute for Food and Development Policy, among others.

More Hunger

Despite the Green Revolution, the number of hungry people increased in the 70's to 700 million people 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

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.

In Mexico, the birthplace of the miracle wheat, hunger is worse today than it was prior to the Green Revolution.

Question of Economics

How is that there is so much more food and yet still more hunger? While there is no doubt that the Green Revolution has been successful in one respect — increasing worldwide food production — it is a different matter when we consider the alleviation of hunger. It is economic and political factors that affect food distribution i.e. who actually receives the benefits of higher food production. It is the distribution of resources that is the crux of worldwide hunger.

It was the aim of the Green Revolution to allow farmers to produce more food. But this objective insofar as it is relevant to the poor depends on what percentage of the world's poor are farmers. In fact nearly one billion people in the Third



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

World are landless (1/2 of them in India and Bangladesh). It is evident that as more and more small farmers are forced to give up their land through economic privation, their plight becomes increasingly desperate. For the landless poor who remained working on farms, research has shown that contrary to expectation, the Green Revolution failed to produce an increase in wages. Moreover, the industrialisation of larger farms displaced workers. These big producers advanced at the expense of smaller farms, as their growth was much greater in real terms.

Cost of Farming

The industrialisation of farming in developing countries, largely as a result of the Green Revolution, entails higher input costs. In India a threefold rise in fertiliser use accompanied the implementation of the new farming technology. In order to get the highest yields from the Green Revolution seeds, pesticides were also required, which resulted in resistant strains of pests. New and extensive irrigation schemes were another hidden expense.

Small farmers were not able to invest the capital required. Moreover as a result of these costs, although yields increased, the net return per acre fell. For example in the Philippines the return as a percentage of the value of the crop, for small farmers, decreased 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

to livestock although this is an extremely inefficient way of processing the nutritional content of grain. It is the demand for meat by those that can afford it that ensures the emphasis on crops such as sorghum for export as feed for animals rather than food for humans.

However if modern science can be used as a tool along with economic reforms, some success may be achieved.

Traditional rice farming in Asia produced 10 times more energy than was expended to grow it. Green Revolution rice reduces the net output in half. Instead of continuous production of one crop, traditional farming methods used intercropping thus cutting the need for costly artificial fertilisers to maintain the soil's nutrients.

The desertification in Africa is in many places due to the imposition of alien farming methods which resulted in the eradication of traditional methods that for centuries had managed to sustain and maintain the fertility of fragile soils through a mix of food crops, trees and livestock.

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.

