Social Summit of the Poor: Northern Bangladesh Social Summit of the Poor: Northern Bangladesh Sound of shuttles and murmur Trammer's Friend' Lives up to its Name by Md Roushanuzzaman From beginning to end, the treadle pump — untike other technologies Trammer's Friend' Lives up to its Name are increasingly turning to us because they found the pumps because they found the pumps cheaper, useful, simple and

EW poor people in Bangladesh know of the United Nations, Not one knows that the UN Social Summit is due to take place. let alone its significance to their lives. The UN is simply another world.

Remarkably, the agenda which will occupy the world's intellectual and political powers in Copenhagen next summer is identical to the one debated each month by the poor and landless of northern Bangladesh Visit one of the 'poor people's summits' and you find, essentially, the same burning issues discussed how to alleviate grinding poverty, how to escape the blight of illness and poor nutrition, how to develop gainful sources of income and em-

feature in every Primary Group and in every People's Federation an expression of the orgamisation and solidarity of the

ployment, how to empower

the disenfranchsed. These

other 'summits' are a regular

by A M Ahmed

Each of the 20 families who form one of the 10.000 primary groups gains strength from their neighbours and fellow group members. From uncertain beginnings, group members share the education and training offered by RDRS. begin some joint activities (of which savings is the most import) and begin to become cohesive and mutually supportive. At least twice a month, the entire group meets to identify their problems, to discuss solutions and to make plans.

Importantly, achievement must be made at the individual family level as well as the group level. Each of the participating families begins to see progress and hope where previously survival and despair prevailed. As they learn of health, more install a basic bamboo hand-pump, some dig a pit latrine, mothers learn to leed their families more nutritiously and the importance of tamily planning, husbands learn to respect their wives

social unit but in themselves are too small to wield real influence in their village. For this reason, mature groups combine in broader Federations at Union level (the lowest administrative area in Bangladesh) covering perhaps 6 to 20 villages. In some areas, RDRS has been promoting union Federation for four years now.

The Federations can and do assume more tasks than the primary groups. Certainly, they duplicate some functions at a higher level - savings and credit, income-generating schemes, organising certain educational or welfare functions, even represent their members to lower powersthat-be as well as help reconcile disputes. Federations organise up to 100 groups at present and this membership is continually growing. To their surprise, they are increasingly a force to be reckoned with in the rural localities. With each passing day, local political and government leaders are more willing to recognise. listen and, occasionally, respond to



Another summer an expression of the organisation and solidarity of the poor.

Copenhagen will attract the powerful and influential, the knowledgeable and the com mitted - all, experts, at sec hand. In Northern Bangladesh, the poor will dis cuss the problems from first hand knowledge and immedi ate experience.

Organising the Poor

landless and marginal families organised and assisted by Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) every year partici pates in 'poor people's summits, and has a say in influence ing the development agenda of their community

The Bangladesh development model - promoted by RDRS and others - promotes social organisation and awareness as the key to poverty al leviation and empowerment

Confronted by a heavy burden of economic and social oppression and exploitation, the first challenge is to organise and conscientise the poor. By organising primary groups in each village to share their tasks and to begin to under stand the reasons for their downtrodden condition, a fragile structure for challenging and overcoming their poverty can begin to be con-Structed.

LANCING at the internal Tional media, no one would think anything other than chronic floods and cyclones ever happens in

Bangladesh. But Bangladesh is now bet ter known as the birth-place of an astonishing rural credit scheme that lends to the poorest of the poor, and is showing international credit institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) how to reduce poverty with less

So successful is Grameen Bank that it is now being replicated in Malaysia, the Philippines and many African countries. There are Grameen clones even in Norway and the United States that lend small amounts of money to disadvan taged inner city women.

Grameen Bank has proven it is possible to reach huge numbers of the poor and help them lift themselves up from poverty using their own skills. Says Grameen's mastermind Muhammad Yunus: "We have transformed banking. Unlike other banks, we give tiny amounts of money to the poorest of the poor."

A US-trained economist. Yunus quickly found out bank ing coneepts he had learnt in school were useless in rural Bangladesh. In the past decade, he has been lending loans of less than US\$ 100 to and to value their daughters.

parents to appreciate the value of schooling. One family memher learns how to look after livestock, another to cultivate a sustainable and intensive homegarden year-round and they find that a little more income is coming into the house Obtaining credit is no longer a Each one of the 200,000 trap by an exploitative moneylender but a reasonable means of developing a small Improvement is slow but perceptible. With knowledge and even small improvements

in living standards comes greater confidence - in their own resources and abilities. and in facing the world. To an outsider, this transformation can be startling-witness the assurance and forthrightness of women who used to shrink away from public contact and cover their faces in their saris. When disaster strikes, as it often does in Bangladesh at s community and personal level (flood, drought, illness, unemployment), poor families are less vulnerable. They can fall back on meagre assets and even then have the protection which greater knowledge and awareness brings.

People's Federations Primary groups are a vital the concerns and demands of

the organised poor. Once a year, the general meetings of the each Federation is held. These are large events where up to 1,000 can attend to elect their leadership, to hear reports on the Federations progress and to set priorities for the year ahead. With only some training and indirect guidance from RDRS, the Federations their own experts. As an exercise in grassroots democracy, they are empowering the poor in a way they have never previously known. Like the rooting of democracy, they face pitfalls and dangers inconceivable in western societies but no other

opportunity offers itself. There are 250 Union Federations at varying stages of development throughout the RDRS working area. In June 1995, several will be holding their own annual general meeting which will coincide with the UN Social Summit in Denmark. The results of that world-level interaction may or may not impact of the lives of the poor. But the poor of northern Bangladesh now have their own forum to shape their own development agenda and know that their debate and their decisions can directly better their lives.

of water joins the usual evening noises.

The farmers are working their pumps to irrigate the ricepaddies," is the explanation offered to a curious visitor with

a great deal of pride. For the pump - a manually operated device called the treadle pump which has become popular among Bangladesh's small and marginal farmers - is the product of local ingenuity, another instance when the adage that necessity is the mother of inventions proves true.

The treadle pump was first conceived and innovated by Narendranath Deb. a farmer from the village of Ulipur in northern Bangladesh.

Mr Deb was moved by the backbreaking efforts of the villagers who desperately tried to irrigate their small patches of land by carrying water in clay pots and pitchers from distant ponds or reservoirs.

An intelligent and enterprising farmer, he wondered if the mechanics of tubewells could be applied to develop a more efficient means of supplying water to the ricefields His idea was to attach multiple cylinders to a single tubewell causing the down-stroke on one to energize the up-stroke on the other - working in a suction-mode.

Mr Deb took his idea to Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), a non-government organisation (NGO) active in his locality in the early 1970s. Two RDRS engineers - Gunner Barnes and Marceline Rozario - patiently and methodically designed. tested and experimented with hundreds of models for more than a decade before coming up with the treadle pump in current use.

The pump consists of sim-

nisations (NGOs) on the

grounds that many are a threat

to national security, are fake

channels for foreign money or

has sparked an outcry from

some of the country's 85,000

NGOs - is further evidence of

growing nervousness world-

wide by national governments

and international institutions

about the rapid rise of private

on by Western donors as part

of their argument that the pri-

vate sector is inherently more

efficient than the public sec-

tor, in aid as well as in busi-

ness. But as the amounts of of-

ficial aid money channelled

through NGOs have increased.

so have allegations that the or-

ganisations have lost their in-

dependence or in some cases

have come into existence

specifically to cash in on aid

ments are alarmed by the eco-

nomic clout and political influ-

ence now enjoyed by big NGOs.

Ugandan governments are

among those which have tried

to control NGO proliferation or

questioned the assumption

that they are always a force for

good. In November, Peter

Pooley. director-general of the

European Union's aid depart-

ment, called for a re-think of

relations between the Union

and NGOs "because we are en-

couraging the formation of

NGOs which are really busi-

Now Pakistan has stepped

The Sri Lankan and

In addition, some govern-

money.

nesses.

into the minefield.

Globally. NGOs were seized

Islamabad's plan - which

are badly mismanaged.

sector aid initiatives.

AKISTAN is proposing

to tighten controls on

non-government orga-

which have proliferated in the country — is pure Bangladeshi

Working with 'Krishak Banethu'

ple mechanical gadgets. It has double-piston cylinder with food valve, a pair of bamboo treadles, a bamboo frame and PVC (polyvinyl chloride) pipe to lift groundwater. Its foot operated device works in a suction mode like a tubewell.

Suggestions from Dan Jenkins, an adviser sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development proved crucial in finalising the

From beginning to end, the treadle pump - unlike other technologies which have protiferated in the country - is pure Bangladeshi. Very little

outside assistance has gone into its technical development A single pump can lift from two to four litres of water per second, depending on the

depth of the water table, and

can irrigate up to one acre of

land. More interestingly, the

pump can be operated even by

women and children. In recent years, a variation of the pump - the "Deep-set Treadle Pump" - was designed especially for arid highlands where the water table is as

The pump has now become popular with farmers, particu larly small landholders, across

deep as 40 feet.

much of the country. International Development

Enterprises (IDE), a US-based company funded by some American businessmen and the Development Swiss Corporation, has been promoting and marketing the pump under the brand name, Krishok Bandhu, Bengali for farmer's friend" "Indeed it's a friend of the

farmers, particularly the poor and small farmers who can't afford expensive power pumps," says Mrinal Sirear, marketing manager of IDE.

Says Mr Sircar; "It has been a success story ... the farmers

For the multitude of illiterate farmers, the power-oper

ated mechanised deep tubewells proved not only expensive, but also complicated to maintain. Price has been a major advantage as a treadle pump is only about Taka 1500 (US \$38)

including installation cost. And the cost for operation and maintenance in one year comes to about \$1. Hossain Ali. 50, a farmer from Algir Char village in

northern Kishoreganj district.

says: "I call it a freedom pump. Once I have got one, I can grow crops round the year without depending on the waterlords who rent out their power-pumps in the village." "It's a giant wealth creator" says Sufia Khatun, a 35-yearold woman from the village of Takerhat in southwestern

Faridpur. Ever since her husband got one of the tiny pumps two years ago, her family's lot has changed. "With crops round the year, we eat well and the children can go to school"

Krishok Bandhu's fame has already spread and the treadle pump technology is now being replicated in Nepal, India and Viet Nam, according to IDE of ficials. Pakistan and Sri Lank are also studying the feasibility

"There is only one answer to poverty - wealth. More wealth, more jobs, more investment - and more wealth. says Bill Derrenger, the director of IDE, who believes his Krishok Bandhu network has given a wealth-creating power to the poor farmers.

"It's a little hen that lays golden eggs," Mr Derrenger

The writer works for the

pendence and control their

work. NGO workers inter-

viewed for this report asked

not be quoted by name for fear

that government would cut fi-

their organisations.

nancial or other assistance to

A representative of a family

planning organisation said ex-

isting laws already enable the

government to prosecute er-

ring organisations: "Existence

of NGOs is not a security risk."

fellow at the Sustainable

Development Policy Institute.

agrees: "What is needed is the

impartial implementation of

existing laws and not new

Dr Shahrukh Rafi, senior

Government Backlash Tries to Rein in Private Groups

Tariq Butt writes from Islamabad

For years, non-government organisations have been heralded as close to the people, flexible and unbureaucratic. Now, reports Gemini News Service, Pakistan has joined a growing number of government which have begun to question their accountability and effectiveness.

Funds from foreign countries must be brought to the knowledge of the government because their use might harm national security and interests," says Dr Sher Algan

Minister for Social Welfare and Special Education, who is spearheading the new legisla

Dr Afgan also draws support from a World Bank study which

which are involved in antistate activities and harming the interest of the country and the law will help in checking them... The law provides for strict action against those

NGOs which had been involved

Ghulam Yasin Soomro, a re-

searcher at the Pakistan

nomics, who argues that the

government must monitor

NGOs as it does doctors "who

have to be licensed to practise

NGO leaders, however,

condemn the proposals as an

attempt to curb their inde-

to protect the patient's inter-

Institute of Development Eco-

His position is supported by

in malpractices in the past."

He says the government is contradictory. It wants local communities to take over work such as repair and maintenance of rural infrastructure. but seems unable to tolerate self-reliant communities or independent organisations working with them or on their be-Similarly, a study by the Aga Khan Foundation concluded that existing laws "can be a means of keeping NGO fakery to a minimum. A recent conference attended by 150 NGOs in Sindh province agreed on the need for accountability and transparency, but maintained that NGOs should police them-

A series of meetings between NGOs and Dr Afgan have failed to make headway.

Irate NGOs, such as Save the Children Fund, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Bedari, and the Citizen Police Liaison Committee of Karachi, sent a telegram to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. criticising the proposed law for failing to recognise their "singular contribution and dedication to the process of socio-economic development of the country."

They point out that the ruling Pakistan People's Party manifesto speaks of 'new forms of participation for an open pluralistic society..... The decentralisation of government lies at the heart of our agenda for constitutional reforms." -

Gemini News The writer is chief reporter with 'The News', Islamabaid

From people to people 18,000 Northern non-government organisations give aid to Southern NGOs \$2.4bn

Small is Beautiful Banking

more than 1.6 million people all over Bangladesh.

Most loan recipients are women who buy a cow or some chickens to raise the family's income level. Yunus says 98 per cent of loans are fully paid back a record not matched by banks that lend only to the

Yunus's lifetime of work was finally recognised by the World Bank which in November gave

a rare grant to the Grameen

fund, a spin-off of the Grameen Bank, The US\$2 million grant will be used as seed money for up to 40 micro-credit schemes in various countries around the

In Washington, Yunus told his US fan, President Bill Clinton: "In order to devote itself to poverty alleviation, the World Bank may have to redesign itself from scratch."

Many Grameen admirers have been trying to clone the Bangladeshi original across Asia. They have set up Cashpor Ithe Asia Pacific Network for Credit and Savings for the Hardcore Poor) to help Grameen-type programmes throughout the region and ex-

pand already existing ones so they can reach larger numbers of the poor.

Cashpor is getting support from the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which just recently got round to the Grameen idea.

In the last 15 years, there has been a shift in economic planning philosophy from a top-down to a bottoms-up apexplains

A small rural credit scheme in Bangladesh puts the world's big development banks to shame by showing them how to reduce poverty with less money. Leah Makabenta of Inter Press Service reports. Selvanathan, coordinator of the

UNDP poverty alleviation programme in the Asia-Pacific region. This means the poor are now seen as best suited to decide their own needs and to chart their development.

Cashpor was launched in 1991 by eight organisations including the Grameen Bank. the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and six other groups from Sabah in East Malaysia. the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

"These groups have been reasonable successful in adapting the Grameen method but they tend to be small in terms of outreach and unsuccessful in finding funds to scale up so they can reach truly large numbers of poor," says David Gibbons, executive trustee and founding member of Cashpor.

Except for one, all Cashpor members are non-governmental groups that do not get support from national governments and international development agencies.

"Cashpor's target for the whole of Asia is 10 million. That means programmes will have to be scaled up substan-

tially and the human resource increased dramatically so they

can reach more household,"

says Gibbons. The emphasis on scaling-up stems from a simple principle of economies of scale. The more, people reached, the more economically viable a

programme will be.

Says Gibbons: "This method of delivering credit requires training. The loans are taken to the poor in their villages. Most poor people are frightened to borrow, they are afraid to go into debt. We have to open their eyes. The work is partly educational and motivational. That requires trained staff and money up front for training before you get any

output.

Loan capital is not much of problem because the high repayment rates are attractive to commercial banks. Gibbons adds, "They will lend to you to loan to borrowers because they know they can get it back. especially if you're charging commercial rates of interest They're interested because we do all the work, we deliver the loan, we collect the money The bank just sits there and collects charges."

The Kuala Lumpur-based Cashpor started the first two years with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and small sums from the Asia-Pacific Development Centre (APDC) Grameen Bank replication programme using UNDP funds.

Cashpor's main priority is to raise funds for its eight members, but it is besieged by applications from other countries that see joining the organisation as likely providing training programmes,

The group is giving priority to the Philippines this year channeling more its funds to its four Philippine members so they can expand their coverage. But it is also replicating Grameen in Vietnam, Thailand. Nepal and Papua New Guinea where existing credit programmes have yet to come close to Grameen

says lack of professionalism among Pakistani NGOs — about 72,000 of which are unregistered - results in inadequate budgeting. administration. monitoring and evaluation.

Many are small, city-based organisations run by upperclass women. A third reason, unique to Pakistan, for Islamabad's feel-

ing that controls are needed, stems from the involvement of Arabs who came into the coun try in the 1980s to support Afghan guerrillas fighting the Soviet-backed government in Since Moscow's withdrawal. Islamabad has faced demands

from several Muslim states that these Arabs should be handed over to face criminal charges in their home countries. It says its attempts to wind up Arabirun NGOs have failed because of a gap in exist ing laws. The new rules would forbid

NGOs from independently entering into negotiations or making an agreement with any foreign donor. All such talks would have to be routed through the government. In addition, the government

solve an NGO and seize its assets if it contravened the new

would have the power to dis-

We do not want to hinder the working of genuinely-motivated agencies," says Dr Afgan. "but there are some NGOs

British Aid Statistics

Total ODA expenditure rose by \$51 million to \$2,172 million in 1993/94. Of this \$1,930 million went to developing countries and \$181 million to countries in transition in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Over 90 per cent of the ODA's bilateral aid (allocable by income group) went to low income and lower middle income countries in each year from 1989/90 to 1993/94

The UK was one of only seven members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) whose official aid to developing countries increased in real terms in 1993. The UK's ODA/GNP ratio of 0.31 per cent in 1993 was higher than the DAC average. Bilateral emergency aid rose to \$179 million in

1993/94 compared to \$144 million in 1992/93 Of

this. \$86 million contributed to the relief of

emergencies in sub-Saharan Africa, and \$52 million went towards disaster relief in the former Yugoslavia. About 45 per cent of the ODA's assistance was channelled through multilateral agencies in 1993/94. Net grants by private voluntary agencies to developing

countries rose to \$250 million in 1992 and increased further to \$300 million in 1993