



Launching Ceremony of



World Food Programme Assisted Rural Development Programme

Economic Relations Division Government of Bangladesh

World Food Programme The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

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Rural Development Programme

Bishow Parajuli
WFP Adviser,
Head, Rural Development
Programme

BACKGROUND: The Rural Development Programme is the largest WFP assisted public earthwork project in the world. The initial phase focused on the provision of relief assistance to people affected by famine. Over succeeding phases, the emphasis has gradually undergone a transition from relief to rehabilitation and to sustainable development.

The Project, since its initiation in 1975, has received a total of 3.5 million tons of wheat at a cost of US\$ 621 million.

THE NEW IMPETUS: Started in January 1997, the new phase has shifted its orientation to focus on people, while at the same time creating infrastructure and other assets as building blocks for growth and development of rural communities. In this way there will not only be increased incomes but also strengthened human capacities for the participants, leading to improved food security and poverty reduction in a sustainable manner.

The following are the key elements of the new phase:

- * In collaboration with NGOs, provision of development packages to the beneficiaries, to enable them to break out of poverty.
- * Introduction of a regular programme of maintenance of infrastructure, in order to enhance durability.
- * For the first time a substantial Government resource contribution, and incorporating food aid as a part of the Annual Development Plan;
- * Concentrating resources on areas with the highest levels of food insecurity;
- * Provision of training, savings and credit support, and food allocations during the most critical September-October months of the year; and
- * Introduction of a cash component in the wages.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION: For the first two years, the project is expected to receive some 400,000 tons of wheat at a cost of around US\$170 million including the contributions from the Government of Bangladesh, WFP and bilateral donors, mainly the European Union, Australia, Canada and France.

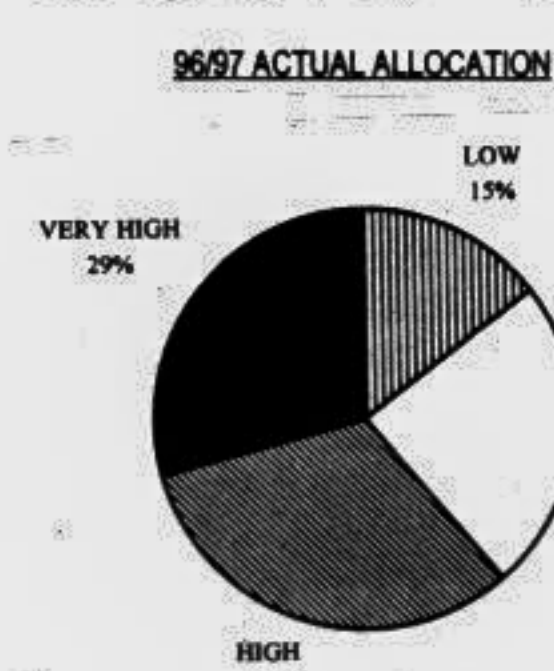
The Project activities are distinctly grouped into four sectors. **Water** - rehabilitation of embankments, drainage systems and canals vital for rural Bangladesh; **Roads** - building of rural growth centre connecting roads for the promotion of rural trade; **Fishery** - developing water bodies to expand the fishery programme as an income-generating opportunity for the rural poor; and **Forestry** - planting of trees as a resource base and creation of assets for the poor.

The graph below indicates the future plan in the allocation of resources to the various sectors. Increase in the allocation is foreseen under the forestry and fishery sectors in line with the higher participation of women in these sectors.

During 1996/97, a total of 1761 schemes were approved, with a commitment of a total of 175,000 tons of wheat supplied by WFP and bilateral donors. A similar level of assistance is expected to be available in the coming year. The average resource allocation per scheme varies between 910 tons for an

embankment in the water sector and 37 tons for developing a pond under the fishery sector.

The project activities are concentrated in areas with high levels of food insecurity - along the banks of mighty rivers and in coastal areas in the south. The chart below shows the actual situation in 1996/97 and the future plan by 2000.



OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS: In line with the reorientation of the project, several key issues are being addressed:

- * Review of work-norms and wage structures;
- * Long-term programming of resources;
- * Greater coordination with food aid donors and partners;
- * Studies on economic issues and beneficiaries contractual arrangements;
- * Emphasizing the monitoring of the project impact and management support, a shift from monitoring just the process;
- * Strengthening of the Project Management Units, and their greater direct involvement in project monitoring and supervision; and
- * Greater level of RD awareness among the various stakeholders: donors, government and the general public.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: The Rural Development project involves a large number of people and institutions. The fishery and forestry sectors are implemented by the Departments of Fishery and Forestry and over 90 NGOs. The water and road sectors have a large number of engineer/managers within BWDB and LGED.

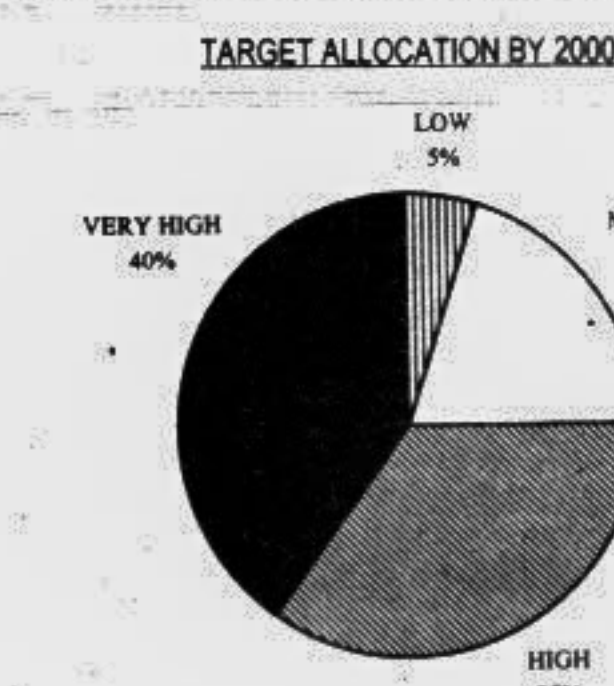
Each scheme is coordinated and implemented by a Project Implementation Committee consisting of representatives from locally elected bodies, the local elite, women's groups and NGOs. The local officers supervise the work in terms of quality and quantity and authorize the release of wheat and cash based on the work performed. In the forestry sector, workers are paid on a daily basis at a fixed rate.

All the RD activities are undertaken during the period January-May, with exception of the routine maintenance programme, which is implemented throughout the year. The Forestry sector activities which begin with planting in July runs continuously for a period of three years. With the pilot initiatives, the new phase also ensures food support to the most needy during the most critical months of September-October.

With the new focus, the project beneficiaries as a part of a

tute women and men into self-reliant members of the society within four to five years.

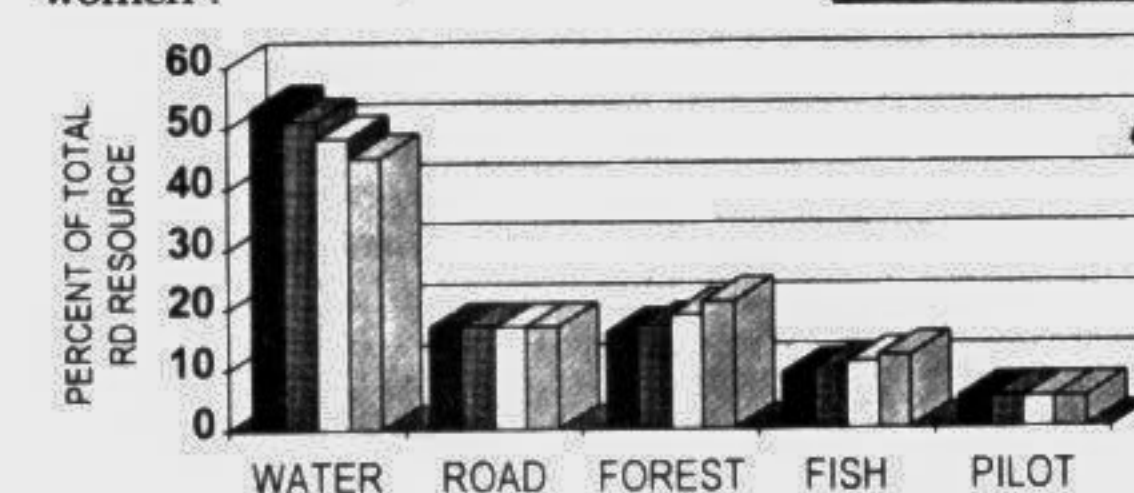
FOOD LOGISTICS: Unlike in many other countries, WFP-supplied food is not physically moved for distribution to the project beneficiaries. Instead it is merged with the national stock at the ports and managed



by the Ministry of Food through the Public Food Distribution System. Wheat needed to pay wages is drawn from the nearest depot of the PFDS.

PEOPLE'S PROGRAMME: Although the project is involved in the building of public infrastructure in rural areas, behind those structures there are several thousands of people with a specific story of their own, each depending on food aid work for a significant part of their living and family support. The project provides employment opportunities for about 500,000 people annually by rehabilitating 2300 km of embankments/canals, 400 km of roads, 1100 hectares of water bodies and planting 4 million trees.

With the new orientation, the project will increase the direct allocation to the poorest women from 20 to 50 per cent within the next four years, thus progressively bringing them and their families out of poverty. The pivotal role of women in household poverty reduction has been well documented. The chart below indicates the planned allocation of resources between men and women:



I would like to relate the story of one of the earth workers as told to Rezaul, a WFP Officer on a recent trip to Patuakhali.

Fatema, a 29 years old widow with four children between the ages of 2 and 10 comes from the village Alipur under Latachapi Union of Kalapara Thana, Patuakhali District located in the southern part of Bangladesh. She resides in a tiny house near the Water Development Board (BWDB) embankment of Polder 48. Her husband, the only earning member, had a reasonable income from fishing to support

the family.

Their dream was to improve the condition of their house and to send their children to school. All those hopes disappeared when Fatema's husband passed away a year ago. Initially, neighbors and close relatives extended their support but gradually Fatema realized that she alone will have to ensure bread for her family.

Fatema started looking for work opportunities. She worked as maid for which she was provided with three meals. Her employer was kind enough to allow her to take the meals home so that she could share it with her children. Her eldest son stopped going to school immediately after the death of his father and started to work as a day labourer. Her 7 year old daughter was employed by her neighbours on a daily meals basis. Fatema moved from door to door to find employment opportunities for cash but failed. Over the months, she sold all of her utensils including her aluminum plates. The last asset left for her to sell was the tin roof of her house. She also thought of begging at the nearby ferry ghat to ensure daily meals

At that time she was informed by Shahannur, another widow of Diaramkhola village, about the implementation of an earthwork scheme exclusively for female workers, supported by WFP. She contacted the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) about her employment and was registered. On 23 February 1997, she received an advance wage for 5 days, that is 30 kg of wheat and started working with an earth worker with seventy other women, the majority of whom were either abandoned or widowed. Despite the difficulties involved in heavy earthwork, she considers this as the best opportunity she has had to work and earn wages. She regards this employment as the only way out of the situation she was in, at which point she had been thinking selling the tin roof of her house.

With the new people centered focus, the Rural Development Programme has added a new dimension of long-term employment opportunities for the poorest, particularly women; providing them the support for skills development and the creation of assets to start new ventures during the year and beyond the period of WFP assistance. WFP beneficiaries like Fatema, now have opportunity to maintain their hope and continue to improve their standard of living, thereby helping them to stand tall as self-reliant members of society.



Message from the WFP Executive Director

The World Food Programme is pleased to be involved in the economic development of Bangladesh and with the reduction of poverty and the improvement of food security for the rural poor.

The global decline in food aid for development has put pressure on WFP to better target resources to the least developed countries in support of projects where food assistance makes a permanent difference in the life of the people. I am pleased that the Rural Development Project has been progressively redirected to meet this challenge.

The Rural Development Project is the largest WFP assisted labour intensive earthwork project in the world. Started as a relief programme in the early seventies, the project has all along made a major contribution to the life of millions of people — as relief, then rehabilitation and now sustainable development.

I commend the Government of Bangladesh for strengthening the development impact of food assisted programmes by making them part of the Annual Development Planning process. The Government has also provided increased resources for the Rural Development Project. Such steps have certainly helped WFP to advocate strongly that donors maintain food aid for Bangladesh in the face of declining global food aid resources.

I am very pleased to announce in this message that Rural Development Project is to increase the direct allocation of resources to women from 20 to 50 per cent, in accordance with the Commitments for Women I pledged on behalf of WFP at the Beijing Conference.

WFP will continue to support the Government and the people of Bangladesh in their efforts to eradicate poverty. On this occasion of the launching of the Rural Development Project, I congratulate all the collaborating partners — government, non-governmental organizations and donors — for their very substantial achievements so far and for their continuing commitments to a "backthrough" for the poor in Bangladesh.

Catherine Bertini
Catherine Bertini

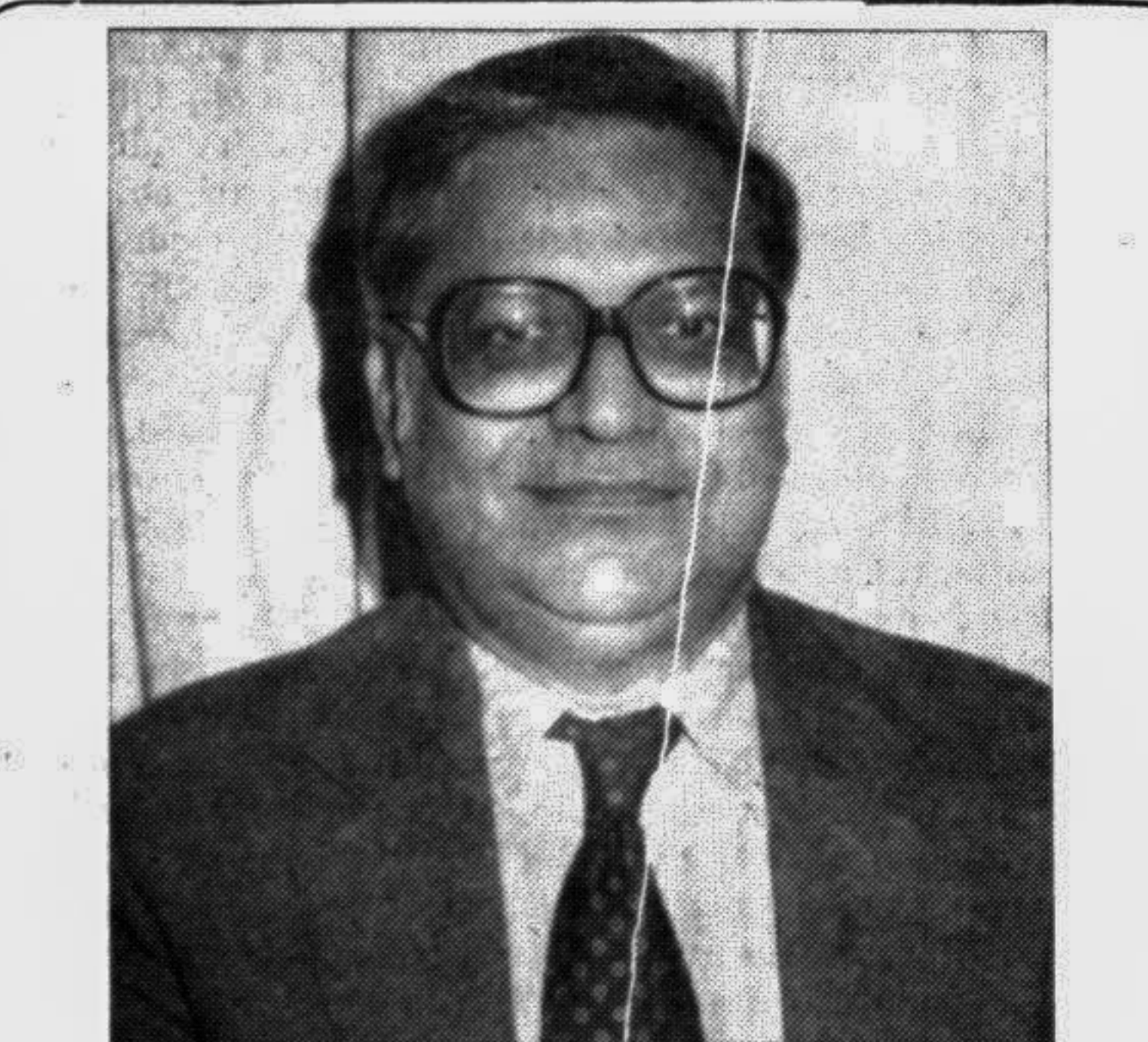


Message from the Minister for Finance

I am very pleased to know that the Economic Relations Division (ERD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have jointly sponsored the 'Launching Ceremony' of the Rural Development (RD) Programme. Through the Launching Ceremony and other public relation measures we should create awareness among the stakeholders in the RD Programme and thereby make full use of the available food resources. The contribution of Rural Development Programme in creating productive employment among the landless men and women is appreciated by the Government of Bangladesh. Indeed the Government is committed to contribute US \$10.00 million per year for implementation of the programme.

I hope that the various participants in the implementation of the Rural Development Programme will redouble their efforts to make this programme a model for targeted poverty alleviation programme supported by World Food Programme.

Shah A M S Kibria
Shah A M S Kibria



Message from Secretary, Economic Relations Division

The 'Launching Ceremony' of Rural Development (RD) Programme has been arranged jointly by the Economic Relations Division (ERD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The purpose of the ceremony is to inform the people about the programme and how it works. The RD programme is a reoriented version of erstwhile Food-For-Works (FFW) programme launched in 1974. The FFW was launched as a relief programme which has undergone several changes over the last two decades and has now become a food assisted development programme. The programme is the result of joint efforts of the Government of Bangladesh, WFP and other development partners.

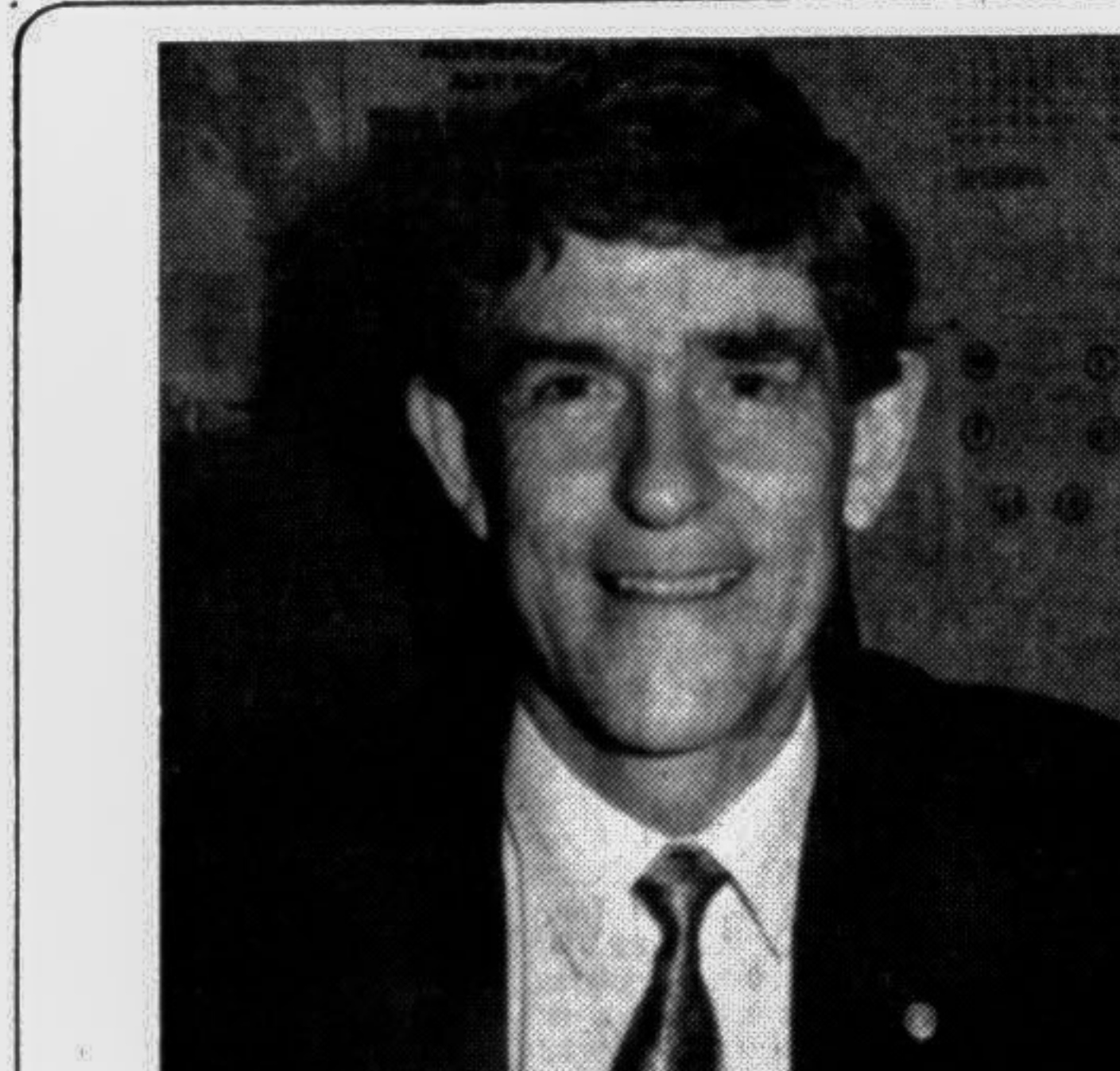
I hope that the 'Launching Ceremony' will provide an opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of the RD programme and will create sufficient enthusiasm among the stakeholders in the programme to attain its objectives.

I hope that our joint effort in implementing the 10th expansion of the RD Programme will bring benefit to all concerned.

Dr Masihur Rahman
Dr Masihur Rahman

The World Food Programme's assistance to Bangladesh over the last 22 years has made a significant improvement in the rehabilitation and construction of embankments, irrigation canals, rural roads, creating opportunities for the poor for growth and development. Excavation of water bodies and planting of trees have provided thousands of rural poor the opportunity to increase their income. With the new orientation, the Rural Development Project, we believe, will have much better impact on the poor making them self-reliant. We look forward to the successful implementation of the new sustainable Rural Development Project and seek continued support from WFP and bilateral donors.

Bangladesh Water Development Board
Local Government Engineering Department
Department of Fisheries
Department of Forest



Message from the WFP Country Director

In the last 22 years of its operations in Bangladesh, WFP has made a considerable shift in the use of food aid. In the new phase, the focus on people has been significantly enhanced. In association with short-term employment benefits, annually half a million rural poor will receive community support to enable them to sustain an improving standard of living, thereby breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

With this major new sustainable human development objective, by the end of 1997 some 150,000 of the project beneficiaries will have received training, savings and credit support, and

September-October lean season food assistance. A continuing association with community based organizations will ensure that they will be able to be self-reliant within four to five years. The poverty targeting mechanism of the Project has been further strengthened by concentrating WFP assistance into those thanas with the highest indicators of food insecurity, unemployment, natural disasters, and female destitution. As we develop the people focus even further we will be looking for new ways to enhance the participation of workers in scheme planning and management. We also are open to new suggestions as to ways we can empower the poorest even further.

With this new orientation in place, I firmly believe that the Rural Development Project from now on will be much better positioned to create those assets which are desperately needed. Under its people focus, it will create human resource and household assets for the rural poor. Under its infrastructure focus it will create the physical assets — water embankments, roads, fish ponds — which are widely acknowledged as essential for the socio-economic development of rural areas, and thus for improved employment opportunities for the landless.

On behalf of the rural poor, I would like to thank particularly the European Union, Australia, Canada and France for their generous continuing contributions. This support is essential if we are to continue together to expand our efforts within the framework of this new initiative to meet the challenge of reducing chronic poverty among the millions of rural landless. I would like to underline that this Project is a major, far-reaching partnership involving the government, non-governmental organizations, bilateral donors, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and other UN agencies. We can all take pride in the accomplishments and future potential of the Rural Development Project.

Alan Wilkinson
Alan Wilkinson