

# Unemployed Rural Educated Youth Formidable Challenge for 21st Century

by Dr. Thomas Costa

Conducive atmosphere and necessary scopes be created for the increasing number of unemployed educated youths. The task is gigantic and all-out effort is needed for a breakthrough.

BA NGLADESH society is basically composed of a vast number of poor and underprivileged people and continues to experience soaring unemployment and growing landlessness. It is the harsh reality that our rural people are largely found to compete for possession of a piece of land and opportunity for employment for their actual existence.

While staying at villages for a considerable amount of time in conducting a field study I had the opportunity to experience the above reality in depth. Side by side I also gathered two different experiences — that the real learning on any social aspect are derived from the live experience of a person, that inspired me. On the other hand, understanding of the hard aspect of rural reality which depressed me very much.

In order to discuss various aspects with the inhabitants, family heads and the leaders of the villages three major social problems were identified by themselves on a priority basis. These are as follows: a) Lack of employment; b) Impact of Dowry; and c) Migration of villagers. Besides they also expressed their views on lack of village roads, lack of Govt. facilities and lack of pure water, etc.

Erik G. Jansen, one Social Science researcher, who had conducted a study in a village of Rangpur district 20 years ago wrote — "One of the best things a well-to-do landlord can offer to a poor neighbour is employment, and one of the worst things he can do is to deny him employment when the poor neighbour asks for it." It is the reality that the grim picture of 20 years ago in Bangladesh has not changed but grown darker and complex.

It is stated by many people that in Bangladesh more than one-third of the labour force is unemployed and under-employed, which is roughly 23 million and each year there are 1.5 million new entrants in the labour market. Many of them are educated unemployed youth. It is definitely a serious problem and a growing challenge for the country. To get rid from this situation Bangladesh has only one meaningful choice: it must aim for a growth rate of not much less than 7 to 8 percent, using labour intensive techniques. But the present growth

rate for last five years is around 4 per cent. The two study villages that I have chosen were Rampur and Sonapur. Rampur is situated in Badalgachi Thana of Naogaon district while Sonapur is in Sadar Thana of Dinajpur. In the Naogaon village there are about 937 people in 198 families. The village now has 91 educated persons with Class VIII and above levels (upto MA), but unemployed. Almost one educated unemployed person belongs to every two houses. In the Dinajpur village there are 1598 people in 408 families. The village now has 54 educated youth persons with Class VIII to Graduation level without any gainful employment. It is apparent that in both the villages the per cent of unemployed educated persons is — in Naogaon village 46 per cent and in Dinajpur village 17.4 per cent. With the increasing trend of education the rate of unemployed educated youth also goes up. On the one side the uneducated youth can take part easily in all kind of farm-based and non-farm activities, but the educated unemployed youth can not. This is the matter of consideration.

One Raihan [25] of Rampur passed Higher Secondary [College] education in 1988. Since then he gave up study and has been looking for a job. His parental family possesses about 3.5 acres of land. Raihan thinks that after acquiring such a level of education one should not work in the agricultural field. "People will not accept it. They will think I am worthless. I have simply wasted my valuable time in education and now work in the cultivable field. I am frustrated and need a job very badly", said Raihan. Other unemployed villagers like thousands of rural society have expressed the similar attitude like Raihan to a great extent. This is the crude reality of rural Bangladesh at present and in the next century. This aspect has been reflected in the UNDP Report '96: "Not to meet this challenge would clearly imply huge increases in poverty, human misery and sufferings, social and political instability". This Report has identified unemployment as a major problem for Bangladesh.

As a Social Researcher I tried to understand this life and death problem of the educated unemployed youth of the country from their own life experience and from my observation. If the challenge of unemployment is not properly met the following impact may be seen in the social reality of our country —

[a] Selling out of valuable asset, i.e. land in order to meet

minimum basic requirements of the households become a regular event. A grim reality of the hard core and marginal poverty of rural poor class. Land gained and lost in last 10 years (1984-1994) provides a clear indication of this option. The Naogaon village has lost some land over what it owned 10 years ago, while the Dinajpur village gained a few pieces of land besides what it owned to years back. It may be mentioned that in Dinajpur village the credit and other activities by some Private Voluntary development organisations has a positive impact on less transfer of land. However, the hard core poor families can not achieve any valuable assets including land yet now.

[b] The traditional norm that women should not claim their part of inherited land is being changed. In the rural areas, women are coming up more and more with their own claim of property rights. Being educated they are now becoming more inclined towards getting a job. The additional pressure on employment sector and increasing trend in claiming property rights can be marked as good signs.

[c] Migration to other villages, cities and towns for work. This internal migration is one of the three main problems of the present study villages. There is a strong tendency of migration of the educated unemployed persons to any part of the country, or even abroad for employment.

[d] Creating employment opportunities in the villages. The institution-building process of the poor, their savings, income generating activities, various sorts of training for skill development, credit support, etc. by the PVDOs have helped to create mostly off-farm opportunities in the Dinajpur village. Perhaps, the absence of PVDOs and other GO agencies in Naogaon village caused lower employment opportunities. My study findings depicted that in the Naogaon village the rate of educated unemployed youth is 46%, whereas in Dinajpur village the figure is 17%. It is clear from the PVDOs experience that some additional non-farm employment opportunities can be created in the rural areas. But it is absolutely impossible to create employment scopes for all. This is the crude reality in our country.

[v] The increase of frustration, violence and other anti-social activities. At present there exists a high degree of frustration among the unemployed youth and this frustration is likely to increase. Regarding violence and other anti-social activities, there is

less likelihood of such incidents in Dinajpur village primarily because of the socio-economic development activities of the supportive agencies which help bring people closer and make them united. But lack of such activities frustrates and generates in Naogaon village, this may lead to create ground for anti-social activities.

High competition is marked for few employment opportunities in the villages. The influential and solvent people are winning the race. For instance, one relative of an influential local leader obtained the position of a school teacher two years ago allegedly by giving Tk 15,000/- as a bribe. What Eric Jansen mentioned in 20 years ago about the serious competition for obtaining employment and possession of a piece of land by most of the villagers is now becoming a permanent phenomenon in our rural society. The competition not lessened rather increased and mounting day by day. It is indeed difficult to say when this sort of competition will turn to a mutual cooperation. My earnest desire is that — conducive atmosphere and necessary scopes to be created for the increasing unemployed educated youth. This challenge should be addressed directly. The task is a gigantic one, but all-out efforts is needed for a breakthrough. UNDP Annual Report '96 has prioritised the following policies for Bangladesh to address this challenge:

a) Creating a conducive and pro-poor environment to help redouble and refocus on-going efforts;

b) Creating more gainful employment opportunities; and

c) Initiating special programmes of employment generation for the poorest.

I also comply with the above suggestion. These are policy matters. However, in the context of research experience my feelings is that the challenge related to employment is a most formidable issue for our country in the coming century. The nation should reach a consensus on it. The problem is like a destructive Atom Bomb. We are carrying this Bomb in each of our families and elsewhere. The nation should be spared from this situation. If we fail to do so the future generation would not forgive our politician and social leaders. Let us come together to raise the matter as a national issue and undertake combined national efforts. In this regard the role of a democratic government is pioneering.

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# 'Biological Warfare' Allegation as Screw Worm Spreads

As another row brewed between Iraq and UN weapons inspectors, Baghdad was also concerned by a livestock epidemic, with one newspaper conjecturing that the outbreak might have been started deliberately. Whatever the cause, reports Gemini News Service, UN officials warn that unless carefully managed, the infestation could spread through the Middle East region. Felicity Arbuthnot writes from London

AN outbreak of the potentially lethal screw worm pest has reached epidemic proportions in Iraq and threatens the entire Middle East region, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Its emergence in Iraq, where it has never previously been seen, has produced accusations of United States-backed biological warfare.

Recalling US participation in the elimination of infestations in the Americas through the release of millions of sterilised male screw worm flies, the Baghdad Observer newspaper commented: "The US government's involvement in the sterilisation facilities also cover for producing the screw worm fly in biological warfare."

It pointed out that plants involved in screw worm control could produce up to five million flies a week and that every sterilised fly had unsterilised parents. "That these Last American parasites are now to be found in Iraq should provoke a few questions about the probability of biological warfare."

To answer the question of how the flies came to Iraq, the newspaper added, "one does not have to look too far: the same way the sterilised insects are delivered — in boxes on a small plane."

The only flights in and out of Iraq since the imposition of a UN embargo are those carrying UN personnel, including members of an international team of

weapons inspectors. Some Iraqi scientists point an accusing finger at these flights.

Scepticism is required over all claims by and against Iraq, with both the Baghdad and its opponents engaged in a bitter propaganda war.

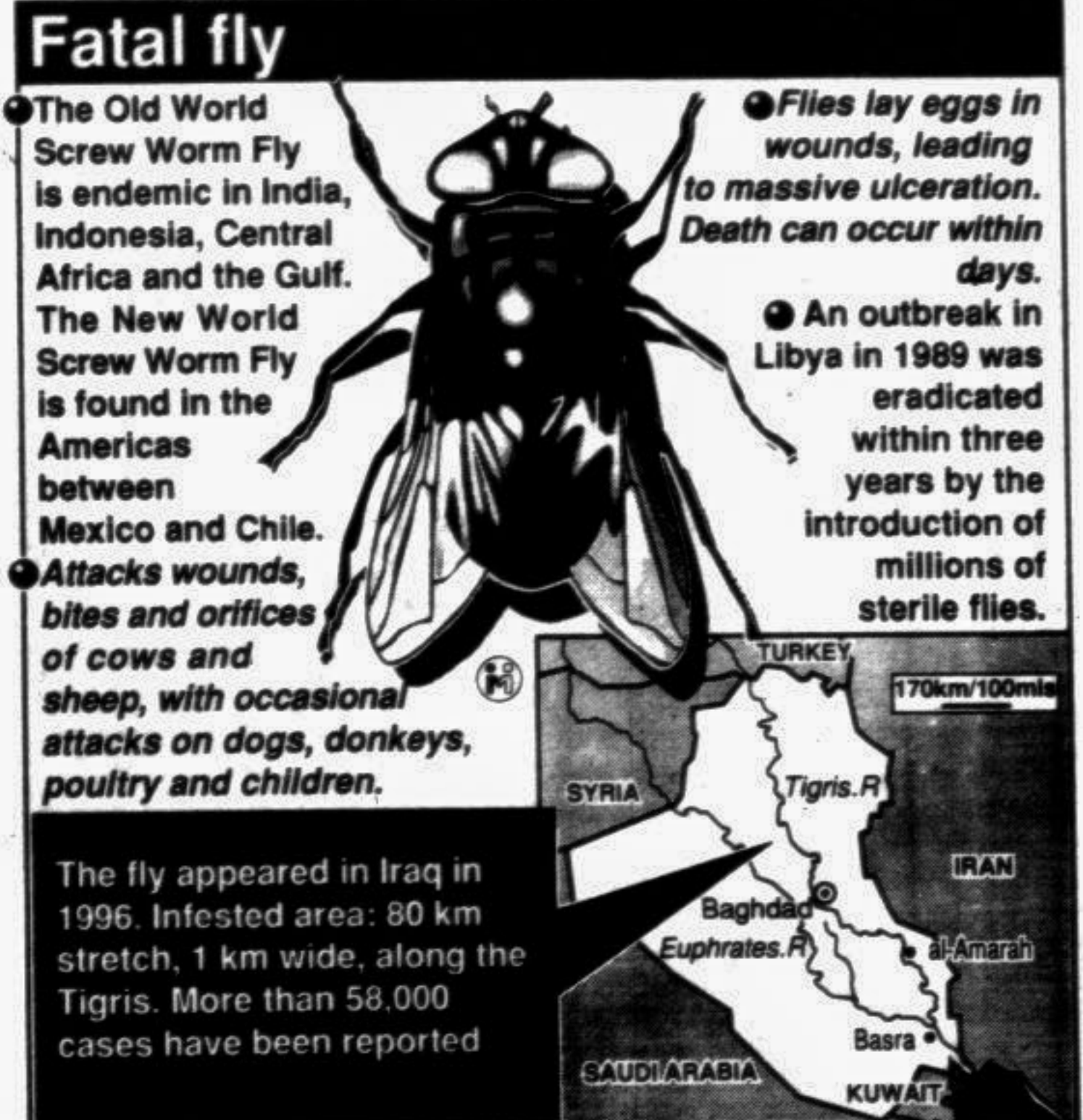
But the allegation deserves scrutiny. George Pumphrey, a senior researcher for the German Parliament who has extensive knowledge of biological warfare, claims that "Iraq is but the latest victim of what appears to be a deliberate introduction of the screw worm as a biological weapon."

Infestation is caused by the larvae of the screw worm fly, which can live in the wound and sand orifices of warm-blooded animals.

Within 12 hours of a fly laying several hundred eggs on the edge of a wound, the larvae hatch and enter the body for feeding. They can kill a cow in less than seven days.

Infested wounds often give off a dark, foul-smelling discharge. Although animals such as cows and goats are most often affected, but humans can be attacked, too. Iraqi officials say 40 people have died in the outbreak.

The adult fly can travel up to 3000 kilometres in its lifetime. The epidemic began in September 1996 and by last December 12 of Iraq's 16 provinces were affected. More than 46,800 cases were reported during



The fly appeared in Iraq in 1996. Infested area: 80 km stretch, 1 km wide, along the Tigris. More than 58,000 cases have been reported

This constitutes an explosion," says FAO economist Henning Steinfeld. He says that Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria are seriously threatened, and that there is also danger for Bahrain, Lebanon, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. The losses come on top of an already serious livestock situation. A shortage of imported feed has reduced poultry production to five per cent of its pre-Gulf War output. Dairy production is down by two-thirds. Until now, the traditional cattle sector, which includes buffalo, has fared better, but in a country where the UN Children's Fund says one-third of children suffer stunted growth or impaired intelligence due to malnutrition, further decimation of livestock could herald disaster. Daniel Robicheau, co-editor

of the book, *Hidden Casualties: The Environmental, Health and Political Consequences of the Persian Gulf War*, says the sort of response generated in Libya — where an international campaign eliminated the screw worm — is required in Iraq. "Without such an international response," he counsels, "Iraqi health authorities see the screw worm fly infestation becoming endemic or pandemic, threatening to destroy animal husbandry and causing grievous consequences to human life as well."

He claims that FAO has done little to combat the menace, and that only a small amount of the relevant pesticide has been delivered. The writer is a freelance journalist based in London who specialises in coverage in Iraq, which she visits frequently.

# Saving the Tiger from Tradition

Tariq Aziz writes from Baripada, India

The annual hunting ritual in the Indian state of Orissa poses a serious threat to one of the country's healthiest tiger populations. Efforts are being made to crack down on the hunters, but the best hope is to change the attitudes of local tribes.

THE hunting ritual of Akhand Shikhar is an important event among the people of Orissa in western India. In April and May each year, they make offerings to the deity of the Simlipal

forest guard responsible for almost 30km<sup>2</sup> of territory, and a shortage of resources, the task is a difficult one.

To make matters worse, the nature of the Akhand Shikhar

put the hunters on the defensive and many hunting parties have been intercepted and dispersed. Arrests have been made and weapons confiscated, but the Akhand Shikhar activities con-

tinued. Shikhar alternatives such as dancing competitions.

WWF is also supporting the Simlipal Reserve management in the creation of additional anti-poaching camps in the buffer zones of the reserve through the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society of Orissa. Village headmen are employed in the new camps because they command local respect and can not only dissuade their people from hunting but also gather



mountains then embark on an orgy of hunting, and burning down forests to flush out and kill as many animals as they can.

This ancient practice ends in joyful celebration — but it is bad news for one of India's finest tiger habitats, the Simlipal Reserve, which covers 845km<sup>2</sup> inside a buffer zone of nearly 2,000km<sup>2</sup>. In this vast stretch of forested hills live more than 90 tigers (*Pantheris tigris tigris*), according to official figures, but their future cannot be guaranteed so long as Akhand Shikhar threatens not only them but also their prey.

The hard-pressed management of the Simlipal Tiger Reserve has been doing its best to reduce the threat, but with each

has changed in recent years. Movement has become easier thanks to the construction of fair-weather roads and army gangs of poachers now operate under the umbrella of the ritual. The locals, while more conscious of the danger to tigers, are reluctant to give up their tradition. In the response to hunting restrictions, they have extended the period of the ritual, which now begins in January — limited kills have resulted in more forest burning in an attempt to flush out greater numbers of animals.

The Forest Department now sets up anti-poaching camps and engages fire-watchers during the Akhand Shikhar period. A platoon of the Armed Police Reserve is also employed at peak times. Such efforts have

information on preparations for the Akhand Shikhar. Such intelligence allows the management to intercept hunting parties and disperse them.

These initiatives are having an effect. The frequency of animal killing has come down drastically this year," says Amarendra Bose, Simlipal's Honorary Wildlife Warden. But many people cling to the tradition and it will take some time to end the annual blood-letting. Bose is optimistic. WWF has already made a difference," he says. "If it continues with its programme for a few more years, the end of the Akhand Shikhar is within sight."

WWF Features The writer works for WWF's Tiger Conservation Programme based in New Delhi.

# Helping Women Farmers Help Themselves

Nancy Hart writes from Salghari, India

THE steep path leading to this village tucked into the Eastern Himalayas is tricky. But Durga Upreti knows it well. For two years, she has been coming up here to teach the villagers new ways to care for poultry.

The beauty of Salghari is deceptive. There is extreme poverty, lack of basic services, roads or health care facilities. Raising better poultry has meant for the villagers a healthier diet as well as extra income from selling chickens and eggs.

Technically, the project focused on the introduction of a breed of poultry known as Rhode Island Red with regional extensionists offering training in keeping the stock healthy. But there is another angle that has given this project impact beyond the village borders. It was planned, in part, by the villagers themselves.

The original scheme was to bring into Salghari new technologies for raising goats. But, when Upreti sat down to talk to the women, they told her responsibility for feeding animals, always falls on the women.

Upreti understood the problem. She realised that unless fodder could be grown near the village, caring for the goats

would only add to the women's burden. So she took this information back to the regional planning office and got the project re-designed.

Instead of introducing goats, the project introduced poultry technology. Today the results of that decision can be seen in the quality of poultry production in the village. It is the kind of successful village participation that the project's sponsor, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), likes to hear.

In fact, that was why extensionists who work in the villages of 12 developing countries, including Upreti, were invited to a 5-day FAO workshop called 'From Farmer to Planner and Back' which, as the title indicates, focuses on development projects that rely on the input of women and men in the villages.

The workshop, sponsored by FAO's Women in Development Service, was held at the international headquarters in Rome in a year when FAO has chosen the theme of "Women Feed the World" for this year's World Food Day on October 16 in recognition of their contribution.

The extensionists not only discussed food production but

also pointed out the problems faced by women farmers ranging from land ownership to access to credit.

"We have brought together people from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Near East," explained Vicki Wilde, the workshop leader. "We hope to harvest from these people who work in the field."

"These are the people who are actually working with the villagers. They are here to tell us what works, what doesn't work, what makes sense. At the end of the workshop we'll pull it all together and publish what they've told us so we can share it with agricultural development workers around the world." During the five days of the workshop, not only did the participants share their experiences with FAO staff, they shared their experiences with each other.

They met in plenary sessions and also in smaller groups, aided by interpreters, to talk about their common experiences and share ideas. The interpreters added an important element to the work, because communication was not inhibited by language.

"What comes out of this is friendship," said Stella

Williams, who represented a fisheries project in Nigeria. "We get to know each other, share information about our work. We learn from each other."

The feelings of friendship and of mutual support were certainly important outcomes of the workshop. But the main outcome will be taking all of the information from these development workers and incorporating it into a how-to guide that can be used by development workers anywhere.

The idea of involving villagers in the various stages of a project is not new. These so-called 'participatory methods' have been evolving for many years.

What's new is the desire to add the next-step-to take information that comes directly from the villagers and factor it into the project plan. Then, it comes back to the village in the form of a project that the villagers can support.

For the villagers of Salghari, there is no question that they appreciated being involved in this project. Not only are the children healthier from the additional meat and eggs in their diets, one villager has even opened a small shop with the money she made from selling eggs. — IPS/APB

by Jim Davis

