

Whither PRSP

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As many as 1.28 billion citizens of our planet are now living below the poverty line income. This is what the World Bank says in its World Development Report, 2000. Almost 72 percent of them live in Asia and about half of the one billion Asian poor live in South Asia alone!

What actually are the characteristics of these "Poor People"? Basically they are that part of the society who are relatively most deprived from income, wealth, education, social security and political power.

Therefore there must be present an absolutely clear recognition of the following truths in any document promising to change the lots of the lower-depth. Firstly it has to be recognised that if there is unequal distribution of initial endowments like wealth, education, security and political power in the society, then there cannot be any fair and equal competition.

The radical answer to the above question is to start with a revolutionary redistribution of wealth and power from which will follow an egalitarian growth or pro-poor growth within the society. The problem of that answer lies in its abstract nature.

On the other hand the traditional mainstream thinkers are prone to believe that the natural law of "Struggle for Existence and Survival of the Fittest" holds good in the society as well and therefore what one can mostly do is to devise a few "Safety Net" measures for at least protecting the rights of the poor to live.

&We have traversed a long way in the last century where we had observed the rise and fall of cold war between supposedly two diametrically opposite schools of thoughts in the field of development discourse.

NGOs, division and development

DR. SYED KAMALUDDIN AHMED

THE recent development in the NGO community may appear a matter of big concern especially for the people who believe in equal participation of civil society along with government efforts to face the formidable challenge of poverty alleviation and social development.

The oft-repeated saying "development is the responsibility of the government" has become an antiquated myth and role of civil society particularly the NGOs in national development is an undeniable truth now.

If this is the reality then the recent happenings in the NGO community, as reported in the media, leaves enough reasons to be distressed.

classes actually forgot that it does not mean either "Charity" or "Benevolence". It is actually a question of right of the deprived people justified not only by an external moral ethical ground but also by an active fulfillment of all necessary responsibilities by the enjoyer of those rights.

& On the other hand the so-called victorious capitalism had tried to introduce various reforms e.g. progressive taxation, social security schemes, etc. in order to address the issue of unequal distribution.

The truth has ultimately been revealed. So this time we are again going to have a donor driven strategy of poverty reduction and it is going to be approved neither through an extended participatory process in the bottom nor through a minimum national debate in the parliament in the presence of all concerned political parties.

or safety net measures could not stop the absolute growth of the total number of poor people living especially in the historically resource poor regions. This traditional safety net approach is merely a tool for intervention only when somebody is sliding down into the pit of poverty.

On Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) At present it seems that the Donors especially WB are very anxious about

the poverty of Bangladesh. Now a days Donors no longer give grants or untied aids. Most of the loans coming from WB is either for a particular project or based on one or another certain strategic policy framework such as SAP (Structural Adjustment Programme).

& Indiscriminate Privatisation of not only industries but also major utilities e.g. water, electricity, gas, railway, port, etc. & The so-called policy of free market policy, which actually means almost unilateral withdrawal of all tariff and non-tariff restrictions by the aid-recipient country.

SAP was introduced in Bangladesh from the middle of eighties when the country was under a Martial Law Regime led by General Ershad. Later in 1990, five years after the introduction of SAP General Ershad was forced to resign from power facing a mass upsurge the backbone of which was the united movement of workers and employees, organised students and agricultural labourers.

the government to dismantle BPC (Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation) in order to establish the complete control of MNCs on the gas and oil sector of Bangladesh. Similarly there is a high pressure from US embassy in Bangladesh to hand over the Chittagong Port to a foreign US based company.

[Debapriya Bhattacharya and Rashed Titumir (ed), Stakeholders' Perceptions Reforms and Consequences: Report on the First National Forum of SAPRI, Bangladesh, CPD and Proshika, Dhaka, 2001]

Given this unfavourable background not only in Bangladesh but also in all over the world the WB had to recognise the failures of SAP at least partly and they tried to put the blame on the local host country government who according to them were not sufficiently committed and have numerous governance problems.

contrariety, and may have roots in philosophical differences among them. However, it may be too early to form an impression and may be equally unwise to be too judgmental. Therefore, instead of wasting our effort on an unworthy yield let us revisit some common issues including leadership.

that the idea of leadership itself shapes the process by which a society does its work". Leadership mobilises groups to do work. Often it demands defining problems, generating solutions, and, perhaps foremost, locating responsibility for defining and solving problems", the authors continued.

It need not be overemphasised that NGOs can deliver services to the door step of the people at a very low unit cost due to their motivation, voluntarism and easy access to vulnerable and outreach population. In order to allow it to sustain the NGOs should reach a consensus to address the current situation with a result seeking motivation.

consideration of shared or rotating leadership, and one may have to recognise both formal and informal leadership with a wider platform of participation. It would minimise the possibility of so-called coterie formation and disastrous infighting. NGO leadership, at this critical phase of their functioning, may not find a better alternative than to seek community opinion to decide upon further course of action to resolve the issues.

This is all the more appropriate because NGOs, almost all of them, in their constitutional objectives, highlight the theme of community empowerment that is shifting the responsibility of developing ideas, planning and decision making from organisations, institutions and professionals to the community.

Once the issue of leadership is decided the leadership may look into few

other matters that may not appear pleasing but certainly a reality. There is a clear dichotomy in the NGO community between national and international NGOs. National NGOs often identify themselves as 'National' and 'Local'. These unconventional dichotomies often give rise to tension. Over time, it has become evident that there is difference in philosophy and functional concept between the NGOs. It is often influenced by political understanding and motivation, and social and religious values in some other time.

Many of the bigger NGOs have easier access to international donors for financial assistance, and communication of these NGOs with donor agencies at times leads to certain degree of tension even with national governments. Donor aids are obviously not unlimited and may sometimes lead to unhealthy competition for scarce resources. Governments nowadays lean

more towards government-NGO collaboration after decade over experiences of positive yields from such collaborations. Lately, such collaboration has been carried to a step further, and NGOs have often to compete for developing such collaboration through open bids. Consequently, there is turf fights and competition for credit that may not always be bestowed with healthy common ground of functioning.

Leadership at the personal level, because of personal magnanimity and charisma, may at times symbolise the principle of development movements. However, there may be occasions where personality and attitudinal traits of the person would not appear conducive to the objective and purpose of the movements, and therefore may have a confounding effect on the whole issue of politico-socio-economic development.

The Government, with a very good intention and for reasons of easier functioning, often assigns larger NGOs to share some of its responsibilities. Unfortunately, the larger NGOs often forget that any civil society initiative, whatever may be its nature, is not a routine bureaucratic exercise rather is a part of a development movement for the people who often do not have

scrutiny and then they will in turn forward it to the September meeting of the member states of the board of directors of WB for the final approval. Till then all so-called soft loan options will be remaining withheld.

At this juncture our organisation "Peoples Empowerment Trust" in co-operation with Action Aid Bangladesh launched a nationwide campaign against this process of donor driven PRSP [Please See our dialogue paper, "PRSP: What, Why and For Whom" in our web site]. The central theme of our campaign was "OWNERSHIP". We pointed out that like SAP, the Government is now again preparing a PRSP under the influence of the "Carrot and Stick" policy of WB and IMF, and this will produce a paper without any national ownership.

In response to our campaign Government of Bangladesh tried to meet both ends in a novel manner. They at first tried to prepare a PRSP in a hurried manner before the Paris Consortium meeting and to give it a semblance of bottom up participation they hired BRAC to arrange twenty-one dialogues. On that thin basis the consultants were asked to prepare a draft PRSP. It was finished just before the Paris meeting and our finance Minister took it with him to Paris calling it interim PRSP.

We hailed these moves towards a correct direction and asked the Government to proceed further and incorporate the real demands of our people within it instead of those SAP agendas superimposed by the donors. At the same time we also started to think and plan about a critical engagement with the content of the draft "National Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction" [published by ERD, Ministry of Finance, GOB, in April 2002].

(To be concluded tomorrow)

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7th Five Year Development Plan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17 the Kingdom's developments; 7) To continue to achieve balanced growth throughout all regions of the Kingdom and increase their contribution to national development;

- (12) To develop mineral resources and to encourage discovery and utilization thereof; (13) To complete infrastructure projects necessary to achieve overall development; (14) To keep abreast of developments in science, technology and information technology, and to encourage research, development and technology assimilation; (15) To continue to protect the environment against pollution and develop appropriate systems, and to preserve natural resources and conserve wildlife; (16) To promote integration among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and to strengthen the Kingdom's relations with Arab, Islamic and friendly countries.

Saudi education system

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18 education for the handicapped. The General Presidency for Girls Education administers the girl's schools and colleges, supervises kindergartens and nursery schools and sponsors literacy programmes for females. The first government school for girls was built in 1964.

After elementary education, students can attend either high schools offering programmes both in arts and sciences, or vocational schools. There are currently over 4,000 intermediate schools and nearly 2000 high schools. Students' progress through high schools is determined by comprehensive examinations conducted

twice a year and supervised by the ministry of education. The Saudi education system achieved both qualitative development and quantitative development since introduction of the country's first development plan in 1970. The number of students increased six-fold between 1970s and 1990s while the number of full-time teachers grew more than nine-fold. The Kingdom's ratio of 15 students to every teacher is one of the lowest and most ideal in the world.

computer project, named after Crown Prince Abdullah, has already been started in 2000 AD. Schools for Saudi Students Abroad: As part of efforts to make education available to Saudi students residing abroad, the kingdom has established educational institutions for them throughout the world. The Kingdom has established three largest institutions in the United States, Britain and Germany. Students attend kindergarten through 12th grade at these schools, receiving instruction in Islam and the Arabic language, in addition to the regular curriculum. A new Saudi school has been established in Rome (Italy), bringing the number of such institutions to 18. The first meeting of the directors of Saudi schools and academies abroad was held in Taif in 2001 AD. Higher Education: Saudi Arabia devoted special attention to

improve higher education to cater to the needs of the country in various sectors of development. With this end in view, the ministry of Higher Education was established in 1975. The ministry embarked on a long-term master plan to enable the Saudi education system to provide highly trained manpower to run the country's modern economy. One of the first objectives of the long-term plan was to establish new institutes of higher education throughout the country and to expand the existing ones. By 1999, there were eight major universities and a large number of other institutions of higher education. As a result, Saudi students can now obtain degrees in almost any field within the country, and if necessary, pursue specialised education abroad.



A secondary school in Al-Ola in Saudi Arabia

