

Where do the children play?

Cat Stevens wrote three decades ago: *I know we've come a long way, We're changing day to day, But tell me, where do the children play?* Bangladesh has come a long way from its precarious beginnings. But we are still far from a good society, judging by the way we treat far too many of our vulnerable children.

JYOTI RAHMAN and RUMI AHMED

ACCORDING to American political philosopher John Rawls, a society should be judged on the welfare of its most vulnerable. In this regard, macroeconomic survival of the global recession or buoyant foreign

reserve is not enough to understand the quality of our social life. Since children are among the most vulnerable in any society, a good test using the Rawlsian framework of how the Bangladeshi society is faring would be to look at how our children are doing. Let's start at the birth. In 2007, less

Table 1: Immunisation (% of children aged 12-23 months)				
	Measles		DPT	
	1997	2007	1997	2007
Bangladesh	72	88	78	90
India	55	67	62	62
Indonesia	77	80	73	75
Pakistan	52	80	52	83
Philippines	79	92	81	87
Thailand	93	96	95	98
Vietnam	96	83	95	92

than a fifth of births in Bangladesh were attended by a skilled health professional. Although this is an improvement over the less than a tenth a decade earlier, child birth in Bangladesh remains a far more hazardous event than in our South and Southeast Asian neighbours (Chart 1). In 2007, 47 children in every 1,000 died at infancy in Bangladesh (Chart 2). This is a significant improvement from over 151 per 1,000 infants lost in 1975. Bangladesh is also doing better than its major South Asian neighbours. But 47 is still a very high number, especially compared with Southeast Asian countries.

Bangladesh tends to do a lot better when it comes to immunisation of those who live beyond infancy. As Table 1 shows, Bangladeshi children aged 12-23 months are relatively more likely to be vaccinated against diseases such as measles or diphtheria. This certainly proves that despite manifold problems in Bangladesh, it is possible to provide services that make clear improvements to living conditions.

Of the children who survive their infancy and live to the age of five, nearly half are short for their age, while nearly two in every five are underweight. Of our major neighbours, only India has a worse prevalence of malnutrition (Chart 3).

The prevalence of child labour is relatively low among Bangladeshi girls, but it is striking to note how high it is among Bangladeshi boys (Chart 4). Over a quarter of Bangladeshi boys aged between 7 and 14 years are economically active, higher than in similar countries in the region. About 63 per cent of eco-

nomically active Bangladeshi children do not go to school, compared with only 15 per cent of economically active Indian children. Coupled with the low prevalence of child labour in India, this means that many more Bangladeshi children have to work compared with their peers in our neighbouring country.

Over three-fifths of working Bangladeshi children are employed in agriculture. This may well reflect the still agrarian characteristic of our society. About an eighth of children who work do so in manufacturing. The rest -- over a quarter of boys, and slightly less than a fifth of girls, who work -- are in the services sector.

Why do parents send their children to work instead of school? Recent studies suggest that child labour falls, and schooling rises, when families escape the subsistence level. This suggests that direct philanthropy can, at the margin, improve children's welfare by taking them away from work and putting them into school. But philanthropy cannot be realistically expected to make a serious and sustainable dent into poverty.

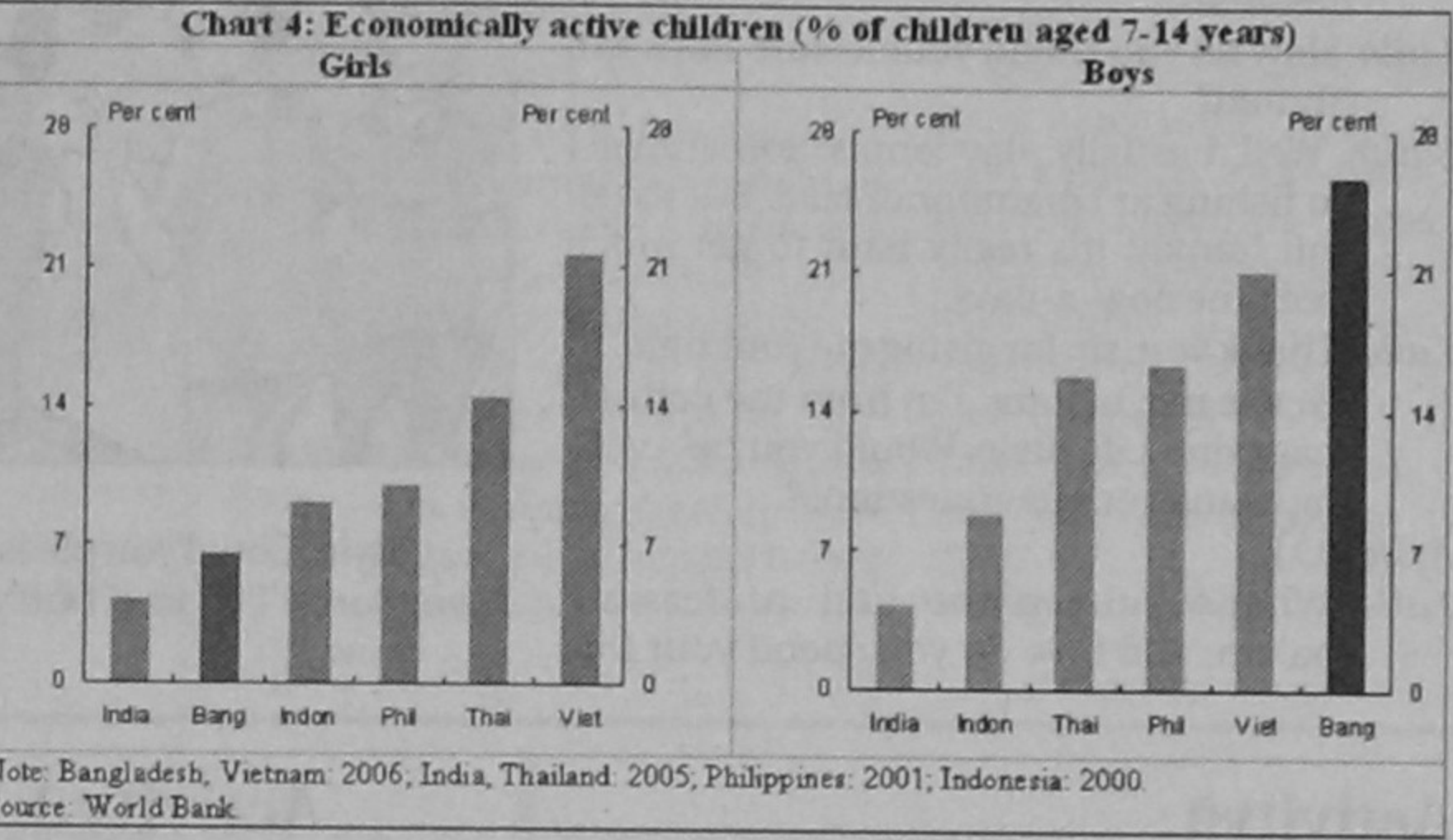
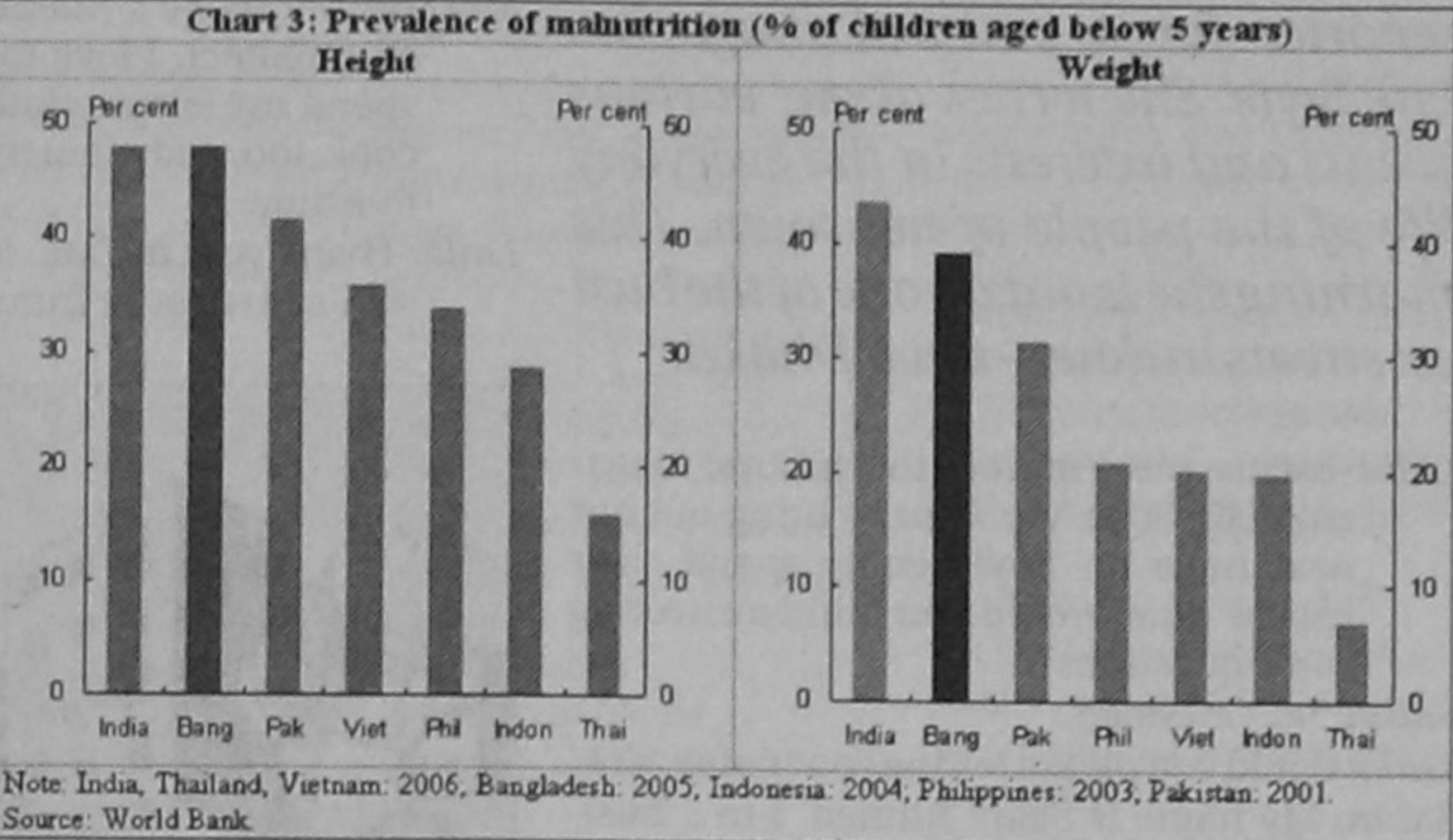
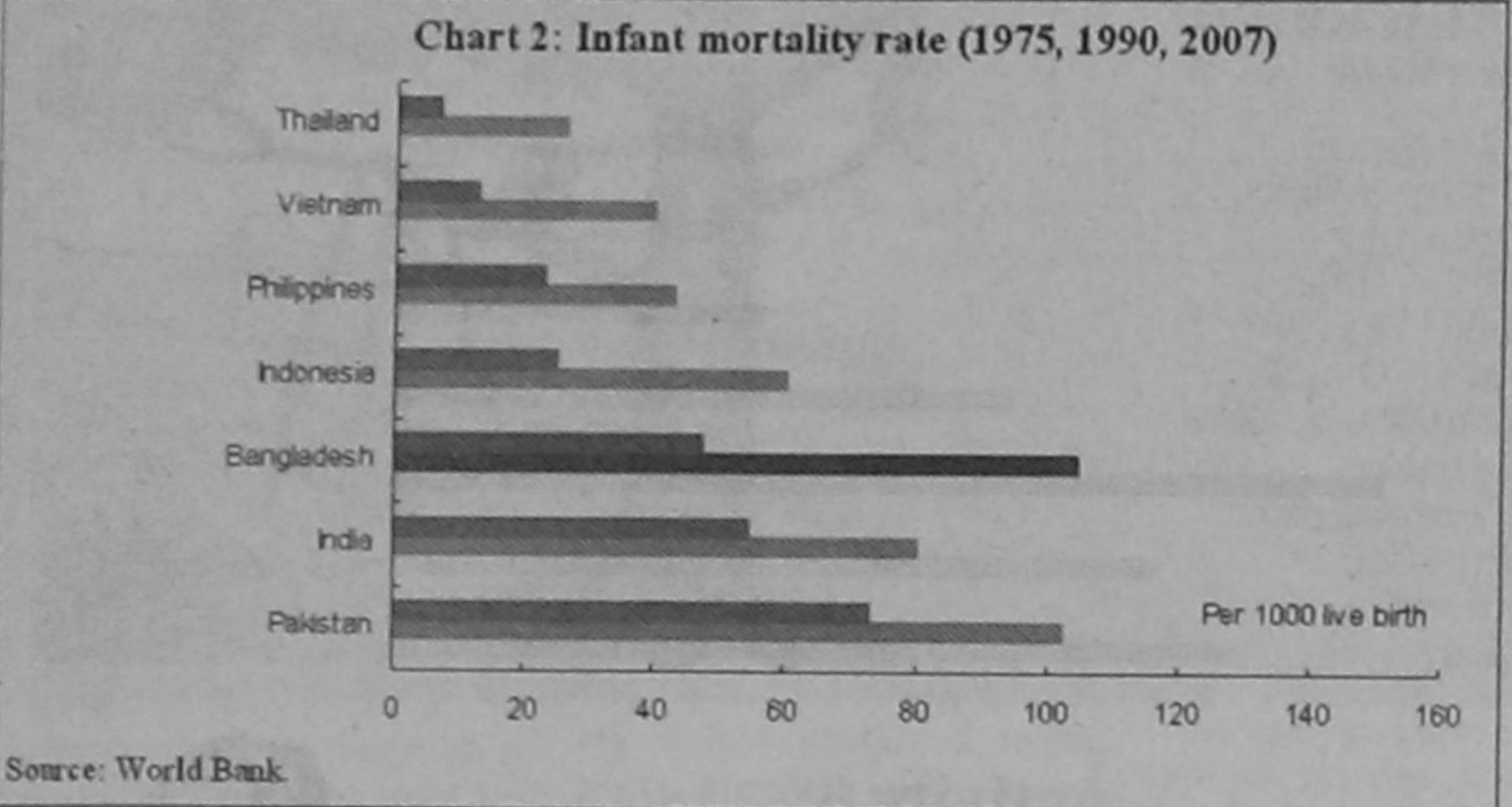
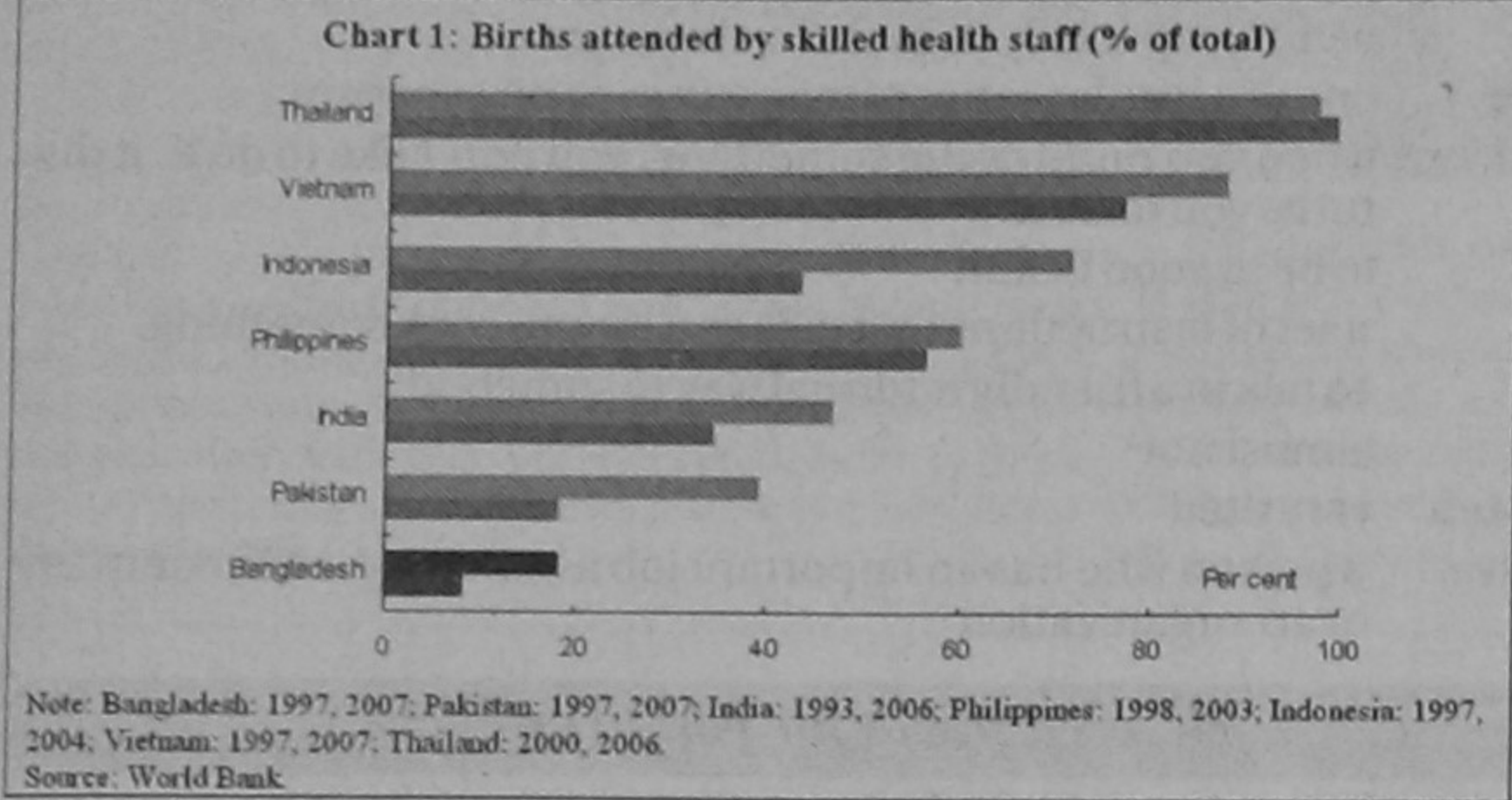
However, beyond philanthropy, the affluent classes in Bangladesh -- that's us, dear reader -- can still make a difference. We need to square up to the fact that the whole culture of live-in child domestic worker is a form of slavery. Perhaps some, maybe most, slave owners are "good," because they (we) feed child domestic workers three times a day, buy them clothes two times a year and, at the end of the month, hand out a modest sum to their parents. Perhaps,

we let them sit on the floor and watch some TV shows, and make them a bed to sleep on the floor.

Maybe, in return, we don't ask much of these workers -- nothing like the factory sweatshops, or working in the mine shaft. They cook three meals for the whole household, make all the beds, sweep the floors and clean the bathrooms, wash all the clothes, go to local grocery for the errands, carry our little ones on their lap, or be the servant to our children who are often older than them. Beyond philanthropy, we, the slave owning class, can own up to the unpleasant reality of our culture.

Cat Stevens wrote three decades ago: *I know we've come a long way, We're changing day to day, But tell me, where do the children play?* Bangladesh has come a long way from its precarious beginnings. But we are still far from a good society, judging by the way we treat far too many of our vulnerable children. Poverty and underdevelopment are complex issues for an individual to tackle. But one can make a difference to the child domestic worker who is slaving away as this piece is read.

Jyoti Rahman and Rumi Ahmed are bloggers and members of Drishtipat Writers' Collective.



Out with the old

The new FYP should adhere to the principles that all development policy documents must be based on national ownership, result-oriented, comprehensive and partnership-oriented, and must be developed with a long-term perspective.

KANIZ N. SIDDIQUE

THE government recently declared that, after the end of NSAPR II in 2011/12, it intended to prepare a five-year development document. NSAPR adheres to a certain process and includes certain characteristics that can be considered as improvements over the past process of FYP preparations and its characteristics.

In comparing NSAPR and FYPs of the past one can say that the new FYP should adhere to the principles that all development policy documents must be based on national ownership, result-oriented, comprehensive and partnership-oriented, and must be developed with a long-term perspective.

Let's assume that the next development document will be called Five-Year National Development Document (FYND). Five core principles must underlie the National Development Document (NDD) formulation:

- A country is expected to identify problem areas, come up with recommendations, and set a time-line for implementation. This process should be based on consultations with stakeholders from the grassroots and the national levels. While the government is the main driving force in formulating PRS, building partnership with all stakeholders is essential.
- Actions and policies taken by the government and non-government organisations, supported by development partners, must bear fruit for poor and disadvantaged people.
- Poverty has different dimensions, therefore, it is not to be restricted to income poverty. In preparing PRS all aspects of poverty have to be addressed. The dimensions (economic, social, human and environmental) of poverty are different in different countries. Thus, understanding and incorporating the country context is essential for developing a PRS.
- Development document needs to be partnership-oriented, and involve coordinated participation of development partners (the government, domestic stakeholders, the private sector, and development partners).
- Five-year national development document must be based on a long-term

perspective adopted for poverty reduction and development. Development documents can be formulated with a five-year time framework, however the documents must be developed with a long-term (ten to twenty year) vision for the economy.

Taking past experiences of Bangladesh into consideration, and also the current trends in formulating national development plans worldwide, at least nine characteristics can be identified in the process and content of the new national development documents.

Need for in-depth consultations: The preparation and formulation of national and sectoral policies must be based on consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. For many years in Bangladesh there has been talk about a "bottom-up" approach in formulating Five-Year Plans, but it was never practiced.

The preparation of planning documents was mainly a bureaucratic process and did not involve political representatives and the general public. It was during the preparation of NSAPR that some consultations took place with people at all levels, particularly at the grassroots level, albeit with a limited spread and depth.

In the future, consultations must be continued and extended in preparing all development documents, and political representatives and general people, especially women, must take part in them.

Consultations to prepare sectoral policies and ensure consistency with national policy documents: Most of the time sectoral policies are formulated in a bureaucratic manner, with little involvement of the non-government stakeholders, particularly those at the grassroots level. Much more consultation must form the basis of sectoral policy.

Sectoral policy documents are often not consistent with the national documents. When line ministries develop activities they do not know whether to follow sectoral policy documents or the national documents, which makes prioritisation of activities difficult. There has to be a system where national policy will provide the general guideline, and sectoral policy will be developed within that structure.

Introduction of single expenditure

concept: In NSAPR, when costing is done, no distinction is made between development and non-development activities. In traditional planning emphasis is given to development programmes. It does not pay attention to revenue expenditure.

In Bangladesh, we tend to make a distinction between development and non-development activities. This is an artificial distinction because, according to the definition of public finance, all expenditure of the government is development expenditure. For example, in our definition, building schools is considered as development expenditure but paying salaries to the teacher is not.

Similarly, agriculture extension services, or subsidies given to the agricultural sector, are also not considered as development activity. The construction of roads is considered as a form of development, however road maintenance is considered as non-development. It is important to come out of this artificial distinction between development and non-development expenditure and consider the entire expenditure as a single expenditure.

Synchronisation of inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial policy, programs and activities: In the preparation of national and sectoral level policy documents, it must be ensured that various actions, activities, programs and projects are consistent and have been synchronised. Sectoral policies are often made without consulting other relevant sectoral poli-

cies. For example, it is confusing if the government talks about women's advancements and rights on the one hand and at the same time encourages proliferation of madrasa education. These sorts of anomalies have to be dealt with. Also, these sectoral policies are formulated in isolation and often don't take into account overlapping inter-sectoral issues.

In national policies, much more attention is given to both poverty reduction and women's advancements and rights issues. This is particularly true for both NSAPRs. However, many sectoral policies did not pay attention to sector specific poverty reduction and women's advancement and rights issues. This makes it difficult for the relevant ministries to undertake and implement meaningful pro-poor and pro-women programs, projects and activities.

Policy formulation at the national and sectoral levels has to be result-oriented: Government spending must achieve the desired results for its citizens. While national and sectoral policies lay out road maps on what activities will be carried out, they must also spell out what results (in measurable terms) they are going to produce. There have to be performance indicators for all activities.

In terms of result-oriented formulation of national and sectoral development policies, results must be counted in terms of how poor people and women are going to benefit from such policies.

Focus on beneficiaries (poor/non-poor, urban/rural, men/women etc.) in terms of formulation of result-oriented policies must be ensured.

Ensuring consistency between policy formulations, rules of business and allocation of business: It is also expected that rules of business and allocations of business should be reviewed and revised every four to five years to be consistent with the emerging needs of the economy. Poverty reduction and women's advancement issues needs to be addressed in an explicit manner in the rules of business and allocation of businesses.

It is imperative that rules of business and allocation of business be consistent with national policies and sectoral policies. It is also essential that sectoral policies be made consistent with national policies. Often, sectoral policies are formulated without, or very limited, consultation with stakeholders. Also, national policies and sectoral policies are often developed in isolation; therefore they may or may not be consistent with each other.

Continuation with policy matrix: National and sectoral policies must be presented in the form of policy matrix, where goals will be spelled out on how much is to be achieved. The actions to be taken to achieve these goals within a stipulated timeframe have to be stated. This will help in assessing the progress (or lack thereof) of the government in

meeting its commitment to create transparency, thus establishing accountability.

The policy matrix needs to be more focused and needs to make clearer distinctions between strategic objectives and activities. More attention should be given to identifying strategic objectives. Some strategic objectives pertinent to women's advancement and rights are actually activities. With respect to identifying strategic objectives a "wish list" approach should not be taken. The strategic objectives must be prioritised. Effort must be made to identify women's advancement and specific strategic objectives for all sectors and thematic areas.

Comprehensive and explicit incorporation of poverty reduction and women's advancements and rights issues: For Bangladesh, the overarching development goal is to reduce poverty substantially and within the quickest possible time, if not totally eradicate it. Reduction and/or elimination of gender-based discrimination is necessary for reducing overall poverty, and is also a development goal.

Poverty and gender-based discrimination issues needs to be included in all rules of business, allocation of business, national policies, and sectoral policies, and also in designing projects and programmes in a systematic manner. Poverty and women's advancement and rights issues need to be included as an integral part of government activities.

Improve awareness about (NDD): Wide dissemination of NDDs to officials of all ministries, divisions, departments and directorates is essential. In this respect, having a Bangla translation NDDs will be handy. The government should immediately translate this document in two versions -- one technical and the other popular.

All technical Bangla versions should be made available to officials of the government at the centre as well as to departments and agencies operating at the field levels. The popular versions should be disseminated to the public, particularly to local level members of civil society, media, and NGOs and members of union parishads, upzila parishads etc.

The new five-year development document must not be a replica of previous five-year plan documents. It must be a cutting age development document, leading to people-oriented, measurable and result-oriented development of the country.

Dr. Kaniz N. Siddique is International Consultant, Financial Management Reform Programme, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh.

