

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

## Reducing poverty in the countryside

NRDC might consider involving more cooperative societies in the marketing of agricultural produces to ensure fair price to farmers and also keeping the price level stable without leaving any scope for traders to form syndicates and manipulate the market prices.

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

THE formation of the National Rural Development Council (NRDC) headed by the prime minister, as reported in some newspapers, is the accomplishment of a long cherished expectation in the realm of rural development.

The coordination and supervision of socio-economic activities and infrastructure development in the rural areas is, in fact, a vision to ensure sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. This is consistent with the declared promises to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021, the golden jubilee year of Bangladesh's independence.

The attainment of this vision is possible through faster agricultural growth, broad-based rural development, targeted employment generation and strengthening

of social safety nets as strategies to achieve poverty reduction objectives. The NRDC can bring the Charter of Change into reality and attain new heights of excellence by achieving Digital Bangladesh.

More interventions and investments are necessary to make the rural economy vibrant, restore peace and discipline in the countryside and modernise the way of living in rural areas. Farming is a way of life for nearly 65% of our population, and rural families comprise a substantial majority of the population. For these families, land represents a fundamental asset, a primary source of income, security and status.

More than half of these families lack either access to land or a secure stake in the land they till. They are landless or marginal farmers who survive on the mercy of nature or at the compassion of the owner of the land. As a result, acute

poverty and related problems of hunger, social unrest, humiliation and environmental degradation persist.

Obviously, there are enough opportunities to make radical changes provided commitments could be translated into realities and good governance could be restored in the rank and file.

Immediately after independence, the Vietnamese government began the policy of "land to the tiller" and transferred ownership to about one million tenant farmers, which converted Vietnam into a food exporting country. Similarly, the government of West Bengal carried out major land reformation and made substantial changes in share-cropping, making West Bengal a food surplus state. There are hundreds of examples, even in CIRDP member states, where land reforms made significant changes in rural livelihood.

The NRDC must bring changes in the system to help poverty reduction through effective interventions like restriction on land ceiling and distribution of surplus land to real farmers. The maximum limit in ownership of arable land was 125 acres during Pakistan regime, which has now been brought down to 28 acres.

The surplus land has not been taken into the account of the government for distribution to landless or deserving

farmers. Similarly, khas land, water bodies and vested properties have been grabbed by non-farmers and land-grabbers in connivance with land department officials and local influential persons.

If the government cannot make substantial changes right now the number of farmers will decrease drastically, whatever the subsidies or incentives provided by the government in cash or in terms of facilities.

Secondly, the utilisation of fallow lands for production of crops must be taken on priority basis. The country is losing at least 220 hectares of land everyday, and 1% of land every year due to soil erosion and indiscriminate housing in rural areas. It is imperative to formulate a rural housing policy with the restriction of housing on agricultural land and water bodies. The project "One House, One Farm" should ensure that every decimal of land is used for agriculture, horticulture or aquaculture.

Thirdly, price stabilisation and agricultural marketing need to be considered on priority basis. Price stabilisation of essential consumer items is a very challenging assignment for an elected government due to its political sensitivity. The public at all levels, irrespective of purchasing power and affordability, raise a hue and

cry even for marginal increase of prices. Price control is, thus, a critical issue related to production, marketing and international trade. It is also connected with the agricultural marketing mechanism where large numbers of middlemen are involved in forming syndicates to control market prices.

NRDC might consider involving more cooperative societies in the marketing of agricultural produces to ensure fair price to farmers and also keeping the price level stable without leaving any scope for traders to form syndicates and manipulate the market prices.

Fourthly, one of the major interventions is to ensure good governance in land administration. The corruption in the office of the tehsilder and sub-registrar is so open that it cannot escape the eye of any prudent citizen. These officials in connivance with some touts manipulate the records indiscriminately for depriving farmers and the poor of their legitimate ownership of khas land or vested property. The computerisation of land records and removal of the old staff involved in land record and land revenue should be completed quickly to limit the scope for corruption.

Besides, increased productivity and adaptation to climate change pose a challenge for the NRDC in increasing the

productivity per hectare. Food safety remains the prime concern because of the adulteration of food items, including vegetables, fish and fruits.

Interventions like safety nets programs for the poor should not be continued for long, except in case of emergency. There should be an institutional approach to ensure sustainability, and institutions working in research, capability building and agricultural modernisation should be encouraged to contribute more. There are many researches and training organisations like Bard, RDA, BARC, BIDS, BISS, Cirdap, Brac, BAU etc, which should be allowed to operate at full capacity.

In addition, improved health care, nutrition, family planning services and free education must be provided so that the rural population knows that the government is concerned about their welfare.

In fact, the NRDC must work in active cooperation with all other ministries/divisions under the direct supervision of the prime minister to generate awareness throughout Bangladesh in favour of the Charter of Change to send the poverty to the museum by 2021.

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## Learning from the 'dark continent'

Bangladesh is rich in having more than half a dozen education commissions and committees. The first one (1972-'74), proposed an 8-year long primary to fulfil the Unesco requirement of compulsory schooling up to 14 years of age. The last education committee (2009-2010) proposed a new education policy late last year, which was approved by the cabinet recently.

ABDUS SATTAH MOLLA

AFRICA is often termed a "dark continent." But there are evidences that modern humans first evolved in this continent, which is rich in both forest and desert. Can there be anything to learn from the African nations regarding education? Although Bangladesh is an Asian country, I argue that she can learn much even from this "dark continent."

I have thoroughly studied the education systems in 22 countries in Africa, and those were published as case studies in a local English language daily. The countries (from north to south in the continent) are Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Mali, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Congo, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Madagascar. This article is the gist of those level-wise (primary, secondary, and tertiary).

We should remember that the percentage of GDP spent for education is a crucial factor in development and maintenance of the standards of education. Since Africa is termed a "dark continent" the general notion would be that they spend very little in education. But data show the opposite. Apart from only Somalia, Nigeria and Chad

of the studied 22 countries, the rest spend more in education than Bangladesh does! Some (e.g., Tunisia, Namibia and Kenya) even reached over 6% of GDP, very near to the Unesco standard of 7%.

## Primary level

The duration of primary education varies from 5 (3 countries) to 8 (6 countries) years in the African nations. But the most prevalent pattern is a 6-year primary, and that is in 30 countries (62.5%), while primary education is a 7-year study in 9 nations. Of the 22 countries studied, 6-year primary is followed in 12 countries that include Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Cameroon and South Africa.

As for universal "basic" (not primary) education, not only the rather developed upper Saharan countries like Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and the southern state South Africa have realised a 9-year long pattern but sub-Saharan Mali and Zambia have also done so. So when we see our education committee's up and doing posture to implement an 8-year basic education, termed that "primary" (wrongly), one would wonder if we are following Somalia and Kenya leaving behind countries like Egypt, Libya and South Africa.

Primary curriculum invariably contains language, mathematics, science, physical

education and religious studies. A few (e.g., Libya, Namibia) use the term "moral" or "ethical" education in place of religion. Assessment is usually continuous in most countries and many (16 out of the studied 22) have primary-ending public examination. Our education ministry appreciably started this last year.

## Secondary level

Although there are two or more subsystems of education in the secondary level, the main system is, obviously, the general education that is preparatory to higher education. The duration of secondary education varies from 3 (Sudan) to 7 (Madagascar) years in the 22 African countries. The usual duration is 5-6 years and the norm is subdividing that into two halves (3 years junior and 3 years senior) as in Algeria, Egypt, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa.

The curriculum is usually integrated in the junior/lower secondary and diversified into groups in the senior/upper secondary. Very few exceptions to this norm are available. For example, curriculum is unified till the end of secondary in Mozambique, while even the junior secondary is diversified in Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Subjects studied in the secondary stage invariably include language, mathematics, natural science and social studies; most also have compulsory religious education. An interesting information is that only four out of the 22 nations provide for studying business education or commerce in the secondary stage, though most countries provide a course in economics. So, having a distinct business education stream at the secondary level and giving so much emphasis on business subjects in private universities are questionable.

Public examinations are usually arranged once on completion of the junior (lower) secondary and again on comple-

tion of the senior (upper) secondary. Some, however, follow the UK system of examinations, i.e., Ordinary level at Grade 10/11 and Advanced level at Grade 12/13. Very few like Somalia, Sudan and Kenya have a single public examination after completion of the undivided secondary education. So, I wonder if the new education policy, providing for a single public examination on completion of 4-year secondary education, is to follow those backward African nations!

## Tertiary level

Tertiary or higher education is usually offered in the universities. 21 countries except Somalia, where there is no provision for doing Masters in-country, have this usual tertiary education. The duration of Bachelor course varies from 3 to 6 years, and that of Masters varies from 1 to 3 years. In just half of the 22 countries studied, the duration of the Masters course is 2 years, and a quarter of them have the duration 1-2 years. Thus, only about a quarter of the studied African nations have the 1-year Masters course that we are still content with.

## What we learn

Bangladesh is rich in having more than half a dozen education commissions and committees. The first one, Bangladesh Education Commission (Dr. Khuda Commission; 1972-'74), proposed an 8-year long primary to fulfill the Unesco requirement of compulsory schooling up to 14 years of age.

The last education committee (2009-2010) proposed a new education policy late last year, which was approved by the cabinet recently. Based on my understanding from studies on Asian, European and now African nations, I would suggest elevating primary education up to Grade-6. I think attempts at making that an 8-year



Teaching the tiny tots is not a tiny task.

long study would create more problems than it can solve.

The secondary stage of 6-year long study would better be subdivided into two equal halves instead of the present 7-year long secondary unnecessarily subdivided into three. The said committee, however, proposed a sudden change from three sub-stages of secondary into an undivided 4-year long study. I am yet to understand the significance of this and would request the cabinet and even the parliament to review this proposal.

The said committee also proposed a new system of a "local" or "regional" examination at Grade-5 and another at Grade-10. I am not much appreciative of such an "innovation" because this is found nowhere in the world. The JS can ask the committee to come up with convincing logic so that we all can understand the worth of this innovation.

Based on the education systems of the

entire Old World (Eurasia and Africa), I would suggest arranging three pre-university public examinations; the first at Grade-6 (primary), the second at Grade-9 (lower secondary; up to which level the government can declare "basic") and the third at Grade-12 (higher secondary).

Such an arrangement would help primary certificate holders to take some vocational courses, lower secondary certificate holders to opt for higher secondary either in general stream or the technical stream (in polytechnic institutes), and the higher secondary certificate holders to vie for general, medical or engineering education at higher levels.

On implementing an invariable 4-year Honours course, the Masters course in all our universities can be a 2-year study so that every student can conduct a piece of research and write a dissertation.

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## Santal revolution: Some reflections

They fought with revolutionary zeal to flush out the intruders and their local agents. According to newspaper reports politicians and lawyers observed Santal revolution day on June 28, demanding constitutional recognition and separate land commission for the ethnic minorities.

MD. SHAIRUL MASHREQUE

DURING the last couple of decades a crop of new social movements presented a seemingly comprehensive framework for understanding the aboriginals -- their world-view, cognitive orientations, cultural patterns and age-long socio-economic institutions.

Anthropologists, while presenting ethnography on a particular tribe, try to understand the ethnic minority from a "creative cultural perspective." There seems to be post-modernisation phenomenon with emerging social movements sharing a common trait -- disenchantment with modernisation and emphasis on sustainable development. Human rights movement, feminist movement and environmental movement are some examples of new social movements.

All such movements led the think tanks to a new realisation -- brushing aside traditional paradigms of development. It is to seek fuller insights into the disadvantaged people, their hopes and aspirations, plight and predicaments. They seek to project a critical view of discursive transformation process in the framework of post-modernist social deconstruction by putting the neglected population first.

There has been increasing realisation about discovering significant historical and economic facts that contributed to the social formation of tribal societies. To quote a social philosopher: "These facts refer mainly to the existence of different modes of production, process of class and state formations, changes in social division of labour and the relations of production, and evolving nature of power relations."

New social movements as new perspective are highly anti-colonial and non-parochial. The forerunners of such movements do not see Adivasis as a "fixed idealised category." A careful review of the ethnography of Adivasis, Santals in particular, reveals the depth of this community, its socio-cultural styles and how social maintenance and attachment to land, territory and kinship acted as an axis for social reproduction and state-sponsored exploitation.

It also describes how the tribal communities maintain their respective traditions, rules of inheritance, rules of marriage and ritual observance and the patterns of deference based on status within the family and outside. Age-long customs, folklore and belief impose both prescription and proscription moulding their

perception about life, rule, political action and participation.

The aboriginals have been passing through stress and strain in the process of modernisation and globalisation. State-internal dichotomy in such process has become ubiquitous as a colonial legacy. They live in jungles and continue to remain as isolated cockpits detached from the mainstream economically, politically and culturally.

We may refer to the hill ethnic group like the Santals as a microcosm minority which was affected by the colonial intervention that battered their lives. They are beginning to raise their voice as a counter-vailing force, by and large influenced by neo-social movement against the violation of human rights.

With the march of modernization, coupled with educational advancement, the aboriginals have by now become acquainted with the techniques of asserting their rights. They are coming in contact with many a human rights group upholding their rich cultures and spearheading neo-social movement against violence that continues to jeopardise the rights of the ethnic minorities.

Even then, they are living in a state of intimidation, facing structural and non-structural violence. We lament their lingering predicaments and deplorable conditions. Mentionably, human rights organisations pointed at the notorious exploitation.

The penetrating influence of British colonialism, coupled with imposition of regulations and control, compelled the Santals to leave their original homelands in hilly districts of Cuttack, Dhal hum,

Manbhum, Brabhum, Chhotnagpur and Birbhum and settle in the plains of Rajmahal hills. Their main home is located in Radha in West Bengal, Chhotnagpur, and Jharkand forests in Bihar.

The British government assigned a special territory for their settlement, which was identified as Santal pargana. In Bangladesh, there are Santal settlements in Pabna, Dinajpur, Khulna and Jessore. Belonging to the proto-australoid race, the Santal population in north Bengal is over 200,000.

They are among the earliest settlers of the subcontinent, having similarities with Mundas, Oraons and Paharias, and are acknowledged as "the progenitors and maintainers of agro-based culture."

The deluge of state violence like firing, skirmishes, arson and destruction of properties was a challenge to their survival. The peace loving and docile primitive people like the Santals organised armed rebellion against the oppressors who encroached upon their natural rights.

There were uprisings in 1811, 1820 and 1831. But the most serious one, expanding far and wide, was the Santal insurrection in 1855-56. It was triggered off when their leader, Bir Singh, was summoned to the kachari of a local landlord, beaten mercilessly, and confined in chains in the presence of his followers (Banglapedia, vol. 9).

High tension in the turbulent areas was visceral as the Santals were guarding most of the important places to resist military expedition. The rebels adopted guerilla tactics to eliminate the occupation forces and their local agents. "Postal and railway communication was severed, the state agents were driven out of their clearings,



Santal community celebrating an occasion.

railway labour contractors, who forced Santal women to become labourers, were killed, if found. Rent payment to zamindars was totally stopped. Pledges to money lenders were negated by a declaration (ibid)."

Many indigenous people who fled from their homes remained out in the open in deep forest after the army crackdown on the rebels. An eerie calm engulfed the areas after martial law was proclaimed on July 19, 1855. The Rajmahal hills were drenched with blood and all Santal villages were razed. The captured santals were made railway construction labour in chains. In 1856, the Santal leaders were captured and executed and the rebellion subsided.

We pay a tribute to the Santal martyrs

who died a heroic death for the establishment of their rights. They fought with revolutionary zeal to flush out the intruders and their local agents. According to newspaper reports politicians and lawyers observed Santal revolution day on June 28, demanding constitutional recognition and separate land commission for the ethnic minorities.

The state must ensure establishment of the rights of the indigenous people. Bangladesh Adivasi Adhikar Andolon organised a day-long program in observance of the 155th anniversary of the Santal revolution. The program ended with a cultural function.

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