

Planning for development



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In their well circulated book, *Politics, Economic and Welfare* (1953), Robert Dahl and Charls Lindblom have argued that the critical question is not how to plan but (a) who shall plan (b) for what purpose (c) in what condition and (d) with what devices? Many other economists of the world have endorsed this argument.

Recently, top planners/policy makers of developing societies repented over-stressing the production functions and ignoring distribution functions of economic planning. The distribution functions are related to who shall plan, for what purpose, in what condition and by what devices.

Over the last four decades, Bangladesh has gained much experience based on various innovative experiments in local-level planning and rural development for the welfare of its population. Bangladesh reflects "a composite picture of all the extremes of poverty and underdevelopment on the one hand and being a land of unexplored potentialities and untapped resources -- both human and physical -- on the other, and at the same time presents planners, scholars and development practitioners alike both a paradox and a contrast."

As we know, rural development is a process of

government which may be defined as an attempt to restructure the government's relationship with its non-urban population rather than as a programme, project or agency.

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The rural as well as overall development programmes need to be formulated and implemented by the government to establish the constitutional provisions into reality. But no planning infrastructure has as yet been developed at division, district or upazila/union level.

The policies/plans, which are implemented by bureaucrats, are generally determined by the ruling party as per election its manifesto. The political representative/leaders impose some development programmes to develop their constituency areas without analysing the financial/economic rate of return. This is not desirable in the society on the one hand and in national economy on the other.

Plans for the development of the "rural poor" (assuming that we can identify them) were not

formulated by the poor in most of the developing societies. Because they did not formulate these plans, they neither understood them nor felt involved with them. The benefits reached those who were not the rural poor, but involved themselves in the name of the rural poor. A number of conscious or sub-conscious factors are probably responsible for this in developing societies.

The reasons for not taking the people into confidence need to be sought in our overall attitude. As a nation we feel we are too poor and weak to be able to make any big efforts to develop ourselves without help from developed countries/agencies, therefore we also feel that our village people are too ignorant, illiterate and fatalistic to be able to understand or care about what their developmental needs are and how these can be fulfilled. This is why the government and the bureaucracy, which are so insistent on central planning system with direct intervention of political elite, bureaucracy as well as policy makers of the ruling party, cannot bring a change in the lot of the rural people.

The people who are involved in central planning are urban dwellers, and have no or little experience of rural government and administration except through rare visits and reading of papers. Can it be possible to ensure the overall development of the society as mentioned in the constitution with the existing infrastructure? Have we ever attempted to ascertain what the rural population (76% of the total population) themselves want, what they are capable of doing, what resources they can make available and what constraints they face?

If we have not, then what we say and do about planning is the urban reflection of rural issues and is, therefore, by its very nature, unrealistic. In fact, planners prepare policy papers and plan documents for two years or five years, but those cannot be implemented due to intervention of

ruling party leaders through preparing and implementing projects which are not included in the plan documents, and also because of lack of resources.

For a country like Bangladesh, where about 76% of the population live in the rural areas, any planning strategy should take stock of the available resources, potential resources, bottlenecks in the way of implementation of the projects/plans, and future prospects with emphasis on the labour intensive methods.

The group-based approach is emphasised in each and every plan in our society because the relatively poor and the disadvantaged remain scattered in the economy in the sector-based approach, and it is difficult to integrate them with the planning process. If sector-based plans are integrated with group-based plans, there will be greater possibilities of poverty alleviation along with rapid economic growth.

Supplier-oriented and non-viable political projects (particularly roads/LGED, health, education) need to be examined in terms of set national policy. Planning units have to be established at least upto upazila level to facilitate preparation of the grass-root-mid-regional plan. Development cannot be imposed from above. It is indigenous to each society and builds primary on its own resources.

Political stability is the prime need of the hour for the welfare of the people through planned economic growth. Each political party should have its own development agenda/policy which can contribute to achieve overall development of the society. It is needless to say that planning institution/institutions should be kept independent (from the centre to the grass-root level), and have to be manned by experienced and technical personnel.

The vision that we all have is the vision of a society meeting the basic needs of the people in an exploitation-free and informed way, and encompassing economic and social equality. Within the frame, discussions and deliberation in the parliament, and between political parties, professional associations, local government bodies and research institutions, are likely to build up consensus on components of the objectives.

In fine, we can say that policy making is largely in the hands of the elected political leaders and the bureaucracy is assigned the execution of that policy. It is true that no western model works in such a neat fashion that the different parts of the system carry out their respective allotted functions. But there is no such "rough-and-ready" demarcation of functions in the political system in developing societies. We may have political leaders who not only formulates policies, but also interfere in the planning process as well as in the operations of the bureaucracy.

We have a powerful bureaucracy where, due to the lack of political stability, national consensus and a body of trained political leaders, civil servants often play a decisive and dual role in policy formulation and its execution. It may be argued that when the country is faced with political instability and lack of national consensus on planned economic growth, not the specialist/technocrat but the bureaucrat (civil/army) is available to fill the vacuum.

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HIV positive people and stigma

The cruelty towards the HIV positive people commonly results in no access to the job market, refusal in giving of inheritance property, and even refusal by doctors to provide medical treatment. Afraid of being ostracised by the society HIV positive people often do not disclose their problems to anyone, which results in physical and mental suffering.

PARVIN AFROJA

WORLD AIDS Day 2010 was recently observed. To create awareness, our government also observed the day in collaboration with the NGOs. But do we think really about the situation of the HIV positive persons in our country? They are often discriminated against and stigmatised in different ways. An HIV positive person is considered polygamous, even if he/she is not, in Bangladesh where polygamy is treated negatively by the society. He/she faces hatred, and is often shunned by his/her own friends and family.

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To reduce the stigma and discrimination regarding HIV/Aids we have to speak positively about the sufferers. As citizens of this country it is our responsibility to take part in combating HIV/Aids, and there is a window of opportunity to prevent this pandemic. We must ensure provision of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010 as our social responsibility.

Since the onset of the epidemic, experience has clearly demonstrated that significant advances in the response to HIV have been achieved when there is strong and committed leadership. We should work on reducing the stigma on HIV/Aids. We have to advocate for the rights of those living with and affected by HIV/Aids through sensitisation of groups, communities and society for creating positive, friendly and supportive relationship with families and friends.

We also have to support empowerment of the people with HIV so they can take control of their lives. We have to take the private sector on board. Health workers should not refuse to provide treatment to HIV-positive people.

In our country the first case of HIV/Aids was detected in 1989. Since then, 2088 cases of HIV/Aids have been confirmed. 37 people died as of December 1, and the total death toll is 241 till date. The estimated total number of people living with HIV/Aids in Bangladesh is around 7,500 as of December 2009.

We should acknowledge persons or organisations that have helped support the cause, and continue the good and supporting relationship between the government and NGOs. The main focus should be on sensitising our communities to respect and accept people living with HIV (PLHIV), and on preventing the spread of HIV. We should not be judgmental as to how they got infected. Most of all we should learn to love them, and then the rest will follow.

The human rights and stigma situation has improved a bit because nowadays we can talk about sex workers, drug users, clients of sex workers, people living with HIV/Aids and adolescents. Refusal of services to them is prohibited in Bangladesh.

Targeted interventions are inadequate because of lack of involvement of media, inadequate monitoring, evaluation and research, lack of proper planning and implementation of HIV and human rights programmes, absence of drug substitution, and lack of general understanding of people living with HIV/Aids. A positive role of civil society in addressing the issues can make a big change in combating HIV.

The government should invest in research and documentation. Institutions should use the best practices and share them with the policy level stakeholders. The voice of the HIV positive people should be raised through media campaign. Entry training and in service training should be provided for HIV/Aids in education awareness and media. Political commitment needs to be strengthened.

To remove the stigma on HIV we need to organise talk shows to raise awareness. The programmes should be implemented for the target people or the clients according to the demand. Law enforcing agencies and the community should be involvement. There should be an active human rights watch groups for reducing stigma and discrimination, and legislation for sex work in brothels, streets and hotels until the government can provide them socio economic security. There should be implementation of existing policies.

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Not missing UNMIN

Even as the Maoist leaders today engage in rearguard action to extend UNMIN's term, we need to be clear that continuation of the Mission beyond 15 January will, ironically, derail Nepal's peace process. In turn, this will guarantee the collapse of constitution writing, the deadline for which is end-May 2011.

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THE United Nations Mission to Nepal, UNMIN, is to be thanked profusely for its efforts with the peace process and graciously shown the door when its term expires on January 15. In the meantime, Nepali political actors, including the Maoists, must concentrate on making successful a unique process that was designed by Nepali stakeholders, starting with the 12-point understanding of 2005.

In its first days, many did feel reassured by UNMIN's presence as a symbol and guarantor of the international community's commitment to peace and democracy in post-conflict Nepal. After the Constituent Assembly elections of April 2008, however, UNMIN's remaining task of monitoring the cantonments was conducted without distinction and at great cost. Even while repeatedly misleading the Security Council with its own version of events, the Mission leadership constantly sought to expand its mandate to be the arbiter of Nepal's peace politics.

There is no doubt that the Mission's inability to challenge the Maoists to stand by their peace commitments contributed to that party's obduracy, helping delay the peace process. Those who had lobbied hard for UNMIN's deployment in 2006 were let down.

The question arises whether we should not seek accountability from the UNMIN leadership in the same manner we do from our politicians and bureaucrats. While Karin Langdren, the present chief, has been rewarded with a promotion and a Burundi assignment, the tone

and tenor of UNMIN's work was set by the former chief Ian Martin, and Tamrat Samuel, the designated Nepal handler at the UN Department of Political Affairs.

Together, Martin and Samuel sought to inject UNMIN into our peace politics, seeking sociological roots to Nepal's conflict when disarming of the Maoist Party should have been the priority. It is they who certified UNMIN's erroneous reading of the Maoists as true agents of progressive change and the other major parties as carriers of the status quo.

Even as the Maoist leaders today engage in rearguard action to extend UNMIN's term, we need to be clear that continuation of the Mission beyond 15 January will, ironically, derail Nepal's peace process. In turn, this will guarantee the collapse of constitution writing, the deadline for which is end-May 2011. The Maoists have preferred to use UNMIN as a security blanket, and they would utilise another extension to filibuster further and influence the last days of the Constituent Assembly.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal lacked the sagacity and courage to convert UCPN (Maoist) into a civilian party when it was united under his command. Now, challenged by his two deputies, the chairman seeks to appease the cantonment commanders, peace process be damned. He seeks to link UNMIN's departure to constitution making and government formation even though the 2006 agreement on the integration/rehabilitation of ex-combatants allows no conditionality.

Fortunately, the political parties and the international community are not about to be



taken in by the Maoist bluff this time around. UML and NC on Wednesday reiterated their position on the non-renewal of UNMIN's term, and Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal has remained steadfast. The word from New York is that the Security Council is not about to reverse its decision and provide another extension.

The change of guard at the UK and US embassies in Kathmandu seems to have delivered a more balanced international approach, and China has spoken out against UNMIN extension as well. Germany and India joining the Security Council as non-permanent members on 1 January will favour the successful conclusion of the peace process.

Anyone who wants to see the Constituent Assembly proceed with its work must answer the question that UNMIN never asked, can any civilised society be expected to proceed with constitution writing when one party retains its private combatant force? Why did the Mission not publicly urge the Maoists to implement the repeated pronouncements of Chairman Dahal as prime minister that the cantonments had in fact come under the Special Committee on

integration and rehabilitation?

The urgent requirement of the next three weeks is to transfer the modest task of monitoring the 28 cantonments from UNMIN to the Special Committee, after which the work on integration and rehabilitation can begin in earnest. The transfer of responsibility should not be a problem in principle, because the committee as well as its technical secretariat includes the Maoists members. And it is a good sign that the Maoists agreed to the appointment of experienced ex-general Balananda Sharma as coordinator.

Looking beyond the fait accompli of UNMIN's exit, the democrat-politicians and diplomats must stand firm as the Maoists seek to manufacture a deadlock. Chairman Dahal perhaps knows that if he pushes too far, the resulting political snowball can lead to a situation of no integration/rehabilitation at all. While the polarisation within his party may not allow the chairman a free hand any more, standing up to UCPN (Maoist) is the best way to promote its democratic evolution.

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