

The state of global disparities

ZAHURUL ALAM

EXPECTED pace of global advancement warrants equitable development, which in turn requires elimination or optimal reduction of disparities among the nations. Disparities combine both economic and socio-political aspects and are linked to the lack of resources and institutional weaknesses. In inequality analysis one should keep in mind that economic disparity is the mother of all other disparities. The institutional and management aspects are products of initial economic disparity, subsequently instigated many fold by the lack of strong democratic governance. The remedial measures logically should involve both economic and governance initiatives simultaneously. Under the current disparity context both in the global and the national arenas, good governance initiatives should encompass economic aspects and vice versa. The consequential socio-political and socio-economic disparities foster marginalisation of population, countries, economies and societies leading to their increased vulnerability and insecurity. The resources allocated for improving their security are misused, resulting in greater vulnerability and insecurity of those and additional segments of the global population. The global disparities expressed in terms of income inequalities

among the countries continue to show upward slope. The 2005 UNDP HDR found only 9 countries accounting for 4% of the world's population with reduced gap. The reverse was true for 80% of the world's population. The richest 50 individuals in the world had in 2005 a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million. The poorest 40% of the world's population currently accounts for only 5% of the global income, while the richest 20% accounts for 75% of that. The 2010 UNHDR shows that the highest per capita GNI recorded in Lichtenstein is 460 times greater than that in Zimbabwe. The average per capita GNI in the Very High Human Development Countries (VHDC) in 2010 was 27 times more than that in the Least Developed Countries (LDC). Disparities between the two groups of countries in adult literacy rate, life expectancy at birth, HDI values and other related indicators continue to be grossly disproportionate in favour of the former. Eleven developed countries recorded an average per capita GNI of more than \$40,000 in 2010. The figure is less than \$4,000 for 62 developing countries and less than \$1,000 for 15 of those. The average per capita GNI in the very high human development countries exceeds that in the LDCs by 26.72 times. Currently, of the 6.3 billion

people of the world, almost 1.4 billion earn less than \$1.25 per day, while 3 billion live on a daily income of less than \$2.5 a day. More than 80% of the world's population lives on less than \$10 a day. These are the people living in the developing countries. On the other hand, in 11 highest per capita GNI countries per capita daily income ranges between \$110 and \$222. The difference is enormous -- 100 to 200 times! In India 42% of the population earn less than \$1.25 per day, while in Bangladesh the figure is more than 51 million (32% of the population). In Tanzania, Liberia and Burundi, 88.5, 83.7 and 81.3% of the people earn less than \$1.25 per day. All effects of colonialism and subsequent lack of good governance in the developing countries have contributed to reduced capacity, participation and opportunities of the people of those countries to utilise available resources in a manner that would ensure required pace of development. Emergence of author-

itarian regimes following the retreat of direct colonialism has prevented people's participation in the decision making and development process, which has prompted widespread corruption and accumulation of resources in the hands of small sections of the privileged power capturers. Lion's share of the national wealth thus remained unutilised or under-utilised, leading to increased income inequality in countries where 80% of the world's population lives. Income disparity has increased poverty, harmed democratic governance and human rights, and has prompted internal conflicts and socio-economic and political disorder in most developing countries, leaving those vulnerable to political, social and environmental impediments. Global priorities in spending show at a glance the existing disparities between the rich and the poor and the developed and developing economies. At the end of the last century spending in cosmetics in

the US amounted to \$8 billion, compared to \$6 billion in basic education in the developing countries. The Europeans spent \$166 billion for buying ice cream, cigarettes and alcoholic drinks against \$9 billion by the people of the developing countries for water and sanitation for all. In US and Europe spending in perfumes and pet foods amounted in 1998 to \$29 billion compared to \$12 billion in the developing countries in reproductive health for all women. Bbusinessmen in Japan alone invested \$35 billion for business entertainment. The world military spending and that in narcotics drugs amounted to \$400 billion and \$780 billion, respectively, while the developing countries could spend only \$13 billion in basic health and nutrition. While reduction of the world's military expenditure alone by only 1% could ensure primary education to all children in all countries, the lack of intention to do that by the respective countries and regimes, invariably by the developed countries, has compelled nearly one-sixth of the world's population to remain illiterate. This has created a huge unskilled labour market in the developing countries, leading to their economic stagnation and socio-political backwardness. The disparity is not only between nations. Distressing inequality prevails between the rich and the poor

in the majority of the countries. In countries, where more than 90% of the people earn less than \$2, there are evidences of enormous concentration of wealth in the hands of a very limited number of affluent people and families. More than 64% of the national wealth is concentrated in the hands of 20% of the population in Brazil and South Africa. In some of the poorest countries, such as Kenya, Senegal and Madagascar, where 22.8%, 17% and 49.1%, respectively, of the population earn less than a dollar per day, the richest 20% controls over 50% of the national wealth. The current trade regime and globalisation have not impacted positively on the developing economies. Developing countries continue to experience economic hardship and social disadvantages. During the '90s, 54 developing countries experienced negative growth rates. The situation remained unchanged or even became worse despite imposition of more and more tools in international relations. At the end of the last century the developing countries accounted for less than 22% of the global GDP, although 85% of the world's population lived in those countries. The success stories in some countries remain as isolated incidents that do not reflect the general trend. The writer is President, Governance and Rights Centre (GRC). E-mail: zalam111@yahoo.com.

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Reviving dialogue on anti-eviction Bill

KISHORE KUMAR SINGH and PETER BOSSINK

SLUM settlements are the visible face of urban poverty in Bangladesh. In the absence of initiatives by the public and private sectors to provide affordable and secure housing for the urban poor, slum living has become an unavoidable reality, and so has the threat of slum eviction. Thousands of slum dwellers suffer eviction from their homes and millions continue to live with the threat. It is estimated that between 1996 and 2004, 115 forced evictions took place across Dhaka, Chittagong and Dinajpur, making some 300,000 people homeless, while the year 2003-2004 saw 58 evictions take place. Despite an acute housing shortage in Bangladesh (it is estimated that demand exceeded supply by six million housing units in 2004) and a declining trend in house ownership in urban areas, slums are being demolished without the provision of alternative shelter to their inhabitants. The reality is that forced eviction without relocation simply shifts poor people from one slum to another or leads to the development of other slums, depleting valuable housing stocks and land. This is particularly evident in Dhaka -- despite the number of slum evictions, the number of slums continues to increase. Improved lives in slums and improved water and sanitation are two of the key targets of MDG 7. However, the fear of eviction discourages development organisations and donors from investing in slum improvement. It also discourages slum dwellers from investing in improvements to their own housing, services and infrastructure. Evicted slum households become even poorer through the loss of their physical and social capital. These factors create a vicious cycle of poverty. Bangladesh is signatory to a number of international resolutions that protect the rights of slum dwellers. One such resolution, the "Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000," states that all states have a fundamental obligation to protect and improve houses and neighbourhoods, rather than damage or destroy them. In addition to its international

obligations, the government of Bangladesh is also bound by national legislation to protect the rights of slum dwellers. The "National Housing Policy 1993" affirms the right to habitation and housing for all and compels the government to take steps to avoid forcible relocations or displacement of slum dwellers as far as possible. The Constitution compels the government to provide shelter for all and protect the right to life and personal



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liberty of all citizens. Many slum settlements are also protected from eviction by Stay Orders handed down by the High Court. Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework that protects the housing rights for all, the reality is that forced evictions continue to take place and rehabilitation and compensation are rarely provided. There have been myriad initiatives and interventions by the government, development partners, NGOs and civil society to address urban poverty and the associated growth of slums. These interventions include (a) slum resettlement programmes, (b) slum improvement and development programmes (without tenure security), (c) government schemes to encourage slum dwellers to return to their villages, (d) legal interven-

tions and protests against slum eviction, and (e) civil society advocacy for pro-poor urban policy and legislation to stop evictions. Sadly, none of these interventions have produced an adequate solution nor have they reduced the number of slum evictions. The government's schemes in the late 1990s to encourage slum dwellers to return to their villages, with incentives such as loans and basic housing, failed through a lack of

International experience shows that providing tenure security encourages slum dwellers and development organisations to invest in shelter and slum improvement which, in turn, boosts progress towards achieving the MDGs. "Prevention of Eviction of Slum Dwellers and Unlawful Occupation of Government Land Bill, 2009" was tabled in Parliament as a private member bill but as of yet it has not been examined by the Parliamentary Private Member Bills Sub-Committee. It is still unclear as to whether a private member's bill is the most effective approach or whether stakeholders should interact more closely with the relevant minister to produce a government bill on the issue. To date, private members bill on a range of important issues have raised debates but not proceeded far. Experience suggests that the Anti-Slum Eviction Act alone may not be adequate unless (i) the government and private sector invest in low cost housing programmes; (ii) urban land management policy and practices are improved in light of growing demands for shelter by the urban poor; and (iii) housing needs of the urban poor are considered in the city's master plan. In addition to strengthening the existing constitutional and policy provisions, the enactment of an Anti-Eviction Bill will provide a strong legal basis to provide land tenure security and deter illegal evictions. Before the bill is moved in Parliament, public debate is required to determine whether it should be directed only against eviction or whether it should also bring into focus issues such as compensation after eviction, participatory resettlement planning before eviction and national budget allocation for low cost housing for the urban poor and extreme poor. The most critical step at this stage is an extensive consultation and public discourse on appropriate policy measures on land tenure security and low cost housing for urban poor. Collectively, these measures will encourage investments to improve lives and livelihoods in slums and help the government achieve the MDGs. Kishore Kumar Singh, International Poverty Reduction Specialist, Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Program (UPPR), UNDP, Bangladesh.

World's 10 hardest exams



IT'S exam season. Last week 9.2 million students sat down to do the gaokao, the annual two-day exam in China. Achieve a Grade A and you'll be fast-tracked through university to the civil service, meaning you never have to work again. If you get a D+ or below, you are executed with a single bullet, or so they say. This is, of course, an outrageous lie. You're allowed as many bullets as you like. The human brain is an amazing thing, working non-stop 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, from the moment of birth through your entire childhood -- and then stopping at the precise moment you step into an exam hall. Instant brain freeze. For me this would continue for three hours, until the magic words "Put down your pen" would cause it to mysteriously start functioning again. Burhanpur College in Madhya Pradesh, India has only five teachers and five students -- but they all failed their exams last week. Newspapers asked who would be most upset: students or teachers. Er, how about parents? They pay the fees. Meanwhile, a reader named Rahul said: "Exams are like girlfriends. Too many questions. Not enough answers. Explanations unavailable. Result is always 'Fail'." Now here's the good news. In the UK, one university scrapped all the complex aptitude tests for entry to a postgraduate course and replaced them with a spelling test.

Professors said it worked better for them. (The only applicant to get 100% was, of course, Asian.) I like this idea. Every course should have a simple, practical, one-question test. It would make nine million students in China happy, not the mention whoever has to mark nine million papers. Exam for electronic engineering students: "Dismantle your mobile phone and use the parts to build a thermo-nuclear device. Blow up the bike sheds." Exam for law students: "File a lawsuit blaming the US trade deficit on Spanish cucumbers. Receive a half-grade bonus for winning the case." Exam for medical students: "Using only your car keys, remove your duodenum and place it on the invigilator's desk. Sew up the opening." Exam for MBA students: "Raise \$50 billion from people around you to launch an unspecified product. Lose all the money. Bluff it out. Successful candidates will get fulltime jobs at Goldman Sachs." Exam for architecture students: "Using only materials found in the playground, build a new wing for staff relaxation. Include a bar and a pool." Exam for economics students: "Predict the precise movements of stock markets around the world over the next three hours. Afterwards, explain why you were wrong with a straight face." Exam for paleontology students: "Remove a tooth from your mouth. Write a paper extrapolating from the tooth the existence of 50-metre feathered lizard men." Exam for psychiatry students: "Lie under the table and talk about your problems. Tell yourself to shut up and get a grip." Exam for astronomy students: "Using a rolled-up exam paper and the lenses from your spectacles, make a telescope. Find God. Note His precise co-ordinates. Start praying for good exam results." Amen. For more visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com