

Working for society

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MAN is a social being. It is generally true that man's progress depends upon the progress of society. A few persons or a section of the society may make progress at the cost of others but, as social progress means the progress of almost all in a society, this cannot be called social progress. In such a situation, harmony between an individual and the society is under strain. Social work makes an effort to maintain this harmony. Those who work to maintain and develop this harmony between the society and the social being are called social workers. It is undeniable that every man is indebted to society, because it is society that makes someone a man. A man alienated from society cannot be a man in the fullest sense. Parents, teachers and the society have a role in the development of a human being. It is a human being who helps build another human being at any level of society. The history of the world and civilisation gives evidence of this.

This is why a man should try to do something for the welfare of the country, society and mankind. Therefore, it is an ethical duty for a man to participate in social work from social responsibility and thus contribute to social progress.

If we look at the Bengali society, we can find a rich tradition of social work. There are great persons like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Kaliprasanna Singha, Rabindranath Tagore, Begum Rokeya and many others among Bengalis who have been distinct as social workers along with recognition in other fields. It seems that the Bengalis are by nature inclined to social work.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his essay *Shikkhar Shangeekaron* that William Adam, a friend of Raja Rammohun Roy, had shown in his report on education that there were more than a hundred thousand schools in Bengal and Bihar. This shows that there existed at least a minimum arrangement for providing education in almost every village. Besides this, rich people during that time felt socially obliged to maintain a school attached with the place of worship at their homes. Teachers used to get honorarium and residential facilities. These schools were established by society, not by the state. Education was not a means of earning money in that period. It was not a profession only; it was an act of devotion for teachers.

In the past, village doctors were loyal to their humanitarian work. They used to go to the house of a sick person any time of the day or night. They felt that treating people was their duty, in which money was not an important matter. In those days, people had a place of honour for them in their hearts. But nowadays the relationship between this profession and social duty has become too thin.

Once clubs and organisations in villages built small bridges, libraries, etc., helped the poor, organised sports and cultural programmes and did many other good things. The people worked as volunteers. The number of such local clubs and organisations has declined. It is therefore an urgent task to restructure and reestablish such local organisations at the grassroots level in the country.

People used to come to the help of victims of traffic accidents or accidents on rivers. Now such social work is almost totally absent. However, the

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PHOTO: ROB COLVIN

tradition of supporting the distressed has not yet died out, and so people in Bangladesh are able to overcome the shocks of cyclones, floods and other natural disasters. This tradition of social work may not sustain if not taken care of.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his essay *Jatio Vidyalay* (National School) that it was natural for a human being to sacrifice. But it is not easy to persuade people to sacrifice with mere words. The nation which could not create a condition for sacrifice in a real way is unlucky.

Akbar Ali Khan wrote in his book *Pararthoparotar Arthaniti* (Economics of altruism) that doing good to others is an act by which someone in a society helps another at the cost of his own well being. At the same time the author has warned that merely intending to help the poor is not enough. One has to help them in a way that will

really benefit them. It cannot be done only by relying on passion.

Many non-government organisations (NGO) are now engaged in various social works across the country. They have contributed by ridding the society of evils like bigotry, superstition, communalism, etc. While engaged in such progressive activities, they have sometimes been victims of harassment at the hands of interest groups. There is no way to belittle their role, especially in raising awareness of the marginal and poor people about their rights and in promoting women rights.

NGO activists work efficiently when disaster strikes because they have a strong network of communication up to the grassroots level. NGOs have a lot of experiences at grassroots level and made a lot of studies and researches about education, health, environmental sustainability, food security, population control, local development,

community partnership, uses of information technology, cultural practices, right awareness, etc., which can be greatly helpful in launching of any big development programme by the government and the private sector.

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Many people, from Florence Nightingale to Ranada Parsad Saha of Bangladesh, are ideal models to be followed by social workers. Some social workers like Mother Teresa are most highly honoured in the world. Fazle

Hasan Abed and Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh have earned reputations as social workers across the globe, though they have not received as much honour at home. Besides persons who are famous, there are countless other social workers who go on working in a quiet way.

We see that many people are now entering the profession of social work. As a profession, social work has to be learnt. It is an academic subject in the modern world. A professional social worker has more responsibility than a non-professional worker. However, the first and foremost condition to be a social worker is a person's sincere will to do work for society.

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No pen and paper, we're going digital!

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The traditional labour-intensive method of manually capturing data from different socio-economic interventions is time consuming, expensive and often requires excess material. The alternative of using mobile phone technology for survey data collection allows for real-time data analysis that can be used to improve project implementation, increase the effectiveness of field interventions, and significantly decrease the use of paper. Thus using mobile phone technology to collect monitoring data is a potentially major breakthrough for real time data collection and analysis systems.

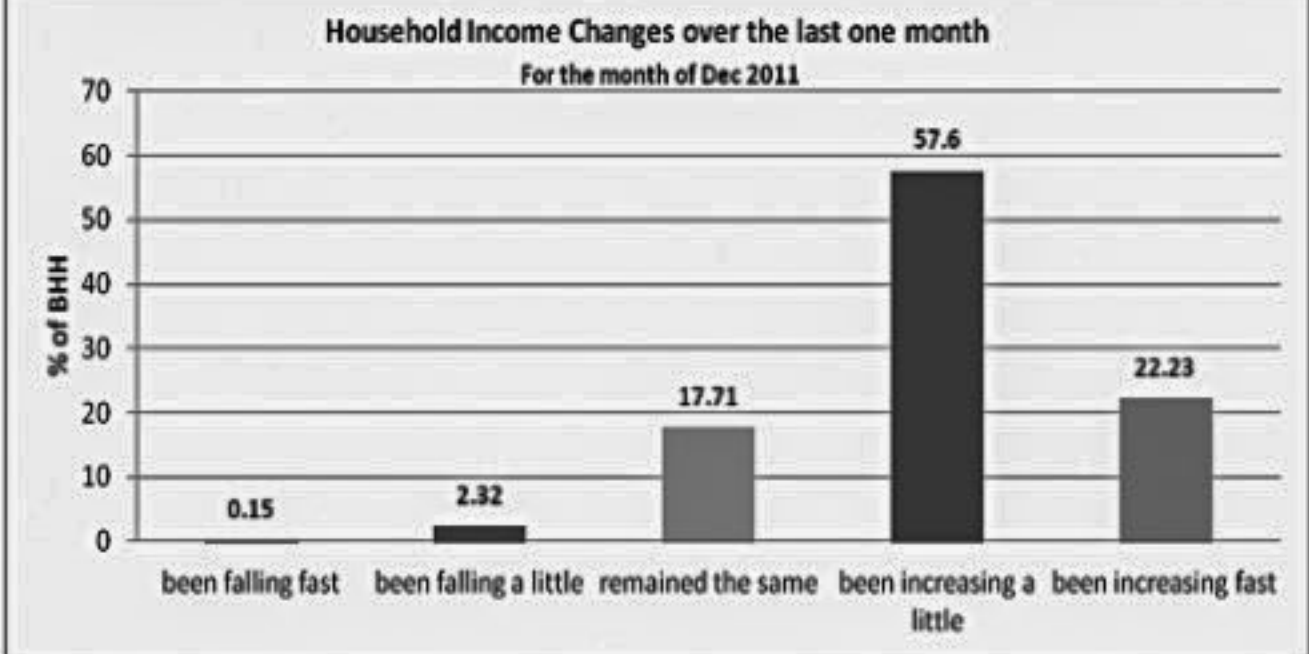
Mobile phones have become a major communication device at the family level, covering approximately 50% of all families in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics). Mobile phones are viewed as a great tool to build and expand digital communication in Bangladesh.

The Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP) programme is a partnership between the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the government of Bangladesh with the goal to lift 1 million people in Bangladesh out of extreme poverty by 2015. A national NGO recently signed a contract with mPower to develop Java-enabled software on mobile phones to monitor and evaluate projects of over 30 NGOs across the country. The success of the pilot phase in January 2011 has resulted in an expansion of the programme to disburse 100 mobile phones across 23 districts.

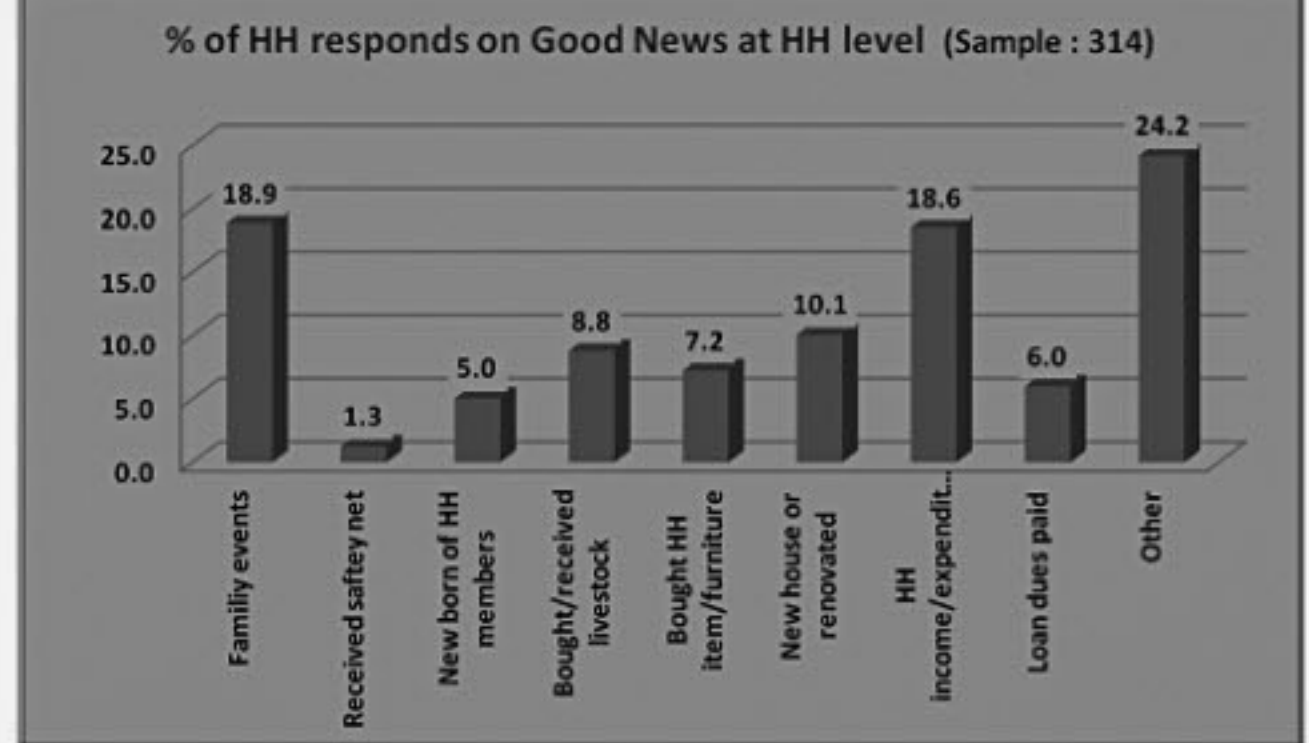
Mobile phones have become a major communication device at the family level, covering approximately 50% of all families in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics). Mobile phones are viewed as a great tool to build and expand digital communication in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) data shows that the number of subscribers reached 80.91 million in September 2011, and it continues to grow. The rapid dissemination of mobile phone technology will further facilitate the success of the programme.

This innovative technology is being used as part of the NGO's Change Monitoring System. The monthly mobile phone surveys will allow it to answer questions such as:

Question: Over the last month has your income (1) been falling fast (2) been falling a little (3) remained the same (4) been increasing little and (5) been increasing fast?

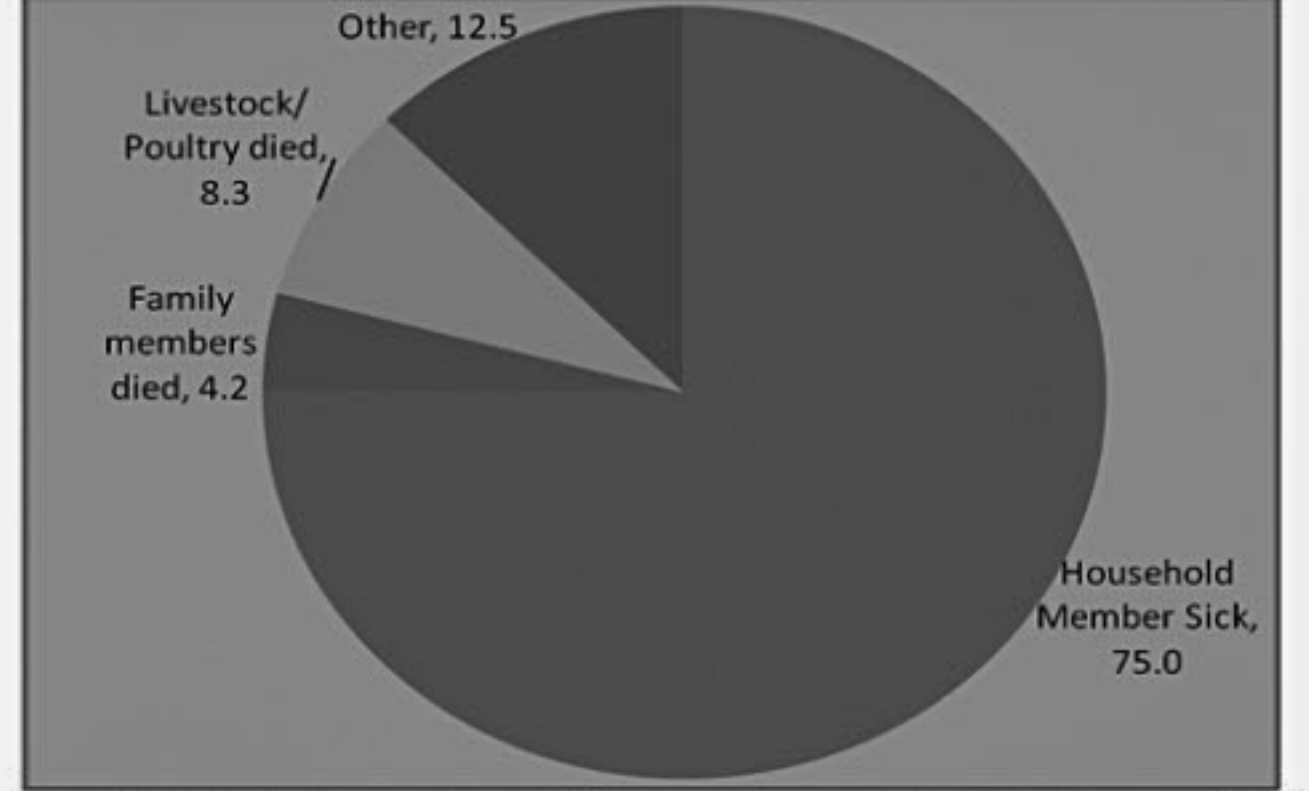


Question: Over the last month have any good things happened for your household?



[Other includes: good result of daughter, good result of son, live with other without rent, savings / storage of paddy, mortgaged land back, sending children to school etc.]

Question: Over the last month have any bad things happened for your household?



Other includes: cow is sold by husband, expenses for jail and case, latrine is inundated, quarrel at home, taka is snatched, fishing net is stolen etc.

It is proposed that the programme, which is undergoing a second pilot, will eventually be rolled out across the entire portfolio of beneficiary households and will collect data on a monthly or quarterly basis. The primary purpose is to produce a frequently updated comprehensive database of all the funded households using a common format that is connected to the baseline and database (through household unique identifiers). This will allow each project to track changes at the household level, improving the impact of interventions on beneficiary livelihoods.

EEP/shiree and NGO partners collectively believe that this form of mobile data collection will replace existing paper-based systems in Bangladesh. Data technicians are already transitioning to the new system and realising its potential to collect data on a wide-range of crosscutting issues affecting beneficiary households.

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Pakistan-US: Eternal wait for review

MOEED YUSUF

SINCE the Nato strike on the Salala check post, Islamabad has been undertaking a "review" of the partnership with the US through Parliament. The rationale provided by the government: The manner in which the relationship was being handled no longer suited Islamabad's interests.

Fair enough. States have the right to recalibrate ties as they see fit. And, as in this case, it is also well within Pakistan's right to raise the stakes by employing diplomatic brinkmanship. But then a state's actions have to be consistent with the goal of enhancing its relevance and ensuring that the other side is compelled to accept its newly proposed terms. All this must be done in a manner that the state's key interests are not compromised.

Pakistan's move to pull back temporarily post-Salala was a setback for the US, and in that sense it did provide Pakistan the upper hand, tactically speaking. Islamabad's decision was not only meant to pacify the charged atmosphere at home but was also aimed at re-emphasising Pakistan's importance and the fact that its support remained critical to the US presence and mission in Afghanistan.

From an international relations perspective, one could argue that this logic makes perfect sense. Pakistan was using the reset to underscore its importance and relevance, both to get the US to give in to some of its demands regarding the tenor of bilateral ties and to assert its importance afresh in terms of its centrality to developments in Afghanistan.

A smart policy would further these goals without losing sight of the ultimate objective: A continued relationship with the US (to their credit, no one in Pakistan's decision-making establishment believes that a ruptured relationship is viable); and relative peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Islamabad's actions have done little to back these objectives. Let me point to two examples of counterproductive decision-making. First, about Pakistan's trump card when it comes to its relevance vis-à-vis the US at the moment -- the Nato supply route running through Pakistan. There is nothing worse in a brinkmanship game than playing your trump card and drawing a blank. For the US, the Pakistan transit facility remains vital -- there is no doubt about that. And so, every time the route is disrupted, one has seen Washington seek a speedy reversal. This

time was no different, except that Pakistan's insistence on taking its time to decide meant that Washington would re-evaluate just what it would mean operating without this route more seriously than it had before.

As some have explained it to me in Washington, lesson number one for the American side has been that, while still critical, the route is not the make-or-break everyone believed it was. Those in the business of studying this seem surprised at how resilient the Isaf presence is in terms of surviving without Pakistan's transit facility. Indeed, given the previous disruptions in this route, the US had already been moving to diversify its options.

The route is now carrying less than 305 of the supplies, down from the time when most of the goods used this facility. As one would expect, Washington's efforts are now to seek ways to

The point is not to question the logic behind and need for the review and reset. But by dragging one's feet on the review and taking questionable decisions in the interim, Islamabad is undermining its own goals vis-à-vis the US and peace in Afghanistan.

reduce its dependence on Pakistan even further -- and this time with the belief that it is not impossible to cut back on the Pakistan supply route and still survive with relative ease.

Does this mean Washington is in a position to do away with the route? Of course not. It would still like it to be reopened as soon as possible; it remains the cheapest option. However, this is not to take away from the fact that Pakistan seems to have decreased, not enhanced its relevance. The northern route is thriving just as Pakistan mulls over what to do next. Second, in terms of the Afghan peace process, how does one make sense of the decision to turn our back on the US Special Representative for Af-Pak, Marc Grossman, since Salala? Islamabad's pretext: until our review is done, we won't re-engage.

As others before me have asked in this space: to what benefit? The answer I get from the policy community in Islamabad is that we wish to signal to the US that we are not desperate to engage on bilateral issues.

First of all, I am not sure why. For pushing this too far may bring us perilously close to a rupture after all. More importantly, what about reconciliation and stability in Afghanistan? Isn't one of Pakistan's stated policy objectives to assist in an intra-Afghan dialogue? And has Rawalpindi not been desperate to get a seat on the big table?

If so, how does avoiding conversations on Afghanistan help? And what is the parliamentary review likely to say which will negate the need to do so?

And if it does really help, then why allow military-to-military and intel-to-intel meetings behind the scenes? The inherent contradiction in the stance is obvious.

Already, Pakistan has provided a convenient excuse to others to point fingers at it for staying away from Bonn II. By deciding to opt out, it came across as the only relevant party not interested in supporting the Afghan transition wholeheartedly. And by delaying re-engagement with the US, it is now reducing the chances of its presence at the upcoming Nato summit in Chicago, which Washington will likely be willing to consider should bilateral ties resume. Again, if you are the country that wants "in" on reconciliation and rightly objects that your concerns are not always considered judiciously, why would you lose an opportunity to make your case at the Nato summit?

The point here is not to question the logic behind and need for the review and reset. But by dragging one's feet on the review and taking questionable decisions in the interim, Islamabad is undermining its own goals vis-à-vis the US and peace in Afghanistan.

Smart brinkmanship gets states closer to their self-defined goals. Reducing one's leverage and relevance and opening doors for greater frustration and finger-pointing from allies and foes alike does not count as such. It is time to lay out findings of the review, keep sight of the broader bilateral and regional objectives, and re-engage with the US.

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