

Women's contribution to development unrecognised

Gender discrimination more prevalent in informal sectors

WOMEN, despite making huge contributions to the economy and the country's overall development, are seldom evaluated properly for their work. This is especially true for rural women who actively participate in agriculture.

A seminar organised by Karmojibi Nari, OSHE foundation and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), has revealed that the labour of the female workers in three main areas – the growing of potato, maize and poultry farming – is not recognised. The reason is that such workers are not included as part of the formal sector and therefore remain 'invisible'.

Apart from household work (also not recognised officially) rural women are actively involved in farm activities – from selection of seed to harvesting and storing of crops. Despite their crucial role in agriculture, the general undervaluing of women by society, deprives them of equitable economic opportunities and access to resources. They are not even considered farmers and it is the men who market the produce and control the income. According to MJF's research, women who work as unpaid workers accounted for 45.6 percent of total employed in agriculture.

A Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) study has estimated the value of women's unpaid work to be 76.8 percent of the GDP of the 2013-14 fiscal year. Women's contribution to agriculture, other informal sectors and to the household must be quantified when determining the country's GDP. Not only that, the government must initiate awareness campaigns to make society recognise the vital role of women in the country's economic growth.

Farmers shortchanged

Direct purchase rules flouted

EVERY year the government procures wheat directly from farmers. This year has been an exception for farmers in Boalmari upazila of Faridpur. From what has been published in a report in *Prothom Alo* on May 5, we understand that government stocks for wheat have been allegedly procured from ruling party leaders and business syndicates. That nearly 80 percent of the estimated 1.5 million kilograms of wheat have been procured from such sources has left many farmers high and dry. What are the thousands of farmers to do now with their unsold crop? Especially since the prevalent market price per kilo of wheat is nearly Tk 6 less than the government rate of Tk 28.

This culture of bypassing set procedures is sure to play havoc on agriculture production. Farmers who have invested heavily in growing crops may be discouraged to do the same in the next production season. Allegations have emerged that this syndicate involves some influential leaders along with their cohorts in the party and some administrative and local government officials. While ruling party leaders at the upazila level may deny any wrongdoing, the flouting of the procurement rules cannot be allowed to be swept under the carpet. This calls for a scooping investigating by relevant authority. This is a matter of food security and farmers' rights which we hope will be treated with the importance it deserves.

The Proximity Principle



RUBANA HUQ

A car ride of about 10 minutes takes your columnist to a slum, which wears a different face in the morning and a completely different one at night. At night, there are big cars being parked in front of the slum, which trade drugs and dangerous substances. Poverty has no choice. The only choice of survival steers the slum dwellers to continue doing what they do everyday. And there's no visible change, ever. Nine days ago, the city corporation election took place. It's almost natural for your columnist to write about the election, the process and the outcome. But, today's column is not about the elections that just took place. It's about how living close does not necessarily mean shared prosperity. It's about how living in proximity does not necessarily ensure public welfare. With the City Corporation Elections being over, the new mayors must pledge the proximity principle and ensure that the lives of the ultra poor change for the better.

Having said that, this column shall now move on to discussing the necessity of believing in the proximity principle, even in South Asia. A recent meeting arranged by the World Bank on South Asia in Colombo brought a few of us together from across the region. The group was diverse and in the two days we spent together, trying to "champion" the cause of proximity principle, all of us, at the end, had become big believers pledging to the essential rule of believing in the shared space of prosperity and freedom. The meeting revealed how we are losing opportunities by the minute...

Most of us live close to each other yet remain dangerously disconnected from our neighbours. South Asia is one such neighbourhood, which has eight official members who routinely indulge in mistrust. In the process, opportunities get marred and challenges overwhelm the scene. For example, if only the member states of SAARC worked in

harmony, then apart from many other platforms where the South Asian neighbours could thrive together, the South Asian energy market would be the first one, which could yield the best possible results.

In 2013, India and Bangladesh implemented a power trading arrangement where India will provide electricity to Bangladesh with plans of extension. Bhutan had started exporting power to India since the early 1960s, and is now exporting 1300MW's of power during the peak of monsoon season – amounting to 27 percent of the total annual revenue for Bhutan. Bhutan plans to sell over 5000MW's by 2019. The Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, have all penned an unprecedented agreement that will bring power from Tajikistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan. More power sharing projects are on the platter where Bangladesh's Northeast to India is also being considered. Nepal signed two major hydro-development agreements with firms from India that will generate 1800 MW. Much more is being considered. A transmission line is now actively being developed between India and Pakistan.

Most South Asian countries have been adversely affected by serious power shortages. While they are endowed with huge energy potentials, there is a great opportunity to increase per capita consumption of energy on the other. At the moment, per capita consumption of electricity – an essential measure of prosperity – varies from about 900 kwh in India to less than 100 kwh in Nepal. Also in India, in a few states, it is less than 100 kwh. The regional average per capita consumption is just 555 kwh, as compared to 2337 kwh per person in East Asia (World Bank figures for 2010).

In reality, how much resource do these South Asian countries possess? India has 285 billion tonnes of coal reserve, yet its present annual production is less than 600 million tonnes. It has 100 -150 GW of Hydro Power potential, the capacity commissioned is only 40 GW. Nepal has more than 100 GW of Hydro Power potential, developed capacity is less than 1 GW. The region has vast under-exploited gas reserves; concentrated in India

(1,241 bcm), Pakistan (1,188 bcm) and Bangladesh (400 bcm). Pakistan has 185 billion tonnes of coal and lignite reserves that have barely been used. Imported oil has been largely used as a default option when other sources of energy for power generation have been lacking, exposing countries to higher import bills and price volatility. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka import all of their oil products.

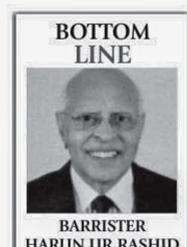
If the South Asian countries do not embark on the proposed collaborative approach, the region's people and governments could spend an additional US\$ 226 billion on electricity supply over the next 25 years. On the other hand, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan – the small, landlocked and resource rich countries would lose investments and would not be able to afford a secure energy supply system if they cannot connect to the electricity markets of the neighbours. The prevailing massive load-shedding/blackouts in Afghanistan and Nepal would continue. Finally, the region would lose out on an opportunity to attain win-win opportunities locked up in energy cooperation. Therefore, explicit roadmaps need to be built for different countries on the bilateral, sub-regional and regional levels and each of their timeframes could be drawn. These plans could then take the process forward while from time to time these road maps may be reviewed and revised based on ground realities that exist in a region that is so closely packed with promise.

Truth is, anything and everything works better if one doesn't operate in isolation. After all, Korail is only 10 minutes away and the nearest South Asian city is only a 25 minutes plane ride. So whether it's a local neighbourhood or an international one, the only thing that works is the commitment to being fair to those who live close by. After all, asymmetric neighbourhoods don't breed prosperity and losing out on neighbourhood opportunities also don't do justice to the collective potential.

¹Estimates compiled from: CEA, Geological Survey of Pakistan, BP Statistical Review 2012

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China reaches out to Indian Ocean through Pakistan



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

CHINESE President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan for two days on April 21, the first visit of a Chinese president to Pakistan in nine years. Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao

reportedly said that this was the President's first foreign trip this year, highlighting the importance Beijing placed on developing Pakistan-China relations in many strategic and economic areas.

The President reportedly committed \$46 billion for infrastructure projects taking forward the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor plan which envisages improving road links and connectivity between China's western Xinjiang region, all the way up to the Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea that China has helped finance and manage. (In response to China's moves in Gwadar, India plans to upgrade and operate a deepwater port in Chabahar, Iran, which is located just 50 miles to the west of Gwadar). For Pakistan, the corridor is a cheap way to develop its violence-plagued and poverty-stricken Balochistan province, home to Gwadar.

Furthermore China has been keen to implement the projects of expanding the Karakoram highway, exploring an alternate road link and a railway link from Kashgar in Xinjiang to Gwadar.

The Pakistan-Chinese Economic Corridor project is a part of the Chinese "One Belt One Road" plan which focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic), linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia, and connect-

ing China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

Both China and Pakistan have common interests in containing the growing Indian influence in the Indian Ocean region. Both are time-tested and all-weather friends and China has consistently supplied arms and equipment to Pakistan over the years.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (left) shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping before a 2014 meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Beijing

The Chinese president, while at a joint sitting of Pakistan's parliament, described Pakistan as China's "dependable" friend and firmly backed its territorial integrity. Given the state of bilateral relations, it is no wonder that he oversaw the signing of 51 agreements including energy, finance and science and technology and host of other areas.

China has strategic interests in the Indian Ocean where the interests and influence of India prevail. China and the

United States are beginning to overlap to protect sea lanes, a part of Chinese maritime-silk route. It is here that the 21st century's global power dynamics will be revealed, according to many analysts.

It was reported earlier that China had plans to sell eight submarines (worth \$5 billion) to Pakistan and it was not known whether the deal was concluded

which is home to the country's Uighur Muslim minority group who has faced restrictions on religious and cultural practices. Beijing has linked violent attacks in Xinjiang to a group believed to have a stronghold in tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

It is reported that Pakistan has been providing China with intelligence and support in its fight against the organisation known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement which is linked to violent attacks in Xinjiang. There are a considerable number of members of the group in Pakistan.

Hoo Tiang Boon, an assistant professor with the China programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, reportedly said that China's motivation for promoting the Economic Corridor project was to boost economic development in Pakistan. If the Pakistan economy develops, then it would help reduce the problem of terrorism.

China is uncomfortable about the Indo-US alliance to dominate the region. Even though Pakistan received \$31 billion from the US since 2002, most of which was allocated to improve security, the government of Pakistan was peeved at President Obama's overlook of the country while he visited India for three days as Guest of Honour for India's Republic Day on January 26.

With the emergence of China as an economic superpower in the region, the Chinese President's visit demonstrates that China and Pakistan enjoy the best of bilateral relations and interactions in strategic and economic matters. It is reported that China with its foreign exchange reserves close to \$4 trillion has embarked on "cheque-book diplomacy" providing funds to developing countries to consolidate its relations with them.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

COMMENTS

"Slave Trade Booms In Dark Triangle" (May 4, 2015)

Md. Shamim Shaikh

The government of Bangladesh must do everything to stop this inhuman activity.

Sajjad

Although it has frequently been in news, no serious effort is being taken to solve this problem.

"Hasina 'dispels' Ban's worry" (May 03, 2015)

Deep

We have been victimised by the AL government and our right to vote has been hijacked. Abusing people's right will not help this party in the long run; it will only alienate them even more.

"Congress, BJP tussle over LBA" (May 03, 2015)

Sam

India's foot dragging on this vital issue is disconcerting.

"Mass grave in Thai jungle" (May 03, 2015)

Md. Ashikur Rahman

Immediate action must be taken against the human traffickers.

"People dread army for its name and Rab for its activities."

--Col Ziaul Ahsan, additional director general of Rab

Akhtar Shah

And they are meant to be serving the people whose purse pays for their salaries! What an irony!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Workers' insurance coverage

R. U. Mirdha's write-up on this topic published in your business page on April 30 is a very important one in today's context. Insurance of workers should be made mandatory for all factories, shops and establishments. The provision of insurance elucidating the levels and minimum entitlements of benefits should be codified and incorporated into both the Factory Act and Shops and Establishment Acts in Bangladesh. To ensure the participation of employees, a deduction of one percent of the monthly wage calculated on the basis of 25 working days per month (excluding holidays and festival holidays if any) can be deducted by the employer and it should be included with the premium being paid by the employer.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
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Lack of safety of lives

This picture depicts the lack of safety of people who do risky jobs like these. Authorities concerned do not consider providing them with safety gears. The photo is taken from Salimullah Muslim Hall near the boundary wall. The authority recruited this man to cut down the dead branches of that tree so that it does not fall on pedestrians and cause accidents. But they forgot to consider that this safety-gearless procedure of chopping down the branches may endanger this man's own life.

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