

# The price of non-governmental growth

**C. RASHAAD SHABAB**

It is well known that since the 1980s, Bangladesh has made astonishing progress on a wide variety of development indicators such as reducing the prevalence of extreme hunger and poverty, increasing primary education enrolment rates, and reducing child and maternal mortality. This progress has been mirrored by an impressive record of sustained GDP growth, spanning decades. In contrast to these successes, the quality of our democratic institutions has languished to the point where they now threaten to undermine all these hard-won gains. This article argues that the provision of public goods and services by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has not only contributed to these successes, but also to this failure.

Much, if not most, of Bangladesh's development has happened outside the purview of its successive governments. The vibrant community of NGOs and civil society organisations working across the spectrum of development issues have been the principal drivers of progress, and undoubtedly, things like reduced infant mortality are progress. But by satisfying the immediate needs of Bangladesh's citizens, the NGO movement has severed a critical link between us and our government. It has decoupled our

access to services that would otherwise be provided by the state, and our ability to effectively demand these services from the state.

The delivery of public goods and services by non-state actors has crowded out not only the capacity of the state to serve its people, but also the capacity of the people to hold the state accountable. And whenever a people have failed to hold their government to account, state policy has followed a predictable trajectory. Unconstrained by the will of the people, the powers that be adopt policies that are designed to extract the nation's wealth for their own enrichment.

It is not hard to list examples of extractive institutions in Bangladesh: overly complicated clearing and forwarding procedures at our ports, a lack of transparency in public procurement, bribes that must be paid before the receipt of most public services – the list is long, and growing. That is because over time, the extractive institutions tend to reinforce themselves. As the political elite divert more and more state's resources under their control, they amass ever increasing means to consolidate their own power.

For the beneficiaries of an extractive system to continue enriching themselves without effective resistance, it becomes

necessary for them to attack people's freedom of speech and expression. This is because extractive policies cannot hope to stand up to the scrutiny of open, public debate.

The filling of key positions by loyalists rather than by the meritorious is also part of the process of extraction. This helps seal off institutions where we citizens might have sought redress from the influence of the will of the people, which becomes increasingly opposed to the incentives of their rulers. This gradual but deliberate erosion of the responsiveness of political institutions to the will of the people makes the prospect of organising any effective countervailing power within the existing system more and more grim.

So far, however, robust economic growth and the widespread provision of social services by NGOs meant that we, the people, were quite satisfied to pay the dues demanded of us by the extractive system, because we could still get on with the business of bettering our own lives. But robust economic growth and extractive institutions cannot coexist in the long term.

Institutions that are designed to extract wealth are very bad at creating it. At the most basic level, if anything of value can be expropriated by the state, nobody has an incentive to invest in creating anything valuable. If we continue on this path

towards ever more extractive institutions, growth will stagnate.

Once this is understood, our right to free speech, our right to be free of state coercion, and our right to an independent judiciary cease to be the idealised luxuries that our leaders would have us believe. Rather, these things are the fundamental building blocks of sustainable economic growth. And without growth, none of the progress that Bangladesh has made in alleviating the human suffering that is symptomatic of poverty can be maintained.

The ability of citizens to effectively make demands of their government and to constrain the power of those who govern them is the key to long term growth and the sustainable eradication of poverty. The NGO movement in Bangladesh has temporarily circumvented, but ultimately failed to address this necessary condition for sustainable development. In the meantime, we the people, having our basic needs met, allowed the system to pervert the nation's institutions; to silence all dissenting voices; and to coerce our fellow citizens who attempted to organise any countervailing power. Such is the price for decades of non-governmental growth.

The writer is a PhD. student in the Economics Department of the University of Sussex, UK.

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE 2016 Women and newborns: The heart of midwifery

**PANDORA HARDTMAN**

MIDWIVES have helped women deliver babies since the beginning of history. We can find references to midwives in Arabic, Greek, Hindu and Islamic texts.

They are privileged to bear witness to moments of intense joy, to some of great sadness, and sometimes death. This is the journey of the midwife. Even with advances in technology and too high c-section rates, deaths occur in the reproductive years because women – usually the poor and the marginalised – have no access, or too late access to qualified health professionals. Today we are helping to change this reality for Bangladesh. On this International day of the Midwife 2016, we celebrate the registration of 597 Bangladeshi Diploma Midwives.

In Dec 2015, 179 midwives recruited specifically from high needs underserved areas graduated from the UK Aid funded BRACU administered Developing Midwives Project (DMP). What was different about this Diploma level course was that it focused specifically on delivering the full range of midwifery services at the community level. Global models of midwifery support a midwife at every level of service delivery to ensure the continuum of care from home to hospital.

The BDHS survey 2014 and other data sources show us that although progress has been made, many women still prefer to deliver at home for a multitude of reasons. Midwifery, whether in a supportive community or in a facility plays a large role in a family's life and midwives function as clinicians, trainers, patient counselors, public health care providers, and advocates. In line with this, the BRACU DMP believes in a vision of "A quality midwife for every community". In its recruitment of midwives from 169 upazilas BRACU DMP is bringing us daily closer to the reality of Midwives everywhere in Bangladesh. New history is being made as women now have access to fully trained Diploma level midwives to care for them within their communities.

An elder midwife once told me that endurance is about knowing yourself well enough to find ways around you, and resisting the temptation to give up. Midwives have a history of resisting the status quo for positive change, such as the midwives who did not allow pharaoh to kill all of the newborn males in ancient Egypt. Throughout history resistance movements have changed the course of events in insurmountable odds. As we celebrate this moment and look to the future of Midwifery in Bangladesh, we encourage every midwife to keep resisting overly technological and medicalised birth, violence against women and children and women's disempowerment. They need to resist the voices that say your dreams are impossible. Midwives, go forth and change the world!

The writer is Clinical Director Midwifery Education-BRACU/DFID Developing Midwives Project.

# A response to "Bringing electricity to more Bangladeshis"

**SEBASTIAN GROH**

ON May 25, The Daily Star, Bangladesh's leading English newspaper, published in print as well as online an opinion article by Bjorn Lomborg titled "Bringing Electricity to More Bangladeshis". In his piece, Lomborg argues that "[g]iven that diesel is five times cheaper [than solar], all the money spent on solar energy for 3 million households could have powered 16 million households with diesel. Smarter spending could have helped 13 million more Bangladeshi households get power cheaper. This shows why it's crucial to study costs and benefits of alternative policies, rather than simply doing what seems to be in trend at the moment." We interpret this as a public defamation of all efforts made by the Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL), its 47+ partnering organisations (POs) as well as its multiple donor institutions since the inception of its solar home system (SHS) programme in 2002. Further, we reject the remark that the SHS programme is a product of trend-following as well as the claim that the SHS is highly inefficient in comparison to a diesel generator alternative.

But at first, let's try to get the facts straight. To date, four million, and not the postulated three million, SHS have been disseminated through the IDCOL programme in Bangladesh. Whereas this number is well documented, continuously updated and available on IDCOL's website ([http://www.idcol.org/old/bd-map/bangladesh\\_map/](http://www.idcol.org/old/bd-map/bangladesh_map/)), it is less well-documented how many systems have additionally been installed outside of the IDCOL programme, but many claim these equally to be in the millions. The total investment through IDCOL, supported by its donors, has been



PHOTO: STAR

USD 600 million since its inception. This 'official' market alone has been providing electricity access to 18.8 million beneficiaries, representing more than 10 percent of the country's total population and almost every fifth person in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

Now, here is where this becomes interesting on the benefit side of the solar equation. The programme brought about an entire eco-system which created approximately 75,000 jobs in the local solar industry with stakeholders including battery manufacturers, solar panel assemblers and hundreds of suppliers of charge controllers, LEDs, efficient fans, TVs, not to mention that the majority of these care female staff in the assembly lines. It is this

ecosystem which laid the path for the rapidly expanding outside IDCOL market, purely created by an active private sector. These forward and backward linkages must be considered in any diligent cost-benefit analysis. Additionally, the fact that the Bangladeshi SHS programme has surpassed Germany's feed-in tariff by far in terms of number of individual solar systems supplied to households underlines the success of this frugal innovation. We must state very clearly that ignoring infrastructural path dependencies and electrification trajectories (similar arguments had been made against the German 'Energiewende' in the past) only lead to a risky short-sightedness and end up in a highly skewed

view of important policy matters.

Lomborg praises the cost effectiveness of diesel generators as the "smart solution" for rural Bangladesh. Now, let's assume for a moment that we do follow his recommendation to address rural electrification by providing a diesel generator for every five households that lack access to the national grid. Provided we always find these five households together, the sound and air pollution all these machines will emit are likely to spur up urban migration trends. Rural life will basically become unbearable. How do we factor this into our cost-benefit analysis? On the micro level, the health impacts of such an intervention increasing diesel particulate matter – the major pollutant

in the country - and the emission of harmful gases on the villagers contribute to premature death, cause cancer, among other health problems, particularly among kids and women. How do we account for these costs? On the macro level, the recommendation of creating a local coal industry to a country that is threatened by climate change to lose 30 percent of its land mass in a scenario of already being among the most densely populated countries in the world, among many other consequences, raises the question of how these projected Tk. 46.2 billion climate costs were actually calculated? As far as the numbers are concerned, they are really hard to follow. Lomborg states that "over two decades, solar energy costs each household roughly Tk. 67,000. Given usage of four hours per day, an hour of solar power costs Tk. 4.59". Multiplying 365 days with 20 years and four hours gives 29,200 hours, hence Tk. 2.3. Condemning solar power in terms of cost-effectiveness by the simple trick of dividing CAPEX and OPEX of a diesel generator by five is at least questionable. How about buying a bigger solar panel and sharing this with multiple households, or interconnecting individual SHS and creating synergies and with that more power and flexibility? Wouldn't that immediately turn all the calculations upside down and with this Lomborg's entire argument?

In short, this week's opinion paper seems to cut corners in many places. It should, therefore, be read with great care, and we urge the energy policymakers to look elsewhere for guidance on how to fulfil Bangladesh's Vision 2021 in terms of bringing improved electricity services to all.

The writer, a German national, is living and working in Bangladesh as the CEO and co-founder of ME SOLshare Ltd, and is also Adjunct Assistant Professor at Independent University Bangladesh and Eastern University.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**VICTOR JARA**  
Chilean poet, singer and political activist

*I don't sing just to sing neither because i have a good voice. I sing because the guitar makes sense and has a reason*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Understands
- Play makeup
- Horse play?
- Ring contests
- Pitch choice
- Big name in TV talk
- Familly
- Disturb
- Self contained
- Snaky fish
- Fixes copy
- Pastoral poem
- Kong, for one
- Airport screening org
- Concert boosters
- "This or that?"
- Nasty dog
- Let pass, as a shower
- Laundry chore
- Gene messenger
- Wille of "Platoon"
- Puts on the wall
- Narrow cuts
- Glossy
- Dele undoer
- Blunders

**DOWN**

- Tropical lizard
- Horse related
- Was in the black
- Family car choice
- Scrub, as a mission
- Nightclub of song
- Got through a crisis
- Theatrical
- Peaceful
- Pistachio part
- Hosp. parts
- Card symbols
- "What-now?"
- Leg parts
- Lab liquids
- Wall art
- Pale
- Craving
- Dianne of "Bullets Over Broadway"
- Chores
- Memo
- Frothy brew

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S	C	O	T	T	A	M	E	S	
H	A	N	O	I	A	D	O	B	E
O	C	T	E	T	R	A	D	O	N
W	H	O	S	T	A	M	E	N	S
S	E	P	A	L	S	L	I	E	
P	O	R	T	P	A	P	A	T	E
D	E	A	E	C	R	U			
I	N	K		P	E	T	A	L	S
A	N	T	H	E	R	S	L	E	T
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E	M	E	N	D	S	A	M	O	A
M	E	E	T	S		M	O	N	K

**Mort Walker's beetle bailey**

WOW! LOOK AT THAT RAIN!

BACK TO BED! WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING IN THIS RAIN!

LET'S GO, MEN! IT'S TIME FOR OUR HIKE!

WE CAN'T HIKE IN THIS RAIN!

LOOK! WHEN I SAY WE'RE GOING TO HIKE, WE HIKE!!

BOY! HE REALLY INSISTS ON GETTING HIS OWN WAY

EVEN WHEN HE'S DEAD WRONG!

SHINE! IT'S TIME TO SHINE!

I GOTTA ADMIT HE HAS AMAZING POWERS!

HE READ THE FORECAST IN TODAY'S PAPER