

# ROLE OF AGRICULTURE in Bangladesh's economic growth



**Shykh Seraj**  
is Bangladesh's pioneer  
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Swadhinata Puroshkar  
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SHYKH SERAJ

After independence, the agriculture sector was Bangladesh's main economic driving force. Its contribution to GDP was around 60 percent. Agriculture in Bangladesh is vital for people's livelihood, employment, and contributing to GDP; we all know that. Its contribution has reduced over the last decade, going from 17 percent in 2010 to 12.6 percent in 2020. The sector is at the centre of our economy, decreasing poverty and ensuring food security. However, with the ever-growing population, going from 147.6 million in 2010 to 164.7 million in 2020, added by the blow of the pandemic and climate change, the sector has continued to be resilient in terms of profitability and productivity.

I still remember international organisations referring to food riots in Bangladesh back in 2007-2008, but we have beaten their assumptions and proved them absolutely wrong; the same way, during Covid-19, agriculture as an individual sector has contributed and supported the people and state of Bangladesh relentlessly. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries globally, with a density of 1,239.7 people living per square kilometre (2018)—its land is decreasing as population grows rapidly. The characteristic of a modern economy is to grow through the industrial and service sectors. This has been observed gradually in the farming sector as well. The economy has also been integrated with the global economy. We have been on the road to a self-reliant growth effort that has become a great example in the world.

The GDP contribution came down for mainstream farming, while the service and industry sector's contribution

increased as people started migrating to the cities from the villages. The service sector was added to the farming sector. Only the mainstream farming sector was regarded as the main source of economic development. Afterwards came the sub-sectors of farming. On the one hand, we could see the boom in food grain



production, especially due to rice varietal developments, and on the other hand fisheries, poultry, livestock and dairy turned into huge economic source. All these sub-sectors started taking shape as commercial farms in the hands of youth and progressive women entrepreneurs, not just amateur ventures. In respect to the mainstream farming sector, the GDP came down, but the significance of farming as a whole, including the sub-sectors, service and industry sectors, have increased manifold. High-value fruit

orchards and vegetables also played a significant role in the economic boom. Not only the farms, but the value addition of the agricultural products came in as a booster for the agricultural service sector. Say, for example, PRAN, ACI; these huge agricultural industrial companies played a key role as well. Besides, the small scale

to 40 percent of the labour force. Thus, agriculture remains the largest sector in terms of employment.

The other indirect contribution of agriculture is to provide basic raw materials for industrial processing. Immediately, jute comes to mind as an example of a product of the agro-processing industry. And at present, many agro-processing industries are fully dependent on agriculture for basic raw materials which include rice milling, sugar, tea, fruit juice, spices, etc. In the FY2020-21, the total production of grains was 455.05 lakh (45.505 million) metric tonnes, potato 106.13 lakh (10.61 million) metric tonnes, pulses 9.39 lakh metric (0.94 million) tonnes, onion 33.62 lakh (3.36 million) metric tonnes and jute 6.25 lakh (0.62 million) bales. BRRI (Bangladesh Rice Research Institute) must be credited for the grain production which has been quite remarkable. Alongside the production, the research didn't stop for a day and with responsibility, it moved ahead with the support of BARI (Bangladeshi Agricultural Research Institute). How can I not mention BINA (Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture) as they are primarily mandated to make peaceful use of nuclear and advanced techniques to boost agricultural production and develop technologies that are environment-friendly as well as sustainable. Once upon a time, we used to import capsicum and today we're growing it here on our soil.

Now, the five-star hotels and many restaurants around the country collect foreign vegetables from inside the country, which is saving a lot of foreign currencies and many people are employed through producing such crops.

▲ **After independence, the agriculture sector was Bangladesh's main economic driving force.**

PHOTO: SYED RIFAT HOSSAIN

agro-processed and agro-dependent industries played a part in the value addition.

Former Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith used to say that, including the service and industry engaged with the farming sector, the GDP contribution of it is nearly 40 percent. Agricultural production value has increased at 3.54 percent per year in the last two decades (1999-2019). The sector remains the main source of employment, as I have mentioned earlier, providing livelihood

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