

How much do we know about our emerging 'new rural'?



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Many associate development with the growth of cities and transformation of the urban landscape. But this is too narrow a view. Development is equally relevant for the rural regions. The relative absence of rural issues in national discourses over the preceding two decades is quite striking. There was a time in the 70s, 80s and even the 90s when rural dominated our research interest. Some interest is still there, but nowhere near as before. The discourse around development is incomplete if our focus remains fixed on urban transformation, ignoring the transforming rural landscape.

A new reality has emerged which I am terming as "new rural". A severe knowledge gap prevails in our imagination vis-à-vis this "new rural". For example, how has the class structure evolved and transformed in the villages of today? Earlier, rural class structure revolved around *matobbor*, *morol*, *jotedar*, petty peasant, landless, etc. There have been

In the earlier waves of the green revolution, small peasantry managed to survive and even prosper. They were an integral partner in the green revolution process. Now there is corporate inroads into agriculture. Urban realities are intruding into rural spaces, where the non-farm is as much a rural reality as the farm. What is the future of the small peasantry in such transforming realities? Bangladesh has always been a land of small peasants. Perhaps still so. But what is their future now? There is a glaring knowledge gap in understanding that.

It is a striking feature of Bangladesh's developmental journey that the largely illiterate peasantry readily embraced technology. Through rapid adoption of new technologies, these farmers, many lacking in formal education, really drove agricultural transformation. Such inventiveness did not stop with technology only. In Daudkandi in the Cumilla region, I have seen spread

centres have emerged in the rural landscape. So have beauty parlours, tailors for up-to-date fashions, restaurant centres, even dating places. Rapid expansion of such consumer demand has its economic aspects but little is known on the social and psychological aspects of these changes.

There was a time when there were distinct divides between urban and rural realities. But such boundaries are rapidly dissolving. We need new analytical frameworks to describe rural and urban, mofussil and metropolitan. We need better understanding of growth of urban centres and spread of urban demand in rural centres. The family head of a rural household maybe working abroad, but he/she now has new aspiration for their children in the village to go for English-medium education. Families are choosing certain development symbols, hoping that these will be the ladders for upward progress. So, kindergartens are sprouting up. Their names maybe English sounding, but are there competent teachers in such institutions? Clearly, villages are brimming with new aspirations but how well are the returns they are getting from their expenditures on "modern" services in education, health, skills, etc? The alarming rise in the educated unemployment is but one area of concern in this regard.



PHOTO: STAR

major changes in rural class structure. But there has been little new research in this area.

A key element of rural transformation is agriculture. There has been research on agricultural transformation but a holistic understanding has been missing. For example, there have been research on agricultural mechanisation. Also on crops, horticulture, fisheries, rice, etc. But how do these transformations in productive activities relate to relations of production? There was a time when rural and agriculture were inter-changeable concepts. Whenever we imagined villages, images of agriculture floated up. But our anecdotal realisations hint that today's transformed villages and agriculture are no longer synonymous realities. But where exactly are the differences? Here too, the knowledge gap is acute.

Key driver of agricultural transformation has been spread of high-yielding varieties. Many features of rural transformation are tied up with this. New seed varieties, chemical fertiliser, multiple cropping, sub-sectors such as horticulture, fisheries, livestock, etc have driven the transformation in agriculture. The transformation of agriculture began from the east. Meghna Dhonagada and Chandpur Irrigation Projects gave a big push to crop production in the 1970s. Akhter Hameed Khan's Comilla Model played an important role in this first phase transformation of agriculture. The next transformation frontier was in the north which saw a big push on boro cultivation through ground-water irrigation using deep-tubewells. This led to major changes in agriculture in the northern districts. Now the new agricultural frontier lies in the south-western districts from Bholra to Barishal, from Khulna to Jashore, etc. Padma bridge has opened new possibilities. We wait to see which model of agricultural expansion will occur in this new frontier.

The transformation of traditional agriculture in Bangladesh is usually referred to as the green revolution, a first wave driven by surface water-based irrigation and a second by groundwater-based irrigation. It is not yet clear what type of technologies will drive agricultural transformation in its new south-western frontier.

The economic base of the rural family is a changed reality. How will we characterise a family who does some agriculture, some non-farm, owns some rural land but also has some property in urban areas? How do such realities fit into our traditional models of class differentiation? Are there winners and losers in the process?

of new organisational forms quite foreign to traditional agriculture, namely a shareholding company model to develop floodplain fisheries. When these low-lying lands go under water during monsoons, there are no ails - plot boundaries. So how do they pursue collective fishing? What do such changes in relations of production signify?

Rural transformation also gained momentum through expansion of non-farm activities. Microcredit played a big role in this. The economics of such activities are well-known though less so on the welfare impacts. But what have been the social impact of the spread of the non-farm? Rural transportation too has seen a sea of changes with both passenger and goods transportation seeing explosive growth. Number of shops and rural marketplaces have sprouted everywhere. Rural consumers are major new customers of urban goods. The economic base of the rural family is a changed reality. How will we characterise a family who does some agriculture, some non-farm, owns some rural land but also has some property in urban areas? How do such realities fit into our traditional models of class differentiation? Are there winners and losers in the process?

There is also a knowledge gap on the remittance dynamics. Remittance destinations are more in rural areas. How has rural life been transformed by such remittance inflows? Community

The kaleidoscope of changes is in all directions, but knowledge gaps in making sense of these is equally glaring. Dress codes have changed beyond recognition. But child marriages too have gone up. What then are we to make of the social norms that are emerging? Village is now connected to the external world. But this connection is being driven by consumption aspirations mainly. The same cannot be said for the spread of a global citizen mindset or responsible behavioural norms.

How is power to be understood in the "new rural"? What are the new power centres in the villages? Before, landed influentials and educated middle class occupied these power spaces. Now politics and state have become central to rural power dynamics. The long shadow of police hovers over these spaces as never before. One important research enquiry can be types and nature of conflicts in today's "new rural". Conflict analysis can shed light on the reality of power dynamics. A moot question here is why does a union parishad election now entails expenditures in the crores. These are urgent questions for sociological research. We need better understanding of women's story too. Women have been central to Bangladesh's development journey. But have they reaped the benefits of it? And what to make of changes in the cultural life in the "new rural"?

Village has always been "home", place of rebirth and regeneration. Village and home - "bari" - are till used interchangeably in the Bangla language. When Covid appear to have made existence itself uncertain, many retreated to the village as their go-to refuge. This means the village - and perhaps the mofussil - continues to occupy our imagination, particularly as a psychological refuge. Despite rapid urbanisation, our cities are yet to win such a status in the collective imagination.

"New rural" will be a critical player in the next chapter of Bangladesh's transformation. That is why a new research drive is such an urgent necessity with a priority on listening. Imposing development models bureaucratically and from the top cannot garner the potential that is waiting to be unleashed in the "new rural".



PHOTO: GOOGLE STREET VIEW

The solution to urban heat island effect can be found in the planting of deciduous trees in Dhaka.

There is a way to cool Dhaka down



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Rain Tree (*Samanea saman*) is also known as the Monkey Pod tree. This huge deciduous tree can grow as tall as 40 metres. Its expansive canopy provides enough shade, while its extensive roots assist in stabilising the soil.

Jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) is a big deciduous tree with a maximum height of 30 metres. It is indigenous to our country and widespread in rural and urban areas.

Mango (*Mangifera indica*) trees can grow 30 metres high and are deciduous. It was first spotted in Bangladesh and India, where it is now native. The tree matures rapidly, and its fruit is a significant source of nutrition for locals.

Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) tree is a vast deciduous tree that can grow as tall as 50 metres. It originated in Bangladesh and is still widely distributed in rural regions. This tree matures quickly and produces high-quality lumber.

As temperatures and air pollution continue to rise in Dhaka, it is imperative that deciduous trees be planted to maintain the appropriate levels of temperature and pollution. To encourage the planting of deciduous trees in Dhaka city, we need a number of initiatives, such as public awareness, urban planning, government support, private-public partnerships, tree nurseries, community involvement, and tree-planting campaigns.

Ultimately, the solution to urban heat island effect can be found in the planting of deciduous trees in Dhaka. Provide shade, increase humidity, and remove heat-trapping pollutants from the air - these are just a few ways deciduous trees contribute to making a city cooler. In addition to helping the environment and people's health, these trees provide a quieter neighbourhood and a better place for wildlife to call home. Involving the local community, informing the public about the benefits of these trees, and securing funding are all crucial to the success of a tree-planting campaign. Planting deciduous trees in Dhaka can be an effective and long-lasting answer to the problem of urban heat islands, if resources and support are provided adequately.

During the sweltering summer months, deciduous trees, which have big, flat leaves, give much-needed shade, which helps to lower the surrounding temperature. In addition, these trees produce water vapour via transpiration. This vapour rises into the atmosphere, causing the air to chill.

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has been seeing worsening environmental issues such as haze, water scarcity, and the urban heat island effect. The last phenomenon occurs when a city's temperature exceeds that in the surrounding countryside. The rising temperature is negatively affecting Dhaka's energy efficiency and the well-being of its citizens.

One way to curb urban heat is to plant deciduous trees - trees that shed their leaves with season change - in urban settings in increasing numbers. These trees are great for cities since they block sunlight during the summer, lessening the impact of the heat island effect, and let in light during the winter, saving money on heating costs.

Typically found in temperate and subtropical locations, deciduous trees produce leaves throughout the spring and summer, then shed them in the autumn and winter. Numerous ecosystems require deciduous trees because they provide shelter and food for animals, improve air and water quality, and help regulate the local climate and weather.

Deciduous trees play an essential role in urban settings since they offer many advantages to both the environment and the inhabitants. One of the key benefits for cities like Dhaka is their capacity to regulate temperature. During the sweltering summer months, deciduous trees, which have big, flat leaves, give much-needed shade, which helps to lower the surrounding temperature. In addition, these trees produce water vapour via transpiration. This vapour rises into the atmosphere, causing the air to chill. This can assist in reducing the area's temperature and make it a more comfortable place for people.

The potential of deciduous trees improving air quality is another benefit for Dhaka's environment. Trees are natural air purifiers and aid in the removal of airborne toxins. This can lower the chances

of respiratory and other health issues in metropolitan settings. In addition, deciduous trees mitigate noise pollution by forming a barrier between busy streets and residential neighbourhoods.

Another advantage is the capacity of deciduous trees in Dhaka city, especially in residential areas like Dhanmondi, to offer a habitat for wildlife. Numerous birds, insects, and other animal species depend on trees for survival. In addition to providing essential homes for these species, deciduous trees can also increase biodiversity in the capital city. This can improve the ecosystem's general health and assist in maintaining a healthy species balance in the area.

There are a number of deciduous trees native to or often found in Bangladesh that can be utilised to assist in lowering the temperature in Dhaka. For example:

Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) is a tree native to Bangladesh that is well-known for its therapeutic benefits. It is a fast-growing tree with a maximum height of 30 metres. It is drought-resistant and able to flourish in poor soil conditions.

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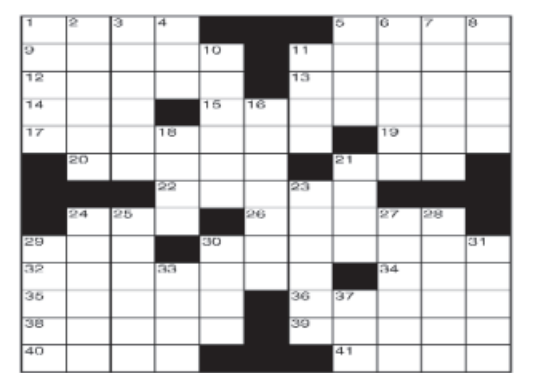
ACROSS

- 1 Glasgow native
- 5 Racket
- 9 Sulky puller
- 11 List of candidates
- 12 Papas of "Z"
- 13 Stately home
- 14 Building wing
- 15 Blackout crime
- 17 On the horizon
- 19 Maiden name label
- 20 Burner setting
- 21 Set a course
- 22 Natural color
- 24 Coral island
- 26 Is nomadic
- 29 Force member
- 30 Film dubbing

DOWN

- 1 Pitch
- 2 Music's Santana
- 3 Spotted cat
- 4 Decimal base
- 5 Blinds piece
- 6 Eye-tooth
- 7 Made amends

- 8 On-ramp sign
- 10 Experience anew
- 11 Urban pollution
- 16 Goller's cleek
- 18 Techno music star
- 21 Spring
- 23 One followed by 100 zeros
- 24 "Relax!"
- 25 Artemis's twin
- 27 La Scala city
- 28 Slept soundly?
- 29 Thunder sounds
- 30 Singer Jenny
- 31 Urges on
- 33 Retain
- 37 Femur's upper end



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