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Contribution of National and International NGOs for Sustainable Rural Development of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs have become an extensively discussed theme in the third world countries as well vastly in social business world. Bangladesh is no exception. The NGOs have appeared as the savior of countless number of people without food, cloth, education and basic health facilities. Bangladesh is one of the top thirteen underprivileged countries. With the record of being the most densely populated country on earth and feeble manpower competency, Bangladesh is facing massive challenge to meet up the demand of her ever-increasing population. Hence NGOs in Bangladesh can continue playing the role of catalyst in the attainment of sustainable economic growth and development provided, an endurable, warm and dependable relationship is there between the Government and NGOs where both are working for the benefit of the people with numerable activities. Their main tasks are to organize these people, create awareness in them and make them development oriented. These organizations are working based on the assessed need and demand of the grass root level farmers and women. By involving the beneficiaries directly, they are working within the context of overall national planning for development.

Keywords: *Poverty, Rural Areas, Activities, Development, NGOs & Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Rural development is an old theme, although the concept has experienced continuous evolution in contents and concerns for organizing development in the rural areas. The primacy of rural development in less developed countries emerges due to the overwhelming significance of rural dimensions in their economies. Rural development, like economic development, reflects concern for reduction in poverty, inequality and exploitation. In most countries, this may also be taken as a concern for 'urban bias' in development since most of the socio-economic indicators such as income, nutrition, life expectancy, physical infrastructure, literacy, provision of social services in the rural areas compare unfavorably with those in the urban areas.

Rural development implies desired positive change in the rural areas both in qualitative and quantitative sense. The reduction of hunger, poverty, unemployment and inequality constitutes rural development, which improves the quality of life and level of living of the rural masses.

In general, rural development is conceived as a strategy designed to improve the socio-economic life of the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest in the rural areas e.g. small farmers, tenants, landless and other disadvantaged groups. Since the prime objective of rural development is to reduce poverty, the rural development programmes must be designed to increase production, raise productivity, promote human resource development and expand employment opportunities. Moreover, the development process must not sacrifice the environmental basis of sustainability. In order to emphasise the mutually reinforcing and multi-faceted nature of rural development activities and the belief that rural development planning with a single focus is unlikely to be truly developmental, the phrase 'integrated rural development' is commonly used to indicate a multipurpose thrust of rural development.

Rural development recognizes, however, that improved food supplies and nutrition, together with basic services such as health and education, can not only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and their ability to contribute to the national economy. It is concerned with the modernisation and magnetization of rural society and with its transition from traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. The objectives of rural development, thus, extend beyond any particular sector. They encompass improved productivity, increased employment and thus higher incomes for target groups, as well as minimum acceptable levels of food, shelter, education and health.

While agricultural development, welfare orientation and poverty alleviation are certainly important elements of the rural development processes; rural development has a much wider connotation. It includes values like participation, along with the socio-political and sustainable development of the rural society. Rural development has always been a constant concern of governments, politicians, planners and social scientists since the beginning of the present century. During the last decades of the 19th the colonial administrators attributed the term 'rural development' to anything they had to do in the rural areas including fighting famines, introducing land tenure, tenancy reforms, curing present indebtedness and remedying the dangers of rural disaffection. A comprehensive philosophy or ideology of rural reconstruction was gradually evolved and propagated in the turbulent 3rd and 4th decades of this century, in order to respond to the new challenges, - political, economic and moral, which emerged and crystallized in the process of decay of the British Raj.⁸ In the last phase of the colonial empire there were two parallel perceptions of rural problem and rural development. These are the departmental perception and philosophical perception. The departments mostly confined their purviews in the field like local governments, co-operatives, education, health, agriculture, irrigation, etc. On the contrary though the philosophical view was broad and obscure it left amazingly influential conceptual legacies in the form of stereotypes: (a) the stereotype of the peasants as childish, ignorant and docile; (b) the stereotypes of the officers as true guides and philosophers and friends of the peasants; and (c) the stereotype of the rural gentry as the government's loyal assistants and the peasant's natural leaders. The colonial legacies in terms of principles and methods of rural reconstruction continued to remain and adopted by successor governments without any tangible changes in the strategy. In the process the task of rural development continued to remain an unfinished agenda where old problems turned into more complicated and formidable.

Bangladesh rural development is synonymous with development itself, as 85 per cent of the people live in the village and all the major resources are based in the rural locations.

"Bangladesh will live only if 68000 villages live"¹⁰ this one simple statement has now become almost a proverb, correctly epitomizes the great significance of rural development in Bangladesh and the priority attached to it by the successive governments. The constitution of the country which is an embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the Bangladesh revolution guarantees "effective measures to bring about radical transformation in the rural areas" and the "narrowing of economic disparity between the rural and urban areas"

Sponsored by the United States in the 1950s the present Bangladesh witnessed two great rural programmes, one is community development and the other is agricultural extension. The concept of community development was the brainchild of American sociologists while the agricultural extension was an already tested concept of the American Land Grant College. Community development included the improvement of everything: social harmony, economic production, education, health and recreation in the rural areas. The American model of agricultural extension also appeared as a viable media of rural transformation in the early fifties.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The basic objectives of the study are as follows:-

1. Whether the Grameen Bank and BRAC have been able to effectively reduce incidence of poverty and slowed down population growth in the rural areas.
2. Whether the poverty alleviation programmes being pursued by the Grameen Bank and BRAC are associated with strengthening ecological foundation in the rural society.
3. Whether the Grameen Bank and BRAC are playing a role in capacity building of the poor to generate biomass for household's energy needs.
4. Whether they have been able to reduce pressure on the exploitation of natural resources by poor to the detriment of environment.
5. Whether they mobilize and involve rural women and poor in homestead plantations and other afforestation programmes.
6. Whether they are really making tangible dents towards development of biological resources and capacity building at grassroots level in ecologically fragile areas.
7. To see whether the Grameen Bank and the BRAC have an edge in augmenting and stop shrinking of biological resources in the run-down rural ecosystem .
8. Have the Grameen Bank and the BRAC been able to stop the poor in using 'scrap biomass' for cooking and have they been able to involve the women and poor in planting tree for energy needs.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been based on two types of data: primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through field study, personal interview and questionnaire schedule. A preliminary reconnaissance survey was made to select households in the targeted villages in two socio-ecological conditions. The major focus of the study is landless men and women who are actively involved in the NGO programmes our sets of questionnaires were prepared to obtain information on the impact of both the Grameen Bank and BRAC. The title of the questionnaires are: different programmes being pursued by the NGOs under surly on the (i) slowing down of population growth (ii) poverty alleviation through generation of employment opportunities based on natural resources development (iii) Human Resources Development (iv) Biological Resource Development and (v) Rural energy development. The questionnaires were subjected to reliability and validity tests on 20 subjects. Upon validity test among the subjects it was found that there was no significant discrepancy among the

subjects while replying to the same questions in the second phase meaning the final phase of interview. To gather information on the socio-economic conditions of the households a separate household survey sheet was prepared and information gathered in this regard through visits of the households. The information on the agro-ecological conditions of the saline affected areas and flood plain areas under the study were obtained through Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methods adopted and followed by the Centre for Integrated Rural Development in Asia and Pacific (CIRDAP) in one of its recent study.²¹⁸ A one-shot survey was made to obtain the information on socio-economic background of the Ioanee households, credit history, their income expenditure pattern, length of membership with the Grameen Bank and the BRAC.

The information provided by loanees were again subjected to recheck in a random manner after a gap of two weeks in order to see if the respondents gave their information in a proper way or not. However, there was built-in checking mechanism within the questionnaires and whenever a discrepancy was noticed; the respondent concerned was consulted again. The detailed impact evaluations were carried out with formal questionnaire surveys on the households. The women loanees were separately asked questions to evaluate impact study. The measurement of NGO impacts was made largely by the control area approach. This involved comparisons of observations in the impacted villages of the NGOs with those from the control village, which has similar agro-ecological condition vis-a-vis the NGO villages before the NGO intervention took place. In principle, the control village would be subject to any general trends in operation since NGO intervention thereby making any differences between NGO villages and control villages attributable to the net impact of the NGO. In order to achieve such comparability, the control village is selected with great care with emphasis on similarity of the NGO villages in terms of pre-NGO intervention.

For evaluation a control village is selected so as to capture all possible changes due to NGO interventions. This village is selected in such a way that it is adjacent to the NGO villages, but is not affected in any way either by the Grameen Bank and BRAC intervention or any other NGOs.

The secondary data relating to the Grameen Bank and the BRAC are obtained from the field offices and the headquarters. Some data of secondary nature are obtained from the documents of Bangladesh government and UN agencies based in Dhaka. Data collection for this study involved a combination of methods. Major part of data was collected through questionnaire-based survey among the households under the Grameen Bank and the BRAC. Specifically designed questionnaires were administered for collection of information from women and male members. Actual sample size was determined on the basis of initial field visits to the areas under study to collect more accurate and complete picture on relevant parameters. Direct questions were also asked about the impact of the two NGOs under study on the promotion of man-made natural resources like biomass, different types of animal and plant husbandry and so on. Information on the households was obtained by interviewing the head of the household. Selection of villages for the study In the village level survey two villages each under the Grameen Bank and BRAC in flood plain and saline ecological zone respectively were randomly chosen keeping in view the similar physiographic feature. And one village from each of the ecological regions outside the domain of NGO operations was chosen as control village for the convenience of comparison of the impact of the NGOs in the study areas. While selecting the control village it was made sure that the village is not adjacent to the ones under the NGO domain because at the end of the day it may not give a

real picture if in case the households are influenced by NGO programmes for their proximity to a village which is included by either of the NGOs under study.

Selection of households

For conducting household level surveys a total of 300 households altogether were selected randomly, 150 from five villages under Mohanpur Thana of the Rajshahi District and similar numbers from the Debhata Thana of the Satkhira District. The break-up of the village wise households is given as under:

Name of the Thana	Name of the NGO	Name of the Village	No. of households surveyed
Mohanpur	Grameen Bank	Baksail	30
		Gopali	30
	BRAC	Bishuhara	30
		Saipara	30
	Control	Saympur	30
Debhata	Grameen Bank	Ragunathpur	30
		Kulia	30
	BRAC	Tiket	30
		Subornabad	30
	Control	Ramnagar	30

The household survey of the villages in two ecological zones under two Thanas is conducted in two phases, one during the period from November to February in 1997 and the other one during January to March 1998. Keeping in view the background of the subjects the Bengali version of the questionnaires were distributed among them in pre-arranged group meetings of the members of the Grameen Bank and the BRAC on various occasions during the study period. In case the subjects were not available in the group meetings personal approach was made to get the questionnaire filled-in on the stipulated time. While the data collection was made adequate precautions were taken so that subjects do not repeat or mistake of the questions asked for. After obtaining the filled-in questionnaires the data were analyzed on the basis of descriptive statistics such as percentage, histogram, bars, pie chart and graphs.

NGOS IN BANGLADESH RURAL DEVELOPMENT

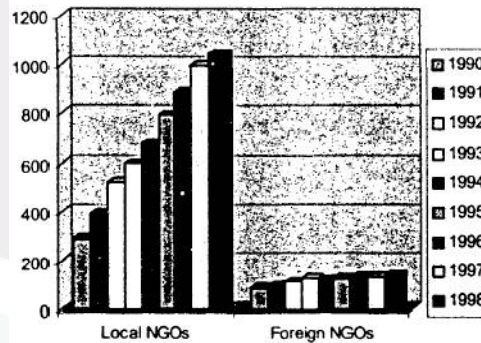
Bangladesh, situated in South Asia, is one of the densely populated countries in the region with a population size of over a fourteen million in a land area of one lakh fourteen thousand square miles, is practically considered to be a hub of voluntary organizations. Possibly the country abodes a massive concentration of non-government organizations the world ever witnessed. Like many developing countries, voluntary efforts at the non-governmental level intended to improve the socio-economic conditions of the under-privileged and disadvantaged sections of the population is not new in Bangladesh. Many individuals and organizations have been utilizing their time, energy and resources in organizing action-oriented participatory programmes to ameliorate the standard of living of the majority of people, particularly those living in the rural areas. These programmes have had significant influence on a variety of people encompassing diverse areas, like health, education, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, small industries and rural entrepreneurship. The phenomenal growth of voluntary organizations, also known as non-government organizations or NGOs, in Bangladesh can be traced back to the relief operations in the aftermath of the devastating cyclone of the late-1970 and the war of independence in 1971. Subsequently, NGO operations were spread out in the worst poverty hit areas of rural Bangladesh. The problem of bare minimum survival of the poor and landless people was extremely acute particularly in

the northern region of the country, which houses pockets of perennial poverty. With the passage of time the NGO activities continue to unfold and shot into prominence in the rural development scenario. The impact of the NGOs has been so visible and effective that at times it is called as "poor men God". The reasons being cited that the trust and goodwill they have earned because of their commitment and devotions for their efforts in salvaging out the poor people from the morass of poverty, illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition and thereby ameliorating the life style of the poor people.

Number of NGOs and Scale of their Activities in Rural Development

According to one estimate the number of registered NGOs with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Women Affairs⁸ is around 20,200. Most of them are small local organizations depending on scant resources. However, among them there is an elite group, which receives considerable funding from foreign sources. Given the massive inflow foreign funds to the NGOs for poverty alleviation the government set up the NGO Affairs Bureau in early 80's during which a military dictator was at the helm of affairs of the country. The Bureau started registering foreign-funded NGOs in 1990. As of November 1997 it had registered 1185 such NGOs, most of them are local. This number is rising (Fig: 4.1). The NGO Bureau also tracks information on foreign-funded NGO projects (Fig: 4.2), including 124 foreign NGOs. Most of these NGOs are also registered with the ADAB, a coalition of NGOs.

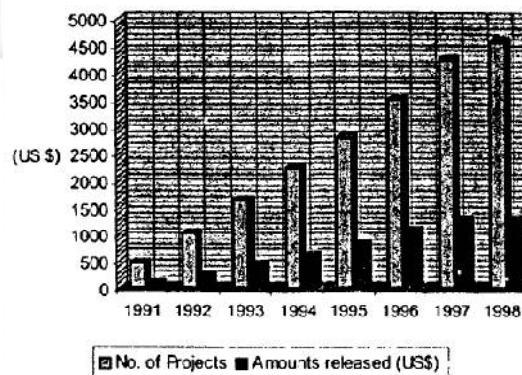
Figure 1: Number of Foreign-funded Local and Foreign NGOs



Source: NGO Affairs Bureau, Dhaka

ADAB members may be distinguished from the local level social groups or clubs whose activities are comparatively restricted geographically and who lack the developmental perspective of the effective NGOs.

Figure 2: Foreign-funded NGO projects and amount released to NGOs



Source: NGO Affairs Bureau, Dhaka

The ADAB has classified the NGOs into three categories - international, national and local NGOs. Local NGOs differ from the national NGOs on various counts. They tend to be restricted to one or two areas of a Thana. Their budget is relatively small, the scope of their programmes is limited and their organizational capabilities are grossly inadequate. These NGOs usually act as local representatives of international and national NGOs. Quite a number of national and international NGOs finance the programme budgets of these local NGOs, while in some cases the more privileged members of the NGO community periodically monitor the development activities of these local NGOs and provide necessary guidance and institutional support services for the implementation of their programmes. According to ADAB sources the developmental activities of NGOs have been geographically extended to 335 Thanas, implying that about 73 per cent of the Thanas have been brought under NGO domain. However, such a macro-level indicator fails to capture the intrinsic worth of the expansion of NGO activities. The extent to which a Thana is brought under the NGO programmes would depend, in the first place, on the number of direct beneficiaries covered by these programmes. It is expected that the larger the number of NGOs operating in an area, the greater would be the coverage of NGO programmes in terms of reaching the target groups.

Taking into account that there are 68000 villages and 460 Thanas in Bangladesh, it appears that even if 32 villages per Thana are considered as a viable indicator of NGO programme coverage although this would not seem to be highly significant. However, in cases of selective interventionist programmes sustained over a decade or so, the number of villages covered in a Thana may increase considerably. A unique example cited here will depict that some NGOs opt for confining their activities in and around capital Dhaka City. The BRAC under its Manikgonj Integrated project has brought into its fold 232 villages, accounting for 81 per cent of villages, within a span of thirteen years of its operations.¹⁰ A more accurate indicator of the extent of coverage of NGO programmes would be the number of target group members who are directly benefited under these programmes. According to one estimate major NGOs like BRAC, Grameen Bank, Proshika and ASA have so far included 7.5 million poor people under their microcredit programme of which the Grameen Bank alone provided microcredit to 2.37 million poor people. This puts the size of these organizations on par with the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), the government's microcredit agency. Review of NGO development programmes indicate that they are mostly concentrated in Dhaka, Savar, Manikgonj, and Tangail, while many Thanas more distant from the capital have few active NGO assisted programmes. NGO programmes reportedly affect some 15-20 per cent of landless households, although the number of NGO programmes is growing rapidly. For example, the Grameen Bank reported 5,56,682 members in May 1989, an increase of about 2,00,000 members since 1987.

Altogether less than 20 per cent of the poorest households are reached with any kind of services by NGOs, which tend to be concentrated in Dhaka, Savar, Manikgonj and Tangail. Many Thanas more distant from the capital Dhaka City have none at all. ¹² Such concentrations have led to competition among different NGOs. Although NGO leaders acknowledge competition for a clientele as a problem¹³, it continues to be a conflict in field operations, particularly between Grameen Bank and other NGOs.¹⁴ According to the estimates of a recent study, the number of NGOs including various local level voluntary organizations working in Bangladesh may be as high as 13000.¹⁵ The network of these NGOs is so pervasive that one estimate says that about 335 Thanas out of 468 has become under the NGO domain covering about 15.2 per cent of the total target - group rural households.

According to Karim16 NGOs operate in more than 50 per cent of the total villages of the country involving over 3.5 million families as beneficiaries of their work. An updated estimatt: by ADAB says that NGOs currently work in about 78 per cent of the villages in Bangladesh and about 24 million people benefit from their activities.

CONCLUSION

The poverty and the unemployment situation have prevailed in rural Bangladesh for decades. There has not been any major improvement of the degree and overall situation of this problem leading towards sustainable development. However, the involvement of NGOs like the GB & BRAC has made initiatives to improve the general situation at least to some extent. The rural Bangladesh scenario in terms of poverty and unemployment has been visibly influenced with the involvement of NGOs like GB & BRAC. One of the important findings of this study is the current trend of poverty and unemployment, education facility, health & others situation in rural Bangladesh. The actual barrier dynamics in rural Bangladesh have never been understood in the academic similar pattern in the case study villages.

Different types and views have influenced those kinds of barrier situation. The labor power has been mainly thought to be employed in the agricultural sector, while, the service sector comes to the second position. However, the recent trend showed that the majority of labours in the case study sites have been gradually attracting today labour. Other finding is the peoples' attitude towards the development and employment generating activities by this nongovernmental organization. The natural calamities along with other types of disasters have increased the poverty and unemployment rate and status to some extent. But, such development activities have less acceptability among the rural populations, because, the attitude and experiences have not been pleasant with this selected NGOs Grameen Bank & BRAC employees. This study has been designed with the basic objective for exploring the contributions those the non-governmental organizations have had in the rural settings of Bangladesh. These the causes of Development rurally through their Social Business steps like; loan, insurance, Housing loan for poor people & other activities. In addition this study has attempted to understand the degree and volume of ongoing poverty situation along with the unemployment status in Bangladesh.

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