

Abdur Rob Khan

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH: MAJOR ISSUES REVISITED

1. An Overview

While the focus of development efforts in recent years on rural development by national governments as well as by international agencies is certainly a positive indication, the unfortunate part of the trend however, is that rural development in the process has been turned into a fad and at the same time, reduced to the level of a tautology. In most cases, flow of assistance to the developing countries is tuned to the shifting focuses and nuances of rural development thinking, and planners also respond to such changes to keep abreast of the latest development theories, a phenomenon described by some scholars as 'development fashions'.¹ Very often little distinction is made between national development strategy and rural development policy in political discussions, planning exercises and academic discourses. "A policy of rural development is a policy for national development", said President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.² Such a conception of rural development as a strategy for national development is necessary for countries having a sizable rural sector. But what happens in practice is that, such emphasis is turned into euphemism, the whole-and-component relationship becomes a mathematical identity

1. See Mahbubul Haq, *The Poverty Curtain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

2. Quoted in Wahidul Haque *et al*, "Towards a Theory of Rural Development", *Development Dialogue* (Upsala) Vol. 2, 1977, p. 14.

and in the process, a great disservice is done to rural development. Bulk of the Government's time and resources is apparently spent in the name of rural development but what turns out is neither rural nor development. New models are evolved, more resources are directed toward rural development by the allocative machinery but rural poverty, unemployment and social inequity accentuate all the same. Emphasis as such is not be a problem in the way of rural development. But emphasis becomes rhetorical and sometimes counter-productive unless backed by *will* and *real efforts*.

Starting at the global end, more than one-fifth of the humanity is still in abject poverty and three-fourths of them are living in rural areas, two-thirds of whom again are concentrated in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan.³ The picture becomes more stark when the global state of a few basic needs indicators is depicted in a row : 873m adults of the world cannot read and write, 500m are either unemployed or under-employed, 450 m people suffer from hunger and malnutrition and 2 bn people do not have access to safe drinking water.⁴ The rich-poor gap also has widened so much that the relative position of the poor has further deteriorated. One may however, argue that over these years, indicators like life expectancy, resistance to diseases, child mortality and general standard of living (in terms of varieties of food intake, quality and varieties of clothes and amenities) have recorded significant improvement. While this is generally and superficially true, it may be said that such improvements reflect more of the spin-off effects of global technological developments and accompanying consumerism rather than the result of conscious efforts toward removal of poverty, unemployment and inequity by individual nations.⁵ Moreover, never has been poverty so stark and grim in

3. World Bank, *World Development Report, 1982* (Washington: World Bank 1982).

4. See Ruth L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures, 1981* (Virginia: World Priorities Inc., 1982), p. 2.

5. For illustration on one of the poor countries like Bangladesh, see A. Farouk, *Changes in the Economy of Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1982), pp. 22-23. The study marks changes in the economy of Bangladesh over the period 1930-79.

relative terms and so voluminous in absolute terms as it is today. And bulk of this poverty is concentrated in rural areas where intervention by consumerism and scattered technology centralises riches and wealth and increases the magnitude and intensity of poverty.

Zeroing down to Bangladesh, the least developed of the four poverty concentrate countries of the region, we come across a 'test case of development'⁶ with a per capita GNP of U.S \$ 140 as of 1982 and an average annual growth rate of 0.3 percent over the period 1960-82.⁷ As of 1981, the population of the country stood at 90m and 85 percent of them lived in the rural areas.⁸ Rural development programmes started in this part of the Sub-continent in the early 1950s, nominal though at the beginning. An impressive number of development programmes and models have been undertaken in the intervening period in the name of rural development. Yet the grips of poverty has been tightened in many respects as may be seen from the following depiction:

20 percent of households in rural Bangladesh have neither homestead nor agricultural land and 10 percent have only homestead but no arable land. Another 20 percent have acreage far less than subsistence requirement, so that percentage of landless households stands at 50 percent of the total.⁹

The rate of increase of landless households over the past decade at 4-5 percent per annum was higher than the growth of population at 3 percent annually and is likely to increase further.¹⁰

6. See Just Faaland and J. R. Parkinson, *Bangladesh— A Test Case of Development* (Dhaka: Oxford University Press, 1978).
7. See World Bank, *World Development Report. 1984* (Washington: World Bank 1984).
8. Population of Bangladesh has been estimated at 96 m in 1984 and the figure is likely to be in the range 130-140 m by 2000 AD. See *the Bangladesh Observer*, 4 September 1984.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Steve Jones, "An Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes in Bangladesh", *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 6 (December) 1979, pp. 75-76.

The current unemployment and underemployment is estimated at between 30 and 40 percent and is growing rapidly.¹¹

There has been a decline of about 50 percent in the real value of agricultural wages between 1965 and 1975.¹²

As a consequence of these trends, the proportion of 'absolutely poor' households increased from 52 percent to 87 percent between 1963-64 and 1973-74 and the proportion of 'extremely poor' households jumped from 10 percent to 54 percent over the same period.¹³

Rate of literacy was 21 percent in 1981-82 as compared to 16 percent in the pre-independence year which indicates rather a humble improvement.¹⁴

Rice production which accounts for 80 percent of the cropped area was only 12.5m tons in 1979-80 as compared to 7.3m tons in 1949-50. On the other hand, rice equivalent of per capita income at current prices was 12 maunds¹⁵ in 1930, 10.6 maunds in 1950 and only 10.2 maunds in 1980.¹⁶

The question that needs to be posed here has perhaps been asked a hundred times: what is wrong with the rural development efforts of the past and the present? The trials and errors in rural development continues and the question still merits repetition. The conventional-wisdom answer of resource scarcity and administrative problems hide many things that very broadly may be traced to the socio-political spheres and hence, cannot be substituted for by increase in resources

-
11. UNDP/FAO, "Agricultural Employment," *UNDP/FAO Mission Working Paper, IX*, April 1977, Dhaka, (mimeo), cited in *Ibid*.
 12. A. R. Khan, "Poverty and Inequality in Bangladesh", *Poverty and Landlessness in Rural Asia*, ILO, Geneva, cited in *Ibid*,
 13. A. R. Khan defines "absolute poverty" as daily per capita calorie intake of 1720-1935 and "extreme poverty" as below 1720, see *Ibid*.
 14. The final counts of the 1981 Census published only recently, however, records a decline in literacy. See *the Bangladesh Observer, op. cit.*
 15. One maund is roughly equivalent to 82 lbs.
 16. See Farouk, *op. cit.*, po 110.

alone. For initiating a meaningful rural *development process*, the non-resource questions assumes critical importance. The present paper has been developed along this line of argument.

Since 1953 a number of rural development programmes as well as institutional changes for rural development have been undertaken and most of them reflect the prevailing development thinking. While adjustment, modifications and reforms are needed in these programmes as they have been basically experimental in nature, the question of continuity and consolidation of experiences become all the more prominent in view of overall resource scarcity. To quote a former Minister of Finance :

...we went on experimenting with new ideas. Indeed it seemed that we were too free with experiments and new models. It is true that a tested technology in rural development does not exist as it does for, say, power generation or textile manufacturing. But innovations within a given framework surely are more likely to succeed than frequent changes in the framework itself.¹⁷

Also important is the question of how substantially different are the various programmes and what the consequences of these frequent changes are. This whole range of questions relating to experiments without continuity constitute the first issue to be reviewed in this paper.

Most discussions on rural development are carried out in a political vacuum and it is lavishly assumed that there is no dearth of 'political will' under a benign government committed to rural development. Discussion and policy exercises are confined to finance, manpower, technology, knowledge and of course, administrative streamlining. While these are certainly important building blocks of rural development, the socio-political dimension is often lost sight

17. A. M. A. Muhit in foreword to Bangladesh Planning Commission, *Strategy for Rural Development Projects* (Dhaka: Rural Development and Institutions Division, Planning Commission, Government of Bangladesh, January, 1984) p.l.

of. But because of the sheer size of the rural sector and its importance in the national economy as well as in aid receipt, rural development may be said to pertain to distribution of scarce resources and hence the central issue of power struggle among pressure groups.¹⁸ The second issue therefore, to be dealt with in this article is : how socio-political issues affect the rural development process.

Another most distinctive thing about rural development in Bangladesh and for that matter, in any developing country with a sizable rural sector, is that the sector itself is spatially, socially and perceptually, if not conceptually, removed from the rest of the nation, from the doorstep of the urban based policy makers, planners, and bureaucrats. The sector is largely isolated (penetration of urban consumerism and urban-based-market-orientation of rural commodities not to be confused with the issue of organic linkage of the rural sector with the mainstream national life) and non-monetised. One has to 'know' about the rural problems and 'go' there physically to implement the programmes the planning for which has earlier been carried out at headquarters in urban centres. From this follow three major issues that characterise rural development in Bangladesh : urban bias, knowledge and perception gaps about rural problems, and poor participation in development programmes. These issues in that order constitute the third, fourth and fifth problems to be taken up in this paper.

The issues are nothing new, nor is there any need of prescribing new models, the paper argues. Models, if any, would grow or emerge from within as rural development is pursued. A second point about the issues is that they are so much inter-linked conceptually that analytical separation, as has however been done, may result in some overlapping. Yet as issues of policy action they merit separate treatment.

18. See Geof Wood, "Rural Development in Bangladesh: Whose Framework?" *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 8, (April) 1980., p. 30.

2. Experiments with Rural Development Programmes and Models

Experiments with rural development programmes and models in Bangladesh, as in most other developing countries, have been influenced by two factors—evolution in development thoughts that found entrance in the national economy through aid-dependency and political changes including changes of ruling regimes. As national governments are not isolated entities in the prevailing international system, it is not unexpected that current pet concepts, specially those of the aid agencies, would be reflected in national development planning. Such adoption, however, without indigenisation and then discarding it in favour of another without consolidation of experiences with respect to earlier ones, leave the nation concerned not only aid-dependent but also model-dependent. A major predicament to the process of indigenisation is the domestic political instability and changes of ruling regimes along extra-constitutional lines. The successive ruling regimes in their search for legitimacy and craving for populism have the tendency of 'initiating' new programmes, introducing new models or instituting reforms. In some cases the content of programmes and reforms are almost the same so that beginning them anew entails not only wastage of scarce resources but also dismantling of organizational and legal infrastructure created earlier. Where programme contents are more or less the same it is through changes in organizational and legal infrastructure that the package is made *new*. Even when the initiative touches a different area (sector, sub-sector or sub-sub sector) strategic shift on the new area automatically relegates the earlier programmes to the background.

The continuity of programmes needed for the growth of a viable rural development mechanism is at stake in either case. In the absence of continuity, people begin to lose confidence in the successive wave of new programmes and models. This eventually becomes a negative point for people's participation in development programmes, an issue to be taken up later in this paper. With this introductory, a brief chronological review of the rural development experiments in this

part of the Sub-continent is made in the perspective of prevailing rural development thinking at global level.

2.1. *Community Development Programmes* : The Community Development Programmes of the 1950s can be regarded as the beginning of rural development in the developing countries in a comprehensive sense. The programmes emphasised optimal utilization of human resources. The original aim of community development was to change the life pattern of the rural population, both as individuals and as communities.¹⁹ The programmes included the expansion of school education, better water supplies, development of cooperatives and improvement of health conditions.

This strategy, however, achieved limited success in relatively small projects. Projects involving larger areas did not bring the desired results. Scholars have identified four main reasons²⁰ for this:

- the objective of raising agricultural production was not pursued intensively enough;
- over-hasty execution and expansion took place at the expense of providing a sound conceptual basis, taking organizational preparations and realising efficiency.
- there was a lack of integration of the existing research and advisory services; and
- implementation of programme was pursued through a complex administrative structure not comprehensible to the rural people.

Rainer Wulf argues, however, that such criticisms do not apply to the objectives or content of the programmes but to the methods used to put them into practice.²¹ Moreover, he argues, “they were far ahead of their time and can provide a useful starting point for future development success within the framework of present-day ‘integrated rural development’, assuming that a comprehensive analysis

19. See Rainer Wulf, “On the Concept of ‘Integrated’ Rural Development”, *Economics* (Tubingen, FRG), Vol 17, 197, p. 65.

20. Mellor as quoted in *Ibid*, pp, 65-66.

21. *Ibid*, p, 66.

of the programmes is carried out."²² An additional observation on the practice of the programmes may be made in terms of the prevailing development theory. In the 1950s and early 1960s growth-based development theory of Arthur Lewis became the model for most of the newly emergent developing countries. The urban industrial sector was given top priority in the expectation that benefits of growth achieved here would eventually 'trickle down' to other sectors including rural areas. As such rural development efforts were of peripheral importance in relation to the core of the economy.

Coming to Bangladesh context, the first ever concrete step toward rural development here (the then East Pakistan) was the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) programme initiated in 1953. The programme envisaged village as the focal point of development and its principal objective was to solve the problems of the rural areas by helping the villagers to help themselves.²³ The V-AID programmes intended to coordinate the resources of the government and the people with a view to creating physical infrastructure (road, irrigation and land reclamation), social infrastructure (health, education, cooperatives and youth development, recreation), raising output in agriculture and non-farm sectors like cottage industries. It used the principle of community organization and development based on previous experiences.²⁴

The programme was to be implemented in selected areas consisting of 100-200 villages, known as 'development area'. A team of extension agents consisting of Area Advisory Committee, Village Councils, Development Officer, Supervisor and Village Workers was created for the purpose. This team led by Development Officer would work out priorities and targets of the rural plan with the help of the Advisory Committee. One training institute was established in 1959 at Comilla.

22. *Ibid*, p. 66,

23. See M. Mohiuddin Abdullah, *Rural Development in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Jahan publications, 1979), p. 30,

24. *Ibid*, p. 31.

However, the programme by and large failed to effect people's participation in plan formulation and implementation on the one hand and any permanent impact on the rural economy on the other. Dependence of V-AID areas on the government for men and material resources was so much that the villagers could never learn to take decision, mobilize internal resources to finance development projects.²⁵ Besides the working relationship between the Development Officer and the local body of the Union Board was not clearly defined. Moreover the programme was not given a fair trial because of the prevailing political instability of the 1950s. At last in 1961, the military government of the then Pakistan abolished the programme.

2.2. *Change-over to Agricultural Development*: The failure of the rather broad-based community development programmes led the planners to focus development strategies to solely on economic aspects in the 1960s.²⁶ The salients of these strategies were the elimination of obstacles in the way of raising production and productivity and improvement of the marketing systems. And the easiest way of eliminating obstacles to increased productivity was introduction of modern technology in agriculture, even if that militated against employment and social justice.²⁷ These programmes were encapsulated as 'Green Revolution' that showed remarkable success in the then West Pakistan (now Pakistan), Indian state of Punjab and partly in the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Viewed in the perspective of overall development thinking, it may be said that this was sort of an extension of the growth-based development strategy in agriculture. In comparison with the earlier community development approach, however, 'Green Revolution' programme may be said to have marked a significant departure. Agricultural development was divorced from development in other sectors and in the process, it became a sectoral approach rather than comprehensive area development approach. In particular, non-farm economic sector and social development areas

25. *Ibid*,

26. Wulf, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

27. *Ibid*,

were largely neglected. In any case, where applied in great rigour, agricultural productivity rose but at the cost of great income disparity resulting in social and political unrests in those countries.

In Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), this phase of rural development efforts had three dimensions: the central measure in agricultural sector, that is 'Green Revolution', corrective relief-cum-infrastructure building programme, that is Rural Works Programme (RWP) and institutional 'innovation,' that is Basic Democracy,²⁸ an experimental system of local government controlled by the Centre.

The 'Green Revolution' aimed at increased agricultural productivity through modern technology (HYV seed, irrigation and fertilizer) and improved farm practices. It was around this time that the Water Development Board (then Water and Power Development Authority) came into being. The Board undertook a number of ambitious flood control, drainage improvement and irrigation projects. The impact was felt on agriculture, but more favourably

'Green Revolution' was pursued without bringing any change in the prevailing mode of production. Such technological approach to agriculture simply exacerbate the existing inequality because the inputs and technology distribution favoured the landed peasantry.

on wheat in (the then West) Pakistan than on rice in Bangladesh. What, however, is of relevance to us was that the 'Green Revolution' was pursued in the context of over-all urban-biased industrial development strategy so that there was a siphoning of resources from rural to the urban areas through appreciated Rupees (Pakistani currency) and a domestic price structure unfavourable to agriculture and favourable to the manufacturing sector. Secondly, 'Green Revolution' was

28. Later on the Comilla model of Integrated Rural Development Programme became institutional framework of the 'Green Revolution' while the Basic Democracy system of local bodies like the Union Council, Thana Council became more pre-occupied with the Rural Works Programme

pursued without bringing any change in the prevailing mode of production. Such technological approach to agriculture simply exacerbated the existing inequality because the inputs and technology distribution favoured the landed peasantry.

The Rural Works Programme or Test Relief projects aimed at the dual purposes of employment and building rural infrastructure like construction of roads, excavation of irrigation and drainage channels etc. The local bodies like the Union Council, Thana Council were entrusted with the task of implementing those projects. While a significant volume of seasonal employment was generated by these programmes, and infrastructure building works were promoted, the fact remains that these programmes were basically project-oriented, occasional in character and therefore, could not make significant contribution to the cause of sustained rural development, which includes institution building and bringing about changes in the production relations. Besides, considerable amount of leakage occurred as a result of misappropriation and inefficient use of the resources by these local bodies dominated by local power structure. In addition, the programmes, like the Green Revolution were based purely on external resources and there was little mobilisation of local resources or participation of the general people in control and decision making.

We now come to the institutional measures of the period, that is Basic Democracy. It was a five-tier system of rather indirect democracy in the sense that representatives elected by direct voting of the people at the Union level constituted electoral college for electing office bearers in the higher bodies upto the Centre in the hierarchy. Although the lower local bodies were expected to identify local problems and formulate projects with wider participation, these bodies became fully dependent on the Centre for funds and necessary assistance. And the allocated resources significantly eroded because of leakages. In this connection the intent and purposes of Basic Democracy has to be understood in a wider national perspective. The indirect democracy was evolved in a bid to give a populist image to the then military dictatorship. As such the spoils and 'extras'

accruing from the various projects were considered to be pay-offs of the legitimisation function of these electorates. Local people were far removed from this system as well as the development projects in point of participation. As we have seen, the projects ensured participation of only few elites in the project committees or advisory bodies. If we talk of political participation of the people, that was also limited to taking part in primary elections. The elected representatives had virtually little accountability to the people who elected them.

2.3. *Transition to rural development*: Transition to a broader concept of rural development from agricultural development was induced by the realisation that technical progress is not identical to over-all progress and development cannot be attained by neglecting the social aspects in a situation where unemployment and underemployment rose along with persistent population rise. The current development thinking in the mid- and late sixties therefore emphasised on the creation of more employment and attaining growth with equity.²⁹

This transitional phase of development thinking corresponded to the experimental Comilla type of cooperatives in Bangladesh initiated by Mr. Akhtar Hamid Khan in 1959. The objective of this approach was to develop local interest and leadership for an internally motivated effort to solve the agrarian problems through specific type of rural institutions. The experiment under the leadership of the East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) Academy for Rural Development introduced a two-tier cooperative system: *Krishi Samabaya Samity* (KSS or Agricultural Cooperative Association) at the primary level and Thana Central Cooperative Association (TCCA) at the *thana* level as a federation of the primary societies. It also envisaged to bring the socio-economic groups like the landless and the women, within

29. See Paul Streeten, "From Growth to Basic Needs", *Finance and Development*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September), 1979. Also see Abdur Rob Khan, "Development Strategy of Bangladesh: Basic Needs Approach", *BISS Journal*, (Dhaka) Vol. 2, No. 1, 1981, pp 1-30.

the fold of similar cooperatives to generate employment and income outside agriculture. More discussion on this approach follows in the succeeding paragraphs. But suffice it to say at this stage that the approach provided an explicit institutional coverage to 'Green Revolution' initiated earlier. Also it marked an important departure from the traditional cooperative system introduced as early as 1904. In the case of Comilla approach *thana* (now *Upa Zilla* or Subdistrict) was considered to play a pivotal role and the village level primary cooperatives were rather sponsored and dependent organization. In the traditional cooperatives, however, the village level or union level cooperatives were more or less self-sufficient. Viewed in this sense, it may be said that the initiative of cooperative in the Comilla approach was shifted upto the *thana* from the village level where it was earlier under the traditional cooperative system.

2.4. 'Unified Approach'—*Integrated Rural Development Programmes*: The UN General Assembly resolution No. 2681 passed on 11 December 1970 provided wide publicity to the decisive re-orientation of the development strategy of integrated rural development as indicated earlier. The new approach termed 'unified' integrated approach begins with an analysis of the failures of the UN first Decade of Development and concludes from this that development must be conceived of not only as an economic process, but as one that affects the whole society.³⁰

As the model theoretically made a very convincing argument, it was favoured by the IBRD and other aid agencies and it was introduced in a number of countries. Empirically however, the integrative approach did hardly encompass sectors and social groups other than agriculture because such integration involved resolution of a set of complex questions. Even interdisciplinary teams have not been able to solve them. More importantly, it does not hold any operational proposal as to how to effectively mobilise the rural people and resources for local development.³¹ As a next best alternative, it ends

30. See Wulf, *op. cit.* p. 69,

31. *Ibid.*

up with a bureaucratic approach with programmes reduced merely to distribution of modern inputs. More awkward is the question of effectively organizing the non-land based social groups (landless, women, artisans) around productive activities. That situation threatens to reduce rural development to production-oriented agricultural development only bereft of distributive justice.

Coming to the Bangladesh context, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was initiated to duplicate the Comilla approach of the BARD. It was taken up as a strategy of national development in the First Five Year Plan (1973-78). As mentioned earlier, the most important component of the IRDP is the two-tier cooperative structure—KSS and TCCA. The KSSs are normally organized for joint use of low lift pump, deep tubewells, shallow tubewells and it is through the KSS that the individual farmers received government credit, fertilizer, pesticides etc. So far as extension and training were concerned, the manager, chairman of the KSS and model farmer received regular weekly training at the Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC) which is not part of TCCA but has close and coordinating links with it. Similar cooperatives were organized for the landless and women mainly as mechanism for distributing credits in non-farm areas like pisciculture, poultry, livestock etc. In the case of agriculture proper, as a follow-up of the 'Green Revolution', stepped up distribution of subsidised inputs led to increased agricultural production.

This type of cooperative capitalism was adopted for rural development for three main reasons.³² First is the land ownership pattern of Bangladesh. Bulk of the land holdings in Bangladesh are small and two-tier cooperatives were found as an institutional mechanism for diffusing modern inputs, credit and knowledge to these small farmers.³³ The second reason was the national political support and international endorsement the Comilla approach obtained. And the third reason

32. See Steve Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

was that the HYV seed-fertilizer-irrigation technology was assumed to be scale-neutral so that equity could be ensured.

As initial euphoria about IRDP subsided, the question of replicability and equity came to the forefront. Between 1962-63 and 1977-78, about 250 thanas could be covered by IRDP. Its replicability faced the greatest hurdle in respect of land ownership which was however, assumed to be less inequitable while considering it as a national programme. Perhaps it was the favourable land ownership pattern of Comilla district where most of the experiments with IRDP was concentrated, that prompted the policy planners to assume away any regional diversity in point of land ownership. There is indeed great regional diversity in the pattern of land ownership, social structure, social composition, hydrology etc. And this, in turn, raises a question as to whether a patented model evolved in the 'laboratory' of one particular area under controlled situation and with so much of organizational and highly skilled manpower could be replicated in other parts of the country with such diversities. The second major criticism about IRDP is the scale-neutrality assumption and its consequence on socio-political and economic sphere. Contrary to the assumption, large farmers and those in local power structure began to dominate the cooperatives, in particular, the distribution and management of the scarce resources funnelled through government machinery. Most of the managers, model farmers had larger land holdings. Besides small and marginal farmers were pushed out of the credit and input distribution system because the rules and eligibility criteria were too high for them to reach. The cooperatives have become, in the words of the Planning Commission itself, 'closed clubs of *Kulaks*'.³⁴ The domination of large farmers is even more marked at the Thana Central Cooperative Association that allocates inputs and credits and provides the linkage between the primary societies and national funds. Various micro-level empirical studies in Bangladesh shows that the large farmers received bulk of the subsidised inputs and

34. *Ibid.*

services channelled through the cooperatives.³⁵ One can easily smell some systemic bias in favour of the landed peasantry in general and the large peasants in particular in the IRDP system of cooperatives.

Thus, while IRDP strategy has led to increased agricultural production, the programme has proved to be costly in terms of the social value of scarce factors of production like capital for subsidies, skilled administrative and other personnel. Besides, IRDP is not primarily oriented to poverty and basic needs as much as it is to production. The landless and women's cooperatives have virtually remained non-starter so far.

2.5. Poverty-oriented strategies of the World Bank and Bangladesh experiments with rural development: Although IRDP continued to draw Government's attention in terms of policy action till late 1970s, it was observed that development organizations and aid agencies like the World Bank began to cast doubt about its poverty-oriented effectivity much earlier. For example, in 1971, the World Bank expressed concern over the monopolisation of benefits of the Green Revolution by the wealthy farmers; in 1972 it expressed its clear bias for attaining equity; in 1973 it urged for paying more attention to small farmers and their productivity, in 1975 it visualised the process and need for bringing the poor in to the process of development efforts. In 1980, the World Bank President re-affirmed the need for removal of poverty:

To reverse the trend, governments must be prepared to make tough and politically sensitive decisions, and to reallocate scarce resources into less elaborate but more broadly-based delivery system that can get the services to the poor, and the poor to the services.³⁶

While these goals still figure prominently in the parlance of the World Bank and other development agencies, again there seems to have been policy reversal in favour of less subsidy and more privatisation

35. See M. Raihan Sharif, "The Village, Rural Poverty and Development Policy Issues: The Bangladesh Case" *The Journal of Social Studies*, No.16, (April) 1982, pp.33-34.

36. Quoted in *Ibid*, p.34.

of the distributive system, before the poverty-oriented concepts even could be operationalised.

For understanding the Bangladesh experiments with rural development in the post-1975 period, rural development programmes as such should not be confused with institutional changes related to rural development. Also distinction has to be made between *official* and *institutionalised* programme on the one hand and rather less institutionalised but *political* programmes on the other.

Let us concentrate on the official institutionalised policies first. Till the launching of the Second Five Year Plan (1980-85) the IRDP strategy continued to enjoy the status both of a programme as well as strategy for institution building. However, disenchantment with the IRDP led to the conception of what is known as the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme³⁷ within the plan framework. Giving the background to the new approach the Plan document reads:

It is widely admitted that government officials and agencies from very closely related fields in agriculture often work at cross-purposes at the rural level, thus wasting the meagre resources that can be channelled to the country-side ... the last few years, particularly the last 2-3 years, have been period of experimentation with several methods of rural development. Several aspects of local planning, specially village planning, with the participation of the villagers have been experimented at several places by independent groups. In the light of the new ferment in ideas the existing projects, programmes and policies associated with rural development were examined with a spirit of questioning and with an urge to do better and more these ferment in particularly rural development contributed to the evolution of the strategy of comprehensive rural development.³⁸

37. See the Bangladesh Planning Commission, *The Second Five Year Plan, 1980-85* (Draft), (Dhaka: Planning Commission, Government of Bangladesh 1980) VII-146.

38. *Ibid.* VII-2.

Basically the strategy is administrative in nature emphasising on *simultaneity and complementarities of programmes and delivery system*. Such simultaneity and complementarities are, however, used in the Plan document as useful analytical tool rather than as a principle of integration of different agencies and services as was the case with the IRDP. The Plan document points out :

The major requirement is that services be simultaneously available and it is often possible to ensure such simultaneity without administrative integration.³⁹

The programme components of the Comprehensive Rural Development Strategy are not that different from those of the IRDP. What however is different is the institutional aspects. It seems that the institutional burden of ensuring simultaneity through coordination would be shifted to one of the local government bodies, presumably, the newly constituted *Upa Zillas* (formerly *thana*).

While the current programme of decentralisation of administration of the government has to be viewed in this perspective, careful distinction has to be made among the constituent concepts of (a) *deconcentration* of resources and decision making from headquarters to branch offices, (b) *devolution* of authorities to autonomous bodies/local bodies or autonomous units of government and (c) *delegation* of authority to organization outside the regular bureaucratic structure such as public corporations, regional development bodies, credit organizations or NGOs.⁴⁰ Of these, deconcentration seems to be the common practice, although, delegation of authority can serve the spirit and purpose of decentralisation. The Plan, however, remains ambivalent on these specifics. This logically raises the question as to what would be the local level organizations as counterparts of KSS in the proposed framework? Will KSS play the same role as they played earlier? In that case there is the question of relationship between TCCA and *Upa Zilla* Council. Or will the Union Council or the traditional primary cooperatives under the *Samabaya* System

39. *Ibid.* VII-5.

40. See World Bank, *World Development Report 1983*, pp.120-122.

play the role of KSS? Unless these questions are resolved the new approach cannot make much headway.

Reverting to the programme content of the new approach it seems that there has not been significant orientation to removal of poverty or social inequality. The subsidiary programmes like the Food for Works Programmes (FWP) or Rural Works Programmes (RWP) however, generate significant volume of employment, particularly for the 'at risk' families.⁴¹

We now turn to the rather less institutionalised but political programmes of rural development. These programmes, normally brainchild of the political leadership, are characterized by high populist value. There are always conscious efforts to posit these programmes on a distinctive base in relation to the preceding regimes. This is not to say that these programmes as such do not have any developmental value. Some of them do contribute to infrastructure building, agricultural development and local level institution building. Also they carry behind them some commitment and high political motivation. Thus such programmes have greater likelihood of success in mobilisation of popular participation. However, what happens in practice is that such programmes are not always given operational shape and there is a tendency to go for hasty implementation without giving proper thoughts about technical, administrative and other aspects. Often the total administrative resources are mobilized to implement the projects. In the process, the projects do not become cost effective. And the unfortunate part of the story is that when the regime changes so do the respective programmes.

A third category of experiments in rural development is the work of the NGOs. Since independence, a host of local, national, foreign and international voluntary agencies have been engaged in different aspects of rural development in different parts of the country. By origin, they may be categorized as national, foreign and international.⁴²

41. Steve Jones, *op.cit.*

42. See Ahmadullah Mia and Abdur Rob Khan, *Participation of Non-Governmental Organization in Integrated Rural Development Programmes in Bangladesh* (Unpublished country report for Centre on Integrated Rural Development in Asia and Pacific, Comilla, 1981)

By level of operation, some are local, some national, while some are multinational. As there is hardly any sufficiently comprehensive inventory of the number, type, functional and geographical coverage of these organizations, we may make only a few preliminary observations. In the first place, most of these organisations have specific entry points like health, family planning, agriculture, literacy, even religion. Maybe resource-wise they cannot cover everything but conceptually they take an integrative approach of the problems of the rural people. Secondly, these organizations in their operation are less bureaucratic and more flexible and field-oriented. Their organizational infrastructures are mostly geared to the field programmes rather than headquarters management. Consequently, their access to the people and people's access to them is relatively easy. They can easily build rapport with the common and otherwise inaccessible people in remote areas. Thirdly and more importantly, bulk of the programmes are poverty and basic needs oriented. Most of the programmes have specific social class or group as their target population. Thus, the approach, orientations and method of work of NGOs in general are distinct from those of the conventional bureaucratic organizations. However, there are some limitations on the part of the organizations to make effective contribution to rural development. Firstly, most of the projects initiated by these organization are of pilot type based on the assumption that these are meant to make the people self-reliant in solving their own problems and once they achieve the objective, the agencies themselves would withdraw to another vulnerable area. But the reality had hardly been so. Quite often a patron-client relationship between the beneficiary groups and the agencies develop and the NGOs find the people too dependent to withdraw from. Thus replicability of their programmes becomes extremely limited. This is an issue that should be addressed in national perspective as to how self-reliant programmes can really be made viable for the vulnerable and below-poverty-line population. Thirdly, most of these organizations operate as isolated units having little linkage with national administrative and support organization. This relative autonomy, which is normally a plus point for NGOs

operation, leads to uncoordinated and overlapping activities. But these criticisms are more related to national policy than to the voluntary organizations themselves. The point is that these organizations have certain amount of financial, material and organizational resources, motivational and leadership potentials as well as basic needs orientation. And these tangible and intangible resources are meant for the poor, landless and vulnerable people of this country. The strategy should be one of maximizing geographical, social, economic and financial coverage by combining both governmental and non-governmental resources. There is no reason why these organizations who are socially and physically amidst the target population should be given peripheral importance in relation to 'mainstream' government agencies or programmes. A true integrated rural development strategy, if we want to call it so, should be one that takes an integrative approach not only to the problems of the people but also to the resources of the nation, governmental and non-governmental. Thus, it is not occasional laudatory or rebuking notes but explicit recognition of NGOs in rural development process that is required. But a possible trap lies here. Integration perhaps is a strong word. This is not to 'take over' or bureaucratise these organizations but to bring their activities in a coordinated framework.

To sum up, rural development efforts have been made in this part of the world at different levels—international, national and local; public, private and voluntary. But viewed in temporal or cross-agency context, there has been little continuity, consistency and coordination. The nation has always been in search of a viable strategy of rural development. But a strategy to be viable for a society *has to grow*, it cannot be developed quickly. Good elements of a model should be allowed to settle down to crystalise and not to be allowed to flow away in the currents of change.

3. Socio-political Dimension of Rural Development

Rural development is a policy concept that has to be operationalised in the social and political contexts of the country concerned. The

context here means that certain social values, political culture and institutions are conducive to rural development and need to be nurtured and taken within the programme fold ; certain features of social and political structures cannot be changed, at least in the short term and are to be taken as parameters of rural development, while others are detrimental and hence need to be curbed and modified. And this should form an essential part of *conscious efforts* toward rural development. But ironically, there is a gap between conscious efforts and reality. In discussion on rural development, non-economic factors⁴³ in general and socio-political in issues particular are either overlooked or assumed to behave in a particular way. The analysis becomes sterile, technocratic and economistic. Leaders and statesmen also often stress the need for keeping development above politics. This reflects part of conscious efforts so far as political issues in rural development is concerned. At real end, however, political issues do arise at different levels and act as intervention variables, consciously or unconsciously as part of an unwritten custom. Why is this so and how does it affect rural development ? The vast rural areas with majority of the population living there provide a melting pot of political and rural development process.⁴⁴ In national politics, rural development assumes central place in power struggle among different groups (perhaps also between classes) because the rural sector dominates the national economy in terms of its contribution to GDP, employment and export earnings and because it involves allocation and distribution of scarce resources. The relationship at the level is, however, less clear as social relations and politics are more complicated because of the one-way feed-back of national politics. The ideological stand and activities of local formal politics mainly come

43. For that matter, general discussions on developmental issues also overlook these factors. For details see, B.F. Hoselitz, "Non-economic Factors in Economic Development", *American Economic Review*, Vol.77 (May), 1957, pp.28-41.

44. See K M Tipu Sultan, *Government and Citizens in Politics and Development: an Asian Case* (Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1978)

down uniformly from the central command at the headquarters. Secondly, there is local politics, traditionally known as 'village politics', centred around kinship, clans and groups and characterised by factions and cleavages. Now while national politics in most cases accentuates rather than unifying, local cleavages, local politics in turn affect local level institutions and distribution of resources and opportunities—two crucial building blocks of rural development. So while discussing the socio-political dimension of rural development one may interpret them in the broader sense to indicate the value orientation of development policy and in the narrower sense, to discuss the actual politics, that is the permutation and combination of relations between and among individuals, groups and institutions at local and national level.

3.1. *Political institution and rural development* : The poor state of political institutionalisation as obtains in the country and for that matter, in most of the developing countries, results in political instability and frequent political changes at the top. This in turn, results in adhocism and frequent changes in development policies as we have tried to point out in the preceding section. Nothing can really strike roots. Lack of continuity in the political sphere results in lack of accountability and hence, lack of a sense of obligation in maintaining continuity in policies, programmes, even in projects at the micro-level. Other features emanating from low level of political development are (a) lack of sharp differentiation between political and the sphere of personal and social relations ; (b) prevalence of cliques ; (c) lack of integration among the various participants in the political process ; (d) sharp generational gap in political orientation and in point of moderation and (e) differentiation between politics and political decision making or, more candidly, between establishment politics and opposition politics.⁴⁵ At least one obvious implication of these features is that

45. Adapted from Lucian W. Pye, "The Non-Western Political Process" in Harvey G. Kebschull (ed), *Politics in Transitional Societies : The Challenge of Change in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (New York : Appleton Century Crafts, 1968), pp.49-59.

there is little scope of arriving at a broad political consensus as to what the perceived needs of the people are and how to approach them. At the local level, implementation of programmes becomes faction-based. Kinship and family relationship gets preference over social relations and social relations get preference over political/professional relations. Also the predominance of traditional local institutions and at the same time, desire for modernisation create strains on these institutions.

3.2. *Class character of the ruling regime*: Although class formation in this part of the Sub-continent has never been clear-cut, the class character or at least class orientation of the ruling regimes very much influences the development strategy pursued, the distributive machinery, the distribution of spoils, to be more specific. The Green Revolution of the 1960s was pursued by a regime backed by a coalition of landed aristocracy and civil-military bureaucracy with explicit commitment to growth-based development strategy financed by capital extracted from agriculture. Viewed in a broader perspective this phenomenon may be explained by what is known as the backward and forward linkages of the ruling regime. The ruling regime uses

The local peasantry develop a two-dimensional coalition for survival and sustenance: one with the national bureaucracy through local and intermediate bureaucracy, and the other directly with the national politicians.

surplus extracted from the rural areas to finance imports of industrial and military equipments from the developed countries and in the process, there is transfer of capital from the peripheral rural peasantry to the metropolis through the medium of the ruling regime.⁴⁶ Similar observations may be made about the post-independence strategies on rural development which traditionally backed the landed peasantry

46. See Mary Kaldor, "The Military in Development", *World Development*, Vol.4, No.6, 1976, pp.454-482.

who, in turn, dominate the local power structure.⁴⁷ The local peasantry develop a two-dimensional coalition for survival and sustenance: one with the national bureaucracy through local and intermediate bureaucracy, and the other directly with the national politicians. The relations between the national bureaucracy and national politicians, in turn, define the nature of state power. That is, however, going somewhat beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁸ The mutual dependency syndrome has been illustrated by Steve Jones⁴⁹:

Locally this power is based on the support of dependent sharecroppers, landless labourers and other clients in intra-village disputes and union and thana council elections. Nationally, the political importance of large farmers individually and as a class depends on their ability to muster votes for the major political parties and to help keep down rural unrest which would threaten the interest of the urban bourgeoisie. This again depends on having a large number of clients locally. In exchange for performing these functions, government policies are tailored to protect and support large farmers' interest.

Is that marriage of expedience necessarily detrimental to rural development? That is again entering into another debate centering partly around the technical question of efficiency of farm size⁵⁰

-
47. For understanding the nature of local power structure, see Atiur Rahman, *Rural Power : A Study of the Local Leaders in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International, 1981). Also see M. Ameerul Huq, *Exploitation and the Rural Poor : A Working Paper on the Rural Power Structure in Bangladesh* (Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1978). Also a good number of micro-level studies sponsored by the Early Implementation Projects (EIP) and Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in connection with evaluating the socio-economic feasibility of small-scale water sector projects (unpublished official reports) may provide useful insights.
48. For elaboration, see Mosharraf Hossain, "Nature of State Power in Bangladesh", *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 5, (October) 1979, pp.1-42.
49. Steve Jones, *op.cit.*
50. See M.G. Quibria, "A Note on Farm size, Efficiency and Socio-economics of Land Distribution", *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol IV, No.1, (January) 1976,

and partly around value judgement on distributive justice. While the landed peasantry on large farms are not certainly anti-productive, empirically it has been found that small farms are more efficient than large farms.⁵¹ Even in case of large farmers, the capital generated as returns to first round of investment, if any, is hardly recycled in agriculture. Rather, it is invested in urban or semi-urban centres or unproductive usurious practices. Re-lending of cheap bank credits at exorbitant interest to disadvantaged farmers and other occupation groups, and the use of LLP motors in rice mills and cinema projectors by the rural moneyed people in semi-urban centres, market places, are known facts. As to distributive justice, the coalition referred to excludes in most cases the small, marginal and landless farmers from the scope of public investment in agriculture and other rural development activities. And this constitutes a major road-block to participatory development in rural areas. Thus propping up of large farmers politically and by material incentives does not necessarily lead to higher production or equitable distribution of resources and production.

3.3. *Political mobilisation*: Political mobilisation of the rural mass should theoretically contribute to political and social development. But since political mobilisation centres around economic issues, it is essential that such political mobilisation be accompanied by corresponding alternative programmes and institution building. In the absence of an alternative in sight, political mobilisation alone leaves the general mass highly politicised threatening to break the existing social fabric of the polity. To give an example, political parties upholding egalitarian principles can directly make mass appeal to the disadvantaged poor people like the marginal farmers and the landless on the issue of social equity, distributive justice and repressions. But these parties hardly provide an alternative to fall back upon on the part of these poor who are otherwise tied to the landed peasantry in an apparently benign dependency relationship. Such sensitisation therefore, has the potency of

51. *Ibid.*

disrupting the existing functional, inequitable though, relations. This brings to the forefront two policy issues. First, there is a need for new domestic political order, that is functional or production-oriented politics, of course not to be monopolised by the ruling regime alone who has the administrative machinery and most of the resources at its disposal. Secondly, the sensitisation programmes carried by some of the NGOs⁵² working in the country need a careful evaluation in the above perspective.

Political mobilisation, however, has also a positive role to play in rural development. Anti-social activities like mis-appropriation, hoarding, black-marketing, smuggling may be checked with the active cooperation of the common people effected through political mobilisation. It may also be viewed as an effective alternative to coercion that is sometimes resorted to in initiating new programmes in the existing socio-cultural milieu. Political mobilisation also assumes critical importance in maintaining continuity of certain rural development programme even when regimes change as well as in switching over to suitable development strategy by the same regime.

3.4. *Local institutions*: Local institutions like local government agencies and NGOs play crucial role in rural development. Those organizations in the first place provide the delivery mechanism of inputs and services to the poor. In passing it should be mentioned that effectiveness in delivering services to the poor, however, vary among these organizations because of differential representativeness, access and service orientation. Secondly, they can mobilise local resources for development programmes. Thirdly, as important agents of mobilizing public opinion, they can create better acceptability of programmes. By the same token, they can act as moderating and neutralising agents with respect both national politics and local politics.

However, most of these local level institutions are dependent on the urban centres. Their identity is not rooted in the villages

52. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) for example, works among the landless poor in the rural areas.

they are located in and the rules of business and administration support of these organization normally come from up and as such initiative at local level is circumvented. Secondly, the elective local bodies are in reality dominated by those in local power structure. The network of kinship and group support in the rural areas is such the rich landed peasantry and local elite get elected each time. The dominance is sustained in a complex mechanism of dependency of the disadvantaged people on them. Kinship support from urban centres and condoning or callous acquiescence from the local and intermediate bureaucracy, all contribute to reinforce their position. Thirdly, the local level voluntary organizations or NGOs work in an uncoordinated manner both among themselves and with respect to the local government bodies and other agencies. Although the most valuable capital they command is their easy acceptability to the common people, whatever tangible resource they possess is sometimes dissipated in so many ambitious programmes they undertake at one time. Besides, they obtain little encouragement and support from the government. Then there is the questions of accountability of these organizations either to the people or to same controlling authority.

Development of local institutions therefore remains a problematic area of rural development in Bangladesh. It is the local institutions that have the potentials of providing the landless and disadvantaged people means of production and productive relations alternative to the existing ones. Yet they are crippled by so many socio-political, administrative and financial problems. Statutory representation of the disadvantaged in these organizations, autonomy and at the same time accountability, service orientation and elements of inter-organization competitiveness, resources and guidance from the centre and at the same time, accomodation to local initiative, are some of the ways to build local institutions.

4. Urban Bias in Rural Development

One important issue of development economics that is drawing scholarly interest in recent years is the urban bias in overall develop-

ment policy, prioritisation, allocation, even in rural programmes themselves. Emphasis is put on rural development, yet resource allocation and other practical measures end up beefing up urban based development and urban consumerism. The period since the 1950s when rural development was pursued in a serious way has been termed by some as "a quarter century of anti-rural development."⁵³ Such a bias also been evident in Bangladesh where the urban sector commands only about 15 percent of the total population. Urban bias is reflected in urban-rural income disparity, allocation of resources, social infrastructures and food rationing system. The reasons may be traced in contemporary historical development, class character of the pressure groups that matter as well as the systemic or technical aspects of the planning process.

The development strategy pursued in the 1950s and 1960s, as we have seen, created a wide urban-rural disparity. When Bangladesh was born in 1971 it had one of the most appalling urban-rural income inequality in the world. Average per capita income was, in 1969-70, estimated to be almost five times higher in urban than rural areas.⁵⁴ Over these years such difference has been further accentuated by allocation bias, inherent bias of the colonial education system specifically against the rural areas, concentration of basic amenities in the urban areas and unequal access to subsidised food and other productive services.

The obvious bias against rural development occurs in the case of allocation of resources. In this context, the general statement made by Holmquist may be cited:

...it is more likely that the urban and upper class interest of bureaucrats and their political allies will triumph and money will flow towards enhancing the urban upper class way of life.⁵⁵

53. Wahidul Haque, *op.cit.* p.14.

54. See M. Alamgir, "Some Analysis of Distribution of Income, Consumption, Savings and Poverty in Bangladesh", *Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol.II, No.4 (October), 1974.

55. Cited in Wulf, *op. cit.*, p.73.

Similar argument holds for Bangladesh as well. As private capital accumulation is very low, public sector plays an important role in development. And as such, allocation of resources is all the more relevant for rural development in general and agricultural development in particular. So far the official policy is concerned, agriculture and for that matter, rural development, has always been given high priority commensurate with the importance of agriculture in the national economy. Till recently, all modern agricultural inputs have been heavily subsidised. Attempts have been made to create elaborate administrative machinery to cater to the needs of rural areas. However, agriculture's share in public and private expenditures and bank credit has not been commensurate to agriculture's share in export earnings, employment and GDP as may be seen in Table 1. "Priority to agriculture, funds to industry and urban infrastructure" seems to have been the *de facto* development strategy.⁵⁶

Table 1 : Share of Agriculture in National Economy and Investment

Share in	Percentage of total (1973-77 average)
Export earnings	90-95
Employment	75-80
GDP	55-60
Public dev. expenditure	20-30
Bank credit	9-11
Private investment	7-9
Current public expenditure	1-2

Source : de Vylder, fn. 56.

The balance is nevertheless unfavourable even if one takes rural sector as a whole instead of agriculture alone into consideration. According to one study, only 24 percent of the total resources under First Five year Plan (1973-78) were allocated to rural development as

56. See S. de Vylder, "Urban Bias in Development: Bangladesh", *The Journal of Social Studies*, No.4 (July), 1979. p.6.

compared to 43 percent under the Pakistan Fourth Five Year Plan.⁵⁷ In the Second Five Year Plan (1980-85), the figure is 29 percent.⁵⁸ The year-to-year Annual Development Plans (ADP) would also reveal the same pattern of allocation to rural sectors vis-a-vis other sectors as have been shown in Table 2 for the period 1975-76 to 1982-83. One obvious limitation of the table, of course emanating from the very the sectoral approach to the planning process, is the lack of clear-cut demarcation along urban-rural lines. Although empirical tracing of the flow of resources upto the destination is a very difficult but rewarding and at the same time politically unacceptable proposition, in the absence of any such evidence, we may bank on our experiences to argue that agriculture, flood control and water resources and rural institutions constitute the rural development sector. One may argue about the dual role of transport and communication, health and family planning as well as education. But bulk of the resources is spent in the urban areas and only a fraction, if any, goes to the rural areas. From Table 2, it is seen that allocation to agricultural sector has increased but it decreased for flood control and water resources as well as in rural institutions over the period. Thus infrastructure building in agriculture got less importance than providing subsidies to agricultural inputs. Such subsidies availed mainly by the large farmers in fact helped maintain their high level of conspicuous consumption because subsidies to this group of farmers is a savings to them. Thus even in agricultural development proper, the percentage of development outlays was actually less than what was shown in the ADPs. There is a second degree urban bias even in whatever resources are allocated for the rural areas. And that is the high degree of leakage in urban-based super-structure of rural development in terms of the ministries, divisions, departments, directorates and various centres and research bodies. The irony cannot be more starkly displayed than done by transports moving along urban streets

57. See Raihan Sharif, *Planning with Social Justice: The Bangladesh Case* (Dhaka; Bangladesh Books Internations Limited, 1982), p. 170.

58. See Sharif, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Table 2: Sectoral Allocation of Development Expenditure, 1975-83

(Figures in percentages)

480

Sector	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83
Agriculture	14.9	16.1	13.5	23.7	21.7	17.8	23.4	25.1
Industry	10.3	14.0	19.7	15.5	12.1	12.4	8.7	11.5
Flood Control and Water Resources	15.3	14.0	12.6	11.4	12.3	18.3	16.5	15.1
Rural Institutions	4.1	3.6	3.5	4.8	4.0	3.7	3.6	3.6
Power and Natural Resources	14.3	11.2	11.5	13.7	15.4	14.9	18.1	16.3
Transport	16.6	20.0	14.0	14.7	17.9	18.0	14.2	13.3
Communication	4.9	3.3	4.0	2.4	3.5	2.6	3.1	2.8
Education & Training	4.0	3.9	3.9	2.4	2.1	2.6	3.2	3.8
Health	3.8	3.1	3.3	2.7	2.5	2.0	2.5	2.3
Population and Family Planning	1.3	2.2	2.6	1.6	1.1	0.9	2.0	2.3
Physical Planning and Housing	7.5	5.9	6.6	5.6	5.4	4.5	1.8	1.1
Others	3.0	2.8	4.8	1.5	2.0	2.3	2.8	2.9
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Million Tk.	(744.42)	(9972.82)	(12196.34)	(15545.96)	(21725.69)	(24682.49)	(25529.37)	(2961.0)

* Others include Social Welfare, Labour Training, Cyclone Reconstruction, Science and Technology and Public Administration.

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh 1982*, (Dhaka: BG Press, 1983), p.459

bearing insignias of, for example, rural water supply, or rural electrification.

In the field of education, the problem may largely be traced to the system as well as content of education, a legacy of the colonial past and perhaps, immune from a number of abortive reform measures. An educated man finds himself unfit and unemployed in rural areas. Behind the very idea of giving and getting education there is the urban-oriented desire to secure a job there and live well. Text books, curricula, examinations, professional recognition, mobility, all these shape urban-oriented ambitions. The mechanism and outcome may be illustrated with the help of the following general argument:

Both internationally, and within individual developing countries, centripetal forces draw resources and educated people in towards the cores and away from the peripheries. At the international level, brain drains are a well-known phenomenon. But there are similar movements within the developing countries. The urban web attracts and then traps professionals, holding them fast with better houses, services, schools and career prospects.⁵⁹

It is sometimes argued that posting of officials in the remote rural areas under a well-conceived decentralisation programme might be a remedy to revert the direction of brain-drains. But without proper educational reform that cannot solve the basic problem. Also age,

Perhaps more serious attention should be focused on the basic question of a functional education system and accompanying institutional measures that ensures job prospects in the rural areas as well.

marriage, children, and seniority would again draw them towards larger urban and administrative centres. Academic researchers go to field work in rural areas when they are young, enthusiastic but less experienced. But when they are older and gain more expertise, they too

59. See Robert Chambers, "Rural Poverty Unperceived: Problems and Remedies", *World Development* Vol. 9, 1981, p. 2.

become trapped in urban centres. Perhaps more serious attention should be focused on the basic question of a functional education system and accompanying institutional measures that ensures job prospects in the rural areas as well.

The other field in which urban bias is reflected is the food rationing system introduced in the country by the British government during the 1943 famine in the then Bengal. The major beneficiaries of the food rationing system are again the urban dwellers, that also in a highly inequitable manner.⁶⁰ Roughly 2 million tons of food grains obtained from donor agencies and procured commercially from domestic producers are distributed through the system. Of this, one third is channelled through statutory rationing system to the urban middle class, one-third to the 'priority groups', namely, the armed forces, the police and government employees while only about one-tenth goes to the modified rationing areas including rural areas and less than one-fifth to the rural poor through FWP or relief.⁶¹ The leakage, however, in both the processes is so big that hardly one-tenth of the total off-take ultimately reach the target group in the rural areas.

Now, what are the major factors behind urban bias? Though this is basically a matter of political will, it may be traced to two factors: class background of the political leaders, somewhat covered in a preceding section, and the planning process itself. One study reveals that more than 50 percent of the parliament members in 1975 came from occupation groups like lawyers and businessmen obviously based in the urban areas.⁶² This dichotomy of urban and rural professions however has partial explanatory value in the socio-political context of Bangladesh where interests of both urban and rural rich and middle class fuse together economically and politically as we have also seen earlier.

Secondly, experiences with two five-year plans and the earlier two-year interim plan suggest that despite political direction to socialistic

60. de Vylder, op. cit.

61. *Ibid.*

62. See Rounaq Jahan, "Members of Parliament in Bangladesh" (mimeo), March 1975.

planning or self-reliant development strategy in the preambular sections, the operational parts of the plan documents collapse to conventional planning methodology. And the methodology involves a number of mechanical steps like, (a) provision of statistical bases on essential parameters (population growth, savings/investment rates) during the base year ; (b) provision of basic premises based on value judgment (equity vs. efficiency or growth for example) ; (c) designing macro-economic model ; (d) designing macropolicies on sub-sectors to support the micro-policies ; (f) building up sectoral and sub-sectoral programmes ; (g) resource budgeting ; and (h) determining resource gap and then exploring ways of meeting the gap with foreign aid.⁶³ In such planning framework, policies regarding the rural areas remain disguised under the rigours of input-output model. Even regional policies, when designed, are not elaborately programmed with identification of urban-rural components.

A way out of this systemic bias, suggests one economist, is 'Ruralisation Strategy', not mere change in sectoral allocation ratios.⁶⁴ Although he does not operationalise the concept, it sounds to be a rewarding departure and perhaps also a difficult re-orientation. This requires more thoughtful attention and experiments. But so far dissipation of resources is concerned, which is also a serious problem, accountability at all stages, both official and political accountability, has to be established. And accountability is a two-way process. After all, why does the landed elite-politician or local-elite-bureaucrat coalitions work ? It is as much due to mutuality of interest as some sort of two-way accountability that works.

In any case, a major reorientation, attitudinal and administrative, is required to redirect material and man-power resources for rural development to rural areas.

63. See Raihan Sharif, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

64. *Ibid.*

5. Knowledge and Perception Gap about Rural Problems

It is hard to believe that in a predominantly rural country like Bangladesh with only 119 urban centres⁶⁵ covering a small fraction of total area and with only 15 percent of the population living in those centres, there is knowledge and perception gap about rural problems. In the first place, the urban and rural areas in Bangladesh form a continuum in which there is a two-way flow of people, commodities and ideas expedited by improved communication. Bulk of the urban dwellers, including those who matter in rural development, have rural linkages in terms of upbringing, early education, kinship and property. Thus, the urban-rural dichotomy in Bangladesh should not have been that pronounced as in the developed industrialised societies. Secondly, since the 1960s, particularly 1970s a considerable volume of literature has grown on different aspects of rural development. The latest is the village study trend. Most of the empirical works related to development and socio-economic surveys are carried out with respect to the rural areas providing greater insights about rural life and problems. Comments one scholar :

Knowledge on the micro-dynamics of a village has nearly reached the saturation point. Rather than spending valuable research man-months more and more on these micro elements,

65. An urban centre normally includes place having a Municipality/Town Committee or Cantonment Board with at least 5000 population in a continuous collection of houses where basic utility services are catered to. These places are normally centres of non-agricultural activities like industry, trade and services. In Bangladesh, places with less than 5000 people are also considered to be urban centres if other characteristics are present. See Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Census Commission, *Bangladesh Population Census*, Bulletin No. 2 (Dhaka: BG Press), and cited in N. Islam, "Rural Development through Urbanization", *BIISS Journal*, Special Issue No. 2, 1982, p. 59. No figure however is available as to what percentage of total area is covered by these 119 urban centres. But it may be presumed that most of them are very small as 54 percent of total urban population live in 6 largest cities.

priorities should now be assigned to the weaknesses about the solution of the identified problems, i.e. development policy.⁶⁶

While no one should have any disagreement on the thrust of the second part of the observation in regard to programme formulation and implementation, the first part of the comment does not seem to be a valid description of reality. Even if making a bibliography on any area of rural development is likely to run to a hundred or more,⁶⁷ it is doubtful if even a significant fraction of the villages in Bangladesh have been covered by studies broadly concerned with issues of rural development. Inadequate geographical coverage is co-existent with duplication or triplication in some places resulting

And it is through rural development tourism that we learn about rural problems and at the same time knowledge and perception gaps occur.

from a set of biases to be taken up in what follows. There is hardly any coherent and comprehensive body of knowledge about rural problems. Nor is there any internal and institutionalized process of learning about rural problems other than through what has come to be known as "rural development tourism"⁶⁸—the phenomenon of brief official or unofficial rural visits. And it is through rural development tourism that we learn about rural problems and at the same time, knowledge and perception gaps occur. The 'tourist' or visitors are normally leaders and government officials, head of the state/government, ministers, bureaucrats, health staff, agriculturalists, educators, community development officials, engineers, private technical specialists, academic research staff, foreign volunteer corps, diplomats, staff of aid agencies, journalists and consultants. They have three things in common: they come from urban areas, they want to find something about rural areas and they are short of time.

66. See Raihan Sharif *op cit*.

67. *Ibid*

68. See Robert Chambers, *op cit* p. 3.

Shortage of time, importance of the visitor and the type of information desired determine what is eventually perceived. Lack of time drives out the open ended questions, the visitor desires a particular type of answers, and the respondents are in desperate search for a correct answer, sometime hesitant and shaky and sometimes over-eloquent. On the whole, formal actions and non-reactive objects are given more attention. The visit inevitably becomes guided by local officials, influentials and other groups. An intimate and private life of the community remains out of sight and knowledge of the visitors.

Such trips are likely to be seriously affected by a number of biases like (a) spatial bias leading 'tourists' to visit mainly near-urban centres or road-side villages, which are accessible by land rovers; (b) project bias for which the visitor has greater inclination to visit areas where at least some programmes have been introduced and non-projects areas are left out of the itinerary of the visitors; (c) success bias, which means the successful projects attract repeated attention while the unsuccessful cases remain unseen and unexplored; (d) person bias in favour of these with whom the rural 'tourists', local officials and rural researchers can develop contact and communication, from whom they can expect to obtain impressions and information, (e) dry-season bias and (f) professional bias.⁶⁹ Professional training, values and objectives dictate the 'tourists' to look for and find what fits their paradigm. Visiting the same village, a water development engineer looks into the hydrological factors affecting agriculture, an agronomist investigates into the yield rates, perhaps very much affected by hydrology, an economist in wage and price which are to a great extent determined by productivity, while a sociologist looks into the patron-client relationship in agriculture. While these are legitimate specialised fields of inquiry by individual experts, the fact remains that the interacting and inter-locking characteristics of poverty comes to the individual tourists in a truncated fashion.

The is not to say that all individuals and agencies take such specialized and partial approach in knowing rural problems. In recent

69. *Ibid.*

years, there has been a shift toward generating information on rural poverty in an integrative and comprehensive manner. Even then the basic limitations of rural development tourism—that is taking a still picture rather than the moving and living thing over a longer timeframe remains.

The question arises as to what are the areas in which knowledge and perception gap is very pronounced. In very general terms, the exact dimension of farmers' poverty is the darkest area. Secondly, farmers response pattern to a particular set of interventions is not known. Thirdly, the fact that rural people are ignorant about their activities, is not a valid description of reality. We go to the rural areas to know their problem, yet we try to impose our version of their problem on them. Fourthly, the social relation, dynamics of rural power structure etc. are areas about which we do not have a correct perception.

The immediate impact of this knowledge and perception gap is felt on a realistic programme formulation and the modalities of its implementation. The importance of knowledge and perception lies in the fact that rural development is a social process *par excellence* which simultaneously engineer the social relations between and among different social groups. A correct perspective of these relations would go a long way in programme implementation.

What is the way out ? At academic or research end, perhaps participatory observation (anthropological method, that is) method could be emphasized alongside the technical data collection through living in the rural area for quite some time. Participating in the way of life of the people would help obtain the most unposed picture of a community. At practical or actual rural development end, regular and efficient internal monitoring system could obviate the limitations of rural development tourism. An alternative through which the two ends could be combined is the concept of action research which has been undertaken with some organizations in Bangladesh. It helps experiment with programmes and at the same time minimises knowledge gap about rural problem.

6. Poor Participation in Development Process

Participation in development programmes on the part of the people (not few individuals) may serve a double-trick—end and means of development. Participation is an *end* of development in the sense that it transforms the people from mere demographic entity to economic and social units. Development is as much a social process and through participation they get opportunity of *going through the process* which changes their attitude, perception, receptivity, mobility and other economic qualities. It is a *means* in the sense that through participation of the people in development process an *effective* implementation of programmes may be ensured. People's opposition, rejection or indifference to programmes is a great hindrance to programme implementation. Apathy and lack of response of the silent majority, the target group that is, makes any mechanism of reaching the benefits to them ineffective. But participation itself is a problematic concept in the context of a developing country like Bangladesh with bulk of the people living even below the subsistence level. And participation on the part of the below poverty line people is not the same thing as that on the part of the above poverty line people. In order to bring the former to the mainstream of national life and enable them to participate in development programmes, special programmes have to be undertaken. But before we come to that let us see what people's participation is.

Ideally people's participation has been defined as "the direct involvement of the rural inhabitants through grass root's level organizations in the decision making, planning and implementation of development activities."⁷⁰ By this definition, a situation where government officials *consult* local people to guide government decision making and when people's involvement in the implementation of development activities is confined to the provision of local labour

70. See L.E. Birgegard, *Manual for Analysis of Rural Underdevelopment* (Uppsala: International Rural Development Centre, Swedish University of Agricultural Science, 1980), p. 95.

would not qualify as people's participation.⁷¹ But this would be perhaps raising the standard at too high a level. We have seen earlier that the local level institutions are not that developed and they have little autonomy in control of resources. The local government bodies are not functioning effectively either. Besides some of the rural development projects are technically complicated. As such it is difficult to meet the above rigid criterion of participation. At the other end of the spectrum we have an impressive radicalisation of the concept of participation in terms of government's participation in people's programme instead of people's participation in government's programmes.⁷² Such a concept has been endorsed by the World Bank and has been applied in irrigation project in Philippines. While ideally this should be the true meaning of participation, there are institutional as well as structural problems. The institutional problem emanates from the rigidity in bureaucratic organization and the traditional top-down decline of manpower quality in the hierarchy. Participation in people's programme require high calibre management and leadership. There is need for attitudinal and behavioural change in government machinery. And the structural problem pertains to the below-subsistence population for whom such participatory development is meant and expected respectively. It is too much to expect self-development or community development programmes to be designed by themselves even when overall guidance is provided. They have to be provided with basic needs and other support to bring them upto the mainstream level. What is needed is specialised programmes as well as target group orientation in other development programmes. The limitations of both these definitions therefore dictate that participation should be defined and operationalised in a flexible manner at least in the short run. We would take people's participation as more of an end than a means of development. Viewed in this perspective, the minimum requirement of participation may be said to have been achieved when (i) the programme concerned reflect the

71. *Ibid.*

72. See World Bank, *World Development Report 1983*, p. 93.

felt-need of the people, (ii) the target population have access to the benefits of the programme, and (iii) representation in the committee is open to the local people in general and the target group in particular.

It would be worthwhile to identify the obstacles to participation on the part of disadvantaged group of the society. The commonly held view is that obstacles to participation are basically structural pertaining to the poverty syndrome mentioned earlier. More than 80 percent of the people of Bangladesh live below the poverty line—deficient not only in income, nutrition and hence physical capability but also in the favourable will and attitudinal factors. It is argued that in the midst of poverty, they develop an attitude of passivity, fatalism, reluctance, and not the least, an apathy toward development programmes. They are resistant to change and apt to make 'we-vs-they' line of division on any issue or development programmes. They look at outsiders with suspicions. These attitudinal and perceptual factors may at best be attributes of poverty and

More than 80 percent of the people of Bangladesh live below the poverty line deficient not only in income, nutrition and hence physical capability but also in the favourable will and attitudinal factors.

cannot by any means be considered as the sole or major reasons for poor participation in programme. If participation is viewed as one of the objectives of development, then these factors become non-argument. There are other significant road-blocks to effective participation, even it is defined in a flexible manner as has been done earlier. In what follows some of the major obstacles to participation has been identified.

6.1. *Decision making and programme formulation mechanism :*

This problem emanates from lack of growth of sufficient local level institutions with delegation of authority. In the absence of such local institutions, decision making and programme formulation are

carried out by distant bodies up in the hierarchy. Programmes come down to the area not in institutionalised shape but as piece-meal projects. This creates the first decisive gap even if the projects reflect felt-need of of the common people. The implication of implementing non-institutionalised programme in the rural areas is that supervision to implementation work is done again through 'rural development tourism' and in the process, those in charge of implementation are accountable neither to local people nor to the authority. Local people are hardly consulted excepting the rich, well-to-do and the influential ones. Thus the poor people are distanced and only few privileged ones may have marginal participation in the residual decision making and project management. A second implication of the lack of appropriate local institutions in sufficient number is that the disadvantaged ones, even if they become vocal or resentful can hardly make their voice felt. The point that is made here is that local level organizations, even if they are of NGO type, with membership from the poor people, can act as pressure groups or bargaining poles moderating the role of conventional local bodies and minimizing adhocism and bungling with people's money.

6.2. *Procedural complications and poor access to institutional facilities:*

In most cases, the poor and the disadvantaged donot have easy access to whatever institutional facilities are available in the localities. Eligibility criteria are normally too high; exceptions are made for these who may obtain facilities under normal rules and the procedures are too complicated for the simple ignorant but innocent people. Bank credits, KSS membership (land ownership criterion) are same of these institutional facilities to which the poor have little access. Examples are there when in even in goods and services specifically meant for target groups, the powerful and influentials can manage to appropriate a large portion.

6. 3. *Local power structure* : From the above it also seen that the role of local power structure in obstructing people's participation is of more fundamental nature. Local power structure is a function of lack of effective local organization and at the same time impedes the

growth of such institutions. What is more, they come to provide 'natural' leadership to local institutions including local elective bodies, even some of the voluntary organizations. Member of the some elite family control many organizations through (a) land-based local power and influence, (b) apparently benign dependency relationship with the poor, (c) kinship relation with those in positions, (d) educated brother, son and daughter, in-law (e) social worker wife, (f) act of (cost-effective) benevolence, like donation of publicity-oriented lump some money, piece of land, and not the least, (g) generously warm hospitality toward visiting politicians, bureaucrats, aid agency people or a consultant engaged in feasibility study. In the process, they are catapulted to decision making role, control of resources, contract for local construction works etc. They participate in development programmes on behalf of the poor. (?) The have to be cajoled and coaxed for making a programme acceptable to the people. Where slightest personal interest is involved, any programme endangering such interest is opposed or compelled to be modified. An honest and upright bureaucrat sometimes become disgraced if their activities adversely affect the power structure. Now, power structure in the rural areas is not something homogeneous having unity of purpose. Different poles of power have different stakes from the same programme and results in a conflictual situation and at times, deadlock. Opposition for opposition's sake becomes norm in programmes sponsored, initiated or favoured by people not liked by others. Common people in the process become disillusioned about such programmes.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

We have tried to highlight five major issues of rural development: one, experiments without continuity, consolidation and replication; two, level of socio-political development and coalition of interests obstructing removal of rural poverty, unemployment and social inequity; three, urban bias; four, knowledge and perception gaps and finally, poor participation in development programmes. At least

the first four of these issues could broadly be traced to political sphere in the sense that they pertain to political development and political stability. Political will, attitude and perception of those who matter in rural development, the dynamics of relations and interactions between different interest and pressure groups and power structure at national and local levels all those matter. The quantum of resources that eventually filter down to the site of the rural development projects is determined by these factors. The response of the local level institutions and the response of the local people or the target group of population are also functions of these socio-political factors. In view of this chained linkage, approach to these sequence of issues could be starting at two ends of the spectrum: political end and participation end.

At the political end, we have pleaded earlier that there should be continuity of programmes, at least of the beneficial elements of a programme irrespective of the regime in power. The argument here is one of national interest, a desperate one at that, given the increasing and alarming level of poverty, landlessness, unemployment and social inequality. So far as the problem of continuity lies in the political sphere, one way out could be less politicisation and more national orientation of programmes so that the succeeding regimes feel less tempted to discard it in favour of their own programmes. The opposition, as well as other interest groups could be motivated to participate in decision making and policy discussions so that the programmes get semblance of legitimacy and do not get an absolute political colouring. In the like manner, politics of production should not be the monopoly of the ruling regime. The opposition and other interest groups should take a competitive attitude (a healthy one, of course) toward productive works and development of the nation. A certain percentage of their party fund could be publicly committed to certain programmes, however, limited they may be.

At the participation end the imperative of participation should be reiterated first. In addition to the two dimensions of participation referred to earlier—end and means of development, that is—there is

a third dimension pertaining to the value orientation of the society. The vision of an egalitarian society with participatory democracy and participatory development requires meaningful participation of bulk of the population who are incidentally the poorer section. Their participation presupposes access to productive resources and opportunities lest they are driven to polarised and even radicalised viewpoints. This is not to sound out a dooms-day theory but highlight the imperative of participation. As to how effective participation can be brought about, the emphasis should be on institution building under public, private and non-governmental initiative. Focus on local level institutions follows from the fact that the rate of participation, however flexibly defined, would be hopelessly low on the part of below subsistence people when considered as individuals. On the other hand, they may be effectively mobilized in an organized fashion by the local level institutions, even if they are dormant and weak at the moment. True, these organizations may be dominated by the rich class even within the organizational folds. But proliferation of organizations for target, cross-target and cross-social groups would loosen such rich-class grips and democratise programmes and institutions. The central point of this argument is that growth of target group oriented organizations would help create multiple poles and dilute the traditional power structure. In the process, the bargaining power of the poor would be strengthened.