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**NGO APPROACHES TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Rural development is the important issue in the development agenda of a country. Among actors working in development field, NGOs play vital role in Bangladesh. Historically discrete individual efforts were made for rural development and gradually institutional and organized initiatives are started in field of rural society in the course of time. The present paper is prepared based on secondary documents such as NGOs annual reports, published articles and government publications. It attempts to explore the areas of income generating activities and human resource development programs which ultimately contribute to socio-economic and structural development of rural communities. The NGOs have proven themselves as the real associates of the government in rural development activities. It also focuses on the NGO contribution on rural development including problems and difficulties such as; religious fundamentalism, pressure from the political leaders and local elites, overlapping in the NGO activities, influence of donor agencies, corruption and fund crisis which act as barriers in the path of rural development. So, it is appeared as new added knowledge in rural development literature.

**KEYWORDS**

Rural Development, NGOs, Women Empowerment, Community Participation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Bangladesh is mainly an agro-based rural society. So, rural development is the main focus of government and non-government efforts from the very beginning of the planned era. Rural development was initiated and encouraged in this region by some outstanding development personalities and institutes since later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the British rule, the permanent settlement and Tenancy Act of 1793, the Rent Act of 1859 were legal initiatives in land reform. Along with legal initiatives, the British government established agricultural development board (1880) and introduced local Government institutions, i.e. Union Board and District Board (1891), organized cooperatives (1904) and rural reconstruction development (1939) for the improvement of agriculture and rural life situation. Sher-e-Bangla A.K.Fazlul Haq, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and some enthusiastic Indian civil service officials such as; Gurushaday Dutta, Nurunnabi Chowdhury, N.M.Khan and H.S.N Ishaque of the Indian Civil Service played important roles in promoting rural development activities to a great extent. (Samad; 2002). Thereafter Pakistan government introduced an important rural development program known as V-AID program. In 1959, Integrated Development Program was first conducted as experimental project in Comilla Kotwuali Thana by the Pakistan Government for training and action research. In 1961, Government of Pakistan launched a program in East Pakistan to create employment opportunity for the rural poor development and develop rural infrastructure (Quddus; 1993). After the independence of Bangladesh, the Government of Bangladesh adopted IRDP as a national program in 1972. Rural local government organizations (union parishad, upazila parishad and zila parishad) in Bangladesh play important roles in implementing rural development programs. In 1970, after the destructive cyclone, NGOs started its relief and rehabilitation based activities in Bangladesh in order to help the cyclone affected people. Then BRAC (1972), PROSHIKA (1976) and Grameen Bank (1976) started their activities in Bangladesh. At present, more than ten thousand NGOs have been engaged in rural development activities.

Both the Government agencies and non-Government organizations are now playing stimulating roles in making rural development in Bangladesh. Right now Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have become an extensively discussed theme in the third world countries. The NGOs have appeared as the savior of countless number of people without food, cloth, education and basic health facilities. Bangladesh is one of the top thirteen underprivileged countries. With the record of being the most densely populated country on earth and feeble manpower competency, Bangladesh is facing massive challenge to meet up the demand of her ever-increasing population. Although agriculture sector is the main source of income for the rural-agro based country, unfortunately this sector has completely failed to create rewarding employment opportunity for the landless. Considering these overall situations, the NGOs are working on rural development. These organizations are working based on the assessed need and demand of the grass root level farmers and women. By involving the beneficiaries directly, they are working within the context of overall national planning for rural development.

**CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION (NGO)**

Rural development is a part of development effort especially in agro-based countries. Rural development has been recently recognized by policy makers as the center price of national development in a developing country like Bangladesh. The term rural development has been used to encompass the whole range of institutional, local, economic, political and technical intervention made by the Government and non-Government agencies in order to increase the well-being of rural people of country.

According to Robert Chambers, 'Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain, for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas, to demand and control more of the benefits of development' (Chambers; 1986).

In Bangladesh, the term NGO is very well known and NGO activities are wide spread. The voluntary social welfare agencies (registration and control) ordinance 1961 defines voluntary organization as associations which are voluntarily formed by individuals for the purpose of rendering welfare and development services outside government structures; drawing funds from national or international sources; and functioning within the legal frame work of the country."

So, it is clearly evident that NGOs are those organizations, which are one way or the other involved in development or welfare oriented activities including various aspects of rural development.

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND NGO APPROACHES**

Bangladesh has passed 43 years of her liberation. Despite of having the effect of urbanization & industrialization, till now it is a rural based country. Out of 161,083,804 populations (Socio economic & Demographic report 2011), 110,009,445 live in rural area. [World Bank-2012.est] Bangladesh has agriculture based

economy. Eighty percent of total population lives in rural area, among them 62% are directly & others are indirectly engaged with agriculture. For this, from the very past, rural areas of Bangladesh have always get priority. For rural development many government & non government initiatives have been taken. Many non- government organizations (NGOs) are working for rural development along with the government organizations (GOs), among them the well known non-government organizations (NGOs) are BRAC, CARE, Proshika, CARE and World Vision Bangladesh etc. These specific non-government organizations (NGOs) are dealing with specific issues related with Rural Development. The approaches of various non- government organizations (NGOs) in the different fields of rural development are discussed in the following manner;

#### **AGRICULTURE**

Agriculture is the most important issue of rural development. This sector contributes around 29% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) & generates employment of 63% of total labor force. (National web portal of Bangladesh). The general agricultural sectors are rice, crops, jute, cotton, sugarcane, flowers, sericulture, horticulture, fisheries, vegetables, live stocks, soil development, seed development & distribution. BRAC expanded their agricultural credit to support the government's effort to achieve self sufficiency in food growing & arranged microfinance program for the tenant farmers. Under this project BRAC is organizing tenant farmers into village organization (VOs) & providing them with both credit & training on modern agriculture. This project had a target to reach 3000,000 tenant farmers in 150 upazilas by end of 2012. BDT 4.45 billion has been distributed to 284,000 farmers through 12000 village organizations (VOs) in 193 upazilas up to December 2012 (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). Grameen Bank provides the loan to the poor farmers at low interest rate for cultivating using agricultural instruments, like irrigation pump, quality seeds, fertilizers & insecticides. Grameen Bank is giving loans for this purpose. ASA provides loans among the poor farmers for the development of agricultural sector. ASA also provides power tiller loan for the poor farmers. BDT 98.85 crore has been distributed among 13,531 borrowers under this sector up to December 2011 (ASA Annual Report, 2012). ASA also providing training to 807 male & 345 female entrepreneurs on crop production, nursery, dairy farming, agricultural technology, giving knowledge on quality seeds, fertilizers & insecticides. Proshika provides micro loans for the poor landless & tenant farmers. It also started Ecological Agricultural program (EAG), training course has arranged under this program to provide training on using insecticides, quality seeds, compost fertilizers & modern technology. Environmental Protection & Regeneration (EPR) is another program by Proshika. For playing important role on environment protection, Proshika was awarded "Bangabandhu Prize 2000" by the Bangladesh Government. Proshika introduced "Friendly Environment Fertilizers" which makes no harm to the environment, crops & soil. Live Stock development Program (LSD) and Fisheries development program (FDP) are income generating programs by Proshika. Proshika arranged some income generating programs for rural people such as, Irrigation & Tilling Technology Service Program (ITTSP), Sericulture development program (SDP), Api-Culture Program (ADP in which Farmers are getting loans & training under these programs. CARE provides training to farmers on how to increase production in agriculture under the program about 2 million farmers increased their production in agriculture in 2010, mainly in north-west & south-east area in Bangladesh (CARE Annual Report, 2010).

#### **RURAL HEALTH, NUTRITION AND HYGIENE**

In Bangladesh, rural health & nutrition status is very poor. Majority people are derived from minimal health & nutrition facilities. For this reason, a significant part of the active non- government organizations (NGOs) of Bangladesh are providing training & education service in the field of health & nutrition. World Vision has contributed BDT 65,841,474.45 in this sector (World Vision Annual Report, 2012). BRAC contributed BDT 3,710,271,278 in health program & BDT 1,339,321,154 in water, sanitation & hygiene program (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). Bangladesh Red Crescent society established 5 hospitals with 471 bed facilities. Besides, Grameen Bank, CARE, Proshika provide awareness program & training in respect to this approach.

#### **RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Women empowerment is very important for a nations building. Without having the empowerment of women, the entire development can't be made in a country. Women of Bangladesh are lagging behind & it is more serious in rural area. BRAC is working for the prevention of violence against women. BRAC launched a social development program in 1985; with a human rights & legal services components where women were enlightened their legal rights taught about the laws concerning marriage, family & inheritance. BRAC contributed BDT 138,151,582 in the Gender, Justice & Diversity program (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). Grameen Bank is trying to empower women financially that bring changes in women' life through giving them micro-credit which help them to increase their autonomy; help them to play important role to take decision in family matters; enhancing their economic & social matter. Proshika delivered training for the rural women so that they can increase income. Proshika also runs integrated multi-sectoral women's development program.

#### **HUMAN RIGHTS AND STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR RURAL POOR**

Despite the fact that rural people have vast experience about life, still they are incapable of developing exact ways to scientifically analyze & fix their problems. In this case, approaches of the non- government organizations (NGOs) are worth mentioning to help the rural people analyze the society & problems in the backdrop of old, superstitious & life perspectives. Non- government organizations (NGOs) such as; BRAC, Grameen Bank, Proshika, and ASA have arranged different seminars & work-shop, joint social activities & application of socio-economic projects. Basically these non- government organizations (NGOs) have introduced essential concepts like developing small groups, credit based co-operatives, mother welfare society & co-operatives, etc, for homeless/landless etc & thus have strengthened the roof of humanitarian progress & organizational structure of rural of people.

#### **EMPLOYMENT GENERATION**

In order to encourage the rural poor to participate in different economic activities & to increase their income through employment generation, several policies, methods & strategies of the non- government organizations (NGOs) have attracted the attention of some foreign development experts. Grameen Bank contributed BDT 5,256,713,610 in livestock & fisheries, BDT 5,178,149,581 in agriculture & forestry, BDT 4,809,595,125 in shop keeping (Grameen Bank Annual Report, 2012). BRAC contributed BDT 6,988,350,392 in income generating projects (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). ASA distributed BDT 98.85 crore among 13,531 borrowers up to December 2011 & provided training for skill development (ASA Annual Report, 2012).

#### **MICRO CREDIT**

Overall economic development is essential for poverty education at the rural level. Besides employment generation, per capita income & scheme to increase savings is required so that a sustainable development & poverty reduction can be seen for the rural poor. The identification of loan as a significant necessity for sustainable economic development for the poor as well as developing an effective method for meeting the demand for loan is a competent model of poverty eradication. BRAC has contributed BDT 2,045,763,985 for ultra poor program, BDT 6,988,350,392 in income generating approaches, BDT 1,171,455,567 in micro finance program (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). Grameen Bank distributed 62931.12 million BDT up to February 2011 (Grameen Bank Annual Report, 2012). ASA helps around 5.5 million households in getting micro credit facilities (ASA Annual Report; 2012).

#### **INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

Literacy problem is one of the biggest social problems in Bangladesh. Rural literacy rate is 46.81 & Rural female literacy rate is 42.59 (Census Report 2011). Many non- government organizations are working to increase the literacy rate in rural area. Non- government organizations (NGOs) run informal & non-formal education to increase the literacy rate in Bangladesh as a whole. ASA operates 900 learning centers adjunct to government. Primary schools in 57 districts & there is a plan to increasing it to 4500 by the year 2015 to provide additional tuition support to about 135000 students in 64 districts (ASA Annual Report, 2012). BRAC launched BDT 4,277,356,988 in education program (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). Grameen Bank provided 36.23 million USD as education loan. (Grameen Bank Annual Report; 2012).

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATION**

It is one of the important sectors in rural development. Rural infra-structure includes roads, bridges, dam e.tc along with these, the development in communication system is also important to keep the better communication system with urban area. At present this low level of infra-structure communication & transportation system is one of the major obstacles in rural development. For this reason, rural people are facing many problems, like not having medical service in time of need, not having distribution of crops & other agricultural production in urban market. For reducing this problem ASA, Proshika, BRAC, Grameen Bank are working in rural area.

**RELIEF AND REHABILITATION BASED APPROACH**

One of the major causes of increase in poverty rate in Bangladesh is natural disaster. The non- government organizations are working for the rural poor people in time of regular need as well as emergencies. Those non- government organizations (NGOs) give support during pre disaster period, during disaster period & post disaster period. BRAC contributed BDT 93,188,884 in this sector (BRAC Annual Report, 2012). Grameen Bank contributed USD 0.45 million in this sector. (Grameen Bank Annual Report, 2012). ASA, World Vision, CARE have also taken several measures in relief & rehabilitation program.

**INNOVATIVE APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY FOR SMALL AND SEASONAL FRAMERS**

In Bangladesh during the 70's society the government agencies initiated irrigation in agriculture. But it was not successful in small farmland. In small size farming land, deep & shallow tube well was not suitable when growing vegetables & spices. On demand from the small & seasonal farmers, the non- government organizations have developed bamboo/can tube well, star pump, *Dheki* pump, etc type of irrigation technology. As this can be produced with little cost, the small & marginal farmers can now easily afford these technologies. Right now in Bangladesh 400 irrigation projects are running with loans from non- government organizations. The non- government organizations arrange to teach appropriate technology for fruits, vegetables, fish & cooking through transfer of suitable technology for family agriculture. The NGOs also use newer communication & transportation technology to play significant role in rural development.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It was proven that the active presences of NGOs are a boon for the rural development in Bangladesh. The NGOs started in a war stricken Bangladesh with relief and rehabilitation program. Right now, they are omnipresent in Bangladesh's rural development through improving socio-economic, cultural, geographic, family planning, education, health, and so on. The NGOs have proven themselves as the true associates of the Government in rural development. For the purpose of rural development along with government organizations (GOs), many non-government organizations (NGOs) are also playing vital role. The non-government organizations (NGOs) which are working for rural development are always facing problems & difficulties including religious fundamentalism, lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy, pressure from the political leaders and local elites, duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities, superstition and stubbornness, ambiguity in knowledge, geographical distance, influence of donor agencies, corruption and treasury fund crisis which act as barriers in the path of rural development. For this, some recommendations may be taken as effective measures for eliminating those barriers.

- Non-government organizations (NGOs) are always facing financial problems for the insufficient funding & resources. Government should also come forward to play vital role to solve this financial problems of the NGOs.
- For the absence of effective work schedule & specific objectives, sometimes the non-government organizations fail to achieve the faith & support of common people. So the NGO objectives should be very clear.
- Non-government organizations (NGOs) should perform priority based activities & should take steps by identifying the actual social problem.
- To implementing the program & work schedule successfully skillful, efficient & experienced worker should be appointed. Training, seminar, & workshop should be arranged to increase the skill level of NGO workers.
- There should have enough facilities of doing research & collecting authentic information regarding rural development barriers and possible ways of solution.
- Participation in politics should be strictly forbidden for the management authority & workers of non-government organizations (NGOs) and NGOs should take their initiatives according to the national policy & planning.
- Rural community participation should be ensured in the stages of taking planning, programs and implementation of NGO activities.
- Extensive research should be conducted on the problems of rural community so that NGOs working with rural development issues can play effective roles in this regard.

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