

Village Development in Bangladesh

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a) Researcher's Identity

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b) Objective

- i. To study the effectiveness of Comilla model on rural development.

c) Executive summary

In the foregoing pages, an attempt was made to draw a pen picture of the changing village of Monagram in relation to a development programme sponsored by the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, Comilla, Bangladesh. Villages represent approximately 85% of the country. Monagram is one of the sixty thousand villages in Bangladesh. Most of the villagers are poor. Their present poverty is linked with the past story of exploitation by the landlords, money-launderers and traders. The villagers are also subject to natural hazards like floods and drought. There is an increasing population pressure on limited land resources which has resulted in uneconomic land-holdings and low yields. Before the programme began a majority of the villagers had become indebted and a few had even become landless. Frustration and resignation prevailed. The poverty of the people caused further poverty thus creating a vicious circle.

In the early sixties the villagers joined the development programme of the Academy and agreed to accept the discipline of making a cooperative effort to fight poverty jointly. A co-operative approach was used by the Academy to discover a formula for improving the economic conditions of the villagers. To solve the problem of shortage of capital in the villages a programme for accumulation of capital through small savings was inaugurated. To overcome mutual distrust among the villagers a system of regular weekly meetings of the full membership of the village cooperative society was introduced. To impart new knowledge and skills to villagers a continuous weekly training programme for the village representatives was established. To convince the

villagers of the importance of the improved farm methods, a demonstration farm was operated under the supervision of Japanese experts. To overcome the difficulties of flood and drought a proper system of irrigation and drainage was constructed with the help of local government agencies. Gradually a complex village development programme emerged out of the cooperative experiment with the villagers of Monagram and surrounding villages.

Some of the principles of village development which were discussed in describing the development process in Monagram can be summarised as follows:

1. The people are the most important element. Hope needs to be installed in place of despair. It is necessary to create conditions for the villagers to realize their own importance. Their outlook needs to be changed and a desire for constant self improvement needs to be aroused among them.
2. An organization is essential. The organization should be easy to understand and simple to operate. A village co-operative which is based on principles of equality is the kind of organization that appears to be suitable for the village people in Bangladesh.
3. Leadership; the effective leadership is necessary for the successful operation of co-operative society. It is necessary to use the existing leaders and make constant endeavors to discover and train new ones. The organizers and the model farmers are emerging as new leaders in the village.
4. Helping people to see real needs; People require help in examining what their real needs are. It pays to organize:
 - (a) intelligent discussions based on facts and figures related to the daily life of the villagers;
 - (b) talks by experts from different fields such as animal husbandry and sanitation;
 - (c) film shows or film strip shows on family planning, irrigation and;
 - (d) demonstrations to show practical results.
5. Haste may lead to waste; improving village life is a slow process and is very different from setting up an industrial plant. It depends upon the people, own participation, self-help, and upon their desire and will for better living; a very slow process at its best. Only disappointment can result the expectation of miracles.

6. A survey of village conditions and the collection of facts are essential. It is necessary to collect information on agricultural production, the general economic situation, health conditions, education and communication to find out the actual needs of the village.
7. Co-ordination; Co-ordination among all nation building departments at all levels, from the village upwards, is vitally necessary. No programme can succeed without the fullest co-operation and collaboration of all concerned departments. Co-ordination is necessary during planning as well as during execution. In the Academy's programme, co-ordination in policy matters was achieved through representation of the heads of relevant departments, such as Agriculture, Education, Health, Co-operation, Local Self-Government and others, on the Board of Governors for the Academy under the chairmanship of the Rural Development Minister of the country. Co-ordination for execution was achieved through meetings of the Thana Council and the Managing Committee of the Central Association; through monthly conferences of Project Directors, and through annual rallies of the different branches of the programme.

These principles almost coincide with those discussed by H.S.M. Ishaque in his book "ABC of Rural Reconstruction" published in 1945.

In the present study, in addition to a detailed account of a single village, a model for village development was discussed. The model has been developed through an evolutionary process. This model lays stress on building local institutions in the form of village co-operatives, Thana Central Co-operative, Thana Council and Thana Training Centre as machinery to carry out development programmes. The village co-operative is the base and other institutions are organizations for support, supplies and supervision.

To organize the village into a co-operative, the starting point is to listen to what the villagers say. Listening to villagers helps to build up mutual understanding and trust. Once mutual trust is achieved, half of the job is done. Other organizations can be built with national and international support on the basis of felt needs.

The study of a single small village is perhaps insufficient to justify the drawing of general conclusions. But the principles as discussed above and the pattern as evolved in Comilla co-operative approach have been accepted as a model for the national rural development programme in Bangladesh.

When one considers the many evils which had existed in the village, the achievement of the past ten years seems to lie more in checking retrogression than in achieving spectacular progress. Nevertheless, co-operative efforts of the villagers have brought notable changes to the village of Monagram. Changes are visible in the shape of capital formation through small savings and shares in the co-operative society. The villagers have acquired new knowledge and skills through training and education. Co-operative effort has made it possible for the villager of small holdings to get the benefit of tube-well irrigation and tractor cultivation; the benefits which only the large scale farming can possibly have. The villagers are growing three sure crops in a year instead of two uncertain crops.

The improved varieties of paddy combined with tube well irrigation have resulted in an increased yield. The villagers' outlook has been changed and they are no longer frustrated and resigned peasants.

They have acquired a new hope of improving their economic conditions and a new desire to live a better life. The villagers' attitude has been changed and they now borrow from banks instead of money-lenders and use insecticides instead of tying talisman with the crop plants to cure pest attacks.

But to what are such changes due? What is the new factor in the village? It is the co-operative society - a change agent. But why did the villagers not adopt the co-operative idea before? The answer lies in the fact that they did not know how to organize themselves. Nobody adequately explained to them the basic principles of co-operation or made a serious effort to understand their problems and to provide for necessary investment in building supporting institutions, creating physical facilities and demonstrating the results of scientific research and improved technology.

Monagram has responded to programmes directly related to economic gain such as increased yield and increased prices. The average yield of paddy in the village has gone up from 20 maunds to 59 maunds per acre. The villagers said that they have more to eat and more to sell. Therefore, it can be fair to conclude that their co-operative has been an effective institution for improving their lot.