

PROPOSALS TOWARDS FORMULATING
DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR THE RURAL
'THANA'S IN BANGLADESH

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Background

Bangladesh is a new nation in the world assembly of nations. On March 26, 1971 the people of erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, declared themselves independent of Pakistan, of which Bangladesh had been a part since August 14, 1947. It took another nine months and a bloody liberation war to finally establish the Bangladesh government in Dhaka. Since independence it faced the immediate task of consolidating the gains of freedom for a quick transformation of the country into 'Sonar Bangla', a popular reference to the 'Golden Bengal' of past glory.

The task was not simple. Bangladesh went through different phases of development and experimentation on development processes in the last decade. But the long cherished development goal of achieving self reliance was not reached. Geographic freedom remains to be transformed into economic freedom.

Bangladesh is a rural country. Based on the preliminary census of 1981, 89.2 percent and 10.8 percent of its population are rural and urban respectively.¹ Cultivation is the main occupation of the people living in rural areas. Rural communities lack employment opportunities, education, health and commercial facilities. The people who are most needed in the villages for rural development are not finding villages

¹B.L.C. Johnson, Bangladesh (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1982), P-10.

an attractive place to live. They are migrating to cities sometimes sixty to seventy miles or more away from the villages. Better employment prospects or at least the hope of these are luring them to the cities. This further aggravates the already poor housing and employment situation in cities. The development of Bangladesh lies in the development of its villages. To reach that end, the tide of villagers crowding the cities needs to be checked effectively. The reasons for poverty, inequitable distribution of income and minimal access to the means of production by the rural poor need to be ascertained and solutions discovered.

The Problems: National and Rural

Basic problems faced by the rural population of Bangladesh are:

Food Shortage

Food shortage is perennial. In 1979-80, Bangladesh imported a record 2.8 million tons of food grain. Table 1.1 gives a picture of grain production and import from the year 1975 to 1981.² The immediate problem in Bangladesh is to feed the population with at least enough to keep them alive. In 1978-1980 Bangladesh imported food grain worth \$788 million which was approximately 47 percent of the country's export earning.³

Land Poverty

The rural people in Bangladesh lack resources. For many, land, the only tangible resource with which they have any contact, does not belong to them. Landless labourers are on the increase. Table 1.2 gives the

²B.L.C. Johnson, P-10.

³Government of Bangladesh, Planning Commission, 2nd Five Year Plan (draft) 1980-1985, 1980, P-I-16.

percentage of landless agricultural labourers in Bangladesh.⁴

TABLE 1.1
FOOD PRODUCTION AND IMPORTS
(IN MILLION TONNES)

Year	Net Production	Imports
1975-76	11.7	1.4
1976-77	10.8	0.8
1977-78	12.2	1.7
1978-79	11.9	1.2
1979-80	12.2	2.8
1980-1981	13.8	1.1 (Estimated)

TABLE 1.2
LANDLESS AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS
IN BANGLADESH

Year	Percentage of total agricultural labour
1960	17.52
1968	20
1974	24.9
1977	33

In 1960, 17.5 percent of the total agricultural labourers were landless. In 1977 it rose to 33 percent. Moreover 50 percent of the households

⁴Anowarulla Chowdhury, *Agrarian Social Relations and Rural Development in Bangladesh* (New Jersey: Allanhold, Osmun & Co., 1982), P-16.

may be considered as virtually landless since they possess less than half an acre of land per household.⁵ A drastic and effective land reform measure is necessary if the government really wishes to improve the condition of these rural destitutes.

Inequity in Income Distribution

The population below the extreme poverty line, which is defined by the minimum caloric requirement of 1805 calories, is 53.6 percent and that below the poverty line of 2122 calories is 80 percent. During the period 1969 to 1989, the gross domestic product increased by 29.6 percent whereas the real wages of the working class people remained one-fourth to one-fifth below the 1969-1970 level.⁶ This indicates that in spite of all the "tall talking", the position of the working class people declined while the rest of the society improved their position. As a result, the purchasing power of the rural poor is continuously decreasing, ultimately pushing them below the extreme poverty line. Inequality in the distribution of income continues to remain a major problem.

Natural Calamities

Natural calamities are a constant companion to the people of Bangladesh. A considerable amount of personal property, shelter and crops are lost each year because of natural disasters. Coastal areas of Bangladesh are vulnerable to cyclone and tidal waves. The whole country is flood prone. Devastating floods, almost every year, kill cattle, damage crops and properties. In 1974, Bangladesh faced a severe flood which officials have called the worst in twenty years. The pre-

⁵Government of Bangladesh, 2nd Five Year Plan, P-VI-5.

⁶Ibid, P-I-15.

liminary estimate of damage was equivalent to US \$3.5 billion.⁷

In addition to these root problems, some secondary problems also need simultaneous attention. These problems are not the cause of underdevelopment or inequality, rather they are the effects of underdevelopment and inequity. Some of these problems are:

Unemployment

Approximately 33 percent of the agricultural labour forces in Bangladesh suffer from unemployment or underemployment.⁸ Most agricultural labourers work only eight to nine months in a year. During the rainy season and in slack periods, they do not normally have work. Rural areas do not have an alternative employment generator, like industry. Dependence on agriculture and abundance of labour during slack periods further reduces the daily wage rate, thus making the situation worse. In 1978-1979, Bangladesh had 10.8 million unemployed or underemployed people out of a total labour force of 30 million. The rate of unemployment among the total labour forces is increasing at a rate of 1.5 percent annually as against an increase of 3.6 percent annually among the agricultural labour forces. Rural people are the worst sufferers.⁹

School Dropout

Fifty percent of the school age children eligible for primary education enter school; but the percentage of dropout is more than 60 percent of those enrolled.¹⁰ The government expenditure on education is

⁷U.S. Government, Area Handbook for Bangladesh. Washington: 1975, p-228.

⁸Government of Bangladesh, 2nd Five Year Plan, P-VI-5.

⁹United Nations, ESCAP, Prospect for the Economic Development of Bangladesh in the 1980's, Vol. 31, No. 1 (June 1980): P-101.

¹⁰Nurul Islam, Development Strategy of Bangladesh (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1978), P-73.

insignificant even for South Asian standards. In 1978-1979, public expenditure on education in Bangladesh amounted to 8.5 percent of the budget.¹¹ The demand placed on the children, to help in family occupations particularly in the cultivating season, is one of the reasons for the large percentage of dropouts from the schools.

Population Growth

The fast growth of population during the last decade has frustrated all development efforts in Bangladesh. Under the present annual rate of 2.7 percent net population growth, the population will be one hundred and sixty million by the end of the century.¹² For economic security, families tend to have more children on the belief that children will contribute to the income of the family. In rural areas, children are in fact taking part in agricultural and other production activities to augment family income. Feeding the people in Bangladesh will become increasingly difficult in the future, if drastic reduction in the population growth is not achieved -- or if a dramatic increase in food production is not possible.

Most of these problems are interdependent. In addition to these examples, many problems can be traced back to these basic constraints. Some of these problems are solvable. Some others, because of resource constraints, remain for the foreseeable future.

¹¹Government of Bangladesh, 2nd Five Year Plan, P-VIII-3.

¹²Ibid, P-XVII-27.

Bangladesh Administrative Structure

Figure 1.1

Administrative subdivisions in Bangladesh

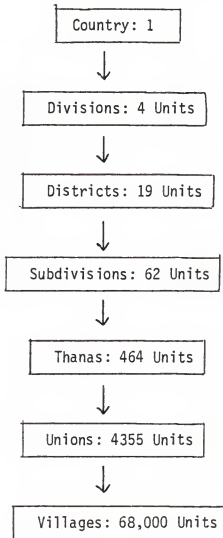


Figure 1.1 gives the hierarchy of administrative subdivisions in Bangladesh. The country is divided into four divisions. A division generally has a population of about twenty million. It is headed by a civil servant known as the divisional commissioner. He is a link between the central government and the district administration and plays a coordinating role in both administrative and development matters within the districts comprising the division.

The divisions are divided into districts. Bangladesh has a total of nineteen districts.¹³ A typical district has a population of around four million. The deputy commissioner is the highest district official. Administrative power in the district is concentrated in his hand. He controls the district through his subordinates and is responsible for collecting revenues, maintaining law and order and for directing development matters within the district.

The districts in turn are subdivided into subdivisions and subdivisions into thanas. Bangladesh has a total of 62 subdivisions and 464 thanas.¹⁴ A subdivision may have a population of around 1.3 to 1.5 million. Subdivisional officers (SDO) are the administrators of the subdivisions. They are intermediary between a thana and a subdivision or district. An average of seven to eight thanas constitute a subdivision.

A thana is the basic administrative unit in Bangladesh. It is the lowest level to which the central government has direct administrative control. An executive known as the Circle Officer administers a thana. Leaving aside a few thanas which are part of big cities or towns, the remaining thanas are nothing more than police outposts. It is a node among a cluster of villages. A thana has an average population of 150,000 to 200,000 and an approximate area of 100 square miles. The thanas are sometimes seventy to eighty miles away from the district headquarters. Each thana is divided into unions and unions into villages.

An average of nine to ten unions constitute a thana. A cluster of 15 to 16 villages makes a union. Bangladesh has a total of 4,355

¹³Stefan de Vylder, Agriculture in Chains. Bangladesh: A Case Study in Contradictions and Constraints (London: Zed Press, 1982), P-X.

¹⁴Ibid.

unions¹⁵ and approximately 68,000 villages. A village normally has a population of about 500 to 1,000 people. Each union has a local government run by the people's representatives elected by popular vote. A map of Bangladesh¹⁶ delineating the administrative subdivisions is shown in Figure 1.2.

The Importance of a Thana in Rural Development

The question arises as to why larger administrative units like thanas are given preference in this study, while smaller units like unions or villages, might equally be considered for an intensive effort in development.

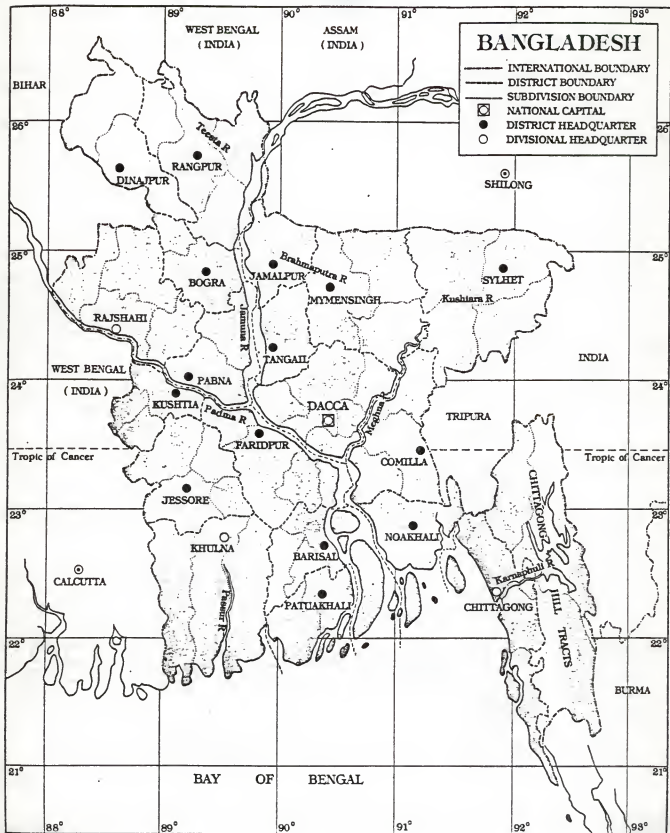
The necessity of local-level planning, resource limitation and lack of technical capability at union or village level are the main reasons for choosing a larger administrative unit like a thana. Present administrative and technical capabilities at the thana level can be increased to give it the capability to develop a comprehensive rural development plan for the areas within its boundary. Strict coordination of local level activities can be done, implementation through local governments at union and village levels can be regularly monitored from the thana centers. A thana center is generally within commuting distance from the surrounding villages. Infra-structures of the thana centers are better than those of the villages. Because of its locational advantage over the surrounding villages, especially in terms of transportation and communication facilities¹⁷, a thana has the potential to

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶Government of Bangladesh, Department of Films and Publications, Facts about Bangladesh: 1980, P-48.

¹⁷Nurul Islam, P-80.

Figure 1.2



develop quickly into an activity and growth center catering to the need of the surrounding villages. Thana centers may ultimately have proper market, storage facilities, recreational facilities and light industries providing additional jobs to the rural unemployed or underemployed labourers. In short, thanas are the first level in the administrative hierarchy that have the potential for economics of scale appropriate to contemporary development.

Scope and Purpose of This Study

My aim in this study is to analyze the present socio economic condition, particularly land tenure, and the administrative structure in the rural areas of Bangladesh. I shall further look for the components of the national problems particularly related to the question of rural development. Furthermore, I shall examine the present rural development policy and programs on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) policy strategy at national level
- b) national policy adapted at local level
- c) comprehensive local plan for achieving the national goal objectives
- d) annual plan based on the long range comprehensive local plan
- e) local participation in implementing the annual program
- f) quality and quantity of feedback if any, from the administrators and the citizens

Assuming that the Bangladesh economy will continue into the future as a mixed economy, I shall try to pinpoint problems at the local level, to ascertain priorities, to suggest ways and means to be

adopted or considered, while revising the present policy or formulating a new policy towards rural development in Bangladesh. This study is thus a policy proposal for developing the rural thanas in Bangladesh.

Methodology of Study

Neither a central allocative planning model of socialist countries nor a disjointed command model of western capitalist countries is in use in Bangladesh. In fact, most third world countries use a form of hybrid planning which tries to incorporate the best of the two opposing planning processes. This hybrid planning process varies widely from country to country in terms of degree of lineancy towards socialist or capitalistic planning processes. In the present study the planning model I am emphasizing is a hybrid model based on self reliance of Bangladesh aiming at phased reduction of dependency on foreign aid.

A literature survey and analysis will be the principal method in preparing this study. Literature to be analyzed and evaluated includes among others:

- a) Non-Bangladesh case studies of rural development
- b) Bangladesh demographic, social and economic information derived from census reports and other publications of the government of Bangladesh
- c) Research done by various national and international organizations on various issues related to rural development in Bangladesh

I have tried to utilize the most recent statistics available, but still chances are there that some of the statistics or information used in this study are possibly outdated by now. That, I believe, will not undermine the overall thrust of the policy recommendations.

Outline of Study

The chapters in the study are sequenced in the following order:

Chapter Two discusses the present and past land reform measures taken by the government. Its failure in accomplishing any measurable change in land ownership pattern was discussed.

Chapter Three examines the positive and negative aspects of existing hierarchial administration in Bangladesh for achieving development goals in the rural areas.

Chapter Four deals with past and present rural development policies and programs of Bangladesh. The causes of failure, limited success or limitation of those programs will be discussed.

Chapter Five deals with the hurdles involved in the implementation of any program in Bangladesh. Class antagonism, conflicting social values of the urban middle class with that of the rural poor, class alliance of political and bureaucratic elites are some of the important variables that contribute to the zero or negative growth derived out of some apparently good programs. This chapter will highlight the degree and nature of these apparently intangible problems.

Based on the findings of the previous chapters, Chapter Six discusses a plausible future development strategy for rural thanas in Bangladesh.

Chapter Seven incorporates policy proposals, based on the findings of this study, towards the formulation of an effective rural development policy.

Conclusions and recommendations for future study are summarized in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTION OF LAND TENURE

Historical Background

During the Mugal occupation of Bengal, "the cultivating peasantry enjoyed security of tenure (as distinct from the idea of absolute ownership) on the lands tilled by them on condition that they share their produce with 'zamindars' (overlords acting as intermediaries between established authority and the tillers of the soil)".¹ Zamindars were the revenue collectors appointed by the Mugal authority to collect land revenue from the cultivators.

When the British occupied Bengal, they made the zamindars absolute owners of the land and the actual cultivators became tenants to the zamindars. This was institutionalized by the enactment of the permanent settlement act of 1793. The revenues paid by the zamindars to the state were permanently fixed but the rents paid by the tenants to the zamindars were not. Zamindars had the liberty of realizing any amount of rent from the tenants and often tenants were evicted from their houses or land -- if they defaulted in payment of rent. The British created this privileged landlord class for the dual purpose of having a class of people friendly to the administration and ensuring regular

¹F. Tomasson Jannuzi and James T. Peach, The Agrarian Structure of Bangladesh: An Impediment to Development (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), P-1.

income from land revenue at minimum administrative cost. Neither the Mughal nor the British tried to improve the productivity of the land. Their primary aim was collection of revenue. The zamindars and the intermediate landlords between the zamindars and the tenants maintained their parasitic growth basing on their revenue income. They were not cultivators themselves nor did they invest any money in the improvement of the land.

During the Mughal rule Zamindari was a political institution and in Bengal it traditionally belonged to the Hindus. After the permanent settlement act of 1793 Zamindari no longer remained a political privilege of an exclusive hereditary occupation. It became more of an economic privilege for the landowners. Anyone with money could buy Zamindari in the open market.² A new landed class of people who were formerly revenue collectors, village leaders or agents of the East India Company began to emerge.³ At this stage another landed class from within the Muslim community of the region also began to develop.

The breaking up of the old landed class and the positioning of a new landed class in its place did not bring any structural change in agriculture. Neither the Muslim nor the Hindu landed class took part in the organization of production. In some cases, it so happened that there were as many as 50 intermediate landlords between the

²B. Chowdhury, "The Dinajpur Report of Buchanan Hamilton" *Indian Studies* 2: 19-36 quoted in Mohammed Shahidulla, "The political Economy of Underdevelopment in Bangladesh Agriculture" in *The Study of Bengal: New Contributions to the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Peter J. Bertocci (Michigan: Michigan State University, 1982), P-72.

³Ibid.

zamindar and the tenant on a plot of land.⁴ The zamindars and the intermediate landlords would appropriate illegal money from the tenants in addition to land revenue. Often these illegal exactions far exceeded the actual amount of the rent. Though the rent payable to the state by the zamindars was fixed, the zamindars continued to increase the rent demands on the tenants through various guises. In the year 1900, the zamindars collected land revenue totalling 160 million taka, while revenue paid to the state was only 39 million taka.⁵

In 1859 the Bengal Tenancy Act was promulgated. Subsequently in 1883, 1885, 1938 and 1949, various reform measures were undertaken to protect the rights and privileges of Bengali peasants. The land laws of the nineteenth century recognized the rights of occupation of various groups of tenants and the limits within which their rents could be enhanced. Even then the quantum of exaction from the actual cultivator was dependent not on the legal sanctions available, but to a very large extent on the instrument of domination. The rent receiving classes continued to impose customary and cultural pressure as well as coercive and physical stress on their tenants.⁶ All these reform measures, because of pressure from the zamindars, failed to produce desired results.⁷

⁴Kamal Siddiquee, *Bangladeshe Bhumi Shangskarer Rajnaitik Arthanithi (Political Economy of Land Reform in Bangladesh)*, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1981), P-15.

⁵Ibid, P-19.

⁶Partha Chatterjee, "The Colonial State and Peasant Resistance in Bengal, 1920-1967", *Journal of Social Studies*, 22 (October 1983): 8.

⁷Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: PPH, 1966), P-445 to 466 quoted in Kamal Siddiquee P-14.

Modification of Land System by the East BengalState Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950

Following partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the abolition of the zamindari system became a topmost priority in the reform list of the newly formed state of Pakistan. As a result, the East Bengal State Tenancy Act of 1950 was promulgated. The new act repealed the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 and also invalidated the permanent settlement act of 1793. The act was intended to create a direct relationship between the state and the cultivator by abolishing the rent collecting rights of the zamindars working as an intermediary between the state and the cultivators.

The system of zamindari was legally abolished through the promulgation of this act. All intermediate rent receiving rights were abolished. A ceiling of 100 bighas (33.3 acre) was established as the upper limit of land a family could possess and all land in excess of that was to be redistributed by the state. The act was successful in the sense that it brought the state into a direct de jure relationship with the rent paying cultivators of land.⁸ The property rights of the zamindars and other landholders were not abolished, only their right as intermediary revenue collector removed. The zamindars and other landholders became landholding tenants of the state. The position of those below them in the agrarian hierarchy did not improve. The act of 1950 did not threaten or alter in any substantial sense, the traditional agrarian structure of the country.⁹ And the reform that took place was rather a revenue reform than land reform.

⁸Jannuji et al, The Agrarian Structure of Bangladesh, P-9.

⁹Ibid., P-10.

In 1961 Ayub Khan, the dictator of Pakistan, did further damage to the already unbalanced land owning structure of East Pakistan. In order to ensure political support from the rural landlords, Ayub's military government raised the 100 bigha (33.3 acre) ceiling of maximum permitted landholdings per family to 375 bighas (125 acres). Confiscation of land in excess of maximum landholding permitted was very slow. Owners of large holdings found enough time to sell or transfer lands under Benami (fictitious) transfer documents. Out of 163,741 acres confiscated by the government, only a small percentage was redistributed.¹⁰ This redistribution had very little effect on the overall landownership pattern of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Land Tenure in Independent

Bangladesh After 1971

Following independence in 1971, the Awami League government of Bangladesh took immediate steps to modify the provisions of the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950. The modifications that were made are:

1. Landholdings of 25 bighas (approximately 9 acres) or less were exempted from payment of land revenue
2. The ceiling on the size of landholding was lowered to 100 bighas (33.3 acres)
3. A de-jure means was provided by which landholders can reacquire lands sold in distress following unprecedented floods and destruction of crops in 1974.¹¹

¹⁰Joseph F. Stepanek, Bangladesh-Equitable Growth? (New York: Pergamon Press, 1977), P-95.

¹¹Januzi et al., P-13.

These modifications did not bring any substantial benefit to the cultivators. In Bangladesh, 99 percent of the farmer families have landholdings below 25 bigha (9 acres). So, the benefit of tax exemption, if any, has not gone alone to the small farmers, it has gone to the big farmers too.¹² Landless families did not get anything out of this tax exemption. Although the land revenue for landholdings below 25 bigha was exempted, the development taxes on land were not. The farmers had to go to the tahsildars (government revenue collector) to pay the development tax and often became victim of exploitations by the tahsildars.

Families having more than 100 bigha (33.3 acres) were asked to surrender the excess land to the government for subsequent redistribution to the landless or near landless people. It was estimated that 0.4 million acres will be available for distribution from the surplus land of the families having more than 100 bigha.¹³ But in reality only 58,409 acres, which is less than 15 percent of the estimated total, were declared excess by the landlords. By January 1976, government could take possession of only 31,250 acres out of the total declared excess by the landlords.¹⁴ In 1973 total distributable government land was 4,15,612 acres, out of which only 900 acres were distributed. Until 1976 only 25 percent of the total distributable government land was settled.¹⁵ More over because of corruption by the revenue officers, landlords, as against landless people, got the allotment of land. Even when the landless people got allotment, they could not use it as big farmers and landlords took possession of those lands by force.¹⁶

¹²Kamal Siddiquee, P-66.

¹³Ibid., P-68.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., P-70.

¹⁶Ibid.

Thus in contemporary Bangladesh, the relations of people to the land have remained relatively unchanged since the nineteenth century despite the legislation enacted since independence from Pakistan.¹⁷ Based on the 1978 land occupancy survey, 10 percent of the households in Bangladesh, own 49 percent of the land, 11.59 percent of the households have no homestead or cultivable land, while 28.78 percent of the households have homestead land but no cultivable land. A total of 40.37 percent household do not possess any cultivable land.¹⁸ The situation is becoming worse day by day. In 1964-1968, only 20 percent of the rural households were without cultivable land.¹⁹ But in 1978, the figure rose alarmingly to 40.37 percent.

¹⁷Jannuzi et al., P-15.

¹⁸Ibid., P-107 (calculated from Table E-1).

¹⁹Stepanek, P-98.

CHAPTER 3

EVOLUTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Historical Background

Bangladesh inherited a colonial system of administration from the British. It went through the 23 years of existence of unified Pakistan without any significant structural change in its administrative system. During Mugal time, a 'suba' or province was the strategic unit of administration. The British chose a smaller area district with a smaller population -- between one to five million.¹ The head of the district was usually a member of the elite Indian Civil Service. He was variously known as the collector, deputy magistrate and the deputy commissioner. He used to wield immense power and responsibility. In the course of time, new activities were added to his responsibility. But right up to 1947, the collector combined in his person, the powers of the senior magistrate with supervision over other magistrates, powers of revenue collector, and all the residual authority of one who more than anyone else represented the majesty of the British rule in the district.² He was never a part of the people. In official terms he was a public servant, but in reality his behavior towards the people was paternalistic.

¹Inayetulla, "Local Administration in a Developing Country" in Development Administration in Asia, ed. Edward W. Weidner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970), P-281.

²Ibid.

This very system continued after the partition of India. Field administration was bureaucratically controlled; and deputy commissioners ruled districts from the district headquarters. Sometimes the outlying thanas were 70 to 80 miles or more away from the district headquarters. Thana development administration at such distances was always loose and in most cases did not produce desired results. Local bodies, especially in the rural areas were hardly more than a mere appendage to the district administration.³ One important reason for the failures encountered in development work is the inadequacy of the administrative structure. Wiedner commented, "Almost all the countries of southeast Asia have planning commissions that work carefully to put out five year plans or their equivalent. The great majority of these plans have been complete failures in practice, no matter what their technical quality. Prominent among the reasons for failure is an inadequate administrative system."⁴

Little attention was paid to the reform of administrative structure during the first decade of the existence of Pakistan. The first major attempt in this line was made by the military dictator Ayub Khan. In 1962 he introduced a new system commonly known as Basic Democracies (BD). In spirit and style the BD system was different from the old system of administration. It stood for a strong executive and at the same time provided for an independent judiciary and representative legislative. A series of steps were taken at the provincial and local levels to decentralize authority, to experiment with new organizational

³Ibid., P-292.

⁴Edward W. Weidner, "The Elements of Development Administration" in Development Administration in Asia. ed. Edward W. Weidner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970), P-11.

devices for developmental activities, to strengthen the departments by evolving improved personal practices and most significant of all by introducing a viable and vital system of local self-government.⁵ Its aim was:⁶

1. to ensure coordinated administration of governmental service and supplies for accelerating socio-economic development of rural areas

2. to utilize viewpoints and experiences of both the elected representatives and trained governmental functionaries by bringing them together under the local councils at all levels of field administration

3. to make the field bureaucracy responsible and responsive to the demands of the rural populace whose elected representatives could freely discuss their needs and press for meeting them in the forum of the local councils

In the BD system, people elected BD members and the BD members in turn elected the parliament members and the president. Excepting this concept of indirect election, the importance of improving the quality of life in the rural areas through rural works program and the increased participation of basic democrats in the development works in their local areas can hardly be questioned.⁷ Thana councils and district councils were formed with elected and appointed members from the civil services to undertake development work. Much of the development work

⁵Inayetulla, P-285.

⁶A.M.M. Shawkat Ali, Field Administration and Rural Development in Bangladesh (Dhaka: Center for Social Studies, Dhaka University, 1972), P-8.

⁷Ibid., P-83, and Rounaq Jahan "East Pakistan During the Decade of Ayub" in Prelude to Crisis. Bengal & Bengal Studies in 1970, ed. Peter Bertocci (Michigan: Michigan State University, 1972), P-8.

in rural areas was coordinated through the thana council and thana functionary circle officer.

The thana, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, was given importance as rural activity center. In terms of quantitative growth, Ayub's BD system worked well. During the period from October 1958 to March 1969, Pakistan experienced an economic growth that was spectacular for Asia in gross quantitative terms. But it occurred within a context of increasing economic inequality between a tiny upper class on the one hand and an enormous lower class on the other. Macro growth was six percent per year for the decade.⁸

The rural works program fund was utilized through the basic democrats. There were complaints of misappropriation of funds. Also the growing economic and political powers of the BD members increased the inequality in the rural areas.⁹ The middle class and urban intelligentsia were not happy with the BD system. To them it was anti-ethical, as it goes against liberal democratic ideals of universal adult franchise and direct election.¹⁰

After independence, elections were held at union level to elect union council members. But no elections were held to elect members for the thana and the district councils, despite specific constitutional provisions in that regard, during Awami League's time.¹¹ Chaos and confusion was the norm. Development work was hampered because of undue political pressure by the Awami League cadres.

⁸Robert Laporte, Jr., "Pakistan and Bangladesh" in Politics and Modernization in South and Southeast Asia, ed. Robert N. Kearney (New York: Schewkma Publishing Co., 1975), P-124.

⁹Rounaq Jahan, P-11.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Awami League was the ruling party in 1972. Shaikh Mujibur Rahman was the prime minister.

When Ziaur Rahman came into power, like Ayub Khan he also gave strong importance to the executive at the district level. Deputy commissioners remained the major coordinators of development works in the rural areas. Like the Awami League regime, no local government was formed at the thana and district level. Some successful experiments were done with 'Shanirvar'¹² program based on the concept of self help. All these programs were executive led, with local people having little to say in the planning process. They were called in at the implementation stage. The success of most of these programs -- most of them were model projects -- can be mainly attributed to the dedication and persuasion of the executive concerned and the direct support it received from the government. Pilot projects or experiments with better political support, better finance and better leadership almost never fail.¹³ Since that may not be the case for projects in a national scale, mass scale self reliant projects without the people's participation in the planning process should be viewed with caution.

The first serious attempt to reorganize administration in Bangladesh was made by the present government of General Ershad in 1982. On October 24, 1982, the president declared administrative decentralization with the thana as the basic unit. In the first phase of implementation, 45 thanas were upgraded. These thanas started functioning from November 7, 1982.¹⁴

¹²Bengali word meaning self reliant.

¹³Sook Bang, "Integrated approach for development programs: Dangers and Prospects" in Integrated Approach to Rural Development, ed. Marilyn Campbell (Ottwa: International Development Research Center, 1975), p-14.

¹⁴Government of Bangladesh, "Bangladesh Embarks on a Process of Decentralization of Administration" Dhaka 1982 (Mimeographed).

A new administrative setup emerged in the thanas with an elected chairman to work as head and a trained senior executive as its executive officer. The setup aims at increasing participation in decision making and developing activities at the thana level. In March 1984, upgraded thanas were to have elections to elect thana chairman. Time is not ripe to comment on the outcome of this administrative change now. But it seems the government is on the right track in bringing the administration near the people. A comprehensive plan supported by annual target plans for the areas constituting a thana and its implementation would result in the achievement of the long cherished desire to accomplish self reliancy by an all out effort in rural development in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 4

NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT: PAST AND PRESENT, A CRITICAL EVALUATION

From age immemorial, Bangladesh has been an agricultural country. During most of the time of its existence, it has served the interest of its foreign rulers. The rulers had only one selfish aim -- uninterrupted collection of revenue. Bangladesh basically served as hinterland for the development of distant urban centers both during Mugal and British rule. Though some spot developments were done here and there, no conscious effort was really made to improve or radically change the social and economic condition of the predominantly rural Bangladesh.

Colonial Inheritance

By introducing the permanent settlement act of 1793, the British created a new class of landlords known as zamindars. They were created to secure loyalty and stabilize revenue receipts.¹ Zamindars were considered the owners of the land and actual tillers were classified as tenants of the zamindar. The revenue paid by the zamindar to the government were fixed, but the rents paid to the zamindars by the tenants were not fixed. The zamindars enjoyed the freedom of extracting any amount of rent from the tenants. The peasants became the victim of exploitation by the zamindars and their agents.

¹Anwarulla Chowdhury, Agrarian Social Relations and Rural Development in Bangladesh (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osman Publishers, 1982), P-71.

The formal institutions of government were kept to a minimum. Government administration below the subdivision level was virtually non-existent. Rural Bangladesh was in fact administered through private bureaucracy of the zamindars. Neither the zamindars nor the British government invested any money out of their revenue income for the improvement of the land. During the later part of the British rule, the government was considering establishment of circle board (Present day thana council) below the subdivision level for directing relief activities during famine, helping schemes in connection with cooperative credit movement and the development of agricultural demonstration.² But this program was never accomplished during British rule.

During 1930's, some civil servants, such as Nurunnabi Chowdhury and H.S.M. Ishaque, became interested in rural development. As administrators they tried to accomplish some development work in their respective areas.³ All these were isolated attempts made by individuals or groups towards rural development. Until the partition in 1947, there were no coordinated rural development programs for the whole of Bangladesh.

Rural Development Program During Pakistan Time

V-AID Program

The first organized rural development program was launched by the then East Pakistan government in the year 1954. It was aided by United

²The Bengal District Administration Inquiry Committee Report 1913-1914 (E.J. Levinge-Chairman) quoted in A.M.M. Shawkat Ali, Field Administration and Rural Development in Bangladesh, (Dhaka: Center for Social Studies, Dhaka University: 1982), P-37.

³Anwarulla Chowdhury, P-73.

States and was known as village agricultural and industrial development program. It advocated four basic programs: a) experts, development centers at thana headquarters; b) trained workers at the village level; c) village councils or the base agency for carrying out the actual work and; d) issue of grants-known as aided self help.⁴ It was hoped that V-AID programs would generate employment and stimulate overall village development. But unfortunately the program was a failure because of the following reasons:

- a) the village councils which were supposed to implement the program under the guidance of V-AID workers did not function well because of conflicting group interests
- b) self-help projects suffered due to lack of voluntary participation
- c) priorities assigned by villagers to various projects were always in conflict with those of V-AID workers⁵
- d) the projects were excessively dependent on foreign aid and experts.⁶

The program was abolished in June 1961.

⁴Ibid., P-75.

⁵M. Alamgir, "Programs of Environmental Improvement at the Community Level", Economic Bulletin for the Asia and Pacific, 32 (June 1981): 70.

⁶Anwarulla Chowdhury, P-76.

Comilla Cooperative Program

The Comilla cooperative program was pioneered by Dr. A. Hamid Khan in the year 1961 and was launched in Kotowali thana of Comilla district. The program was the outcome of field research done by the Pakistan (now Bangladesh) Academy of Rural Development in Comilla. The comilla cooperative system consists of a village credit cooperative run by villagers at the village level; and a central cooperative at the thana level responsible for supplying new technology, agricultural inputs like fertilizer, insecticide, high yielding variety seeds etc., training the cooperative members and supervision. The cooperative was intended for small farmers with the strategy of avoiding domination by big farmers, though the big farmers would not be excluded from the cooperative.

Big farmers were sceptical about the outcome of the cooperatives, so they did not join initially. Small farmers were mainly the members of these cooperatives. Number of cooperative societies grew rapidly and by 1970 eleven more thanas in Comilla district joined the program. The thana central cooperative provided village cooperatives with loans, irrigation pumps, fertilizer, seeds, etc. Growth of membership in the cooperatives and repayment of loans by the cooperative members was encouraging as is evident from the following table 4.1.⁷

⁷Robert D. Stevens, "Comilla Rural Development Program to 1971" in Rural Development in Bangladesh and Pakistan, ed. Robert D. Stevens et al. (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976), P-101.

TABLE 4.1

STATUS OF COMILLA TYPE OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES 1970

Agricultural Cooperatives	Average No. of Cooperative Societies per Thana	Average Number of Cooperative Members	Average Shares and Savings Per Member	Average Loan Issued Per Member	Overdue Loans over Total Loans (Percentage)
Comilla Kotwali Thana 1960/61-1968/69	301	11,673	\$ 28.98	\$ 52.71	2%
Three External Thana	229	5,873	\$ 10.30	\$ 57.75	4.4%
Seven Comilla District Thana	196	5,620	\$ 19.53	\$ 54.60	9.5%

Considering the per capita income of \$100 in 1970, the savings shown in the table is significant. In Comilla Kotowali Thana in 1968/69, 37 percent of the farmers were cooperative members. They increased yield by 98 percent as compared with only 10 percent for a control group of farmers outside Comilla Thana.⁸ The pioneering work done in Comilla in sixties was encouraging and the Comilla model was thought to be effective for the whole of the country.

Emergence of Bangladesh

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Bangladesh government took an ambitious scheme for phased implementation of Comilla type model cooperatives throughout the country. The scheme was given the name 'Integrated Rural Development Program'. It has the following objectives as defined by A.N.M. Eusuf, Registrar of Cooperative societies, government of Bangladesh:⁹

1. to create an institutional infrastructure for effective utilization of resources available for development through the two tier cooperative model
2. to organize farmers into permanent cohesive disciplined groups for planned programs primarily aimed at agricultural development
3. to utilize institutional credit facilities offered and supervised by the Thana Central Cooperative Society (TCCA) and to build rural capital through shares and savings

⁸Ibid., P-104.

⁹A.N.M. Eusuf "The Integrated Rural Development Program in Bangladesh" in Integrated Approach to Local Rural Development, ed. Marilyn Campbell (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 1975), P-22.

4. to select agricultural innovations and to promote adoption of such innovations by individual members through cooperatives
5. to study and experiment for further development and prepare plans for development in areas such as warehousing, marketing, processing, rural electrification, education, health, housing etc.
6. to develop local leadership through participation in training by village leaders, managers, model farmers, chairman and accountants organized by the TCCA.

The first level in the cooperative models is village level cooperative society and the second level is thana level cooperative society (TCCA). TCCA has wider responsibility. It is responsible for the preparation of annual production plans, the procurement of necessary inputs, the distribution and realization of credit and the arrangement of supplies and services for implementing the program. But the most important function of TCCA is training of managers, model farmers and chairmen of the village cooperative societies.

The pre-independence success story of Comilla thana did not remain unblemished after the independence. Post independence record of IRDP cooperatives was a mixture of success and failure. The IRDP is yet to expand itself to all the Thanas of the country. Fewer than 40 percent of the total farm families have been covered by the cooperative system developed in Comilla.¹⁰ The rate of growth of membership in societies and the number of societies has declined greatly and loans forwarded to cooperatives largely remained unrealized.

¹⁰ Quazi Md. Munjur-I-Mowla. "Comilla and U-J: A Comparative Study in Rural Development Policies", *Journal of Social Studies* 10 (October 1980): 94.

Though the original Comilla cooperatives were intended for the protection of small and medium farmers against the large owners and money lenders, the IRDP cooperatives were soon taken over by the large farmers. Some of the traditional village leaders and rural elites who were sceptic at the beginning of the Comilla type program are now beginning to join the program. Some of them are not even farmers. In the first managing committee of Comilla Kotowali Thana cooperative, 67 percent of the office bearers had farming as their main occupation. But in 1969-70 only 17 percent of the managing committee members of the society had farming as their main occupation.¹¹ The members of the managing committee are now having long overdue loans themselves. According to one study quoted by Stefan de Vylder, a large proportion (52 percent) of the defaulters were the members of the managing committees of the primary societies while 79 percent of these defaulting members were directors and office bearers of the managing committee.¹² In the earlier years small farmers derived benefit out of the cooperative program. But now whatever benefit is accrued from the program is going to make the large farmers richer. The smaller farmers are increasingly becoming poorer.

One vital weakness of the original Comilla model and subsequent IRDP cooperatives is its inability to include landless labourers in the program. None of the members of the village cooperatives are landless. So, out of all government subsidy to the cooperatives and the increase

¹¹Badruddin Ahmad, Who Decides (Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1972), P-16 & 37.

¹²Stefan de Vylder. Agriculture in Chain, Bangladesh: A Case Study in Contradiction and Constraints (London: Zed Press, 1982), P-147.

in yield, the landless labourers gained little. The landholding patterns of cooperative members in a Comilla village as studied by Majumdar¹³ is given in Table 2.2.

TABLE 4.2
LANDHOLDING PATTERN OF COOPERATIVE
MEMBERS IN A COMILLA VILLAGE

Landholding Category	No. of Members	Percentage
Landless	nil	nil
Below 1 acre	4	11.5
1 to 2 acres	20	57.5
2 to 5 acres	6	17
Above 5 acres	5	14
Total	35	100

The near landless category of people (i.e. holdings less than one acre) is also not well represented in the village cooperatives. Landless and near landless labourers were excluded in actual practice from the cooperatives since they could not obtain any credit which required land collateral.¹⁴

So, the second important weakness of IRDP cooperatives is their inability to prevent domination by big farmers. Management of the

¹³A. Mannan Majumdar "Village Mohajanpur" in Exploitation and the Rural Poor, ed. M. Ameerul Huq (Comilla: Bard, 1976) quoted in Anwarulla Chowdhury, P-79.

¹⁴Stefan de Vylder, P-144.

cooperatives was in the hands of the big farmers even in the initial stage of Comilla cooperative which will be evident from the following Table 2.3.¹⁵

TABLE 4.3
LANDHOLDING OF THE MEMBERS
OF THE MANAGING COMMITTEE
(COMILLA KOTOWALI THANA)
1966-1968

Landholdings Category	No. of Members	Percentage
Landless	--	--
Below 1 acre	--	--
1 to 2 acres	3	25
3 to 5 acres	4	33
Above 5 acres	5	42
Total	12	100

'Shanirvar' Movement

The Bengali word "shanirvar" means self reliance. The pioneer of this movement was Mahbub Alam Chashi. From the later part of 1975, the movement started to gain popularity in the development circle. Chashi, the initiator of the movement, summed up the objectives and goals of Shanirvar as:

¹⁵Badruddin Ahnad, P-35.

"... sustained national effort to make the country self-sufficient and ultimately surplus in food production and also self-reliant in all other sectors of economy . . . Its central focus is on the rural sector and the initial thrust is to create an awareness among the rural people about the development possibilities of their individual rural areas on the basis of their own resources - physical and human, official and non official."¹⁶

The main emphasis of the shanirvar ideology is on self help and maximum utilization of unutilized or underutilized resources. The Shanirvar movement further emphasizes voluntary participation. In the initial stage shanirvar program was an isolated locally-organized program. But afterward in the process, mainly because of the initiative of Chashi, the program got national recognition and became a national movement. A six tier organizational structure at the village, Union, Thana, subdivision, district and national level was formed for the implementation of the program. Each level committee is responsible for its area and aims at self-sufficiency in its area.

Unlike IRDP, shanirvar programs are bureaucrat led programs. One of the most successful examples of a shanirvar program is Ullashi-Jadunathur project in Jessore district. Under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner, Jessore the Ullashi-Jadunathpur canal was dug in a record time of six months by the local people. Forty three percent of the work was done by voluntary labour by the villagers, members of armed forces and ansars. The remaining 57 percent was done by hired labourers.¹⁷

¹⁶M.A. Chashi, "Self Reliant Rural Bangladesh, Problems & Prospects" Paper read at the 2nd annual conference of the Bangladesh Economic Association, 1976. Quoted in M. Gulam Sattar, Rural Development Through Self Help (Comilla: BARD, 1979), P-33.

¹⁷M. Gulam Sattar, Rural Development Through Self Help (Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1979) P-18.

The total cost of construction was Taka 1,930,000 of which Taka 984,000 was direct government grant.¹⁸ Landless labourers worked five days per week as paid workers and two days per week as voluntary labours. Big farmers and businessmen did not take part physically but they contributed cash money to hire labour for doing their part of the work. A large part of the work was done by mobilization of local resources -- human as well as material. Both pressure and persuasion went side by side in the resource mobilization process.

In IRDP type project, the landless labourers get very little or nothing. But in Ullashi landless labourers were employed five days a week and remaining two days they were persuaded to work free. Benefits from these types of projects will go largely to the landowners because of better irrigation and drainage resulting in higher crop yield. As usual, the landless poor will get nothing.

In Ullashi local organizations and local people were not involved in the planning process.²⁰ The plan for canal digging was imposed on them from the top. Neither Comilla nor Ullashi is an attempt at social revolution.²¹ Their aim is to increase production, increase the income of the rural people, but without changing the social structure. A deliberate attempt to maintain status quo is visible in both the programs. IRDP emphasizes on institution buildup and training. Thanas are given

¹⁸Ibid., P-24. ¹⁹Ibid., P-20.

²⁰Ibid., P-19,20.

²¹Quazi Md. Munjur-I-Mowla, "Comilla and U-3: A Comparative Study in Rural Development Policies." *Journal of Social Studies* 10 (October 1980): 106.

importance in IRDP programs as center for coordination and training of the village cooperative members.

Like the first five-year plan, and in the second five year plan of 1980-1985 also, the Bangladesh government has high hopes of achieveing growth and equity through a strategy of comprehensive rural development plan.²² But it does not explain how the plan is going to achieve equitable distribution of income to alleviate the sufferings of the rural poor.

²²Government of Bangladesh, 2nd Five-Year Plan (Draft) 1980-1985, (Dhaka: Planning Commission, 1980), P-VII-3.

CHAPTER 5

POLITICS OF ADMINISTRATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Who wields power in Bangladesh? Answering this question is important before undertaking any development activity in Bangladesh. In present day Bangladesh, industrialists or multi-national corporations are not powerful enough to influence decisions within the government. If so, who holds power in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh is a four-way partnership between bureaucrats, military, urban middle class, and rural elites. Power is shared between these groups in varying proportions. From 1971 to 1984 Bangladesh had several governments but the very nature of power sharing did not change. With the change in governments, groups only changed positions, one group coming closer to power than the other. The poor were always ruled. They never had the chance of controlling the affairs of their own country in which they are a majority.

In the past thirteen years of its existence, Bangladesh has had both civilian and military governments. When the civilian governments were in power, the urban middle class was the dominant force in the arena of power. From 1972 to 1975 Awami League, a nationalist political party, was in power. The urban middle class was its support base. Almost the entire middle class -- lawyers, doctors, students, teachers and government servants; and the entrepreneurial class supported the

Awami League program of full regional autonomy.¹ Awami League leaders and cadres enjoyed power and exerted immense influence on administrative machinery. The bureaucrats, though considered essential for their expertise in general administration, did not enjoy the same power as the party stalwarts and cadres.

But after the killing of Mujib², when the army came into power, the bureaucrats were given more power than the past political administration. The army had no alternative except conferring administrative responsibilities on the bureaucrats while the overall supervision rested on the army personnel. The army, since it could not believe the existing political parties and because of its training in discipline, sought alliance with another trained cadre; the civil servants. That is why in Bangladesh, the bureaucrats are enjoying more power and prestige under the protection of the army rule.

The rural elites like union council chairman, local member, imam (priest) of local mosque have kinship ties with the urban elites. These ties are continuously strengthened through social contacts and marriages. They maintain a hot relationship with local officials such as the circle officer, the thana agricultural officer and the police chief to enhance their political and economic prestige.³ Urban based political organizations maintain their rural links through the rural elites.

¹Talukder Maniruzzaman, The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International Limited, 1980), p-29.

²Shaikh Mujibur Rahman, prime minister of Bangladesh in the early days of independence.

³B.K. Jahangir, Differentiation, Polarization and Confrontation in Rural Bangladesh (Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka University, 1979), p-253.

A vast majority of the urban middle class believe in liberal democracy while an increasing number of students believe socialism is the cure to all the malices in Bangladesh. The army is faction ridden. The Bangalees have observed coups and counter coups within the army based on political doctriation.⁴

Religion plays an important role in the day to day life in rural Bangladesh.⁵ Even the government does not want to take drastic measures in delicate religious issues like family planning and population control for fear of losing popularity.⁶ The urban middle class, though generally acknowledging a population problem, does not really practice family planning. An enormous gap between acknowledging a population problem and an effective pursuit to limit its growth exist. The first family planning minister of Bangladesh used to associate family planning with slaughter.⁷ The village mollas and the imams (priests) regularly present frightening images of communism during Friday prayers and Eid congregations.⁸

In the context of Bangladesh, a true understanding of these complex power relationships and values is a necessary pre-requisite for any development activity.

⁴A touching detail of faction politics within the army is given in Lawrence Lifschultz, Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution (London: Zed Press, 1979).

⁵Clarence Maloney, Peoples of South Asia (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), P-199.

⁶Marcus F. Franda, "Perceptions of a Population Policy for Bangladesh", American Universities Field Staff Reports, South Asia Series, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Bangladesh), 1973, P-6.

⁷Ibid, P-2.

⁸A similar incident is reported in a case study by B.K. Jahangir in Differentiation, Polarization and Confrontation in Rural Bangladesh, P-247.

In the event of land reform, those people who will have to surrender their rights on surplus land belong to the power group mentioned earlier. Any drastic reform measure is bound to encounter objections from interest groups within the inner circle of the government. To remain in power, governments in the past always submitted to these inner pressures. Any reasonable government plan gets diluted in this way, before it reaches the lower echelon.

In the context of Bangladesh, B. K. Jahangir is right in asserting that, "policy framing, development strategy and decision making are exclusive concerns of the inner circles of power Decentralization, verging on social activities, devoid of ideological orientations gets recommendation from the government. Interest in local and sectoral problems is considered legitimate, but legitimate participation in an organized way in the arena of decision making, or in the political struggle for the control of the state is suspect."⁹

A vicious cycle operates in all the poorer countries. It is not the fact that reform is impossible, rather the reality is that no reform measure will be taken if it goes against certain vested interests. "It is not just a lack of capital, just backward ways or just a population problem or even just a political problem which weighs upon the poorer nations. It's a combination of all of these, each aggravating the other."¹⁰

To be successful, a reform measure might be painful. Some degree of rigidity in implementation may even be necessary. The price

⁹B.K. Jahangir "The State as a Relation of Production: Bangladesh", The Journal of Social Studies, 18 (October 1982): 116.

¹⁰Robert L. Heilbroner, The Great Ascent, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963) P-72.

of development is likely to be political and economic authoritarianism. It may either be left wing or military nationalistic rule.¹¹ In a majority of the Latin American countries land reform was implemented by military governments. Reform programs in Latin America, though initially successful, became a futile exercise in the long run. The absence of a systematic program and political motivation to transform the benefits of land reform into a lasting economic growth in real terms is mainly responsible for this failure. This is why in Mexico, landless people who became landowners in 1940, became landless again in the 1960's.¹²

Another factor which is crucial in Bangladesh politics is Bangalee¹³ emotion. There are examples where Bengali pride and emotion were used by politicians for the wrong purposes. At the same time examples can be cited where this pride and emotion were used to unite the whole nation. In the 1965 war against India, the people of Pakistan including the present day Bangladesh were united against India. After a call by President Ayub Khan, the people voluntarily deposited cash and valuables in banks to support the war against India. That was the only year in the history of Pakistan when domestic savings rose to a peak of 13 percent of the GDP compared to 8.7 percent of the GDP in 1976-77.¹⁴ The same thing happened in 1971; 70 million Bangalees were united in

¹¹Ibid, P-28.

¹²World Bank, Land Reform in Latin America, World Bank Staff Working paper No. 275, 1978, P-17.

¹³'Bangalee' stands for 'Bangalee' nation. But the word 'Bengali' indicates the language spoken by the Bangalees.

¹⁴Government of Pakistan, Planning Commission, 5th Five Year Plan, (Karachi: Planning Commission, 1978), P-3.

response to a call by Shaikh Mujibur Rahman to liberate Bangladesh from the clutches of Pakistan.

Can this emotion and pride be used again for a different cause; economic development of the country? Possibly, yes. But a different strategy is necessary to be worked out. Historically Bangladesh was always ruled by foreigners. The British ruled Bengal from London through their viceroys in Delhi. The Mugals did the same; they ruled from their capital in Delhi. Bangalee revolts or protests always took time to rock the seat of power in Delhi or London because it had to pass through the Bengal representatives of the rulers. They possibly got used to it and found it more acceptable to be ruled by a foreigner than a fellow Bangalee. The Nawabs of Dhaka were quick to realize this facet of Bangalee character. To remain superior, they maintained a difference with the Bangalees. Bengali never became their household language; though they enjoyed power and prestige as Bangalees in Bengal.

Now after the liberation of Bangladesh, Bangalees are ruled by Bangalees. The person who is elected as a president is a Bangalee, the one who is thrown out is also a Bangalee and the person who will come to power will also be a Bangalee. Though stability is a precondition for development, since independence the Bangalees were not fortunate enough to have that.

In addition to economic frustration and mounting inequality, it is also a factor that the Bangalees are facing difficulty in having faith in their own leaders. Do all these factors equate against stability? Empirical evidences are not available to support or deny it. Assuming that the assertions are true, can the leaders have some patience against criticism? Instead of pointing guns at the people can they come down to them? Can they make some honest confessions about their program

and what they have achieved? Can they explain the reasons why some of their programs were a flop? Instead of finding scapegoats, can they become bold enough to accept the truth and accept responsibility for failure?

If they come out to the people and volunteer to accept punishment for the mistakes, then possibly people won't have to burn public properties, possibly they won't make rubble out of what is achieved at the cost of meagre resources. The non-violent way of protesting by Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the USA was successful in producing immense psychological pressure on the good sense of the ruling class. The rulers realized it very well that a stone throwing mob can be fought, but not a dedicated group of people who aim at hitting the conscience of the rulers silently.

A similar technique, but from the other direction, should be used in Bangladesh. A non-violent response by a ruling government to a violent agitation by the people is likely to produce some psychological pressure on the good sense of the people. Bangalee emotion and pride for the country would work at that stage; their good sense would distinguish the public property from the government.

The author is optimistic; the people will have a sweeping turn in their attitude towards the government -- the government will have a new mandate to continue their program. Compared to the administrative practices of the past, this proposal may sound utopian, but it may have more positive elements for success than the traditional approaches.

CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE RURAL THANAS IN BANGLADESH: AN EMPHASIS ON LAND REFORM & ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION

Land Reform

Of the three major resources of land, labour and capital both land and capital are in short supply in Bangladesh. The average size of an agricultural farm was only 2.5 acre¹ in 1977 and it is decreasing at a very fast rate. The only abundance Bangladesh has, is in the supply of unskilled manpower. Any development in Bangladesh should aim at:

1. Fast increase in agricultural production, and
2. Equitable distribution of income to alleviate the condition

of the land-less poor

by the maximum utilization of the existing resources. Per household land holding in Bangladesh is less than the world averages, but still that is the only major area from which Bangladesh can derive its capital for development. The 1977 land occupancy survey of Bangladesh found that 8.6 percent of the household having five acres to over fifteen acres of land own 43 percent of the total agricultural land in Bangladesh.² If

¹Peter J. Bertocci, "Structural Fragmentation and Peasant Classes in Bangladesh", Journal of Social Studies 5 (October 1979): P-49.

²Summary Report of the 1977 Land Occupancy Survey of Rural Bangladesh (adapted). Quoted in United Nations Economic Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific, "Prospect for the Economic Development of Bangladesh in 1980's", Vol XXXI, No. 1, (June 1980): P-102.

the maximum land allowed to a household is five acres, approximately 20 percent of the total agricultural land will be available for redistribution. Twenty percent of the total agricultural land of about 19.35 million acres,³ will amount to 3.87 million acres.

In addition to these lands, the central government owns (Khas) 1.4 million acres of land.⁴ Based on the 1977 land occupancy survey, 6,933,000 households having nil or less than one acre holdings own a total of 1.8 million acres.⁵ If the surplus land of 3.87 million acres and the government's land of 1.4 million acres are distributed equitably among the 6,933,000 households, then each household will have 1.02 acres of land. Srilanka experienced success in expropriating excess land from the surplus holding farmers. A clause in the Srilanka land reform law allowed the government to expropriate land in excess of the government approved ceiling without compensation if declarations on land holdings were not made within the time limit or if they were proved to be false. The clause had tremendous effect; by the end of 1974 over 500,000 acres of land were expropriated by the government under the provisions of the land reform law.⁶

Land owners whose land has been expropriated may be compensated. In Chile, after expropriation of land, the government paid 10 percent of the compensation in cash and the remainder in twenty-five year agrarian

³Ibid.

⁴Zainal Abedin, "Prospects of Agrarian Reforms in Bangladesh". The Journal of BARD, Vol. 2, No. 122, July 1981 and Jan. 1982, P-24.

⁵United Nations, Prospect for the Economic Development of Bangladesh in the 1980's", Economic Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific Vo. 31, No. 1, June 1980, p-102.

⁶United Nations, Progress in Land Reform-6th Report (New York: 1976), P-76.

bonds.⁷ In Peru, beneficiaries of reform were to reimburse the government for land received over a period of twenty years. In Taiwan after land reform in 1953, landlords were paid 2.5 times the annual yield. Seventy percent of the total compensation was paid in land bonds and the remaining 30 percent in public enterprise stock. In addition to that, land bond carried an interest of four percent. The purpose of paying landlords with the stock of government-owned enterprises was to convert public corporations into private enterprises.⁹

The vital question to be answered now is, if the land is distributed among the landless poor and they are allowed to cultivate on their own, will the situation improve or production increase? The answer is possibly no. Why is this so? In Latin America, grain production increased after land reform. This happened because more and more uncultivated lands were brought under cultivation by the new allottees. Another contributing factor is the amount of land allocated to the reform beneficiaries. The smallest average allotment in Latin American standards of 5.7 ha of irrigated land in Chile¹⁰ is over-generous in Asian standards. In Bangladesh, only two percent of the households owned that much land in 1977.

In Mexico, the benefit of land reform in terms of equity consideration was short lived. As a result of land reforms between 1910

⁷World Bank, Land Reform in Latin America: Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Peru & Venezuela, World Bank Staff working paper No. 272, 1978, P-31.

⁸Ibid, P-28.

⁹Kang Chao, Economic Effects of Land Reform in Taiwan, Japan and Mainland China: A Comparative Study (Madison: Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, 1972), P-5 (Mimeographed).

¹⁰World Bank, Land Reform in Latin America, P-15.

to 1940, Mexico managed to have striking reduction in the number of landless families from 1.1 million to 0.2 million and small farmers (minifundios) from 2.3 million to 0.83 million.¹¹ However, after another twenty years, the absolute number of landless families have grown half way back to the 1910 figure. In 1960, the number of landless and small farmer families were 1.28 million and .47 million respectively.¹² Smaller number of minifundio families in 1960 compared to 1940 and large excess of landless families indicate that fragmentation of land because of population growth is not the cause of increase in the number of landless poor, rather selling of land to the large farmers is the root cause of it. This will be more true in the case of Bangladesh, for most of the beneficiaries of land reform will have land around one acre only. Perennial monetary crisis and a trend of spending lavishly on social occasions like a son or daughter's marriage¹³ cause a rural family to lose their only land asset in a short time as they become landless again. So, for Bangladesh, transferring of ownership of a small parcel of land alone will not serve any purpose in the long run.

China had similar problems in the initial years of its socialist existence. From 1948 to 1955 or more exactly from 1950 to 1955, for all practical purposes, agriculture in China continued to be managed on an individual basis. Each household was responsible for production decisions and the selling of its produce from the land allotted to them during land

¹¹Ibid., p-17.

¹²Ibid.

¹³People in rural Bangladesh have a trend of getting money by mortgaging property sometimes to pay for house building or buying food after a natural disaster or sometimes to pay for expenditures incurred in a marriage ceremony. And the irony is, in most cases, they cannot pay back the mortgage amount to get back their property.

reform. The shortage of capital and other resources were so acute that as early as 1953, the poor peasants began to fall into debt and sell their land to richer peasants.¹⁴ As a result though the initial plan for collectivization was scheduled for 1958 to 1962, it was decided, in a decision taken by the communist party at its sixth session in 1955, to be expedited.¹⁵ By 1958, all the lands were brought under collective cultivation and the private ownership of land was abolished.

In Bangladesh, the problem is two directional. One is ensuring equitable distribution of income and the other is fast increase in agricultural production. Existing output from the land is not sufficient to feed the population. Every year Bangladesh imports around two million tons of food grain to fill the deficit. If Bangladesh hopes to avoid dependency on foreign food grants and imports and if developing the economy basing on indigenous resources is its aim, then it must generate enough savings from its agricultural output. This concept of avoiding dependence on foreign food grant is important considering Bangladesh's past experience with food aid. Bangladesh's dependence on food aid had made it vulnerable to the political pressures applied by the donor countries. Food becomes a tool for political sanction in their hands. The threat to withhold, cut or slow down deliveries has enabled countries like the United States to compel policy changes in aid receiving countries. In 1974, the United States used food as a political weapon against Bangladesh.

¹⁴United Nations, Progress in Land Reform, P-57.

¹⁵Ibid., P-58.

Supply of food grain under PL 480 was withheld, which ultimately was responsible for the famine following the worst flood in the preceeding two decades. More than 25,000 people died of starvation in the worst hit district of Rangpur.¹⁶ If Bangladesh can double its agricultural output, it will become a food exporting country. Technically it is not impossible, since Japan and Korea produces three times more food grain per acre on land far inferior in quality to Bangladesh. The use of improved seed and fertilizer is the key to the increase in agricultural production. Consider an ideal situation: where money to buy improved seeds and fertilizer is available on easy credit. Even in such a situation production in small farms under private cultivation will not increase proportionately - which is evident from the following table.¹⁷

TABLE 6-1
INCREASE IN AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT IN COMILLA COOPERATIVE

Size of Farm	Percentage Increase in Yield Per Acre in 1970 Compared to 1963-64 Production
Below 2 acres	78
2 to 3.5 acres	125
Over 3.5 acres	124
Average	98

¹⁶Rehman Sobhan, "Politics of Food and Famine in Bangladesh" in Bangladesh Politics, ed. Emajuddin Ahmad (Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka University, 1980) P-159 and 175.

¹⁷S.A. Rahim, Rural Cooperative and Economic Development of Subsistence Agriculture (Comilla: Bard, 1972)(Mimeographed). Quoted in Nurul Islam, Development Strategy of Bangladesh (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1978) P-28. And also in Stefan de Vylder, Agriculture in Chains, Bangladesh: A Case Study in Contradictions and Constraints (London: Zed Press, 1982) P-143.

While small farmers in Comilla cooperative having landholdings of less than two acres have increased their production by 78 percent; large farmers increased it by 125 percent. The increase in production by large farmers can be attributed to their privileges of having easy access to the cooperative credit and more utilization of fertilizer. Utilization of fertilizer for local variety winter rice was 29 pounds per acre for small holdings of less than 2.5 acres, 38 pounds per acre for holdings between four to six acres and 45.5 pounds for holdings above ten acres of land.¹⁸ The reason is obvious; compared to big farmers, small farmers wield less influence and face difficulty in getting agricultural credit. Even if they get credit, for the reason of other priorities, they do not use the full amount of money for buying fertilizer. Naturally, input becomes less in small farms than in large farms. To counter these problems, a different strategy needs to be identified in order to ensure an increase in food production.

Proposed Agrarian Reform Program

All expropriated land will be owned by the state. Landless labourers and peasants can be given nontransferable usufructory right on the expropriated land after its distribution to them. But their children can inherit it in the case of death of the allottee.

Any mortgage on this type of land, both verbal and written, should be considered void and punishable under law. After redistribution of land, rural households will have lands around one to five acres.

Each village should have two or more agricultural cooperatives in which all these landowners should become a member. Membership of the

¹⁸Nurul Islam, P-27.

cooperatives may be optional. But to ensure production, non-cooperative members must satisfy a production quota requirement which should be strictly monitored. If production goes below the assigned target output, then the non-cooperative farms should either become a member of the existing cooperative or pay a fine equivalent to the amount it failed to produce.

The cooperative will maintain a list of all lands owned by both absentee and working members. Thirty-three percent of the output will be distributed to the members as dividend or rent on the basis of their share in the land pooled together. The share in the output can be calculated from the total production of the cooperative. Present ridges demarcating the land into tiny parcels can be removed and instead ridges at suitable location can be constructed to retain water and maintain access.

Work can be performed under different group headings such as preparation of land, planting, spreading of fertilizer, harvesting, etc., or different worker groups can be allocated bulk areas to be cultivated at their discretion.

For each job, the amount of manhour and animalhour labour necessary should be predetermined in a meeting of the cooperative executive council elected by the cooperative members. Each job should be task oriented. Each group responsible for any job should finish the job within the time allocated. Even if they consume more time than what is allocated, still they should get paid for the allocated time only. This will help avoid policing on the cooperative workers. The cooperative office can have some salaried employees from the members to keep record of the

time worked by each individual in a group on the basis of time report submitted by the group. After each harvesting season, time allocation for different jobs can be revised basing on the past season's experience. The cooperative can apply for credit from the agricultueal banks in thana headquarters. All input, like improved variety seeds, fertilizer, insecticide and farm machineries, should be bought and supplied by the cooperative.

Out of the remaining 67 percent of the output, 40 percent will go to the working members. A working member will get remuneration on the basis of his share of the total input into the production process, both in terms of human labour and animal labour. Working members thus have an edge over the non-working member's for share, that is, 40 percent compared to 33 percent for the non-working members. The amount of remuneration is tied directly with the production. With the increase in production, remuneration of the members will also increase.

Remaining 27 percent of the output can become a reserve in the cooperative collectively owned by the members. This money will be used for paying back loans, purchasing inputs, paying government taxes, paying for improvement of land, paying for improvement of housing and health care facilities and providing for future purchase of farm machinery. In this system both the working and non-working members will have less with which to be discontented with. Because both 33 percent or 40 percent of the output, as rent of the land and wages respectively will not give a remuneration less than 50 percent of the present output if the present output is increased by only 50 percent. In most cases, in the present low productive system, sharecropping farmers in Bangladesh get 50 percent of the output and the landowners get the remaining 50 percent as rent. Sharecropping farmers usually pay for seed and fertilizer. Even

if the cases of Korea and Indonesia, where rice production is three times and two times that of Bangladesh per acre respectively in 1975,¹⁹ are not considered, Bangladesh has its own example in Comilla Kotowali thana, as appeared in table 6-1. In Comilla, rice production per acre in 1970 increased by 125 percent over the 1963 production rate as a result of the use of improved variety seeds and fertilizer and the cooperative support.

If the food production can be doubled as in Comilla Kotowali thana, then the cooperatives will have enough savings to mechanize production, which will ultimately release some labour to be utilized in village level small industries, based on raw or intermediate technology. If necessary, these industries can be seasonal operating during slack time when there will be less or no work in the agricultural farm. Poultry, animal husbandry and fish cultivation in derelict ponds, may be some of the diversifications where surplus agricultural labour can be used.

Village industries, thus created will distribute 40 percent of their income as wages. Out of the remaining 60 percent, 40 percent will be kept separate for purchasing inputs, paying taxes, providing for modernization and the remaining 20 percent can be distributed as dividends among the cooperative members, based on their share in the land pool using a ratio of 1 to 2 between the non-working and working members. That is, for the same share in the land pool a working member will get double the amount of dividend received by a non-working member. This is necessary for gradual reduction of income disparity between the people. This system

¹⁹M. Alamgir, "Programs of Environmental Improvement at the Community Level". Economic Bulletin for Asia & the Pacific, Vol. XXXII No. 1, June 1981 (New York: United Nations, 1981), P-66.

will not eliminate disparity in income but will reduce it to a great extent. The possibilities of unequal income might work as an incentive to fast growth.

In Vietnam land reform was carried out in 1956. Until 1969 low rank agricultural cooperatives (2nd phase of a three phased collectivization program) were functioning in Vietnam. In these cooperatives some production tools were owned in common but the private land ownership was not completely abolished. As a result an encouraging growth in productivity was recorded. In 1960-61 output of paddy was 1 ton/hectare higher than the pre-reform figure of 3.5 ton/hectare.²⁰ The land distributed to a five member family in Vietnam is a little more than .33 hectare (.82 acre)²¹ which compares favourably with the suggested land of approximately one acre to be made available for landless poor in Bangladesh. In the initial takeoff period, Bangladesh will have to depend primarily on the increase in agricultural output. This is particularly true, considering the fact that 54.6 percent of GDP is involved with agriculture.²²

Decentralization of Administration

Bangladesh has inherited an inefficient bureaucratically controlled administration. But there is no denial to the fact that in a country where only 20 percent of the population is literate, bureaucrats with their training and specialized administrative ability can play a constructive role in the development administration, if suitable administrative structure is developed. Administrative decentralization has now become

²⁰United Nations, Progress in Land Reform, P-78.

²¹Ibid, P-76.

²²Government of Bangladesh, Planning Commission, 2nd Five Year Plan (Dhaka: 1980), P-I-8.

a precondition for all development work in the third world countries.

As a first step towards administrative decentralization, all specialized government agencies should have an office at thana level, having sufficient power and authority to take decision at the local level without referring it to the central office. This can be done by allocating an upper limit in monetary terms up to which thana level officers can take decisions. Thana should have a separate planning cell staffed with qualified planners having sufficient expertise to formulate a comprehensive development plan for the thana. A statistical officer is necessary to keep quantitative record of growth and decline within the thana area. Unions should submit a production report by the end of each year to the thana headquarters.

The thana level officers will work under an elected thana council. An executive officer will work as coordinator between all the thana functionaries and the thana council. Thana council will have the ultimate decision making authority for the development of the thana.

The thana planning department, in conjunction with other government agencies, should formulate a plan for development and submit it to the thana council for approval. Fifty percent of the thana staff, especially the technical assistants and clerical staff, can be recruited locally. Their jobs will be non transferrable, and the thana council will pay their salary. Remaining staffs will be government employee and their jobs will be transferable to different thanas in Bangladesh. There should be regular training sessions for the thana level officers at suitable time intervals in which they can share the experience of their counterparts in other parts of the country. This will enhance their skill and they can come back to their respective thanas with new ideas after each such session. Mechanisms for advancing junior officers

into higher positions will also increase the productivity and morale of the organization. The thana council chairman should submit confidential reports to the central authority on the performance of these officers in specific terms every year. But the decision to transfer or keep them should come from the central authority. The central authority will decide on the transfer issue after giving due consideration to the confidential report. This is necessary to avoid political transfer or transfer arising out of personality clashes with the officer concerned and the thana chairman.

In the initial years of implementation, thana level officers may have differences with the thana council on policy matters which will not remain in the later years because of acclimatization of the officers with the new setup and increased skill of the council. In the context of Bangladesh, this factor is indeed very much important. The officers in most cases are likely to have a higher level of education than the thana chairman or councilors. This generally leads to a feeling of superiority among the officers and they in turn try to impose their values on the people, which is possibly true for all bureaucratic administrations.

When the bureaucrats controlled the administration from district headquarters the people in the rural areas never felt what is going on and they never took part in the planning process. As usual, in such situations, the bureaucrats took all the decisions regarding any area while the people remained indifferent. But in the present case, the area being considered is on average 100 square miles and the extreme parts of thana are eight to ten miles from the thana center. Here people will know more about their surrounding and they are the right people to decide what is good or bad for them. The executives with their expertise and analytical skill should make the people aware of the situation and

suggest schemes for development with all its plus and minus points in easy understandable terms and also in terms of monetary implications.

The thana plan should be formulated to attain the goals and objectives of the more generic national plan. The existence of present subdivisions between the thana and the district is not necessary. Sub-division staffs can be transferred to the thanas if necessary after re-training. There should be planning at four major levels; national, divisional, district and thana. Divisional and district level planning will be regional in nature. Their main emphasis will be on regional coordination and they should plan projects to be taken up at regional level. The main thrust of planning activity should be in the thana level. From the national and regional level, a target production requirement should be notified to the thanas based on their soil and fertility condition. On the basis of that target, the thanas will formulate their production plans for the different unions and villages within the thana boundary.

Thana should further develop a guideline plan for the unions to follow. This guideline plan should be easy to interpret so that elected people's representative in the union and villages can implement it with limited or no planning experience. If the expertise in union level are developed and activities increased then all the thana level functions can be taken down to the union level in the final phase of rural development in Bangladesh. In addition to the target program for increasing food production, thana should simultaneously pursue programs for the elimination of illiteracy and population control.

Thanas should have the authority to tax agricultural output. These tax incomes can be shared between union, thana and national authorities in varying proportion. The thana master plan should include a plan for beautification and future infrastructure development in dif-

ferent phases. Bangladesh is fortunate in at least one respect that its rural beauty still has remained unspoiled. It does not have much built environment in the rural areas which need rebuilding. Some highly developed western countries are now facing the problem of unplanned development. Billions of dollars are now spent in the name of slum clearance. From 1978 to 1980 up to \$400 million per year was authorized to assist severely distressed cities and countries through neighborhood reclamation in the USA.²³

It is now time for Bangladesh to act. Bangladesh can now benefit from the experience, including costly mistakes done by many of the developed nations. Infrastructure planning in thana should give due consideration to beautification and environmental planning. If it is done from the very beginning it can be done at no extra cost.

The Korean people have been wise in that respect. Basic aims of the Saemaewul movement in Korea are: 1) environmental improvement and 2) increase in income for the villagers. Beautification of village surroundings is one of the ten topmost programs listed in the priority list of activities to be performed by the movement.²⁴ A master plan incorporating the hopes and aspirations of the people in each thana will definitely help development of the thanas to attain the national goals and objectives.

Finance for all development work in thanas will come from the tax income of the thanas and government grant. To ensure development within the thanas, government grant may be tied with some precondition

²³Arthur B. Gallion and Simon Eisner, The Urban Pattern: City Planning and Design, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1980), P-154.

²⁴Woo Hyuk Kang, "Rural Development in Korea: The Saemaewul Movement" in Integrated Approach to Local Rural Development ed. Marilyn Campbell (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 1975), P-19.

such as achievement of agricultural production target, canal excavation or village road building target, elimination of illiteracy etc. The thana can impose the same preconditions to the unions and villages to qualify for a development grant from the thana development fund. This will encourage competition between the thanas. Moreover if a thana fails to get a government grant the chances of the thana chairman and councilors getting reelected will be jeopardized. A village will compete with another village for getting a larger share of the development pie from the thanas.

A possible side effect will be unequal growth between the villages, thanas and regions. That may be a price Bangladesh will have to pay at the initial phase of its rural development if it wants fast growth. Conflict between efficiency (fast growth) and regional equity were experienced in Spain and China though the planning processes in both the countries differ from each other.^{25,26} Communes in China still have varying income. Poor and rich communes or brigades are possible in China. Depending on the income accrued out of agricultural or industrial production, commune members in different communes enjoy different incomes and facilities.²⁷

But it is not an ill which cannot be countered effectively. Capitalist states try to minimize the regional gap by offering high rates of return and by pumping more government investment money into the low-income region. Sometimes a moratoria on tax is also used as an incentive.

²⁵H.W. Richardson, "Regional Development Policy in Spain" In Regional Policy ed. John Friedman and William Allonso (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1975), P-712.

²⁶Sartaz Aziz, Rural Development: Learning from China (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978), P-27.

²⁷United Nations: Progress in Land Reform, P-59.

Socialist China on the other hand is trying to counter this problem by pricing grains differently in different regions. The price paid to the low-income commune for the grain supplied within the assigned quota is relatively high compared to the price paid to the high-income commune.²⁸

Projects were divided into three different categories in Korea:²⁹

- 1) self help projects, 2) common support projects, and 3) special support projects.

Similar strategy can be adopted at thana levels for all development work. Self help projects can be implemented at village level where the thana will play the role of coordinator among the villages. Projects needing special help, say if a given thana does not have sufficient resources, can be sent to the next higher level of planning for resource allocation. All thana level annual target plans should be done in the middle of each year based on the past year's experience and the provisions of the thana comprehensive plan. Emphasis should be given on the principle "cut your coat according to your cloth".

Both Nurul Islam and Just Faaland et al emphasized the importance of thana as the nucleus of decentralized economic and political development in Bangladesh.^{30,31} At the present level of development any attempt to bring down the administration to a further lower echelon will be prohibitive both in terms of cost and availability of trained manpower.

²⁸Sartaz Aziz, P-27.

²⁹Woo Hyuk Kang, P-20.

³⁰Nurul Islam, P-80.

³¹Just Faaland and J.R. Parkinson, Bangladesh: The Test Case of Development (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1976), P-157.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY PROPOSALS

Reform measures are suggested to be undertaken in two distinct areas; land tenure and administration. The criteria are as follows:

Land Reform

1. Maximum ceiling of land to be owned by any household is five acres
2. Government owned land and the surplus land expropriated from the big farmers is to be distributed to the landless poor -- minimum land-holding for any household become one acre
3. Compensation for land expropriated may be two and one-half to three times the annual yield of the land. Ten percent of the compensation can be paid in cash and remaining in 20 to 30 years agrarian bonds or stock in public corporations.
4. The state will own the expropriated land. The allottees will have usufructory right only with the provision of transferring that right to children in case of death of the original allottee.
5. Land allotted thus is not transferable, save as per provisions in proposal three. Any mortgage on such land, written or verbal, will be considered void and punishable under law.
6. All the people in a village should become a member of any one of the two or more agricultural cooperatives to be formed in the village. Membership in the cooperative should be voluntary

7. All the lands in a village should be pooled under the cooperatives in the name of the members. Cooperatives can apply for credit from the banks at thana headquarters

8. One third of the agricultural output should be distributed as dividend or rent to the members on the basis of their share in the land pool, while 40 percent should go as wages to the working members and the remaining 27 percent to be used for purchasing input, paying back principal and interest on loan, paying government taxes, providing housing and health care facilities for the members and providing for purchase of farm machineries

9. Non-cooperative members can cultivate their land on their own. But they should comply with a production quota requirement which should be strictly monitored. If they fail to achieve the production target either they become a member of the cooperative or pay a fine equivalent to the amount they failed to produce

10. With the increase in production, cooperatives will have savings to mechanize production. This will release workers to build and work in small scale industries in the villages. Savings of the cooperatives can be used to finance the industries. Forty percent of income from industries will be distributed as wages to the workers and forty percent will be kept for the purchase of input, modernization, expansion, paying taxes, etc. Remaining 20 percent will be utilized for paying dividends to the members on the basis of their share in the land pool - with a provision that for the same share of land a working member gets double the dividend of a non-working member.

Administrative Decentralization

1. Administration should be brought down to the local level. That is, the Thana is to be the functional administrative unit, all government agencies should have office at thana level with sufficient authority to take decisions on local matters at the local level.
2. Thana council is to be elected by popular votes. It should have final authority on decision making at thana level. Coordination between the thana level officers and the thana council to be done by an executive officer responsible for overall administration of thana projects.
3. The thana should have a planning cell staffed by planners qualified enough to formulate a comprehensive plan for the thana. The thana should also have a statistical department responsible for keeping record of growth and decline within the thana boundary.
4. Thana planner, in conjunction with other thana level officers representing different government agencies, should formulate a comprehensive plan for thana development. Important elements of the plan will be: a) agricultural output plan; b) education plan; c) population control plan; d) infrastructure development plan; e) housing and industries plan; etc.
5. The thana should formulate a guideline plan for the union or villages to follow. The plan should be generic in nature, simple to follow, so that union or village elected leaders with little or no planning experience can follow and execute it.
6. One-half of the thana staff can be recruited locally and paid by the thana council. Remaining 50 percent should be central government employees transferrable to different thanas throughout the country.

7. The chairman of the thana Council should submit performance evaluation report for all the thana level officers to the central authority each year.

8. Present subdivisions between the districts and the thanas are not necessary and can be abolished.

9. Planning should be done at four different levels; national, divisional, district and the thana. Divisional and district level planning should be regional in nature. Their main emphasis should be on regional coordination and they should plan projects to be implemented at regional level. The main thrust of planning should be directed towards the thana. The thanas should formulate their plan to attain the goals and objectives of the national plan.

10. Each thana should be assigned a quota for agricultural production basing on its soil and fertility condition each year. Similar quota can be assigned for literacy and population control also.

11. The thanas should have authority to tax agricultural output. All tax income can be shared between the union, the thana and the state in varying proportions.

12. Finance for all thana level projects will come from two sources; 1) thana's own tax income, and 2) government grant. Government grant should preferrably be tied with the accomplishment of assigned targets of production, etc. Different weighing technique can be used for qualifying or disqualifying a thana for government grant.

13. The thanas can impose the same preconditions on the unions and villages for getting a share out of the thana development fund.

7. The chairman of the thana council should submit performance evaluation report for all the thana level officers to the central authority each year.

8. Present subdivisions between the districts and the thanas are not necessary and can be abolished.

9. Planning should be done at four different levels; national, divisional, district and the thana. Divisional and district level planning should be regional in nature. Their main emphasis should be on regional coordination and they should plan projects to be implemented at regional level. The main thrust of planning should be directed towards the thana. The thanas should formulate their plan to attain the goals and objectives of the national plan.

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12. Finance for all thana level projects will come from two sources; 1) thana's own tax income, and 2) government grant. Government grant should preferably be tied with the accomplishment of assigned targets of production, etc. Different weighing technique can be used for qualifying or disqualifying a thana for government grant.

13. The thanas can impose the same preconditions on the unions and villages for getting a share out of the thana development fund.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The development model of Bangladesh suggested in this study may be termed as a hybrid model, which has drawn extensively from both the socialistic and the capitalistic development models. In the context of Bangladesh, given the poverty and social values of the people, the author feels that a hybrid model as discussed in the preceding chapters might be an answer to its development problems.

The proposals and suggestions described in the preceding chapters are not a panacea for economic development in Bangladesh, nor are they assumed to be a foolproof solution of distributing income equitably among the people. For the sake of fast growth, the system advocates phased reduction in income disparity and at the same time encourages competition between communities to save more to be invested in manufacturing industries. Since private ownership of land exists, private savings deriving out of an increase in production and an increase in rent earnings, may be utilized again in private small-scale industries.

Conservative elements in the ruling elites may find these proposals anti-religion or socialistic. On the other hand, ultra-progressive radical elements might level them as reactionary aiming at inhibiting or delaying the process of social changes through class struggle. The liberals, who believe in democracy and incremental changes as a means toward achieving national goals and objectives, will possibly support these proposals. Moreover, if the proposals are implemented, there will

be a shift in the balance of power toward the rural areas.

There is a belief held by many that Bangladesh can 'sink' no further. However, objective data indicates the fact that Bangladesh is continuing to decline. The people of Bangladesh, nay the whole Indian sub-continent, have waited a long time for a revolutionary social change through class struggle, but all in vain. Do the people have to wait until all of them are starved to death?

The author believes that if through incremental changes, the economic health of the people is restored, they will be in a position to decide their fate themselves. If this 'sinking' is to be forestalled all resources and potentials are to be utilized to their fullest extent.

Further studies are necessary to determine the impact of social values of the people on development activities. To be successful, all development strategies should be calibrated based on these impact studies. Existing cities in Bangladesh are swelling and government money is constantly pumped into these cities in the name of different development grants and subsidies. It is now time to reconsider these present urban development strategies in the context of a predominantly rural country. Future studies in both urban and rural topics will help formulate a comprehensive development strategy for Bangladesh.

As an initial step, eight thanas, two each from the four divisions in Bangladesh, might be considered as model thanas for the implementation of land reform and administrative decentralization program. The lessons learned in these thanas can then be utilized to implement the program nationally.

Having suffered as it has over the last few centuries, it is imperative that Bangladesh, now free, remain a free country. It will be able to do this through the dedication and hard work of its people if they choose the correct development policies for their future.

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PROPOSALS TOWARDS FORMULATING
DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR THE RURAL
'THANA'S IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

This study has dealt with the problems of rural development in Bangladesh. The major problems in rural Bangladesh are: a) food shortage, b) land poverty, c) inequity in income distribution, and d) natural calamities. In addition to these root problems, some secondary problems, the cause of which may be attributed to the root problems, also need simultaneous attention. These problems are: a) unemployment, b) school dropout, and c) population growth.

The first five chapters: the introduction; evolution of land tenure; evolution of administrative structure; national rural development: past and present, a critical evaluation; and politics of administration for rural development, analyzed the past and present situations as indicated in the chapter titles. The chapters examined the advantages and disadvantages, supported with statistical data, of past and present rural development, policies, the status of land tenure and administrative structure in Bangladesh.

Based on the analyses of Bangladesh in these five chapters and several non Bangladesh case studies, in Chapter Six titled "Development Strategy for the Rural Thanas in Bangladesh", the author advocates a hybrid planning model for the development of rural thanas in Bangladesh. The hybrid model tries to incorporate the positive aspects of both socialistic and capitalistic development models. A new planning and implementation strategy is suggested which requires self reliance based on indigenous resources.

Reform activities for Bangladesh are suggested in two major areas; land tenure and administration. Distribution of surplus lands from large landowners to the landless poor is suggested. Maximum and minimum landholdings per household after redistribution of land is suggested to be five acres and one acre respectively. Private ownership of land would continue but with regulations to implement the collectivization of land. Absentee landowners would receive 33 percent of output, working members of the collective would receive 40 percent, and the remaining 27 percent would be used for purchasing input, paying of taxes, purchasing of farm machineries, providing housing and health care facilities and other needs of the members of the collective.

Administrative decentralization is suggested with the thanas becoming the rural administrative centers. The main thrust of planning activities would be in the thanas and the administration would be decentralized to the local level to ensure "grassroots" participation in the planning and implementation stages. The thana would have taxing authority and planning function. Each thana would be assigned a goal for agricultural production, eradication of illiteracy and population control etc. The government development grant to the thanas would be made conditional to the attainment of production and other goals assigned by the government. Each thana would formulate its annual target plan on the basis of a comprehensive plan tailor made to the specific requirement of the thana under the broad guideline of a national plan.

Chapter Five titled "Politics of Administration for Rural Development" further deals with political issues involving development administration with particular emphasis on power sharing by the bureaucrats, military, urban middle class and rural elites in Bangladesh.

Chapter Seven summarizes all proposals advocated in the study.

Finally, in conclusion, eight thanas; two each in four divisions are suggested to be taken as model thanas for trial implementation of this program. The result of that test could then be utilized to implement the program throughout the nation.