

# **The Common Country Assessment**

## **BANGLADESH**

September 1999

UNITED NATIONS

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# ACRONYMS

ADAB	Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh
ALGAS	Asia Least-Cost Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy
ARI	Acute Respiratory Infections
AsDB	Asian Development Bank
ASA	Association for Social Advancement
ASK	Ain O Shalish Kendra
BARC	Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BCAS	Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
BISE	Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education
BMET	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training
BMSP	Bangladesh Manobodhikar Shammonoy Parishad
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association: Dhaka
BOI	Board of Investment
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BUET	Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
BUP	Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad
CCA	Common Country Assessment
CCHRB	Co-ordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh
CDF	Credit and Development Forum
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CHR	Centre for Human Rights
CHTDB	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board
CIDPS	Cottage Industries Development Programme Support
CIRDAP	Centre of Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific
CMI	Census of Manufacturing Industries
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil society organisation
CUS	Centre for Urban Studies
DfID	Department for International Development
DOE	Department of Environment
DPHE	Department of Public Health Engineering
DPI/UN	Department of Public Information/United Nations
DTW	Deep tubewell
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EPI	Expanded Programme of Immunisation
EPM	Energy Protein Malnutrition
ERD	Economic Relations Division
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FFYP	Fifth Five Year Plan
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HES	Household Expenditure Survey
HKI	Helen Keller Institute
HPSP	Health and Population Sector Programme
ICDDR,B	International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh
IDD	Iodine Deficiency Disorder

IDPAA	Institute for Development, Policy Analysis and Advocacy
IFI	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
INFS	Institute of Nutrition and Food Science
IPEC	International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour
IPHN	Institute of Public Health and Nutrition
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLP	Low lift pump
MFI	Microfinance institution
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forestry
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
MoLGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives
MoLJPA	Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
NEMAP	National Environment Management Action Plan
NGO	Non-government organisation
NID	National Immunisation Day
ODS	Ozone depleting substance
OECF	Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund
ORT	Oral Rehydration Therapy
PMED	Primary and Mass Education Division, Ministry of Education: Dhaka.
RCS	Research and Computing Services Pvt., Ltd.
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
SAHDC	South Asia Human Development Centre
SAHRDC	South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre
SCF-UK	Save the Children Fund-United Kingdom
SEHD	Society for Environment and Human Development
STD	Sexually transmitted disease
STW	Shallow tubewell
SVR	Sample Vital Registration
TCC	Tripartite Consultative Committee
TTC	Technical Training Centre
UK	United Kingdom
UNCERD	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPL	University Press Ltd.
UPU	Universal Postal Union
USA	United States of America
VTI	Vocational Training Centre
WARPO	Water Resources Planning Organisation
WCHR	World Conference on Human Rights
WSSD	World Summit for Social Development



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-- PART ONE --

# **INTRODUCTION**

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## BACKGROUND TO THE CCA

### 1.1 The CCA and the UNDAF for Bangladesh

THE PREPARATION OF THE COMMON COUNTRY ASSESSMENT (CCA) IN BANGLADESH comes with on-going efforts to enhance collaboration and integration of UN system activities in the country. It builds upon existing co-ordination under the ambit of the Resident Co-ordinator System and on the decision of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), in 1996, to harmonise programming cycles by 2000. It also builds on the attention given by UN agencies in Bangladesh to co-ordination of development assistance in the extended community of development partners, by means of the Local Consultative Group.

The JCGP, now the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), defined the CCA as a joint compilation and review of a common set of indicators at the country level to provide the basis for planning and programming activities. It is a collaborative process to collect and review basic data and information in order to improve understanding of the country's development situation in a coherent and focused manner. In contrast to an in-depth analysis, the CCA is designed to identify, in consultation with national authorities and development partners, those areas which merit priority attention in development assistance from the UN system.

The CCA and the indicators set will be reviewed periodically and updated whenever warranted. The CCA will form the basis of the Bangladesh United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The UNDAF is a strategic planning and collaborative programming framework that helps to identify priorities for United Nations action. The UNDAF is designed to bring greater coherence, collaboration and effectiveness to United Nations development efforts in the field by identifying common challenges, common responses, common resource frameworks, and potential partnerships.

Thus, while the CCA maps the scope of the development challenges that face the country towards fulfilling human rights, the UNDAF subsequently delineates the points of entry of respective agencies for optimal, co-ordinated and demonstrable development support to Bangladesh.

### 1.2 Scope, Process and Delimitation of the CCA

#### 1.2.1 *Scope*

THE OVERALL SCOPE of the CCA has been determined in the context of: i) national development priorities as articulated in plans and policies, ii) country-level follow-up to UN global conferences and commitment to global conventions, and iii) the mandate for agencies of the UN system operating in Bangladesh.

As per provisions of United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/C.2/53/L.56, 1 December 1998, the CCA is a country-based process for reviewing and analysing the national development situation based on a strategic approach. The CCA identifies key issues as a basis for advocacy, policy dialogue, and preparation of a co-ordinated United Nations response (UNDAF). The CCA includes an Indicator Framework that helps to determine the development situation in a country. The indicators address general development targets, such as illiteracy and the infant mortality rate, as well as specific goals derived from the major United Nations conferences and conventions, such as the elimination of child labour and the status of follow-up to United Nations human rights treaties (Annex I).

The CCA-Bangladesh thus focuses on appropriate United Nations system-wide collaboration for i) planning, programming and implementation; ii) capacity-building; iii)

humanitarian assistance, including refugees; iv) disaster preparedness and response; v) regional issues, as relevant, vi) cross-cutting themes such as gender; vii) national execution; viii) monitoring and evaluation; and ix) strengthening the Resident Co-ordinator system.

### **1.2.2 Process** *WILL BE FINALISED WHEN REPORT IS COMPLETE*

The UN Team in Bangladesh whilst awaiting the final guidelines for the CCA and UNDAF, held a Futures Search cum Team-building Exercise in Dhaka in November 1998 which was facilitated by the UN Staff College. Subsequently, based on a decision of the UN Heads of Agencies meeting of 11 January 1999, to make the preparation of the CCA an internal and fully inclusive exercise, preparatory work was conducted by UNICEF, WFP, FAO, UNFPA and UNDP from February to June 1999. The technical working group charged with preparing the CCA reported directly to the UN Heads of Agencies under the chair of the Resident Co-ordinator. Non-resident UN agencies were consulted on the development of the Common Country Indicators Framework (see Annex II for agencies consulted).

Close interaction was maintained with the Government of Bangladesh GOB throughout the entire process, culminating in.....

Consultations were also held with:

- Civil Society Organisations and development NGOs (see Annex III);
- The wider community of development partners (see Annex IV); and
- International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank, ADB and IMF.

### **1.2.3 Delimitation**

It is evident that Sustainable Human Development<sup>1</sup> depends to a large extent on aspects of development that reach beyond UN agency support *per se*. For example, creating an enabling environment through macro-economic management, fiscal and monetary reform, banking sector reform, developments in the energy sector and infrastructure development is a critical vector of change that can enhance or diminish the prospects for human development in Bangladesh. These are areas of development intervention that largely fall under the purview of the international financial institutions (IFIs), notably the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.

This Common Country Assessment seeks to determine the broad direction and content of development in Bangladesh through a rights perspective. On the basis of this exercise, the CCA serves as a 'barometer' of progress towards the realisation of various human rights. With the development of the Bangladesh UNDAF in mind this CCA, therefore, assesses the full range of development interventions in Bangladesh. In so doing the document devotes particular attention to those areas where individual agency mandates provide for programmatic focus.

There are however obvious constraints to this exercise, both external and internal to the UN system itself, that need to be taken into consideration. This CCA has been developed in the context of zero-growth or declining overseas assistance to development in Bangladesh and elsewhere in South Asia. The quantum of resources available to agencies of the UN system in the next five-to-ten years is also uncertain. It is in this setting that UN agencies must clearly identify the value, locate the content and communicate the relevance of its development services. In the coming years, the UN must situate its interventions to explicitly meet Bangladesh's development priorities in a co-ordinated and optimal manner. In so doing, the UN system in Bangladesh has to be seen supporting national efforts to protect and realise human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Human Development is defined by UNDP as human development in a sustainable manner by focusing on poverty elimination, the advancement of women, productive employment, and protection and regeneration of the environment.

### 1.3 The Role of United Nations in Promoting Rights

In his report to the General Assembly, "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", the UN Secretary General reaffirmed the integration of human rights with UN activities and programmes. The report echoes the Final Declaration of the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, adopted by 171 states including Bangladesh, which maintains that:

Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.... The promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms must be considered as a priority objective of the UN in accordance with its purposes and principles, in particular the purpose of international co-operation.

Along with international peace, security and development, human rights are integral to the mandate and programme of the UN. Under the UN Charter the international community recognises that all human beings have equal, inalienable rights. With the Charter and the subsequent Universal Declaration of Human Rights, those rights have been codified and have acquired legal status. The preamble of the Charter states, among other things, that the UN was formed:

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women;... to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained; and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

The UN system-wide organisation has a responsibility for the realisation of human rights. A comprehensive set of international human rights instruments, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and Social, Economic and Cultural Rights guides the UN in safeguarding the full realisation of rights enshrined in them. A rights perspective in the development paradigm thus entails the observance of the basic principles of universally recognised human rights.

Given their mandates UN agencies thus have the obligation to assist member states to respect, to protect and to promote or fulfil human rights. Several human rights-related tasks and functions emerge from these obligations: setting standards, promoting awareness of and implementing those standards, and monitoring progress. The United Nations emphasises the need to put people, young and old, at the centre of the development process and give them a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. As part of this objective, United Nations agencies support governments in their efforts to fulfil the commitments and obligations of various international agreements and conventions. These instruments aim to create the positive global, national and local environments that allow all people to flourish and to enjoy their rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Together these treaties, conventions and declarations emphasise not only that human rights are multidimensional, encompassing social, economic, cultural and political issues, but also that these rights are interrelated and interdependent. The UN's human rights instruments create legal obligations for countries that are party to them. They also create roles, functions and obligations for the agencies and organisations that make up the UN system.

Some UN agencies -- such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>2</sup> (OHCHR) and UNHCR -- have expressly designated mandates and specialised technical

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<sup>2</sup> In 1994, adopting a recommendation of the UN World Conference on Human Rights, the General Assembly created the position of a High Commissioner for Human Rights, reporting directly to the Secretary General and the General Assembly, to head the UN's human rights system. The High Commissioner's mandate extends to every aspect of the UN's human rights activities: monitoring, promotion, protection and co-ordination. The High Commissioner is responsible for promoting universal human rights and for ensuring system-wide co-ordination on all matters related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

expertise on human rights. Working groups of the Commission on Human Rights are entrusted with performing studies (for example, on the right to development) and developing new human rights instruments (for example, a declaration on human rights defenders and optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Torture).

Promotion and implementation of human rights standards are undertaken by the relevant UN agency, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNHCR, UNICEF and UNDP. Monitoring has been entrusted to the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission and to various treaty bodies such as committees set up under human rights treaties on torture, women, children, racial discrimination, civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights.

#### **1.4 A Common Country Assessment based on Rights**

This Common Country Assessment constitutes a situation assessment and analysis of the development scenario in Bangladesh with respect to fulfilling human potential through exercising rights and assuming responsibilities. This CCA categorises rights in four mutually enforcing clusters: Survival, Livelihood, Protection and Participation.

The level of assessment is at the individual, community, social and national levels. It marks the steps being made towards meeting needs at all of these levels through achieving development objectives while clearly indicating the areas of required future progress. The following chapter explains in greater detail the conceptual approach taken in this CCA to integrate a rights perspective for the Bangladesh development context.

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FROM A RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

RECENT EFFORTS TO REAFFIRM RIGHTS as an integral focus of development activities have been strengthened by a number of political and social trends and events since the early 1980s. Taken together these changes are creating renewed focus on public accountability, good governance and the realisation of human rights as the ultimate purpose of development efforts. The extraordinary momentum behind the process of ratifying international human rights treaties, has also reinforced the concept of public as well as individual accountability. The UN global conferences held in the 1990s have further reinforced social and political support for human development and human rights and participating countries are committed to adopting agendas for action that aim to transform various human rights principles into practical actions. These conferences are:

- World Summit for Children (1990)
- World Conference on Education for All (1990)
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992)
- International Conference on Nutrition (1992)
- World Conference on Human Rights (1993)
- International Conference on Population and Development (1994)
- World Summit for Social Development (1995)
- Fourth World Conference for Women (1995)
- Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (1996)
- World Food Summit (1996)

Concurrently, there has also been a shift in the development paradigm. The widely accepted concept of Sustainable Human Development demonstrates that economic, political, social, environmental and cultural dimensions are all aspects of the development process. Globalisation of the economy has made the realisation of human rights more urgently felt to ensure a more equitable world. Governments and international financial institutions have come to increasingly recognise that expenditures in human development are both sound economic investments and necessary conditions for the realisation of human rights.

### 2.2 Assessment through a Rights Perspective

Assessment from a rights perspective leads to an understanding of the mix of underlying and structural causes that taken together prevent some people from realising their rights. The assessment identifies the level of causes and the linkages between various problems.

A rights perspective requires a better understanding of the WHYs and HOWs and demands an enhanced approach that takes into account the larger context and enables in-depth analysis of the basic causes and structural issues behind the non-fulfilment and violations of rights. An explicit conceptual framework facilitates this process and identifies the possible, immediate, underlying and structural causes of problems and the relationships between them. Many of the problems have common roots and the identification of the root

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<sup>3</sup> The conceptual framework for the CCA in Bangladesh was examined in light of the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) proposed by the World Bank and it was found that there is congruence between the two frameworks. This congruence is highlighted in Annex V and forms a basis for consideration in the forthcoming UNDAF.

causes of the problems is essential to understanding how these multiple factors impact on people.

Such a conceptual framework moves from viewing individuals as 'objects with needs to be satisfied' to understanding and dealing with them as 'subjects who possess rights'. This implies that for the realisation of rights it is essential that obligations be fulfilled by all the various actors at different levels of society, including institutions at the family, sub-national, national and international level. A pattern of relationships therefore exists between the individual as the claim-holder and a number of duty-bearers with responsibilities and obligations.

While it is acknowledged that all analytical models such as the conceptual framework are a simplification of complex social phenomena, nonetheless models help to identify and understand factors that have the most impact on the human development, and how these factors interact with each other. Models are also useful in selecting strategies that enable key duty-bearers to fulfil their responsibilities. The emerging series of causal factors facilitates the development of appropriate social interventions that help to break the cycle of deprivation.

The conceptual framework is thus a tool for:

- Analysing the CAUSES of the problems encountered
- Establishing LINKAGES between them
- Creating a clear HIERARCHY of causes and their "relative" weight
- Placing greater FOCUS on root causes.

The conceptual framework for the CCA exercise is illustrated in Figure 1. The framework identifies four clusters of rights - Survival, Livelihood, Protection and Participation, each of which is associated with the following sets of rights:

- **Rights to Survival**

- ◇ Population
- ◇ Health
- ◇ Food and nutrition
- ◇ Water and sanitation
- ◇ Shelter and urbanisation
- ◇ Healthy physical environment

- **Rights to Livelihood**

- ◇ Education
- ◇ Employment
- ◇ Income

- **Rights to Protection**

- ◇ From violence
- ◇ From exploitation
- ◇ From discrimination
- ◇ To identity

- **Rights to Participation**

- ◇ Association
- ◇ Expression
- ◇ Empowerment

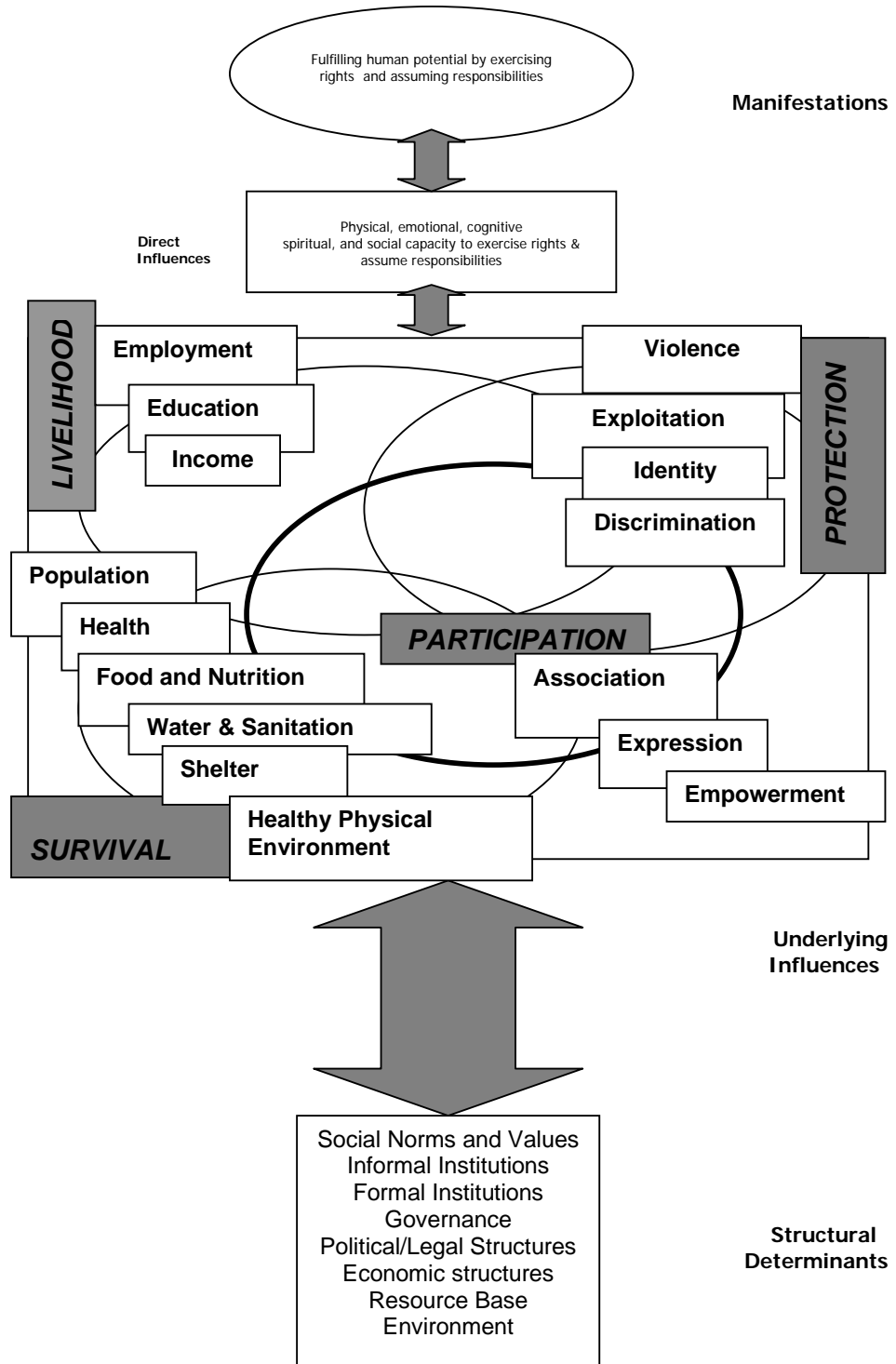
The fulfilment of these rights and their underlying influence leads to the individual's capacity – physical, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and social – to exercise rights and assume responsibility. This capacity in turn leads to the fulfilment of the full human potential. The Survival, Livelihood, Protection and Participation rights are thus determined by the basic and structural determinants such as the resource base and environment, as well as economic, political, and legal structures.

Based on the conceptual framework, this CCA is divided into four parts. The first part discusses the background of the CCA and the UNDAF and describes the rights based approach adopted for this CCA. The subsequent second part gives a brief country overview and describes the structural determinants within the country context that affect the realisation of the four clusters of rights. The third part comprises four chapters based on the clusters of right of Survival, Livelihood, Protection and Participation. These chapters raise the issues relevant to each cluster of rights, analyse the problems faced in addressing the issues and identify gaps which need to be addressed if the particular cluster of rights is to be realised by the people. The fourth part is a synthesis of the previous chapters, based on



which the gaps and the priority needs for ensuring basic rights to livelihood, survival, protection, and participation are identified.

**FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMMON COUNTRY ASSESSMENT FROM A RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE**



-- PART TWO --

# **COUNTRY OVERVIEW**

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## BANGLADESH

### 3.1 Introduction

At the end of the British rule in August 1947, the sub-continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Bangladesh, then part of Pakistan, was known as East Pakistan. Twenty four years later at the end of the War of Liberation, it emerged as an independent and sovereign state on 16 December 1971, and as of 1999 ranks 133rd among the 185 members of the United Nations<sup>4</sup>.

A diverse mixture of different religions and cultural traditions among its population arising from its historical past has led to the development of a rich cultural heritage in Bangladesh, in terms of art, music, theatre, poetry and literature. Elements of both Islam and Hinduism can be found in the daily lifestyles of Bangladeshis. The area is also known for greater religious tolerance than many other parts of the region. Society is conservative with respect to the status of women however, and a combination of factors including poverty and cultural values, which give men and boy children a higher status relative to women and girls, acts to create a situation of considerable inequality between the sexes.

Since independence Bangladesh has faced many setbacks as a result of factors that include political instability and effects of natural disasters and famines. Much of the time the country has been under martial law and democracy is still a relatively new experience. More recently, evidence from various UNDP Human Development Reports indicates that the Human Development Index of Bangladesh has shown significant improvement in the decade of the nineties rising from 0.309 in 1992 to 0.438 in 1996/97<sup>5</sup>. In spite of this Bangladesh continues to remain among the lowest ranking countries in the world because of structural determinants that constrain higher social and economic growth.

This chapter gives a brief overview of the cross-cutting themes, such as the state of governance, the socio-economic situation of the country, gender relations, and the natural environment, that influence and affect the full realisation of the rights of survival, livelihood, protection and participation.

### 3.2 Governance

Bangladesh is governed by a parliamentary form of government with the President as the head of state and the Prime Minister as the chief executive of the country. The country is administratively divided into six divisions each placed under a Divisional Commissioner. Each division is sub-divided into zilas (districts) totalling 64 in all. The administration of each zila is headed by a Deputy Commissioner. The zilas are further sub-divided into thanas (sub-districts) headed by the Thana Nirbahi Officer. Currently there are 490 thanas of which 30 are in metropolitan cities. These thanas are further divided into 4,451 unions where local governance is entrusted to elected bodies called *Pourashavas* (municipalities) in urban areas and *Union Parishads* in rural areas.

The Bangladesh Constitution provides for a unicameral legislature that is called the *Jatiya Sangsad*, or the national parliament. It comprises 330 members of whom 300 are directly elected by adult franchise, and 30 are female members elected by the *Jatiya Sangsad*. Election to the current and seventh *Jatiya Sangsad* was held on June 12, 1996.

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<sup>4</sup> *Basic Facts about the UN*, DPI/UN, New York 1999.

<sup>5</sup> BIDS/UNDP (1999).

The Supreme Court, the highest judiciary in the country, is headed by the Chief Justice, and comprises the Appellate Division and the High Court Division. Special courts or tribunals, such as labour courts and family courts, exist for adjudication of relevant disputes. There are Metropolitan Magistracy for the four major metropolitan areas of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna. Criminal and civil courts operate at the zila level and Grameen Courts are in the process of being instituted at the village level.

Currently local government reforms are being implemented to revamp the system of rural local governance in the country. In addition to the union parishad, which has had over 100 years of unbroken presence at the local level, bills have been passed during the seventh Parliament for the instatement of village and sub-district councils in 1997 and 1998 respectively. A draft bill is also under consideration for the establishment of district councils.

Bangladesh's political history has been a troubled one: two centuries of British colonial rule were followed by another period of colonial administration under a state, the centre of which lay in West Pakistan. At the time of its independence Bangladesh lacked a critical mass of people familiar with conducting affairs of a modern nation-state. Physical infrastructure was decimated by a violent war of independence. Human resources fared little better: very low levels of education, minimal basic health and limited employment opportunities this meant that the scope for the growth and participation of a civil society was limited.

In the absence of established and home-grown institutional and political structures, factional interests and informal association served to ensure opportunity and access to resources. At times when these "national" political groupings became untenable, or were violently usurped, the military stepped in, either under martial law or with a civilian front. Sixteen of Bangladesh's 28 years of independence have therefore passed under non-democratic rule.

Public and political life in Bangladesh has thus largely been characterised by violent dislocation and non-democratic governance. It is only since the early 1990s that democratic government has been established, with the succession of the sixth parliament of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party being succeeded in June 1996 by the seventh parliament of the Awami League.

## **Box 1: The Chittagong Hill Tracts**

### **An Initiative in Peace Building**

Situated in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, the Chittagong Hill Tracts comprises the three districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban<sup>6</sup>. The ethnic population in the district consists of as many as 14 tribes each having its own distinct dialect, culture, practices and rituals. The three largest tribes among them are the Chakma, the Marma and the Tripura. In 1991 the total tribal population in the CHT was estimated to be about 500,000<sup>7</sup>.

Migration of Bengali settlers into the area began as early as 17<sup>th</sup> century but gained momentum only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To protect the tribal peoples from the influx, the Indian Limitation Act of 1877 was enacted which drastically restricted the Bengali migration. Subsequently, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation No. I was introduced in 1900 by the British Raj, that comprised a package of rules for administration of the Hill Tracts and aimed at protecting the rights and interests of the tribal people, and preserving their culture, customs and practices. In 1930 however, an amendment to the Regulation made entry into the Hill Tracts easier, and in 1964 the restrictions were entirely lifted and the area was thrown open to all.

The CHT has major potential for growth because of its agricultural, forest, and energy resources. These very assets have over the years attracted non-tribal immigration which in turn has instigated conflict between the region's indigenous peoples and the non-tribal settlers. Moreover, during the liberation war, the Hill Tracts, with its cross-border accessibility, was also a source of insecurity for the nation. Thus at birth, Bangladesh inherited an incipiently politicised ethnicity that had its immediate origin in the mid-sixties. The decades-long conflict that ensued created a sense of fear, distrust and frustration among the indigenous population and subsequently gave rise to unrest in the region, often culminating in armed conflict. To contain the unrest CHT was placed under military control that continued to suppress the indigenous population of the region.

Eventually, on 2 December 1997, ending more than two decades of conflict in the CHT, a Peace Accord was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS). The Accord proclaims to uphold the political, social, cultural, educational and economic rights of all the citizens of the CHT, expedite their socio-economic development process and preserve and develop the rights of all citizens of Bangladesh.

Following the Accord, a joint GOB-donor working group was established to decide on parameters and process requirements for identifying and elaborating immediate and medium support measures for CHT. In this regard UNDP fielded a needs assessment mission on 5 April 1998 and a report was submitted on 15 May 1998<sup>8</sup>.

In addition a two-day international conference on "Peace and Chittagong Hill Tracts" jointly organised by the Prime Minister's Office, the Economic Relations Division of the Ministry of Finance and the UNDP, was held on 20-21 June 1998. The objects of the conference included facilitating discussions on the issues concerning peace in the CHT; apprising the participants on the on-going initiatives launched in the region; and fine-tuning the options and priorities leading to the implementation of the post-accord programmes. Members of Parliament, senior civil and military officials, and international and national experts attended the conference.

Subsequently, a 22-member CHT Interim Regional Council was constituted on 6 September 1998 to ensure law and social justice initiate development options in consultations with the UN agencies. Amid dissension expressed by the opposition political parties, the Interim Regional Council was eventually installed on 27 May 1999.

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<sup>6</sup> ERD (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Estimated from the 1991 census figures in BBS (1998).

<sup>8</sup> UNDP (1998a).

### 3.3 A Socio-economic Overview

#### 3.3.1 The Economy

The macroeconomic situation in Bangladesh during the 1990s has shown positive trends in several indicators such as the GDP growth rate which, while modest, has increased steadily from an estimated 3.4 percent in 1990/91 to almost six percent in 1996/97-1997/98, declining to an estimated 5.2 percent in 1998/99 (Table 3.1), reflecting the impact of the severe floods. The GDP per capita has also shown rising trends, increasing from US\$ 273 in FY 90/91 to US\$ 337 in FY 97/98<sup>9</sup>.

These improvements in the economic performance of the country are partly the outcome of improved macro-economic management: the World Bank General Macro Performance Index for Bangladesh shows a rise from a low 2.4 in 1984 to a somewhat more respectable 4 in 1998<sup>10</sup>. The government achieved this improvement by adopting generally sound macro management measures during the 1990s to reduce fiscal deficits, contain inflation, correct the distortions in the exchange rates, and promote export-led growth.

**Table 3.1. Trends in Selected Macroeconomic Indicators, 1990/91-1998/99**

Indicator	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99
GDP growth rate (%)	3.4	4.2	4.5	4.2	4.4	5.3	5.9	5.7	5.2
GDP per capita (US\$)	277	275	276	285	314	330	333	337	-
<b>As % of GDP</b>									
Savings									
Domestic	4.1	5.8	7.0	7.5	8.2	7.5	7.5	8.6	8.4
National	10.9	13.0	14.4	15.0	16.0	14.2	14.8	14.8	14.3
Investment									
Public	5.7	5.5	6.4	7.6	7.2	6.3	6.5	6.6	7.0
Private	5.8	6.6	7.8	7.8	9.4	10.7	10.8	11.2	11.5
Budget									
Total Revenue	9.6	10.9	12.0	12.2	12.1	11.9	12.2	12.1	11.9
Tax Revenue	7.8	8.8	9.6	9.3	9.6	9.2	10.0	9.9	9.5
Total Expenditure	16.8	16.8	17.9	18.2	18.9	17.2	17.3	17.5	17.2
Overall budget deficit	-7.2	-5.9	-5.9	-6.0	-6.8	-5.3	-5.1	-5.4	-5.3
Import	15.0	14.8	16.8	16.2	20.2	21.6	21.8	22.1	-
Export	7.3	8.4	9.8	9.8	12.0	12.2	13.5	15.2	15.9
<b>In million US\$</b>									
Forex reserves	880	1,608	2,121	2,765	3,070	2,039	1,719	1,739	1,740
Direct foreign investment	-	4	7	16	6	7	16	249	187

Source: MoF (1999); MoF/MoP (1999)

\* In constant prices.

\*\* Assuming a negative growth rate of -2.6% in the crops subsector, BBS estimated the GDP growth rate for 1998/99 to be 3.8%. After the 1998 floods, because of the bumper boro crop, GoB upward revised the crops subsector growth rate to 3.48% and re-estimated the 1998/99 GDP growth rate as 5.2%.

However, the overall budget deficit, while declining from 7.2 percent of GDP in FY 90/91 remained at more than 5 percent between FY 95/96 – FY 98/99, mainly because expenditures reached around 17 to 18 percent of GDP, while revenue stagnated at around 12 percent of GDP<sup>11</sup>. Part of the spending pressure has been incurred, inter alia, from subsidising loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and financial institutions, emphasising the need for rationalising and prioritising state expenditures and instituting proper expenditure monitoring procedures and mechanisms. To reduce the deficit further, it is also necessary to improve government revenue earnings through measures such as overhauling the tax administration system, broadening the VAT network, and increasing taxpayer compliance.

<sup>9</sup> MoF (1999)

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (1999). The General Macro Performance Index has a scale of 1 to 6. One suggests poor policies and performance and six good policies and performance over an extended period.

<sup>11</sup> MoF (1999) Op.cit.

The Government's wage bill and debt service obligations account for more than half of the recurrent (revenue) budget, squeezing funds for essential non-wage inputs and affecting service delivery. Whereas 38 percent of the recurrent budget is spent on the wage bill which services overstaffing, and 16 percent is spent in interest payment on public debt reflecting the rising cost of domestic borrowing, only nine per cent is allocated for supplies and services such as essential drugs, textbooks, utilities, and fuel needed to run public institutions and facilities<sup>12</sup>. Also, the budget for FY 1999-2000 once again upwardly revised the allocation to the defence forces by some eight percent. Such spending could have been diverted to social sectors that contribute to alleviating poverty.

This has special significance in light of the decline in donor funding<sup>13</sup>, official aid dropping from eight percent of GDP in the early nineties to four percent in 1997/98<sup>14</sup>. About three to five percent of the aid is food aid, three to six percent is other commodity aid, and the bulk 89 – 94 percent is project aid. Foreign aid utilisation however, is low, with disbursement as percentage of the total available amount ranging or projected to be between 20-26 percent in the period 1997/98 – 1999/2000. The best utilisation is in commodity aid, the disbursement of which reached 76 percent in 1998/99, while disbursement of food aid reached 58 percent in the same year. The most dismal performance is in project aid, with disbursement in the period 1997/98 – 1998/99 amounting to only 18 to 21 percent<sup>15</sup>.

Although both national and domestic savings registered increase in the decade of the nineties, the savings rate is extremely low, especially domestic savings which, at 8.4 percent of GDP in FY98/99<sup>16</sup> is about a third of the average rate of savings (27 percent of GDP) in all developing countries and less than half the average savings rate in South Asian countries<sup>17</sup>. This is reflected in public investments which show sluggish growth oscillating between 5.5 and 7.6 percent in FY 90/91 – FY98/99. Due to active promotion of the private sector, however, private investment has nearly doubled to 11.5 percent of GDP recently<sup>18</sup>.

Private sector investment, while increasing (Table 3.2) is however, still very low, partly because domestic savings are insufficient for infrastructure investment and savings mobilisation is weak. Furthermore, because of perceived risks, the capital market is failing to attract domestic savings.

**Table 3.2. Trends in private sector consumption and investment 1994-1999**

Expenditure Component	Percentage of GDP (at current prices)				
	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-1999
Consumption	91.76	92.48	92.49	91.40	91.55
Private	78.02	78.84	78.36	77.51	77.53
Public	13.74	13.65	14.13	13.89	14.02
Investment	16.63	16.99	17.28	17.82	18.69
Private	9.41	10.71	10.78	11.17	11.65
Public	7.22	6.29	6.50	6.64	7.04
Uninvested Private Sector Surplus	12.57	10.45	10.86	11.32	10.82

Source: Estimated from Preliminary Estimates of GDP 1998-99, SNAB, BBS, April 1999.

\* preliminary estimates.

The increase in private sector investment has helped to boost export growth from 7.3 percent in the beginning of the decade to nearly 16 percent in FY98/99, but the growth rate has been

<sup>12</sup> World Bank (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>13</sup> Between 1971/72 and 1997/98 Bangladesh received a commitment of nearly US\$ 40 billion of which 46 percent was grant and 54 percent was loan. MoF (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>15</sup> MoF/MoP (1999)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> UNDP (1999)

<sup>18</sup> MoF (1999) Op.cit.



modest, with exports during July 1998 – May 1999 only 2.7 percent higher than in the comparable period a year earlier. Weakening external competitiveness, power shortages, and disruptions at the Chittagong port were among the key contributing factors<sup>19</sup>.

Imports however, rose at a faster rate reaching more than 22 percent of GDP in FY98/99<sup>20</sup>, reflecting in part increased domestic demand, although strong flood-related imports were important in 1998/99. This has contributed to reducing foreign exchange reserves to an uncomfortably low level of US\$ 1.5 billion<sup>21</sup> equivalent to little more than two months import bills of the country. Import growth of non-food items has however been modest, reflecting the current weakness in activity. Moreover, the export base is very narrow, with 75 percent of the export earnings derived from readymade garments and knitwear<sup>22</sup> which makes the Bangladesh export market highly vulnerable to market developments in these sectors<sup>23</sup>. Immediate attention therefore needs to be given towards expanding and diversifying this base.

**Table: Balance of Payments 1990-95 (at 1989/90 prices)**

Category	Million US\$
Import Payments	(-) 22,735
<i>Goods (c.i.f.)</i>	(-) 19,681
<i>Services</i>	(-) 3,054
Export Receipts	13,138
<i>Goods (f.o.b.)</i>	10,392
<i>Services</i>	2,746
Balance of goods and services	(-) 9,597
Remittances	4,296
Current Account Balances	(-) 5,301
Medium and Long Term Debt Repayments	(-) 1,140
Balance of Payments Gap	(-) 6,441
Aid Inflow	7,564

Source: Fifth Five Year Plan 1997-2002

Imports of goods has been increasing at an annual rate of 6.14 percent, the import of foodgrains rising sharply by 16 percent annually compared to six percent annual rise in non-food and intermediate goods imports. Although the import of capital goods declined in the period, together with textiles, it comprises a major part of the non-food imports. Import of textiles however grew at 30 percent in response to higher foreign demand for readymade garments.

The average annual growth rate of exports was about 12 percent with non-traditional exports, such as leather, frozen food, readymade garments and knitwear, growing at a rate of more than 17 percent whereas traditional exports, such as tea, jute, and jute goods registered a decline. The major expansions took place in frozen food, readymade garments and knitwear, and together with leather goods and specialised textiles, has helped diversify the non-traditional exports and reduce the overall risk of price fluctuations.

The Government is in the process of formulating a Five Year Trade Policy (Import and Export Policy) and has adopted the Export Development Strategy which among other things, focuses on product diversification and quality improvement; backward linkages with export-

<sup>19</sup> IMF (1999)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> MoF/MoP (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>23</sup> For example, the GATT Multifibre Agreement which aims to establish global free trade in textiles and textile goods by the year 2005, may have negative impact on the country's readymade garments and knitwear industries.

oriented industries and service sectors; and development of new markets for Bangladesh exportables.

Currently the only border trade arrangement Bangladesh has is with Myanmar in the Teknaf side of Bangladesh. There is however a proposal for a South Asia Development Triangle encompassing Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and eastern and north-eastern parts of India for promoting trade and investment growth in the region. Bangladesh as the only partner with access to seaports stands to benefit significantly from such a partnership.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has shown a remarkable increase from only four million US dollars in FY91/92 to US\$ 249 million in FY97/98, dropping however to US\$ 187 million in FY98/99. On a registration basis, the largest share of FDIs is from the USA (20 percent) followed by Malaysia (14 percent) and UK (12 percent)<sup>24</sup>. In the case of UK, 72 percent of the US\$ 1.08 billion has been registered with BOI in the period July – December 1998 while India registered more than 50 percent of the US\$ 328 million FDIs in the same period<sup>25</sup>. Dominated by gas and power, FDI is taking place in telecommunications, manufacturing and the service sectors. Except for UK and India however, FDI registered with the Board of Investment (BOI), has been steadily decreasing since FY92/93, partly because of the recession and financial crises in South East Asia, and partly because of political disturbances, infrastructural bottlenecks, an inefficient financial system and an institutional environment that is bureaucratic and corrupt.

A major source of foreign exchange earnings is remittances from overseas workers. It has been estimated that between 1976 and 1998, the flow of remittances was as high as US\$ 16.5 billion, with around US\$ 1.6 billion received in 1998 alone, representing more than a third of the total foreign exchange current account earnings for that year<sup>26</sup>. Thus remittances contribute to about four per cent of the country's GNP, provide 30 per cent of the export earnings, and contribute to 20 per cent of the import payments. In addition, remittances constitute nearly 30 per cent of the country's national savings<sup>27</sup>. Remittances are continuing to rise at an accelerating pace and during July 1998-May 1999 period, totalled US\$ 1534 million which was 11 percent higher than in the same period of the previous year<sup>28</sup>. Additional remittances enter the country through unofficial channels in the form of consumption goods and equipment or through direct remittance of workers' wages to the families.

Reflecting the price and exchange rate developments in Bangladesh relative to its trading partners, the real effective exchange rate of the taka, based on the IMF index was appreciated in April 1999 by 3.8 percent relative to January 1999 and by 8.6 percent relative to the 1997 average. Expectations against the taka were reflected in part in a widening of the gap between the official and parallel market rates from April 1999. Although the taka was devalued by a little over two percent on July 18, 1999, as per IMF, this adjustment was significantly less than needed to offset the recent loss in external competitiveness<sup>29</sup>.

At the sectoral level the economy is slowly but steadily shifting its emphasis from agriculture to the manufacturing and the service sectors, the share of agriculture in GDP having dropped from 28 per cent in 1990 to 23 per cent in 1998 while there has been a three per cent point rise each in manufacturing and the service sectors<sup>30</sup>.

Within the agriculture sector, there has been significant diversification. In 1990 the sub-sectoral shares stood at 67 per cent from crops, 15 per cent from animal farming and 11 per cent from fishing. In 1998 whereas the share from crops dropped to 53 per cent, that

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<sup>24</sup> MoF (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Islam, M.N. (1999).

<sup>27</sup> Statistical Department, Bangladesh Bank, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> IMF (1999) Op. cit.

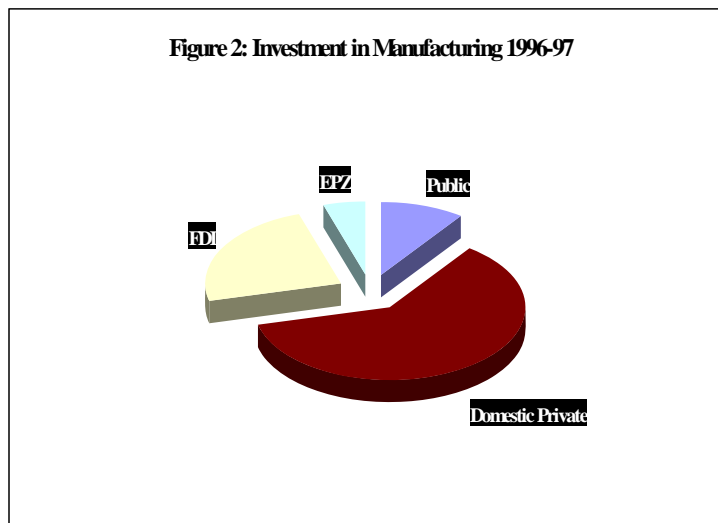
<sup>29</sup> IMF (1999) Op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> BBS in FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

from fishing nearly doubled to 21 per cent, and the share of animal farming registered a three per cent point increase to 18 per cent<sup>31</sup>.

The increase in manufacturing is largely attributable to the readymade garment and knitwear industries which have displayed significant growth, exports from these sub-sectors increasing more than threefold from US\$ 1,183 million in 1992 to US\$ 3,784 million in 1998<sup>32</sup>. Most of the contribution is from large and medium scale enterprises, small-scale<sup>33</sup> enterprises accounting for less than 30 per cent of the sectoral income. The major portion (90 per cent) of the investment in manufacturing comes from the private sector, the domestic private sector contributing more than 60 per cent to this investment<sup>34</sup>.

The performance of the private sector has been varied in the different sectors. While agriculture registered the least growth, land development, small irrigation development, distribution and sale of agricultural inputs, and non-crop activities such as fisheries, livestock and forestry have seen major growth in private investment.



Source: FFYP (1998)

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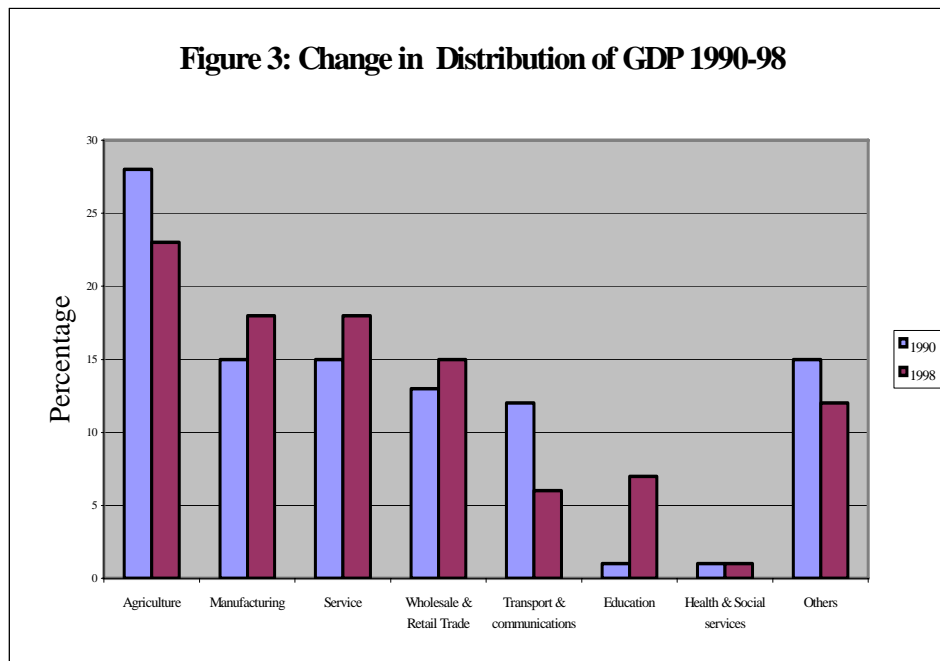
<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> BBS in World Bank (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> BBS defines large scale enterprises as those engaging 50 persons or more; medium scale enterprises as those engaging 10 – 49 persons; and small scale enterprises as those engaging less than 10 persons.

<sup>34</sup> BBS in FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

**Figure 3: Change in Distribution of GDP 1990-98**



Source: BBS in World Bank (1999)

### 3.3.2 The Poverty Situation

The most recent estimates of the Human Poverty Index (HPI) for Bangladesh show that the HPI has decreased from more than 61 in 1981-83 to about 40 in 1995-97<sup>35</sup>. This is reconfirmed by findings that while poverty remains endemic, aggregate poverty has declined from 59 per cent in 1983-84 to lie in the range 45-53 per cent in 1995-96 (Tables 3.3 and 3.4).

**Table 3.3. Trends in Poverty Incidence in Bangladesh**

Source	Extreme Poor ( per cent of population)		All Poor ( per cent of population)	
			1991/92	1995/96
BIDS/UNDP 1999				
Rural	-	-	53	51
Urban	-	-	34	26
CIRDAP/BBS 1999			<b>1996</b>	<b>1998</b>
Rural	-	-	47.9	47.6
Urban	-	-	44.4	44.3
World Bank/BBS 1999	<b>1991-92</b>	<b>1995-96</b>	<b>1991-92</b>	<b>1995-96</b>
National	42.7	35.6	58.8	53.1
Rural	46.0	39.8	61.2	56.7
Urban	23.3	14.3	44.9	35.0
HES 1995-96	<b>1991-92</b>	<b>1995-96</b>	<b>1991-92</b>	<b>1995-96</b>
Rural	28.3	23.3	47.6	45.4
Urban	26.3	26.4	46.7	48.5
BIDS 1995	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>
	25.8	22.5	57.5	51.7

Source: Compiled from BIDS/UNDP (1999); CIRDAP/BBS (1999); Rahman, H.Z. (1998); World bank (1999).  
Note: Estimation method is headcount index using direct calorie intake.

Extreme poverty has also decreased in this period from 41 per cent to 23-35 per cent<sup>36</sup>. Rural poverty has dropped from 53 per cent in 1991/92 to 51 per cent in 1995/96, urban poverty experiencing a higher drop from 34 per cent to 26 per cent<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> BIDS/UNDP (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> Rahman, H.Z. (1998).

<sup>37</sup> BIDS/UNDP (1999) Op.cit.

The decline in the incidence of poverty over the decade of the 90s has however, been at the very modest rate of less than one per cent point a year so that in 1996 some 60 million people remained below the poverty line of 2100 - 2200 Kcal. with nearly 40 million being extremely poor<sup>38</sup> who do not meet even a daily energy intake of 1,805 calories<sup>39</sup>.

Other poverty-significant evidence that corroborate the reduction in the levels of poverty include the decrease in the proportion of rural population without access to basic clothing from 15 to four per cent in the period 1990-95; and the decline in the proportion of rural households living in extremely vulnerable types of housing from nine to two per cent in the same period. Again, the incidence of malnutrition was the lowest in end 1996<sup>40</sup> and real wages increased by about seven per cent between 1991/92 and 1996, especially in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors<sup>41</sup>.

However, the burden of poverty continues to fall disproportionately on women in areas of nutritional intake, access to gainful employment, wage rates, and access to maternal health-care. Not only are female-headed households (estimated to be between five to nine per cent<sup>42</sup> of rural households) the worst-off group among the poor, but also households dependent on female earners (estimated to be 20 per cent of rural households) have a higher incidence of poverty than those dependent on male earners.

In addition, the elderly people in Bangladesh are becoming increasingly vulnerable to destitution and extreme poverty as changing social conditions deprive them of the protection and care that were traditionally provided by family and kinship structures.

**Table 3.4. Poverty Trends 1984-85 to 1995-96**

	Very Poor					Poor				
	'83-84	'85-86	'88-89	'91-92	'95-96	'83-84	'85-86	'88-89	'91-92	'95-96
<b>Headcount</b>										
National	40.91	33.77	41.32	42.69	35.55	58.50	51.73	57.13	58.84	53.08
Rural	42.62	36.01	44.30	45.95	39.79	59.61	53.14	59.18	61.19	56.65
Urban	28.03	19.90	21.99	23.29	14.32	50.15	42.92	43.88	44.87	35.04
<b>Poverty gap</b>										
National	10.42	6.85	9.89	10.74	7.89	16.52	12.27	15.35	17.19	14.37
Rural	10.51	7.36	10.76	11.73	8.90	16.83	12.50	16.01	18.06	15.40
Urban	6.53	3.70	4.20	4.89	2.75	14.26	10.85	11.06	12.00	9.19
<b>Gini Index</b>										
National	25.53	25.66	27.94	27.15	31.01	25.38	24.73	27.02	25.92	29.34
Rural	24.33	23.80	25.96	25.06	26.43	24.62	23.58	25.71	24.34	26.47
Urban	29.46	29.87	31.09	31.09	36.03	29.31	29.34	31.35	30.68	35.38

Source: World Bank (1998); BBS (1998).

Poverty has declined more in urban than in rural areas and the rates of decline have been more pronounced in the case of extreme poverty which has halved since 1983-84. Rural aggregate poverty has also declined by some 15 percentage points in that period. Urbanisation, which has increased at a very fast pace from 12-13 per cent in the early eighties to 22-23 per cent in the mid-nineties, has thus benefited both the moderate and the extreme poor.

It is a matter of concern however, that in spite of the positive economic growth and reduction in poverty, inequality as measured by Gini Index based on consumption levels, has registered an increase. Overall inequality has increased faster in the 1990s than in the 1980s, and is more pronounced in the urban than in rural areas. Inequality is also more pronounced for the very poor than for the poor. The slow reduction in poverty in an environment of

<sup>38</sup> The extreme poor are also referred to as the very poor, the hard core poor, and the poorest of the poor.

<sup>39</sup> Rahman, H.Z. (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Mitchell, D. (1998).

<sup>41</sup> CIRDAP (1997).

<sup>42</sup> Hamid, S. (1995).

relatively high economic growth has been attributed to this rising inequality rather than to increase in population.

There is also regional variation in poverty levels that cuts across both rural and urban areas. The disparity is more prominent in urban than in rural areas, possibly because of the skewed urbanisation process. Moreover, there are localised pockets of extreme distress in the ecologically vulnerable low-lying belts along major rivers and the coastal areas.

Five critical process dimensions have been identified as perpetuating the poverty situation. These are natural disasters, illness-related lumpy expenditure, insecurity, dowry, and death of the main income earner in a household. Natural disasters include floods, cyclones and riverbank erosion; illness-related expenditure includes expenses incurred for illness of family member or livestock; insecurity includes loss from theft, dacoity, eviction from land, litigation, physical threats, extortion, police harassment, legal expenses, rape and abandonment of women, and general absence of law and order; and dowry expenses are incurred on a daughter's marriage.

Of these process dimensions illness-related expenditure routinely affect about 40 per cent of rural households while crisis arising from insecurity dimensions affect some 15 per cent annually. Dowry expenses create crisis situation for about four per cent of the households and death of main earner affects another two per cent. The magnitude of the income erosion arising from these five dimensions is estimated to be nearly 8,000 taka annually or nearly 16 per cent of the average rural household income<sup>43</sup>.

Seasonal dimensions also exacerbate the poverty situation. While traditionally there have been two major periods of seasonal deficit in rural Bangladesh, the widespread expansion of winter rice production has significantly reduced the impact of the March – May lean season. The lean season from September to November however continues to be a food deficit period for many households, whose fluctuations in income and consumption are not captured by standard poverty measures.

Such seasonal deficits are mainly experienced by rural households whose principal occupations are wage labour and petty trade<sup>44</sup> who were also found to be the most severely affected by the famines of 1943 and 1974<sup>45</sup>. This unequal impact is due to fall in wage employment opportunities and in earnings from trade during the month of October: wage employment declines by as much as 62 per cent and average wage levels fall by 20 to 50 per cent depending on the region. More than 40 per cent of the petty traders suffer a fall in their daily earnings. Such drop in income levels leads to reduction in food intake, asset depletion and increased indebtedness<sup>46</sup>.

The poor in Bangladesh are not homogeneous and fall into three distinct groups<sup>47</sup>:

- The extreme poor households (22.7 per cent of rural households) lie clearly below the poverty threshold and have a daily per capita intake of <1800 Kcal; own on average 0.15 acres of land; have on average a per capita annual income of Tk. 3757; and suffer chronic food deficit.
- The moderate poor households (29.2 per cent of rural households) lie around the threshold of the poverty boundary and have a daily per capita intake of <2112 Kcal; own on average 0.50 acres of land; have on average have a per capita annual income of Tk. 6287; and are occasionally food deficit.
- Tomorrow's poor (21 per cent of rural households) currently lie above the poverty threshold but are vulnerable to income erosion pressures and consequent descent into

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<sup>43</sup> Rahman, H.Z. (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>44</sup> Rahman, H.Z. (1995).

<sup>45</sup> Sen, A. (1981).

<sup>46</sup> Rahman, H.Z. (1995) Op.cit.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

poverty. They own on average 1.5 acres of land; on average have a per capita annual income of Tk. 8368; and are neither food deficit nor food surplus.

### 3.3.3 Microfinance and Poverty Reduction

Currently 10.2 million people in Bangladesh have access to microfinance services under programmes run by the Grameen Bank, and 495 NGOs including BRAC, Proshika, and ASA. Of these 86 per cent are women<sup>48</sup>. Total cumulative loans disbursed as of December 1998 stands at Tk. 175 billion, 62 per cent of which have been disbursed by the Grameen Bank alone. Most of the disbursement has been in rural areas, less than two per cent being directed at urban areas. Members' savings total more than Tk. 13 billion<sup>49</sup>.

While many factors, such as food aid and employment generation through food-for-work and cash-for work programmes that directly benefit the very poor, have contributed to the appreciable though modest reduction in the incidence of poverty, microcredit programmes such as those of the Grameen Bank, BRAC, and BRDB RD-12, have been found to be conducive to reducing the extent and depth of poverty and have managed to sustain household welfare on a longer-term basis. Moreover, it has been found that when poor households are sustained over several years, the positive impact of programmes such as those of BRAC, are higher<sup>50</sup>.

Thus, for example, moderate poverty has been found to be appreciably lower (62 per cent) among Grameen Bank members than among non-members who fulfil the eligibility criteria<sup>51</sup> (72 per cent). Also, moderate poverty in villages not covered by any credit programmes is higher among those who are eligible (66 per cent) for microcredit programmes (Table 3.5)<sup>52</sup>.

**Table 3.5. The Impact of Grameen Bank Credit on Poverty Reduction**

Type of Group	Headcount ratio for moderate poverty	Headcount ratio for extreme poverty	Poverty Gap Index	FGT Index
Grameen Bank Villages				
Eligible and participating	61.61	10.32	13.18	2.82
Eligible but not participating	71.54	17.07	17.83	4.45
Not eligible and not participating	43.06	9.72	9.28	12.00
Total	58.94	12.90	13.60	3.03
Non-programme villages				
Eligible	65.59	9.72	15.47	3.65
Not eligible	51.11	11.11	11.45	2.56
Total	58.51	10.21	14.84	3.48

Source: Adapted from Khandker and Chowdhury (1996). FGT Index = Foster-Greer-Thorbecke Index. The higher the index the more severe the poverty among the poor.

In spite of these encouraging trends, no significant variation has been observed in the incidence of extreme poverty between members and those fulfilling eligibility criteria in villages not covered by credit programmes, the headcount ratio for extreme poverty in both cases being around 10. On the other hand, headcount ratio for extreme poverty among

<sup>48</sup> While the majority of the clients are women, there is increasing evidence that they do not always utilise the loans themselves, but rather act as credit conduits for male family members. Such issues have given rise to on-going debates about the real impact of microfinance on poor rural women.

<sup>49</sup> CDF (1999).

<sup>50</sup> Mustafa, S. et. al. (1995).

<sup>51</sup> The criteria to be fulfilled in order to be eligible for loans at entry point include: landownership not exceeding 0.5 acres of cultivable land; value of assets not exceeding the value of one acre of medium quality land; main occupation is wage labour; must belong to a group.

<sup>52</sup> Khandker, S.R. and O. H. Chowdhury (1996).

eligible non-members in villages covered by Grameen Bank stands at 17 which is very high compared to all other groups.

This confirms other findings<sup>53</sup> that point out that credit programmes in general, have not been successful in reaching the poorest of the poor. Some of the main causes for this shortcoming include self-exclusion of the poorest; the group self-selection process<sup>54</sup>; location because the very poor are often concentrated in difficult to access regions, and this increases the credit delivery cost for the institution; attitude of the target beneficiaries because in some areas highly vulnerable to ecological disasters the poor have become habituated to receiving humanitarian relief.

### **3.3.4 Gender**

The Gender-related development index (GDI) ranks Bangladesh at 123rd position out of 174 countries<sup>55</sup>. The main causes for this low index value are low literacy rates and the low share of earned income of women compared to men. It has been estimated that in 1997 female literacy rate was slightly more than half that of men, and women's real GDP per capita was less than 60 percent that of men<sup>56</sup>.

Recent years have seen an attempt to bring women more effectively into the mainstream of events in Bangladesh. Although women constitute 49 per cent of the population, their numbers are not reflected in the decision-making structures of the country. Currently, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition are female, but at the senior levels of the executive, legislature and judiciary, the numbers of women are strikingly few. Apart from the 10 per cent of reserved seats for women in Parliament, only seven women have been directly elected as members of parliament.

This is partly due to the reluctance of political parties to field women candidates because they are often at a disadvantage in both social and economic terms in comparison to their male counterparts. This disadvantage has been partially redressed in the recent Union Parishad (UP) elections that provided for direct election of women to one quarter of the seats at the local level. This means that there are now 12,828 female members<sup>57</sup>, of whom 20 are chairpersons of their Union Parishads<sup>58</sup>. Around 10 per cent of judges in the subordinate courts are women<sup>59</sup>. However, there are no female judges in the Supreme Court, and women hold less than five percent of senior positions in the civil service.

In terms of ownership of land and assets, men at all levels of society are better off than women, a significant portion of the people living in absolute poverty being women. Households headed by women are among the poorest in the country with 45 per cent of female-headed households living below the poverty line<sup>60</sup>. This situation is perpetuated by socio-cultural norms that favour men in matters related to inheritance and other financial dealings, and promote the giving of dowry by women's families at the time of their marriage.

The systemic discrimination faced by women and girl children means that their access to resources such as education, health and finance is restricted throughout their life cycle. This reinforces their position of disadvantage relative to men. The fact that Bangladesh is one

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<sup>53</sup> Hashemi and R. Schuler (1997).

<sup>54</sup> Hashemi et. al. (1997) however finds that a relatively small proportion of women is excluded for this reason.

<sup>55</sup> UNDP (1999).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> ASK (1997).

<sup>58</sup> UNDP (1999).

<sup>59</sup> Figure provided from Gradation List prepared by MoLJPA by Mr. Hassan Shaheed Ferdous, Judge and Deputy Director Training, Judicial and Administrative Training Institute.

<sup>60</sup> UNDP (1999) Op.cit.



of the very few countries in the world where women have a lower life expectancy than men is an indicator of the existing discrimination against women.

In general, women's contributions to the economy remain invisible because much of their activity consists of non-market work which is not reflected in national and international statistics. In rural areas, women have limited access to markets and employment opportunities, and while the microfinance schemes provide women with opportunities for self-employment, market access remains a persistent problem. When employed in market work, women usually operate in the informal sector, where their wages are lower than those of their male workmates. Even in readymade garments manufacturing, which has been the fastest growing sector of the economy in recent years, and where the majority of the workforce is female, the working conditions are often in violation of legislative provisions. Female workers are perceived to be less demanding and assertive, and senior management positions in the factories remain a male preserve.

Women's workload is frequently heavy, leading to the concern about the "triple burden" they carry in terms of market and non-market productive activity, as well as reproductive responsibilities and child rearing. Within the family, women are rarely in a position to participate in decision making with regard to important matters such as children's education and marriage. However, as more women participate in market work a gradual change is observed to be taking place in the social structures. In spite of this, and although the constitution of Bangladesh provides for equality between citizens irrespective of gender, for the majority of women in Bangladesh, the inequitable inheritance laws, as well as social perceptions and cultural practices with regard to dowry and divorce, continue to foster their subordinate position in society.

### **3.4 The Natural Environment**

#### ***3.4.1 Natural Resource Base***

Bangladesh extends from the Bay of Bengal in the south and merges into the highlands of India under the foothills of the Himalayas in the north. The largest delta in the world, Bangladesh makes up 8 per cent of the 600,000 sq. m. Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin, and funnels nearly all the outflow into the Bay of Bengal<sup>61</sup>. This brings with it a yearly cycle of floods and silt loads which constitute the natural base of soil revitalisation, traditional agriculture and fisheries. The country is predominantly flat, having highland tracts in the upper middle, south-eastern and north-eastern sections, parts of which are covered by forests. Almost half of the country has an elevation of less than 10 metres above sea level.

Tropical cyclones or hurricanes, accompanied by storm surges, in the pre-monsoon months of April-May as well as the post-monsoon months of October-November regularly hit the coastal areas which are sometimes also inundated with tidal waves.

In rural areas the poor depend on common property resources such as open water fisheries, wetland based flora and fauna, and government land and forests for a significant part of their livelihoods. More than 15 per cent of the income of a rural household can be accounted for by such activities as foraging for food, fodder and building materials<sup>62</sup>. Some 80 per cent of the total population depend to some extent on the utilisation of natural resources or on processing the resultant products. This access is however getting more and more restricted as traditional partnerships of resource utilisation and management disappear in the face of increasing commercialisation and resource exploitation.

#### **□ Forests**

The total forest and woodland area in Bangladesh is estimated to be 1.47 million hectares or 11.3 per cent of total land area. Forests in Bangladesh face continual depletion, forest cover

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<sup>61</sup> Gayen, P. (1998).

<sup>62</sup> BIDS/UNDP (1998).

having shrunk from 24 per cent in 1947 to merely 6 per cent in 1998<sup>63</sup>. In the coastal belt, mangrove trees have almost disappeared in many places due to conversion into commercial agricultural enterprises such as shrimp farms<sup>64</sup>.

Escalating population pressure, increasing landlessness, competing uses of forest land, illegal cutting of state forests, the rising need for fuelwood for rural domestic use and over-harvesting of forest resources have all contributed to the erosion of the natural resource base. About 2.5 per cent of existing closed forest is logged annually which, compared to the 2.6 per cent logging rate of major timber producers such as Malaysia and Costa Rica, makes the Bangladesh rate one of the highest in the world. In addition, poor concession management and monitoring, together with corruption, have led to low rates of rent capture and negligent forest management practices.

The principal direct economic impact of deforestation and destruction of the natural habitat is loss of state revenue and a significant decrease in timber and non-timber production. Other impacts include decreased natural storage capacity for excess water; increased soil erosion; and reduced biodiversity of potential value of the gene pool in these habitats. The cost of deforestation has been estimated to be about one per cent of GDP.

In order to reverse such trends, the National Forest Policy, which was approved in 1994, emphasises rehabilitation and afforestation of degraded forestland, adoption of conservation techniques, support to participatory forest management, and support to agro-forestry on private land. However, while the policies are sound, their effective implementation is constrained by the lack of capacity and motivation of local and national institutions.

#### □ *Biodiversity*

Bangladesh is rich in biodiversity. There are some five hundred species of fish and at one time, the country boasted some thousand species of rice. Numerous aquatic plants, many of which are edible, contribute to soil fertility during the dry season. Bangladesh contains the world's biggest tidal flat with the largest intact mangrove forest. The World Heritage Sundarban mangrove forest, in the south-west of the country, is famed for the Royal Bengal Tiger and has one of the world's richest collection of flora and fauna.

Biodiversity in Bangladesh is threatened by forest conversion and encroachment, mismanagement of water resources; changes in water flows; surface water pollution and salinisation; and poaching, all of which affect the major wetlands, forests and wildlife reserves. Species that are currently under threat include the Royal Bengal tiger, the Gangetic dolphin, elephant, leopard, and the White-winged wood duck. Modern farming methods and deforestation also endanger genetic diversity of several species of flora.

#### □ *Soil Degradation*

Bangladesh has achieved significant increase in its crop production mainly through improved technology such as high-yielding varieties of grains supported by higher levels of irrigation and more intensive use of fertilisers and pesticides. Recently however, total foodcrop production and rice yield increases have stagnated and current environmental, agricultural and population trends threaten to undercut prospects of maintaining continued agricultural growth in the coming decades. Such environmental degradation is the result of land use conflicts, soil degradation, and toxicity impacts tied to the use and handling of agricultural chemicals.

The two major constraints in combating land degradation in Bangladesh are high population pressure and the absence of a national land use policy. Such a policy, however, is expected to emerge from the UNDP-assisted Sustainable Environment Management Programme (SEMP) which is supporting environmental projects aimed at promoting and institutionalising

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<sup>63</sup> DOE (1990).

<sup>64</sup> UNDP (1999b).

sustainable use and management of the environment as identified by the people of Bangladesh<sup>65</sup>.

#### □ *Water Resource Management*

Increasing and conflicting needs of the different water-using sectors strain the country's water resources, especially during the dry season. During the wet season on the other hand, the combination of high rainfall and peak flows from the Padma, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers cause floods that can affect more than 55 per cent of the total land. The situation is complicated by man-made interventions for controlling floods or developing irrigation which can, and often do, have negative impact on the environment. Inadequate planning of flood control, drainage, and irrigation interventions are thought to have led to worsened off-site flooding, drainage of wetlands, and increased waterlogging and salinisation. Such impacts directly affect households and people's livelihoods by causing destruction to life and property. Some water development projects have displaced and caused disproportionate hardship on people and have moreover failed to adequately compensate the people for their relocation. In addition, conflicting interests of different water users have led to self-serving behaviour such as destruction of embankments by squatters and shrimp farmers.

At the institutional level the technical skills of workers and government staff involved in water management are inadequate. Such institutions are generally considered lacking in capacity for developing and implementing policies that prevent or reduce the negative impact of water projects on the environment.

Experience shows that government policies characterised by a clear top-down approach, such as the Flood Action Plan, exacerbate environmental problems. Learning from this, the Government has recently taken steps towards developing a more comprehensive plan starting with the Bangladesh Water and Flood Management Strategy. Other initiatives include institutional strengthening of the Water Resource Planning Organisation (WARPO) to take on added environmental responsibilities. Such institutions can only be effective if they have the capacity to generate and implement technical knowledge on the design of environment-friendly water structures and can implement participatory policies in the design or restructuring of water projects.

#### □ *Biomass Energy*

With an annual per capita energy consumption of approximately 100 kJ of energy, Bangladesh is one of the lowest energy consuming countries in the world. About 55 per cent of the country's energy comes from traditional biomass sources such as fuelwood, crop residue and animal waste; another 24 per cent is met from its own reserves of natural gas; while hydroelectric power meets a further two per cent of the energy requirement. The remainder is met from imported coal and mineral oil<sup>66</sup>. In spite of the low energy utilisation rate, and although consumption of domestic supplies of natural gas is increasing<sup>67</sup>, biomass fuel is being consumed beyond regenerative limits because constraints in increasing the consumption of commercial energy sources, prevent any significant drop in the overall reliance on biomass fuels in the near or medium term.

This high demand for biomass has both environmental as well as health costs: it fosters soil degradation, lowers agricultural yields, degrades forests, contributes to loss of vegetative and animal biodiversity and leads to high levels of indoor air pollution with health impacts that have yet to be measured on a national scale.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Gayen, P. (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>67</sup> Per capita consumption of commercial energy has been increasing at over 7 per cent annually in recent years and natural gas consumption has increased in excess of 15 per cent annually. Cited from MoEF/World Bank (1997).

#### □ *Climate Change*

The possible physical effects from global warming and climate change pose such threats to Bangladesh as damages to coastal infrastructure that could reach as much as 12 per cent of GDP by the year 2010; increased incidence of diseases; increased flooding and other natural hazards; changes/degradation of ecosystems; changes in water supply to urban settlements; and changes in cropping patterns and other agricultural activities which could result in drop rice production by as much as 10 per cent. It is estimated that due to the predicted rise in sea levels, the 65 per cent of the population who are currently vulnerable to floods, may increase to more than 90 per cent with about five million people being severely affected by the inundation<sup>68</sup>.

#### □ *Environmental Policies*

Current macro-economic and sector policies in Bangladesh have both direct and indirect impact on sustainable development. A review of such impact shows that several sectoral policies have shortcomings when viewed from an environmental perspective. Some policies that may partly conflict with environmental objectives include energy (electricity, gasoline, natural gas) pricing policies; agriculture input subsidies for urea, pesticides, and irrigated surface water; and forestry pricing policies for concessions and stumpage fees.

Other sectoral policies, while not having direct conflicts, have gaps in terms of environmental objectives. These include agriculture policies that do not cover expanded research and extension on sustainability of technologies, cropping systems and land use; and industrial policies for updating and implementing pollution control. Sectors where the key concern is implementation of existing policies rather than formulating new ones, include industry; water resources (including upstream environmental assessments); education where public awareness is a necessary element of the implementation of many of the other sectoral policies; and health and sanitation; and population. Sectors in which policies for environment protection are absent include coal and petroleum where there is also the need for setting standards; land resources where current land use policies are at a very preliminary stage of analysis; fisheries and livestock where attention is needed to ensure long-term fisheries sustainability; urbanisation and solid waste management; and transport and shipping where transport-related standards (for vehicles, fuels, and shipping) are needed together with adequate traffic management and promotion of public transport.

The list of environment-related policy items clearly shows that addressing environmental concerns is a multi-sectoral and multi-agency undertaking. It does not fall under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry alone, but requires the active policy and implementation attention of a large number of line ministries.

#### □ *Environmental Expenditures*

An analysis of the current environmental expenditure by GoB shows that environment-related investment amounts to only five per cent of the total public yearly investments as presented in the Annual Development Plan (ADP). The allocation of environmental investments are skewed towards the "green" sectors of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, which account for over half of the total while physical planning accounts for another third. Investments in the "brown" sectors of industrial and urban pollution are much smaller and consist of 13 per cent in industry, one per cent in gas and oil, and one per cent in transport and communication<sup>69</sup>.

In the ADP about 10 per cent of the projects are for institutional capacity building, primarily in the natural resources area, and there are few, if any, cross-sectoral projects. Of the 252 recommendations made by NEMAP, only about 15 per cent are currently being

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<sup>68</sup> Gayen, P. (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>69</sup> MoEF/World Bank (1997).

funded, and even within these GoB investments may not be adequately addressing the recommendations<sup>70</sup>.

### 3.4.2 Disaster Vulnerability and Preparedness

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries of the world. Because of its geographical location and other environmental reasons, the country is frequently exposed to various types of natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, riverbank erosion, tornadoes, droughts and earthquakes. It has been estimated that while only about four per cent of global cyclones make landfall in Bangladesh, the country is burdened with 90 per cent of the world estimate of the loss of lives and damage to property arising from such natural disasters. The cyclone that struck the coastal areas of Bangladesh in November 1970 caused over 300,000 deaths and US\$ 2.5 billion worth of damage to property. In the recent floods of 1998 damages were estimated to be two to three billion US dollars<sup>71</sup>.

**Box 2: Bangladesh: Major Natural Disasters 1822-1998**

Year	Type of Disaster	Deaths
1822	Cyclone	40,000
1887	Cyclone	100,000
1898	Cyclone	175,000
1943-44	Drought, irregular rain, transport dislocation and War (includes West Bengal)	3,000,000
1960	Cyclone	11,149
1961	Cyclone	11,468
1963	Cyclone	11,520
1965	Cyclone	19,270
1970	Cyclone	300,000
1974	Floods followed by famine	30,000
1985	Cyclone	11,069
1987	Floods	1,657
1988	Floods	5,708
1988	Cyclone	2,379
1991	Cyclone	138,868
1998	Floods, lasting for nearly three months, covering 65 per cent of land area	1,000

Source: UNDP (1995; 1998b).

Floods and riverbank erosions cause extensive damage to crops and property affecting some one million people annually. On the other hand, some areas of the country are susceptible to drought. Such disasters have direct effects such as loss of lives and property and indirect effects such as loss of employment and income, reduced access to products and services, and opportunity cost of resources that need to be diverted to relief and rehabilitation.

Until recently, disaster management has been conducted on a somewhat 'ad-hoc' manner in the country, government and non-government agencies responding with relief operations after the emergencies have occurred. The concept that disaster management must address all aspects including preparedness, mitigation, protocols, emergency response and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation, has begun to be accepted in Bangladesh, and efforts are underway to take a more comprehensive multi-donor approach to the problem.

In this respect, the Government has taken several initiatives to build up institutional arrangements at all levels for effective and systematic disaster preparedness. Following the devastating cyclone of April 1991, the Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) was created in 1992 under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, and acts as the focal point for GOB disaster management (DM) activities during normal times particularly focusing on the

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> UNDP (1998b).

preparedness aspect. In addition, councils and committees have been established at the national, district, thana and union levels for overall disaster management. A guidebook on Standing Orders on Disaster has been designed which outlines duties and responsibilities and actions to be taken in an emergency by the various ministries, government departments and agencies.

Longer-term development support that incorporates disaster management with a focus on disaster mitigation and risk reduction include community empowerment and local area development schemes.

<b>Box 3: The Floods of 1998</b>	
The prolonged floods of 1998 have been the worst of the century. Nearly 70 per cent of the country was submerged for a period that extended to nearly three months. The floods affected some 30 million people and caused loss of 1000 lives and extensively damaged agriculture and infrastructure.	
<b>Damage in US\$ (million)</b>	
Crops	774
Shelters	250
Education	35
Health	24
Roads	165
Railways	33
Rural infrastructure	172
Water resources	139
Urban infrastructure	73

Source: UNDP (1998b).

In spite of such progress disaster management continues to need major focus. The few formal evaluations of the Government's disaster management activities recommend that

- More attention needs to be given to disaster preparedness to reduce risks and losses;
- Better co-ordination needs to be facilitated/promoted through necessary training between the various actors in the field that include line ministries/departments/agencies, the armed forces, civil society, NGOs, and professional.

A UNDP-assisted needs assessment conducted in the aftermath of the devastating cyclone of April 1991, confirmed that in order to improve disaster management it is necessary to:

- establish national policies, plans and guidelines;
- strengthen existing institutions and co-ordination mechanisms in the field;
- organise extensive public education and community mobilisation activities;
- promote specific, practical measures to develop and test 'proofing' techniques;
- improve early warning systems;
- improve existing methodologies for the assessment of damages and needs;
- develop specific expertise and management systems for the overall management and co-ordination of emergency response operations;
- integrate the capabilities of the civil administration, the armed forces, NGOs, professional and other organisations; and
- widely disseminate knowledge and information about the risks of disasters and their mitigation.

Towards this end a multi-donor project (funded by DFID/UK, UNICEF and UNDP) has been under implementation since the mid-1990s. The project assists the Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) to maintain an emergency-related Geographic Information System (GIS) database and

library. The project also provides support for extensive training and awareness building activities from the national to community levels; for the preparation of local disaster preparedness action plans, and for the formulation of policies, plans and programmes related to disaster management. In an effort to raise awareness regarding preparedness, the project promotes and facilitates co-ordination and co-operation between the various ministries, agencies, the armed forces and civil society organisations that are involved in disaster management activities. However, given the frequency and intensity of natural disaster occurrence in the country, a wider and more comprehensive programme approach to disaster management is required.

-- PART THREE --

# **THE RIGHTS TO DEVELOPMENT**



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## THE RIGHT TO SURVIVAL

### 4.1 Introduction

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH as outlined in Chapter 2 has identified the elements that characterise the cluster of survival rights as such basic needs as health and healthy physical environment, food and nutrition, shelter, and water and sanitation. Through Articles 15 and 18 (1) of the Constitution<sup>72</sup> the state ensures the provision of such basic necessities to its people and the follow-up to the UN global conferences show appreciable, and on occasion significant, improvement in some of the social indicators. In spite of such progress a large part of the elements that comprise the rights to survival remain inadequately, and sometimes wholly, unaddressed.

This chapter assesses the current status of the various elements of survival relevant to Bangladesh, attempts to diagnose the problems and their underlying causes and identifies gaps that need to be filled if the people are to be ensured their right to survival.

### 4.2 Population and Reproductive Rights

The population growth rate has shown a marked decline in the decade of the nineties, falling from 2.0 in 1991 to 1.8 in 1996<sup>73</sup>, the current population of Bangladesh being thus estimated to be about 126 million. However, in spite of the decline the sizeable population base and the high proportion (45 per cent)<sup>74</sup> of women in the childbearing age of 15-44 years, ensures that in absolute terms Bangladesh will continue to experience a high population growth which is expected to reach 162.7 million by 2015<sup>75</sup>. Currently children (less than 15 years) comprise a significant portion (more than 40 per cent) of the population while the proportion of the elderly (60 years and above) is relatively small (less than 6 per cent)<sup>76</sup>.

Although the male:female life expectancy ratio has shown positive trends, rising from 56.5:55.7 in 1991 to 58.1:57.6 in 1996<sup>77</sup>, the population remains male-biased with 49 per cent of the population being female. Poverty and cultural practices reverse the natural tendency for women to have greater longevity so that Bangladesh remains one of the very few countries in the world where the women have a lower life expectancy than men.

The curb in the population growth rate is reflected in the fertility rate which dropped from 4.3 in 1991 to 3.4 in 1996<sup>78</sup>. The combination of factors that contributed to this decline include a significant drop in infant mortality rate from 92 per thousand live births in 1992 to 78 in 1996<sup>79</sup>; increase in contraceptive prevalence rate from 40 per cent in 1991 to 49 per cent in 1997<sup>80</sup>; increase in the mean age at first marriage from 18 to 20 years for girls; increase in female literacy rates; and higher female labour force participation rate<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (as modified up to 31 December 1998), Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, GoB.

<sup>73</sup> BBS in World Bank (1999).

<sup>74</sup> BIDS/UNDP (1999).

<sup>75</sup> UNDP (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>76</sup> Estimated from BBS (1998).

<sup>77</sup> BBS (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> World Bank (1999) Op. cit.

<sup>79</sup> FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>80</sup> NIPORT (1995); (1998a).

<sup>81</sup> UNDP (1999a).

Concern over the projected population growth in the country has directed attention to the need for simultaneously addressing issues related to reproductive health and reproductive rights where reproductive health focuses on matters relating to contraception and population control and the more recent reproductive rights approach emphasises the basic right of couples to decide on the number, the spacing and the timing of childbirth, and to have access to the means that enable informed decision making.

There are several barriers in trying to address reproductive rights issues. These include inadequate levels of knowledge about human sexuality, inappropriate or poor-quality reproductive health information and services, the prevalence of high-risk sexual behaviour, discriminatory social practices, negative attitudes towards women and girl children, and above all, the limited power many women and girls have over their sexual and reproductive lives. In addition, although women seldom play any decision-making role in such matters within the household, the onus for practising contraception is perceived to be women's responsibility.

The Bangladesh experience with regard to reproductive rights show that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of unwanted pregnancies because of their lack of information and access to relevant services. Moreover, although age at marriage has reportedly increased for girls, a large number continue to become teen-age mothers which leads to a deterioration in their health. This is evident from the differential rate of morbidity between women and men, morbidity being 14 per cent higher for women. The gap is the widest during women's reproductive age, when the differential rises to 38 per cent<sup>82</sup>. Other age groups whose reproductive rights remain unfulfilled are older men and women who have distinct reproductive and sexual health needs.

The prevalence of STDs and HIV/AIDS exacerbated by the lack of information and preventive measures, also creates obstacles for realising reproductive rights. Women are particularly vulnerable to these diseases because while they themselves may be monogamous, they are unable to control the sexual behaviour of their husbands who may be simultaneously having more than one partner.

Although recent years have seen impressive increase in contraceptive prevalence in the country, there continues to remain the need for a major focus on raising awareness on issues related to both reproductive health and reproductive rights, including the need to ensure that men take equal responsibility through increased contraceptive use such as condoms. Greater awareness also needs to be created among adolescents who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of early and frequent pregnancies. Among the challenges that lie ahead for Bangladesh are the adoption of preventive measures in the spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS which if not contained could have devastating consequences.

## **4.3 Health**

### ***4.3.1 Health Services***

The Government is the main provider of health services in the country, with the private sector playing an increasingly larger role in the sector. NGOs such as Grameen Bank, ASA, and BRAC are also involved in this sector, mainly in the provision of primary health care in both urban and rural areas. Other organisations providing health services include the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, the Lions Club, the Diabetic Foundation, and ICDDR,B.

However, with less than 40 per cent of the population receiving basic health care, availability and accessibility to health services continue to be a bottleneck in the country<sup>83</sup>. This is evident from trends that indicate that the number of persons per physician has increased from 4526 to 4915 in the period 1991 – 1996. This is because although the number of registered doctors has increased by more than five per cent point a year (table 4.1), the low base number of qualified doctors still leaves a wide gap between demand and supply.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> MoHFW (1998).

Thus, although the number of medical colleges, both government and private, has doubled from 10 to 20 in the same period, and there has also been a change in the sex composition of the students, with female students increasing by 18 per cent compared to a fall of one per cent among male students<sup>84</sup>, the total number of medical students have shown only marginal increase of one per cent point a year. With population increasing at 1.8 per cent annually, the supply of medical professionals thus cannot keep up with the demand, even under the assumption that all medical students graduate as qualified medical personnel. Among the reasons for the slow growth in the number of medical students is the limited physical capacity in the government medical institutions. The private sector is attempting to fill the lacuna but has as yet made only very limited progress.

**Table 4.1. Availability of Medical Facilities 1990/91-1996**

Year	Hospitals			Hospital beds			Doctors	Nurses	Mid-wives
	Govt.	Private	Total	Govt.	Private	Total			
1991	610	280	890	27,111	7,242	34,353	21,004	9,655	7,713
1996	645	288	933	29,502	8,025	37,527	27,425	13,830	11,200

Source: Director-General of Health Services (Health Information Unit), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.  
Note: Doctors, nurses and midwives referred to here are registered professionals.

The availability of hospital beds has also worsened: persons per hospital bed has increased from 3,205 in 1991 to 3309 in 1996<sup>85</sup>. As in the case of medical personnel, the supply cannot match the demand, there being less than five per cent increase in the number of hospitals, 30 per cent of which are private, and only nine per cent increase in the number of beds, 20 per cent of which are in private medical facilities. The shortfall is due to constraints in both financial and qualified manpower resources.

Immunisation coverage of children has also shown a declining trend in recent years. The proportion of children (12-23 months) immunised against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus (DPT3) has fallen from 88 per cent in 1994 to 67-68 per cent in 1997, as has immunisation against measles and tuberculosis<sup>86</sup>. This is partly due to the withdrawal of donor financial support for immunisation programmes and the inability of the Government and NGOs to sustain the massive programme from their own resources.

The quality of health services, both public and private, is highly varied for reasons that include lack of trained manpower, lack of equipment, lack of discipline in applying proper medical procedures, and the near absence of monitoring and supervision by regulatory bodies such as the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council and the Bangladesh Nursing Council. Thus ensuring the accountability of doctors and nurses through prosecution for malpractice and negligence is conspicuous by its absence. Moreover, the high cost of private health services from qualified practitioners put such services beyond the reach of the poorer segments of the society.

The dearth in medical services especially in rural areas, creates other hardships for the people: it takes nearly one hour on average to reach any health facility such as a government hospital, Rural Health Centre, medicine shops, NGO First Aid Centre, or Mother and Child Health Centre<sup>87</sup>.

#### **4.3.2 Health Status of Population**

The conventional demographic indicators of the health status of the Bangladesh population all register improvement in the decade of the nineties (table 4.2). This is also evident from research findings that indicate that rural morbidity is on the decline, and that while people in

<sup>84</sup> BBS (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>85</sup> World Bank (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>86</sup> BBS/UNICEF (1998).

<sup>87</sup> BBS (1997).

general have benefited, the positive impact is relatively higher on women and on the poor<sup>88</sup>. This is partly due to increase in the provision of government and non-government health services, the spread of health education, and increased access to safe water and improved sanitation practices.

Although morbidity rates have improved in recent years, the disease pattern has remained unchanged, infectious and parasitic diseases arising from malnutrition, lack of hygiene and poor living conditions dominating the scene. Thus the most prevalent afflictions in rural areas are diarrhoeal diseases, skin diseases, intestinal worm infestations, peptic ulcer, acute respiratory infection, anaemia, diseases relating to micronutrient deficiency, pyrexia of unknown origin, and eye diseases. In addition, pregnancy and childbirth related illnesses continue to be major threats to women's health.

Thus, although maternal mortality rate has nearly halved since 1990, the rate of 4.4 per 1,000 live births in 1996<sup>89</sup> is still a matter of serious concern. The reasons for the high maternal mortality rate include the low nutritional status of pregnant women, the lack of access to or utilisation of health care services, and domestic violence: only 25 per cent of pregnant women receive antenatal care or assistance from a trained attendant at childbirth<sup>90</sup> and about 14 per cent of maternal deaths is associated with violence<sup>91</sup>.

**Table 4.2 Trends in Demographic Health Status**

Indicator	1991	1996
Crude birth rate per 1,000	32.0	27.0
Crude Death Rate per 1,000	13.0	9.0
Total Fertility Rate	4.3	3.4
Infant Mortality Rate	92.0	78.0
Under-five Mortality Rate	146.0	112.0
Maternal Mortality Rate	4.7	4.4
Life Expectancy	56.1	58.0

Source: World Bank (1999); UNICEF (1998); FFYP (1998)

Nearly all the acute illnesses in rural areas receive some kind of treatment, the overwhelming preference being for modern allopathic medicine. Curative care is sought largely from private health providers, of whom only 20 per cent are qualified medical practitioners. Of the private health care providers nearly 40 per cent are *quack* doctors, and another 17 per cent are dispensers in pharmacies and medicine shops. As yet NGOs play a minor role in providing curative health care in rural areas<sup>92</sup>.

It is estimated that in rural areas for each episode of illness, on average children suffer 10 days, adults 14 days, and the elderly over 20 days. This has major financial implications for the household through the loss of income from lost days of work and additional expenses that can range from Tk. 80 to nearly Tk. 2700 per month, depending on the severity of the illness<sup>93</sup>.

Public sector provision of curative health care in rural areas has nearly halved since 1984, falling from meeting 20 per cent of the total rural treatment needs to 12 per cent in 1995. The access to treatment from qualified medical practitioners has also dropped from 36 per cent in 1987 to around 34 per cent in 1995<sup>94</sup>. These declining trends hold special significance for women because while most men seek treatment from qualified medical

<sup>88</sup> Begum, S. (1996).

<sup>89</sup> FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>90</sup> MoHFW (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>91</sup> MoHFW/UNICEF (1998).

<sup>92</sup> Begum, S. (1996) Op.cit.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

practitioners for all types of illnesses, social norms and poverty situation of households cause women to more commonly rely on the cheaper government health services for themselves and their children. This is especially true for women from extreme poor households.

The fall in the demand for public health services is due to reasons that include inadequate management of the facilities and personnel; inadequate and insufficient supply of equipment, pharmaceuticals, and other medical requisites; apathy of the medical personnel in providing the services; and lack of adequate training and experience of the medical personnel.

Part of the personnel problems arises from the disinterest of government staff to be posted in rural areas where facilities such as schools and housing are scarce and inadequate. Also, almost all qualified practitioners in government service, especially in the capital and the major cities, establish their own private practices that they attend after office hours. The tendency is thus to frequently refer patients seeking government health services to these private clinics, where the patients receive better attention but at a much higher financial expense than what they would expect to pay in government facilities.

#### ***4.3.3 Government Priorities and Needs in the Health Sector***

The national priority issues in the health sector as identified in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) include ensuring universal access to essential, quality health care and services and further reducing the Net Reproduction Rate to one by 2005. The strategies to achieve this goal include a strong Maternal and Child Health-based family planning programme within the framework of reproductive health care and reorganised health and family planning service delivery system; the provision of quality service; decentralised administration and inter-sectoral programmes; co-operation among all relevant public bodies; and resource mobilisation. This is to be supplemented by increased social sector investment in education, primary health care and women's development.

To this end the Government has substantially increased its public sector outlay for health from less than three per cent in the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-1995) to seven per cent in the Fifth Five Year Plan, part of the increase being met by reducing population and family welfare expenditure from more than four per cent in the Fourth Five Year Plan to three per cent in the Fifth Plan.

In addition the National Health Policy was approved by the Cabinet on 10 May 1998 and is awaiting approval by the Parliament. The main objectives of the policy are the provision of necessary and better medicare services to the people of all sections of the society, especially the rural and urban poor. The policy further aims to eliminate malnutrition, especially among children and mothers, and to implement effective and integrated programmes for improving nutritional intake of the people. The policy also stresses the need for special medicare for both the physically and mentally disabled and for improvement of medical facilities to encourage people to seek treatment within the country instead of going abroad.

#### ***4.3.4 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences in Health Issues***

UN conferences held in the decade of the nineties that highlight health-related issues include WSSD, ICPD, the World Summit for Children, Habitat II, World Food Summit, FWCW, and ICN. Among the commitments that emerged from these conference declarations was a major stress on adequate policy formulation and implementation.

In this respect, besides the National Health Policy, Bangladesh has paid special attention to HIV/AIDS related concerns raised in WSSD and has several policies and plans in place. In 1997, the Government approved the National Policy on HIV/AIDS and STD Related Issues and with the participation of NGOs, representatives of various communities and donors, has developed the Strategic Plan for the National AIDS Programme of Bangladesh 1997-2002. An Operational Plan for National AIDS/STD Programme 1998-99, based on the framework of the Health and Population Sector Programme 1998-2003, and emphasising the

implementation of the National Policy and Strategic Plan by various actors during FY1998/99, has been prepared by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

As a follow-up to ICPD, Bangladesh has adopted the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, and has made a shift in the direction of planning a reproductive health programme that can deliver essential services in an integrated way. Towards this end the Health and Population Sector Strategy (HPSS) has been adopted by the GoB in order to approach issues of reproductive health from a holistic life cycle perspective, taking into account a number of reproductive health services including safe motherhood, family planning, prevention and control of RTI/STD/AIDS, maternal nutrition, unsafe abortions, adolescent care, neo-natal care and infertility. Based on these principles a five-year Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP) 1998-2003, which gives priority to an Essential Services Package, is being implemented by the GoB. However because of the new approach and the lack of management, communication and advocacy among the many stakeholders at central and field level, HPSP has yet to make any tangible progress<sup>95</sup>.

Some of the UN global conferences have set quantitative targets to be achieved within a given time period. Selected targets and the recent achievements made by Bangladesh are given below.

**Table 4.3: Selected Health-related Targets of Global Conferences and Achievements in Bangladesh**

Quantitative Targets	Achievements
Increase EPI coverage to 100% by 2000;	77% EPI coverage in 1996 <sup>96</sup>
To halve the 1990-level MMR by 2000, and halve it again by 2015 (for countries with very high MMR);	MMR has been nearly halved from 850/100,00 live births in 1990 to 440 by 1996 <sup>97</sup> .
To reduce IMR to 50-70/1000 live births or to one-third whichever is less, by 2000;	IMR has reduced from 92/1000 live births in 1991 to 78 in 1996 <sup>98</sup> .
Increase life expectancy to more than 65 years by 2000 and to more than 70 by 2015.	Life expectancy has increased from 56.10 in 1991 to 58 in 1996, but gender disparity remains with male life expectancy at more than 58.1 years compared to 57.6 for females <sup>99</sup> .
Increase ORT use to 96% by 2000;	40% ORT use in 1997 <sup>100</sup>
Iodise all edible salts by 1996.	In 1997/98, 78% of households used iodised salts and over 96% of the salt sold in the market was iodised salt <sup>101</sup> .

Source: UNDP (1998c); FFYP (1998); BBS in World Bank (1999).

## 4.4 Food Production, Food Security and Nutrition

### 4.4.1 Food Production

#### □ Crop

Crop agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy, and Bangladesh has made considerable progress in food grain (rice and wheat) production since its independence. Food grain production has increased from 10 million MT in 1972 to approximately 21 million MT in 1998 with an average growth rate of 3.13 percent, although growth in food grain production

<sup>95</sup> GoB/World Bank (1999).

<sup>96</sup> World Bank (1999) Op cit.

<sup>97</sup> BBS (1998).

<sup>98</sup> World Bank (1999)Op. cit.

<sup>99</sup> FFYP (1998) Op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> BBS/UNICEF (1998).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

slowed down to 2.77 percent during the period 1990 – 1999<sup>102</sup>. Production of other crops such as sugarcane, pulses, oilseeds have remained more or less static while that of potatoes, vegetables and fruits have shown some increase.

Current food grain production satisfies approximately 85-90 percent of estimated national food demand while the production of other nutritionally valuable crops such as fruits, vegetables, pulses and oilseeds is far below the requirement<sup>103</sup>. The stagnation or decline in crop production and productivity has mainly resulted from shortage of cultivable land for agricultural expansion, slow expansion of irrigation coverage and inefficient on-farm water management, low quality of seeds and poor seed replacement rate, and poor soil organic matter and imbalanced use of fertiliser. Weakness in technical interventions including research, extension and training, has also affected the sub-sector.

Farming practice in Bangladesh is largely dominated by a mono rice-based cropping pattern and farmers are reluctant to change this tradition and diversify towards the production of more profitable and nutritionally valuable crops mainly because of the lack of secured market, capital, and technological know-how. In addition, the seasonal nature of crop production often causes decline in producer prices and considerable post-harvest loss is common during the peak season.

It is estimated that by the year 2020 the demand for cereals (assuming 2 percent per capita income growth rate) will increase substantially to approximately 37 million MT to meet the needs of a population exceeding 170 million. This implies achieving and maintaining an average annual production growth rate of 3-4 percent during the next two decades<sup>104</sup>. This target poses a serious challenge to the country because not only has the average cereal production growth rate in the past decade been marginal, but also available land for agricultural expansion is nearly exhausted, while the need continues to grow for diversifying the mono cereal-based cropping pattern to meet the demand for nutritionally rich food.

To meet this challenge and to satisfy current and future domestic food demand, a rapid and sustainable crop production and productivity growth must be achieved while ensuring effective conservation and management of natural resources.

While pursuing the above, priority needs to be placed on the expansion of irrigation and its efficient utilisation and management, and on rapid increase in crop productivity through the improvement of seed quality, soil fertility and fertiliser application combined with effective technological interventions and institutional capacity building covering research, extension and training programmes. Diversification of mono cereal-based cropping pattern towards substantial production increase of high value crops such as fruits and vegetables, for both domestic and export markets, is the key that can open several doors: increase the availability of nutritionally valuable foods, boost farmers' income, and create a base for potential foreign exchange earnings.

#### □ *Fisheries*

The fisheries sector is a major source of nutrition, income, employment, and foreign exchange earnings in the economy of Bangladesh. Fish provides 60 percent of the national animal protein<sup>105</sup> and the sub-sector contributes five percent to the total GDP, approximately 10 percent to the agricultural GDP and about 9 percent to the total foreign exchange earnings<sup>106</sup>. Fish production has increased in recent years from 847,000 tons in 1989/90 to over 1.37 million tons in 1996/97 (1,079,000 tons of inland fish and 294,000 tons of marine

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<sup>102</sup> MoA (1999)

<sup>103</sup> BARC (1998)

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> FFYP (1998) Op. cit.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

fish)<sup>107</sup>. Nearly 1.2 million people are directly employed in this sub-sector and another 11 million are indirectly engaged in activities related to the sector<sup>108</sup>.

In spite of having vast water resources and an approximately seven percent annual increase in fish production in the past several years<sup>109</sup>, per capita fish availability and intake is on the decline as fish production has not been able to keep pace with increasing population and fishing pressure<sup>110</sup>. Moreover, the sector is under increasing stress, both in capture and marine fishery, because of inadequate knowledge of both extension workers and fisherfolk, lack of efficient use of fishing equipment, over harvesting and indiscriminate killing of juveniles, degradation of environmental and fisheries resources, fish diseases, defective fish conservation laws and lack of adequate and proper processing, marketing and other facilities. Problems such as property rights, competing water use and associated conflicts, inadequate credit facilities, lack of technological know-how and training, and poor quality of fish seeds are additional factors that create obstacles to the development of this sector.

Despite these constraints, Bangladesh holds major potential for increasing fish production from its open (flood plains), close (ponds, ox-bow lakes), brackish (coastal) water and marine resources, provided that productive, sustainable and modern technologies are available and accessible to farmers. Strengthening research, extension and management, development of location-specific participatory technologies associated with various support services including credit, marketing, processing and post-harvest handling, fisheries community empowerment programmes, conservation of natural fish habitat and resource base, are among the factors essential for ensuring sustainable growth of the sector and for increasing the income and improving living conditions of fishing communities. Through integrated rice-fish culture, there is enormous potential for expanding aquaculture in the 10 million hectares of rice fields. In addition, the export of fish (mainly shrimp) and fish products, which generates substantial foreign exchange earnings, has the possibility for higher growth through improved quality and quantity at production and processing levels.

#### □ *Livestock*

Livestock is an integral part of the country's farming system and is also a major source of draught power. It plays an important role in the traditional subsistence economy of the rural population, generates employment and income for the rural poor, especially women, and provides animal protein through meat, milk and eggs. The livestock subsector contributes about four percent to total GDP of the country, about 10 percent to agricultural GDP, and six to seven percent to total foreign exchange earnings, mainly from leather<sup>111</sup>. The current annual growth of 8 percent in this sector<sup>112</sup> is impressive and is mainly attributed to good growth in poultry, duck and dairy farms established under private initiatives.

However, while Bangladesh has a high density of domestic animals, their productivity is extremely low. Livestock rearing in Bangladesh is predominantly a household activity and is maintained at a subsistence level with livestock feed comprising crop residue - mainly straw from rice and wheat. As much as 90 percent<sup>113</sup> of total poultry production is generated at the village-level. Local breeds of poultry (*desi*) predominate, with small flocks kept under a scavenging system. Despite the high annual growth enjoyed by the sector in recent years, a wide gap still persists between the potential and the realised yield of milk, meat and eggs. The reasons for this include the prevalence of animal diseases, insufficient disease control services, poor research and extension infrastructure, inadequate maintenance and quality control of drugs, poor performance of public poultry farms, poor artificial insemination and vaccination coverage, acute

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> INFS (1998a)

<sup>111</sup> FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



shortage of feeds and fodder, low productivity of local breeds, lack of production technology, lack of and poor management of support services, including credit, marketing, processing, and storage.

To meet the development challenges in the livestock sector, several issues need to be addressed. These include improvement of the quality and productivity of the livestock through breeding and extension programmes; promotion of veterinary health care services, particularly for the control of infectious diseases and parasitic infections associated with wider coverage of vaccination; increase in production and supply of feed concentrates and fodder; improvement of livestock feeding and management practices through skills development and farmers training programmes; promotion of low cost technologies that ensure higher productivity, cost effectiveness and integration of livestock within existing farming systems; expanding rural marketing networks; timely supply of input; need-based research; access to credit facilities, particularly for resource-poor farmers, supported by greater involvement of NGOs; and the promotion of private sector poultry and dairy enterprises in rural areas; promotion of livestock insurance schemes, are the major development challenges in the livestock sector.

#### □ *Agriculture Support Services*

Agriculture support services play an indispensable role in increasing food production through developing and promoting marketing systems, reducing post harvest losses, and through research and technology transfer.

Agricultural marketing is essential for maximising the income of producers and ensuring sustainable supply of farm produce to consumers at reasonable price. The existing 7800 primary and secondary public markets are structured for handling mainly rice and wheat, and marketing support for other commodities still remain very weak<sup>114</sup>. In addition, the lack of market information and intelligence and inadequate facilities place both farmers and consumers at a major disadvantage.

To scale up agricultural production in the country it is also important to develop a sustainable and functional mechanism that links agricultural production with a marketing system that ensures timely supply of produce in a desirable form and in needed quantities. Towards this end the issues that need to be addressed on a priority basis include improved marketing and marketing information services, sound infrastructure particularly in rural areas, adequate transport facilities, market promotion of high value crops, grading and standardisation of agricultural products, and value addition of agricultural products. There is also need to develop mechanisms that link domestic and export markets and enable a free flow of Bangladeshi products to foreign markets.

Post harvest loss contributes to food insecurity in the country and depending on the season and commodity, losses can reach as high as 30 percent of production<sup>115</sup>. Besides vagaries of nature, the causes of such losses include inadequate post-harvest technology for processing, preservation, and handling, especially in the case of fish and animal products. Post harvest loss can be reduced through agro-processing fruits, vegetables and other perishables during the peak season which ensures their availability throughout the year and helps to modulate prices. Food processing and preservation, supported by an organised and efficient marketing system, encourage farmers to increase production and realise higher incomes, enable expansion and variation of people's diet, and ensure regular consumption and intake of vitamins and minerals.

To promote agro-processing, extension services should provide training and demonstration facilities to farmers, especially women, in village-level food processing and preservation techniques. To expand employment opportunities and generate higher income for poor households that will enhance their food security and improve their nutritional status, it is necessary to promote the involvement of the private sector in developing area-based agro-processing enterprises and businesses.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> BARC (1998) Op.cit.

In the circumstances, because of the high initial investments needed for adopting such intensive production techniques, credit becomes a vital factor for promoting diversification of cropping patterns to achieve higher production, productivity and profit. Nonetheless, one of the major constraints faced by farmers in trying to achieve this is a lack of access to credit or insufficient loan amounts for their production activities because of the reluctance of commercial banks and existing microcredit schemes to sanction credit for the procurement of agricultural inputs because of the high-risk nature of agricultural enterprises. It is important to note however, that agricultural credit programmes, need to be combined with effective field training, research and technical advisory services to ensure proper utilisation of inputs for maximising profits. It is also important to note that credit support is required not only for poor farmers but also for agribusiness and commercial farming that can boost agricultural production and growth rate and expand rural employment opportunities.

#### □ *Agricultural Input*

As a result of policies that promote increased production through market liberalisation and involvement of the private sector in the supply and distribution of fertilisers, irrigation equipment and, to a lesser extent, seeds of crops other than rice and wheat, the use of agricultural inputs has increased significantly in recent years.

Fertiliser<sup>116</sup> consumption has increased 2.6 times in the last 10 years reaching over 3 million tons in 1996/1997, paddy crops accounting for over 70 percent of the urea use<sup>117</sup>. The country's fertiliser nutrient use has increased from 18 to 108 kg/ha/yr. In the period 1973-1994, nitrogen alone constituting about 80 percent of the nutrients<sup>118</sup>. However, because it is cheap, urea is the most heavily used fertiliser and the indiscriminate increase in urea application has raised concerns about possible nutrient imbalance in soil-plant systems that can have negative impact on crop productivity. To discourage such practices, it is necessary to promote the use of blended fertilisers and DAP through massive training programmes to create awareness among farmers about soil nutrient requirements and the importance of timely application of balanced doses of fertilisers based on soil testing results. The use of organic manure, bio-fertiliser and compost as well as granular urea also needs to be promoted further.

Quality seed is another vital component for increasing crop productivity. Recent stagnation/decline in crop productivity growth is found to be related to the limited supply of quality seeds to farmers and the low seed replacement rate (about 5-6 percent annual seed replacement rate which is extremely low compared to the desired levels of over 30 percent)<sup>119</sup>. According to the 1995 report of the Task Force of the Ministry of Agriculture, about 600,000 MT of seeds of different crops are put to use every year for crop production. Of this, five percent is supplied by the public seed sector, one percent by seed traders, one percent by NGOs, and the remaining 93 percent is saved by farmers from their previous harvest. Around 55 percent of the rice cropping area is covered by High Yielding Varieties (HYV).

Following the adoption of the Seed Policy in 1993, NGOs and private seed enterprises have rapidly increased their HYV and hybrid seed production but still have managed to cover only 10 – 15 percent of total national requirement<sup>120</sup>. Again, although contract seed growers schemes, as well as farmer-to-farmer seed exchange programmes, have been initiated in recent years, there is no significant improvement in the seed replacement rate. To overcome this lacuna, it is important to rapidly promote the production and the use of quality seed/planting material at farmers level through advocacy, demonstration and training. It is also necessary to encourage private seed enterprises and nurseries to increase production of quality seed and other planting material to meet domestic demand.

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<sup>116</sup> TSP, SSP, MoP, DAP and Urea.

<sup>117</sup> MoF (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>118</sup> BARC (1997)

<sup>119</sup> MoA (1993)

<sup>120</sup> World Bank/FAO (1997)

Irrigation has made significant contribution to increasing agricultural production in the country<sup>121</sup>. Since 1973 the area under irrigation has expanded from 0.5 million ha to 3.5 million ha. Minor irrigation has been liberalised and is now firmly in the private sector which has led to rapid expansion of minor irrigation, specially the low-cost shallow tubewells (STWs) used for exploiting groundwater. This has resulted in a 6.6 percent annual growth rate in the coverage of irrigated area between 1982/83 and 1995/96, which has been the main engine of growth in the agricultural sector. However, the current acreage under irrigation represents only 40 percent of the total cultivable land in the country, which offers significant scope for further expansion. The share of the area irrigated by groundwater has increased from 41 percent in 1982/83 to 69 percent in 1996/97, while surface water irrigation has declined from 59 percent to 31 percent.

The average area irrigated per unit in 1995/96 was 3.46 ha for STWs, 20.8 ha for deep tubewells (DTWs) and 9.5 ha for low lift pumps (LLPs). Assuming that on average each STW has the capacity to irrigate 7 ha, each DTW 30 ha, and each LLP 14 ha, the total irrigated area is estimated to utilise only 57 percent of the total capacity of all installed minor irrigation equipment<sup>122</sup>. Since on average, water use by crop is around 25-30 percent against the desired level of 45 percent, in addition to increasing irrigation coverage, top priority needs to be given to promote on-farm water use and management efficiency of already existing irrigation infrastructure. Moreover, because of recent concerns of falling water tables and arsenic contamination of groundwater, there is need to promote surface water irrigation. Local manufacturing of irrigation equipment and spare parts should also be promoted to ensure a sustainable supply at a reasonable price.

Since 1985 agricultural subsidy has been gradually reduced and now exists at a minimum level on seeds and fertilisers. BADC, which produces HYV seeds of cereals and other selected crops that are sold to farmers at subsidised rates, contributes less than 10 percent to the total seed production in the country<sup>123</sup>. Urea is manufactured locally and benefiting from the low price of domestic natural gas, is sold at a moderate price. While the need remains to gradually withdraw subsidy from the agriculture sector, it is also necessary to give due consideration to resource poor farmers and enabling them to have better access to agricultural inputs which will help to increase their farm income and to attain a high national food production growth rate that the country has to achieve to meet present and future demand.

#### **4.4.2 Food Security and Nutrition**

Food security has been defined by the World Food Summit as "*access by all people at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life*". The three key components of household food security have been identified as:

- Availability (national production, commercial imports, food aid, security stocks);
- Access (ability to purchase food or produce it, at the household level);
- Utilisation/nutrition (adequate diet, health and caring practices).

Food security is of critical concern to the Government of Bangladesh, a concern that is reflected in national policies which emphasise increased domestic cereal production, target food grain self-sufficiency, and maintain large food reserves to face emergencies. However, while aggregate national production and emergency stocks are essential to food security, other conditions must also be fulfilled if availability, accessibility, proper utilisation and nutritional value are to be ensured for the people.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

#### □ *Availability*

Domestic production is currently 10 -15 percent short of estimated food grain requirement in the country. The situation may worsen in the future because of a growing population that will demand a more than 60 percent increase in food grain production in the next two decades while facing various production constraints as outlined in the Section 4.4.1. In addition the production of non-cereal foods such as fruit, vegetables, oilseeds, pulses, fish and animal products is far below target, which has resulted in low availability and high price for these nutritionally valuable foods. Thus, the availability of fish, which constitutes about four percent of the total food intake and provides 60 percent of the national animal protein, is on the decline as is the consumption of milk and milk products<sup>124</sup>.

At present food deficit is met through food import and food aid<sup>125</sup> with food aid filling approximately 30 percent of the gap<sup>126</sup>. While the imports, food aid and sufficient stocks have ensured adequate gross availability of food in the markets in recent years, the situation can very quickly destabilise in the event of natural disasters such as the floods of 1998 which caused severe damage to staple rice crops across two growing seasons and affected some 30 million people<sup>127</sup>. Prompt reaction of the Government, NGOs and communities, together with massive imports by the private sector and generous donor response, helped to avert a food crisis which could have reached mammoth proportions.

Other instruments of food management include the Public Food Distribution System, the level of commercial operation of which has declined over the years as restrictions to participation of the private sector in foodgrain trade and management have been progressively removed.

#### □ *Access*

Food may be available in the markets, but can the poor always pay the price?

To ensure that the poor, especially the hard-core poor, have access to food, the Government, with assistance from its development partners, uses food aid resources in several ways. These include Food for Education to encourage poor households to send their children, especially girls, for primary education, and "safety net" programmes such as the Vulnerable Groups Development (VGD) Project and Rural Development (RD) Project which together provide direct food support to about one million households every year<sup>128</sup>.

Food aid policies recently adopted by the WFP Executive Board, reflect the growing global consensus that in order to be effective, food aid must be linked with other development strategies and operations to improve access to food. Under the VGD project some 400,000 poor women annually participate in long-term personal development activities organised by the GoB and its development partners. Activities under the RD Project are linked to development plans of line ministries and include maintenance of public and community infrastructure such as embankments, canals, rural roads, fishponds, and tree plantations which provide massive employment for unskilled rural labour.

There are several dimensions to ensuring access to food. These include the seasonality problem and the geographic distribution of food insecurity that affect different segments of the population. Among food insecure households, there are variations in the extent of and the causes behind the severity of food insecurity, factors which affect the efficiency of the programmes that seek to fill the access gaps. To overcome such problems and to enable effective implementation of national food policies, it is necessary to improve the targeting of food insecure households. To help target such households, the Resource

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<sup>124</sup> INFS (1998a) Op.cit.

<sup>125</sup> MoA (1996)

<sup>126</sup> WFP estimates

<sup>127</sup> UNDP (1995)

<sup>128</sup> WFP (1996)

Allocation Map for Food Assisted Development has become a valuable tool for identifying geographic locations of the different types of food insecurity in the country.

□ *Utilisation/Nutrition*

The average Bangladeshi diet is estimated to be about 15 per cent deficient in energy. This qualitative inadequacy of the diet also affects a significant proportion of the better-off population who consume well in excess of the minimum daily requirement of 2,100 kcal. The diet is seriously low in fat, oil and animal protein leading to high levels of protein-energy malnutrition and micro-nutrient deficiencies manifested mainly through anaemia, night-blindness and goitre, with women and children being the worst affected. It is estimated that about 80 per cent of children under five years, 74 per cent of adult females, and 40 per cent of adult males suffer from iron deficiency anaemia. Furthermore, every year some 30,000 children become blind due to vitamin A deficiency while iodine deficiency disorders affect half the population<sup>129</sup>.

The Body Mass Index (BMI) of more than half the women of reproductive age are less than 18.5<sup>130</sup> which is the cut-off point for the low-weight indicator. Together with malnutrition during adolescence and pregnancy, which affects foetal growth, low BMI results in about 30 per cent of babies being born with birth weight below 2.5 kg.<sup>131</sup> Combined with nutritional deficiencies during childhood, one third of all children thus become severely stunted, with long-term chronic malnutrition affecting the learning abilities of many of them. This vicious cycle has been maintained and even enforced by a gender bias that influences intra-household food distribution and opportunities of and access to care, education, employment and income. In the long run this has major implications for the educability and productivity of the individual, the household, and the nation. Estimates indicate that comprehensive nutrition intervention can avert an income loss of US\$ 23 billion over a ten year period<sup>132</sup>.

Dietary intake and morbidity patterns directly affect nutritional status. The effects of malnutrition caused by inadequate food intake are compounded by conditions that do not allow full utilisation of the nutrients that are consumed. At the household level these conditions include access to water, sanitation, and health services, and maternal and child care practices. Availability, accessibility, and utilisation of safe drinking water, sanitation facility and health services contribute to morbidity patterns. On the other hand, caring practices, which are behaviour-driven and include breast feeding, complementary feeding, general feeding, treatment of illnesses and injuries, hygienic practices, and stimulation of child development, influence both the dietary intake and the morbidity pattern. It has been found that family members of even high-income households in Bangladesh suffer from malnutrition because of improper caring practice arising out of lack of knowledge, attitude and cultural behaviours.

The frequent natural disasters in the country also affect the nutritional status of the population, especially children, as has been reported by the National Nutritional Surveillance Programme in 1998. To prevent such malnutrition, there is a need for timely distribution of food at the local level during the disaster and post-disaster period; increasing capacity for nutritional assessment through training programmes; and increasing local capacity for the production of blended food for children.

□ *Food Quality and Safety*

Food contamination is a serious and widespread problem in the country. Negligence and malpractice in the food supply and distribution system contribute to this problem. Food adulteration is common, 50 per cent of food products examined by the National Institute of

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<sup>129</sup> GoB (1997).

<sup>130</sup> NIPORT (1998).

<sup>131</sup> INFS (1998).

<sup>132</sup> UNICEF/ADB/INFS (1998)

Public Health being found to be below standard. In addition, increased urbanisation has resulted in increased demand for street food with its attendant risks.

The national capacity for food quality control is limited and fragmented, the responsibility for quality control, including food inspection, food analysis services and the overall administration, lying with various ministries and agencies that are not effectively co-ordinated. Outdated food laws and regulations do not embody recent changes and developments in the food sector, such as Codex standards and recommendations, nor do they provide the basis for taking legal action against violators of the existing laws.

#### 4.4.2 *Addressing Food Insecurity and Nutrition in Bangladesh*

Widespread persistent poverty is the main cause of food insecurity in the country, the result of which is direct and indirect malnutrition that charges a heavy toll on children in particular. In terms of lost and sub-standard human lives the effect of food insecurity is far greater than the much-publicised impact of natural disasters. To ensure food security the areas that need to be addressed on a priority basis are thus food production and the purchasing power of the poor.

##### **The Invisible Disaster**

Every day some 600 children die from malnutrition in Bangladesh. This disaster toll is of the same scale as that of the Tangail Typhoon of 1996. It is occurring day after day, every day of the year<sup>133</sup>.

#### □ *Food Production*

In order to satisfy current and future domestic demand, nation-wide crop intensification programmes have to be promoted and accelerated to achieve rapid productivity and production growth, under sustainable and environmentally sound manner. Expansion of irrigated coverage also needs top priority. At the same time, diversification of mono cereal-based cropping pattern towards substantial production increase of high value crops including fruit and vegetables, as well as livestock and fish products for both the domestic and the export markets, need to be given high priority as such strategies promote the availability of nutritionally valuable food, increase farmers' income, and enhance the potential for foreign exchange earnings. Such interventions should however, be strategically harmonised and effectively co-ordinated with food procurement, storage and distribution programmes. In this context, a favourable policy environment associated with institutional and policy reforms, promotion of the private sector and involvement of civil society organisations can help to create an enabling environment for achieving faster agricultural growth.

Agriculture is important to food security not only as a means to supply markets with food, but also as a source of home consumption and income for a vast majority of the population. Thus, in order to attain food security at the household level, priority needs to be given to providing support to marginal and landless farmers and women in rural communities, who constitute a substantial portion of the poor and are among the main food producers of the country. Such efforts should be combined with various support services, including agricultural credit, and products marketing, agro-processing and prevention of post-harvest losses, and programmes for off-farm income generation and community empowerment.

#### □ *Purchasing Power of the Poor*

In order to expand access to food, the purchasing power of the poor can be increased through targeted interventions that enhance the skills and micro-entrepreneurship potential of the poorest segment of the population, particularly women. Interventions that have

<sup>133</sup> Cited from a speech delivered by WFP Country Director on 12 May 1998 at the First Development Forum, Bangladesh

achieved a broad national coverage of vulnerable women include rural income diversification initiatives through support services for start-up capital and training. To enable access to these programmes, women from households suffering from high food insecurity are provided with basic food packages of wheat that guarantee them a supply of staple food during the crucial start up times. The food package also represents assets brought into the household as a direct result of women's participation in development. Labour-based investments in infrastructure, if properly designed and maintained, also help to increase purchasing power, not only through direct income transfer, but also through increased communication and new business start-ups in under-served areas.

#### □ *Child Malnutrition*

Mortality and morbidity are the result of malnutrition, 54 percent of mortality among children less than five years old in developing countries being attributed directly or indirectly to malnutrition<sup>134</sup>. In Bangladesh, child malnutrition is a major problem and there is need for improving food supplies and for incorporating child nutritional status as a measurable outcome of relevant development programmes. The nutritional status of children can be improved through agricultural diversification, homestead food production, effective communication strategies, and fortification of certain food where appropriate. The National Plan of Action for Nutrition should also be fully implemented. Currently several inter-ministerial multi-donor projects for mainstreaming food security and nutrition issues are under implementation, the largest among them being the Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project (BINP) and the National Nutrition Programme (NNP). Initiatives taken under these projects are about to be expanded, their links to general food security operations being crucial for targeting people.

#### **4.4.3 Government Priorities and Needs for Ensuring Food Security**

The major priorities that have been identified by the Government for ensuring adequate food and nutritional intake of the population are achieving self-sufficiency in food grain production at a higher level of per capita consumption, and increasing production of oil-seeds, pulses, fruits, vegetables, livestock, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy products, with market mechanisms and policy instruments helping to maintain appropriate incentive prices for important agricultural commodities. To this end the FFYP aims for an overall accelerated growth in agricultural production and productivity that will raise cereal production level to 25 million tons by the year 2002. This is to be achieved through modernisation of agriculture through the provision of extension services, training, inputs, and credit to farmers. The major thrust of the programme is increased irrigation coverage especially through minor irrigation projects, improved water resources management, and improved varieties of rice and wheat. Subsidies on fertilisers and other inputs may be selectively provided with due consideration given to economy and efficiency of such subsidisation.

Other strategies for ensuring food security include maintaining a buffer stock to meet emergency needs during natural calamities and disasters.

#### **4.4.4 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences on Food and Nutrition Related Issues**

The global conferences that have directly addressed food and nutrition are WSC, ICN and the World Food Summit. The goals and commitments of the ICN include the elimination of hunger and all forms of malnutrition while the World Food Summit has called for [...] *access by all at all times to the food they need for an active and healthy life [...]*. In this respect, Bangladesh is committed to halve its malnourished population by the year 2015.

Some of the global conferences have set quantitative targets to be achieved within specified time periods. The targets and their achievement status in Bangladesh are given below.

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<sup>134</sup> Murray, C.J.L. and A.D. Lopez (1996); Ppelletier, D.L. et. Al. (1993)

**Table 4.4: Selected Nutrition-related Targets of Global Conferences and Achievements in Bangladesh**

Quantitative Targets	Achievements
By 2010 Increase: Energy intake to 2150 Kcal;	Energy intake in 1995-96 was 1817-1945 Kcal. <sup>135</sup>
Oil intake from 7 gms. to 20 GMS/person;	In 1995/96 <sup>136</sup> : oil intake = 10 gms/person; urban = 17 gms; rural = 8.4 gms.
Pulse intake from 14 gms. to 50 gms.;	Pulse intake = 14 gms/capita; Urban = 19 gms; rural = 13 gms.
Vegetable intake from 57 gms. to 213 gms;	Vegetable intake = 153 gms; Urban = 143 gms; rural = 154 gms.
By 2010: Eliminate night-blindness in children	0.67% in 1997 <sup>137</sup>
Reduce the prevalence of Low birth weight from 50% to 5%;	30% of children had low birth weight in 1998 <sup>138</sup> .
Reduce severe EPM in under-two children from 11% to less than 1%;	6% of under-two children suffered severe EPM in 1997 <sup>139</sup> .

Follow-up to the conferences at the policy level include the adoption in 1997 of the National Food and Nutrition Policy and the National Plan of Action for Nutrition both of which are yet to be fully implemented. More recently, at the Bangladesh Development Forum held in Paris, April 1999, GoB has committed to developing a comprehensive Food Security Policy which will address the issues of food availability, accessibility, and utilisation/nutrition in an integrated manner.

To achieve the goals set by GoB in WSC, specific interventions have been implemented in the field of nutrition with inter-sectoral support and participation of all stakeholders and communities. Such interventions include massive Vitamin A supplementation in NID and Vitamin A week, and universal iodination of all 267 salt mills.

In addition, extensive programmes in breastfeeding promotion and protection, promotion of proper caring and feeding practices, control and prevention of iron deficiency anaemia, and low birth weight reduction, are being implemented. A code for breast milk substitute has been formulated; a law has been passed for universal salt iodination; baby friendly hospital initiatives have been introduced in 200 health facilities that cover more than 70 percent of maternity beds; and health and nutrition programmes are being implemented which provide iron supplement and ante-natal care to pregnant women.

Government of Bangladesh is also according high priority to improving food quality and safety for consumers. A national committee headed by the Director General of Health Services is working to introduce amendments to the Bangladesh Pure Food Ordinance 1959, Pure Food Rules 1967, and Special Ordinance 1985, all of which are currently inadequate to address the malpractice in unsafe food and adulteration. The amendments will update the rules and ordinances to reflect standards and practices developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission for ensuring food safety. The Institute of Public Health with assistance from

<sup>135</sup> INFS (1998). The range is because of seasonal variation in food consumption

<sup>136</sup> BBS (1997).

<sup>137</sup> HKI/IPHN (1999).

<sup>138</sup> INFS (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>139</sup> UNICEF (1999).



WHO is conducting awareness raising campaigns and mobilising public opinion to address the situation.

## 4.5 Water and Sanitation

### 4.5.1 Water

One of the most successful social sector achievements in Bangladesh has been the tremendous coverage in the access to tubewells for drinking water. In 1996, mainly through the installation of some four million tubewells 96 per cent of the population had access to tubewell, tap or ringwell within 150 metres of their dwellings<sup>140</sup>. Recently however, due to arsenic contamination of groundwater in some regions, the effective coverage of safe water has dropped to around 80 per cent<sup>141</sup>. Moreover, because of topography and hydro-geology, only 55 per cent of the population in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts have access to tubewell, tap, or ringwell<sup>142</sup>. Such regional variation necessitates the need for looking into other alternatives for safe water supply, besides ground water as the primary source.

**Table 4.5. Access to safe water**

Indicator	1981	1991	1996/97
Infant mortality rates/1,000 live births	111	92	78
Access to safe water ( % of population)	-	80	96

Source: FFYP (1998); BBS/UNICEF(1998).

The focus on ensuring the availability and accessibility to quality drinking water emerged from findings that water-borne diseases are among the major causes of the high infant mortality rates in Bangladesh. Thus over the decades, extensive interventions helped to change drinking habits to pumped groundwater from tubewells and brought down national infant mortality rates from 111 per 1,000 live births in 1981 to 78 in 1996 (Table 4.3). Together with access to sanitation and proper hygiene behaviour, the increased access to safe water has reduced the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases in children by as much as 25 – 34 per cent in some areas where health-related projects are under implementation<sup>143</sup>.

At the national level the reduction in the incidence of diarrhoea in children is much more modest, the decline in rural areas being 3-4 per cent points and in urban areas about eight per cent points<sup>144</sup>. This is partly because of unhygienic behavioural patterns such as not using cleansing agents such as soap or ash when washing hands after defecation, and reserving tubewell water only for drinking purposes: 66 per cent of rural households use other sources of water for household work<sup>145</sup>.

#### □ Arsenic Contamination

Arsenic contamination of groundwater has affected 44 of the 64 districts where arsenic levels have been found to be above 0.05mg/litre which is the nationally accepted standard in Bangladesh, USA and many countries in Europe. The WHO recommended provisional level is however 0.01 mg/litre. Geologists have forwarded several reasons for the occurrence which include oxyhydroxide reduction and pyrite oxidation. The contamination is not uniform and in an affected village all tubewells may not be simultaneously or equally contaminated.

<sup>140</sup> FFYP (1998)Op. cit.

<sup>141</sup> International Conference on Arsenic Pollution of Ground Water in Bangladesh, 1998.

<sup>142</sup> UNICEF (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>143</sup> ICDDR,B/CARE (1995).

<sup>144</sup> NIPORT (1998); (1996).

<sup>145</sup> UNICEF (1999) Op.cit.

Preliminary estimates show that although the actual number affected is as yet not known about 21 million people are currently exposed to contamination<sup>146</sup>.

Serious constraints in the current crisis is the lack of awareness about the problem and lack of access to information about the effects of arsenic and its mitigation. A recent survey found that only five per cent of women in rural areas had heard of arsenic and only four per cent knew that diseases caused by arsenic can be prevented by using water with safe levels of arsenic<sup>147</sup>.

Other social implications of unavailability of safe water from tubewells include women having to walk longer distances to collect safe water in badly affected areas. Also access to safe water may be restricted because the poor cannot afford the high cost of technology such as deep tubewells, nor can they wield the necessary political influence needed to ensure that subsidised deep tubewells are installed in their neighbourhood. In addition, field observations indicate that the idea of tubewells as a source of safe water has become so engrained that people are unwilling to change their water consumption and water management behaviour even when they are aware that the tubewells they are using are arsenic contaminated<sup>148</sup>.

The UN family in Bangladesh has been actively addressing the arsenic problem and in 1997 in immediate response to a Government proposal, UNDP provided support to the Emergency Arsenic Mitigation Programme which was initiated in 200 worst-affected villages in 21 districts. This project has tested over 30,000 tubewells for arsenic contamination and has provided clinical support to people currently suffering from chronic arsenicosis. Another 300 villages and 50,000 more tubewells will be covered by June 1999<sup>149</sup>.

The World Bank has provided US \$32 million as a first tranche to the national programme for both short and long-term mitigation measures. The national programme, which is being co-ordinated by the Government through the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and the Ministry of Local Government, has set up the National Arsenic Mitigation Information Centre (NAMIC).

Together with UNDP, UNICEF has been among the first to provide support to the DPHE for nation-wide testing of existing tubewells. UNICEF is now directing its support towards an integrated, action research and development initiative in four thanas with the objective of providing a comprehensive solution that may be replicated across the country. The initiative is being implemented by DPHE in collaboration with BRAC and the Grameen Bank. UNICEF is also undertaking an extensive communication and awareness raising campaign on arsenic and is supporting a nation-wide survey, in conjunction with the IDD survey, to better understand the spread of arsenicosis patients in the country.

WHO is funding studies to evaluate field test kits for arsenic detection and publishing guidelines and together with UNESCO is supporting the synthesis of knowledge and mobilisation of information network interventions. The International Atomic Energy Agency is supporting technical collaboration with the national programme for accurate determination of the origin and movement of both groundwater and contaminants in deep aquifers, leading to an assessment of deep aquifers as a long-term drinking water source.

#### □ *Regional Water Sharing*

Access to water is also affected by regional issues because more than 90 per cent of the surface water in Bangladesh originates outside its territories<sup>150</sup>. The situation gives rise to

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<sup>146</sup> DfID (1999).

<sup>147</sup> UNICEF (1999) Op. cit.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> National Conference on Co-ordinated Action for Arsenic Mitigation, February 27-28 1999, Dhaka, Bangladesh, organised by MoLGRD&C, MoHFW, UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, World Bank.

<sup>150</sup> UNDP (1999b).

uncertainties in the quantity of water available to Bangladesh because of the upstream use and water diversion from the shared rivers.

Sharing of the Ganges River waters has been a major point of contention between Bangladesh and India for more than two decades, because control of the water has predominantly been in the hands of the upstream riparian India<sup>151</sup>. However, a historic treaty between the two countries was signed in December 1996 that stipulates a more equitable sharing of water of the Ganges. This has allowed Bangladesh better, although limited, access to Ganges water in the dry seasons<sup>152</sup>.

There is a potential for developing a regional and basin-wide co-operative water-sharing framework involving India and Nepal which could enable greater sharing of benefits by all the countries. Such regional watershed management and co-operation may be facilitated by the United Nations through the establishment of a Himalayan commission, similar to the UNDP supported Mekong River Commission<sup>153</sup>. Sharing of water of the Brahmaputra River and all other trans-boundary rivers may also be placed within this framework such that these international rivers are equitably and fairly shared among the co-riparian neighbours for optimal water resource management in the region<sup>154</sup>. Such initiatives however, call for strong political commitment from all the concerned countries.

#### **4.5.2 Sanitation**

About 40 per cent of the households in Bangladesh use hygienic latrines such as water sealed latrines and home-made pit latrines. The usage in urban areas is nearly double that of rural areas, the cheaper home-made pit latrines being more popular than water-sealed latrines. In the metropolitan slums the access to sanitation is worse than in rural areas with only 23 per cent of the slum households having access to hygienic latrines compared to 37 per cent of rural households<sup>155</sup>. In general while washing hands after defecation is a common practice, there is little importance given to the use of ash or soap.

The urban sewage system is inadequate and most of the waste flows untreated into nearby waterways. A sewage treatment plant has recently been constructed in Dhaka and more such plants are in the pipeline.

The Government, in partnership with NGOs, is in the process of providing proper sanitation facilities, training, and awareness building throughout the country. At present there are 7000 private/NGO production-cum-sale centres for the DPHE type water sealed latrines. In addition the Grameen Sanitation Programme is expected to produce and sell 1,800,000 latrine sets by 2001. Social mobilisation together with demonstration effect of such interventions, is thus expected to improve sanitation standards in Bangladesh in the coming decade<sup>156</sup>.

#### **4.5.3 Government Priorities for Meeting Water and Sanitation Needs**

The Government has identified the need for increased access to safe water and sanitation facilities as a prerequisite for improved health status in the country. The objective is to be achieved by increasing the number of deep tubewells in the rural areas. To ensure efficient maintenance of the tubewells as well as to reduce public expenditure, people's participation will be incorporated in the rural water supply programme. In addition financial incentives such as soft loans will be offered to encourage the private sector to manufacture tubewells and sanitary latrines.

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<sup>151</sup> Begum, K. (1987).

<sup>152</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review (1997).

<sup>153</sup> UNDP (1998d).

<sup>154</sup> Ahmad, Q.K., et.al. (1994).

<sup>155</sup> UNICEF (1999).

<sup>156</sup> DPHE/UNICEF (1998).

These priorities however had been identified by the FFYP before the arsenic problem had reached the current crisis proportions and the Government now plans to continue conducting surveys of arsenic poisoning of tubewells and implement remedial measures.

In urban areas the priority issues are to curtail system loss in the water supply and to develop improved sanitation facilities and sewerage systems. For urban water supply emphasis is being given to surface water treatment rather than to the development of ground water.

#### ***4.5.4 Follow-up to United Nations Global Conferences in Water and Sanitation Related Issues***

Global conferences that address the issues of water and sanitation are ICN and FWCW. Some specific targets set in these conferences include ensuring access to safe water to 100 per cent of the population, and increasing sanitation facilities coverage from 48 per cent to 100 per cent by the year 2000.

To address some of the issues, the National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation 1998 was approved in January 1999. Achievements of conference targets however show that although access to safe water had reached 96 per cent coverage by 1996<sup>157</sup>, recent arsenic contamination problems have reduced this coverage to about 80 per cent in 1998<sup>158</sup>. Moreover, as mentioned above, access to sanitation still remains poor with only 40 per cent of the households in Bangladesh using hygienic latrines such as water sealed latrines and home-made pit latrines.

## **4.6 Shelter and Urbanisation**

### ***4.6.1 Shelter***

Most of the housing facilities in Bangladesh lack proper construction, with about 85 per cent of rural dwellings having inadequate protection from wind, rain and floods<sup>159</sup>. The situation is only marginally better in urban areas where 84 per cent of the houses are temporary or semi-permanent constructions made from thatching, bamboo, and corrugated iron sheets. Such weak structures make the dwellings highly vulnerable to natural disasters.

Poverty and land pressure are major constraints in access to residential land so that 30 per cent of rural households do not own any homestead and informal occupation and squatting is found to be on the rise in recent years<sup>160</sup>. In urban areas on the other hand, 60 per cent of the houses are owner-occupied but the figure drops to 30 per cent in metropolitan centres such as Dhaka city<sup>161</sup>. The unequal distribution of real estate ownership is especially evident in urban centres where the high income group, which comprises two per cent of the households, have access to 15 per cent of the residential land. On the other hand, the low income group, which comprises 70 per cent of the households, has access to only 20 per cent of the residential land<sup>162</sup>.

It has been estimated that by 2025, nearly 35 per cent of the land mass will be required to meet the demand for human settlements<sup>163</sup>. The demand for housing will be much more acute in urban areas where three million households live below the poverty line<sup>164</sup>. Much of this demand arises from workers employed in urban-based industries which

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<sup>157</sup> UNDP (1998).

<sup>158</sup> See section 4.6.2.

<sup>159</sup> GoB (1993).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> UNCHS (1998).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Islam, N. (1997).

<sup>164</sup> World Bank/BCAS (1998).

foster growth of urban slums in cities such as Dhaka, where 30 per cent of the population live in some 3000 slums<sup>165</sup>. Living conditions in these slums are poor with inadequate water, sanitation and other facilities increasing the vulnerability of slum dwellers to disease and malnutrition. They are also exposed to unregulated and exorbitant house rents, harassment from mastans, moneylenders and extortionists, and are also subject to eviction without notice by the Government because of the illegal status of the slums.

Nearly 70 per cent of the housing in the country is provided through the informal private sector, the formal private sector catering mainly to the upper middle and high income households. Public housing, which meets only seven per cent of the market demand, is intended mainly for the government employees with some provision kept for site and service schemes for squatter relocation<sup>166</sup>.

The problem of housing shortage is exacerbated by the lack of housing finance. The private sector meets the needs of only those who can afford to pay, mortgage financing being a necessity in the formal sector. This lack of housing finance makes a down-market move in the formal housing sector virtually impossible, so that informal housing solutions will continue to prevail in urban areas, for both rental and ownership<sup>167</sup>. Given the high priority that people accord to their housing requirements, it is necessary to examine the housing finance needs of this group that comprise the largest segment of the housing market.

#### **4.6.2 Urbanisation**

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the world and the annual increase of about 1.5 million people in urban areas generates some 300,000 new households every year creating an estimated demand for 200,000 new urban dwellings annually. This is actually an underestimate because it does not take into account the need for replacement of the 84 percent of the housing stock which is constructed from temporary or semi-permanent material. Depending on the allowance made for these replacement dwellings, it is likely that the number of urban dwellings required each year would average about 250,000 units<sup>168</sup>.

While the projected demand and the existing shortfall predicts high potential for housing construction as a growth industry, there are several constraints to the realisation of this potential. The most significant of these include unplanned development; a slow rate of supply of utilities and facilities; high costs of development; complicated real estate tenure and transfer systems; absence of adequate planning for government land use; poor institutional and management capacity; and inability to capture value increases brought about by government action.

The growth of urban areas has been consistently faster than the growth of infrastructure provision to service the urban population. As a result, large sections of the urban population have no access to municipally provided services: only 40 percent have access to public water supplies and 25 percent to hygienic sanitation. In Dhaka, 30 percent of the population have no recognised system of sanitation<sup>169</sup>.

The urban poor everywhere lack access to land and where they do actually occupy land, the area per household is extremely small, and that too with little or no security of tenure. If they are legally in occupation as tenants of private landlords, they are vulnerable to being dispossessed as tenancy laws for non-agricultural land is generally ignored, especially in the case of poor occupants. If they are occupying private land as squatters, either illegally or with the tacit acquiescence of the landowner, they not only have to pay protection money but are also liable to be dispossessed if the owner finds better use of the land. If they are illegally occupying government land, they are liable to be evicted at any time. While the

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<sup>165</sup> AsDB (1999).

<sup>166</sup> UNCHS (1998) Op. cit.

<sup>167</sup> Hoek-Smit, M. (1998)

<sup>168</sup> UNCHS (1993)

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

government claims to give long notices, such evictions sometimes occur with minimal warning.

A survey of government agencies involved in managing and developing urban land reveals that no special legal arrangements exist for the management of urban land and, and little differentiation is made between the approaches to urban and rural land management systems and strategies. Moreover, very little urban land acquisition and development by government agencies is directed to the needs of the urban poor<sup>170</sup>.

#### □ *Natural Disasters*

The geographic location of Bangladesh makes the country prone to various natural disasters such as floods, tidal waves, cyclones and earthquakes which have major impact on human settlements, especially of the poor and the disadvantaged. The most recent disaster was the floods of 1998 which reached the highest water levels ever reported in the country. It caused unprecedented suffering to the people, displaced families, completely demolished about 900,000 houses and damaged 1,300,000 others<sup>171</sup>.

While flooding and drainage issues affect and/or disrupt both urban and rural life in Bangladesh, it is the urban situation which is becoming more critical. Unplanned and unregulated growth in flat lands has reduced urban living standards to unacceptably low levels. Natural drainage patterns have been disturbed and have not been replaced with systematic drainage systems. While some major infrastructure have been recently constructed in selected towns, the low-income areas have yet to be connected to these systems.

There is therefore, an urgent need to address these problems through disaster preparedness projects for urban and rural shelter and settlements.

#### **4.6.3 Government Priorities for Shelter and Urbanisation**

Some initiatives to meet housing needs are already underway in rural areas. Grameen Bank in recent years has enabled some 380,000 households to build improved shelters while other NGOs have together provided another 300,000 or so housing units<sup>172</sup>.

The Government acknowledges that there is an acute shortage of affordable housing both in the urban and rural areas. To address the housing problems of the low and middle-income households, the disadvantaged, and the homeless, a National Housing Policy was approved in 1993. In addition, government *khas* land is being used for solving housing problems, especially for the poorer households. Moreover, to encourage private sector housing initiatives, tax concessions are being offered to those constructing with their own resources. Other initiatives include GoB-private sector collaboration such as a housing project<sup>173</sup> which is aimed at partially meeting the housing needs of urban middle class families.

The Fifth Five Year Plan strategy for improving the quality of life and living conditions of people includes the provision of adequate physical infrastructure and other services; preparation of land use; master plans for urban centres and rural areas; developing low-cost housing options; initiating resettlement of slum dwellers; providing basic services such as safe drinking water, sewerage, and sanitation facilities to urban and rural inhabitants; developing basic infrastructure in zilas, thanas and unions; and combating environmental degradation and air and water pollution. Moreover, following the Grameen Bank housing model, plans are underway to provide better access to land and finance, as well as affordable and durable building material and technology in rural areas.

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<sup>170</sup> McAuslan, P. (1999)

<sup>171</sup> UNCHS (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>172</sup> Islam, N. (1997) Op.cit.

<sup>173</sup> Under government-private sector collaboration the Nitol Housing Project was launched on 9 June 1999.

#### **4.6.4 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences on Human Settlement**

The global conferences that directly address housing needs and human settlements are Habitat I and II. The Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II, while calling for sustainable human development and adequate shelter for all, has not set any timebound quantitative targets. In this regard, there has not been much specific follow-up to the conference in Bangladesh, but the national development plans recognise the existence of housing problems in the country and have identified priorities to address the shortage of housing.

Such initiatives include the "Asrayon" project that has been launched by the Prime Minister's Office to provide shelter to destitute families by giving them access to *khas* land for homestead construction.

The Support for Implementation of National Plans of Action (SINPA) is a recent attempt to contribute to the task of building the capacity required to implement the National Plans of Action in the context of the Habitat II Conference. Under this programme, the Institute of Housing Studies (HIS), Netherlands, is providing support for capacity building of institutions to make them more responsive to existing needs<sup>174</sup>. A three-year project has been initiated in the Tangail Pourashava under the guidance of a high-powered National Steering Committee chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works. The ongoing urban rehabilitation programme is also in line with the recommendations of the Habitat II, National Plan of Action.

The Housing Fund has been created to provide soft housing loans for the poor. NGOs are entrusted with the task of constructing houses and handing them over to the poor on a long-term loan basis. The Housing Fund Trustee Board has recently (July 1999) sanctioned Tk. 134 million for the construction of 6700 new low-cost housing for the poor in rural areas covering 155 villages in 53 districts. To date 1748 houses for the poor have been constructed under this programme<sup>175</sup>.

A large project has recently been approved to address urban poverty alleviation in 11 cities and pourashavas in the country, making local governments more responsive to the needs of the urban poor and focussing on the improvement of low-income areas in these towns. Various efforts are also underway to improve urban transport systems, urban primary healthcare services in four cities, and solid waste management and infrastructure development in 21 secondary cities.

Other initiatives in urban development include capacity building of the Dhaka City Corporation; master plan development for the cities of Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna, including extensive remodelling of the city of Khulna<sup>176</sup>.

The main challenge for the coming decade is the successful implementation of these various plans.

## **4.7 Healthy Physical Environment**

### **4.7.1 Environmental Degradation**

A combination of high population density and other social, economic, and policy factors, is pushing Bangladesh towards unsustainable use of its resource base, including its water resources, soil, fisheries, forests, and wetlands. In addition, the dual trend of industrialisation and urbanisation<sup>177</sup> is creating serious and growing air and water pollution and solid waste problems.

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<sup>174</sup> CUS (1998).

<sup>175</sup> The Bangladesh Observer, 11 July 1999.

<sup>176</sup> CUS (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>177</sup> Urban population is growing at over five per cent annually. Cited from World Bank (1997).

It has been estimated that some 80 per cent of all illnesses in Bangladesh, which total more than 15 million cases annually, are related to waterborne diseases<sup>178</sup>. Water-related health impacts such as sickness and death comprise the single greatest category of environmental damage in Bangladesh which is valued at two to four per cent of GDP<sup>179</sup> in terms of lost productivity, lost wages, and cost of treatment. In addition, a very high proportion of infant mortality is associated with water-borne infectious and parasitic diseases, while about a third of all deaths of children under five is due to diarrhoeal diseases alone.

A World Bank study<sup>180</sup> identifies the principal causes for the degradation in the water quality as:

- Inadequate sanitation and seepage of agro-chemicals into water supply sources in rural areas;
- Pollution due to municipal and industrial<sup>181</sup> waste discharge in urban areas;
- Intrusion of saline water in aquifers; and
- Iron and arsenic contamination of water supply sources due to the release of naturally occurring metals in aquifers.

The study further shows that the small subset of industries that contribute to a large percentage of the pollution load include industries such as spinning, weaving and finishing textiles; non-ferrous metals; iron and steel basic industries; basic industrial chemicals; tanneries and leather; petroleum refineries; pharmaceuticals; and sugar refineries.

Urban degradation, including urban water and sanitation, solid waste disposal and worsening transport-related air pollution, make the capital city of Dhaka one of the least healthy cities in the world. It has been estimated that 15,000 deaths are caused annually from air pollution-related health impacts<sup>182</sup>. The three pollutants which pose significant problems are suspended particulate matters (SPM), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), and air-borne lead. A survey conducted by the Department of Environment (DOE) shows that while the highest levels of SPM reached in Dhaka city in 1990 was 570 micrograms per cubic metre of air by 1996 these levels had increased to 1773<sup>183</sup>. Ambient SO<sub>2</sub> levels in commercial areas are nearly five times the national standards and nearly ten times above WHO guidelines. The impact of such high levels of pollution in the city of Dhaka is evident from a recent report of the Chest Disease Hospital which finds that three-fourths of the children admitted into the Child Hospital complain of breathing troubles and that the number of asthma and asphyxia patients is on the rise.

Lead levels in Dhaka are also high by world standards and up to five times the recommended WHO guidelines. The level of lead content in the blood of street children is found to be in the range of 90-200 mcg/decilitre that is far beyond the WHO standard of 25 Mcg/decilitre.<sup>184</sup> This has serious implications for children in particular, as lead retards both physical and mental growth.

In Bangladesh Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) are used in aerosols, as propellant gas, in small to large refrigeration units, in hospitals as anaesthetic gas, in fire fighting equipment, in computer cleaning agents, and in silos as fumigating agents. ODS are wholly

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<sup>178</sup> Such diseases include diarrhoea, trachoma, intestinal worms and hepatitis.

<sup>179</sup> World Bank (1997) Op.cit.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> More than 1200 industrial sites have been identified as causing significant pollution. Cited from World Bank (1997) Op.cit.

<sup>182</sup> World Bank (1997) Op.cit.

<sup>183</sup> Gayen, P. (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>184</sup> Shamunnay (1999).



imported items and in 1996 nearly 76 per cent of the total imported amount was consumed by a single company that manufactures aerosol products<sup>185</sup>.

It has been estimated that carbon dioxide emission has increased from 11.63 million tonnes in 1990 to 23.28 million tonnes in 1995 and is projected to reach 30.88 million tonnes in the year 2000<sup>186</sup>. Estimates of technology-based emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> reveal that of the 12088 Gg released from the energy sector, 4392 Gg was emitted from the energy and transformation sector, 2420 Gg from the industry sector, 1875 Gg from the transport sector and the remaining from small combustion and fugitive emission<sup>187</sup>.

#### ***4.7.2 Government Priorities for Maintaining a Healthy Physical Environment***

The Fifth Five Year Plan has identified several environmental issues that need attention. These include the agricultural resource base especially land and water; impact of chemicals used in modern agricultural practices; biodiversity; biomass; deforestation; wetland and fisheries; the mangrove ecosystem; industrial pollution; coastal and marine water; salinity; sanitation; and urbanisation.

The strategy for environmental protection places major thrust on training technical personnel for pollution control; introducing environment studies in educational institutions; raising public awareness in environmental issues; land use planning; water resources management; industrial pollution control; and disaster mitigation measures.

However, as the implementation of the various policies require adequate financing, the Government has identified the need for shared responsibility by all partners including government organisations, local government bodies, NGOs, research and training institutions, and the private sector.

#### ***4.7.3 Follow-up to United Nations Global Conferences for Healthy Physical Environment***

The main conference to address environmental issues is UNCED which has asked for exhaustive commitments by signatory countries to Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Forest Principles, Climate Change and Biological Diversity.

Bangladesh has taken some follow-up initiatives in this regard which include establishing a National Environmental Council in 1993, enactment of the Environment Protection Act in 1995, development of the National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) and its subsequent follow-up with the Sustainable Environment Management Programme. Other policies in place include the National Energy Policy and the Bangladesh Water and Flood Management Strategy.

### **4.8 Problems in Addressing Survival Issues and their Causes**

Among the major problems in adequately addressing the diverse survival issues are constraints in finances and policies regarding allocation of resources. While the Government has increased its health sector allocation from three per cent in the Fourth Five Year Plan to seven per cent in the Fifth Five Year Plan, public expenditure in the health sector still remains distressingly low at less than Tk. 100<sup>188</sup> per capita annually at 1996/97 prices. This cannot be expected to realistically expand, either in quality or quantity, public health services to any meaningful extent. On the other hand, per capita defence expenditure for FY 1998/99 is nearly Tk. 2,400.

A curb in the population growth will help to allocate higher resources per capita to meet survival needs, and recent achievements in reducing both fertility rates and population growth rates are encouraging steps in the right direction. However, since the base population was high

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<sup>185</sup> DOE (1998).

<sup>186</sup> BCAS/BUET/BIDS/BUP (1998).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> BBS (1998).

the real impact of the reduction can only be felt a generation or two later.

While the majority of the population suffers from inadequate coverage of its survival needs, the negative impact is disproportionately high on women, children, and the poor. While the main causes behind this are poverty related, the situation is exacerbated by cultural practices and attitudes towards allocation of scarce resources to vulnerable groups. Thus the rights of survival of women, children, and the poor are superseded by those of the socially, culturally, and economically stronger members of the society.

Other factors that also impinge on people's survival rights are activities which while having economic benefits, incur high costs to the environment. Both the poor and the non-poor contribute, in differing degrees, to the deterioration in healthy physical environment through modern agricultural practices, unregulated commerce and industry, and rapid expansion in urbanisation and urban slums. The constraints in adequately addressing these issues arise from the vested interest of the many parties involved. Corruption and rent seeking practices allow the rich and/or politically well connected to flout existing rules and regulations and establish commercial and industrial ventures that are detrimental to the environment.

The inability to expand rural employment opportunities leads to increased rural-urban migration which, combined with the economic necessity of the poor, the self-interest serving motivation of political parties, and the subsequent ineffectualness in the implementation of existing policies, result in uncontrolled expansion of slum areas. Such expansions create serious problems for the state to meet the increasing needs of public services of water, sanitation, and energy in urban areas.

Thus, while the state has a major role to play in co-ordinating the expansion and growth of the social and economic sectors which ensure the survival rights of the people, it is constrained by lack of financial and institutional capacity, the impact of which is exaggerated by the failure in governance due to both political and bureaucratic corruption, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness.

The attempt of the Government and its development partners to address some of the survival issues has resulted in limited country-wide impact from such developmental initiatives mainly because of the relatively small-scale and project-oriented nature of the interventions. Moreover, even when the projects prove successful in the areas and regions where they are being implemented, they do not always lead to improvement in institutional capability and capacity at the national level mainly because of policies and practices that hinder effective and efficient utilisation of trained manpower.

#### **4.9 Identified Gaps**

An assessment of the status of people's survival rights indicates that while much has been achieved over the years, there are issues that need to be addressed and existing gaps reduced for ensuring people's survival rights to any appreciable extent. These gaps include:

- Insufficient attention by the Government and donors
  - To increasing food production to meet the food security and nutritional needs of the population in the next two decades of the coming millennium.
  - To promoting agribusiness and agro-processing that can expand rural employment opportunities;
  - To promoting livestock and fisheries sectors;
  - To implementation of policies for attaining rapid improvement in the nutritional status of the people, especially children.
  - To improving institutional capacity for nutritional assessment through training and other measures.
  - To the control of ARI and diarrhoeal diseases.
  - To adolescent and women's nutritional status in a more holistic manner.

- To ensuring quality and safe food for the people.
  - To ensuring quality health services to the people, especially the poor.
  - To exploring possibilities of health and livestock insurance schemes for the poor.
  - To exploring cheap and renewable sources of energy that can replace fuelwood and biomass which deplete the environmental resource base.
  - To environmental policies such as replacing the outdated and project-based Environment Impact Assessment by the more recent and comprehensive Strategic Environmental Assessment.
  - To control urban pollution through monitoring and regulating the number and types of vehicles, their road-worthiness, and their pollution-emitting levels; expanding sanitation, sewerage and drainage systems; and other related factors.
  - To raise community awareness and participation in the importance of maintaining a healthy physical environment.
  - To increasing public access to information on fiscal and financial incentives offered by the Government to promote pollution abatement in new and existing industries.
  - To providing alternative cheap housing for slum dwellers that will enable the abolition of slums and their attendant health risks.
  - Simplifying land transaction procedures to enable easier and cheaper access to land.
- Insufficient involvement of NGOs and the private sector in:
- Providing health services to the urban and rural poor including life and health insurance schemes especially designed for their needs and financial capacity.
  - Vitamin A and iron fortification of food.
  - Production of blended food affordable by the poor.
  - Providing housing for the urban and rural poor.
  - Providing cheap but quality housing material for the poor, to serve the double purpose of enabling the poor to have better housing and reducing exploitation of the environmental resource base for housing material.
  - Solid waste disposal in urban areas.
  - Pollution control in urban areas.

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## THE RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD

### 5.1 Introduction

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS, which was first introduced in the World Summit for Social Development 1995, recognises that employment and income open up the route to many other human development goals, but at the same time emphasises that livelihoods should be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable for current and future generations.

At the national level Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh affirms that it is the fundamental responsibility of the state to secure for its citizens the basic necessities of life and guaranteed employment which ensures their constitutional right to work. This right is therefore the right of the people to have access to factors that enable them to maintain a level of income and consumption that meets their basic needs.

In harmony with these concepts and commitments, the rights-based approach of the CCA conceptual framework thus identifies the right to livelihood as the second cluster of rights with education, employment and income comprising its main elements. This chapter assesses the current situation of these elements, highlights the problems and their underlying causes, and identifies the gaps that need to be filled to ensure the right of livelihood to the people.

### 5.2 Education

#### 5.2.1 Formal Education

Adult literacy rate in Bangladesh has shown significant improvement since 1991 increasing from 35.3 per cent to 51 per cent in 1997<sup>189</sup>. The increase was marginally higher for women rising from under 26 per cent to over 38 per cent in that period<sup>190</sup>. In spite of this, there is still more than 17 per cent point gap between men and women, the gap being wider in rural areas, where only 36 per cent of rural women are literate compared to 60 per cent urban women<sup>191</sup>. Moreover, there is a direct relationship between poverty and the education level<sup>192</sup> of the household head. Nearly 60 per cent of households where the heads have no education are poor compared to 19 per cent of households where the head has ten or more years of schooling<sup>193</sup>.

The increase in literacy rate is largely due to government and donor emphasis on primary and non-formal education. Public expenditure in the education sector has increased from 13.3 to 47 billion taka in the period 1990-1999<sup>194</sup> with per pupil allocation reaching Tk 586 (at July 1999 prices) in 1997<sup>195</sup>. The Government has made special efforts to improve female literacy rates through policy measures and direct affirmative actions that include stipend programmes, free education for girls at secondary school levels, food-for-education programmes, and allocating a 60 per cent quota for female primary school teachers.

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<sup>189</sup> Planning Unit, PMED.

<sup>190</sup> World Bank (1999) Op.cit.

<sup>191</sup> BBS (1998a).

<sup>192</sup> In terms of years of schooling.

<sup>193</sup> UNDP (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>194</sup> FFYP (1998) Op. cit.; Planning Unit, PMED.

<sup>195</sup> UNDP (1999) Op. cit.

This has resulted in the number of female primary school students increasing by 46 per cent compared to 32 per cent for boys and the number of female primary school teachers has increased by 68 per cent compared to 14 per cent for male teachers (table 5.1).

In addition, the female:male primary school enrolment ratio has increased from 34:66 in 1980 to 48:52 in 1997. Primary school completion rate has also shown a positive trend, increasing from 42 per cent in 1990 to 61 per cent in 1995. Factors that help to retain children in school include higher socio-economic status of household, improved infrastructure in the area such as availability of electricity, non-involvement of the student in income generating activities or housework, better facilities such as toilets, libraries, enclosed school compounds, and programmes such as food for education.

**Table 5.1. Selected Educational Statistics**

Educational Institutions	No. of schools				Students ('000s)				Teachers ('000s)			
	Boys & Co-ed.		Girls		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	'90	'96	'90	'96	'90	'96	'90	'96	'90	'96	'90	'96
Primary schools	45,480	61,081	303	502	6,912	9,113	5,433	7,950	160	183	40	67
Secondary schools	-	10,806	-	2,052	-	3,277	-	2,511	-	135	-	22
Govt. Colleges					227	598	88	292	5	15	1	3
Government universities					41	51	12	15	-	3	-	0.6
Non-govt. universities					-	3	-	0.9	-	0.6	-	0.1

Source: BBS (1998)

The completion rate for girls is 62 per cent compared to 60 per cent for boys. At secondary school level however, boys have the advantage, the completion rate being 58 per cent for girls and 68 per cent for boys<sup>196</sup>. The reasons for this include cultural practices which restrict a girl's mobility once she reaches puberty, compounded by factors such as lack of female teachers, lack of adequate facilities in schools, such as separate toilets for girls, overcrowding in classrooms, distance of schools from homes, vulnerability to teasing by boys, rape, acid throwing and other dangers, and the need to help at home with housework.

However, while national emphasis on education has increased enrolment in primary schools, there are serious concerns about the quality of education being provided. It has been found that about half of all students fail the terminal examinations at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, and only about 56 percent of children completing the five-year primary cycle achieve basic education criteria<sup>197</sup>. This is partly because while enrolment increased from 11.6 million in 1995 to 11.7 million in 1997 in state-owned schools, the teacher/student ratio simultaneously increased from 1:73 to 1:76<sup>198</sup>. Also, although the share of students in government schools dropped by some four per cent, the slack being taken up by private schools, here too, the teacher/student ratio is unbalanced, there being one teacher for 48 to 68 children<sup>199</sup>. Other factors that affect the quality of education are weak management and supervision, poor teacher attendance, irregular school attendance of students, outdated teaching methods, budgetary constraints in allocations reserved for books and other teaching aids, and lack of accountability of school authorities to parents, guardians, and communities.

At the tertiary level women's participation drops to 20 per cent, the choice of subjects for the majority (75 per cent) of the women being non-science subjects. This is one of the

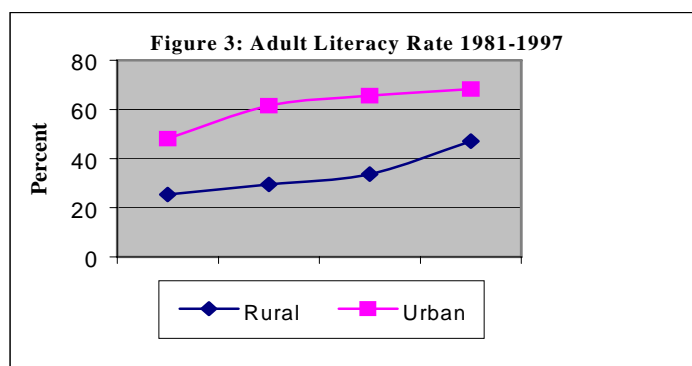
<sup>196</sup> BBS (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>197</sup> CAMPE (1999).

<sup>198</sup> UNDP (1999a).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

main causes of their absence from the skilled labour market and consequently higher status or higher paid jobs.



Source: SVR in Bangladesh, BBS 1998

It must be noted however, that the significant gains in female literacy rates and educational facilities are mainly the result of the very low base figures, so that in spite of the progress recorded the female:male ratios for the various indicators remained lopsided in 1996<sup>200</sup>.

Primary school students	100:115
Primary school teachers	100:273
Secondary school students	100:131
Secondary school teachers	100:614
Students of state universities	100:322
Teachers of state universities	100:579
Students of private universities	100:359
Teachers of private universities	100:489

Recent trends show that the private sector is increasingly investing in higher education, some 80 per cent of degree colleges and 16 newly established universities being under private management<sup>201</sup>.

There are however major problems in trying to narrow the gap and providing the boost that the education sector needs. It has been estimated that to achieve the goals of the National Plan of Action for the Education for All by 2000, the Government must provide primary education facilities for an additional 5.84 million 6-10 year old learners and basic literacy programmes for some 26 million adults half of whom are female<sup>202</sup>.

Several government and non-government initiatives are being implemented in an effort to address these issues. The Government expects to meet primary education targets through the formal primary school system with supplementary support from non-formal education for the former dropouts and non-starters. The Government is also rehabilitating non-functioning community schools with assistance from NGOs, some of whom are conducting experiments in providing formal primary education services. In addition the Government is prioritising non-formal education to eradicate mass illiteracy.

<sup>200</sup> Estimated from BBS (1998).

<sup>201</sup> World Bank (1999) Op. cit.

<sup>202</sup> PMED (1995).

□ *Financial Returns to Education*

While the emphasis on education by government and donors is a major factor behind improved literacy rates, the rate of return that a household receives on investments in education of family members is also a factor in rational decision making. It has been estimated that across all levels and types of schooling, for both males and females, schooling yields about ten per cent return on earnings foregone by the household. The rate of return is marginally higher in urban areas (10 per cent) than in rural areas (9.5 per cent)<sup>203</sup>.

The highest returns are from primary education, the average earnings for those who have completed primary school being nearly 53 per cent higher than those who have had no schooling or are primary school dropouts. The returns to education drop significantly at the junior secondary school level to under eight per cent, but rises sharply to over 16 per cent for bachelor's degree holders.

There is gender variation in the returns to investment. The return to primary education for girls (16.5 per cent) is nearly twice that for males (9.2 per cent). The returns to secondary education are also higher for females than males. However, at the higher levels of education, the returns for males are higher than the return for females which implies that women with higher educational qualifications are not employed in higher-paid jobs. While few studies have directly addressed this issue, among the causes for this phenomenon could be the lack of specialisation in fields that attract higher salaries. Other causes could be reproductive-related responsibilities, including housework and child rearing, that prompt women to opt for lower-paying, but conveniently-timed jobs such as school teachers and part-time employees. Such dual burdens also sometimes force women to abandon fast track career paths that give them access to higher salaries.

□ *Science and Technology*

In 1995-96 some 59,000 students were enrolled in technical institutions, including medicine. The percentage distribution of students shows that the lowest enrolment is in engineering mainly because of constraints in the physical capacity of the various institutions. There are five institutions that offer degree courses in engineering which cover civil, electrical and electronic, and mechanical engineering. However, while the total annual capacity in these institutions is 1370, applications from eligible candidates each year number more than ten times the available capacity<sup>204</sup>.

**Table 5.2. Technical/Vocational Education in Bangladesh 1995-96**

Technical institutions	Number of students (%)
Engineering	2480 (4)
Medical*	19735 (33)
Other technical**	23362 (39)
University***	13763 (24)
Total	59,340 (100)

Source: Estimated from BBS (1998).

\* Includes ayurvedic, homeopathic, and unani medicine;

\*\* Includes agriculture, polytechnic, vocational, trade, leather, textile, glass and ceramics, etc., and technical teachers training.

\*\*\* Faculties of science, biological sciences, and pharmacy.

While the projected overall demand for technical personnel in Bangladesh is yet to be estimated, the shortage in supply is evident from statistics that show that there are nearly 5000 persons to a physician, nearly 9000 persons to a nurse, and only 400 specialists in

<sup>203</sup> Hussain, Z. and Y. Tanaka (1999).

<sup>204</sup> FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

information technology are being produced every year where demand is in the range of 8000<sup>205</sup>.

While physical capacity of institutions limit the number of students, personal choice also directs students to non-technical subjects. Thus in 1995-96, of the total number of university students only 30 per cent opted to study science, including biological sciences and pharmacy, the majority (51 per cent) enrolling in the faculties of arts and social sciences<sup>206</sup>.

Furthermore, few female students opt for science subjects, only 10 per cent of students in the faculties of science, biological science, and pharmacy being women. Thus of the total number of female students in the four universities, the majority (62 per cent) enrol in liberal arts and social sciences and only 25 per cent specialise in technical subjects<sup>207</sup>.

#### □ *Vocational Training*

The two main providers of skills training in the public sector are the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the Ministry of Education. BMET offers vocational training at 11 Technical Training Centres (Tics) located in urban industrial areas and in the Bangladesh Institute of Marine Technology. BMET also provides non-institutional programmes in the form of apprenticeship and in-plant upgradation training for industrial workers and supervisory personnel. Tics also conduct special self-employment oriented training courses for other agencies.

Participation in such apprenticeship programmes is however low, because industries prefer to give their workers on-the-job training which saves them both time and money and ensures specialisation in their individual fields. Moreover, financial constraints and institutional incapacity prevent BMET from fulfilling its mandate which includes research and development.

There are 51 Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs) under the Ministry of Education, most of which are located in small towns and semi-urban areas. The courses offered by the VTIs are designed to meet the needs of the of a modernising agriculture sector. Besides these other ministries also run vocational training programmes including the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare which are involved in women's skills development. In addition there are some 100 NGOs that impart non-formal vocational training mainly to the poor.

In order to develop skilled technical manpower the Annual Development Plan has allocated Tk. 1.2 billion for financing 13 projects in the period 1990-1995. The projects helped to increase the number of students in the Secondary School Certificate (vocational) course by nearly 180 per cent and those in the diploma courses by 13 per cent. However, no change was observed in the number of enrolments at the degree level courses in textile, leather and technical teachers' training<sup>208</sup>.

#### **5.2.2 Non-formal/Mass Education**

In a drive to increase overall literacy rate the government is supplementing efforts in formal education with parallel initiatives in non-formal education. The objective of the Mass Education Programme is thus to increase the literacy rate of the 11-45 year age group from 30 per cent to 60 per cent in the project area by the year 2000. In addition, in order to institutionalise a comprehensive non-formal education system in the country, the Expansion of Integrated Non-formal Education Programme has been launched in 69 of the 460 thanas in the country. About two-thirds of the non-formal education programme is implemented through some 192 NGOs and one-third through the direct control of district co-ordinators who monitor and supervise field programmes in each district. Nearly 370,000 people have benefited from the programme in the period 1990-1995.

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<sup>205</sup> Chowdhury, J.R. (1996).

<sup>206</sup> Estimated from (BBS 1998) .

<sup>207</sup> Estimated from (BBS 1998).

<sup>208</sup> Statistical data in this section is quoted from the FFYP (1998).



Besides their co-operation in government programmes, NGOs are also involved in a variety of nonformal education initiatives through which over two million children are enrolled in nonformal learning centres<sup>209</sup>. This represents about eight percent of the national primary enrolment<sup>210</sup>. However, there is no system to assess and recognise the equivalence of the formal and nonformal systems.

The Total Literacy Movement programme has been introduced in two districts of the country. Activities under the programme include training programmes for teachers, supervisors and librarians. The programme also supports the development of primers, teacher's guides, teacher's training manual, and supervisor's training manuals.

In addition, the Directorate of Non-formal Education, with assistance from IDA, AsDB, UNICEF, SIDA, NORAD, SDC and DfID, has launched a five-year project, the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children Project, which aims to reach 351,000 urban working children located in six divisional cities. DNFE is working in partnership with 150 NGOs to carry out the major activities.

The FFYP has allocated 14 billion taka for non-formal education. At least 10 per cent of this amount is expected to be mobilised by the community/private sector through literacy drives.

### ***5.2.3 Government Priorities and Needs in the Education Sector***

The government is committed to raising the literacy rate to 100 per cent by the year 2005 with a mid-term target of achieving 70 per cent literacy rate by 2002. To this end one of the strategies of the Fifth Five Year Plan is to make the compulsory primary education programme more effective through local government and community support. Also, in order to enlarge the technological base of economic development, more emphasis is being given to technical and vocational education programmes at secondary, higher secondary as well as at the university levels.

To increase the absorption capacity of institutions, the Fifth Five Year Plan has made provisions to add 47,000 classrooms to existing government primary schools and to reconstruct/renovate/repair 15,000 government primary schools. In addition, 20,000 satellite schools and 5000 non-government, community-based primary schools are being established.

While five billion taka for 29 projects have been allocated for technical manpower development in the FFYP, substantial private sector participation is expected through support for nine per cent of the new polytechnic institutions and 90 per cent of other technical and vocational institutions. To encourage private investment in technical and higher education, fiscal and other incentives are being offered. In addition, NGO and community participation in formal education is also being encouraged.

### ***5.2.4 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences in Education-related issues***

The global conferences that specifically address issues relevant to education include Education for All, ICPD, WSSD, the Children's Summit, the World Food Summit, and Habitat II. Some of the quantitative targets set in the conferences and achievements made by Bangladesh are given in the table above.

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<sup>209</sup> World Bank (1999a).

<sup>210</sup> BBS/UNICEF (1998) Op. cit.

**Table 5.3. Selected Education-related Targets of Global Conferences and Achievements in Bangladesh**

Quantitative targets	Achievements
By 2000:	
Raise gross primary enrolment rate to 95%;	Gross primary enrolment rate reached 96% in 1998.
Increase primary level completion rate to 80%;	Primary level completion rate reached 61% by 1995;
Raise gross female enrolment rate to 94%;	Gross female enrolment rate reached 94% by 1996;
Reduce primary level dropout rate to 30%;	Primary level dropout rate reached 40% by 1995;
Increase adult literacy rate to 62%.	Adult literacy rate reached 51% by 1997.

Sources: UNDP (1998c); BBS (1998b); World Bank (1999); PMED.

## 5.3 Employment and Labour Markets

### 5.3.1 The Labour Force

Of the 56 million people aged ten years and above who comprise the labour force, about 19 per cent work for wages, salaries and commissions, another 19 per cent are self-employed, about 17 per cent work as unpaid labour in household economic activities, and about 14 per cent are engaged in household work.<sup>211</sup>

**Table 5.4. Annual Average Growth Rate of the Labour Force 1989-1995/96**

Period	National			Urban			Rural		
	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
1989 – 1995/96	2.3	3.5	0.3	17.5	16.9	21.7	0.3	1.5	-1.1

Source: Labour Force Survey 1995-96.

\* A change in definition resulted in the negative growth rate.

The labour force of the country is growing at a rate of 2.3 per cent in the period 1989-1995/96, the aggregate growth rate for men being more than ten times that of women (table 5.4). In urban areas however, where the growth rate was nearly 18 per cent, female labour force growth rate surpassed the male growth rate by some five per cent points. This phenomenon is the result of rapid urbanisation that has taken place in recent years and the expansion in industries that employ female labour which include readymade garments, pharmaceuticals, and frozen food. The sluggish growth rate in rural areas reflects the lack of employment opportunities<sup>212</sup>.

The majority (87 per cent) of the labour force is employed in the private informal sector, another 12 per cent are absorbed in the formal private sector, and the remaining are employed in the public/autonomous sector. Nearly half the labour force is illiterate, and the figure rises to 70 per cent in the case of women. Among the economically active are 17 million children between the ages 10-14, half of whom are female<sup>213</sup>.

The activity rate for men stands at 78 per cent and for women at 51 per cent (table 5.5). Because of the heavy involvement in the informal sector, unemployment is low at 2.5 per cent, but underemployment is high at nearly 35 per cent<sup>214</sup>. Underemployment is lower in urban areas because of the relatively higher formal sector employment opportunities. Underemployment is also reported to be higher for women than men, but these estimates do not take into account women's household work and other reproductive-related responsibilities.

<sup>211</sup> Labour Force Survey, 1995-96.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> BBS (1998), (1997); LFS 1995-96.

<sup>214</sup> LFS 1995-96 Op. cit.

**Table 5.5. Selected statistics of the labour force of Bangladesh 1995-96.**

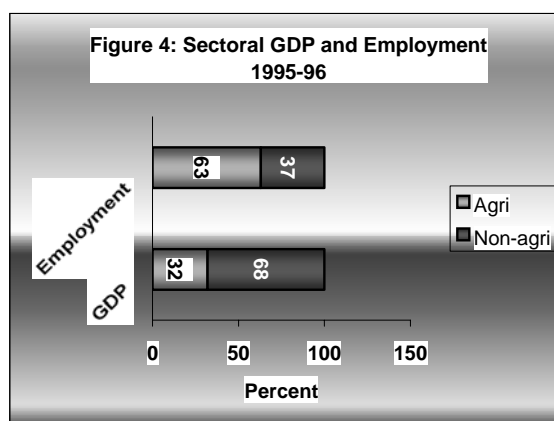
Indicators	Usual definition			Extended definition		
	Both	M	F	Both	M	F
<b>Economically active person (million)</b>						
National	41.7	34.1	7.6	56.0	34.7	21.3
Urban	9.3	7.3	2.0	10.2	7.4	2.8
Rural	32.4	26.8	5.6	45.8	27.3	18.5
<b>Participation rate (%)</b>						
National	48.3	77.0	18.1	64.8	78.3	50.6
Urban	46.4	71.1	20.5	50.6	71.5	28.6
Rural						
<b>Refined activity rate (%)</b>	48.3	77.0	18.1	64.8	78.3	50.6
<b>Unemployment rate (%)</b>						
National	3.4	2.7	6.3	2.5	2.7	2.3
Urban	4.9	4.4	6.5	4.5	4.4	4.6
Rural	3.0	2.3	6.3	2.1	2.2	1.9
<b>Underemployment rate (%)</b>						
National				34.6	12.4	70.7
Urban	-	-	-	19.6	10.0	44.4
Rural				37.9	13.1	74.6

Source: Labour Force Survey 1995-96.

Usual definition: Those aged ten years and above who were either employed for pay or profit or with/without pay or profit, or seeking/available for job during reference period are considered economically active.

Extended definition: Those aged ten years and above who were either employed for pay or profit or with/without pay or profit, or seeking/available for job during reference period are considered economically active. Economic activities include own household economic activities such as care of poultry and livestock, threshing, boiling, drying, processing and preservation of food.

### 5.3.2 Employment



Source: BBS (1998); MoF (1998).

A comparison of the sectoral GDP against the sectoral employment generated reveals that agriculture, which contributes only a third to the national income, absorbs nearly two-thirds of the labour force because of the highly labour-intensive nature of the sector, and the lack of other employment opportunities. On the other hand, the non-agriculture sector (including public administration and defence) contributes nearly 68 per cent to national income but absorbs about 35 per cent of the paid labour<sup>215</sup>. The low national literacy rate, insufficient technical manpower, and the slow growth of industries all contribute to this inequitable access to relatively higher-paid employment.

<sup>215</sup> BBS (1998); LFS 1995-96.

**Table 5.6. Employment by status and sex**

Status of employment	No. of persons engaged (000)		
	Total	Male	Female
Admin. Clerical sales workers	171	169	2
Production and related workers	985	810	175
Director/partner and proprietor	21.5	21	0.5
Daily hired workers	135	116	19
Unpaid workers	15	13	2
Total	1,327.5	1129	198.5

Source: CMI 1991-92.

Further examination of the employment status of the national labour force shows that about 85 per cent of the persons engaged are men, and 15 per cent are women. Nearly three-quarters of the persons engaged are production and related workers, about 10 per cent are daily hired workers, and about one per cent are unpaid workers (Table 5.6).

Most of the female labour are production related workers, and partly because of their low literacy rate have only marginal involvement in higher status employment such as proprietors or sales clerks. Moreover, while on average industries employ only one per cent of male and female workers as unpaid labour, some manufacturing industries display a greater propensity to exploit unpaid female labour. Thus about 85 per cent of the female labour in pottery and china manufacturing and 21 per cent in electrical machine manufacturing are unpaid family workers (Table 5.7)

**Table 5.7. Unpaid family workers in selected industries**

Selected Industries *	% unpaid family workers	
	Male	Female
Pottery & china manufacturing	20	85
Manufacturing electrical machines	3	21
Handloom textiles	5	12
Manufacturing textiles	2	9
Rice milling	1	2
Average over all industries	1	1

Source: Estimated from CMI 1991-92.

\* Those industries with highest unpaid family labour.

While the highly heterogeneous character of the non-formal labour market has discouraged attempts at estimating its size especially in terms of value added, it has been found that productivity differentials between the formal and the non-formal sectors are substantial. In terms of employment however, the non-formal sector engages about 87 per cent of the labour force mainly as self-employed or own account workers, unpaid family helpers, and day labourers.

Empirical evidence<sup>216</sup> indicates that there is high correlation between poverty and engaging in non-formal activities with women's earnings from such employment being far less than that of their male counterparts.

#### □ *Social Security for Workers*

While there is no comprehensive social security system for workers in Bangladesh, a legal framework consisting of several laws regulate the current social protection measures. The laws and ordinances cover issues such as workers' compensations, fatal accidents at place of work, maternity benefits, and group insurance and benevolent funds for government servants.

<sup>216</sup> UNDP/ILO (1998).

While these measures hold for both the private and the public sector workers, social protection schemes are rarely taken in the private sector mainly because the large supply of surplus labour precludes the need for such incentives for retaining labour. Recently however, through collective agreements provident funds and pension schemes are being introduced in some of the larger industrial and commercial enterprises. The rural and unorganised urban sectors remain outside such social security schemes.

#### □ *Microfinance and Employment Generation*

Microfinance has made significant contribution to poverty reduction by lowering the poverty gap between the poor and the non-poor and lessening the severity of poverty among the poor as measured by the FGT Index. This has been achieved through credit programmes that have helped to increase<sup>217</sup>:

- Total income per household by 29 per cent
- Total production per household by 56 per cent
- Labour force participation rate per household by 10 per cent
- Monthly hours of paid work per household by nearly 7 per cent
- Rural wages by more than 13 per cent .

This improvement is attributable however, not only to the availability of microfinance, but also to additional factors that enable more effective utilisation of the credit. Such factors include the level of infrastructure development; proximity to the capital or large towns; market demand for the product being manufactured; availability of family manpower; and entrepreneurship capacity of the loanee or her family members.

On the other hand there are factors which dampen or erode the positive impact of the microfinance programmes and these include ill health of the loanee; illness/death of main income earner; illness, death or theft of livestock; natural disasters and ecological vulnerability; political instability; lack of law and order; political exploitation of the poor; and cultural constraints such as influence of religious leaders.

While microfinance institutions are by and large performing satisfactorily and are expanding their outreach, several emerging issues call for immediate attention. These include the introduction of a regulatory and legal framework for microfinance institutions, improved management practices, formalising/standardising of procedures, and search for alternate sources of funds as concessional loans continue to be squeezed. Moreover, there is need to explore avenues for extending microfinance services to the vulnerable non-poor, the enterprising poor, as well as small entrepreneurs who fall through the *credit gap*. These groups do not fulfil existing eligibility criteria of MFIs and either do not have access to commercial credit services or consciously avoid such sources because of their attendant corruption and processing delays.

#### □ *Overseas Employment*

Overseas employment/migration, whether official or unofficial, has long been a coping strategy for households facing financial constraints and the Government encourages overseas employment because of the opportunities it provides its citizens as well as the remittances it receives. BMET estimates that the average number of workers officially employed overseas during the nineties was over 192,000. Overseas employment dropped between 1992-1994, but since then has again shown a rising trend reaching nearly 268,000 in 1997/98<sup>218</sup>. Other estimates put the gross official figure to more than two million in the period 1991-96<sup>219</sup>, with foreign employment absorbing some four per cent of the country's labour force<sup>220</sup>. It is assumed that the majority of the undocumented labour are unskilled workers.

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<sup>217</sup> Khandker, S.R. (1996).

<sup>218</sup> BMET (1998).

<sup>219</sup> Statistics provided by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), University of Dhaka.

<sup>220</sup> Siddique, T. (1998).

Bangladeshi migrants are predominantly male, but there has been some significant female migration at professional and semi-professional levels especially to the Middle East. The Government however officially discourages international migration of women because of various incidences of abuses to which women migrants have been subjected. In July 1998 the Government placed a ban on foreign employment for female nurses and housemaids but lifted the ban on nurses three months later.

The overseas labour market conditions in the region have changed considerably over the last decade which is evident from the fact that the flow of migrant workers to Malaysia dropped from nearly 152, 844 in 1997 to 551 in 1998. The deteriorating economic situation of South East Asia and the middle east together with increasing competition from the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Vietnam have pushed down wages by as much as 50 per cent in some sectors<sup>221</sup>.

In spite of such drawbacks, remittances are continuing to rise at an accelerating pace and are contributing significantly to the country's foreign exchange earnings and national savings (see Section 3.3.1).

There are very few international or national policies related to labour migration. Among the international policies the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) was adopted in 1994 for addressing global, trade-related temporary movement of people. In Bangladesh the key legislation on labour migration is the Emigration Ordinance 1982. In the face of recent labour migration dynamics and the globalisation of the labour market however, the legislation needs to be modernised to meet the emerging challenges. While policy makers in Bangladesh recognise the necessity to improve and strengthen the labour migration process, there remains a gap between enactment of policies and legislation and their effective implementation.

### **5.3.3 Micro, Small and Large Enterprises**

#### **□ Micro-enterprises in Bangladesh**

While micro-enterprise has not been given an official definition, it is frequently associated in the literature with cottage industries and with household establishments. Existing evidence<sup>222</sup> indicates that in the decade 1980-1990 there has been little growth in the cottage industries sector which in 1989-90 provided employment to about 1.33 million workers, the average employment in each cottage unit being about three persons. The level of employment grew at the modest rate of just over four per cent while the number of new undertakings grew at an even lower rate of under three per cent. Whatever growth took place was in the larger sized units and this helped raise the overall growth rate of the sector.

A major part of cottage industries comprises handloom textile manufacturing. The 1990 Handloom Survey Report estimates that there are more than 212,000 units in the country with a total of more than 514,000 looms. The overwhelming majority (99 per cent) of the units are private, family-owned units which engage about five workers on average. The productivity in the handloom sector is poor compared to even household establishments in food manufacturing, textiles, and transport equipment<sup>223</sup>.

Other types of micro-enterprises range from agriculture-related activities such as poultry, livestock, dairy, rice/oil mills, agriculture equipment making, and trading in inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, to non-farm enterprises such as petty trading, small businesses in transport, timber, bakery, medicine/pharmacy, and enterprises manufacturing bricks, ring slabs, or RCC pillars. The most profitable amongst these enterprises with a potential for growth are shop keeping and petty trading.

More than 90 per cent of the micro-enterprises are individually owned and the predominant (nearly 70 per cent) source of investment is from own capital. While on average

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<sup>221</sup> BMET (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>222</sup> Bakht, Z. (1996).

<sup>223</sup> Verma, S. and P. Kumar (1996).

micro-enterprises engage about two workers, depending on the type of enterprise, have the potential to engage as many as five workers. The market for the entrepreneurs is usually confined to the village itself or to the nearby villages and selling is usually done directly to consumers or to intermediaries.

Gender-based discrimination exist in wage rates, women's wages in micro-enterprises being significantly lower than that of men. For example, women earn on average Tk 71 per month from shop keeping and Tk. 1,600 per month from fisheries whereas men earn Tk. 243 and Tk. 2250 respectively. The only enterprise in which women hold the advantage is sericulture where women's monthly wages are nearly twice that of men<sup>224</sup>.

□ *Small and Large Enterprises in Bangladesh*

The Census of Manufacturing Industries 1991-92 reports that of the existing small and large manufacturing establishments, nearly 99 per cent are in the private sector. The remaining one per cent comprises mainly public enterprises, with joint ventures making only marginal contribution. Nearly 70 per cent of the establishments are medium scale (engaging 10 – 49 persons), 20 per cent are small scale (engaging less than 10 persons) and about 10 per cent are large scale enterprises that engage 50 persons or more (Table 5.8).

**Table 5.8. Types of establishments by status and scale**

Status	Small Scale	Medium Scale	Large Scale	Total
Government	-	7	203	210
Private	5,337	18,154	2,666	26,157
Joint venture	-	29	50	79
Total	5,337 (20)	18,190 (69)	2,919 (11)	26,446 (100)

Source: CMI 1991-92.

Note: Small scale = less than 10 persons engaged; medium scale = 10 - 49 persons engaged;

Large scale = 50 and more persons engaged.

The manufacturing establishments engage about 50 persons on average, the number of persons engaged being directly correlated to the size of fixed assets of the enterprises. Average fixed assets of state-owned enterprises, which are all large-scale, is more than Tk. 290 million, compared to just over a million taka for the average private sector enterprise, most of which as seen earlier, are medium scale. The average fixed assets for joint enterprises, none of which are in the small-scale category, stand at about Tk. 52 million<sup>225</sup>.

Thus, on average the state-owned establishments engage more than 1300 persons, joint ventures 290 persons and private enterprises less than 40 persons. Average fixed assets per person is the highest (0.22 million taka) for government-owned establishments, followed by joint enterprises (0.18 million taka), with only Tk. 40,000 for the private enterprises (Table 5.9).

The decade 1977/78-1989/90 witnessed a fairly vibrant small industry with a significant increase (8 per cent) in value added in the sub-sector. However, the number of units and employment grew at the more moderate rate of about four per cent, while the size of small enterprises remained more or less unchanged at 13 workers per unit. This implies that productivity augmenting growth has taken place and new enterprises with higher levels of productivity have entered the market<sup>226</sup>.

Thus, where in 1978 the dominant sub-sectors of food processing, textiles and basic metals together accounted for nearly 85 per cent of employment and 78 per cent of the value added, over the decade the sector has become more diversified and textiles, chemicals and metal fabrication have gained significant importance. New industries introduced in this period include ready-made garments, lime products, automobile servicing, jewellery, industrial

<sup>224</sup> IDPAA (1998).

<sup>225</sup> CMI 1991-92.

<sup>226</sup> Bakht, Z. (1996).

chemicals, and wooden furniture. These new industries are located in the urban and semi-urban areas and are found to have larger average employment size and are more capital intensive than the average small industry. The average employment size of the new industries is nearly 18 persons, and fixed assets per worker is about Tk. 62,000. In comparison, the average employment size for all small industries stands at about 14, and the average fixed assets per worker stands at Tk. 55,000.

**Table 5.9. Fixed assets and persons engaged by ownership of establishments**

Ownership	No. of establishments	Total fixed assets (million taka)	Total persons engaged*	Average persons engaged per establishment*	Average fixed assets per establishment (million taka)	Average fixed assets per person (million taka)
GOB**	210	61,511	280,273	1,335	292.91	0.22
Private	26,157	36,774	1,024,124	39	1.41	0.04
Jt. Venture	79	4,130	22,890	290	52.28	0.18
Total	26,446	102,415	1,327,287	50	3.87	0.08

Source: CMI 1991-92.

\* Includes unpaid labour

\*\* Includes nationalised government-owned establishments.

Rural (including semi-urban) industries, producing income elastic products and catering to urban markets, have also experienced growth and expansion. Among the rapidly growing small enterprises which have a high rural component are fish processing, synthetic textiles, and agricultural implements. The average investment in such small enterprises is about Tk. 160,000 taka, average employment is just under six workers, and average cost per employee is nearly Tk. 33,000. The overwhelming majority (81 per cent) self-finance initial investment and another 18 per cent borrow from various sources such as family and friends. Interest cost on borrowed funds range from 10 to 120 per cent depending on the source<sup>227</sup>.

Some of the constraints to the growth of small enterprises are found to be similar to those faced by micro-enterprises for graduating into larger firms such as the lack of market to support the degree of specialisation needed to achieve economies of scale. Other constraints include organisational factors such as difficulties in enforcing contracts because of lack of timely access to courts or insufficient tort law. This is one of the reasons for the near absence of partnerships in small enterprises.

In general it has been found that the major constraints which continue to create obstacles to the growth of Smells include<sup>228</sup>:

- Lack of access to credit and other financial services;
- Lack of infrastructure including energy and communications;
- Lack of technology;
- Low management and administrative capability of entrepreneurs;
- Low productivity of enterprises;
- Lack of availability of raw materials; and
- Lack of skilled manpower.

## 5.4 Income and Consumption

The average monthly income per household shows an increase of more than 50 per cent in the period 1988 – 1996, rising from Tk. 2865 to Tk. 4366 (Table 5.10). The increase has however been significantly higher in urban areas (89 per cent) compared to rural areas (37 per cent)<sup>229</sup>, which reconfirms that urban poverty has reduced at a much higher rate than

<sup>227</sup> World Bank (1994).

<sup>228</sup> Hamid, S. (1999); UNDP (1998e).

<sup>229</sup> BBS (1997).



rural poverty. Moreover, while the average number of earning members in urban households, the number in rural households register a decrease. This implies that better employment opportunities together with the higher literacy rates in urban areas enable more members to contribute to household income and reduce the economic dependency ratio.

**Table 5.10. Trends in Average Household Income 1988 - 1996**

Year	Average size of household	No. of earning members	Economic dependency ratio	Income per hh (taka/month)	Income per member (taka/month)
1995-96					
National	5.26	1.48	3.6	4,366	830
Rural	5.25	1.46	3.6	3,658	697
Urban	5.30	1.59	3.3	7,973	1,504
1988-89					
National	5.54	1.55	3.6	2,865	517
Rural	5.52	1.56	3.5	2,670	484
Urban	5.61	1.55	3.6	4,224	753

Source: BBS (1997).

There has been a major change in the sources of household income in this period. While the share of agriculture has dropped by some seven per cent points, the share of the service sectors has increased: business and commerce has increased by some five per cent points and professional wages and salaries by 22 per cent<sup>230</sup>.

There is also a change in the expenditure pattern of households. The share of food in consumption expenditure of households displays a decreasing trend in the period 1991-96, the drop being higher (8 per cent points) in urban than in rural areas (5 per cent points) because of added non-food expenses such as house rent and other miscellaneous items (Table 5.11).

A comparison between the consumption expenditure of the poorest and the richest households show an almost exactly opposite pattern. The poorest spend 58 per cent on food and 42 per cent on non-food items whereas the richest households spend 38 per cent on food and 62 per cent on non-food items. In rural areas the poorest households allocate 70 per cent of their consumption expenditure on food while the richest households spend 45 per cent. In urban areas only 30 per cent of the consumption expenditure of the richest households is spent on food compared to 66 per cent by the poorest households<sup>231</sup>.

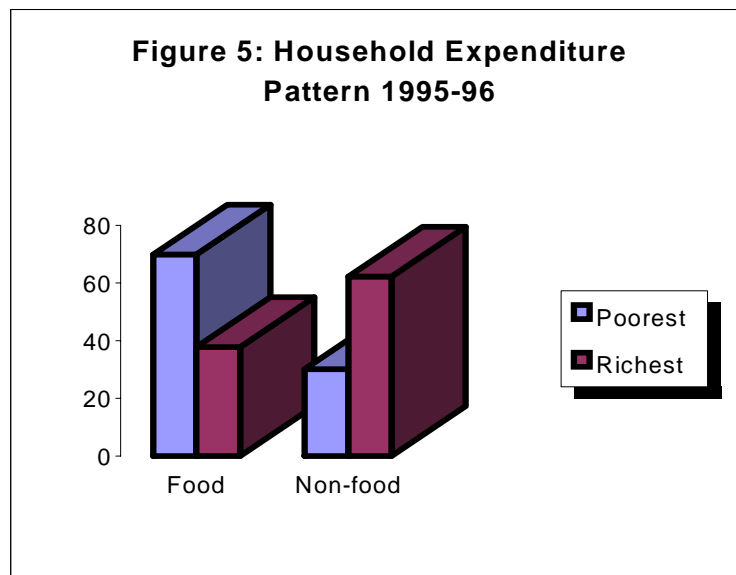
**Table 5.11. Consumption and Expenditure 1991 - 1996**

	National		Rural		Urban	
	Food	Non-food	Food	Non-food	Food	Non-food
<b>1995-96</b>						
Total	57.7	42.3	62.4	37.6	46.3	53.7
Poorest 5% of households	69.9	30.1	70.1	29.9	65.6	34.4
Richest 5% of households	37.8	62.2	45.3	54.7	30.1	69.9
<b>1991-92</b>						
Total	64.7	35.3	67.4	32.6	53.9	46.1
Poorest 5% of households	70.6	29.4	70.4	29.6	71.5	28.1
Richest 5% of households	47.5	52.5	53.9	46.1	33.8	66.2

Source: BBS (1997).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.



Source: BBS (1997)

The share of cereals in total food expenditure has also declined and has been replaced by higher consumption of fish, meat, fruit, milk and milk products. The increase has been more in urban than in rural areas, which again reflects the better economic situation of urban households.

## 5.5 Government Priorities for Employment Generation

One of the major objectives of the FFYP is to generate substantial gainful employment opportunities with increase in productivity through an optimal choice of traditional labour intensive and new generation technology. The Plan envisages creating an additional 6.3 million jobs by the year 2002, mainly in sectors with the potential for highest employment growth such as power, gas, natural resources and industry. At the same time self-employment opportunities for the rural poor are being expanded through targeted production and employment programmes and wage employment opportunities are being promoted through rural infrastructure building and maintenance.

The strategies for industrial development in the Fifth Five Year Plan emphasises optimum utilisation of indigenous endowments, promotion of employment and catalysing the growth of production and exports. The objective is to achieve structural change in the economy which will be conducive to accelerated growth of overall GDP through a market economy, will strengthen the balance of payments, will strengthen the technological base, and will generate productive employment and poverty alleviation.

To this end traditional sub-sectors such as textiles and clothing, jute, tea, leather and leather products, along with agro-based small and medium industries, have been given priority. Special thrust is being placed on selected industries which include textile and clothing, leather and leather products, computer software development and data entry, electronics industry, selected agro-based industries, fish industries, light engineering industries, chemicals and gas-based industries, industries with linkages to the garments industry, handloom industries such as the Grameen check and the Dhaka check, and hotel and tourism industries.

In order to develop the market economy with the private sector as the key player, and to encourage larger flows of direct foreign investment, implementation of structural adjustment policies through reforms in fiscal and monetary management, banking, trade and privatisation have been identified as priority needs.

## 5.6 Problems in Addressing Livelihood Issues and their Causes

There are several problems in trying to ensure people's rights to livelihood which means ensuring employment and income to meet their basic needs. This is a mammoth task because

as a direct result of the changing demographic dynamics, the current rate of growth of the labour force will remain unchanged for the next two decades or more. The job market will thus have to create two million new jobs a year to employ new entrants and keep unemployment down to 10 per cent by the year 2020<sup>232</sup>. Moreover, it is expected that most of the new jobs will be created in industry and the service sectors and a major portion of the new jobs will require skilled and semi-skilled labour.

Government priorities with its focus on industry and energy sectors for employment generation are based along similar lines. There are however some major difficulties in trying to concretise these priorities, the most significant of which is the conflict in policies for the rural poor and the urban rich. On the one hand the country is faced with the task of increasing employment opportunities for the poor through self-employment with minimal productivity and almost no potential for expansion; low-tech industries such as food preservation and processing which have limited capacity to absorb the vast underemployed, unskilled rural labour force; and wage labour in rural infrastructure building and maintenance which while ensuring subsistence income again has little potential for growth.

On the other hand, it is attempting to expand high growth, capital intensive sectors and trying to capitalise on the exploding information technology (IT) industry, both of which need highly skilled technical manpower. While such policies have enabled indiscriminate expansion in private sector IT training services, they have not been supported by any regulatory measures that ensure the quality of such services. Furthermore the focus on urban-based industries is encouraging rapid urbanisation with all its attendant problems arising out of insufficient capacity of the state to meet the increasing demand for urban facilities.

Again the employment generation policies are not linked to education policies so that the supply of skilled and semi-skilled labour does not correspond with the labour demand in industry. The situation is further exacerbated with inadequate supervision and quality control of educational services being provided by the government, non-government and private agencies. In addition, the poor level of proficiency in the English language creates an added barrier for developing expertise in the field of science and technology.

Moreover, the prevailing culture in the industrial and commercial sectors discourages investment in worker and personnel training because of financial considerations as well as the perceived lack of utility of the training services offered. In addition, institutions such as BMET, that offer such services, lack financial resources and adequately trained manpower to design and market their product to suit the current needs of industries. This also restricts large-scale development of technical expertise.

Thus the basic conflict arising out of government priorities that support little or no growth employment policies for the majority of the population and encourage high growth for the minority creates a drag that holds back the country from achieving its development objectives of poverty eradication with economic growth. The large-scale investment needs for rural infrastructure development that can encourage growth and expansion of rural-based industries thus competes unsuccessfully with urban industrial requirements.

Democracy being at its infancy in the country, the larger but weaker section of the society is as yet unable to exercise its political strength to realise its right to livelihood.

## **5.7 Identified Gaps**

To resolve these conflicts and to ensure people's right to livelihood, certain gaps need therefore to be filled by the various development partners.

The gaps to be addressed by the Government include:

- Rationalising existing economic growth and employment policies that conflict with development objectives of poverty eradication.

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<sup>232</sup> World Bank/BCAS (1998).

- Increasing technical manpower in order to compete in the fast growing globalisation process through incentives such as scholarships for students; and fiscal and financial incentives to the private sector to provide relevant, quality services in this field.
- Increasing capacity in technical institutions including traditional and modern medicine, engineering, and polytechnic institutions.
- Implementing policies that encourage specialisation and vocational training in industries that have been prioritised in the national development plans.
- Linking training and education with employment opportunities and labour demand in the industrial sector.
- Introducing career counselling services in schools, colleges and universities, especially those located in rural and semi-urban areas, to encourage training and specialisation in fields for which there is market demand.
- Increasing proficiency of in the English language to enable students to compete in the fields of science and technology.
- Ensuring quality control in training and educational services provided by government, non-government and private agencies.
- Developing rural infrastructure and providing financial and fiscal incentives for the private sector to invest in industries in the rural areas in order to boost employment opportunities.
- Encouraging microfinance institutions such as PKSF to explore ways and means for assisting NGOs to promote diversification and expansion of self-employed activities and micro-enterprises of their clients in order to increase employment opportunities for the very poor.
- Encouraging greater participation of the private sector for providing quality and demand-linked training and education.
- Exploring avenues for increasing overseas employment opportunities for Bangladeshi nationals and encouraging private sector participation in this area.

Development partners of the Government may assist in partnership with the private sector to address the following:

- Support to enrol the remaining 20 percent of children not in primary education.
- Support to improve the quality of primary education with a focus on improving teaching-learning methodologies to strengthen creative and analytical skills of children for higher achievement and appropriate life skills.
- Support large-scale vocational and technical training programmes that are linked with the market demand for labour;
- Support programmes for capacity building of technical institutions including engineering, medicine, and polytechnic institutions;
- Support programmes for promoting small and medium scale industries;
- Support programmes for entrepreneurship development and business management training especially for the moderate poor;
- Support training programmes for skill development of the very poor to enable them to compete in the labour market;
- Encourage reallocation of public financial resources from non-productive sectors such as defence to social sectors.

NGOs/CSOs should assist individuals, communities and local government bodies to:

- Become aware of the social and economic returns to investment in education in order to improve school completion rates and contain dropout rates;
- Campaign with the government for rural infrastructure development and other facilities that encourage rural industries development and employment generation;
- Access relevant information on training and employment opportunities;
- Explore new types of activities that have both market demand and increase employment opportunities for the poor.

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## THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

### 6.1 Introduction

The Constitution of Bangladesh was framed in 1972 and guarantees that all existing laws that are inconsistent with fundamental rights will be declared void to the extent of inconsistency, and decrees that the State is forbidden to make any law that is not consistent with fundamental rights<sup>233</sup>. The rights guaranteed by Articles 27 to 43 of the Constitution include the following: right to protection of life and personal liberty, and home; right to equality before the law; equality of opportunity in public employment; safeguards against arrest and detention; protection with respect to trial and punishment; prohibition of forced labour; freedom of movement, assembly association, thought and conscience, speech, profession, or occupation and religion; and non-discrimination on a religious basis. These rights are applicable to all citizens, regardless of race, creed, religion, sex or birth.

With the return of democracy in the country issues relating to protection are raising a number of concerns in Bangladesh today as these have a direct impact on the lives of people -- men, women and children -- at all levels of society. The absence of a secure environment has important human development implications as poverty eradication and national development can only be achieved in a situation where people are sufficiently secure in terms of person and property to be able to channel their energies towards building a better future.

In a longer-term perspective, it becomes increasingly clear that fundamental rights must be protected if sustainable progress is to be made towards overall development goals. This has led to greater awareness among policymakers and the general public about the importance of these rights and the need to ensure that they are fully realised. Such rights however, imply not only the right to physical protection of life and material property, but also to universal human rights to freedom from violence, exploitation, invisibility and discrimination.

### 6.2 Violence

#### 6.2.1 Violence in Society

The country has seen a nearly 40 percent increase<sup>234</sup> in crime incidences in the period 1991-96 partly as a result of the law and order situation and partly because of greater freedom of press and improved reportage. The crimes include assaults on individuals, destruction of property, shootings and homicides. The situation is exacerbated by protection enjoyed by political henchmen and the perceived ineffectiveness of law-enforcement agencies and the judicial system, partly arising from low salaries, lack of infrastructure and lack of training and promotion opportunities.

Corruption, together with lengthy and cumbersome legal procedures, discourages the poor and marginalized segments of society from accessing the existing legal system, causing them to take recourse to the informal *shalish* (mediation) system active in rural areas. While the *shalish*, which comprises influential people such as village headmen, members of the local government system, and some village elders, sometimes adequately meets the need for local mediations, its strong patriarchal nature (members are usually all male) often prevents fair hearing of cases involving women, especially those from poor households. In those cases

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<sup>233</sup> UNDP/UNDESA (1998).

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

where radical elements are present, the *shalish* has been known to decree so-called *fatwas*<sup>235</sup> that place the villagers, especially women, in social and physical jeopardy.

Within the legal system, the Supreme Court remains an institution which retains some integrity in the minds of the people. However, in general terms, attempts at addressing the law and order situation are frequently undermined by outdated laws, loopholes in procedures and the massive backlog of existing legal cases. Delays in investigation and bringing cases to court have sometimes led to pre-trial prisoners spending years in jail. Combined with a general lack of public awareness regarding existing laws and procedures and delays in passing new legislation, these factors have led to a pervasive implementation gap whereby the credibility of the entire justice system has been adversely affected. Such adverse effects are further intensified by the continuance of legal instruments such as the Special Powers Act of 1974, which allows initial preventive detention for a period of one month which can be extended up to six months, in some cases without placing the person on trial. In the past, the application of this law has been criticised for contributing to the abuse of human rights.

Reports of police brutality and inhumane treatment of victims discourage reporting violations to law-enforcement agencies. This is particularly true for rape survivors who suffer doubly from the initial violence perpetrated on them and subsequently from male bias in legal courts, and the resultant trauma and humiliation that many have to endure. The practice of "safe custody" has also led to numerous human rights violations, with many women and children placed in shelters and jails being sexually assaulted, sometimes by members of law-enforcement agencies. The grounds on which women and children are placed in safe custody are often questionable, with vagrants, juvenile offenders and the mentally retarded being among those routinely placed in such shelters. The capacity of the jails is insufficient to keep up with the rising numbers of people in custody, a situation worsened by the poor living conditions in most jails, as for example, the Jessore Central Jail which is housing twice its capacity of inmates<sup>236</sup>.

### **6.2.2 Violence against women**

Gender based violence takes various forms such as wife beating, rape, acid-throwing, trafficking, sexual coercion and harassment, as well as verbal and psychological abuse, and usually stems from existing socio-cultural attitudes which regard women as inferior to men. While there are few reliable statistics on violence against women, newspaper reportage on crimes against women and children indicates that such activities appear to be on the increase. Some 3,123 cases of violence against women (of which 735 were murder cases and 904 were cases of physical torture) were reported between January and August 1996, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs<sup>237</sup>. Thus, although the maternal mortality rate in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world, more women are dying from violence-related incidents than from pregnancy related causes<sup>238</sup>.

Domestic violence is widespread, and occurs in the form of spousal rape, induced suicide and wife beating. Violence taking place in the domestic sphere also includes abuse of domestic servants, sexual and physical abuse of children, and incest. While reliable data is scarce, it is believed that nearly 50 percent of all murder cases where women are victims can be attributed to marital violence arising out of the inability of women to meet dowry demands, tension created in polygamous marriages, custody rights of children, and adultery allegedly committed by wives<sup>239</sup>. Although the law prohibits rape and physical spousal abuse, it makes no provisions for spousal rape as a crime. Recent attempts to address issues related

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<sup>235</sup> *Fatwas* are not recognised by the legal system in Bangladesh

<sup>236</sup> The Independent newspaper (31 May, 1999)

<sup>237</sup> UNDP/UNDESA (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>238</sup> MoHFW/UNICEF (1998)

<sup>239</sup> Estimated from data compiled by the Documentation Unit of Ain O Salish Kendra (Apr.-Oct. 1998)

to violence have included the passing of legislation, such as the Control of Repression on Women and Children (Special Provision) Act 1995.

A significant number of the reported cases of violence are rape cases, sometimes followed by murder of the victims. A disturbing trend is the involvement of law enforcement and security personnel: in 1997 police officers were found to be implicated in 11 incidences of rape<sup>240</sup>. In such cases, victims' families are often pressured into dropping the charges. Investigation and filing of rape cases are also complicated by inefficient procedures, difficulties in obtaining forensic evidence, delays in processing, and undue influence wielded by the perpetrators and their families.

Acid burns are a major hazard especially to women and young girls between 11 and 20 years of age, the number of reported cases rising from 47 in 1996 to over 200 cases in 1998<sup>241</sup>. The motives for such attacks include family feuds, inability of women to meet dowry demands, rejection of marriage proposals, refusal to permit polygamy, and refusal to pay extortionists. The trauma and disfigurement caused by such attacks have adversely affected many women, and cases against the perpetrators often flounder due to lack of access to legal facilities, threats made against victims and their families, and corruption prevalent in the legal system.

#### **Box 4: Case Study 1: Rape**

Because of the prevailing socio-economic concepts of women and girls in society e.g. that "good" women are never raped, women are sometimes held responsible for such incidents. Vigilantism against women for perceived moral transgressions is common, and can include painful and humiliating punishments. It is not uncommon for the local community elders to mediate in rape cases by making the perpetrator pay compensation or marry the victim, irrespective of the consequences of such an enforced marriage e.g. domestic violence. In recent months, four cases of rape of female Union Parishad members have been reported<sup>242</sup>, including the rape of AB (name withheld) in Noakhali by the Chairman and Secretary of the same UP; despite her attempts to register a case against them, both the perpetrators currently remain free. However, in contrast, in Sylhet six men received a sentence of fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Tk. 5000 each for gang-raping a woman, who is the ex-wife of one of the men. This clearly indicates that there are also cases where women victims of violence can obtain justice from the legal system.

### **6.2.3 Violence against Children**

While the Government of Bangladesh has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, albeit with two reservations on Article 14.1 and Article 21<sup>243</sup>, because of the socio-cultural milieu, children in Bangladesh are perceived to be directly and universally subject to the authority of adults, primarily their parents or guardians. The idea that children are individual entities with rights and privileges, is a relatively new concept for most people.

Physical chastisement of children is not unusual in Bangladesh, and is widely accepted, but they are too often victims of physical, psychological and sexual abuse. As in most cases all over the world, the perpetrators are adult family members, or friends of the family and the children are trapped into silence by their fear of retribution by the adult concerned and/or rejection by their families. For children without the protection of adults or families, the situation is even worse, a survey finding that almost one quarter of child domestic servants have been sexually abused by their employers<sup>244</sup>. Beatings and verbal

<sup>240</sup> BMSP/CCHRB (1998)

<sup>241</sup> Acid Survivors Foundation (1999)

<sup>242</sup> The Daily Janakantha (May 17, 1999)

<sup>243</sup> These relate respectively to the rights of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and rights related to adoption.

<sup>244</sup> Blanchet, T. (1996)



abuse are common and the children are often totally dependent on the whims of their employers. Given that the number of child servants in Dhaka alone is estimated to range between 200,000 and one million<sup>245</sup>, the problem is a serious one.

An even more vulnerable position is that of children living on the streets, who are at the mercy of people they meet such as pimps, mastans and the police. In addition to being victims of physical abuse and sexual molestation, these children live under constant threat of being taken into safe custody or placed in so-called vagrant homes or orphanages. Street children often resist going to such homes and orphanages not only because conditions there are often bad, but also because they are reluctant to give up the freedom of their life on the street. The total number of street children in Dhaka is estimated to be around 215,000<sup>246</sup>. Some make a living as child prostitutes, of which there are about 50,000<sup>247</sup> in Bangladesh.

The abusive treatment of children has been recognised as a problem by the government, and has been addressed through legislation enacted for the prevention of repression of children under the Control of Repression on Women and Children (Special Provision) Act 1995. To date, some cases have been brought to trial under this law, but because the penal provisions are extremely harsh, there have been few effective prosecutions.

**Box 5: Case Study 2. Sexual Abuse of Street Children**

Two police constables on patrol in Dhaka raped Muhammad Shawkat, a thirteen year old street child in 1993. After being repeatedly assaulted by them, the boy spent three days in hospital for treatment of his injuries. Thereafter, he went missing without a trace, possibly because of fears of retaliation or as a result of intimidation<sup>248</sup>.

The treatment of juveniles in the judicial system also raises several concerns. The situation is complicated by the fact that many children are sent to prison by their own parents or guardians: in the last two decades parents/guardians themselves committed some 3,790 children to the Tongi Correctional Institute in comparison to 433 convicted through police charges<sup>249</sup>. In 1997, in addition to 5,500 juvenile convicts, some 257 children below the age of 16 years were under trial in various prisons<sup>250</sup>. The facilities in the correctional institutes are usually inadequate to meet the developmental needs of the children in custody, and authorities are not always sufficiently aware of children's rights or perspectives.

**6.2.4 Government Priorities for the Prevention of Violence**

The Fifth Five Year Plan identifies some protection-related issues, and seeks to address them through the adoption of measures for improving all aspects of law-enforcement. Specific attention is given to the prevention of gender based violence, and women's protection is to be ensured through women's empowerment, realisation of their rights to property, rehabilitation of women survivors of trafficking and violence, and the increased participation of women in decision making. Towards this end, the implementation of CEDAW is an identified priority.

In addition, the protection of children is also a priority to be achieved through implementing CRC and other instruments such as the National Children Policy, the Decade Action Plan for the Girl Child, and the National Plan of Action for Child Development.

<sup>245</sup> UNICEF (1997)

<sup>246</sup> World Vision (1992)

<sup>247</sup> INCIDIN (1997)

<sup>248</sup> Star Weekend Magazine (June 19, 1998)

<sup>249</sup> Statistics from the Tongi Correctional Institute

<sup>250</sup> UNDP/UNDESA (1998) Op.cit.

In an effort to address some of the outstanding issues, the Cabinet, on 2 August 1999 endorsed a policy for setting up a Destitute Women and Children Welfare Trust for the repressed and economically handicapped women and children.

### ***6.2.5 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences in Violence-related Issues***

The increased concern over the law and order situation in the country is partly the outcome of UN global conferences such as the WCHR in which the Vienna Declaration called for governments to ensure human rights for all with special attention for the protection of vulnerable groups such as the poor, women, children, religious and ethnic minorities, refugees and migrants, the disabled and the elderly.

The WWSD, FWCW and ICPD have also emphasised the need to implement specific policies aimed at the elimination of domestic violence and the protection of victims of violence with particular attention to the elimination of violence against women, children and the disabled<sup>251</sup>.

As follow-up to such conferences, the government has withdrawn two of the four reservations subject to which it had ratified CEDAW in 1984<sup>252</sup>. In addition, to ensure children's rights and their protection the government drew up the National Children Policy in 1990, and in 1992 adopted the Decade Action Plan for the Girl Child and the National Plan of Action for Child Development (1997-2002), the last of which was approved by the Cabinet on 2 August 1999. In spite of such policies and plans however, the FFYP does not provide strategies for achieving the stated objectives nor does it set specific targets or financial allocations.

In order to create an enabling environment for human rights and address issues related to violence in society through ensuring full independence of the judiciary, the present government has taken positive steps for separation of the judiciary from the executive organ pursuant to the fundamental principles of state policy as enshrined in Article 22 of the Constitution. The Expert Committee has prepared the bill, which is expected to be tabled in the Parliament soon. Furthermore, based on an earlier initiative by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, the draft bill for the establishment of Grameen Courts, has been prepared, and will undergo revisions prior to being placed before the Parliament in 1999-2000. It is envisaged that the Grameen Courts will adjudicate at pre-trial stages at the grass-roots level, and thereby reduce unnecessary, expensive and time-consuming litigation. The government has also initiated a programme to provide legal aid to the disadvantaged through Legal Aid Committees formed in 61 districts. These committees are headed by District and Sessions Judges and the functioning of the committees will be monitored by a National Committee headed by the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.

Based on the pilot project initiated by the government on the institutional development of human rights in Bangladesh in 1996, a draft bill has been prepared which proposes the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission for the protection and promotion of human rights. This draft bill has already been vetted by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and has been approved in principle by the Cabinet. It is now anticipated that the bill will be placed before Parliament in the September 1999 session.

For the prevention and eradication of violence against women, a twelve-year multi-sectoral project has been initiated by MoWCA, along with complementary efforts to build the capacity of law-enforcement agency personnel to deal with women victims of violence. The women-friendly hospital initiative is currently being undertaken by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the MLJPA have undertaken initiatives which include the establishment of investigation cells in four police stations to deal with women victims, the setting-up of a cell for the prevention of violence against women in the central office of the

<sup>251</sup> Articles 5, 18 27, Vienna Declaration 1993; Articles 56, 61, Programme of Action, WCHR; Articles 15b, 15k, 35l, 73f, 73g, 79a Programme of Action WSSD; Commitment 41, Copenhagen Declaration WSSD; Articles 124, 125, Platform of Action FWCW;

<sup>252</sup> Reservations on Articles 13(a) and 16(1)(f) were withdrawn in 1997. Reservations on Articles 2 and 16(1)(c) remain in force.

police, and acceptance of the definition of violence against women as described in the Beijing PFA. But much remains to be done in the area of updating legislation related to protection, and to increase the effectiveness of the law-enforcement and judicial systems.

## **6.3 Exploitation**

### **6.3.1 Prostitution**

A combination of poverty, abandonment/destitution and illiteracy has led to some 100,000 women in Bangladesh being engaged in prostitution<sup>253</sup>. While some women have themselves chosen to follow this profession, often due to the lack of other employment opportunities, others have been lured or forced into the flesh trade against their will. Regardless of the circumstances that lead up to their entry into the trade, women who have once worked as prostitutes find it virtually impossible to find means of alternative livelihood. The structure of the brothels and the network of the pimps keep women trapped in the profession, while the social attitudes to prostitutes prevent women from seeking help and support for finding other employment. The situation is further complicated by the fact that because prostitution is legal in Bangladesh, there is little legal protection for women who, while voluntarily engaging in prostitution, seek restitution for rape and sexual coercion.

Child prostitution is common among street children and under-aged sex workers operating within brothels. According to a survey undertaken by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), around one-third of the women interviewed became sex workers before they reached sixteen years of age. While employing under-age sex workers is illegal, the pimps and brothel-owners find it easy to manipulate the system in their favour through false affidavits or paying bribes.

### **6.3.2 Trafficking**

Trafficking in women and children within Bangladesh, as well as to other Asian countries, is the result of a complex combination of factors that include poverty, population pressure, cultural perceptions about the rights of women and children, globalisation and the demand for labour and prostitutes in the international market. Young girls, often considered financial burdens by their families, are sometimes entrusted to traffickers by their guardians in return for promises of work or marriage. Adult women are also lured with promises of marriage or employment or sometimes just abducted or taken by force.

Within the region, Bangladesh is viewed as a "sending" country, while others, such as India, are viewed primarily as "receiving" countries. India is also a transit area, from where women and children are siphoned off to the rest of the world. While exact numbers are not known, it is estimated that around 200,000 women and children have been trafficked to the Middle East in the last two decades, and 4,500 women and children are trafficked to Pakistan each year<sup>254</sup>.

While the main reason for trafficking is prostitution (an estimated 300,000 Bangladeshi children work in the brothels of India<sup>255</sup>), women and children are also supplied as domestic servants and may have to work as bonded labour. For example, in a number of cases women have been forced into domestic service while children have been supplied as camel jockeys to some Middle Eastern countries. In such situations, the individuals concerned are vulnerable to various kinds of abuse from their employers but because of their illegal status and ignorance, they have no means of recourse. Despite the existence of protective laws, such problems are difficult to address because of the regional and cross-border context.

Moreover, those engaged in trafficking are well-organised and frequently have influence with the law-enforcement agencies, who allow them to manipulate the system to

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<sup>253</sup> Bangladesh AIDS Prevention and Control Programme (1998). Male prostitutes are not taken into consideration here.

<sup>254</sup> MoWCA (1997)

<sup>255</sup> BNWLA (1998)

their own advantage. Thus, although the law provides severe penalties under the Control of Repression on Women and Children (Special Provision) Act 1995, the crimes are seldom punished because police and local government officials in collusion with the perpetrators, choose to ignore such activities.

### **6.3.3 Domestic Labour**

A large number of men, women and children work as domestic servants in the country, with children comprising nearly 50 percent of the workers in lower income, middle-class households<sup>256</sup>. Child domestics are vulnerable to beatings and assaults by their employers: 25 percent of housewives in households which employed child servants stated in a survey that they physically beat child domestics<sup>257</sup> for reasons that were not specified in the study. An estimated two-thirds of the child domestics are girls<sup>258</sup> who are vulnerable to sexual molestation by employers. In general, child domestics do not receive the same benefits as adults, although their workload may be as heavy, and are preferred by employers because they are cheaper and more docile.

#### **Box 6: Case Study 3. Domestic Servant Tortured**

In Ishwarganj, a ten year old girl was admitted into the thana hospital suffering from severe bruises, including a crushed knee, burns and bald patches on her scalp due to the physical torture and abuse inflicted on her by her employers<sup>259</sup>. As a whole, domestic servants remain a relatively inaccessible group, as the abuse and exploitation they experience take place behind closed doors. This makes the issue of protection through the legal system even more difficult to address.

### **6.3.4 Formal and Informal Employment**

Around 87 percent of the labour force is employed in the informal sector<sup>260</sup> where there are no legal provisions to protect workers from health hazards or exploitation.

On the other hand, although the Constitution (Article 38) does provide every citizen with *the right to form association or union, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of morality or public order*, the total number of union membership remains low and unions are found mostly in the formal sector: about three percent of the total labour force are affiliated to unions<sup>261</sup>. Legislation hampers the representation by trade unions of the interest of workers in small enterprises, and collective bargaining at the sectoral or industry-wide level. Rural workers' organisations are denied statutory recognition. While the inability or the unwillingness to join and form unions is not a violation of the right to organise, the situation is aggravated by politicisation, internal factionalism and even instances of corruption. Malpractices, which are in fact promoted by legislation that hampers the registration of maverick unions, detract from the effectiveness of workers' organisations in safeguarding the interests of their members.

Moreover, although there has been escalating growth in factories and establishments, there has been little increase in the number of inspectors assigned to inspect factories and shops in the last fifteen years<sup>262</sup>. This lack of adequate monitoring and supervision exposes workers to health hazards and accidents in the workplace. For example, it has been estimated that 42 percent of female workers in readymade garment

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<sup>256</sup> RCS (1998)

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Shoishab Bangladesh (1998)

<sup>259</sup> Prothom Alo newspaper (May 27, 1999)

<sup>260</sup> ILO (1998)

<sup>261</sup> Department of Labour (1998)

<sup>262</sup> ILO (1998) Op.cit.

manufacturing industries suffer from chronic health problems. Abortions are also more frequent among such workers because of their reluctance to adopt contraceptive methods whose side-effects adversely affect work efficiency<sup>263</sup>. In general, around 8000 industrial accidents are reported every year of which 20-40 are fatal accidents<sup>264</sup>. In the majority of cases, little or no compensation is available for workers or their families.

### **6.3.5 Child Labour**

Among the earliest legislation to address issues of child labour are the Factories Act of 1934 and the Employment of Children Act, 1938, the latter being introduced with the intention of checking the abuses of the employment of children beyond the scope of the Factories Act. The Factories Act 1934 was subsequently revised and amended as the Factories Act, 1965<sup>265</sup> which prohibits among other things, the employment of persons below 14 years of age. In spite of such laws, it is estimated that children aged between five and fourteen years (about half of whom are girls) constitute about 11 percent of the 56 million labour force<sup>266</sup>. The vast majority of them are occupied in the informal sector and as such are often exposed to hazardous and exploitative working conditions. In rural areas, 79 percent of children work in agriculture and work an average of 27 hours a week<sup>267</sup>. In urban areas, they are employed in some 202 different occupations, including waste collection, brick breaking and prostitution<sup>268</sup>.

The factors contributing to the existence of a child workforce are complex, and can only be addressed in the overall socio-economic context of Bangladesh. Poverty and the lack of viable alternatives for the family force children to seek work. Together with difficulties in monitoring child labour in homes, establishments and factories, this makes the eradication of child labour a daunting task.

#### **Box 7: Case Study 4. Child Labour**

Alya, an eleven year old girl, was killed when a boiler exploded in the rice mill where she worked with her parents, who are migrants from Gaibandha. The explosion took place at around 6:30 am in a factory in Bogra, while the rice was being boiled in preparation for husking. A case has been registered in this regard with the thana authorities<sup>269</sup>.

Due to international concern over the issue of child labour, initiatives have been undertaken in recent years to reduce the numbers of children working in factories, but these are largely limited to children working in readymade garment manufacturing industries. As a result, child labour in garment factories has fallen from 43 percent in 1995 to 13 percent in 1998. The initiatives include raising awareness among employers and the children's families, providing alternatives for child workers, and ensuring better inspection of factories<sup>270</sup>.

### **6.3.6 Government Priorities for Labour Protection**

The FFYP has prioritised issues relating to the exploitation and working conditions of workers in general, including the special needs of commercial sex workers and child labourers, such as the need for review and amendment of laws and effective enforcement of existing laws related to the protection of children in difficult circumstances. The government has also

<sup>263</sup> Paul-Majumdar, P. (1998)

<sup>264</sup> ILO (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>265</sup> The Act is applicable to factories employing ten or more workers.

<sup>266</sup> BBS (1996a)

<sup>267</sup> ILO (1997)

<sup>268</sup> INCIDIN (1997)

<sup>269</sup> The Sangbad newspaper (January 9, 1999)

<sup>270</sup> ILO/BGMEA/UNICEF (1997)

identified the need to reduce the gap between male and female labour force participation, and has taken cognisance of the fact that to achieve this objective women must be given support services such as childcare, training and transport facilities.

In addition, in order to reduce health hazards and accidents at workplaces, as well as prevent economic exploitation of workers, the need to improve inspection of factories and workplaces has also been identified as a priority. However, such issues of inspection are to be addressed while protecting the sensitivities of investors.

### **6.3.7 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences in Issues Relating to Exploitation**

The Copenhagen Declaration, WSSD, calls for governments to safeguard the basic rights of workers, protect vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as commercial sex workers, promote respect for relevant ILO Conventions, including those on the right to organise, and the elimination of forced and child labour<sup>271</sup>. Emphasis has been placed in recent conferences on preventative measures to eliminate the "flesh trade", including the need for governments to address the root causes behind prostitution and other forms of commercialised sex, as well as forced marriages and bonded labour<sup>272</sup>. Together with WSSD, other conferences such as FWCW and WCHR, call for the need to address issues in trafficking, harmful child labour, child prostitution, exploitation and abuse of children, including the needs of unaccompanied minor children and children in special and difficult circumstances<sup>273</sup>.

After the World Summit on Children (WSC) took place in 1990, the first Bangladesh National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) was completed in 1992 entitled Progothi (progress); in the same year, a Decade Plan of Action for the Girl Child, Samata (equality), was launched to combat discrimination against girl children.

In its efforts to address exploitation GoB, in the 86<sup>th</sup> session of the International Labour Conference held in June 1998, endorsed the adoption of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The aim of the Declaration is to reconcile the desire to stimulate national efforts to ensure that social progress goes hand-in-hand with economic progress and the need to respect the diversity of circumstances, possibilities and preferences of individual countries. The Declaration recalls that all Members, even if they have not ratified the ILO core labour Conventions, have an obligation, arising from the very fact of membership in the organisation, to respect, to promote and to realise, in good faith and in accordance with the ILO Constitution, the principles concerning fundamental rights at work which are the subject of those Conventions<sup>274</sup>.

To address the needs of children, the National Children's Policy (NCP) was drawn up in the context of the World Summit for Children, and the Child Rights Convention (CRC) was adopted (albeit with reservations) in 1994. The rights based approach adopted in the National Plan for Children analyses the needs of children who require special protection. A second draft national plan for 1997-2001 has been approved by the Cabinet, and is expected to be launched later this year. The CRC reporting process has itself leveraged an additional MoWCA-led effort to assess the situation of children.

UNICEF has been working with the BBS and the UN Statistics Division to monitor progress towards the goals of the WSC by carrying out surveys and developing indicators; data are also gathered through the MICS<sup>275</sup> surveys which are carried out annually. The concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child encourage the government to take initiatives in additional areas related to children's rights, such as implementation of the juvenile justice provision of the 1974 Children's Act, birth registration,

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<sup>271</sup> Commitment 3a and Commitment 3i, Copenhagen Declaration, WSSD;

<sup>272</sup> Article 130b, Platform for Action, FWCW, 1995

<sup>273</sup> Articles 132d and 178n, Platform of Action FWCW; Articles 34h and 55d, Programme of Action WSSD; Article 48, Programme of Action WCHR.

<sup>274</sup> Of the seven fundamental conventions Bangladesh is yet to ratify the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).

<sup>275</sup> BBS/UNICEF (1998) Op.cit.

and the promotion of child rights among decentralised government agencies and the public at large.

With the successful development of these instruments and the progress made on the health and nutrition status of children, it is clear that the GoB has made considerable efforts to improve the position of children. Much remains to be done, however, especially with regard to protection issues. One problem concerns the definition of childhood, which varies in different documents. Thus the National Children Policy includes only children below the age of 14 years, although the CRC defines a child as every person under the age of 18 years<sup>276</sup>; such inconsistencies result in the exclusion of many children from protection to which they are entitled under the Convention.

With regard to child labour, as mentioned earlier, the government has initiated the IPEC and is introducing additional measures to improve the condition of child workers. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 1994 between the GOB, ILO/IPEC, UNICEF and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association aimed at eliminating as a matter of priority the worst and most exploitative forms of child labour, taking up income generation programmes for the families of the child labourers and undertaking advocacy on child rights and the gradual elimination of child labour.

This initiative has shown particularly effective results in the garments sector, where about 8000 former child workers below 14 years of age were removed from 2000 garment factories and placed in schools<sup>277</sup>. Funds have been allocated under the Ministry of Social Welfare and the MoWCA to undertake phased elimination of child labour, especially in hazardous occupations, and for the provision of services to urban hard-to-reach children. In 1998, about 800 civil servants received training on child labour issues<sup>278</sup>, and the subject is being integrated into training curricula at the National Academy for Primary Education, as part of plans to use primary education as a tool to combat child labour.

As a follow-up to the international conferences, specific efforts are also underway to reach especially vulnerable groups such as commercial sex workers and street children, with the Department of Social Services breaking new ground in terms of its approach in dealing with these groups. A project is also being formulated by MoWCA to address the complex issue of trafficking in women and children.

A number of innovative programmes have been launched on skills training and employment generation, including the development of women entrepreneurs through the provision of skills training and credit, and pro-poor vocational training efforts. Community empowerment programmes and local development projects are also being implemented with the objective of enabling the poor and disadvantaged segments of society to access legal structures and ensuring their rights to protection.

## **6.4 Identity**

### ***6.4.1 Birth registration***

Although a legal framework for birth registration exists in the country, lack of awareness as well as logistics and human resources prevent universal registration of births so that there is no functioning birth registration system in the country. While Article 7 of the CRC, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, stipulates that every child has a right to a name and identity, a UNICEF supported survey on birth registration reveals that only 11 per cent of births in Bangladesh are registered<sup>279</sup>. The absence of birth registration makes verification of age of any person impossible, which has serious implications-- especially for young offenders, under-age prostitutes and child workers who are being denied access to special protection or treatment provided to them by law. It also has implications for an individual's identity and

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<sup>276</sup> MoWCA/UNICEF (1997)

<sup>277</sup> ILO (1997) Op.cit.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Rahman, N. (1997)

citizenship, which is crucial for the development of a democratic society that protects its citizens from exploitation and promotes their civil rights.

#### **6.4.2 Marriage registration**

It is estimated that while 40 percent of all Muslim marriages are registered, Hindu marriages in Bangladesh apparently remain unregistered. This is because such legal provisions for marriage registration exist under the Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration) Act 1974 but are absent under the Hindu Family Law Rules. The 1872 Christian Marriage Act makes registration of every Christian marriage compulsory.

The main reasons for the low level of marriage registration are the lack of awareness of the existence of a marriage registration system and the benefits of registration, as well as a reluctance to strengthen the position of women by ensuring their rights through registration. Upon dissolution of a Muslim marriage, a woman can obtain maintenance from her husband or recover her dower, provided the marriage has been registered. Similarly, on the death of a husband or wife, the surviving spouse has legal grounds for receiving his or her share of the deceased's estate only if the marriage has been registered.

Promotion of marriage registration began mainly as a tool to reduce under-age marriages. The 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act (which applies to all religions) makes it an offence to marry or play a part in the marriage of a child, defined as a female under 18 years of age or a male under 21 years of age. The Act does not declare these child marriages void, but provides penalties for those involved (excluding the child). It is also possible to obtain an injunction from the court prohibiting a planned child marriage. Additional protection is available under Muslim law for girls given in marriage before they reach the age of 18. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939 gives such girls the right to obtain a court order dissolving the marriage. In spite of these measures, around half the women are less than 18 years old at first marriage.

#### **6.4.3 Death Registration**

Like birth and marriage registration, death registrations are limited in Bangladesh due to low literacy, the low level of awareness and traditional practices in this regard.

#### **6.4.4 Government Priorities in Birth, Death and Marriage Registration**

In recent years, the government has been emphasising the need for marriage registration and working to raise awareness in that regard. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs has in the past taken this as a theme on International Women's Day in order to raise awareness, and has brought out a publication to provide information on the matter, in collaboration with UNICEF. While some effort has also been made to raise awareness regarding birth registration, birth and death registration remain lesser priorities for the moment.

#### **6.4.5 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences in Issues of Birth, Death, and Marriage Registration**

Consistent with Article 7 of the CRC, the FWCW calls on Governments to ensure that a child is registered immediately after birth, and has from birth the right to a name and to acquire a nationality.<sup>280</sup> CEDAW states the need for ensuring equal rights and responsibilities between men and women regarding guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children in Article 16 (1) (f). FWCW also calls on Governments to enact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is only entered into with the free will and full consent of intending spouses, as well as laws concerning the minimum legal age of consent and age for marriage<sup>281</sup>.

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<sup>280</sup> Article 274 b, Platform for Action, FWCW, 1995

<sup>281</sup> Article 274 e, Platform for Action, FWCW, 1995



Considerable efforts are underway to promote marriage registration. At the same time information on birth registration is also being disseminated to some extent. Death registration however, remains a relatively neglected area.

## 6.5 Discrimination

### 6.5.1 Women

Despite some progress made in recent years, women in Bangladesh still suffer from severe discrimination. In a culture where girls are valued less than boys, women experience discrimination and relative deprivation in every stage of the life-cycle. They enjoy fewer rights and can access limited opportunities relative to their male counterparts, and consequently have lower literacy rates, lower incomes, fewer assets and lesser access to resources. Women also experience higher levels of malnutrition and morbidity, with morbidity being 14 percent higher among females than males<sup>282</sup>. This difference is most pronounced during women's reproductive age (15 to 49 years), when morbidity for women is 38 percent higher than for men<sup>283</sup>.

In social terms, women experience violence and exploitation differently and more directly than men. The growing number of female-headed households have been identified as among the most disadvantaged in the country. The differential status of women and men is perhaps most effectively highlighted by the fact that Bangladesh continues to be one of the very few countries in the world where women's life expectancy is lower than that of men, leading to the calculation of an estimated seven million "missing" women and girls---victims of different kinds of neglect<sup>284</sup>.

### 6.5.2 Minorities

#### □ Religious

According to the population census of 1991, 88.3 percent of the population was Muslim, 10.5 percent Hindu, 0.6 percent Buddhist and 0.3 percent Christian, the rest belonging to other religions<sup>285</sup>. While Muslims and Hindus are represented in all six divisions of the country, Buddhists are mainly concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The Constitution, under article 2A, establishes Islam as the state religion but guarantees under article 41, the freedom of religion, and the protection from discrimination on grounds of religion under article 28. However, the Vested Property Act of 1976 undermines these constitutional rights, as in a number of cases members of minority communities have had their property confiscated under the Act.

According to various press reports, violence against minorities, including rape, extortion and raiding of places of worship has occurred on a number of occasions over the past decade<sup>286</sup>. However, most of the incidents occurred in the wake of the 1992 demolition of the Babri mosque in India by Hindu extremists. In most cases, the victims remain silent for fear of retaliation and are unwilling to report incidents to law enforcement authorities. Minorities have reportedly experienced some discrimination in the administration of justice, especially at the level of the village *shalish*<sup>287</sup>. They also sometimes face harassment as for example in the case where, when the members of the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Welfare Trust applied for welfare funds, they were allegedly asked by the Central Audit Bureau to

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<sup>282</sup> BBS (1997b)

<sup>283</sup> UNDP (1999a)

<sup>284</sup> Estimate based on BBS figures

<sup>285</sup> BBS (1994)

<sup>286</sup> SAHRDC (1999)

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

convert to Islam<sup>288</sup>. Other acts of discrimination faced by minorities include lack of access to jobs and political office, and insufficient representation in decision making bodies.

□ *Ethnic*

The ethnic minorities of Bangladesh comprise a little over one per cent of the country's population and are geographically located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and in plain areas of greater Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Tangail districts<sup>289</sup>. While they are Bangladeshi nationals, they are not formally recognised as "ethnic minorities" or indigenous groups in the constitution. Thus, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)<sup>290</sup> was informed by GoB in 1992 that "racially and culturally, Bangladesh has been a melting pot for thousands of years, and today has a completely homogeneous population. There is no racial discrimination in Bangladesh since there is but one mixed race"<sup>291</sup>. There has however, been a change in official perspective since then. In her address to the Hague Peace Conference in 1999, the Prime Minister referred specifically to the problem in CHT and to "the right of an indigenous people, an ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and social minority, to preserve their own identity, culture, tradition and values."<sup>292</sup>.

In spite of the recognition of the tribal communities' need for special attention, and the decision to place the 14 "special area" thanas under the supervision of the Special Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Secretariat, ethnic minorities continue to face problems especially in gaining access to land. Land being communally owned, individuals do not hold title deeds to the lands they have traditionally cultivated or occupied as homesteads. This, together with deforestation from commercial logging, has become one of the most serious sources of contention between ethnic communities and the Bengali settlers who have been gradually encroaching on land communally owned by the minorities. The Bengali Muslim population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has risen from 2.94% in 1941 to over 50% of the population today<sup>293</sup>, and growing population pressure and conflicts over land ownership in the last two decades led to an internal conflict resulting in insecurity and violence, with women and children being especially targeted for detention, torture and sexual assault.

The peace agreement signed on 2 December 1997 between the Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS) and the GoB is a milestone and represents an unprecedented opportunity to usher in an age of greater understanding and co-operation between the various communities. The present government has played a key role, which has been given due recognition in the international arena, in reaching this understanding under circumstances which were not always conducive to peace. In the wake of this achievement, further steps will be taken to deal with relevant issues arising in the course of implementation of the accord, such as setting up the land commission which will settle land disputes between the tribals and the Bengali settlers, and addressing the matter of crimes committed during the conflict. Mechanisms will need to be developed to deal with these matters satisfactorily, and priority will need to be given to such matters in order to preserve the goodwill and harmony that has been achieved as a result of this long-awaited peace accord.

□ *Others*

In addition to the above groups, there are an estimated 230,000 Bihari Muslims who gained an anomalous status when Bangladesh achieved independence. Their legal status remains unclear, failing agreement between Pakistan and Bangladesh about their citizenship.

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<sup>288</sup> Jumma Peoples Network (1996)

<sup>289</sup> The ethnic groups include the Bangshi, Bawm, Buna, Chak, Chakma, Coach, Garo/Mandi, Hajong, Harijon, Khasia, Khyang, Khomoi, Lushai, Mahat/Mahatoo, Marma, Monipuri, Munda/Mundia, Murang, Muro/Mo, Pahari, Pankue/Pankoo, Rajbangshi, Rakhain, Saontal, Tanchanghya, Tipra, Tripura, Urang, Uruo/Urua/Uria, and others.

<sup>290</sup> SAHRDC (1999)

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> GOB (1999)

<sup>293</sup> SAHRDC (1999) Op.cit.

Recent attempts to discuss this matter, including at the D-8 Summit in February 1999, have not succeeded in finding a solution to date.

#### **6.5.4 Refugees**

Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to basic humanitarian principles by granting temporary asylum to 250,000 refugees from Myanmar, who crossed the border in 1991 and 1992. However, the authorities depend on ad hoc approaches as the country has neither a specific policy framework nor legislation on refugees. Moreover, it has not acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention. As a result, there is no mechanism to examine the need for protection and determine the status of asylum-seekers arriving individually or in larger groups, and there is no clarity about the standards of treatment of refugees. The various rights in the Constitution apply in principle only to nationals; there are no special provisions for non-citizens as such.

Differences have been noted in the Government's treatment of refugees in Bangladesh. The 250,000 Rohingyas in the influx of 1991-92 were granted temporary refugee status and UNHCR was later requested to provide material support and to assist with voluntary repatriation. Such an arrangement did not exist for previous refugees, and as mentioned earlier, there is no mechanism for any new asylum seekers from Myanmar or other countries. As most of the refugees have gone back to Myanmar, only 22,000 are left in two camps. For the sake of law and order and to protect the local labour market, the refugees' freedom of movement outside the camps is severely restricted, and many who left the camps to work as daily labourers met some form of punishment or informal fines. As a result, and although progress towards a settlement remains blocked, the refugees remain dependent on aid. UNHCR co-ordinates nutrition, shelter, health and sanitation and informal primary education. WFP provides basic food rations. The refugees are free to practice their religion, but political associations are forbidden. In contrast, the small number of urban refugees in the country have greater freedom in terms of mobility, and many are allowed to study and seek employment. These include individuals from countries in situations of conflict and although the GoB does not have a specific understanding with UNHCR regarding the status of urban refugees, they enjoy the protection and assistance of UNHCR according to standard practice in the region.

#### **6.5.5 HIV/AIDS**

Law, ethics and human rights are primary components in HIV/AIDS management, addressing the many and varied problems associated with people affected by HIV/AIDS. Equally, in prevention and impact reduction interventions these key components play a vital role.

In the context of Bangladesh, while the HIV/AIDS epidemic has not yet emerged as a social problem, experts observe that the problem remains "hidden" due to inadequate surveillance mechanisms and research. Thus while the government reports that 105 cases have been tested HIV/AIDS positive in 1998<sup>294</sup>, the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS estimate that at the end of 1997, the number of HIV-infected individuals stood at 21,000<sup>295</sup>. Moreover, as 31 percent of those infected are between the ages of 16-30<sup>296</sup>, there are clear demographic implications for the spread of the disease. The situation is complicated by the fact that parents, service providers and policy makers are not aware or do not want to acknowledge that children, especially adolescents, may be sexually active and are at risk of infection. It has been found that 50 percent of STD cases are students, the majority (80 percent) of whom contract the disease from commercial sex workers<sup>297</sup>. Others with high rates of HIV prevalence include frequent travellers and migrant workers.

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<sup>294</sup> AIDS DAY Newsletter, 1998

<sup>295</sup> UN Heads of Agencies "AIDS Presentation" handout (November 15, 1998)

<sup>296</sup> Financial Express newspaper (December 2, 1998)

<sup>297</sup> SCF-UK (1998)

The relative lack of priority given to HIV/AIDS by policymakers and civil society is among the factors contributing to the absence of a code of conduct or protective legislation related to HIV/AIDS. Discrimination, stigmatisation and the related loss of human rights to confidentiality, informed consent, education and counselling remain a problem. Similarly, media reporting which avoids sensationalising AIDS-related news items continues to be one of the many challenges to be addressed for the proper management of HIV/AIDS in the country.

**Box 8: Case Study 5: HIV/AIDS**

In Rangpur town, district authorities placed four floating prostitutes suspected of being infected with HIV/AIDS in prison, in order to protect others from being infected. The magistrate asked the concerned authorities to arrange related tests and medicare as requested by the victims.

### **6.5.6 Disabled People**

National data on disability in Bangladesh is scarce and significant discrepancies are observed between different sources according to the definition of disability and the criteria used for identification. Thus GoB surveys (1982 and 1986), estimate the prevalence rate of disability at less than one percent, WHO estimates place the figure to be around 10 percent<sup>298</sup>, and in Jamalpur District it is estimated to be nearly nine percent<sup>299</sup>. Among the most seriously affected are children, 10,000 becoming disabled every year with paralytic polio while leprosy claims 150,000 additional victims every year<sup>300</sup>.

The law provides for equal treatment and freedom from discrimination for the disabled but in practice, disabled persons face social and economic discrimination. The Government has not enacted specific legislation for increasing accessibility for the disabled. Facilities for treating the mentally ill are generally inadequate; often this care is available only for those who can afford personalised services.

Government programmes for the disabled are under the responsibility of the Department of Social Services in the Ministry of Social Welfare. They include schools for the blind and for the deaf located in different parts of the country, a National Centre for Special Education, and an employment rehabilitation centre and other initiatives such as an integrated education programme for the visually impaired. These institutions however, lack capacity to meet the demand and are annually able to provide training to only 2,000 disabled children and trainees all over the country<sup>301</sup>.

From a rights perspective, the Government has been keen to ensure equal opportunities in all spheres of life for the disabled in Bangladesh and has adopted the national policy for disabled persons in November 1995. However, when ten blind candidates applied to take part in the BCS 18<sup>th</sup> examination, the Public Service Commission refused to provide candidates with admission cards on the ground of blindness, despite provision to the contrary under Clause 8 of the national policy for people with disabilities<sup>302</sup>. Several cases of

<sup>298</sup> The figure of 10 percent was also given by the Prime Minister in her speech at the occasion of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Disabled Day, on 03 December 1997, during a programme organised by the Ministry of Social Welfare : " ....calling upon the affluent section of the society to come forward in helping the disable, who constitute more than 10 percent of the population ...", quoted from The State of Human Rights in 1997, BMSP, CCHR: Dhaka

<sup>299</sup> Actionaid Bangladesh (1996)

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> CCHR (1998)

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

rape involving disabled girl children<sup>303</sup> have pointed out that the particular vulnerability of disabled women still requires much more attention and specific protection from the law.

In spite of the reiterated commitment of the Government to the cause of the disabled, the current education and rehabilitation programs remain extremely limited in scope. Provisions contained in the National Policy for people with disability will have to be strongly enforced if equal opportunities to employment and education are to be translated into reality.

#### ***6.5.7 Government Priorities in Issues of Discrimination***

Discrimination against minorities is recognised as an issue in the FFYP, but not all groups are given equal importance. Disability is mentioned as a priority concern, especially disabled children, and some financial provision has been made for them. While religious minorities and indigenous peoples are specifically mentioned in the Plan, refugees are not identified as a group which face discrimination. Similarly, the discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS is not recognised, although this issue is addressed from a health perspective and it is seen as a social problem.

#### ***6.5.8 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences on Issues of Discrimination***

Issues of discrimination have been addressed in great detail by several global conferences including, WSSD, WCHR, FWCW, ICPD and the Children's Summit<sup>304</sup>.

As a follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWCA) of the GOB has prepared a National Policy for Women, along with a National Action Plan (NAP), to address the cause of women's advancement in Bangladesh. These documents were finalised in 1997 and 1998 respectively. In addition to this, the GOB organised a formal dissemination workshop for NAP and the Institutional Review of the WID Capability of the GOB, a study which identifies the GOB capacities for gender mainstreaming and areas requiring strengthening. In order to strengthen the advocacy and co-ordination role of the MOWCA, steps have been taken to prepare a mission statement reflecting these priorities and amend the ministry's allocation of business accordingly.

Bangladesh had earlier ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, albeit with four reservations. Subsequently, two of those four CEDAW reservations were removed by the government in 1997. These were on Article 13 (a) and 16 (1) (f). Efforts are being made to facilitate the removal of the remaining two reservations.

The National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) was set up in 1995, and consists of high-level representatives from line ministries, the Planning Commission, members of Parliament and civil society representatives. The NCWD is chaired by the Prime Minister, and has the responsibility for oversight at the national level regarding issues related to women's development. However, since inception, it has met only twice in April and July 1997.

In accordance with the commitments made in Beijing, WID focal points and assistant WID focal points have been appointed in a total of 47 line ministries and agencies. The status of the WID focal points and assistant focal points has also been upgraded with the decision to appoint to these posts persons holding the rank of either Joint Secretary, Joint Chief, Deputy Secretary or Deputy Chief<sup>305</sup>. The WID focal point network has been further strengthened through the development of terms of reference and provision of training inputs to the focal points. An important development has been the establishment of WID focal points in different sections of the Planning Commission.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Articles 15k, 54b, 55f, 56, and Commitments 4f, 5c, 5e of Copenhagen Declaration, WSSD; Article 274d, Platform of Action, FWCW; Articles 19, 21 of Vienna Declaration and Articles 22, 27 of Programme of Action, WCHR.

<sup>305</sup> MoWCA (1999)

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) aims to integrate women's development into the macro framework and reduce gender disparities in all sectors. It also contains a separate chapter on women's development issues. The amount allocated to the MOWCA under the plan involves a considerable percentage increase compared to earlier allocations.

In October 1995, a National AIDS Committee was established, and acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on all aspects of HIV/AIDS. This was followed, in May 1997, by the approval of the National Policy on HIV/AIDS. The government, NGOs, community representatives and development partners in Bangladesh developed a "Strategic Plan for the National AIDS Programme for 1997-2000". In the Health and Population Sector Programme for 1998-2003, a component on "reproductive health care with prevention and control of STDs, HIV/AIDS and adolescent care" was included<sup>306</sup>. In addition to government efforts, the United Nations established the "Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in Bangladesh" in 1998. Raising public awareness regarding the causes and methods of prevention of AIDS among the general population, as well as high-risk categories and adolescents, will be one of the challenges to be addressed in the immediate future.

Projects have been initiated with various ministries to deal with many of the issues related to protection. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is implementing a number of projects aimed at building the capacity of the ministry to undertake advocacy and co-ordination of efforts in the area of women and children's development. These include a technical assistance facility to provide support to the MOWCA and all line ministries to address women's issues in their sectoral plans, as well as efforts to promote policy leadership and advocacy through a special unit within the ministry and through the building of an information base to strengthen its institutional capacity. In addition to this, an effort is underway to promote the capacity for gender mainstreaming in all GOB ministries and agencies through provision of gender training to government servants through the key national training institutes, commissioning of gender-based research and gathering of gender disaggregated data for use in policy formulation, and a communications campaign to raise public awareness about issues affecting women and girls, including violence. MOWCA has already established a Gender Information Resource Bank, and is collaborating with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics on the publication of a WID compendium. A variety of measures have been adopted to strengthen the Department of Women's Affairs under MOWCA. The Ministry of Education has undertaken an initiative for the inclusion of gender concerns in the proposed Education Policy. The Ministry of Information has taken on a project to build public awareness on issues related to the development of women and children, which includes information on CEDAW and CRC.

## **6.6 Problems in Addressing Protection Issues and their Causes**

Many of the problems in addressing protection issues are structural in nature, and relate to the lack of effective protection provided by the law. The problems in maintaining law and order are keenly felt by all levels of society today. Yet any attempt to come to grips with the corruption and mismanagement within law-enforcement agencies would have to deal with the problems created by the absence of discipline, accountability and community participation in policing, as well the lack of human resources, adequate remuneration, training and equipment faced by those who are engaged in the work of law-enforcement.

Similarly, the implementation gap with respect to the existing laws, along with the huge backlog of cases and the prevalence of influence-peddling by wealthier segments of society, contributes to a situation where the judicial system is virtually paralysed. The lack of independence of the judiciary makes it difficult for the courts to function as they should, and the lack of adequate infrastructure and proper access to legal aid, and insufficient numbers of trained lawyers and judicial officers, worsens the situation. The loss of faith in the overall systems of law and order stem from the corruption and lack of transparency, accountability and respect for human rights which prevail in many institutions and agencies.

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<sup>306</sup> Anwar, M.T. and N. Kabir (1998)

The situation is worsened by contextual problems of poverty and inequality in Bangladesh, which leaves poor and marginalized groups unable to access the judicial and law-enforcement systems. Attitudes to vulnerable groups serve to further undermine their chances of justice, as they are seen as a source of gain in a social system which encourages predatory behaviour. Even the political system fails to encourage any degree of accountability, and effectively condones the use of non-legitimate methods e.g. muscle-power, to perpetuate the holding of power. The situation is also affected by the culture of power politics and climate of intolerance that prevail in the political arena, and the tendency for local power struggles to overshadow the national interest for many politicians.

The absence of democratic traditions and lack of civic education amongst the masses create a situation where the status quo cannot be effectively challenged. At the same time, the perception of limited resources being available serves to fuel violence, desperation and exploitative and rent-seeking tendencies in society. All of these causes serve to undermine social order and create a situation where effective protection cannot be obtained from the legal system. As a result, whether the poor are seen as labour to be exploited, or as victims to have their meagre assets further depleted through extraction of bribes or protection money, they are trapped in a cycle of deprivation which impoverishes the country as a whole, and impedes development---in moral and human, as well as purely economic, terms.

## **6.7 Identified Gaps**

The universal rights to protection are related to basic human rights common to all individuals: the right to live in a society free of fear, violence, exploitation and discrimination, where every person is entitled to freedom of thought, expression and conscience, where no-one has to pay the price for being part of a racial, religious or ethnic minority. If the people of Bangladesh, regardless of age, disability, race, religion, gender, creed, caste or ethnicity, are to experience such a society, the mechanisms which ensure the protection of these rights will have to be made to function more effectively.

In the longer term, prevailing socio-economic circumstances, which make some groups, such as women and the poor, more vulnerable than others, would also have to be addressed through compensating mechanisms such as legal aid. In the long run, development in the wider sense is closely related to the protection of basic rights. People who experience chronic insecurity of person and property cannot channel their energies towards nation building. Thus, from the perspective of human development, as well as realisation of the commitments made by the GoB to various international covenants and documents, the right for every citizen to live and work in a society free from violence, exploitation and discrimination must be the guiding principle for any long-term national development planning.

The main responsibility for ensuring that the human rights of its citizens are respected lies with the state, and the GoB is a signatory to a number of international conventions and documents, such as CEDAW and CRC, which seek to protect these rights. Also, while Bangladesh acceded to certain human rights conventions in 1998, it has yet to accede to the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which is a key document. However, the fact remains that the implementation of these commitments will necessitate building the capacity of many state institutions, notably the judiciary and law-enforcement systems. Unless punitive sanctions take place against those who violate the laws protecting society---whether those laws are related to personal protection, the safeguarding of property or the governance of socio-economic systems--- social stability cannot be maintained. Ensuring the rights to protection is a fundamental step in facilitating social and economic development in Bangladesh, as progress in these sectors will be understandably slow unless people experience a basic sense of security.

Restoring confidence in the law-enforcement agencies would be a crucial step in a long-term process aimed at ensuring the rights to protection, and could be done through provision of training and equipment, and raising awareness of the roles and responsibilities of law-enforcement personnel. In addition to dealing firmly with instances of corruption or brutality, attempts could be made to build links between the police and the public, and to promote concepts of safe communities and community policing among the public.

Sensitisation of law-enforcement officers regarding issues related to minorities and vulnerable groups such as women and children would help to ensure that gross violations of their rights did not take place. Greater efforts could be made to draw on regional efforts and experience, including cross-border co-operation, to combat trafficking of women and children.

The enforcement of existing laws regarding protection from violence and exploitation requires the effective functioning of the judicial system. This would necessitate clearing the massive backlog of pending cases and addressing problems related to influence-peddling, as well as access to the legal system for marginalized groups. Special tribunals could be set up to expedite the process, and legal aid provision would enable the poor, as well as women and members of minority communities, to seek justice.

The provision of shelters for female victims of violence, and close monitoring and supervision to prevent the abuse of the safe custody mechanism, would contribute to greater numbers of women finding an alternative to the situations of physical and mental abuse they have experienced. The rehabilitation of victims of violence, and women and children rescued from traffickers could be facilitated by setting up an effective support system of shelters, where training for income generation and legal aid facilities could be made available.

The improvement of the juvenile justice system and the appropriate treatment of children in custody, as well as legislative measures to protect children from sexual abuse, would be important steps in ensuring the enforcement of children's rights. The respect that exists among the populace for the Supreme Court should be reinforced and built upon by undertaking judicial reform as necessary to improve the effectiveness of the justice system as a whole.

The protection of minorities including religious and ethnically diverse groups should be ensured through the enactment of legislation where necessary, including the repeal of discriminatory laws and the protection of the land rights of tribal peoples. Similarly, if Bangladesh remains reluctant to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention, introducing national refugee legislation would enable a more effective management of any future refugee flows, including better protection.

The discrimination experienced by disabled persons and those infected with HIV/AIDS can partially be addressed through the development of policies and codes of conduct related to the treatment of these groups, but simultaneous efforts must be undertaken to ensure the enforcement of existing legislation such as the adaptation of workplaces to address the needs of disabled workers. The existing lack of awareness regarding the causes and methods of preventing HIV/AIDS is another major obstacle that must be addressed in order to prevent an epidemic in the next decade. In addition to educating the general public, special campaigns must be undertaken to reach high-risk and hard to reach groups such as adolescents, professional blood donors, commercial sex workers and intravenous drug users. Women's additional susceptibility to the disease due to physiological factors should also be highlighted<sup>307</sup>.

The capacity of the state to enforce some of the existing legislation related to protection from exploitation needs to be strengthened, and the gaps in legislation need to be addressed. Although the Labour Policy dealt with labour issues in general, it did not address gender issues or the rights of women workers specifically. The government drafted a new Labour Code in 1994, which is still being processed for approval. This draft should now be updated and revised in view of the Beijing Platform for Action, in order to ensure that women workers' interests are addressed within it.

In terms of enforcement of laws, while provisions for equal remuneration for work of equal value exist for the establishment of minimum wages, women workers continue to be paid less than their male counterparts, while separate amenities and childcare provisions are not available in many public offices. Compliance with laws related to the right to a safe work environment in the workplace could be facilitated by inspection of working conditions in factories and establishments of various kinds. The enforcement of minimum wage legislation,

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<sup>307</sup> UN Heads of Agencies "AIDS Presentation" handout (November 15, 1998)



removal of gender disparities in wage rates, enactment of legislation against sexual harassment and monitoring the number of hours worked would contribute to a less exploitative work environment. Such monitoring of work conditions could also help to address issues related to child labour, although the eradication of child labour would necessitate identification of alternative means of sustenance for working children and their families.

Good governance requires that public servants and service providers at all levels work towards greater transparency and accountability to the people that they serve. Anti-corruption measures could be adopted on a priority basis. Criminals should not receive protection because of their political affiliations, and rent-seeking behaviour should be strongly discouraged. Greater awareness regarding the needs and rights of vulnerable groups, on the part of policymakers as well as those who implement policies, would contribute to ensuring that discrimination and exploitation were rooted out. Such increased awareness on the part of service providers regarding these issues, as well as on the part of those belonging to the most vulnerable groups, is a precondition for any system of law and order to function effectively.

The strengthening of civil society can contribute significantly to the improvement of governance in the country. The media have an important role to play in ensuring well-informed reporting, and stimulating public debate on laws and policies, in addition to promoting vigilance regarding law-enforcement by the police, and promoting awareness of human rights abuses such as the trafficking of women and children. The situation regarding child labourers and that of domestic servants are examples of areas where civil society agencies and the media have worked to raise the awareness of the general public.

Similarly, common perceptions and negative stereotypes of women and girls, which contribute to the way that they are viewed and treated within their families and in society, must be addressed in order to combat violence and the commercial exploitation of women e.g. as labourers and sex workers. Greater public awareness regarding issues related to identity such as birth, marriage and death registration would complement government efforts to promote such record-keeping. Development partners can also play a role in providing assistance to particularly disadvantaged groups, such as the disabled. In order to promote the effective development of mechanisms which promote rights to protection, partnership between the key actors concerned, including the government and civil society organisations, is a necessary first step.

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# THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

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For the most part, there continues to be insufficient participation and so even less empowerment. In this way, the numerical majority remain the political minority.<sup>309</sup>

## 7.1 Introduction

A HISTORY OF through-migration and settlement has left its mark on Bangladesh's social order. The active, rich and unstable alluvial plain made up of the Padma, Jamuna and Meghna basins has also deeply informed Bengali culture and society. This has resulted in a wealth of cultural attributes and localised idiosyncrasies, given the parameters of relative ethnic and linguistic homogeneity; less salutary is the highly factional, deferential and hierarchical aspect of political life.

Although historically considered a region rich in natural resources, Bangladesh's political past has been one fashioned by expropriation, marginalization and neglect. Two centuries of British colonial rule ended in 1947, only to be superseded by another period of colonial administration under the rubric of a Pakistani state. Independence in 1971 presented the emerging nation-state with a new dilemma. With 10 million dislocated people and with physical infrastructure in tatters, the country faced famine and a rapid erosion of faith in the institutions of governance.

Behind this lay a fundamental weakness in the constitution of Bangladeshi public life: a legacy of exogenous rule had left Bangladesh without a critical mass of people familiar with conducting affairs of a modern nation-state. Together with this, very low levels of education, menial basic health indicators and limited employment opportunities meant that the scope for civil society agency<sup>310</sup> remained limited. Civil participation has manifested itself effectively at unitary moments, such as during the violent war of liberation. However, without an educated, healthy population and without a stable political process, such examples of civil society exerting influence on affairs of state have been the exception rather than the norm.

Into this public vacuum, a succession of political formations comprising groups possessing newly acquired wealth have vied for pre-eminence. In the absence of recognised formal institutions, factional interests and informal association have served as the social capital that ensures opportunity and access to resources. On the occasions when these political groupings became untenable, or were violently usurped, the military stepped in, either under martial law or with a civilian front. As a result, 16 of Bangladesh's 28 years of independence have passed under non-democratic rule. It is therefore the military and the civil administration that became, de facto, the seats of authority.

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<sup>308</sup> 'Participation' is used here to mean voluntary involvement of individuals and groups in civil and political affairs. In this chapter, association, expression and empowerment as seen as corollary aspects of civil and political participation.

<sup>309</sup> UNDP (1996)

<sup>310</sup> The UNDP document *Governance for Sustainable Human Development* (1998) describes civil society as "more than just society. It is the part of society that connects individuals with the public realm and the state -- it is the political face of society. Civil society organisations channel people's participation in economic and social activities and organise them into more powerful groups to influence public policies and gain access to public resources, especially for the poor. They can provide checks and balances on government power and monitor social abuses. They also offer opportunities for people to develop their capacities and improve their standards of living -- by monitoring the environment, assisting the disadvantaged, developing human resources, helping communication among business people." (p8)

The intervening years have seen a continuing erosion of the social fabric of the country, with a system of 'shadow governance' holding sway. The main consequences of these unaccountable and non-transparent processes has been the undermining of the country's public, private and educational institutions, loss of public revenue and inefficiency in basic service delivery. This shadow system of governance has been fuelled and sustained by rapid and highly concentrated capital accumulation, much of which is expatriated, leaving relatively low rates of domestic savings and investments. The lack of conventional employment opportunities has resulted in the rise of corruption and social delinquency, leading in turn to a breakdown of law and order. The upshot of this is the continuing fragmentation of society and the deterioration of common interest.<sup>311</sup>

In spite of these historical trends, developments over the past decade give hope for some positive progress. The assumption of a plural political system in 1991 has set in motion a long, if difficult process of change. This chapter takes stock of this progress and concludes on challenges that need to be addressed to take forward a national agenda for greater participation and the fulfilment of civil and political rights.

## **7.2 Association**

### **7.2.1 General issues**

An assessment of issues related to association in Bangladesh cannot simply be limited to formal and semi-formal involvement by individuals and groups in civil society organs. Bangladesh society is similar to other societies in the region where informal association is a valuable form of social capital, often serving as a resource in ensuring subsistence or enhancing livelihood opportunities. Informal association deriving from familial or geographic affinities can form the basis for significant access to resources and political leverage in all strata of society. This also has negative variants.

One of the more pernicious dimensions of informal association has been discussed in Chapter Six, The Rights to Protection, with regard to the use of muscle power by political groupings. These forms of association, described once as a manifestation of 'patron-client' relations is mutually-reinforcing for the immediate interests of the parties concerned. The benefactor is able to garner the support of a 'constituency,' while the beneficiary is conferred largesse in the form of access to assets and resources that would not otherwise be available through formal channels.

This form of association, in both positive and negative forms, is deep-rooted in Bangladesh society. It has tremendous capacity for positive application. But because it runs parallel to the formal administrative and financial structures of state and civil society, it frequently serves to undermine social and economic progress as it works unseen within and between the regulatory apparatus of formal institutions. Informal association therefore features in complex overlapping forms and represents, simultaneously, both a boon and a bane for society in Bangladesh. It is a boon because it can present a deep reservoir of social resources for a country committed to collectively forwarding its development effort; yet it is a bane because the personal power, influence and resources derived from certain types of informal association cannot easily be checked by law.

### **7.2.2 Association through civil society organisations**

Since the resumption of democratic governance in 1991, civil society has shown clear signs of robust assertion. Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bangladesh have played an increasingly important role in all aspects of public life.<sup>312</sup> Many were active during the movement that resulted in the demise of the autocratic regime in 1990. Thousands of non-government

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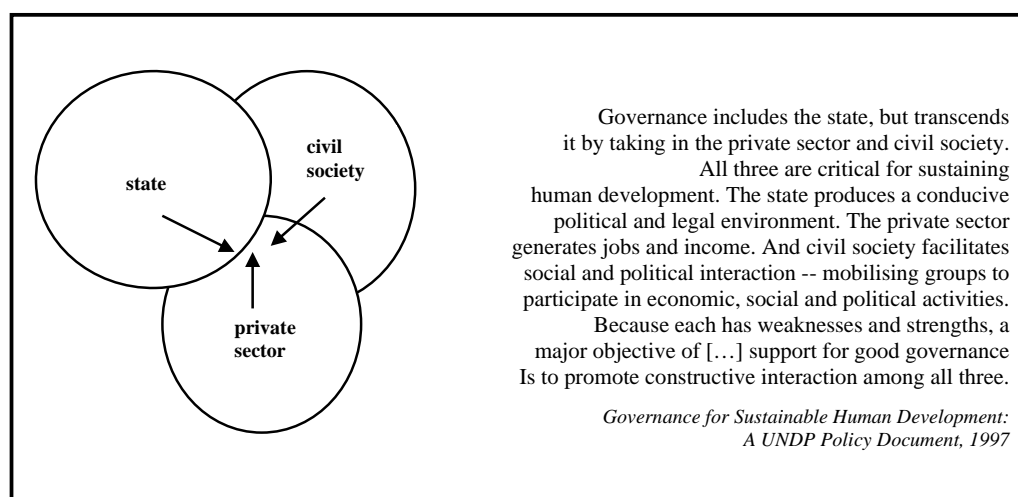
<sup>311</sup> Sobhan, R. (1996)

<sup>312</sup> CSO is used here in the broad sense to incorporate all social, cultural and development-related activity organised into formal bodies by private citizens, including non-government development organisations (ref.: *Development Partners: Forging New Partnerships With Civil Society Organisations*. Speech by the UNDP Administrator, James Gustav Speth, at the DPI/Annual NGO Conference, 19 September 1995). CSOs are the part of society that connects individuals with the public realm and the state.

development organisations (NGOs)<sup>313</sup> now cover a breadth and depth of poverty alleviation intervention that embraces much of the country. Activities range from employment and income generation, forestry and sustainable resource management, public health and sanitation, family planning, education and practical skills training and housing and infrastructure maintenance. These initiatives are supported by proactive development advocacy, research and interest representation, marketing and retail and information and communications technology service provision<sup>314</sup>.

Apart from the extensive and innovative activities of national and local NGOs, civil society activities in Bangladesh cover a wide variety of interventions into public life. Amongst the most significant is the growing voice of women's and legal rights organisations that provide both remedial and proactive legal support to disadvantaged women and children, often the victims of human rights violations.<sup>315</sup> 'Green' lawyers frequently pitch themselves against polluting industries, challenge anachronistic state policies and counteract illegal practice in the urban and rural environment.<sup>316</sup> The cultural rights of minority groups are given prominence in the work of other CSOs.<sup>317</sup> And continuing the legacy of support to the democratic movement, many CSOs play an active role supporting continuity in the electoral process through voter education, popular theatre and other public information programmes. Many of these CSOs are accepted by the Bangladesh Election Commission as important actors for monitoring elections.<sup>318</sup>

**Figure 6: -- ACTORS IN PARTICIPATION**



<sup>313</sup> The most visible of these are also amongst the largest NGOs in the world, including the *Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)*, *Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra*, the *Association for Social Advancement (ASA)*, and *Nijera Kori*.

<sup>314</sup> The Government of Bangladesh's policy on NGOs resulted in 1991 in the establishment of an NGO Affairs Bureau, to which all NGOs must be registered in order to be eligible for overseas funding. NGOs maintain their own mechanisms for co-ordination and oversight, principally the *Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB)*.

<sup>315</sup> *Ain o Salish Kendra* and the *Mohila Parishad* are two notable examples; other prominent CSOs supporting women and children include *Nari Shishu Adhikar* and *Shoishab*.

<sup>316</sup> The first, and still the most active, is the *Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association*.

<sup>317</sup> Amongst the most active of these are UBINIG and the *Society for Environment and Human Development*.

<sup>318</sup> While the *Fair Election Monitoring Alliance* has assumed a key role in a monitoring capacity, a large number of CSOs have been active in two parliamentary elections, bye-elections and local government elections in both voter education and monitoring.

While many of these CSOs continue to operate with modest resources at the grassroots level, others have grown into nation-wide operations straddling several tiers of intervention. Along with policy lobbyists and specialised research bodies, several non-government development organisations in Bangladesh with an extensive local-level member base have developed strong working relationships with the Government of Bangladesh and its overseas development partners. These instances of co-operation offset the sometimes contentious image of CSOs in Bangladesh and the attendant conflict that this brings. Several large NGOs have field level programmes whose viability and success depends on memoranda of understanding with the Government of Bangladesh. This includes livestock vaccination programmes, and forest and inland fishery resource management. In 1982, one particular NGO was instrumental in affirming a progressive national drug policy that helped to make essential medicines affordable to the poor.<sup>319</sup> Recent examples of the growing recognition of NGOs are evident in the involvement of an NGO representative in the vital Finance Committee that prepared recommendations detailing the scope of fiscal management for the reformed system of local government in Bangladesh.

Alongside these examples of local-national programme-policy linkages, in the past decade Bangladeshi CSOs have become active in multilateral fora at the regional and global level. The presence of several CSOs at major UN-sponsored conferences is testament to this.<sup>320</sup> Advocacy and regular lobbying interventions with large multilateral partners on a range of development issues further reflects the growing international stature of Bangladeshi CSOs.

The 1990s have also borne witness to qualitative changes in the nature of NGO agency. Civil society intervention in Bangladesh in local, national, and now international affairs has gradually become a professionalized venture, with the moral suasion of youthful post-independence social activists being increasingly complemented, and replaced, by an emphasis on technical prowess. Large institutional structures have apparently replaced informal associations, although many development organisations are still managed through values of loyalty and personal association as much as by merit and technical aptitude. In this it is possible to observe a microcosm of wider society reproducing itself within individual organisations, where formal institutional structures are suffused, and sometimes bypassed, by shadow processes based on informal association. It is this dynamic that has stoked questions in recent years about the accountability of many CSOs in general, and certain development NGOs in particular.

One of the observable changes that has accompanied the growth and formalisation of institutional structures in the non-government sector has been the increased depoliticization of employees of these organisations, often working under draconian administrations. Employment opportunities are taken to establish material security or attain social recognition in a country where such opportunities for educated urban and rural middle-income groups is scarce. The employment market is therefore such that NGOs, especially bigger organisations, have a large and largely compliant supply of people seeking employment. This facilitates, and contrasts markedly with, the trend of some NGO leaders to become increasingly associated with specific political parties. In different ways, both phenomena in the evolution of development NGO activities -- the gradual depoliticization of staff behaviour and the increased politicisation of certain NGO leaders, form new characteristics in the evolution of the NGO phenomenon that will ultimately inform the nature of NGO interaction with the state.

Over 900 of the CSOs mentioned here draw on technical and financial support from overseas development partners. This is a reflection of the continuing vulnerable economic predicament of Bangladesh as a developing country and the long-standing relationship between Bangladesh and the international development community. Bangladesh's development partners, towards the end of the 1980s, began to seek out CSO alternatives as

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<sup>319</sup> *Gonoshasthyo Kendra*.

<sup>320</sup> The United Nations Conference on Environment & Development in 1992, the World Summit on Social Development in 1995, the International Conference on Population & Development, also in 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1996 and Habitat II, also in 1996.

an avenue for development assistance. Yet along side these large and, in some cases, highly visible CSOs, many of them development NGOs, there are several thousand other smaller organisations and informal associations operating at the local level that bear testament to the vitality of individual and collective civil society efforts. The vibrant presence of civil society organisations today draws from a rich heritage of philanthropy and social service that Bangladesh may well be proud of.

### **7.2.3 Workers' Organisations**

At the national level, there are 22 trade union federations representing the 5,694 trade unions at the plant level<sup>321</sup>. These trade union federations and the plant-level unions represent 1.8 million workers. The Industrial Relations Ordinance of 1969 provides for regulation of trade union activities (including strikes and lockouts), the relations between employers and workers, and the avoidance and settlement of any differences and disputes arising between them.

Despite the existence of such a legal framework, industrial relations in Bangladesh are frequently confrontational and at times politically motivated. This is most notable in the case of particular state-owned enterprises. The confrontational character of relations makes it difficult to engage in effective collective bargaining. It is estimated that over 60 per cent of loss of working hours is due to political factors, while the remaining 40 per cent can be attributed to economic reasons. There is also reluctance on the part of employers, trade unions and the government to accept responsibility for what has gone wrong, to identify solutions and to co-operate for the effective functioning of the industrial relations system. As such, further participation of all three partners is required to narrow differences and provide effective fora for consultations and collective decision making. This requires high levels of political commitment, strengthening of tripartite institutions, encouragement of collective bargaining processes, and reform of the labour law. Greater attention will have to be given to implement the legislation, with a view to improving working conditions and social and labour protection through enhanced participation.

## **7.3 Expression**

### **7.3.1 Print and electronic media**

There have been discernible improvements in the scope for articulation of individual and group-based rights since 1991. This has largely stemmed from the consolidation of a print media, in Bangla and in English, where the standard of investigative journalism continues to improve. With the expansion of options beyond a state-run print media, 'second generation' issues related to press freedom are beginning to present themselves as they have in other countries of the region. These issues concern, for example, the balance of reporting given the interests of their proprietors. Meanwhile, writers of fiction and social commentators remain vulnerable to punitive redress by the government.

While marking the qualified advances of the print media under present circumstances, the forward steps have been further offset by the continuing lack of progress in creating an independent electronic media in the form of an autonomous Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Radio. Throughout the 1990s, both the BNP and Awami League governments have made commitments to instituting independent electronic media, without tangible results. Latterly, an Independent Media Commission<sup>322</sup> submitted its deliberations to the government in 1997 but the matter has yet to be concluded upon by the country's highest decision-making bodies. In spite of this inaction with respect to BTV and Bangladesh Radio, a second terrestrial television channel is being set up during 1999. Nevertheless, the slow progress towards establishing an independent or autonomous electronic media is symptomatic of an inchoate state and its ruling bodies, where control over the means of image projection is a common reflex.

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<sup>321</sup> Directorate of Labour (1998).

<sup>322</sup> Financed in part by the UNDP.

Nevertheless, a free print media and electronic media are essential ingredients for a society committed to forwarding opportunities for expression. But the availability and access to other media tools is also important. As yet, Bangladesh lags behind other countries in the sub-continent in terms of access to and use of information technology. In spite of this, Bangladesh continues to innovate in the use of information technology for extending a voice to sections of the population without access to media tools through conventional means. The extension of cellular phone use by Grameen Phone to poor village women and the filmmaking activities of women group members of NGOs like Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra are two cases in hand.

The qualified advances in the print media need to be tempered with the basic reality of Bangladesh's literacy rates, which set the basic parameters of efficacy for the print media as an agent of social change. Here we observe that the combined male/female literacy rate in 1997 was 51 per cent.<sup>323</sup> In 1995-96, only 42.4 per cent of 464,000 students appearing in secondary school exams passed. In the same year, only 24.3 per cent of the 521,000 students appearing for higher secondary exams passed.<sup>324</sup> This being the case, it is evident that the majority of the population of Bangladesh, women and men, continue to fall outside of the purview of the print media's influence. This in itself is significant: as long as Bangladesh retains high levels of non-literacy, then the print media as an organ of influence will continue represent development issues based on the perceptions of the resource-rich (that is, resource-rich in educational, financial and lifestyle terms). The development debate remains at risk of being a proxy debate, without the self-articulation of the poor, politically marginal majority.

### ***7.3.2 The Special Powers Act***

Behind this progress, successive governments have continued to refer to a legal instrument that offers discretionary powers of detention: the Special Powers Act of 1974. This Act confers authority to preventively detain any person initially for one month, and thereafter to prolong the detention by a period of six months, with the approval of the Advisory Board. The Act has specific provisions about the prejudicial acts for which a person can be detained under this law. These include: i) the execution of a detention order; ii) the communication of grounds; iii) the conditions of detention; iv) the procedure of the Advisory Board; v) orders on absconding persons; vi) the temporary release of any detainee; vii) special tribunals to try offenders; viii) punishments; and ix) revocation of detention orders.

However, the reasons for which a person can be detained under this Act are similar to the ones provided in the Penal Code and other laws for detention (see the table below). The difference lies in the fact that proceeding under this Act makes it easier to effect detention without fully preparing the case beforehand, and even without placing the person on trial. Detention on suspicious grounds is initiated under Criminal Procedure Code section 54, but continuation effected under the Special Powers Act.

The extent of preventive detention under the Special Powers Act and the reasons used are not made public, as the relevant information is considered to be confidential and is covered under the Official Secrets Act 1923, violation of which is punishable under law.

The majority of cases of preventive detention under the Special Powers Act are not brought before the High Court. In most cases the detainees are either poor or not allowed to communicate with their relatives or friends, or they are in fear of facing the High Court. It is estimated that on average the cost of getting a writ of habeas corpus moved and heard before the High Court, including issuing of a rule nisi, costs between Tk10,000 and Tk100,000, depending on the lawyer. For those who cannot financially afford the protection of law, which means the vast majority of the poor and disadvantaged who are detained, the Special Powers Act is the single most pernicious law in Bangladesh.

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<sup>323</sup> PMED (1997)

<sup>324</sup> BISE (1996)

**Table 7.1. Preventive Detention under the Special Powers Act and Penal Code<sup>325</sup>**

<b>Prejudicial articles in the Special Powers Act</b>	<b>Compatible provisions in the Penal Code, 1860</b>
Section 2(f)(i), prejudicial to the sovereignty or Defence	Sections 121 - 123A, 124A (offences against the State)
Section 2(f)(ii), prejudicial to the maintenance of Friendly relations with foreign powers	Sections 125, 126 (offences against friendly countries)
Section 2(f)(iii), prejudice, the security of Bangladesh, endangers public safety or Maintenance of public order	Sections 121 - 123A, 124A (offences against the State); 141 - 160 (offences against public tranquillity); 279 - 291 (public safety)
Section 2(f)(iv), creates or incites hatred, feelings of enmity between communities, classes or sections of people	Sections 295 - 298 (offences relating to religion); 503 - 506 (criminal intimidation, insult and annoyance); 153A (promoting enmity against classes)
Section 2(f)(v), incites or interferes with the Administration and maintenance of law and Order	Sections 107 - 120 (abatement); 141 - 160 (offences against public tranquillity); 172 - 190 (contempt of the lawful authority of public servants); 191 - 229 (false evidence and offences against public justice)
Section 2(f)(vi), prejudices maintenance of Supplies and services essential to the Community	Sections 283 (danger or obstructing in public way or line of navigation)
Section 2(f)(vii), causes fear of alarm in public	Section 511 (attempt to commit offences)
Section 2(f)(viii), prejudices economic or financial Interests of the State	Sections 230 - 263A (offences relating to coin and government stamps); 463 - 477A (offences relating to documents and to trade or property marks), 478 - 498 (offences relating to trade, property and other marks); 489A - 489E (offences relating to currency and bank notes)

While in spirit the Act is intended to provide the Government with an additional tool to secure the peace, especially in circumstances of deteriorating law and order, it nonetheless offers the possibility of discretionary use of preventive detention against political opponents. Both democratically-elected and non-democratic governments have used it to their advantage. To illustrate the point, detentions under this Act have continued to rise during the democratically elected political regimes since 1991.<sup>326</sup>

Attitudes towards the Act follow a typical pattern. Political parties, while in opposition, seek to condemn this Act and advocate its repeal, but habitually reverse their position when they come to power. As this pattern repeats itself in other areas surrounding central instruments of authority and control (for example separation of judiciary from the executive), repealing this Act will require consensus agreement among the major political parties in the Parliament.

**Table 7.2. Yearwise number of detenus under the Special Powers Act 1974**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of detenus</b>	<b>Number of released persons through writ or habeas corpus</b>
1974	513	13
1975	1,114	31
1976	1,498	46
1977	1,057	25
1978	753	30
1979	980	31
1980	710	41
1981	1,759	29
1982	1,548	54
1983	872	44
1984	643	36

<sup>325</sup> UNDP/UNDESA (1998)

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.



Year	Total number of detenus	Number of released persons through writ or habeas corpus
1985	882	48
1986	2,194	94
1987	4,585	327
1988	4,907	741
1989	4,482	871
1990	4,615	1,099
1991	5,302	1,710
1992	6,497	1,594
1993	3,669	1,066
1994	2,968	630
1995	4,173	1,705
1996	5,413	3,376
1997	4,016	Not available
1998	6,740	Not available
1999, up to June	6,650	Not available

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs in The Daily Star Newspaper, 25 July 1999

### **7.3.3 Political expression**

The people of Bangladesh continue to express high levels of enthusiasm in the political process in spite of punitive instruments designed to restrict expression. This has been borne out in experiences since the resumption of democratic governance in 1991. Various parliamentary, by- and local elections during the 1990s together have seen an average turnout of over 70 per cent of registered voters. The last parliamentary election in 1996 brought a high voter turnout of 74 per cent. The local elections at the union parishad level, held in December 1997, saw a turnout of over 75 per cent, with some districts recording a turnout of eligible voters of over 80 per cent, including women voters. And in spite of boycotts, the municipal elections of March 1999 saw turnouts averaging over 50 per cent of elected voters. While this is a positive sign, it represents a gilt-edged opportunity. Clearly, the electorate in Bangladesh is keenly exercising its democratic franchise; this nonetheless can be quickly dissipated and overtaken by frustration if economic development, poverty alleviation and a sharing of national wealth does not ensue.

Perhaps the most worrying mark of the current conditions for expression in Bangladesh is the recourse to hartals, gheraos and other forms of street agitation, which on occasions give rise to violent confrontation. These forms of dissent are used for various reasons, including:

- To protest actions or policies assumed by the government, or actions undertaken by law enforcement agencies on behalf of the government;
- To protest the alleged lack of access to the floor of the Parliament.

The recourse to hartal, viewed widely at home and abroad to be detrimental to Bangladesh's development prospects, is a symptom of the confrontational condition of Bangladeshi polity. While institutional reforms are being initiated and yet to be fully implemented, the main protagonists in public life remain reluctant to establish norms of debate based on mutual professional respect. In the absence of agreed terms of engagement, or a culture of dialogue, expression becomes violent, intolerant and recriminatory, eroding the basis for an inclusive, participatory environment.

While political expression depends on the involvement of civil society and its interest groups in the public arena, an active, representative and plural political system is key to making it viable. One dramatic aspect of reforms initiated since 1996 has been the emergence of a large body of women in elected office. Some 13,500 women, elected directly to three of twelve general seats, now occupy office as members of union parishads. Another 20 have been directly elected as 'chairmen.' Similar provisions, at the municipal and upazila

levels, have been made for women, ensuring an unprecedented presence in public decision-making arena. While this serves as an example of the government's commitment to the advancement of women, representational concerns have to be matched by commensurate authorities and facilities to allow women members to serve their constituencies effectively. This remains a concern and this concern is compounded by reports of neglect of women's requirements by male chairmen and members, and of violence against women members (as discussed in Chapter 6).

The population census of 1991 lists 29 different ethnic minorities in Bangladesh.<sup>327</sup> Twenty of these ethnic minorities live in the south east of Bangladesh -- in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts -- making this one of the most ethnically diverse pockets of indigenous settlement in the world. Yet, owing to a constitutional provision that describes all inhabitants of Bangladesh as Bengali, the ethnic identity of tribal minorities is still not recognised. It is only with the formalisation of the regional council in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in May 1999, that the rights to political expression of certain ethnic minorities has been brought into the fold of national political discourse.

It is widely recognised however that the process of advancement of women and ethnic minorities within the ambit of Bangladeshi polity will be a long one. This process will necessarily entail the institutionalisation of scope for women and minorities to engage in political expression at sub-national and national levels. As the country anticipates further positive developments in this direction, it is instructive to note that, numerically, women in local government currently fair better than women parliamentarians, where only seven out of 300 elected seats are currently occupied by women. A further 30 seats are occupied by women selected for those positions by the government. These comparative levels of representation contrast massively with the resources available at the disposal of union parishad members as compared to parliamentarians, an imbalance which is more marked where women are concerned and one that threatens to prolong a highly vertical and centralised imbalance in functions and authority in favour of the central state. Representation of women in government service is similarly poor. Figures available from 1995 show that only 3 per cent of all employees of the Government are women.<sup>328</sup>

Religious and ethnic minorities fare less well in terms of numerical presence. While Muslim Bengalis comprise 96.36 per cent of all parliamentarians, only 2.42 per cent are from the Hindu community and 1.52 per cent are tribal representatives.<sup>329</sup>

## **7.4 Empowerment**

### **7.4.1 Local Governance**

In an emerging democratic polity, processes are as important as institutions, although the two are not always present in tandem. Much is said and done in Bangladesh about empowerment of the poor and disenfranchised. As elsewhere, this has to be complemented by reforms to create an enabling environment, backed by tangible steps towards devolution of functions and financial powers, and by galvanising economic growth away from urban centres, to become meaningful. In the absence of these reforms, much of the efforts to support the poor in Bangladesh will be undermined, and rights to participation will continue to be limited. Despite this need to co-ordinate and pace the required change, Bangladesh still has to match the representational features of decentralised governance with corresponding financial and administrative power to locally elected authorities.

While Government efforts continue to unfold in a generally promising direction, the poor in Bangladesh have a large and articulate lobby of NGOs working to forward their

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<sup>327</sup> Namely the Bangshi, Bawm, Buna, Chak, Chakma, Coach, Garo/Mandi, Hajong, Harijon, Khasia, Khyang, Khomoi, Lushai, Mahat/Mahatoo, Marma, Monipuri, Munda/Mundia, Murang, Muro.Mo, Pahari, Pankue/Pankoo, Rajbangshi, Rakhain, Saontal, Tanchanghya, Tipra, Tripura, Urang, Uroa/Urua/Uria, Others.

<sup>328</sup> SAHD (1999)

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

welfare and interests. Many of these organisations have achieved world renown for the extent and sophistication of their programmes. It is only since 1996, however, that the Government has initiated a potentially far-reaching process of reform in local governance that seeks to bring the decision-making process closer to local constituents, with the requisite devolution of authorities. Nevertheless, there remain a number of fundamental issues to be further discussed and resolved about the policy orientation, direction, institutional capacities, comprehension and motivation to see these reforms through.

A Local Government Reform Commission constituted in 1996 submitted its report to the Government in 1997. The report focused on four key areas of concern: i) structure; ii) composition/representation; iii) functions; and iv) powers/authority of local government. According to one member of the Commission, the main reasons for pursuing local government reform were twofold: i) a general sense of enthusiasm for local government that exists in Bangladesh combined with b) a negative perception of central government.

While these reforms are essential to further democratisation, empowerment entails more than instating new institutions at the local level, or re-orienting existing ones. It involves the mobilisation, involvement and enhanced awareness of the general population. More fundamentally it requires good will and an understanding and pursuit of common interest. For it to be inclusive, it has to involve those sections of the population traditionally furthest removed from the sphere of decision-making, namely women, the poor and ethnic minorities. For it to be sustainable then a benign balance between local self-governance and central direction needs to be met.

As a result of the reforms, there are now some 13,500 women who have been directly elected into office at the union parishad level, with others due to take office after the conduct of the upazila parishad elections. In representational terms, elected bodies at the level of local governance have moved ahead of the national parliament, as discussed in section 7.3.3 above.

The box below takes stock of the current state of local government reforms in Bangladesh.

### **Box 9: Local Government Reforms in Bangladesh -- Latest Developments<sup>330</sup>**

- ◇ Action on a key recommendation of the Local Government Reform Commission, for a permanent Local Government Commission to oversee the implementation of reform, was postponed. Along with this, a recast role for the MoLGRD&C (in law-making and inter-mediation) was also postponed;
- ◇ The instatement of four tiers of local governance has been endorsed by the Government of Bangladesh (for elected councils at the village, union, upazila and zila levels);
- ◇ Elections have since taken place at the union parishad level (December 1997). This was followed by the recent pourashava elections (February 1999); Upazila elections are scheduled for 1999;
- ◇ Currently, a high court injunction is preventing elections at the gram parishad level from taking place;
- ◇ In the meantime, the Cabinet has approved the instatement of union-level social development committees. These are legally-sanctioned bodies comprising three wards each in which corresponding women union parishad members will serve as ex-officio chairs;
- ◇ Three out of every twelve seats for union parishads, pourashavas and upazila parishads have been reserved for women to be directly elected;
- ◇ Concern remains over the future of the upazila parishad, as no political consensus exists at the moment to make its functioning tenable (the main opposition parties opposed the indirect election of members during the passage of the bill through parliament in November 1998);
- ◇ Instead of a proposed Permanent Finance Commission, a short-term finance committee was convened to determine the scope of the financial authorities of local government. The committee did not propose sharing of national revenues through intra-governmental transfer of resources. Consequently, the local government system remains dependent on central government grants through the present dispensation;
- ◇ A final decision on the zila parishad proposal has been postponed by the Cabinet; therefore the prospect of district-level elections has been forestalled until resolution of outstanding issues;
- ◇ There are three priority areas of required support to help implement the reforms. These are in: i) training; ii) 'augmented resources' for development; and iii) capacity building for the MoLGRD&C and the Planning Commission.<sup>331</sup>

#### **7.4.2 The NGO alternative**

With a fledgling democratic polity and a hostile institutional environment, many NGOs that spoke of political empowerment in the 1970s and 1980s out of a populist spirit have retrenched into the middle ground of economic pragmatism of the 1990s. As late as the 1980s, NGOs were perceived by progressive forces within Bangladesh and by the international development community as effective alternative development service providers to non-democratic Government. This has been replaced in the 1990s with a new orthodoxy perceiving NGOs as viable and experienced partners in development. The mainstreaming of NGO interventions to correspond to donor priorities is partly demonstrable in the way NGOs have changed their operational vocabularies, especially with regard to the poor, which has changed from 'members' to 'beneficiaries' and, in some instances, to 'clients'.

This mainstreaming of development interventions is most clearly manifested in the rapid expansion of microcredit based programming and a concentration of development assistance in the hands of a few NGOs that have grown into mammoth nation-wide operations. Microcredit has become the mainstay of many of these and other organisations and one of the principal vectors of development programming. Mainstreaming of innovations such as microcredit may justifiably be seen as the most enduring legacy of the NGO phenomenon in Bangladesh.

The resumption of democratic governance however presents an unexpected challenge to NGOs. With the return of elected governments, NGOs may find that they are

<sup>330</sup> As of July 1999.

<sup>331</sup> As expressed by the Member Secretary of the Local Government Reform Commission and former Secretary of the Local Government Division, MoLGRD&C, in a meeting with the Local Consultative Group Sub-group on Governance, 22 February 1999.

required to compete with government for scarce development assistance, where previously moral suasion was a sufficient rationale. Today, at least in principle, elected governments represent constituencies, bringing into sharp relief questions of NGO accountability. Performance in service delivery is also gradually replacing political ideology as the distinguishing factor between government and non-government intervention. Difficulties being experienced by NGOs to 'graduate' their organised groups of poor women and men is also giving rise to the concern that they have become substitutive of civil society, rather than a complement to it. In the meantime, it is evident that the vast experience of the NGO community in Bangladesh offers rich possibilities for further collaborative interaction with the government in the years to come.

### 7.4.3 Community empowerment

#### BOX 10: GoB/UNDP Community Empowerment Programme

##### Objectives & Beneficiaries

The UNDP-supported Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) is a significant pilot programme in support of the Government of Bangladesh's poverty alleviation efforts. Within this broad framework, it innovates and promotes strategies and techniques specifically targeted to meet the needs of the hard-core poor, who account for about 50 per cent of the poor population, and most of whom do not benefit from the traditional micro-credit approach. The programme is primarily aimed at closing this gap by focusing on the following two objectives which are explicitly pro-poor and pro-women:

1. Empowerment of the poorest members of local communities so that they have more control over factors and decisions which affect their lives (i.e. increasing their capacity for sustainable human development; and
2. Re-activation of local government and strengthening of NGOs so that these become more responsive to the poor majority, by facilitating linkages between the poor and government and NGOs, at both this level and more central levels, and thus influencing policy.

The main thrust of the programme is therefore to build capacity for development at the community level both amongst the poorest members of local communities, especially women, and in the lowest levels of local government. The different CEP projects are pursued as pilot schemes with an underlying long-term objective of replicating a successful model at the national level. Strategic linkages will be developed with other service providers that are institutionally appropriately placed to provide sustainable support to the target clients in meeting their social, economic and infrastructure needs. This is in view of the need to strengthen the linkages of accountability between local and national levels.

The development of participatory local level planning will provide for a very effective mechanism for up-scaling and replicating successful variants of poverty eradication through community empowerment. Bottom-up capacity building requires capacities for awareness, group formation, planning and design, financial resource management, technical skills for income generation and micro enterprise development, realisation of entitlements and effective interaction with public services and authorities. Where appropriate, the extension services of NGOs with a proven record of interaction with poor women, men and children will be sought by the programme to provide capacity-building training.

##### Emerging lessons

Lessons that have been learned to date emphasise the need to have a very clear vision and action plan for addressing issues of:

- ◇ Targeted versus non-targeted approach;
- ◇ Cohesiveness and sustainability of village organisations;
- ◇ Expansion and sustainability of micro finance;
- ◇ Overall sustainability and replication of the community empowerment programme.

Recent critiques of microcredit-based interventions have highlighted that these programmes, though successful in part, do not reach the hardcore poor.<sup>332</sup> This section of the population is permanently 'below the line' and in need of welfare, as well as development assistance. With this in mind, the Government of Bangladesh has recently adopted a number of experimental initiatives that take a communitarian perspective to empowerment and reactivating local governance. The adoption of 'empowerment' in its social as well as economic connotation is a

<sup>332</sup> Microcredit is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5: The Right to Livelihood.

telling return to an objective that many NGOs have discreetly moved away from during the 1990s.

These pilot exercises, known collectively as the Community Empowerment Programme, seek to develop socially inclusive mechanisms for change at the sub-national level, by tapping into or redirecting latent social capital for the benefit of local communities in general and the hard-core poor in particular, are profiled in the box below.

## 7.5 Government Priorities and Needs in Issues of Participation

As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the Fifth Five Year Plan (FFYP) does not deal directly with the issues of rights. In spite of this, it sets as its first order of priority the alleviation of poverty through accelerated economic growth, under the guided framework of a market economy.<sup>333</sup> As such, the Plan is under no illusions as to the gravity of the tasks at hand, stating in forthright terms:

Bangladesh is poverty-ridden... The vast majority of people are still ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed and ill-educated, and the percentage of absolute poor in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world.<sup>334</sup>

By retaining a macro-level and a sectoral perspective, issues pertaining to rights emerge through a conventional institutional formula. In this way, concerns related to association, expression and empowerment feature throughout the document. Significantly, section 2.2.4 of the FFYP acknowledges a strengthened system of local governance, and participatory planning in particular, as important:

[the FFYP] departs from the concept of central planning in a significant way. In tune with the government's thrust on strengthening local government institutions at all tiers and their developmental role, a major focus of the Fifth Plan is local level participatory planning and the integration of the local level development programmes/projects with those at the national level. In this contest, necessary reorientation of the role of the Planning Commission is envisaged. Further, the Fifth Plan envisages an active coalition of the government and NGOs so that the full potential of NGOs in complementing the development efforts of the government can be tapped in a cost effective manner.

The rights of women and children to association, expression and empowerment are given attention in the FFYP. Twenty-four goals and objectives<sup>335</sup> for women and children are set out, with a further fourteen specifically for children.<sup>336</sup> Some of those that are directly related to women's rights to participation include:

- a) promote equality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;...
- c) ensure equal rights of women and men in all spheres of development, including access to information, skills, resources and opportunities;...
- d) enhance the participation of women in political, civic, economic, social and cultural life;...
- f) establish and transform state structures and practices to enhance gender equality and improve the status of women;...
- n) reduce the gap in male-female labour force participation rates;...
- p) increase women's representation in governance and administration, including in all tiers of local government;...
- u) ensure participation of women in national and international peace negotiations;...

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<sup>333</sup> FFYP (1998) Op.cit.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

Other goals and objectives set out in these sections address the establishment of an enabling environment to enhance the rights of women and children to participation. Several others cut across survival, livelihood and protection rights and these have been noted in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

The FFYP sets out 15 objectives for the mass media<sup>337</sup> that have a direct bearing on expression, mainly by enhancing the capacity of the communications media. This includes:

- d) improve the press as the fourth estate -- the conscience keeper of the people -- to play a positive role in national development.
- k) attain functional autonomy in Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television.

While utilising resource allocations is important to ensure that objectives set out in the FFYP are met, forward progress on these two objectives will require clear policy direction from the government. The next two objectives of the FFYP with respect to the media touch upon this aspect of reform:

- n) review and amend the Press & Publication Act for ensuring freedom of the press.
- o) provide and sustain freedom of the of media in general in pursuance of the constitutional guarantee for freedom of speech and communication.

In spite of these stated objectives, retention and discretionary application of the Special Powers Act of 1974 remains to contradict efforts to enhance the citizen's rights to expression and association. Similarly, follow-up to the Independent Media Commission of 1997 would be a necessary next step towards the autonomy or independence of the electronic media, in keeping with the objectives articulated in the FFYP.

Local level participatory planning is a vital and instrumental means towards establishing development activities more tailored to local needs, especially of hitherto under-served groups such as women and the hardcore poor. The assessment in this chapter recognises the central value of more inclusive mechanisms of planning, although this in itself does not exhaust the range of rights to participation, particular with regard to association and expression. National priorities and needs extend further than this. These wider concerns of participation are raised in section 2.5 of the FFYP, which stresses the importance of fostering self-help within the ambit of an enabling institutional environment. Later on, section 7.5 of the FFYP outlines the importance of participatory planning that is inclusive of all stakeholder concerns and responsive to their needs:

Alleviation of poverty and employment generation are the central objectives of the Fifth Plan. Given the market failure the public sector must play the role of a catalyst in associating the vast segment of the populace who are under-privileged and often are left out of the development process. Local level-participatory planning, therefore, will start with building a mechanism where people, at large, specially ion the vast expanse of rural areas, will provide inputs to the planning process of the country; and people at the grassroots level, through conscientization, consultation and participation, will get the scope to determine the local needs and priorities and integrate them into an overall planning exercise of the country through their elected local bodies.

## **7.6 Follow-up to UN Global Conferences, Conventions and Covenants**

### ***7.6.1 The World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995***

Bangladesh is a signatory to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action that pledges to make the eradication of poverty, full employment and the fostering of stable, safe and just societies their overriding objectives. The ten commitments to the Principles and Goals of the World Summit cover the goals of: i) a better enabling environment, ii) eradication of poverty. iii) expansion of productive employment and

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

reduction of unemployment, iv) social integration and v) implementation and follow-up. Two commitments in particular pertain to the right to participation. These are reproduced below:

□ **Commitment Four**

Promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

□ **Commitment Five**

Promoting full respect for human dignity, achieving equality and equity between women and men, and recognising and enhancing the participation and leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development.

The Programme of Action which emerged from the Copenhagen Declaration also detailed five sets of goals, of which the following pertains to enhanced participation:

**Goal IV: Social Integration**

- Responsive government and full participation in society;
- Non-discrimination, tolerance and mutual respect for and value of diversity;
- Equality and social justice;
- Responses to special social needs;
- Responses to specific social needs of refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers, documented migrants and undocumented migrants;
- Violence, crime, the problem of illicit drugs and substance abuse;
- Social integration and family responsibilities.

Bangladesh set up a 37-member national committee on 17 August 1996 to provide leadership in the formulation and implementation of a National Plan of Action within the framework of FFYP and to fulfil the commitments to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. Most of the follow-up to date has addressed the poverty eradication, education and employment aspects of the agenda (under commitments 2, 6, 9 and 10).

Following in part from WSSD, but also as a result of the autochthonous growth of a democratic polity in Bangladesh itself, reforms in the institutions and processes of governance have been initiated since 1996. Towards the twin goals of poverty alleviation and economic development, the government has undertaken capacity building initiatives in the areas of Parliament, the Election Commission and local government structures. It also plans reforms in the Judiciary, Public Administration and the setting up of an Ombudsman's Office and a Commission for Human Rights.

**7.6.2 The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995**

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, several policy-related actions have been initiated in Bangladesh.

With respect to participation, the national follow-up includes a National Plan for Implementation of the Platform of Action, with four goals. These are reproduced below:

- To make women's development an integral part of the national development programme;
- To establish women as equal partners in development with equal roles in policy and decision-making in the family, community and the nation at large;
- To remove legal, economic, cultural or political barriers that prevent the exercise of equal rights by undertaking policy reforms and strong affirmative action;



- To raise/create public awareness about women's differential needs, interests and priorities and increase commitment to bring improvement in women's position and condition.

It is perhaps with the advancement of women that the inalienability and universality of all four sets of rights (survival, livelihood, protection and participation) are most abundantly apparent, as exemplified in the goals set above. Under the Plan, 12 sectoral ministries have been charged with developing comprehensive sectoral plans for integrating women into the development process. These include the Ministries of Social Welfare, Agriculture, Education, Environment and Forestry, Fisheries and Livestock, Health and family welfare, Home Affairs, Information, Industry, Labour and Manpower, Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.

In its strategic objectives and actions, the Platform for Action and its national follow-up also addresses the role of women in power and decision-making as well as women and the media.

### ***7.6.3 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights***

Bangladesh has yet to ratify or accede to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by United Nations General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 September 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976 after 35 states had ratified or acceded to it. Upon signing, Bangladesh will report to the Human Rights Committee that is charged with reviewing performance in creating and maintaining civil and political rights in areas including the following:

- The right to self-determination;<sup>338</sup>
- Non-discrimination in the application of the Covenant and the availability of remedies to persons whose rights or freedoms have been violated;
- Equal enjoyment of civil and political rights by men and women;
- Conditions under which Bangladesh may suspend its obligations in the time of emergency;
- The right to life;
- Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- The right to liberty and security, and the conditions of arrest and trial;
- Humane conditions of detention;
- Position of aliens under the Covenant;
- Equality before courts and tribunals, the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, minimum guarantees for persons charged, review of convictions, and compensation for miscarriage of justice;
- The right to privacy and protection against attacks on the honour and the reputation of the person;
- Freedom of opinion and expression;
- Prohibition of war propaganda and advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred;
- Protection of the family and equality of rights of spouses;
- The rights of children and their protection.

Bangladesh has also yet to ratify or accede to: a) the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OPT) which is supervised by the Human Rights

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<sup>338</sup> CHR (1997)

Committee, and b) the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at the abolition of the death penalty. Both OPT and OPT2 provide recourse for individuals who claim that their civil and political rights have been violated and may call the State into account for its actions. As such, citizens in Bangladesh have no such recourse.

#### **7.6.4 International Labour Standards**

The Government of Bangladesh has ratified ILO Convention No.144 on Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) which advocates the principle of tripartism, meaning effective and fruitful dialogue in economic and social policy making among the Government, the employers and the workers. Based on this principle, the Government adopted the Labour Policy of 1980. There are three main actors at the workplace: the government, the employers and the workers. In line with this principle, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has constituted at the national level the Tripartite Consultative Council (TCC) which has become the forum for important decision making on a wide range of economic and social issues.

In the TCC, the Government is represented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, employers by the Bangladesh Employers' Federation, and the workers, by the national trade union federations. There are at present 22 national trade union federations representing about 5,694 basic unions in 1998. Trade unions, as a part of civil society, are one of the oldest institutions in the country which serve to protect the rights of workers and ensure their participation in development efforts. The Industrial Relations Ordinance of 1969 allows the formation of trade unions in the country. However, due to the very small percentage of the labour force who are affiliated to unions (about 3.2 per cent), a large majority of workers remain disorganised and unprotected.

Bangladesh has ratified ILO Convention No.87 -- *Freedom of Association & Protection of the Right to Organise* and No. 98 -- *Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining*. These instruments provide the principles to protect and ensure the basic rights of the workers and their participation in the process of national development. Bangladesh, however, has not yet ratified the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122). This "priority" Convention requires countries to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment as the overarching goal of all economic policies, and as such substantiates the right to work. Economic and social policy must be co-ordinated and kept under review.

### **7.7 Problems in addressing issues of participation and their causes**

A central problematic that faces Bangladesh as it attempts to nurture more participatory and inclusive forms of governance is the historical fragility of the state and the on-going, uneven formation of its ruling elite. Both are in the process of dramatic flux. At one level, the state is being increasingly superseded by the forces of economic, political and cultural globalisation. At another, the emergence of a Bangladeshi elite lends itself to further concentration of political and economic resources.

Though policies, development projects and programmes are becoming more inclusive in design and implementation, they are as yet rarely planned, co-ordinated or evaluated to the extent required to sustain greater participation. Without serious efforts towards the geographical redistribution of economic plant and effective administrative devolution for a more conducive enabling environment, governance will remain centralised in the hands of the elite, specifically men, while locally elected bodies remain under-resourced with their potential unrealised.

#### **7.7.1 Leadership, co-ordination and consensus-building**

Given the historical experience of exogenous and deferential traditions, realising the full range of rights to civic and political participation in Bangladesh is more than a question of reorienting institutions. Frequently in public discussions on political and civic affairs, reference is made to a need for all stakeholders in the process to 'change attitudes.' This applies especially for those who perceive extended participation for others as equivalent to an

encroachment of their own opportunities. Sharing of interests therefore becomes a key concern. This question of sharing interests has multiple permutations and many stakeholders; each permutation is illustrative of this pervasive problem. It could be a matter of: i) a ruling party MP vis-à-vis an opposition MP; ii) a parliamentarian vis-à-vis an upazila chairman; iii) an upazila parishad chairman vis-à-vis the thana nirbahi officer; iv) a male member of a union parishad vis-à-vis a woman member; v) appointed officials vis-à-vis elected representatives; vi) Bengali majorities vis-à-vis ethnic minorities and vii) public officials & representatives vis-à-vis constituents, especially supporters of opposition parties. Underscoring all of these are elite perceptions of need in relation to popular perceptions of need, and women's perceptions as against those of men. Moreover, while attitudinal and institutional changes need to be sustained, it is increasingly obvious that co-operation and co-ordination between all stakeholders in the development process is required.

### ***7.7.2 Advancement of women and gender mainstreaming***

Representational politics in Bangladesh, and civic activity, are both heavily dominated by men. Vital steps have already been taken, such as the reservation of three out of every twelve seats in local government for women. But while there are nearly 13,500 elected women members in office at the union parishad level, there are only seven directly elected women in parliament (the other thirty are selected). Redressing these chronic imbalances remains problematic, given the likelihood that many men, of all political persuasions and all social strata, will need to be convinced of the benefits of greater women's participation in political and civic life.

### ***7.7.3 Democratisation***

Resolving these differences, and reconciling widely differentiated sets of civic and political interests, is central to extending rights and ensuring responsible role-playing by key stakeholders in Bangladesh. Powerful male-oriented gender-biases in Bangladesh contrive to restrict women's rights to participation in all strata of society. Moreover, the common perception that Bangladesh is a homogeneous society (reinforced in the Constitution) detracts from the rights of the country's ethnic minorities.<sup>339</sup>

Moreover, the introduction and institutionalisation of democratic systems without temperance and acceptance of difference from the actors concerned can lead to greater chauvinism, conflict and a systemised marginalization of minority interests. While it is relatively easy to effect institutional and procedural reforms for a democratic system of governance, persistence of illiberal attitudes will result in the erosion of legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary Bangladeshi citizens.

### ***7.7.4 Decentralisation and empowerment***

The union parishad in Bangladesh is arguably the country's most enduring nation-wide institution, with over 100 years of unbroken continuity in rural areas. There are currently 4,451 union parishads spread over 64 districts and contiguous to approximately 86,000 villages. The current reform programme seeks to augment this elected tier of local government with three others, at the village, sub-district and district levels. The importance of local self-governance, based on the principal of representative, administrative and fiscal subsidiary, is now recognised around the world as a vital aspect of democratisation. The high level of interest in Bangladesh given to local elections in rural and municipal areas suggests that this is also the case in Bangladesh.

Representational issues have been thoroughly addressed in the current reforms, particularly with regard to the inclusion of women into existing and proposed tiers of local governance. Change has been less forthcoming in the devolution of administrative functions and fiscal authority. Without the political commitment to realise this important dimension of the reform process, effective decentralisation will remain an unrealised. Consensus within and

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<sup>339</sup> The Chittagong Hill Tracts is one of the most ethnically diverse pockets of indigenous cultures in the world.

between actors in parliament and civil society is therefore imperative to continue the reform programme in a sustainable manner.

### ***7.7.5 Globalisation***

With Bangladesh integrating further into the global economy, the uncertain and uneven economic, social and cultural consequences of its integration bring into the question of the nation-state as the ultimate unit of analysis. Apprehensions exist that globalisation trends will place Bangladesh in an increasingly vulnerable situation, especially in terms of human outcomes to far-reaching processes of change that occur outside the aegis of a fragile state. In this context, the readiness of the state (its legislature, executive and judiciary), and of civil society, will have a profound effect on the ability of Bangladesh to foster a meaningful democratic climate and move towards the fulfilment of human rights, including those of a civic and political nature.

## **7.8 Identified gaps**

High levels of poverty, lack of access to resources and non-literacy prevent the direct, participatory association, expression and empowerment of a majority of the population, especially women and the poor, to formal and semiformal bodies; representation of their rights and interests has therefore upto the present been 'mediated' through NGOs and other intermediary lobbies.

### ***7.8.1 Association***

Many of the problems related to association in Bangladesh are due to:

- Poor quality of public education facilities, low teaching standards, antiquated curricula and outdated modes of pedagogy combine to limit the development of critical faculties in the student body and therefore offset the prospect of constructive engagement in public affairs;
- Relatively low levels of civic awareness or intermittent interest amongst the resource-rich for the public consequences private actions; for examples, even positive initiatives through value-oriented association are out-numbered by countervailing trends towards further deterioration of the human and natural environment;
- 'Privatisation' of public life in Bangladesh, whereby individual citizens tend to become more concerned with their immediate personal or family economic interests than those that affect the community and the country as a whole; this undermines the convergence of public interest on a wide scale, especially amongst resource-rich sections of the population where 'political capital' is concentrated;
- Social and economic gender inequality leads to political inequality between women and men; significant gaps remain between the constitutional right of women to association and the realisation of this right, due in main to a public environment that is not conducive to women's presence and intra-household decision-making that resists women's articulation and visibility in public arena;
- Lack of accountability of public officials, especially in the civil administration, that diminishes the perceived efficacy of lobbies and associations; this undermines the resolve of the private citizen when confronted with public issues of concern;
- Propensity of public officials and important duty bearers to side with controlling authorities of the day rather than associate with mandates and public interests;
- Lack of effective co-ordination amongst civil society bodies exemplified by factional or territorial interests influencing the quality and results of interaction;
- Highly skewed concentration of resources in favour of a very small number of large CSOs; this has also threatened the plurality of CSOs;

While employers organisations are seeking greater labour market flexibility, in the wake of globalisation and increasing international competition, workers' organisations are becoming increasingly concerned about growing unemployment and casualisation of the labour force. A major challenge for Bangladesh will be, to develop labour and wage policies, which not only promote investment, enhance productivity and provide greater labour market flexibility, but also ensure social and labour welfare.

Gaps that remain include:

- Legislation that allows more effective tripartite participation as far as possible;
- Strengthen the tripartite machinery such as TCC to realise its full potential and effectiveness;
- Lack of a mechanism to bring the majority of unorganised workers (who are at present outside the purview of laws and social protection) and to ensure their participation in the various forums like the TCC;
- Lack of women's organisations to correspond to their increased role and participation in various tripartite bodies.

### ***7.8.2 Expression***

Problems related to expression are in part caused by:

- Lack of tolerance of different forms of expression in public arena; lack of visible or credible role models in public life who set the example for tolerant interaction in the exchange of views;
- Unresponsiveness and unaccountability of duty bearers (for example public officials and institutions) to public interests, because of an absence of or lack of recourse to appropriate mechanisms;
- Propensity of public officials and other important duty bearers to forego opportunities to express personal views and defer to the controlling authorities of the day; in this way, the range of ideas expressed in public arena is diminished;
- Concern over reproach and recrimination preventing or inhibiting the extent of articulation in public fora; the Special Powers Act of 1974 is a main obstacle to cultivating an atmosphere of openness;
- Electronic media still under state control;
- Absence of consensus on most apt terms of engagement and forms of conflict resolution, without the recourse to hartals and other deleterious activities;
- Deferential environment in public institutions that do not foster open and productive expression as a part of a participatory process.

### ***7.8.3 Empowerment***

The FFYP articulates several of the requirements necessary to ensure the empowerment of local communities. Although preliminary steps have been taken, these remain as gaps in the process towards enhancing their social and economic agency in particular, and participation in public life in general. Section 7.5.3 of the FFYP identifies the following 'steps' which as yet remain gaps in the reform process:

- c. Allocate more resources to the restructured and re-oriented local government bodies from the development budget of the central government with focus on human resource development and poverty alleviation;
- g. Institutionalise the process of conflict resolution particularly in the important fields of (i) top-down versus bottom-up processes of planning; (ii) deconcentration versus devolution of power in favour of the local government bodies; (iii) allocation of development funds through sectoral plans versus district plans ; (iv) incentive structures favouring the relatively more efficient versus inefficient groups and sectors;

and (v) promotion of growth through structural adjustment reform programme without disregarding social responsibility; the most optimistic element in the field of conflict resolution is expected to be the 'strategy of popular participation' because, if it is allowed to find its own course, it is expected to generate its own dynamics of conflict resolution through the gradual process of dialogue and consensus.

Other gaps that curtail the scope for empowerment include:

- Overt and aversive reluctance of resource-rich stakeholders to share access or relinquish control over political, natural and economic assets;
- Persisting elite/male perceptions that the poor and women cannot manage economic resources and manage public affairs;
- Antiquated legislative frameworks or policies that are framed to serve expropriatory interests rather than the interests of empowerment;
- Conventional perception that empowerment is limited to micro-level economic activities, whereas it is evident that empowerment has important social and political dimensions (especially when considering gender inequalities and the re-activation of responsive local governance);
- Externally conceived development interventions that create and prolong dependencies rather than alleviate poverty in a sustainable manner and empower the poor.

-- PART FOUR --

**TOWARDS  
THE UNDAF  
BANGLADESH**





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## TOWARDS THE UNDAF

### 8.1 Bangladesh Summary Assessment and Analysis

The Constitution of Bangladesh ensures its people the rights to survival, livelihood, protection and participation. Government priorities, sectoral action plans, as well as policies and interventions, often introduced as follow-up to the UN global conferences, address these basic rights, focussing for the most part on the issues of survival and livelihoods.

Against a unique socio-economic, cultural and historical backdrop, the country has achieved varying degrees of success in solving some complex problems. The problems are complex because, while national income is increasing, the disparity in income distribution is widening; while the trade and industrial base is broadening, unemployment and underemployment remain endemic; while food production is increasing, high incidence of malnutrition continues unabated; while enrolment rate in educational institutions, especially at the primary level, is rising rapidly, illiteracy remains a major burden; while EPI coverage is high and longevity is increasing, the infant, under-five, and maternal mortality rate is among the highest in the world; while nearly 100 per cent of the population have access to potable water, arsenic contamination of ground water adds new complications; and while sustainable human development is a national objective, ecological disaster proneness of the country undermine and restrain progress.

The inability to play catch-up in meeting the basic needs of the people is primarily the result of poverty, the impact of which is exaggerated by failures in governance and macroeconomic mismanagement induced by political and bureaucratic inefficiency, ineffectiveness, lack of responsiveness and corruption. Such dysfunctional developmental administration translates into, among other things, a deterioration of the law and order situation in the country; burgeoning illegal cross-border trade; and the curtailing, and sometimes even violation, of the people's right to protection and participation.

The situation is further compounded by crippling delays in implementation of development plans, policies and programmes; insufficient co-ordination and Co-operation among the various stakeholders in their development efforts; the lack of political commitment, and the slow progress in institutionalising the democratic process in the country. In addition, the country is hampered by the dearth in financial and institutional capacity of public and private bodies. Furthermore, while the NGO community is extremely vibrant, recent years have seen growing concern over accountability and their substitutive, rather than complementary role, in national efforts to mobilise civil society. Political life remains uncertain, with political leaders needing to set a better example for mature public discourse.

More recently, however, the restoration of democratic franchise in 1991 has set in motion a period of reform of public institutions towards greater transparency and responsiveness. Avenues of participation, especially the print media, have flourished in the country. In spite of this, the electronic media, a vital tool for education and public awareness in Bangladesh, remains state-controlled.

Endemic poverty is also perpetuated by the increase in the country's population. Although remarkable progress is being made to reduce the population growth rate to a unitary natural reproduction rate, the enormous size of the base population ensures that the positive impacts of a slower growth rate will only be felt several decades in the future.

This large population is both a cause and a result of the poverty situation in the country. It is a cause because development initiatives are not fully able to meet the rapidly growing demands of the people. Resources are either spread so thin that their effectiveness is diluted, or are concentrated in limited areas and benefit a relatively small portion of the

population. The impact of large-scale microfinance initiatives with extensive outreach has served to contain a poverty explosion rather than promote rural growth to any meaningful extent. A large population is also a result of poverty because in Bangladesh household survival depends on diverse sources of livelihood and coping strategies which rely heavily on the availability of both paid and unpaid family labour.

In spite of such population pressure, recent decades have witnessed a decline in poverty, especially in urban areas. This has, however, been accompanied by an increase in inequality of income distribution and in the severity or intensity of poverty. The combination of poverty and population, together with low productive agricultural practices, inefficient forest management, and lack of effective fisheries development, is wearing away the environmental resource base and jeopardising the physical environment, especially in urban areas which are experiencing unbridled urbanisation unsupported by necessary services and facilities.

Adding to this complex scenario are socio-cultural norms that instigate discrimination, exploitation and violence based on gender, poverty, ethnic origin, and the vulnerability of children, the elderly, the handicapped, and those afflicted with diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Such alienation from the rights to protection not only hinder the affected people from gaining access to means that can ensure their livelihood and survival, but also prevent them from participating in and contributing to the nation's development.

While the government is aware of the root causes behind the country's development problems, its strategies for solving the problems are dependent on financial constraints that influence its choice of policies for allocating scarce resources such as between socio-economic development and defence; between social sectors and economic growth through the free market; and between the more easily addressed urban-centred growth and the more challenging prospect of rural development.

All these are obstacles to the fulfilment of rights for the Bangladeshi citizen that need to be overcome to realise the full human potential available in the country.

## **8.2 UN Support to Rights-based Development**

Ever since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the United Nations has been committed to expanding the possibilities and potential of all peoples. Furthermore, the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development underscored the mutually-reinforcing nature of all rights: social, economic, civil and political. The United Nations has been a partner of Bangladesh throughout its history, following the call for self-determination that resulted in its dramatic birth as an independent nation-state.

As Bangladesh prepares to step into the new century, the centrality of rights to all dimensions of the country's development not only continues to be relevant but has never been more compelling. Some UN agencies are already adopting the rights-based approach in their programmes, while others, through this CCA, have taken cognisance of the importance of this approach in their development co-operation with Bangladesh.

The United Nations has, over the years, gained the trust of the Government and people of Bangladesh and is now well positioned to continue supporting national efforts in tackling some of the country's most pressing problems. This CCA thus delivers two overarching messages:

- Bangladesh's development achievements can be significantly enhanced by focusing on the realisation of rights to expand life opportunities for all its citizens; and
- the United Nations system in Bangladesh is already well-placed to support this challenge in the coming years.

## **8.3 Development Challenges**

The Common Country Assessment indicates that the agenda for development is already being addressed. On-going projects support the full gamut of rights, including comprehensive

interventions for building responsive governance, institutionalising human rights, improving standards of health, education and skills development, family planning, water and sanitation, development communication and advocacy, sustainable natural resource management, food security and nutrition, and disaster preparedness. In mediation and co-ordination, the United Nations has a special role to play in emerging issues such as peace-building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and supporting the co-ordination of activities in arsenic mitigation.

These challenges form the focus themes for the development of a rights-based UNDAF for Bangladesh. Through the forthcoming United Nations Development Assistance Framework, agencies, funds, and other entities of the United Nations system will be able to enhance and improve the focus of their support to Bangladesh. This will be achieved through sharpening and deepening a rights-based approach to development assistance, improving co-ordination to strengthen operational complementarities, and more effective utilisation of resources.

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# APPENDIX I

## Status Of Ratification/Accession of Principal International Human Rights Instruments: Bangladesh\*

No	Convention/Covenant	Ratification/Accession
1.	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (16 December 1966)	
2.	International Convention Against Apartheid in Sports (10 December 1985)	
3.	Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1930 (No. 29) and 1957 (No. 105)	22 June 1972
4.	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Rights to Organise Convention 1948 (No. 87)	22 June 1972
5.	Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949 (No. 98)	22 June 1972
6.	Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (No. 100)	22 June 1972
7.	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)	22 June 1972
8.	Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (28 July 1951)	
9.	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (18 December 1990)	
10.	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (7 March 1966)	11 June 1979
11.	International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (30 November 1973)	5 February 1985
12.	Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989)	3 August 1990
13.	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (18 December 1979)	6 November 1994
14.	Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (9 December 1948)	5 October 1998
15.	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (16 December 1966)	5 October 1998
16.	Convention on the Political Rights of Women (31 March 1953)	5 October 1998
17.	Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (10 December 1962)	5 October 1998
18.	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (10 December 1984)	5 October 1998

Source: Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations, New York; Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

\* As of 10 June 1999.