

Factors Affecting Development in Bangladesh: An Approach to Overcome

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〈Abstract〉

The intention of this paper is to analyze the factors affecting development in Bangladesh. It will also examine the key elements which have been affecting the development activities on poverty, education, health, gender and the environment in Bangladesh. Development is a key element for a ‘good change’ of overall socio-economic conditions of the developing countries like Bangladesh. Through a holistic development approach, it is possible to improve socio-economic conditions, education, employment, health and nutrition, the environment and the political freedom in the society. Due to the lack of people’s direct participation in development activities in Bangladesh, underprivileged people cannot improve their socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, even an increase in dynamic economic growth and higher food production has not played an effective role in reducing poverty unless there is a proper distribution system. Improvement of poor people lives in Bangladesh through development depends upon the ownership and control of resources, participation in socioeconomic, cultural and political activities, and other factors including involvement in decision making, social mobility, awareness and skill of the people in society. Participation and contribution to the society is also important for empowering the poorest of the poor.

〈Keywords〉 Poverty, Education, Health, Gender and the Environment

1. Development Problems in Bangladesh

Historical observation of Bangladeshi development activities over the past decades conclude that most of the development programs/projects could not achieve their goals and that the targeted people had not tasted the fruits of development. So before discussing development in Bangladesh, it might be worthwhile to review the factors that affected development in the past, and to take into account the reasons for the past failures of most of the development programs in Bangladesh. Since the country was independent in 1971, until today Bangladesh received billions’ of dollar as loans/grants either from the industrialized developed countries or from the international development agencies (World Bank and Asian Development Bank) for its development programs. These foreign loans/grants were given to the country for the poor people but nevertheless, were spent by the rich. Presently, Bangladesh has a multitude of problems and some of them are very crucial, such as, education, health and nutrition, poverty, housing, and the environment. According to the Asian Development Bank ‘In Bangladesh, the population

living below the national poverty line was 24.3 percent in 2016.¹ Even today, most of the poor people problems are significantly interrelated with shelter, food, clothes, basic education, and access to primary health care services.

Considering all those above mentioned realities and present situations of Bangladesh, it is necessary to take into account the benefits for the poor people in the development program. There are many development approaches that are in accordance with the geographical, cultural and socioeconomic conditions of a country or from one region to another. Most of the development planners emphasize Basic Human Needs (BHN) such as food, wearing clothes, health facilities, shelter and education for the individual country or region. So, what kind of development approach should be taken in Bangladesh and for whom? What are the real problems of the country? And what will be the main components to be mentioned in the development program?

To answer all these questions, it is necessary to reflect once more on the past. In the past, most of the country's development programs tended to bypass the real beneficiaries of the development at the grassroots level. In the past, many of the government plans didn't properly address that human resource development is the central element for the overall development activities of Bangladesh. As a result, most of the population were not able to improve their well-being nor tasted the fruits of development of the country, because poverty has not been alleviated, health and nutrition condition are still very poor and literacy rate remains low. Naming these existing problems areas would give a list of *Poverty, Education, Health, Gender and the Environment* in Bangladesh.

1.1 Political Instability and Bureaucratic Corruption

Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been ruled mainly by military government put in power by "coups d'état." In the last three decades, more than a dozen presidents and several political regimes have ruled the country. Bangladesh was under military control for a long period. The first military government came to power in 1975, another military regime controlled the country from February 1982 to December 1990. During this period, most of the donor countries including Japan stopped their official development assistance to Bangladeshi development projects except for some humanitarian projects. As a result, the country's development activities were stagnant during those years, and educational and human resource development were severely affected due to lack of both overseas financial and technical assistance.

Recently, the civil government has taken initiative on free-market economic reform that includes liberal industrial policies which will lead to a surge in direct foreign investment and technology transfer from industrialized countries. Foreign investment and technology transfer is still very low in Bangladesh due to the country's political instability and turmoil even though the economy is heavily dependent on foreign loans mainly from Japan and western countries. 'It is now widely advocated by Western official aid agencies that effective development requires

¹ ADB, 'Asian Development Bank: Basic Statistics', 2018

not only appropriate macro-economic policy, but also a healthy political environment- what is termed 'governance.'² Without public accountability, the official orthodoxy suggests that political and economic institutions will become corrupted, thereby reducing their efficiency and also failing to separate the functions of government and the functions of the market. 'The condition of a country's economy and its political life are held to depend in the end on the vigor and scrupulousness of the public ('civil society') organized and represented in many forms of association.'³ Bureaucratic corruption as with most other social process is purposive behavior which may be a deviation from an expected norm but is undertaken nevertheless with a view to attain material or other rewards.

As Myrdal points out that "the extent of corruption has a direct bearing on the stability of the South Asian governments, observing that in the downfall of many political regimes, the major and often decisive cause has been the prevalence of official misconduct among politicians, administrators and the society at large. More or less, there is corruption in every society. In Bangladesh, it is said that 'absolute power means absolute corruption' where corruption at the highest levels of government is recognized as a critical obstacle to development. Therefore, the achievement of the development goals of the poor people needs not only their participation but also their direct involvement in the country's political affairs.

2. Poverty is the Central Problem of Development

The World Bank in its publications recognizes that it is not easy to define a 'poverty line' for all countries. In fact, the perception of poverty varies, not only from one historical moment to another, but also from one culture to another. The United nations publications give this definition; 'The level of income below which it is not possible, from an economic standpoint, to guarantee an adequate diet, in nutritional terms, as well as providing non-food essentials.'⁴ Poverty is a state of economic, social and psychological deprivation occurring among people or countries lacking sufficient ownership, control or access to maintain acceptable living standards. The poverty line is a dividing line between the poor and the non-poor. The poverty line level of expenditure can be expressed either as "per capita" or as "per household" expenditure for a period (i.e. a month or a year). The most common and simplest measure of poverty, known as the Head Count Ratio (HCR), simply counts the number under the poverty line. *Poverty line* is defined by the minimum calorie requirements as recommended by a joint WHO/FAO expert group. For South Asian countries, the minimum requirement for each age group is 2122 kcal, per person, per day. However, in Bangladesh the average intake is 1805 kcal.

'Poverty is not merely a problem of low incomes; rather, it is a multi-dimensional problem that includes low access

² Sarwar K. Lateef. 'Governance and Development', World Bank, Washington D. C., 1992

³ Robert Archer. 'Markets and Good Government', NGLS, New York, 1994, p. 24

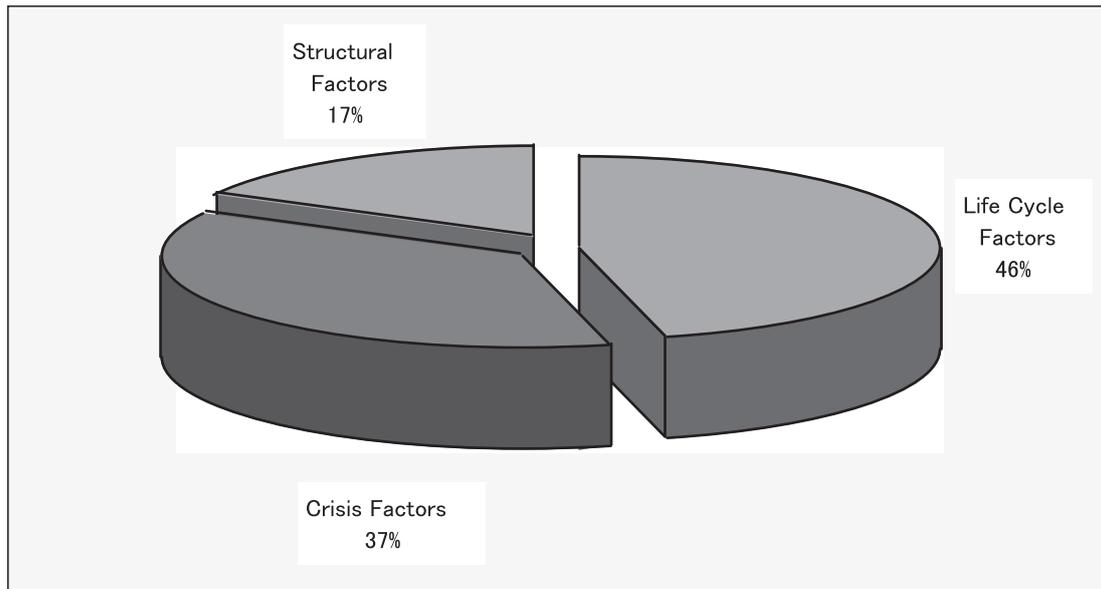
⁴ UPL, 'Rural Poverty in Bangladesh: A Report to the Like-minded Group' North-South Institute, Dhaka, 1990, p.5

to opportunities for developing human capital and to education, health, family planning, and nutrition.⁵ The effects of poverty can be seen in social indicators: high infant mortality and high premature female mortality, high morbidity, high fertility, low literacy rates, low primary school enrollments and malnutrition. Education, basic health care, and family planning services are crucial for generating and sustaining economic growth. As Sultan Khan said over the past development decades, ‘the South Asian government have taken various initiatives to create anti-poverty programs. The failure at poverty alleviation can be attributed to the following major factors: following a development paradigm alien to the region, sectoral imbalances, top-down strategies, inequitable distribution of assets, lack of rural productive infrastructure, over exploitation of natural resources.’⁶ Inadequate development of the social sector, the use of development resources as political patronage, and viewing the poor as a liability, therefore, to be shunned, ignored and disregarded. Land is a major asset and is the source of important economic, political and social power. Its distribution pattern is significantly uneven, in favor of large farmers, limiting access of the poorer groups to resources and opportunities. As a result, a major percent of the country’s population who live in rural areas do not participate meaningfully in the decision-making process.

Bangladesh has experienced over the past development decades all these major factors mentioned by Khan. Furthermore, being an agricultural country the farming land is not equitably distributed among the rural people. Due to the frequent natural disasters and river erosion in Bangladesh, land ownership has become more unequal day by day. People become landless because of slower economic growth and rapid population growth which means an annual increase of poor people in rural areas of Bangladesh. There are also some other factors such as in Pie Chart 1 where Rahman defined downward mobility in terms of three kind of factors. He stated that downward mobility is comprised of life-cycle, crisis and structural factors. In 46 percent of cases, downward mobility is occasioned by life-cycle factors, such as loss of earning members or increase in the number of dependents. The importance of life-cycle factors is almost evenly balanced by the negative impact of various crisis factors which together explain downward mobility in 37 percent of cases. Various structural factors explain the remainder 17 percent of cases. What is particularly noteworthy here is the relative importance of crisis factors, which, at 37 percent, underscore crisis and insecurity as critical dimensions of the vulnerability of rural households. All these three factors are direct causes of rural poverty in Bangladesh. Life-cycle factors mean more dependents and less earners within a family. Structural factors entail inflation and fewer opportunities for the rural people. Crisis factors include natural disasters, loss of property, and health expenditure as stated by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Study (BIDS).

⁵ World Bank, ‘Poverty Reduction in South Asia’, Washington, D. C., 1994, p. 9

⁶ S. Sultan Khan. ‘Institutional Development at the Grassroots for Poverty Alleviation’ Forum of International Development Studies, No. 3, Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University, Japan, 1995, p. 36

Pie-Chart 1 Factors Explaining Downward Household Mobility

Source: H Z Rahman, Crisis and Insecurity: The 'Other' Face of Poverty, 1995

About 84 percent of Bangladeshi live in the rural areas, where farming concentrates on growing food grains. 80 percent of the crop land is sown for rice and other cash crops. Since access to land in the Bangladesh countryside is inequitable, population increases have eroded the potential increase in rural wages.

3. Educational Problems in Bangladesh

Historically, indigenous and traditional education systems have been managed by the community in Bangladesh. The community has continuously managed and controlled the primary and secondary levels of education, even after the modern education system was introduced by the British rulers in the early 19th century. In 1973, the Bangladesh government emphasized educational expansion and improvement, and nationalized most of the country's primary schools. Nationalization of primary schools virtually dissociated schools from the community. It is now universally recognized that, for healthy growth and better management of education community, participation is an important factor.

Presently, Bangladeshi education system is facing some major educational problems such as *low enrollment*, *repetition* and *high dropout rates*. At present, 'In Bangladesh, the primary net enrollment rate is 92% and the primary completion rate is 75%.⁷ The present gross enrollment in primary-level educational institutions is almost 100 percent of school age children, and among them due to poverty a good percentage of children dropout every year.

⁷ World Bank, 'Education Policy and Data Center', Washington D.C., 2015

3.1 Low Enrollment Rates

The causes for low enrollment of children in South Asian countries are outlined below:

- 1) Parents' illiteracy/low level of education
- 2) Parents' lack of motivation for and about education
- 3) Parents'/family's poverty pressure children to work instead of attending school
- 4) Teachers' unkind/unsympathetic attitude to students
- 5) Shortage of learning materials and an unattractive school environment
- 6) Schools lack of sufficient seating room/seat benches

3.2 High Drop-out Rates

Dropout rate may be defined as a student who enrolls in a school but fails to complete the relevant level of the educational cycle. In Bangladesh, at the primary school level, this means that a dropout fails to reach the final grade (Grade V), and at the high school level the final grade is (Grade X). Dropout rates vary from one region to another, for instance there are rural-urban gaps. The following factors are very much related to child dropout rates in Bangladesh.

- 1) The child works and earns to meet family needs
- 2) The child is busy doing daily household work
- 3) The child remains occupied with the family occupation

There are other causes for dropouts which include geographical distance, inadequate physical facilities compared to the population density of a particular area, and the financial condition, low motivation and lack of interest in education of parents of school-going children. Sometimes Muslims parents do not want to send their daughters to schools where teachers are male.

3.3 Repetition

High drop-out rates have greatly increased repeaters in primary and other levels of education in South Asian countries. Repetition rates in South Asian countries vary according to the grade and geographical area. The main reasons for repetition of the primary school student in South Asian countries are as follows:

- 1) Continuous absenteeism by students
- 2) Not taking the annual examination
- 3) Failing the examination

4. How to Overcome the Existing Educational Problems

It is not a very easy to task, nor is it possible in the short term to overcome all the existing problems in the

educational system in Bangladesh. However, it may be possible to overcome the above mentioned problems and to achieve the universal primary education goals in the near future through the government's long-term initiatives for educational programmes. This paper's suggestions to reach the targets of SDGs by the year of 2030 are as follows:

- 1) The ruling government should have a strong commitment towards children from slums studying at Underprivileged Children Education Programme (UCEP) schools, giving education creating miraculous changes for those working children, by providing compulsory primary education to all out of school-age children.
- 2) The government should recruit more female teachers and improve training facilities for teachers.
- 3) The government should increase educational expenditure in the national financial budget.
- 4) Besides formal schooling, the government should also emphasize non-formal schooling.
- 5) The government should establish a Village Education Committee (VEC) in every village.

VEC would monitor and help to improve community involvement through Parents Teachers Associations (PTA). VEC will be responsible for motivating and informing illiterate parents about the overall socioeconomic benefits of education and its impact on their children's future.

4.1 Utilization of the Existing Schools

The individual country's existing primary schools could be used in two to three shifts for the children and at the same time the school could be used at night for adult education, e.g. morning and afternoon for children and at night for adults. According to this proposal, schools can increase their enrollment of school-age children as well as contribute to the community by providing adult education.

4.2 Church, Temple and Mosques Used as Feeder Schools.

In Bangladeshi context, particularly in the rural area, the religious leaders are respected by the people and play a vital role in the community. The religious leader has a respected position in the local community and knows the village's circumstances well. So the religious leader has considerable influence, allowing plans to become reality. These religious institutions are used for prayers. However, it is not always used from dawn to dusk. So the government could utilize existing facilities of the churches, temples and mosques as education centers before and after prayer times. This kind of initiative for education centers could create an educational environment in the community for school-age children.

4.3 Collaboration with NGOs

Over the past decades, the relationship between government and NGOs have evolved from one of mutual suspicion and even hostility to a situation today in which the government provides substantial funding directly to NGOs for a

range of educational projects. Although there are many factors involved in implementing a development program to a less developed country. In Bangladesh, due to economic constraints and lack of manpower government should have bilateral and multilateral collaboration with NGOs for underprivileged children's education. There are many NGOs are working for out of school children's education in South Asian countries. NGOs have nationwide social networks and have workers living at the grassroots level both in the large cities and rural areas as well.

4.4 Educational Policies and Plans

The role of education and its development is at the heart of present debates, such as sustainable human development, poverty reduction, the promotion of universal human values and tolerance, and the challenge of new information and communication technologies policies. Therefore, decision-makers are responsible for developing a clear vision and relevant implementation strategies to take up the challenge of achieving the mission they are given, especially in the context of the Education for All.

4.5 Introduction of Non-Formal Education

Non-Formal Education (NFE) is an educational approach that offers flexible timings and entry ages for children who never enrolled in, or for some reasons had dropped out from the formal education system. NFE may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions, and cater to persons of all ages. It may cover educational programmes to impact adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, work skills, and general culture. The NFE system has been playing an important role in providing quality education to the underprivileged children in a friendly environment in which students including working children can take general and vocational education.

5. Health and Nutritional Problems

Health can be considered one of the most important population-related development sectors. Changes in health conditions have a direct impact on economic growth rates, which have a direct impact on almost national development activities of a country. Improvements in overall health of the population also significantly reduce that portion of a country's resources which must be applied to provide for the health service, which additionally cannot contribute fully to the country's economic and social progress. Every country strives to improve the basic health and nutrition of its citizens. In fact, economically disadvantaged people do not have access to adequate food in their daily life. Poor nutrition is caused by widespread poverty in developing countries. Undernutrition is a severe cause of reducing energy and illness that results in reduced performance at work. The World Health Organization (WHO) cites 'approximately two-thirds of the population do not have reasonable access to any permanent form of health service, and a highly sophisticated technology serving a small minority of the population to the neglect of Primary Health Care (PHC) of the majority.' Poor education and economic situations have a direct bearing on the health system.

In the developing countries, like Bangladesh, lack of awareness of health means that people are not able to understand their health and nutrition problems or the ways in which to solve them. Nutrition is defined as a process whereby living organisms utilize foods for maintenance of life, growth and the normal functioning of organs and tissues, and the production of energy. The major communicable disease in Bangladesh are vaccine-preventable diseases (VDP), tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases. However the disease burden in Bangladesh has shifted from communicable to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases. More than half of hospital deaths are due to NCDs. Usually, a disease does not depend upon on person's wealth or poverty. But the table 1, significantly shows that in Bangladesh due to the economic disparity of rural and urban areas' the kind of major diseases are quite different. The rural poor people don't have access to safe drinking water, and due to lack of education they are not achieving the health benefit of hygiene and environmental sanitation. The disease burden in Bangladesh is further exacerbated by unsanitary living conditions of the poor economic conditions of both urban and rural areas.

Table 1 Major Health problems in Bangladesh

Common Health Problems in Bangladesh-Rural	Common Health Problems in Bangladesh-Urban
☞ Malnutrition	☞ Hypertension
☞ Worm Infestation	☞ Air Pollution
☞ Skin infections	☞ Sound Pollution
☞ Diarrhea	☞ Heart Diseases
☞ Acute Respiratory Infections (ARIs)	☞ Diabetes
☞ Anemia	☞ Cancer
☞ Tuberculosis	☞ Dengue Fever
☞ Malaria	☞ Asthma
☞ Leprosy, etc	☞ Drug Addiction
☞ Lack of Health Care Service	☞ STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases, etc)
☞ Poor Housing and Poor Sanitation	☞ HIV/AIDS
☞ kala-Azar	☞

As mentioned before, in South Asian countries, the minimum calorie requirement for each age group is 2122kcal, per person, per day as recommended by the WHO, yet, in Bangladesh the average in take is only 1805kcal. Nutritional problems in Bangladesh include chronic dietary energy deficiency, protein energy malnutrition, maternal malnutrition, low birth weight, vitamin 'A' deficiency, iron and folic acid deficiency, iodine deficiency disorders, and other micronutrient deficiencies. This situation illustrates how poor the services are in Bangladesh. Poor nutrition, often called under-nutrition can damage physical, intellectual, and mental health, leading to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to disease, impaired physical and mental development and reduced educational productivity.

5.1 Demographic and Health Characteristics Change

Bangladesh is a country of 160 million population, of which 49.4 percent are women. Population growth rate is 1.57 percent. The sex ratio of the total population is 1.024 (1024 male per 1000 females) which is higher than the global sex ratio. Bangladesh government almost achieved the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and has committed to achieving SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) by 2030, to improve maternal health, by reducing the maternal mortality ratio. ‘The MDG 4 target for Bangladesh has been set to reduce the under 5 mortality ratio from 146 per 1,000 live in 1900 to 48 per 1,000 live births in 2015.’⁸ The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has developed various policies on new-born health, including antenatal care, delivery, postnatal care, and new-born care.

Bangladesh, the eighth most populous country in the world with about 160 million people, has recently been applauded as an exceptional health performer. ‘Improvements in the survival of infants and children under 5 years of age, life expectancy, immunization coverage, and tuberculosis control in Bangladesh are part of a remarkable success story for health in the South Asian country.’⁹ In 2012, the Lancet attributed Bangladesh's success to a ‘pluralistic’ health system pulling in government and NGOs that emphasized the role of women in delivering action on family planning, immunization, oral rehydration therapy, tuberculosis, and vitamin A supplementation. The role of gender equity, including the widespread education of girls, was noted in the report.

Table 2 Population and Demographic Data (As of 2011)

Indicators	Total (2000)	Male (2000)	Female (2000)
Population	160 (123)	50. 6 (62.7)	49.4 (60.4)
Life Expectancy (Year)	69.9 (60.6)	68.9 (60.7)	71.1 (60.5)
Infant Mortality Rate per1000 live births	35 (57)	36 (58)	33 (56)
U5M Mortality Rate per 1000 Children	41 (80)	44 (58)	38 (66)
Maternal Mortality per 1000 women	-	-	1.96 (4.4)
Total Fertility Rate per 1000 Women	-	-	2.24

Table 2 shows progress in infant, child and maternal mortality has been particularly striking, with an unprecedented reversal in the number of deaths among girls compared with boys. Bangladeshi women hold the key to success as infant mortality plunges and life expectancy climbs to 71.1 years. Bangladesh received the UN award (2010) for its remarkable achievements in attaining the Millennium Development Goals particularly in reducing child mortality.

⁸ NIPORT, ‘Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2011’ Dhaka, 2011, p.121

⁹ The Lancet, ‘Bangladesh: Innovation for Universal Health Coverage’ The lancet, London, 21 November Issue, 2013

‘Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey is not expected to decrease significantly for decades. As in other countries, the population is ageing over time due to decreasing fertility rates (.3 births per woman in 1975 to 2.3 in 2011).’¹⁰ There is a little hope that Bangladeshi health demographic characteristics are moving to a good change day by day.

5.2 Disease Profile and Nutritional Problems in Bangladesh

Nutrition is defined as a process whereby living organisms utilizes foods for maintenance of life, growth and the normal functioning of organs and tissues, and the production of energy (WHO, 1973). Nutritional problems in Bangladesh include chronic dietary energy deficiency, protein energy malnutrition, maternal malnutrition, low birth weight, vitamin ‘A’ deficiency, iron and folic acid deficiency, iodine deficiency disorders, and other micronutrient deficiencies. This situation illustrates how poor the services are in Bangladesh.

The recent survey report of the Directorate General of Health Services of Bangladesh, major communicable diseases such as intestinal infection/diarrheal disease, tetanus, pneumonia and tuberculosis account for 14 percent, 11.5 percent, 9.2 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively of all deaths. It is estimated that about 80 percent of all illness in Bangladesh are directly or indirectly linked with poor hygiene, arising from inadequate uses of safe water and sanitary disposal of human waste. ‘Communicable diseases are still predominant in Bangladesh. Due to these diseases mortality and morbidity are very high. Infectious diseases like Cholera, Typhoid, Tuberculosis, Leprosy, Whooping cough, Measles, Malaria and worm infestations are primarily responsible for major causes of morbidity and mortality.’¹¹ Out of 23 million under five children, only 5.6 percent are nutritionally normal according to their weight for age. More than 80 percent of pregnant women are anemic, and 10 to 20 percent maternal deaths during delivery are attributable to maternal anemia.

Every country strives to improve the basic health and nutrition of its citizens. Health can be considered one of the most important population-related development sectors. ‘To overcome multi-dimensional inter-sectoral problems and to meet the challenges. Bangladesh Government has launched Health and Population Program in consultation with the development partners and the stakeholders to reform health care services, especially those of children, women and the poor and achieve quality of care with adequate service delivery capacity and financial sustainability.’¹² Changes in health conditions have a direct impact on population growth rates, which have a direct impact on almost all other factors related to development across the board. Improvements in overall health of the population also significantly reduce that portion of a country’s resources which must be applied to provide for the sick, who additionally cannot contribute fully to the country’s economic and social progress.

¹⁰ NIPORT, ‘National Institute of Population Research and Training’ Dhaka, 2011

¹¹ MOH, ‘Guideline for a National Health and Nutrition policy’, Dhaka, 1992, p. 9

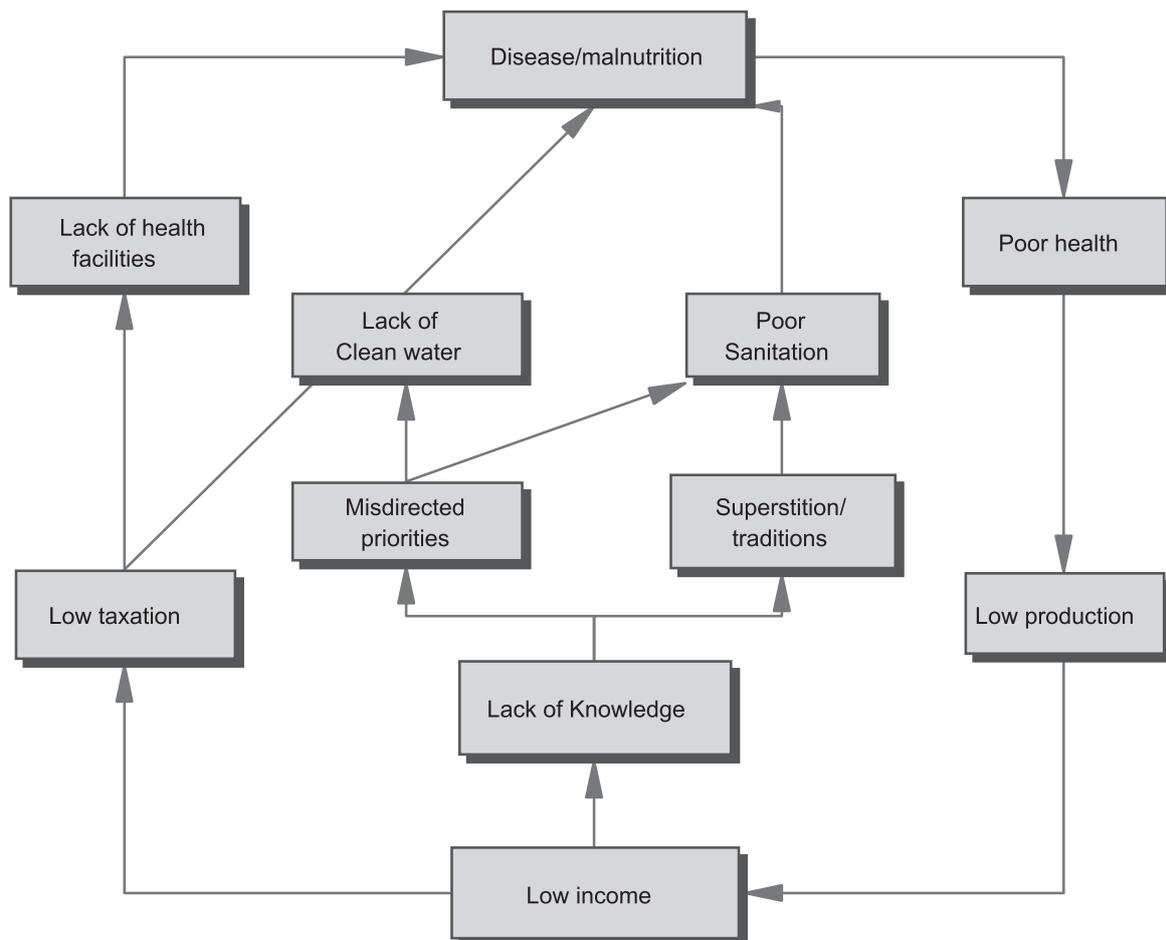
¹² MOH, ‘Health and Population Sector Program (HPSP) : A sector wide program approach’ Dhaka, 2015, p.2

Total population of Bangladesh stood at about 160 million and is steadily increasing at 1.34 percent (2011) growth rate, the population is projected to grow to 180 million by the year 2000. Due to economic constraints, lack of skilled manpower in the health profession, and weak health service delivery system, the country cannot meet the demand for health services from such a large population. Poverty and unfavorable cultural norms are largely responsible for the devastating health situation in rural Bangladesh. With poor sanitation, and widespread malnutrition these hazards inevitably take their toll. Better living conditions would certainly raise health standards, but saving lives need not be postponed till the country grows richer.

5.3 A Vicious Circle of Poverty and Disease

Some may argue that *'People are poor because they are in ill-health, others may say, people are in ill-health because they are poor.'* Here, the following illustration shows how these two factors integrated into the diagram of the vicious circle disease and poverty.

Figure 1 A Vicious Circle of Poverty and Disease



Source: Stan Burkey, People First, A guide to self-reliant, Participatory Rural Development, 1993

According to Figure 1, one problem causes another. For example, a person who is in poor health is less productive at work, which means he earns less, and due to a low income he has insufficient access to adequate food and

nutrition, health facilities and education. The poor are unable to pay taxes, so the government doesn't have enough money to pay for all the required services due to financial constraints.

6. Women in Development

The Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-2015) of the Bangladesh government, which is the national medium term development plan committed to transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 (also known as Vision 2021), considers women's engagement in political and economic activities as a cross-cutting issue with women's empowerment as one of the main drivers of transformation. The plan called for a more integrated approach and 'Women Empowerment' objectives included increasing women's participation in income generating activities; motivating women for greater participation in education and skills training programs, expanding credit facilities for women to encourage self-employment for improvement of their socioeconomic condition. 'One of the important visible changes occurring in the public arena in Bangladesh in the last two decades is the increasing participation of women in public life. The diversity and proliferation of organized activities undertaken by women needs to be viewed in the wider context of sociocultural, economic, and political scenario prevailing in the country.'¹² These massive organization of activities of the rural poor women significantly empowered them through their active participation in multifaceted social development activities.

'Proponents of WID (Women in Development) believe that women's position in society is determined by their access to education, technology, and other vital resources, and, hence, their negligible contribution to the economic progress of the community. Therefore, women's position in a society...and the economic state of the country itself can be improved by facilitating women's participation.'¹³ There is a female head of state in Bangladesh. But millions of their less fortunate sisters toiling in fields and factories face higher risks of violence and continue to earn lower wages than male. "What is unique about South Asia is that it has produced the highest number of women heads of states and heads of government. But it has not helped the situation for women. In Bangladeshi male dominant Muslim society there is a long tradition of women staying at home and men working outside the home. Even in this modern age, only a small percentage of women are involved in development as well as in economic activities. Major constraints in joining development activities are illustrated in below;

- ☞ Due to gender inequality and inferior status, women in and outside the family remain vulnerable, subordinate and dependent. Traditional socio-institutional norms, customs and beliefs deter women from participating in socioeconomic activities
- ☞ Official statistics have failed to capture women's participation in economic activities. Substantial contributions

¹³ Rahnuma Shehabuddin, 'The Impact of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh', Grameen Bank, Dhaka, 1992, p. 23

made by women especially in agriculture, livestock, poultry and fisheries have remained unrecognized due to which women have remained at the periphery of economic development.

- ☞ It is difficult for women not only to get paid job but also to get equal wages for equal work. Majority of the female labors are involved in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs with low returns and wages.
- ☞ Female literacy is half that of male which limits their opportunity for training and skill development.
- ☞ Due to an inadequate data base, it is difficult to design multi-sectoral or multi- ministerial approach to programs for mainstreaming women.
- ☞ There is a lack of political commitment regarding women in development leading towards marginal and gender neutral approach in economic policies and development programs of the government.

6.1 How to Overcome the Problems of Women in Development

The following aspects can help overcoming existing problems of empowering women in Bangladesh:

1. To increase public initiatives to educate more women through creating opportunities for more scholarship and establishment of more educational institutes for girls students.
2. Special and large scale training programs for female of different level of educational background should be initiated by both GO-NGOs to improve their skill and knowledge for increasing their production capability and also extend their marketing network, so that they can link them with the wide market.
3. Awareness building of men about women empowerment through education, motivation, training and extension work by GO-NGOs on their social and civil rights and responsibilities.
4. Either at Village or sub-district level a strong and well organized organizations should be initiated by government, from where women will get support for their overall development activities.
5. Existing misinterpretations of religious law on women development which may be harmful for women, should be reviewed properly by learned religious leaders, and those should be circulated for motivating both men and women.
6. Women should be involved in politics at different levels, and at the same time elected women representatives

should be given more and specific responsibilities which will enable them to participate in all development activities.

7. Rural women, are mostly involved in farm activities with or without wages, but there should be wide employment opportunities for women at non-farm sectors and they must be given equal opportunities and equal wage rates like men.
8. To ensure women's participation either as planner, or implementer or as beneficiaries in poverty alleviation or women development program, or in any other development programs through GO-NGOs.
9. Monitoring of programs implemented for women's development should be ensured by government authority at different levels, so, that impact of programs on women's socio-economic development towards their empowerment should be properly reviewed.

7. Environmental Priority in Development

Geographically, Bangladesh lies in the world's largest delta formed by three great rivers: the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Megna. The delta nation has frequent natural disasters such as drought, flood, water-logging, cyclone and tidal surge, tornado, thunderstorm, river/coastal erosion, landslides, salinity intrusion, hailstorm, extreme weather events etc. Drought in the winter and river erosion in the rainy season, tremendous floods, in the monsoon, deadly cyclones and tornadoes almost every year. These natural disasters are common occurrences which causes heavy damages and obstacles to the country's development. As a result, the development target could not be reached.

Each year, about 26,000 sq. km. or 18 percent of the country is flooded. During severe floods, the affected area may exceed 52,000 sq. km. or 36 percent of the country and nearly 60 percent of the net cultivable area. In an average year, 775 billion cubic meter of water flows from the Himalayan mountainous territory into the Bay of Bengal water flows across along the southern coast of Bangladesh from June to September through the three main rivers. This normal cycle of floods cause severe damage to infrastructural communication systems, such as, roads and highways, bridges, and culverts almost in every year.

Some factors which causes great damage to development programs in Bangladesh were mentioned earlier in this paper. Environmental imbalance is one of the factors which affected and is still affecting development activities in Bangladesh. Which should be given priority, development or environment, such a dilemma is very difficult for a developing country like Bangladesh. A poor country cannot give first priority to the environment in their development policies. As a low income country, first priority naturally goes to the Basic Human Needs (BHN),

second choice, should be addressed to industrialization, to improve the country's economic and employment conditions and it's quite natural that priority to the environment ranks in third position.

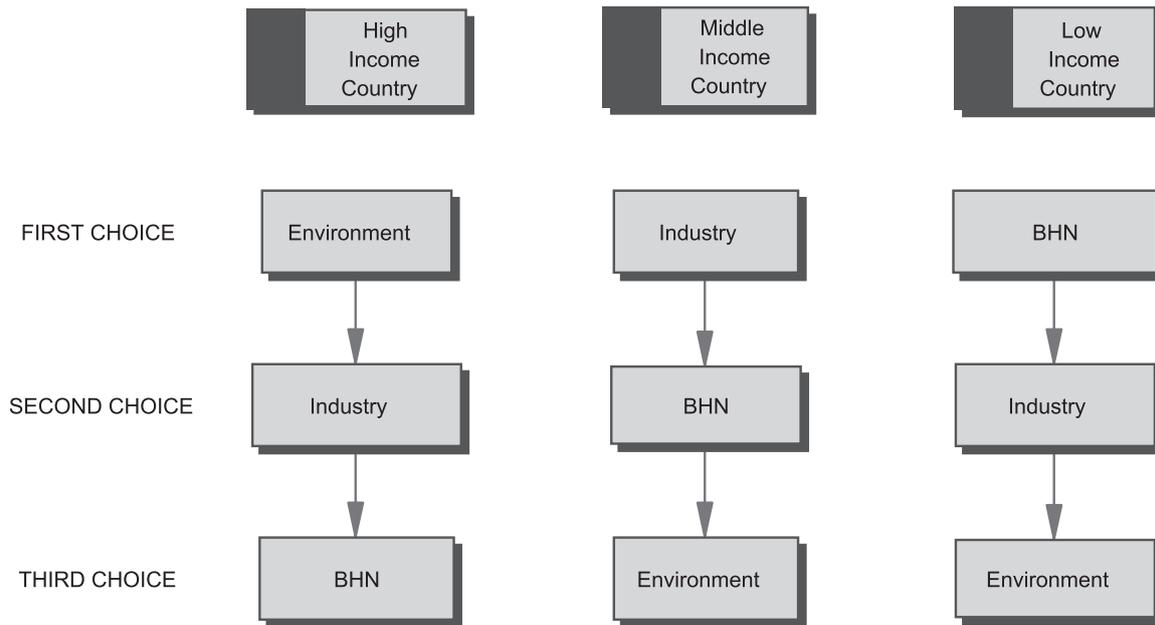
In Bangladesh, 'the government's encouragement to cultivate shrimp for export has resulted in unplanned shrimp cultivation in the coastal areas of Khulna district, and this is threatening crop production, availability of fish and ecological balance due to the preservation of saline water in the arable lands by the shrimp cultivators.'¹⁴ No doubt there is economic growth and some people are being benefited by exporting shrimp. But the rest of the farmers and fishermen of that area are affected from the environmental damage. Needless to say, for a poor country economic growth is very essential, and it is also necessary to adopt a strong policy which improves economic growth and reduces environmental damage for its sustainable development.

In the last two decades, many environmental policies on sustainable development have been formulated by the government including the National Environmental Policy of 1992. Due to lack of 'Institutional capacity for implementing the various action measures identified for fulfilling the primary functions of environmental planning, monitoring and enforcement remains weak.'¹⁵ Development professionals are thinking of setting up a model of the relationships between sustainable development and the environment. The UN and the World Bank have been encouraging their member countries to improve their environmental condition. One single approach is not enough to protect the environment for all countries, since each individual country has its own specific socioeconomic, cultural, political and geographical conditions. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the ecological balance for the sustainable development. Because, if the environment is ignored, economic growth will become a threat to the developing countries.

Figure 2, Shows that environment is pre-conditional for sustainable development, but in the practical sense it might be a very difficult task for the developing countries like Bangladesh to emphasize the environment as priority number one. The country still has to address and to improve the BHN of its population. Among the Asian countries, the environmental priorities in development has been taken by the individual government according to respective country's socioeconomic background. The situations of high income Eastern Asian countries (e.g. Japan) which have a leading edge in technology and are economically sound, are special to them. Therefore, so when Japan, for example, initiates a development project it can give more emphasis on environmental issues or sustainable development. The middle income and emerging in a South East Asian country (e.g. Malaysia) is still in the development highway, so they still choose industrialization rather than environmental issues. But low income countries in South Asia (e.g. Bangladesh) still need much more socioeconomic development. Unfortunately, the low

¹⁴ CIRDAP, 'Environmental and Ecological Aspects of Poverty and Implications for Sustainable Development in Bangladesh', Dhaka, 1994, p. 90

¹⁵ ADB, 'Country Environmental Analysis Bangladesh' 2004, p.42

Figure 2 Environmental Priorities in Development

income countries cannot put the first priority on environmental issues. Considering these three levels of incomes, it can be concluded that Japan gives first priority to the environment, Malaysia to industry, and Bangladesh to BHN.

It is a common belief that development simply means the process of economic growth of a country. This belief is well accepted, because, to improve the overall socioeconomic condition of a region or country, the economic growth is the main criterion. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the ecological balance for the sustainable development. 'Economic growth in postwar Japanese society has been accompanied by much environmental destruction. It can be said that Japan has the worst record of environmental damage among the advanced countries.'¹⁶ Japan has, with that, realized miraculous economic development during the 1960s. But a lack of proper safety initiative on environmental issues, the country later has been facing many environmental hazards, many lives were lost because of environmental damage. Such as air and water pollution in Mie Prefecture, Minamata disease due to waste water contaminated by methyl mercury in Niigata and Kumamoto Prefecture, and Itai-itai disease in Toyoma Prefecture. Japan is among the worst offenders concerning environmental disasters related to economic growth (Funabashi:1992). Because, usually the development management based on a long-term strategic plan, if the environment is ignored, then not only the economic growth, also for the human live it will become a great threat in the long-run for a region or country.

However, the development professionals are thinking of setting up a model of the relationships between sustainable development and the environment. The United Nations (UN) and the World Bank have been encouraging their

¹⁶ . Harutoshi Funabashi 'Environmental Problems in Postwar Japanese Society'(International Journal of Japanese Sociology) Number1, October 1992, p.18

member countries to improve their environmental condition. One single approach is not enough to protect the environment for all countries, since each individual country has its own specific socioeconomic, cultural, political and geographical conditions.

8. Recommendation and Concluding Remarks

Development programs have succeeded through a holistic approach when beneficiaries' were given first priority in their development activities. Due to the lack skills and financial limitation the poor people cannot carry solve their existing problems. The country must cover all its poor people and make benefit, while at the same time achieving a development objective. So the country and academic institutions could work together in drawing on their past experiences in development activities, and figure out what they do collectively or individually in the future to improve development strategies. Their effective involvements would be an alternative or new path to improve or good change of the poor people socioeconomic condition through participatory development. It is recommended that the government become involved in social infrastructure and corporate can play a vital role to providing fund and business skills. The poor people have indigenous knowledge and some kind of business skills, so the corporate side can act as a partner with them to turn the poor into social entrepreneurs. Following the above discussions, it may be concluded that the innovative development approach can play an important role in self-employment to make an impact on poverty reduction and empowering the poor at the grassroots level in developing countries like Bangladesh.

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