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# The Impact of Rural Development Program on Poverty Alleviation: A Case of Bangladesh

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# The Impact of Rural Development Program on Poverty Alleviation: A Case of Bangladesh

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**Abstract-** Poverty alleviation through rural development programs (RDP) has significant implication for Bangladesh the world's most densely populated country having 71 percent rural inhabitants. Considering the significance, the study examined various rural challenges and poverty reduction strategies of RDP underpinned by a quantitative research technique. 192 poor households were randomly selected from four study villages under Chittagong District. The result indicates that the RDP, housing and agriculture, health and education, significantly improved the poverty situation among poor people through economic capabilities, human capabilities, protective capabilities, and political capabilities of sample households. This finding implies that improvement in rural areas can be safety net in lacking job opportunities in urban areas due to economic meltdown or recession. Therefore, result brings out implication for government and policy makers to reduce excessive population influxes of migrant workers and farmers from rural to urban cities through well-designed rural development program.

**Keywords:** rural development; poverty alleviation; bangladesh.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a densely populated country of 160 millions of population. Bangladesh, with its 40% people living below poverty line and 18% living in absolute poverty, is suffering from acute rural-urban economic disparity along with substantial poverty, inequality, deprivation, illiteracy, lack of proper health and sanitation facilities (BBS, 2014). The economy of the country is basically an agrarian one with vast majority of population living in rural areas. The agriculture sector is unable to generate scope for further employment resulting in entry of rural population towards urban areas. Rural areas are characterized by isolation, lack or inadequate provision of basic amenities, inadequate health and social services, stagnant agriculture and scanty industries. Underemployment and unemployment are ordinary phenomenon particularly in rural Bangladesh. The vast human resources are remained unemployed due to lack of education, proper training and concentrated efforts to help grow the rural economy. As a result, the country is in the problem of uneven distribution of income that

causes serious hindrances in balanced geographical growth as well as growth of GDP (Mondal, 2000).

According to Ahmad & Hossain (1983), rural development is one of the most important factors for economic growth in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is primarily an agro-based country. Agriculture contributes nearly one-fifth of the gross domestic product in Bangladesh. In order to increase the growth of agriculture, the Government has planned several programs pertaining to Rural Development in Bangladesh. Rural development aims at improving livelihoods of rural people in an equitable and sustainable manner, both socially and environmentally, through better access to natural, physical, human, technological assets and social capital and services, and control over financial or economic and political productive capital that enable them to improve their livelihoods on a sustainable and equitable fashion. The basic objectives of Rural Development Programs have been alleviation of poverty and unemployment through creation and development of basic social and economic infrastructure, provision of training to rural unemployed youth and providing employment to marginal Farmers/Laborers to discourage seasonal and permanent migration to urban areas (Taylor, Dyer, & Yunez-Naude, 2005).

The rural economy is an integral part of the overall economy of Bangladesh. As majority of the poor reside in the rural areas, the prime goal of rural development is to improve the quality of life of the rural people by alleviating poverty through the instrument of self-employment and wage employment programs, by providing community infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, electricity, road connectivity, health facilities, rural housing and education and promoting decentralization of powers to strengthen the economy of Bangladesh (Sen, 2003).

There are a number of different approaches to understanding the meaning and relationship of rural development and poverty reduction. Rural development as a concept has following dimensions: poverty alleviation, agricultural development, ruralization of development, and peasantization of development (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2000). Rural development may be defined as the development of regions excluding the urban areas such as the towns and cities. Smaller settlements such as villages, farmsteads, and market towns are normally included within the concept of rural,

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while most of the land area is expected to be used as agricultural land, forest or in its natural state. Therefore, the promotion of rural development in a sustainable way has the potential of increasing employment opportunities in rural areas, reducing income disparities, stemming pre-mature rural-urban migration, and ultimately reducing poverty at its very source (Anriquez and Stamoulis, 2007). Hemson, Meyer & Maphunye (2000), explains rural development as follows: "Rural development is multi-faceted in nature. It unfolds into a wide array of different and sometimes interconnected practices. Among them are landscape management, the conservation of new nature values, agro-tourism, organic farming and the production of high quality and region-specific products." Poverty reduction and alleviation aims at reducing the negative impact of poverty on the lives of poor people, but in a more sustained and permanent way including using poverty relief programs. It includes the state's social grant programs which could reduce the impact of poverty for many people. It should be noted that poverty reduction programs tend to have longer term goals. Thus the state's social policies both provide immediate relief for poor people, but have also been found to provide a developmental stimulus by empowering people to look for jobs who live in households in which members receive social grants, or start their own small businesses. Basically, poverty reduction refers to strategies and policies that reduce the number or percentage of people living in poverty or the severity of the impact of poverty on the lives of such people. Almost all the developing countries in the world facing the challenge of providing adequate employment and food entitlements to their present population (ILO, 2005). Poverty is multi-faceted (Khan & Ali, 2014). It can be linked with hunger, unemployment, exploitation, and lack of access to clean water, sanitation, health-care or schools. It can also be vulnerability to crisis and homelessness (Woolard, 2002).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of rural development is all encompassing multidimensional facets of rural life. Conceptually rural development is inter-disciplinary relating to economics, political, public health, business management, co-operative, credits, community operation and other fields. The World Bank defines rural development as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people. It involves extending benefits of development to the groups who seek a livelihood in the rural areas (RDS, 1999). Rural development refers to improvement in the well being of the people living in rural societies. Rural development encompasses poverty reduction as it improves the livelihood of the people who lack capabilities to meet their basic needs. Since three-

quarters of the population and the poor live in rural areas, "impoverished (poverty)" indicates conditions resulting from income poverty. Improvement of well being of the bottom 50 percent of the rural people would contribute substantially to poverty reduction in the country (IBBL, 2008). The term rural development means raising the productivity and the real income of families their levels of livelihood by increasing employment opportunities in farm and non-farm activities, thereby facilitating their levels of physical, social and cultural well being (Veal, 2005).

Rural development deals with multi-dimensional issues, such as infrastructure, health care and hygiene, education, environment and governance as well as local income generation. Frequently, the concept of rural development is used confusedly with "agricultural development" or "regional development", however these concepts differ as "agricultural development" mainly aims at increasing agricultural products such as crops, livestock, fish and etc. Human being, land and capital are simply regarded as production of goods and means. On the other hand, "Rural Development" mainly targets on people and institutions. Rural development includes agricultural development activities; however it is one of the means of economic revival for active farmers and targeted rural villages. "Regional" has a wide meaning to describe "area" (i.e. a certain area in country) or "region" (i.e. continent of countries) (Fedderke et al, 2006).

Rural development aims to improve sustainable livelihoods by implementing comprehensive development programs for rural areas where a majority of people live in poor conditions. Rural development can also contribute to reduce poverty in urban areas by reducing excessive population influxes from rural areas. The promotion of rural development requires effective external inputs to generate sufficient results and is capable of bringing further improvements. Development issues must therefore be comprehensively and cross-sectional understood for this to be realized. Maximum use of human and material resources in rural areas is also necessary to alleviate poverty. It is also important to safeguard the environment through resource management and natural disaster prevention. Moreover, it is essential that governments assist a variety of activities through a cross-sectional approach (Fedderke, Perkins & Luiz, 2006).

Rural development issues are often equated with poverty reduction. Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept. Traditionally poverty is viewed as pronounced deprivation in well-being. "To be poor is to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate and not schooled" (World Bank, 2001). Poverty is usually measured with reference to a threshold level of income or expenditure (called poverty line) needed to meet food and non-food basic needs for a person to maintain a healthy and productive life. These

measures are called “income poverty”. Social scientists and policy makers now agree that low levels of education and health are of concern in their own right. The deprivation in education and healthcare merit special attention when accompany material deprivation (NEDA-WB, 2003).

Rural development refers to the improvement in the well being of the rural people. Rural development would encompass poverty reduction, if the livelihood improvement brings into its fold people who lack capabilities to meet the basic needs. Since 75% of the total population in Bangladesh still lives in rural spaces, an extensive rural development that uplifts the well being of rural people would contribute substantially to alleviate poverty in the country. In order to alleviate poverty, rural development requires an increase of consumers, industrial development, and the improvement of infrastructure, and inhabitant's productivity through expansion, education, health care services (Glaeser & Kohlhase, 2003).

Balat & Porto (2005), defines rural development as the provision of social and physical infrastructure, the provision of financial services in non urban areas, non-farm and small-medium enterprises activities in rural communities and market towns that are more closely linked to the rural economy than they are to the economies of the larger urban cities, as well as the development of traditional rural sectors, such as agriculture and natural resource management. The key elements that will facilitate the realization of rural development include social infrastructure, physical infrastructure, and financial services. The dynamics of these three elements will pave the way to uplift the living conditions of rural households. Observing events and issues related to such dynamics can facilitate the measurement of the constructs of rural development.

According to World Bank (2001), the rural development strategies are: (i) Deepen and implement key structural reforms to help ensure a sustained, higher, and broad-based growth of agriculture, by removing policy and institutional distortions and making the sector more efficient and internationally more competitive; (ii) Facilitate increased and prioritized strategic public and private investments; (iii) Improve natural resource management; and (iv) Strengthen institutional framework, capacity and performance.

Glaeser & Kohlhase (2003), focused on peri-urban centers; they reported an efficient road system would enable an estimated 90% reduction in the cost of transporting goods. Lowering transportation costs has such implications as: people are no longer tied to natural resources, consumer-related natural advantages become more important, population is increasingly centralized in a few metropolitan regions, people are increasingly decentralized within those regions, high-density housing and public transportation become increasingly irrelevant, location of manufacturing firms is

not driven by proximity to customers or suppliers, and provision of education.

#### a) *Rural Development and Poverty Reduction*

Rural development process reveals a remarkable policy shift from community development approach to poverty alleviation. Policy makers realized that development planning with local participation is meaningless without reference to the empowerment of the rural poor as possible way out to alleviate poverty (Khan & Ali, 2014). A large portion of the poor lives in rural areas. Rural development must constitute a major part of a development strategy if a large segment of those in greater need are to benefit. The importance of rural development on poverty alleviation in a developing country like Bangladesh is increasingly realized by the policy communities. Development of basic infrastructure is essential to progress towards social development (Hemson et al, 2004). Development of such infrastructure can facilitate rural development and, hence poverty alleviation. Rural development is closely connected with the empowerment of rural communities, which has to include the encouragement of civil society and public participation in decision making in a democratic culture. The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2005) assessed the dynamics between accessibility and poverty. Isolation of poor communities leads to poor access to basic goods like health and education, common risk factors that result initially in deprivation and eventually in poverty. Rural development is seen as a means of facilitating access to such goods. Development of capacity building and rural infrastructure results in lower transportation costs, access to farm inputs, and access to markets. Improved accessibility will minimize poverty. According to Balat and Porto (2005), policies that basically expand opportunities for households to earn higher incomes help in poverty alleviation. To secure higher levels of well being, complementary policies like provision of infrastructure credit and extension services are necessary. Rural development results from the improvement of the economic, social, and environmental conditions of the community. These three aspects complement each other and lead towards the overall improvement of individual and community well being.

According to *OECD/DAC Guidelines on Poverty Reduction*, poverty is described as the lack of the following five capabilities.

- i. Economic capabilities: to earn an income, to consume, and to have assets
- ii. Human capabilities: to have access to health care, education, sufficient nutrition, clean water, and hygienic living conditions
- iii. Political capabilities: human rights, to participate in political and policymaking process, and to be able to have an influence on decision-making.



- iv. Socio-cultural capabilities: to participate as a valued member of the community with social status and dignity
- v. Protective capabilities: to prevent vulnerability from food insecurity, illness, crime, war, and conflict.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to investigate the impact of rural development on poverty alleviation. In order to achieve the main objective, following specific objectives have been identified:

- i. To examine various dimensions of rural development in terms of their impact on poverty alleviation.
- ii. To assess the impact of rural development programs on poverty alleviation and social empowerment.
- iii. To give some recommendations to make rural development programs more effective to alleviate poverty from rural Bangladesh.

### IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study adapted a quantitative approach utilizing survey methodology with associational and field-based analysis. The data collection exercises were aimed at gathering information about the impact of rural development programs on poverty alleviation and social empowerment. The study examined the relationship between poverty alleviation and social empowerment, as the dependent variable, and rural development evaluation dimensions, as the independent variables.

The target population for this study was the poor households of Chittagong District (south) in Bangladesh. The study was conducted in four villages of four police stations of Chittagong District. Survey questionnaires were distributed among purposively selected poor households through a group of 4-5 members. 246 questionnaires were distributed in the sample areas and a total of 212 completed questionnaires were returned. After removing the ones with missing data, 192 usable questionnaires were analyzed- a 78 percent response rate.

The constructed six dimensions of rural development evaluation are represented by 24 items. Four items assess housing facilities, four items assess literacy and education, five items assess healthcare support, four items assess employment opportunity, three items assess transportation facility, and four items assess agricultural support. Poverty alleviation and social empowerment is represented by a constructed six-item scale that measures poverty alleviation and social empowerment. All items are measured on a 5-point Likert-scale, with "1" indicates the strongly disagree, "5" indicates the strongly agree. Babakus and Mangold (1992) suggested that five-point Likert would reduce the "frustration level" of respondents and

increase response rate and quality. Six demographic items namely gender, age, marital status, and occupation of poor household respondents were included in the survey to facilitate the interpretation of the results.

Nardi (2003) defines unit of analysis as 'the element about which you are observing and collecting data, such as a person responding to a questionnaire, a school, an editorial or local business'. The study variables were measured at the individual level as this unit of analysis was one integral to the research design. Each individual and each subject investigated were treated as an individual source (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Three kinds of statistical analysis were conducted for this study using SPSS 19.0. First, factor analysis was conducted to the construct validity, fit and appropriateness of the instrument (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Second, internal reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of all scales (Cronbach & Furby, 1970). Third and finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between predictor and criterion variables as highlighted in the research framework to test the research hypotheses. The study examined the following hypotheses:

*H1:* The dimensions of rural development (Housing and agriculture, health, education, training and development, and communication) have a significant impact on poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

*H1a:* The rural- housing and agriculture is positively related to poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

*H1b:* The rural- health dimension is positively related to poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

*H1c:* The rural-education is positively related to poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

*H1d:* The rural-training and development is positively related to poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

*H1e:* The rural-communication is positively related to poverty alleviation and social empowerment.

### V. ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### a) Demographic Profile of Respondents

Out of 192 completed questionnaires 87.5 percent are male and 90.6 percent are married. 34.4 percent respondents were aged between 36 and 45 years old and 27 percent were aged between 46 and 55 years old, and 72.6 percent respondents had three or more children. 30 percent and 26.5 percent respondent were qualified with higher secondary and secondary level respectively. Only 6 percent respondents were uneducated. Out of 192 poor households, 60 from village one, 40 from village two, 50 from village three, and 42 from village four. In terms of occupation, 42.3 percent respondents were involved with agricultural

sector, 32 percent were from small business. Only 6.5 percent respondents were self employed.

b) Factor Analysis

To conduct the factor analysis to verify the basic structure (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010) as well as dimensionality (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010) of variables of the study principal component factor analysis using the Varimax rotation approach was applied. The factors of independent variables namely housing & agriculture, health, education, training and communication were shown in table two. A five factor solution emerged explaining 66 percent of the total variance in five

dimensions of rural development. The KMO value of sampling adequacy is 0.729 indicating sufficient inter-correlations with the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chisquare=3308.475, P<0.01). The findings of the analysis of dependent variable (poverty alleviation and social empowerment) are shown in table three. All the items were loaded into one factor explaining a total variance of almost 65 percent. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is 0.612 indicating a good inter-correlations with a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi square=2634.475, p<0.01).

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.729
Approx. Chi-Square		3308.475***
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	158
	Sig.	.000

\*\*\* p<0.01

Table 2 : Component Matrix

Items	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Now agriculture office ensures distribution of high quality seeds in our village.	.79				
2. Distribution of fertilizer bow becomes smooth.	.77				
3. Most of the time my family members have the supply of electricity.	.76				
4. The agricultural production has been increased in our village	.75				
5. Housing has become more comfortable in our country.	.72				
6. There is a recent development in the farming tools and machines.	.70				
7. Most of my family members use sanitary latrine.	.68				
8. Most of my family members have access to pure drinking water from tube-well piped line etc.	.67				
9. Number of elderly people has increased in our village.		.76			
10. Infant mortality rate has been decreased for the last five years in our village.		.74			
11. Costs of health care facilities are reasonable.		.72			
12. Health care centers are equipped with necessary machines.		.62			
13. People are aware about healthcare services in our village.		.59			
14. Now more of our children can read and write.			.74		
15. The number of educated people has increased in our village.			.72		
16. Rate of school attendance of our children has increased.			.66		
17. Access to school attendance of our children has increased.			.63		
18. Training opportunities are available for agricultural farmers.				.84	
19. Income generating training is also available in our village.				.79	
20. Livelihood opportunities have been increased in our village.				.76	
21. Income generating opportunities have been increased in our village.				.71	
22. Now our travel time from village to town is decreased.					.64
23. Travel cost is reasonable.					.62
24. There are available public transports in the village.					.61

The five factors derived are housing & agriculture, health, education, Training and employment, and communication. The content validity ratio of all items in the scale was more than 0.50. This fully confirms the report of Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2005) regarding the appropriateness of factor

analysis. Finally, the instrument contained 24 items, excluding six dependent variables. The various factors and the corresponding statements, along with their reliability alpha have been incorporated into.

Table 3 : Factor Loading for Poverty Alleviation and Social Empowerment

Items	Factor Poverty Alleviation and Social Empowerment
Poverty and Empowerment 1	0.81
Poverty and Empowerment 2	0.83
Poverty and Empowerment 3	0.87
Poverty and Empowerment 4	0.91
Poverty and Empowerment 5	0.74
Poverty and Empowerment 6	0.82
Percentage of Variance	64.87
KMO	0.612
Approximate $X^2$	2634.542***

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ c) *Reliability Analysis*

Reliability analysis is the second important criterion after factor analysis that ensures goodness of measures. Reliability analysis using Cronback's alpha was conducted to determine the reliability of the scales as shown in table 4. The reliability coefficients for variables of Independent variables- housing, 0.90;

literacy and education, 0.88; healthcare support, 0.83; employment, 0.81, transportation, 0.79; agriculture, 0.84; and poverty alleviation and social empowerment, 0.89, respectively, exceed Nunnally's (1978) recommended threshold of 0.70. Hence, the instruments used in the study were both reliable as well as valid (as shown by the factor analysis results).

Table 4 : Reliability Statistics

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Housing	4	0.90
Literacy and Education	4	0.88
Healthcare Support	5	0.83
Employment Opportunity	4	0.81
Transportation Facility	3	0.79
Agricultural Support	4	0.84
Poverty Alleviation and Social Empowerment	6	0.89

d) *Regression Analysis*

Table 5 : Regression for Poverty Alleviation and Social Empowerment

Measuring Scales	Standardized Coefficients	Significant (p)
Housing & Agriculture	0.29	0.01
Health	0.23	0.03
Education	0.14	0.06
Training and Employment	0.13	0.43
Communication	0.11	0.13
F-Value		17.23
R <sup>2</sup>		0.324
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.221

The results of the regression analysis, as presented in table 5, showed that there is a significant positive relationship between poverty alleviation and

social empowerment, and dimensions of rural development. The resultant output has an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.324 ( $p=0.01$ ) and yielded three significant dimensions namely housing & agriculture, health, and education which concurred with the findings by Mashreque & Nasrullah (2001). This implies that the dimensions "Agriculture & housing", "Health", "Education" contributed significantly. These three dimensions accounted for  $\{(0.29+0.23+0.14)^2=0.43\}$  43.0 percent of the variance of dependent variable. The other two dimensions training and development, communication did not contribute significantly towards explaining the variance in the overall rating of poverty alleviation and social empowerment. These two dimensions accounted for about only 6 (5.7) percent variance of poverty alleviation and social empowerment. Hence, the hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c are accepted, and hypotheses H1d and H1e are not accepted.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that rural development programs like housing and agriculture, health, and education bring significant results in terms of increasing income and social empowerment which is similar to the study of Ahmed & Hossain (1983). The study suggests that expenditure on rural development programs increases income and socio-economic capacity of rural poor households in Bangladesh. The relationship between rural development dimensions: housing and agriculture, health, education, training, and communication imply that rural poor households experienced positive impacts. This means that rural development programs succeeded to bring a positive impact on the alleviation of poverty and development of socio-economic capacity of rural poor households. The positive impact is consistent with respondents' perception expressed during the survey. The results also indicate that housing and agriculture, health and education have a positive significant relationship with poverty alleviation and social empowerment. The other two dimensions namely training and communication have also a positive but not significant relationship with dependent variable. Housing and agriculture is the best predictor of rural development program dimensions.

There is still a dearth of research carried out on measuring the impact of rural development programs on poverty alleviation. Future research might usefully be done on how to make training effective and communication in terms of contribution to alleviate poverty and develop socio economic condition of rural poor of Bangladesh. In order to make the training effective training needs analysis may be conducted to make the training programs effective. So, the country, policy makers, concerned ministry should take necessary steps for proper rural development to alleviate poverty and improve income and quality of life of poor people.

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