

***SUMMARY OF TIDE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEMINARS ON
(1) FINANCING THE RURAL POOR AND (2) SOCIO
ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF DEVELOPING FISHERIES
RESOURCES IN BANGLADESH***

M. Lutfor Rahman *

The inaugural session was designed to cover two seminars held during 25-26 June, 1986. While Dr. M. Ekramul Ahsan, Chairman of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council was the special Guest, Professor A.K.M. Aminul Haque, Vice-Chancellor, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) delivered his inaugural address. Both of them emphasized the importance of the seminar topics in the contest of national development. The inaugural session was presided over by Mr. Md. Akramuz Zaman, Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, and Chairman, Bureau of Socioeconomic Research and Training, BAU. Dr. M. Lutfor Rahman, Professor and Head, Department of Agricultural Finance, BAU, was the overall coordinator of the two seminars.

Both the seminars were well attended by the BAU Faculty members, NGO Officials, researchers, and representatives of various organizations namely the Ford Foundation, Winrock International, Bangladesh Bank, Grameen Bank, USAID, CIRDAP, SARI, Fisheries Research Institute and Universities. Some graduate students of BAU also participated in the seminars.

Seminar on "Financing the Rural Poor in Bangladesh"

Figures as quoted by different sources and agencies indicate that the degree of landlessness and level of poverty of the rural population in Bangladesh have reached an alarming proportion. The process of land transfer has added a new dimension to our rural problems by the way of making the rich more rich and the poor the pauper, ultimately accelerating the process of polarisation in the rural power structure. Resultantly, the vast

*Professor and Head of the Department of Agricultural Finance, Bangladesh Agricultural University Mymensingh, and Coordinator of the Seminars. Assistance provided by Dr. W.M.H. Jaim, Dr. Idris Ali Mia, Mr. Ati Akbar and Mr. Abdur Razzak, Rapporteurs of the seminars, are gratefully acknowledged.

mass of our rural poor have no other way but to depend on the mercy of the rural elite at such a cost that is threatening their bare existence. The successive Five Year Plans as launched by the Government of Bangladesh could not make any dent on rural poverty due to insufficient fund allocation in major sectors like social welfare, education, health, etc., and the total avoidance of the issues related to effective land reform, a precondition to rural development in Bangladesh. However, to improve the economic and social condition of the rural poor, the Government has undertaken a host of rural development programmes that include Food for Works Programme, Rural Works Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, Rural Banking Service, Swanirvar Programme, etc., and also allowed innumerable Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) to work in this field. Realising the importance of the issue of rural poverty, and to exchange ideas and views of the researchers and policy makers on the effectiveness of various anti-poverty programmes as undertaken by some GOs and NGOs, a one day seminar on "Financing the Rural Poor in Bangladesh" was organized on June 25, 1986 at the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU). The seminar was jointly sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Bureau of Socioeconomic Research and Training of BAU, Mymensingh.

Professor Md. Habibullah of Dhaka University and Professor A.M. Muazzam Husain of BAU presided over the two working sessions of the seminar. In all, eight papers were presented and two lectures were delivered from the notes of the authors. However, only two papers concentrated on the evaluation of different credit programmes designed for the landless and rural poor. The rest of the papers were mainly concerned with various facets of the problem of the rural poor, such as their economic subsistence and nutrition poverty levels, fund requirements of the rural poor and small farmers for consumption and investment purposes, and a tendency for non-repayment of tube-well loans due to bureaucratic inefficiency.

Evaluation results of a few credit programmes designed for the small farmers and landless poor, as followed and executed by various Government Organizations (GOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) were presented in the seminar. It was found that a good number of participants still depend on selling labour inspite of the income generating activities initiated by different GOs and NGOs. It was also found that loans were utilized almost properly and repaid fully for which group responsibility acted as the main driving force. However, groups have led to develop as a multitude of a few persons working for a short-term goal rather than to develop as a cohesive unit dedicated for all-round development of the rural families concerned.

In the evaluation of the Small Farmers' Development Programme (SFDP), it was found that most of the group members have increased their income and asset position and a positive change has occurred in their social attitude and awareness. However, it was found that the ideology of group planning was ignored both by the groups and planners, and in the plan, the total need of the rural poor was not considered. It was apprehended that the target approach of rural development by financing the rural poor through pilot

projects will not bring the desired result in the long run if the poor are not organized at the grass root level and they realize their due share from every part of the delivery system.

A good number of discussants participated in the discussion session and highlighted the issues related to rural unemployment, potentials of non-agricultural sectors for income generating activities and assessing the credit and consumption requirements of the rural poor families. For this, joint production plan, production management and provision of support services should be made for them. Although the efforts being made by the NGOs in financing the rural poor and other rural development activities were recognized, it was felt that most of their activities are centred in and around the places which are well connected with the capital city. Their activities are not well spread over to the underdeveloped areas and under-privileged communities who are living in sub-human condition. It was also felt that the activities of all the NGOs should be well coordinated by the Government along with its own rural development programmes and policies. The existing rural power structure was viewed as a threat against undertaking any meaningful and far-reaching programmes for the rural poor. To overcome this, it was opined that strong political commitment for the cause of the rural poor must be exhibited by the politicians, administrators and policy makers of the country.

Seminar on "Socioeconomic Aspects of Developing Fisheries Resources of Bangladesh"

The fisheries sector in Bangladesh contributes about 5 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP) and earns nearly 6 per cent of the nation's foreign exchange. It provides about 80 per cent of the animal protein intake in the diet of our people. However, in the last two decades fish catch and production have registered a gradual decline in the country. Realizing the urgent need for development of the fisheries resources, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken various programmes to this end. The programmes include installation of hatcheries for production of fish fry, bank loan for pond fish culture, construction of cold storages, procuring trawlers for capturing marine fishes, supply of fishing nets, gears and other equipments, facilities for shrimp culture in the coastal areas, and so on. The success of most of these programmes for increasing fish production and developing fisheries resources depends largely on two issues : one being its physical and technical aspects, and the other its socioeconomic aspects. There is no guarantee that if a programme is found feasible and profitable on physical and technical grounds, the same will be accepted by the farmers. The acceptability of such programme will largely be affected by the socioeconomic conditions that prevail in the society during a particular period. It is from that point of view, the need for holding a seminar on the importance of socioeconomic aspects of developing fisheries resources in Bangladesh was felt. The seminar was held on June 26, 1986, at BAU and was jointly sponsored by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and the Bureau of Socioeconomic Research and Training (BSERT) of BAU, Mymensingh.

The working session of the seminar was chaired by Professor M. Sekandar Khan of Chittagong University. In all, seven papers were presented in the seminar. Unfortunately no paper was presented on the marine fisheries sub-sector and as such the socioeconomic issues related to this sub-sector could not be discussed and debated. As a result, the seminar discussion was confined to the inland fisheries sub-sector only which accounts for nearly three-fourths of fish production in the country. Out of the seven papers presented, three were based on the findings of research projects related to fisheries development. The authors of these papers, M.L. Rahman, M.F. Alam, M.S. Islam, S. Dewan and M.A. Quasem, highlighted quite a few socioeconomic characteristics and problems prevailing in the fisheries sector of the country. The distribution of ownership pattern of waterbodies was found to be highly skewed. The productivity of the ponds was found to be very low. It was found that most of the fish pond farmers still follow the traditional method and they are not used to using supplementary inputs in their ponds. Higher net return from the cultured ponds depended on higher yield and price of fish, and economic use of material inputs and labour. It was found that the recipients of fisheries credit are generally the medium and large farmers. However, the average size of ponds was found to be very small to make profitable and scientific aquaculture with borrowed funds. Utilization of fishery credit was found to be more or less satisfactory. However, the repayment performance was found to be disappointing, similar to most other loan programmes of Bangladesh Krishi Bank, the main source of fishery credit. Disposal of surplus fish did not pose a serious problem. In majority of the cases surplus fish was sold to the local fishermen. Non-availability of fish fry and technical knowledge for scientific fish culture and lack of agreement among the co-owners in case of jointly owned water bodies were identified as some of the obstacles to scientific pond fish culture in Bangladesh.

The rest of the papers were based on secondary data highlighting various socioeconomic problems in developing pond fish culture in the country. M. Rahman in his article, emphasized the sociopolitical factors that surround and affect the small scale fishermen. Most fishermen, particularly those who are involved in small scale fisheries, barely possess the social and economic position and standard of living that determine the extent of a community's participation in development activities. The professional fishermen are recorded to have gradually shifted away from their traditional occupation in many open area waterbodies because of the preponderance and sociopolitical influences of the non-professionals. Similarly land-use and land-lease conflicts have developed in many shrimp cultivation areas affecting the interest of small farmers and land owners. Poverty, landlessness and population growth are the important factors that call for attention in planning for fisheries development. The role of CIRDAP and some NGOs on various action programmes on rural women in fishing communities, small scale fisheries development along with regular rural development programmes, etc., also came for discussion.

Among the discussants, M. Serajul Islam of Rajshahi University observed that the fisheries production programmes should be so designed as to make reach its fruits to the

beneficiaries, i.e., the rural poor. The BAU may come up with an action research programme on fisheries development, he hoped. Anthony Bottrall of Ford Foundation emphasized the need for studies on the seasonality of fish culture in the north-west zone of Bangladesh, aquaculture management systems in different aquatic zones of the country, the facilities relating to fish marketing with special reference to volume of catch, and to determine the rate of environmental pollution affecting the aquatic life. He further stated that a sort of coordination was required between the irrigation engineers and fisheries scientists in order to avoid or minimize the conflicts that might affect the irrigation and aquaculture goals. M. Mortuza of Grameen Bank stressed the need for technical assistance in favour of banking service for fisheries development programmes. Professor Sekandar Khan while delivering his presidential speech emphasized 'he intensified pond fish culture in Bangladesh. He also agreed with various speakers' emphasis that for a successful and meaningful fisheries development programme, 'the men behind the net' should be the central focus. With this objective in view, the Government of Bangladesh should formulate appropriate policies at national level to safeguard the rights and privileges of the fishermen. In order to bring about a rapid change in the fisheries sector of the country, the socioeconomic aspects of fisheries development along with its technological aspects, should be taken care of. To this end, Fisheries Research Institute, Directorate of Fisheries and Fisheries Development Corporation should establish and strengthen their Socioeconomic Divisions by hiring agricultural economists and sociologists.