

THE ROLE OF NGOS IN PREVENTING UNEMPLOYMENT IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract: *Based on personal observation, qualitative and quantitative research method, objectives of this study have been set to explore the contributions of the non-governmental organization (NGOs) in Bangladesh with the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) as the case. Two villages of the Chandpur district of Bangladesh were selected. Results indicate that the NGOs are capable of contributing in preventing unemployment in rural areas with diversified programmes. However, the involvement and interaction of NGO employees with the rural population needs to be friendly.*

Key Words: non governmental organization (NGO), Bangladesh, development programmes, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), unemployment

Introduction: The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have attached themselves with the employment generation activities regardless of male or female gender bias. They are initiating programmes for poverty alleviation through the sustainable development activities. Involvement of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with such activities has been evidenced through several academic research works (Chowdhury & Mukhopadhaya, 2011). Hundreds of such kind of organizations are in operation in Bangladesh for decades and are mainly financed by the international donor agencies. However, in many cases activities of such organizations and their presence in most rural areas of Bangladesh are very limited. This study has restricted its focus on a single large scale non-governmental organization known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). This is the world's largest non-governmental organization (NGO) which started the activities back in 1972 having Sir Fazle Hasan Abed as the entrepreneur (Reza & Ahmed, 2009). This organization has gradually expanded its activities in diversified sectors and mainly in the areas like employment generation and poverty alleviation through sustainable developmental initiatives. Again, this organization has been playing role to develop the socio economic status of the women through involving them with the development activities. The adoption or implementation of programmes those are designed to bring the women with the development initiatives thus have been ensuring a better livelihood that is mostly free from hard core poverty. As outlined, main objective of this study has been to explore the contributions of the non-governmental organization (NGOs) from the developing country perspective, Bangladesh as a case. This has tried to assess the current unemployment situations in Bangladesh. With this purpose, the study has critically explained typologies of the executed programmes of BRAC, in the particular area of poverty alleviation.

Literature Review:

2.1 Unemployment Situation: Bangladesh Perspective: Unemployment situation has remained constant in Bangladesh for the last few decades. The recent trend denotes that there have been some improvements in the unemployment scale in recent years. However, there has been always a serious anomaly in the measurement of employment status of the country population.

The total labour power has not been uniquely distributed in diversified sectors. The available data of 2011 shows that the 25% of the total labour force has been employed in services sector, where the industrial sector represents slightly more of 30%. Traditionally, agriculture has been the major employment generation sector with 45% of the entire population. The existing trend of rural employment situation has been remaining alarming due to the climatic disasters and natural calamities. Bangladesh has to consider its employment generation strategies over the coming years with an aim of reducing the unemployment rate to a considerable level. According to the Asian Development Bank (2012) Bangladesh experienced a mixed growth in the agricultural, industrial and service sector in 2011. The projected growth in these sectors in 2012 would stand as 4.3%, 7.8% and 7.2%, respectively. The unemployment rate in Bangladesh in 1996 was 35.2%, in 2001 was 35%, in 2008 was 2.5% and 2010 was 4.8%, respectively. Again, according to (Bangladesh Economy, 2012), Bangladesh has a large number of employable work force numbering to 73.87 million. Out of which, 45%, 30% and 25% of the entire work force has been employed in the agricultural, industrial and service sector, respectively.

2.2 Dynamics and Features of NGOs: A wider definitional framework of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can be as these refer to those voluntarily formed associations by the individuals with the purpose of serving or rendering developmental or welfare services outside the control of governments. These organizations usually draw funding from the international donor agencies or other relevant sources and function within the set legal frameworks of the identified country. In the book titled 'Social welfare legislation in Bangladesh', Ahmad (2003) has argued that the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are more or less involved with the social developmental processes through their executed activities or initiatives. The ways are so well planned and range from project funding, service provision engagement, building capacities, awareness to uniting groups of peoples (Baccaro, 2001). The term 'NGO' is a common or well-known phenomenon in Bangladesh and the developmental activities of such organizations are deeply rooted (Khandker, et. al., 2006). The approaches those these organizations usually follow are diversified and well directed, to some extent. As an academic topic the study on numerous issues of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are well established. The governmental constitutional set up and supportive legal procedures fully or partially incorporate the activities and the organizational structures of such organizations (Ronalds, 2011). However, there has been a clear lacking of constitutional framework for directing the actions and diversifying the initiatives. Not even, there has been any precise definition of such organizations. In the developed countries like the United States of America or the Great Britain, the term of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is defined as the non-profitable organizations. Academically, these organizations are meant to be the aid providing organizations (Wood & Sharif, 2005). Doh and Teegen (2003) have attempted to define these as the non-profit agencies those serve a part of the public interests. The NGOs are primarily established with the aims of fulfilling few of the specialized purposes than the monetary related or reward based activities to the stakeholders or beneficiaries. These are the organizations supported by the government and the taxation systems. These usually exclude the profit oriented or property based social agencies. These organizations are generally defined as the peoples' associations with which the members or persons are involved on voluntary basis (Kilby, 2011). The activities or programmes of these non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are characteristically attached with the grass root level population with an aim to contribute in developing their living standard and the rendered status of life. These organizations not necessarily work within the control of the governmental agencies. Rather

than they perform activities parallel to these and within the set legal frameworks of the government.

2.3 The Bangladesh Rural Advanced Committee (BRAC) Context- Programmes and Policies:

Involvement of the Bangladesh Rural Advanced Committee (BRAC) with the development initiatives soon after the independence of a new Nation- Bangladesh referred significance (Hossain & Sengupta, 2009). Main reason was that the redevelopment and rebuilding of the country were much demanded after nearly a year long war. This is the world's fourth largest non-governmental organization (NGO) having operations in twelve countries across the world and over 120,000 employees (Bangladesh Rural Advanced Committee, 2012). The activities and involvements of BRAC have been diversified starting from the basic micro finance to social forestry or sericulture, from CGI education to social enterprise or tenant farmers development (Halder, 2003). All of the projects are aimed of alleviating poverty in a sustainable manner through empowering the poor and alleviating poverty (Abed & Matin, 2007). In recent times, BRAC has diversified its poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes. Microcredit has been found as an effective tool for the poverty alleviation process in a more controlled and sustainable way (Eastwood & Lipton, 2000; Huda, 2010). The developmental processes in the rural areas and mainly in the countries like Bangladesh are largely conducted through involvement of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). BRAC has diversified programmes aimed for well being of the rural and marginal population of Bangladesh. The diversified programmes as the Micro Finance and empowering the rural economy through targeting the Extreme poverty, Adolescent Empowerment, Tenant Farmers Development Project, BRAC has attached itself with the developmental initiatives in rural Bangladesh. The Community Empowerment Programme, Gender Justice and Diversity, the Social Enterprise programmes are specifically aimed towards the development of overall poverty situation and employment generation in the rural Bangladesh (Abed & Matin, 2007; Halder & Mosley, 2004).

Research Design: The research has been designed in accordance with the theoretical base of research methodology. In total 18 interviews were conducted. Out of these, 16 of them were conducted with direct beneficiaries of poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes, respectively. 2 interviews were conducted with the BRAC officials as the 'Key Informant'. Details are as the following: First, the direct beneficiaries through the poverty alleviation programs by BRAC. These were concerned about the beneficiaries' fundamental ideas about the poverty, the trends and characteristics of poverty, the ways peoples fight against poverty, the BRAC intervened approaches for poverty alleviation and the direct or indirect effects of such programs in their normal livelihood. Interview conducting sites were random and within the case study area of Chandpur, Bangladesh. Respondents were both male and females with four male and four female, respectively. The second category of interview has been concerned with the beneficiaries of the employment generation programs by BRAC. These were concentrated on questions like the meaning of unemployment to the rural poor people, the dynamics of unemployment problems, the programs initiated by BRAC those have been aimed to influence the rural peoples' livelihood and the impacts those are generated by these programs. Site of these interviews were also randomly selected and some of the interviews were conducted in the respondents' house. These interviews involved both the male and female respondents with four each from each group. The third set of interviews was focused with the Key Informants those were the selected officials of BRAC and has attempted to outline the official viewpoints, policies, initiatives and facts regarding poverty alleviation and employment generation. These were also face to face interviews with twenty to thirty minutes length. For these interviews the respondents were contacted through telephone and e-mails. The questionnaire was sent to their email and based on the agreed time

the researcher appeared in their office to conduct the interview. Two interviews were conducted for this purpose. The semi-structured questionnaire format has been used for all of the interviews. Medium of language was the local Bengali that was later on interpreted by the researcher into English. Qualitative approaches like the personal observation, visual documents and printed publications were also used for the purpose. The questionnaires were comprised of a highest number of thirteen questions. As it is believed that a useful questionnaire should contain at least twelve questions with few more central or sub questions (Zikmund, 2010).

Site for this study has been selected on the basis of easy communication access and familiarity of the researcher. After careful consideration about the suitability and capacity for data generation along with the opportunities for better quality research information, two villages of the Chandpur district of Bangladesh has been selected. Main reason for the site selection was the inner integrity of program and beneficiaries. There has been a major shift in the developmental activities in this village by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), even though the operational activities of this non-governmental organization have been wide spread within the entire geographical area of Bangladesh. The researcher very specifically selected the site due to the development initiatives taken by BRAC. The research site has been carefully observed by the researcher for years due to the relationship as the place of birth and has been found worthwhile as a site for conducting such research activities. The restricted time schedule and financial constraints have also been considered. There has been a clear attempt and mind set to continue and complete the research within the set period of time through the best possible use of time, labor and expenses. Eventually, a case study can possibly expand over several years following its depth of research problem and associated complexities.

The data and information as typical fact have never been widely available and easily accessible. The locally published newspapers are normally a very good source of information on the affectivity of major developmental initiatives of both the government and non-governmental agencies. As believed that, the basic areas of data collection for a qualitative research normally are combined with three aspects as the database, followed by triangulation and the base of evidence (Thomas, 2011). The interviews have been conducted over a time period of one month; starting from the middle of March, 2012 till the end of Middle of April of the same year.

The interviews have been conducted in person and face to face and the accompanied numerical data has been represented through the use of MSEXcel. The semi structured questionnaires have been designed with spaces for writing the answers. All of the interviews were written on the questionnaire. However, the discussions were open-ended and all of them lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes. These answers were then typed and saved in the personal laptop for ensuring the maximum safety of data and information. The interviews have been transcribed personally other than using the modernized and sophisticated soft ware like Atlas.ti or NVIVO. The basic reason behind such act has been to get more involved with the collected data and information. The researcher read the interview answers by word by word from the written format of the questionnaire. Although the process has been one of the time consuming works, still it offered the researcher to get deep through of the interviews and the themes to the information more explanatorily. All of the data has been coded through the use of key words as the heading of the discussed paragraphs that has allowed the researcher to put the research on a solid ground. As the research has been based on the qualitative data and the researcher had the utmost intention to make the best use of information. All of the attempts have been to be more usable and more meaningful for interpretation. The sequence that the research data and information followed was simple and easy by character. Very first the data has followed the coding, the data accumulation and the data categorization for using

regarding relevancy for this study. The second or middle stage highlighted the data organization, and showing the result. The later and third part represented the ground of interpretation that eventually denoted the data explanation, discussion, analysis those obviously led to the concluding stage (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). In order to maintain the anonymity and the highest possible data confidentiality, the respondents have been categorised according to the alphabet as respondent A, B or C. Their names have not been cited elsewhere and the signature on the Consent Form was treated as optional.

Findings and Discussions:

4.1 Income, Expenditure and Savings: Regarding the earning, expenditure and savings only one of the respondents, A3 answered that he can save handsome amount of money. As this respondent answered that, 'My father was a Mahajan (Landlord) and was well known in the region. This is how I managed to get a considerable amount of land property'. However, respondents like A1, A2, A6, A7, and A8 identified themselves as the day laborers and told that they were unable to save any amount of money for their families. A4 and A5 argued that they earn sufficiently to cover their family expenses, but unable to save anything.

4.2 Rural Unemployment Situation: Respondent B1 argued that, 'Unemployment problem has been persistent in the villages where peoples have been struggling to get a better job to ensure their source of livelihood and the supply of daily needs'. B2 responded that 'Unemployment situation has been gradually appearing as one of the major problems in the villages at least for the last few decades. However, involvement of the non-governmental organizations like BRAC has been contributing positively in reducing the severity of the unemployment problem'.



Figure 1: Case study sites in the Chandpur district of Bangladesh (in star mark) (source: modified from the Bangladesh BCC working group, 2012).

This table represents that the unemployment situation has been very high with half of the respondents. Where, the part and full time employment were similar in number.

4.3 Employment Status and Family Support: Out of the 8 respondents, 4 of them were unemployed, 2 of them were casual day laborers and 2 of them were in full time employment. The respondents who were unemployed have been passing the most miserable life. As coined

by the respondent B7, ‘How can I save money? I do not even have a job at all’. However, B8 who was in full time employment stated that, ‘Commodity prices have gone so up that I am unable to save some money for future use. But, I can manage my family properly’. In case of job loss, these two respondents argued that they will do daily labor. Because, B6 argued that, ‘Daily laborer job is the most common to find’. The other two respondents who were casual day laborers told that they always consider themselves as unemployed due to the casual nature of work.

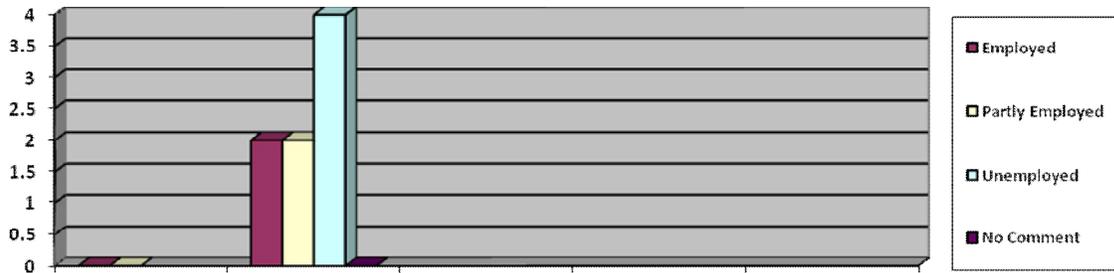


Table 1: Employment situation in the case study villages.

4.4 Expectations from BRAC’s Employment Generation Programmes: B3 argued that, ‘In a traditional rural Bangladesh, unemployment situation has been considered as a basic element of the rural life standard. BRAC can be beneficial in preventing the unemployment problems in the case study villages’. B4 expected that ‘The employment generation programmes by BRAC can help us a lot’.

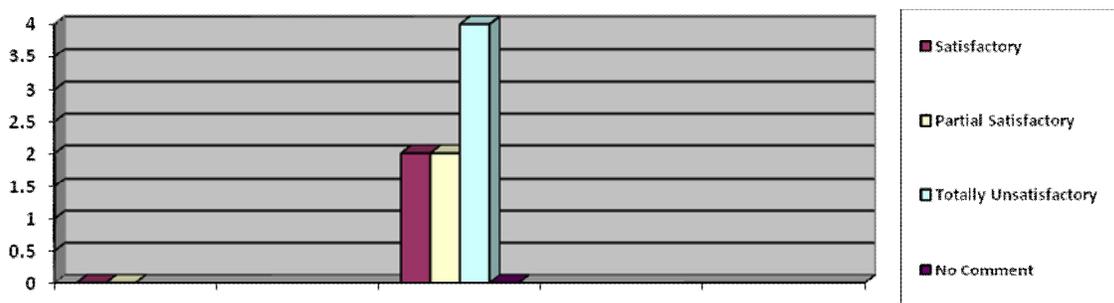


Table 2: Level of experiences in terms of BRAC’s initiatives to prevent unemployment.

The respondents were asked about their experiences regarding their experiences with BRAC's employment generation programmes. Half of them expressed that they were totally unsatisfied. Major reason for this unsatisfaction has been identified as the BRAC employees' unwillingness to provide better services to the respondents and staying in touch with them.

4.5 Impacts and Benefits from the Employment Generation Programmes: According to the first Key Informant K2, 'BRAC so far has launched some authentic and more suitable employment generation schemes. For example, The 100 Day Employment Generation Programme has been considered as very new in its nature'. The second Key Informant K2 coined that, 'From general viewpoint, 'The Community Development Programme', 'The Social Communication and Advocacy Programme' as a mean to empower the rural women has been found as effective to promote socio-economic status and the employability of the rural women to the certain level'.

Regarding the employment status, the respondents have been suffering from unemployment. In the case study villages, the unemployment status has been traditionally remaining similar. The trend of job creation and opportunities for self employment has not been found as mentionable. The very basic reason for this was the failure by the non-governmental organizations to attract the huge number of unemployed population in the case study villages. Table below represents the status of unemployment in the case study sites.

Poverty and unemployment are interrelated (Smith & Lusted, 2010). The available data represented that, the poverty level was 51% in 1991 (Bangladesh Economy, 2012). However, in the case study village the unemployment rate was 50%. Most of the respondents argued about the existence of poverty and respondent A2 challenged about the existence of poverty. In addition, as Chambers, et. al. (2011) have mentioned that the poverty status of an area can be measured by the income status, then poverty and unemployment status in the case study villages have been persistent for decades.

4.6 The Typologies of BRAC programmes: The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee or BRAC has several poverty alleviation programmes those have been aimed to alleviate poverty in a significant manner. Most of these programmes have been designed with an aim of alleviating poverty in the rural areas. However, not all of these programmes have been found as effective in a similar pattern and at the same rhythm. Nonetheless, few of these programmes have been considered as having better impact for alleviating poverty. Respondent K1 argued that the, 'We do not really want to say that all of the poverty alleviation programmes have been successful for alleviating poverty in a sustainable way. But most of the programmes have been found better affectivity'. Respondent A5 argued that the, 'The micro credit scheme has helped us to get the basic capital to start and operate our own business in a trouble free way and without any considerable hassle'. Economic development through the poverty alleviation schemes has been considered as the main base of the BRAC poverty alleviation programmes. The credit operations and savings schemes have enabled the rural peoples to accumulate and invest their savings in such businesses those can support their sources of livelihood and socio-economic well being. Respondent K2 emphasized on the 'The dynamic and beneficial poverty alleviation schemes adopted by BRAC have been contributing positively in the rural peoples livelihood to alleviate poverty'. In a sense, BRAC has been formed with a unique combination of low level poverty market, the non poverty business and the business enterprise. As a 'Poverty Enterprise' BRAC has been positively having impacts in alleviating poverty and thus to bring changes in their livelihood. All of the poverty alleviation schemes as adopted by BRAC have more or less impacts in poverty alleviation. In the case study sites the micro finance schemes those are mostly targeted to reduce the extreme poverty have been found more beneficial for the rural population. Respondent A7 has stated

that 'Not all of the programmes have been benefitting us in general. But few programmes have been of great help for us to alleviate poverty and to find out the way that will ensure us to provide our daily supply of basic living'. The Agriculture and Food Security Programme has also been found as effective in poverty alleviation of the agriculture dependent population. A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 and A8 have more or less recognized the good impacts of this programme on the rural peoples' life pattern that has helped them to fulfil the very basic demands of their livelihood. The Tenant Farmers Development Project has also been considered as having capability to alleviate poverty in a more sustainable way. However, few of the initiatives have been found as having negative effect on the poor population. Like repayment of the loan instalments has been widely considered as bringing trouble to the poverty affected rural community. The tight framework and deadline for the loan interest repayment has been found as creating enormous pressure on the rural population. As A5 stated in a simple manner, 'Sometimes they simply take away all of our belongings, if they we cannot repay the loan instalment in due time. This makes the poor more poor'.

Conclusion: Existence of the unemployment situation in the case study villages has been clearly found. The trend of a reducing unemployment pattern has also been traced in the case study areas. Women in the case study areas have been found as more involved in the economic activities and the thus to promote the rural entrepreneurial activities. The female respondent B1 has argued that, 'We can now enjoy more economic freedom and power in decision making process than ever before. The employment generation programmes adopted by BRAC has been helping us to promote our status to a certain level from where we can set our goals'. The key respondent K2 have argued that the, 'The employment generation schemes and mainly the women empowerment schemes have helped the rural women to come forward and attach themselves with the mainstream economic activities'. Numerous programmes as adopted by BRAC like 'The Social Responsible Investments' and the 'Social Enterprises' can be mentioned as having better impact on the livelihood of the rural population. Employment status in the case study site has not been found as severe. In fact, many of the rural unemployed peoples have been still struggling in the case study sites to overcome the unemployment problem and to get a minimum job that will help them to support their livelihood. Unemployment status in the case study sites can be considered as having impacts on the social advancement. Literacy level in the case study sites have been found as considerably poor and the rate of literacy growth in these areas cannot also be claimed as rapidly expanding. However, BRAC has also involved itself with the literacy programmes along with the capacity building of the uneducated population. In this way, BRAC has been found as affirmatively contributing in promoting the unemployment status. Major contributing areas of BRAC's employment generation programmes have been mentioned as the empowerment of women and their attachment with the mainstream poverty alleviation schemes. Also, this NGO has been helping to create employment for the educated groups of youth population. In general, the women and the youth populations have been considerably found as major beneficiaries of the employment generation schemes by BRAC. The marginal farmers, landless populations are the other type of beneficiaries those have been widely affected by the employment generation schemes. The main way through which these segment of rural populations are benefitted is that the supply of capital and training. The main criticism that is concerned with the efficiency and attitudes of the BRAC employees needs to be improved. As mentioned by B6, 'These peoples sometimes misguide us'. Poverty and the unemployment situation as a problem have been continually prevailing in rural Bangladesh for decades. There has not been any major improvement of the degree and overall situation of this problem leading towards sustainable development. However, the involvement of NGOs like the BRAC has initiated to improve the general situation at least to

some extent. The rural Bangladesh scenario in terms of poverty and unemployment has been visibly influenced with the involvement of NGOs like BRAC. One of the important findings of this study is the current trend of poverty and unemployment situation in rural Bangladesh. The actual poverty situation and unemployment dynamics in rural Bangladesh have never been understood in the academic similar pattern in the case study villages. Different types and views have influenced the poverty and unemployment situation. The labor power has been mainly thought to be employed in the agricultural sector while, the service sector comes to the second position. However, the recent trend showed that the majority of labors in the case study sites have been gradually attracting the day labor ours. Other finding is the peoples' attitude towards the development and employment generating activities by the non-governmental organizations like BRAC. The natural calamities along with other types of disasters have increased the poverty and unemployment rate and status to some extent. But, such development activities have less acceptability among the rural populations, because, the attitude and experiences have not been pleasant with the BRAC employees. This study has been designed with the basic objective for exploring the contributions those the non-governmental organizations have had in the rural settings of Bangladesh. In addition this study has attempted to understand the degree and volume of ongoing poverty situation along with the unemployment status in Bangladesh. This study has also tried to outline the effects of activities and initiatives undertaken by the non-governmental organizations. Findings have been able to explore the present status of poverty and unemployment situation in rural Bangladesh through the case studies. This has again helped to offer the understanding of the programmes those are carried out and considered as successful in the rural Bangladesh. The activities and initiatives carried out by the non-governmental organizations have been found as both positive and negative to build a better and sustainably developed Bangladesh. This study has faced two basic limitations. First, the limited time allotment that has refrained the researcher to carry out more interviews representing more types of populations. The second limitation has been the rural populations' unwillingness to share their views and ideas about BRAC and its activities having a fear that this can have negative impacts on their interrelationship with BRAC. However, the researcher has attempted to overcome these limitations and to enrich the study through personal observation. The dynamics and extent of rural poverty traditionally cover extended areas and there is a clear opportunity to conduct further studies on diversified aspects in the future.

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