



BOOK REVIEW

Dynamics of Rural Growth in Bangladesh: Sustaining Poverty Reduction

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"Dynamics of Rural Growth in Bangladesh: Sustaining Poverty Reduction" is a 232-page book written by Madhur Gautum and Rashid Faruqee. Gautum Madhur was the Task Team Leader, and Rashid Faruqee was the Senior Advisor for a core-study team whose research was documented in this book, which was published under the World Bank Group in 2016. Gautum and Faruqee's book dwells on the development of the seemingly stagnant rural economy of Bangladesh. The book discusses how Bangladesh has undergone significant changes in economic development and has reduced poverty. However, the book is quick to note that the rural economy has been somewhat excluded from this development process. It is an untapped source of potential socio-economic development, which may largely contribute to Bangladesh's overall progress.

The second chapter outlines a detailed depiction of the challenges the agricultural sector persistently facing, i.e., the limited land base for cultivation, high population density, vulnerability to natural hazards, undiversified production base, and poor infrastructure and methods irrigation. Historically, floods have been the most debilitating natural disaster to have shaken the core of agricultural growth. However, people living in coastal areas often have to take the brunt of regular storms.

However, whatever improvement has been there to date in Bangladesh's agricultural growth has been due to the country's challenging "macro policy environment" and the aggregate sectoral terms of trade. The authors also pointed out how the price increases in food and agricultural prices cannot be attributed to agriculture's recent performance improvement. Towards chapter-four, the authors extensively discussed the need for Rural Non-Farm Growth (RNF) and how it must be expanded to diversify the employment and trade activities of people living in rural areas. While non-farm activities have been part of the rural economy, the activities have changed

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overtime. Traditionally, RNF activities comprise crafts and utensil items, requiring a certain level of artistic skill. However, the need for specialization declined overtime as technology took over. Mass-manufactured and cheaper products replaced traditional crafts. In the concluding part of the fourth chapter, agriculture is still a driving force behind RNF growth as around 50 percent of the households involved in non-farming activities hold a direct link to agriculture. RNF is seen as one of the vital catalysts of poverty alleviation.

The book also covers a series of sub-topics concerning farmers' accessibility to the Bangladeshi market. The need for farmers to acquire incentives, which they may use to diversify, is repeatedly addressed. The authors assert the importance of accessible markets and efficient value chains. The overall situation has improved because infrastructural investments and the marketing of agricultural products have been funded by private investments in trade, service sectors, and transport.

Towards the middle of chapter-five, it becomes apparent that the authors have observed numerous factors that have primarily contributed to the development of the agriculture sector. However, the prominent factors duly noted are demographic changes, increased human capital and education, a comparatively efficient demographic dividend in the country, decreasing family sizes, and technological advancement. Since the 1980s, key reforms have led to the improvement and facilitation of irrigation in Bangladesh through the widespread use of groundwater pumps, improved technology through high-yielding plants and fertilizers, and an improvement in connectivity. In a nutshell, a series of social and economic policies have assisted in bringing about these changes. Moreover, the agriculture sector has been divided into sub-sectors for the ease of readers to understand. It was found that rice continues to dominate as it is considered a staple. Moreover, fisheries have been doing significantly better than the livestock subsector as fisheries are dominated mainly by natural settings such as monsoons and are more favorable and easier on "the pocket."

In chapter six, the authors mainly discuss food security and Bangladesh's urgency in dealing with Malnutrition instead of solely interpreting food security through calorie-counts. Though Bangladesh is self-sufficient in producing rice, the country is yet to diversify its crop. As noted by the authors, the agriculture sector has to be at par with the growing demands for rice and other food in the coming future. Policies have been mainly focusing on domestic rice production and shying away from other nutrition sources.

For obvious reasons, Malnutrition has severe human development impacts in Bangladesh, such as loss of economic productivity, education, and health. The overall diet of the average Bangladeshi lacks diversity, failing to secure adequate nutrients. Though variety in food has increased, the food is not being consumed sufficiently. Gautum and Faruqee asserted the need for relevant data to provide compelling evidence related to Malnutrition in Bangladesh. There is a gap in data that needs to be addressed by collecting information on 1. Households' agricultural production patterns 2. Patterns of consumption and 3. Nutritional outcomes.

In the last chapter (chapter-7), the authors briefly pinpoint the actions that need to be taken to bring about sustainable development in Bangladesh's rural areas. The first action involves

implementing development strategies that involve both farm and nonfarm growth, favoring the agriculture sector holistically. The system must address food security issues, poverty alleviation, reduce economic vulnerability, and further develop development.

The second action plan must revolve around diversifying agriculture rapidly with balanced attention projected towards rice. The diversification should steer towards non-crop agriculture without neglecting or over-emphasizing the rice sector. Moreover, acceptance of traditional and non-traditional technology needs to go hand in hand to build resilience in agriculture.

The third action plan involves rebalancing public expenditure and reforming the current policy framework. It is essential to remove anti-agriculture bias in terms of nonfarm activities from macro-level policies. Farmers must be assisted through relevant policies to facilitate correct knowledge regarding the use of technical expertise. In the long run, this would curb environmental wastage and inject growth into agriculture production. The public expenditure must also be rotated towards research into non-crop activities, non-rice crops, livestock, and fisheries.

The fourth action plan involves facilitating an environment that encourages "robust nonfarm growth" and efficient value chains. Access to finance, power, roads and other forms of information and technology is necessary to remove obstacles from achieving growth. Small businesses must be able to depend on formal institutions for support and for acquiring knowledge

Lastly, the final action plan involves the incorporation of investment into connectivity. Connectivity has had an overall positive impact on Bangladesh and has aided rural people in their businesses over the years. Continued investment into infrastructure would bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, allowing rural roads to become an essential feature of the mainstream market.

Overall, the book is informative in providing quantitative information regarding the rural area's general economic layout, farming and non-farm activities, and a general overview of Bangladesh's agriculture sector. However, the authors' scope was to discuss the urban and rural gap and how sustainable development would possibly work as a liaison in bridging the socio-economic gap. Moreover, more detail was required regarding the social and political factors that have shaped Bangladesh's rural communities.