

BOOK REVIEW

Readings in Bangladesh Development: Volume II

K.A.S. Murshid, Minhaj Mahmud & Kazi Iqbal

Published by: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies;
E-17 Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh
Pages in Book: 810

Year: 2021

Price: TK 1000.00; US\$ 20.00

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"Readings in Bangladesh Development" has been published by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies to honor the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on his birth centenary. The two-volume book comprises notable published articles over the last 50 years. Fifty years have been divided into two halves, and the second volume incorporates 23 articles produced between 2000-2020. The aim was to cover pertinent contemporary development issues and challenges experienced by the country over the years. In this regard, cutting-edge research in various sub-disciplines conducted by old and young scholars has been included. The articles cover governance, infrastructure, N.G.O.s and microcredit, human development, urbanization, poverty reduction, inequality, etc. This report is comprised of some of the major highlights of the book.

Bangladesh has gone through many calamities but has always been resilient to shocks. Non-governmental organizations (N.G.O.s) are often credited for this success. In his paper, Sajjad Zohir has provided an overview of the N.G.O.s in Bangladesh. The emergence of the N.G.O. sector in the post-independence era has been traced, and the author has examined their intervention and evolving nature. Despite the credit given to the N.G.O.s, a dissatisfactory outcome in terms of inclusion has been found by Atiur Rahman and Abdur Razzaque. The poorest of the poor are less represented or excluded in the social programs of N.G.O.s. Similar limitations have been observed in credit programs which is a significant path of receiving social services from these institutions. More and more N.G.O.s are providing micro-credits, especially to

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DOI: 10.46333/ijtc/10/2/18

women but how effective is that to women empowerment is an issue for meticulous examination. Simeen Mahmud observed that, although access to self-employment and mobility in specific spaces has improved for women, evaluating the real empowerment, access to the male-dominated public sphere, household resources, and better wage employment should be considered.

Like many other developing countries, inequality has risen in Bangladesh simultaneously with rapid growth. S. R. Osman and Binayak Sen have found two trends of inequality in rural Bangladesh in the 2000s. The findings are that the income distribution has increased over the decade while the distribution of consumption remained almost unchanged. Both foreign-remittances and self-employed non-agricultural activities were highly un-equalising in nature, and the former accounts for about a 70 percent rise in income inequality. The remittance-receiving household has an advantage of higher initial assets than non-receiving households, which enabled them to spend on the lumpy expenditure of sending people abroad. As for consumption inequality, negative savings and increased consumption is observed at low-income strata. The authors hypothesized that the underlying reason could be the relaxation of liquidity-constraint by the rapid expansion of microcredit.

Today, misgovernance has become deeply embedded in Bangladesh's social and political forces, which poses a threat in realizing development potential and a sound democratic system. A thorough examination of the political economy is necessary to understand the root of this disease. For this purpose, Rehman Sobhan examines the dynamic of political behavior and the interests involved in the competition for political power in Bangladesh in the past years. Building an inclusive, just society that democratizes both economy and politics is imperative to establishing good governance. Understanding political dynamics is fundamental as the research conducted by Reshad N. Ahsan and Kazi Iqbal found that political violence not only deteriorates export price it may also deter Western Retailers from sourcing products from Bangladesh. Another crucial finding is, the effect is acutely experienced by the smaller and newer exporter, which can be dispiriting for an emerging economy.

The right to health is something every individual is entitled to. Despite Bangladesh made progress in declining maternal and child mortality rates for a while, the progress has been slowed down for several factors examined by Omar Haider Chowdhury and S.R. Osmani in their paper, "Towards achieving the right to health." Factors that impede achieving this fundamental right are low participation, inequitable access to services, and the absence of accountability. Nevertheless, promoting good health requires a holistic approach as this relates to other human rights such as the right to participate in the decision-making process, information, education, etc. For example, Binayak sen and Sharifa Begum illustrate that female education, autonomy, and empowerment are essential to improving maternal nutrition, the critical pathway for influencing child nutrition. In this regard, decentralization can be pretty fruitful, according to the study of Jean-Paul Faguet and Zulfiqar Ali on two Upazilas- Saturnia and Rajnagar. Despite having a better household income, Rajnagar was way behind Saturnia in healthcare. Therefore, as the thematics of localities differ, the local dynamics, institutions, and political economies ought to be analyzed separately, and the interventions also have to be made accordingly.

An important issue in development is the exposure to violence adolescents have. In the study "Adolescent Exposure to and Attitudes toward Violence," K.A.S Murshid and Nadine Shaanta Murshid explore the nature and structure of adolescent exposure and attitude and examine the associations between them in the context of Bangladesh. With rapid changes in socio-economy and demography, more females are now in the public arena for education or providing labor. It, in turn, has created an upsurge in exposure to violence, which is the root of creating a culture of fear. The study also shows how socio-ecological factors may impact exposure to violence.

Overall, this carefully selected collection of papers is essential for understanding the evolution of Bangladesh's development. However, a brief update of the current scenario regarding each topic would've been more helpful for the readers. The limitation of the book is understandable as the editors had to exclude many equally worthy studies for the space constraint. Every development enthusiast or practitioner should read this rich collection of materials to be conscious of the development journey of Bangladesh, the prevalent issues and ponder the routes to improve.