

Rural Development in the Contemporary Globalized World: Boon or Bane

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Abstract

In a globalized world dynamics of rural development in Bangladesh have changed immensely. In responding to the research questions that what impact globalization has made on poverty and rural society in Bangladesh, the author wrote this paper using mixed methods. Findings relating to impact of globalization on poverty unearthed the fact that exponential increases of rice production and wages of labour employed in agriculture have contributed to reduction of rural poverty in Bangladesh. Increased agricultural growth was the end result of privatization of agricultural inputs in Bangladesh that in fact helped the farmers adopt modern agricultural practices such as use of HYV, agrochemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers. Unobstructed growth with huge remittance earning also helped reducing poverty. In tandem with reducing poverty, globalization has increased income inequality in Bangladesh. Interconnectedness with the global economic system coupled with privatization and NGO-nization has unleashed new stimuli to today's rural life and society. The new dynamics of rural development emanated from globalization has challenged contemporary cooperative organizations and socio-cultural values in the rural society. Lastly, from both content analysis and case studies, it can be concluded that, in a globalized world, Bangladesh has no choice but to be integrated with the global economic system. Hence, the best way to deal with globalization is to coexist with it so that Bangladesh can solve its problems utilizing mutual cooperation and collaboration at regional and global levels.

Introduction

Globalization has emerged as an irresistible force to sway every aspects of human life in today's world. Unobstructed trade of goods, services, cataclysmic development of ITCs and socio-cultural

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integration across the globe appears to be the overwhelming aftermath of globalization. *Ipsa facto* there is hardly any scope that can escape from such reality. Globalization has both positive and negative consequences and ramifications. Likewise it brings opportunities and poses threats to both rural and urban life. Free trade, privatization and market forces are increasingly putting the rural economy at stake. In order to combat with the situation, the threats have to be coped with and opportunities have to be grasped. The aggressive advancement of globalization coupled with market economy has been persistently changing the old concepts, practices and systems of rural development, especially in the developing countries. Against such a backdrop, an effort is employed to delve into the impact of globalization on poverty and rural life and society in Bangladesh.

Methodology of the paper

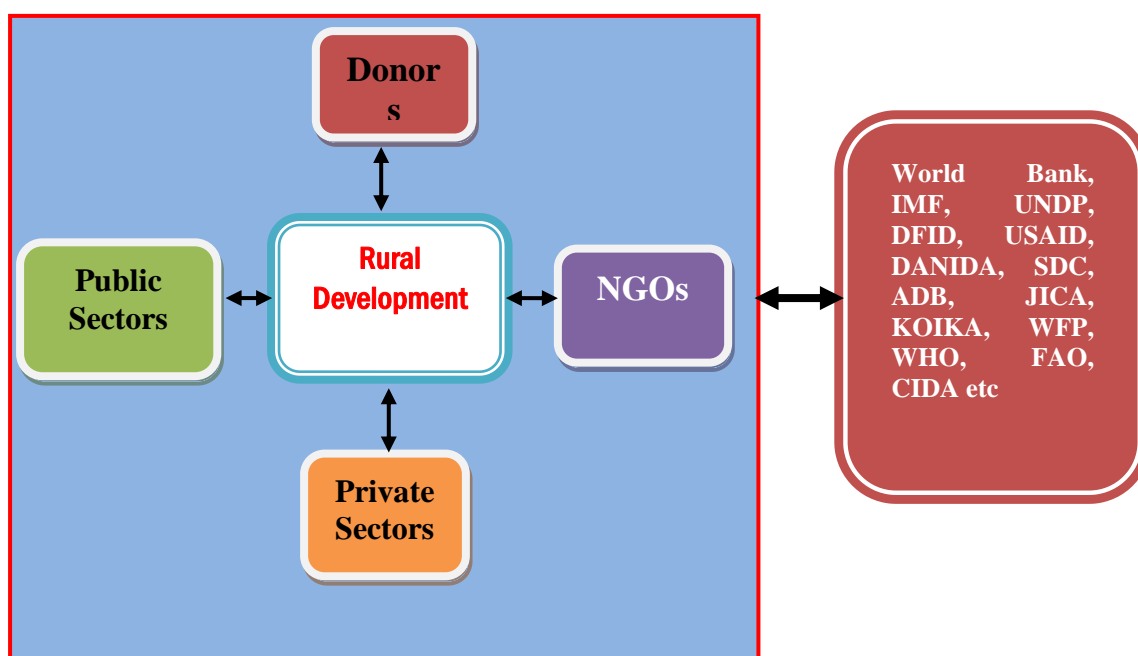
Through this article the author endeavored to seek out the research questions: what impact globalization has made on poverty and rural life and society in the contemporary changed contexts of rural development in Bangladesh? In unraveling the above research question the paper is prepared following a mixed method research approach because of the fact that as globalization is a vast issue, so drawing inference from both quantitative and qualitative data would help get deeper and holistic insights about the research issue. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Quantitative data were collected from secondary sources adopting a heuristic literature review obtained through books, journal articles, research reports, workshops and seminar papers and online internet search following the content analysis method. Qualitative data were collected from primary sources. To supplement quantitative data, two in-depth evidence based case studies were added to illustrate impact of globalization on poverty and rural life and society. Through the qualitative cases impact, ramifications, magnitude and processes of globalization on broader areas of rural development namely rural poverty and life and society have been analyzed systematically.

Rural Development (RD) in Bangladesh: The Contemporary Scenario

The history of RD is rich in Bangladesh. The journey of conventional RD started in this subcontinent with the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) program, which was basically a community development program (CDP). It was started simultaneously in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and many other developing countries of

the world, with different names and programs but the main essence was same and these CDPs were sponsored by USA under food assisted development program (PL-480) with a view to encounter revolutionary tendencies in the third world countries. Since early eighties with the advent of globalization, privatization, market economy and revolution of NGOs, the phase of state-fostered RD underwent massive changes by multiple players and actors (Figure-1). In this changed context, government line agencies are deemed as inefficient, technically incompetent, understaffed and philosophically conservative for ushering RD. Now, it has been recognized that NGOs and community based organizations have a significant role to play in improving service delivery and providing improved mechanisms for targeting disadvantaged groups in the field of RD. The following figure can present today's RD actors in Bangladesh.

Figure -1: Major Players in Rural Development



Impact of Globalization on Rural Development in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's integration with the global economy has spawned positive and negative ramifications on RD. Global pressures are increasingly changing the character of states and nature of RD, local governance and institutions so this paper purports to delve into the impact of globalization on rural poverty and social life in the changed context in today's Bangladesh. Discussions of the impact of globalization are supplemented with brief summaries and analyses in each aspect.

Impact of Globalization on Poverty

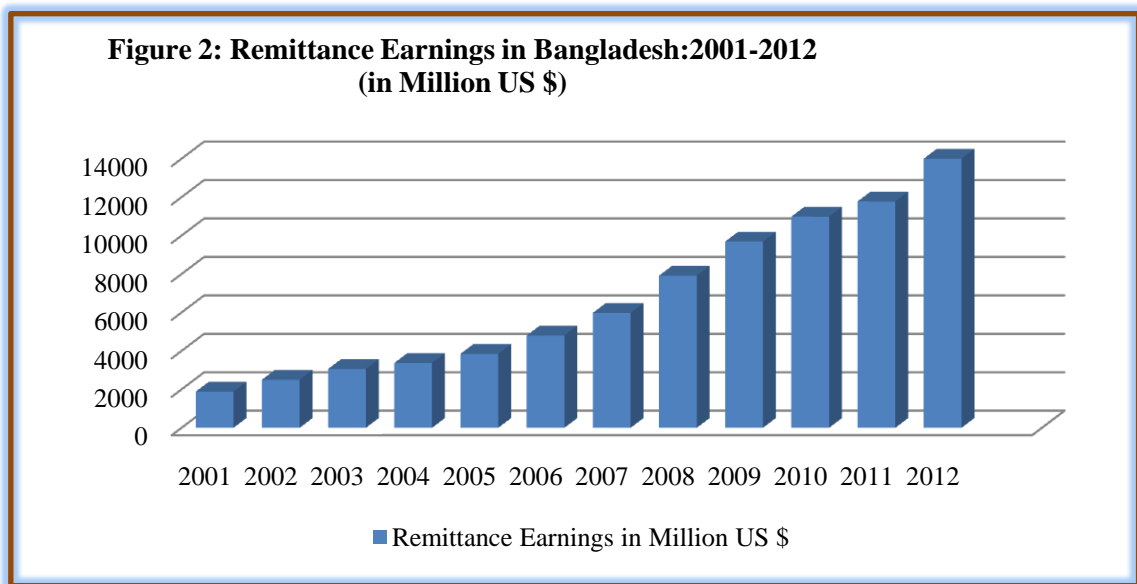
Based on the meticulous analysis, it was observed that due to globalization poverty in rural areas has reduced but at the same time globalization has intensified inequalities, which adversely affected the rural life and well-being of the poor people. Osmani (2005) found that compared to the 1980s, the 1990s decade witnessed accelerated growth and faster reduction of poverty in Bangladesh but it also widened income inequality. Poverty situation was somehow static, which was 52% in 1983-84 but poverty fell to 50% in 1991-92. Again another study found that poverty situation has got improved trends which was 58.8% in 1991/1992 and reduced by 49.8% in 2000 with an annual reduction rate of 1.8% (BBS, 2001; World Bank, 2002). The trends of poverty continued and further reduced again by 31.51% in 2010 (World Bank, 2012). In Bangladesh, both urban and rural areas enjoyed reduced poverty in the 1990s, but more poverty reduction was observed mainly in rural areas. Urban poverty maintained a steady decline in the last two decades-falling from 41% in 1983-84 to 34% in 1991-92 and then further to 26% by 2000. By contrast, rural poverty changed very little in the 1980s-the proportion of people in poverty was 54% in 1983-84 and 53% in 1991-92. But by 2000, it had fallen to 44%. Moreover, poverty in both urban and rural areas declined by an impressive 19 percentage points in the last decade and a half (World bank, 2012). Thus, accelerated rate of poverty reduction was observed in the 1990s was essentially a rural phenomenon.

On the other hand, evidence shows that the negative consequence of globalization on poverty has enhanced income inequality. Nath and Al Mamun (2004) found that as an aftermath of globalization, trade openness promoted investment but it did not enhance distribution of income rather it had augmented income inequality, especially for the rural poor. Dev *et al.* (2008) also found that income inequality measured through Gini Coefficient had increased from 0.432 in 1995/96 to 0.451 in 2000 and then increased further to 0.467 in 2005. In case of income of rural household, income inequality has increased from 0.385 in 1995/96 to 0.393 in 2000 and 0.428 in 2005.

Summary and Analysis

Myriad factors facilitated poverty reduction in Bangladesh. Firstly, globalized labour market has helped Bangladeshi workers to enter into global job market easily, which in turn helped massive increase of remittance from emigrant Bangladeshi workers. This remittance

earning helped rapid economic growth in Bangladesh. Evidence shows that in the last two decades since 1980, the volume of remittance sent by Bangladeshi workers has grown at the rate of 8.5% annually in real terms. By the end of the 1990s, the annual receipts had amounted to roughly 30% of export earnings and over 4% of GDP. Even recent remittance earning also shows the same trends (Figure-2). Same case happened to RMG sector as it also increased remittances earning by an average of takas 17 billion in 1980s decade and in the next decade it rose by nearly takas 50 billion. As a result of this accelerated growth, the size of remittance as a proportion of GDP went up from 2.5% in 1990-91 to 4.1% in 1999-2000.



Source: Prepared by the author using World Bank data, 2013.

The second factor behind accelerated growth was enhanced agricultural production, which registered the biggest jumps in rice production in the late 1980s. After hovering around a total of around 15 million metric tons throughout the 1980s, the production of rice jumped to 18 million in 1989-90 and stayed unchanged for most of the 1990s until it jumped again towards the end of the decade. This 20% jump in production of the biggest crop of Bangladesh agriculture-was a major source of enhanced demand stimulus for the rural non-farm sector. The reason behind increased agricultural production was liberalization of agricultural inputs, especially elimination of non-tariff barriers for importation of cheap irrigation equipment, *i.e.* shallow tube-well. Before liberalization, shallow tube-wells used to be distributed by government at a subsidized price in order to promote irrigation but it failed to satisfy demand properly. Liberalization helped reducing

market price of shallow tube-wells almost 40% which was even below the subsidized price. This price fall, combined with relaxation in existing restrictions, resulted in an enormous expansion of irrigated area. Evidence shows that from 1986-1996, total irrigated area jumped to an average of 3.5 million acres-the increase was nearly 50%. The expansion of irrigated area brought about a correspondingly sharp increase in use of fertilizer. The combined effect of expanded irrigation and enhanced use of fertilizer was reflected in discrete jump in rice production during the late 1980s. Econometric evidence has confirmed the predominant role played by trade liberalization of irrigation equipment in boosting rice production in the late 1980s (Ahmed, 2001; Hossain, 1996). Ahmed (2001) has estimated that the net effect of liberalization amounted to some 38% of the incremental rice production between 1988-89 and 1996-97.

Thirdly, increase of labour wage in agricultural sector has helped reduce poverty in rural areas more than urban areas. Household Expenditure Survey (BBS, 2001) showed that salaried employment in the rural non-farm sector was much more rewarding for the poor than any other mode of employments (Osmani *et al.*, 2003). Thus the relative expansion of larger non-farm enterprises, allowing for greater absorption of labour into salaried employment, has played a key role in bringing poverty down in the 1990s. The extent of underemployment has declined from 43% in 1990-91 to 35.3% in 1999-2000 (Salmon, 2002). At the same time it was found that the rate of unemployment increased among educated people (Bachelors and above) but those with no education at all had an unemployment rate of only 1.4% (BBS, 2000). However, employment status has also improved, in the sense that the proportions of both self-employed and wage-workers have gone up relative to unpaid family workers (Salmon, 2002). Therefore, rural populations were not affected much by globalization current.

The adverse effect of globalization is that it has widened income gap hugely in Bangladesh. The growth gained from remittance has caused a negative impact for the poor people although they have got a small chunk of the resources through the trickle down effects. But this extra flow of money in rural areas has marginalized the poor people. Due to adoption of market economy, these poor people could not invest in agricultural sector rather these hard core poor have become the worst victim of eternal drudgery and slavery as globalization forced these class to be labour class. Some of these poor have forced to migrate to cities and some of them have adopted low paid domestic

labour. In fine it can be summarized that rapid expansion of the ready-made garments, increased flow of remittances, a quantum jump in rice production in the late 1980s, and an increase of labour wage in the agricultural sector-have contributed national economic growth. Globalization has eased helping hand to each of these proximate sources. But the negative feature of globalization lies with the income equality and increased remittance has also contributed negatively in widening income inequality.

Impact of Globalization on Rural Society: Empirical Evidences

How globalization and free market economy has changed the dynamics and intricacies of rural development in today's Bangladesh has been illustrated beneath through two evidence based case studies.

Sad Demise of Deedar Cooperative Society in Free Market Economy

In the realm of cooperative movement and community leadership "Deedar Comprehensive Society" of Comilla was a successful cooperative in Bangladesh. In the year 1960, a suspended police constable named Md. Easin started forming a cooperative society organizing 9 rickshaw pullers of *Kashinathpur* and *Balarampur* villages. Villagers, composed of poor farmers, landless, unemployed youths and few money lenders etc., were hard pressed by their eternal enemy *i.e.* poverty and other concomitant sufferings like illiteracy, malnutrition, lack of necessary civic amenities. In such a context, Easin thought day after day how to save the poor villagers from their sufferings. One day he gathered few poor rickshaw pullers and villagers in a meeting where Dr. Khan delivered speech on the importance of cooperative. Being encouraged by the utterance of the then founder Director of BARD, Dr. Akhter Hameed Kahn, Easin made up his mind to form a cooperative society composed of nine rickshaw pullers who were employed in his own rickshaw garage. On request from Easin these nine poor men started to save one *ana*¹, the cost of one cup of tea, from their daily budget spent in Easin's grocery shop where he sold tea, *pan*², and cigarettes along with other

¹ One ana = 6 paisa. One paisa= 1/100 of a taka, that represents Bangladeshi currency. Ana was in practice as a unit of exchange in the early 1950s but it is non-existent now a days. For clear understanding of the readers please note that 1 US\$=77.63 Bangladeshi Taka (as on 23 April, 2014). The fraction has been transformed in full.

² A kind of leaf which is taken with betel-nut, sprinkle of lime and zarda (a kind of chewing tobacco flavoured with spices). It is a popular habit to rural people in Bangladesh and few other South Asian countries.

commodities. This was just the beginning of a successful community organization. In every week they sit together to count their total savings gathered from daily theft saving and started thinking of few investment plans. Slowly more villagers started to join the society. After some years their savings turned into huge amount to be invested in any profitable investment. After that they invested money in purchasing rickshaw and gave those to some benevolent members following “higher purchase³” method. Within a short span of time the society members started to harvest benefits of a cooperative society. Immediately after that the society never turned back. It started to grow in a geometric way and due to its huge demand their membership was expanded to children, youth and women. With increased membership and saving, society’s investment plan was diversified. To make society self-reliant managing committee of the society developed some innovative, participatory and democratic *modus operandi*, which they promised to follow unequivocally. Thus villagers from different occupational groups such as farmers, day laborers, factory workers, rickshaw pullers, track and tractor driver, manson, carpenter, government employees, businessmen, school teachers etc. started joining the society.

To improve financial condition of the members, society undertook various productive projects such as embroidery, sewing, poultry and livestock rearing, cow fattening, fisheries, vanki business⁴, fruits and vegetable cultivation in homestead, stock and preservation of seeds, weaving fishing nets, petty business, various cottage industries, savings and capital formation etc. Started with only 9 *anas* capital in 20 years Dideer Society became owner of huge assets amounting to 10 crores⁵ taka. At the same time the society also owned huge moveable and

³ Hire purchase is the legal term for a contract, in which persons usually agree to pay for goods in parts or installments. For example, if the price of a rickshaw is 3000 taka but in higher purchase system the total price may be fixed at 5000 taka. Member can rent a rickshaw giving 1000 taka at a time and the rest of the amount he can pay at installments from his own earning. As soon as a member repays the whole amount the contact ends and that member can own the rickshaw for good.

⁴ *Vanki* is a local term used by the Bangladeshi villagers to denote a special type of business, in which villagers used to buy raw and unprocessed paddy from the farmers and they process the paddy in to rice by boiling, drying and finally preparing rice using mechanized rice mill. After having the final product, the villagers then sell the rice in the market with a high margin of profit. This whole process of this business is popularly known as *Vanki*.

⁵ Crore is a unit of money which is popularly used in Bangladesh where one crore = 10 million.

immovable resources including 4 acres of arable land, a model high school, a primary school and a *madrassa*⁶. Immediately after its phenomenal growth, as a successful cooperative society, Deedar society started receiving many awards namely Presidents Award in 1976; Best Cooperator Award in 1982; which ended in Magsaysay Award in community leadership in 1988. After getting that international award there started a skirmish between Easin and the members. Some members claimed that Easin should share his prize money with the members because it was the devoted members for whom he got the Magsaysay Award. Keeping this issue in mind members were bifurcated into two streams and after long hither and dither members became successful to bag chunk of the share of that prize money but this issue led to the disintegration of this very successful cooperative society. Easin was severely demoralized and gradually Deedar Samity turned into a fiasco. Deedar's huge accumulated properties unleashed chaotic/bizarre socio-political impulses. Inability to cope with such external threats/dynamics and manage organizational resources prudently resulted in moribund situation of this successful cooperative.

Now in a globalized world many of its income earning projects have already lost its potentiality in the community due to open market and availability of better products. Villagers do not purchase fertilizers from the cooperative shop rather they purchase agricultural inputs from competitive market prices. Instead of solidarity and unity, individualism has become the common pattern of the villagers and nobody wants to remain in the cooperative organizations anymore. It is now all history like other successful cases in Bangladesh.

*Analysis on the sad demise of Deedar Samity*⁷ represents the grim picture of globalization and free market. Primarily visionary leadership, democratic practices, shared values, trust and belongingness of the members played a crucial role behind the success of Deedar Samity. But due to sudden onslaught of privatization, market forces and technological revolution arising out from the irresistible and draconian reality of globalization such community organization collapsed without notice. In an age of commercialization and globalization, nobody wishes to take the helm of social development unless some personal interests are involved. Thus owing to dearth of

⁶ Madrasa is a religious school for the Muslim community.

⁷ Samity is a Bengali word which stands for cooperative society.

benevolence and altruistic thinking Dideer's efforts ultimately collapsed. Factionalism and personal interest hinders collective action. Any organization collapses when its members or stakeholders hanker after monetary gain and want to exploit petty group interest and start skirmish for trifling matter that in turn help spoil team spirits, social solidarity, cohesiveness and thus factionalism turns into fiasco. Now-a-days cooperative and community organizations are infested with the problems of regionalism, grouping, sub-grouping and factional feelings, which are playing negative role in promotion of any collective action in national and local level. All these bad elements of cultures for maximization of individual interest and consumerism are basically the end product of globalization, capitalism, free trade and openness.

The Scenarios of the Simpur-Rantnaboti Villages in a Globalized World

Simpur and Ratnaboti villages are two adjacent villages in the Southern part of Comilla district. In these villages, the normal pattern of life of the villagers is quite different than those of other villagers in Bangladesh. Here most of the villagers have TV sets with satellite dish line where they can watch at least 40 channels. The major occupations of the villagers are farming; petty traders; small service holders in government, private and NGOs; some villagers have transport business and stock business; few villagers are involved in smuggling with fruits, sugar, illegal alcoholic drinks from neighbouring Indian states of Tripura. In these villages huge numbers of NGOs⁸ are working for bringing development and change in the villages. Here before 20 years the villagers' main occupation was agriculture and now after interventions of a commendable number of GOs and NGOs, the whole scenario has been changed. Most of villagers or households are found having multiple involvements in various societies or NGOs at a time. Now at least one family member of many households is a wage earner which helped their economic condition. Involvement of the poor village women in NGOs activities such as dealing with microcredit and

⁸ The major NGOs working in these villages include the Grameen Bank, ASA(Association of Social Advancement), CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), USAID(United States Agricultural and Industrial Development); Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP), BARD; Anser Ali Foundation for Development(AFID); BRAC(Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee); Swiss Development Corporation (SDC); Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDP); Mohila Unnoyon Samitty (Women Development Society) by the Social Welfare Department; Youth Development Centre by the Department of Youth Development etc.

attending various training programs have brought about revolutionary changes in the art and thinking process of these hard working women. Thus women's consciousness level, their mobility, their socialization, modernization, social-economic and cultural empowerment, social knowledge about contraception and reproductive rights and care, availabilities of different channels in the TV and interactions with many women and NGO extension agent- have changed the mind-set of these rural women and nobody can exploit these women in any activities. But at the same time such interventions are not of unmixed blessings rather those have spawned some problems for the village society as a whole. One very very poor woman, Romena whose husband recently died by an accident, expressed her satisfaction with NGO intervention in the following way, *"sir if I were forced opt maid servant work for the sake of my livelihood, I might have to consume many bizarre things including being beaten and having experienced sexual harassment from the rich villagers but now I am free from all those nuisances or stupidities because of my involvement with the NGOs and she further elaborated that that they would rather die if NGOs did not come to work to their villages"*(translated by the author). Just to confirm it the author shared the same views with an old male school teacher, Ruhul Amin who refuted Romen's views rather he elaborated that NGOs are making them slaves of loans. To repay one loan they again take another loan from another source thus they are entrapped with the vicious circles of debt by the NGOs. According to Ruhul Amin, now *"NGOs are vehemently engaged in doing poverty business instead of removing poverty"*. Nazma, a woman whose husband, Tota Mea lived in Italy came back recently after he stayed 16 years there. Recently Tota Mea on his returned from abroad started a rent-a-car business. Before he came back her wife began construction of a 2 unit 5-storied building in the village, the second floor is underway now. Tota's family lives in the first floor of the building which is fully equipped with modern amenities. Through changing his economic status he has emerged as rural elite, who has stakes in almost all the major incidents in the villages. In another case, Shefali begum whose husband went to Saudi Arabia 3 years ago immediately after her marriage is now involved in extra-marital relationship with a young man, that is creating nuisances in the overall village cultures and such phenomena are not uncommon in these villages. Thus opportunities created by globalization have contributed to ruin of the indigenous culture and social values.

Analysis of the above case reveals that NGO-nization of the rural society have devastated and challenged old practices and cultures and unleashed immense potential for women's empowerment and mobility in rural Bangladesh. As an aftermath of the dynamics of globalization rural power politics has underwent different stimuli, which has resulted in economic inequality in rural livelihood. Last but not the least globalization broke the myth of indigenous cultures.

Synthesized Summary of the Case studies

Findings of the empirical cases reveal that rural development in a globalized world has become more complex and dynamic phenomena. The rich and middle class rural people have emerged an entrepreneurial class using the advantage of privatization and market mechanism. Some villagers have involved themselves in self-employment in non-formal and off-farm rural business which has further augmented growth and employment in the rural society. Traditional cooperative organizations have faced serious challenges to encounter the irresistible forces of globalization and private capitalism. Globalization has challenged traditional value system and social-economic lifestyle in the rural Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Based on content analysis and empirical evidence it can be substantiated that globalization has changed the reality of rural development in today's Bangladesh. In the changed context, the public sector should play an enabling role for rural development taking cognizance of other actors such as donors, NGOs and private sectors. To save conventional cooperative organizations from the shocks of privatization and globalization, loan for modernization, innovation, and business diversification should be properly guided under public-private partnership. The cooperative organizations especially those are engaged in productive, financial and commercial activities should be equipped with modern technologies, updated knowledge and know how so that they can diversify their business in more demanding areas to stop further marginalization or pauperization and to survive and sustain their economic performance. To reduce rural poverty and address income inequality scope of employment opportunities and the safety net benefits should be augmented through expanding pro-poor public expenditure in education and health services. Although Bangladesh economy is interconnected with the global economy but its economy has obtained a vibrant growth with the huge remittance by

the expatriate Bangladeshi workers. The country has more or less ensured food security through adopting HYVs and modern technology. Therefore, Bangladesh has nothing to be afraid of the shocks arising out from globalization. It was quite evident from the global recession of 1995-2000 when most of the South-East Asian countries were highly affected by that global economic down turn but Bangladesh economy was not affected much. Judging from different angularities and present geo-politico-economic perspective, it would be impossible for Bangladesh to avoid globalization by shutting down the borders. Economic growth is essential for development, which can be attained through trade liberalization, but the growth must satisfy the equity standards. Specific protection and special boost-up mechanisms are also necessary for Bangladesh to become mature to compete globally. Regional economic cooperation and local politico-economic treaties/conventions must be developed to reap maximum benefits of globalization.

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