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DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
A Basic Needs Approach

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-A BASIC-NEEDS APPROACH

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FORWARD

Much has been said and written about the position and negative aspects of various approaches to development. Obviously there are no ultimate answers to development nor only one true approach. Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) involved in development work, like others in the field, are also involved in trying out various approaches with the hope of evolving a method that can alleviate some of the existing problems. Some of those NGOs select one single approach for their programmes, while there are others experimenting with more than one.

Though each NGO obviously has its own rationale for experimenting with particular types of programmes or approaches and will of course argue their stand with determination, perhaps they cannot assume that approaches other than their own are not applicable.

In his paper the author has put forward strong arguments as to why a certain approach has been selected by Nijera Kori. In being this is not intended to cast aspirations on any NGO or other approaches. There is great need and scope for experimentation and diversity through which organisations involved in development efforts can learn from each other. We hope this paper will be taken in the spirit it was written, of putting forward a rationale for a view point.

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INTRODUCTION

It is now widely stated that the development and improvement of human resources as productive agents must be a central objective of development policies. This has led to a shift of emphasis from the concept of development through the accumulation of material wealth to increasing investment in human capital. This has already become a new creed to the policy makers and planners in developing countries with respect to the development of the human infrastructure.

THE GENESIS

Economics growth in industrially developed countries confirms the relative importance of non-material investment. Although the progress achieved in those countries manifests a spectacular increase in the stock of physical capital, the improvements in intangible human capital are no less significant.

Economics backwardness is largely revealed in the under development of human capital or human resources in developing countries and is manifest in several particular forms: low labour efficiency, factor immobility, limited specialisation in occupation, a deficient supply of entrepreneurship, and customary values and traditional social institutions that minimize the incentives for economic change. The economic quality of the population remains low where there is little knowledge of what natural resources are available; the alternative production techniques that are possible; the necessary skills, the existing market conditions and the institutions that might be created to favour economizing effort and economic rationality.

An improvement in the quality of the “human factor” is then as essential as investment in physical capital. An advance in knowledge and the diffusion of new ideas and objectives are necessary to remove economic backwardness and instill human activities and motivations that are more favourable to economic development. Although investment in material capital may indirectly achieve some lessening of the economic backwardness of human resources, the direct and more decisive means is to through investment in human being.¹

SITUATION IN BANGLADESH

It is imperative to discuss in brief the present situation in Bangladesh with respect to “human resources” at the outset. The average per capita income is 100 dollars only and over four-fifths of the populations are considered to be below the poverty line in terms of minimum caloric requirement. They still live in poverty, in the darkness of illiteracy and in shanty houses. About two thirds of children of 5 to 11 years of age have access to primary education and there is only one doctor per 10,000 persons.² This is the picture of human resources that exist in Bangladesh.

It is frequently quoted by persons in power and authority that though Bangladesh is poorly endowed with material resources, she possesses a vast reservoir of human resources. But when the Government and its agencies talk about strategies with respect to skill formation and raising technical capability of the population through education and training, research and extension and institutional set-up with appropriate linkages between all these elements,³ it clearly reveals that our human resources are not that much resourceful, i.e., they are not well equipped and well organised to fit themselves in the development process as defined by the authority.

THE CONCEPT

The question that naturally arises is at what point a human being is to be treated as a human capital. The answer may lie in the following propositions:

- (a) The person is to contribute positively to the income of the nation.
- (b) The contribution should be at par with the potential the person possesses.

Two features from the above-mentioned propositions may follow which are:

- (a) Possession of necessary skill;
- (b) Gainful employment.

Hence, the development of human resources essentially envisages the problem of developing an infrastructure and opportunities where the people can effectively contribute to the society through gainful employment. This necessitates the following:

- (a) Adequate employment opportunity for all;
- (b) Adequate programs for imparting necessary skills and know-how;
- (c) A well designed investment plan and an execution mechanism to materialise the former.

In fact, the problem of human resource development cannot be separated from the problem of employment which has been clearly admitted in the 2nd plan as such : that a strategy of production of basic needs must be matched by a viable strategy of employment generation and human resources development so that the poor may have access to the item of basic needs.⁴ This highlights an issue of profound interest that the per capita consumption of the poor needs to be increased.

The overwhelming majority of the populations in Bangladesh are poor. It has been agreed by the planners in principle that the expansion of employment is a very important factor in increasing production and in generating purchasing power to distribute the fruits of increased output of goods and services.⁵ This may be squared with the proposition that all have a right to work. The right to work should implies that each person available for and willing to work should have an adequately remunerated job is said to be increasingly being recognised as one of the basic rights in Bangladesh.⁶

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

Now let us look at the present employment situation in Bangladesh. The official statistics, however, reveal some astonishing findings. According to the Pilot Manpower Survey undertaken by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 1979, percentages of employed population have been 87.6 and 3.7 for male and female population of 10 years of age and above respectively. Only 1.3% of the male civilian labour force have been found unemployed during the survey period. There had been no female unemployment. However, as much as 88.9% of the female population of the said age-group have been found to be engaged in “household work” and are not included in the “civilian labour office.”⁷

Nevertheless, these data give a very distorted picture with respect to the employment situation in Bangladesh. The overwhelming majority of this “employed” population line below the poverty line. Though they are employed, their employment is far from being remunerative to provide them with basic necessities of life. But the extent of this “underemployment” with respect to income has not been identified in the official statistics.

The data on female employment is quite ludicrous. The bulk of the women of working age have been omitted from the civilian labour force and have been found to be engaged in “household work”. This clearly unfolds the typical attitude of the authority toward the woman as if the women are not available for or willing to work in productive activities. In fact, their participation and contribution in activities, which is evident in almost all rural households, particularly among the poorer stratum, are not socially recognised. They do participate in such activities alongside with their typical “household responsibilities” in the rural sector. One finding reveals that as much as 71.21% of the women labour force in rural Bangladesh work as unpaid family helpers.⁸ It is also a fact that the women are subject to wage discriminations on frequent occasions.

From the above-mentioned discussions, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- (a) The bulk of the labour force is either unemployed or underemployed;
- (b) The women do participate in productive activities but are largely unpaid or underpaid vis-a-vis their contribution in productive activities are nor socially recognised;
- (c) The consumption level of the people is too low which seems to work as a disincentive to participate in productive activities.

BASIC-NEED APPROACH

The last proposition (c) unfolds one of the most fundamental problems that needs to be resolved prior to undertaking any planning exercise for the development of human resources. This envisages a basic-needs approach to the problem. Here it may be relevant to quote from in ILO report as such: **development planning should include, as an explicit goal, the satisfaction of an absolute level of basic needs.**⁹

The concept of basic needs illuminated in this report includes two elements:

First, there are certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing are obviously included, as would be certain household equipment and furniture.

Secondly, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, health and educational facilities.

A basic-needs oriented policy implies the participation of the people in making the decisions which affect them. Participation interacts with two main elements of a basic-needs strategy. For example, education and good health will facilitate participation, and participation in turn will strengthen the claim for the material basic needs.

The satisfactory of an absolute level of basic needs as so defined should be placed within a broader framework – namely the fulfillments of basic human rights, which are not only ends in themselves but also contribute to the attainment of other goals. Employment enters into a basic-needs strategy both as a means and as an end. Employment yields an output. It provides an income to the employed. And it gives a person the recognition of being employed in something worth his while.

The fulfillment of physical basic-needs target in the poorer countries cannot be achieved by a redistribution of goods currently produced. Not only the structure of production must change, but the total amount of produce must also rise over time. For this reason, it should be stressed that a rapid rate of economic growth is an essential part of a basic-needs strategy. Part of the necessary increase in output will come from making use of currently underemployed and unemployed labour resources and linking them with a better allocation of capital, and partly through the redistribution of productive resources. Fuller employment would thus be a means of producing more goods and simultaneously of acquiring more purchasing power to gain access to them.

Improvement in the quality of employment or conditions of work should be another important objective. Many people's work at present is demoralising, undignified, inconvenient or even dangerous (to health if not to life). Thus making employment more humane and satisfying is also an element of a basic-needs strategy.

In order to fulfill the basic needs of the people, a very high rate of growth on its own is likely to worsen the pattern of income distribution as had been observed in many countries. Another way of meeting basic-needs may be considered by combining rapid growth with substantial redistribution of income. This redistribution must result in the production of more basic goods and services. The generation of adequate employment opportunities is an essential component of this approach. The productive mobilisation of the unemployed and the underemployed vis-a-vis higher productivity of labour are also necessary to ensure both a level of output high enough to meet basic-needs targets and its proper distribution.

Redistribution of ownership or access to land and other resources combined with the reorientation of public services may bring about an improved distribution of income. In any case, this strategy implies a very high level of investment without which there will be no growth, no meaningful redistribution.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

Our governments, both the present and previous ones, seem to agree verbally with this concept. Persons in power and authority frequently assure the people of 'more' employment, 'adequate' health care and education, 'appropriate' structural changes in social institutions in public meetings and seminars. Targets are also set to achieve these: to double the production of food within five years, to provide universal health care facilities by the end of the 20th century, to provide facilities for primary education to all children of school-going age by 1985, and so and so forth. This type of slogans had been raised by all regimes and nothing was implemented to any significant extent. Even there had been symptoms of further deterioration of the situation. The common people are at the brink of frustration and ruination. Every regime tries to find the root of all evils in the previous regime and promise a golden future. But the future never knocks the door and lofty commitments end in sheer hypocrisy.

A critical review of government efforts and planning exercises done so far reveals that there is a big gap between commitments and implementation, between the expectation and the reality. Amidst this situation, it is very difficult to remain optimistic, and one's optimism has its limits too.

It has been evident that targets are often too ambitious and investment planning is contradictory to the objective. We must decide what things we need first: more power pumps or colour television, universal primary education or a palatial parliament building, employment for the parents of hungry children or a children's park, more industry or a new international airport.

To embark on a basic-needs strategy, it is necessary to determine a set of basic-needs targets. It is essential that the people whose basic-needs have to be met should participate in the determination of these needs, rather than having them handed over from the above. It will probably be found that such participation is severely hampered by the lack of organisation that can express the views of the poorest groups on the one hand and by governmental interventions on the other.

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Given the socio-politico-economic milieu of Bangladesh and past experiences, it is hardly convincing that the situation will undergo any radical transformation unless the participation of the people, particularly the rural poor which constitutes the bulk of the population, is ensured. But this participation may take place effectively only when their right of participation is socially established, i.e., when they will be able to establish their hegemony in all spheres of social life, turning the existing balance in the social power structure upside down.

This issue, however, entails certain political considerations. Hard realities of life reveal that the pious wish of developing human resources in the true sense of the term can never be materialised undermining the existing nexus of social relationships and the power structure. There had been enough academic exercises in this regard during the past and will be many more in future. But the problems remain unresolved. The clue lies in the political will of the people personified in the government and since the governments experienced so far failed to give response to popular interest or have their own interests and aspirations opposite to that of the people, the situation remained the same as had been in the past.

NGO EXPERIENCE

Since the liberation of Bangladesh, a host of non-government organisations (NGO) have been working with projects and activities in different areas of Bangladesh. Many of these have been striving for the development of human resources by adopting various means and programs which may be roughly summarised as follows:

- (a) providing certain essential services, i.e., non-formal education, health care facilities, population education and family planning services, etc., to the target audience;
- (b) providing skill training in different fields;
- (c) The mobilisation of the rural poor, particularly the landless and women through a process of conscientisation.

With respect to population education and related services in order to check the population boom, enough emphasis in terms of personnel and material has been given so far with negligible impact on the rate of fertility. It is probably reasonable to argue that the early satisfaction of basic needs of the poor and the consequent raising of aspirations will itself contribute to the reduction of fertility.

Similarly, it seems equally utopian to develop a sound health care system for the people, particularly the rural poor, by providing more health and nutrition education and clinical services unless the people are able to eat enough and live well. Remunerative employment itself may take care of the problem to a significant extent.

Many NGOs have been imparting non-formal education to the adult people in respective project areas. It is very difficult to assess their performances in this regard since these programs have not been duly evaluated in many cases. However, experience reveals that the illiterate adults seldom find any interest in literacy since it does not bring any immediate material benefit to them. Frequent drop out of participants in many such centers have been experienced. In most cases, the participants lose interest in this program as soon as they become able to sign their names.

The development of small and cottage industries have been endeavoured by some NGOs by providing skill training and physical inputs to different groups and individuals. However, this is not working effectively due to the lack of an appropriate infrastructure. Shortage of operational capital and imperfect market conditions with respect to the procurement of inputs and disposal of outputs may be mentioned particularly in this respect. Often funders from abroad patronise these ventures whereby the foreigners are assured of luxury craft products by exploiting very cheap labour in Bangladesh. A lot of urban-based NGOs run and controlled by the elite are engaged in this program and have become career social worker by earning name and fame and frequent trips to foreign countries. Given the absence of a broad-based home market for these products, it could not provide employment opportunity to the producers on a regular basis and to a greater extent.

THE MOBILISATION OF THE RURAL POOR

It has been mentioned earlier that the development of human resources needs to be correlated with the basic-needs strategy which should be addressed toward the poorest sections of the population. This necessitates and appropriate social infrastructure at the outset. Experiences reveal that a lot of programs are being endeavoured to correct the periphery instead of healing the root cause of all problems.

Amidst this situation the question naturally arises what is to be done. Here we like to emphasis once again that the proper development of human resources in the true sense of the term is possible only when there is an appropriate infrastructure in the society conducive to such development. This necessitates prior reorganisation of existing values and institutions without which the present state of things will continue to perpetuate.

The development and welfare of the bulk of the population may be achieved only when their conscious and active participation on determining their conditions of existence is ensured. To be specific, it is rather utopian to think about mass welfare unless the people are able to establish their hegemony in the society, in its political institution, the government. With this concept some NGOs have been working with the people, particularly the rural poor, in order to organise and mobilise their indigenous capability and power. The name of Nijera Kori may be particularly mentioned in this regard.

To Nijera Kori, the explanation of poverty does not lie in the pressure of population upon resources, but in the organisation of these resources by a very small minority.¹¹ This led to the strategy of working exclusively with the most exploited disadvantaged people who are at the bottom rung of ladder, deprived from the real benefits of development efforts, struggling hard and yet unable to meet their minimum requirements.

All these efforts are supposed to lead to the creation of an organisation of the most exploited group in the society so that they can build their confidence and strength in the process of taking control over their lives.

Nijera Kori feels that the development of human resources will be the logical consequence of appropriate transformation in the existing institutional set up and a people's organisation is the only instrument that can achieve this in the long run. Thus to view the problem of the development of human resources independently and to embark on sporadic programs in this regard will eventually and in crocodile terms.

CONCLUSION

The write-up which has been presented here may not seem to be value-free. It is largely agreed that the ultimate goal of all development efforts is the welfare of the common people. However, there are sharp differences in opinion with respect to the meaning and extent of welfare on the one hand and with respect to means and strategies to be adopted on the other. Here in this write-up, certain value judgments have been explicit which may not seem "Logical" to many belonging to different values. In fact, it is very difficult, rather impossible, to remain value-free ultimately.

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