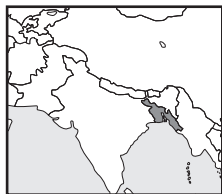


## The drawbacks of poor governance



The failure in governance in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, is accompanied by a score of other specific threats to human security, including the pressures of globalisation, poverty, unemployment, an outdated legal system, a weak civil society, lack of political commitment, an insensitive approach to gender issues, etc. Both the Government and NGOs are trying to improve the situation. Their separate actions, however, have not yet managed to strengthen human security rapidly enough.

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Human security encompasses those aspects of security that affect an individual, a community or a state, including economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. Also, as stated in Transparency International's report, "in any civilized society the two most important factors which would be the indicators of the quality of life are firstly, the protection of life and property and secondly, the dispensation of justice. In Bangladesh, both these factors are largely absent".<sup>2</sup> This underscores the urgency of introducing good governance in a country so badly affected by poverty and want.

Although the country ranks 139th in the Human Development Index and is the very last in the Transparency International Index, there have been improvements in some aspects of human security. But there are many shortcomings as well and the pace of changes is still slow, and personal insecurity has increased, especially for women.

### Economic security

Economic security has been increasing in Bangladesh as reflected in rising per capita income and declining poverty. The head count ratio of poverty decreased from 58.8% in 1991-92 to 49.8% in 2000. The poverty gap also decreased from 17.2% to 12.9% and the squared poverty gap from 6.8% to 4.6% during the same period.<sup>3</sup> However, the poverty reduction rate has been very slow - about one percentage point per annum. If the present trend continues it will take about 50 years to bring down the level of poverty to zero. While there have been

some improvement in terms of poverty reduction measures, the absolute number of poor people has increased - about 65 million people were poor in 2000. Furthermore, poverty reduction during the 1990s was accompanied by increasingly unequal income distribution. Both the urban and rural poor have become more vulnerable in terms of income security due to privatisation brought about by structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which have already left many people unemployed.<sup>4</sup>

### Food security

The Constitution declares that the State is fundamentally responsible for ensuring the food security of its citizens. Total food-grain production in the country nearly doubled between 1980-81 and 2000-01. But increase in food per capita availability over the same period was outpaced by population growth. Considerable progress has been made, however, in agricultural production (especially rice), in the liberal import policy which facilitates the closing of the food gap rapidly in times of emergency, and in a number of food programmes targeted at the poor. Yet there are still seasonal and regional food problems. The recent widespread cases of starvation in the northern part of the country indicates that food sovereignty has not yet been achieved due mainly to an inefficient official distribution system and the fact that the poor do not qualify for unemployment benefit.

### Health security

Health security (relative freedom from diseases, infections and malnutrition) has improved for most of the population, but the Government's overall health expenditures are not directed at securing poor people's health. The poor are more prone to illnesses than the non-poor irrespective of sex or other social indicators. Marginalised groups continue to face strong barriers to access a corrupt public health care system and are forced to attend private clinics. The rich always get priority and better facilities. This disparity between poor and non-poor in terms of access to government health care is more acute in

urban areas. The urban ultra-poor are particularly deprived in terms of curative care and maternal health (Chart 1).

The health system also glaringly discriminates against women. More than 90% of births take place in the mother's home and are not supervised by trained staff, and deaths due to pregnancy-related complications affect three women per hour (26,000 per year).

### Environmental security

There are mixed results in environmental security. Access to safe drinking water has increased and now reaches 95.44% of the population, yet there is the growing menace of arsenic contamination - 50 of the country's 64 districts are now exposed to this threat. On the other hand, although access to sanitation has increased from 21% in 1990 to 43.4% in 2000, it is still a far cry from the 80% sought by the Millennium Development Goals. Air pollution in Dhaka City has increased, and the land is degraded as a consequence of the excessive use of chemical fertilizers, deforestation and saline water intrusion due to shrimp culture. Deforestation has doubled the areas vulnerable to flooding. However, social forestry, nurseries and vegetable gardens are on the increase. Finally, Bangladesh faces a threat derived from the greenhouse effect: a rise in sea level which may affect coastal areas.

### Personal security

Personal security has deteriorated in many ways. Law and order is marked by insecurity, coercion and violence. This has led to poor governance, criminalisation of politics and violation of citizens' rights. The media provide ample evidence of the disturbing crime growth and the troubling shortcomings of legislation, law enforcement system, court system and prisons.

The personal security of people from all social groups and strata is at risk, and women are the most threatened by lack of security. The most common manifestations of violence against them consist of dowry related violence, rape, injury or death by corrosive and poisonous substances (i.e. acid throwing) and slave trafficking (see box).

Lack of personal security has limited investment, especially direct foreign investment, and has slowed down the rate of poverty reduction.

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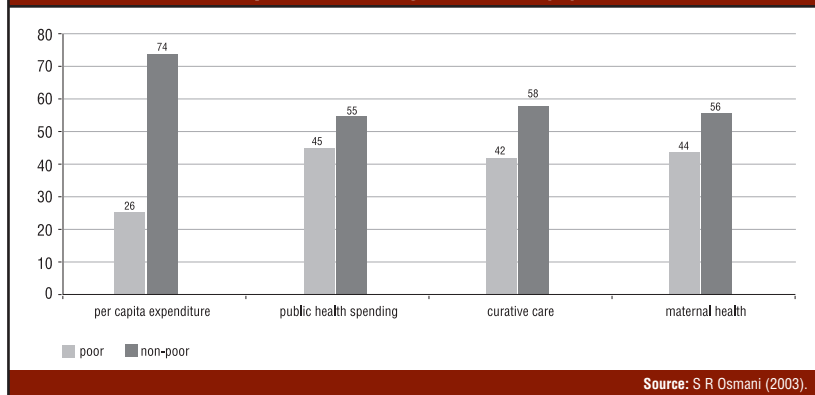
2 [www.ti-bangladesh.org/docs/survey/overview.htm](http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/docs/survey/overview.htm)

3 Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS). *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2000*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Planning Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh, 2003.

4 Rahman, Atiur *et al.* "Impact of Structural Adjustment Policies: An Assessment Using Participatory Tools". Vol II, Main Report (Mimeo). Dhaka: SAPRII, 2000.

## CHART 1

### Distribution of health expenditure in Bangladesh, 2000 (%)



### Structural obstacles

The 2002 UNDP report stresses the need for establishing law and order in the governance system for all, particularly for the excluded. The report also states: "...until now there has been a critical lack of studies that analyse these complex issues and attempt to understand their deeper structural causes."<sup>5</sup>

A recent study<sup>6</sup> shows that more than 60% of suicide cases are associated with various human security issues. The determining factor in 70% of these cases was personal insecurity including family feuds, torture by family members, dowry disputes, rape, sexual harassment, forced marriage, divorce, poverty, indebtedness, illness, fear of being arrested/accused, etc. Again, about 60% of the victims were women, the majority of them housewives (72.3%), followed by female students (19.8%) and domestic workers (5.2%).

The overwhelming lack of democratic mechanisms makes good governance impracticable. Economic and food security issues can only be guaranteed by an equitable distribution of resources and personal security can only be improved by ensuring that law and order are respected. Political security depends on political will and commitment. Many of these issues can only be resolved by adhering to a participatory governance system.

Bad governance practice at the local level, where trials and verdicts (Shalish) are usually conducted by the chairman or a member of the local government (Union Parishad) together with a village leader (Matbor) and a religious leader (Imam) may be equally responsible for human insecurity.

### Government strategies

Broadly speaking, Government interventions are aimed at:

- Accelerating and expanding pro-poor economic growth

5 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Security in Bangladesh: In Search of Justice and Dignity*. Dhaka, September 2002.

6 Rahman, Arifur. "Gender Analysis of Suicide in the Contemporary Bangladesh" (draft mimeo), supported by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP). Dhaka, 2004.

- Fostering human development of the poor
- Supporting women's advancement and closing the development gender gap
- Providing social protection to the poor against shock and vulnerability

A fifth strategy, which is likely to gain importance in the near future, is to enhance participatory governance, by listening to the voices of the poor and improving the non-income dimensions of well-being.

Some of the recent steps taken by the Government to ensure human security are:

- Introduction of speedy trials<sup>7</sup>
- Establishment of an independent Anti-Corruption Commission
- Legal reforms (see box)
- Restructure of law enforcement agency
- Anti-Crime Operation<sup>8</sup>

### The NGOs' role

There are more than 2,000 NGOs working in the country including large ones like the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Asha, PROSHIKA<sup>9</sup> and CARE. Their activities directly or indirectly help promote human security. The main focus of their activities is development of income generation; education and health services activities; training and infrastructure support; providing micro credit and legal aid; and conducting awareness activities. Many national and international NGOs have been working to enhance the food security situation, some of them working only with the Government, others with part-

7 When Parliament passed this controversial Bill in 2002 for serious crimes like murder, rape, trafficking in illegal arms and explosives, and drugs trafficking, the opposition Awami League walked out in protest.

8 The torture and death of detainees held in custody during the recent anti-crime Operation Clean Heart, involving 400,000 members of the armed forces, seriously undermined human security.

9 PROSHIKA is an acronym of three Bangla words, which stand for training (*proshikkhan*), education (*shikkha*), and action (*karmo*).

ner NGOs and community based organisations. Their actions, however, are unable to achieve substantial impact due to poor governance.

### Ways forward

Co-ordinated efforts are needed on the part of the Government, civil society organisations and NGOs to deal with governance problems in consultation with the people, particularly women and marginalised groups. Good governance cannot exist unless all stakeholders collaborate and participate in making it possible. ■

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### Rising violence against women and children

In Bangladesh - and in Myanmar, Cambodia and Pakistan, among other countries - sulphuric acid, cheap and easily obtained, is used by men to disfigure, and sometimes kill, women and girls. The reasons for these attacks are refusal to accept marriage proposals, domestic fights and quarrels over the property of goods.

A dramatic rise in violence against women in Bangladesh led, in March 2002, to the adoption of laws punishing sulphuric acid attacks with the death sentence. According to police records, the use of acid rose 50% between 2000 and 2002. In 2001 there were 13,339 cases of domestic violence, six times more than those registered in 1995 (2,048). Khaleda Zia, who was re-elected Prime Minister in 2001, introduced two additional laws as a deterrent. That year, 2,343 people were arrested for domestic violence. One year later, not one of them had been sentenced for their actions.

A rise in the slave trade has also taken place. It is estimated that, every year, between 5,000 and 6,000 women and children are victims of this trade, mainly from rural areas toward the cities and to India and Pakistan. The main victims of this traffic are children and poor women stigmatised due to marriage failure or pregnancy out of wedlock. Representatives of Caritas Bangladesh reported in April 2003 that the slave trade, linked to drug and arms traffic, has close ties with Bangladeshi political leaders.

Source: Information provided by *The World Guide 2005-2006*, which will be made available on the Internet in October 2004.