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Geographical Study of Local NGO's Contribution to Rural Development:
A Case on the Riverside of Jamuna, Bangladesh

（ローカルＮＧＯによる農村開発に関する地理学的研究 –バングラデシュ、ジャムナ川流域の事例–）

Abstract

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in rural development across Bangladesh. The key sectors of NGOs' contribution are- education, health, agriculture, environment, child protection, vocational training, economic empowerment, livelihood rehabilitation, human rights, infrastructure development, and disaster management, etc. In this study, I explored three important contribution sectors of NGOs i.e. education, agriculture, and micro-credits to support rural inhabitants of Bangladesh. The study was performed along the riverside of Jamuna, Bangladesh; a remote rural area where many local NGOs support local people to improve their lives and livelihoods. This study involved 30 NGOs in 126 union councils (a smallest administrative hierarchy consists of 3-5 villages) of 5 districts. This study has conducted 533 Household Surveys (HHS), Key Informant Interviews (KII), 50 Focused Group Discussions (FGD) and participatory observations to get the firsthand experience of all the services provided to the local people by the NGOs. ArcGIS 10.2 was used for detailed mapping and analyzing of NGOs' contribution areas in providing educational, agricultural and micro-credit services and the areas that still lack those facilities. Furthermore, it was used to identify suitable agricultural lands for crop production and identify the concentration of NGOs, offering micro-credit programs in rural areas and find potential areas in need of such programs. A Garmin GPS device has been used to locate all MFIs (175 branches of 30 NGOs), educational institutions (358 schools) and growth/commercial centers (42 commercial centers) accurately and collected waypoints were converted to KML format. Furthermore, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences' (SPSS 16.0) software was also used for analyzing the socioeconomic characteristics. Besides, the correlation was analyzed between profit from agriculture and six dependent variables and also between monthly income and selected eight dependent variables (luxurious assets) using SPSS. This study used satellite images of Landsat TM and WorldView from the year of 1975 to 2015 to identify spatial and temporal dynamics of alluvial char as well as to plan for the NGOs distribution to ensure the proper services for the rural poor. Data needed for GIS and RS analysis were taken from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS), Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) and Char livelihood Program (CLP).

The research has illustrated that poverty, lack of transportation/communication facilities, insufficient and unplanned educational infrastructure, lack of awareness, unequal spatial distribution of rural schools, and natural barriers are the main causes of educational backwardness in rural areas of Bangladesh. Local NGO facilitates education sectors by increasing consciousness, development of a need-based curriculum, creation of graded learning materials, non-formal education and food for rural poor students. Unfortunately, donors' have not taken any initiative for providing clean water, playgrounds, providing access to internet, computers, electricity and other facilities. Moreover, male and female literacy rates are 38.85% and 32.26% respectively. Evidently, the female literacy rate is less than the male literacy rate due to religious barriers, transportation systems and the perpetuation of poverty. The duration of the projects and the condition of the local NGOs and infrastructure designed for rural schools create an unstable situation in rural education. Therefore, local NGOs should emphasize on project duration and the proper utilization of local resources and services.

This research has also investigated NGOs' services provided in the agriculture sector, including a suitable location for agricultural crops in the study area using GIS technology. The results revealed that local NGOs facilitate farmers by giving various agricultural aids such as agricultural inputs (seed, fertilizer, pesticide), agricultural tools, cash loans, agricultural training, irrigation facility, support for women in kitchen gardening, etc. People in remote rural areas were mainly involved in farming, while those near the capital (Dhaka) of Bangladesh or other developed areas were primarily engaged in either industry or other service sectors. Correlation analysis revealed that farmers' income is being increased with the increase of farmer's training, access to agricultural inputs, availability of domestic animals in the household and access to agricultural loans. The results further showed that all the land in the study area is not suitable for farming. The study suggests, both the Government Organizations (GOs) and NGOs should raise awareness among farmers and help them to identify best suitable crop production areas.

On the contrary, this study presented the contributions made by micro-credit in poverty alleviation by increasing the income generating activities and empowerment. There are a few prominent micro-credit institutions, e.g. BRAC, Grameen Bank, RDRS Bangladesh and ASA those are working particularly towards the poverty alleviation, empowerment and improvement of living standards of the rural poor. Correlation analysis revealed that farmer's income is significantly related to the use of luxurious products. However, in terms of poverty alleviation, some individual achievements have been made, while net welfare achievements at the union level are remaining absent. Finally, this study plans for sustainable development and make the optimal distance from the centers of commerce and social services areas to ensure proper services to the local poor people along the riverside of Jamuna, Bangladesh.