

Development - the weapon for mass destruction

Background Information

The 20th century was the most remarkable century in the human history for many reasons ranging from people's knowledge, relationship to invention and destructions. The century has offered the world with a range of innovations as well experienced 207 wars including two major and devastating world wars in the human history where almost all countries have directly or indirectly affected. In the second half of the century, four key themes emerged from the collective concerns and aspirations of the world's peoples: peace, freedom, development, and environment as an effort of securing the world from devastations.

Although the WW I caused death of 14 million people but the WW II is considered the most devastating and horrific war in the human history in terms of casualties, costs and property damage. The war has killed more people, cost more money, damaged more property, and affected more people than any other war in history. A total 110 million militaries from 61 countries took part in the war resulting 55 million deaths, 65 million people disabled and costing more than \$1 trillion making it more expensive than all other wars combined. The property damage caused by the war was immeasurable.

In addition to casualties and property damage the WW II probably caused more far-reaching changes in the social systems, peoples' thoughts and relationship. The devastation of 'atom bomb' and effectiveness of long-range missile has seriously shaken the world leaders to think about the future existence of the human being on the earth. For the first time in human history they started thinking for establishment of "peace" by resolving the reasons of conflicts. Major barriers to peace identified were the occupation and resource disparity between countries.

As a result of this aspiration in the 2nd half of the twentieth century, four key themes emerged from the collective concerns and aspirations of the world's peoples: **peace, freedom, development, and environment**. Freedom was sought early in the post-war world in the struggle to end imperialism; to halt totalitarian oppression; and later to extend democratic governance, human rights, and the rights of women, indigenous peoples, and minorities. The success of many former colonies in attaining national independence was followed by a focus on economic development to provide basic necessities for the poorest two-thirds of the world and higher standards of living for the wealthy third. Finally, it is only in the past 45 years that the environment (local to global) became a key focus of national and international law and institutions.

This realization has resulted freedom of many countries from occupation and initiation of development interventions as part of poverty alleviation. The speech of the US President **Harry Truman** in 1949 has identified the '**development of undeveloped areas**' as a priority for the west as an effort to establish peace in the world:

*"More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas..... I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life... What we envisage is a **program of development** based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing ... **Greater production** is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.*

Since then the world has become preoccupied by the "**development**." Every industrialized country has developed its "**development aid agency**," (like UNDP, USAID, DFID, JICA, EEC etc.) multinational development banks (MDBs) thrive on it and dozens of international organizations, including the United Nations system, are devoted to it. The purported goals of development were to eradicate poverty, raise standards of living to equal those found in the industrialized, "developed" countries, and generally to

provide all the requisites for happiness such as education, health, clean water, food, housing, transportation, energy, etc aiming to establish peace in the world.

Based on above noble wishes of rich countries, the third world countries have experienced a series of development approaches ranging from state run ‘Top-down’ approach during 1950 to ‘Integrated Approach’ during 1960 to ‘Grassroots Development’ since 1975 and now ‘Market Development Approach’. All approaches aimed at eradication of poverty from the life of poor people without taking into consideration the opinion of the poor and local context but based on perception of poverty by the non poor and specially the donor agencies. As a result, worldwide poverty is sustaining to create passage for sustainable existence of development organizations. This can be justified by looking at the poverty alleviation scenario of Bangladesh by thousands of local, national and international NGOs, bi-lateral agencies and government of the country over the last 43 years period and at the cost of billion dollars every year. Some skeptical people say that if this money could be given to poor people directly in cash then every poor would become millionaire by this time. Unfortunately, this did not happened in the life of the poor but the leaders of the implementing agencies. The poor at the cost of their poverty has contributed the growth and expansions of the NGOs and ensured luxurious life for the NGO leaders. One day the NGO leader who had no office now has countrywide establishment and leading a very luxurious life through ‘poverty businesses.

Reasons for failure

The reasons of failure are many and among them following two are major;

1. Lack of understanding of local context of poverty and
2. Absence of graduation in development approach

1. Lack of understanding of local context of poverty

The biggest failure of poverty alleviation approaches is in understanding of the poverty situation as well devaluation of local/social capacities & opportunities in addressing poverty in a society.

Poverty is generally categorized as the state of deficiency in money or means of subsistence by ignoring its varied dimensions and effects. Whereas, the state of poverty is not only for deficiency of money or income but also associated with the non-economic conditions of a family which have direct impact on the economic conditions such as social conditions, household capacities, vulnerability context as well moral states of the family.

In short, Poverty is a broad front and multi-dimensional. As much it is about income and income earning opportunities; similarly, it is also about food security to quality of life; about asset bases; human resource capacities; social bondages or capitals; vulnerabilities and coping abilities; about moralities; human security and so on. Given such a multifaceted definition of poverty, it is clear that the successes of any development interventions greatly depend on successes of the inclusion and integrating the multidimensional aspects of poverty in its activities according to local context and priorities. For example; what microcredit can do for the poor depends on the poor’s ability and the local opportunities.

At the same time, the state and causes of poverty is not similar throughout the country and even in every family. It varies from place to place, person to person, time to time and the poverty reduction approach and strategies therefore, require variations according to the specific need of the people as well available opportunities in the family and region. Poverty reduction activity in Dhaka slum cannot be same as poor living in the coastal regions or in the north or hill tracts region. It cannot be same for the families with disabled people and families with number of working people. Similarly causes and dimensions of poverty as well solutions to those causes, people’s priority and available opportunities in each region vary from the other. It is important to conceptualize the poverty from local (social) context, based on people’s perceptions; their priorities and based on local opportunities. What the local people think about the causes of their poverty; what strategies they considers best to combat their poverty are to be seriously

considered by the development agencies. The answer of these questions can better address the local reality of poverty. Thus selections of poverty reduction interventions based on local reality are important to reduce poverty from the society. Poverty is a social context and multidimensional therefore, the poverty eradication mission demands incorporation of a series of interrelated and mutually reinforcing activities and in an integrated way so that one activity takes care of others and finally secures sustainability of the economic growth in the lives of the poor. Otherwise, increased income will never be translated into economic growth if they are not united and interdependent together, not increased conditions and abilities through easy access to capital for IGAs/ business and strengthened with moral and religious practices, not protected with good health, given access to education, skill and information, freed from social and economic exploitation and protected from the damages of any man made or natural calamities.

A single solution (like MC) to all problems approach of development will never be successful until ***right program for right people at right place*** is designed based on local context (the social capitals). Until the causes of poverty is addressed by appropriate interventions, only supply of money may help in reducing consumption crisis or meeting obligatory vulnerabilities like sickness, marrying daughter or house repairing but will never help increase capacities of fighting the causes of poverty.

Another scenario of development interventions is that the development project proposals are formulated based on priorities established nominally by the recipient government, but usually influenced by the donor agencies according to their prescribed process of poverty alleviation. The western perception of poverty as 'economic deprivation' has tempted the donor agencies for attempting to import western economic system by transforming traditional economic system into one more similar to the western pattern without considering local context where people's relationship, culture and priorities were very different than those western conditions. As a result the so called development interventions not only fail to reach the desired goals but permanently destroy the century long inherent social capacities and willingness in addressing the poverty and vulnerabilities. For example; the Micro Credit (MC) program which is very much appreciated for its non collateral base and easy repayment system. But none ever talked about the damages MFI causing to the social bondage and cohesions of the people by segmenting them into different groups and using mutual trust and relationship as insurance for repayment. In addition, this grouping and dependencies on MFIs has totally destroyed the social bondage and responsibilities and created apathy among the people which is noticed in case of disasters or vulnerabilities as is explained below in disaster response section.

2. Absence of graduation in program approaches

Since post II world war, the world has experienced a number of development approaches aiming to poverty alleviation as a means of conflict resolution and to sustain peace. Every approach has had success in meeting the needs and necessities at that particular time and situation. Development is a process of change and therefore development approaches also requires changing to adjust with the changing circumstances. For example; the innovation of airplane in hundreds year before has contributed innovation of spacecraft today only for the graduation and adjustment of knowledge and skills over periods.

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated poor countries as well frequently affected by natural disasters from both political and natural sources. However the country is widely known for its vibrant NGO sector and innovation of 'Micro Credit' model as a successful tool for poverty alleviation. At the beginning MC has demonstrated good success in particularly by giving poor access to money for meeting shocks at emergencies or running IGAs and thus making them freed from the debt cycle from the money lenders. After two decades, the same approach started receiving criticisms for its ability to contribute in poverty alleviation. The key reasons behind this criticism lies within the inability of the MC program in accommodating the changes taken place in the socio-economic context in its surroundings.

We are living in an ever changing environment. The concept of basic needs has changed over time as well definition of poverty. Social conditions, people's perception, social values and tie-ships, choices, priorities, and necessities are changing. Under such a changing context static development concept cannot contribute to the changing dimensions of poverty. Changes in the poverty alleviation approach

through MC also required modifications according to changing global context. Unfortunately the MC model over the last 36 years failed to graduate its approach by accommodating the graduated needs, choices and priorities of the poor they are working with.

Every approach evolves based on or targeting to certain conditions and when the condition changes the approach or strategy requires adjusting itself according to the changing circumstances. The social context which has fueled the necessity of MC approach has changed significantly over time due to improvement in communication systems, increased income earning opportunities as well series of structural changes. Unfortunately this reality was very much ignored by the Microfinance Industries (MFIs) therefore, failed in graduating their programs according to the changing needs of the poor.

The NGOs require understanding that every approach has its lifetime according to the need of that context and changes require under the changing circumstances. Failure to adjust with the changing circumstances may out track them from the development sector by the strangers with appropriate approach and strategies.

Disaster Management – another disastrous effort for the poor

Like poverty, disaster is also considered as one of the major barrier to sustainable development. Disaster whether it is manmade or natural is considered a barrier to sustainable economic growth in the life of the poor. Therefore, disaster management is an integral part of the development interventions by the donor agencies. This support is provided to protect the hard-earned growth and development at the cost of billion dollars. When a disaster hits the victims require instant support to overcome vulnerabilities aiming to regain into normal productive condition. According to the nature and intensity of the disaster the types of support as well duration for the support varies.

No doubt the intention is good. But the way disasters are managed by the donor agencies and their implementing partners is very much questionable. Similar to the development interventions the disaster management activities also never considers the local context, people's abilities and priorities. The damages are measured by the outsiders and interventions are also designed based on their own perceptions sometimes which are not only funny but insulting for the victims and embarrassing for the local agencies. For example; birth control pills, condom and pampers were found send by donors to victims who are starving and living under open sky. This happens because of the gaps in perception of the social context and necessities by the donor agencies. Moreover, the approaches donors follows in responding to disastrous situation causes more and sometime permanent disaster in the life of the victims than the natural disaster does.

Peoples inherent disaster responsive arrangements – the social capital

In addressing to vulnerability or disastrous situation we always undermine the inherited strength and capacities of the effected people and the community where do they live. Man is considered as social animal and they live together in a society or community under an interdependent and interrelated relationship which is essential for their survival and protection. Since the primitive age, people in a community have been maintaining an inherent quality of defensive arrangements against, and adjustment with, any vulnerable situation. These protective arrangements were seen both at individual as well collective levels.

Poor are born and live in a range of vulnerabilities. The poorest households frequently experience a combination of many different types of vulnerabilities for example natural disasters like tornado, cyclone, river erosion, landslides or insecurity of tenure, erratic employment, few or no assets, chronic ill-health, domestic violence, communal or political conflicts etc. The majority of very poor households and individuals experience a number of interlinked factors that make them more vulnerable and may result in a downward spiral into chronic poverty.

Uncertainty is part of their life and accordingly they develop various types of coping mechanism to survive with vulnerabilities. These include building social networks as forms of insurance, accumulating assets

like land, cow, goat; savings account; collective actions and so on. However, the range of coping strategies of poor is naturally limited as well restricted to their limited resources/assets and by the other stresses on their livelihoods. These stresses are intensified further for a number of trends such as increasing prevalence of diseases, conflict, globalization or environmental degradation. In addition to economic, health, education poverty, climate change is becoming one of the major threats to livelihoods options and strategies of the poor.

Bangladesh is by born an economically poor country. Its geographic location coupled with political instability has kept it susceptible to frequent natural and political vulnerabilities. Therefore, people living in the country has developed and adopted various strategies to cope with these adverse situations. The existing strategies in response to managing vulnerabilities can be divided into two categories:

1. The ***coping*** strategy includes the preparations for avoiding or minimizing risks/vulnerabilities (before the disaster).
2. The ***responsive*** strategy includes the activities / actions usually taken after any disaster.

The coping strategies:

The people living in frequent vulnerabilities have developed strategies to cope with or survive under such situation. This coping strategy includes activities at the HH level as well community and /or market based. The coping strategies followed by rural communities were:

- To reduce the affect of crisis (floods, cyclones, joblessness etc) on livelihoods, people in these areas were found undertake some preparatory activities before the incidence occur and targeting to the possible impact of the shock. These preparations are taken both individually at HH level like food storage, savings at home or in group, migration for income, raising homestead above flood level etc. and collectively at the community level like repairing embankment, repairing community shelter or common property management etc.
- At a prolonged period of crisis which affects on reserved food, people were found to adopt strategies like rationing food consumptions, use of savings and then lending, temporary migration for income, sale of assets. At the extreme point causes permanent migration to cities and towns.

Responsive strategies:

Among the responsive strategies against unexpected disasters the poor people are dependent on various sources and arrangements made by the community.

- ***Community based arrangements.*** This is the immediate response comes from the neighbors, kinships, relatives to the victims which are mainly in the form of shelter, cloth, food and medical treatments. These are inherited social arrangements existed from generations and before developing donor, public or market based arrangements. As a social animal people have developed their own responsive arrangements against any arisen crisis such as cyclone, flooding, community conflicts etc. by protecting themselves through community based inter-dependent informal and collective arrangements. For example; helping neighboring affected HHs, collectively repairing damaged dams or embankments to protect their crops and shelters.
- ***Market-based arrangements.*** In rural villages informal lending sources (against money or crop or labor) lending are very strong and active in absence of formal market based institutions. When the immediate community based support is over, the victims move onto market based solutions like borrowing from shops, selling labor or crops in advance or lending money at a higher rate of interest.

Among the poor people this social bondage and tie-ship is very strong because of their continual vulnerability throughout their life. Since evolution of NGOs and initiation of development interventions following the post liberation situation, this social capital of poor families eroded over the last four decades. Development interventions or relief operation in the name of poverty alleviation or saving the disaster-affected victims, the NGOs have created divisions among the poor people (by segmenting them into different groups NGOs), made people dependent on outside assistance, damaged community based cohesion, and renders them inactive, devoid of self-confidence and crippled day by day.

Manikgong is a district nearest to mega city Dhaka. The district was very much known as the laboratory of NGOs because most leading organizations have tested various program approaches in this district. BRAC ASA, Proshika and many other leading NGOs have their training centers as well has had organized groups there in most upazillas. Billions of dollars been spent through these NGOs in the name of empowerment of poor by implementing a number of activities ranging from human & skill development training to social awareness, community mobilization including resource and material supports aiming to enhance capacities of poor to be able to manage their poverty by themselves as individuals and collectively by their groups. When a devastating tornado in 1989 hit the district and caused severe havoc in some parts of the area most of us thought that the well trained and organized groups of NGOs would successfully demonstrate their abilities of managing shocks and vulnerabilities by themselves. This expectation was made based on the enormous supports the leading NGOs have provided to these people over the last 14 to 15 years period to enhance their social and financial capacities of managing poverty and vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, the expectation was proved false. The members of organized groups were found sitting idle on ruins and debris caused by the tornado hoping to have their supported NGOs to come and tell them what to do.

On the other hand the non-members of NGOs and marginal farmers immediately started to measure the damages caused by the tornado and initiated to overcome the situation with whatever is left by the disaster. These unorganized (by NGOs) non-members poor victims quickly get organized and decided that if anything was to be done to get back in normal life, it would have to be done now and by themselves. Without any delay they quickly started supporting themselves by sharing whatever resources they have and within a few days they were successful in rebuilding and repairing their houses through collective efforts. In contrary, the NGO members remained sitting idle until the supporting NGOs reach them and capitalize their miseries and debris caused by the Tornado by taking photographs, publishing in news papers and writing proposals for donor funding. By this time they were provided immediate relief by the NGOs in the form of foods, temporary shelters in schools, Medicare and kept those waiting until the visits or responses from the donor agencies been done and funding was assured. As a result the NGO members were kept waiting in miseries for the donors supports to come ignoring the inherent capacities of them in returning to normal life.

But the million dollar questions arose from this situation about the results or outcomes of the development interventions ran by the NGOs in this region. The development agencies at the cost of billions of dollars over the 15 years period has made the poor crippled and dependent on external assistances by damaging the inherited community based relationships (social capitals) once what was the major sources of supports during shocks and vulnerabilities. Not only has paralyzed the potential capacities of the victims and the society but also caused severe damaged to local economy as well the organization itself. **Following are few examples** of the damages caused by so called development and disaster responsive activities.

- Due to propaganda and publicity of the NGOs, huge quantity of relief goods was showered by the Donors agencies through various government and NGO sources. Along with the NGOs and government agencies various Social, Religious & business organizations, Universities and many other institutions also rushed into the area with relief commodities. The distressed people become restless in collecting and storing relief goods instead of engaging themselves in reconstruction and income earning activities. They started capitalizing their miseries for collecting more and more relief goods realizing that if they rebuild or repair their houses they will not receive these free supports from varied sources. The competition among the NGOs, government agencies and social organizations in distribution of relief goods has prolonged the relief activities for several

months. The nearness to and easy communication with Dhaka, the capital city facilitated an unrestricted flow of relief goods in the area. This abundance and easy availability of valuable relief goods have provoked other non affected people from there and neighboring areas to rush into the affected areas for collection of relief materials leaving their normal livelihoods activities. As a result there arose an acute shortage of labor to work in agricultural fields, reconstruction of houses, local factories or repairing of roads and so on which were essential for regaining normal life and maintaining local economic systems.

- Through this massive relief operation, all basic requirements like foods (includes everything like rice, lintel, oil, etc.), cloths, drinking water, medicine etc. were made available at the door step of the people. This has seriously impacted on the local market and product distribution system making the associated people unemployed. Small shops were closed from a dearth of customers. Local productive sectors and industries were forced to shut down for lack of employees and customers. As a result the stable local economic system suddenly collapsed. On the other hand, purchase of huge quantity of daily necessary items from the wholesale markets has resulted temporary shortage in Dhaka markets resulting sufferings for the city consumer and the distribution channels to other districts consumer markets. To address one short-term crisis in a small area the unplanned relief operation created a number of long-term crisis's in the region and caused sufferings for the people from neighboring areas too.
- By sheltering victims in schools, college & other teaching institutions the normal teaching for the students was hampered for the total period of relief operation. As a result the infrastructure, furniture's and total environment was damaged lack of sanitary facilities for huge number of families in a small area.
- Unplanned and uncontrolled relief operation also causes serious damages to local NGOs both in their normal development activities and their staff members. Long-term relief operation requires suspension of their normal development interventions for example Micro Credit to engage staffs in disaster responsive activities resulting another disaster in the program to manage later and in the long run. During disaster response most times under the pressure of donor agencies the concern NGOs are found to undertake relief and rehabilitation activities beyond their capacities resulting not only severe strain and stress on staff members, shatters organizational control system but also results ineffectiveness of the work they are involved with. This over stress and loose control system in many cases found provocative for dishonest staffs to get involve in corruptions. Moreover, competition among the NGOs to bring more coverage (no. of areas and recipients) for donors' satisfaction pushes them into inter-organizational conflicts, serving same recipients by multiple organizations or by the same organization for multiple donors.

As a result, the most devastating tornado of the century which could not demoralize the spirit of the affected people except making some physical damages, it was the huge volume of unplanned relief activities which has caused a series of long-term damages in peoples' productivity, social relationship and local economic systems.

This is not only the case of Manikgonj but still continuing almost in every case in the country. Disaster responses in 1991, 1993, 1996 to recent major two in 2007 and 2009 the 'Sidre' and 'Aila' in all cases the responsive scenarios was same as was the case of Manikgonj in 1989. As a result over three decades of disaster responsive interventions have totally crippled the peoples' inherent capacities and social bondages making them fully dependent on external assistances or aids. Therefore, we see that the people affected by Sidre and Aila in southern part of the country (in 2007 and 2009) still living on the embankments after 6 and 4 years of the disasters. They are still living on the embankment in temporary shelters hoping to have external supports whereas they can get back to their normal life with their own initiatives. Around 350 km protective embankment remained unrepaired and causing inundation of thousands hectors of crop lands and fishing ponds making them unproductive. This is causing productive loss for the people living in the area for both land owners and laborers. But they are not taking initiative to repair the embankments and their houses hoping to have donor or government assistances. They are

living in miseries which are manageable by them but the 'receiving' tendency has crippled their normal capacities of managing shocks and vulnerabilities by themselves.

In rural areas poor people usually live in thatched houses which require repairing every alternative year. It was tradition in villages that the poor people in the villages repair or construct their houses together. They build or repair houses collectively and complete the work together. They would enjoy the work like festivals. They would work together, eat together and all the time sings songs. Yes they had no cash money but they had a very rich heart full of love and responsibility to each other. But now these people have got cash money in hand to do the jobs by themselves may be by hiring people from the locality but have destroyed the community feelings and responsibilities through so called development activities. The roads, culverts or embankments which at emergency usually would repair by the community people collectively to protect their own properties and resources are now left to have done by the government or by NGOs through donor supports.

Unfortunately the most common saying of NGO "learning by doing" could not provide them any learning from the situation of Manikgonj or similar many other interventions throughout the country over the last three decades. BRAC the leading NGO in Bangladesh has had similar learning immediate after the liberation war of 1971 in Sulla, Dhirai and Banichong areas of Sylhet District. The poor people in these areas were severally affected by the devastating liberation war and thousands of people lost their houses and basic things require for living. BRAC as part of their rehabilitation assistance supported these people with tin shed houses, every basic household material along with relief goods and cash money to help regain their normal life. Usually those people used to live in thatched house and their means of livelihoods was daily labor, wood cutting and so on. When those people were provided with wooden framed nice tin shed houses and showered with relief goods which were beyond their normal standard and volumes they lost their interest of working in field or forest. The easy access to quality food ration and cash money from various sources and for about six to seven months period has totally crippled them and made them dependent on external free aids for living. They were doing nothing except waiting to have their free rations. This was not the end. The abundant free time has resulted gambling and drug addiction among the people which finally led to violence in the households. When the relief operation was over the people did not go back to their normal work until they had sold their last asset they were provided by the donor agencies.

Since the liberation war the country was affected by 22 notable natural disasters nationally or regionally. In each and every case the situation was handled by the NGOs and their supporting donor agencies almost similar to the way it was managed in Manikgong without taking the learning from each event into consideration. Therefore, it is a question from every corner about the intention and outcomes of so called development interventions run by the NGOs and at the cost of billion dollars every year. Empowerment, capacity building and social cohesion are common dialogues of development agencies as means of reaching the state of sustainable development. But all above examples and situations are puzzling and challenging our trusts on the motives of development interventions.

How the development or relief operations should be planned and managed

As a poor and naturally vulnerable country, Bangladesh requires both development supports as well disaster responsive activities. But the interventions whether it is for long-term development or short-term disaster response should never aim to make the people dependent on external assistances but to be helped in enhancing their productive capacities and social capitals which they have been maintaining for centuries.

In addressing to any disastrous situation the implementing agencies must be careful in designing the responsive activities without ignoring the local capacities. Although a few but there are some examples of productive and meaningful development interventions which were highly successful in both poverty alleviation and vulnerability management without undermining the personal and social capacities of the people. Unfortunately we never looked into these examples and never tried to learn from the successes.

Kingshuk Shomiti is one of the renowned self-help organization of poor in Mirpur of Dhaka town formed by some rickshaw puller aiming to manage their vulnerabilities by themselves. Over the two decades of period this organization has established itself as one of the biggest self-help organization having billion dollar assets in the form of baby taxi, Bus, Shops, real estate business and so on. Behind their success it was not only their willingness for change, hardships and commitments but also the lack of external donor supports and advices. They have designed projects within their capacities and limitations without being ambitious for overnight changes.

Chrdubba Landless Shomiti could be another example who were initially organized by a local Organization been working in Sonagazi upazilla of Feni district. It was an Association of local landless poor people who organized themselves into a self-help group aiming to resolve their livelihood problems through an interdependent relationship among the members of the association. They raised savings weekly to accumulate capital for meeting emergency financial needs at crisis as well running Income Generating Activities by the members. Within 10 to 12 years period this small initiative became strong organization in the village who not only would take care of the poor members but also welfare of the other poor families within the village.

Modhupur Pineapple Association could be another example of successes made by the poor people by themselves and for themselves. The Association started with 16 poor members who would used to buy pineapple individually from the farmers and sold in nearest market with a little margin. When they were helped to get organized and combine their capital together to buy large amount from the farmers and sell them in distant city market for the first time they realized the strength of working together. They made significant profits from their first shipment to Dhaka town and was able to double their business capital. In addition they received a number of business contacts and understood about the market demands as well price variations for quality and sizes of the product. This visit to Dhaka town and contacts with a number of buyers has enhanced their confidence to expand their business but capital was one of the major barriers in this regard. To raise more fund they formed number of new associations with similar poor people and with the help of the supporting organization they were able to manage a loan of Tk 500, 000 (US\$ 6,250) from a national Bank. This support has sparked the growth and expansion of the Association and within 4 years period they became the most successful agricultural enterprise in the region. Now they have number of Trucks, store houses, lands and many other assets including trustworthy cliental relationship with local Banks. The total investment from the supporting organization was only 175 US\$ used to train them on Business Planning and Management.

There are many other successful similar cases throughout the country. In all cases it was the interdependent relationship and freedom of the participating members in deciding their welfares based on their own skills, knowledge and capacities. In cases where facilitating organization was involved their role was limited to supporting with information and skill development. The successes behind these organizations were mainly the absence of donors advices and having fullest liberty in designing activities based on their collective capacities. They were not dictated by any non poor donor agency but themselves who were poor and aware of their own limitations and capacities as well causes of their poverty. They tried to overcome those causes with interventions which they considered best within their capacities, limitations as well conducive to local context.

Similar examples are also there in case of disaster response. The 1991 cyclonic storm which has caused severe damages some parts of the Chittagong districts and mainly Sitakundo, Mirsharai and neighboring areas. Many national and international organizations (NGO) got involved in relief and rehabilitation activities with resources showered by the donor agencies. All organizations have followed the same approach as is seen two years before in Manikgonj except a local NGO that was working there for about 12 years. Immediate after the disaster the NGO got involved in rescue works within its working areas (sonagazi and Mirsharai areas) and begun providing foods, treatment and temporary shelters. Within two days the Team Leader of the NGO sat with the affected people to decide about the rehabilitation works. With the affected people they made an assessment of the damages caused by the Cyclone and identified the opportunities left by the disaster. Finally in consultation with the affected people they have designed the rehabilitation works which was totally different than the other organizations were doing in the neighboring areas. They formed small groups in each village and utilized the local skills and capacities in

rehabilitation and reconstruction works. While the other NGOs hired people from other districts and towns to do the reconstruction works like building houses and repairing roads and cleaning water sources the local NGO organized groups became involved in doing the same reconstruction activities collectively by themselves at the cost of relief goods allocated for them by the donor through the that NGO. When the other NGOs provided tin (CI Sheet) shed houses in replacement of their damaged thatched houses the people of that NGO's working area refused to build houses by CI sheets. The reason of refusal was for their experience of damages CI sheet causes during storm. They came up with experience of how flying CI sheets during strong wind or storm causes death and injuries. When they were given decision making authority, the community people identified the most vulnerable HHs such as women headed HHs or the HHs with disabilities or old aged people or people with injuries to ensure support in priority. This is one of the best examples of how community people are in best place to decide on the appropriate interventions for them.

This local organization has demonstrated a unique example of supporting the vulnerabilities with assistance not to make them dependent on external aids but to strengthen and reinstate the local capacities damaged by the disaster and motivated them to enhance their social capitals in overcoming their vulnerabilities. While the other NGOs hired contractors and purchased materials from distant places to build houses and distribute relief goods the local NGO tried to manage everything possible from the local areas without affecting the local economy and through uniting local people the local NGO tried to strengthen the social capital.

All those examples were nothing new but happening since primitive ages. The famous teaching of Prophet Mohammad (SA) to a beggar could be a best example of how development interventions should be designed. One day a beggar came to the prophet for begging. The holy Prophet asked him about what property does he posses. The beggar replied that he has nothing but a blanket. The prophet asked him to bring the blanket and He managed to sale it to his companions. With the money earned from the sold blanket the Prophet bought some food for the hungry beggar and with the rest He bought an axe. The prophet himself has fixed the handle with the axe and then asked him to cut fire wood and sale in the market for his livelihoods. He also reminded the beggar that Islam strongly prohibited begging but to utilize god gifted potentials for livelihoods. As a result of a small support the beggar was permanently freed from the begging or dependencies on external unsure supports and become self-dependent.

This teaching of the holy prophet is also found in a Chinese adage which says ***“giving a fish to someone will make him dependent on the provider for the second time but teaching him the techniques of fishing will make the person self-dependent.***

Both teaching of above are examples shows what the development effort should be. It should be based on people's ability, local context and to make people self dependent than making dependence on external resources. The purpose of development interventions should be to strengthen the social capitals s.a social bondage, cohesion, interdependent relationships etc. not to create division among them and permanently crippled to depend on external supports.

Poverty should be seen from its broader perspective. Every development intervention must look at the causes of poverty and try to cure it not the symptom. Lack of money is the symptom of poverty not the cause and giving money or resources may help temporary relieve the pain but will never cure except making dependent on supports.

Poverty should also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, social exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate, or to develop meaningful connections with other people in society. Until development interventions aims at removing the causes of poverty through understanding the real causes and help people in strengthening their capacities of fighting their poverty by themselves, poverty will sustain in its fabricated form justifying the sustainable existence of the development agencies.

People should not be treated as helpless

People are social animals and they always live together only for the reason that they need each other in the course of survival struggles. In every society or village there is some sorts of ties and relationship exists which we call social capital. From centuries people have strengthened their social capitals and protected it for their interdependent survival. They have built the capacities of managing shocks and vulnerabilities by themselves without hoping to have any external supports. But the development agencies over decades of operation have totally destroyed this social cohesion and relationships by segmenting them in different groups and making them dependent on them.

The development agencies must avoid the “**big brother**” attitude of assuming that the poor or disaster affected people as helpless and they do not know the ways of coming out from miseries. This is absolutely wrong understanding by the development agencies. Even in extreme misfortunes, the distressed people try to rebuild their lives on their own, with their own resources, with whatever strength and energy they can pull and employ. The above examples in Manikgonj, Modhupur, Dhaka and Sonagagi areas could be the best example to realize what sustainable development is. Development agencies should rely on peoples’ abilities of managing their own lives. Instead of dictating and controlling, they should be allowed to be the actor of the dramas of their daily own lives.

CLICK LINK for Supporting Power Point Presentation
[Sustainable Development](#)