

The Lock-Down and Food Insecurity in Developing Countries: A Democratic Social Ownership Organization

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Abstract

The COVID-19 is a great threat and the poverty is gearing up its effects for the entire human civilization. To eradicate this issue a number of model has developed, but the traditional approaches have not ensured the actual ownership of the impoverished people. This paper attempts to recommend a model that will really work for making sure the ownership of the poor segment of the society by fulfilling the food security and generating the new jobs for the members of the Self-sustaining Social Institute (SSI).

Keywords: Actual Ownership, Food Security, New job generation, SSI

1. INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic due to the COVID-19 is a great threat for human civilization within a hundred years. It is not just a health issue, but also a profound shock to our societies and economies. Food is the first and foremost priority not only for human, but also for all living beings to survive. In the developed world, the food is not a problem at all; even the government, such as Canadian government, is quite capable

to deliver food from door to door. But, in case of developing countries, the food security is a great concern. Because a large number of people are living in this region, as a result their purchasing capacity is profoundly low as well as they have no savings to meet the demand in the emergency period. According to the United Nations (2020), more than 700 million people which is approximately 10% of the world population, still live in extreme poverty and is struggling to fulfil the most basic needs. One hundred and thirty millions people are in vulnerable plight in terms of acute hunger by the end of 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic (UN, 2020). Bangladesh, a densely populated country (1,115 people/km²), but it has shown noticeable progress in poverty eradication over the last 20 years. The rate of poverty declined by 21.8% in 2020 from 48.9% in 2000 (Chowdhury, 2020), which has backed to improve food security indicators of the entire nation. Therefore, Bangladesh has made significant improvement over the last few years in four dimensions of food security: food availability, food access, food utilization and food stability (Roy, et al., 2019). Amid such a situation, the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that Bangladesh is not only vulnerable in health care services, but also vulnerable in food security.

To control the transmission of the COVID-19, local lockdowns, travel restriction, social distancing were imposed in all the parts of the country, which were a great threat in food security for improvised people who were jobless or out of the work. Although the government frequently stated that they were well prepared to face any crisis. In addition, up until mid-March, we were all in a denial state saying that we have nothing to fear about and in February, there were no measures, after mid-March we saw some measures that have been taken to combat COVID-19 (Khatun, 2020). Furthermore, the BRAC (2020) has conducted a study on the micro, medium and small enterprises during the economic shutdown and the key findings are: the average monthly income was approximately BDT 33,726 (USD 398) before the lockdown but after the lockdown, none had any income at all; and less than 6% of the respondents had some savings, on the other hand 77.8% did not have any savings that they can use. Moreover, a host of families will remain vulnerable for some time even as the economy restarts in the aftermath of the lockdown (Mahmud, 2020). In this situation, the government has taken steps to distribute

the relief among the poor segment of the society; however, the approach was full of corruption especially in the process of relief distribution. The experience of pandemic has proven that we did not seriously consider pandemic issues in the preparedness actions plan (Anwar, et al.,2020) As a result, it is the time to be prepared to tackle the upcoming pandemic situations. But, the food security issue will be addressed here. For this purpose, the developing countries like Bangladesh should develop local level food capacity which will be owned by the local people by formulating a democratic social ownership organizationfor ensuring the food fecurity.

2. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

This research has been conducted based on the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), reviewing the local and nation media and collecting information from the social media. Moreover, the data is also collected by using the messenger and mobile. In addition, the group discussion via messenger was used to collect the information from the local elite persons. The study area (Figure-1) is located in the South-Western part of Bangladesh as well as it is inanUpazila named Tala which is in Satkhira District and under Khulna Division and a part of Kashipur, a village of the Sarulia Union, has taken as the unit of the Democratic Social Organization.

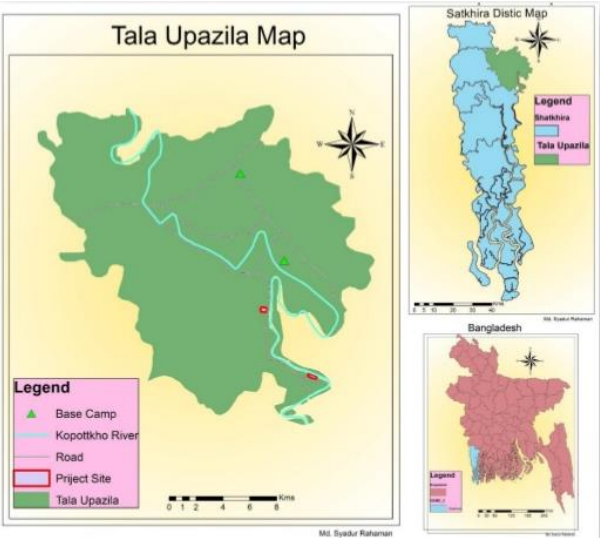


Figure 1: The Study Area

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Problem Identification

The survey revealed that a slew of allegations against the local government has been observed in case of relief distribution. Politically biased list of the people has been made by the local leader which is totally unlawful and inhuman for the society. These accusations also have been supported by the local and national media as well as social media like Facebook, Youtube, etc.

In the field, it has been observed that the UpazilaNirbahi Officer (UNO) of Tala is so prompt to take the decision to serve the people and the local people satisfied by his activities. But, the fact that he had to need an authentic list of the impoverished people and he was dependent on the local Union Parishad Chairman for collecting the data of the poor people. There was a serious allegation against 10 Chairmans out of 12 Chairmans about the data (politically biased and satisfying their own vote bank) that they had submitted to the UNO. So, it was generally impossible to reach the supplied food to the really needy person in the grass roots level.

Similarly, approximately 60% people were needy in these dire economic plights. But, the fact was that the supplied food met the demand of the utmost 15% percent people. The other 45% people were lower middle to middle class; they were not able to express anything to anyone about their demand. So, they were the most vulnerable segment of society in the context of COVID-10 crisis.

Other daily necessities, to maintain each of the family depended on the vegetables. The field data revealed that more than 55% of the farmers were involved in vegetables production. But, due to absence of road communication, the farmers were bound to sell the product by less than 40% to 60% price. For instance, I have talked with a producer of eggplant and he informed me that in normal situation he sold it by BDT. 20 Per Kg, but the price of per kg was highest BDT. 10. So, they were another vulnerable group of people in this catastrophic period.

3.2 The Recommended Model

A strong local economy is needed to cope up from the dire pandemic plight like COVID 19. The local strong economy will ensure to meet

the basic needs in the disastrous period. To make a strong community economy, an organization is needed that will work as the regulatory body of the local economic affairs. Here, I am proposing an association named Self-sustaining Social Institute¹ (SSI) (Figure-2) which will regulate the entire financial system by participating the people with effective and efficient investment of the capital which is owned by members of the institute.

The SSI is a new model of the rural economy as well as democratic social ownership organization. The cooperative system, soft loan from bank, social business, government assistance and assistance from various national and international organizations (e.g. United Nations Development Programme, Food and Agricultural Organizations, Climate Fund) will be possible sources of funding for the SSI which will play a crucial role in the grass roots levels to fulfill the demand of food especially for the poor segment of the society. Conversely, in traditional organization, the real ownership of the poor people has not been ensuring, therefore they are not satisfied on the traditional social institute which has been working for a long span of time.

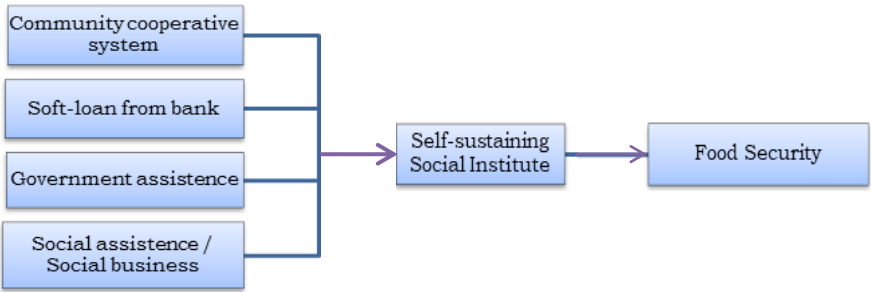


Figure 2: Self-sustaining Social Institute

The SSI will be owned by the members and here there will be no other people who can articulate that this institute is his or her property. It will be the common peoples' property and each members of the institute will have equal share of it. According to Banerjee (2020) the

¹Self-sustaining Social Institute (SSI) is a new form of social organization to develop the local community as an independent productive unit by accumulating the fund of cooperative society, soft loan of bank, government assistance as well as social assistance or social business for the purpose of meeting the substantial needs of the people like awareness building, medical services, food security and other daily necessities.

government should provide money in the hands of poorer people who will spend it immediately and kick-start demand in the economy. It will work as a self-sustaining organization in the grass roots level. The SSI will not only ensure the food security of the community, but also it will assist to gear up for increasing the employment opportunity as well as to minimize the high scale profit of middlemen in market mechanism system. As a result, the local people will get the items of food at a minimum price. Moreover, the members of the SSI will be benefited in three ways- a) by getting the foods at low cost, b) the profit will be shared among the members and, c) by creating the new jobs.

Calculation of the Proposed Model

Firstly in the first year, the cooperative society will be opened by at least 200 members of a community as well as each family will pay BDT.35 per week (This amount is determined through the FGDs in the local level based on the financial condition of the people) to the institute. In the beginning 3 months, the institute will only collect the money from members.

Total Amount in 3 months (at least 12 weeks) = BDT. $(200 \times 35 \times 12)$ = BDT.84,000

After 3 months the institute will start a rice processing business on a small scale and the processed rice will be sold to the members by only BDT. 2 benefit. According to the Population Census (2011), the average size of the family is 4.13 and on an average each person consumes 500 gram rice per day. So, the total amount of rice per family is approximately 2 kilogram. Therefore, the totality of rice of 200 families is (200×2) kilogram = 400 kilogram. And, per day 400 kilogram rice will be sold to the members and the total benefits of the institute will be BDT. 800.

Total profit after 3 months (90 days) from rice selling = BDT. (800×90) = BDT.72, 000

Total capital after 6 months from weekly installment and rice selling
= BDT. $(84, 000 + 84, 000 + 72, 000)$
= BDT.2, 40, 000

In the same way, after 1 year the total capital of the social institute from two sectors-
= BDT. $\{(84, 000 + 84, 000) \times 2\} + (72, 000 \times 3)$
= BDT. (3, 36, 000 +2, 16, 000)
= BDT.5, 52, 000

Likewise, this food project will be continued to enhance the capital of the social institute. It should be noted here that the members of the organization will be benefited by two phases; one is that the profit will be distributed among them equitably and they will get food at lower price than the market price. And, in the rice processing industry a number of people will be employed. It is also noted that the conventional cooperative society has no boundary to implement, this for the institute, the capital will be implemented only to meet the demand of the basic needs like food of the people. In this avenue, the SSI which is a democratic social ownership organization, will assist to fight against any form of crisis that hinders the prosperity of the local society by transforming the institute into a self-sustaining institute. In social business, Yunus and Weber (2007) have also emphasized on the subject of self-sustaining term of the company. After achieving the goals, this genre of organization can be replicate to the other community to strengthen the economy in the rural level.

4. CONCLUSION

The outbreak of COVID19 cannot be compared with any event of human history in the perspective of life threatening. The advancement of technology is surrendered in this particular case, because still science is not able to find out a solution to protect civilization. To fight against it the government of Bangladesh declared a program to distribute the relief like food among the poor people. But, it is proved that food relief is a genre of kindness that makes the people dependable. So, it is high time to think of paradigm-shifting from a relief based society to a self-sustaining community where they will be independent as well as gain the capacity to fight against the challenges. Otherwise, it is not possible to ensure a meritocratic culture in society in the long run that is the ultimate goal of human civilization.

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