

# Pen N Paper SHAON

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## CHALLENGES IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

by Benzir Shaon

### INTRODUCTION

Farming is the ancient and the most common profession in Bangladesh. Most of the people of Bangladesh live in village and most of the villagers (*62% manpower in agriculture*<sup>1</sup>) are involved in farming. One of the main reasons of having common interest to farming is: the land is very fertile and most of the part of Bangladesh is plain. Another interesting thing is Bangladeshi people naturally good in farming. Agricultural sector is the single largest contributor to GDP. The crop sub-sector dominates the agriculture sector contributing *about 72% of total production. Fisheries, livestock and forestry sub-sectors are 10.33%, 0.11% and 7.33% respectively*<sup>2</sup>. Though government has many positive steps for that sector but still agriculture has some present and future challenges as well.

## **PROBLEMS & LIMITATIONS**

### **Financial Problem**

Bangladesh is not such a rich country that has adequate money to spend at any time for any sector. Sometimes some major and emergency agricultural decision needs a good amount of money that is not possible all the times to provide for that sector.

### **Natural Disaster**

Natural disaster like flood, drought, excessive rain and other natural disaster are barrier to meet the expected level of production. Specially the natural disasters mentioned above are mostly harm crop production. The flood of this year (2007) destroys huge area of crop fields.

### **Promotion of New Inventions**

Bangladeshi agriculturists have some glorious inventions that can change the scenario of our land. But unfortunately because of negligence of different part of government these inventions cannot be promoted and reached to farmers' door that ultimately brings zero result.

### **Improper Distribution of Seed & Fertilizer**

This problem has recently found by a research by *Media Personality & Agriculturist Shaikh Siraj*, that is our seed and fertilizer is not properly distributed and only because of that each year farmers face acute crisis having adequate stock.

## **Mono-crop Production**

Farmers are more interested to produce some few crops like: rice, because of less risk. And for this reason other cash crops and non-rice crops are in risk because of non-production. Rice uses four or more times more water than crops like wheat and maize, and the lack of adequate water will be a major impediment to future agricultural productivity.

## **Accessibility to Weather Report**

The farmers don't have the accessibility to weather report that creates serious problem in crop production. The most dangerous crisis occurred in 2007's rice production. That year because of cold wave and not reporting to farmers about it the national rice production faced a serious crisis; the farmers got "*Chita*" rice.<sup>3</sup>

## **Higher Input Cost of Production**

The problem is that compared with many neighboring countries (where input subsidies frequently exist), the farmers in Bangladesh are at a disadvantage in terms of lower productivity and higher cost of production due to higher unit costs of such inputs as seed, fertilizer, water and labor. Higher production, marketing and distribution cost combined with lower output prices have resulted in a non-profit pursuit.

## **No Formal Road Transportation System**

To sell and transport agro-products to city or other areas there is no formal or planned road transportation system that creates problem for distribution of goods.

## **Products and production<sup>4</sup>**

There is no testing lab, certification, quality management and monitoring excess costs, small and medium sized enterprise (SMEs) in Bangladesh. Lack of cost-benefit analysis (market analysis/research) and product diversity are also bottlenecks in that sector.

## **Coordination Between Government & Private Stakeholders**

Government and other NGO's those who are working in agriculture sector are not well coordinated, that's why expected return is not visible. Even related ministries are not well coordinated at-all.

## **Lengthy Decision Making Process**

Agriculture is in many ways depends on nature, which can change at any time. Many cases the government authority takes time to take decision that sometimes don't work because of lengthy process.

## **Crop Pest Control**

From the available statistics it has been found that about *10% to 15% crops<sup>5</sup>* are destroyed in the field each year due to insect pests. It has been estimated that the amount of crops damaged is nearly double the amount of food grain imported in this country each year.

## CHALLENGES

### Over Population

Bangladesh actually produces a lot of agricultural products but because of over population we cannot enjoy the output of that production. So over population is another problem in that sector.

### Lack of Agricultural Labor

The number of agricultural labor has decreased from *14.5 million (1983-84) to 11.1 million (1996)*<sup>6</sup>. For this reason in rural areas many rich land owners face that problem during the peak season

### Less Land More Production

The challenge in front of Bangladesh is now to increase output from same stock of land as land is used in many other purposes. And to meet the challenge the productivity rate of land has to *increase up-to 50%*<sup>7</sup>.

### Irrigation and Electricity and Fuel

The pump irrigation cost is US\$ 51<sup>8</sup> per hectares and the Diesel cost is high especially during the irrigation season where 90%<sup>9</sup> pumps are run by diesel.

### Lowering Ground Water Level In Dry Season

During the months of March, April and May<sup>10</sup> (dry season) the ground water level goes down. This is also the “critical period”<sup>11</sup> for rice and wheat when

they are in seed formation stage. So it creates serious problem for irrigation for that season.

### **Seasonal Unemployment In North-West**

North-West part of the country is the driest of all other land and incidence of poverty is the highest. From September to November the unemployment problem arises among farmers because during that time they have nothing to produce that can give them financial support and later it turns to acute poverty during the time, which called in local language '*Monga*'. To solve that agro-related problem is a challenge in that sector. Different governments in different times tried but couldn't reach to a permanent solution.

### **Loosing Fertility & Excessive Land Use**

As we have less land and more population so the land gets excessive pressure on it. More cultivation is done in a single piece of land that is a reason of loosing fertility of land. On the other hand because of too much population the land is divided into many parts that also decrease productivity.

### **Excessive Use of Fertilizer & Pesticides**

Farmers use more pesticide and fertilizer that harms environment and land loses its natural fertility. If the process goes in that way finally we will lose the fertility of land which is alarming. At the same time we are losing many fishes as the pesticide mixed land water finally mixes with the water of river, canals and ponds.

## **Loosing Underground Water Level**

For over population we use and set more deep tube-well and pump for irrigation. That may create a serious natural disaster even this may harm agricultural production. Because of this our land goes down, as underground water gives a support for balanced height between upper land and the earth.

## **Poverty Alleviation for Agriculture**

To ensure proper agricultural development poverty alleviation and overall economic development is a pre-requisite where the rural people still live below the poverty line.

## **Continuous Deforestation**

Continuous deforestation in costal area of Bangladesh (*Barisal, Noakhali and Chittagong coasts*)<sup>12</sup> is creating trouble. The agricultural land on those areas can easily now be destroyed by cyclone.

## **Hybrid Seed**

Because of higher productivity farmers become interested to hybrid seed rather than other high food valued seed category like *Aush* and other natural country seed.

## **Farakka Dam**

In the north-west part of country's poverty's another reason is Farakka Dam that built in India. That creates problem for irrigation for north-western part

of agricultural land. Government is trying to solve that problem since for a long time but cannot resolve that problem.

## **SOME POSITIVES**

### **Coastal Forestation**

Government's positive approach for coastal forestation is really a praiseworthy step that has been adapted for last some years. For taking this project the coast of Bangladesh in South is now bordered with green trees and it's a successful program of government.

### **Tea Production**

Tea is a cash crop of Bangladesh that is produced in eastern hilly areas of the country. Bangladesh earns a good amount of foreign currency from finest tea export.

### **Some Other Revolutionary Invention<sup>13</sup>**

There are some revolutionary inventions in that sectors like: Drum Seeder (a machine), Leaf Color Chart System (a chart system with different color), Guti Urea (a processed form of urea fertilizer) etc are going to have positive contribution to our national crop production.

## **Hybrid Seeds**

It's another revolutionary item in agro-research. Our agriculturists have invented such seeds those have high productivity, such as: IRRI. The hybrid seeds are used in many parts of the nation.

## **Government Funding for Research**

It's a very positive approach from government that they fund a good fund for agro-research. And the researches have glorious inventions in that sector.

## **Self Dependent on Rice Production**

Bangladesh is today self dependent on rice production. Bangladesh imports a nominal amount of rice which is a very positive side.

## **Crop Cycle**

Today because of agricultural awareness, technical advancement and government's approach farmers know how to use land through out the year, that has increase the productivity.

## **Seasonal Fruits Out of Season**

Today we get seasonal fruits through out the year like: winter vegetable, mango etc because of agricultural development.

## **Monga Situation**

Presently some NGO's like BRAC and RDRS are working there for that prospect.

## **Self Employment for Youth**

For recent some years Government has taken a very good initiative for the self employment of educated young people. That added a new dimension in our agro-products. They are working for producing poultry, fish, flower, fruits, vegetables etc.

## **Step for Pulse Production**

On 24 July 2007 a program arranged on pulse production with all levels of related publics including researchers, government top officials and farmers where government has said all kinds of support will be provided from government for pulse production.<sup>14</sup>

## **Middlemen in Distribution**

Recently it's the most discussed issue. Because of the middlemen in distribution of vegetable and other agricultural products the price goes high and farmers don't get the actual price.

## **Successful Control over Bird-Flu**

The caretaker government and the previous government took careful step to control bird-flu in Bangladesh which was an international crisis on poultry industry. Government even supported to those poultry farmers those who faced financial loss.

## RECOMMENDATION

Here there are some recommendations that may help to come out from these challenges and problems.

1. To avoid environmental degradation government can take more initiatives.
2. Government can take support from NGO's or other voluntary organizations for agricultural development in rural areas.
3. Government can encourage more for production of cash crops like: jute production, by which we can earn foreign currency.
4. Government can arrange short term or long term loans for farmers for risk taking.
5. Weather Department should ensure the accuracy and accessibility of weather & report to farmers.
6. To develop *Monga* crisis in north-west, government can encourage small and cottage industry during that unemployment period or can take other economic project.
7. Farmers should be encouraged to use natural fertilizer.

8. Government should rationalize public expenditure allocation, increasing public investment in infrastructure and public good services and promoting private investment in agriculture.

9. Capacity building of the Ministry should focus in on enhancing ability to provide good governance based on accurate information and knowledge and clear understanding of the impact of policies on the beneficiaries.

10. Inter-ministry coordination and collaboration is needed.

11. The fisheries and live-stock sectors are benefited by private sector and for this reason it needs more concentration from respective authority.

12. Agricultural growth should come from efficiency in the use of inputs, not from the expansion of input use.<sup>15</sup>

13. More concentration to better seed and agricultural research is needed.

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**This is the full version of that Assignment**

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Ref – 9
- <sup>2</sup> Source: BBS, 2004 and Handbook Agricultural Statistics, MoA See Ref - 11
- <sup>3</sup> See Ref – 1
- <sup>4</sup> Challenges, Page: 2, Ref – 4
- <sup>5</sup> Banglapedia, under heading “Crop”
- <sup>6</sup> Agricultural Sector: On the Threshold of Twenty-First Century by M.M. Akash, Page: 108, See Ref – 13
- <sup>7</sup> Agricultural Sector: On the Threshold of Twenty-First Century by M.M. Akash, Page: 99 See Ref – 13
- <sup>8, 9, 10, 11</sup> Page: 10 of Ref – 2
- <sup>12</sup> CHAPTER 5, Part I, AGRICULTURAL GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT, by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad & S.M. Hasanuzzaman, See Ref – 7
- <sup>13</sup> See Ref – 1 (Actionable Policy Brief (APB): Volume-1)
- <sup>14</sup> Channel I News, 24 July 2007
- <sup>15</sup> Recommended by Dr. Hossain in a Dialogue program by CPD, See Ref – 12

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