

Sustainable Rural Development in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Three Villages at Gopalganj District

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ABSTRACT

Background: Rural development in Bangladesh is crucial for the country's socio-economic progress, given the significant portion of its population residing in rural areas. However, achieving sustainability in rural development poses numerous challenges due to various factors such as poverty, environmental degradation, and limited access to resources. Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas. The term 'rural development' is used to describe the deliberate actions made in non-urban parts of a developing country to alleviate or eradicate poverty, increase resilience, promote ecological sustainability and build capacity to meet these and other issues. Rural development has traditionally centered on the exploitation of land, intensive natural resources such as agriculture, aquaculture and forestry. However, change in global production networks and increased urbanization have changed the characteristics of rural areas. According to World Bank estimation, rural population is 66.5% of the total population and remaining 33.5% are urban population in Bangladesh. It is quite evident that without development of the larger portion of the population of the rural area, sustained development is not possible for the country. Rural development is deeply rooted within our society and it is integrated in the way of life, livelihood and culture of the people of Bangladesh. Since independence the Government of Bangladesh has been taking constant initiatives in terms of policies, strategies and programmes to promote sustainable rural development in the country. In this connection a research work has been undertaken to know the prospects and challenges for sustainable rural development entitled; "Sustainable Rural Development in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Three Villages at Gopalganj District" during 2022-2023 fiscal year. For this purpose, 03(three) villages beside BAPARD have been selected named Tarashi, Jathia and Satrakanda.

Objectives: This research aims to investigate the prospects and challenges associated with rural development in Bangladesh and to identify strategies for enhancing sustainability in this context. A case study approach is adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics and complexities involved in rural development initiatives. The specific objectives were: to identify the betterment related to sustainable promotion of development on rural community; to elucidate the prospects and challenges faced on rural prosperity achieving sustainable development; and to suggest possible ways for minimizing the problems and challenges that rural member faced in course of their sustainable rural development.

Methods: The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of secondary data with qualitative insights gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations. A specific rural area in Bangladesh is selected as the case study site to capture the nuances of local contexts and experiences.

Results: Analysis of the data reveals both promising prospects and formidable challenges in the realm of rural development in Bangladesh. On one hand, there are instances of successful interventions that have improved livelihoods and enhanced community resilience. On the other hand, persistent issues such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental degradation continue to hinder sustainable development efforts.

Conclusion: Despite the challenges, there exist opportunities to promote sustainable rural development in Bangladesh through targeted policies, innovative approaches, and community participation. By addressing socio-economic disparities, strengthening institutional capacities, and integrating environmental considerations into development strategies, it is possible to create a more inclusive and resilient rural landscape in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Rural Development, Sustainability, Prospects, Challenges, Community Resilience, Community Participation, Resilient Rural Landscape

INTRODUCTION

Rural development in Bangladesh holds paramount importance in the nation's journey towards sustainable growth and equitable development. With approximately 70% of the population residing in rural areas, the vitality of rural development initiatives cannot be overstated. However, the pursuit of sustainable rural development faces a myriad of challenges ranging from poverty and infrastructure deficiencies to environmental degradation and climate change impacts. Accordingly, this introduction sets the stage for exploring the prospects and challenges inherent in rural development in Bangladesh. It highlights the significance of addressing these issues to ensure the well-being of rural communities and to foster national progress. Additionally, it underscores the need for evidence-based research and strategic interventions to navigate the complexities of rural development effectively.

Rural development underscores the necessity of adopting a comprehensive, forward-thinking approach towards rural areas. This approach entails considering various aspects such as social and economic development, infrastructure requirements, access to essential services, and territorial cohesion. Implementing such a long-term vision calls for an integrated and coordinated strategy at the European, national, and regional levels (European Commission, 2020). This endeavor has led to a series of significant reforms with profound socio-economic and political implications. The overarching goal of these reforms is to ensure that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) becomes more environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, and economically competitive. This entails implementing measures to make the CAP greener, such as strengthening conditionality requirements. Additionally, efforts are directed towards making the policy fairer by redistributing income support, imposing social conditions, supporting young farmers, enhancing gender balance, among other initiatives. Furthermore, measures are being taken to enhance the competitiveness of the CAP, including the establishment of a crisis reserve fund (European Commission, 2022) It encompasses various principles, policies, and management strategies designed to address the unique challenges and opportunities present in rural areas. This comprehensive approach involves initiatives to enhance agricultural productivity, infrastructure development, access to education and healthcare, as well as efforts to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable livelihoods. Rural development emphasizes the empowerment of rural communities, the conservation of natural resources, and the promotion of social equity and inclusion.

Globalization has significantly impacted rural communities, exacerbating many of their current challenges. While globalization is often viewed positively, concerns arise regarding the free flow of goods and services, the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the spread of Western culture (Rahman, 2014). Consequently, governments have increasingly privatized healthcare delivery responsibilities, necessitating innovative approaches to coordination. Strategies such as contracting out, promoting private provision, introducing quasi-markets, and organizing voluntary sectors have been employed to facilitate the transition towards privatizing welfare services.

The challenges hindering sustainable development in rural Bangladesh are deeply entrenched and interconnected, creating a complex web of obstacles for rural communities. Despite concerted efforts to address these challenges, poverty remains a pervasive issue, trapping vulnerable populations in cycles of deprivation and marginalization. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure and basic services, coupled with the vulnerability to natural disasters exacerbated by climate change, further exacerbate the plight of rural communities, undermining their socio-economic progress and well-being (Wegulo, 2018).

Additionally, the rapid urbanization and migration from rural to urban areas present a formidable challenge for rural development in Bangladesh (Adugna&Hailemariam, 2011; Wegulo, 2018). The exodus of labor from rural to urban centers not only depletes the rural workforce but also strains urban infrastructure and services (Wegulo, 2018). This migration trend underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to revitalize rural economies, create employment opportunities, and improve living conditions in rural areas (Bryceson, 2006; Wegulo, 2018).

Furthermore, globalization has introduced new dynamics and challenges to rural development in Bangladesh. While facilitating market access and technological advancements, globalization has exposed rural communities to volatile global markets and intensified competition, particularly for small-scale farmers and artisans. Additionally, the spread of Western culture and consumerism has led to shifts in traditional values and livelihood practices, necessitating adaptive strategies to preserve local cultures and identities (Rahman, 2014).

Addressing these interconnected challenges requires holistic and integrated approaches that prioritize sustainable development principles (Ferdous et al., 2019; Barua& Rahman, 2021). Achieving sustainable rural development in Bangladesh necessitates not only addressing immediate socio-economic needs but also fostering resilience, promoting environmental conservation, and enhancing social inclusion (Ferdous et al., 2019; Barua & Rahman, 2021). Consequently, effective strategies and policy interventions are imperative to overcome these challenges and promote inclusive and resilient rural development in Bangladesh (Ferdous et al., 2019; Barua& Rahman, 2021).

In the discourse surrounding rural development, scholars have extensively explored various aspects, including strategies to reduce spatial inequality and foster balanced regional development (Wegulo, 2018). Theoretical frameworks such as the growth pole theory and central place theory have been proposed to bridge regional gaps and stimulate both rural and urban development. However, achieving balanced spatial development remains elusive in many developing countries, including Bangladesh, where significant regional disparities persist (Hasnath, 2020).

To address these disparities and promote rural development, initiatives such as the "My Village My City" project have been launched to bolster local markets and stimulate the economy. However, concerns about uneven distributional patterns in investment persist, potentially impeding rural development efforts (Akther &Rahaman, 2021). Consequently, there is a gap in understanding the dynamics of rural development concerning growth centers, particularly within the context of Bangladesh (Unwin, 2017; Darwent, 1969; Wegulo, 2018).

Throughout this paper, we delve into the multifaceted dimensions of rural development in Bangladesh, drawing insights from both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. By focusing on a case study approach, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the specific contexts, successes, and limitations shaping rural development dynamics in Bangladesh. In the subsequent sections, we will explore the objectives, methodologies, findings, and conclusions of this research endeavor, aiming to contribute to the discourse on sustainable rural development in Bangladesh and beyond.

THE THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theoretical Framework

a. Growth pole theory:

François Perroux (1955) and Albert O. Hirschman (1958) explained that the growth pole theory suggests that economic development can be stimulated by concentrating investment and development efforts in specific regions or "poles." These poles act as centers of growth, generating economic activities that spread to surrounding areas. In the context of Bangladesh, this theory can be applied to identify and promote key growth centers in rural areas, thereby stimulating overall rural development and sustainability.

b. Central place theory:

Walter Christaller (1933) discussed the Central place theory proposes that settlements serve as central places that provide goods and services to surrounding areas, with larger settlements offering a wider range of goods and services than smaller ones. This theory can inform rural development strategies by understanding the spatial distribution of services and infrastructure in Bangladesh's rural areas. By strategically locating central places and ensuring access to essential services, rural communities can achieve greater sustainability and resilience.

c. Spatial development models:

Various, including Albert Losch (1940) and others explained that the Spatial development models provide frameworks for understanding the spatial distribution of economic activities and resources. These models consider factors such as geography, transportation networks, and market access to analyze patterns of development and inform spatial planning initiatives. In the context of Bangladesh, spatial development models can help identify opportunities and challenges for rural development, guiding policymakers in allocating resources and implementing sustainable development strategies across rural regions.

These theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights into the dynamics of rural development, guiding policymakers and practitioners seeking to address the challenges and promote sustainability in Bangladesh's rural areas.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

a. The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the complexities of rural development in the context of Bangladesh. It delineates key concepts and interrelationships crucial for analyzing the multifaceted nature of rural development, sustainability, and the challenges posed by globalization. However, rural development encompasses deliberate actions aimed at enhancing the economic, social, and environmental well-being of rural communities. In Bangladesh, where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas, ensuring sustainable rural development is imperative for achieving broader national development goals. Furthermore, sustainability is central to the conceptual framework, representing the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable rural development entails balancing economic growth, social equity, and environmental stewardship to ensure long-term prosperity and resilience in rural communities.

Table 01: The table presents a clear breakdown of the concepts involved in the conceptual for the research study on rural development in Bangladesh.

Concept	Definition
Rural Development	Deliberate actions aimed at improving the economic, social, and environmental well-being of rural communities.
Sustainability	The ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
Globalization	The process of increasing interconnectedness and interdependence among countries, results in the exchange of goods, services, information, and ideas

	across borders.
Community Participation	The active involvement of rural community members in decision-making processes and development initiatives that affect their lives.
Resilience	The capacity of rural communities to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses, including economic fluctuations, natural disasters, and environmental degradation.

Globalization adds another layer of complexity to rural development dynamics, as it brings about increased interconnectedness and interdependence among countries. While globalization offers opportunities for economic growth and technological advancement, it also poses challenges such as market volatility, cultural homogenization, and environmental degradation, particularly in rural areas. Community participation and resilience are integral components of the conceptual framework, emphasizing the importance of engaging rural community members in decision-making processes and empowering them to adapt and thrive in the face of changing circumstances. By elucidating these core concepts and their interplay, the conceptual framework serves as a guiding framework for investigating the prospects and challenges of rural development in Bangladesh within the context of globalization.

b. Analytical Framework:

The analytical framework outlines the methodological approach for systematically exploring and analyzing the various dimensions of rural development in Bangladesh. It delineates the research objectives, methods, and sample sizes necessary for conducting a comprehensive investigation into the prospects and challenges of rural development within the era of globalization. The research objectives are designed to address key research questions related to sustainable promotion of development in rural communities, elucidating prospects and challenges faced in rural development, and suggesting possible ways for minimizing problems and challenges encountered by rural community members.

Table 02: The table presents a clear breakdown of the objectives, methods, and sample sizes involved in the analytical frameworks for the research study on rural development in Bangladesh.

Objective	Methods	Sample
To identify the betterment related to sustainable promotion of development in rural communities	- Survey Questionnaire - Rural Participatory Method	50
To elucidate the prospects and challenges faced in rural development within the era of globalization	- Survey Questionnaire - Interview Schedule - Focus Group Discussion	50 samples - Four FGDs
To suggest possible ways for minimizing the problems and challenges faced by rural community members	- Focus Group Discussion - Key Informant Interviews	Four FGDs - Twenty KIIs

To achieve these objectives, a combination of research methods is employed, including survey questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. These methods enable the

collection of quantitative and qualitative data from diverse sources, providing a holistic understanding of rural development dynamics.

The sample sizes for each objective are carefully determined to ensure representativeness and adequacy for drawing meaningful conclusions. By engaging rural community members, key informants, and stakeholders, the research aims to capture a wide range of perspectives and insights on rural development issues.

Through the analytical framework, the research endeavors to generate empirical evidence and actionable recommendations for promoting inclusive and sustainable rural development in Bangladesh amidst the challenges of globalization.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design and methodology serve as the backbone of any study, providing a structured framework for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In this section, we delve into the intricate details of how this research was conducted, outlining the strategies employed to achieve the study's objectives effectively.

Research Design

To navigate the complexities of rural development in Bangladesh and explore the prospects and challenges of achieving sustainability, a meticulously crafted research design was implemented. The design incorporated a mixed-method approach, amalgamating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to capture a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

Methodological Approach

The research methodology embraced various data collection techniques tailored to the diverse facets of rural development. These methods included:

a. Quantitative Methods:

Questionnaire Surveys: A structured questionnaire was administered to gather quantitative data from rural communities. This approach facilitated the systematic collection of information on key variables related to rural development and sustainability.

b. Qualitative Methods:

- Key Informant Interviews:* In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and development practitioners. These interviews provided nuanced insights into the contextual nuances and challenges faced in rural development efforts.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):* Interactive group discussions were facilitated with community members to delve deeper into their perceptions, experiences, and aspirations regarding rural development. FGDs fostered a collaborative environment, allowing for the exploration of diverse viewpoints and collective insights.

Sampling Strategy

The research employed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure the representation of various perspectives and

experiences within the rural population. Sample selection was conducted meticulously, considering factors such as geographic diversity, socioeconomic status, and community engagement.

Data Analysis

a. Quantitative Data Analysis: Quantitative data from the survey questionnaire were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were computed to summarize the data and identify trends.

b. Qualitative Data Analysis: Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The themes and patterns emerging from the data were identified through a process of coding and categorization.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were synthesized to draw comprehensive conclusions and insights. The implications of the findings for rural development policy and practice were discussed, highlighting opportunities for promoting sustainable development in rural areas.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, ethical principles were upheld to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and measures were implemented to safeguard their anonymity and privacy. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research design and methodology facilitated a nuanced understanding of rural development dynamics in Bangladesh. The insights generated from the study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on rural development and inform evidence-based policy and practice interventions aimed at enhancing the sustainability of rural communities in Bangladesh.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Socio-demographic Profile

Age, sex, education, migration history, ethnicity, religion, marital status, number of children, occupation, and household income are all examples of socio-demographic factors. Based on several socio-demographic factors, various index variables are constructed.

The socio-demographic features of the respondents are identified based on the respondent's sex category, age structure, religious status, educational qualification, and occupational status. In addition, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are also identified. The entirety of this variable contributes to the analysis of the livelihood pattern of the respondent.

The characteristics of the surveyed population were analyzed, revealing insights into key demographic factors. In terms of sex, the majority of respondents were male, accounting for 80% of the sample, while females constituted 20%. Regarding religion, Islam was the predominant faith among respondents, with 40% identifying as Muslim, while Hindu respondents comprised 60% of the sample. Marital status distribution indicated that the majority of participants were married, representing 93.3% of the sample, whereas unmarried individuals constituted 6.7%. In terms of house structure, a significant portion of respondents resided in mud-built houses, accounting for 86.7% of the sample. Brick-built houses were less common, representing 8.9% of respondents, while other types of housing accounted for 4.4%. These frequency distributions provide valuable insights into the demographic composition of the surveyed population, informing future research and

development initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of rural communities in Bangladesh.

Table 03: Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents.

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Sex	Female	09	20	1.80 ~2
	Male	36	80	
Religion	Islam	18	40	1.60 ~2
	Hindu	27	60	
Marital Status	Unmarried	3	6.7	1.93 ~2
	Married	42	93.3	
House Structure	Mud-built house	39	86.7	2
	Brick Built House	4	8.9	
	Others	2	4.4	

Visualize the sexual representation of the respondents. 80% of respondents were male and 20% of respondents are female. A large portion of respondent’s family structure belongs to the nuclear category (51.1%). Again, 48.9% of respondents’ family structure is extended type. Neither respondent’s family type is extended nor others. 42.2% of respondents’ income lies between 5001-10000. Surprisingly, 35.6% of respondents’ income lies below 5000. Only some minor families that have 4.4% income lie more than 20000. About 33.3 % of respondents owned 1-5 katha and secondly, 20% of respondents owned 11-15 kathas of land. Only 13.3% of respondents owned more than 15 kathas land.

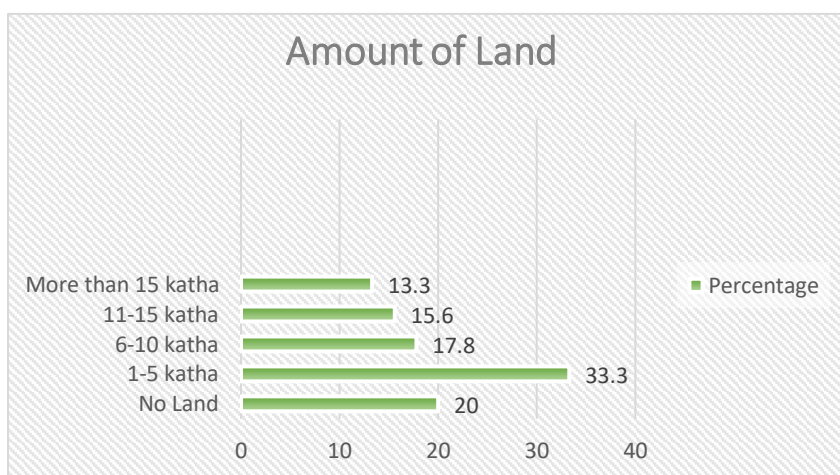


Chart -01: Respondents’ land ownership scenario.

Progress and Challenges Associated with Sustainable Rural Development Initiatives in Bangladesh

During the field research, the focus was on assessing the progress and challenges associated with sustainable rural development initiatives in Bangladesh. Several key findings emerged from the study, indicating both

successes and areas for improvement. In the villages surveyed, notable strides were observed in the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, including organic farming techniques and the adoption of climate-resilient crop varieties. These efforts contributed to enhanced food security and resilience to climate change among rural communities. Additionally, community-led initiatives such as water conservation projects and renewable energy installations showcased the proactive engagement of residents in promoting sustainability.

However, challenges such as limited access to markets, inadequate infrastructure, and persistent poverty underscored the complexities involved in achieving sustainable rural development. Moving forward, the findings from this field report emphasize the importance of continued investment in infrastructure, capacity-building, and inclusive economic development strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of rural communities in Bangladesh.

Sustainable development is the international community's most urgent priority and the core aim of the 2030 Development Agenda for sustainable development. ECOSOC operates at the center of the UN system's work on all three pillars of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental. To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations.

Table 04: Sustainable Development and Rural Development.

Concepts and Response	Frequency	Percentage
Rural Development needs at the grassroots level		
Strongly Agree	21	46.7
Agree	23	51.1
Neutral	1	2.2
Suggestions		
Yes	24	53.3
No	16	35.6
Perspectives of SD on rural development.		
Loan, allowance, pure water, and communication facility	18	47.4
Shelter and communication	6	15.8
Education, treatment & employment facility	7	18.4
Women empowerment	2	5.3
Drug addiction and good governance	2	5.3
Training and plantation	3	7.9

The data presented reflects the respondents' perspectives on various aspects of rural development, as well as their suggestions for addressing the needs at the grassroots level. In terms of the perceived necessity of rural development initiatives at the grassroots level, a majority of respondents agreed, with 46.7% strongly agreeing

and 51.1% agreeing. This indicates a widespread recognition among the surveyed population of the importance of implementing development interventions directly within rural communities to address their specific needs and challenges.

Furthermore, respondents were asked whether they had suggestions for addressing these needs, with 53.3% responding affirmatively and 35.6% indicating otherwise. This suggests that a significant portion of the respondents actively engaged in offering potential solutions or recommendations to enhance rural development efforts. These suggestions can provide valuable insights for policymakers and development practitioners seeking to design and implement effective interventions tailored to the needs and priorities of rural communities.

Additionally, the perspectives of respondents on sustainable development (SD) in the context of rural development were diverse, reflecting a range of priorities and concerns. The most commonly cited aspects include access to essential services such as loans, allowances, clean water, and communication facilities, which were mentioned by 47.4% of respondents. This highlights the significance of addressing basic needs and improving infrastructure to support rural development initiatives. Other perspectives mentioned by respondents included the importance of shelter and communication (15.8%), education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (18.4%), women empowerment (5.3%), drug addiction and good governance (5.3%), as well as training and plantation activities (7.9%). These varied perspectives underscore the multidimensional nature of rural development and the need for comprehensive, integrated approaches that address diverse challenges and priorities within rural communities.

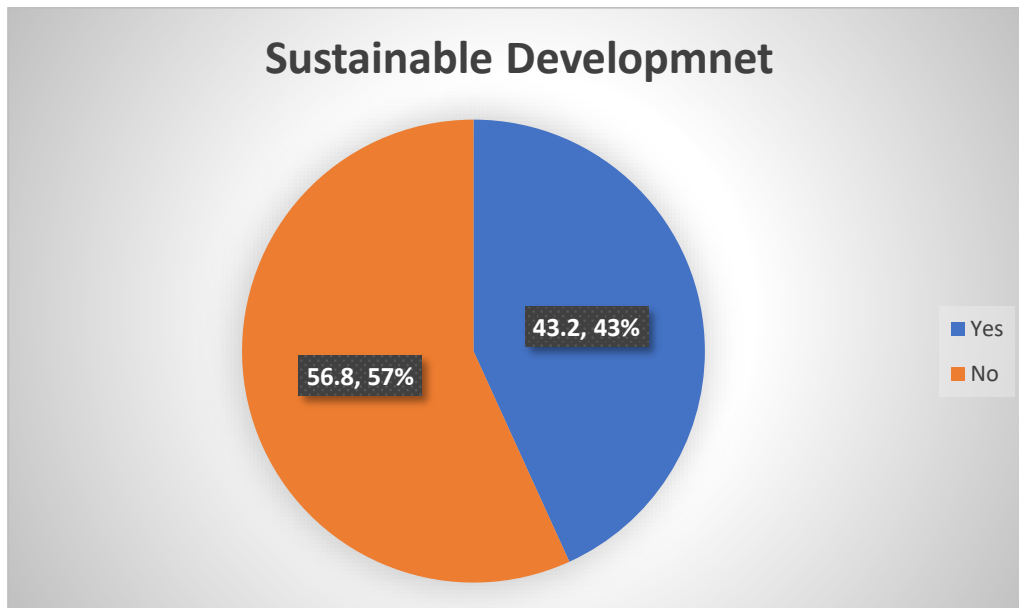


Chart-02: Respondents’ familiarity with Sustainable Development Project.

About 57% of respondents aren’t familiar with sustainable development. 43% of respondents are familiar with this scheme.

Table-05: Descriptive analysis for Likert variables.

Attitudes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Frequency
Do you understand what sustainable life means?	7	15	1	22	0	4	45
Local Leaders can hold a	45	0	0	0	0	1	45

good role in regional development projects.							
Development project brings good to the participant and his/her family.	0	1	0	0	44	5	45
This area needs a development project for SD	0	0	0	0	45	5	45
Propaganda about rural development projects ensures sustainable development.	0	0	0	0	44	5	44
Community development project for ensuring good change in my area.	3	0	7	2	33	5	45
For any nation rural development must for SD	0	0	0	0	45	5	45

The data provided presents responses to various statements reflecting attitudes toward sustainable development (SD) and rural development projects. Regarding understanding sustainable life, 45 respondents indicated agreement (22 agreeing and 23 strongly agreeing), suggesting a high level of comprehension among the surveyed population. Respondents unanimously agreed that local leaders can play a significant role in regional development projects, with all 45 respondents indicating either agreement or strong agreement. When asked about the perceived benefits of development projects for participants and their families, 49 respondents agreed (44 agreeing and 5 strongly agreeing), indicating a positive outlook on the impact of such initiatives. All 45 respondents agreed that development projects are needed for sustainable development in their area, emphasizing the perceived importance of such projects for fostering sustainability.

Similarly, 49 respondents agreed (44 agreeing and 5 strongly agreeing) that there is a need for propaganda about rural development projects to ensure sustainable development, underscoring the importance of raising awareness and promoting participation in such initiatives. In terms of community development projects bringing positive change to their area, the majority of respondents (40 out of 45) indicated agreement (33 agreeing and 7 neutrals), reflecting optimism about the potential for such projects to drive positive transformations. Finally, all 45 respondents agreed that rural development is essential for sustainable development, highlighting the unanimous belief in the pivotal role of rural development in fostering sustainability at the national level.

A large portion of respondents argued developmental schemes bring socioeconomic development to individuals and families. Community developmental projects are needed for sustainable growth and every rural development is a must for socio-economic development. Rural area needs more sustainable developmental projects and public participation must have to increase for attaining the SDG goals.

Table 06: Pearson Test

Name	Local Government huge role in rural development	Which one is an intensified barrier for you?
Pearson Correlation	1	0.89

Sig(2-tailed)		0.604
N	38	36
Pearson Correlation	0.89	1
Sig(2-tailed)	0.604	
N	36	43

H_0 = There lies no relationship between role of local government and barriers

H_A = There lies a strong relationship between the role of local government and barriers.

The data presented indicates a strong positive correlation of 0.89 between the perceived role of local government in rural development and the intensity of barriers experienced. This suggests that as the perception of the local government's significant role in rural development intensifies, so does the perceived intensity of barriers faced by individuals. However, the p-value of 0.604 suggests that this correlation is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that this relationship may occur by chance rather than being a true effect. The sample sizes for each correlation calculation are also provided, with 38 and 36 observations for the first correlation and 36 and 43 observations for the second correlation, respectively.

Prospects and Challenges to Rural Prosperity

Rural communities face challenges related to demographic changes, workforce development, capital access, infrastructure, health, land use, and environment and community preservation. The key elements of rural development in Bangladesh are (a) poverty alleviation and raising the living standards of the rural poor; (b) equitable distribution of income and wealth; (c) wider employment opportunities; (d) participation of the local people in planning, decision-making, implementation process, benefit.

The data provided presents responses to several questions related to rural livelihoods and government intervention in the rural economy. Regarding the fulfillment of basic needs, 80% of respondents indicated that they and their families have not fulfilled basic needs, while 20% reported otherwise. This suggests a significant proportion of respondents' face challenges in meeting their necessities. When asked about the most challenging aspects they faced, the majority of respondents cited food (39.5%), followed by shelter (23.3%). Other challenges mentioned include loans/incentives (6%) and irrigation (4.7%).

Table 07: Challenges and Government Steps Regarding Rural Development.

Questions	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Have you and your family fulfilled basic needs	Yes	09	20	1.80~2
	No	36	80	
Challenges you faced	Foods	17	39.5	
	Irrigation	02	4.7	

most.	Shelter	10	23.3	01
	Loan/ Incentives	06	06	
	Others	08	08	
Government steps to improve rural economy and its citizens	Strongly Agree	32	71.1	01
	Agree	11	24.4	
	Neutral	02	4.4	

This highlights the prevalence of food insecurity and housing concerns among the surveyed population. In terms of government initiatives to support the rural economy and its citizens, the majority of respondents (71.1%) strongly agreed with the steps taken by the government, while 24.4% agreed. Only a small percentage expressed neutrality (4.4%). This indicates an overall positive perception and support for government interventions aimed at improving rural livelihoods and economies.

Current Situation of Rural Community in Study Areas

1. Rural Infrastructure

This concept has an enormous impact on rural development. Roads, electricity, water supply, irrigation facilities, seed facilities, etc. are the primary portion of rural infrastructure. Our FGD-1; FGD-2 and FGD-3 have explored:

The development of a smooth communication system under the supervision of LGED and Relief management led to the easy transportation of goods. They also opined that electricity and water facilities operated advance change among the rural inhabitants.

2. Sources and Factors

Once upon a time, our rural community was a much more self-income-generated sector. But owing to industrialization we lost our most valuable attitudes and prestigious works. Here respondents 1, 2 & 3 opined that-

“Corps, fish, animal, and forest resources were the primary sources of income. Besides handicrafts, cash crops production, and cottage industry sector have a major impact on the livelihood of the inhabitants (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).”

3. Developmental Programs and Effectiveness

Enhancing community-level development projects is a must. The right project must be ensured at the right time. Respondents 1,2 & 3 opined that –

“RD1; RD2; RD5 & RD12 developmental scheme initiated by the BRDB (Bangladesh Rural Development Board) enhanced community development. Among these, RD5 (Rural Development-5) development is launched in all upazilas of the Greater Faridpur district. Still, this project is running, and its facilities loan. Besides, RD12 works for poverty elimination.”

4. Challenges

“Internal conflict and lack of consciousness are the major challenges of rural development. Stereotypes and

the absence of logical knowledge act as a barrier to rural development (Jatia & FGD-1)."

"Child marriage, communal conflict, lack of consciousness, and low education rate are the main barriers. Besides, the dowry system, internal political polarization; absence of technical education, and loan facilities with high interest are the more challenges (Tarasi & FGD2)."

"Village politics, communal conflict, loan facility with interest, dowry system, etc. are the barriers towards rural economic growth. The majority of inhabitants faced challenges regarding education. (Chotrokanda & FGD3)."

Prospects for Rural Development

In the 21st century, most Asian nations are moving towards developing and marked as developed nations. It is only possible because of the holistic development scheme and good governance system.

1. Emerging sectors and role of industry

"The role of industry in rural communities is limited. Lack of infrastructural development, absence of resources, and most importantly lack of marketing facilities are the barriers to industry settlement. Industrial production systems and maintenance of industry are also the major drawbacks of rural enhancement. Rural communities are moving towards cities for employment purposes (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3)."

2. Role of Technology and Innovation

"Enhancing mobility is initiated through technological innovation. Rural communities are attracted to technology and innovation. Again, to build a smart rural community, technology, and innovation are must (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3)."

Table 08: Insights from Focus Group Discussions about the Perspectives on Rural Development.

Concepts and Responses	Key Points from FGDs
Rural Infrastructure	Rural infrastructure, including roads, electricity, water supply, and irrigation facilities, significantly impacts rural development. Participants highlighted the importance of a smooth communication system supervised by LGED and Relief management for easy transportation of goods. Electricity and water facilities were also noted as catalysts for change among rural inhabitants (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).
Sources and Factors	Participants discussed the historical sources of income in rural communities, such as crops, fish, animals, and forest resources. They emphasized the impact of handicrafts, cash crops production, and cottage industries on rural livelihoods. However, industrialization has led to a decline in traditional income sources (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).
Developmental Programs	Community-level development projects, particularly those initiated by BRDB, were seen as effective in enhancing rural development. Specific projects like RD5 and RD12 were highlighted for their contributions to poverty elimination and overall community development (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).

Challenges	Internal conflicts, lack of awareness, stereotypes, and inadequate education were identified as major challenges to rural development. Participants also highlighted specific issues like child marriage, communal conflicts, and the absence of technical education (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).
Emerging Sectors and Industry	Despite the potential, rural industry faces barriers like infrastructural limitations, lack of resources, and inadequate marketing facilities. Participants expressed concerns about industrial production systems and the migration of rural populations to urban areas for employment (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).
Role of Technology and Innovation	Technological innovation is seen as essential for enhancing mobility and building smart rural communities. Participants emphasized the need for technology and innovation to drive rural development (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).
Major Obstacles to Sustainability	Various social, cultural, and economic obstacles hinder sustainable rural development, including communal conflicts, regional politics, low education rates, and social stereotypes. Participants stressed the importance of addressing these challenges for sustainable development (FGD-1; FGD-2; FGD-3).

These key points from the FGDs provide valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences of rural communities regarding infrastructure, sources of income, developmental programs, challenges, emerging sectors, technology, and sustainability.

Challenges to Achieving Sustainability

1. Major Obstacles

“Sustainable development is a must for a smart nation. There remain major obstacles to rural development. Communal conflict, regional politics, dowry system, superstitions, low education rate, child marriage, child labor, lack of loan facilities, etc. are the barriers towards rural development (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).”

2. Social and Cultural Factors

“Man is a social being. Human beings are directly related to their social and cultural scheme. Culture is what you do. From the ancient age to the present time human beings can’t free themselves from cultural factors. Rural development has a direct relationship with social and cultural factors (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).”

3. Collaborative Attitude

“To enhance rural development, project evaluation and monitoring is a must. Without good leadership and collaboration, it is impossible to enhance societal advancement. Both the government and mass people have to work together. Only a collaborative mentality can enhance our social development (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).”

Endorsements of Mass People from FGDs:

Project evaluation is a must for development. As we are the inhabitants of 3rd world nations, we are highly dependent on governmental projects and foreign aid. Mass people recommend new policies for changing their distressed lives.

1. Lived Experience and Policy

Sustainable development is a lifelong process. Every project must have a particular aim. Without proper plan

and evaluation projects can't mitigate their mottoes. The exit plan is a must for the implementation of the project. Projects developed based on an exit plan can ensure sustainable development easily (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

2. Education and Technical Knowledge

Education is a basic right. Without education, development can't be achieved. Among the SDGs, education is the prime. Technical knowledge can ensure broader development. The government has to arrange a skill-based education system. The more the people are educated, the more the sustainable development is achieved (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

3. Plan-based Project

Plan can win the race. Perfect planning and leadership are a must for ensuring rural development. The local administrative body has to select the right project for the right community. Planning, monitoring, funding, evaluation, etc. must be done to ensure sustainable development (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

4. Proper Selection of Problems

Proper selection of problems is a must for rural development. The government must have to work for improving the lifestyle of the community. Eradication of poverty, primary and technical education facilities, gender and social stereotypes, dowry system, child marriage, etc. must be properly diagnosed and eliminated. Raising mass awareness to tackle the barriers. Prevention is better than cure which means proper planning and diagnosing of problems is a must for enhancing rural development. Overall, a holistic development scheme is needed for rural development (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS FOR IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations drawn from the insights gleaned through the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) offer a comprehensive roadmap for future implications in rural development initiatives. Here's an analytical rephrasing of these recommendations:

Project Evaluation and Policy Reform:

The FGD participants underscore the critical importance of project evaluation in ensuring effective development outcomes. They advocate for the establishment of robust evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact and efficacy of rural development projects. Additionally, there is a consensus among community members for the implementation of new policies aimed at addressing the persistent challenges faced by rural populations. These policies should be informed by the lived experiences of the community and designed to address their specific needs and priorities (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

Education and Technical Skill Development:

Education emerges as a central theme in the FGDs, with participants highlighting its role as a catalyst for rural development. The FGDs emphasize the need for the government to prioritize education, particularly technical and skill-based training programs. By equipping rural populations with relevant skills and knowledge, such initiatives can empower individuals to participate meaningfully in economic activities and contribute to sustainable development efforts. The government is urged to invest in education infrastructure and curriculum development tailored to the needs of rural communities (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

Community-Centered Planning and Implementation:

The FGDs stress the importance of community-centered planning and implementation processes in rural

development initiatives. Participants advocate for the active involvement of local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that projects are tailored to their unique contexts and priorities. Furthermore, they emphasize the need for transparent and inclusive governance structures that facilitate meaningful participation and accountability. By fostering partnerships between local authorities, community members, and development organizations, rural development efforts can be more responsive and sustainable (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

Sustainable Resource Management:

Resource management emerges as a key concern in the FGDs, with participants highlighting the importance of sustainable practices for long-term development. Recommendations include promoting environmentally friendly agricultural techniques, such as organic farming and water conservation measures. Additionally, there is a call for the protection of natural resources, including land and forests, to safeguard the livelihoods of rural communities. The government is encouraged to enact policies and regulations that promote sustainable resource management practices and support the adoption of eco-friendly technologies (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

Infrastructure Development and Access to Basic Services:

Access to basic infrastructure and services is identified as a critical determinant of rural development outcomes. The FGDs highlight the need for investments in infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and sanitation facilities, to improve connectivity and enhance the quality of life in rural areas. Furthermore, there is a call for increased access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and clean water, particularly for marginalized populations. The government is urged to prioritize infrastructure development projects and ensure equitable access to basic services across rural communities (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

Promotion of Livelihood Diversification:

Diversification of livelihoods emerges as a strategy to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability in rural communities. Participants emphasized the importance of promoting alternative income-generating activities beyond traditional agriculture, such as small-scale enterprises, agro-processing, and tourism. By creating opportunities for diversified livelihoods, rural populations can mitigate the risks associated with agricultural dependence and adapt to changing economic conditions. The government is encouraged to support entrepreneurship development and provide access to financial resources and market linkages for rural enterprises (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange:

Capacity building and knowledge exchange are identified as critical components of sustainable rural development. The FGDs highlight the importance of investing in human capital development, including training and skills enhancement programs for rural residents. Additionally, there is a call for the promotion of knowledge-sharing platforms and networks that facilitate the exchange of best practices and lessons learned among communities, government agencies, and development practitioners. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation, rural communities can build their resilience and adaptability to emerging challenges (FGD1; FGD2 & FGD3).

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study encountered several limitations that warrant acknowledgment. Firstly, data collection in the field presented challenges, with difficulties arising in reaching targeted individuals due to their sporadic absence, leading to disruptions in the daily schedule. Moreover, reliance on secondary data may have introduced potential shortcomings, influencing the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the study's findings. Additionally, the participation of some individuals in interviews and focus group discussions was hindered by time constraints, as they were occupied with work during the daytime, potentially impacting the diversity of perspectives gathered.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Regarding ethical considerations, the researcher adhered to a set of principles to ensure the integrity and credibility of the study. These included obtaining prior permission before initiating data collection, maintaining strict confidentiality of all collected data, conducting pretests and tests of instruments to ensure reliability, providing a detailed and transparent description of the study process, and upholding professionalism throughout all stages of the research endeavor. These ethical guidelines were implemented to uphold the rights and welfare of participants and to ensure the ethical conduct of the study.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research findings underscore the urgent necessity to diversify agricultural practices in rural Bangladesh, offering a pathway to bolster livelihoods and mitigate poverty. Non-crop agriculture emerges as a particularly promising avenue due to its potential to generate higher value-added activities, especially in post-production stages, thereby providing more productive employment opportunities for resource-poor households. However, realizing these potential hinges on collaborative efforts from the public sector, necessitating investments in rural infrastructure, education, skills training, and financial services tailored to low-income individuals. Encouraging the transition of workers from agriculture to higher-paying non-farming occupations represents a positive stride toward this objective, complemented by support for mechanization and small-scale agro-processing businesses to propel rural economic development further.

Furthermore, it is imperative to dismantle regulatory barriers and ensure equitable distribution of revenue from the rural non-farm economy to foster inclusive growth. Enhancing opportunities for children from low-income households to access high-quality secondary education plays a crucial role in bridging existing socioeconomic disparities and empowering future generations. Additionally, creating a supportive policy environment and championing inclusive growth strategies are pivotal for establishing an enabling ecosystem that facilitates sustainable rural development.

In essence, achieving sustainable rural development in Bangladesh necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates agricultural diversification, infrastructure development, skills enhancement, and social inclusion. By prioritizing these interventions and fostering partnerships between the government, civil society, and the private sector, Bangladesh can unlock the full potential of its rural economy, improve the well-being of its rural population, and significantly contribute to broader national development goals.

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