

Community-driven dev approach to quicken poverty cut efforts

Says WB economist

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh can make quick progress in its poverty alleviation efforts with Community Driven Development (CDD) approach, as the country's 'great human capital' still remains largely untapped, said a World Bank economist.

"This is something where Bangladesh can work on to make sure that the country's 150 million people are using their capacities, ideas and innovativeness for quicker development," World Bank Senior Economist and Task Team Leader of Social Investment Programme Project (SIPP) Dr Meena Munshi said in an interview with the news agency.

Meena is working with the World Bank for designing and implementing Rural Development and Poverty Reduction Programmes in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh using the CDD approach.

She said a pilot project styled 'Social Investment Programme Project' (SIPP) launched in Bangladesh's two most impoverished districts - Gaibandha and Jamalpur -- has shown that the CDD approach is more effective.

Launched in 2003, the project has given the communities the control over planning, decision-making and investment resources. Its main objective is to develop effective financing and institutional arrangement at community level for improving their access to local basic services through community-driven small-scale infrastructure development and social assistance.

So far, nearly two million poor people in Gaibandha and Jamalpur have been benefited from the project. Under the programme, village organisations have been formed in 922 villages

through inclusion of women, youths, and the poorest. It has reached over 190,000 poor households, and mobilised them into 14,274 small livelihood groups (Jibikayan Groups) that make savings and internal lending.

Social Development Foundation, an autonomous organisation established by the government in 2000, is implementing SIPP with support from the World Bank to address the country's acute poverty as outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The main strategy of SIPP is to put the poor at the centre of development by forming village institutions.

Meena, a former post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies in the University of Virginia, said Bangladesh has started the CDD approach 3-4 years back and this approach in the first three years focused on community infrastructure development.

"For any poverty alleviation programme, you need 8-10 years' time. Building and sustaining community institutions and investing in sustainable livelihoods need longer-term vision and cannot be achieved in a shorter period of time," she said.

"If the people are given the opportunities, information and the resources actually needed for coming out of poverty, then this approach is very, very effective," she added.

About the same project in Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Madhya Pradesh of India and that in Sri Lanka, Meena said they have started walking on the same path and they are showing very good results.

"I see the same trend in Bangladesh although it is too early to say as the livelihood part has just started," she said voicing a high hope that there will be a tangible

progress in Bangladesh in 10 years' time.

Asked about mechanisms to help the community members market their agricultural produces and other products, the SIPP Task Team Leader said the programme is focusing on that part too. "Our focus is on how to aggregate products and cut the middle men to help these marginal farmers benefit from this agricultural growth. The focus of SIPP is on organising the producer groups and helping them get the necessary skills and generate employment in rural areas. And the producer groups can federate at certain cluster level or the district level, which will actually give them the negotiating power with the private sector. That is one of (our) strategies."

The second part of the strategies, she said, is getting the private sector directly involved with the farmers' groups and that will help both parties actually cut down the cost. "Thirdly, there will be efforts to improve the quality and the value addition -- how the farmers can get into the processing part apart from selling and looking at the whole value chain."

The programme, Meena said, will also help the community members set up small processing centres near their areas, as there is a lot of demand domestically for fruits and vegetables, dairy and meat and fish, and then there is the export market.

Asked whether SIPP would be expanded further in Bangladesh, Meena said: "We've already expanded the programme from Gaibandha and Jamalpur to cyclone-affected areas apart from expanding it to the flood-affected areas. Under the second phase of this programme (SIPP), we've planned to expand it to 10-12 districts of Rajshahi region."