

# **An Appraisal of the Memorable Contribution of Nobel Laureate Professor Elinor Ostrom in the Perspective of a few Case Studies in Bangladesh**

Tanvir A. Khan  
Independent University, Bangladesh

## **ABSTRACT**

*The present paper is an outgrowth of a research work based on a few case studies of Bangladesh in light of the memorable contribution of Nobel Laureate Prof. Elinor Ostrom. The paper observes that the resources meant for the common people are wasted in the process of self-interest of the ruling coterie and the elite.*

*While citing the Comilla experiment (located in Bangladesh) as the **first case study**, it is found that authors observed cooperatives to have fallen prey to elite capture in many rural communities.*

*While citing the Dhaka city as the **second case study**, it is observed that a harmony between the density and the supportive infrastructure is crucial in formulating a sustainable built environment, and not the Floor Area Ratio. This challenges the concept of the commons in relation to utilities (gas, electricity, water, etc.).*

*While citing the BRDB model and comparing it with the NGO model as the **third case study**, it is observed that in the public sector human development was accepted in its programmes.*

*The target group approach with conscientization as the core element has a potential to lessen the aggravation of inequality in the society. The 'common resource' could then be relatively safe and pave the way to avoid tragedies of the 'common'. So, clearly Elinor Ostrom's contribution to lessening the sufferings of commons seems most pertinent in this situation.*

**Keywords:** Commons, Collective Action, Influential Local People, Future Collective Benefit, Conscientization, Human Development

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study is an endeavor to analyze three case studies of Bangladesh in light of the work of Professor Elinor Ostrom. It is observed that the resources meant for the common people are wasted in the process of self-interest of the ruling coterie and the elite.

The paper intends to highlight the concept of collective action and the commons in the light of Prof. Elinor Ostrom's research observations. A lot of discourses have taken place among the researchers on this topic and a few highlights are discussed below.

Kenneth J. Arrow, Nobel Prize-winning economist's observation cited in Elinor Ostrom's book (2010):

research of Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues on the emergence of well-functioning collective rules for exploitation of renewable natural resources has overturned conventional wisdom and led to new insights of the greatest importance for both policy and the understanding of fundamental economic and ecological processes .

This book, *Working Together: Collective Action, the Commons, and Multiple Methods in Practice* (2010), is based on the several decades of research by Nobel award winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom and her talented colleagues. The two messages that are asserted are: that "it is possible for individuals to act collectively to manage shared natural resources on a sustainable basis"(Ibid). The second message is that "the existing structure of academic disciplines in the system of higher learning deeply handicaps researchers from attaining true insights of this type"(Ibid). Research had determined that the possibility of people managing their own common pool resources through democratic and egalitarian participation is possible unless people or institutions are in the way.

Multi-disciplinary approach to solution finding is the best method when the mindset to participate, shunning egos and listening to each other's viewpoint objectively make its mark. Short of that, the well-known story of the seven wise men each exploring a different part of the elephant and coming up with seven different, equally absurd, "theories" of the creature is "a fairly literal depiction of what happens when economists, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and anthropologists address the issue of the regulations of the commons, or virtually any other complex social problem" (2010). Each has important insights that are ignored or negated by the others.

In the words of Poteete, Janssen, and Ostrom (2010):

Unfortunately, there are still considerable 'battles' among scholars who rely on different methods or assumptions. Some scholars engaged in in-depth descriptions of cases challenge the usefulness of efforts to seek general patterns, while some who do large-N observational research do not recognize the value of case studies or experiments in untangling causal process. Likewise, scholars from different disciplines or theoretical perspectives often hold different assumptions about the world works, or disagree about priorities, both in research and in policy.

Researchers and funding agencies should be encouraged by the stunning results to redouble their efforts to create a truly unified and transdisciplinary ensemble of behavioral science disciplines.

How often do we realize that these are nothing but consequences of our collective greed and selfishness when we criticize these urban menaces?

In 1968, Hardin discussed this in an article titled 'The tragedy of the commons', which was published in the *Science* journal. The article describes a hypothetical situation in which multiple individuals, acting independently to fulfill their self-interests, ultimately deplete a shared limited resource even when it is clear that it is not in anyone's long-term interest for this to happen. The central idea of Hardin's (1968) article is:

based on mediaeval land tenure in Europe where herders used to share a common pasture on which each of them was entitled to let their cows graze freely. Per Hardin's example, it is in each herder's interest to put the next (and succeeding) cow (he acquires) onto the land even if the grass-producing capacity of the common pasture is exceeded and permanently damaged. The individual herder receives the benefit of an additional cow while destroying the future collective benefit of the entire group.

Hardin's (1968) metaphor illustrates the argument that "free access and unrestricted demand for a finite resource ultimately destroy the resource temporarily or permanently through overexploitation". It is true that as a metaphor 'tragedy of the commons' should not be taken too literally or the term 'tragedy' should not be seen as a real tragedy. This term has particular relevance in analyzing universal selfish behavior of humans in maximizing self-interest even at the cost of damaging some collective interests. Therefore, "it can be applied to describe many man-made environmental, economic and social problems in the world today" (1968).

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. The first one is to analyze three case-studies of action-research projects of Bangladesh in light of the memorable contribution of Nobel laureate Professor Elinor Ostrom. These will hopefully help the readers in understanding how the common resources are being abused in Bangladesh. The second purpose lies in the identification of the third case study that has been purposefully selected to highlight a solution (acceptance of 'human development' in the programmes) that is in-built in the system. There will be a way out if the formal system cooperates with the beneficiaries.

## FEW CASE STUDIES

Few case-studies would be presented which were excellent action-research projects determined to change the scenario existing at that point of time without the analysis taking sides whether it was pro-left or pro-right. The author believes that if there is a will there is a way however adopted the model is.

The first one is the famous Comilla model followed by Dhaka's urban plan; and last but not least the social action programs of mobilizing NGOs in Bangladesh.

### Case Study 1: The Famous Comilla Model

The Comilla Model was a rural development programme launched in 1959 (Mashrigi et al., 2003). Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (renamed in 1971 the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, which is located on the outskirts of Comilla town, was founded by Akhter Hameed Khan the cooperative pioneer who was responsible for developing and launching the programme (Khan, 1960.)

While the results of the Model ultimately frustrated Khan's ambitions, it has important implications for rural community development, particularly cooperative microfinance and microcredit (Raper, 2007).

#### *Origins and Purpose*

The Comilla Model was Khan's reply to the failure of *Village Agricultural and Industrial Development* (V-AID) programme, launched in 1953 in East and West Pakistan with technical assistance from the US government. The V-AID was a governmental level attempt to promote citizens' participation in the sphere of rural development (Khan, 1983).

Khan (1983) argued that for Comilla to develop rapidly, the farmers in its village must be able to rapidly expand their production and sales. The main constraint they faced was inadequate local infrastructure – especially roads, drains, embankments and irrigation. But even if the government had the resources to build this infrastructure, Khan argued, the problem would not be solved. Once constructed, infrastructure must be regularly maintained. The benefits of it must be managed effectively based on rules that users could accept and predict. In Khan's view it was essential to develop 'vigorous local institutions' capable of performing this type of local maintenance and management (Khan, 1983).

For this reason, the Comilla Model piloted a methodology for stimulating agricultural and rural development, based on the principle of grassroots cooperative participation by the people (Raper, 1970). Dr. Khan found inspiration for the cooperative development aspect of his Model from German cooperative pioneer Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, whose rural credit unions had been an early example of institution-building in predominantly non-literate communities.

### *Implementation*

To simultaneously address problems caused by the inadequacy of both local infrastructure and local institutions, the Model integrated four distinct components in every *thana* (sub-district) where it was implemented:

- a. establishment of a training and development centre,
- b. a road-drainage embankment works program,
- c. a decentralized, small scale irrigation program, and
- d. a two-tiered cooperative system, with primary cooperatives operating in the villages, and federations operating at thana level (Khan, 1983)

Considerable emphasis was placed on distribution of agricultural inputs and extension services, for example by helping farmers to grow potatoes in the sandy Comilla soil, and using cold storage technology (Chowdhury, 1989).

Another key implementation challenge, Khan wrote, was to ensure that the four programs grew stronger at the same time in a mutually supporting way. In particular, "... the relation between the Rural Works and Irrigation Programme and the cooperatives is very close and vital. The first two develop the productive capacity of the land and increase the farmer's income. The cooperatives safeguard the farmers from money lenders and enable them to modernize their farming methods. The cooperatives promote the accumulation of self-owned capital through thrift and they promote managerial and technical skill through training. Their ultimate aim is self-financing and self-management" (Khan, 1983)

In the villages, the Academy introduced a number of pilot projects beginning in 1959. These pilot projects were guided by two goals: first, to provide a real-life learning situation for its trainees; and second, to devise pilot programme and institutions which could serve as models capable of replication (Khan, 1983).

In guiding and operating the projects, a set of principles and strategies were formulated as the bases for developing the pilot projects, resulting in a unique rural development approach ([http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/C\\_0309.htm](http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/C_0309.htm)).

### *Features*

The main features of the Comilla Model were:

- The promotion of development and of refining of various institutions, both public and private, and establishing a system of interrelationships between them;
- Involvement of both public and private sectors in the process of rural development;
- Development of leadership in every village, including managers, model farmers, women organizers, youth leaders, and village accountants, to manage and sustain the development efforts;

Development of three basic infrastructures (administrative, physical and organizational);

Priority on decentralized and coordinated rural administration in coordination with officials of various government departments and the representatives of public organizations;

Integration and coordination of the various developing services, institutions and projects;

Education, organization and discipline;

Economic planning and technology;

Development of a stable and progressive agriculture to improve the conditions of the farmers, and provide employment to rural Labour force

These features distinguish the Comilla Model from other rural development approaches, such as community development, the *target group* approach, and intensive area development (Quddus, 1993)

#### *Difficulties*

For various reasons the *Comilla Model* was unable to achieve its goal. It had particular troubles with government relations and efforts to build strong cooperative institutions.

According to Khan:

in actual practice, the four programs suffered from distortion, mismanagement, corruption and subversion. After Independence of Bangladesh, while the First Five Year Plan gave general endorsement, both theoretical criticisms and practical difficulties became more severe (Khan, 1983).

Escalating loan defaults became a particularly important concern, undermining the hope that the cooperatives would become self-reliant and develop into strong institutions. Dr. Khan reported that influential local people had secured management positions in the cooperatives. "They are powerful and well informed. They know that the old sanctions (certificates, notices, pressure by officers) are now dead, and they can repudiate their obligations with impunity" (Khan, 1983).

In addition, the new government annulled loans issued by its pre-independence predecessor.

Chowdhury reports that by 1979 only 61 of the 400 cooperatives were still functioning. She attributes this result to four factors: fraud/lack of internal controls, stagnation, diversion of funds, and ineffective external supervision. The central problem of fraud and weak controls "was possible not only because of individual dishonesty, but because the people were not made aware of their rights, and were not in a position to voice their rights ..." (Chowdhury, 1989).



At the same time, there were difficulties with government relations made more difficult by the departure of Khan for Pakistan.

The officers and change agents were not ready to plan with the local people and to report to them directly.... The dynamic personality of Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan helped to mobilize and harmonize diverse groups to work towards a common goal for rural development. Afterwards, the contradictions within the Comilla approach manifested themselves (Chowdhury, 1989).

#### *Lessons from the Comilla experience*

Comilla Model provided an experience to be profited by later practitioners. In the early years of BRAC (NGO) and Grameen Bank in the 1970s, both Dr. Muhammad Yunus and Fazle Hasan Abed tested cooperative approaches to delivering credit to poor people. They concluded that the **cooperative strategy could not work in rural Bangladesh**. Instead, both directly targeted the poorest people, while attempting to keep out those who were not poor.

Dowla & Barua recently summarized the thinking at Grameen Bank: A major reason for the prior failure of credit cooperatives in Bangladesh was that the groups were too big and consisted of people with varied economic backgrounds. These large groups did not work because the more affluent members captured the organizations. (Dowla & Barua, 2006)

Later cooperative development initiatives in Bangladesh, like RD-12 and the Swanirvar ('self-reliance') Movement also adopted a targeting strategy (Rahman, 1999).

Both Yunus and Abed also attempted to catalyze collective enterprises that were locally owned and controlled. However, problems with internal control and elite manipulation continued, and by the 1990s Grameen and BRAC, along with all the main microfinance NGOs in Bangladesh, had abandoned cooperative approaches and developed highly centralized control and service delivery structures.

#### *Discussion and Results: Case-1*

Authors in this debate had observed that the merits of poverty-targeting continue to stimulate debate in microfinance. They observed that while many micro credit institutions have adopted poverty-targeting, most cooperatives reject it. "The 1<sup>st</sup> principle in the Statement on the Co-operative Identity affirms that cooperatives are open to all persons in a community" (1983). Poverty-targeting is seen as 'reverse discrimination' on the basis of social or economic status.

In this view, the main problem with the Comilla Model as observed by these authors was that it neglected the 4th cooperative principle: independence from government. This neglect is clearly visible in the Khan's initial design of the Model, since the cooperatives were conceived of as an instrument for maintaining public infrastructure, and were dependent on the delivery of government extension services and credit for their success. "Cooperatives however, have fallen prey to elite capture

in many rural communities, and in less densely populated nations than Bangladesh, it still proves challenging to deliver microfinance to them" (Ibid).

### **Case Study 2: Dhaka's Urban Plan**

Dhaka was ranked the second least desirable city to live in, just ahead of Harare of Zimbabwe, as reported in the Economist. It was observed that the higher the ranking of a country in the index the lower it is placed in the livability list.

This relationship can be explained as Hadi (2010) had suggested with the help of the term 'tragedy of the commons' coined by the US ecologist Garret Hardin in 1968.

'Greed' is one of the main factors that lead humans to corruption. "An overwhelming pursuit of self-interest that leads humans to deny the rights of fellow humans or to indulge in a degree of selfishness may completely ignore the collective goodness for society". Hardin's phrase 'tragedy of the commons' can enter the discourse at this very moment (Hadi, 2010).

'The tragedy of the commons' published in the Science journal describes a hypothetical situation in which "multiple individuals, acting independently to fulfill their self-interests, ultimately deplete a shared limited resource. It is clear more so often that it is not in anyone's long-term interest" (Ibid).

Herders used to share a common pasture as observed by Hardin on which each of them was entitled to let their cows graze freely" (1968). It is in each herder's interest to put the next (and succeeding) cow (he acquires) onto the land even if the grass-producing capacity of the common pasture is exceeded and permanently damaged. The individual herder receives the benefit of an additional cow while destroying the future collective benefit of the entire group" (Hardin, 1968).

Hardin was primarily interested in the problem of human population growth. It is true that as a metaphor 'tragedy of the commons' should not be taken too literally. "It can be applied to describe many man-made environmental, economic and social problems in the world today". When water is used at a higher rate than the reservoirs are replenished, fish consumption exceeds its reproductive capacity, or oil supplies are exhausted, we face a 'tragedy of the commons'.

We can definitely explain Dhaka's situation with the help of 'tragedy of the commons'. "Uncontrolled pursuit of self-interest, coupled with lack of proper implementation of correct policy and absence of adequate enforcement of relevant laws, has transformed the city into a jungle of concrete. People are vying for very basic amenities that are usually taken for granted by most citizens in the developed countries" (Hadi, 2010). Most of the land owners in Dhaka want to take the maximum advantage of the land by building up to its maximum potential even sometimes by violating zoning and building regulations.



*Discussion and Results: Case-2*

A harmony between the density and the supportive infrastructure is crucial in formulating a sustainable built environment, and not the FAR.

A system of infrastructure is built to support particular densities assigned for particular parts of a city. Although floor area ratio, the ratio between the total floor area for all the floors of a building and the surface area of the plot on which the building is constructed, is introduced in the National Building Code to regulate maximum buildable area on a site, FAR only controls the total built floor area, and not the total number of dwelling units, which in a way controls the total number of families and population residing in a given building (Hadi, 2010).

Two buildings having same FAR will have exactly same total built floor area. The building having more dwelling units will accommodate more people than the other building will even if the FAR for both the buildings is the same.

Tremendous pressure on the infrastructure can be put on such as roads, utility lines, communications systems, etc. if we don't increase the capacity of our infrastructure simultaneously. "Ultimately, these are affecting our physical and mental health, productivity and above all our self-esteem as a nation, which in a way are directly related to the livability indexes of our very own city, Dhaka" (Hadi, 2010).

We may spend an abnormal amount of money to decorate our own plot or house or flat but how many times we think about spending collectively to upgrade our common neighborhood streets, parks or shared facilities. But unfortunately we tend to forget that our selfish actions will ultimately create a 'tragedy of the commons', which we (ourselves) cannot escape from.

Some dedicated people are fighting and sacrificing their petty interests to create a better future. But their voices are mostly lost either due to decreasing size of their caucus or due to increasing power of the forces that are behind these urban menaces, directly or indirectly (Hadi, 2010).

We need a comprehensive policy that includes long-term regional planning with the elements of strategic growth management, sustainable urbanization, decentralization, traffic management and inter-departmental cooperation among various government agencies.

The sheer magnitude of the problem requires a strong political will (both from the government and opposition parties) to fix the problems of Dhaka. Until and unless the opposition parties support the government in its initiative, civil societies and various professional groups are completely on board, it is impossible for the government alone to embark on this very challenging and seemingly impossible venture.

“There is a strong need for self sacrifice and determination from citizens, strong public-private partnership and, above all, a national unity for this common cause” (Hadi, 2010). Our political leaders need positive attitude, conviction and courage irrespective of political affiliation to initiate that effort. We need actions and we need them right now, before the problems grow way out of proportions and beyond our control.

### **Case Study 3: The Social Action Programs of Mobilizing NGOs e.g. GSS (Gono Shahajya Songstha) in Bangladesh**

This case study explores the initiatives of the public and private sector in the context of the alleviation of poverty of the rural poor in Bangladesh. “The central thesis is that the public sector has made a significant departure, at least in theory, towards the conceptualization of the rural poor programme in a way that the private sector, particularly the non-governmental organizations, has been performing for the last two decades” (Khan, 1989).

This study emphasizes the recognition by the NGOs, particularly the “moderate” ones that the nature of both the problems and the solutions change in the process. Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the “moderate” NGO under study, has gone through a “learn as it goes”, responsive, inductive process. This study argues quite the contrary with the public sector initiative. “It was only prior to the preparation of the Third Five Year Plan that debates were initiated to seriously criticize the rather sterile two-tier cooperative model for rural poor mobilization around employment generation and acquisition of assets. Presently, BRDB (Bangladesh Rural Development Board) opened the “flood-gate”, which so long prevented the NGOs to contribute to the formulation of the training module of BRDB rural poor programme towards human development and institution building” (Ibid, 1989).

Although it has been argued that “moderate” NGOs, like BRAC, “are not institutions setting about to prove a specific model or theory of development in a dogmatic or absolutist sense, it would be difficult to say that they are not guided by an ideology, as this study argues, when the NGOs themselves have accepted the “Freire-type conscientization” (Ibid), which in itself is a loaded concept”. This study presents a “mobilizing” NGO, namely GSS (Gono Shahajya Songstha) where the concept of “conscientisation” has been shown to transcend the limits of present day thinking of moderate NGOs (Ibid).

GSS has decided from its inception that it would not promote income-generating activities like other leading “moderate” NGOs. Its main function would be “concentrating solely on conscientization, in theory and practice, so as to be close to the notion of landless mobilization” (Ibid).

GSS believes conceptually that "the landless do not constitute a class but a conglomerate of various class forces". GSS sees all of these classes as being oppressed and they may well all be victims of the same relation of dependence (Ibid).

The catalytic forces, e.g. groups of organizations, who are loyal to the objectives of mobilization, should limit themselves, as GSS believe, "to only facilitating the process of organization building of the oppressed". They should not go beyond that, as GSS believes, it would take the shape of paternalism and thereby the objectives would be self-defeating (Ibid).

GSS strictly believes "what all the agents of working class mobilization, e.g. NGOs, political parties, etc. could do is essentially establish a systematic dialogue between them, in order to come to some agreement, which would unite the working class instead of dividing them" (Ibid).

GSS feels strongly that "the forces of mobilization have been undermined by the contradictions in the process of conscientization, mobilization, and politicization". The resultant effect has been the increasing dependence of the target groups on the NGOs (Ibid).

GSS believes that the process of conscientization, involves three levels of conceptualization. The third level, however, is greatly emphasized. GSS observed that "progressive application of solidarity is perceived by the target group towards the adjustment of the practices of the state, the laws which permit the dependence and exploitation of one class by another" (Ibid, 304).

To GSS, resource mobilization continues to be at best a means for strengthening collective effort rather than an end in itself. The dependence on NGOs "contradicts the notion of liberation" (Ibid). On the other hand, access to resources is gained through pressure of collective action on the part of the target people; the process is self-propelled and is itself liberation (Ibid).

GSS observed that "the need for a nationwide organization for the target people was felt to be critical to ensure continued support for the local struggles of the target people. This organization should be seen as the means to establish landless control over the production process, the administration and the marketing system" (Ibid). However, GSS makes it quite clear, that "this should be independent of any mobilizing NGO, who is itself under the NGO umbrella". By directly developing this organization, it would jeopardize the sanctity of that umbrella for other organizations whose aims are less overtly political. GSS feels, that "whether or not and indeed at what stage the NGO framework, as stipulated by the State, should be infringed is something for an organization of the target people to decide" (Ibid).

The process of mobilization is essentially a political process and obviously a fact, GSS believes, that they do not dispute with.

#### *Discussion and Results: Case-3*

The study looked at several hypotheses. The first hypothesis was "concerned with cooperatives. Although, they are universally accepted tools for combating poverty,

cooperatives in the agriculture sector of Bangladesh faced fundamental maladies". The two-tier cooperative structure, UCCA-KSS, designed to organize small farmers were dominated by the large farmers. "Gradual erosion was observed in thrift deposits, weekly meetings and audit of cooperative societies, as well as poor recovery rate of credit". The survival of the two-tier cooperative societies was also observed to depend greatly on government's liberal patronage during the last two decades (Ibid, 317).

The study, therefore, argues that "the cooperative institutions in the agriculture sector have not been freed from external interference, and genuine cooperators cannot man and run these cooperative societies" (Ibid). The attitudinal change in government functionaries, this study argues "could only come about through a determined effort of the upper echelons of the Bangladesh Rural Development Board, in discharging their duties in the agriculture sector". However, it is also argued in this study that the same organization (BRDB), while discharging their duties towards the rural poor programmes have dispelled the doubts of critics towards bureaucratic officialdom, by accepting human development in its programmes. At least in theory, this is no mean achievement for BRDB, as human development is expected to influence the attitudes of both BRDB officials and cooperators alike (Ibid, 317-318).

The second hypothesis was "concerned with the integrated character of the IRDP model". It is argued that the "emphasis of integration of the four components (the two-tier cooperatives, the rural works programme, the thana irrigation programme, and the thana training and development centre) has been lost as it stands isolated from each other". The Comilla model was designed in such a way that the rural works and irrigation component could develop the production capacity of land and increase the farmer's income. Cooperatives and training were thought of as safeguards from money lenders and enable the farmers to modernize their farming methods. It is argued "opinions differ on the intrinsic viability of the Comilla model itself" (Ibid).

The view of the proponents of the model lead one to the conclusion that the failure of Comilla experiment cannot be attributed to any inherent fault in the model itself. It was rather that "the model was not at all given a fair trial. It is argued that the cooperative societies were expanded too fast, thus emphasizing quantity instead of quality". Moreover, after 1971, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) which later was renamed BRDB (Bangladesh Rural Development Board), launched the cooperatives "without the three other inseparable components of the Comilla model". It is argued that without irrigation water, drainage and other infrastructure, cooperative societies cannot survive. It is also argued that the two-tier cooperative system had to compete with rural soft programmes of the government at a lower rate of interest and without the rigors of cooperative discipline. Not that in practice, the cooperative societies, it is argued, have "been pursuing rigorous credit discipline themselves". The whole exercise is "argued to constitute a lesson in futility of cooperation in a situation of inequality" (Ibid, 318-319).

The third hypothesis was “concerned with the participation or the absence of it, of the rural poor in the realization of programmes designed for them”. It has been argued that through the public and private sector initiatives a new development philosophy has emerged in Bangladesh towards the rural poor programmes. This philosophy “originates from a method devised in Brazil to conscientise the rural poor through adult literacy programmes”. A method of consciousness raising of the down-trodden through this approach, it is argued “leads the rural poor to understand the unjust social, economic and political structures which exploit them”. Participation is seen as the true form of democracy. This study argues that “emphasis on human elements, by both the public and the private sector, is amply demonstrated in their programmes, where participation is accepted as one of the core elements”. It is also argued that the Headquarters and the local authorities have duly accepted public opinion as a resource (Ibid, 319).

The fourth hypothesis was “concerned with a target group approach with conscientization as the core element” (Ibid). It is argued that the “rural poor programmes comprise of homogenous groups of people, unlike the cooperatives in the agriculture sector, and it appears to have a potential to lessen the aggravation of inequality in the society” (Ibid).

Income generating programmes is argued, to have brought the rural poor up to the subsistence level, which is no mean achievement. However, it is argued that credit should not be an end in itself and allowed to dominate the social aspects of the rural poor programmes. It is argued that the rural poor should be cautious that these programmes do not pursue economism by concentrating on credit alone. So far the record has been found to be satisfactory (Ibid, 320).

This study is limited to the three organizations. However, further research is necessary in order to include a few more organizations working for and with the rural poor. The author feels it is necessary to pursue the present research interest to test a few more pre-determined hypotheses along the lines of this present research (Ibid).

The above research findings are most likely to have a profoundly useful effect on the rural-poor programmes of Bangladesh. The findings can be of great use as a lesson for properly utilizing resources which are essentially from the common pool and pave the way to avoid ‘tragedies of the common’.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussions lead to conclude that the cited case studies in light of the works of Prof. Elinor Ostrom seem to be most enlightening for our nation. It is observed that the resources which are meant for the common people are wasted in the process of self-interest of the ruling coterie and the elite. However, the poor needs to face the challenge through appropriate strategies with the help of the system.



While citing the Comilla experiment as the **first case study**, authors observed that while many micro credit institutions have adopted poverty-targeting, most cooperatives reject it. Each farmer whether large, medium or small had a right and equal stake in the cooperatives and common resources. Yet common resources were usurped by the 'club of kulaks'.

While citing the Dhaka city as the **second case study**, it is observed that where there was one bigha of land for one household, there are now 36 plus or minus households in the same area challenging the concept of the commons in relation to utilities (gas, electricity, water, etc.).

While citing the BRDB model and comparing it with the NGO model as the **third case study**, it is observed that human development was accepted in its programmes. The attitudinal change in government functionaries could only come about through a determined effort of the upper echelons. A new development philosophy has emerged in Bangladesh towards the rural poor programmes. A method of consciousness rising of the down-trodden through this approach, it is argued leads the rural poor to understand the unjust social, economic and political structures which exploit them.

The target group approach with conscientization as the core element has a potential to lessen the aggravation of inequality in the society. The 'common resource' could then be relatively safe.

A national unity for a common cause with a strong need for self sacrifice and determination from citizens, strong public-private partnership and, above all our political leaders need positive attitude, conviction and courage irrespective of political affiliation to initiate that effort. Actions are needed and we need them right now, before the problems grow way out of proportions and beyond our control.

The messages that Nobel award winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom and her talented colleagues brought with this book *Working Together: Collective Action, the Commons* had proved in the context of Bangladesh through the third case study that it is possible for individuals to act collectively to manage shared natural resources on a sustainable basis. Research had determined that the possibility of people managing their own common pool resources through democratic and egalitarian participation is possible unless people or institutions are in the way which is reflected in the first two case studies.

In fine, the outcome of similar research findings in future would hopefully have profound policy implications in properly utilizing resources which are essentially from the common pool, and pave the way for avoiding 'tragedies of the common'. Here lies the true philosophy of Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom's wonderful contribution.



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