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EMPHASIS ON LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING GIVEN IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS:

In realization of such perceived necessities of planning for the rural areas, the country's successive five year development plans laid considerable emphasis on local level planning, the need for appropriate organizational development for the purpose and people's participation in the process.

The First Five Year Plan: On the question of people's participation in the development process, the country's First Five Year Plan stated that, "the only way we can ensure their participation is by decentralizing development activities. Small projects and various development programmes particularly in rural areas must be implemented through the local government institutions." Expressing the apprehension that "such decentralization may lead to some inefficiencies in implementation at the early stages until local expertise in planning and executing development programmes has been gained", the plan went on to say that "this is unavoidable if participation of the people is to be secured". The plan suggested that "while formulating a fairly comprehensive plan for the country, the details in many areas have to be worked out by local government agencies. The National Plan must be explicated into District, Thana and Union Programmes and targets, wherever possible. Local government officers should be responsible for drawing up detailed District and Thana plans under the guidance of the local government representatives." The plan emphasized "the need to combine technical and institutional planning at the local government level. The Zilla and the Thana Parishads will be able to act as co-ordinating authorities only if the services of the officials of the various ministries and agencies

working at District/Thana levels are placed under the operational control of the Parishads. The primary role of the concerned ministries will be servicing, back-stopping and monitoring of performance". The plan, however, at the same time assumed that "the resources made available by the National Government through the annual development plan will be augmented by the community with its own resources. The community participation and financial contribution will be realized only if the local governments can show in their plan the kind of work they will undertake out of their own resources. If a community finds that it is not only expected to implement a programme but also draw it up and where necessary and feasible make a contribution to the effort by using their own resources, they will gain confidence in their own abilities and also be more enthusiastic about the work".

The Second Five Year Plan: With great emphasis on rural development and with the decision of devolution of government administration down to the thana level already taken, the Second Five Year Plan stated that "in the democratic setting, the prime mover of rural development will in fact, be the people themselves, while the Government will act to complement local efforts with financial and technical supports and with such other inputs as may be locally missing. Initiative of local people will be encouraged to evolve a framework of grass-root planning and implementation. It is understood that a plan cannot be considered a success unless people deem it so". The plan pointed out that "in the past all efforts for rural development failed for lack of support of rural institutions. Though motivation and enthusiasm among people were not lacking, the approach to rural development which was top-down, not only failed to appreciate the felt needs of people but also inhibited their initiative. The plan therefore, emphasized building grass-root level production organizations among the target groups to promote a back-to-back relationship with Thana Administration, in order to reflect felt-needs of people in official policies and programmes".

The Third Five Year Plan: The main theme and focus of the country's Third Five Year Plan is alleviation of poverty through productive employment, an intention which was also outlined in the previous plans. With the major incidence of poverty in the rural areas where as much as 85 percent of the country's population lives and the capacity of the modern urban sector to bring about only marginal incremental

employment opportunities, it is imperative to initiate effective development intervention are to be planned, initiated, formulated and implemented locally with only some policy guidelines, monitoring and supplemental resources support from the centre. Elaborate administrative institutional and technical and technical arrangements have already been created which will be discussed in some detail later.

PAST EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING IN BANGLADESH:

Local level participation in local development endeavours is not a new concept in this country. The experiences of local level planning in Bangladesh has a long and varied history. Development activities at the local level for the local people and by the local people started in this country in the first half of this century. However, the system could not crystallize in the proper perspective and be firmly anchored and integrated into the total canvas of national socio-economic development to bring about any sustained socio-economic structural change for the better in the rural areas.

The process of systematic local level development efforts per se started after 1947. The first rural level planning activities in a co-ordinated manner started during the mid-fifties with the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Programme (V-AID). However, such community development efforts could not be sustained and widely replicated for a host of socio-economic, organizational and political reasons and eventually the programme was abandoned in 1961. The V-AID Programme was followed by other programmes including the development activities under the Basic Democracies system. The Rural Works Programmes (RWP), programmes of the Thana Training and Development Centres (TTDC), the Thana Irrigation Plan (TIP) and the Two Tier System of Co-operatives. These last four pillars of planned rural development programmes were developed by the Comilla Academy for Rural Development, later renamed as

Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). The Comilla experiment received international acclaim as an integrated approach to rural development which achieved remarkable success initially but could not ultimately come out of deadlock and sustain.

(To be continued)