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Statistical Training

A training course on agricultural statistics has been inaugurated in Dacca on Monday. It is not perhaps frequently that training courses of such special and technical nature are organized in the country. It is not this alone, however, that makes the course important. This is a regional course, organized by a number of agencies jointly, and participated by experts from abroad. The FAO and the UNDP are both involved in it apart from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, and the focus of the course is set as much on problems of the region as on those in Bangladesh. It is this special feature that draws one's attention to the course immediately.

Dr. Fasihuddin Mahtab, the Planning Minister, has emphasized, in his inaugural speech, the need for having men trained in statistical methods, as efforts must continue to be made to improve the quality of these when applied to situations prevailing in the region. What the Planning Minister has not said, presumably out of a sense of courtesy, is that the state of both data collection and data analysis, as it obtains now in many a developing country, is far from satisfactory—in fact, in some cases alarmingly poor. This leads to difficulties that are at times almost impossible to overcome. Development plans based on inadequate and unreliable data, and on projections, which are true more in dreams than in reality, are bound to lead to deplorable consequences. Their success is never guaranteed and their failure, having the usual multiplier effect, widens the credibility gap. Since the major concern of the developing

nations now is a rapid and large increase in food production, strategies formulated on the basis of less than correct data are particularly risky in the agricultural sector.

The present course reportedly emphasizes training on community level statistics. The Planning Minister is happy about this, for this is what is needed in countries which, like Bangladesh, try to promote and work on the basis of a decentralized system of planning. The experiment that was initiated in the recent past in the form of the institution called Gram Sarkar, responsible for coordinating and overseeing both the planning and the execution of the local developmental projects, has started paying dividends. If now the system can be made a little more sophisticated than before, streamlining its ways and removing the limitations which could not be foreseen earlier at the innovative stage, its success would all the more be pronounced. Employing improved statistical methods would be one positive way of achieving this.

Cooperation among the developing countries in organising this training course is a pointer to their awareness of problems linked with a lack of adequate statistical data and of their determination to overcome these. We join the Planning Minister in thanking Afghanistan, Bhutan, Laos and Samoa for sending their representatives, and hope that the awareness of the need for organizing such courses and of the positive contributions these can make would, rather sooner than later, be more widespread than now.