

Students share uplift work

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THE greatest wealth of Bangladesh are its man and land, and on both these accounts, our rural landscape provides the protoplasm to economic life. So economic emancipation of this country presupposes a real prognosis of the rural situation and an earnest endeavour towards rural development. But economic and social anarchy pervading over the rural scene have made our rural environment acutely ironical and vicious. There are plundering of surplus production, prejudicial exploitation of material and human resources, regular and systematic transfer of scarce commodities vitally wanted for local need; all these result from the whims of a few who feel least for hundreds of their suffering and oppressed fellows. The vast majority of the rural inhabitants have to-day no confidence in their own abilities; they just survive without having any incentive for life and work. Such is the background when the nation feels appropriate to beckon its large students' community since they are the persons capable to sacrifice self-interest and comfort for rendering voluntary development services in the rural areas. By that, each and every student of the University can act as an inspiring fountain of life and awaken the moribund society of the village. Herein lies the significance of the concept of the Rural Development Service. Kteirp hve etaiou shrdur

During the last few years, the students of the Department of Geography, Jahangirnagar University, conducted a series of rural surveys in different parts of Bangladesh. These surveys led to the realization that mere questionnaires does not precisely indicate the nature of the complex rural problems. To obtain basic information on the diversified rural problems, an investigator needs essentially to identify himself with the villagers, share, even if temporarily, their pains and problems so as to be able to look to the possible solution through villagerman's eyes. Such a direct and active involvement into the remedial measures can make one properly conversant with the facts of realities. Thus inspired by pragmatic ideas, an action-oriented research project viz., Comprehensive Rural Development and Planning (CRDP) of Palthalia Union (Close to University Campus) was initiated in June 1977. On 15 December 1977, President's Adviser-in-Charge of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs declared over one hundred students of the Department of Geography participating in this action-research programme as the first Work Company of Jahangirnagar University. Palthalia Union under Savar Police Station consists of 39 villages. It is indeed a

encouragement that in the first matter of great pleasure and phase of the programme upto June 1978, almost every student of the Department actively participated in the development activities of these villages and have helped in the identification of their problems and evaluation of their resources.

From the beginning of the project till now, the contribution of the students in some special areas has been noteworthy. An unmetalled kutcha road of nearly one and half a mile length has been newly built or partly reconstructed. Efforts are being made to remove illiteracy from five villages through five adult education centres and few sub centres. Over one thousand men and women have been receiving literacy education in these centres. In Walia, first

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of these villages, rate of literacy has increased from 10 to over 90 per cent in less than six months' time. The students, in collaboration with the villagers, have planted over 6000 trees in eleven villages of the union. By organising Workers Association, unemployed or underemployed poor-men are being encouraged to work in activities designed to enable them to earn from small capital investment (e.g. making of jute bags, bamboo-baskets, paper bags, etc.) A tubewell for drinking water has been sunk at Walia where there was no tubewell so long. Apart from efforts for removal of illiteracy from amongst the rural women, female students are also trying to educate the village women in matters relating to family planning, hygiene, sewing and knitting, handicrafts, etc. The dispirited and dejected youths of the village have been activated to a new life, through introduction and encouragement of games and sports, physical exercises and cultural activities.

However, there is no denying the fact that time has not yet come to assess the extent of success or the degree of failure of the University students' participation in rural development. The teachers and students committed to the programme are gradually grasp-

ing the concept through trial and error practice of the philosophy. But the Comprehensive Rural Development Project of Palthalia has made it evidently clear that the participating students are to-day well-aware and convinced of their definite role on rural development. They are determined to assist the crippled rural society towards self-reliance and prosperity by identifying themselves with the poor villagers during University vacation and short holidays.

In the light of the experiences gathered in the early stages of the action-research programme (CRDP) on Palthalia, it has been observed that full utilization of the voluntary services of all the students can not be achieved through their involvement into research activities alone. Research, as it is well known, entails a long time and a lengthy process demanding one to move with extreme care and academic dedication. So in order to utilize the enthusiasm of the students desirous to render voluntary services directly in activities relating to rural development it was considered appropriate to separate the community development aspects from the action research project (CRDP). Thus, in July 1978 a programme of Rural Development Service (RDS) has been instituted in place of the action-oriented CRDP. The RDS introduced, as such, is a voluntary venture of the students of the Department of Geography at Jahangirnagar University to render community development service in the rural areas.

The concept of students participation in rural development is not new. Similar activities have already been initiated in many parts of the developing world. In the Peoples' Republic of China all students need to spend a definite period in a commune. Participating of University students in such programme is compulsory in Ethiopia and Nepal. In several Universities of Indonesia there is a programme known as 'Study and Service'. However, the programme of the RDS has been designed on the basis of the experiences gathered from our action-oriented research project, CRDP. It does not reflect in any way foreign philosophy or experience. Our thoughts and ideas will grow and bloom conforming to the needs of our rural society. Bangladesh nationalism and economic emancipation of the country are at the essence of the RDS concept.

PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES OF DRS PROGRAMME:

1. To provide the University students with opportunities so that during holidays and vacation they can apply theoretical content of education they have obtained at the highest seat of learning to the practical and material problems of the nation.
2. To create an awareness amongst the students community for voluntary service that will enable them to appreciate precisely their responsibilities towards the country and the nation.
3. To undertake constructive and production-oriented projects in rural areas through the mobilization of local resources and manpower. This may be attempted in collaboration with developmental agencies already working in the villages, if there be any, or initiated afresh in cooperation of the villagers. The fields of students services on such activities may be spread over complete eradication of illiteracy, proper utilization of land and extension of agriculture, construction and repair of roads and improvement in the movement facilities, assistance in health and family planning programmes, creation of employment provision for landless labour forces, introduction of small scale rural industries under the auspices of individual or cooperative management and adoption of compatible applied technology into the operation of productive processes.
4. To create constructive leadership within the precipitated rural society by way of rendering ardent and dedicated services. This leadership and work force will put their might to properly utilize local resources and transform gradually the rural economy into a self-reliant one.
5. To help introduction of realistic thinking in the education system of the country. This will result from the reflection of the students services and experiences in the rural areas.
6. To make meaningful contribution towards projection of institutional structure and development planning in the rural areas and planning-oriented research or rural problems.
7. To make the government properly aware of the magnitude and dimension of rural problems. The students belong to an unbiased community. Through their neutral eyes and undaunted courage, they can fearlessly depict every obstacle to rural development. All these will help our University students to produce 65000 descriptive maps with physical plans for 65000 of our villages in less than 5 years time.

(To be continued)