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# Education and Human Resource Development in Bangladesh\*

by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

That Bangladesh has a tremendous potential in her vast human resource is probably well recognised by now. Hence the problem of developing and releasing the creative energy of the people and mobilising this entire pool of resource for productive purposes has to become a strategic policy issue in any development programme.

One can immediately identify two broad aspects of the problem : (i) development of ability and skill of the people, and (ii) mobilisation and utilisation of this resource in productive activities. It should be obvious that any efforts directed towards tackling this twin problem cannot be based on economic analysis alone ; the whole range of sociological, psychological and political considerations interacting in a complex fashion become crucial elements here. Thus the problem assumes a truly multidisciplinary character. Unfortunately, despite the crucial importance of the problem, very little systematic efforts are known to have been directed towards an understanding of the issues involved. The present paper, while in no way strives to fill up the vacuum in this area, attempts to review some of the issues involved and approaches to the problem.

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## 2. LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE IN BANGLADESH

### 2.1. The Major Issues

There will be two major issues in any programme on human resource development ; they are : (a) identification of areas where critical shortages persist, and (b) location of the areas where surplus exists. It may not be difficult to identify the areas of shortages for a country like Bangladesh ; they can be categorised as follows :

First, there is a shortage of highly educated manpower like doctors, engineers, agronomists, scientists, etc. Not only there is a shortage, but in addition, a serious regional imbalance in the distribution of such high level manpower is created in favour of the urban areas by their lack of mobility. Most of the people in such professions prefer<sup>1</sup> to stay in urban areas which cover a very small fraction of the total population of the country.

Second, there is a critical shortage of top level managerial and administrative personnel, especially in the public sector. The dearth of entrepreneurial talent in the private sector is also notable.

Third, there is a shortage of manpower in categories like middle level technicians, agricultural extension workers, nurses, midwives, and so on.

Fourth, there is a shortage of qualified teachers at almost all levels. Historically low remunerativeness of the teaching profession compared to other occupations, coupled with more attractive employment opportunities at home and abroad always preserve the conditions for a continuous drain of highly educated manpower.

On the other hand, it is perhaps needless to mention that there is a huge surplus of unskilled manpower in both rural and urban areas. In the rural areas the surplus mainly takes the form of un-

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<sup>1</sup> This preference is in fact general and is not confined to people of professions referred to here.

deremployment sustained by the tradition of income and work sharing in peasant households. In the urban areas, the problem shows its manifestations in a crowding of professions requiring little initial capital and no skill, although there is also a large army of openly unemployed labour. The problem continues to be aggravated by a continuous migration of people from the rural to the urban areas which has many serious implications.

## 2. 2. From Statement to Quantification

Although it is easy to identify the problem areas, a quantification of the relevant magnitudes may not be so. The usual practice in the empirical literature is to use some indicators of human resource development.<sup>2</sup>

The indicators of human resource development being used in the present study are from two categories : ( i ) those related to the stock of high level manpower, and ( ii ) those related to educational efforts.<sup>3</sup> The indicators that will be used from the first category are :

- ( a ) Number of physicians and dentists per 10,000 of population.
- ( b ) Number of nurses and midwives per 10,000 of population ;
- ( c ) Number of scientists and engineers per 10,000 of population.

The indicators from the second category are :

- ( a ) Students enrolled at the first level of education as a percentage of the estimated population aged 5 to 14 inclusive ;
- ( b ) Students enrolled at the second level of education as a percentage of the estimated population aged 15 to 19 inclusive ;

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example [ 12 , 25 ].

<sup>3</sup> It should be made clear at this point that while no attempts are being made to provide any 'estimates', the figures to be presented are merely designed to provide a rough idea of the magnitude of the problem.

- (c) Enrolment in the third (higher) level of education as a percentage of the estimated population aged 20 to 24 inclusive ;
- (d) Combined primary and secondary enrolments as percentage of age-group 5—19 ;
- (e) Teachers per 10,000 of school-age population for each level ;
- (f) Student-teacher ratio for each of these three levels of education .

Now the question is : how shall we use these indicators for the purpose at hand ? There are some variables ( e. g., the enrolment ratios ) where there are fixed ceilings. In such cases we know what is or should be the target ; and hence it is easy to see the gap between the actual and the target. But there are variables ( e. g., doctors per 10,000 of population ) where no such fixed ceiling exists. The problem in such cases is that there are no final goals, the absence of which makes it difficult to get a quantitative idea of the magnitude of shortages.

One alternative in such situations is to make some international comparisons. In order to do this it is necessary to take one or some of the developed countries as some sort of an 'ideal' and compare the performance of the LDCs with that of the developed countries. It may seem at this point that this procedure requires an implicit assumption that the countries accepted as 'ideal' have already achieved the maximum attainable in a particular field, although the procedure is being designed for situations where no such ceiling exists. It is necessary to point out, however, that no such strict assumption is necessary for our purpose. It may be sufficient to assume that the level achieved by the 'ideal' countries can be taken as 'desirable' from the point of view of LDCs like Bangladesh. Then the actual achievement of the LDCs can be compared against the level attained by the developed countries. The gap between the two can be taken as rough indicator of the extent of shortage in a particular area.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gosktowsti [ 11 ] has suggested a more sophisticated method of calculating this gap by using the concept of 'taxonomic' distance. His method is, however, more appropriate for tracing the movement of the gap over time.

There is another problem associated with this procedure. The figures we are going to present are only averages for the respective countries. Hence, they do not imply anything about the pattern of interregional or interpersonal distribution of the benefits indicated by the variables. For example, a particular number of doctors per 10,000 of population in a country does not say anything about their location (e. g., rural or urban) or the availability of their services to the various income groups of the society. Hence, even a high value for such variables may not be sufficient as an indicator of the level achieved by a particular country, unless further information is available about the pattern of their distribution.

With these words about methodological problems we may now have a look at our data. In Table I we have assembled information about the indicators included in our first category mentioned earlier. The countries for which these information are presented include some developed (or ideal, as we have termed) countries like U.S.A., U.K. and Japan as well as some less developed countries. The picture revealed by this table, though not entirely unexpected, point out the pathetically low level of development of human resource achieved by Bangladesh in the fields mentioned.

For example, while a developed country like U. S. A. has nearly 15 physicians per 10,000 people, Bangladesh has not even one. The picture remains grim even if we compare it with a less developed country like Srilanka or India, for these countries have more than 2 doctors per 10,000 people. Thus we see that Bangladesh has a long way to go even if it only wants to reach the level attained by Srilanka or India, not to speak of that of the developed countries. The same story is revealed by a comparison of other categories of high level manpower included in Table I. The precarious condition of the rural people can be realised better if we remember that those figures are only averages and that most of such manpower is concentrated in the urban areas of the country.

When we bring in the question of development over time and look at the growth of medical facilities in Bangladesh, an even worse performance is revealed ( see Table II ). In the case of doctors there has been a decline in their number per 10,000 population. Although there has been a small increase in the number of nurses and midwives, the situation has not improved appreciably even in these cases.

TABLE I

## AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF THE STOCK OF HIGH LEVEL MANPOWER

Country ( Year )	No. of Physicians per 10,000 Population	No. of Dentists per 10,000 Population	No. of Nursing Personnel per 10,000 Population	No. of Midwifery Personnel per 10,000 Population	No. of Scientists & Engineers per 10,000 Population
Bangladesh ( 1974 )	0.67	—	0.14	0.11	1.46
Ceylon ( 1968 )	2.70	.16	3.66	3.17	—
India ( 1967 )	2.22	—	1.20	1.31	—
Japan ( 1969 ) <sup>a</sup>	11.12	3.55	26.22	2.83	—
Singapore ( 1970 )	6.56	0.95	21.52	15.08	—
U.K. ( England & Wales ) ( 1967 ) <sup>a</sup>	11.75	2.60	30.63	3.72	34.20 <sup>b</sup>
U.S.A. ( 1969 )	14.90	5.01	50.48	0.10	83.37

Notes : a = Estimated population figures of 1966 are used.

b = Fig. for U.K. for the year 1968.

Sources : [ 1, 18, 27 ].

A direct 'estimate' of shortages of high level manpower as provided by the Planning Commission is presented in Table III. These figures should, however, be looked at with caution for several

TABLE II  
GROWTH OF MEDICAL FACILITIES IN BANGLADESH (1969-1974)

Year	Number of Physicians per 10,000 Population	Number of Registered Nurses per 10,000 Population	Number of Registered Midwives per 10,000 Population
1	2	3	4
1969	1.95	0.11	0.10
1970	1.17	0.12	0.10
1971	1.03	0.10	0.13
1972	1.05	0.11	0.15
1973	0.68	0.10	0.10
1974	0.67	0.14	0.11

Sources : [ 6, 7 ].

TABLE III  
AN ESTIMATE OF THE STOCK OF HIGH LEVEL MANPOWER IN BANGLADESH

Type	Number of Job Aspiring Degree Holders	Number of Post Demand-ing this Quali-fication	The balance : Unemployment/ Inappropriate Placement
1	2	3	4
1. Master's degree holders in natural sciences	6,492	6,096	+ 396
2. Engineering Graduates	4,456	4,887	- 431
3. Engineering Technicians	11,182	11,416	- 234
4. Post-graduate medical specialists	263	304	- 41
5. Mid-level doctors	4,640	4,881	- 241
6. Medical technicians	5,655	10,617	- 4,961
7. Agricultural professionals	3,569	4,897	- 1,328
8. Teaching professionals	63,897	2,43,214	- 1,79,317
9. Fibre technologists	871	4,134	- 3,263

Notes : Master's degree holders in Natural Sciences, in spite of a positive balance, have been listed in the deficit table. This is because much more than 396 natural scientists are employed in (a) bureaucracy where Master's degree in Natural Science is not the prescribed qualification, and in (b) Defence Science Organisation and other military establishments.

Source : [ 18 ].

reasons. First, the number of posts demanding a particular qualification (especially for doctors, teaching professionals, agricultural professionals) does in no way reflect the 'requirements' of the country. For example, we have seen earlier that Bangladesh must double its stock of medical personnel just to reach the level achieved by Srilanka. Hence, the reported number of posts available are themselves underestimates of what is required by the country. Secondly, it has been recognised by the Planning Commission [ 18, p. 12 ] that the deficit figure for mid-level doctors is not the exact number of unfilled vacancies. In fact, the number of vacant positions is larger. The figure indicates that even if all the doctors who are now abroad and all those who are doing private practice at home would have taken salaried jobs in the country, even then unfilled vacancies would have been of this size.

Now, we come to our second category of human resource indicators—those related to educational efforts. Looking at the enrolment ratios, we see that at none of the three levels are they anywhere near the desired achievement. When compared with the developed countries it is seen that enrolment ratios at all levels are much lower in Bangladesh. Comparing enrolments at the first level, we see that the figure for Bangladesh is lower than half of those for U.K. and U.S.A., and less than two thirds of what it is in Japan. Enrolment ratio of Srilanka is also nearly double that of Bangladesh. An even worse picture is revealed by a comparison of enrolment ratios at the second level. If the combined first and second level enrolment ratio is any better guide, we can have a look at it from column (4) of Table IV. But the relative picture of Bangladesh remains essentially the same in this case as well. When we take the third level enrolment ratio, the position of Bangladesh becomes better compared to Srilanka and India, and less worse compared to U.K. But when compared to Japan or U.S.A., the situation remains the same.

TABLE IV  
AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF ENROLMENT RATIO  
AT DIFFERENT LEVELS (PERCENTAGES)

Country (years)	1st Level	2nd Level	Combined 1st & 2nd Level	3rd Level
1	2	3	4	5
Bangladesh (1973-74)	34.74	32.62	34.30	7.37
India <sup>a</sup> (1963)	37.11	40.62	37.95	3.51
Japan (1968)	58.85	91.68	71.86	15.92
Singapore (1968)	66.02	67.45	66.43	8.03
Srilanka <sup>b</sup> (1965)	64.09	80.04	68.38 <sup>c</sup>	1.41
U.K. (England & Wales) (1967)	69.71	94.65	78.25	9.79
Northern Ireland (1968)	72.23	101.99	81.30	10.41
Scotland (1968)	70.30	78.01	72.67	14.76
U.S.A. (1968)	77.81	104.70	86.06	47.59

Notes : a = Population figures for 1961 are used.

b = Population figures for 1963 are used.

c = Enrolment figures of 1964 is used because no information is available for 1965.

Sources : For Bangladesh figures [7].

For other countries [26, 27].

It would have been more interesting to compare the orientation to agricultural and natural sciences in the enrolments at the third level;<sup>5</sup> but lack of data precludes this.

<sup>5</sup> For, an indiscriminate expansion of higher education and increased third level enrolment in the humanities subjects may ultimately achieve nothing but a group of educated unemployed. In Bangladesh this is already emerging as a problem, though not as acute as in India.

If the number of teachers per 10,000 of school-age population and the student-teacher ratio are any indicators of the qualitative aspect of education, we can have some idea of development in this field from Table V. Both these indicators point to an acute shortage

TABLE V

## AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF THE AVAILABILITY OF TEACHERS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

Country (years)	Teachers per 10,000 of school-age Population			Student - Teacher Ratios		
	1st Level	2nd Level	3rd Level	1st Level	2nd Level	3rd Level
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bangladesh (1973-74)	64.69	126.60	n.a.	53.71	25.76	n.a.
India <sup>a</sup> (1968)	75.77	231.1 <sup>b</sup>	21.50	48.98	17.57	16.32
Japan (1968)	224.59	453.30	146.57	26.20	20.22	10.86
Singapore (1968)	220.48	301.32	68.31	9.94	22.38	12.98
Srilanka (1965)	244.81 <sup>c</sup>	6.15 <sup>d</sup>		27.93 <sup>c</sup>	22.91 <sup>d</sup>	
U.K. (England & Wales) (1968)	424.96 <sup>c</sup>	95.73		18.41	10.22	
Northern Ireland (1968)	247.12	747.55	100.46	29.23	13.64	10.37
Scotland (1968)	246.51	526.16	148.89 <sup>e</sup>	28.52	14.83	9.91
U.S.A. (1968)	221.18 <sup>f</sup>	524.81	n.a.	25.74	19.95	n.a.

Notes : n.a. = not available.

a = Population figures of 1961 are used.

b = Population figures of 1963 are used.

c = 1st and 2nd levels combined.

d = Figure for teachers is that of 1964.

e = 1961 figure.

f = Includes pre-primary level teachers and population.

Sources : [ 1, 26, 27 ].

of teachers at all levels in Bangladesh. For example, while there are nearly 54 students for each teacher at the first level in Bangladesh, the number of such students is about half in countries like Japan and U. S. A., and less than half in U. K. Moreover, the number of teachers per 10,000 of school-age population at the first level in Japan and U. S. A. is nearly four times and in U. K. more than four times as that in Bangladesh.

### 3. LEVEL OF UTILISATION OF HUMAN RESOURCE IN BANGLADESH

The extent to which the vast pool of human resource in Bangladesh is being utilised can be seen from estimates of unemployment and underemployment in various sectors. Although it is easy to identify the areas where a surplus of manpower may exist, the quantification of such surplus still remains one of the most thorny issues in development economics.<sup>6</sup> And as far as Bangladesh is concerned, an additional limitation is imposed by a lack of data. In such circumstances no quantification can be much better than an 'informed guess'. Let us nevertheless try to have a look at the situation.

#### 3. 1. Agricultural-rural Surplus

Although the seriousness of the problem of agricultural or rural unemployment or underemployment is no longer debated, it is very difficult to come by any reliable estimate of the magnitudes involved. Quite a number of estimates are, however, available by now. While most of these estimates are available in percentage terms, they could be applied to the relevant labour force estimates to obtain the absolute magnitudes. The various estimates are presented in Table VI.

A few comments about the data presented in the table are in order. First, most of the estimates presented here deal with the agricultural sector alone, and more specifically, on crop production.

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<sup>6</sup> For a neat discussion of some of the theoretical as well as empirical problems involved, see Sen [23].

TABLE VI

VARIOUS ESTIMATES OF AGRICULTURAL — RURAL UNEMPLOYMENT  
IN BANGLADESH

( In percentage )

Source of finding	Period				
	Late 1950s	1960-61	1964-65	1969-70	1974
1. Dacca University Socio- Economic Survey Board	30.00 (5.42)	—	—	—	—
2. Rajshahi University Socio-Economic Survey Board	—	20.00 (3.61)	—	—	—
3. Habibullah, M.	—	25.00 (4.51)	—	—	—
4. Stern, J.J.	—	34.00 (6.14)	30.80 (6.41)	32.40 (7.44)	—
5. F.A.O.	—	—	—	32.50 (7.47)	35.60 (8.73)
6. Robinson, W. C.	—	20.00 (3.61)	—	—	—
7. Muqtada, M.	—	—	—	39.80 (9.15)	35.70 (8.73)
8. Rabbani, A.K.M.G.	—	—	40.00 (8.32)	—	—
9. B.I.D.S.	—	—	—	—	28.00 (6.86)
10. Masum, M.	—	28.14 (5.08)	—	—	—

Source : For 1 to, 9, [4]. For 10, [19].

Notes : Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers in million. These figures have been obtained by applying the percentages to the estimated rural labour force available from [4].

Activities of the rural population in Bangladesh do not remain confined to crop production or to agricultural operations only ; they may extend to non-agricultural activities like improvement of rural infrastructure,

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4. Stern, J.J.	—	34.00 (6.14)	30.80 (6.41)	32.40 (7.44)	—
5. F.A.O.	—	—	—	32.50 (7.47)	35.60 (8.73)
6. Robinson, W. C.	—	20.00 (3.61)	—	—	—
7. Muqtada, M.	—	—	—	39.80 (9.15)	35.70 (8.73)
8. Rabbani, A.K.M.G.	—	—	40.00 (8.32)	—	—
9. B.I.D.S.	—	—	—	—	28.00 (6.86)
10. Masum, M.	—	28.14 (5.08)	—	—	—

Source : For 1 to, 9, [4]. For 10, [19].

Notes : Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers in million. These figures have been obtained by applying the percentages to the estimated rural labour force available from [4].

Activities of the rural population in Bangladesh do not remain confined to crop production or to agricultural operations only ; they may extend to non-agricultural activities like improvement of rural infrastructure,

small business, and so on. Hence, any guess about the magnitude of rural unemployment from the figures presented should be made with caution.

Second, and more interesting is the variation in the percentage of unemployment found by different estimates. It may be mentioned here that while some of the estimates presented here are based on micro-level data, others are based on national data. And it is quite possible that estimates based on one type may differ from those based on another. Some of the variation may also be due to differences in the time period involved. But the more fundamental cause of the variation may lie in the different concepts involved and the consequent differences in the methods used.<sup>7</sup>

Third, an important factor which characterises agricultural activities is seasonality. Labour requirement in agriculture does vary substantially between peak and slack seasons, and with that may vary the gainful employment opportunities of agricultural workers. This fact becomes all the more important because it cannot be assumed that labour applied in the slack season is a perfect substitute for that applied in the busy season. In fact, a more realistic assumption would be one of complementarity between labour applied during different seasons of the year. Hence, the blanket terms like agricultural unemployment or underemployment should be treated with caution, unless any reference is made to seasonal variation. Such aggregate figures as presented in Table VI, therefore, do not carry much meaning especially if one is concerned with employment policies.

Although the fact of seasonality does not alter the possibility of the existence of surplus labour under certain conditions, it remains true that the availability of work does vary considerably between different seasons in an agricultural economy. It is not even impossible to find temporary migration of labourers from the urban to the rural areas during peak periods of agricultural activities. How does one explain such phenomenon? In order to have a clear perspective on the problem

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<sup>7</sup> A brief discussion of the methods used in the estimates presented in Table VI can be found in [ 4 ].

it is necessary to remember the distinction between the income and production aspects of employment as drawn by Sen [ 23 ]. For many of the temporary migrants, participation in agricultural activities during some peak periods ( e. g., harvesting ) may merely be a means of establishing his rights to the share of the family income from a joint farm. It is quite possible that he is merely helping his family members to cut down their efforts, and his absence would not have caused any reduction in output. Thus, he may be regarded as employed from the point of view of income although he is still surplus from the production point of view. Hence, before drawing any conclusion regarding the seasonal requirement of labour simply by looking at the number of persons working during a season, it is necessary to take into account the complex institutional set-up which influences the interrelationships between work obligation, economic support and income sharing.

There are indeed conflicting evidences on the incidence of worklessness during the peak season. While Muqtada [ 20 ] found no unemployment during peak seasons for a sample of farms in Dinajpur District, Rushidan Islam [ 17 ] found as high as 27 per cent of the total supply of mandays remaining unemployed during the peak season in a Barisal village. Using Habibullah's data for a Noakhali village, Iftikhar Ahmed [ 2 ] also demonstrated the existence of a substantial amount of unemployment ( more than 13 per cent ) during the peak season. While regional variations in the demand for and supply of labour is a possibility, much of the differences in the results are probably due to methodologies adopted.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of the above discussion is this : The extent of worklessness during peak seasons may be smaller compared to that in slack seasons ; this in no way implies the non-existence of surplus labour in Bangladesh agriculture. It is, however, true that seasonal variations in labour requirements make the formulation of employment policies a tricky and difficult job.

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<sup>8</sup> A forthcoming note by the present author contains a detailed discussion of these issues. See [ 16 ].

Finally almost all the estimates of surplus labour in agriculture concentrate on active male members in the rural households ; thus very little is known about the employment status of rural women. From whatever fragmentary evidences are available, it appears that rural women spend most of their time in household work and post harvest operations ( e. g. , processing, storing, etc. ) which can be done inside the household. One study indicates that 'at most 50 per cent of the existing female labour time would be needed to carry out the existing household activities, and the other 50 per cent could be diverted to other forms of productive work ( provided, of course, that such employment could be generated' [ 1 ]. This study also indicates that the time requirements for household work could be even further reduced if certain simple technological improvement could be introduced.

Another study [ 15 ] points out that seasonal variation in both employment and wage rates is more pronounced for female workers than for male labourers. Moreover, the levels of employment and wage rates are also lower for female workers compared to their male counterparts. These facts can have serious implications for the level of income and welfare of those households in which earnings of female members constitute an important part of total income.

### 3. 2. URBAN UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Even a great deal less is known about urban unemployment than is the case with the agricultural sector. The data presented by Iftikhar Ahmed [ 2 ], although not up-to-date, is known to be one of the few well organised findings in the field. Table VII provides a summary of the data presented by Ahmed.

It is seen from the table that the latest year for which information is available is 1965 ; and very little is known about how the demand for and supply of labour have behaved in these cities after 1965. Alamgir, *et al.* [ 4 ] have used these figures along with the population of 1974 to arrive at a tentative estimate of the urban unemployed. They have provided three estimates—high, low and medium—for the year 1974. The respective figures are 1. 15, 0.48 and 0.65 million.

TABLE VII  
LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRINCIPAL CITIES OF  
BANGLADESH

City	Year	Labour Force	Total Employment	Unemployment as % of the Total Labour Force
Chittagong	1964	179,420	144,004	19.74
Khulna	1964	90,526	57,130	36.80
Saidpur	1965	18,611	9,745	47.64
Rajshahi	1965	17,786	12,042	32.30
Mymensingh	1965	24,649	13,445	45.44
Barisal	1965	24,564	14,176	42.29
Comilla	1965	16,488	12,526	24.03

Source : [ 2 ]

The application of 1964 (or 1965) unemployment rates to 1974 population is, however, inappropriate for several reasons. First, the stream of migration from rural to urban areas, and consequently the rate of urbanization, got their momentum during the period 1961-1974. During this period, the urban population of Bangladesh grew at the (exponential) rate of 6.70 per cent per annum, and this rate is double the rate for the decade 1951-61. Urban population has increased by 137.61 per cent during 1961-74 [ 8 ]. It is estimated that of the total urban population in 1974, at least 39.36 per cent came from the rural areas [ 8 ]. It is thus clear that supply of labour force in cities must have grown at a very high rate during 1965-1974.

On the other hand, it is difficult to see how the demand for labour could have matched this rapid increase in supply for at least two reasons. First, the elasticities of employment in large and medium scale industries have been found to be small during mid and late sixties [ 13 ]. Second, small scale industry, a potential source of demand for labour grew at a much smaller rate than the population growth rate [ 4 ]. Moreover, it is also unlikely that the government sector has been able to expand employ-

ment at a rate required to absorb the residual jobseekers. Hence, the picture of urban unemployment must be much gloomier today than may appear from the figures provided by Alamgir *et al.*

It may, of course be argued that not all whose employment status could not be explained are unemployed; it is quite possible that a substantial part of them may end up as self-employed in the so-called urban 'informal' sector. But it must be remembered that activities like street vending, car-watching, shoe-shining, etc. are characterised by very low productivity and low income. And many of those engaged in such activities would be available for work if more productive jobs could be found for them.

### 3. 3. Unemployment of the Educated

Now we turn our attention to another category of unutilised and underutilised human resource—the educated manpower. With regard to unemployment of the educated, a fairly exhaustive account is available in a Planning Commission publication [ 18 ]. According to this study, about 44 per cent of the educated job-seekers ( defined as all economically active persons with S. S. C. degree or higher qualifications ) in Bangladesh were unemployed in June 1973. Table VIII brings out this picture clearly.

TABLE VIII  
EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG THE EDUCATED IN  
BANGLADESH,

( Figures in lakhs )

Educated Job-aspirants	Appropriate Placements	Inappropriate Placements	Wholly Unemployed	Rate of Unemployment
10.88	4.28	1.81	4.78	44%

Source : [ 18 ].

Thus it is seen that of the total number of 10.88 lakh educated job-seekers in 1973, 4.21 lakh were absorbed in occupations appropriate to their educational background, 1.89 lakh were inappropriately placed and 4.78 lakh were unemployed. It is thus clear that the problem of unemployment

of the educated has already reached grave dimension. And unless an appropriate action programme is launched immediately, the problem is certain to lead to undesirable social and political tensions.

#### 4. PAST AND PRESENT POLICIES : A CRITIQUE

In the last two sections we were trying to provide an overall picture of the level of development and utilisation of human resource in Bangladesh. And it must have become clear that while there is a huge surplus of unskilled labourers in both rural and urban areas, an acute shortage of critical skills and abilities is also a reality. In addition, a substantial proportion of the educated manpower remains unutilised or underutilised.

The past as well as present policies in the field of education are directed to an indiscriminate expansion of physical facilities in almost all fields irrespective of the degree to which these facilities are utilised and the employability of the products. For example, the number of primary schools in 1978 was estimated to be 40,445 with an enrolment capacity of over 80 lakhs. But the actual number of students was found to be a little over 58 lakhs. Thus we see that only 72 per cent of the capacity that exists in the primary schools is being utilised. If we look at the number of students actually attending schools the picture becomes even gloomier [21]. Clearly, the focus of the policy has been on the establishment of new schools without looking at other factors that might constrain the enrolment and continuation of children in schools.

Similarly, capacity in the field of technical education has expanded substantially during the last two or three decades, but much of this capacity remains unutilised or underutilised.<sup>9</sup> And despite this, policies are being undertaken to create more and more capacity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a systematic analysis of these issues, see [22].

<sup>10</sup> For example although the capacity in the 22 Vocational Training Institutes of the country is severely underutilised, many more such institutes are now under implementation. Moreover, there is a plan to set up one such institute in every thana. Similarly, there are plans to set up more Technical Training Centres and Polytechnics although a substantial capacity in the existing ones remains underutilised.

In the field of general education also the policy seems to be to go on producing graduates inspite of the fact that the problem of unemployment of the educated has already assumed grave dimensions.

Coming to labour utilisation policies, it must be mentioned that the gigantic problem of employment has been curiously neglected by the planners in the past. The section or chapter on employment strategy is normally added to a plan document only to round off the discussions and to make them look complete and respectable. Thus the employment strategy hardly becomes an integral part of the overall growth strategy or policy framework. In fact, most of the plans which are likely to have favourable employment implications ( e. g., spread of HYV crops, expansion of rural works programme, etc.) are planned primarily for higher production. Whatever employment generating potential they might have are regarded as additional benefits ; the actual employment implications are never worked out with any seriousness.

It is clear that the type of employment policies and manpower plan we are used to think of and construct does not hold out much hope for the full utilisation of the country's human resource in the foreseeable future. Unless we are in principle willing and in practice able to think of a radical approach to the problem of development itself through the productive utilisation of the country's human resource and the release of the creative energy of the masses, we shall continue to have a sizable stock of unemployed and underemployed manpower even after the turn of the century ( Table IX ).

In recent years, attempts have been made to utilise labour through what is called 'people's participation' in the implementation of rural infrastructure projects. In these cases, the experiment has been to provide the labour component of a project through voluntary participation of the people. But certain crucial issues are involved in this strategy to which attention must be paid. The first question is : who will supply this voluntary labour. The most equitable arrangement that can be thought of may be to distribute the workload of a project amongst the potential beneficiaries at a progressive scale. Even under such arrangements, some work load will fall on the landless labourers.

TABLE IX

EMPLOYMENT BY ECONOMIC SECTOR AND TOTAL  
LABOUR FORCE, 1975 AND 2000

( Illustrative calculations of the incidence of unemployment )

Sectors	Million	Man Years
	1975	2000
Employment in :		
Agriculture	15	20
Manufacturing	1	4
Commerce	1	2
Services	2	6
All Other ( including construction )	1	4
Total Employment	20	36
Unemployment	7	20
Labour Force	27	56

Note : The figures for 1975 are estimates only, based on incomplete information. They must be considered only as indicative of the structure of occupations rather than absolute level.

Source : [10.]

But since labour power is the only means by which they can earn a living, imposition of a part of the voluntary labour on them must imply a loss of income that could be generated from alternative employment. And if we consider the fact that a mass of the population is already subsisting on a below poverty level of income, the implications of any further loss of income opportunities for the landless become grave indeed.

Second, the fundamental pre-requisite for a successful mass mobilisation is the ideological motivation of the people. And in shaping this motivation, political education plays a key role. Such education in its turn, has to be based on the political philosophy of the state. In

the absence of the necessary type of political philosophy, the difficulties involved in motivating the mass of population in Bangladesh should, therefore, be clear.<sup>11</sup>

The implications of the above are clear. For a success of mass mobilisation through self-help projects, the creation of objective conditions is a pre-requisite. This in turn calls for fundamental reforms, especially in the area of landownership. It is, however, recognized by almost all concerned<sup>12</sup> that such a strategy of development must be based on 'a sound political process' and 'a fundamental land reform programme'. But at the same time it is suggested that 'as these two dimensions of the development process may not be satisfactorily fulfilled in near future, the second best that could be done is to start the process of development through 'people's participation' [3]. Unfortunately, what is lost sight of in this suggestion is that the achievement of 'people's participation' will depend crucially on the 'two dimensions' mentioned here.

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<sup>11</sup> It is often pointed out that the canal digging project at Ulas'li in the Jessore District has succeeded in 'motivating and mobilising rural people to participate in the development process'. An objective evaluation of this case, however suggests that the physical participation of top-ranking leaders and the close supervision and effective monitoring by the bureaucracy may have been crucial factors contributing towards whatever success has been achieved. Even some amount of coercion was also necessary at some stages. Some indication of these can be found in [5].

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, [3], which contains a report of two sessions of discussions which were participated by academicians, researchers, top bureaucrats and policy makers.

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# Population Growth Rates and Single Women

by

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In Bangladesh, the average age for males at first marriage is about eight years higher than the average age for females at first marriage.<sup>1</sup> With a high rate of population growth, this difference in age may pose some problems in terms of the relative numbers of males and females reaching marriageable age in any given year. With high rates of population growth, younger age cohorts will be larger than older age cohorts, and, to be specific, the number of females in a younger age cohort will be larger than the number of males in an older age cohort. This clearly presents a problem in a society where single women have a difficult life. And in so far as the rate of population growth for Bangladesh has accelerated tremendously since World War II, this problem is new and unprecedented. In order to examine the magnitude of the problem I will first work out the mathematics with some simplifying yet realistic assumptions. Next, the census data for Bangladesh will be incorporated into the discussion. Finally, I will end with some speculations on marriage patterns and fertility rates.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper I will use the singulate mean age of marriage as the average age of marriage. Data on singulate mean age of marriage is from, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1974 *Population Census Report*, National Volume, p. 19.

