

GLOBALIZATION, ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN BANGLADESH

**GLOBALIZATION, ENVIRONMENTAL
CRISIS AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN BANGLADESH**
edited by **matuur rahman**

This volume contains articles written by researchers from both Bangladesh and Canada involved in an IDRC (Ottawa) funded study on the manifestations of Globalization on the people and environment of Bangladesh

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Globalization, Environmental Crisis and Social Change in Bangladesh

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PREFACE

Over the last two decades which have been marked by economic globalization, radical transformations have been taking place in the social and economic systems in Bangladesh. Through the process of globalization increased opportunities exist, reflected in economic growth for some but increasing disenfranchisement of the great majority marked by severe social dislocations. Globalization has produced tension between traditional bases of livelihood and emerging export-oriented commercial production. This tension is reflected in the perceived uncertainty of the future livelihood of workers in the garment as well as shrimp industries. Tension may become significant within the export-dependent industries themselves, especially when future existence is threatened by many international market conditions. Recently, the government of Bangladesh has been forced to provide millions of dollars in subsidies to the garment industry¹ and bail out the shrimp industry suffering from virus induced production losses as well as market uncertainties². For investors, there is a source to provide subsidies and to bail out ailing industries, but the disenfranchised peasants, and garment and shrimp workers facing uncertainties of livelihood due to such uncertainties, have no such protection in Bangladesh. The traditional mutual support system that is being dislodged by market forces has not been replaced by any social safety net.

A multidisciplinary group of researchers from both Canada and Bangladesh have tried to understand the manifestations of these transformations and consequent tensions. The Disaster Research Institute (DRI) at the University of Manitoba, Canada, initiated a study in 1998 to inquire into the impacts of globalization in Bangladesh. The research project, entitled "Globalization, Environmental Crisis and Social Change: A Case study of Bangladesh" (GECSC), was funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada. The overall objective of the research was to understand the effects of globalization on socio-economic well-being, social organization, and environmental sustainability in Bangladesh from a political economy perspective. The conceptual framework adopted in the project emphasized changes in production relations, including the commodification of labour, shifting livelihood patterns and changing social relations affecting people in two newly emerged export-oriented industries.

The GECSC project was designed to address issues from both national and local perspectives. Social organization issues were explored in two ways: a macro-level analysis and a micro-level analysis. The macro-level analysis entailed a broad review of institutional features affecting the character of Bangladesh's integration into the world economy. This analysis considered some of the political economic issues which condition the policy environment or which are broader in scope than any single sector of activity. The micro-level analysis was carried out through studies on the local and sector specific dimensions. The aim was to review some of the processes already at work. In this analysis

1 see The Daily Star, June 14, 2002, P.1, "Release of Tk 50 crore subsidy for RMG ordered".

2 see The Daily Star, May 18, 2002, P. 6, "Frozen food exporters seek bailout package".

two different contexts were selected to examine the effects of globalization in Bangladesh: (1) shrimp cultivation in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, and (2) the garment industry in Dhaka. These newly emerged export-oriented industries involve wage-labour jobs that are severely limited in scope, duration and security, and often employ the most docile and vulnerable people. These sectors also involve a significant environmental dimension (e.g., salinization of agricultural land and unplanned growth of garment industries in residential areas in Dhaka).

The GECSC study, on which the chapters in this book are based, aimed to address changing landscape, livelihood, and social relations in response to rapid commodification of labour. Hence, this book is about identifying implications of globalization translated in terms of two export-oriented industries in a country where the majority of the population is engaged in an informal livelihood struggle. Therefore, the research premise in this book or, for that matter of the GECSC study, is limited in that it lacks analyses of many other aspects important to the overall impact of globalization on the broader Bangladesh economy and society. Readers will notice that this book also lacks formal policy prescription. This is because, first, it was not developed as a policy study per se; and second and more importantly, in the face of ever changing conditions, we cannot envisage adequately the global political economy relations, much less can we propose policy prescriptions to the problems emanating from globalization that would alleviate the distress suffered by the majority.

The research project was set off with a thematic consensus amongst the researchers about the purpose and implications of globalization in Bangladesh. The team attempted to highlight the manifestations of globalization by looking at the policy environment under which economic globalization is being enacted, and the process and implications of class and gender dimensions of livelihood shifts and environmental change. However, individual points of view and idiosyncrasies remain explicit in their research-based contributions in this book. Each of these contributions may be appreciated for their own merits.

This book is divided into four parts. The first part reviews the range of issues related to, and puts Bangladesh in the context of, globalization. Chapter 1 and 2 define the concept and process of globalization in Bangladesh's perspectives. Chapter 3 examines the strengths and weaknesses of the newly emerged export-oriented activities. This chapter argues that the prospect of progress in Bangladesh under globalization may be subject to its own structural problems as the narrow-based export industrialization, such as the ready-made garments, has little value to add and planning for backward linkages is weak. Different stakeholders can take advantage of such structural weaknesses in imposing terms and conditions of development at their will. Chapter 4 argues that Globalization with a corporate-face and excessive dependence on foreign money may only keep Bangladesh as "perpetually developing". Chapter 5 reviews public policy decisions that set parameters for new investment and development strategies in Bangladesh. Current trend in globalization may be viewed as a stratagem for internationalization of capital rather than economic development of Bangladesh. Hence, this chapter examines selected policy initiatives of the government and international institutions to gain an understanding of the current global processes at work in Bangladesh.

Inasmuch as the process of globalization under international capitalism is most effective under conditions of cheap labour, effective change in the world of workers exploited by these conditions requires rising social consciousness among workers not only in the rising export-oriented sectors, but also in the peasant agriculture and informal sectors. Tension between traditional bases of livelihood and emerging export-oriented commercial production tends to give rise to new social groupings as a survival strategy of the workers. The trend in such social groupings may result in civil society activities reaching beyond the common jurisdiction of a trade union-style bargaining agency. Kurunamoi Death Anniversary following people's movement against shrimp industry in the South western region of Bangladesh is a case at hand (see Gain, 2002: pp. 122)³. The disenfranchised poor lack organizational and political power in Bangladesh. Civil society movement could be a motive force in empowering the poor and might ensure peoples' participation in globalization from below vis-à-vis a pervasive top-down globalization process. Dialogue between workers, and global linkages among workers facilitated by local and international civil society initiatives, may be needed in order to have a voice in the global decision-making arenas. As noted in chapter 6, the rise of the NGOs and civil societies to prominence in Bangladesh poses many challenges to their integrity and opportunities. The NGOs and civil societies are in need of balancing the opportunities and risks they face through their national and global relations with the opportunities and resources at the community level.

The second part examines social change through negative consequences reflected in massive shift of population from rural to urban centres, clash of values, social tension, conflict, violence and uncertainty of a secure livelihood, all of which add to social suffering among vulnerable people. Disenfranchisement, or the separation of labour from the means of production in rural Bangladesh, has been subjected to intense discourse in the political economy forum for a long time. On one hand, it is viewed as 'necessary' for capitalist development. On the other hand, it is viewed as 'evil', for it displaces the poor from their existing self-employing livelihood and pushes them into a world of uncertainties. Analyses of social dynamics prevalent in Bangladesh explains much of the cause and implications of disenfranchisement, which identifies the withdrawal of self-employed rural dwellers from their professions to transfer to the wage-earning economy, especially the export-oriented garment sector. The clothing industry is basically an assembly service industry and is labour intensive. Some 1500 garment industries in the Metropolitan Dhaka employ about 1.5 million workers most of whom are female, destitute, and docile. Commodification of women labour in the garment industry separates the women from traditional social relations and the newfound livelihood in the garment sector is wrought with uncertainties, which push them into chaotic social relations (Chapters 7 and 8).

The third part examines the degrading impacts on the environment and local people, e.g., shrimp cultivation and rural water control projects that reduce bio-diversity, produce soil salinization, often displace small agricultural producers, and affect land ownership

3 See Philip Gain, editor (2002:317-330), Bangladesh Environment Facing the 21st Century, Dhaka: SEHD, for rising popular movements against commodification and privatization of commons in Bangladesh.

concentration. This industry is also marked by the rise of exploitation of women labour force, and social unrest. Social and economic development dynamics explain why some rural dwellers move to wage labour in newly created, albeit very uncertain, informal sectors, such as shrimp farms and harvesting shrimp fries (Chapters 9 and 10). Once disenfranchised, struggle for survival becomes tougher for individuals, especially the rural women, who were used to a traditional household and *samaj*-based mutual support system. The impact of the shrimp industry on gender relations in the backdrop of the overall socio-economic and structural transformation taking place in southwestern Bangladesh are analyzed in Chapter 11. This chapter sheds light on the specific nature of global capitalism as perpetrated in Bangladesh and illustrates the linkages of global capitalism with the local economy. Here, it is noted that the impact of globalization on third world countries like Bangladesh is essentially systemic in nature.

The fourth part of the book highlights the research methods used in the GECSC research. While the macro analytical research has drawn upon historical analysis, indicators of policy influence, and consideration of institutional arrangements for policy making, the micro analytical research were designed to provide micro-level information on specific responses to the phenomenon of gendered commodification of labour and livelihood shift (Chapter 12). Human-made environmental issues are involved in the shrimp study portion of the study as it push self-employed peasants into the wage-labour market or displaces them from their livelihood as a consequence of export-based production. The range of techniques used in these two studies includes content/archival analysis, longitudinal studies, questionnaire surveys, and structured as well as informal interviews, focus group discussions and qualitative analysis. Remote Sensing and GIS applications were used to model specific analytical results (e.g., land use under shrimp cultivation) to generate visual information for wide dissemination and to stimulate new hypotheses relating to resource use, environmental degradation and sustainability, and human displacement (Chapter 13).

The research project that provides the basis of the papers in this book is the result of cooperation of numerous individuals, public officials and agencies, private sector agencies and university faculties in Bangladesh and Canada. The project is especially indebted to the local people and local government officials of the study areas. Special thanks are due to Al Haj Sheikh Mohammad Alamgir Haider, Chairman of Ramjannagar Union Council and the TNO of Shyamnagar Upazilla for providing not only logistical support but also valuable insights into the research problems of the shrimp industry. The research team would like to extend its gratitude to the workers and management of the garment industries that participated in the study. Special thanks go to Mr. Moniruzzaman and Mr. Aslam Farukh Babul, Shrimp Gher Owners and Businessmen in Sora, Shyamnagar subdistrict of Satkhira and garment industry owner Dr. Raihan Sharif in Dhaka for their cooperation in field works.

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Chapter 1

Context and Trends of Globalization in Bangladesh: Towards a Critical Research Agenda

Matiur Rahman and Raymond Wiest

“...much of what goes under the catch-word “globalization” has in fact been a recurrent tendency of world capitalism since early-modern times.”
- Giovanni Arrighi (1997)

“[Globalization is] a process that involves the increasing cross-national spread of products, markets, firms, and production factors.”
- DFAIT (2002)

INTRODUCTION

The ever-increasing interdependencies among nations in resource exploitation, production (including out-sourcing), and marketing, and the need to remove impediments to this interdependency, are driving forces behind the rush for globalization. National and socio-cultural borders are frequently obliterated by information and communication conveyed through modern technology and by financial flows of capital. The structural changes in the polity and society of a country like Bangladesh are aimed at integrating Bangladesh into the global economy by facilitating the homogenization of various markets, political and social systems. This entails meeting demands of investment capital and lending agencies. Globalization can be viewed as a process of transforming the various systems hitherto recognized as independent nations and unique societies to meet the needs of a capitalist free market economy.

Over the past two decades, radical transformations have been taking place in the social and economic systems throughout the world. Economic globalization, the rise of ever powerful transnational corporations, continuing revolution in information and communication technologies, political and social liberalism, and the dominance of market forces and consumerism have marked this era. Although these transformations have increased economic interdependence and world trade and are producing enormous wealth, they have largely failed to promote holistic, sustainable and equitable development (see Bhalla 1998). As a result, these global forces have produced rapid social change, often marked by more inter- and intra-regional disparity, environmental and ecological crisis, social

disintegration, conflict and violence. Local population growth and natural disasters further aggravate the magnitude of human hardship.

A proper understanding of the effects of globalization requires that we come to terms not only with the theoretical economic implications, but also with the power dynamics that influence the process and condition the “rules of the game”. To this end, the research project “Globalization, Environmental Crisis and Social Change: A Case Study of Bangladesh” (GECSC), set out to contribute to a deeper understanding of globalization impacts, and to critically assess policy in relation to globalization-related initiatives in Bangladesh. In this article we explore the globalization concept and global processes, and offer an overview of research questions and methodology that challenged the project.

PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBALIZATION: MYTHS AND GLOBAL PROCESSES

Economic globalization refers to integration of various economies of the world through increased internationalization of production, distribution and marketing of goods and services (Harris, 1993). The term globalization is often defined in terms of multilateral trade liberalization – or freer trade across borders. According to Oman (1994), “globalization is the growth of economic activity spanning politically defined national and regional boundaries...increased movement across boundaries of goods and services, via trades and investment, and often of people via migration”. Globalization means a shift from Fordism (a mass production model on assembly line introduced by Henry Ford) to what economists now call a “Flexible Accumulation Model” aided by computers, telecommunication and shipping innovations. Now, nuts can be made in one country, bolts in another, microchips in one, circuit boards in another, and all of these can be assembled in global *maquiladoras* in any of the countries of the South, where labour is less costly. In the process, employment in countries of the South is formalized and commodified, increasing new employment opportunities for some of the population.

However, there is also the opportunity to repeat events that have been documented in history of labour. For example, in some industries in Bangladesh, mostly young, docile women are hired and paid one tenth of a developed country’s minimum wage. The ever-increasing number of women workers in the global factories is being facilitated by the rhetoric of women’s’ liberation from the third world kitchens. Since the adoption of market liberalization policy in the late 1970s, a totally export-oriented garment industry has engaged more than 500,000 women workers in Bangladesh. Cheap labour seems to be the driving force and the issue of equity and environmental sustainability are posited as mutually exclusive values. Moreover, global forces play a significant role in shaping the fate of these industries in the Third World. Dickens (1998) notes that:

The importance of textiles and clothing as a basis for today’s newly industrializing and less industrialized countries, together with their continued, though much diminished, importance in the older industrial economies, have made these industries into an international political football. They are the subject of fierce political controversy between developed and developing countries and, increasingly, between the developed economies themselves.

This ‘international political football’ game is played under certain rules set by global players such as in the Multi-Fibre Agreement. As Dickens (1998) points out, “Textiles and clothing are the only industries in the world economy to which special international trade restrictions apply through the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA)”.

Not only are countries of the South affected by these international conventions. Globalization can put a developed country such as Canada in a dilemma as well. As Tom Ford (1997) put it, “.... freer trade could bring us benefits. But each international accord, agreement treaty and understanding *limits our freedom of action and may harm our culture*” (emphasis added). Globalization, in this case, is viewed as a threat to national sovereignty. However, countries of the South are more vulnerable to the enormous power of the multinational corporations and multilateral development agencies. The latest plan to limit freedom of action and to control cultures in the South is being negotiated by corporatist administrations of the public and private sectors of the OECD countries. The multilateral agreement on investment (MAI) that is being hammered out currently by OECD would override a country’s laws in the service of transnational corporations (McMurtry 1997). John McMurtry (1997) notes:

What unifies the diverse prescriptions of this extra parliamentary formation of a transnational framework of law is the single, final goal of releasing corporate investment from any interference or social condition set by national or local public authority. This dispossession of citizens and communities of their collective rights to protect their lives and resources as their own is, in the end, grounded on a metaphysical principle: that unfettered market rule has a *natural right* to regulate all of the world’s societies in their best interests (emphasis added).

Encroachment on the sovereignty of nation states in the third world by powerful corporate capital is understandable. The combined GDP of the entire South Asia (\$297.4 b) is far less than gross revenue of the three giant corporations of the world (\$ 329.4b for GM, Toyota, and Exxon). One can expect that the degree of vulnerability of the nation-states in the South will increase, given the economic power these corporate giants wield.

However defined, current globalization is about international trade. All forms of international flows (money or technology from private or ODA sources) are now meant to facilitate cross boarder trade. As John Stackhouse (1992) notes,

In Canada’s case, the \$150-million in aid targeted for Bangladesh railways – a dubious development goal at that – was designed as much for the benefit of the contractors, including Canadian Pacific and General Motors, as it was for the people of Bangladesh. Japan, the largest bilateral donor with a \$418-million budget this year, has developed its own approach. At the top of its current shopping list are a massive Japanese-built fertilizer plant and, for the capital city where two million people live on the street, a new telephone system. France, too, has its eyes on a digital phone exchange for the port city of Chittagong.

Stackhouse focused on the negative potential of the foreign aid, but he did not explain how these investments bypass common people. The preponderant evidence nevertheless supports his contention that an economic self-interest permeates foreign investment. In such a situation, it is not surprising to find that in Bangladesh entire government departments (e.g., Power Development Board and Family Planning) are financed and directed by foreign donors.

Globalization, therefore, may be viewed as a process of integration of national economies to the world free market economic system. It is associated with cross-border free trade, finance, and investment (in goods, services, and technology), and is facilitated by national policy reforms, such as economic liberalization. Concomitant with these, are significant changes to the socio-cultural and the economic relations of production. Thus the concept of globalization is multi-faceted, and considered as having the following dimensions:

- Economic (trade, FDI, MNC's out-sourcing, financial flows);
- Political/ideological (diminishing role of the state, free market capitalism);
- Socio-cultural (change in consumer behavior, re-orientation of social structure);
- Technological (enhancing efficiency in production, distribution, communication);
- Ecological (patenting of natural species, seeds, herbs and medicinal plants).

As we currently know it then, globalization refers to a relatively recent wave of corporate capitalism that features trade liberalization in the form of reduced national constraints on international capital for access to natural and human resources, privatization, and unconstrained access to markets. This trade liberalization is accompanied by the relatively free flow of information across national boundaries through communication technology advances – widespread availability of microcomputers and access to microcomputer-based communication – and adoption of corporate capital's hegemonic global marketing and spread of a culture of consumption. A wage labour economy characterized by increasing individualization is an associated feature (McMurtry 1998, Robbins 1999).

The word “globalization” is becoming increasingly fashionable in recent decades. It is the latest in a list of buzzword popularized in the last three to four decades: “social development”, “integrated rural development”, “sustainable development”, “environmental conservation”, “woman in development”, and in the late 1990s, “globalization”. Like the concept of development, the concept of globalization is seen as a way to socio-economic progress, and has become everybody's business. Similar to the definitions occurring in discourses on development, the definition of globalization is a moving target; it is being defined by various people according to their tastes and beliefs; and it is almost universally recognized as a multifaceted phenomenon. Depending on one's viewpoint, the scope of globalization affects the economy, polity, technology, culture, and ecology of a nation state. Advocates of globalization believe it is inevitable, whether you like it or not. To them, globalization is like a road-roller; people have two choices – to be a “part of the road-roller or to be part of the road”. As Madison (1998) postulates, “*Like all profound transmutations in history, globalization is something that is not a matter of human choice.*” You do not even have the alternative choice of standing beside the road!

The juggernaut character of contemporary inclusive global economic processes can be recognized, but there are those who flag the power of development discourse (e.g., Escobar 1995), and the mythic proportions of the current “globalization” construct. Several years ago, Harvey (1995:8) drew attention to the historical conditions that are the foundation of globalization rhetoric:

Bretton Woods was a global system, so what really happened here was a shift from one global system (hierarchically organized and largely controlled politically by the United States) to another global system that was more decentralized and coordinated through the market, making the financial conditions of capitalism far more volatile and far more unstable. The rhetoric that accompanied this shift was deeply implicated in the promotion of the term “globalization” as a virtue. In my more cynical moments I find myself thinking that it was the financial press that conned us all (myself included) into believing in “globalization” as something new when it was nothing more than a promotional gimmick to make the best of a necessary adjustment in the system of international finance.

Giovanni Arrighi (1997:1-2) concurs with many researchers “in seeing present transformations as not novel except for the scale, scope and complexity”; instead, he argues, there is a new fashion for the term “globalization” based in rapid expansion in the foreign exchange market. Most significant in his argument is that “the specificities of the present transformations can be fully appreciated *only by lengthening the time horizon of our investigations to encompass the entire lifetime of world capitalism*” (emphasis added).

Optimists postulated that through integration of national economies, a harmonious one world economic system would be created for the progress and development of human societies. A melting pot will result as regional cultural values and practices are “homogenized” to form a “global culture.” Advocates and critics of this view abound and related lectures and literatures have proliferated. Universities are offering courses and research publications on globalization; civil society organizations are offering forums to discuss effects of globalization; and, national and supra-national agencies are drafting agendas, regulations and multilateral agreements to advance it.

Globalization of people, culture, commodities, ideas and artifacts, and elements of ecology have been taking place since homo-erectus migrated out of Africa a million years ago. Humans have an amazing adaptive capacity that permits accommodation of new ideas and adjustments to new situation and environment. Innovative ideas and technologies augment our adaptive capability. Homogenization and integration of cultures, ideas, trade and technology has occurred through the actions of such evolutionary processes. However, modern day globalization is different. It appears to be a blueprinted process, a kind of deliberate imposition of change for the interest of certain sections of society at large. Societies change through either an evolutionary process or a revolutionary one. We have some significant examples of revolutionary changes with global implications. One such change occurred in the sixteenth century Europe, when the state was separated from the church. This happened because the church allegedly exerted too much control over society. Thereafter, the state, in different forms, became the planner and manager for a society. Now, “Business’ is said to be facing the pressure of excessive control by the state. The state is allegedly becoming a serious bottleneck to the free market operations. In the last couple of decades in the 20th century, there appears another need for a premeditated

(revolutionary) change: The revolution for separation of “business” from the state, making it free from all clutches of controls and regulations.

One significant difference between this free market revolution and the sixteenth century revolution is that the agents of change are different. Important social thinkers, such as Zwingly, Martin Luther, and Menno Simons endeavoured to “free” the people from the “clutches” of the church that controlled and shaped every aspect of their societies. In the modern day revolution, the change agents are important social institutions, not individuals, such as the WB, IMF, OECD, WTO. The first group's concern was people, while the second group's concern is international trade devoid of people. It is not hard to see why financial institutions, not human rights commissions; trade organizations, not humanitarian organizations; and economic development agencies, not ethical-spiritual-cultural agencies, are spearheading the cause of globalization. These institutions and agencies are transnational in character, and therefore, hold powerful positions in the world that can be used to hammer out various rules, regulations, laws and multilateral agreements that can override legal authority of nation-states. Yet, nation-states continue as agents of corporate capital. They may be losing some autonomy, but they are not withering. Nation-states are deeply involved in legitimating free capital flow, facilitating privatization of resources and social services, controlling the price of raw materials, limiting the power of labour unions, issuing and denying credit, and regulating the price of money itself (Robbins 2000).

Interestingly, this attempt at change – albeit the separation of “business” from the state – is carried out in collaboration with state-based neo-liberal ideology. Opposition to this change is coming from a hitherto unexpected corner of the society: the civil society. The opposition is occurring not only in the regions where this change is sought, but also in the regions from where the changes are being sought. Civil society organizations and church groups in the West are in some cases either opposing or trying to end this marriage of the state and business.

In order to understand contemporary globalization, it is necessary to understand the direction of the process of globalization. Generally, the *spreading* of ideas, knowledge, technology, capital, politics and culture may be termed as globalization. But, is this spreading going to be a centripetal, periphery to centre process or a centrifugal, centre to periphery, process? It is not very hard to see which polity, capital, technology, cultures are going to be homogenized into a global unity. Current events suggest that the elements of the periphery, for example the concept of ecology of the Ojibway people or the Iranian culture, may not be globalized! The antagonists of globalization do not agree that homogenization of various cultures is taking place. To them, globalization is a centrifugal process, the Americanization of the globe. Protagonists see a very positive 'civilizing' effect of globalization on Third-World-societies. For example, Madison (1998:7) believes that the Third World can learn “civility” by the “MacDonaldization” of their societies. Both views are centred on a process of centre to periphery globalization. The first view appears as serious concern for preserving diversified cultures of the world, while the second one advocates the need for westernization of all cultures into one global culture.

The drive for globalization has been under public scrutiny from its inception. People are talking, debating and arguing about its good side, bad side, need and purpose. It is not possible to bypass public opinion. Intensifying efforts by civil society movements to define globalization is a sure sign of peoples' awareness of things that shape their social life. People are consciously asserting their rights to share the decision-making processes that mould human societies at local, national and global levels. This differs from the discourse on previous social and economic development practices. For the last fifty years, we have seen that concepts, ideas, needs for, and demands of development have been created in one place, and then introduced, most often imposed, on other places around the world. Peoples were treated as victims of “underdevelopment” who needed rescuing.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBALIZATION

The political economy of globalization refers to the relational dynamic involving differential power between states, institutions, and classes – a system of relationships in which national governments and non-governmental agencies express their relative powers viz a viz other nations and transnational corporations in policy formulation that affects social change and environmental conditions. In immediate practical terms, this study must be informed about the role of the Bangladesh government and other institutions within the country in directing resource use and investments in relation to the needs of its population and the pressures at work on a global scale.

Political and trade relations across borders are not new phenomena. Imperialism, colonialism and military conquests have, in fact, always accompanied human societies and have historically produced multinational economic networks, displacement of populations, culturally heterogeneous countries, and multinational empires under the supervision of hegemonic political powers (Said 1993). What makes the situation different in today's world is that the means of production, not just products of production, are being internationalized, and the technologies and agreements that permit this are transforming societies around the world at a higher magnitude and speed. In the case of Bangladesh, the uniqueness relates to a new polarization of power and resources. The phenomenon is aided by development strategies funded by bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, international and local NGO communities (Bayes and Muhammad 1998). Evidence shows that the rush to economic globalization can result in higher rates of displacement of peasant farmers from their livelihood bases (IDPAA1997; SEHD 1998; Tutu 1997), rapid encroachment of vital common property resources and ecological reserves, and coerced land polarization by new business interests. On the other hand, export-oriented production of agricultural commodities (e.g., seafood cultured on arable lands, and vegetables for international markets) is giving quick rise to new entrepreneurs (producers and distributors) and middlemen. We therefore begin by presenting globalization as processes within a global political economy that need to be more fully understood (see Wolf 1982). The global system is full of paradox – attraction of wider market participation and consumption culture versus the destruction of natural habitats and species, disenfranchisement of rural peoples, and concentration of power and wealth – and the poorer regions of the world are the most defenceless.

A recent IDS (1998:2) proposal – “Spreading the Gains from Globalisation” – captures the complexity of globalization as process, and its impact. The points are paraphrased here:

- it is an *ambiguous* mix of potentially contradictory processes that are integrating and disintegrating, equalizing and unequalizing, inclusive and exclusive, stabilizing and destabilizing;
- it is an *uneven* process between regions, countries and social groups;
- it is an *unsettling* process that creates financial transaction volatility, and threatens uncertainty and insecurity for people;
- it is a potentially *disempowering* process that reduces autonomy of national governments, undermines accountability, and “breaks up established social relationships in the realms of kinship and civil society”.

A study was conducted for the last four years to look at how the political economy of globalization is playing itself out in Bangladesh with a view to understanding the workings and implications of the policy environment and, in particular, the effects of globalization in two export economy sectors – garments and shrimping.

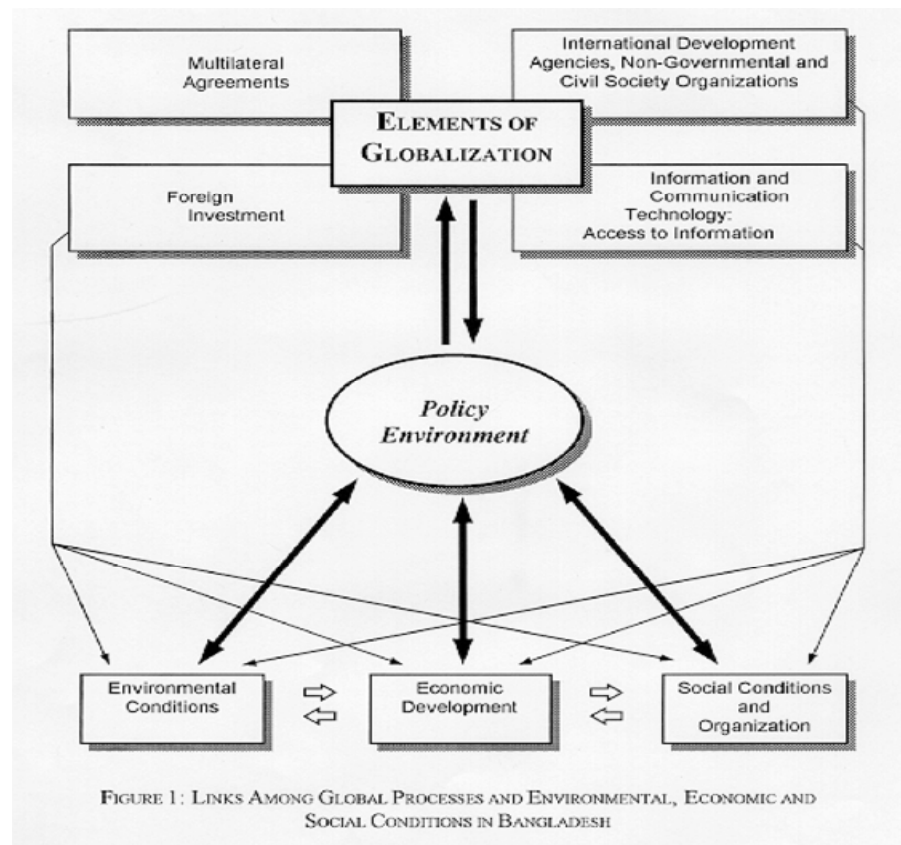
GLOBAL PROCESSES IN BANGLADESH: THE CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Bangladesh, with a growing population of almost 130 million, has been experiencing the effects of globalization since the late 1970s. Through economic liberalization and structural adjustment programs, Bangladesh has sought to obtain the economic benefits of globalization. Significant array of reforms, deregulation and liberalization has been undertaken as a part of the process of globalizing the economy. Several unprecedented incentives are being offered to global investors, for example:

- 5-10 year tax holiday;
- Duty-free import and export of machinery and goods in the EPZ;
- Unrestricted foreign ownership in investment;
- Full repatriation of profits and capital gains;
- Multiple-entry visas and a liberal work permit;
- Prompt registration of investment at the one-stop Board of Investment;

- Reform of the legal system, including legal protection to foreign;
- Investments against nationalization and expropriation.

In the case of Bangladesh, the interplay between the environment and patterns of economic development is particularly important. The most frequently noted relation in Bangladesh is the movement of people caused by economic hardship or opportunity, environmental crisis and often civil strife and conflict. There is a long history to the dynamics of human ecology and livelihood; it is now being speculated that the ecological dynamics are being altered more rapidly by the changing nature of human economic behaviour. While there are positive effects of globalization, there is increasingly little space left for the small and poor peasants in Bangladesh, and little evidence that the country's poor are reaping many of the benefits.



More than ever, multinational corporations stand to gain short-term benefit from natural disaster and national policies that impel massive numbers of people to leave their rural origins. Few countries in the world are as subject to the vagaries of environment as

Bangladesh. The country suffers major environmental disasters regularly. Environmental hazards exacerbate the problems of landlessness, rural out-migration and size of urban squatter settlements within and beyond the border of the country. Such migration from vulnerable and affected areas poses serious threat to the local and regional security, polity and economy. Recent history has witnessed serious incidence of conflicts between local (indigenous) people and the recently resettled Bengali peasants in the Southeastern hilly regions (Chittagong Hill tracts) and between illegal migrants across the border and locals in Indian states of Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. As a consequence of seeking globalization and environmental control, Bangladesh appears to be one of the few South Asian countries where massive social change created by the interacting and interdependent forces of globalization, population explosion, urbanization and environmental degradation are most easily discernible. Environmental hazards are major challenge to Bangladesh's efforts at gaining from participation in globalization. The hazards need to be predicted and mitigated, including identifiable social suffering, if a stable economic environment is to be maintained.

A number of policy reforms have been undertaken to facilitate global investment in Bangladesh. A relatively low cost labour force makes Bangladesh attractive for global investment and trade, but may leave the labour force in a trap of low wage immiseration. Environmental degradation and capital investments together are accelerating the rate of rural disenfranchisement and a shift from small-scale agriculture and artisanry to more dependence on volatile employment sectors in newly emerged export-oriented industries. With increasing encroachment by larger investment in shrimp cultivation, for example, social conflict and impoverishment among the small-scale agricultural producers and landless workers appears to have increased. Consequently, shifts in social relations arise that undermine established networks of security and create new conflicts. The rapidly expanding urban labour supply presents a formidable economic, social and political problem.

Furthermore, capitalist development itself depends on stable institutional arrangements and favourable environmental conditions. The process of economic globalization is primarily affected by the interaction between the state and international initiatives and investments (see Muhammad in this volume)

These interrelated political/economic, environmental and social problems suggest that there are important roles to be played by government and by social organizations to manage the effects of globalization and how it manifests itself in the daily lives of people in a country like Bangladesh. Figure 1 shows government and other institutional policy initiatives at the centre, and connecting global processes to social, economic and environmental changes in Bangladesh. Linking the various dimensions of the problem, the GECSC research model encompassed: 1) the political economic forces underlying the policy context for foreign and local investment, production relations, and social relations; 2) environmental dynamics; 3) livelihood changes; and 4) organizational responses.

Environmental Degradation and Population Displacement

El-Hinnawi (1985) defined environmental refugees⁴ as those persons who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life. El-Hinnawi further subdivided environmental refugees into (i) those who are temporarily displaced due to an environmental stress (e.g., earthquake); (ii) those who are displaced due to permanent changes in the original habitat (e.g., a change in the shoreline due to riverbank or shoreline erosion and flooding); and (iii) those temporarily or permanently displaced due to a loss in their standard of living (e.g., a deterioration of the resource-base to the point where it no longer meets basic human needs). Another group can be added to this third category, a group that is displaced due to development of mega projects for development. It is estimated that more than 20 million people are displaced due the development of mega dams around the world. These displaced people, like all other displaced, end up in the slums of third world cities. The problem of displacement is immense. Jacobson (1988:pp) notes, “Environmental refugees have become the single largest class of displaced persons in the world.” Myers (1993) estimates that the numbers may be as high as 25 million.

In the case of Bangladesh, the problems of landlessness, impoverishment and consequent rural out-migration are compounded by environmental hazards as well as environmental degradation caused by economic and other development activities. Natural hazard induced population displacement is endemic in Bangladesh. It is estimated that natural hazards, on the average, displace more than a million people permanently in Bangladesh each year (REIS, 1991). In case of severe floods or cyclones, the figures are much higher. On the other hand, the conflict in southern Bangladesh has so far produced more than five million internally displaced people. Most of these people gravitate to Dhaka, the capital. It is conservatively estimated that 40% of Dhaka’s eight million people live in squatters and slums.

One of the economic riches that Bangladesh is pursuing in its globalization effort, is the development of an international seafood industry. Seafood export has become the third highest foreign exchange earner in Bangladesh. International donor agencies and NGOs (e.g., The World Bank, UNDP and The CARITAS) made massive investment in this Asian “Blue Revolution” what Goldenberg (1997) termed as “Aquatic Klondike”. Within the last decade, more than 350,000 acres of agricultural land in coastal districts of Bangladesh have been turned into shrimp farms. Much of these farms now suffer serious soil degradation owing to the salinization that occurs from salt water flooding. Goldenberg (1997) notes, “---the land has been turned into saline desert, unfit even for grazing cattle.” The industry employs a huge labour force, composed mostly of women who are poorly paid. It appears that the aquaculture technique in any given location is temporary, but its environmental impacts are enduring.

⁴ The term “refugee” is normally defined as those individuals who leave their country of origin. El-Hinnawi’s definition is less formal in that it reference those who have been temporarily or permanently dislocated from their region of origin. National characteristics are eliminated by this change.

The previous paragraph identifies the impact of one globalization activity on human dislocation and environment. Efforts at environmental control designed to mitigate natural hazards, reduce rehabilitation costs and increase the continuity of economic activity also create social change pressures. Following the severe floods in 1988 and 1989, a massive National Water Management Plan (NWMP, formerly known as FAP) was launched under the coordination of the World Bank in 1989. This water management plan calls for construction of high embankments along all the rivers in Bangladesh for which the construction alone will cost more than US\$10 billion. Environmentalists in Bangladesh and around the world expressed serious concern about the environmental impact of the plan. It has been pointed out that the high embankment plan will be devastating for the livelihoods of millions of farmers and fishermen. According to a UNDP report (Minkin, 1989), "Perhaps more than people in any country, Bangladesh's citizens depend on natural wild fisheries resources for their food and livelihood." More than 50 percent of the fresh water catch comes from annually flooded lands, and the rests come from the rivers, estuaries, and shallow depressions called *Beels*.

It is feared that, if the World Bank plan goes ahead with its embankment construction, the peasantry will lose the prime source of protein in their diet. More than 80 percent of animal protein for the peasants come from fish. The export-oriented shrimp-culture is, on the one hand, degrading the environment and, on the other, dislocating a large number of people. The proposed embankment plan will have similar consequences. It is imperative that a cost-benefit analysis of these activities is carried out so as to help develop appropriate policy options.

Commodification of Labour, Livelihood and Social Relations Shifts

Human labour in Bangladesh has long been engaged productively in rural agriculture, although not typically in capitalist labour market terms. A long history of production of foodstuffs for direct consumption, production in cottage industry or small-scale artisanry, reciprocal labour, or labour in exchange for home-site tenure and payment in kind from landlords and patrons is giving way to the sale of labour, i.e., wage labour. Commodification of labour is one specific and central impact of globalization. It moves people from traditional social, contractual, mutual, and non-wage labour dynamics into a wage-labour economy with a fundamentally different organizational base and different morality (see Polanyi 1957; Wolf 1982).

The impact is profound in fundamentally agrarian societies – like rural Bangladesh – in which competition for access to parcels of land has been a dominant feature. Competition for land is uneven, however, and is often abetted by the capricious nature of natural forces (e.g., riverbank erosion) that displace families unpredictably and become manipulable by large landholders and/or moneylenders with political connections (Zaman 1989; Zaman & Wiest 1991). The consequence is increasing disenfranchisement within the agrarian sector, particularly striking because agriculture absorbs some 80% of the country's total labour supply. This disenfranchisement of large numbers of rural smallholders is accompanied by the expansion of capital-intensive monoculture production enterprises geared towards international markets, by temporary rural day labour jobs that offer little security, by rising

urban population concentration teamed with rising underemployment and unemployment, and by shantytown settlements (*bustees*) characterized by poverty and destitution.

Shrimp farms that have arisen in response to global marketing are owned by economically and politically powerful people and often maintained by private armies. It has been reported that the powerful people use coercive methods to gain and retain control over shrimp fields. In recent years murder, rape, and forced displacement of small-scale agricultural producers and landless workers have increased significantly in Southern Coastal areas of Bangladesh (Nijeri Kori 1996:12-14; Siddiquee 1998:13-18). People are denied basic rights to livelihood, security of life and personal possessions, including houses. Lands are “leased” from local producers who are helpless, often without any payment of rent. By promulgation, public (*khas*) lands were distributed to the landless, but these are now illegally transferred to large shrimp farmers. This has given rise recently to several bloody confrontations between the shrimp farmers and local petty commodity producers (peasants and artisans).

Petty commodity producers who become involved in the wage economy typically subsidize their wages through some continued reliance on their own production (Jansen 1987). Their absorption into a market economy is partial and/or piecemeal, leading to what has been referred to as partial proletarianization. In macro-economic terms, this can be viewed as an inadequate extension of capital, as a subsidy of capital, or as some combination thereof (see, for example, Stavenhagen 1975; Portes and Schauffler 1996; Wiest 1979, 1984). Partial proletarianization masks the displacements and uncertainties of labour commodification by keeping alive some of the elements – including the dependencies – of the traditional social net. The ability of individuals and families to continue such a patchwork of livelihoods is variable, depending on such things as group composition (e.g., consumer/worker ratio), the nature of resource control, wage levels, and distances. Generally, kin-based corporate control of resources in agrarian societies has declined in response to the impact of capitalism – wage labour and production for a cash economy. As Bina Agarwal (1999) put it, “*desettlement* is not easily turned into *resettlement*”.

Exponential growth of environmental and land tenure refugees to cities, and increased numbers of women wage labourers under globalization’s export orientation, produce new forms of family and personal life (Agarwal 1990; Shikdar 1996). These conditions are widely associated the world over with growing numbers of woman-headed households. The normative gender-based division of labour is challenged, but without a viable alternative. Hence, both men and women become increasingly rootless; men often take flight from domestic responsibility, and women are often left to fend for themselves without benefit of socially recognized access to resources or jobs (Wiest 1995; Wiest et al. 1994). Implications of woman-headed domestic groups already have gained attention (Cain, et al. 1979; Islam 1982; Wiest 1991, 1998), and recent studies underscore the greater reliance of women heads on kinship networks than men who head households (e.g., Pryor 1992:149-150; Zaman 1995, 1996). Vulnerability to disturbance of livelihood base has both a gender and class dimension – women and the destitute poor are the most vulnerable.

Commodification of labour produces broad-sweeping changes in livelihood base that undermine established social relations. Families and larger kin networks are disrupted. Thus, as indicators of the nature of production systems, family form, women's status, and gender relations are expected to reflect impacts of globalization. One specific consequence of employment conditions commonly associated with globalization is new stress in gender relations and rising domestic violence as women are drawn into new roles that may conflict strongly with normative expectations; men generally are left to continue with the normative expectation of being household "breadwinners", however contradictory with the new reality (see Wiest 1983; 1998). Under some conditions, however, women are favoured over men in access to wage jobs within agro-industrial or garment industry jobs which, on the one hand, offers women some new recognition but, on the other hand, leads to their exploitation as minimum wage earners (Collins 1995; Ong 1991).

When people are being channelled out of their established positions as self-employed small-scale agricultural producers or as artisans (see Stackhouse 1998) and into insecure wage work, the scenario is particularly difficult in urban contexts that are the destination of large numbers of rural disenfranchised people. A small proportion of dislocated peoples are able to realize an improved quality of life through reliable jobs, but this manifest social differentiation itself can aggravate social unrest. Divisions that become pronounced in terms of differential access to jobs and improved living conditions – whether based in class, religion, or ethnic differences – take on a dynamic in society that threatens the allocation of public resources.

The social net to which people lay claim differs from society to society and has changed over time. Most of the world's societies are still organized principally in terms of kinship, at least at the local level, even though these local-level kin-based organizations are subordinate to state administrations in virtually all parts of the world today. People in these societies must cope with rapid and sometimes catastrophic change through institutional resources that have been seriously undermined in colonial domination and global capitalism. The displacements and uncertainties of partial proletarianization and commoditization seriously impinge upon capacity to cope under normal circumstances, and more seriously with natural and/or conflict-induced disaster.

Family form, women's status, and gender relations are important indicators of the nature of production systems, and can be expected to reflect impacts of globalization. People meet day-to-day needs through participation in groups that have varying form. A general trend in agrarian societies has been the reduction in corporate control of resources by extended kin groups (e.g., Stavenhagen 1975; Wolf 1966:66-73), and increasing individualization. Extended families are associated with a production base (technology and tenure) that benefits from additional *permanent* workers in one domestic unit. Extended families can concentrate resources and labour. In troubled times (e.g., economic depression or war), the extended family can more easily field workers to draw upon other income sources (e.g., wage labour). Extended families offer protection and security; poor people often "create" extended families through ritual kinship ties to others and form reciprocal supportive relationships (Robbins 1999:177). Nonetheless, extended families generally have to cope

with more tension and an ever-present fragmentation threat. Nuclear families arise when landed resources become scarce, when peasants become wage-labourers, and when technology permits intensive cultivation on limited amounts of land.

Kin-based corporate control of resources in agrarian societies has declined in response to the impact of capitalism – wage labour and production for a cash economy. Landholdings have been fragmented through equal inheritance customs, rural population increases, and the absence of income acquisition alternatives. These broadly-documented trends have diminished the incidence and power of extended kin groups; they have given rise to nuclear family households and a multiplicity of non-viable holdings or “sub-family farms” (Stavenhagen 1968); and they have favoured concentration of resources in the hands of a rich peasantry, a bourgeoisie, and/or transnational corporations. Widespread rural-urban and international labour migration is a consequent response to these trends, involving processes in which household and family structure are key factors.

A substantial literature exists on Bangladesh domestic group organization that makes clear the importance of this level of social organization to such issues as production potential, fertility and population control, family size and economic well-being, patriarchal control and inheritance, implications of gender-based division of labour, age and sex composition, the dilemma of widowhood, and economic mobility and social class. The implications of woman-headed domestic groups has begun to gain attention (Cain, et al. 1979; Islam 1982; Wiest 1998). Recent studies underscore the greater reliance of women heads on kinship networks than men who head households (e.g., Pryor 1992:149-150; Zaman 1995, 1996). Labour migration and transnationalism are widely researched phenomena that long precede the current wave of globalization, yet maintain their prominence in the current wave. Bangladesh has been an exporter of labour for a long time, experiencing the benefits and drawbacks of heavy reliance on remittances. Under conditions of liberalization it would be expected that barriers to movement of labour would be reduced, but that would mean bearing the full costs of labour reproduction, and addressing social discrimination (see Hammar, et al. 1997). The often cheap labour supplied by the transnational migrant is desired, but the person who does the labour is not. So, as Robbins (1999:133) puts it, the problem for the labour-importing countries is “*how to keep the borders open to cheap transnational labour while at the same time maintaining the boundaries of the nation-state*” (original emphasis). There are, nonetheless, implications in the transnationalism of the current wave of globalization for social cohesion among labour, as discussed in a previous section (see reference above to Portes 1996).

Social and Policy Actions

Social change is often examined through negative consequences reflected in unemployment and underemployment, massive shift of population from rural to urban centres, clash of values, political instability, social tension, conflict and violence, all of which add to social suffering among vulnerable people. Since globalization produces tension between traditional bases of livelihood and emerging export-oriented commercial production, and is commonly exploitative in the extreme of the natural environment and human labour, it is often marked by the rise of social unrest and countervailing efforts to design alternative development models predicated on local social and cultural values.

The conditions that give rise to exploitation in globalization have deep historical roots, but as cultural and social constructions they are modifiable with effectively applied knowledge, power, and political will. Organized and potential social solidarity and action among affected people is an alternative that can and should be researched among such an exploited population. Social action must be based on consciousness of one's structural role under globalization conditions and of legal rights, which means that form, content and process of education must be studied (Kramsjo and Wood 1992). Hence, the case study research on the garment and shrimp industries will address changing social relations in response to rapid commodification of labour, and bases for social solidarity and social action to achieve empowerment, where "empowerment" is taken to be an individual's or group's ability to legitimately ensure entitlement decisions and enfranchisements in its favour (Agarwal 1990:394-95).

Social organization to manage the effects of globalization on society can be studied at three different levels: locally, nationally in terms of policy response, and internationally in new forms of global solidarity. A brief description follows.

(1) Attention needs to be given to social relations of the poor and dispossessed – kin and quasi-kin relations, neighbourhood interdependencies, religious organizations, labour organizations – and their efforts to organize, or be organized (e.g., through informal and formal initiatives of NGOs and CSOs), for action in defence of their own human rights and an improved quality of life.

(2) Public policy decisions that set parameters for new investment in clothing and fishing industries help us explore policy options open to the public and private sectors. Selected policy initiatives of the Government of Bangladesh and International Institutions (e.g., Policies on Fishing, Multi-Fibre Agreement, Structural Adjustment Programs etc) was examined to gain a current understanding of the global processes at work in Bangladesh. The garment sector study enables us to examine contexts where industry depends heavily on social and environmental stability. Capital intensive ventures were examined for degrading impacts on the environment and local people, e.g., shrimp cultivation and rural water control projects that reduce bio-diversity, produce soil salinization, often displace small agricultural producers, and affect land ownership concentration.

(3) Effective change in the world of workers exploited by the conditions created in the process of globalization requires rising social consciousness among workers, dialogue between workers, and global linkages among workers facilitated by local and international civil society initiatives. Ronald Nigh (1997) points out that "Complexes of transnational brokerage" – made up of a wide variety of actors ranging from other governments, international financial institutions, private foundations, non-governmental organizations, world churches, corporations, etc. – are becoming more numerous, varied and interconnected than before.

A CRITICAL RESEARCH AGENDA

Project Objectives and Research Questions

The above overview of changes in the social fabric of Bangladesh demonstrates that an examination of livelihood changes must reach well beyond commodification per se – beyond market dimensions of livelihood – into gender relations, the political economy of labour, sustainability of resources, and quality of life. It raises questions such as the following:

- What national policies have been adopted to meet the obligations of globalization?
- What were the conditions that led the Government of Bangladesh to be signatory to international agreements and regulations?
- What mix of factors drive rural people to urban centres?
- Does the rural land concentration behind rural to urban migration create urban labour market conditions favourable for low-wage foreign investment?
- Does the gendered division of labour within patriarchy facilitate labour force docility, and how does gender ideology affect managerial selection of workers?
- Do labour surplus conditions foster political and economic repression as instruments of labour recruitment and management?
- How can rural-urban support networks of family and kin be encouraged and sustained?
- How is micro-credit affecting livelihood options, and what organizational supports are in place to assure that micro-credit is accessible to those most in need?
- What factors are involved in the establishment of wage rates?
- Are employers considering and pursuing improved human resource policies to raise productivity, and why? What incentives might be placed before employers to improve working conditions, wage scales, and treatment of workers?
- What avenues do workers follow to pursue safe working conditions, just wages, and human rights?
- What is the character of worker awareness of processes of hiring, setting working conditions and job security, and addressing problems in the workplace?
- What supports can be offered to people who are subjected to and threatened by rival political powers?
- Are there cooperative production and management strategies that would permit rural communities to carry on sustainable livelihoods that contribute to provisioning the nation?
- What are the coping strategies pursued by the affected communities, and what kind of support are they able to mobilize in social organization?

The GECSC research objective was designed to deepen understanding of the effects of globalization on socio-economic well being, social organization, and environmental sustainability in Bangladesh from a political economic perspective. The project explores issues of social organization and well being in two ways. The first is through a broad review of institutional features affecting the character of Bangladesh's integration into the world economy. This is a macro-level analysis to consider some of the political economic issues conditioning the policy environment (e.g., the place of Bangladesh in the international Multi-Fibre Agreement) or issues broader in scope than any single sector of activity.

The second is through the studies on the garment and shrimping industries focused upon the local and sector-specific dimensions. These studies aimed at a review of processes already at work to temper the impact of globalization and at exploration of options currently underused. In this micro level analysis two different contexts were selected to examine the effects of globalization in Bangladesh: 1) the garment industry in Dhaka; and 2) shrimp cultivation. These newly emerged export-oriented sectors (garments and shrimp) involve wage-labour jobs that are severely limited in scope, duration, and security, and often employ the most docile and vulnerable – women.

As a summary guide to the specific parts of this complex research design, the following sector-specific objectives defined the study:

- 1) to examine the **political economic forces conditioning the effects of globalization on Bangladesh** with attention to the role and policies of key actors, including government, social organizations, and international development agencies;
- 2) to study the gendered conditions of **wage employment in the garment sector**, examine shifts in livelihood options and social relations, and explore organizational options among garment workers for social action designed to improve socio-economic conditions and human dignity over time; and
- 3) to study changes in **social and environmental well being in the shrimping industry**, assess evolving social relations associated with interacting forces of globalization and environmental change in the local political economy, and explore organizational options for the community of stakeholders involved.

The objectives associated with each of the study sectors raised a number of research questions. Those for the **Policy Environment Study** were framed as follows:

- What were the conditions that led the Government of Bangladesh to be signatory to international agreements and regulations such as the Multi-Fibre Agreement, trade liberalization and structural adjustment policies (SAP), the Flood Action Plan (FAP) and the Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP), and the third Fisheries Program.

- What national policies have been adopted to meet the obligations undertaken in the above agreements?
- What processes led to the national policies? 4. Are the policies producing their anticipated effects? What problems resulting from the policies were anticipated and planned for, and what unanticipated problems emerged?
- How have the policies been operationalized in the procedures of the government departments that are responsible for implementing the policies? Are the procedures consistent with the policies?
- What changes in the composition of industry and agriculture have accompanied the changes in national policies? Have export-oriented sectors, such as the garment and shrimping industries, assumed greater importance to the national economy?
- How are export-oriented industries, such as the garment and shrimping industries organized and regulated?
- What roles have Non Government Organizations (NGOs) taken in the processes of adjustment? Have these roles been judged to be complementary, supplemental or contrary to the actions of the government?

Research questions directing the **Garment Sector Study** were as follows:

- What is the gender and class character of garment sector employment?
- How does employment in the export-oriented garment industry affect women's domestic (household and family) roles and status, their entitlements, and their empowerment?
- How do linkages with communities and families of origin affect garment sector workers? What is the character of the relationship and the impact on livelihood change?
- What health and work safety hazards do garment workers experience? What avenues are there for improvement of workplace health and safety, and how might workers be involved to effect such improvement?
- How are garment workers to be treated in the workplace, what are their legal rights, and what is the actual character of their treatment? Are there identifiable structures and practices that interfere with worker rights, work schedules, a secure work environment, and safety in passage between workplace and residence?
- What is the nature of social and proletarian consciousness? Can subaltern strategies among garment workers be identified similar to those noted in other contexts of rapid labour commodification (e.g., Malaysia, see Ong 1987)? What is their character and, in particular, their contribution to worker solidarity and potential action to improve working conditions and wages?
- What organizational bases for solidarity and political action can be identified, and what political and structural impediments to social cohesion among workers can be identified?

- What organizational efforts are there to link up with international labour organizations?
- How does formal and informal education in Bangladesh relate to gendered access, social and proletarian consciousness, solidarity and organizational efforts to address human rights, wage levels, worker health and safety, living conditions, and global communication among workers?
- What is the NGO and CSO involvement in addressing the human rights and sustainable livelihood needs of garment sector workers, and what new possibilities are there for NGO/CSO involvement?

The crucial research questions for the **Shrimping Industry Study** were as follows:

- What are the direct and collateral environmental impacts produced by the shrimping industry as identified by the stakeholders of the industry?
- What changes in land-use practices are associated with the shrimping industry?
- What is the gender and class character of employment in the shrimping industry?
- How does employment in the export-oriented shrimping industry affect women's domestic (household and family) roles and status, their entitlements, and their empowerment?
- What are the direct and collateral impacts produced by the shrimping industry on the traditional livelihood and health profiles of the stakeholders of the industry?
- What advantages and disadvantages of the shrimping industry are identified by its stakeholders? How do the stakeholders perceive their industry's role in the national economy and in the processes of globalization?
- What viable livelihood options within and outside of the shrimping industry exist for affected individuals and rural communities?
- What are the underlying factors and outcomes of displacement of small-holding agricultural producers?
- What coping strategies are emerging among the stakeholders in response to social and environmental problems they perceive being produced by the shrimping industry? What socio-political actions are contained in the coping strategies? What organizational bases for solidarity and political action can be identified?
- What new economic opportunities (e.g., co-operatives for agricultural and fishing products; establishment of hatcheries) arise that are related to the shrimping industry?
- What involvement has there been by local and international NGOs in response to the changes in both livelihood options and environmental conditions associated with the shrimping industry?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IMPLICATIONS: CONCLUDING REMARKS

We argue that a fundamental starting point for globalization-related research is to recognize that theory of capital and theory of globalization are *social theory*. The record of capitalism on which globalization as we know it is founded in a unique system of relations of wealth, human energy and tools of production. That system has produced unprecedented division and differentiation – of regions, societies, and people. This differential access to means of production based in deep histories. Our project thus accepts that a methodological implication is to understand the history of capitalism and the social relations that have unfolded, including the role of patriarchy in capital accumulation (Mies 1986). By the very nature of its logic and its structural rules, capitalism produces contradictions in society manifest in conflicting interests of class and gender.

Understanding the character of capitalism will not readily transform it into the equalizing system it is so often touted to be, so another fundamental point with methodological implications is that it be examined in its every form and guise. Systemic contradictions and obfuscated features must be probed, e.g., hidden as well as public transcripts (Scott 1990), mechanisms and effects of co-optation, and systemic inequalities in resources and power that are often held to be *natural*. A starting point is to develop sensitivity to and vigilance for mollifying, neutral-sounding, or public service language that, at a minimum, is co-opting in effect – the “public transcript” of James Scott (1990). Our approach encourages probing beneath the superficial gloss of human relations to the underlying structural features – the hegemonic character of institutional rhetoric and rule, of class and gender ideology, and of selling our labour (see Rahman 1999).

Globalization within monopoly and peripheral capitalism has not been an equalizer in service to humanity. If social science is committed to human rights, quality of life, and sustainability, then it must act in accordance with evidence that any of these is threatened. Social science normally should act to facilitate organized resistance to threats, or social cohesion, rather than uncritically supporting the dominant globalization agenda. Those affected by the processes of change under study should be consulted and engaged in project planning and the research should attempt to foster an understanding of the phenomena that affect people.

Constraints of time and resources, and the very research techniques themselves (particularly survey instruments) lead to characterizations of observed groups or societies as static, artificially-bounded, non-changing units rather than complex cultural systems variably intertwined with exogenous elements. This is particularly true of a society experiencing manifestations of globalization. It is therefore incumbent that observers are diligent with history, process, and connectedness, and critical reassessment of observations and interpretations.

The interconnectedness of human societies and humans and their environment becomes more apparent than ever with attention to globalization. Globalization challenges us to achieve meaningful linkages between on-the-ground micro-phenomena and seemingly unbounded macro-structural phenomena such as global financial markets. Single

researchers cannot grasp all things; nor can they study all things. The multidisciplinary and international composition of the research team offers considerable breadth and advantage in this regard. Nonetheless, participating researchers were challenged to attend to “relationships” (see Wolf 1982), and to *study locally, but think and link globally*.

The multidisciplinary format of the GECSC project builds upon the findings found in the literature that are sketched in the preceding section, and examines these through the critical stance summarized above. In addition, interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration stimulated further critical insights.

There are many works we build upon and apply critically. A small number, from early to recent, are highlighted here. Karl Polanyi's (1957) such landmark work *The Great Transformation* still offers useful insights for our time. A brief work by Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1975) – *Social Classes in Agrarian Societies* – deals with six processes of change affecting rural social structure: introduction of money economy; private landholding and commercial monoculture; migration of workers and rural exodus; urbanization; industrialization; and national integration. The book by Eric R. Wolf (1982), *Europe and the People without History*, makes a compelling argument for removing the disciplinary barriers that arose in the 19th century as instruments of class and state, and for returning to a process-oriented political economy approach. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, by Arturo Escobar (1995), offers a provocative analysis of development discourse and practice, and global relations of inequality. The poignant title of John McMurtry's (1998) book – *Unequal Freedoms: Global Market as an Ethical System* – captures an underlying character of globalization and returns us to an important recognition of differing systemic moralities that can produce disaffection, anomie, and breakdown. Benjamin Orlove's (1997) work on status competition and consumer behaviour – “the allure of the foreign” – shows that the use of foreign goods to express status differs in intensity; in Latin America it has been “almost insatiable”, he maintains, and where there are “home-grown” status goods, the allure is diminished (Orlove 1997). Richard Robbins (1999) offers an informative overview of the history of capitalism and a compelling portrayal of the culture of consumption. And finally, the compendium edited by Don Kalb, et al. (2000), *The Ends of Globalization: Bringing Society Back In*, offers a considerable range of expertise and social science insight on challenges to neoliberal notions and neoclassical understandings of globalization and global processes.

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