Bangladesh: Socio-Economic Impact of Rural Electrification Program

Extension of infrastructure in rural areas is essential for bringing down any meaningful change in the rural living patterns. Before our liberation in the year 1971, we had little facilities created for the rural people. Virtually, govt. had little opportunities for expansion of the distribution network in a massive scale. In 1972, Rural Electrification Directorate (under Power Development Board) was established to gear up efforts towards formation of a separate body responsible for electrifying rural areas. In 1976 NRECA conducted a feasibility study for reaching electricity to each and every rural home and other rural establishments. As a result Rural Electrification Board was formed to take up efforts at bringing down changes in rural living patterns.

Over the last 20 years, the program has reached about 350 thanas of the country, thus making it a core development program. The program has brought light to many families, hitherto remaining in complete darkness. It has given them the enlightenment towards modern lining, freedom from poverty, malnutrition and hunger. Electricity has brought many families close to the rural homes. Some of them are thinking of taking new initiatives in industrial and agricultural sectors.

Rural Electric societies have provided jobs to rural families/youths. In addition, a total of 5,800 persons are employed in the construction firms and consulting offices working for the program. Rural people now have much better work-habits and an improved sense of discipline and social security, which came as a result of the assurances of basic amenities in life.

Literacy rate in the rural areas has increased significantly due to the expansion of mass education program. Poor workers can attend the night schools at the end of the day’s business. They can also sit beside the children to supervise their education. Living pattern in rural areas have changed due to introduction of new consumer items and like Refrigerator, Television, Radio, Cassette Players, Fans etc. Villages are experiencing a kind of urbanization in the shape of civic amenities, regular education, sanitation and health care and enhanced economic activities.

By dint of TV, people are now keeping informed about the latest state of sports,
culture and political developments. As the satellite has opened up the world before the eyes, people get acquainted with the world and this ensures their early socialization.

RE program has sped the other development activities in the rural areas. Many new infrastructure development NGOs (non government organizations) and human development bodies have extended their activities in remote rural areas to help govt’s efforts at poverty alleviation and human development. By dint of electricity, NGOs are encouraging varied human endeavors in the form of handicraft development and cross cultural interchanges.

These things ultimately reduce migration towards cities and relieve them of stagnation of infrastructures and civic amenities. On the other hand, it ensures effective and maximum utilization of human and other properties.

Speedy electrification of our rural homesteads & other consumers have sped timely utilization of natural and other resources. As agricultural productivity has increased, availability of rice & other food items in villages have helped rural people maintain better food habits.

Women of the rural areas are enjoying the benefits of electricity very well. They can do extra work after household job and add to family earnings. Women are getting self-dependent, making small groups of income generating purposes, specially rearing poultry and cattle, making vegetable farms & taking-up weaving and sewing projects and opening small shops. Electricity has given them special advantage of forming micro irrigation groups in villages, thus revolutionizing the traditional concept of man-run irrigation systems. This is helping them developing entrepreneurial skills and the qualities of leadership. This is leading to a concept of empowerment of women towards better sustainability and solid social existence. Recently, this has drawn fond attention of the development experts round the globe.

Rural Electrification fits in quite comfortably with the current buzz, words in the lexicons of development partners such as poverty alleviation health care, education, food production etc. The program in Bangladesh has already witnessed with manifold and for reaching socio-economic impact in the electrified areas as stated above. A recent USAID study’s findings and assessments about impact of the rural electrification program in Bangladesh are the following :-
a. 93.7% at the electrified households reported decrease in fuel cost.
b. 78.2% households reported an increase on working house.
c. 62.0% reported an increase in household income
d. 81% reported an increase in reading habits
e. 93.7% reported an increase in children’s study time.
f. 92.0% reported an increase in amusement as well as standard of living.
g. 94.7% reported an improvement in security.

Source: [http://www.bangladeshgov.org](http://www.bangladeshgov.org) 07/09/2002