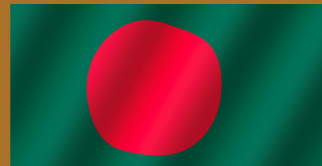


Rural Development in Bangladesh



It is with immense pride that I convey my heartfelt greetings and best wishes to all stakeholders, policymakers, practitioners, and development enthusiasts across the Asia-Pacific region on the historic occasion of the first celebration of World **Rural Development Day**.

The declaration of World Rural Development Day by CIRDAP is a truly visionary initiative. It recognizes the fundamental reality that the world remains, at its core, a rural world, with approximately 43% of the global population still living in rural areas. For Bangladesh, the significance is even greater, as around 61% of the country's population resides in rural communities. By focusing global attention on rural development, this occasion serves as a timely reminder that sustainable national progress is inseparable from the well-being and empowerment of rural people.

As the Director General of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), I feel deeply privileged to lead an institution that has been a pioneer in advancing rural development for more than six decades. Since its establishment on 27 May 1959, BARD has played a crucial role in shaping rural development practices. Guided by the vision of becoming

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a leading institution for better ideas and practices in rural development, BARD's mission is to nurture the trend of sustainable rural advancement through training, research, and action research, and to propose innovative strategies that open new horizons for rural prosperity. BARD's legacy is closely tied to the globally acclaimed Comilla Model of Rural Development, a landmark initiative that transformed rural development paradigms in the 1960s. The Comilla Model evolved out of a series of experimental pilot projects conducted in Comilla Kotwali Thana, BARD's designated social laboratory area. It was driven by the search for practical and innovative solutions to rural poverty in a densely populated agrarian society.

The Comilla Model was built upon four key components:

- 1. Two-Tier Cooperative System**, promoting farmer-led institutions for collective action and empowerment.
- 2. Rural Works Programme (RWP)**, creating rural infrastructure and employment through community participation.
- 3. Thana Irrigation Programme (TIP)**, expanding irrigation facilities to boost agricultural productivity.
- 4. Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC)**, strengthening local capacities and shifting rural development from a colonial administrative approach to a pro-people service delivery system.

Through these initiatives, the Comilla Model brought about a paradigm shift—moving away from top-down, bureaucratic interventions toward participatory, community-driven rural development. It not only improved livelihoods by enhancing agricultural productivity and rural infrastructure but also laid the foundations for a more inclusive and responsive rural governance system.



The development and success of the Comilla Model were rooted in a meticulous and participatory methodology:

- **Establishment of BARD** as a specialized training, research, and pilot project institution.
- **Survey research and action research** in a designated laboratory area to develop viable rural development models.
- **Thorough consultations with villagers**, identifying their problems and collectively designing solutions.
- **Close collaboration with the National Planning Commission** for strategic alignment with national policies.
- **Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and refinement** of the pilot projects based on field realities.
- **Assisting government agencies** in scaling up and replicating successful models across the country.

The impact of the Comilla Model extended far beyond its initial pilot area. It inspired the establishment of several **independent institutions** in Bangladesh that continue to play vital roles in rural development. Examples include the **Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)** for cooperative development, the **Local Government Engineering Department (LGED)** for rural infrastructure, the **Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC)** for irrigation development, and the **Upazila Complexes** for decentralized rural service delivery — all of which evolved from the pioneering ideas and practices initiated under BARD's action research framework. Building on the strong foundation laid by the Comilla Model, BARD continued its tradition of innovation. In the 1980s, BARD introduced major initiatives like the **Small Farmers and Landless Labourers Development Project (SFDP)** and the **Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP)**, further deepening its commitment to participatory and integrated rural development.

To date, BARD has **experimented with 74 action research projects**, many of which have significantly influenced national rural development policies and practices. Moreover, BARD has conducted **over 750 research studies** and continues to produce around **10 new research studies** each year, helping to shape new ideas and strategies for sustainable rural development.

Today, BARD's core functional activities include:

- **Training of government officials**, local government representatives, NGO personnel, and community leaders, conducting an average of 195 training courses and reaching over 8,300 participants annually.
- **Research and evaluation** studies generating evidence for policy and programme development.
- **Seminars, conferences, and workshops** at both national and international levels.
- **Advisory and consultancy services** for the government and development organizations.
- **Piloting innovative projects and models** for sustainable rural development.

Amidst the evolving landscape of rural transformation in the 21st century, BARD remains at the forefront of action research in emerging and priority areas, including:

- **Agricultural mechanization and collective farming** through community enterprises.
- **Floodplain aquaculture and safe food production.**
- **Adaptation practices for livelihood improvement in charlands.**
- **E-Parishad initiatives** to strengthen service delivery and rural governance.
- **Rural tourism and handicrafts promotion** for income diversification.



- **Social inclusion programs** targeting women, differently-abled individuals, and elderly populations.
- **Community-based support models for rural elderly and persons with disabilities** to enhance social inclusion through participatory action research.

BARD has been hosting the International Conference on



Governance and Development (INSEARCH) for more than a decade. Hosting the INSEARCH Conference at BARD has reinforced its role as a center for applied and policy-relevant research. By bringing together global experts to explore governance, education, and environmental sustainability, the event supported BARD's mission to advance community-based solutions aligned with the SDGs.

BARD maintains partnerships with national and international organizations to advance inclusive and sustainable rural development. Domestically, it collaborates with ministries, agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions. Internationally, BARD has worked with FAO, UNDP, ILO, and AARDO on capacity building, action research, and policy advisory. These collaborations have strengthened BARD's capabilities and global influence in shaping rural development agendas.

BARD's collaboration with CIRDAP remains a source of pride, as CIRDAP itself began its journey from BARD's campus in Cumilla. Over the years, BARD and CIRDAP have worked together in joint training programs, research studies, and policy support initiatives aimed at advancing integrated rural development across the Asia-Pacific region.

As we celebrate the first World Rural Development Day, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of inclusive growth, people's participation, innovation, and sustainability. Guided by the spirit of the Comilla Model, BARD remains dedicated to fostering a future where rural communities are not merely recipients of development but are active agents of their own transformation.

Let us work hand in hand to uphold the vision of prosperous, equitable, and sustainable rural communities. Wishing all the successes of **World Rural Development Day** in advancing inclusive and sustainable rural transformation.