

## Role of Union Parishad in Social Security: An Evaluation in the Context of Rural Bangladesh

Mohammad Tarikul Islam\*

**Abstract :** *This paper attempts to analyze in brief the concept, origin, strategies of social security and the role of Union Parishad (UP) in this regard. It is pointed out that social security as a non-traditional security concept is considered as one of the fundamental criteria of today's modern world. In our human society, some contingencies, seen or unseen are however found common and people have from time to time attempted to find out proper counter measures against those. Social security as one of this counter measures that act as a major weapon to face the challenges and threats in society. Government and its local unit have the major responsibilities to ensure social security in rural area of the country. Local unit of the central or federal government shoulders various functions to resolve the existing contingencies by providing social assistance and social service. In a developing country like Bangladesh where about 80% people live in rural area are confronted with various social threats that endanger the social security of them. Union Parishad is the only representative body of the central government, which plays a vital role to ensure social security in rural Bangladesh. Union parishad has two types of social security programs like social assistance and social service. Unfortunately for us that despite have a long existence of Union Parishad it is confronted with some chronic problems till today. As a result it could not play effective role to ensure social security for the rural people. The article also considers in brief the importance of social security in rural Bangladesh.*

### 1.0 Introduction

Social security is a non-traditional security concept. It is considered as one of the fundamental criteria of modern world. As a mechanism for meeting human needs social security has achieved nearly universal acceptance. Access to social security has become a fundamental human right in the globe. Social security can usefully be thought of as the product of centuries of effort to provide people with a means of support in the face of individual, social and economic distress. The quest for survival has prompted people from the beginning of its existence, to devise ways of protecting itself from the hazards of life. In developing and developed countries some contingencies like unemployment, old age, employment injury, widowhood, death of the principal bread earner of the family, natural disaster, hunger are the common in human society. These have always been with people but the impact of contingencies has never been so marked as in the present society. In the modern age social problems are multi dimensional and it is difficult to cope with problems only by voluntary and humanitarian values people usually pursue. The

\* Young Professional, Policy Support & Advocacy Cluster (Directorate) UNDP Bangladesh

reason why importance of social security is indispensable to cope with any mishap that may be fell upon there at any time in human society. Bangladesh is a developing country in the 3rd world. Her majority people live in the rural area. They have to face many difficulties and obstacles such as employment crisis, employment injury, poverty, natural disaster, famine, sickness, and physical disabilities as well. Such sort of chronic problems endanger the very existence of the majority people living in the village. Union Parishad is the lowest tier of the central government of Bangladesh that serves the interests of the local people. It has a good number of functions regarding social security programs. But, UP is confronted with few problems that create obstacles on the way to ensure social security in rural Bangladesh.

The paper is organized as follows: section two presents the meaning, origin and nature of social security, section three provides importance of social security in rural Bangladesh, section four presents an evaluation of the role of Union Parishad in ensuring social security in rural Bangladesh. Finally, some concluding remarks are given in section five.

## **2.0 Social Security: its Meaning, Origin and Strategies**

### **2.1 Meaning of Social Security**

Social security is very comprehensive phenomenon in the complex modern age. The term 'social security' was first officially used in the title of the United States Legislation the social security Act of 1935'. Social security means protection by the society against any contingencies of modern life. It denotes an organized system to safeguard miserable situation and it is designed to aid individuals and groups to attain a satisfying standard of life and health. In other way round, social security is an economic protection that is given by the society to its members when victimized under natural disaster or risks of hunger or famine.

There is how ever no such definition of social security which could be universally accepted. Its meaning by means of scope and objectives differs from country to country according to the prevailing traditions, ideals and social legislations. According to T.I. Mathew, "Social security is the protection furnished by society to its members in prescribed contingencies or circumstances, its purpose is to reduce the impact of contingencies involving a loss or substantial reduction in income and to provide a medical care and/ or financial guarantees against the economic consequences of those contingencies when do occur"<sup>12</sup>.

International Labour Organization (ILO), the most concerned agency about it offers the following words, -- social security is that society furnishes through appropriate organization against certain risks to which its members are exposed. These risks are essentially contingencies

against which the individual of small means cannot effectively provide by his own ability or foresight alone or even in private combination with his fellows<sup>3</sup>.

W.A Friedlander states that social security is a program of protection provided by social legislation against sickness, unemployment, employment injuries, death of wage earner, old age of disability dependency and accidents- contingencies against which the individual can not be expected to protect himself<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, we can say that social security is basically a program of economic protection provided by the state or society when the people are confronted with contingencies like sickness, industrial accident, old-age, death of the bread earner of a family, natural disasters, famine, unemployment, etc on a systematic basis. Above all, social security scheme aims at mitigating apart from these, adequate wages, a minimum working hours and welfare of the vulnerable people of the society.

## 2.2 Origin of Social Security

Social security concept came into existence in the nineteenth century in Western Europe. In this region industrialization had begun and the working class had made its appearance. Here was a large new class of factory workers, completely dependent on the regular payment of wages for their subsistence and therefore, reduced to privation by a spell of sickness or unemployment. It is true that there existed in north-western Europe poor laws under which destitute persons could obtain relief (subject to loss of civil rights); but, as one might expect and as was intend, no one would avail himself of relief if he could possibly avoid it. There has been dramatic expansion in social security throughout the twenty century. In post 2nd world war, the expansion of social security was encouraged by colonial authorities, especially the British and French, who were eager for political and social order and stability and they were frequently willing to replicate, in appropriately, their own systems. The newly independent ex colonies that emerged after the war found that their colonial social security heritages was reinforced, rather than questioned, by the expert advice they received from international agencies with therein Eurocentric approaches. Now social security has been part and parcel of every developed and developing countries throughout the whole world<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.3 Strategies of Social Security

Despite the rich diversity of social security strategies in evidence on a global basis, it is possible to identify the major strategies of social security: social insurance, social assistance and social service.

### **2.3.1 Social Insurance**

The strategy is an employment related, approach to social security. The concept of social security began to social insurance. The first broad system of social insurance was created by the government of Germany between 1883<sup>6</sup>. Social insurance system is by now compulsory for the wage earners that means the employees-skilled and unskilled alike, young and elderly, male and female and regardless of their state of health. Social insurance is one of the devices to prevent individual from falling into the death of poverty and misery and to help him or her in times of emergencies. It involves apart from sums of money compensation against loss resulting from particular emergencies.

### **2.3.2 Social assistance**

Social assistance means benefits payable as of legal right from public funds in prescribed types of need deemed not to be due to applicants own fault. It is available for persons falling outside the scope of the main insurance scheme on which insurance benefits is insufficient to meet their need. The goal of social assistance is to provide a minimum economic aid to a person who having no other means of supporting themselves which is called as 'safety net'. It has been developed for the needy and low-income group, medical allowance for old-age, family allowance, child allowance, test relief program, allowance for vulnerable, poor or disaster affected people etc are the examples of social assistance that act as counter measures to protect people from acute poverty. The whole cost of social assistance program is met by the state and the local units of the government<sup>7</sup>.

### **2.3.3 Social service**

Social service is a primary program of social security. It was introduced at the beginning stages of human life. A social service is directed by the state, local units of government and non-government level to aid individuals and groups to attain a satisfying standard of life. It is used for child welfare, labor welfare, women welfare and the rehabilitation of the vulnerable groups in the society.

## **3.0 Importance of Social Security in Rural Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a developing country in the 3rd world. It is an agro-based country. About 80% people live in the rural area and almost they are engaged in agricultural activities. People living in the village are more or less affected with some contingencies like unemployment, employment injury, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, death of the principal bread earner of the family, natural disaster as well. Such problems are very complex and it is difficult to cope with problems only by voluntary

and humanitarian values of the people. So, social security is indispensable to cope with any mishap that may be fell upon them at any time in rural Bangladesh. Natural disaster has been a common phenomenon and affect upon the whole society. Natural disaster like flood, cyclone, and famine causes many lives and create poverty, want, unemployment, disease etc. Agricultural sector is not sufficient enough to generate full time employment opportunities for the people in rural Bangladesh. The reason why, most of the people become seasonal unemployed. Moreover, illnesses, diseases, disabilities, vulnerabilities of the child, women, and old-age have been the major problems in rural Bangladesh. Individuals can not face the devastating impact of the above mentioned chronic problems alone. Therefore, social security is indeed an important element to resolve the existing problems in our rural Bangladesh. Social security is one of the devices to prevent individual from falling into the depth of poverty, misery, vulnerability and disaster and help him or her in times of emergences in rural area. The goal of social security is to provide minimum economic, physical and social aid to persons who having no other means of supporting themselves. So, social security is in fact an important part and parcel of people living in our rural Bangladesh.

#### **4.0 The role of Union Parishad in Social Security in Rural Bangladesh : An Evaluation**

Bangladesh is a newly independent unitary state. It achieved her independence in 1971 through a nine month long bloody liberation struggle. Union Parishad is the lowest tier of the central government in Bangladesh. It is the representative unit of the local people and is dedicated to serve the rural people in many ways. Union Parishad has many functions which are closely related to social security programs. In fact, Union Parishad plays a significant role in ensuring social security for the people living in rural Bangladesh. Union Parishad has two types of social security programs like social assistance and social services. It should be mentioned here that the functional responsibility of local government in Bangladesh at the Union level has undergone changes five times so far, namely in 1885, 1919, 1959, 1976 and 1983. The current functions of Union Parishad regarding social security are given below:

- ♦ Education is the part of social services. As about 80 percent people live in rural Bangladesh, so there is no alternative to give them light of education for the development of nation. Union Prishad has the responsibilities to encourage the people to send their child to school. Moreover, it has the authority to look after and assist the governing body of the local educational institutes for ensuring quality education.

- ♦ Employment opportunities are the part of social assistance. Union Parishad plays a major role to create job opportunities directly or indirectly for the rural unemployed and seasonal unemployed people. It provides logistic support to the farmers, fishermen, businessman in many ways. UP assists the farmers by providing fertilizers and seeds. It assists the fishermen to cultivate fishes in a planned way. More over, UP extends its financial support to those who run the small and cottage industries in a small scale.
- ♦ Over population is the ultimate product of unemployment. Bangladesh is in fact an over populated country. The growth rate of population is much high in rural area than that of urban area in Bangladesh. UP shoulders the responsibility to reduce the growth rate of population by building social awareness as well as looking after the family planning work in this regard.
- ♦ Poverty is a chronic problem in rural Bangladesh. Poverty alleviation is one of the social assistance. To alleviate poverty, there is no alternative to the development of the different sectors in rural area. UP has the responsibility to conduct a survey for the identification of vulnerable people to assist the central government in this process. UP also recommends the central government to take necessary actions like initiating development projects in local area for involving vulnerable section in the society.
- ♦ Managing basic needs is a major part of social assistance. UP shoulders the responsibilities in this regard. It has few programs like food for work, VGD, VGF, TR, RMP etc. All of those programs generate an opportunity for the poor, disabled, old-age and vulnerable section to manage their minimum requirements for maintaining livelihood.
- ♦ Union Parishad also plays a vital role to assist old persons, widows, divorced women and disabled freedom fighters by providing salary on the basis of installments. It identifies those help seeking persons and approaches the authority concern to assist them.
- ♦ Natural disaster has been a regular affair in Bangladesh. Most of the people in rural Bangladesh face the devastating appearances of the natural disasters in every year. UP assists the disaster affected victims by providing them relief goods like food, clothes, and shelters during the natural calamities<sup>8</sup>.

Basically, these are the programs of the National Government and Union Parishads are involved in planning, identifying and distributing the

assistance to the vulnerable sections. These are not self-financed programs of UP.

However, it is usually found that Union Parishad faces serious problems in performing their assigned tasks regarding social security programs. Of those, the following deserve special mention:

- (1) Inadequate finance is the most serious problem faced by Union Parishad. The UP implements some major development projects with the annual government grants. The government also permits UP to levy taxes and faces on a limited number of resources. Owing to various factors, UP does not, or is unable to fully exercise its taxation powers. On the other hand, due to delay in the release of grant funds by the government, UP cannot play an effective role to provide social security to the rural people by initiating various programs.
- (2) Non-cooperation of UP members is responsible for the less functioning of Union Parishad to ensure social security. For smooth functioning regarding social assistances and social services, this function sometimes becomes a serious barrier. Every UP has project committees for undertaking various development projects. But most of the times, UP members remain absent from the scene. Moreover, they are reluctant to work unitedly for their petty personal interest.
- (3) The functions of the UP cover every aspects of rural social and economic life. However, the success of the Union Parishad is discharging these functions depends largely on the capability and efficiency of UP functionaries such as chairman, members and secretaries. In order to make them effective, training in relevant skills is a must. Unfortunately, training available to them at present is rather inadequate. The reason why, UP cannot effectively work to serve the rural people by providing social assistance and social services.
- (4) Lack of coordination between elected representatives and government functionaries also hampers the UP's normal functioning<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to the above obstacles, patron-client relation, political influence and lack of technical staff also hamper the effective functioning of UP for the promotion of social security in rural Bangladesh.

## 5.0 Concluding Remarks

What becomes very clear from the above discussion is that Union Parishad is one of the most important units of the central government to

render social security to the rural people in Bangladesh. Any programs of Union Parishad are very significant contributors to social assistance and social services of the local people living in rural area. It has been understood by the academics and the policy planners that for social security in rural area there is no alternative to Union Parishad. UP has a major responsibility to cope with local contingencies like natural disaster, poverty, old age, widowhood, vulnerabilities, sickness, unemployment, employment injury, disabilities etc by providing various aid likes social assistance and social services. But Union Parishad is confronted with some chronic problems. As a result, it has failed to show as viable institution to render social assistance and social services properly. Moreover, functions of the UP regarding social security are not enough to address the existing social contingencies. Time has come to realize the importance of social security for the social and economic benefits of the rural people specially who are disabled, unemployed, poor, sick, old-age, widow, divorced and vulnerable. The obstacles which jeopardize the very functioning of UP should be addressed properly. Additional pro social security programs should be incorporated with the existing function responsibilities of UP. Cooperation between NGOs and UP is a must in this respect. NGOs play an effective role to provide social assistance and social services to the vulnerable groups in rural Bangladesh. NGOs are very operational in this regard. NGOs and UP can jointly shoulder the responsibilities for the deliberation of social security program for the rural people.

It is thus imperative to find proper ways and strategies for the success of Union Parishad in discharging its responsibilities properly.

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