Role of International Development Agencies in Policy Formulation of Bangladesh: The Nexus between and among the National and International Stakeholders

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Abstract: The Multilateral Agencies and Donors i.e. the Development Partners are pivotal part for facilitating and operating development process in the developing countries. Through their course of action a nexus and alliance take its shape with the local agents on the basis of which they implement their agendas for their own shake. Taking this advantage the upper echelons of the society continue to use their authority for this purpose. This paper overviewed on this relation and the consequent societal impact on the country in its policy formulation and management with a glance on the environmental policy related issues in Bangladesh.

Introduction:

The transformation of the colonies into independent state didn't necessarily change the nature of dominance over the countries, later named as developing countries. Super powers and the leading countries in the world economy continued their way of controlling in terms of economically and politically. Societies with strong zeal of independence and the urge for getting free from the exploitation was primary force for the independent struggle. But the resources for achieving economic emancipation ware not enough for those countries. Persistent surplus extraction form the periphery virtually made those countries resource scarce. The new agents of colonies were emerged as the savior for the economy. Mode of intervention was named as aid and the new era of exploitation started. Institutions involved in this purpose both in the form of bilateral and multilateral organization are called donor agencies. They some times in the form of bilateralism and some times in the form of multilateral process employed their full endeavor to invest the surplus capital accumulated through the history. In course of their action they built strong nexus with the local political authority, the government machinery, social elites, influential intellectuals, business class and other

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related part of the society. Through this interaction among and between those actors the agencies for the external assistance are making the public policy domain of the developed countries as their social laboratory for experimentation which ultimately converted those countries into dysfunctional one. This paper attempts to have a glance into the dynamics of the relations of the stakeholders and their contribution to the formulation of the public policies, whether in the interest of them in the guise of assistance.

Scheme of the Paper:

This paper first identifies the different stakeholders in the national-international public policy nexus. Thereafter tries to explain the way in which International Development Agencies, as key players, operate with diverse stakeholder interest and how they influence public policy and management in Bangladesh with a glance over the environmental policy related issues in the country.

Stakeholders in the National-international Public Policy Nexus:

The main stakeholders in the national-international public policy nexus are divergent groups. Those are multilateral agencies, donors, political party in power, public bureaucracy, professionals political elites, and experts in related fields. Internationally the multilateral agencies are the reflection of the multi-stakeholders concepts which includes the interest of different countries in the international level and the stakeholders for the national levels. These also include the policy makers, public bureaucracy, business people, and the press. Their are 40 multilateral and 14 bilateral major agencies working in the country (Economic Relations Divisions).

In the international scenario the stakeholders and actors are now the economically developed western countries, multinational companies, the intelligentia engaged in the formulation of their policies. All of them are playing the role of facilitation of the interest of the donor country's and establishing their ideological stronghold in the recipient country. International politics is also playing a vital role in this environment of donors. Though the world is now uni-polar, the earlier scenario was full of tension in the race of injecting the alien ideas and establishing dominance through external aids. The experts and executives of the multilateral agencies are also influential actors of this process.

The Nexus from the Historical Perspective:

From the Pakistan period the donors in 60s were actively influencing the internal affairs of the recipient countries. The matter of aid was full of conditionalities in consonance with the interest of the donors and the also in the interest of the recipient country's vested groups. The multilateral agencies were prone to make strategic alliance with the vested interest groups for their own interest. In making such alliance they employed the political elites, state bourgeoisie, the trading bourgeoisie and industrial bourgeoisie. Sobhan and Ahmad (1980) in 'The Role of Public Enterorises in an Intermediate Regime' mentioned extensively the complex and interconnected interest of the social classes at that time for grabbing the foreign aid for their social elevation and the mode of using public enterprise for their gain. This study also portrays the nature and character of the donors in realizing their own interest and the influence and the extent of the negative role played by them. At that time the whole bourgeoisie class was busy with their act of surplus extraction using the public enterprises. The donors were very active in policy influences at that time. They were in favor of the expansion of private sector to facilitate the industrial and trading bourgeoisie in capital accumulation, though the whole environment was conducive to the flourishing of public sector.

Intimate to the state machinery the and the beneficiary of the liberation war the new emergent class always kept pressure to the state for managing the investment flow alive and the state had to manage the resources from the external sources. Here the tripartite relations among the donors politicians and bureaucrats created an environment of win win situation for all of them. Donors were pleased to play their role in an absolute impunity and the politicians were complacent to have their share in the bill of development programme and the bureaucrats having both present and future benefits.

It is evident that the public bureaucracy acted for the interest of the private sector. They in some careful acts played the role of the portraying the public sector management negatively in terms of their management, inefficiencies and corruption. The authors premised in the way that some of the bureaucrats with the background of the rural feudal class structure married the daughter of the businessmen which ultimately favours them in working for the business class. The multilateral agencies with their influence were successful in formulating the investment policy favouring

the private sector. The important impact on the economy was that the state sector became weak and the way for the multinational corporations was opened.

The first confrontation with the World Bank was related with the repayment of the loan of the Pakistan period. The Bank was in a position of not forfeiting the loans in any terms and the country with its strong nationalistic zeal and fervor-disagreed to repay, though finally had to agree on certain portion.

Sobhan (1982) in other work on aid titled as The Crisis of External Dependence; The political economy of foreign aid to Bangladesh explained the role of the World Bank in dealing with the state machinery and the way designed for different types of humiliation of those institution and also the blueprint of categorically tarnishing the images of those institutions. The target was on the Planning Commission for their first Five Year Plan. In 'Green Cover' reports the Bank blatantly belittled the spirit of the plan. By this time the political and economic situation of the country were turned volatile and the image of the government gradually depicted as the failed one. Both national and international media acted on behalf of the donors in highlighting the failures of the government. Later the Planning Commission replied those comments categorically, but the damage was done by this time.

After 1975 August tragedy the scenario changed in favour of the Bank because by this time the planning commission metamorphosed and the experts favouring the interest of the Bank since the Pakistan period, became member of the Planning Commission. Government strategy and its articulation began to reflect the Bank's position in every area of policymaking (Sobhan 1982). The Bank was involved in most major policy decisions and, in some cases, even contributed to the stuff work, as in the case of the review of Flood Policy (Flow of External Resources cited by Sobhan in ibid, p196)

The World Bank acted in flourishing the capitalism in the country through pursuing the policy for private sector investment and the arrangement of credit for the private investment by providing loans. This provision of aid finance to support the development of capitalism in Bangladesh has become an important demonstration of the use of aid in the service of ideology (ibid, p197).

From this explanation it is understood that the prevailing nexus between the stakeholders of the policy process, donors and multilateral agencies has its origin in the history and it has several facades and dimensions from the very beginning. The nature of this relation though not changed fundamentally till now but the tendencies of the multilateral agencies are strongly skewed towards favoring the elites of the country. Sobhan (1982) in mentioning the contradictions of donors aid philosophy expressed that the

"The aid recipients in Bangladesh know that in the final analysis all aid coming into Bangladesh has to be filtered through a bureaucracy and an elite social formation which exercises state power. The donor's pressure to direct aid projects to the poor thus generates a drama of deception, where both donor and recipient combine to fabricate projects ostensibly designed to serve the poor but which in practice largely perpetuate the wealth of the elite. The vocabulary of aid may have thus changed in recent years but its distributive bias has largely remained intact. The donors and particularly those within their community who speak for a change in donor strategy, will thus have to realize that the search for an equitable aid strategy in inequitable societies is a chimera".

In the changed scenario at the later part of the 80s the World Bank found the regime welcoming to the extension of Western influence and was fully receptive to every idea put out by donors (ibid). The Bank and Fund have now, under cover of their multilateral format, emerged as highly effective proxies for the western powers (ibid).

Sobhan (1982) had also showed the gradual elevation of the Bank as the perpetrator in the policy formulation of the country. Within the framework of the entente cordiale which prevails between the World Bank and the policy-makers of Bangladesh, the Bank continues to remain as a major political force in Bangladesh (ibid).

Contribution of the Foreign Aid to this Nexus:

The pivotal part of influence and the nexus between the actors and stakeholders are related to the flow of aid and the benefit originated form the aid. Foreign aid to Bangladesh is classified as Food aid, Commodity aid and Project aid. If we identify the groups who are beneficiaries of the

foreign aid it reveals that the list contains suppliers of goods and services from specific countries abroad where the bulk of the aid funds are spent. This category of fund recipients include the foreign consultants, construction contractors, equipment suppliers and indeed the workers who contribute to the production of this equipment, farmers growing food for aid, shipping companies, banks, insurance companies, indeed all categories of people into whose hands aid funds will flow (Sobhan, 1990). The premium earned by these suppliers of equipment and material at non competitive prices, use of U.S shipping line (for U.S. aid) and employing foreign consultants who are not really needed or can be locally substituted represents an unrequited appropriation from the Bangladesh aid budget.

A considerable volume of aid funds are now locally disbursed and form those local indentors can be benefited. Because they receive commissions for providing their services in importing machinery for the project, though here again all or part of this commission may be paid abroad. Local consultants receive fees for designing and supervising the project: contractors are engaged in projects for construction and installation of equipment (ibid). The bureaucrats and the policy makers are not out of this part. They receive unofficial compensation for facilitating the flows of aid to particular beneficiaries (ibid).

It has been argued in the (Sobhan, eds 1990, p167) that the aid has created a new rich class in the Bangladesh all of whom are urban residents. The emergence of this class follows the pace of aid flow in Bangladesh since 1971. Upper echelon bureaucrats have played a pivotal role in supporting this development in the way that most of the members of this group (indentors, consultants, contractors, bureaucrats) have strong social ties whether through intermarriage or by being part of a social milieu. Exbureaucrats become business directors, indentors become industrialists, traders become contractors, and many continue to cocurrently operate in these various groups of whom are dominating the economic life of country (ibid).

Radical Transformation of the Development Partners:

The sole dependence on aid was actually crippled the political sovereignty of the country for the decades after the liberation (Sobhan, 2004, p139-141). The first two decades after liberation was of absolute dependence on aid for Annual Development Plan implementation. It was nearer to 100% and reached at 100% for some years. Due to the extent of

dependence on aid the development partners were prone to intrude into the policy arena in whatever situation to uphold their interest.

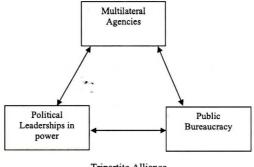
In the 1990s Bangladesh's aid dependence declined significantly (ibid). The development partners perspective on aid to Bangladesh was in a course of radical transformation. These changes originated in the changing perspective to aid at the global level (ibid). The major change in the world after the fall of he Soviet Union made the indispensability of U.S.A more visible to the world and the developing country like Bangladesh remained to in constant understanding that its future lies in maintaining friendly relations with the United States. This conviction was no longer driven by our aid dependence on the U.S but by the fact that the U.S.A was the largest single market for Bangladesh's readymade garment exports and that continued and increased access to the market was crucial to the economic sustainability of Bangladesh (ibid p142).

Aid and Bureaucracy:

The constant relationship between the bureaucracy and development partners remain as it was from the very beginning. Sobhan (2004,165) reiterated that the underlying logic of bureaucratic support for aid articulated in the author's volume on External Dependence written in 1982 remains no less valid today. He had then observed that a segment of the upper bureaucracy continue to benefit from aid as consultants and hope that these favours will continue even after they retire.

Sobhan (2004) also observed that

Aid thus became and now remains the soft option for covering up operational inefficiencies, ineffective and uneconomical use of public resources, lack of creative policy responses and discourages effective or innovative governance (ibid).



Tripartite Alliance

International Development Agencies, their operation with diverse stakeholder interests and influence on public policy and management in Bangladesh:

From the inception even from the earlier days of 60s the international development agencies are operating with the diverse stakeholder interests and continued to sustain their position as one of the key player in the policy direction of Bangladesh, which has already been mentioned earlier in this paper. Their first intervention in the policy process to pursue political objectives was in 1974 when the US government, then under President Richard Nixon, used Bangladesh's dependence on food aid to pressurize Bangladesh to discontinue export of jute goods to Cuba (Sobhan, 2004). Apart from this other areas were the intervention in the investment policy for facilitating private sector basing on the aid credit to serve the interest of few elites who had continued in keeping the act of surplus extraction using the state machinery.

One of the principal areas where pressure from the donors comes to be exercised relates to the formulation and conduct of economic policy. In Bangladesh donors have tended to freely express their views on the suitability of various policies enacted by the government of the day, the quality of the administration and the integrity of the political leadership. This attitude originates in the belief that the size and importance of their contribution to Bangladesh development effort gives them a right to dictate how it should conduct its development affairs. Indeed there is no area in the development field where donors do not choose to exercise a say. They have attempted to influence policies on state ownership, the

role of the private sector, the monetary and fiscal policies of the regime, pricing policy, distribution policy, the use of administrative controls, the structure of development expenditure, the external value of currency, the pattern of development administration and a variety of other operational, policy-oriented and ideological issues.

At the beginning the multilateral agencies were reluctant to speak about the state of corruption in the country in the name of interference into the domestic affairs but now the concerns for the donors are exclusively related to governance issues and the aid flow depends on the state of governance of the country which is measured on the basis of some implausible and non-contextual indicators.

The development partners and the domestic alliance interact in such a way that the interest of them is to get highest priority. The issue of poverty alleviation is now the major area to deal with the donors assistance. The longstanding issue of poverty has been successfully traded by the policy makers to get aid from the development partners. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper has been imposed over Bangladesh as the policy prescription prepared for the poverty ridden countries of the developing countries. Bangladesh had no option in denying this prescription like almost all of the policy prescription by the development partners. The politicians kept mum because some fund will be available. Bureaucrats didn't attempt for any sort of resistance because the political authority assented for. The local consultants and experts welcomed it rather than analyzing the viability and applicability of it.

Two of the surveys conducted in Bangladesh on the attitude, perception and relational status of the donors and multilateral agencies can make some real picture before us. Centre for Policy Dialogue in its Pre- election Policy Briefs: Results form the Identification Exercise report (CPD,2000:7-9) identifies that policy-making in Bangladesh remains almost entirely within the domain of the Bureaucracy. 69.2 percent of the respondents identified it as the most important actor in policy formulation. The Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, took second place with MPs coming third. The people's belief in the influence of NGOs has been reflected with it emerging as the fourth most important actor in policy-formulation. The Local Government and Private Sector Leaders came fifth and sixth respectively, with Government Party Leaders/Workers bringing up the rear.

In that survey (ibid) the respondents were also given the option of naming other agents they believed to be important in policy formulation. Most of those who exercised this option stated that aid donors to Bangladesh were core actors in this regard. Some had even named donors as the most influential actor. Most of these respondents spoke of the World Bank and the IMF as the most influential of the donors. Other donor countries and agencies, as well as various multi-national corporations and American imperialism were also mentioned. It is very interesting to note that in one of our evaluations, donors emerged as the most influential actor in policyformulation. Civil society, including intellectuals and the media, have also been considered to be important, while one of the respondents particularly mentioned CPD as being influential in this regard. On the other hand, it was also stressed that the opposition parties have a substantial role to play in the formulation of public policy in Bangladesh. A few other respondents expressed their opinion that there were other actors involved but did not mention any names.

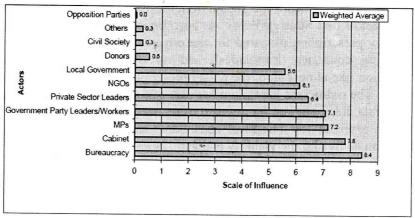


Figure: Influential actors in Policy formulation

Source: Study conducted by CPD, 2000

The other study conducted by Aminuzzaman (2007) was about assessing the views of senior level bureaucrats on the role of the donors relating to the policy reform in Bangladesh. From that study the observations made are:

- a. Views of the members of public bureaucracy/professional are not duly recognized and or appreciated by the donors.
- b. Donor assigned international and national consultants take a lead role in setting the reform agenda.

c. Political leadership plays a weak/inactive role in setting the policy guidance or reform agenda.

Members of bureaucracy and policymakers as well as managers of the economy usually complain against the harshness of the donors' reform proposals and they observed that because of political constraints as well as lack of effective institutional capacities, the pace and outcome of reform has been weaker than actually committed to the donors (ibid).

NGOs, Multilateral Agencies and Foreign Aid:

In contrast to the professional classes, Bangladesh's large and growing NGO constituency is emerging as a much more potent force in the aid relationship (Sobhan, 2004, 161). The NGOs has attained in such an alternative image for receiving the foreign aid that to some extent government have to lag behind in this respect. The NGOs are now one of the prime beneficiaries of the foreign aid in Bangladesh. Large portion of foreign aid is allocated for the NGOs in Bangladesh. To some extent they are acting on behalf of the donors in this country. For most of the programmes ranging from non-formal education to health care, nutrition, skill development, etc., aid plays a crucial role even for the big NGOs (ibid). So the human resources working in the NGO sector can be categorized as one of he most aid dependent portion of the country. The are playing the role of poverty alleviator, which perpetuates the dependence on foreign aid.

The Nexus and Foreign Direct Investment:

Alam and Hossain (Monash University Working Paper) mentioned the impact of the nexus between bureaucracy, politics and business on foreign direct investment. The paper observes that the powerful but ineffective bureaucracy is one of the main deterrents of foreign direct investment and also argued that it is possible due to the close link between politics and bureaucracy in Bangladesh. However, the nexus between politics, bureaucracy, and domestic and foreign businesses is a feature in the economy, which does not allow the country to link with the global economy, as policy reforms fail to work through corruption (ibid). This paper has mentioned earlier that the investment environment for the foreign investors has been created at the behest of the multilateral agencies and donors. But the investment scenario couldn't further improved due to the constant failure of establishing some environment desired by the foreign investors.

In mentioning the role of multilateral organization and donors in corruption an foreign direct investment Alam and Hossain identifies that aid of donor countries could increase corrupt practices through misuse of funds from the parts of both donor agencies and recipient countries and through the collusion of both parties (Cooksey, 2000 cited in Alam and Hossain). While explaining the liberal FDI regime of Bangladesh Alam an Hossain (ibid) mentioned that the FDI regime as a part of its trade liberalization process, has largely resulted from the pressure of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and some donors through the structural adjustment program (SAP).

Alam and Hossain also expressed the concern about mentioning corruption from the World Bank perspective in the following way:

However, the World Bank, other multilateral organizations and aid agencies could not suddenly blame Bangladesh for corruption and deny their responsibility for promoting corruption in Bangladesh and other developing countries. It could be argued that multilateral organizations and aid agencies are now implementing governance-related strategies which they could have initiated before their wholehearted endeavor to ensure trade liberalization. Last things came first in the mistaken strategies of donor agencies, which were implemented through loans and grants to developing countries in spite of their governance problems.

The nexus between politics, business and bureaucracy is nurturing corrupt practices and the indifference of multilateral organizations in addressing corruption factors thereby fortified corruption (ibid).

Changed Scenario of the Relationship and Influence:

Sobhan (2004,160) argues that the class of aid intermediaries remain alive and well even today as those were in the 80s. A large number of aid financed capital-intensive infrastructure development projects in such areas as power, telecommunications, transport, irrigation, water supply and sewerage provide opportunities for earning significant commissions from aid financed infrastructure projects (ibid). The trading and industrial bourgeoisie, who were one of the main beneficiaries of aid, have now moved on to the ranks of the trade-dependent classes. The commission agents and construction contractors, who used to benefit from aid still remains intact. However, the social and political influence of this class is no longer as significant as it was in the 1980s because of the growth in the contribution and influence of the trade dependent bourgeoisie.

Sobhan (2004, 163) further argues that the other significant and growing group of aid beneficiaries from the NGOs and professional community are as yet not significant political players in Bangladesh. The public as well as political position of this class, where it is declared ,tends to be somewhat inimical to DP influence, if not aid. Thos segments of this community who do take public positions on policy issues have tended to be supportive of greater self-reliance in our development strategies as well as greater autonomy in our policy choices. They are in some cases quite hostile to development partner driven policy agendas. Sobhan (2004,164) also stated that those NGOs and professionals are a bit cautious about expressing their opinion in public about the development partners due to their dependence for institutional survival.

Sobhan (2004,166-168) in concluding part expressed that, as things today, development partner-recipient relations remain publicly cordial but discordant in practice. The successive regimes in Bangladesh privately feel and occasionally publicly state that the development partners have no business lecturing them about governance and particularly the politics. At the same time the regimes are unwilling to challenge the right of the development partners to introduce such issues into the development discourse. They are incorporating different governance issues in which Bangladesh have failed according to them, with the term of availability of the aid. The contradictory proposition here is that they are not postponing the aid on the ground of failure to meet the governance parameters. In some occasions they stopped the disbursement. But it never perpetuates. Bangladesh in its course was also not showing the desire to fulfill those terms and conditions provide by the donors at the time of the loan signing the agreement.

Terming this situation as flawed one (Sobhan, 2004) it has been argued that it is less apparent how the development partners will expect to seek compliance from the GoB in the areas of governance and politics. Sobhan recollects

That at the end of the 1970s quite number of development partners stopped aid to Vietnam after it invaded Cambodia in order to over the Pol Pot regime. In sharp contrast, no development partners suspended aid to Tanzania when it invaded Uganda to overthrow Idi Amin regime. This contradiction in development partner practice is worth pointing out because their intervention in rather murky world of politics, security and

strategic concerns remains a grey area riddled with subjectivity and overridden with double standards.

In such circumstances the development partners of Bangladesh should spell out a global policy on these issues before they develop a specific policy towards Bangladesh as to what they may do about malgovernance and dysfunctional democracy (ibid).

Consequent effect of World Community's and donor's step in formation of Environmental policy and legal regime of Bangladesh:

This paper has already identified the pervasive contribution and influence of the multilateral agencies donors and world community in policy formulation of Bangladesh. This paper now intends to bring some light on the policy intervention and integration of the environmental issues in the policy making arena of Bangladesh where the world community and the donors have contributed equally.

Increasing awareness of resource degradation and pollution has formed a new and complicated cross-sectoral challenge to development policy and aid programmes and the bilateral as well as multilateral development community has had to address pressing environmental concerns, and adjust organizations and policies to new demands and expectations relating to the nature of development assistance (Laugen, T & Lunde, L.,1996).

The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), more popularly known as the Brundtland Report, had a strong influence in shaping the development and the environmental activities in Bangladesh (Khan and Belal,1999:312). The increased importance to environmental issues can be measured form the establishment of the separate ministry for the environment with forest and forming the department of environment in 1989 (ibid).

The Task Force report of 1991contained the suggestion and recommendation on different measures to strengthen the environmental institutions and legislation (Task Force Report 1991 cited in Khan and Belal,1999:312).

K. Alam (2005) mentioned that during the 1990s, there was considerable progress in Bangladesh regarding the formulation of environmental policies and strategies. Much of this development resulted from the signing of different International Conventions, Treaties and Protocols

(ICTPs) and the overwhelming emphasis on environmental issues by the global community. So far Bangladesh has signed a significant number of ICTPs that include environmental considerations. Some noteworthy milestones framing policies and strategies, include: Environmental Policy 1992, National Environment Management Action Plan 1995, Environment Conservation Act 1995, Environment Conservation Rules (ECR) 1997, Environment Court Act 2000, and Environment Conservation Act (Amendment) 2002. A new ministry named the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) was established and the Department of Environment (DOE) was upgraded in 1989. Despite these achievements, little progress has been made in the area of integrating environmental concerns into policy-making (ibid).

Environmental issues from donors perspective was incorporated in the reform agenda of the nineties. The list of reform suggested by the donors included the provision for environmental impact assessment of major new projects during the Fourth Five-Year Plan, and strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Environment which is considered as fallout of the Rio conference on the Global Environment (Syeduzzaman, 2004).

Following this course the environmental issues have been integrated into the development agenda in Bangladesh. In 1992, the Government made provisions for 'environmental scrutiny' of all development projects, which mandates input from the Ministry of Environment and Forest during project appraisals in the Planning Commission. Almost all of the contemporary international environmental movements by the international community in the form of signing conventions, protocols and treaties are assented by the country. Though the environmental performance of the country is not satisfactory form the part of compliance and remained in mere enactments, the issue of environment has been started to be considered in designing the development activities in the country. Through the interaction and compulsion by the development partners and the international organization for environmental movements the environmental policy issues has now gained its prominence in development literature.

Conclusion:

It is evident from the literatures available on the political economy of the aid and on the nexus between multilateral agencies and their national facilitators, that the situation has been improving gradually though not in a considerable pace. Still many sectors of the divergent stakeholders have the same relation and stake keeping the motive of private gain and ignoring the interest of the country, with the multilateral agencies and donors. Some times it has been turned into the state of portraying the country as the perpetual dependent on their assistance, apart from achieving some of the successes in the field of reducing dependency. But the nexus persists in the form of metamorphosing and transforming of the class into new shape and dimension.

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