UNNOYON AND BHALO THAKA – UNDERSTANDING BANGLADESHI DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract:

The 1970s marked an era when gender disparity continued to hinder 'development' for some of the developing countries of the world (World Bank policy research report, 2001). Development policy planners, eventually, became aware that not all women can access resources, as men are able to, and not everybody's skills and experiences get recognized as 'knowledge'. To understand women's participation in development, and to discern perceptions of development in terms of women's specialized experiences, it is, therefore, necessary to link together gender, local knowledge and development, in a wider perspective. In this article, I intend to start by describing key terms like 'gender' and 'development' found in discourses resonating around gender, development and local knowledge. I shall argue, in this article how local understanding of *unnoyon* (local development) and *bhalo thaka* (wellbeing) in Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur, two villages in southwestern Bangladesh varies, significantly, from the western perception of development and wellbeing and explain that local people's perception of their own development and wellbeing depends on people's class, caste, gender, age and social status.

Keywords: Gender, development, women, empowerment, rural Bangladesh

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Main text:

In trying to understanding what is meant by gender and development, sometimes there appears to be some confusion regarding use of 'women' and 'gender' as different terms. Words such as men, women, male and female usually refer to the biological classification, while gender, femininity and masculinity, are used as terms which have socially constructed meanings. Often sex is, mistakenly, used in some cases, to imply the biological and psychological characteristics that define men and women (WHO, 2012). WHO (2012) defines gender as 'socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes, that a given society considers appropriate for men and women'.

According to Reeves & Baden (2000), gender connotes the 'hierarchical relations of power between women and men that tend to disadvantage women'. These relations, as they suggest, is exhibited in socially acceptable gendered practices, such as the division of labour and resources, and gendered ideologies, such as set patterns of behaviour for women and men. In interpreting what is meant by 'gender', discussions about development often focus on the conditions endured by women, because of women's unequal treatment in countries targeted for development, and the lesser value attributed to their feminine gendered category. For western development planners, victimization of poor women in public (markets and workplaces), as well as in private spheres, e.g. within households, in some developing countries, has encouraged these countries to identify women (mostly poor) as development targets.

Development

After the Second World War, 'development' emerged as a key ideological tool (Gardner & Lewis, 1996) for understanding the global power relations. This was the period when development, embedded in neo-colonial constructions of the world, acted as an indicator of advancement, and 'progress' was seen an attempt to divide and differentiate the world between the North and the South, by identifying the former as superior and 'developed', and the latter as inferior and 'underdeveloped'. Sachs (2010) identified the 1940s as the beginning of the 'age of development', when economic development was seen 'simply as growth in the income per person, in economically underdeveloped areas' (Esteva 2010: 8).

In 1970s, as Esteva argues, the international development strategy concentrated on a global strategy, forming a unified approach to development and planning, that was aimed at growth, not

only in terms of economic outputs, but also social welfare. This unified approach, most importantly, put the concept of 'participative development' into the discourse on economic development. In 1978 UNESCO experts coined the term 'endogenous development', and criticized W.W. Rostow's economic analysis of development, as being attempted in stages. By using such a term, these experts rejected using the mechanical imitation of the western industrialized societies as a model for development, and proposed taking account, instead, of particular nations aims to 'develop' (Esteva, 2010).

Esteva identifies the 1980s as the 'lost decade for development', and sees the 1990s as the period that 'gave birth to a new development ethos', referring to it as 'redevelopment' (e.g. developing again that was not properly developed earlier). Both the north and the south were, at this time, undergoing this process of redevelopment, searching for the missing link between 'development' and 'redevelopment'. As a result of this quest, the term 'sustainable development' was adopted, and became the acceptable term for use in western development discourse.

Discourses on Gender and Development

To create a significant impact on millions of people across the globe, sustainable_development appeared as 'an enormously powerful set of ideas' to western minds, for bringing about planned change (Gardner & Lewis, 1996:2). This implied taking action to develop the 'under developed'. The tendency to understand development as 'economic advancement' is widespread in development discourses, where the common interest of the western nations is to incorporate change into the lives of the economically 'downtrodden' people of the non-western world. By aiming to improve poor people's economic conditions, in terms of maximizing the fulfilment of basic needs, development targets vulnerable groups, such as the small scale farmers and women headed households, which some scholars relate with dependency.

In 1969, Andre Gunder Frank saw development as a tool, used by the North to exploit the South, and so maintaining its cycle of underdevelopment. For him, underdevelopment is nothing but a process 'embedded within particular political structures' (Gardner and Lewis, 1996: 17). In 1990s, scholars like Escobar, Hobart and Ferguson explained the dependency politics of development and underdevelopment, as neo-imperialism, where capitalism is the strategic weapon for exploitation used by the western nations.

In the postmodern era, when development started to get scrutinized, in terms of reflexivity and representational politics, crucial analysis took place, and concepts like gender, local knowledge and poverty tended to be redefined with subjective realities. From the modernised concept of 'top down' development, the focus shifted to 'bottom up', and the 'grassroots approach. Critically, in development planning, it was accentuated that men and women are not equally affected by development, and require separate consideration. Arguments were resonating around the fact that modern ideas of development should be replaced by alternative, endogenous development, defined as 'local development'.

The way that women became development targets were influenced by the 1970's western feminist thoughts, is reflected in the discourse of Women in Development (WID). Followed by the 1975 UN International Year for Women and the International Women's Decade (1976-1985), Women in Development (WID) projects were aimed at incorporating women into economic development. The underlying concept for such projects, was that since women's status starts to deteriorate because of their alienation from the market economy, so_if women are engaged in income generating activities, it will improve women's status in both their family and society, due to them now being economic contributors (Razavi & Miller, 1995). It was highlighted, that by considering only women's economic advancement, meant failing to understand women's real, or potential, contribution in terms of social reproduction, along with subsistence production (Momsen, 2004).

It is important to discuss WID and its shift to GAD (Gender and Development) in order to understand the development policies of developing countries, like Bangladesh, where women's active participation in economic activities, is still seen as a key development initiative. For instance, in government funded development projects in Bangladesh, such as 'food for work', income generation projects for destitute women, free education for girls up_to higher secondary level, vulnerability group development (VGD), nongovernmental microcredit schemes, seeing poor women as beneficiaries of welfare projects is clearly reflected.

Gender and Development (GAD) has emerged as the crucial tool for enhancing women's empowerment since the mid-1970s. It has criticised the WID approaches for exclusively focussing on women as development beneficiaries, and cataloguing women into homogenous categories. GAD, also, criticized WID approaches, for overlooking gender relations in

societies that determine men and women's access to economic resources. GAD projects concentrated on gender and gender relations (socially constructed arrangement of relations between men and women) rather than 'women', or 'men' as focal points. Finding the difference between practical gender needs, which means improving women's lives by supporting their existing roles, and strategic needs, and also by enhancing women's ability to accept new roles, were now seen as gateways to empowerment. These projects tried to focus on how gender ideologies in societies shape development (Razavi & Miller, 1995). To understand GAD approaches towards development is one of the main aims of my research, which is how the involvement of gender in development, is applicable in the case of local development in Bangladesh.

The 1980s empowerment approach, which materialized in the gender and development debate, as a tool for vesting power in the weak, through grassroots participation, and by considering empowerment as a 'method' for achieving social transformation and for gender equality' (Momsen, 2004: 14). In Bangladesh, this approach has gained much popularity, as it targeted the resource-less people of this country. Often, such development planning is influenced by western understanding of empowerment, without being aware of the local dimensions of *khomotayon* (empowerment).

In 1989, Vandana Shiva anchored the 'sail of ecofeminism' in gender and development debates, by introducing the concept of Gender and the Environment (GED).The key focus of this concept, was to investigate the interrelationship between women and the environment, by accentuating women's role as carers and managers of the environment, and its sustainability. According to this view, sustainable development could be ensured, if women's role in managing the environment is appreciated and manipulated, when planning development. However, this approach failed to notice that some men (local farmers, indigenous wood cutters, honey collectors and others, who depend on the natural resources for maintaining their living) are also good managers of the environment, and their knowledge is equally important in understanding local development.

From 1995 onwards, 'gender mainstreaming' began to develop as the crucial focus of most development projects, in developing countries such as Bangladesh. By employing the vigour used in the empowerment approach, it aimed to involve both men and women as equally important development partners, for the success of development project cycles.

Local knowledge

In order to negotiate the 'development impasse', local knowledge appeared as a mantra, since the demise of the grand development theories of the 1970s and 1980s (Wayland, 2001; Briggs, 2005). In the postmodern era, when deprivations are denoted in terms of subjective understanding and relativism (Gardner & Lewis, 1996), comprehending local constructions of people's everyday realities become increasingly important.

Sustainable development debates were centred on understanding local customs and practices, the constellation of which demonstrate 'local knowledge'. This was crucial, in the sense that it 'represented a shift from preoccupation with the centralised, technically oriented, solutions of the past decades, that had failed to alter the life prospects for a majority of the peasants and small farmers around the world' (Agarwal, 1995 cited in Briggs, 2005).

'Western science' vs. 'people's science'

It was due to the increasing tendency of development planners to take into consideration that local knowledge, is a major contributor to development, that post development discussions were, usually, concerned about the binary division of people's knowledge systems into western knowledge and local knowledge. Western knowledge was seen as scientific, as it is objective and systematic, whereas local people's skills are regarded as not being scientific, but traditional and subjective (Briggs, 2005).

The politicization of knowledge representation is clarified in the subtle division of between western expertise and local understanding of their everyday lives. As an apparatus for expressing power , local knowledge is under represented in western development dialogues, because of the fact that local knowledge is not the 'expert's knowledge' and, hence, not a possible source for exerting the power. As local knowledge is seen as the ordinary daily skills employed by the local people, it is considered to be nothing more than 'people's science' or 'local science'.

Nevertheless, local knowledge represents practical solutions to technical problems found in many development projects related to indigenous cultures, and in traditional practices around the world. In particular, local people are seen now as key managers of their natural resources, and local people's knowledge exhibits sets of practices, skills and knowledge useful for maintaining environment sustainability. 'Western science' in such contexts gets merged with indigenous

knowledge, in order to help maintain the shared platform of development expertise, where local ‘’science’ is the equal partner in understanding endogenous development.

Understanding wellbeing

Led by Dr. Sarah White, the **Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research (WeD)** began at the University of Bath, UK, under the project termed ‘Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways’, with a major multi-country interdisciplinary study, funded by the ESRC 2002-2007. By understanding the importance of measuring wellbeing at a local level, White explained that WeD is an approach that asks ‘what people would like, what they aspire to’. According to her, “it draws attention to the need to consider the quality, not just the quantity, of what is provided, and the process of implementation, not just the end results’ (University of Bath website, 2013).

As an approach focussed on wellbeing, WeD considers 1) what people have or do not have (material); 2) what people do or cannot do with it (relational) and 3) what people think or feel (subjective). Wellbeing is viewed as a process which determines what people perceive as wellbeing, according to the context in which they live (WeD website, 2010). It rests on the idea that wellbeing can deliver a better understanding of the dynamics of poverty and social change. Often this approach is credited with offering a positive focus on people’s hopes, instead of a negative emphasis on what they lack, and by identifying connections between different parts of life, the qualities of relationships, or personal capacities, that can promote or undermine development effectiveness (White, 2008).

However the wellbeing approach is not without critics since it has potential hazards in its uses in development practices (White, 2009). Wellbeing in her words is a ‘fuzzy’ concept that is pre-occupied with affluence. Therefore a focus on wellbeing can be inappropriate for the poor:

Development and wellbeing in Bangladesh: A brief overview

In Bangladesh, that gender is an issue for men, as well as women, is hardly ever considered by development planners. As a result of men taking for granted their image of authority and guardianship, it continues to remain in the background when designing welfare-based development for poor women. However, the idea of empowerment, as the essence of gender and development, is criticized in recent writings (Cornwall & et al, 2007 & Singh, 2007). According to Cornwall & *et al* (2007: 3) women often ‘appear in narratives of gender and development

policy 'as both heroines and victims, heroic in their capacities for struggle, in the stead-fastness with which they carry the burdens of gender disadvantage, and in their exercise of autonomy; as victims of curtailed choices, having to endure a triple work burden, and on the receiving end of male oppression and violence'. Similarly, Singh (2007) decries that the gender and development paradigm, 'sets unrealistic goals for women, goals that fail to recognise the realities of lives' (2007: 104).

Development, as a vehicle for progress in Bangladesh, dates back to the time of the Pre- British Mughal empires. Such development focussed on material improvements and the_economic welfare of the provincial states of the Indian sub-continent, rather than on understanding gendered aspects, by segregating men and women into different development categories. In terms of women's development, western education appeared as a crucial element for bringing changes into the women's lives in colonial time (Davies, 2006).

In 1947, according to Hossain (1979), India- Pakistan independence from the British colonial empire, marked a philosophical change in the realm of development. India and Pakistan, being two autonomous states, had separate development regimes. Natural disasters and famine, until 1970s, overrode the development scenario, so there were insufficient opportunities for proper development planning for the entire region of Bangladesh, as a deprived, provincial state of Pakistan (Hossain, 1979).

The liberation war of Bangladesh, in 1971, spearheaded the dominating development policy of Pakistan, and devastated that of Bangladesh, by destroying the economy, society and political atmosphere. The period was marked by immense violence against women, when many women were physically tortured and killed. Poverty was widespread during the war, and so development was instituted with foreign aid in an attempt to redress the marooned war victims of Bangladesh. (Firdaus, 2010).

Basically, development started to take shape in independent Bangladesh during the post liberation war period, when the country required reconstruction of its roads and communications, and economic and political rebuild were necessary. Non-government organizations like Grameen, BRAC etc. appeared as crucial in the process of re-establishment of the state, in terms of incorporating the rural poor, specially the women, in development projects (Davies, 2006).

Understanding women's practical, as well as strategic needs, received prominence, while Bangladesh set the 'Millennium Development Goals (MDG)' as Development targets, in order to eradicate poverty and ensure a sustainable future for all (UNDP- Bangladesh, 2010). From the 1980s onwards, the Government of Bangladesh started paying attention to understanding and managing gendered needs, in poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP) (USAID - Bangladesh, 2011).

Pre- Liberation war period (before 1971)

Development during British colonial periods had depended on charity; especially, that of zaminder (feudal landlords) families, who used to help the victims of the natural disasters like flood, famine, and epidemics, as part of their benevolent activities. Christian missionaries undertook development initiatives in terms of setting up hospitals, schools, and orphanages in poverty stricken areas (Haider, 2011). The target of the missionaries was to initiate a social as well as a religious change in the region.

Although the process of British colonization of Indian Subcontinent was that of subjugation and economic exploitation, the period is credited with the evolution of a comprehensive philosophy of rural reconstruction (BIDS, 1979). According to a report of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 'British colonial administration invented two parallel perceptions of rural problems and rural development: the departmental perception and the ideological perception. The departmental perception was based on local government, cooperatives, education, health, agriculture, irrigation, etc. The ideological perception enlarged the departmental perception, and envisaged a role for the administrators and identified three conceptual legacies: 1) that peasants were ignorant and docile; 2) the officers were the true guides and friends of the peasants, and 3) the rural elites as the government's loyal standard bearers, and the peasant's natural leaders. The succeeding governments and international agencies inherited these conceptual legacies, and used the old approaches as alternatives to revolution, as a non-revolutionary ideology and technique of rural development, as an antidote to poverty' (BIDS, 1979:4).

Indigo plantations devastated the economy of colonial Bengal, by undermining indigenous subsistence production, and the worst event that colonial Bangladesh experienced was the Bengal Famine of 1943.Many starved during this time and many also died. Yet the British regime in Bengal, as history suggests, ushered in development, denoting the period as the

'Renaissance in Bengal'. At this time development incorporated the use of the English calendar system, and improved railways, installed an efficient administrative system, a_separate land tenure system, and a postal service. It also introduced English language and literature, and brought about the social development of western educated middle class. All these signalled modernisation, in terms of the westernization of the east.

In the early 1950s, Bangladeshi women became the focus of family planning programmes of the Pakistani government village development projects (Feldman & McCarthy, 1984). In 1953, the first large scale rural development programme was the Village Agriculture and Industrial Development (V-Aid) programme that encouraged the villagers to work cooperatively. However, as Haider (2011) explains, the V-AID programme, unexpectedly, collapsed in 1960, without any successor being developed. It did, however, create awareness among the rural mass about their problems, and among the policy makers about the need for rural development, as the prerequisite for national development (Haider, 2011).

The idea of community development, as a strategy, came in the development discourse in 1956, in the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD), known at present as the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BRAD). There it appeared as the Comilla Approach (based in the Comilla region) which got integrated into the rural development process, with its cooperatives and two-tier organizational structure (Haider, 2011) .The main characteristics of Comilla model were: 1) thana (the lowest level of local government administrative unit) with authorities acting as coordinators and planners, 2) union councils, which emerged as vehicles for widespread participation in the planning of locally positioned projects, 3) that civil Servants, as well as the locally elected leaders, should be learned and competent 4) flood control, irrigation and drainage, become the focus of the projects, and 5) information, and its publication, should work as channels for raising consciousness and preventing corruption(BIDS, 1979). According to the BIDS report (1979), during the period 1962-1970 the Bangladesh government allocated 75% of all its Rural Welfare Programme funds to road constructions, whereas only 10 % went to drainage and flood control.

Post- Liberation war period (1971- present)

Both governmental and non-governmental institutions (NGOs) undertook massive reconstruction works to help war stricken Bangladesh immediately after 1971. As Mahmud (2008) stated,

'Bangladesh emerged as desperately poor and overpopulated, and reeling from overwhelming war damage to its institutional and physical capital'. He defines the war torn period of newly emerging Bangladesh, as a 'test case' for development (Mahmud, 2008). This marked a crucial stage in re-establishing the society and economy of the country with the help of the foreign aid, channelled through national NGOs such as BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Grameen, ASA (Association for Social Advancement), Proshika and many others. These NGOs acted as microcredit lending organizations for rural women, mostly poor, and aided rural business entrepreneurship through development aid (Kabir, 2007).

According to Islam (2011), during this time the NGOs not only provided voluntary service and medical assistance for war damaged victims, but also they initiated development programmes to support the government of Bangladesh. They centred their focus mostly on 'rehabilitation, community development, and hunger protection, food for work and infrastructure development for the war affected country' (Islam, 2011).

Korten (1990) suggested that the post liberation war NGOs, based on their function and activity, can be grouped into following:

1. NGOs in the first period, placed emphasis was on providing rehabilitation for the poor.
2. NGOs in the second period, aimed at community development, with a range of activities including agricultural reforms, health and education.
3. NGOs in the third period targeted sustainability as the key feature, and implemented the concept of sustainable development, by carrying out large scale programmes

The understanding of NGOs activities is important for the gendered pattern of development in Bangladesh. Since the independence of the country, women's issues have emerged as significant in the development agenda, gearing the government, as well as the non-governmental sectors', to invest in women's development needs. In particular, at the nongovernmental level, several NGOs began programmes for the benefit of women, which_were concerned with education, training, and credit systems (Islam, 2011).The key point of this focus was on women, as due to the devastating aftermath of the Liberation War of 1971, women had suffered the most from 'the ensuing dislocations and atrocities' (Duza & Begum, 1993).

As Duza & Begum (1993) suggested, the after-war welfare oriented development approach, although aimed to develop women's position in the rural areas, it was not successful. Therefore,

to initiate some income generation activities, in order to change women's vulnerable position both in their families and society appeared to be essential (Feldman& McCarthy, 1984). However, as Feldman & McCarthy noticed, while most post liberation war development programmes were aimed at social welfare, the development of the productive skills of the women as programme participants were overlooked. Moreover, since such programmes adhered to a simplistic feminist bias, which assumed that all women are equal and dependent, they failed to take into account the differential class interests of women, and so generalized most programme efforts.

Since 1997, women in Bangladesh have been_participating, actively, in the local government elections, and taking part, widely, in economic spheres, such as the readymade garments sector, business entrepreneurship, and professions such as medicine, teaching and others. The commitment of the government of Bangladesh to promoting equality between men and women is reflected at the recently endorsed Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and the Bangladesh Sixth Five Year Plan (FY 2011- 2015) that aims to heighten women's participation in productive economy, as well as gender equality, so as 'to ensure women's empowerment in all spheres of life' (USAID- Bangladesh, 2011).

Local Knowledge in Bangladeshi Development Literature

Bangladesh, as a developing country, has realized, in recent decades, the need to incorporate local knowledge into development planning. Its Government is recognizing the importance of indigenous knowledge in development policies, related to natural resource management (Sillitoe, 2000 b). For instance, in 1995 the National Environmental Management Action Plan recommended making use of the indigenous land use practices in the expectation that it_would increase production. Similarly, in 1996, in the New Agricultural Extension Policy, the Bangladeshi Government evaluated the Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK), as being sustainable, and recommended integration of local farmers' practices into formal farming research policies.

Scientists in Bangladesh concentrated on understanding local technical skills, mostly in agricultural practices, in order to validate their ideas about diversified farming practices of rural Bangladesh (Bentley & Nash, 2003).Projects were initiated and aimed at integrating local knowledge in development process, in particular when dealing with disaster management,

natural resource management and for building safer communities (IFRC, 2008). Since the 1980s, Bangladeshi study groups had established a progressive development organization known as UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternatives) in order to make room for more localized and indigenous forms of development .For instance, they started to work with the local handloom weavers in Tangail, Bangladesh, to encourage their local skills and improve livelihood conditions (Finley, 2010). Similarly, in 1997 a group of development practitioners, researchers and social workers established BARCIK (Bangladesh Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge), an NGO for undertaking research in the fields of environment, bio conservation and natural resource management. The organization explored and integrated local practices and expertise into contemporary development programmes. BARCIK aimed to understand the farming practices of the very poor farmers in rural areas, and create scope for poor farmers to discuss their indigenous technical knowledge of land management and farming, with farmers in other regions, development practitioners and academic intellectuals by arranging regional workshops. Through these workshops, it aimed to present knowledge of local development projects, and highlight the problems_experienced by very poor local farmers who are resource less, in order to give them empowerment and livelihood sustainability (BARCIK website, 2012).

In recent years, international NGOs while channelling development trends in Bangladesh through local NGOs, also concentrated on integrating local knowledge into development initiatives. For example the DFID (Department for International Development, UK) through its projects in Bangladesh attempted to incorporate the understanding of local knowledge of the Bangladeshi flood plain, into suitable methodologies for natural resource management research, in order to ensure sustainable development, in terms of empowering the local people (Sillitoe & *et al*, 1998). To illustrate , the Char Livelihood Project (CLP) aims to improve the rural livelihoods of the fragile *char* lands (discussed in chapter 1) of north-western Bangladesh, by accentuating the local knowledge systems .

Trends of incorporating local knowledge in development discussions

While local knowledge is situated and embedded in a complex cultural matrix, it is necessary to understand local knowledge in relation to the wider socio-political process. Failing to do so, could prove disastrous. An example of this is what occurred immediately after the liberation

war, when development planners of Bangladesh, supported by IMF and other public and private funding bodies, placed emphasis on introducing highly mechanized production for exports, which they believed would lead to economic growth. For this purpose, they designed a development programme, which involved converting cultivable land, previously used for subsistence farming, into a system of export oriented cash crop cultivation. As a consequence, alienation from land started taking place, which led to a pool of migrant labourers in the cities, who could become neither workers nor producers in the export economy. Polarization of classes started to take shape in rural Bangladesh, as richer farmers gained greater access to land and agricultural inputs, and the poorer counterparts were pushed towards a vulnerable position of dependency and despair, and going through a bitter process of alienation (Jahangir, 1977). Such conditions limited the livelihood opportunities of the rural poor in Bangladesh, and aggravated the food crisis and increased poverty. In rural areas development also overturned traditional caste based societies, by incorporating livelihood diversification opportunities. For instance western education influenced many low caste and untouchable Hindus to change their caste based professions into paid employment, such as working in factories, teaching, banking and many others.

While 'sustainable livelihoods' emerged as a pragmatic development jargon for most development practitioners in 1980s (WCED, 1987), in Bangladesh indigenous knowledge achieved primary importance in agricultural development project planning. According to Chadwick *et al* (1998), some of the earliest work on indigenous knowledge was produced by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) in 1982. It published an extensive review of the various agricultural tools and appliances that were, currently, in practice in different parts of Bangladesh. In the last decade, as Ahmed (2004) suggested, that the government of Bangladesh prepared documents for environmental management and agricultural extension, particularly related to natural resource management, and placed weight on indigenous technical knowledge (ITK).

By considering food security, and sustainable livelihoods, as the chief development target, the government of Bangladesh encouraged agricultural research, involving the local farmer's knowledge. As Ahmed (2004) noticed, the agricultural research institutes in Bangladesh are engaged in collecting and conserving genetic material. These institutes include the Bangladesh

Agricultural Research Institute, Jute Research Institute and Rice Research Institute work as gene banks, to conserve related genetic materials. All these documented the plant genetic resources of Bangladesh (Khan and Ahmed, 2000).

Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK) and natural resource management

That indigenous knowledge comprises the technical aspects of local learning, has long been the understanding of the development planners and practitioners of Bangladesh. For instance, Tsai and Ali (1997) gave a list of fishing technologies, as a way of documenting indigenous fishing technology. During their work with tropical flood plain fisheries, their aim was to show how the local fishermen's age old finishing techniques were influenced by the spears, traps and nets that had been introduced by the fisheries projects of 1980s.

Being technology oriented, indigenous knowledge is often represented as indigenous technical knowledge (ITK). According to Mallick, 'Bangladesh possesses a rich heritage of indigenous knowledge, through which people try to manage their production systems on the flood plain, for exploiting land, fisheries, livestock and forests, to earn their livelihoods (2000:41). Many, including Shiva (1996), Gain (1995) Chadwick et *al* (1998), UNDP (2007), WWF International (2008) and others, have argued that it is the local people that act as the preservers of their own resources and environment. Their argument was that, since the indigenous people are the local managers of biodiversity and natural resources in a region, they (the local people) should be given the control over the use of the resources. For instance, Sillitoe (2000b) identified how farmers of rural Bangladesh possess knowledge of soil fertility management and acquire sustainable land utilization.

According to the UNDP Community Dialogues on Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) (2007), the indigenous people's perceptions of what constitutes local or indigenous knowledge, varies according to age. For example, for elders, natural resources include soil, water, and forest. The elder locals prefer to relate natural resource management with slash and burn cultivation, since it regenerates soil. It is, according to them, a good practice as it allows for sustainable use of resources, and provides immense benefits to the community, by enhancing social solidarity among the community members. As the report stated, 'by drawing on indigenous knowledge and technologies, the indigenous peoples sustain and protect the rich biodiversity in the CHT region' (2007: 6).

In maintaining biodiversity, men as well as women possess their own expertise. While, rural men in Bangladesh engage in preparing their agricultural lands with *gobor shar* (cow dung) and animal waste *(Leda* dropping) (Sillitoe, 2000b), women maintain agro diversity by collecting and storing seeds for the following cropping seasons (Oakley & Momsen, 2007, Shah & Nuri, 2000). As such, women enhance the chances of diversified species being developed in agricultural production, and this helps to minimize seed scarcity for the local farmers in rural markets. However, indigenous technical knowledge in Bangladesh also takes_into account the expertise of the local people, including restoring the fish eco-system, by salvaging the almost extinct species of fisheries in fresh water bodies, as well as managing sustainable aquaculture, by utilizing the indigenous fisher's knowledge, particularly that of the Hindu *jele* (fishermen) castes, who possess many indigenous fishing techniques (Islam & *et al*, 2000).

Indigenous knowledge and perceptions of local people's everyday practices and life experiences

In Bangladesh, according to Sillitoe (2000), a prevalent understanding, regarding indigenous knowledge, of the scientists and researchers, is that it only comprises local technical skills related to natural resource management, climate change and disaster preparedness, but as anthropologists become more engaged in varieties of anthropological research, local understanding of daily practices are getting increasing importance for comprehending indigenous worldviews.

Many anthropologists have shown, during their work in rural Bangladesh that local people, both men and women of varying ages, castes and class, have diversified skills which they deploy in carrying out their daily activities (Werner, 2007; Begum, 1983; Feldman & McCarthy, 1984; Bentley & Nash, 2003 *et a*l). For instance, poor elder farmers possess a better storage of indigenous farming knowledge, than do the younger farmers, while rich farmers manipulate their knowledge of capitalist expansion of agrarian business to make a profit in the market. Hindu men and women, of different castes, have different patterns of knowledge, which are related to their distinctive caste based professions. Local fishermen and women have knowledge about indigenous fish species and fish breeding, local weavers possess local crafting knowledge, confectioners know how to make best use of their knowledge to make sweetmeat and spiritual healers employ their indigenous healing knowledge for curing diseases.

As Feldman & McCarthy (1984) described, rural women of Bangladesh do a range of activities every day, within the domain of their households. As they put it, 'the processing of all crops, for example, is women's work, as it comprises the selection and preservation of seed for planting. Care and feeding of livestock, rearing of poultry, and for growing family supplies of fruits, spices, vegetables and herbs are women's tasks. Pickling, drying, and preserving certain crops, as well as weaving and spinning cloth and thread, and making and repairing the household artefacts, utensils and equipment, are also women's responsibilities' (1984: 91). Women, alongside these duties, undertake many others inside as well as outside of their households, particularly if they belong to fishing or any caste based communities like potters, weavers and confectioners. All this work requires certain specialized skills that are women's personal expertise. However, since such knowledge varies in terms of age, women mostly acquire knowledge of these everyday skills from the older generations. In my research, I have focussed on indigenous knowledge that local men and women employ in their everyday lives, for purposes such as food processing, healing, caring, crafting and other household skills.

Gender and local knowledge in the context of development in Bangladesh

As Bangladesh is a country with social patriarchy, men are central to the power structure of the society. In rural areas, men are usually the key decision makers, inside as well as outside the household. Since 'it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge', so 'it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power' (Sarup 1988; 74), Oakley and Momsen (2005) argued that, 'gendered knowledge is often considered to be embedded in relations of power, culture and context' (2005; 196).

In Bangladesh's rural economy, society and politics are generally male dominated, and so is knowledge, that does not mean that all women, are considered to be subordinates, who have to obey, care and carry out the tasks and orders, in order to please their male counterparts (Feldman & McCarthy, 1984). Many women in rural areas are the decision makers in household affairs, and exercise power over the men. Yet 'women's knowledge, has been considered, mainly, as

local and traditional, subsistence oriented, contextual, communal, uncorrupted by the influence of the market, and passed on informally' (Oakley & Momsen 2005; 195).

Due to the eco-feminist movements in recent decades, women's knowledge, along with that of men, is getting increasing attention. Although, for long, women's knowledge, as natural resource managers, was seen by development practitioners as naïve and traditional, nowadays women are seen as active agents of sustainable environmental management (Oakley & Momsen, 2005).

While men in rural Bangladesh are engaged in agriculture, fishing and other livelihood activities, women from high and medium income households, in the rural areas, prefer to work within the domain of their households, due to the gender ideology of *purdah*, but women from low income households, often are pushed, by their economic hardship, to participate in income generating activities in the local markets. In addition, divorce and desertion, and male out-migration, have forced the so called docile wife/mother to become the sole earning member of their families (Duza & Begum, 1993).

Women, irrespective of class, caste and age, work in their home gardens which are useful sources of food in good times and essential in lean seasons. Many researchers have shown that women's participation in agriculture, within as well as beyond the homestead, is common in rural Bangladesh (Akhter & *et al*; 2010, Jewitt; 2002, Kashem & Islam; 1999, Miranda; 1990). This occurs, in particular, in agricultural fields, where men do most labour intensive activities, like ploughing, land preparing, harvesting etc., women mostly do the post harvesting work, such as parboiling, winnowing and threshing (Feldman & McCarthy, 1984).

According to Akhter *et al* (2010), rural women not only possess considerable knowledge as farmers, home gardeners, cattle raisers as well as small traders, but, also, they have significant skills in forest conservation within the proximity of their home garden area. Women also know how to heal the minor ailments of their household members, specially the children, since they have good knowledge about herbs as natural medicines (Werner, 2007).

Men, in rural Bangladesh, possess considerable knowledge in managing wet land resources such as ponds, *beel*,and *haor* (different kinds of water bodies), in order to maintain the freshwater ecosystem, and ensure the sustainable use of them for fishing and agriculture, as well as for household use. Moreover, rural men have indigenous skills for managing livestock and the treatment of animal diseases (Chadwick & et al, 1998). According to Begum *et al* (2000), men

are natural resource users, and have expanded knowledge of medicinal plants in their surrounding forests or home gardens. As *kabiraj* (herbalists), they employ their medicinal knowledge of herbal plants in treating the minor ailments of the local villagers.

Understanding *unnoyon /unnoti*

Locally, development is termed as *unnoyon* or *unnoti* in Bangladesh. By *unnoyon* people mean development and development activities are referred to as *unnoyonmulok kaaj* (development works). By *unnoti* they perceive the level of progress attained after development. These concepts are subjective, and vary with individuals and groups, according to class, caste, age, gender and social status. Most often, the government and development planners of Bangladesh do not take such variations into consideration while designing development. Based on a technocratic idea of development, which maintains that development should be imported from foreign experts, development policies in Bangladesh reflect the colonial mentality of the west, by aiming to develop the 'under developed'.

I shall argue, in this thesis, that local understanding of *unnoyon* and *unnoti* in Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur is not always similar to the western perception of development. For instance rural elite men, such as union council chairmen and members, and businessmen, see development as construction of new roads, bridge, culverts, hospitals, schools, flood control and dams, which corresponds to the western notion of development, but such an idea of development is not *unnoyon* for certain people. Local poor farmers do not see the building of embankment on the Padma river, as their *unnoyon*, as it stops bringing *poli mati* (alluvial silt) along with the flood water, to their fields, and reduces the fertility of agricultural lands. Having a new pitch constructed on roads, restricts their irrigation water by hampering the indigenous practice of making water flow through channels in the mud roads. Some poor farmers see schools as being based on a modern, western concept of education, as a threat to their indigenous agricultural tradition, as it prompts their children to disregard agriculture as livelihood practice. Mechanization of agriculture means *unnoyon* for rich and medium farmers, who are affluent, whereas the local poor farmers see it as their *onunnoyon* (not development) bringing *obonoti* (under development) into their lives.

I have found about fifty cases, in Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur, where poor men and women see modern schooling as loss of their household labour. According to these people, if their sons and daughters go to school, they (the children) have not enough time to help their parents in the managing of household chores, and for livelihood activities such as farming, fishing and shop keeping. As parents, they believe that sending their daughters to school, means a loss of opportunity for girls to learn household work, which could lead to them suffering in their post marital life. For such parents, development means a good marriage for their daughters, and for their daughters, they think development is to be a good wife and mother.

Fig.1. Children going to school at Decree Charchandpur

Most poor girls see their development as getting married to an affluent person, and to live in luxury, rather than getting educated and earning their own living. As Joytun, one of the poor girls, who attend secondary school at Char Khankhanapur, puts it, '*As a girl my unnoti is in marrying a handsome and rich husband, with sensible in-laws. Education can provide me with the scope to learn new things and get a paid job, but it will not give me peace and happiness in*

life'. This indicates that among rural poor women good marriage and a successful marital life imply development and wellbeing.

Rich households see sending children to school as an indicator of development and a mark of social prestige. Girls from such households feel education can liberate them by opening up avenues of learning, and exploring their lives, and will serve as means of attaining good status in society. For example, I belong to an affluent house in Char Khankhanapur, and both my parents and I believe that by getting a good education, means gaining independence and good evaluation in society. This is closer to the western understanding of women's development. Like poor girls, some girls from rich households, nonetheless, see modern education as source for achieving a good match in marriage. The idea behind such a view is that well educated men, living in cities, prefer educated women as their wives. However, I have noticed about 15 cases in both villages, that girls who attained college and university qualifications', do not, necessarily, achieve good matches in marriage. The reason is dominant patriarchal ideology. While it is common for some Bangladeshi men, and their families, to look for brides who are submissive, compromising and *shongshari* (expert in household chores), so educated brides, possessing confidence and strong personalities, are not considered to be good as brides and not *shongshari* at all, by prospective grooms and their families.

In relation to the above point, from my findings for this research, I tend to question the western understanding of women's empowerment and development. While western feminist economists believe that by incorporating women in economic sectors, this will allow women to be empowered, in terms of improving their status in Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur, I have noticed that, when speaking about economic employment, some poor and rich women speak about their increased work load, and their difficulties in managing domestic chores. For such women *unnoti* is not seen, solely, as income generation, but in the smooth maintenance of their daily lives. For example, Seema, a banker from Char Khankhanapur, considers paid employment as her *obonoti*, as it allows less time for her to spend on domestic affairs, which strains her relationship with her husband and in-laws. For women like Seema, *unnoti* is spending quality time with her family members being a good wife, mother and daughter-in-law, where *khomotayon* or empowerment relates to getting good social treatment within and outside family. Based on such understanding of *unnoti* and *khomotayon*, I argue, that local women's

empowerment mostly depends on social attitudes towards them, rather than getting involving in income generation activities I shall, also, challenge the western notion of associating women's decision making power with their economic independence, since I have noticed some women from both poor and rich households are key decision makers in their households, without having their own income, and some women have no decision making power within households, despite earning a living for themselves and their families. I argue that local women's idea of *khomotayon* depends on men's support within their families.

The local understanding of development lies, significantly, on the perception of *kaaj* (work). According to western point of view, while both working inside and outside the house is seen as work, local villagers see only income generating activities as *kaaj*. If women spend lengthy hours in doing household chores and post harvesting activities, men do not see women as doing *kaaj*. Women see their work, as well as men's work, done outside household to earn money as *kaaj kam* (work that earns money). If men do not work to earn money locally, people perceive them as *ghore bosha* (sitting in home), saying that they are *kaaj kam kore na* (doing no work). Women, however, see household duties as *ghorer kaaj* (domestic work), referring to it as *nijer kaaj* (own work). Men see domestic work as *meyeder daitto* (women's duty) rather than *kaaj* (more details appear in Chapter 5).

Development policies in Bangladesh, aimed at poor women in rural areas, are based on western understanding of work, instead of them being aware of the local meaning of *kaaj*. Such policies are not based on knowledge of how local women perceive to be their own development in terms of *kaaj*, and so impose welfare programmes for improving poor women's economic and social condition. My argument is that because of failing to apprehend the indigenous notion of work most governmental and nongovernmental welfare programmes put poor women in a vulnerable position, where women struggle to maintain a balance between *ghorer kaaj* (household work) and *kaaj kam* (work for money).

For local Hindu men and women of lower castes such as Betei (weaver), Sutradhar (carpenter), Kamar (potter) and Kumar (blacksmith), *unnoyon* is the term that they use for bettering their craftsmanship. Most of these people see the western notion of development (road construction, schools and impact of media- television, radio, satellite television networks, newspapers, etc. as *onunnoyon*. According to them, due to improved road systems and media advertisements, there is

an increasing demand in the markets for plastic, aluminium and stainless steel items, instead of traditional pottery, metallic (iron) , bamboo and wooden crafts, which imposes difficulties on them in maintaining their required standard on living from their traditional caste based professions. Moreover, incorporation of modern household stuffs into the local market, and the western style of education, is gradually leading to their traditional occupations becoming extinct, and so they are being pushed towards livelihood diversification.

Local healers such as *kabriaj* (herbalists), *ojha* (snakebite healer), and *fakir* (spiritual healer), village doctors and local pharmacists do not perceive development from western point of view. While the western idea of development of health and wellbeing is to provide modern healthcare facilities to local poor, in terms of setting up hospitals and supplying western medicine, poor villagers and local healers see western medicine as their *onunnoyon* (underdevelopment). Local poor people, both men and women, consider hospitals as places of monetary exploitation, misbehaviour of health professionals, and sources of practices which further deteriorate their existing health conditions**.** This is because they have little faith in formal health care arrangements. Traditional healers consider modern medicine as detrimental to their indigenous knowledge of healing, and as a threat to their livelihood security. Hospitals and modern medicine, however, mean *unnoyon* (development) for local affluent, as they can afford expensive modern medical treatment.

Huzur, the local Muslim religious leaders and informal healers, relate *unnuyon* with the construction of new mosques and Hindu Brahmin *purohit* (spiritual leaders) understand building of *mandir* (temples) as *unnoyon***.** Both *huzur* and *purohit* do not see the western model of rural development, which implies road constructions, expansion of rural markets, setting up schools, hospitals and credit organizations, as their *unnoyon*, since these are unrelated to their livelihood practices. For local traders, businessmen and auto rickshaw drivers, however, roads are an important expression of *unnoyon*.

Like local farmers, rural fishermen who employ indigenous fishing technologies and local strategies of fishing, see building flood control embankment on the Padma as their *onunnoyon*. According to them, construction of dams decrease water flow to local water bodies, such as ponds, as well as in small tributaries of the river, which, consequently, leads to the drying up of fishing channels and endangers indigenous fish species. For these fishermen *unnoyon* means

allowing natural fish to breed in fresh water, and so the dam is seen as an obstacle to their traditional profession of fishing.

In Bangladesh, agricultural policies are oriented towards scientific agrarian expansion, in terms of disseminating information and supplying of a high yielding variety seeds (HYV). Local rich farmers often consider such policies as *unnoyon* in economic terms, but very poor farmers, who depend on indigenous seeds for subsistence production, see such policies as their *onunnoyon*. According to local poor farmers HYV seeds are not only expensive but are also are replacing the use of indigenous seeds, cause declining soil fertility, and threaten their local knowledge of seed management. Women from poor farming households, see the use of modern, scientifically selected, seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides used in the fields, as causing *obonoti* in family health, and deterioration in food taste. For most poor men and women, *unnoyon* is deemed to help them get benefit from their indigenous farming practices, such as cropping, using indigenous seeds, employing local technologies and bio-fertilizers. Bangladeshi agricultural development schemes pay little attention to such variations in local perceptions of *unnoyon*, and conjure up an image of a generalized understanding of development, aided by the expansion of scientifically managed agriculture.

Differentiating between *bhalo thaka* (wellbeing) and *dhoni howa* (getting rich)

Locally, if anyone in Bangladesh is asked *apni kemon asen?* (How are you?) , the answer follows three certain patterns: *bhalo asi* (I am well), *motamoti bhalo asi* (moderately well) and *bhalo nei* (not well). People at Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur also describe their condition in a similar way, by drawing a distinction between *shukhe thaka* (happiness) and *bhalo thaka* (wellbeing). In explaining their wellbeing, they importantly identify, as important, the inter - relationship of *bhalo thaka* and *dhoni howa* (being rich).

In western development literature, the wellbeing of non western, developing countries is perceived materially. They are seen as possessing a lack of fulfilment of people's basic needs, such as food, health facilities, education and income and, non materially, as suffering emotional and psychological deprivation (La Placa *et al*, 2003). Most often, such understanding misinterprets the local understanding of wellbeing, this view is supported by Camfield *et al* (2006)'s work on comprehending the basic interplay among relationships, happiness, and

wellbeing, in Bangladesh. In their work, Camfield *et al* showed that local perceptions of wellbeing vary in terms of age, gender and social status. As they argued, that_along with indicators such as income, health and education, an individual's relationship with family members and wider community define wellbeing for local people. McIntyre & Rondeau (2013: 83) consider such an explanation of local people's wellbeing, as 'whole person development'.

My understanding of local wellbeing (*bhalo thaka*) is based on McIntyre & Rondeau's whole person development theory which argues that a person's wellbeing should be understood in relation to his or her entire situation, encompassing his/her economic, social, political, spiritual and emotional aspirations of life. It also follows that the wellbeing and development approach (WeD), sees wellbeing through material, relational and subjective interpretations of local people's aspirations. For example, I argue that for some local poor men in Decree Charchandpur, *bhalo thaka* means getting financial and social support from their wife's natal home, but for poor women *bhalo thaka* corresponds to no demand being made for dowries from in-laws, good behaviour from husband and his family, and having a_good bond with her children. White (2006:4) demonstrated how an 'understandings of a good life, as well as the capacity to achieve it, clearly differs from person to person, and from place to place'. My own opinion is that local meaning of *bhalo thaka* is quite subjective. Anu, one of the poor young women of Char Khankhanapur, for example, sees *bhalo thaka* as her ability to visit her natal home whenever she wishes. As she puts it, '*my husband does not allow me to visit my parents frequently. I would feel well if I could go and see them often*'. For Hanif, a poor rickshaw puller, *bhalo thaka* corresponds to receiving good behaviour and care from his wife.

Rich men and women, and often some of the poor, draw a clear distinction between *bhalo thaka* and *dhoni howa*. For instance, Ruby, wife of Gazi Khan, a rich landlord of Char Khankhanapur said, 'I am rich and live in luxury, but I am not well. Money is there but my happiness is lost', which indicates her own interpretation of wellbeing is independent of her material condition. Similarly Komola, a poor woman working as a day labourer in Degree Charchandpur, has stated, that 'rich people are financially solvent but they are not well and happy.' In her words, '*taka thaklei bhalo thaka jay na, Shukh o taka diye kena jay na'* (money cannot make one feel well, neither can it buy happiness'. This statement gives the impression that as a relative concept *bhalo thaka* is related to *shukh,* but it may not be always related to *dhoni howa*. This can be validated

by the statement of Momota, a widow, who explains her wellbeing as seeing her daughters happily married. As she says, 'I am happy and feel well, despite my poor health to see my daughters happy in their married lives. I am successful as a mother and feel contended.' McIntyre and Rondeau (2013) highlight similar finding among some ultra poor Bangladeshi women, for whom wellbeing is related to their successful motherhood.

Asadullah & Chaudhury (2012) showed that infrastructural development, such as construction of roads and decreasing economic inequality, mean wellbeing for local poor in rural areas. However, I shall argue that this perception is a western oriented interpretation of wellbeing, and I will show, through information obtained from my research, how development programmes aimed at promoting economic inequality and infrastructural development, have enhanced social inequality and ill-being for the local poor in Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur.

Khatun *et al* (1998) identified certain indicators of rural women's psychological wellbeing in Matlab, Chandpur. Such women, according to them, display self competence, possess self esteem, exercise self control, display self related anxiety, possess knowledge about the environment, are critically conscious about self and surrounding, possess self related aspirations, self autonomy, determination, problem solving and life satisfaction. I consider such indicators of wellbeing, are a reflection of the western feminist concept of seeing poor rural women as individuals who needs to be liberated economically, socially and psychologically. Understanding rural women's wellbeing, in this way, fails to capture women's idea of wellbeing according to local concepts. For instance, in my study villages most poor women see their *bhalo thaka* (wellbeing) in relation to their dependency on their husbands, and their own welfare, as well as that of their natal family members. I have observed some rich women, whose actions indicate that they think that good women should not try to be problem solving individuals, or show their self esteem and autonomy, as they consider displaying these attributes, as bad conduct or *beyadobi* in the presence of men. Most Hindu women at Char Khankhanapur, for example, believe that as mothers and wives women should not have self related aspirations. They see self sacrifice as an example of their wellbeing, in the belief that it will bring them honour and prestige, as good mothers and wives. In such cases, Hinduism serves as a religious backdrop, where self sacrificing mothers and wives are seen to be acting as a *devi* (goddess). Similarly, some Muslim women, influenced by the Islamic code of life, consider their wellbeing lies in

remaining submissive to their husbands. As Rozina, a Muslim woman states, ' *if I dissatisfy my husband I cannot enter jannat (the heaven)*' This supports my contention that Khatun *et al'*s idea of using what they term as a 'feeling self competence', is not a valid term for describing rural Muslim women's sense of wellbeing.

Hindu men and women, as religious minority groups in Char Khankhanapur, see their *bhalo thaka* as their ability to worship regularly in local temples. This corresponds to White's (2010) finding, which shows how religion acts can be seen as source of wellbeing for local people of low social status. For example, poor scheduled caste Hindus, such as cleaners and leather workers, identify their wellbeing with their access to temples, and good social treatment from fellow Hindus and surrounding Muslim people. They say they feel well and happy, when they are, socially, not treated as 'untouchables', and do not have to face discrimination because of their caste status.

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the western discourses on gender and development, and have highlighted how these discourses guide Bangladeshi development policies, aimed at seeking technocratic solutions for local problems. In relation to local knowledge, I have tried to see if the western perception of development is suitable for understanding local meaning of *unnoyon* (development) and *bhalo thaka* (wellbeing) in rural Bangladesh. Drawing on my research findings at Char Khankhanapur and Decree Charchandpur,two villages of southwestern Bangladesh I have shown, in this article that the local interpretation of development and wellbeing is subjective, and is based on an individual's local setting and circumstances. My argument centres on the idea that native understanding of *unnoyon* and *bhalo thaka*, markedly differs from the western perception of development and wellbeing. It, also, indicates that for comprehending local aspirations for development in rural Bangladesh, it is important to appreciate local people's perception of their own development and wellbeing, which varies according to class, caste, gender, age and social status.

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