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Role of Fisheries Sector on Sustainable Development of Maldives: How Can Education Help?

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ABSTRACT

Proper utilization of natural resources has been considered as one of the key tools for development. Experience confirms that while a few countries have become industrialized through the proper usage of natural resources by expanding other sectors with the alignment of global development phenomena, some countries are only consuming the wealth of natural resources and expending pleasurable daily life without working for fundamental sustainable development required to meet the future challenges. Maldives is one of the developing countries having some potential natural resources. A country of islands must have an ample prospect of fisheries sector. There is a shortage of competent manpower both at the level of policy making and at the grass root level. The fisheries sector of Maldives is yet to be developed with a long run vision that is connected with the national development goal. Country's borrowed British education system is not necessarily catering to the local need. Given the nature of this short communication research letter, this study will explore some issues with an aim of offering some suggestions towards a solution.

Key words: Maldives, fisheries sector, education, development, policy

INTRODUCTION

Criteria of development and approaches towards development and their schemata have evolved out of historical social practices (Alam *et al.*, 2009; Rabby *et al.*, 2011a; Birdsall, 1993; Kaplan and Celik, 2008). Interpretation of social events is guided and constrained by the prevailing rationality which itself reflects the dominant constellation of power (Alam, 2009; Rabby *et al.*, 2011b). Living in the era of globalization, denying the definition of development and its patterns (economic, social and human need) prescribed mainly by Western school of thought would not only make a country isolated but also dysfunctional (Alam *et al.*, 2009; Rabby *et al.*, 2011a). Approaches towards development process may vary from one country to another (Rabby *et al.*, 2011a). A country which lacks natural resources is in a disadvantaged position in the running competition of development compared to other counterparts which have been enjoying the benefit of natural resources (Nargis and Hossain, 2006; Scoones, 1998). However, evidence also asserts that over dependency on natural resources makes a nation lethargic which can be a greater hindrance for development. None can repudiate the need of competent manpower for the developmental process

(Alam *et al.*, 2009; Al-Amin *et al.*, 2012). A country where natural resources are in place should use this as an extra support to open and operate other sectors that can sustain even after a sudden collapse of the naturally established sector or a sector supported by the nature.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND ISSUES

Maldives is a country of islands. The size and shape of the Islands vary albeit the lifestyle, climate, living-hood and income pattern amongst the Islands' population are almost same (Adam, 2006). Almost all of the islands are accommodating very less number of populations (MOPND, 2006a). Male the capital of Maldives accommodates one third of total population (MOPND, 2008, 2006b). The south named as Addu city (combined with a few Islands) contains the second largest population (MOPND, 2006a). Operating educational establishments in these two areas are less hassling compared to others in term of communication and other administrative processes involved (World Bank, 2002).

Lack of competent academic force and atypical geographic disposition restrict the country not to have its own distinct education system (World Bank, 2002). Primary and secondary school system has been operating in the country since long; however, the main purpose of these schools is to cater to the students; so that after a certain period, they can qualify the British prescribed O and A levels examination. It is thus a prodigious lacking of education system to offer something concrete that is exclusively vital for the local developmental needs (Alam, 2009). The students who obtain O and A level qualifications are lucky enough to serve for public service (World Bank, 2002). Due to lack of local tertiary education, students usually travel overseas to study undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Mohamed, 2005; Chauhan, 2008; Middlehurst and Woodfield, 2004). The number of candidates having undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications is dramatically increasing with an employment placement in public service, business and politics (ADB, 2012). Higher education provides a podium of research helping the country to have a secondary and primary education that ensure the supply of semi-skilled, upgrading skilled manpower required targeting the local developmental needs (Castely, 2005). Lately, a few private institutions of higher education alongside one public counterpart offer tertiary education. But unfortunately, these institutions' responses are towards meeting the demand posed through "diploma disease" (Mohamed, 2005). It is therefore a knowledge driven higher education which is still missing.

Given the nature of the primary, secondary and higher education, in-service training has to play the vital role for preparing their employees ready for the job (Alam *et al.*, 2009). Although fisheries sector needs both highly skilled and semi-skilled manpower, the quantity of semi-skilled population is exceedingly higher and producing this manpower is the main responsibility of secondary education (Al-Amin *et al.*, 2012). Understanding these statuses, this paper will map the economics of Maldives focusing the fisheries sector with a view to outlining some steps that education sector can consider to have a sustainable development process in Maldives.

After drawing the introductory section, this paper will briefly post a research design. Before making the concluding remark, this study will provide some insights about Maldives economics and education.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This is short communication research paper which aims at generating a discourse through the analysis of secondary data and intellectual debates. In order of obtain information, a number of

official web sites of Maldives government, scholarly sites hosted by different organisation and blog sites are browsed. Moreover, in order to understand economic development, a number of works of conducted UN bodies (i.e., UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO) are used. Data and references are used as supplementary from earlier literature.

ECONOMICS OF MALDIVES

Maldives is a Muslim country earlier ruled by the British colonial system. It is therefore often observed that both Islamic and British rules and regulations ran parallel to each other to administrate the country (Mohamed, 2005). Lately, American domination in global administration process has also been seen as an agenda of the country. Maldives is a south Asian country that is passing an experimental process. Since the population is very small and having huge income from the usage of natural resources, the setback of this experimental process is yet to provide a harsh lesson for the community (Adam, 2006). But if this continues, it may take it in a course of action that might bring the danger for the nation.

The country is yet to introduce a proper taxation process ensuring a balancing between income and expenditure. The main income of the government is GST (goods and services taxes) collected from every buyer. GST is imposed to everyone who buys anything regardless the income level, location, type of the product and need level of the product. Most of the people have to contribute a significant amount of GST in order to buy the daily necessary items (Chen, 2010). Consequently, the contributions towards GST both by the rich and the poor clusters are almost same. This kind of economics provides a harder life for the poor and now many people are frustrated in balancing the necessity of life. Since the poor cluster is less educated, they are yet understand the shortcoming and flaws of the GST system even though they are fed up with it. However, as the citizens have been paying GST hereditarily, they see it as a culture without being too critical about it. An informal and optional system named as Zakat (Islamic taxation) is in place (ADB, 2007). The concept of contribution of Zakat in narrowing the gap between the poor and the rich is somehow dysfunctional since the system is not developed officially (ADB, 2007). The GST is the main income for the government to use both for revenue and development budgets.

Cost of living in Maldives is extremely high as compared to the standard of life style and the supports for citizenship received. Noting the high figure of GDP (Gross Domestic Product/Income), it can be apparently considered that life in Maldives are opulent. Unfortunately, the average income in Maldives cannot ensure a modicum standard of living at all. It is because, (1) almost 100% dependency on import for both short and long term needs, (2) high expansive inshore carrying cost and (3) very negligible number of consumer targeted by one single market.

EMPLOYMENT SECTORS AND CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT

The country has mainly depended on two sectors. They are tourism and fisheries (Inception Report, 2007). Both of the sectors consume the highest proportion of employment (MOPND, 2008). The third largest sector of employment is public service locally known as civil service which also includes teaching profession (MOPND, 2008). Apparently data shows that tourism contributes largely towards GDP sharing (DNP, 2011). It is thus the government which provides a favourable condition for tourism sector. Even though, fisheries sector provide a larger employment, the income and contribution towards GDP sharing is slower than tourism (DNP, 2011). Negligence towards fisheries sector both by the government and societal levels is the

main constraint for the institutionalisation of fisheries sector of the country. However, if data of informal and part-time engagement on finishing and their income were to be added, the figure would change significantly.

Tourism sector may largely benefit the country. However, a few important facts need to be noted, (1) the business of tourism is always in mobilisation for a number of natural and global contrived reasons, (2) full time employment with tourism may hinder a decent family life which may bring social problems and (3) a country with faith in Islamic value may produce different conflicting and rival groups in the society. One important fact remains silent in the discourse of tourism business in Maldives. Although this sector provides a large share to GDP, the key portion of the income of this sector goes to the hand of the foreigners (who own these enterprises). It is therefore providing a negligent amount to GDP sharing, with the bulk of the income going overseas. This situation also makes the life of Maldivians very hard since the citizens of Maldives are losing out against the competition of global purchasing power. On the other hand, foreigners, earning from Maldives, enjoy a life of luxury. Despite all these shortfalls, it is the reality of Maldives to bank upon and survive on this sector. However, country needs to have another parallel industrial sector in order to confront any sudden drawback that they may need to face in the future with the change of global era.

EDUCATION IN MALDIVES

Most of the schools are combined schools providing access both to boys and girls (MOE, 2010). There are some separate schools for both the genders. Almost all the schools impart education from primary to secondary levels. Schools in the atoll also provide education up to higher secondary level. Currently the operation with a provision for higher secondary education is gradually on in most of the schools. These days, most of the islands have a school. The age range of school population varies. However with regard to age policy, every school has its own policy prepared in the light of national policy. Since appearing for O and A level examinations has no age limit, it is thus a neglected agenda in school system especially at the secondary and higher secondary levels. It is worth noting that an age based policy for formal education system is also vital to consider for economic and taxation policy of a country. Without ensuring a minimum standard on it, it is hard to make an economic plan and it is also unfeasible to provide a school system with a view of demographic needs.

The dropout rate is high at the secondary level. These primary or semi-secondary graduates may join with the labour force after being dropped out from secondary provision. Many of them also cannot join the labour force as their knowledge and skills (that they have acquired) are not saleable in the labour market. Moreover, age restriction for work is also a core cause for not being part of the employment force immediately after being dropped out. These days, a significant portion of school aged population (either in school or dropped out) are addicted to drugs (UNDP, 2009). Whatever, the fact is; at some point many of these primary or semi-secondary graduates join the labour force with the involvement of two major sectors, (1) tourism and (2) fisheries.

CURRENT SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Little initiative in developing the human resources for both sectors, (1) tourism and (2) fisheries can be observed at secondary school provision (MOPND, 2008). However since then, schools mainly cater to the students for the need of passing the examination of British system conducted O and A level examinations. The endeavours for the development of human resources in both sectors never

see the light of success (Castely, 2005; World Bank, 2002). Delivery of such education is just an official agenda but not a pragmatic reality in practice. While employees in tourism sector may receive some in-house training (with the training provided by the private sector) the workforce involved in fisheries sector remains untrained.

THE NECESSITY OF TRAINING

In order to ensure the long term and sustainable fisheries sector, fishermen need to know the right time and right category of the fishes that they can hunt without interrupting the production cycle (Al-Amin *et al.*, 2012). A number of casualties always occur for fishing in an adverse situation (Rabby *et al.*, 2011b). Training on it may help to reduce the number of casualties. Fish preservation and fish preparation and preservation for international community without harming the climate are hard but important tasks (Al-Amin *et al.*, 2012). Without having a well outlined training, knowledge in due course cannot be accrued. These kinds of activities would be the tasks of secondary schools while higher education needs to find out a way of research in this area that would directly contribute to the sector and also would find out a way in supporting the education and training offered in the secondary school.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND POLICY

Arguments may convince that providing this kind of training may increase the productivity of an individual fisherman which would ultimately provide a higher sharing of GDP of this sector. This also may help to reduce gap of income amongst different professionals. However, as the way forward to direct policy makers, a few issues need to be revisited with a rigorous consultation before making policy and regulatory framework. The issues are: (1) Does Maldives need some specialized schools exclusively for this kind of training? (2) What could be the course and curricula and how will they be designed? (3) How will this programme be incorporated into the existing system? (4) How to encourage the students to be attentive in such programme? (5) Where to find the qualified competent instructors? (6) What will be the mode and module of theory and practical sessions? (7) What will be the commencing grade for this training?

Answering all these questions may need a wider consultation and discussion with an in-depth analysis of a huge amount of government documents in connection with economic, public and education policies. As and when necessary, government should initiate micro researches with an engagement of competent researchers from various fields (i.e., economics, education, public policy) before drawing policy and regulatory measure. However, with regard to the first issue, we argue that given the geographical pattern of Maldives, this training needs to be a part of the secondary school provision in order to ensure that all the pre-mature graduates of different regions are covered.

CONCLUSION

With the current status, this is a neglected area. Legislators and policy-makers are reluctant in prioritising this sector as it is seen as an orthodox and non-prestigious profession. It is now time to think that this sector could be a fundamental industrial sector that would be able to contribute to the global fundamental needs to a great extent. For constitutionalizing this sector, a national body needs to be established which would look after the research and developmental activities of fisheries sector. Under the operational guidance of this department, centre needs to be established

at each atoll to mobilize field level activities. Demands for the fundamental needs will always be in place even if sudden global crisis may bring down the demand craving of man-made items (Alam, 2009). Therefore, providing preference for institutionalisation of such industry will contribute for national sustainable development.

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