

Abstract

**Population, Poverty and Governance:
Understanding the Institutional Linkages
among National Population, Health and Poverty Reduction Policies,
Programs and Strategies of Bangladesh**

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This article is concerned with the institutional relationship between and among population policy and other national development policies in the context of developing countries; in particular, the interplay of actors and institutions from government, market and civil society in the formulation of national development policies in Bangladesh. In this article, the term ‘governance’ has been used to describe a new pattern of relations between the state and society by which public actions are regulated, coordinated and controlled. It is well acknowledged that public policies are the outcomes of a multilevel battle of interests among the members of policy network. In general, the member of policy network includes state actors, for instance, bureaucrats, parliament, politicians and non-state actors e.g. professionals, interest groups, voluntary organizations, media and so on. Every member of a policy network tries to incorporate their own values, norms, aspirations and interests into the policy document while the public policy is the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society. Therefore, a public policy document eventually turns up as a document of contesting values, norms and priorities. The success or failure of a particular policy largely depends on how these different set of contesting values, norms, interests and priorities are made compatible, less-conflicting to each other. The public policy documents not only spells out the policy goals but also outlines the means and channels through which they are to be achieved. In every society, various sectoral development policies are interconnected and interdependent on each other, for instance, the success of health policy largely depends on how population policy is implemented or vis-à-vis. Therefore, the achievement of broad goals for a country, e.g. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), depends on the degree of convergence and congruence of goals, values, norms, aspirations and interests which are outlined in different independent policies. In other words, the level of achievement of developmental goals for a country could partly be explained by the degree of convergence and congruence of values and norms, which are referred here as institutional linkages.

Taking this view into account, this paper intends to explore the variation of institutional linkages between and among MDGs, Poverty Reduction Strategies, National Health Policy 2000, National Population Policy 2000 and recent Annual Development Plans of Bangladesh. Using government data, the paper reveals that the intra-policy and inter-policy institutional linkages are very poor. However, high institutional linkages are observed in those cases where policies have been found to be successful. This paper also reports a set of values, norms and practices that are divergent and incongruent to each other for which further review and readdress is needed. Data has been

collected from three sources: the content analysis of policy documents, Bangladesh Demographic and Health Surveys (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics) and interview of key actors.

Moreover, the new institutionalists perceive institutions as actors, political actors that not only respond to external changes but also tend to dominate their environment. Neo-institutionalist theories of governance allow us to see institutions as clusters of factors explaining changes in policy outcomes, state society exchange processes and government capabilities (Pierre, Jon Models of Urban Governance: The Institutional Dimension of Urban Politics, Urban Affairs Review, Vol. 34, No. 3 January 1999; Rhodes 1997).