

Director General's Report on the Activities of CIRDAP

At the outset, I extend hearty welcome to all the Distinguished Members of the Executive Committee and observers from several organizations in this important meeting. I would also take this opportunity to convey my gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh to host the meeting at this historic city of Dhaka.

After three months of my joining in CIRDAP in September 2004, we had prepared a new vision paper which underscored the need for a 'fresh look' to CIRDAP. The vision paper was discussed and endorsed by the Technical Committee (TC- 20) in Colombo, Sri Lanka and suggested developing concrete policy proposals for the consideration of the CIRDAP policy bodies. Based on the guidelines of the TC- 20 a new strategic framework was adopted by the Twenty -Fifth Executive Committee (EC- 25) and Fifteenth Governing Council (GC-15) meetings, held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2005.

The new strategic framework underscored the unique organizational structure of CIRDAP, with three policy bodies represented by the top officials and policy makers of rural development in CIRDAP Member Countries, (CMCs) which can be developed as regional platform for policy dialogue on various experiences of rural development (RD) and poverty alleviation (PA) initiatives based on country specific needs and priorities. Since then, three regional policy dialogues and one Ministerial Retreat were organized, which provided opportunities to the policy planners of CIRDAP Member Countries (CMCs) to discuss each other's experiences about RD and PA processes and learn valuable lessons. The policy dialogues were well appreciated by CMCs and recommended to be a continuous feature of the EC/GC meetings of CIRDAP.

The Sixteenth Governing Council (GC- 16) meeting in Manila, in May 2007 felt that there have been sea changes in RD and PA policies of CMCs from the contemporary national and international policy context then that of the establishment of CIRDAP in 1979. Therefore CIRDAP may require repositioning itself through new approaches and dimensions of RD and PA to remain contextual and relevant to CMCs as well as to develop new partnerships with the relevant stakeholders at national, regional and international levels. Accordingly, GC- 16 decided to review the RD and PA policies and programs in CIRDAP Member Countries, evaluate CIRDAP from its institutional and strategic perspectives and hold Second Ministerial Meeting to reaffirm the new mandate

to CIRDAP. The Government of Japan provided the funding support for all these activities. Accordingly, the GC 16 constituted a CIRDAP Evaluation Committee (CEC) with representatives from India, Iran, Malaysia, Japan and CIRDAP Secretariat. The draft Evaluation Report was discussed during the Third Policy Dialogue in Langkawi Malaysia in March 2009, which was finalized based on the comments from CMCs.

After 20 years, we are organizing the Second Ministerial Meeting, which is expected to participate by over 25 countries of Asia-Pacific Region and over 45 donor agencies working for RD and PA. Therefore, it should be organized in a professional manner that should establish a milestone in the RD and PA policies and programs. One of the most important aspects of organizing the meeting will be ensuring participation from all countries/agencies at the highest level. Then only, the Meeting can resolve important emerging issues. Hence, it was agreed in the Special GC meeting in New Delhi in 2008 that all countries will participate at the highest level.

With this small background, I would like to organize this report into two parts. Part 1 will give a summary of the activities of the past two years, while Part 2 gives synopsis of some of the important policy proposals which will be discussed during EC/GC meetings and the Second Ministerial deliberations.

1. Part 1: Progress of CIRDAP 2008-09

The following table summarizes the activities of CIRDAP over the past two years:

Years	Research	Training	Pilot Project	Information & Communication	SOCSEA	Total
2008	3	15	1	2		21
2009	5	8	4	3		20
Total	8	23	5	5		41

1.1. Training Division: The Division has implemented several capacity building activities of RD functionaries.

Regional Programmes

Several regional programmes were organised in different member countries in collaboration with various sponsoring agencies. The Government of India has been

kind enough in sponsoring several thematic regional training programmes to help CIRDAP Member Countries (CMCs) to exchange and learn from each others experiences. More so, it was an initiative and support of capacity building efforts of CMCs through knowledge dissemination, sharing of expertise/experiences in rural development efforts, to gain deep insights and hands on experience on ground realities and innovative and best practices in rural development initiatives of member countries. Similarly, the Government of Pakistan has sponsored two regional programmes, out of which one has been completed and another will be organised in near future.

Training-cum-Exposure Visit

A few training-cum-exposure visits were organised in Bangladesh which were sponsored by the Bankers Institute of Rural Development (BIRD), India; National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), India to study microfinance and rural livelihood. Bangladesh is the hub of microfinance and such exposure has given better understanding of the subject and provided opportunity to discuss critical issues with all stakeholders. While expanding its canvas, the Training Division developed networking with other International Organisations. One exposure visit was sponsored by Integrated Protected Area Management Project (IPAC) of US AID to visit to Nepal covering natural resources development that includes land, water and forest.

Commonwealth Secretariat – CIRDAP Collaborative Programme

A high level regional workshop on “Participatory Techniques for Planning and Management of Rural Development Projects” was organised at Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development & Municipal Administration (AHK NCRD & MA), Islamabad, Pakistan, which was attended by 46 participants and resource persons from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Iran, Lao PDR, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. The workshop was focusing on participatory approaches in planning and management of rural development programme with particular reference to involvement of grassroots level local government institutions.

1.2 Research division: The Sixteenth Governing Council (GC-16) meeting in Manila, in May 2007 felt that there have been sea changes from the contemporary national and international policy context, since CIRDAP was established in 1979. Therefore CIRDAP may require repositioning itself through new approaches and dimensions of Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation (RD & PA) to remain contextual and relevant to the CMCs as well as develop new partnerships with the relevant stakeholders at national, regional and international levels. Accordingly, it decided to review the RD

policies and programs in CIRDAP Member Countries; evaluate CIRDAP from its institutional and strategic perspectives; and hold Second Ministerial Meeting in 2009 to reaffirm the new mandate to CIRDAP. Accordingly, the Research Division coordinated the country level assessment of RD policies and programs. Similarly, the Research Division facilitated the CIRDAP Evaluation Committee (CEC) to evaluate CIRDAP.

In collaboration with IFAD, a research study on Access to Land and other Natural Resources by the Rural Poor has been conducted. The aim of the study is to identify issues which determine improved access to land and other natural resources by the rural poor people, particularly women and indigenous groups in four Asian countries namely, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines. As of September 2009, three reports have been received from the country researchers of Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines. All these reports have been finalized based on the comments/ feedback received from the country workshops, organized during the period September to November 2008 and the concerned experts. CIRDAP also organized a regional consultation in July 2009 to discuss and formulate policy issues for the Second Ministerial Meeting. The SOCSEA is trying to get the report including holding of the National Workshop.

CIRDAP organized the third Regional Policy Dialogue on the Success of Malaysia in Rural Transformation in collaboration with the Government of Malaysia from 27 to 30 April 2009 in Langkawi, Malaysia. All CMCs participated, in which 8 CMCs participated at the ministerial level. Seven presentations were made on various dimensions of RD policies and programs of Malaysia. It was received very well.

As decided in the Special GC meeting held in India in 2008, the Rural Development Report -2009, has been prepared under the title “Changing Rural Livelihoods in CIRDAP Member Countries: Constraints and Opportunities”. The findings of the report are expected to provide basis for policy papers to be presented during the policy dialogue. The Report is under printing and expected to be distributed during the meeting

1.3 Pilot Project Division: The Pilot Project Division conducted the following projects during the period:

Strengthening Capacities of the Organizations of the Poor: Experiences in Asia (SCOPE) funded by IFAD, was conducted in collaboration with ANGOC, in five Asian countries namely, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Mongolia and the Philippines. The

main objective of the project is to increase the capacity of IFAD and its partners to design and implement CBO development actions and promote up-scaling and policy linkages of CBOs through their clusters and federations. The main findings of the Project were:

- There is a need for an enabling policy environment and legal framework for Rural Poor Organization (RPOs),
- Support mechanisms that will continue the support to RPOs when projects end are necessary to ensure RPO sustainability; and
- Networking self-help groups and federations to address common cause and other issues of RPOs, and for lobbying and advocacy.

Coordination of Good Practices of Four Integrated Rural Development Projects of Bangladesh being Implemented under the Ministry of LGRD&C.

Coordination of four selected IRD projects (viz, SLGDFP, LDCCP, PRDP and CVDP) of Bangladesh based on the converging elements among them was experimented. It was funded by JICA. The main findings were:

- Coordination among IRD projects would enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the programs.
- The projects would still keep their separate entity of their own while benefiting from successful elements from other projects.

Health Care Programme for Rural Areas in Bangladesh

Since Action Research Division has not implemented any projects on health issue, it has decided to implement a project in three phases as follow:

(a) Health Check up for selective rural Poor School Children

Project was conducted as Action Research in 3 Primary Schools in remote villages in connection with Health and Milk Teeth Check up of 700 of students to prepare a proposal for the Government of Bangladesh.

(b) Equip selected Rural School Children of Bangladesh with the ‘Hygiene Care Pack’

Based on the Health check up programme, Action Research Division found out most of the diseases resulting from unhygienic practices and accordingly, ‘1000 hygiene care packs’ containing basic items with pictorial brochure in local language were distributed to schools in the remote rurals.

(c) TV Programme on Health care of Rural School Children: Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WSH) – Experience Dissemination in the Light of Islam, between I.R. Iran and Bangladesh.

As TV can reach and make impact in remote rural areas easily, the Action Research Division is preparing TV programme on Health Care. All these programmes are sponsored by Islamic Republic of Iran.

Workshop on ‘Reduction of Post-Harvest Agricultural Crops Losses’

As Post-Harvest Loss in agricultural crops is 30% – 50% in South and South-East Asian Countries, based on FAO reports, hungeriness is the main problem of Bangladesh. CIRDAP holds on a workshop addressing some methods to reduce the losses and some lessons from Iran to make consideration of stakeholders especially policy-makers and ‘doers’ how it is possible to decrease the losses ensuring the food security.

1.4 Information and Communication Division (ICD): CIRDAP is mandated to act as an information dissemination focal point for its member countries. As such, ICD regularly disseminates information on the research, action research, pilot projects, and training activities of CIRDAP via print, audio-visual and electronic media. Also, regional and cross-country data generated through regular and periodic publications are being disseminated through other information services like library and online services.

In the recent times, information technology (IT) has had a massive upsurge and has emerged as one of the most effective tools for intervention in rural development. CIRDAP recognises this and has been trying to improve its IT services by making stronger the IT base of the headquarters with India assistance, in order to render better and effective net working with member countries.

Several notable breakthrough and initiatives also were achieved in public communications. Its peer reviewed research journal, the Asia-Pacific Journal of Rural Development (APJORD) gained increased stature internationally. With academic websites such as CAB International, Oxford, UK and EBSCO Publishing, USA uploading full text on their websites, the number of good quality articles received from Asia and Africa has increased remarkably.

The services provided by the division are: (a) Information Generation, Management and Dissemination, (b) Library Services, (c) Information Technology Services, (d) Audio Visual Support Services, and (e) Public Relations/Advocacy.

1.5 Administration and Finance Division: Administration and Finance is a supporting division in nature for smooth operation of Centre's activities in general and for accelerating the professional activities in particular. Apart from regular administrative, financial, personnel, procurement and Protocol activities, the Division has been involved in:

- **Construction of an International Conference Centre (ICC):** As per the decision of GC- 16 in Manila in 2007, the Government of Bangladesh has provided nearly US\$ 2.11 Million to construct the International Conference Centre in CIRDAAP Campus. The building is designed and supervised by Public Works Department, which is expected to be completed before the meeting in January 2010. The Division is now in the process of developing management structure of ICC and equipping its cafeteria.
- **Amendment of CIRDAAP Agreement:** The EC-25 in 2005 authorized the Director General to appoint a Legal Expert for preparing a draft proposal on the amendments of the CIRDAAP Agreements and placing it before the next EC. As per decision, Dr. Kamal Hossain, the internationally renowned senior lawyer and constitutional expert was appointed for preparation of the draft proposal. The matter was discussed in the GC-16 (2007, Manila) and it was decided that the proposed evaluation committee will look into the matter and CIRDAAP will place it in the next EC and GC Meetings to be held in 2010. The Evaluation Committee has recommended the amendment to CIRDAAP agreement as proposed by the Legal Expert.

- **Updating of CIRDAP Operations Manual:** CIRDAP Operations Manual was approved in the Fifth Regular Meeting of CIRDAP Governing Council held during 17-19 December 1985 in Indonesia based on the contemporary issues and realities. During last three decades, new challenges and problems emerged which lead to introduction of new ideas and development approaches. Evaluation Committee has proposed a plenty of recommendation, which requires amendment, and enhancement of the Operations Manual in the changing context. In view of the above, it is proposed to authorize DG to appoint one consultant for updating of Operations Manual.

1.6 Planning and Resource Mobilization Unit (PRMU) : It was created in 1996 under the supervision of Deputy Director General (DDG) with an objective to convene, organize and coordinate policy body meetings. It was also expected to develop a functional planning system and an integrated M & E mechanism in CIRDAP.

It has not yet established as a full-fledged unit with independent functional status. It is currently headed by a professional designated as Special Officer. The PRMU, under the guidance of Director General, has been involved in organizing and coordinating all CIRDAP policy body meetings (TC/EC/GC/RPD/SMM). Comments, suggestions, recommendations and decisions of the meetings are also followed up timely and efficiently.

In order to make the unit more dynamic and functional, the Evaluation Committee has recommended to up grade the position of Special Officer and also to make provision for a professional and a Secretary. After filling up the position of DDG, the Unit can work more extensively.

1.7 Sub-Regional Office of CIRDAP in South East Asia (SOCSEA) Jakarta, Indonesia : The Sub-Regional Office, which was established in 1997 to link CIRDAP with East Asian and Pacific countries and generate resources and knowledge of rural development and poverty alleviation from successful experiences of Southeast Asian countries. It has played a key role in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation between the Non-Aligned Movement Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation (NAM-CSSTC) and implementing various regional programmes and projects. It has also been playing a very vital role in making liaison with CIRDAP and Non -CIRDAP countries in East Asia.

During the period under review, SOCSEA implemented three Regional Programmes and seven in-country programmes.

2. Part 2 : Forward looking strategy for CIRDAP:

As we all know that CIRDAP was established in 1979 with the consideration that the magnitude and nature of rural development policy packages, which are implemented under several ministries and departments for a longer time period, need professional services such as development of operational manuals, capacity building of the functionaries, monitoring the implementation process and reviewing and feed backing the achievements to the policy makers. Similarly, at the regional level, learning from the experiences of other countries and regional cooperation to address the mistakes/drawbacks was thought to help achieve better results. This was the concept of CIRDAP in which an effective networking between national level rural development institutions, what is called the CIRDAP Link Institutions and CIRDAP was designed.

In spite of the sea changes in the policy context at national, regional and international level, it appears that IRD approach is still relevant for rural development policies and reducing rural poverty, because the conventional theory that rapid economic growth as a conduit of reducing rural poverty does not seem to have worked. For example, the recent FAO report shows that the level of poverty in Asia-Pacific region has increased in 2007 despite the consistent economic growth in most countries. Poverty is concentrated in rural areas, particularly in the South Asian region. Several international reports suggest that the development efforts of the recent past have failed to address a number of important issues. The food insecurity is increasing, which is likely to be aggravated due to the effect of climate change. More labour force is going to be unemployed due to, among others, the declining job creation in the rural areas. The inequality of the distribution of resources, opportunities and prosperity is increasing. Similarly, it is also evident that the donors' efforts are not generating desired development results. Hence, the Paris Declaration 2005 has asked for ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability for development resources between donors and receiving ends.

Therefore the government must take a decisive action to implement rural development policies and programmes for better results. Several rural issues such as capacity building of local governments, access and management of natural resources, generation of productive employment, access of the poor to public services etc. need

more research. In this endeavour the donors should join hands with the government, based on the recommendations of Paris Declaration.

In this background of the Second Ministerial Meeting of Rural Development of the Asia-Pacific region is being organized with the call for “Working Together for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods”. We have thought that the Second Ministerial Meeting will be a watershed moment for the history of CIRDAP. What will be the outcome of the meeting? Will more countries join CIRDAP? Will CIRDAP be able to follow up the content and vision of the Dhaka Declaration? These are the pertinent questions. In this endeavour, we have put forward the following three specific proposals to make CIRDAP capable to fulfil its role.

2.1 Core Budget for regular activities of CIRDAP:

In the past years, the planning processes of CIRDAP have been more and more professional. The annual progress review and program formulation for the next year is made in the CIARPS (CIRDAP In-house Annual Review and Planning Seminar) where the current TC Chairperson also participates. The Technical Meeting (TC) discusses the projects, along with their own proposals, in more detail. Finally, the EC and GC meetings incorporate the projects in the Programme Works and Budget (PWB) of the next biennium. In spite of this rigorous exercise of planning, there is no guarantee that the projects will be undertaken, because there is no Core Budget of CIRDAP to implement the regular activities.

Hence, while preparing the programme and budget for the next biennium, it has been proposed in Agenda Item - 8 that the DG may be authorized to transfer 25% increase of the country contribution (as a general consensus made during the Third Policy Dialogue meeting in Lankawi, Malaysia in 2009) for the core activities of CIRDAP. Such arrangements would enhance the professional engagements and output of CIRDAP.

2.2 Operationalization of the recommendation of CEC: The Sixteenth Governing Council (GC -16) meeting in Manila, in May 2007, constituted a CIRDAP Evaluation Committee (CEC) to evaluate CIRDAP from its strategic and institutional perspectives. It was felt that there have been sea changes from the contemporary national and international policy context, since it was established in 1979. Therefore CIRDAP may require repositioning itself through new approaches and dimensions of Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation (RD & PA) to remain contextual and relevant to the CIRDAP Member Countries (CMCs) as well as develop new partnerships with the

relevant stakeholders at national, regional and international levels. The CEC prepared the report, based on the ToR, in which a deep analysis, constructive and candid observation and comprehensive package of reforms have been made for the improvement of CIRDAAP. In Agenda Item 11, these recommendations are proposed for operationalization. They include capacity building of CIRDAAP Secretariat for making powerful and energetic institutions that has competent, powerful and energetic staff resources; restructuring of CIRDAAP network to make consistent across the CMCs; capacity building of CIRDAAP Link Institutions for making them capable for providing professional services to RD and PA policies and programme; repositioning of CIRDAAP as a platform for regional cooperation; resources mobilization for professional services for RD and PA through policy priority; involving donors in the policy dialogue and capacity building of RD and PA using CIRDAAP and converging point; and developing strategic partnership with other regional organization for enhancing regional cooperation and synergising achievements.

These proposals need to be seen as package proposals, because they will help to achieve the larger goal of enhancing the capacity of the RD institutions of the government for better implementation of RD policies and programme and reducing poverty. Therefore, implementation of one aspect may not serve the purpose. I would only add here that time has come to take a decisive action for addressing institutional problems of rural development.

2.3. Expansion of CIRDAAP Membership: In the Conference of the Plenipotentiaries of the Establishment of CIRDAAP in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 29 July 1978, several other countries such as Republic of Korea and Papua New Guinea had also attended as government representatives and Australia, Bhutan, New Zealand and USA as observers. Similarly, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Kampuchea, Fiji, Japan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nauru, Samoa, Singapore and Tonga were also mentioned in Annex 1 of CIRDAAP Agreement. But subsequently they did not join CIRDAAP. Now some of the countries like Japan, Australia and New Zealand are major Asian donors having priority programme and interest on poverty alleviation and rural development. Similarly countries like China and RoK have successful experience on the transformation of rural economy. Their involvement in CIRDAAP will highly enrich its capacity and resources.

Accordingly, the Special Governing Council in New Delhi decided to officially invite these countries to attend the Ministerial meeting in 2009 and join CIRDAAP as member.

It has also decided to follow up through the diplomatic channels of CMCs before the Ministerial meeting in 2009. The Government of Bangladesh organized a briefing session to the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of all countries invited in the meeting on 21 July 2009 where the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Local Government and Cooperatives requested to consider for joining CIRDAP and participating in the Second Ministerial Meeting at the highest level. I do hope that other CMCs will also request the same to all countries through their diplomatic channel.

2.4 Resource mobilization: The CEC Report has noted that CIRDAP is facing serious financial constraint due to two major reasons. One is the continued and growing budget deficit with CMC contributions falling short of actual administrative and other expenditures incurred by the Centre since 1994-1995. Second, there has been a steady decline in the availability of donor funding of projects, especially since 2000 with sudden withdrawal of funding by the Government of Japan. While the Centre had so long been trying to meet the recurring fund shortage by relying on the miscellaneous incomes derived from the internal sources, freezing new hiring and resorting to other cost-saving measures, these are adversely affecting the overall programme of work in terms of quantity, quality and efficiency. Therefore the challenge is to create a stable and strong long-term financial base through mobilizing resources from various potential sources.

We have analyzed the issue of resources mobilisation in the broader framework of capacity building of RD institutions at national and regional levels. At the national level there is a need for capacity building of CLIs for its research and training activities as well as providing professional services to RD and PA programme activities. Similarly, more resources would be required for capacity building of local governments, in awareness raising, training and exposure visits. At the regional level, the professional capacity of CIRDAP needs to be enhanced for capacity building of the national-level institutions. Similarly, in order to provide technical inputs to the regional dialogues of the policy makers, more research needs to be done on several emerging issues. It should also collate information and collaborate with other national and international agencies to make itself a regional-level repository of current knowledge on RD and PA.

Accordingly, we have proposed that CMCs may take a bold decision for allocating at least 2% of the RD budget outlay for capacity building and professional services to programmes and capacity building of institutions. Similarly the donors may also be encouraged to allocate resources in the same manner for providing support, among

others, in HRD, exposure visits, procuring international expertise etc., where foreign currency would be required.

Similarly, we have proposed that a donors' meeting may be organized sometimes in 2010 for working out a joint mechanism for strengthening the national level RD institutions to generate comprehensive knowledge and provide effective services to RD policies and programmes. At the regional level, CIRDAP could be an appropriate forum to discuss policy issues on RD and PA with CMCs. The three policy bodies: Technical Committee (TC), Executive Committee (EC) and Governing Council (GC) representing from professional to policy making levels from CMCs, could be developed as convergence points of donors and partner countries for regional level policy dialogue on RD and PA policies and emerging issues.

Looking ahead:

By now CIRDAP has made its presence felt in the Asia- Pacific Region. Several good works of CIRDAP have been well appreciated by CMCs. The Government of Bangladesh has provided a generous support to develop its infrastructure. The Government of India has agreed to establish an ICT Centre in the CIRDAP International Conference Centre.

I think, time has come to take advantage of this institutional capital. The CEC has given enough idea how to go forward. I sincerely hope that CMCs would take these ideas positively and make decisive actions in the Second Ministerial Meeting.