

# Social Capital<sup>1</sup> of Community Organizations<sup>2</sup> for Enhancing Social Protection<sup>3</sup> : Experiences of Japan and Bangladesh

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**Abstract :** *Globally, the governments dedicate a significant portion of their national budgets to social protection, though a good number of vulnerable people remain excluded from the benefits of these programmes. Such types of exclusion errors are not infrequent in Bangladesh as well. However, these victims of exclusion errors somehow manage to get support from the social capital of community organizations. Drawing on the examples of the Japanese neighbourhood organizations (NHA), the paper endeavours to explore the possibility of tapping the potential of the age-old traditional community organizations of Bangladesh for more systematic protection of the poor and vulnerable people of the society.*

*The study reveals that the community organizations could have better served the vulnerable groups of the society when these organizations would be given formal status by associating them with local government offices following the model of Neighbourhood Associations (NHA) of Japan. These organizations may also be given some lump grants during disasters to support their members, complementing the social protection of the poor at the grassroots level. Thus, the social capital of community organizations may be better employed for strengthening the overall social protection system of Bangladesh.*

## Introduction

Bangladesh invests more than one-sixth of its national budget in social protection programmes covering around six crore people.

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<sup>1</sup> Social capital is social relationships like trust, norms and networks that create an environment of cooperation within a community and beyond.

<sup>2</sup> A community organization is a process by which a community identifies needs or objectives, takes actions, and thereby develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices within a community.

<sup>3</sup> Social protection refers to a specific set of actions to address the vulnerability of people's life through social insurance, social assistance, and inclusion efforts.

Still, a large segment of the vulnerable population remains outside the purview of any social security programmes. Such deprivation is usually called exclusion errors which are common in many countries across the world. Nevertheless, evidence shows that these victims of exclusion errors may not necessarily remain completely unassisted as they manage to receive support from the social capital of community organizations as is argued by Amornsiriphong and Piemyat (2011) and Dercon and Krishnan (2003). Therefore, the social capital of the community organizations is regarded as a strong source of informal social protection all over the world.

It is hypothesized that the social capital of community organizations could be better utilized for the social protection of deprived people if these organizations are backed up by government organizations. Therefore, the paper endeavours to explore the possibility of tapping the potential of the age-old traditional community organizations like '*samaj*' or '*millat*' for more systematic protection of the poor and vulnerable people of the society. The article draws from the good examples of the Japanese examples of community organizations and provides recommendations for strengthening informal social protection in Bangladesh.

## **Objectives**

The mere existence of social capital promoted by local elites may not be sufficient to compensate social protection needs of the deprived people. Therefore, the main objectives of this paper are (1) to analyse the importance of the social capital of community organizations for social protection, (2) to examine how the support from and formal linkage with the local government institutes enhances the efficacy of the community organizations in complementing social protection and (3) to assess the feasibility of Japanese NHAs model in Bangladesh for complementing social protection.

In Japan, the traditional community organizations, known as NHAs build social capital through several of their activities. The social capital built by these age-old community organizations was found to have positive effects on social protection. To what extent the social capital of these organizations is conducive to the social protection of Bangladesh is the main focus of the study.

## **Significance**

Community organizations are very important entities for any society and their roles in building social capital and thereby bolstering the social protection needs of the people who are excluded from any formal social protection. Though the government has taken up a number of measures like using the proxy means test method to identify potential beneficiaries. The government is also utilizing a grievance mechanism to find out the deprived candidates. Despite all the efforts there remain people outside social protection. However, there is hardly any study on the issue of utilizing the social capital of community organizations for the social protection of the people. The study may contribute to formulating policies for traditional community organizations for strengthening social protection in Bangladesh.

## **Background Information**

Throughout Japan, many community organizations have various names such as Jichikai (自治会), Chounaikai (町内会) and Choukai (町会). In English, these organizations are commonly called neighbourhood associations (NHAs). These organizations consist of people living in a particular neighbourhood and membership in these organizations is voluntary. Members pay a certain amount of money as membership fees. Their activities include the celebration of festivals, scheduling evacuation drills in preparation for natural disasters and overall social welfare.

The policymakers of the American Occupation identified the NHAs as vital organizations to ensure food supply and social support to the people during the second world war. Japan could sustain the strain of war due to the support from the social capital of the NHAs. Therefore, in the social, political, and economic turmoil immediately following the war's end, the authorities on the scene saw a continuing need for NHA as a means of maintaining order (Bestor, 1989). Some scholars view the NHAs as the subordinate organizations of the local governments. So, there is no denying the fact that these NHAs have been not only a part of the Japanese social structure but also an indispensable component of the Japanese social welfare.

According to Pekkanen (2006), these community organizations are considered strong factors for building social capital in Japan. Recently, the importance of these organizations is being recognized a new, though these organizations are still facing a lot of challenges. Therefore, Yokomichi (2009) comments, “the position with regard to communities in the form of Neighborhood Associations and the like is that their importance has come to be newly recognized, but the present situation is not in any way one that conveys relief and reassurance”.

The counterpart of the Japanese NHAs in Bangladesh might be found in the traditional community organizations in the village. These organizations are called Samaj (Society) which are significant voluntary organizations in the village consisting of a number of households. The functions of Samaj include organizing socio-religious rituals in the locality concerned. An informal council of samaj locally settles village disputes and may also arrange night watches to prevent local crime. It also plays a vital role in disaster management at the local level.

It is interesting to note that both the Japanese NHAs and the community organizations of Bangladesh, such as Samaj or Village Government possess some features in common, though their contribution to the social protection of the respective countries may not be identical. Therefore, it is worthwhile to make a comparative analysis of the said organizations of both countries and to evaluate their social capital contributing to social protection.

In Japan, the neighbourhood associations are working in partnership with the local governments to deliver particular services to their members in the form of circulating information, management of garbage and arranging some social programmes and so on. The government of Japan had from time to time given guidelines in different forms to streamline the functions of the autonomous neighbourhood associations, “90 per cent of them were set up through government encouragement” (Pekkanen, 2004). It is argued that these traditional community organizations proved so efficient in promoting social protection with particular support and oversight from the government. The social capital of community organizations effectively supplemented social protection as these organizations are

formally linked with government organizations. Therefore, following the examples of Japanese community organizations the paper explores the probability of providing government supports in fostering the traditional village communities or Samaj for strengthening social protection in Bangladesh by utilizing their vibrant social capital resources.

### **Definition of Important Technical Terms**

Social Protection it needs to be clarified that social protection is not confined to simply providing cash support or relief. The social empowerment of the marginalized group, mental support for the old and disabled and supports in emergency or disaster are also within the scope of social protection. Support in the identification of the deserving candidates for social protection and delivery of the benefits are also part of social protection. This will be clarified from the definition of social protection below:

The NSSS and the European Report on Development define Social Protection as ‘A specific set of actions to address the vulnerability of people’s lives through social insurance, offering protection against risk and adversity throughout life; through social assistance, offering payments and in-kind transfers to support and enable the poor; and through inclusion efforts that enhance the capability of the marginalized to access social insurance and assistance.

The remarkable difference in socioeconomic status and social security spending of Bangladesh and Japan may raise the question as to the aptness of comparing the community organizations of these two countries. Social protection is not confined to the delivery of cash and kind only, it is also concerned with social inclusion and empowerment of the people. Therefore, there is still scope for comparing the social protection of these two countries. Moreover, the economic conditions of Japan were similar to that of Bangladesh only a few years Back.

Social protection is of two types one is formal and the other is informal. (Devereux and Getu 2013; Amdissa 2013) have differentiated the formal and informal social protection by saying that the formal social protection is guided by economic and social principles while the

informal social protection is guided by religious and cultural principles, as well as community and family values. Once again the comparison between Japan and Bangladesh is very significant when informal social protection is concerned.

## **Social Capital**

The idea of social capital can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville in the 19th century, who was influenced by the great civic spirit of America. According to Putnam (2000), the term social capital was first used by Lyda J. Hanifan (1916), an educationalist and a state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia in the USA. Hanifan (1916) defined social capital as “those intangible substances that count for most in the daily lives of people; namely, goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit” (Hanifan, 1916).

The concept of social capital has recently gained much popularity worldwide mainly through the works of Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993). James Coleman defined social capital by saying “it is not a single entity but a variety of different entities that consist of some aspect of the social structure that facilitates certain action of actors – the person or corporate actors within that structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman, 1988, p.98).

The World Bank defines social capital as “the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions underpinning a society—it is the glue that holds them together” (World Bank, 2001).

In consideration of various definitions, social capital may be defined as social relationships like trust, norms and networks that create an environment of mutual cooperation within a community, facilitating inter-community communication as well as the closer linkage between communities and the government or local government.

## **Social Protection:**

A wider definition of social protection is, as mentioned in Hasan (2019) 'a set of formal and informal interventions that aim to reduce social and economic risks, vulnerabilities and deprivations for all people and facilitate equitable growth'.

The NSSS and the European Report on Development on Social Protection define social protection as 'a specific set of actions to address the vulnerability of people's lives through social insurance, offering protection against risk and adversity throughout life; through social assistance, offering payments and in-kind transfers to support and enable the poor; and through inclusion efforts that enhance the capability of the marginalized to access social insurance and assistance'(GED, 2015).

The Finance Division follows an overall policy regarding a programme as that of social protection when that falls under social allowances for the poor, employment generation, food security and human development initiatives. The Finance Division publishes a list of programmes as those of social protection each fiscal year

## **Community**

According to Cohen community involves two related suggestions the members of a group have something in common with each other; and the thing held in common distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other possible groups (Cohen, 1985, p. 12).

After Willmott (1986), Lee and Newby (1983) community can be explored in the three ways like a place, interest and communion. First of all, the community can be seen as related to some place or territory where people have something in common. It can be named in another way of naming this is as 'locality'. Secondly, people share a common characteristic other than a place. They are linked together by factors such as religious belief, occupation or ethnic origin. Thirdly, community refers to the sense of attachment to a place, group or idea. There is, of course, a strong possibility that these different ways of approaching community will also overlap in particular instances. Place and interest communities may well coincide.

Blaumer (1988) described it 'as a densely woven world of kin, neighbours, friends and co-workers, highly localized and strongly caring within the confines of quite tightly defined relationships'.

Therefore, the term community has been regarded as a small group of kins, neighbours, and friends residing in a particular area involving some social interactions and social bonds.

### **Community Organizations**

Harper & Row, (1967) defines a community organization as a process by which a community identifies needs or objectives, takes actions, and thereby develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices within a community.

### **Samaj in Bangladesh**

The villages of Bangladesh have shown a tendency toward self-reliance since ancient times. "The authority of the central government seldom extended to the remote villages of the sub-continent. Thus, it is said that village self-government in the sub-continent is as old as the villages themselves (Siddiqui, 1994, p.24). It is samaj which had been playing a very important role in the social protection of the village communities. The traditional 'samaj' or village committee of Bangladesh may be identified as the counterpart of the Japanese traditional community organizations, NHAs. Before making doing comparative analysis a brief description of samaj is given below:

(Rahim & Schwarz, 1998), have given a brief description of the Samaj System in Bangladesh. The basic social unit in a village is the family (paribar), generally consisting of a complete or incomplete patrilineally extended household (chula) and residing in a homestead (bari). The individual nuclear family often is submerged in the larger unit and might be known as the house (ghar). Above the bari level, patrilineal kin ties are linked into sequentially larger groups based on real, fictional, or assumed relationships.

A significant unit larger than that of close kin is the voluntary religious and mutual benefit association known as the samaj or society. Among

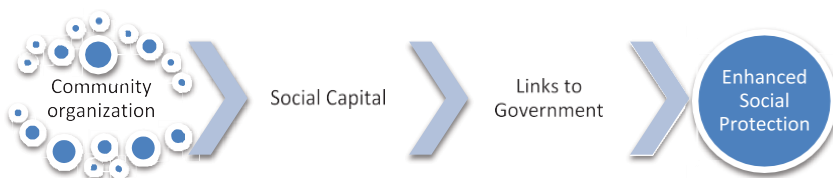
the functions of a samaj might be the maintenance of religious centres. An informal council of samaj elders settles village disputes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The role of social capital is very important as has been suggested by Putnam “The social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development, as well as for effective government” (Putnam 1993b, p.37). In this respect the comments of Coleman (1993) are relevant; he comments that “social capital can improve the efficiency of other forms of capital—such as economic capital, human capital, and environmental capital—by reducing transaction costs. In other words, social capital may make a significant contribution to enhancing social protection by way of enhancing its efficiency.

However, social capital may not bring good results for society if it lacks formal relations with the government. Social capital can only enhance the capacity of governmental institutions and economic growth where it promotes social cohesion, a goal that is realized in a “society in which people work toward common goals and in which diversity is recognized but does not lapse into conflict” (Robinson, 1997, p.2). However, communities, where social ties between members are strong, do not always enhance social cohesion. They may be so hostile to outsiders that they may instigate civil, racial or sectarian conflict or, as tends to be the case with gangs, they may promote illegal or morally reprehensible behaviour. Therefore, cohesion from the perspective of the entire territory is crucial for the social capital to work for the well-being of the society.

One of the important components of social capital is informal norms which “depend on a dense and relatively closed social structure that has continuity over time” (Coleman, 1993, p.9). Therefore, based upon the above-mentioned literature review and theoretical framework the main arguments of this article may be expressed in the following diagram:



The above diagram shows how the community organizations in cooperation with the local governments can play an important role to strengthen and ensure social protection for the marginalized people. The characteristics of social capital, autonomy, social cohesion and the basis in the tradition are the enabling factors for the community organizations to social protection.

in rural Bangladesh, informal social protection is carried out through patron-client relations, in which better-off patrons provide “help” for their poorer clients, but in doing so are in a structural position of power over them.’ ( Gardner and Ahmed 2009). Therefore, the social protection arising from better-offs may be associated with exploitation or potential subordination of the beneficiaries. However, the social capital from the organizational set-ups of community organizations may equally ensure food security and social empowerment.

### **Social Protection in Japan and Bangladesh**

The legal basis of social protection in both Bangladesh and Japan is their constitutional provisions, while both the countries have a number of Acts of Parliaments for the implementation of different types of social protection. Japan gets its mandate for social protection from the Japanese Constitutional Law (1947) which states that all Japanese people have the right to enjoy the minimum standard of living and decent life. On the other hand, the constitution of Bangladesh of 1972 has the provision for social protection in Article, 15. Japan initiated its universal social protection in 1950, but Bangladesh has recently initiated the process of formulating the lifecycle-based social security system which will be targetted universal for the poor and the vulnerable.

Japan has a universal child benefit programme and disability benefits programme. Bangladesh has been progressing towards the introduction of child benefits scheme to cover half of the children

below 5 years of age. The universal social benefits for persons with disability has been recently introduced in Bangladesh.

While the Japanese social security system is broadly characterized by its employee pension, social insurance and medical insurance, the Bangladesh system is still dominated by social assistance. However, Bangladesh has just taken measures for introducing a voluntary private pension which is almost ready to launch. The social insurance system in Bangladesh is another important agenda in its long-term plans as stipulated in the NSSS.

Though the Japanese social security system is by far stronger than that of In Bangladesh, still, there are some aspects of social protection which are comparable to Bangladesh. These include social protection, especially food security during a disaster situation, the social empowerment of women, and inclusiveness. Community organizations played vital roles in social protection during the wartime disaster in Japan. Therefore, as far as social security in times of calamities and the empowerment of the disadvantaged groups are concerned, there is still scope for comparison between Bangladesh and Japan.

### **Analysis and Findings**

The NHAs have inherent social capital contributing to the social protection of the vulnerable. It is also shown above that the corresponding organizations at the community level in Bangladesh have some characteristics in common to those of Japanese NHAs, though a lot of dissimilarities do also exist.

Now the question is whether the NHAs possess any characteristics to create an environment of mutual trust and friendship among the members of a community. However, only mutual trust and social norms within the members of a particular community are not enough for social cohesion; the community should have bridging relations with external communities. Moreover, it should also be ascertained that these communities are somehow connected with the government, as any social capital without linkage to the government may not effectively enhance the cause of social protection.

Nakata (2003) pointed out that NHAs play a vital role in creating relations between the neighbours and solving different social problems through mutual cooperation. (Nakata 2003). Thus the NHAs address the problems of social exclusion and marginalization by facilitating their participation in the community. The members, including the women and children, find a forum to express their opinions.

The NHAs are famous for their role in ensuring food security in disaster-torn Japan, especially during World War II when food was scarce. These organizations played critical roles in distributing whatever food was available. These organizations were the backbones of food supply and food security. During any disaster, the NHAs support the government in the rescue operation and food supply. These community associations hold evacuation drills in preparation for natural disasters. Therefore, it is evident that the NHAs have very strong roles in fostering social protection through social capital as well as linking with government organizations.

The traditional Samaj system in Bangladesh is also famous for its social capital and social protection. However, they lack formal linkage with government or local government organizations. In absence of such links, they cannot build up capacity for social protection to the level of the NHAs of Japan. Though it enhances social cohesion among the members of the same religion or casts in different areas, its role in creating social cohesion among people of different religions or casts is not strong.

The Samaj has closer similarities with the Japanese NHA. So the government of Bangladesh may encourage the activities of community organizations that will fulfil most of the features of social capital. To reform the existing organizations fulfilling most of the features of effective social capital is really a critical task. But as the ready reference is there in the NHA of Japan, the feasibility of replicating the Japanese system can be explored.

### **Recommendations**

The government of Japan is making efforts not only to promote NHAs but also to reform and readjust them consistent with the

changing situations. Bangladesh also recognizes that community-level organizations should be reformed and revitalized, and accordingly has made several efforts to establish some type of community organization in the form of village government. But those efforts did not bring ultimate success because of some technical problems. Therefore, it is reasoned that a renewed model of community organization in the combined form of community organizations like *samaj* in Bangladesh can play a vital role in social protection.

Ikawa (2003) has proposed to elevate the community organizations at the neighbourhood level to a position from which they can even formulate policies for the issues concerning them. However, Bangladesh, with its experience of difficulties in implementing village government may not be so optimistic. Therefore, it would be enough for Bangladesh if it could replicate some of the characteristics of the NHAs in Japan at the community level.

Therefore, drawing on the experience of Japanese NHAs it is recommended that the *samaj* continues its existence generation after generation without having any formal registration with any government or local government organizations. In other words, the community organizations in Bangladesh are created and operated only in the minds of their members. But in Japan, there is a system of registering the NHAs with the municipal governments. By such registration, an NHA gets formal recognition and it becomes possible for the local government to communicate with the NHA. Therefore, following the model of NHA, a system of maintaining a register to enrol the community organization may be introduced in the basic tier of the local government of Bangladesh. But such registration should not be made obligatory because this may give rise to debate as to legal justification. Therefore, it should be the choice of the community leaders to get their organization registered or not.

The local community organizations may also be encouraged to share information with the local government about their social protection initiatives. These organizations may also be given the responsibility to identify the most deserving candidates for social protection coverage. Thus the exclusion error might be minimized to some extent. These organizations may also be given lump sum grants during disasters or

natural calamities to support their members. The practice of providing such grants will not only complement the social protection of the poor at the grassroots level but also strengthen ties of these organizations with the government exploiting the best from the social capital of these organizations.

However, in Bangladesh, there is hardly any detailed research on the possibilities of utilizing the traditional community organizations for securing inclusive social protection programmes of the government as stipulated in the vision of the National Social Security Strategy of Bangladesh. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that extensive research may be undertaken by the government about these organizations concerning their potential roles in social protection.

### **Conclusion:**

The difference between Bangladesh and Japan in socioeconomic status will probably be the first and foremost impediment to convincing the policymakers of Bangladesh that the Japan NHA system can also be implemented in that country. And above all, several efforts to reform community organizations had not seen much success in the history of Bangladesh. However, as the gaps between the traditional samaj system of Bangladesh and the NHA of Japan are not so wide, one can be optimistic to fulfill these gaps and thereby establish grassroots organizations in the form of Japanese NHA. In this respect, it can be mentioned that the system of Japan has not been introduced after the economic growth. Rather this system had been in existence even during the worst economic crisis in this country. So the consideration of the economic difference between Japan and Bangladesh may not be logical to refute the possibility of replicating the Japanese system. So there is scope for further study to find out the method or procedures to inject some of the features of NHA into the traditional samaj of Bangladesh and create autonomous community organizations that will play a vital role in bolstering social security efforts of the government.

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