

Note from the Editor

For a while now we were having all kinds of troubles with the website at www.bangladeshsociology.org. Much of these are technical but some relate to negligence on the part of the service providers. As a result, we have finally decided to move to another site and rented space at a new site by the name www.bangladeshsociology.net and have started operating from that site and eventually plan move to the new site entirely, if there is not much of a technical problem. So, from now on *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* will be available from both the sites. We hope that we shall be able to offer hassle free service from there.

This issue in the meantime is ready with a mix of articles covering a wide range of subjects. We had originally decided to focus on women empowerment in this issue as we had received a number of articles on the subject but unfortunately some of the articles were not cleared by the reviewers. We are, thus, left with only a couple of articles on women empowerment and another on women entrepreneurship. The first of these is the controversy over women's empowerment in India. The authors Abdul Waheed, Afzal Sayeed and Sheikh Idrees Mujtaba begin from the premise that the Muslim women in India suffer from disempowerment, justification for which is ingrained in the religious and cultural norms and supported by the sharia. This, the authors argue, is neither scientific nor based on empirical evidence. On the contrary, they conclude that the disempowerment of Muslim women in India is rooted in the embedded poverty, high illiteracy, constantly increasing everyday insecurity and deprivation of welfare schemes.

The situation of women in Bangladesh is far removed from that of the Muslim women in India. Women, in Bangladesh, particularly the rural women, are often quoted as the very symbol of empowerment of women in a developing country. Located at the centre of microcredit lending programmes, the women have over the years earned much freedom of decision making as they control the purse. Sifat-E-Azam, Obaydullah Al Marzuk and Tabassum Amina in their "Social Struggle of 'Empowered' Women in Bangladesh" argue that this empowerment of illiterate and poor women in the rural setting is often and automatically transposed on the women with higher education and a well paying jobs, the professional women, as being even more empowered. Unfortunately, they argue from evidence gathered through a sample study of professional women, that these women are not as "empowered" as is commonly assumed. Indeed, while the husbands welcome the added income brought home by the women, the day to day struggle the professional women have to face and in particular the role they have to play at home is far from a liberating one and is still steeped in the old cultural expectations.

As opposed to the professional women reported in the above article, the women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh seem to be doing better in the three regions of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rangpur, reported by Munsura Rahmatullah and Farhana Zaman in their study of "Female Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Constraints, Motivation and Success". The women entrepreneurs, they show do face some constrains, including cultural ones, but by and large they receive major support from the family. Indeed, their success can actually be attributed to that support since much of the starting capital is often generated from the family. The Bangladeshi women in this study seem to fare better in certain ways compared to even their developed country counterparts especially in terms of their reasons for starting a business and succeeding in the venture. As opposed to the work-family conflicts suffered by the professional women in the Sifat-E-Azam, Al Marzuk and Amina study, these women entrepreneurs appear to be dealing better with their work family situation as well.

Entrepreneurship, However, takes on a very different meaning in the context of Zimbabwean economy as reported by Nhodo Lloyd in "Innovation and the Exercise of Agency in an Informalising Economy: An Analysis of the Lived Realities of Entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market in Masvingo Urban". The entrepreneurs of the Chimsuana Market, in the face of the impediments introduced by the "dollarization" and the subsequent "informalisation" of the economy, showed tremendous innovativeness and by using the agency, they not only successfully improvised under the given conditions but dictated the form and shape the structure can take. Lloyd "triangulated" the Stracturation thesis, the Strain theory and the Sustainable Livelihood Framework in order to explain and understand these issues.

In recent years I have been intrigued by the changing composition of the middle class in Bangladesh and its fast altering value structure. In a search for some clue I landed in a huge deluge of middle class research reported on the internet by, guess who, the economists! That very fact was more surprising for me than the content of the research papers. In any case, I suddenly came upon a monumental, albeit thoroughly confusing, effort by the economists, led by the ones from the World Bank, trying to "define" the middle class. The result of that sudden discovery is the lead article in this issue, "Beware, the Middle Class is being Hijacked by the World Bank!" by me. I was at a loss to define this set of economists of the World Bank variety, who, in spite of their total lack of understanding of the intricacies of "class analysis", indulged in one armed with complicated looking equations and household surveys deciphering "income data"! The reviewer of the article had, fortunately, suggested calling them the "free market economists" and I have left it at that. Hope the article will be a challenge to the sociologists to respond to these "free market economists" and prompt them to indulge in a fresh round of "class analysis" which seems to have gone out of fashion since the demise of the Soviet Union and the eventual burial of the Marxist thoughts.

The concerns raised in the above paper on the power of the World Bank, the IMF and other such world organizations to impose their "neo-liberal" policies on the poor developing countries is echoed in the article by Akeem Ayofe Akinwale on the "Labour Unions' Struggle with Neo-liberal Policies in Nigeria". Like the governments of many developing countries coming under the sway of the World Bank and similar agencies, Nigerian governments have from time to time had to adopt "neo-liberal" policies dictated by these agencies. Such decisions regularly create adverse conditions for the workers in every country and in the end prove to be detrimental to the very process of development. Labour Unions in Nigeria have regularly voiced their dissatisfaction over the adoption of such neo-liberal policies often through violent protests. Akinwale brings home these issues through a study of 440 respondents from two major Nigerian unions. He concludes that "there is urgent need for a substantial improvement in government's relations with labour unions to promote industrial peace and development in Nigeria".

Sociologists, indeed, scientists of all disciplines, frequently indulge in research, often commissioned to do so, on complicated subjects to assist policy makers and administrators to make informed decisions. The policy makers and administrators on their part quote findings of such research to drive home their decisions, particularly in matters of public debate. However, M.P Sebola seriously questions this very simple assumption in his "Research in South African Public Administration: The Paradox of Science, Politics and Economics of a Public Policy". Focusing his arguments on the HIV/AIDS debate of the former President Thabo Mbeki era in South Africa, he shows how governments, in spite their avowed aim of using informed knowledge, depend squarely on the economic and political expediency in their decision making. The article concludes that the "ruling governments only consider scientific recommendations that purports to support their preconceived ideologies before scientific studies are undertaken".

MP Sebola continues his search for responsible or good governance with JP Tsheola and M. Molopa in the paper on "Conventional Mass Media and Social Networks in a Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery?" raising the issue of dependable media. The researchers argue that though the media has "a strong realistic potential to promote the voices of the poor majority", the media continues to use the violent protests by the poor for service delivery in South Africa for "making headline, selling their products and running their businesses" rather than representing the voices of the poor. They conclude that "access to conventional media is highly variable and dependent upon economic and socio-political class. Whereas the "haves" access all forms of media, poor people may be limited to the social media networks, unless when conventional media seek to exploit their plight for suspicious, unspecified agendas".

Social media has become important for the wrong reasons also. Lufuno Nevondwe and Kola O. Odeku in their paper on "Protecting Children from Exposure to Pornography in South Africa" looks at the use of online media as it is being used to create and distribute child pornography in South Africa. The authors argue that "the lack of parental supervision on the use of cellphones by their children perpetuates child pornography." The paper examines the mandate of the Films and Publication Board which is fighting against child pornography. The paper also "looks at the rights of the children and freedom of expression and how these rights either complement or contradict each other and argues that the best interest of the child are of paramount importance in every matter." Finally the paper recommends legislations prohibiting child pornography in South Africa.

One of the novelties that Bangladesh has exported to the rest of the world in the recent times has been the concept of collateral free micro credit. The results, though largely debated, have impressed country after country to adopt the system in one form or the other. But here, in their study of another similar concept that of "rotating savings" Alimos Mushuku and Julliet Mayisa show that the practice of group saving and sharing the saving for assisting a single recipient or a single cause among the poor is an age old process that can be traced to as early as the 200 BC in China and demonstrate the evidence of its existence in many countries of Africa and elsewhere. In the study of "Unlocking the Door from Poverty through Rotating Savings and Credit Associations: A Study of Group Based Savings in Ward 14 of Gutu District, Zimbabwe" Mushuku and Maysia explain the workings of this system of collateral free informal banking system as is being currently practiced in Zimbabwe.

Thus, in the end, this issue has turned out to be very rich in diverse topics. We also have a very rich collection of authors from five different countries in Asia and Africa, some fresh, for the first time, young authors mixed with seasoned senior scholars. The issue this time deals much more in theoretical papers, that were missing for long in the journal, than papers reporting results from empirical research and we hope this will lead to future contribution of similar articles. In all, we have been able to retain our high standard of academic presentation in this issue as well. Hope the reader will find them as stimulating.