

Institution: University of Bath		
Unit of Assessment: C20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Extreme poverty eradication in Bangladesh		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period employed by submitting HEI
Joe Devine	Professor and Deputy Dean, previously Senior Lecturer and Lecturer	September 2000 - present
Geof Wood	Professor, Dean	September 1973 – September 2010
Mathilde Maitrot	Lecturer, previously Research Associate	April 2014 – January 2017, November 2019 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>From 2008 to 2016, Devine led colleagues at University of Bath in the research activities of a DFID funded programme in Bangladesh, <i>Economic Empowerment of the Extreme Poor</i> (EEP). The novelty of EEP was its exclusive focus on the welfare of the extreme poor, those unable to cover even the most essential needs from their own resources. This research, which has continued up to the present, has achieved three significant impacts during the REF 2021 period. First, it has demonstrably influenced the Bangladesh Government's policy towards the extreme poor. Second, his work with NGOs has resulted in changes in their strategies and priorities. Third, as a result of the first two impacts, over 1,000,000 people have directly benefitted from increased welfare resources and support and have moved out of extreme poverty.</p>		
2. Underpinning research [<i>Numbers in brackets refer to the References in Section 3</i>]		
<p>From 2008 to 2016, Department for International Development (DFID, now FCDO) funded a multi-million-pound programme in Bangladesh, <i>Economic Empowerment of the Extreme Poor</i> (EEP). This aimed at achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 1, 'end poverty in all its forms'. It was unique in focussing on the needs of the extreme poor (the poorest 5% of the population): those who fall below not only the national poverty line recognised by the Bangladesh Government, covering basic needs, but also the lower poverty line, covering only the most essential needs. The programme was implemented nationally through partner NGOs.</p> <p>The University of Bath already had a strong reputation for its poverty research in Bangladesh, evidenced in research grants, publications, policy engagement, and external awards. Devine helped design EPP, and with colleagues was then asked to lead the research arm of the programme. Drawing on primary data generated through life history methodologies, surveys, and case studies of NGO interventions, this research highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of fine-grained or localised analysis of extreme poverty [5] • the structural causes of extreme poverty, with very limited prospects for socio-economic mobility [1, chapter 3] 		

- the feminisation of extreme poverty [4]
- the impact of extreme poverty on maternal and child health, and infant nutrition [3]
- the limits of income and assets alone to support sustainable livelihoods of the extreme poor
- the prevalence among the extreme poor of additional life course conditions such as widowhood, chronic illness, disability and age [2, chapter 10]
- the prevalence of extreme poverty within religious and ethnic minorities [5]
- the concentration of extreme poverty in areas, which are geographically remote or more vulnerable to adverse climatic impacts [5].

The research is robust, in covering a wider range of datasets, descending to finer levels of granularity, and introducing new statistical analysis and interviews. It contests the recent World Bank view that the prevalence of extreme poverty in Bangladesh primarily reflects an east-west divide in the country, and points instead to local concentrations across the whole country (World Bank (2019) *Poverty Assessment Report. Facing Old and New Frontiers in Poverty Reduction*. Dhaka). It recommends a shift in policy discourse away from lifting (or 'graduating') people out of extreme poverty, to notions of their 'resilience' and the sustainability of their livelihoods [4, 5]. It has also exposed the fragility of the livelihood improvements gained by extreme poor people, because of local power structures that exploit them [2: chapters 4, 5].

In 2017, Devine and colleagues convened international experts on extreme poverty dynamics in Bangladesh, to produce a comprehensive empirical study of extreme poverty and to draw out policy-relevant recommendations [1]. This book was described as "indispensable for anyone engaged with the character and trajectories of extreme poverty and with the world's sustainable development goals" (Professor Barbara Harriss-White).

Much of this research has also involved 'co-production' with partner Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The 2018 publication [2] brings together lessons learned from the NGO interventions over the period of the EPP programme. The interaction with NGOs continued, with a workshop (in 2019) of leading NGOs in Bangladesh, led by Devine, and committed to a "new generation of poverty graduation thinking for Bangladesh" [6].

3. References to the research

1. Devine, J, Wood, G, Ali, Z & Alam, S 2017, *Extreme Poverty, Growth and Inequality in Bangladesh*. Practical Action Publishing, Rugby. ISBN 978-178-04-4947-0
2. Wood, G, Ali, Z, Maitrot, M & Devine, J 2018, *Aiding Resilience among the Extreme Poor in Bangladesh*. The University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka. ISBN 978-984-50-6240-4
3. Goto, R, Devine, J, Mascie-Taylor, CGN, Ormand, J & Abdul Jabber, J 2019, 'The impact of an income-generating activities programme on children and mothers' undernutrition in extreme poor rural Bangladeshi households', *Public Health Nutrition*, vol. 22, no. 16, pp. 3073-3082. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980019002015>
4. Maitrot, MRL, Wood, G & Devine, J 2020, 'Understanding resilience: lessons from lived experiences of extreme poverty in Bangladesh', *Development Policy Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12543>
5. Ali, Z., Ahmed, B., Maitrot, M., Devine, J., and GD. Wood (2021). *Extreme Poverty: The Challenges of Inclusion in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Turtle. ISBN 978-984-35-0066-3 [delayed]
6. Devine, J, Tasker, M & Self, V 2019, *A new generation of poverty graduation thinking for Bangladesh*. Save the Children. <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2019/new-generation-poverty-graduation-thinking-bangladesh>

Related Grants

2008-2015 - Devine, J. (PI), Wood, GD. (Co-I), Maitriot, M. (Research Officer). 'Economic Empowerment of the Poorest Challenge Fund', DFID. GBP643,000

2019 - Devine, J. (PI). Wood, GD. (Co-I) as Principal Investigator. 'New Policy Responses to Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh: What difference does it make?' (Research England, QR GCRF, GBP50,000)

2020 - Maitriot, M. (PI), Wood, GD. (Co-I), Devine, J. (Co-I). 'Analytical Support in Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh' (DFID – South Asian Research Hub. GBP100,000).

4. Details of the impact [*Letters in brackets refer to sources of evidence listed in Section 5*]

Since 2008, Devine's research into extreme poverty has had a demonstrable impact on strategic decisions of the Government of Bangladesh, donors and NGOs. This has fundamentally altered the landscape of poverty reduction strategies, resulting in direct benefits for the country's extreme poor.

1. National Policy Reform and Innovation

Throughout the EEP programme, Devine and the Bath team used their research findings to inform policy-focussed dissemination activities. The dissemination activities culminated in a 2015 workshop with the Planning Commission (the country's central planning organisation chaired by the Prime Minister), in which Devine and colleagues delivered the keynote presentation based on their EEP research [A]. The country's top policy decision-makers and the Minister of Planning attended. Devine assisted the Minister in drafting post-conference communications; and in his main address to the media, the Minister then publicly committed to introduce specific measures to tackle extreme poverty [B2].

Devine was then asked by the Planning Commission to write a proposal for the implementation of these measures, which was incorporated verbatim into the 7th Five Year Plan (FYP) [C]. This was the first time the Government had committed to specific measures for the extreme poor. It signalled a radical change in the policy landscape, with the responsibility for the welfare of the extreme poor shifting from a donor concern to one owned by the Bangladesh government and society. As a leading Bangladeshi policy analyst commented, '*This is a hugely important achievement: and one no-one could have imagined*' even two years before the conference [B1].

In 2020, the Government requested Devine and colleagues to write a report on extreme poverty for the 8th FYP (see Section 3 above, reference 5). This involved an extensive evidence-based update on the prevalence of extreme poverty; in the words of the British High Commission, this went well beyond "*the World Bank's report ... on the differences in poverty levels between the East and West sides of the country*" [D].

2. Influencing Strategies of Development Organisations

Much of Devine's research has focused on the rights and entitlements of poor people. In Bangladesh we observe a separation between poverty-focussed and rights-focussed programmes, evidenced in the way donors manage programmes, as well as how NGOs present themselves. Our research highlights the inseparability of the two when dealing with extreme poverty.

In 2016, Devine led an international team to review the strategy of Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), the largest human rights and governance NGO in Bangladesh. This led to MJF receiving a GBP48,000,000 grant from DFID (FCDO). Devine's role in this is recognised [E], with MJF's Executive Director noting how he "*helped connect MJF – an organisation that focuses on rights and entitlements - to DFID's extreme poverty priorities*". MJF collaborates with over 100 NGOs. As a direct result of Devine's work, MJF committed to work with partners, "*so that they can also develop strategies ... to connect and contribute to discussions on poverty reduction. This is a new direction but an important one*" [E].

Much of the EEP research was co-produced with partner NGOs. Devine mentored early career researchers and worked with NGOs to strengthen their research capacity. This is highlighted by Uttaran, whose Director notes that NGOs “*don’t normally have time or resources to carry out research that makes a difference in-house*”. This influenced the organisation’s strategy and priorities, and consequently its ability to “*better serve the extreme poor*” [F].

3. Direct Benefits for the Extreme Poor

The EEP programme was unique in its exclusive focus on the extreme poor. By the end of the programme in 2016, the programme had exceeded all its targets, with over 1,000,000 extreme poor beneficiaries ‘graduating’ from extreme poverty, 1,170,000 achieving food security, and 153,000 benefitting from cash transfers programmes [G,H].

Furthermore, since the 7th FYP, the Government has committed more welfare resources for the extreme poor. In 2018/19, it allocated a total of GBP6,000,000,000 for extreme poverty programmes, an increase of GBP3,000,000,000 from 2014/15. This represents an increase of 1.82% of GDP dedicated to extreme poverty reduction, and therefore signals a real increase rather than just a nominal one.

Additionally, the Government has increased investments in its Social Safety Net (SSN) programmes from 2.02% of GDP in 2014-15 to 2.53% of GDP in 2018-19. Moreover, the proportional allocation of SSN resources exclusively targeting the extreme poor has increased from 11% in 2014/15 to 21% in 2018-19. All of these changes are direct Government responses to the commitments outlined in the 7th FYP [B2].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Conference April 8-9, 2015, NEC Conference Room, Planning Commission of Bangladesh: Presentation by Wood-Devine-Maitrot http://www.shiree.org/conference-on-eradication-of-extreme-poverty-in-bangladesh/#.Xqlbky2ZP_Q
- B. Letters from Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, stating:
 - (1) that the Ministry has used text drafted by Devine in the Plan (dated June 2015);
 - (2) outlining key findings from research coordinated by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (dated January 2020).
- C. General Economics Division, Planning Commission (2015). [7th Five Year, FY2016-FY2020: Accelerating Growth, Empowering Citizens](#). Dhaka: GED, Planning Commission: Section 4.2.7.
- D. Letter from Senior Development Advisor, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Dhaka Bangladesh, acknowledging Devine’s contribution to the summary note submitted to the Planning Commission as well as report submitted for the 8th Five Year Plan (dated 26 November 2020).
- E. Letter from Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, outlining Devine’s contribution to the organisation’s strategy (dated 6 July 2017).
- F. Letter from Director of Uttaran, outlining Devine’s contribution to the organisation’s strategy (dated 30 December 2018).
- G. Seibold, J., Brocklesby, M., Goodman, R., Smith, D., Gordon, R., and O. Chowdhury. (2016). *EEP/ Shiree Comprehensive Project Completion Review*. Unpublished Report, Commissioned by DFID, Bangladesh.
- H. Case Study - Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP) Challenge Fund, Bangladesh. <https://www.ecorys.com/global/our-work/economic-empowerment-poorest-eeep-challenge-fund-bangladesh> (Accessed 23.01.21).