

Information & Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D): **Role of Amateur Radio in Development Communication of Bangladesh**

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1. The world is now divided into two. One part is affluent in information, the other poor in information. At present time the nation that does not have any way or knowledge to acquire information through information & communication technologies is poor. Presently there has also been severe change in the definition of 'Literacy'. The citizen able to use or having access to Internet, computer, telephone, radio & other technologies, is a digitally literate citizen. And the one's unfamiliar to use or not having access to these are digitally illiterate. This new dimension of illiteracy has added up to our society in this age of information & communication technologies. In the third world, specially in Bangladesh there has emerged a regrettable distance rather than the expected proximity. And this pitiable distance is called Digital Divide.

Information & Communication Technology consists of facility to communicate, Information resource & authority to communicate. Presently in Bangladesh for every thousand people there are only 1.5 computers, 4 telephone connections & 7 televisions. That means from the above instance we can see digital divide is not only limited between the first & third world but have spread between the cities & villages, between men & women of Bangladesh. In recent times the rapid flourishing of ICTs is playing a significant positive role in poverty alleviation. The increased possibility of acquiring & sharing information resulting from the expansion of Information & Communication Technology creates positive atmosphere for poverty reduction.

So, today the biggest challenge stands before us is how we will use Information & Communication Technologies as the greatest tool of poverty

reduction in Bangladesh. How the poor people will use Information & Communication Technologies to empower themselves, how they can use to bring about positive change of their condition & position & how can their access to the knowledge society be increased. Above all how to establish Information & Communication Technology as a human & public right rather than opportunity.

2. A preeminent medium of Information & Communication Technology is amateur or ham radio. Amateur radio is a science related Hobby. People having this hobby are called Ham or Amateur Radio Holder. Hams communicate with other Hams all over the world through radio transceiver after getting license from the Government. The Hams have opportunities to attain plenty of skills in the attractive world of Information & Communication Technologies.

Hams play a major role in national disasters, emergency medical treatment & other public services. Specially in situations when the general communication systems like telephone, mobile, satellites are devastated hams instantly come to action by setting up alternative communication & serve people as volunteers. A ham is devoted to be tolerant, honest, friendly & patriot.

The authority of amateur radio can play a big role as part of ICTs in a developing country like Bangladesh. Because,

a) A workforce skilled in electronics or technology can grow up without any extra investment though the expansion of amateur radio.

b) The skill of amateur radio holders in electronics & modern communication system can be used in nationally important aspects including poverty reduction.

c) The amateur radio holders can provide such important public services that are not possible by the government bodies in such a short time.

d) The individual skill, knowledge & experience of the amateur radio operator's helps to make the nation confident & self-dependent & present the country to the world with respect.

3. Bangladesh Government approved the introduction of amateur radio service for the first time in 1992. Ministry of Post & Telecommunication of Bangladesh works as the focal ministry for amateur radio through the T & T Board. The T & T Board used to provide license for General grade, or High Frequency through a one level examination. At present the number of license receiver is around 60 – 70. But in Japan a total of Thirteen lakh, Fifty thousand One hundred & Twenty seven (13,50,127) & in Australia Twenty two thousand nine hundred & sixty five, in India Fifteen thousand amateur radio operators are operating now. The T & T board stopped taking the exam to acquire amateur radio license for last three years without any pre declaration. We encouraged the board through continuous advocacy for those three years. Morse code being included in the previous exams resulted to a passing number of 4 – 5. Also there were various mentalities working not to let people pass.

4. A national amateur organization named ‘**Bangladesh Amateur Radio League**’ was established on 20th May 1979 as a amateur radio related organization. This organization became member of International Amateur Radio Union in 1992. Besides, in 1993 the Foundation for Amateur Radio Services (FAIRS) Bangladesh branch was established. These two organizations worked as amateur radio organizations in Bangladesh from 1993 to year 2000. But afterwards due to change of leadership & other reason, Bangladesh Amateur Radio League became an ineffective & now defunct organization. The person whose name is in the web site as general secretary has been staying in America for long. This is quite unwanted to us. Bangladesh is absent in the world amateur related forums only because of it’s ineffective organizations. But still some people are trying to stay with it. As a result Bangladesh’s representation in amateur radio programs has collapsed home & abroad. BARL is failing to play any effective role to preserve the interest of amateur holders & clear the roadblocks in the way of amateur radio growth.

5. BNNRC was established on year 2000. Since then BNNRC started nationwide campaign for the spreading of amateur radio. For this awareness about amateur radio increased nationwide specially among the civil society along the coastal belt. BNNRC started continuous advocacy since

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission was established on 2001. As a result amateur radio exam was first held under BTRC on January 2004 & for the first time Morse code was withdrawn in Bangladesh. Keeping the exam in front BNNRC started nationwide campaign. A total of 300 applied for the exam & 237 of them took part in it. A total of 76 passed the exam overcoming all barriers.

6. Amateur radio can play a positive role in development communication of Bangladesh. Specially alternative communication can be built up between the coastal zone such as the 16 districts & the capital city.

Already amateur radio network between Dhaka- Chittagong, Dhaka-Coxsbar, and Dhaka – Barishal & Dhaka – Bhola has been established & working successfully.

Moreover, recently experts identified Bangladesh as an earthquake prone area. They said, **Bangladesh is situated on the harmful tectonic plates of Indian sub continent. An earthquake of 6-rector scale can turn cities like Dhaka/Chittagong or Shylhet into piles of debris. Besides devastating buildings earthquake also harms the service structures. For instance, conflagration from bursting the gas pipes etc. Water, electricity & telecommunication systems are severely damaged during earthquake. So communication systems other than amateur radio can’t be initialized instantly.**

7. We can provide a helping hand to reduce damage & increase security through establishing amateur radio at an emergency during natural calamities like Cyclones, typhoons, earthquakes etc. According to a statistics, although only 5% of the world cyclones strike Bangladesh but 85% of the world’s cyclone damage is created here. Bangladesh’s major weakness in taking cyclone precautions & carry post cyclone activities is malfunction of telecommunication system.

Besides, the tendency of cold wave, heat wave, boat capsizing & water surge is increasing everyday. Amateur radio can stand beside public as an Information & Communication service.

8. Discussing the present barrier/s of the growth of Amateur Radio in Bangladesh

a) *Amateur radio is not yet popularized nationwide for lack of mass awareness regarding amateur radio operation.*

Recommendation: To campaign regularly with the initiative of BTRC, Ministry of Science & ICT, various university, educational institute & to take initiative to establish at least one amateur radio club station in every district.

b) *To introduce one level examination system & arranging examination every six month.*

Recommendation: To take examination every 6 months with the initiative of BTRC & to re introduces one level examination. To give general grade license to the examinees passed in last January instead of novice license. BNNRC has already submitted an application to the honorable chairman.

c) *71% direct & indirect tax on the import of amateur radio set*

Recommendation: As amateur radio is accepted as part of ICTs & moreover, according to paragraph 3.2.7 of Bangladesh Government's Information & Communication Policy it has been said that "Use of Information & Communication technology & information services has to be brought under the purchase ability of mass people". Furthermore, as it is not used in any commercial activity & amateur radio holders contribute to establish life line communication for public interest, so all the direct & indirect taxes on amateur radio should be reduced & brought to 5% like India. Initiative from the Ministry of Science & ICTs is expected in this regard.

d) *About the new application form purchase rate & processing fee set by BTRC. Presently BTRC has set 500 taka as purchase rate of all kinds of form & 5000 taka as processing fees.*

Recommendation: As amateur radio is never used in commercial purposes & it contributes to establish lifeline communication for public interest & it is a hobby of common citizen so all the fees of application form & processing fees should be

withdrawn. In India it takes only 500 taka to complete all the processes.

BNNRC has submitted at memorandum to the chairman of BTRC.

9. As Bangladesh is basically a disaster prone area, help by the amateur radio operators is very much required to set up communication before & after disaster. Moreover, it is also needed to establish amateur radio as a popular medium by removing the barriers of amateur radio growth in Bangladesh.

10. Besides, to establish Bangladesh as a developing country of the third world to the outside world, the importance of person-to-person communication is immense.

11. **So come, let us all together utilize Information & Communication Technologies to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDGs). And let's jointly demand to establish the opportunity of Information & Communication facility as a human right rather than mere opportunity.**

Information source:

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