



পল্লীতথ্য

# Pallitathya

An Information and Knowledge  
System for the Poor and Marginalised

*Experience from Grassroots in Bangladesh*

**ABRIDGED VERSION**

Edited by **Ananya Raihan**



December 2007



**Pallitathya: An Information and Knowledge System  
for the Poor and Marginalised**  
*Experience from Grassroots in Bangladesh*

Abridged Version

*Edited by*  
Ananya Raihan

*Written by*  
Ananya Raihan  
Mahmud Hasan  
Md. Forhad Uddin  
Md. Masum Billah  
Narayan Chandra Das  
Taposhi Sarker

*Copy Edit:* Meftaur Rahman and Moazzem Hossain  
*Cover Concept and Design:* Ashraf Abir  
*Photograph:* Munira Morshed Munni  
*Graphics Design:* Alma Ferdousy Leya and Forhad Bin Azhar  
*Layout:* Khayrul Hasan and Ikhtiar Hasan  
First Edition Published December 2007

Some Rights Reserved  
(Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No derivative works 3.0)

*Cover photo: Salma, the mobile lady from Nilphamari heads to a village riding her bi-cycle with her mobile phone to facilitate rural community beneficiaries, particularly women and people with physical handicap to call help desk experts for consulting on various livelihood issues.*

Published in Bangladesh by Morshed Alam Sohel  
D.Net (Development Research Network)  
6/8, Humayun Road, Block B, Mohammadpur, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh.  
E-mail: [publication@dnet.org.bd](mailto:publication@dnet.org.bd), Web Address: [www.dnet.org.bd](http://www.dnet.org.bd)  
Tel: 88 02 8156772, 88 02 9131424, 88 02 8124976, Fax: 88 02 8142021

ISBN: 984-300-001263-0

Price:  
Abridged Version      BDT 150  
                                    USD 15  
Main Monograph      BDT 800  
                                    USD 80

Printed in Bangladesh at Pathway

*The views in this publication are those of authors only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisations involved in this publication*

## [ About D.Net ]

---

D.Net (Development Research Network), a not-for-profit institution for undertaking research and action programmes in Bangladesh, was established in 2001. D.Net's vision is a society where information and knowledge facilitates all stakeholders' participation in generation of wealth and its equitable distribution for poverty alleviation. Its mission is to become a premier organisation in Bangladesh and beyond by undertaking research and various action programmes in the areas, where information and knowledge can contribute to poverty alleviation, economic growth and peace. During initial years of activities, D.Net's initial focus was research on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Development. D.Net's in-depth research in the area of ICTs for poverty alleviation has drawn attention of stakeholders not only in Bangladesh, but also across the globe. Under its Mission 2010, D.Net's five year strategic plan, D.Net conducts research and implements important action programmes primarily in six thematic areas:

- Access to Information and Knowledge
- Enhancing Business Competitiveness for Economic Growth
- Governance and Human Rights
- Human Resource Development
- Institutional Capacity Development
- Economic and Development Policy Research

D.Net also undertakes policy influencing activities, for bringing burning issues before the policy makers and stakeholders to create awareness and to take proper actions.

D.Net has started to play a visible role in the research arena within the national boundary and in South Asia. It also has gone beyond South Asia through telecentre.org, Canada and ELDIS, UK. D.Net is a member of Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), OneWorld SouthAsia, and PANAsia Network of IDRC. D.Net received the Global Gender and ICT Award 2005, at the World Summit on the Information Society for its innovation of linking mobile telecommunication for improving access to livelihood information by the poor people, particularly women and the handicapped, through the introduction of the “mobile lady”.

# [ Pallitathya Team ]

( 2 0 0 3 - 2 0 0 7 )

## **Research Team**

Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal, Ahmed Taufiqur Rahman, Ajoy Kumar Bose, Akib Ara Jesmin, Angshu Jyoti Fouzder, Ananya Raihan, Anir Chowdhury, Arif Shah Nawaz, Ashok Kumar Paul, Atik Ahsan, Dipak Kamal, Farhana Fatehin, Farzana Sultana, Fatema Begum Labony, Fatema Ferdous, Ferdousi Akhter, Fida Mehran, Hasan Shahriar Rahman, Hasna Shireen, Kazi Mushfiqur Rahman, Kanij Rubyat, Khadiza Khanam, Mahmud Hasan, Md. Abu Nashir Khan, Md. Firoz Kabir Mahmud, Md. Forhad Uddin, Md. Masum Billah, Md. Nasimul Islam, Md. S.M. Rezaul Bari, Md. Selim Ahmed, Mohammed Farid Uddin, Mohammed Hafiz Uddin Bhuiyan, Mohammad Monir Hossain, Mohammad Saiful Alam, Mridul Chowdhury, Mst. Qumrunnahar Begum, Munia Islam, Narayan Chandra Das, Nazrul Islam, Pedro Garcia Ramos, Rifat Karim, Sabrina Khandaker, Sadia Tasneem, Saif Uddin Ahmed, Santana Ayub, Shadhan Kumar Das, Shah Md. Ahsan Habib, Shahedur Rahman Shamim, Shahnawaz Ali Khan, Shak Ruhul Amin, Shamsun Taha, Shayla Parveen, Suparna Roy, Suvashish Karmakar, Tahira Nasreen, Tahmid Ahmed Adib, Taifur Rahman, Taposhi Rabaya, Taposhi Sarker, Tariqul Islam, Zahidur Rahman.

## **Barefoot Rural Research Team**

Asgar Ali, Nilphamari; Chach Pru Marma, Bandarban; Humayun Kabir, Jhenaidah; Kethui Marma, Bandarban; Lokman Hossain, Bhola; Mong Chaching Marma, Bandarban; Rakibul Hasan, Jhenaidah; Ruhul Alam, Nilphamari; Suvash Chandra Gharami, Bagerhat.

## **Field Research Team**

AMM Yahia Swaon, Noakhali; Arjun Chowdhury, Netrokona; Asrafal Hasan Saon, Comilla; Chitto Ranjan Roy, Mymensingh; Md. Al Mamun Azad, Khulna; Md. Forhad Uddin Khan, Noakhali; Md. Mahfuz Bosunia, Rangpur; Md. Mazedul Islam, Rajshahi; Md. Nuruzzaman Chowdhury, Khulna; Md. Sazzad Hossain, Gazipur; Md. Shafiqul Alam, Nilphamari; Md. Shamsuzzaman, Jessore; Md. Tariqul Islam, Jessore; Mijanur Rahman, Netrokona, Nura Alam Parvez, Dhaka; Pronob Biswas, Netrokona; Rajib Banik, Chittagong; S.M. Abu Yusuf, Chittagong; S.M. Kamal Hossain, Khulna; Saiful Ahmed Jony, Kishoregonj; Sayeful Islam, Tangail; Sohaq Ahmed, Bagerhat.

### **Technical Team**

A.H.M. Ashrafuzzaman, A.K.M Ganiul Zadid, Arafat Rahman Opu, Ashik Masud, Avimunnay Halder, Fahud Khan, Golam Sarwar, Hamidur Rahman, Hasina Akhter Erin, M. Abdur Rahim, Mahbub Jamil Pulak, Maksuda Ahmed, Mamunur Rashid, Md Harun Ur Rashid, Md. Mynul Islam, Md. Nur Alam, Ms. Naznin Matin, Muhammad Mohin Uddin, Munimuzzaman Khan, Naimul Haque Joarder, Naimul Haque Joarder, S.M. Ashraf Abir, Shahnur Rahman, Shirajul Islam Mamun, Shuvo Ahmed.

### ***Infomediary and Mobile Lady: The Real Heroes and Heroines***

#### ***Babrijbar, Nilphamari***



Arju Khatun



Hosneara Khatun



Jabedul Haque



Protap Chandra Sarkar



Rubina Akter



Ruhin Ansari



Umma Salma

#### ***Charbata, Noakabli***



A.M.M. Yahia Saon



Jharna Rani



Joyesrekor Joya



Kamal Uddin



Md. Hosnain



Jabed Iqbal

### *Mongla, Bagerhat*



Amal Biswas



Debobroto Mistrri



Ebika Biswas



Keka Biswas



Md. Kamrul Hasan



Nayan Mondal

### *Jamtala, Netrokona*



Dipal Chandra  
Majumdar



A.F.M. Bayezid



Habiba Akter



Helim Fakhir



Kalyan Bhushan  
Debanath



Moslem Uddin



Mukul Begum



Rumu Rani Ghosh



Shahjahan Kabir



S.M. Marshall Hiro



Tapoti Sharma

### *Kajoli, Magura and Durlavpur, Jhenaidah*



Selina Akter



Taslima Parvin

# [ Acknowledgement ]

## **Funding for *Pallitathya* Experiment**

Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB), Dhaka, Bangladesh  
International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada  
Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Dhaka, Bangladesh

## **Evaluation Partner**

Association for Progressive Communication Women's Network Supporting Program (APC-WNSP), Johannesburg, South Africa

## **Content Development Partners**

Acid Survivors Foundation, Agricultural Training Institute, Ahsania Mission, Ain-O-Shalish Kendra, Bangla Academy, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute, Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons, Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Center, Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, Bangladesh National Scientific and Technical Documentation centre, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh Rice Foundation, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, Bangladesh Rural Development Board, Bangladesh Silk Foundation, Bangladesh Teacher's Training College, Campaign for Popular Education, Department of Agriculture Extension, Department of Livestock Service, Dhaka Community Hospital, University of Dhaka, Dhaka Medical College Nursing Institute, Directorate of Primary Education, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Disaster Management Bureau, Friends Admission Consult, Gonoshahajjo Sangstha, Gram-Bangla Unnayan Committee, Health 21, Infectious Disease Hospital, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, Jatio Jubo Proshikkhan Academy, Karmojibi Nari, Khulna University, Directorate of Fisheries, Madaripur Legal Aid Association, Ministry of Religion, Nagorik Uddog, National Forum of Organizations Working with Disabled, Practical Action Bangladesh, Shabolombi Unnayan Shanshta, Sher-E-Bangla Agricultural University, Soil Resource and Development Institute, Steps Towards Development, Voluntary Health Services Society, [www.bdjobs.com](http://www.bdjobs.com).

## **Local Partners**

Dhoritry Samaj Kallyan Shongha, Mongla, Bagerhat; Digonter Dak, Noakhali; Local Citizen Committee (Nagorik Committee), Babrijhar, Nilphamari; Orthonaitik Manabik Unnayan Shangstha (OMUS), Netrokona; Sagoriaka Samaj Unnayan Sangshta, Noakhali; Saikat Degree College, Noakhali; Union Parishad, Charbata, Noakhali.

## [ Preface ]

---

The development paradigm evolved during the last four decades in Bangladesh as well as around the world. Poverty eradication was the ultimate goal of all development efforts. At the initial phase, the focus was primarily on improvement of the income poverty situation. Gradually the focus spread on the non-income issues, which was crystallized through the development of Human Development Index (HDI). Combination of income and non-income issues was considered as holistic approach towards neoclassical strategy of poverty eradication. The non-income poverty eradication approach covered a wide range of factors which influenced the improvement of living standards, including, *inter alia*, access to quality education, access to health care, access to productive employment opportunities etc. However, access to information and knowledge, as a dimension of access to resources, which determines *haves and haves not*, remained unexplored in the poverty discourse.

This monograph is an attempt to share the experience of an experiment on whether access to information and knowledge has any role to play in addressing poverty. A system of information and knowledge exchange for the poor and marginalised was designed for this experiment, where information and communication technologies (ICTs) are one of the components of the system. The experiment, spread over a period of more than four years since 2003, tested the system termed as “*Pallitathya Model*”, consisting five basic components: content, multiple channels of information and knowledge exchange, *infomediary* (human interface between information and knowledge-base), ownership and mobilisation (marketing). The system is based on two pre-requisites: it focuses on the need of a poor and marginalised community, and it emphasizes on income generation for financial sustainability, where possible.

Under the *Pallitathya* experiment, all system components were built from zero. It was essential to understand the existing information and knowledge system practised by poor and marginalised community people. A needs assessment research was conducted by a joint rural-urban research team. Based on the gap identified in the prevailing information and knowledge exchange system, a number of livelihood questions were identified which can not be resolved by existing system. The outcome of the needs assessment research was findings on absence of information and knowledge in those livelihood areas. As there was no digital livelihood

content in Bangla and in semantics, which is easily comprehensible by ultimate beneficiary within a community, for the making the experiment possible, ICT-based content development efforts were undertaken. After four and half years, the outcome vindicates that information and knowledge gap was very rightly identified. Considering the pervasive illiteracy among the community beneficiaries both in mother tongue and illiteracy in ICTs the '*infomediary*' as a system component was introduced. Such a system component allowed *Pallitathya* research team to include illiterate people to benefit from *Pallitathya* system not waiting for time when such literacy would be achieved. The research team was aware about slow 'technology diffusion' and 'behavioural change'. The team was also aware of attribution problem of any 'impact'. Thus, for capturing any 'positive' or 'negative' change in a community, the research team followed a 'transaction' based approach and used 'Outcome Mapping' as a methodology for capturing 'change', if any.

A new concept of 'benefit of investment' (BOI) was introduced for assessing benefit accrued by a community in monetary terms, where applicable, against investment made in a community-based unit of *Pallitathya* information and knowledge system. Such an indicator was needed, as there is confusion whether investment in building information and knowledge system for the poor and marginalised is justified, because there is competing needs for investment. The combined BOI for the whole *Pallitathya* experiment is 1:4.64, which means for each Taka investment for 15 months of operation of the system the community benefited for Taka 4.64. The BOI for information and knowledge services was estimated 1:4.42, whereas BOI for income generating services was only 1:0.25. It is to be mentioned that the BOI mentioned above was estimated considering all costs including cost of operation for conducting research at head office level. If only local unit level cost is considered, the BOI was 1: 18.33. In this case, the BOI for information and knowledge service was 1:17.43 and for income generating service 1:1. The research findings strongly argue for 'public assets' and 'public goods' opposed to only financial sustainability argument, while income generating aspects should not ignored for nurturing entrepreneurial mindset. The research findings also show that the information and knowledge system as 'kiosk' is less preferable, rather the system unit should be embedded in a broader community ecosystem.

Since 2003 more than 120 researchers have been involved in the *Pallitathya* experiment. They passed many sleep-less nights to make the experiment reaching a meaningful end and to produce a good publication for sharing the findings of the experiment with broader constituency. The research team is particularly grateful to all community leaders and barefoot researchers, who are the real heroes and heroines for proving that access to information and knowledge is an essential dimension of poverty paradigm. The research team is grateful to Professor Rehman Sobhan, who is the 'light house' of D.Net's political economic approach towards research and action programmes. His insights have been guiding the research team throughout the painful process of conducting such a 'difficult' action research. The research team also owes to D.Net's governing body, particularly its first Chairperson Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya for endorsing the philosophy of building information and knowledge system for the poor and marginalised. The research team acknowledges the endorsement of research idea by the board of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB), particularly Dr. Shamsul Bari. Professor Anisur Rahman inspired the research team with the concept of participatory action research. International Development Research Centre (IDRC) came in at the very right moment, when there was no hope to continue such a big experiment, where all elements had to be built on the way of its journey. The research team would like to mention here the contribution of Nancy Smith, Stephen McGurk and Frank Tulus. The Pallitathya experiment could not get its holistic shape without timely endorsement and support of Manusher Jonno Foundation, particularly of Shaheen Anam. The research team was continuously encouraged by Dr. Hameeda Hossain, Advocate Sultana Kamal, and Professor Zafar Iqbal.

We acknowledge the contribution of all our partners, who helped us in content development technology solution design and research design. Here, we should mention about Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and Association for Progressive Communication (APC)WNSP. The research could address gender dimension rightly thanks to thoughts and support of APC colleagues. GKP played an instrumental role in consolidating D.Net's efforts in institution building.

Finally, the research team would like to express its sincere gratitude to Dr. Toufic Ahmad Chaudhury, Chairperson of D.Net, who was always with us

in all difficult moments. We deeply appreciate support of D.Net's colleagues, they have proved that nothing is impossible. The team owe to their families and spouses, whose support was the key in making the 'mad rush' of research possible.

The research team believes that the findings and methodologies developed in the process of experiment would be useful to researchers, practitioners, policy makers, media, academia and other stakeholders. We know that many of the elements of *Pallitathya* model can be improved further and replaced with some better elements. We believe that researchers and practitioners will take away the model further with many new twists and directions.

The research team would like to apologize for omitting any name mistakenly, whose contribution played an important role in reaching a meaningful end. We welcome constructive criticism and inputs in improving the methodologies developed in the process of conducting the experiment. We believe that research in this arena just started and we have to go a long way for making our efforts truly benefiting poor and marginalised.

|               |                  |                     |
|---------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Ananya Raihan | Md. Forhad Uddin | Narayan Chandra Das |
| Mahmud Hasan  | Md. Masum Billah | Taposhi Sarker      |

December 2007

# [ Table of Contents ]

## FOR ABRIDGED VERSION

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| Acronyms and Abbreviations   | XV   |
| Glossary of <i>Pallitathya</i>   | XVI  |
| I. Background  | 03   |
| II. <i>Pallitathya</i> Model: System Component   | 04   |
| II.A. <i>Pallitathya Kendra</i> : The Common Access Point  | 04   |
| II.B. Information and Knowledge Base: <i>Jeeon IKB</i>   | 06   |
| II.C. <i>Infomediary</i> : Human Interface between<br>Knowledge-Base and Community Beneficiaries | 12   |
| II.D. Channels for Exchange of Information and Knowledge   | 14   |
| II.E. Help Line: A Door Step Information Service   | 15   |
| II.F. <i>Jeeon-Thikana</i> : The Destination Sought After  | 18   |
| II.G. <i>Jeebika.com</i> : Online Local Language Job Portal for Rural People                     | 20   |
| III. Methodologies Developed and Used in <i>Pallitathya</i> Experiment                           | 21   |
| IV. Facts and Figures about <i>Pallitathya</i> Model on the Ground                               | 27   |
| V. Outcome Mapping for Selected Boundary Partners  | 31   |
| VI. Ripple Effects of <i>Pallitathya</i> Model   | 41   |
| VII. What Worked and What Not  | 43   |
| VIII. From Research to Movement  | 47   |
| IX. <i>Pallitathya</i> Outcomes  | 48   |
| <i>Pallitathya</i> in Media  | 49   |
| <i>Pallitathya</i> Photograph  | 51   |
| Content of the Main Monograph  | 55   |

---

## [ List of Diagram ]

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| Community Ecosystem with <i>Pallitathya Kendra</i>                                 | 05   |
| Information and Knowledge Exchange System at <i>Pallitathya Kendra</i>             | 07   |
| Home Page of <i>Jeeon-IKB</i> ( <a href="http://www.jeeon.com">www.jeeon.com</a> ) | 09   |
| Home Page of <i>Jeeon-Thikana</i>  | 19   |
| Home Page of <a href="http://www.jeebika.com">www.jeebika.com</a>                  | 20   |
| Boundary Partners of <i>Pallitathya</i>  | 24   |
| Comparative BOI for four <i>Pallitathya Kendra</i>                                 | 36   |