

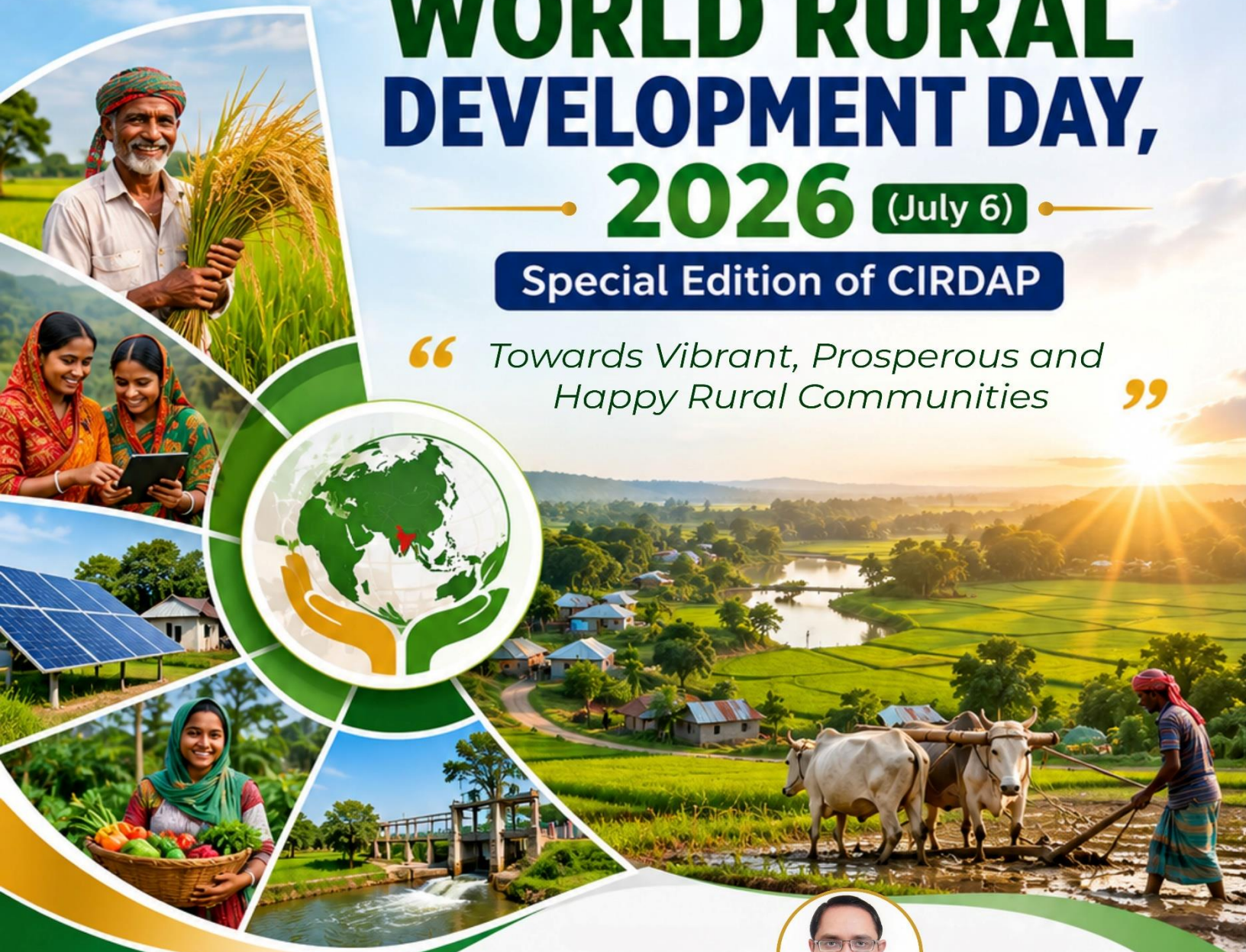


The 2<sup>nd</sup> Celebration of

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Special Edition of CIRDAP

“ Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and  
Happy Rural Communities ”



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# **BARD and Rural Development in Bangladesh: From Field Innovations to Sustainable Rural Transformation**

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## **1. Introduction**

Bangladesh is predominantly a rural and agrarian country, where rural development has historically remained at the center of national development efforts. Since independence, rural transformation has been regarded not merely as an agricultural concern but as a comprehensive process involving economic advancement, social inclusion, institutional strengthening, human development, environmental sustainability, and participatory governance. Over time, the concept of rural development in Bangladesh has evolved from a production-centered approach to a broader and more integrated framework that prioritizes livelihoods, local institutions, resilience, and community empowerment.

Within this transformation journey, the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) has played a pioneering and enduring role. Established on 27 May 1959, BARD has emerged as one of the country's most influential institutions in generating and promoting innovative approaches to rural development. Since its inception, the Academy has continuously engaged in action research alongside its two other statutory mandates—training and research—as stipulated in the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development Act, 2017.

Through decades of field experimentation, policy engagement, institutional innovation, and capacity development, BARD has significantly contributed to shaping Bangladesh's rural development discourse and practice.

## **2. Role of BARD in Rural Development: A Chronological Perspective**

One of the most remarkable contributions to rural development in Bangladesh emerged through the institutional innovations introduced by BARD during the 1960s. The internationally acclaimed Comilla Model, developed under the leadership of Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan, became one of the most influential rural development approaches in the Global South and continues to inspire development initiatives worldwide (Khan, 1996; World Bank, 1975).

The Comilla Model emphasized people's participation, cooperative organization, training, local governance, and institutional coordination. Four interrelated components formed the foundation of this model:

- Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC)
- Rural Works Programme (RWP)
- Thana Irrigation Programme (TIP)
- Two-tier Cooperative System

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These initiatives aimed to strengthen local institutions, enhance agricultural productivity, improve infrastructure, and ensure active participation of rural communities in development processes. Over time, the principles and operational mechanisms introduced through these initiatives became institutionalized within various government programmes and administrative structures. For instance, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was established in 1972 following the success of Comilla Model. The IRDP was the outcome of two tier cooperative system, one of the major components of Comilla Model. Later in 1982, IRDP was transformed into the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB).

Building upon the lessons of the Comilla Model, BARD introduced the Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP) in 1975, which further strengthened rural development interventions in Bangladesh. Unlike earlier development approaches that primarily focused on agricultural production, CVDP adopted a holistic and integrated village-based strategy combining livelihood generation, education, health services, institutional development, leadership cultivation, and social mobilization.

By mobilizing rural communities through cooperative societies and community-based organizations, the CVDP enhanced access to essential public services, expanded economic opportunities, and fostered stronger and more participatory local governance systems. The programme promoted self-reliance, participatory decision-making, social inclusion, and local leadership development, thereby contributing significantly to poverty reduction and rural social transformation.

### **Action Researches of BARD**

In response to changing development priorities and emerging rural challenges, BARD continues to undertake a broad spectrum of action research initiatives addressing contemporary socio-economic issues. Current action researches include:

- Rural livelihood improvement through Village-Based Organizations (VBOs) and Union Parishads
- Market expansion and capacity development of the traditional Khadi industry
- SDG localization through enhanced citizen participation
- E-Parishad initiatives for improved rural service delivery
- Vocational skills development and employment generation for Qawmi Madrasa students
- Community-based support mechanisms for elderly and differently abled populations
- Floodplain aquaculture and safe food production through community enterprises
- Climate adaptation and livelihood improvement in char areas
- Rural tourism and community-based livelihood diversification

These initiatives reflect BARD's continued commitment to generating evidence-based, scalable, and sustainable rural development models responsive to contemporary realities. At present, BARD is also implementing an Annual Development Programme (ADP) project entitled "Ecological Farming through Village-Based Organizations", which seeks to promote environmentally sustainable agricultural practices and improve rural livelihoods.

## **Human Resource Development initiatives of BARD**

Beyond action research, BARD has played a major role in human resource development through extensive training programmes targeting government and non-government officials, project beneficiaries, local government representatives, members of cooperative societies, university faculty members, and students. As of April 2026, BARD conducted 9,489 training courses with participation from approximately 330,922 individuals, including 200,211 male and 130,711 female participants. BARD has signed a number of MoU with different universities such as Bangladesh University of Professionals, Bangladesh, Yeungnam University, South Korea, Cumilla University, Bangladesh, Royal University of Bhutan etc.

## **Research Programmes of BARD**

Research remains another central pillar of BARD's mandate. On average, the Academy conducts 10–12 research studies annually, aligned with national development priorities and policy directions. Through generating field-based evidence and practical knowledge, BARD's research contributes to policy formulation, enriches training programmes, and facilitates the development of innovative rural interventions.

## **3. Present Focus of BARD: A Way Forward**

Rural Bangladesh is currently undergoing rapid transformation driven by economic development, demographic shifts, technological advancement, climate variability, changing occupational structures, urbanization, and market integration. These evolving realities demand new and adaptive approaches to rural development. BARD continues to respond through experimental programmes and field-based action research addressing multifaceted rural challenges. Experience demonstrates that meaningful participation of local communities remains a fundamental condition for successful and sustainable rural development. Future rural development approaches must place greater emphasis on community ownership, institutional sustainability, climate resilience, digital inclusion, entrepreneurship development, and localized innovation.

Drawing upon its long history of field experimentation and institutional learning, BARD maintains that rural development cannot be achieved through fragmented interventions alone. Sustainable transformation requires an integrated process built upon active citizen engagement, institutional capacity, and evidence-based policymaking.

BARD serves as the national link institution of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), fostering regional cooperation through collaborative research, training, and knowledge-sharing initiatives.



*Group photo of international training programme on ‘Leadership Development Training Programme for Strengthening Rural Cooperatives’ organized collaboratively by BARD and CIRDP*

In addition, every year, BARD, in collaboration with the African-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO), jointly organizes an international training workshop titled “Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: Financial Inclusion and Rural Transformation.” BARD has also been implementing the Saemaul Plus End Poverty Program (SPEPP) in partnership with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), drawing upon global best practices to promote sustainable rural development. Moreover, BARD organizes international research conference with the collaboration of INSEARCH every year. These strategic international partnerships have significantly strengthened BARD’s institutional capacity and are expected to pave the way for more innovative, inclusive, and impactful development interventions in the years ahead.



*Certificate Award Ceremony of AARDO international Training Programme*

The Academy's present initiatives strongly align with the Government of Bangladesh's national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If appropriately nurtured and scaled, these initiatives hold the potential to evolve into future models of rural transformation.

As demonstrated through the legacy of the Comilla Model, BARD remains uniquely positioned to generate new pathways toward inclusive, resilient, and sustainable rural development in Bangladesh and beyond.

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