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Causes, effects, and remedies of social conflict in rural areas of Bangladesh

Dr. AHM Aktarul Islam ^{1*}, Dr. Md. Shahidul Islam ², Dr. Afroza Banu ³

¹ Professor, Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia, Bangladesh

² Associate Professor, Department of English, Trust University, Barishal, Bangladesh

³ Associate Professor, Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia, Bangladesh

* Corresponding Author: **Dr. AHM Aktarul Islam**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to examine social conflict's origins, consequences, and potential solutions in Bangladesh's rural communities. A mixed method approach was used for conducting this study. The study investigated the underlying causes of social conflict, analyzed how it affects people and groups, and offered solutions for dealing with and resolving such disputes in four Upazilas under Kushtia and Jhenaidah districts (Kushtia Sadar, Kumarkhali, Sail Kuppam District, and Harinakundu from July 2022 to February 2023). Community members, local leaders, government officials, and experts in conflict resolution were the respondents of this study. A survey questionnaire was used for collecting quantitative data while interview, focus group discussion, and observation were done for collecting qualitative data of this study. Findings of this study revealed that socioeconomic gaps, land ownership conflicts, tensions between different ethnic and religious groups, political considerations, and cultural variations are some of the elements that contribute to social conflict in rural Bangladesh, and the implications of these conflicts on the impacted populations are extensive and include economic repercussions, social disintegration, displacement, decreased access to essential services, and psychological effects. The findings got some potential solutions including enhancing interethnic and interreligious dialogue, promoting inclusive development and equitable resource distribution, supporting community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, investing in education and awareness programs, and strengthening governance and the rule of law.

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Keywords: Rural Areas, Social Conflict, Causes, Effects, Remedies

Introduction

Rural areas in Bangladesh are frequently plagued by social conflicts, which hinder their social development, economic progress, and overall well-being, and these conflicts arise due to various factors such as land disputes, resource scarcity, socio-economic disparities, cultural differences, and political marginalization. According to ACLED (2019b) ^[1], social conflict is a complicated, multifaceted problem that hampers the growth and welfare of local communities in Bangladesh's rural areas. Numerous socioeconomic inequalities, land ownership issues, ethnic and religious tensions, political factors, and cultural variations exist in Bangladesh's rural districts. Due to competition for scarce resources, authority, and respect, these elements foster a climate that is social conflict-prone. Social conflict has far-reaching effects on rural communities, having an impact on many facets of daily life. It has negative economic effects on livelihoods and trade, as well as decreased agricultural productivity (ACLED, 2019a) ^[2]. The social fabric that holds communities together is torn away by social fragmentation and mistrust. For many, displacement becomes a terrible reality that disrupts lives and adds to suffering. The issues that rural residents experience are made even more difficult by the restricted availability to essential services like infrastructure, healthcare, and education.

Moreover, the emotional and psychological impacts of social conflict leave lasting scars on individuals, hindering their well-being and hindering social cohesion (ACLEED, 2019a)^[2]. Despite the prevalence of social conflict in rural areas of Bangladesh, there is limited knowledge about the underlying causes, the wide-ranging effects on individuals and communities, and the most suitable strategies to address and mitigate these conflicts. Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate and analyze the causes, effects, and remedies of social conflict in rural areas of Bangladesh in order to provide insights for policymakers, community leaders, and organizations working towards sustainable development and peace-building in these regions. Thus, this paper attempted to investigate the root causes, consequences, and potential solutions of social strife in these areas. It attempted to learn more about promoting social cohesion and sustainable development through comprehending the fundamental causes of conflict, investigating its effects on people and communities, and suggesting resolution options.

Objective of This Study

This paper aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues faced by these communities and offer insights into potential strategies for promoting social harmony and sustainable development by exploring the causes, effects, and remedies of social conflict in rural areas of Bangladesh.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to investigate the causes, effects, and remedies of social conflict in rural areas of Bangladesh disputes in four Upazilas under Kushtia and Jhenaidah districts (Kushtia Sadar, Kumarkhali, Shailkupa, and Harinakundu from July 2022 to February 2023). This involved both qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, and quantitative methods, such as surveys and data analysis. It selected study participants purposefully based on their relevance and expertise in the field. This included individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, different religious groups, various cultural communities, and individuals with experience in conflict resolution. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including community members, local leaders, government officials, and experts in conflict resolution had been done to explore their perspectives on the causes, effects, and potential remedies of social conflict in rural Bangladesh. This study organized focus group discussions with representatives from different social groups to gather insights on their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding social conflicts. Field observations in rural areas had been launched to gain firsthand knowledge of the social dynamics, interactions, and conflicts within communities. It administered surveys to collect quantitative data. It analyzed survey data using statistical methods. It conducted thematic analysis of qualitative data obtained from interviews, focus groups, and observations to identify recurring themes, patterns, and connections related to the causes, effects, and remedies of social conflicts in rural areas. It employed statistical and descriptive analysis techniques to

analyze data.

Results and Discussion

There has been extensive discussion of social strife in Bangladesh's rural areas in the literature, including its causes and impacts. In order to solve social conflict in rural Bangladesh, this literature review will emphasize the study findings, ideas, and recommended tactics from the major scholarly works that explore these elements. Bangladesh's large ethnic (national) homogeneity, with a history of cordial social connections and a strong feeling of national identity, is one of the country's distinguishing characteristics. Almost 98% of the population is Bengali (Gankovsky, 1974)^[3]. Bangladeshi villages once stood for something immovable and unchanging. They were once linked to "primitivism" and everything else that exploits the sinister sides of long-standing customs and heritage. Some Bangladeshi villages have only lately seen significant societal change (Sarkar, 2018)^[9]. Bangladeshi village society, like societies generally in the Indian subcontinent, have mostly remained unchanged for decades without experiencing any significant change (Karim, 1976)^[5]. Marx referred to this as the Asiatic Mode of Production, which is characterized by a dictatorial ruler, an unchanging state, and a society with a hydraulic economy (Mondal, 2014)^[8]. Due to their century-old traditions and legacy, village societies have not made significant advancements (Wood, 1981)^[10].

A majority of Bangladesh's youth are involved in its violent political culture (Midgley, 2018)^[7]. Although they are dormant, social, ethnic, and religious disputes are frequently employed in politics. Extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, torture, beatings, and harassment are some types of political violence (Herbert, 2019)^[4]. Blockades and strikes with political motivation are prevalent in Bangladesh, particularly during election seasons. Political polarization has resulted in a large number of political disputes, which suggests a political culture where players are unable to reach agreements with their adversaries and instead resort to using force to further their political agendas (Midgley, 2018)^[7].

The use of violence to attain political dominance also increased as a result of the criminalization of politics. The Rohingya insurrection on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border has recently become one of the biggest problems facing the country. Conflict in CHT is another significant issue for Bangladesh. There, the indigenous community is subjected to a lot of violence, abuse, and discrimination (Herbert, 2019)^[4]. The experience of the people of Char land in Bangladesh can be compared to that of Brahmanbaria; Zaman (1991)^[11] outlined the part that "Lathiyal" played in gaining political dominance in the Char. The local elites, who are largely Jotedars [wealthy peasants who possess large swaths of land], instigate violent conflict through the use of Lathiyals with patronage ties in order to seize fresh territory. Local elites (Jotedars) like the Sardars of Brahmanbaria stoked such confrontations. Samaj, Gushti, and Salish make up the power structure in rural life, according to Khan (2013)^[6]. Gushti is the name for a social structure like a clan that is based on shared ancestry. Khan felt that gushti's contribution to societal disputes in the past was crucial. Gushti is a shared emotion that has helped a community become cohesive.

Findings from Survey Questionnaire

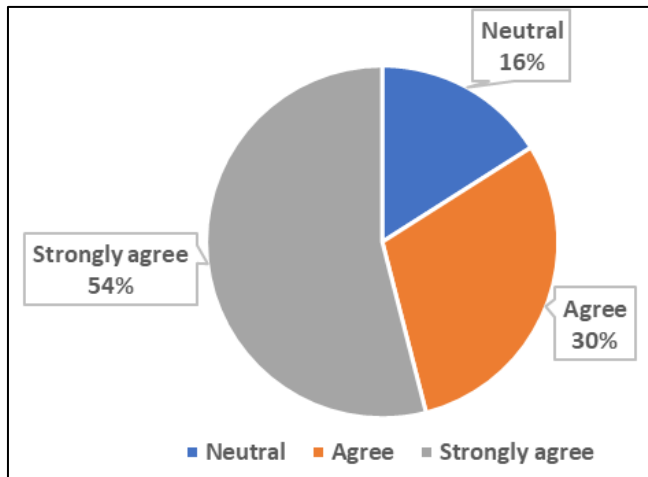


Fig 1: Socioeconomic disparities cause social conflict

The data provided in figure 1 indicates that a majority of respondents (84%) either agree or strongly agree that socioeconomic disparities cause social conflict, while 16% expressed a neutral stance.

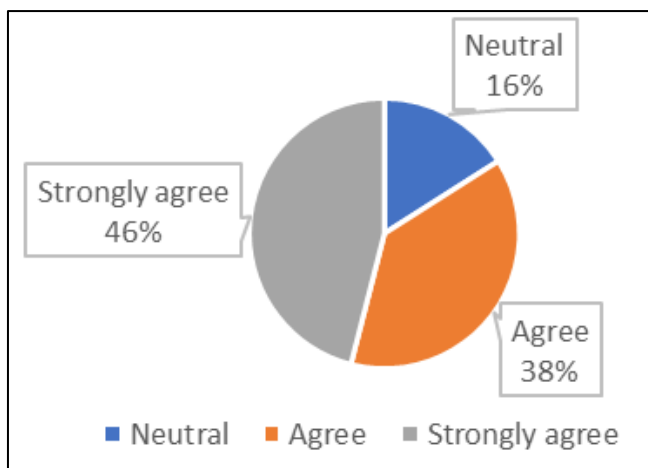


Fig 2: Land disputes cause social conflict

The data provided in figure 2 indicates that a significant majority of respondents (84%) either agree or strongly agree that land disputes cause social conflict. Among the respondents, 46% strongly agree, while 38% agree with this statement. Only 16% expressed a neutral stance.

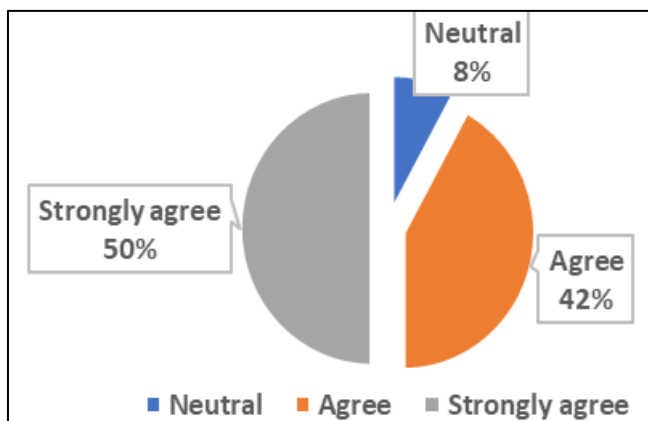


Fig 3: Religious squabble causes social conflict

According to the provided information in figure 3, most respondents (50%) strongly believe that religious disputes lead to social strife, whereas 42% agree with this claim. Only 8% expressed a neutral stance.

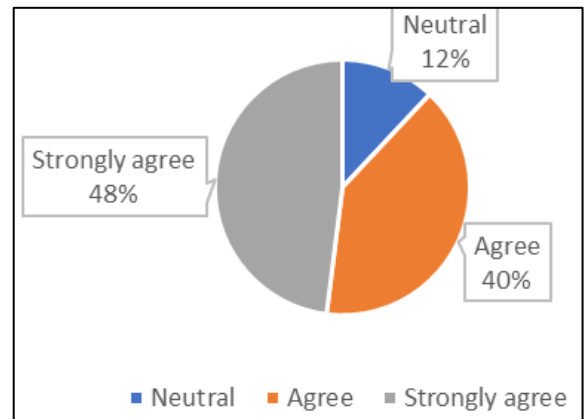


Fig 4: Political rivals cause social conflict

According to the information in figure 4, the majority of respondents (48%) seem to strongly believe that political rivals lead to societal strife. Additionally, 40% of respondents agree with this statement, while 12% expressed a neutral stance.

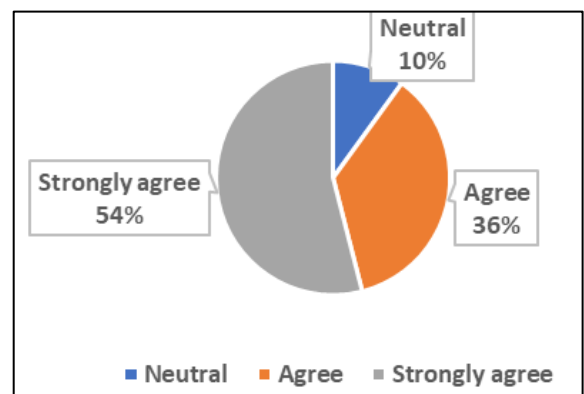


Fig 5: Cultural disparities cause social conflict

It is clear from the statistics in figure 5 that the majority of respondents (54%) strongly concur that cultural differences lead to social conflict. Additionally, 36% of respondents agree with this statement, while 10% expressed a neutral stance.

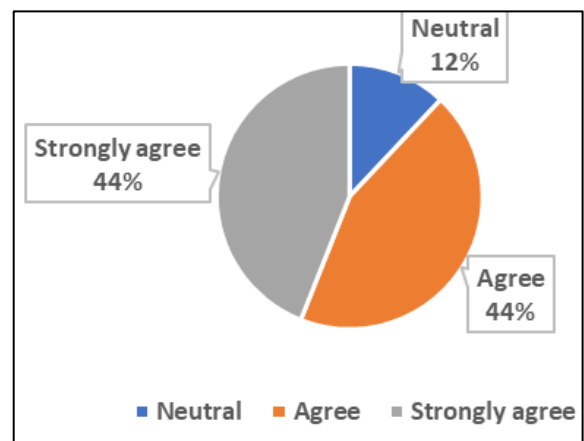


Fig 6: Social conflict hoists violence and insecurity

According to the information in figure 6, a sizable majority of respondents (44%) strongly agree and believe that social strife causes violence and instability. Additionally, 12% of respondents expressed a neutral stance on this statement.

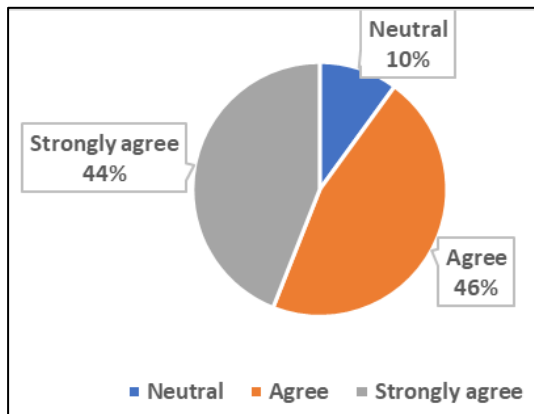


Fig 7: Social conflict elevates displacement and migration

It is clear from the statistics in figure 7 that a sizeable portion of respondents (44%) strongly agree and an additional 46% agree that social strife causes migration and displacement. Moreover, 10% of respondents expressed a neutral stance on this statement.

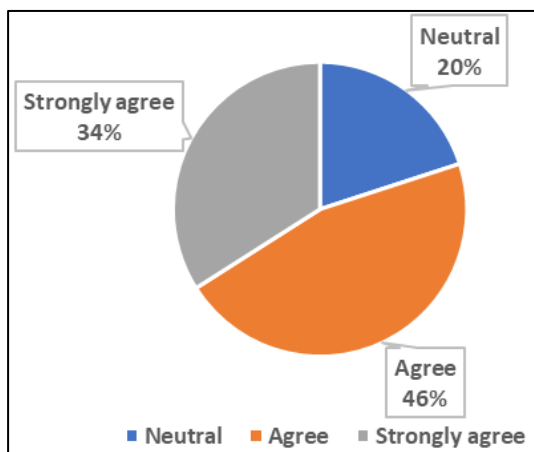


Fig 8: Social conflict upraises economic instability

Results provided in figure 8 make it clear that a sizeable percentage of respondents (34%) strongly agree and another 46% believe that social conflict causes economic instability. Moreover, 20% of respondents expressed a neutral stance on this statement.

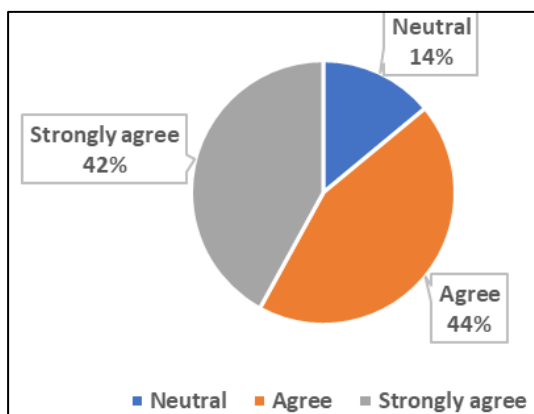


Fig 9: Social conflict uplifts social polarization and divisions

Figure 9's findings make it clear that a sizeable majority of respondents (42%) strongly agree and another 44% think that social strife fuels polarization and division in society. Furthermore, 14% of those polled had a neutral opinion on this assertion.

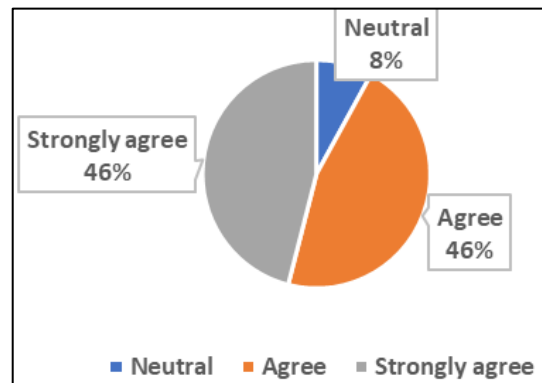


Fig 10: Dialogue and mediation can decrease social conflict

Figure 10's findings clearly show that a sizeable majority of respondents (46%) strongly agree and another 46% believe that conversation and mediation help lessen societal strife. In addition, 8% of respondents said they had no opinion on this claim.

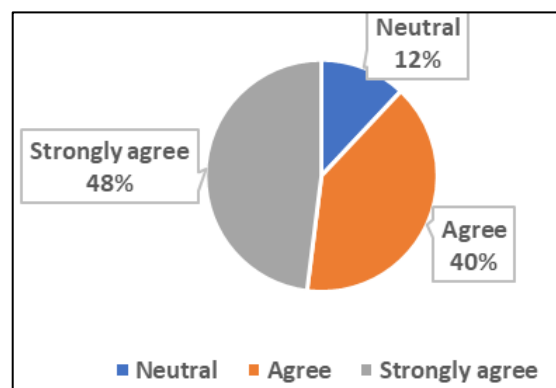


Fig 11: Access to Justice can reduce social conflict

Figure 11's findings make it clear that a sizeable majority of respondents (48%) strongly agree and another 40% believe that access to justice helps lessen societal conflict. Additionally, 12% of respondents said they had no opinion on this claim.

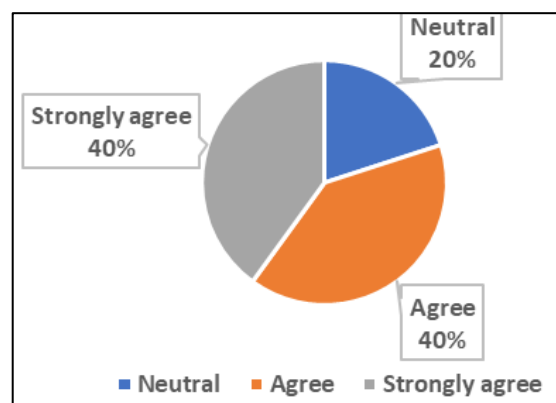


Fig 12: Economic development and poverty alleviation can remove social conflict

Based on the information in figure 12, it is clear that 40% of respondents strongly agree and another 40% believe that reducing poverty and promoting economic growth can end social conflict. Furthermore, 20% of those surveyed had a neutral opinion on this assertion.

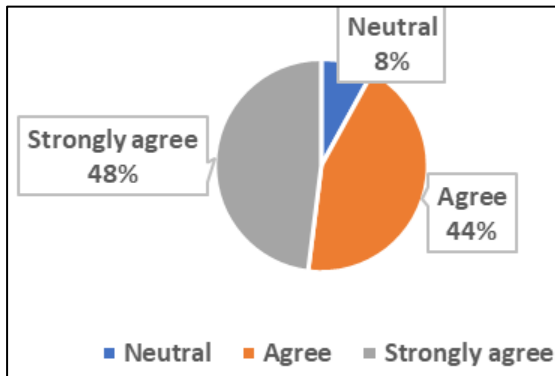


Fig 13: Education and awareness can lessen social conflict

According to the statistics in figure 13, 48% of respondents strongly believe that education and awareness help minimize social conflict, and another 44% agree. In addition, 8% of respondents said they had no opinion on this claim.

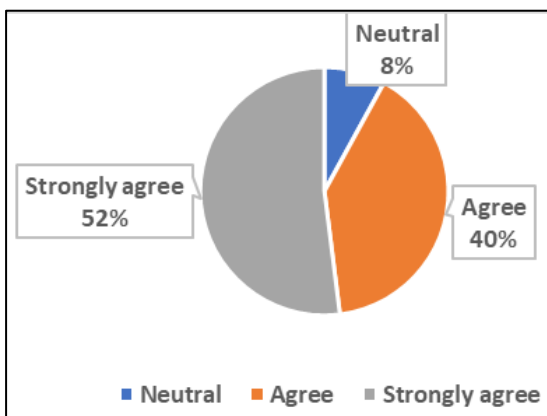


Fig 14: Effective governance and accountability can decrease social conflict

It is clear from the data in figure 14 that 40% of respondents and 52% of respondents agree that good governance and accountability can reduce social strife. In addition, 8% of respondents said they had no opinion on this claim.

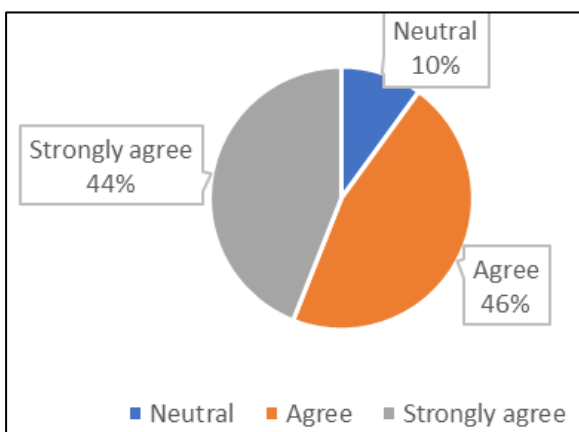


Fig 15: Community empowerment and participation can reduce social conflict

Based on the information in figure 15, it is clear that 44% of respondents strongly agree and another 46% agree that increasing community participation and empowerment can lessen social conflict. Furthermore, 10% of those surveyed had a neutral opinion on this assertion.

Findings from Interviews, Focus Group Discussion, and Observation

Causes of Social Conflict in Rural Areas of Bangladesh:

1. **Socioeconomic Disparities:** Uneven distribution of resources like land, money, and opportunities can cause tensions and conflicts between diverse socioeconomic groups.
2. **Land Conflicts:** Land rights disputes regularly occur in Bangladesh because of a lack of arable land, especially in rural areas. Disagreements between farmers, landowners, and landless individuals may escalate tensions and occasionally result in bloodshed.
3. **Religious Conflict:** Bangladesh is a multiethnic country with a largely Muslim population. Religious competition and conflicts can lead to social strife, particularly in areas where multiple faith communities coexist.
4. **Political rivalries:** When political rivalries and affiliations flare up in rural areas, conflicts can develop between members of various political parties. These disputes may be sparked by rivalry for resources, clout, and authority.
5. **Cultural Disparities:** Each of Bangladesh's numerous ethnic groups has its own distinctive cultural practices and traditions. Language, culture, and normative differences can make social conflicts worse, especially when there is a lack of tolerance and understanding between different groups.

Effects of Social Conflict in Rural Areas of Bangladesh

1. **Violence and Insecurity:** Social conflicts often escalate into violent altercations that cause harm, deaths, and property destruction. This violence causes dread and unease in the community, which hinders social and economic growth.
2. **Displacement and Migration:** People may leave their houses and move within or externally as a result of social tensions. People who are displaced face more risks because it is challenging for them to find a place to live, a job, or access basic services.
3. **Economic Instability:** Social disputes impede economic activities including trade, tourism, and agriculture, which has a severe effect on the quality of life in rural areas. Investing and development projects might also be hindered, which would lead to a lack of job opportunities and economic stagnation.
4. **Social Polarization and Divisions:** Long-lasting conflicts among people undermine cooperation and trust across different groups by escalating societal polarization and division. This can erode societal cohesion and make it more difficult to address the underlying causes of conflict.

Remedies for Social Conflict in Rural Areas of Bangladesh

1. **Dialogue and Mediation:** Promoting communication and mediation between parties to a dispute can help advance peaceful resolutions and build confidence. Community-based conflict resolution procedures can be implemented to settle disagreements on a local level.

2. **Access to Justice:** Land disputes and other issues can be resolved by ensuring equal access to justice and supporting the judicial system. This means improving the efficiency and fairness of the court system in addition to providing support and legal help to impoverished communities.
3. **Economic Development and Poverty Alleviation:** The core causes of social unrest can be lessened by closing socioeconomic gaps through focused development initiatives, campaigns against poverty, and equitable resource distribution.
4. **Education and Awareness:** By fostering cultural sensitivity, education, and awareness, one can foster tolerance, respect, and understanding among diverse populations. Educational institutions may contribute much to the advancement of peace building and conflict resolution skills.
5. **Effective Governance and Accountability:** Promoting efficient, accountable, and transparent governance at all levels is essential for reducing social conflicts. Through effective management, inclusive decision-making processes, and the resolving of grievances, trust may be built and conflict can be avoided.
6. **Community Empowerment and Participation:** Promoting community engagement.

Discussion on the Findings

Past studies reflect that those social conflicts can arise in rural Bangladesh for a number of reasons, such as socioeconomic inequalities, land disputes, religious tensions, political rivalries, and cultural differences. Communities affected by these conflicts may experience violence, displacement, economic instability, and social unrest. To address these problems and advance peace and development in rural Bangladesh, it is essential to comprehend the causes, consequences, and potential solutions of social conflict. Thus, these past studies have found causes and effects but not addressed any solution of this problem. However, this study has revealed causes, effects, and some particular solutions preventing and minimizing societal strife. This study has found that the unequal distribution of money, resources, and opportunities among various people or groups within a society is referred to as socioeconomic inequalities. Such differences can cause a variety of social conflicts when they exist. Social conflicts can also be influenced by other elements including political ideology, ethnic or religious tensions, economic inequalities, or old grudges. The findings reveals that social strife and the escalation of social polarization and divisions are closely related. It reveals that conversation and mediation are effective ways to lessen and manage social conflict, and having access to justice may be an important way of preventing and minimizing societal strife. Many people think that reducing poverty and promoting economic growth can help to lessen social unrest. According to the findings, many people think that raising people's levels of knowledge and understanding could lessen societal conflict. It is noted that eliminating social conflict requires strong accountability and governance. The findings reveal that involvement and community empowerment have a significant role in lowering social strife.

Conclusion

This study offers a thorough framework for looking at the causes, repercussions, and solutions of social conflict in rural

Bangladesh by using a mixed-approaches approach that blends qualitative and quantitative research methods. It enables a more nuanced understanding of the subject by embracing the viewpoints and experiences of various stakeholders and serves as a basis for the creation of efficient methods to deal with social issues in Bangladesh's rural areas.

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