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**The Fertility Change in Pakistan and Bangladesh:  
A Study of Failure and Success**

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## **Abbreviations**

DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FPP	Family Planning Program
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEM	Gender Empowerment Index
HDI	Human Development Index
LDC	Less Developed Country
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SAP	Social Action Program
SAPP	Social Action Program Project
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>p.4</b>
1.1 Background	p.4
1.2 Aim of the Study	p.6
1.3 Method and Material	p.6
1.4 Disposition	p.6
1.5 Pakistan and Bangladesh: Their Common History	p.7
<b>2. Conceptual Framework: Gender Relations, Poverty and Fertility in a South Asian Setting</b>	<b>p.10</b>
2.1 Gender Relations	p.10
2.2 Poverty and Insecurity	p.13
2.3 Method of Analysis	p.16
<b>3. Bivariate Analysis</b>	<b>p.17</b>
<b>4. Study and Analysis: Socio-economic Change in Pakistan and Bangladesh</b>	<b>p.19</b>
4.1 Gender Relations	p.19
4.1.1 <i>The Gender Gap in Education</i>	p.19
4.1.2 <i>Age at Marriage and Spousal Age Difference</i>	p.23
4.1.3 <i>Female Labour Force Participation</i>	p.24
4.1.4 <i>GEM and GDI</i>	p.25
4.1.5 <i>Government Policies and NGOs</i>	p.27
4.1.6 <i>Family Planning Programmes</i>	p.30
4.1.7 <i>Comments</i>	p.34
4.2 Poverty and Insecurity	p.35
4.2.1 <i>HDI</i>	p.35
4.2.2 <i>Economic Inequality and Poverty</i>	p.36
4.2.3 <i>Urban and Rural Development</i>	p.38
4.2.4 <i>Government Policies and NGOs</i>	p.40
4.2.5 <i>Comments</i>	p.42
4.3 Final Discussion	p.43
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>p.49</b>
<b>6. Bibliography</b>	<b>p.50</b>

## 1. Introduction

The majority of the countries in the developing world are still in the second phase of the demographic transition. This means that although the death rates have fallen, the birth rates remain high, leading to population growth. The transition from the first phase, where both birth and death rates are high, to the second phase has happened at an accelerated pace in this part of the world, due to the rapid spread of antibiotics, as well as other medication and health care, and improved sanitation methods. The birth rates have proven much more difficult to reduce, however. The resulting high population growth is a great burden for countries that are struggling to improve their economic and social conditions. What is especially alarming is that the growth rate is constantly increasing. In 1960 there were three billion people in the world, and in 1999 the world population reached six billion. So in only 39 years the world population has doubled. It is very difficult to keep up with this growth economically and populations in countries with the highest growth tend to suffer from poverty. The achievement of a sustainable economic development becomes more difficult with the high birth rates and the young populations they lead to. The negative effect of the population growth that is taking place today therefore outweighs the positive aspects, such as increased technical progress and a larger labour force. For these reasons, it has become one of the main goals of international development and aid organisations to work with local governments for a reduction in birth rates and total fertility rates, in order to improve their economic performance and reduce poverty levels.

### 1.1 Background

The present study is a spin-off from my Bachelor's Thesis, which was a macro-economic study of the impact of one socio-economic variable, female education, on the total fertility rate in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> The total fertility rate (TFR) can be defined as the total number of children that would be born to a woman if she was to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with prevailing age-specific fertility rates.<sup>2</sup> The results in my thesis showed a weak negative relationship; more context-dependent than theory would imply. Of the thirty

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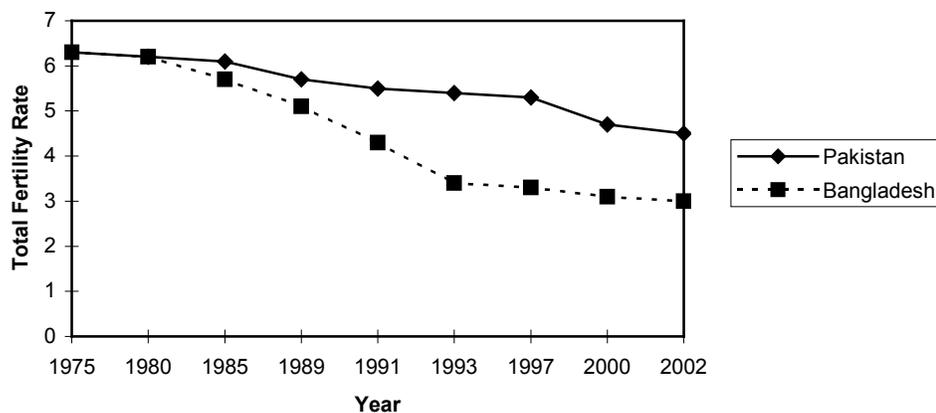
<sup>1</sup> Larsson (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Definition taken from [www.worldbank.org/data/working/def8.html](http://www.worldbank.org/data/working/def8.html)

countries included in the study, several did not fit the expected pattern. One of these was Bangladesh, which had a relatively low fertility rate combined with a low level of female education. Bangladesh has received international attention for its quite remarkable reduction in fertility, despite low levels of socio-economic development. This development is in opposition to traditional fertility theory, which sees fertility reduction as dependent on higher socio-economic development. What has been present in Bangladesh, however, is a widespread Family Planning Programme (FPP), so one conclusion that has been drawn is that the success of this FPP is accountable for the lower fertility rates. This view has received much criticism for being too simplistic, however.

Between 1948 and 1971, Bangladesh was part of Pakistan. Both countries are predominantly Muslim less developed countries of the same region. Until the end of the 1990s, Pakistan failed to reduce its fertility rates, despite FPPs and a higher economic development than Bangladesh.

**Chart 1: Fertility Change in Pakistan and Bangladesh**



A comparison of the total fertility rates in the two countries is shown above.

The difference is striking, especially considering their common past and cultural similarities. In 1975, both countries had a TFR of 6.3, but in 1997, the TFR in Bangladesh was down to 3.3 children, while Pakistan was still struggling at a level of 5.3. Bangladesh's reduction was particularly strong in the end of 1980s and the early 1990s. It then stagnated, while Pakistan experienced a stronger reduction in the end of the 1990s. By 2002, Pakistan's TFR had fallen to 4.5, but Bangladesh's was still lower at 3.0. Despite Pakistan's higher economic development, which should have put

it in a more favourable position from the outset, Bangladesh managed to reduce its TFR at an early stage while Pakistan's TFR was been kept practically unchanged until the mid-1990s. In 1997, the average Pakistani woman only had one child less than 22 years earlier. The gap between the countries has narrowed, as the graph shows, but it is still interesting to study this different development in the fertility rates in two countries with a common history and culture.

## **1.2 Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study is to determine the reasons for the difference in the fertility change in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Why did Bangladesh have such a quick success, and Pakistan failed, despite their common history which includes early measures to reduce the population growth? The fact that they were previously one country makes the comparison especially interesting, as they part from a common political and economic background, and similar levels of fertility.

## **1.3 Method and Material**

As socio-economic development is known to hamper the fertility rates, a number of socio-economic indicators will be studied, in order to determine in which areas the two countries differ. Government policies and FPP will also be studied, as well as the involvement of NGOs.

The statistics are mostly taken from the UN, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and official national sources. The risk of data inaccuracy should not be underestimated, however, as always when dealing with less developed countries. In order to get a more complete picture of the socio-economic situation, several indicators are used when possible. For example, when the gender gap in education is studied, both the primary and secondary enrolment ratios are presented, as well as the literacy rate.

## **1.4 Disposition**

Below follows a short summary of Bangladesh's and Pakistan's common history. Then a conceptual framework, which introduces the relationship between poor gender relations, poverty and high fertility rates, specific to the South Asian setting, will be presented. This is followed by a bivariate analysis which investigates the relationship between the TFR and some of the socio-economic variables. Then comes an in-depth

study and analysis, which is divided into two sections - the first looks at indicators of women's status and policies aimed at enhancing equality between the genders; the second focuses on poverty and insecurity, and includes a look at poverty alleviation policies. A final discussion brings the results of the two sections together, and this is followed by a conclusion.

### **1.5 Pakistan and Bangladesh: Their Common History**

In 1947, when the British rule was terminated, the Indian Subcontinent was divided into two countries, based on their respective religion: India, where Hinduism was the main religion, and Muslim Pakistan. The idea of creating a separate state for the Muslim people, known as the Two Nation Theory, was introduced by the poet and philosopher Iqbal in 1931, and it was adopted by the Muslim independence movement, the Muslim League in 1940.<sup>3</sup> It is based on the tension that existed between Hindus and Muslims, which Jinnah, the creator of Pakistan, expressed in the following terms: "The Hindus and Muslims belong to different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature. They neither inter-marry or inter-dine and indeed, they belong to two different civilisations which are based on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their outlook on life and of life are different. It is clear that Hindus and Muslims derive their inspirations from different sources of history..."<sup>4</sup>.

Pakistan was divided into an Eastern and Western part (today Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively), separated by approximately 2000 km. of Indian territory. Iqbal's idea of the Muslim state consisted of Western Pakistan only, but because Eastern Bengal was populated by a great majority of Muslims, it also became part of the new Muslim nation.

From the outset, Pakistan was difficult to rule. It was badly prepared for independence in terms of administration, politics and economics. Large numbers of educated Hindus fled the country to India, while Muslims, mainly farmers, immigrated to Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> But it was especially the distance between Eastern and Western Pakistan, both geographically and culturally, that made the situation critical. Apart from the existing cultural differences, there were a number of factors contributing to the growing conflict between the two parts of the country. The Bengalis felt disregarded by the leaders in Western Pakistan, of which practically all

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<sup>3</sup> Carlson (1999:100-1)

<sup>4</sup> Blinkenberg (1998:23)

<sup>5</sup> Stjernberg (1972:14)

originated from the West. Some spoke of internal colonialism. Some figures may give an understanding of the Bengali's disadvantage: in 1965-66 and 1969-70, Eastern Pakistan's exports contributed to 50 percent of Pakistan's total exports, but its imports only 33 percent. The West in the same period got 64 percent of all development investments as opposed to Eastern Pakistan's 36 percent. At the same time, Eastern Bengal's population was 25 percent larger than Western Pakistan's.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Bengalis were severely hit by the Kashmir conflict when it led to the banning of trade with India. Eastern Pakistan had little sympathy for the conflict, and being surrounded by Indian territory they were in a very vulnerable position. In 1966, a six-point plan for regional autonomy was set up by a separatist movement in Eastern Pakistan, the Awami League, which increased the internal crisis and eventually led to the fall of the military regime of Ayub Khan. His successor Yahya Khan chose to deal with the problem not with military measures of suppression, but by trying to introduce democracy in the country.

In 1970, East Bengal was struck by its largest flooding catastrophe in modern history, with half a million deaths. The reaction from the Western wing came late, and the help arrived after some delay and in some cases not at all, which caused great frustration among the Bengalis. Many meant that the Government's slow reaction was intentional. The bitterness came through in the first general elections since Independence, only a few months later that year, where the Awami League, with its leader Sheik Mujibur Rahman, won an overall majority in the Assembly.

Sheik Rahman refused to change any claims made in the six-point plan, which made Yahya Khan fear, along with many others, that the results of the elections would eventually lead to the splitting of Pakistan. Negotiations were set up, where attempts were made to persuade the Sheik to change parts of the six-point plan, but without success. The first parliamentary session was therefore cancelled by Yahya Khan, leading to great protests, and in March 1971, government troops marched into Eastern Pakistan.

Western Pakistan's military attack caused enormous refugee floods to India, where the public became more and more in favour of the Bengalis. In fact, many Indians had sentimental links with the Eastern Bengalis, especially the Western Bengalis who had a common history, language, literature etc. with the people of Eastern Pakistan. In December 1971, the war was a fact, and Indian troops marched into Eastern Bengal,

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<sup>6</sup> Blinkenberg (1998:258)

with the objective to liberate it from Western Pakistan. The war only lasted fourteen days, but it was extremely violent. With its end, Bangladesh became an independent state.

## 2. Conceptual Framework: Gender Relations, Poverty and Fertility in a South Asian Setting

### 2.1 Gender Relations

Patriarchy is an important social institution in South Asia, influencing relations between men and women at all levels of society. Its impact tends to be especially strong in Muslim areas, where it is complemented and reinforced by the practice of *purdah*. According to this tradition, the honour of a family is determined by the respectability of its women, which in turn depends on their seclusion from the public sphere, and in particular from men outside of the nearest family. This is an efficient way of controlling women and maintaining the higher status of men, since it makes women dependent on their male family members. The women, being secluded, are responsible for the family sphere, while all public matters are left in the hands of the men, who are the breadwinners. For several reasons, inequality between the genders contributes to a high level of fertility in South Asia.

The discrimination against women in this region starts as soon as they are born. Household allocations have been known to favour some members over others. It has generally been the men and boys who are favoured over the women and girls, and the young over the elderly.<sup>7</sup> These differences in allocations are reflected in variations in nutritional status, making girls more prone to disease and therefore also to infant and child mortality.

Because of the tradition of patrilocal marriage, where a newly married woman is removed from her family of birth and places her in her husband's locality, a girl tends to be viewed as a "guest" in her family of birth.<sup>8</sup> The investments made in her, such as education, will not come back to her own family, but to the family of the future husband. This, as well as the fact that women traditionally do not contribute to the household income, limits incentives for sending her to school. In addition, men tend to be reluctant to marry women with a higher education than themselves, and the men with higher education are often of higher economic status, demanding large dowries. As a result, poor families may also for marriage market reasons find it improper to send their daughters to school. The low incentive for female education

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<sup>7</sup> Dasgupta (1995:1886)

<sup>8</sup> Cain (1979:406-7)

has a positive impact on the fertility level, as theory shows a negative relationship between education and fertility, with a particularly strong correlation between female education and fertility. Female education tends to for example raise the age at first marriage, and the access to the labour market which according to Mincer's theory increases the opportunity costs of children. Female education can also give women a greater independence and status within the household, in particular if she can contribute to the family income. This may in turn give her other goals than childbearing, affecting the demand for children negatively. Specific health education will also give young girls a better knowledge about family planning and possibly reduce child mortality, thereby affecting the fertility level negatively on the supply side.

Marriages are often arranged in South Asia, with the girl having little say in the choice of husband. The age at first marriage is low in the area, in particular in the case of women, since they from a young age are at risk of being accused of indecency, which will result in family dishonour. Marriage at a young age will of course raise the number of reproductive years within the couple, contributing directly to a high natural fertility. A younger wife will also be more susceptible to opinions and orders of her husband and in-laws. She will have had less time to experience the outside world, form opinions of her own and develop an independent personality, which would have made her better prepared to withstand pressures from her new family.<sup>9</sup> This fact, together with the large age gap that is generally prevalent between the spouses, puts the young wife in a subordinate position relative to her husband at the outset of the marriage. The man is often as much as 10 years older than his wife in parts of South Asia. In addition, the fact that the bride leaves her family and home, and is placed in a completely new environment, where her family has a very limited possibility to intervene on her behalf, increases her vulnerability further.<sup>10</sup> In this setting, a young wife will have little authority to express and implement any family planning or labour division desires she may have.<sup>11</sup> Delayed marriage is also generally connected to a longer period of education, and/or labour market participation, which both have a negative impact on the fertility level.

The young wife, when she arrives at her new household, takes on the lowest position in the family-hierarchy. Her possibility to influence household decisions is

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<sup>9</sup> Sathar et al (1988:418)

<sup>10</sup> Cain (1979:406)

<sup>11</sup> Sathar & Kiani (1998:552)

negligible. Her status will gradually improve with the birth of each child, especially sons, giving her an incentive to have many children. The status is also improved with age. Among the women, it is the mother in law that has the greatest power, due to her experience in household matters and to the birth of her sons.<sup>12</sup> So a woman's role changes throughout the lifecycle. Nevertheless, her status is always inferior to that of her male relatives, as well as to men in general.

The subordinate role of the wife towards her husband, their age difference and the practice of village exogamy, all contribute to the unequal relationship between the spouses, making open communication between the two difficult. Society, and patriarchy and Islam in particular, prescribes them separate roles and areas of responsibility within the household, reinforcing the difficulty in obtaining mutual decision-making, where the wife has a say in matters concerning the family. Indeed, according to a study by Kennedy and Oniang'o, a woman's allocation decisions have a bigger effect on her family's health than when the man is responsible for the family income<sup>13</sup>. So if a wife can be part of the decision-making in the household, the children will tend to benefit from it.

The traditional South Asian setting largely excludes women from the labour market, as men are viewed as the main breadwinners of the family. Low participation in the formal labour market leaves women economically dependent on husbands and other relatives. When their husbands are unable to provide for them, sons will take on this role, so there is a clear incentive to give birth to many sons to provide an old-age security. Women that want to or need to work outside the household face tough labour discrimination, with only certain jobs viewed as acceptable for women. As mentioned previously, female employment will tend to raise the opportunity cost of having children, increase the age at first marriage and give the household a higher income, all factors that are negatively correlated with fertility. Female employment may also raise the status of women within the household and undermine the risk insurance value of children.<sup>14</sup>

The unequal gender relations discussed in this section contribute to the high fertility rates in South Asia. Normally, in a society where women are empowered, the women will have a lower net benefit of children than men, since, physically, women pay the higher price for a large family. Pregnancies, giving birth and breast-feeding,

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmad (1991:65)

<sup>13</sup> Dasgupta (1995:1886)

<sup>14</sup> Wabr eus (1998:19-20)

represent heavy strains on a woman's body. These aspects, together with the risk of maternal mortality, makes the costs of children higher for women than for men, implying that women should have a lower demand for children. However, when the gender relations are as unequal as described above, this difference may be insignificant, or distorted, with women having a higher demand for children despite their biologically higher costs. The women in these societies, being economically dependent on men, tend to see their sons as an insurance against personal calamities, such as widowhood and abandonment. With the inability to provide for themselves, women are dependent on the help from close male relatives in the event of such calamities. They are therefore much more vulnerable than men, and in addition, the large age gap between spouses makes the probability of widowhood significantly higher for the wife. This will tend to positively effect their demand for children. Their increased status within the family that comes with the birth of children, and especially sons, will also have this effect.<sup>15</sup>

## **2.2 Poverty and Insecurity**

In poor families, the security aspect discussed above is a factor which tends to increase both men and women's demand for children. Although men are economically independent, they too will be dependent on their sons for old-age support, due to the lack of institutional sources of insurance and a well functioning capital market. With the risk of child mortality, as well as the possibility that not all sons will be able or willing to provide support for their ageing parents, couples will be prone to have larger families than desired, in order to minimise the risk of destitution. Of course, gender bias aggravates the situation, as they will have to double their offspring to make sure that they will have enough sons to ensure their old-age support.<sup>16</sup>

It is not only a matter of securing one's old age, however. Children are not only viewed as ends in themselves, but also as productive assets, since they can contribute to the survival of the household, both through market and home-based activities. Households are faced with a number of risks, such as extreme weather conditions and lawlessness, and children are often seen as the only securities against these calamities. With several sources of income, risks are spread out, reducing vulnerability.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dasgupta (1995, 2000)

<sup>16</sup> Ray (1998:311)

<sup>17</sup> Cain (1981)

In agricultural communities especially, children tend to be important productive assets. The lack of modern agricultural technology creates a high demand for labour, at least in areas with high population density, where fallowing is impossible. Here, labour intensive methods are used to solve problems with soil fertility, weeds, water control etc. These tasks are often performed by women and children, creating an incentive for large families. As long as the children can contribute more to the household than they cost, they will be economically beneficial to the parents and the rest of the family.<sup>18</sup>

Dasgupta has in his work emphasised the link between population growth, poverty and the degradation of the natural-resource base, and how all three aspects feed on each other. According to his framework, the process of economic development has eroded traditional methods of control of local commons in agricultural communities, leading to over-exploitation of these natural resources. This creates a free-riding problem, where parents put some of their costs of children on the local community, so that too many children are born, putting pressure on the local environment. When the natural resources are depleted, more labour is needed to collect fuel and water. These tasks are the responsibility of women and children, so there will be further incentive to enlarge the family. This will worsen the problem, and a vicious circle is created. According to Dasgupta, this explains why people in various parts of the world, including South Asia, have been unable to lift themselves out of extreme poverty, even while the national economies have experienced growth.<sup>19</sup>

The urban population may have the same incentive to have many children in terms of providing an old-age security as the people living in the countryside. Nevertheless, poor children in the cities can contribute to the household income to a lesser extent than in an agricultural environment, due to the type of work available. Family patterns also tend to change in an urban environment, with smaller family units, making it difficult to move some of child-rearing responsibilities to the extended family, raising the cost of children. The joint family setting that often prevails in the countryside, where many generations live together, makes it easier for women to give birth to many children as the responsibility and care-taking can be spread out to other family members. Families and individuals that move to the urban areas do not have this social network and may therefore settle with smaller family units. The gender relations and family values are also more likely to be affected by

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<sup>18</sup> Boserup (1984)

Western values in an urban setting, which includes smaller families and a changed attitude to contraceptives, affecting the fertility levels negatively.

The uneven division of power between the genders and the high level of insecurity contribute to the downward mobility pressure on the poor, and to the high level of fertility. One should be aware, however, that all of these variables are endogenous, and that the direction of the relationship is uncertain. Poverty, can for example be a consequence, as well as a determinant, of the high population growth. The traditional relationship between poverty and fertility is positive, with a poor setting leading to a higher demand for children for reasons discussed above. New theories from Kabeer and Boserup speak of poverty-driven fertility reduction, where in some conditions the relationship between poverty and fertility is negative. In environments with persisting economic uncertainty, poor families can chose to adapt their family size to the income. Boserup argues that since population growth has in the past coincided with economic expansion in the developing world, families have chosen to adapt their income to the family size, rather than the opposite. Now that developing countries have for example become more dependent on exports and capital imports, suffer debt crises and face protectionism from the West, the available options to raise household incomes have fallen, and families have to make new choices. They may therefore opt for an adaptation of the family size to the income. A situation of acute and prolonged poverty can therefore have a positive impact on the fertility level, adding to the complexity of the poverty-fertility relationship.<sup>20</sup>

As the above discussion has determined, the reasons for a high rate of fertility on the Indian subcontinent are many, with social institutions and traditions acting together with high levels of risk and poverty. Although the emphasis has been on the demand for children, the cost of fertility regulation and the natural fertility are also affected by these factors.<sup>21</sup> The natural fertility level, or the supply of children when no birth control is used, will tend to be positively correlated with the tradition of early marriage. The cost of fertility regulation, which includes not only financial cost, but also psychic costs and practical problems, will of course be affected by the low income levels, as well as the gender relations within the household and in the community.

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<sup>19</sup> Dasgupta (1995, 2000)

<sup>20</sup> Prakash (1997: 10-11)

<sup>21</sup> See Easterlin et al (1980)

### 2.3 Method of Analysis

As discussed in the introduction, the aim of this study is to determine the reasons for the differences in the total fertility rate in Bangladesh and Pakistan. The focus will be on socio-economic factors known to have an impact on the fertility level. A quantitative study would consist of a multivariate time-series analysis, since we are studying the development of the fertility rate in only two countries over a long period of time. The multitude of variables affecting the total fertility rate, combined with problems obtaining reliable statistics for the whole time period, has made it difficult to carry out a time-series analysis, however. The analysis will therefore be a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, with the inclusion of relevant statistics for comparisons when available. A short bivariate analysis will be incorporated to give a general indication of the relationship in the cases where the statistics is available, however.

Changes in the factors that affect the gender relations and insecurity, discussed in this second chapter, will be analysed and compared between the two countries. Based on the above discussion, a model has been set up with the total fertility rate as the dependent variable, and the determinate variables affect the gender relations and/or the insecurity level, and in some cases they affect fertility rate directly. The determinate variables in our model are the gender gap in education, age at first marriage, female labour force participation and women's status and autonomy, the poverty level, urbanisation and human development. They gender relations and the insecurity have an impact on the fertility rate via the demand for children, use of contraception and exposure to intercourse. (see model below).

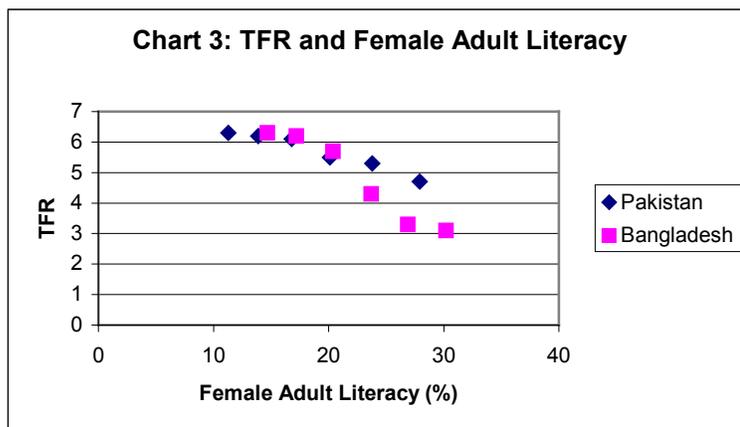
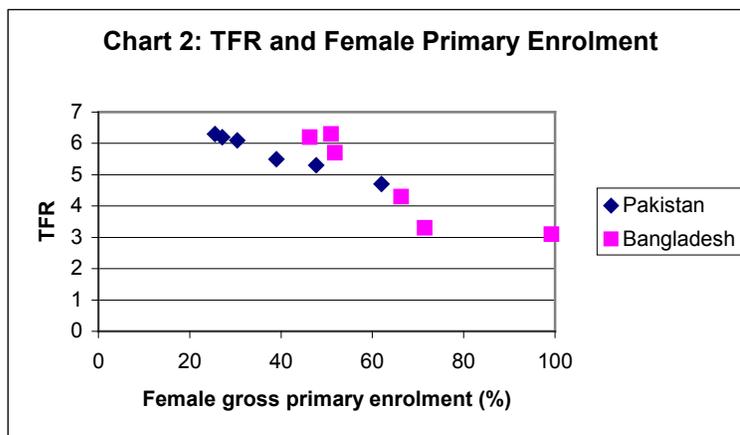
The analysis also includes family planning programmes and other government and non-governmental policies that may have had an impact on the total fertility level in each setting.

#### Model:



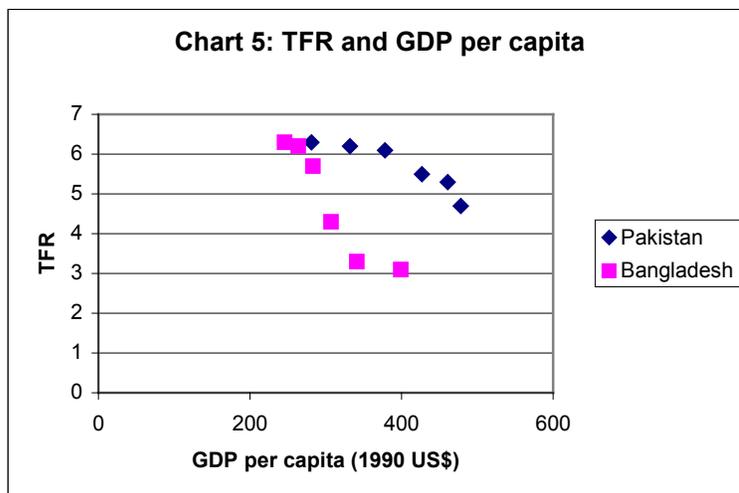
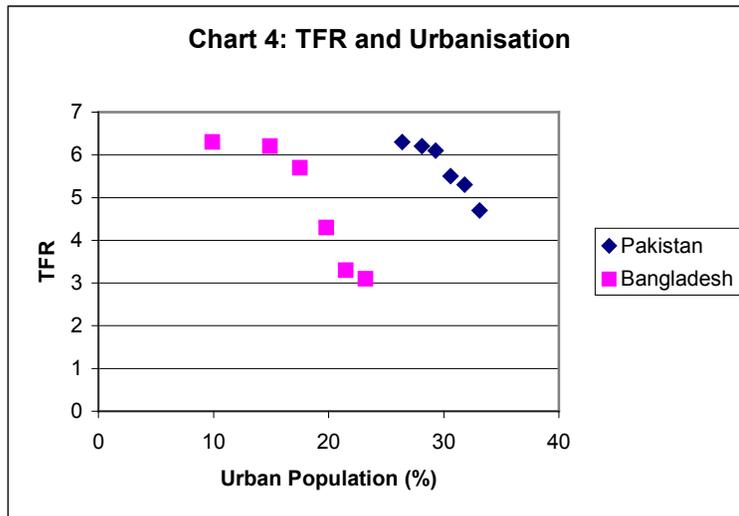
### 3. Bivariate Relations

This section looks closer at the relationship between the total fertility rate and a few of the determinate variables – two gender related factors, urbanisation and GDP per capita, which is used as a measure of the economic development. The statistics come from the UN, and were available for five-year intervals, starting in 1975, although some indices were taken from the closest year available.<sup>22</sup>



Based on the above graphs, both female primary enrolment and female adult literacy have a negative relationship with the total fertility rate, implying a lower fertility rate with higher female education which is in line with theory. A correlation to test the fit between the total fertility rate and the female primary enrolment shows an  $R^2$  of 0.98 for Pakistan and 0.80 for Bangladesh, where 1 is a perfect fit. The results were similar for female adult literacy, with very high numbers. This strong relation is probably

largely due to the small sample of variables used, and so should be studied with caution.



A weak negative relationship can be determined between urbanisation and the GDP per capita and the total fertility rate, as shown in the graphs. Again, the  $R^2$  is very high for both variables, with figures between 0.85 and 0.90.

The graphs indicate a negative relationship between the total fertility rate and two important variables affecting the gender relations in the countries, as well as with two variables affecting the poverty and insecurity levels. A closer study of these and other determinate factors on the fertility rate follows in the section below.

## **4. Study and Analysis: Socio-economic Change in Pakistan and Bangladesh**

The underlying factors influencing the fertility rate in the region, discussed in the conceptual framework, are a consequence of the given socio-economic and cultural environment. As a result, changes in the socio-economic setting may bring forth a change in the fertility rate. The following section is an attempt to study and analyse social and economic changes that have occurred in Pakistan and Bangladesh, through a population perspective, in order to determine if there are variations that can explain the gap in the fertility rate.

Firstly, we will look at the gender gap in socio-economic development, in order to determine whether there are any variations in the status and autonomy of women between the two countries. This section will be followed by a study of the economic indicators, in order to get an idea of the extent of poverty and insecurity in each country. Although we study the gender relations and the poverty aspect separately, it is important to bear in mind their interaction, and their cumulative effects on the fertility rate.

### **4.1 Gender Relations**

As we have discussed, patriarchy and the tradition of purdah have created an environment where women are discriminated against and given a subordinate role to men. This situation, in combination with poverty, creates a favourable setting for large families. Differences in the extent of this gender inequality can therefore be related to differences in fertility rates.

Below, we shall study different socio-economic indicators of women's status and autonomy in both countries, as well as government policies, FPPs and NGO's contributions. This will give an idea of the gender relations in each setting, and perhaps provide us with possible explanations for the fertility divergence.

#### *4.1.1 The gender gap in education:*

Both countries have had a relatively low level of educational attainment, male as well as female, although much progress has been taking place in this field in the last 20 years. Nevertheless, gender gaps still remain, with women and girls being the ones who to a larger extent are illiterate and deprived of education.<sup>23</sup> In the beginning of the 1970s, Bangladesh and Pakistan had a total primary school enrolment ratio of 54 and 40 percent respectively, while the corresponding percentage for girls was 35 and 22 percent.<sup>24</sup> Both total and female primary enrolment figures were higher in Bangladesh, but the gender gap was similar in the two countries. During the decade, the enrolments expanded faster for girls than boys in Pakistan, reducing the gap, at least in the younger age group.<sup>25</sup> By 1980, the total primary school enrolment was 39 percent and the female primary school enrolment 27 percent in Pakistan. Illiteracy rates remained high, again in particular for women, with 86.1 percent of women aged 15 and above being illiterate in 1980 and 59.6 percent of men in the same category, giving a divergence of 26.5 percent. In the same year, the youth illiteracy rates, for people in the age group 15 to 24, were 78.5 percent for girls and 48.2 percent for men, which represents a gender gap of over 30 percent.<sup>26</sup>

In Bangladesh, the adult illiteracy rate was 82.8 percent for women and 60.0 percent for men, while the youth illiteracy rate was 74.1 percent for girls and 55.3 percent for boys in 1980. In both cases, the gender gaps were lower than in Pakistan, by 3.7 percent and 11.5 percent for the adult and youth rates respectively. By the mid-1980s, the girls' primary school enrolment in Bangladesh had risen to about 50 percent.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1990s there was a faster development in terms of reducing the gender gap in education in both countries, but the change has been specifically strong in Bangladesh, as seen in Table 1.

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<sup>23</sup> Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000:104)

<sup>24</sup> UNDP

<sup>25</sup> Sathar et al (1988:419)

<sup>26</sup> World Bank 2002, Sathar & Casterline (1998:779)

<sup>27</sup> World Bank 2002, Caldwell et al (1999:72)

**Table 1: School Enrolment Ratios**

	Gross Primary School Enrolment Ratio (%)				Gross Secondary School Enrolment Ratio (%)				Gross Tertiary School Enrolment Ratio (%)			
	1990		2002		1990		2002		1990		2002	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Bangladesh</b>	77	66	94	98	25	13	45	50	7	1	8	4
<b>Pakistan</b>	82	39	80	57	30	15	25	19	4	2	3	2

Source: Asian Development Bank 2005

In 1990, the gender gap in the primary school enrolment ratio in Bangladesh was limited to 11 percent, while the corresponding gap in Pakistan was as high as 43 percent, show the figures above. The gap in secondary school enrolment in Bangladesh is only one percent bigger than in the primary enrolment, and 3 percent smaller than in Pakistan. In Pakistan, the gender gap is in fact smaller at the secondary than at the primary level. The tertiary school enrolment figures show a larger gap for Bangladesh than for Pakistan, on the other hand. Both countries have very low total enrolment ratios at this level, however.

In the last decade, there have been some very important changes in the enrolments. In 2002, Bangladesh had practically 100 percent primary school enrolment, with girls surpassing boys by 4 percentage points. On the secondary level, Bangladeshi girls have also surpassed boys, by 5 percentage points. While the female gross secondary school enrolment ratio has increased by 37 percent between 1990 and 2002, the corresponding rise for males was limited to 20 percent. At the tertiary level, the gender gap has fallen from 6 to 4 percent. In Pakistan, the changes have not been as significant, but the country has experienced an important rise in female education, at least at the primary level. The gender gap in enrolments fell from 43 percent in 1990 to 23 percent in 2002 at the primary school levels. Some of the reduction in gender differences can be attributed to a fall in the male enrolment ratio at all three schooling levels, however. Again, the gender gap in the tertiary school enrolment is smaller in Pakistan, but the one percent reduction from 1990 is solely due to a fall in the male enrolment ratio.

The literacy rates improved somewhat in the 1990s for both Bangladesh and Pakistan, although they remain low.

**Table 2: Adult and Youth Illiteracy Rates**

	Adult Illiteracy Rate (% of people aged 15+)				Youth Illiteracy Rate (% of people aged 15-24)			
	Bangladesh		Pakistan		Bangladesh		Pakistan	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>1990</b>	55.7	76.3	50.7	79.9	49.3	66.8	37.5	69.4
<b>1995</b>	53.2	73.1	46.5	76.2	46.4	63.7	32.0	63.5
<b>2000</b>	50.6	69.8	42.6	72.1	43.3	60.3	28.9	58.1

Source: World Bank 2002

The gender gap in illiteracy rates remains higher in Pakistan in the 1990s. It stays at around 30 percent throughout the decade, with a slight reduction of 2.7 percent in the younger age group between 1990 and 2000. In Bangladesh, the divergence in the male and female illiteracy rates amounts to about 20 percent.

In conclusion, both countries have had large gender gaps in the enrolment ratios, but they have generally been greater in Pakistan. In the last decade, Bangladesh has had a remarkable development in female education, which has resulted in gender parity in school enrolments. An improvement has also been observed in Pakistan, although an important gender divergence remains. The gap in literacy levels, which takes longer to change, is still significant in both settings. It is larger in Pakistan than in Bangladesh, however.

Two important problems facing the educational sector in both countries are high drop out rates and the quality of the education supplied. In Pakistan, as much as 56 percent of the girls dropped out of primary school in 1994, compared to 33 percent in Bangladesh. The corresponding rates for boys were 46 and 31 percent. Again, the gender gap was greater in Pakistan.<sup>28</sup>

#### *4.1.2 Age at marriage and spousal age difference:*

In Bangladesh, the legal minimum age at marriage is 18 for women and 20 for men. In Pakistan the corresponding ages are 16 and 18.<sup>29</sup> These laws are rarely effectively enforced, however, and child marriages are still common, particularly in rural areas.

<sup>28</sup> Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000:104-5)

<sup>29</sup> UN 2005

As the Table 3 indicates, the age at first marriage has been lower in Bangladesh than in Pakistan for both sexes between the start of the 1970s and 1990s. The difference is visible in both sexes, but is larger in the case of women, and this results in a bigger spousal age difference in Bangladesh.

**Table 3: Singulate Mean Age of Marriage**

	Singulate Mean Age at Marriage Pakistan				Singulate Mean Age at Marriage Bangladesh			
	1972	1981	1988	1991	1974	1981	1989	1991
<b>Men</b>	25.7	25.1	24.9	26.3	23.9	23.9	25.5	24.9
<b>Women</b>	19.7	20.2	20.6	21.6	15.9	16.6	18.0	18.1
<b>Age Difference</b>	6.0	4.9	4.3	4.7	8.0	7.3	7.5	6.8

Sources: Sathar (1993:143), UN 2000

Statistics on marriage rates in different age groups show an important difference in the female marriage rate between the two countries, again with Bangladeshi women marrying at a younger age than the women in Pakistan. There is a divergence in the male marriage rates as well, but less significant and consistent. There is a slightly larger share of the men in the youngest age group that has married in Pakistan than in Bangladesh, but in age group 20-24 the Pakistani men lag behind.

**Table 4: Percentage Ever Married**

	Percentage Ever Married Per Age Group, 1991					
	15-19		20-24		45-49	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Bangladesh</b>	5.0	51.3	31.6	89.5	99.3	99.6
<b>Pakistan</b>	6.2	21.9	24.7	60.6	98.0	98.0

Source: UN 2000

More recent statistics from the UN show similar divergences between the countries' female marriage rates. In 2000, 48 percent of the women aged 15 to 19 had ever been married in Bangladesh. In 1998, 21 percent of the Pakistani women of the same age had ever been married.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> UN 2005

The fact that the men tend to marry later probably results from their positions as breadwinners, which forces them to find employment before they will be considered eligible for marriage. Women, on the other hand, tend to stop working in order to get married, or work in order to delay marriage.<sup>31</sup> In addition, families do not need to fear the fact that their sons might have pre-marital relationships, since this does not affect the family honour. Men will therefore not be as pressured to marry at a very young age.

#### *4.1.3 Female labour force participation:*

Poor women in Bangladesh and Pakistan face a conflict between their traditional role and their need to increase family income. According to purdah, women are to remain within the family sphere, with household and childcare responsibilities. However, when the family suffers from hardships and are unable to live on the husband's income, women are forced to join the labour force, with the risk of becoming social rejects. So it is mainly the most destitute who break the social barriers against female employment, together with a small urban elite who work by choice, influenced by Western values. In many cases the jobs are informal, especially in rural areas, and of lower status than the typical male jobs. Indeed, the gender division of society permeates the labour market, with clear cut lines between what jobs and tasks are acceptable for women and men to perform.<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult to measure the female labour force participation. As mentioned, women often work in the informal market, and the cultural barriers that exist against female employment may cause underreporting of their labour participation. In addition, women working in family businesses or on farms, are often reported as housewives. This brings us to the major problem with determining the female labour force participation: its definition. Should only paid and market oriented activities be included, or should home based activities, which of course constitute an important form of economic valuable work, be considered as well? Various surveys and censuses have used different definitions, leading to comparison problems. For example, as a result of broadening the definition from one survey to the next, the estimate of the female labour force participation in Bangladesh rose from 8 percent in 1984-5 to 62 percent in 1989.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sathar et al (1988:425)

<sup>32</sup> Sathar et al (1988:417-20), Egerö (1998:100)

<sup>33</sup> Amin & Lloyd (1998:51)

Due to the above definition problems, as well as differences in methodology, the statistics in this field should be viewed with great care and awareness of the inaccuracies that may prevail. However, available data can give a general idea of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's participation in the labour force. According to World Bank sources, the female percentage of the labour force in 1997 was 27 in Pakistan and 42 in Bangladesh. Pakistan's average annual growth rate in female labour force participation was 4 percent between 1980 and 1990, and 5.1 percent in 1995-98. This is greater than the annual male growth rate, which declined to a level of 2.7 percent in 1995-98. In Bangladesh, the female labour force has grown at an average annual rate of 16.7 percent between 1989 and 2000, which is more than six times the growth of the male workforce.<sup>34</sup>

In 2003, the economically active female population (as a percentage of the population in age group 15 to 64) was 39.3 percent in Pakistan and 68.4 percent in Bangladesh, again revealing a large difference between the two countries. Pakistan has had a higher rise from 1990, however, when the corresponding share was 29.5 percent. In Bangladesh the rise was only 1.1 percent from 67.3 percent.<sup>35</sup>

The largest share of the economically active women are employed in the agricultural sector, with 77 percent in Bangladesh and 73 percent in Pakistan in 2000-02. The corresponding share in 1990 was 85 percent in Bangladesh and 72 percent in Pakistan, so Bangladesh has had a considerable reduction in the share of women working in the agricultural sector in the last decade, while Pakistan has experienced a slight rise. In comparison, 53 and 44 percent of the economically active men were employed in the agricultural sector in 2000-02 in Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively.<sup>36</sup>

In Bangladesh, the growth in the textile and garment industry in the 1980s and 1990s has created an important job opportunity for women. Some 85-90 percent of the employees in this industry are women, and about half of the 18 percent of the employed women that work in the manufacturing sector are employed in the textile and garment industry.<sup>37</sup> The garment industry has contributed greatly to the women's work opportunities outside the home.

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<sup>34</sup> Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000:57-8)

<sup>35</sup> Asian Development Bank 2005

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> World Bank (2002a:23)

#### 4.1.4 Gender empowerment measure (GEM) and Gender Development Index (GDI)

It is problematic to find a measure of women's status, since it is affected by so many different factors, each reinforcing the other. The above indicators give an overview of how women are treated in the respective country, but they are not perfect proxies for female status or autonomy.

UNDP has made an attempt at measuring gender inequality by developing a Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), and a Gender-Related Development Index (GDI). The former is an index that focuses on three variables that reflect women's participation in political decision-making, their access to professional opportunities and their earning power. In other words, it takes into account their possibilities to participate economically as well as politically, vis-à-vis men. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan have low GEM values, although Pakistan's values were particularly low in the second half of 1990s - in 1999, Pakistan had the second lowest value of 102 countries. The GDI focuses on the same variables as the Human Development Index (HDI), but is adjusted downwards for gender inequality. It measures longevity, knowledge and access to the basic resources needed for a decent standard of living. While the GEM concentrates on women's participation, the GDI is concerned with their basic capabilities and living standards.

In UNDP's *Human Development Report 2005*, Bangladesh and Pakistan had GDI values of 0.514 and 0.508 respectively. Both GDI and GEM vary between 0 and 1, with 1 meaning perfect gender empowerment. Bangladesh thereby does slightly better than Pakistan in terms of women's capabilities and living standards, although the difference is very small. The GEM values show a greater divergence between the countries, with Pakistan having a higher value, 0.379, compared to Bangladesh's 0.218. In 1995, when UNDP introduced these measures, Bangladesh and Pakistan had GDI values of 0.334 and 0.360 respectively, while their GEM values amounted to 0.287 and 0.153. So ten years ago, the relationship was inverted, with Pakistan having a higher GDI value and a lower GEM value than Bangladesh. One should be careful when comparing annual changes in the measurements for each country, since they often reflect revisions of the data used to calculate them rather than actual changes in the countries.<sup>38</sup>

Both countries have lower GEM values than GDI values, which is in line with the social setting where women have limited access to the political and economic

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<sup>38</sup> UNDP 1995, 2004, 2005

sphere. Between 1995 and 1999, Pakistan had lower GEM values than Bangladesh, and lacking statistics meant that no GEM values could be calculated for Pakistan between 2000 and 2002. From 2003, Pakistan ranked higher than Bangladesh in gender empowerment. Pakistan's higher GEM value in 2005 can mainly be attributed to a considerably higher percentage of the seats in the parliament held by women, 20.6 compared to Bangladesh's 2.0.

Bangladesh's GDI rank is on the other hand 2 steps higher than the country's HDI rank, while Pakistan ranks 4 steps lower in GDI than HDI rank. This implies a better gender development than human development in Bangladesh, and the opposite relationship for Pakistan.

Since these measures are based on official data that is often unreliable, it is not recommendable to see them as complete indicators of women's empowerment and gender equality. In addition, these issues are too complex to be contained in a few proxy indicators. They can be valuable as a complement to more in-depth studies, however.<sup>39</sup>

#### *4.1.5 Government Policies and NGOs*

All poverty-alleviation and population policies have at least an indirect impact on women's development, since poverty-reduction and lower fertility rates will benefit the whole population. Nevertheless, the respective governments in Pakistan and Bangladesh have also introduced, at least on paper, programmes and projects aimed specifically at women and girls, since they suffer from greater social and economic deprivation than their male counterparts. In addition to government policies, a number of NGOs are active in the area, many of which collaborate with the governments in specific projects. In fact, Bangladesh's NGOs are among the most active in the world, according to the World Bank.<sup>40</sup> Here, the tradition of development NGOs goes back to the time of independence from Pakistan, when organisations were established to rehabilitate dislocated families. When their initial task was completed, they continued with longer term poverty-alleviation, and their target groups were the population's most vulnerable, i.e. women and children. Their work has had an important part in the reduction of poverty in Bangladesh, as well as the promotion of women's autonomy,

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<sup>39</sup> Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000:40-41), see also Dijkstra & Hanmer (2000) for an in-depth analysis of the GDI and its shortcomings.

<sup>40</sup> World Bank (2000a:1)

and some have set the example for similar organisations in other countries.<sup>41</sup> Pakistan does not have this long tradition of NGO activities.

The main government policies targeted specifically at women in Pakistan and Bangladesh, are aimed at increasing the education levels. As we have seen, Bangladesh has been successful in raising the female primary and secondary enrolment, and it is now in parity with the corresponding male level. In 1994, the Bangladeshi government introduced two important incentive programmes targeted at underprivileged groups: the Female Secondary School Stipend and a Food for Education programme for primary school age children, which supplies wheat rations to children that participate in school. The aim was to discourage dropouts, which have been considerable. The secondary scholarship scheme is targeted at all girls in grades 6 to 9, and requires 65 percent attendance and a certain grade average. In addition, parents of scholarship recipients are required to sign a bond guaranteeing that the girl will not be married before 18.

The programmes, together with informal schools set up by NGOs such as BRAC (a large national NGO), have been effective in increasing the enrolment rates and decreasing the school dropouts, as well as in delaying marriages, according to a study by Amin and Sedgh. The BRAC schools give preferential enrolment to girls, and the policy is to maintain a 70-30 ratio of girls to boys. They also intend to provide a gender-sensitive education.<sup>42</sup> The secondary schooling in Bangladesh is almost entirely provided by NGOs, for-profit schools and religious schools, so the government is very dependent on these organisations.<sup>43</sup>

Being a country with one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world, the government of Pakistan gave education priority in its Social Action Program (SAP), introduced in 1993. The SAP aimed at raising primary education, basic healthcare, family planning and improve the water supply and sanitation in rural areas. In terms of education, the aim was to achieve 55 percent literacy rate by 2003 and 70 percent by 2010. As much as 65 and 66 percent of the total expenditure of the government's Social Action Program Project 1 (SAPP-1, 1993-96), and SAPP-2 (1997-2002) respectively, were to be spent on the education sector. Primary education was the top priority in this sector, and a key area of interest was the promotion of female primary education in terms of quality and access. Mixed schools were to be introduced

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<sup>41</sup> Amin & Lloyd (1998:37)

<sup>42</sup> Amin & Sedgh (1998)

<sup>43</sup> World Bank (2005:70)

in areas where this is culturally acceptable, and employment of female teachers to be increased. For many, it is unacceptable to have males teaching their daughters, at least at middle and secondary levels. As in Bangladesh, female stipends were recently introduced in three provinces, in order to retain girls at schools after the primary level. In some rural areas, free text-books were given to poor girls, and throughout the country a motivational campaign was launched to encourage the population to send their daughters to school. Under SAPP-2, the goal was that 70 percent of new schools should be for girls. According to government sources, the private sector and NGOs stand for a substantial part of the newly established primary schools in the last two years of the 1990s.<sup>44</sup>

The results of the SAP were disappointing, however, in particular in the education and health sectors. Only marginal improvements were observed in education levels and quality. According to a study by the World Bank, SAPP-1 mainly succeeded in accelerating the construction of facilities rather than raising the supply of school material, medicines and other delivery services. An important reason for the failure was that politics affected the distribution pattern of the benefits, with traditional patronage systems directing the distribution rather than community needs. In addition, the government failed to reach its targeted spending on the programme. The gap between the targeted and actual spending as a percentage of the GDP increased gradually throughout the programme. In 1998-99, the government contribution to the SAP was 1.46 percent, compared to targeted 1.8 percent.<sup>45</sup>

In 2001-02, Pakistan launched an Education Sector Reform Action Plan, which is to be completed by 2005-06. It is a new initiative to raise enrolment rates at all educational levels, and the targets are very ambitious. The gross primary enrolment is for example targeted to 100 percent by 2005. The government hopes to succeed by solving the governance problems in the delivery system found in the SAP. The implementation of the reform will lie with the provincial and the district governments, and funding will be dependent on the impact of improvements made in administration and economic growth. Two provincial governments have informed that they will lay emphasis on improving the quality of the education, including the recruitment of new teachers, rather than on the opening of new schools.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> GOP(2000)

<sup>45</sup> World Bank (2002b:115)

<sup>46</sup> World Bank (2004:47-48, 50)

An important obstacle to women's possibility to take part in income-generating activities, is their limited access to credit. The formal financial institutions are mostly unattainable to women. The Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan has taken the lead in providing credit to rural women. Still, less than 7 percent of the loans granted by the bank before 1992 went to women. In Bangladesh, out of the 879,000 people who took out loans in commercial banks in 1994, only 64 were women. Therefore, numerous initiatives by the governments and NGOs have been made to provide women with micro-credit. The Bangladeshi Grameen Bank, set up in 1983 and supported by the government, has with its system of group lending to the rural poor, and the concept of peer monitoring, become a model followed by a number of NGOs in the area and other parts of the world. Over 90 percent of its lenders are women. The sum of NGOs providing micro-credit in Bangladesh serve over 10 million people, with almost 90 percent of the borrowers being women. In Pakistan, 95 NGOs disbursed micro-credit in the end of the last decade, and around a quarter of the borrowers were women. So organisations in Bangladesh have been more successful in targeting women.<sup>47</sup>

#### *4.1.6 Family Planning Programmes (FPP):*

More directly linked to the fertility rates than the policies discussed in the previous section, are the numerous population policies that have been introduced in each setting, starting from an early period. Pakistan was one of the first developing countries to show an interest in family planning, when already in the mid-1950s its government provided funding for a local family planning association. This early interest made Pakistan a Third World pioneer in the subject.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, this strong commitment has not sustained throughout the years. Nevertheless, in 1965, an extensive family planning programme (FPP) was introduced, with a more intensive and organised effort to reduce the birth rates in the country, which of course at this time also contained Bangladesh. Traditional midwives, *dias*, were an important part of the motivational work of the campaign, and they worked together with public and private doctors. Despite the big efforts, the set objectives, which were very optimistic and included the prevention of five to six million births in a five-year period, were not

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<sup>47</sup> Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000:65-66)

<sup>48</sup> Rukanuddin et al (1992:109), UN (1969:13)

fulfilled.<sup>49</sup> In 1970, the total fertility rate was still at almost seven children per woman.<sup>50</sup>

After the war, both countries continued with family planning activities. Throughout the years, the commitments of the frequently changing governments and political leaders have varied, and the approaches to family planning have differed. For long, supply factors dominated the population activities, but in the 1990s more work was done to raise the demand for birth control. The programme in Bangladesh has received international attention, as the country has experienced a major decrease in the birth rate, and a World Bank report from 1994 attributed the reduction almost entirely to the FPP. This has been criticised for being a much too simplistic view, however.<sup>51</sup> Whatever the reason, the fact is that the practice of birth control in Bangladesh has reached exceptionally high rates for a LDC with such low socio-economic development. Below follows a short summary of the population activities in Pakistan and Bangladesh after they became separate nations.

After the failure of the FPP of 1965, Pakistan continued with a Continuous Motivation System, which divided the country into operational units of about 10,000 people. Each unit had one male and one female motivator's team, that replaced the female dias used previously, and they were responsible for visiting each participating couple every three months to promote family planning and to supply contraceptives. It was followed by a Multisectoral Approach, launched in the early 1980s. This strategy was more broad-based than previously, and had a closer connection to other development sectors in the country, such as the health sector. The change was based on the recommendations set up by the World Population Conference in Bucharest, in 1974.<sup>52</sup> To facilitate administration the country was divided into four provinces and each province into several districts. Family Welfare Centres delivered the services, and each centre was to represent between 15,000 and 30,000 people. The centres were not only responsible for family planning services, but also for mother and child health services and the treatment of minor ailments. In addition, some workers at the centres taught women various income generating skills, also making training centres.<sup>53</sup>

In 1985, the government set up the Non-Governmental Organisations Co-ordinating Council, who's aim was to mobilise private sector population activities and

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<sup>49</sup> UN (1969:15)

<sup>50</sup> World Bank (1993:290)

<sup>51</sup> Cleland et al (1994), Egerö (1998)

<sup>52</sup> Rukanuddin et al (1992:109-10)

<sup>53</sup> Kironde (1998:13-14)

thereby increase the role of NGOs. Despite the efforts made, coverage remained low; in the beginning of the 1990's only between 15 and 20 percent of the population was estimated to have access to the family planning services, including both government and NGO services.<sup>54</sup> In 1993, the SAPP 1 was introduced, and the population part of the programme included both demand and supply factors. On the supply side, family planning information and services were to be improved, and thereby meet the existing demand. This FPP was also to complement other programmes within the plan, such as health and education, and to motivate economic activities, in order to create further demand for family planning. In fact, the impact on the fertility indicators was one of the few positive outcomes of the SAP. The knowledge of contraceptives rose sharply among married women in age group 15 to 49, from 38.4 percent in 1991-92 to 92.3 percent in 1998-99, according to the Pakistan Integrated Household Surveys (PIHS). The actual rise in the use of contraceptives in the same group was limited to 10% in the same period however, from 10.3 percent to 19.5 percent. Nevertheless, the population census from 1998 indicated the start of the demographic transition, with an estimated population growth rate of 2.2 percent per year, compared to 3 percent about a decade earlier. The total fertility rate was almost 5 births per woman at the end of the 1990s.<sup>55</sup>

In SAPP-2, factors such as the use of mass media for promotion of family planning, the strengthening of supervision and training, and the broadening of the range of services were given specific attention. The unstable political, economic and social situation makes the development of the family planning activities quite uncertain, however.<sup>56</sup>

After independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh's government pronounced its' strong commitment to population planning. Basically, the population activities had the same organisation as the Pakistani FPP, and the Pakistani programme workers were re-employed. A sense of emergency lead to this rapid solution, rather than a new organisation which may have been more successful.<sup>57</sup> A broad-base, multisectoral system was introduced in the mid-1970s, a bit earlier than in Pakistan. Some important features of this programme were the integration of maternal and child health, and the introduction of active participation of a number of ministries. Qualified

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<sup>54</sup> Rukanuddin et al (1992:111)

<sup>55</sup> World Bank (2002b:65), World Bank (2002c:16-17)

<sup>56</sup> Kironde (1998:15-16)

<sup>57</sup> Haider et al (1995:22), Cleland et al (1994:106)

male and female field workers, known as Family Welfare Assistants, with similar tasks as the male-female teams in Pakistan, were recruited. They were required to have an eighth-grade education. The population activities expanded in the 1980s, to reach a greater part of the population, both in terms of geography and socio-economic group.

The results of the efforts were ambiguous. The awareness of modern contraceptive methods was as high as 94 percent, while the contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods had only risen from 14 percent in 1983 to 24 percent in 1989. These figures are close to those recorded in Pakistan about a decade later. The total fertility rate in 1989 was at almost 5 children per woman. Female sterilisation rates had risen successfully, but in general the family welfare services lacked efficiency and client follow up.<sup>58</sup>

In the beginning of the 1990s, the government took a major initiative to implement one of the largest health and FPPs in the world. It was done with the help of international donors, of which one of the major ones was the World Bank. The programme had six major aims:

- 1) The intensification of the family planning service delivery.
- 2) The strengthening of the health service delivery.
- 3) Improvement of programme support to the above delivery systems.
- 4) The introduction of women's and nutrition programmes.
- 5) Mobilising community support and participation.
- 6) Increasing the involvement of NGOs and the private sector in order to complement the government's efforts.

As can be observed, the programme continued and intensified much of the work that had been started in the previous decade. At last, Bangladesh's population efforts showed positive results. According to the DHS 1993-4, the contraceptive prevalence rate reached almost 45 percent and the total fertility rate was down to 3.4.<sup>59</sup>

In fact, the two countries have had rather similar FPPs, although the scale of the latter FPP in Bangladesh was exceptionally large, and received much support from international donors. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1990s that Bangladesh showed a marked increase in contraceptive prevalence. Pakistan has spent less money on the FPP than Bangladesh, the political support has been more ambiguous, and as a

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<sup>58</sup> Haider et al (1995), World Bank

consequence the external support has been weaker.<sup>60</sup> According to Sathar, major reasons for the lack of success of the Pakistani programme may be the few family planning facilities, the lack of services accessible to the rural population, and the lack of suitably trained female personnel in the clinics. The concentration on distribution targets has also led to neglect of the quality of services. In Bangladesh there has been a more favourable ratio of family planning workers to the population, and the family welfare assistants have eight-grade education. The Pakistani programme has had problems finding suitable female workers, especially in the countryside. This is not surprising, as the female participation in the labour market is lower than in Bangladesh, and since old traditions, such as *purdah*, tend to be more pronounced in the countryside. It is of course a major problem, since male workers will not have access to secluded women, making it extremely difficult to reach them. In the later 1990s, in connection to Pakistan's SAP, the availability of so-called Lady Health Workers rose, however, which may have contributed to the increased use of contraceptives in this period.<sup>61</sup>

#### *4.1.7 Comments:*

In terms of the male-female education gap and the female employment levels, the inequality between the genders is greater in Pakistan than in Bangladesh. Pakistan also has a lower GDI than Bangladesh according to the latest estimates, and its gender-related development is lower than its human development. Its GEM value ranks higher than Bangladesh's, on the other hand, and the male-female gap in age at first marriage is smaller than in Bangladesh.

The governments in both countries have made attempts to reduce the gender gaps in social development, such as encouraging female education. These initiatives have been more successful in Bangladesh, which has reached gender parity in both primary and secondary education, while Pakistan still struggles with lower female than male enrolment ratios at all levels. A number of NGOs are also involved in increasing women's possibilities to take part in the economic development in the countries. In particular, they provide the poor with education and micro-credit. Moreover, large FPPs have been introduced in both countries. After some time, the Bangladeshi programme showed results, at least if the contraceptive prevalence rate is

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<sup>59</sup> Haider et al (1995:35)

<sup>60</sup> Kironde (1998:52)

<sup>61</sup> Sathar (1993:145-6), World Bank (2002c:17)

used as an indicator of the effectiveness of family planning activities. The Pakistani FPP has only recently managed to raise the country's use of birth control, however. In terms of women's status, family planning can be considered a factor that enhances women's possibilities to join the labour force and to take a more active part in family decisions in general.

All of the above socio-economic factors give us an implication of the gender relations in respective country, and they all tend to influence the total fertility rate both by affecting the gender relations, as well as the poverty levels. With greater access to education and the labour market, for example, women will tend to marry at a later age, and hopefully become more independent, have a greater impact on family decisions and be less prone to see children as an insurance against risk. This will have a negative effect on the fertility rate. But schooling and participation in the labour market will also tend to increase the family income, reducing the poverty and the risk-factor. This also has a hampering effect on the fertility rates.

In the following section we shall study the extent of poverty and insecurity in each setting, again as an attempt to find reasons for the divergence in fertility.

## **4.2 Poverty and Insecurity**

Poverty and economic insecurity can cause a high total fertility rate, as was discussed in the conceptual framework. A comparative study of the extent of poverty and economic inequality, and the urban-rural division of the population, will provide an insight in the economic development in the area, and any divergences in this field may consequently explain, at least in part, the variations in the fertility rates. Therefore, a study of these factors follows below.

### *4.2.1 Human Development Index (HDI):*

UNDP developed the HDI in 1995, as an alternative development measure that includes social as well as economic variables. The indicators used are: life expectancy at birth, representing a long and healthy life; a composite indicator for educational attainment (adult literacy rate and a combined gross school enrolment ratio), representing knowledge; and real GDP per capita, representing the standard of living.<sup>62</sup> The index was developed as an attempt to attract the attention to the broader

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<sup>62</sup> Dijkstra & Hanmer (2000:41-42)

concept of human development, as a counterbalance to the purely economic indicators, such as the GDP. An assessment of the HDI trends between 1975 and 2003, made by the UNDP in the *Human Development Report 2005*, is shown in Table 5. The values are based on comparable trend data.

**Table 5: Human Development Index**

	HDI	
	Pakistan	Bangladesh
<b>1975</b>	0.363	0.345
<b>1980</b>	0.386	0.364
<b>1985</b>	0.419	0.389
<b>1990</b>	0.462	0.419
<b>1995</b>	0.492	0.452
<b>2000</b>	-	0.506
<b>2003</b>	0.527	0.520

Source: UNDP

In terms of human development, Pakistan is more advanced than Bangladesh, since its' values are closer to one. The difference is limited, however. Both countries have had a steady increase in their values in since 1975, according to UNDP's estimates. In 2003, which is the last estimate, Pakistan ranked 135 and Bangladesh 139 out 177 countries, placing them both in the medium human development category. As in the case of the GDI and the GEM, this index should be studied in combination with other aspects of socio-economic development, since its three indicators cannot give a complete picture of the human development in a country.

#### *4.2.2 Economic Inequality and Poverty*

The most recent estimates show a higher incidence of poverty in Bangladesh than in Pakistan. Bangladesh's national poverty headcount ratio was estimated to 49.8 percent in 2000, while the corresponding share for Pakistan in 1998-99 was 32.6 percent. In the early 1990s – 1991-92 for Bangladesh and 1990-91 for Pakistan – the corresponding shares were 58.8 percent and 34.0 percent respectively. Bangladesh has thereby managed to reduce the share of the population living in poverty in the 1990s, while the share of the Pakistanis living below the poverty line remained almost

unchanged. For Pakistan, this was a contrast to the previous decade, when its poverty headcount rate fell sharply, in particular between 1984-85 and 1987-88. In this period, the country's poverty headcount ratio fell from 46.0 percent to 37.4 percent.<sup>63</sup>

Bangladesh's onset of the poverty decline started in the end of the 1970s in connection to a strong growth in the agricultural sector. The reduction stagnated in the mid 1980s, but continued throughout the 1990s.

The difference in development in the two countries in the 1990s can largely be explained by the divergence in the economic growth. Bangladesh's growth in GDP per capita was 3 percent per year, while the annual growth for Pakistan in the same period was 1.4 percent.<sup>64</sup> In the periods with strong poverty reduction in Pakistan, 1984-85 to 1987-88 and 1987-88 to 1990-91, its GDP per capita growth rates were considerably higher at 4.1 and 2.8 percent respectively.<sup>65</sup>

Economic inequality is high in both countries, but the trend has differed somewhat. Based on statistics from the World Bank Poverty Monitoring Database 2002, the consumption-based Gini index development is shown in the table below. The Gini index rises with inequality, so the figures show that Pakistan had a higher inequality level than Bangladesh in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, as well as in the beginning of this Century. Between 1993 and 1996 there was quite a large reduction, from 34.1 to 31.0, followed by a rise again to 33.0 in 2003. In Bangladesh, there was a sharp increase in the Gini index between 1992 and 1996, from 28.2 to 33.5, giving it a higher inequality level than Pakistan. The trend then turned around, but the index has still not fallen to the lower levels of the 1980s and early 1990s.

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<sup>63</sup> World Bank (2002a:4), World Bank (2002b:20)

<sup>64</sup> World Bank (2003:7)

<sup>65</sup> World Bank (2002b:26)

**Table 6: Inequality – the Gini Index**

<b>Pakistan</b>		<b>Bangladesh</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Gini Index</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Gini Index</b>
1987	33.2	1983	26.9
1991	33.2	1986	26.9
1993	34.1	1988	28.8
1996	31.0	1992	28.2
2003	33.0	1996	33.5
-	-	2000	31.7
-	-	2003	31.8

Source: World Income Inequality Database v. 2.0a, UNU-WIDER

Since the mid-1980s, Pakistan has had a fall in the Gini index, with the exception of the rise between 1991 and 1993. Its Gini index in 2003 was slightly lower than the index in 1987. Bangladesh, on the other hand, had a higher Gini index in 2003 than in the mid 1980s, so its inequality level has risen.

In both countries, the poverty and inequality change over the last decade has differed between the urban and rural areas. In Bangladesh, the poverty reduction in the 1990s was experienced both in the cities and in the countryside. In urban areas, however, the income growth was higher but the inequality also increased, since it was mostly the more affluent that benefited from the change. In the rural areas, the growth was slower, but it was more broad-based, affecting all levels of society.<sup>66</sup>

In Pakistan, the urban poverty fell in the 1990s, while the poverty in rural areas stagnated after a sharp fall in the previous decade. The economic inequality rose in the urban areas, however, while it fell slightly in the rural parts of the country, not unlike the development in Bangladesh.<sup>67</sup>

#### *4.2.3 Urban and Rural Development*

Children are important contributors to the household income of poor families. The fact that children work, and thereby reduce the risk factor and contribute to the survival of the family, has a positive impact on the demand for children. Child labour

<sup>66</sup> World Bank (2002a:7-8)

<sup>67</sup> World Bank (2002b:20-27)

is particularly widespread in the agricultural sector, which absorbs a lot of labour. In consequence, it is of interest to study the proportion of the population living in rural areas, and the development and the size of the different sectors.

Both countries are predominantly rural, but Bangladesh to a greater extent than Pakistan, as can be observed in Table 7, showing the urban population as a percentage of the total population.

**Table 7: Urbanisation**

<b>Urban Population as Percentage of Total</b>					
	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2003</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	25	28	34	36	34
<b>Bangladesh</b>	8	11	17	20	27

Source: World Bank

More than a third of Pakistan's population was urban in 1998, while only a fifth of the Bangladeshi population was living in the cities. The rise in the urbanisation has been stronger in Bangladesh, however, in particular between 1998 and 2003. Both countries have a clear trend of increased urbanisation, as indeed would be expected for countries at this level of development. According to the United Nations Populations Division's projections, Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka is expected to be ranked the fifth largest city in the world by 2015, with a population of 20 million. In 1999, it was listed as number 20.<sup>68</sup> In Pakistan, there are wide numerical variations in rural/urban populations in different provinces. The Capital Territory, which includes Islamabad, has the largest share of urban population - according to the 1998 population consensus it was as high as 65.6 percent, and the FATA had the smallest share of only 2.7 percent.<sup>69</sup>

In Bangladesh, the national average real wage increased 30 percent between 1983 and 1996, but wages in agriculture lagged behind this general wage as well as wages in other sectors. In manufacturing, the real wage was 50 percent higher in 1996 than in 1983, compared to an 18 percent increase in real agricultural wages. In addition to this slow development, agricultural workers are suffering from higher unemployment levels and greater underemployment than other workers.<sup>70</sup> This has

<sup>68</sup> Caldwell et al (1999:71)

<sup>69</sup> GOP (2000)

<sup>70</sup> World Bank (1998:31)

brought with it a movement of labour from farm to non-farm activities. This is particularly the case among the landless and the marginal landowners, who's acute lack of security place them among the most vulnerable in society. It has also contributed to the increasing migration to the cities. Labour force survey data from 1999-2000, show that about 40 percent of the rural labour force is employed in non-farm activities. In 1987, the corresponding share was 34 percent.<sup>71</sup>

In Pakistan, the share of the labour force employed in the agricultural sector shrunk by almost 6 percent between 1994 and 2000, from 50 percent to 44.1 percent.<sup>72</sup> The rate of unemployment is higher in urban areas than rural areas, however, in opposition to the situation Bangladesh. Pakistan does not have the same population density so the landless are not as abundant as in Bangladesh.

Both countries are experiencing shifts in the economic sectors, with agriculture, which is still employs the largest share of the work force, loosing ground to manufacturing and services. Bangladesh still has a larger share of its' population in rural areas and employed in farm activities than Pakistan, however.

#### *4.2.4 Government Policies and NGOs:*

Poverty has often been treated as an unfortunate by-product of the growth process, which has to be endured until the trickle-down process eventually brings an end to it. As the poor have remained redundant in many countries, even though the economies have experienced an increased growth, this trickle down process now tends to be considered insufficient to alleviate poverty. Governments in Pakistan and Bangladesh have therefore introduced poverty-alleviation programmes to come to terms with the problem.

In Bangladesh, there is a long tradition of safety nets funded by external food aid, including the previously mentioned Food for Education programme. In the start of the 21st Century, some 95 percent of the total safety net expenditure went to different food transfer programmes, while the remaining 5 percent went to assistance programmes to specific vulnerable groups like the elderly and female household heads. In the beginning, the main focus of the food transfer programmes was relief aid, providing help to families suffering from natural disasters or other forms of immediate distress. These programmes still exist, for example The Vulnerable Group Feeding and Gratuitous Relief, but there has been a move toward more development

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<sup>71</sup> World Bank (2003:9)

oriented programmes, like the Food for Education and a Food for Work programme which provides wheat for work in rural infrastructure projects. A third big development oriented food aid programme is the Vulnerable Group Development, which provides food grain and training to disadvantaged women. Food for Work is the largest programme, followed by the Food for Education, which is growing at the fastest rate.<sup>73</sup>

The large food transfer programmes have been relatively good at targeting the poor, in particular through the decentralisation of the selection of the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, there has been a need for more precise targeting so that poor areas get a larger share of the money. Only 27 percent of the country was covered by the Food for Education programme, for example, and as many as 50 percent of the beneficiaries were above the lower poverty line. There have also been large leakage problems in the system.<sup>74</sup>

In response to this, and the rise in the prices for food commodities in 2001-02 making an extension of the programme to other parts of the country too expensive, the government of Bangladesh decided to replace the Food for Education programme with a Primary Education Stipend Project in 2002. It provides cash assistance to poor pupils and their families throughout the rural parts of the country. It has been influenced by the government's stipends to female secondary pupils, which has had a lower incidence of leakage.<sup>75</sup>

In Pakistan, the previously mentioned Social Action Program (SAP) was launched in 1993, with the aim of closing the social gap by raising public spending on social development and improving the institutional framework for service delivery. It was somewhat successful in increasing the access to health and educational facilities, but the quality remained poor and in particular it did not address the important demand-side obstacles. The government expenditure target was not reached, in fact social expenditure fell in the later years of the programme, and unlike Bangladesh, it was unsuccessful in targeting the right groups. On the local level the implementation of the programme was often used politically, as a vehicle for patronage, at the expense of the poor households that needed the services.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> GOP (2000)

<sup>73</sup> World Bank (1998:37,41), World Bank (2002a:67-69)

<sup>74</sup> World Bank (2002a:70-77), Tietjen (2003:4-5)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> World Bank (2002b:114-116), World Bank (2002c:5,17)

In a new Human Development Strategy, launched in a poverty reduction strategy in 2002, the government of Pakistan has tried to take into consideration the shortcomings of the SAP and address some of the problems in service delivery and focus on institutional improvements. It puts a large emphasis on devolution of power and the decentralisation to local governments, including the responsibility of social services like education, health centres etc.<sup>77</sup> Large demand-driven programmes are still lacking, however.

The work of the many NGOs present in Bangladesh is to a large extent targeted towards the poor and very poor. Their work includes the provision of micro-credit, education and training, health and family planning services, and sanitation services. The largest NGOs engaged in Bangladesh are Grameen Bank, BRAC, Proshika and Association of Social Advancement (ASA). The size of these organisations, and of their programmes, is exceptional, and for many activities the NGOs' programmes have reached the size of similar government programmes. In several cases they reportedly offer services with quality superior to the public alternatives, and with larger coverage, taken together.<sup>78</sup>

Many NGOs focus on providing access to credit for households and small enterprises, a service in large part lacking from the formal credit markets in both countries. The lack of credit contributes to the vulnerability of the poor, and often traps them in a life of destitution. In Bangladesh, the formal loans made up 2.4 percent of the total rural credit market in 1998-99, while the semi-formal sector for credit, supplied by the NGO micro-finance institutions, represented as much 81.2 percent of the market. The informal loans, provided by for example local moneylenders or relatives, made up 16.3 percent. In 1991-92, the corresponding shares were 8.6 percent, 59.4 percent and 16.3 percent.<sup>79</sup> This shows a considerable rise in importance of NGO provided loans in the rural sector in the 1990s.

Pakistan was slower in providing micro-finance than Bangladesh, and has a less extended network. The most important programmes are so-called rural support programmes, which covered 62 districts in the end of 1999. They consist of models for development based on institution building, including micro-finance. Nevertheless, the rural support programmes are concentrated to the northern areas of Pakistan, and rural Sindh and Balochistan has very limited penetration, for example. From fear of

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<sup>77</sup> World Bank (2002d:5-6)

<sup>78</sup> World Bank (1998:47)

<sup>79</sup> World Bank (2002a:31-32)

leakage and misuse of NGO funds for micro-credit, the government of Pakistan set up a Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) in 1999, which distributes credit through selected NGOs. A Microcredit Bank was also introduced, in 2000, which provides funding capital provided by public and private banks, but at non-profit basis.<sup>80</sup>

#### *4.2.5 Comments:*

Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have relatively high levels of poverty. Bangladesh's poverty headcount ratio is higher than in Pakistan. On the other hand, it has managed to reduce its poverty levels in the 1990s following a period of stronger economic growth, while Pakistan's growth stagnated during the same decade leading to a limited poverty reduction. In the 1980s, the opposite trend occurred, with stagnation in Bangladesh and growth and poverty reduction in Pakistan.

The HDI results show a somewhat higher level of human development in Pakistan compared to Bangladesh, although the difference remains limited. The urbanisation is higher in Pakistan, but so is the economic inequality as measured by the Gini index. Its inequality has fallen in the last decades, while it has risen in Bangladesh, however. Bangladesh seems to have been more successful in its poverty-alleviation policies, in particular through the focus on external food programmes, and it has a long tradition of micro-credit through NGOs. Pakistan's poverty-alleviation programmes have been poorly implemented, and there has been an insufficient commitment from the government to raise social expenditures.

Most factors therefore show a higher incidence of poverty and insecurity in Bangladesh than in Pakistan, except its more successful pro-poor policies and greater access to micro-finance schemes.

### **4.3 Final Discussion**

The study above is an attempt to determine how gender relations and insecurity factors differ between Bangladesh and Pakistan, in order to find explanations for the gap in the fertility rates. As was established in the conceptual framework, low status of women and high levels of risk and poverty, are factors that tend to affect the fertility rate positively. Such factors are prevalent in both settings, albeit to various extent, and

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<sup>80</sup> World Bank (2002b:111-112)

therefore any variations and changes in them will contribute to the difference in fertility rates.

The comparative study of gender relations shows wide gaps in both countries, but most indicators show a less favourable situation for women in Pakistan than in Bangladesh. In fact, Pakistan's indicators of women's status have for long been among the lowest in South Asia, which as a region is considered to be one of the worst areas in terms of women's status and autonomy. Pakistan's gender gap in education remains high, while Bangladesh has reached gender parity in the primary and secondary enrolments. Pakistan also has a considerably lower female labour force participation than Bangladesh, and its last GDI measure is lower than Bangladesh's. On the other hand, Bangladesh has a greater gender gap in the first age at marriage, and women in Bangladesh marry at a younger age than in Pakistan. In addition, the last GEM measure is higher for Pakistan than for Bangladesh, although previous years have shown the opposite relationship. Despite these exceptions, the results indicate a better environment for women in Bangladesh than in Pakistan.

The study of the poverty and insecurity in both settings indicate a more favourable situation in Pakistan, on the other hand. On average, the Pakistani population has experienced less economic and human deprivation than the Bangladeshis. Pakistan has had a higher HDI level since the UN started using the measure and it has lower poverty levels and a greater urbanisation than Bangladesh. While Pakistan had a strong economic growth in the 1980s, the decade after showed an economic stagnation. In the same period, Bangladesh experienced a strong poverty reduction, so the pattern has begun to change. Bangladesh is still lagging behind in terms of poverty and insecurity, however.

So Bangladesh has had a more favourable setting for fertility reductions in terms of gender relations, while Pakistan has been better off in terms of the rate of poverty and insecurity. In other words, the results of the first section of the chapter correspond with the population situation in Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively, as women's status has a negative relationship with the fertility rate. The results of the study on poverty and insecurity do not, as this variable is normally negatively correlated with the fertility rate.

Pakistani culture and society accords an extremely low status to women, and this fact is probably a major reason for the high fertility rates, which prevail despite the economic growth and which only started to fall more significantly in the end of the

1990s. Bangladesh, on the other hand, has experienced a reduction in the total fertility rate, despite the higher poverty levels. One possibility is therefore that the more equal gender relations have a stronger negative impact on the fertility rate than the lower poverty levels. Nevertheless, as we have seen, there has been a significant poverty reduction in Bangladesh in the 1990s, and it is in fact during this period that the reduction in fertility has been most significant. So the greater economic development in the 1990s may have contributed to the lower fertility rates. The reduction in fertility started earlier than this economic improvement, however, so it cannot be merely a case of lower poverty and insecurity that has led to today's situation.

In fact, the results are in line with a study from 1995 by M. Murthy, Guio and Dréze on fertility and gender bias in India. They concluded that investments in improving women's status had a faster impact on the TFR reduction than investments in reducing the insecurity factors.<sup>81</sup> Bangladesh has had a better development in terms of gender relations than Pakistan, while Pakistan's insecurity and poverty levels are lower. In consequence, Bangladesh has had a stronger and faster TFR reduction than Pakistan.

The large FPP set up in the beginning of the 1990s in Bangladesh is also a factor that has contributed to the decline in fertility rates. The programme did have an impact on the knowledge and use of contraceptives. Pakistan's family planning initiatives did not start to have an effect on the fertility rates until the end of the 1990s, in connection to the SAP. Previous efforts had failed for reasons including lack of government commitment, resulting in less international economic support and poor organisation, but also the cultural barriers that make it very difficult to employ female workers, and thereby impossible to reach large parts of the female population. The greater gender gaps in Pakistan also suggest that spousal communication is poor, especially in matters concerning such sensitive subjects as birth control. So the poor results from the family planning can partly be traced back to the low status of women.

In an article from 2000, Basu and Amin emphasise the need to look beyond immediate causes of reproductive change and take into account historical and cultural factors when looking at the efficiency of family planning policies. They have studied the Bengali culture, both Western Bengal and Bangladesh, and hypothesise that several underlying cultural aspects have contributed to the fertility decline, which has taken place in both areas, despite them being submitted to different population

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<sup>81</sup> Murthy et al (1995)

policies. The authors mean that aspects of the Bengali history, culture and politics have provided the people with a willingness to change, often in spite of socio-economic circumstances, which has resulted in a unique form of Bengali modernism and nationalism. This modernism has in turn facilitated the transition to a secular society, where people see themselves as primarily Bengali, and only secondarily as Muslim or Hindus, or Bangladeshi or Indian. This sense of unity has been strengthened by the common language, which has enabled communication between Eastern and Western Bengals. The language has also exposed each region to a wider world of ideas and behaviours, since they differ in terms of religion and politics. In terms of politics, the (urban) elites in the area have unusually strong interactions with the general (rural) population, which has facilitated the diffusion of ideas and attitudes to the public. This bond between the different socio-economic groups is according to the authors partly a result of the emigration of the elite to Western Pakistan after India's partition, making it possible for the educated middle class landholders to move to the cities and make their voice heard, while maintaining their connections within the rural areas. The fight for independence from Pakistan probably also increased the sense of unity between the different groups.<sup>82</sup>

The good communication between the urban elite and the rural population, has facilitated the diffusion of the family planning policies. The openness to change and the secularism has also contributed to the acceptance of birth control and to a less strict following of purdah. Indeed, the increasing Islamisation that has taken place in parts of the Muslim world has not gained ground in Bangladesh, perhaps due to the relatively tolerant attitude of the government, who has not tried to suppress any such movement.<sup>83</sup>

Basu and Amin mean that it is this background that has enabled the Bangladeshi fertility reduction to take place, making it context dependent. It is therefore not merely a question of repeating the same procedure in a different setting in order to achieve the same positive results.

If we look at Pakistan, although it is also a Muslim developing country, in the same region and even formerly the same country, many important factors sets it apart from Bangladesh. Beginning with religion, it has a stronger Islamic tradition with conservative values, and religious political parties have received greater public support. This fact tends to enhance patriarchy and the practice of purdah, in

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<sup>82</sup> Basu & Amin (2000)

accordance with our results in the gender relations section. In terms of relations between different socio-economic groups, the elite does not have the same bond with the rural population. It is still very much a feudal society with powerful landlords exercising great power over their regions. This may make it more difficult for new ideas to spread from the educated elite to the general public, including attitudes on family planning. It is indeed in rural areas that traditional values are the most difficult to alter, and it is not a coincidence that the FPP has had problems finding female workers on the countryside. However, the political support given to the FPP has also varied, so it is not simply a question of ideas diffusing from the elite to the poor.

It seems quite certain that strong patriarchy and the consequently low status of women is an important determinant of the high fertility rate in Pakistan. Women have an extremely low status in Pakistan. Female child abandonment or genocide and gender specific abortions made possible with modern technology is a problem in Pakistan, while Bangladesh has largely been spared from this trend. The discrimination against women is less extreme in Bangladesh, and this has probably contributed to a quicker acceptance of family planning and other factors raising the status of women, such as female labour participation.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh does not have particularly high indicators of women's status. Despite this, and despite high levels of poverty, it has managed to reduce its fertility rate significantly. Basu and Amin contribute this to the underlying factors discussed above. Another possible reason that has been put forward by for example Boserup and Kabeer, is the hypothesis of poverty-driven fertility reductions, discussed in the conceptual framework. Their studies have shown that families that suffer from prolonged poverty and uncertainty have chosen to reduce their household expenditure by lowering fertility.<sup>84</sup> In other words, poverty may lead to lower demands for children, despite of, or even due to, low socio-economic development. This hypothesis contradicts traditional theory, which states a positive relationship between poverty and fertility. Bangladesh fits the pattern described, as its population has suffered from poverty for several decades, while still managing to reduce fertility rates considerably. It is not completely accurate, however, since the period when Bangladesh experienced its greatest reductions in fertility was also a period of reductions in poverty. Nevertheless, the inequality level did rise in the period before

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, Amin & Lloyd (1998:44)

<sup>84</sup> Prakash (1997:10-11)

the fertility reduction, which may have pushed some of the poor households over the threshold and forced them to limit the number of children.

The poverty-driven fertility reduction hypothesis could also explain the higher fertility rates in Pakistan - poverty and risk has not been as high as in Bangladesh, so the acute economic necessity to limit family size has not been present. It also fits the trend in Pakistan in the 1990s. During this decade Pakistan's economic growth stagnated, and it is in the end of this decade that the fertility rate finally begins to drop more significantly.

This point has also been presented by Sathar and Casterline. In an article from 1998 they discussed the possibility that a fertility reduction was finally on its way in Pakistan, following the reduction in economic growth in the 1990s. New statistics suggest that they may be right, as the fertility rate has continued to fall in the new Century. They claim that whatever the economic costs to couples of large numbers of children, these costs seemed affordable in a period of income growth, and in particular, were considered lower than the costs of challenging cultural views on reproduction and women's roles. This, in combination with weak and inconsistent political support for family planning, lead to a deep ambivalence towards birth control in the population.<sup>85</sup> With a deteriorating economic situation, with increasing poverty levels, these costs may have shifted and lead to poverty-driven fertility reductions, as has possibly taken place in Bangladesh.

Another factor which may have contributed to the fertility reduction in Bangladesh and enhanced the poverty-driven fertility reduction is its very dense population and the demographic pressure on the land. Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries, and there is a large shortage of land for its population. This may have made its inhabitants more susceptible to family planning and a shift toward smaller families, in addition to the poverty factor. This demographic pressure on the land has not been experienced in Pakistan.

The poverty-driven fertility reduction in Bangladesh was most likely strengthened by a successful FPP and the improvement in the gender relations. In Pakistan, patriarchy is a stronger institution, making it more difficult to break social barriers against women's autonomy and the use of contraception. Other factors affecting its slower TFR reduction include a weaker government support for the family planning and social policies.

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<sup>85</sup> Sathar & Casterline (1998:780)

## 5. Conclusion

The quicker reduction in fertility in Bangladesh than in Pakistan can be attributed to a combination of factors. Firstly, women's status and gender relations are better in Bangladesh, and have improved considerably in the last decades, for example with complete gender parity in enrolments 2002. Secondly, a poverty-driven fertility seems to have occurred, where the long period of poverty in the country has forced families to re-evaluate their decisions regarding family size, as a way to survive. The demographic pressure on the land also contributed to this shift, with severe population density forcing parents to reduce the number of children they chose to have. The successful FPP and many NGOs helped make this strong fertility reduction possible by supplying contraceptives and providing health and family services.

In Pakistan, a stronger religion and other cultural factors contribute to a weaker status of women than in Bangladesh. There have been improvements in some variables, such as reduction in the educational gap, and the age at first marriage is higher than in Bangladesh, but the status of Pakistani women is still among the worst in the world. The poverty and insecurity has been less acute in Pakistan, a factor which according to traditional theories should contribute to a lower TFR. This has not been the case, however. Instead, in line with the poverty-driven fertility reduction theory, there has not been an acute, long term poverty in the country, so families have not been forced to review their family-size decisions. In addition, the strong traditions in gender relations and a lower population density can make this transition slower than it has been in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, a lower economic development in the 1990s may have led to a start in Pakistan's poverty-driven fertility reduction.

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