Executive Summary

There has been tremendous population growth in Bangladesh for the last three decades. The country is dominated by human settlements, which are basically rural in their socio-economic characteristics. It is, however, characterized by high population density, which is more than 400 persons per square kilometers. Land is the basis of wealth and power in the rural areas. It is used for agricultural and habitation purposes. However, the continued growth of rural population in a backward economy and the crowded countryside are putting severe strain on the land for living in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

Qadeer (2000) has defined the high-density rural regions in South Asia as the Ruralopolises, which are extended rural regions of urban level densities in between towns and cities. According to Qadeer, the distinctive characteristics of a Ruralopolis are: high population density; agro-based economy; fragmented land holdings; a continuous stretch of homesteads and villages between agricultural fields; and a growing demand for rural community facilities, services and infrastructure development. The term Ruralopolis can be used to describe the high-density rural areas of Bangladesh. Urban level density prevailing in an agrarian economy presents a theoretical paradox. Therefore, it is very important to find out how people live and have access to land for living.

Qadeer's paper has examined, on a broad scale, the impact of high population density on settlement patterns and residential economy of the rural areas in South Asia. This report examines a small, high-density rural area in Bangladesh. It is primarily concerned with the effects of population pressure on spatial organization and the provision of residential land in the selected high-density rural *mauzas* (smallest administrative unit) of Homna Thana, a subdistrict, in the Comilla District of Bangladesh. The purpose of the paper has been to undertake an empirical analysis of the propositions underlying the concept of the Ruralopolis.

Homna Thana has a rural density of 1253 persons per square kilometers and an area of 180.13 square kilometers. Based on the availability of data relating to Homna Thana, only 86 rural *mauzas* have been included in this study. Population density is the independent variable and the rural settlement pattern, residential land supply, and housing conditions are dependent variables. The following are the findings of this report:

Findings:

(I)   Homna Thana is a slice of high-density rural Bangladesh; it is largely rural with only one urban *mauza*. However, there are minor differences in the socio-economic characteristics of the rural and urban areas of the *Thana*. The ratio of non-farm to farm employment in the rural areas of the Thana is fairly high. High-density of population necessitates a high proportion of households

to be employed in non-farm activities, as the land cannot sustain such large numbers of workers.

(II)   There is a limited degree of correlation between the population size and density. The very high-density *mauzas* have small area and are growing rapidly. Settlements with rural densities of 1000-3000 persons per square kilometers are most common.

(III)   Majority of the settlements is linear in form with homesteads lined along paths and roads. The distribution pattern of the settlements in the very high-density rural *mauzas* is directly related with the existence of communication networks, market facilities, educational facilities, and nearness to urban centers. Observations of the settlement hierarchy within the high-density rural subdistrict has shown that the hierarchy of functions is weakly correlated with the variations of rural densities

(IV)   The pressure on land is evident given the small area (includes agricultural land) of the very high-density *mauzas*. As density level increases, the area used for habitational purposes also rises. It appears that the more dense *mauzas* are experiencing more pressure on land.

(V)   Housing conditions in the high-density rural areas are weakly correlated with differences in density. Tile/CI sheet is the main construction material of roofs of dwellings. As density increases, tube-wells are the primary source of water. About 33 to 50 per cent of the households have no latrine facilities in these high-density rural *mauzas*.

(VI) The settlement pattern in the village of Ramkrisnapur illustrates that linear settlements have developed along the riverbank and rural *kutcha* (unpaved) roads. The spacing between the homesteads is very low. Most of the homesteads have one-room with poor and crowded living conditions.

Most of the findings of this micro-level study confirm Qadeer's propositions underlying the concept of the "Ruralopolis."