

GO-NGO Relations: The BRAC Experience

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Introduction

Because of the multitude of problems, both natural and man-made that Bangladesh has had to face ever since its inception, we perhaps lose sight of its positive aspects of the fact that by putting our heads together we have also achieved 'miracles'. The very fact that we are today independent is one of those. There are other achievements which can also claim to belong to that category. A few of those are: Grameen Bank, BRAC, Government's Family Planning Program, Non-government organizations' (NGO) role in the Government's Immunization Program, the Private Sector's Garments Industries and doubling of food production by our toiling farmers. It is noteworthy to say here that in all these successes the women, especially the poor have played a very key role and it has been a partnership between the poor and the management of these organizations. The international community was also a facilitating partner to these achievements.

Besides the poor and the international community the contribution of NGOs in achieving these miracles was no less important. The NGOs while contributing to these miracles gradually evolved and their relation with the government transformed from one form to another. The change in the relationships can be divided into three phases. The 1970s was the decade of coexistence without interaction, in 1980s the relationship polarized and 1990's was the decade for understanding and rapprochement between NGOs and the government.

It was found that after the War of Independence in 1971 there was a big surge in the development of NGOs in Bangladesh. This was mainly because of the culmination of the spirit for national independence to one for national development in the people and for the availability of a large quantity of relief to them from various sources (Fernandez 1987; Lewis 1993).

The NGOs in the 1970s were small in size in terms of number of villages their programs covered and number of villagers within those to whom the programs were extended. Because of such a magnitude of NGOs on one hand and limited involvement of government in rural development on other the activities of both the

organizations seemingly neither overlapped nor contradicted with each other. It was a relation of mutual coexistence without interaction, in other words, they ignored each other. This relationship was however blended with cooperation wherever needed (Lewis 1993).

The performance and achievement of these small NGOs in late 1970s and early 1980s were well noticed. As a result, huge amount of funds were channeled to these NGOs. The channeling of funds allowed the NGOs to grow bigger and extend their programs to a large number of customers within a short time. Not only that, they opened new programs for rural development. Besides expansion, NGOs also managed to run their business efficiently.

The success of NGOs was not without a down side. A sense of pride developed in the NGOs which some might refer as 'arrogance'. This created a sense of jealousy in many Government Organizations (GO). It was also observed that many government officials viewed the NGOs as a threat to their interests or as outside agencies usurping the government's responsibility (Fernandez 1987). As a result of these attitudes in the Government and in the NGOs towards themselves and towards each other the organizations gradually polarized and distrust towards each other developed among them.

Understanding and Rapprochement between GO and NGO

In spite of the expansion the larger NGOs in the beginning of this decade, together could cover only a fraction of the population in Bangladesh -- some have estimated that they reached only 10-20 per cent of the land-less households at that time. In the second half of the last decade both the GOs and NGOs came to their realization that development can be achieved better only if both the organizations work hand to hand. Besides, a group of thoughtful leaders were of the opinion that "... the objectives of eradicating poverty had to be achieved as quickly as possible, and the volags [i.e., NGOs] were too few to cover the country, it was necessary for the government to organize and support them." (Fernandez 1987 p. 44). The foreign donors also appreciated the merit of such cooperation (World Bank 1987).

The GO-NGO cooperation was rationalized on following grounds (Bhattacharya and Ahmed 1995):

1. The poor could be induced to participate in the development process through raising their consciousness and by mobilizing them. The NGOs proved their worth in conducting these processes successfully. Thus it was believed that greater was the cooperation between the government agencies and the NGOs, greater would be the participation and accessibility of the poor to the public services for their development.
2. The NGOs from some highly successful programs have acquired rich experience in planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, etc., of the program. Through cooperation with NGOs, the GOs could use the NGOs' experience for successful adaptation of those programs within their organization.
3. Because of the limitations of the NGOs in institutional and resource absorption capacity it was felt that they would hardly be able to cover the whole country exclusively of their own in the near future. In this context, the NGOs could expand faster and provide services to a larger section of the people if government support was extended to them.
4. Given the absolute resource constraint of the country, it was imperative to avoid duplication of human development efforts in order to ensure wider coverage and extended impact. Accordingly, coordination of the GOs and NGOs became very pertinent for planned expansion of their activities.
5. The cooperation between GOs and NGOs could contribute towards emergence of a system where organizations would have functional specialization; which in turn would result removal of overlaps, foster mutual help and assistance, and supplement each other's work.

With the passage of time the government increasingly acknowledges the effectiveness of the NGOs' approach in reaching the poor, which concomitantly led to the scaling up of the cooperation between both organizations. An overview of GO-NGO cooperation projects three types of arrangements between them (World Bank 1996):

1. Sub-contract -- GOs entered into contracts with NGOs which were selected on the basis of competitive bidding.
2. Joint implementation -- NGO entered into partnership arrangements with GOs as co-financier or joint execution of the project.
3. Government as financier of NGO projects -- Government or national banks finance NGOs for running a project.

Growing instances of partnership between the government and the NGOs have been witnessed in the areas of education, health, environment, population, women and youth-development, livestock, fisheries, resettlement and disaster management. In some of the projects single NGO and an organization of the government cooperated with each other but in other cases more than one NGO and a number of organizations of the government were involved in such ventures. As part of BRAC we would like to present two cases of cooperative ventures between BRAC and government organizations.

Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development

The Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development (IGVGD) program is carried out by BRAC in cooperation with the World Food Program (WFP) and two other government organizations -- Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation (DRR) and Directorate of Livestock Services (DLS). By now the program has covered a large number of VGD card holders who constitutes about 19% of the BRAC's Rural Development Programme members (2.2 million).

The program aims at improving the income earning potentials of very poor disadvantaged women, who as Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) card holders are entitled for a monthly ration of 31.35 kg. of wheat from the government for a period of 18 months. In order to do that it provides training on poultry rearing and provides economic loans along with scope for its utilization during the period they are supplied with the ration. The objective is that through these supports they will be able to earn at least an equivalent amount of the monthly take home ration in cash during their entitlement period.

The VGD card holders are jointly selected by representatives from DRR, DLS, local union councils¹ and BRAC according to the selection criteria set up by BRAC for them to participate in the program.

The IGVGD program has a number of components with backward and forward linkages.

1. Poultry Hatchery: The poultry hatcheries buy poultry eggs from local BRAC office and incubates these eggs through Chinese rice-husk method. After incubation the one day old chicks are sold to chick rearers.
2. Chick rearing unit: The chick rearer raises the one-day old chicks in their home for a two month period. After this period the chicks are sold to key rearers. Besides hatcheries the day old chicks are sold to chick rearers by BRAC's field offices.
3. Key rearing unit: A key rearer raises hens and cocks from 2 to 5 months of their age. They buy these birds for rearing from chick rearers.
4. Pullet rearing unit: Pullet rearers buy 5 month old poultry birds from the key rearer and raises them as long up to selling the birds away.
5. Feed sale centers: To run the units effectively one poultry feed sale center is established in each program location. It sells balanced feed for high yielding variety (HYV) birds.
6. Poultry Worker: To prevent poultry mortality and to develop poultry rearers, one VGD woman from each village is made responsible for vaccinating the birds owned by the members. She also informs them about better poultry rearing practices.

BRAC purchases HYV eggs and one-day old chicks for distribution to poultry hatcheries and chick rearers, respectively, from the Department of Livestock (DOL), working under DLS. On the other hand poultry workers receive vaccines directly from the DOL offices in their unions (local administrative unit). The IGVGD program comprises a multistage development model. The success of the program is dependent to a great extent on the proper functioning of all its components.

¹ A union council comprises of 1 chairperson and 12 members all elected and represents their union (i.e., local government unit).

The cooperation mechanism between BRAC and GOs in relation to IGVDG can be grouped under three broad heads -- decision for cooperation, formulation of the policy and implementation of the policy.

Decision for cooperation

BRAC, after developing IGVDG program model, being convinced that the reduction of morbidity of poultry was a key factor for the success of the program and deciding that the VGD card holders may be included in the program, approached DOL in Manikganj district for their cooperation in the implementation of the program. Between 1983 and 1985 an informal cooperation developed in Manikganj whereby the office supplied vaccines and provided technical advice to the program units. After extensive evaluation of the model by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock the model was accepted as viable and workable. As a result a large scale expansion of the program through coordination and cooperation of the organizations was planned and materialized.

Formulation of the policy

The liaison between the ministries and BRAC in relation to IGVDG is maintained through three-monthly review meetings. These meetings are supplemented by three-monthly district coordination committee meetings. This committee, where BRAC and the functionaries of the ministries participating in the program, links policy level with implementation level.

A sub-committee of the VGD committee is responsible for decision making on policy issues regarding the IGVDG program. The DOL, WFP and BRAC are represented in the sub-committee. It reviews progress and discusses problems of the program. Besides, feed back from district level officials of the ministries involved in the program along with BRAC's suggestions and proposals are also discussed and decided upon by the sub-committee.

Implementation of the policy

The coordination and implementation of the program take place through the upazila (sub-district) VGD sub-committee. The sub-committee chaired by the respective upazila chairperson and representatives from upazila administration, union parishads chairperson and members, participating ministries and BRAC. Four items related to VGD program (i.e., savings, health and nutrition, education, and income generation) are discussed in the upazila VGD sub-committee meeting.

The monthly meeting of the sub-committee receives problems, takes decisions on and instruct the concerned persons regarding field implementation. The meeting acts as a strong mechanism to ensure cooperation of union parishod functionaries and receive feedback from them.

The Project Implementation Officer (PIO) of the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation and Upazila Livestock Officer (ULO), representing government in upazila, provide support to BRAC in the implementation of the program. The PIO works, closely at field level, ensuring cooperation of the union parishod. In the case of difficulties and misunderstandings between BRAC and union parishod s/he irons out such problems. In arranging training PIO ensures attendance of participants to the training. The officer also supervises the distribution of ration by union parishod, proper loan utilization by the participants and assesses income earned by them.

On prevention and cure of poultry morbidity the ULO plays a role by ensuring supply of vaccines and makes field visits whenever invited for by BRAC personnel. They assist BRAC staff in training organized for poultry rearing and vaccinators. They also instruct union level livestock assistants to assist BRAC in the distribution of vaccines both of their own initiative and as per advice from their district level superior.

Expanded Programme on Immunization

The Extended Programme on Immunization (EPI) is a cooperative venture between the Ministry of Health and Family Planning Services and number of NGOs with BRAC as a major player. The aim of the program was to immunize all the

children with the target against six major killer diseases, i.e., tuberculosis, polio, tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, and measles.

The government of Bangladesh after being aware of the prevalence of high child mortality in the country pursued a policy to reduce infant mortality and morbidity due to these six killer diseases through immunization of children mainly. Although the program was launched with sufficient number of immunization facilities and staff to support these in 1979 the outcome from the investment was not satisfactory. By the end of 1985 only 2% of the targeted children were immunized.

The Government's health program intended to improve the situation through intensifying their EPI activities. With the assistance of the UNICEF and the World Bank a new strategy was introduced by inviting the NGOs and private sector to complement the government effort with their experience.

The government and donors were convinced that mobilization of both effective consumer's demand and resources to provide immunization are two key elements in achieving a rapid and sustainable increase in immunization coverage. The past observation indicated that although the government health sector was good in supplying information and inputs but their performance in creating the demand for immunization was not satisfactory. On the other hand NGOs had good record in creating demand among people through mobilization. Therefore, it was felt that by involving NGOs in the EPI program of the government an effective functioning of both demand and supply sides of the program would be possible.

Although the responsibility of mobilizing people in the identified areas for immunization was entrusted to NGOs later on they were also involved in assisting EPI in many operational areas, including demand creation, planning and advocacy, developing management capability, policy formulation, research and monitoring, and mass communication.

In early 1986 BRAC decided to broaden its child survival effort over Oral Rehydration Therapy Program by incorporating EPI in its agenda. Initially BRAC intended to remain involved with EPI for a short period but soon realized that it would be difficult for the government to carry out an immunization program unless

some assistance was provided to it for a longer period by a large NGO like BRAC. Thus BRAC decided to keep on assisting government in immunization.

BRAC identified five major areas including both the supply and demand sides of the program where it could assist the government. These agreed areas of cooperation between Ministry of Health and BRAC were as follows.

1. Assistance in Creating Demand: There would be a three-member team in each of the EPI upazilas under BRAC exclusively for EPI activities. One of the activities of the team would be to organize meetings in each village in order to increase awareness about and demand for vaccination. This team would stay in each upazila for a year during immunization doses given in it by the government staff.
2. Assistance in Planning and Advocacy Exercises: Before immunization program started in an upazila or a union, advocacy and planning exercises would be organized with the government officials and local elite. In the meetings BRAC workers and local EPI staff would discuss the EPI operation to be conducted and take decision regarding the role of various persons involved in the operation.
3. Assistance in Training: BRAC would provide training to mid-level and lower-level government staff on social mobilization and management of EPI. BRAC would also select local youths and train them to become EPI volunteers.
4. Assistance in Policy Formulation: BRAC would represent the National Steering Committee on EPI headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Planning. Besides providing input and feedback to the Committee, BRAC would assist government in formulating policies regarding EPI. It would also participate at the weekly EPI staff meeting in Dhaka and provide feedback for process documentation and research work. It would represent the upazila level coordination committee for EPI.
5. Assistance in Research and Monitoring: BRAC would undertake research and evaluation activities on EPI.

After 1991 the cooperation between BRAC and government is still continuing, however on slightly different format. By now the program has covered 96% of the

children under one year of age and 68% of pregnant women with its activities in the program areas.

Learning from Cooperation

Although NGOs share common goals with the government in poverty alleviation, human resources development, women's development, environmental protection etc. the government and the NGOs differ, however, in the way they go about realizing these goals. The differences are often attributable to variations in expertise, experience, resource base, and administrative or management systems. The following factors predispose the government and NGOs in certain ways of working:

1. The government can levy taxes to raise revenues for its operational expenditure. NGOs resources, mostly in the form of donations or contracts, are dependent on the assessment of the fund givers.
2. Government administration is guided by specific rules and regulations. It has less flexibility in its operations. In contrast, it is generally believed that NGOs have a simpler management system and can be more flexible.
3. The government can force compliance. This power can be abused in the absence of proper governance. NGOs rely on mobilization of voluntary groups at the grass-root level for their effectiveness.

Study (Asian Development Bank 1992) indicated that the NGOs and GOs cherish certain attitude about each other. The GOs think that NGOs (1) lack accountability, (2) practice insufficient inter-NGO coordination, (3) spend too much money on their operations, and (4) rely too much on foreign funds. NGOs on the other hand think that GOs (1) are rigid, bureaucratic and try to over-regulate NGO activities, (2) unnecessarily require prior approval for foreign funded projects, (3) lack appreciation about the differences in approach and style of NGOs' project management and (4) do not differentiate between NGOs with a proper record of performance and less-committed NGOs.

The experiences and learning that BRAC derived through its cooperation with GOs were to a great extent influenced by the factors that predisposed the GOs and NGOs in their ways of working and the attitude they cherished about each other.

- The GO-NGO cooperative ventures undertaken were successful in reaching their objectives in most cases. A happy combination of GO-NGO efforts can foster rapid national development.
- The NGOs have proven their worth in implementing developmental programs successfully side by side with the government. The NGOs not only had complemented but also supplemented the development program.
- The NGOs because of their characteristics are in an advantageous position in offering services to bottom 50% of the population. The NGOs which are involved in the cooperation should visualize their role as one of catalytic forces to initiate and implement activities which government otherwise would not have been able to undertake. Observation shows that NGOs are always ready to battle poverty.
- Observations show that the contribution of NGOs are often not recognized by the GO and there is a tendency in GO to consider NGOs as their subordinates in the cooperative ventures or they have contracted out the program to the NGO. Such tendencies can demoralize and demotivate NGOs in playing their share in the cooperative ventures. Effective cooperation between these two organizations depends on mutual understanding and sense of equal partnership. But GO and NGO should have respect for each other, should treat each other equally and recognize each others contribution to the success of the program.
- Due to past cooperation the confidence of GOs on the capability of NGOs have immensely enhanced. But, it must be mentioned that because of the prevailing attitude of GO and NGO towards each other both the organizations still lack confidence on the capability of the other in conducting their role successfully in the cooperative ventures. This lack of confidence can be removed through openness in both the organizations and through dialogue between them

- The emerging collaborative relationship between GOs and NGOs will become more effective if it is formalized within a legal framework. In the absence of such a legal framework sharing of resources and their optimum use by these organizations in cooperative venture can get affected.
- It should be accepted in principle that proven comparative advantage will be underwriting in the emerging division of labor between GOs and NGOs in the cooperation. Wherever NGOs will be found more cost-effective as a conduit, GOs will clear the space for them and vice versa.
- The roles and responsibilities of both GO and NGO in the cooperative venture should be finalized at the outset of the cooperation. If this is not done, as experience indicate, the organizations might try to shun away from conducting difficult and/or unpleasant part of the program. Such a tendency ultimately could adversely affect the program. In case of non-compliance of stipulated duties provisions should be made for punitive actions in order to ensure achievement of project objectives.
- In cooperative ventures, the NGOs occasionally suffer from the lack of autonomy to plan and implement programs based on their experience and expertise. For cooperation to be effective and program to succeed such autonomy is considered necessary.
- The donor agencies have potentialities to play a role in sensitizing the possible cooperating organizations from government and NGO sectors regarding the potential advantages in having joint development programs.
- The NGO personnel need to have a lot of patience to deal with the rigid structure and bureaucracy of the government. Number of tendencies were observed in dealing with the government officials in implementing the cooperative programs by the NGOs.
 1. In general, the GOs are not committed in cooperating with the NGOs. They usually extend cooperation when the objectives of the program conforms to the political commitment of the party in power. The cooperation is also

received if there is an international pressure/suggestion for the implementation of the program that support should be extended to NGOs.

2. The NGO can receive cooperation from lower level government officials in running the program by having official letter from their higher authority instructing them to cooperate to the program. But such letter was found not effective in the situations where lower level officials had disliking for the NGOs.
3. The cooperation of government officials at individual level can be derived through rapport building and by creating good relation with them. An effective way of doing this was through offering training to the government staff.
4. Lack of knowledge on BRAC was a bar to GO cooperation. When BRAC came up with a program associated with an organization well reputed and well known, e.g., ICDDR,B, BRAC readily received cooperation from the government officials.
5. The support of lower level government officials can be ensured by close and intensive persuasion. For example, to make government officials attend the training sessions as facilitators.

Presently the relationships between GOs and NGOs are quite positive, which were not so much in the earlier years. The GO-NGO relationships have traveled a long way up till now. However, there is still a long way to go which can be achieved by taking positive steps in the light of the learning from this study.

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