

GOAL: FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY?

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ABSTRACT

BRAC's Gender Quality Action Learning (GQAL) Programme was initiated in 1994 to improve the quality of programmes with village women and to improve the quality of gender relations within BRAC. In its first year of intervention, GQAL covered 28 area offices of BRAC's Rural Development Programme and 8 area offices of the Health and Population Division. This short term process documentation of the GQAL programme aimed at finding out whether GQAL's operations have reflected its stated objectives; whether the gender messages in GQAL's documents have been reflected in its operations and what the strengths and weaknesses of the programme are after its first year of operation. Information for the study was collected through review of GQAL documents, discussions with members of the Core Gender Team, participant observation of GQAL intervention sessions in area offices, group discussions and informal interviews with area office staff participating in GQAL, and participant observation of GQAL facilitators' monthly meetings. Since this was not an evaluation of the programme, no recommendations have been made. However, several implications for future action have been identified, as follows: GQAL has created a forum for discussion but it needs to specify whether this is solely a 'gender' forum and whether there are mechanisms for institutionalising this forum. The GQAL manual provides many useful 'gender' messages, but these messages should be made more specific to the context of BRAC. The GQAL programme is ideally a gender redistributive / transformative form of training. But can it bring about significant changes within the existing context of programme concern? In its first year of interventions, GQAL focussed primarily on its second goal, that of improving gender relations within BRAC. It is now time for GQAL to address its first goal, that of improving quality of programme with village women and it needs to specify what measures will be undertaken to carry out this goal. Finally, GQAL needs to address the important issue of whether all issues are gender issues and whether GQAL is sufficient in itself to address all such issues.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evolution of the GQAL Program

BRAC has been committed to poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor since its very inception. Special emphasis has always been placed on the plight of rural women, as they are often the ones most affected by poverty. Since the late 1980s, BRAC has been committed to gender equity, both programmatically, in terms of its commitment to women's empowerment, and organizationally, with its interest in recruiting women staff. Gradually, a sense of necessity has emerged among staff for understanding more about gender and its role in development. In early 1994, a Gender Team was formed within BRAC. This team initiated the development of a gender quality process that would involve BRAC staff in deepening the capacity of the program to empower women and transform gender relations within BRAC. Based on the findings of a series of consultations and 23 needs assessment workshops, the Gender Team developed a Gender Quality Action Learning (GQAL) program. The program intended to accomplish two broad goals, namely, improving the quality of program with village women and improving the quality of gender relations within BRAC. The program aims to strengthen BRAC staff's capacity to plan, deliver and monitor gender equitable programming and work with managers and staff to strengthen organizational systems, policies and procedures in support of BRAC's gender goals.

Study Objectives

GQAL has currently completed its first year of interventions in RDP and HPD. Starting in September 1996, it will begin its interventions in NFPE, as well as expand further in RDP and HPD. While GQAL's operations were ongoing, RED took an initiative to document the process of these operations in order to understand how the program is working to achieve its stated goals. Three area offices which participated in the GQAL intervention process were purposively selected for the study, one in HPD and two in RDP. The

objectives of the study were to document the GQAL program's operations and provide a preliminary analysis of its first year of interventions. More specifically, it aimed to find out whether GQAL's operations have reflected its stated objectives and whether the "gender" messages in GQAL's documents have been reflected in its operations and what the strengths and weaknesses of the program are after its first year of interventions.

GQAL Manual and its Gender Messages

The GQAL manual contains information to introduce GQAL participants to gender concepts and also give them an orientation to the GQAL cycle, the steps involved in the cycle and what GQAL hopes to achieve throughout its intervention package. Many activities and examples are used to introduce GQAL participants to gender concepts, with particular emphasis placed on areas in which women are at a disadvantage when compared to men, such as their access to resources and societal benefits. The manual also provides information on the employment opportunities available to women in different countries. It also contains three stories, situated in an area office in RDP, HPD and NFPE, respectively, which provide examples of some of the positive and negative aspects of working under the GQAL cycle.

Findings Based on the Issue Generation Process of the GQAL Cycle: The issue generation process of the GQAL cycle served as a brainstorming process in which GQAL participants were asked to identify as many issues, concerns and problems that they could, relating to their work in BRAC. The issues that were generated included gender, management, program, personal, and behavioral and attitudinal issues. Specific gender issues were few; most of the generated issues were management related ones.

Interview Findings and Study Team's Observations: As a result of the GQAL generated workplans, GQAL participants, i.e., area office staff, are now more aware of the design of their work and the areas in which their skills are weak. So they can take measures to improve upon these areas. Through the formulation of workplans, GQAL participants have acquired efficient time management skills. Since everyone is aware of the

workplan, they no longer feel that work is being overloaded on them. Through GQAL, more efficient use of the capabilities of all the area office staff, whether male or female, is taking place, making the area office more efficient in its operations. GQAL participants were unanimous in their opinion that GQAL should continue beyond its first year and that it should also expand further within BRAC. At the root of these findings, it is clear that cooperation is being emphasized. In this way, operations within the organization will run more smoothly and BRAC will become more efficient in meeting its goals of poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor. It appears that the GQAL facilitators act as catalysts in providing GAT members with encouragement regarding GQAL. According to the study team's observations, it was found that GAT members' perceptions about GQAL, whether positive or negative, were very much linked with the presence of the facilitators. The GQAL program is a gender-neutral type of training. It has not specifically tried to change the gender division of labor nor specifically favor women. It has tried to identify the actors, whether male or female, who are best suited to efficiently meet BRAC's goals. However, according to GQAL's two goals and the four assumptions it is based on, it would seem that GQAL ideally is a gender redistributive/transformational type of training, because it seeks to ensure a more even redistribution of power, responsibilities and division of resources between men and women staff of BRAC. Such changes will require a lot of time and GQAL needs to specify what measures it will take to ensure that such changes occur in order to transform BRAC.

Implications for Future Action

BRAC's Gender Quality Action Learning program is a new venture. In its first year, the program has run satisfactorily well, though it has shown certain weaknesses. But since it is an ongoing process, certain steps may be taken to overcome these weaknesses.

1. It was found that not all the gender messages and examples used in the manual were entirely relevant. For example, the "gender tree" and "gender bridge" which are used as illustrations to introduce GQAL participants to gender are concerned with large scale changes in society, while GQAL is primarily concerned with bringing about change in

BRAC, first and foremost. For participants to effectively apply their knowledge on gender, they need to be provided with examples and information which is relevant and context specific to the needs of BRAC. For example, if instead of describing society in the form of a tree, BRAC as an organization could be described in the form of a tree and then questions could be raised about how far BRAC is responsible for bringing about change in society as a whole. This would make it easier for GQAL participants to relate the theoretical concepts of the manual to the work they carry out in BRAC.

2. According to GQAL's four assumptions, widespread changes within BRAC are envisioned, as a result of the intervention process. At this initial stage of the program, it is not possible to state whether such change has in fact occurred. GQAL is taking place at the operational level. It is now time for GQAL to devise the ways and means by which the intervention process will initiate action at the policy making level.

3. GQAL has emphasized staff cooperation and group work towards the realization of BRAC's existing twin goals. It has not specifically tried to change the gender division of labor nor specifically favor women. It has tried to identify the actors, whether male or female, who are best suited to efficiently meet BRAC's goals. Thus, the GQAL program is a gender-neutral type of training. However, according to GQAL's two goals and the four assumptions it is based on, it would seem that GQAL ideally is aimed at being a gender redistributive/transformational type of training, because it seeks to ensure a more even redistribution of power, responsibilities and division of resources between men and women staff of BRAC. Such redistribution is politically very challenging because it requires changes in the existing framework where men are required to give up certain privileges and take on certain new responsibilities. Such changes will require a lot of time and GQAL needs to specify what measures it will take to ensure that such changes occur in order to transform BRAC.

4. In its first year of interventions, GQAL has focused primarily on its second goal, that of improving gender relations within BRAC. Some confusion persists about its first goal, that of improving quality of program with village women. Some GQAL participants mentioned

that in meeting this goal, they were disseminating information to VO members on such things as treating all children equally, for example, by not discriminating among them with regards to the allocation of food, education, medical care and so forth. Such information dissemination, while useful, does not fully meet GQAL's first stated goal, especially as there is no mechanism to ensure the implementation of this information. Thus, GQAL needs to make clear how it intends to improve quality of program with women.

5. The issue generation stage of the GQAL cycle has produced a vast array of problems and concerns, but not all were related to gender. For example, many management related issues which are not directly related to gender were raised. An example of this is "frequent change of decision slows down staff's workspace." There is no doubt that whatever the nature of the selected issue, it was dealt with in a constructive and positive manner. But, since this is a Gender Quality program, first and foremost, how relevant was it for the program to tackle non-gender issues? At the same time, the question is raised, is every issue a gender issue? GQAL needs to make clear whether it considers all issues to be gender issues and if so, then clearly show how they are so. Obviously, gender issues cannot and should not be completely isolated from the overall context of program concern. At the same time, however, in order for a program like GQAL to bring about a significant change a change which can be sustained, the overall context in which the program is operating also needs to be addressed and changed, if necessary.

INTRODUCTION

BRAC has been committed to poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor since its inception. Special emphasis has always been placed on the plight of poor rural women, as they are often the ones most affected by poverty. BRAC's various programmes reflect the organization's concern about this disadvantaged group. Currently, the bulk of BRAC's programme's are directed to women: 85% of credit is targeted to women; 70% of all students in BRAC's primary schools are girls and 85% of the members in BRAC's village organizations are women (Rao and Kelleher: 1995).

Since the late 1980's, BRAC has been committed to gender equity both programmatically, in terms of its commitment to women's empowerment, and organizationally, with its interest in recruiting more women staff. Despite BRAC's efforts at recruiting women staff, their retention level remained very low. In 1991, a Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) was set up to advise on women's issues and try to find out the reasons behind women's rapid dropout from the organization. WAC recommended the need for continuous interactions with BRAC staff on behavioral issues. To meet this demand, the Training Division of BRAC developed a one day module on behavioural aspects of gender awareness named "Men and Women: Partnership in Development" (Gender Training Interventions, BRAC: undated).

Gradually a sense of necessity emerged from the staff for understanding more about gender and its role in development. Assessing the needs from various discussion forum among BRAC staff and also from other NGOs working with women, BRAC's Training Division, at the end of 1992, developed a six-day long course on gender, whose aims were to a) develop gender sensitivity, and b) acquire analytical skills of project and programme activities. The course, named Gender Awareness and Analysis Course (GAAC) started from mid 1993.

In early 1994, a Gender Team was formed within BRAC with four members of the Training division and three external consultants. This team initiated the development of a

gender quality process that would involve BRAC staff in deepening the capacity of BRAC programmes to empower women and improve gender relations within BRAC. Initially, the Gender team conducted a series of consultations and 23 needs assessment workshops with more than 400 BRAC staff at all levels. The team used the findings of these sessions to develop a training programme called the Gender Quality Action Learning (GQAL) programme. The programme intended to accomplish two broad goals of improving the quality of BRAC programmes with village women and to improve the quality of gender relations within BRAC.

The programme aims to strengthen the capacity of BRAC staff to i) plan, deliver and monitor gender equitable programming and ii) work with managers and staff to strengthen organizational systems, policies and procedures in support of BRAC's gender goals (Rao and Kelleher: 1995). GQAL has currently completed its first year of intervention in the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the Health and Population Division (HPD). Starting in September 1996, it began its interventions in the Non-Formal Primary Education Programme (NFPE), as further expanded in RDP and HPD. While GQAL's first year operations were ongoing, RED took an initiative to document the process of these operations to understand how the programme is working to achieve its stated goals.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to document the operations of the GQAL programme and provide a preliminary analysis of its first year of intervention. More specifically, it aims to find out:

- * Whether GQAL operations have reflected its objectives;
- * Whether the gender messages in GQAL documents have been reflected in its operations; and
- * The strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

Since GQAL is a long-term, continuous process, RED has designed the following long-term objectives to carry out a more in-depth and detailed evaluation of the programme:

- * To examine how far GQAL's two objectives and four assumptions are relevant to BRAC;
- * to examine GQAL affected changes at the organisational and programme-participant levels;
- * to examine the implications of GQAL at the policymaking level; and
- * to examine whether GQAL has been able to sensitize relationships between men and women in the long-term.

METHODOLOGY

GQAL's first year of intervention covered selected RDP area offices (AO) in Rajshahi and Pabna and selected HPD AOs in Mymensingh. The cycle began in 28 RDP AOs in Rajshahi and Pabna in June 1995 and in May 1995, it began in 8 HPD AOs in Mymensingh.

This study was qualitative in nature we purposively selected three AOs from three regions of the program. Two were selected from RDP, one in Rajshahi, one in Pabna, while one AO from HPD Mymensingh was selected. Information were collected through:

- i) review of GQAL materials and documents;
- ii) discussions with members of the Core Gender Team;
- iii) participant observation of GQAL intervention sessions in AOs;
- iv) group discussions with AO staff;
- v) informal interviews with AO staff; and
- vi) participant observation of GQAL facilitators' monthly meetings.

LIMITATIONS

The study was designed to follow the GQAL programme cycle which began in May 1995 and ended in June 1996. The study team's fieldwork should have been completed by April 1996, but the prevailing political crises in the country prevented this. Data collection was therefore completed in May, rather than April 1996.

GQAL: PROGRAMME AND OPERATIONS

The broad objectives of the GQAL programme are as follows:

- a) to improve the quality of BRAC programmes involving village women; and
- b) to improve gender relations within BRAC.

The GQAL programme is grounded on four basic assumptions:

- in order to deliver quality program that empowers women, you need the perspectives of various kinds of both men and women staff and primary stakeholders;
- a male-directed organizational environment restricts fora where women's voices can be heard, devalues women's work, facilitates men's mobility, success and power at the expense of women and leads to high female dropout;
- to deepen program quality, increase responsiveness to primary stakeholders and improve program impact, the focus on quantitative targets (associated with a hierarchical organization with a directive supervision ethic) must be balanced with a concern for quality program and its impact on empowerment of women; and
- in order to improve quality, men and women front line staff and VO members must be engaged in the task of analyzing the process and outcomes of program delivery so as to continuously improve the depth and quality of program and its ability to actually empower women and transform gender relations. This analysis requires skill in gender and program analysis, time to do it, a climate of acceptance of new ideas and the respectful collaboration of men and women staff and members (Rao and Kelleher: 1995).

The GQAL intervention process has three phases, the initial learning phase, the planning and action phase, and the evaluation and recycling phase. To facilitate the intervention, AO staff participating in the programme were divided into teams known as Gender Action

Teams (GAT). Depending on the number of staff in each AO, between one and three GATs were formed. The GATs were involved in GQAL seminars, which were the key interventions of the GQAL programme. These seminars were conducted by 20 trainers (4 of whom comprised the Core Gender Team), who had participated in GAAC. They had also undergone a ten-day Training of Trainers (TOT) course which helped them to be GQAL facilitators.

The GQAL trainers act as facilitators in the GQAL intervention process. Their role is to introduce GAT members to gender issues, as well as introduce them to the tools they will use in the GQAL action learning process. The trainers also assist GAT members during the various stages involved in the intervention process.

The first phase of the GQAL programme is the **Initial Training Phase**, in which knowledge and information is disseminated to GAT members. Earlier, each part of each phase was conducted in the AOs, the GQAL facilitators underwent sessions in which they were familiarized with the process needed to carry out the programme. These sessions were part of the facilitators' monthly meetings. In the **Initial Training Phase**, GAT members receive an introduction to gender concepts and an orientation of the tools they will require in the GQAL process. They also receive training on personal and organizational change issues. When introducing GAT members to gender concepts, the facilitators make use of a manual in which gender is explained through the use of the "gender tree" and "gender bridge", among other things. In Phase One, GAT members also undergo sessions in which they discuss how to bring about behavioural and attitudinal changes, both at the individual and organizational levels.

Phase two is the **Planning and Action Phase**. At the beginning of this phase, GAT members participated in brainstorming sessions in which they generated issues which are mainly problems and concerns they face through working in BRAC. At the onset, these issues were not limited to solely gender ones. In fact, the issues that came up included management, programme related, personal, behavioural and attitudinal, as well as gender

ones. In the next part of Phase two¹, GAT members chose one issue with which to work on during the intervention process. Issue selection is based on three criteria: *i) is the issue gender related; ii) is the issue important to GAT; and iii) can GAT contribute to improvement of the issue.* After the issue selection, a WEB analysis is done on the issue, in which its primary, secondary and tertiary causes are identified. From these causes, actionable causes are identified. Actionable causes are those on which concrete work can be done to bring about visible results to the issue. Next, all the actionable causes are assessed on the basis of four criteria: *i) whether they are directly related to the main issue; ii) whether they will have an effect on the organizational quality of BRAC; iii) how much influence they have on other actionable causes; and iv) whether the GAT can work on them.* The actionable cause which fits most of these four criteria is chosen as the Selected Actionable Cause (SAC).

After the SAC has been identified, possible activities are discussed, which will best meet that SAC. When choosing these activities, four questions have to be asked: *i) can GAT actually work on these activities or are they expecting management to take care of them; ii) will these activities make a difference on the actionable cause and issue; iii) will these activities bring about changes in the issue by April 1996; and iv) how much will these activities affect gender relations in the office or the empowerment of rural women.* On the basis of the identified activities, an action plan matrix is developed. Each activity has corresponding tasks associated with it. In the matrix, these tasks are broken down according to who will do them, when, where and how these will be done.

For the rest of this phase, the GAT works on implementing its action plan. About a month after the action plan is developed, there is a follow-up session to determine whether the identified tasks are being carried out on time. Modifications and changes are made accordingly. Further follow-up sessions are also carried out to ensure that the action plan is being carried out in a satisfactory manner.

¹ Phase two is a very lengthy and complicated process. It will be made clearer in the findings section in which information obtained from a GQAL intervention area is presented.

Phase three is one of Evaluation and Re-cycling. After several months (approximately 5 to 6 months) of work on the action plan, the impact of the plan is evaluated. If the GATs feel that their selected issues have been dealt with in a satisfactory manner, then they select another issue by repeating the various stages of phase two again. In the first year of GQAL's operations, most GATs worked with only one issue.

FINDINGS

I. GQAL manual and its gender messages

This manual was prepared by the Gender Team and provided to GAT members during the initial training phase. It contains information which introduces GAT members to gender concepts. It also gives them an orientation to the GQAL cycle, the steps involved in the cycle and what GQAL hopes to achieve through its intervention package. Many activities and examples are used to introduce and explain the concept of gender to GAT members, with particular emphasis on areas in which women are disadvantaged compared to men. The example of “*kaj*” (work) helps GAT members to realize that the work carried out by women which usually have no monetary value attached to those, such as childcare and household work are not valued or recognized. Also, those who engage in this type of work are not even considered to be working or doing anything noteworthy. The pie chart of “work analysis” explains in more detail different types of work and who carries them out. The first type of work is reproductive work, which has no income associated with it. It is women who predominantly carry out this type of work. The second type of work is productive work, since an income can be derived from it. Examples of productive work include agricultural labour, business, and so forth. It is mainly men who undertake productive work. The third type of work identified is community-related work, which is voluntary in nature and includes such activities as facilitating religious ceremonies and so forth. Again, according to the manual, it is mostly men who undertake such work.

The manual also provides information on how women face disadvantages compared to men because of their access to resources and benefits are more restricted than that of men. Also, women tend to face a lot of violence and sexual harassment, as compared to men. The example of the “gender bridge” describes the society in its present state as being more in favour of men than women. All resources and facilities are directed towards the betterment of men, at the expense of women. The example of the “gender tree” describes the society in the form of a tree; the trunk of the tree is society, the roots are basic human

values and beliefs, and the branches are the systems that people have devised to meet those values and beliefs. The systems are discriminatory towards women and the source of this discrimination lies in the roots of the tree, in the human values and beliefs.

The manual also provides information on the opportunities available to women in different countries. Information are provided on the participation of women in agricultural activities in different countries; the percentage of female-headed households in the developing world; how women compare with men in terms of wages received for productive work and so on. Basically, this section of the manual tries to draw attention on the visibility or invisibility of women in different socioeconomic, political and other activities in different countries.

The manual also contains three stories of three area offices in RDP, HPD and NFPE. These three stories provide examples of some of the positive and negative aspects of working under the GQAL cycle. The positive aspects include examples of cooperation among staff while working on selected issues under the GQAL cycle. The negative aspects include behavioural and attitudinal problems faced by staff while carrying out the steps of the GQAL cycle, which they have to do in addition to their existing workload.

II. Operational procedures of two stages of the GQAL cycle

A. Issue generation process

The issue generation process of the GQAL cycle served as a brainstorming process in which GAT members were asked to identify as many issues, concerns and problems that they could, relating to their work in BRAC. The issues were not necessarily limited to gender issues, but in fact also included management, programme, personal and behavioural and attitudinal ones. Specific gender issues were few. However, through various processes in the latter part of phase two, the chosen issue, no matter of what nature, was linked with gender-related concerns if *i) if poor TG women suffer; ii) if inter-staff*

relations suffered; and iii) if problems occur in the family life of a GAT member. To best understand the way the issues have been categorized, a brief description is provided herein, along with examples.

Personal Issues: The issues which solely affected the individual who has listed them. These issues might be personal opinions or complaints about work or purely personal problems that the individual had faced in his/her work. Examples: i) *interference in personal freedom (Pabna RDP GAT # 3)*; ii) *staff had to work even when they were not interested (Mollapara SLDP GAT)*.

Management issues: The issues which were best handled by relevant authorities in the management. These might be concerns or problems that hindered to a positive working environment. Examples: i) *"no matter how much work we do, there is never any evaluation of it (Pabna RDP GAT # 2)*; ii) *there are no set timings for work (Pabna RDP GAT # 2)*."

Program related issues: The issues which were related to positively or negatively carrying out activities of various programmes. Examples: i) *"it takes a lot of time to deposit service charges and as a result, other assigned work falls behind (HPD Mymensingh GAT)*; ii) *difficult to run programme with just VGD cardholder women (Pabna RDP GAT # 3)*."

† **Gender-related issues:** The issues that were directly related to problems in the relationships between and among male and female staff. Examples: i) *"gender discrimination against female staff (Pabna RDP GAT # 1)*; ii) *manager always overloads female POs with work (HPD Mymensingh GAT)*."

B. Phase two revisited: information from an HPD GAT

The GQAL intervention process is a lengthy one. To provide a better understanding, particularly of the different steps involved in phase two, the information from HPD

Churkhai, Mymensingh is presented herein. The selected issue for the HPD Churkhai GAT was "heavy workload which prevents high quality work from being carried out."

The WEB Analysis of this selected issue is as follows:

Table 1: WEB analysis of a selected issue

HPD Churkhai, Mymensingh GAT

Selected issue: *Heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out*

MAIN ISSUE	PRIMARY CAUSES	SECONDARY CAUSES	TERTIARY CAUSES
heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out	1) too much work, not enough staff to carry it out	a) not enough staff b) too many components	
	2) sudden work	a) rapid expansion of program b) asking for a report again and again c) sudden change of decision d) national report e) suddenly wanting a report	
	3) lack of proper planning	a) staff not skilled b) lack of training c) old staff can't give time to new staff d) new staff not enthusiastic to learn e) lack of orientation	
	4) not enough staff	a) staff dropout b) program expansion	
	5) disaster	a) hartal b) heavy rainfall	
	6) work not carried out according to priority	a) lack of training b) lack of proper planning c) lack of orientation d) not enough knowledge of different	

	components	
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Table 1 (continued)

Selected Issue: *Heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out*

MAIN ISSUE	PRIMARY CAUSES	SECONDARY CAUSES	TERTIARY CAUSES
heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out (contd.)	7) unplanned leave	a) opportunistic leave taking b) emergency c) too much work so can't avail leave when necessary	
	8) too many components	a) societal need b) policy	
	9) staff dropout	a) residential problem	i) rented house ii) housing not available according to choice
	9) staff dropout (contd.)	b) heavy workload c) inadequate remuneration d) nature of work e) can't avail leave when necessary	
	9) staff dropout (contd.)	f) posting far away from home	i) limitation of program
	9) staff dropout (contd.)	g) behavioral reasons	i) traditional attitude ii) meanmindedness

The actionable causes of the HPD Churkhai GAT were as follows:

1. *Lack of orientation,*
2. *Not enough knowledge of different components,*
3. *Lack of motivation,*
4. *Lack of proper planning,*
5. *Staff are not skilled,*

6. *Lack of training,*
7. *Old staff can't give time to new staff,*
8. *New staff are not enthusiastic to learn,*
9. *Too much work so can't avail leave when necessary,*
10. *Opportunistic leave taking,*
11. *Attitude/mindset,*
12. *Behavioural reasons,*
13. *Meanmindedness, and*
14. *Traditional attitude.*

The Selected actionable cause (SAC) for the HPD Churkhai GAT was “not enough knowledge of different components.” The identified activities for the SAC were:

1. *To assess how much knowledge there is on the components.*
2. *To exchange views with each other.*
3. *To discuss component-related issues at weekly meetings.*
4. *To give orientation on the components.*
5. *Older staff will assist new staff, and*
6. *To make a list of components and determine which ones have not had related training packages.*

The HPD Churkhai action plan is presented in brief with one identified activity and its corresponding tasks. The entire matrix is presented in the Annex.

Table 2: Action Plan of HPD Churkhai, Mymensingh GAT
November 1995 - April 1996

Issue: *heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out.*

SAC: *not enough knowledge of different components.*

ACTIVITY	TASKS	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
1) to assess how much knowledge there is on the components	a) to make a list of components	PO	By November 22, 1996	AO	With information obtained from office files and documents
	b) to make a list of all staff and what components they have previously worked on	PO	By November 22, 1995	AO	Through discussion with all AO staff
	c) to observe the work related to the components and identify the weak areas	AM	By December 24, 1995	AO and field	According to Monitoring and MIS rules
	d) to prepare questionnaire on the components * AM can change questions when necessary	PO	By January, 1996	AO	To prepare questionnaires after talking to staff member who monitors the components

Table 2 (continued.)

Issue: Heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out.

SAC: not enough knowledge of different components.

ACTIVITY	TASKS	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
1) to assess how much knowledge there is on the components (contd.)	e) to select dates to hold exams on the different components and let GAT members know the results	AM	Between January 20 - 30, 1996	AO	To change questions as and when necessary; to hold exams on selected dates; to inform GAT members of results.

III. GAT members' perceptions about GQAL:

GAT members seemed to hold positive perceptions about the GQAL programme. They felt that as a result of GQAL, cooperation among staff had increased and that they can now openly discuss personal and work-related problems amongst themselves and with their managers. An example of the issues discussed with managers includes the case of a female PA posted in Mollapara SLDP who, was trying to get transferred to Rangpur where her husband (who also worked in BRAC) was posted.

The GAT members were found to cooperate more with each other when carrying out their tasks. When asked if this was something new and which they did not do before the initiation of GQAL, they replied:

“No, we have always cooperated with each other as much as possible, but through GQAL, we have acquired a renewed understanding and appreciation of teamwork.”

As an example provided by GAT members, a female PA in Mollapara SLDP AO just returned from maternity leave. Previously, she used to do her loan repayment collections in areas far away from the AO. Since this had now become difficult for her, her co-workers made an alternative arrangement so that she could do her collections near the AO and someone else would take over her previous areas.

One issue that was among the most frequently selected in the GATs was "heavy workload." GAT members were asked whether GQAL had managed to decrease their workload. According to them:

"No, our workload has not gone down, but because we now carry out tasks according to the GQAL action plan, where all responsibilities and tasks are clearly allocated among all, we have now become more organized about the way we work."

The findings also suggest that GAT members had acquired efficient time management skills. They openly discuss their problems, if conflicts arise even after an assigned workplan has been devised, then they resolve those conflicts through discussions. Since everyone is aware of the workplan, they no longer feel that the work is being overloaded on them. Also, they were now more aware of the design of their work and their weaknesses, so that they could take measures to improve their weaknesses.

The GAT members seemed very enthusiastic about GQAL, but some discrepancies were observed. For example, GAT members were heard to tell the facilitator:

"Upon hearing that you were coming again for another GQAL session, we opened up our notebooks to refresh our memories about GQAL."

This leads one to conclude that GAT members' perception about GQAL, whether positive or negative, is very much linked with the presence of the facilitator. It seems that the facilitator acts as a catalyst, that is, s/he provides them with encouragement regarding

GQAL. However, not all GAT members were enthusiastic about the programme. When told that the study team had arrived to collect information on GQAL, they were heard to say:

“We thought that GQAL was finally over, but here you have come again, to collect information from us about it.”

In many areas, GAT members thought that because of no follow-up sessions during the non-cooperation movement, the GQAL programme was over. Some GAT members even seemed apathetic about the entire programme:

“At least during the GQAL meetings we get to sit down and relax for an afternoon and not going out for collection of loan repayment.”

It seems that AO staff felt overloaded with their work and saw the GQAL intervention session as an opportunity to take a break from their work.

When asked whether staff relations had improved because of GQAL, one male GAT member replied:

“Now we view female staff as colleagues, capable of working with the same skill and sincerity as us. Before GQAL, we did not view them as such. Now we consider them as our equals.”

The response of a female GAT member was similar:

“Before, we were given unimportant tasks to carry out, because we were considered to be incapable of handling accounts or money. Now, our male colleagues respect us and the management divides tasks equally between us and them.”

Before, male staff used to be given more importance in work allocation, the idea being that they are capable of better work (performance) and they can work for longer hours, as well as be posted far away from their home district without any problem. Therefore, they would be given more important tasks to carry out. Now, both male and female staff carry out all tasks. This suggests that through GQAL, more efficient use of the capabilities of all AO staff is taking place, making the AO more efficient.

GAT members were unanimous in their opinion that GQAL should continue beyond the first year and that it should expand further within BRAC. According to them”

“GQAL should be carried out in all BRAC’s programmes simultaneously. GQAL sessions should be carried out with all staff at all AOs. Thus, cooperation among staff will increase.”

Another reply was:

“GQAL should continue, especially for new staff, so that they understand its importance. Also, upto now, GQAL discussions and implementations have only occurred at the field level. They should start to expand to the policy level soon.”

It is clear from the findings that cooperation (among staff) is being emphasized. Thus, it will help the organization run smoothly and more efficiently in meeting its twin goals of poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor.

Theoretical groundings:

Because GQAL emphasizes relationships, its theoretical grounding can be found in the Gender and Development (GAD) Approach to development (Young: 1988). According to GAD, "gender" is concerned with relationships between men and women, and also between men and men, and women and women. These relationships are often unequal and based on power and authority. Based on the findings of this study, it can be stated that in its first year of interventions, GQAL focused primarily on improving gender relations within BRAC.

GQAL addressed behavioural issues. Behaviour and attitudes play a vital role in determining gender relationships. This is reflected in the interview findings where GAT members stated that they now have the courage to talk about their problems, personal or official, with their managers. At the same time, managers are more willing to listen and take note of staff members' problems and concerns. This can be stated as GQAL's major strength. It has created a forum in which staff members can freely discuss their problems and concerns without fear of favour or retribution. But the question that needs to be asked is, is this forum a "gender forum" and do participants perceive it as such? Is there any scope for this forum to be regularized? In other words, is there enough interest among policy makers and others in the management to institutionalize this forum? Also, will these fora continue beyond the GQAL intervention process or will they be discontinued when and if the GQAL process ends? These are some issues that GQAL needs to make address regarding these fora which have been created through its intervention processes.

In response to the above questions, members of the GQAL Core Gender Team explained their rationale behind the creation of these fora. In many programme areas, some information gaps had been created in which colleagues were not aware of each other's work and what problems could arise while undertaking that work. Thus, it was first

necessary to overcome these information gaps through forum in which everyone become more aware of each others' responsibilities and of the problems that could arise while undertaking those responsibilities. Once such forum had been created and an atmosphere of openness established, participants would then be comfortable enough to discuss problems related to their work and working with each other. This would set the basis for improving gender relations within BRAC. Because one of the main goals of GQAL is to improve quality of gender relations within BRAC, it is necessary that this forum addresses issues that are most important to all staff. Therefore, certain specific issues may have been overlooked in favour of issues that were important to most people. Those specific issues were raised in favour of issues that were important to most people. Those specific issues were raised in other forum such as Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) meetings and have been noted by the concerned authorities.

Basically what GQAL tried to do is create an environment where workload does not seem so heavy. The programme does not have the means to decrease workload, but rather to try to reduce tensions and the stresses related to carrying out work and thereby create an environment in which no one feels overburdened with work.

Major strengths and weaknesses of GQAL:

† In terms of relationships being enhanced or improved, there are many examples of staff cooperation, where if a staff member goes on leave, another staff member takes over his or her responsibilities. Obviously such cooperation existed even before the GQAL intervention process was initiated. But now because of GQAL, particularly the GQAL generated action plans, such cooperation is more visible. But there is no doubt that such enhanced cooperation enabled the AOs to be more efficient regarding how their work was carried out. This cooperation process was facilitated by a yearly leave plan which was prepared by the GATs and approved the respective AMs. This leave plan is another positive outcome of GQAL. It allows the AO to plan ahead. But difficulties lie in

implementing this leave plan. For the sake of the plan, staff members are required to list down tentative dates on which they might take leave. Upon closer inspection of the plans, it was found that in fact, staff members did not avail leave on those dates. This of course is a practical issue because how can someone at the beginning of the year know when and for how long they will require leave at the end of the year? At the same time, even if such a leave plan is formulated, it will not be effective unless it is properly and timely updated and revised, something that was found to be lacking in at least one of the AOs from which information was obtained.

What type of gender training is GQAL:

An important issue that needs to be raised at this point is that when talking about improvements and cooperation, the gender neutral term "staff" is always used, rather than "men" and "women." Also, when issues such as "heavy workload" are raised, it is never phrased from a gender point of view but rather from the point of view of staff. So it seems that the cooperation of staff is being emphasized, rather than that of men and women. This raises the question, what type of training is GQAL? Is it gender-neutral, gender-specific or gender-redistributive/transformational?² Gender neutral training is that which leaves the existing division of resources and responsibilities intact while attempting to identify the actors most appropriate for the realization of pre-determined goals. Gender-specific training includes targeting activities and resources which women are likely to benefit from and control. Gender-redistributive/transformational training seeks to transform existing gender relations in a more democratic direction by redistributing more evenly the division of resources, responsibilities and power between men and women (Kabeer: 1994b).

² Kabeer originally talks about three types of policy options. In the context of GQAL, they are considered as types of trainings.

Based on the findings of this study, it would seem that GQAL fits into the first type of training, which is gender-neutral. GQAL, has emphasized staff cooperation and group work towards the realization of BRAC's existing twin goals. It has not specifically tried to change the gender division of labour nor specifically favour women. It has tried to identify the actors, whether male or female, who were best suited to efficiently meet BRAC's goals. However, according to GQAL's two goals and the four assumptions it is based on, it would seem that GQAL ideally fits into the third type of training, which is gender redistributive/ transformative, because it seeks to ensure a more even redistribution of power, responsibilities and division of resources between men and women staff of BRAC. However, as Kabeer has pointed out, such redistribution is politically challenging because it seeks to change the existing framework by requiring men to give up certain privileges and undertake certain new responsibilities. Such changes will require a lot of time. GQAL needs to specify what measures it will take to ensure that such changes will transform BRAC into becoming a truly gender sensitive organisation. These measures may include formulating new policies and guidelines and also establishing a mechanism that will ensure the implementation and follow-up of these new policies and guidelines.

According to its four assumptions, GQAL envisions wide-spread changes within BRAC. At this initial stage of the programme, it is not possible to state whether such change has in fact occurred. The programme is taking place at the field level, in the AOs, and for such widespread changes to occur, it would have to expand to encompass the entire organization. As far as expansion is concerned, the programme began its interventions in NFPE September, 1996, and also further expanded in RDP and HPD at the same time. But it is not known how far or to what extent GQAL intends to permeate the entire organization, particularly the policy making level. The GATs are the key components in the intervention process and it is the AO staff who form them. How would the GATs be formed at the policy making level? The position of GQAL within BRAC needs to be clearly identified, particularly with respect to the highest policy making levels, especially, as it prepares to begin its next round of interventions within BRAC.

GQAL manual: How it can be improved

In terms of the gender messages and the examples used in the manual, it was found that not all of them are entirely relevant or context-specific. The "gender tree" and "gender bridge" are primarily concerned with large scale changes in society, while GQAL is primarily concerned with bringing about change in BRAC, first and foremost. So, it is possible that these two examples do not provide as thorough or accurate an introduction to gender as could be hoped. Perhaps if they were made more specific to the context of BRAC, for example, by describing BRAC as a tree and then addressing the issue of how far BRAC is responsible for bringing about change in society as a whole. The pie chart of work analysis and the information provided on areas in which women are disadvantaged when compared to men provide GAT members with a realization that women are "behind" men in many areas of life - social, political or economic. But the corrective measures which are identified are again, not always specific to the particular context of BRAC. The triple-role work framework identified in the "*kaj*" example is not relevant in Bangladeshi context because women do not traditionally participate in community work as such. At the same time, the triple-role work framework has also been theoretically criticised by many authors, (Kabeer: 1994a). Also, the information provided on the opportunities available to women in different sectors in different countries is perhaps not quite relevant in an introduction to gender. Since GQAL focused primarily on improving gender relations within BRAC, it may be that GAT members could not relate the information in the manual to the day to day activities they carry out for BRAC.

Selected issues: All are not gender related

The issue generation stage of the GQAL cycle produced a vast array of problems and concerns, which the GATs have dealt with through their action plan matrices. However, it was discerned from the study findings that specific gender issues were few. There is no doubt that the issues selected, whether management, programme, personal, behavioural,

attitudinal or gender related were dealt with in a positive and constructive manner. Since this is a gender quality programme, it needs to be considered whether it was relevant for the programme to tackle non-gender issues. The question was raised whether every issue was a gender issue? If, in the name of gender, a purely management-related issue is dealt with, how relevant is that for the GQAL programme? As was seen in the findings of the issue generation process (p 10), the selected issues were linked with gender. Because gender as a theoretical concept is still a relatively new area of investigation, these links need to be made clear and specific. The GQAL programme needs to make it clear whether it considers all issues to be gender issues. Obviously, gender issues cannot and should not be completely isolated from the overall context of the programme. For a program like GQAL to bring about a significant substantial change, the overall context in which the programme is operating also needs to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

Since this study focused primarily on those who were involved in the GQAL programme, it is not possible to determine how much value BRAC as a whole places on it. Gender concepts are still fairly new as theoretical concepts and there is not yet widespread knowledge or awareness of them, both in Bangladesh and also in the specific context of BRAC. Also, those not involved in GQAL may be confused by what exactly the program hopes to achieve. The intervention process is a long and involved one, and to someone not familiar with it in its entirety, it may seem confusing. The study team itself was confused as to how the program intends to meet its first goal, that of improving quality of program with women. What is meant by improving quality of program? Giving out more loans? GAT members were asked what they were doing to meet this particular goal and one member in Mohadevpur replied that in the weekly Gram Shava meetings, he was disseminating among VO members the information he had learned through GQAL. This information included such things as treating all children equally, especially with regards to the allocation of food, education, medical care and so forth. This type of information dissemination, while useful, does not fully meet GQAL's first goal, particularly as there is

no mechanism to ensure the implementation of that information. Thus, the GQAL program needs to make clear how it intends to improve the quality of program with women.

Since the GQAL programme is, there were discrepancies and inconsistencies in its operations. The programme was not following a set design of operation. However, it is expected, however, that the lessons learned from the first year of will be implemented in the future.

5. Savings are not returned to group members.
6. Loan installments cannot be collected on time.
7. Difficult to run program with just VGD cardholder women.
8. Can't discuss VO problems in office (i.e., shortage of poultry).
9. Group members are not aware of the rules.
10. Target groups are not aware of the programs.
11. Group members have to start loan repayments before they have even had a chance to enjoy the fruits of that labor.
12. Difficult to run HRLE program in older offices.
13. Loans are not used for their specified purposes.
14. Problems of VOs are often falsified.

PERSONAL ISSUES

1. Postings far away from home prevents us from keeping in touch with our families.
2. Staff face disturbances when they work.
3. Staff have to work even when they are not interested.
4. Husband/wife both work in BRAC but are posted in different places.
5. Women who ride bicycles will become paralyzed in the future.
6. Staff become confused, puzzled because they have to work with more than one component.
7. BRAC has no bosses, only bossing.
8. There are religious barriers to BRAC's work.
9. A group member's husband gets annoyed when she is constantly approached on behalf of a program.
10. Staff suffer mental tension because of their work in BRAC.
11. Even easy task become difficult in BRAC.
12. Excessive motorcycle mileage is shown when reporting official work.
13. Can't live with wife/family.

14. Staff can't speak openly about injustice or corruption.
15. Interference with personal freedom.
16. Can't speak out about problems.
17. Staff often have to work 24 hours of the day. .
18. Staff have to collect installments even in bad weather.
19. Staff often discuss others' problems without permission.
20. Divorces occur because leave is not available as/when required.
21. Suddenly being overburdened with work puts us in an awkward position.
22. We often commit small indiscrepancies when carrying out office work, but then we don't like it when we are disciplined for it.
23. Difficult for female staff to ride bicycles during their period.
24. Problems of intra-village politics.
25. Can't even take time to go to the toilet.

BEHAVIORAL/ATTITUDINAL ISSUES

1. When staff make mistakes, instead of being told how to correct them, they are disciplined or their jobs are threatened; very rarely do they get feedback on the mistakes.
2. Staff treated badly in front of guests.
3. Staff are threatened.
4. Senior staff favor one particular PO.
5. Staff face a lot of harassment when they go on leave.
6. Lack of cooperation among staff.
7. A negative impression exists of BRAC.
8. Don't get assistance from co-workers.
9. No sense of unity among staff.
10. Senior staff often use bad language.
11. Senior staff create a fuss when juniors go on holidays.
12. Some VOs have fatwabaz problems.

13. Lack of honesty among staff.
14. Behavior of senior staff is detrimental to work and leads junior staff to develop negative attitudes about their work.
15. Manager views staff simply as day laborers.
16. Manager displays power over staff.
17. Staff's relatives are looked down upon.
18. Because of a previous mistake, senior staff often show annoyance with a staff member.
19. Senior staff don't treat junior with respect or look out for new staff.

GENDER RELATED ISSUES

1. Women have to go to the field very far away from the office.
2. Manager always overloads female POs with work.
3. Reluctance to promote women.
4. Women staff paid more attention to than male staff.
5. Gender discrimination against female staff.
6. Male POs are not held accountable for their work.
7. Female POs are considered weak and are therefore not given any responsibilities.
8. More male staff than female staff get promoted.
9. Social superstitions exist against sending women on training.

Table 2: Action Plan of HPD Churkhai, Mymensingh GAT

November 1995 - April 1996

Issue: heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out.

SAC: not enough knowledge of different components.

ACTIVITY	TASKS	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
1) to assess how much knowledge there is on the components	a) to make a list of components	PO	By November 22, 1996	AO	With information obtained from office files and documents
	b) to make a list of all staff and what components they have previously worked on	PO	By November 22, 1995	AO	Through discussion with all AO staff
	c) to observe the work related to the components and identify the weak areas	AM	By December 24, 1995	AO and field	According to Monitoring and MIS rules
	d) to prepare questionnaire on the components * AM can change questions when necessary	PO	By January, 1996	AO	To prepare questionnaires after talking to staff member who monitors the components

Table 2 (continued)

Issue: Heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out.

SAC: not enough knowledge of different components.

ACTIVITY	TASKS	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
1) to assess how much knowledge there is on the components (contd.)	e) to select dates to hold exams on the different components and let GAT members know the results	AM	Between January 20 - 30, 1996	AO	To change questions as and when necessary; to hold exams on selected dates; to inform GAT members of results
2) to hold component related discussions at weekly meetings	a) to make a list of respective work requirements of field and AO	PO	By December 7, 1995	AO	through discussions and with information gathered from documents
	b) to give out responsibilities for holding component based meetings	PO	By November 30, 1995	AO	each staff will be given the responsibility to prepare a discussion on a particular component
	c) to assist those who will prepare discussions	AM	By December 16, 1995	AO	by distributing component related books and handouts

Table 2 (continued)

Issue: Heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out.

SAC: not enough knowledge of different components.

ACTIVITY	TASKS	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
2) to hold component related discussions at weekly meetings (contd.)	d) to carry out role plays on agenda issues at weekly meetings	Person who facilitates weekly meeting	Will continue during weekly meetings	AO	The allocated staff will present a component related discussion at weekly meeting
	e) to hold discussions on mistakes that occur when working on components and make arrangements for their correction	GAT	Will continue during weekly meetings	AO	Through question and answer based discussions at end of weekly meeting
	f) to arrange special meetings when necessary	AM	From April 1 - 30, 1996	AO	After discussions with senior staff
3) Old staff will assist new staff	a) to give orientation to new staff	PO	Ongoing after staff has been at AO for 7 days	AO	To give them an idea about BRAC, its different programs and their related work

Table 2 (continued)

Issue: Heavy workload prevents high quality work from being carried out.

SAC: not enough knowledge of different components

ACTIVITY	TASKS	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
3) Old staff will assist new staff (contd.)	b) to assign new staff to study important office files and different components	PO	Ongoing after new staff has been at AO for 7 days	AO	By distributing different files and component related paperwork
	c) field and office work should be taught hands on to new staff	PO (male) PO (female)	Ongoing after new staff has been at AO for 7 days	AO and field	if new staff is male, male PO will do it; if new staff is female, female PO will do it
	d) old staff will follow up work of new staff	PO (male) PO (female)	Ongoing after staff has been at AO for 7 days	AO and field	By monitoring work
	e) to provide positive feedback	PO (male) PO (female)	Ongoing after staff has been at AO for 7 days	Office campus	Every week, should compliment at least two good tasks and keep a record of who compliments and who receives the compliment

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