

**Capacity development through training: the case of
BRAC village organizations**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Capacity development through skill training is an important component of BRAC's credit programme. This study looked at the impact of capacity development of BRAC beneficiaries on their performance as village organization (VO) members as well as use of the skill gained. Qualitative data were collected from 3 VOs of south Uddamdi village of Matlab thana where BRAC started working since early 1992. During analysis comparison was made between members who received training and members who did not receive any training.

Results indicate that 27–39% of the VO members chosen for BRAC training were largely selected by VO management committee in consultation with PA and PO. Sometimes a member received training up to 5 times on different topics but did not use more than two. There are large number of non-target group (NTG) members present in these VOs (on average 27%) who influence the selection process. About 83% of the trainees were above the age of 40 years. Also, VO management committee members and small group leaders appeared to be more likely to be selected for training. Statistically significant effect of skill training on savings/credit performance was noted. Group members who received various inputs for capacity development such as training, credit and employment opportunities were better-off socially and economically than those who did not get this opportunity. While looking for regularity of attendance, it was seen that members who received training were more regular in weekly meetings than those who did not receive any training. Problems in using training knowledge were lack of opportunities and support from fellow group members as well as staff. Operational problems associated with training include inducing false hope and inadequate supplies of training materials.

Members perception about training was initially not favourable but later when the benefits started showing, their interest increased. The study shows that members perceive the VO as a mechanism through which they may receive services and inputs from BRAC and they exert pressure on BRAC staff to provide them with these inputs. This sometimes stress the relationship between the members and staff. However, VO members and BRAC staff pursue for increased interdependency to protect the interest of VOs.

In general, effective skill development had a positive impact on group members' lives. Therefore, it may contribute towards sustainability of VOs and their role as an instrument of change. However, during VO formation a clear concept of mobilization should be provided to BRAC staff. The selection procedure of trainees could be made need-based and more participatory. Finally, follow up of trainees is necessary to ensure proper application of training skills.

The following recommendations are made:

- During VO formation a clear concept of mobilization should be provided to the field-based BRAC staff. They should refrain from creating false hopes and thereby losing the trust of members which is necessary for any sustainable relationship.

- The selection process should be more participatory and based on the felt needs of its members, not oriented to fulfilling programme's target for the year.
- More follow-up is necessary to ensure that the knowledge gained from training is retained, shared, disseminated and applied by trainees in income earning activities.

INTRODUCTION

Organizing the poor: developing BRAC's village organizations (VOs)

'A people's organization must develop certain skills to make it self-reliant and self-sustaining. It should be able to manage its internal affairs, economic activities and its relations with its external environment.' BRAC believes that the landless poor are capable of initiating changes in their lives, meeting their own needs and improving their socioeconomic condition if properly organized and provided with necessary support (1). The Rural Development Programme (RDP), the core of all BRAC activities, is a multi-faceted programme which works to improve the socioeconomic status of the rural poor.

The organization and other activities of RDP start at the village level. These functions are performed by a small field unit known as an area office (AO). A male or female programme organizer (PO) from the AO goes to a village and initiates a survey to identify the target households. The target population, according to BRAC's definition, consists of people who do not own more than 0.5 acre of land including homestead and who earn their livelihood by selling at least 100 days of manual labour per year. The PO holds discussion with this target group of men and women about the measures that may be undertaken to tackle their problems. These particular groups are then encouraged to form a more permanent village organization (VO). Once a VO is formed, each member begins a savings programme, depositing a minimum of Taka two every week. Gradually, the members are encouraged to take on income generating activities that are facilitated by BRAC's credit programme. As the further develop, they elect a management committee of 5-7 members, including one president, one secretary, and one cashier who maintains the society's financial records and resolution books. These positions are rotated every year. Conscientization of group members is facilitated through group meetings. Group members meet once a week regularly. Credit, savings and other issues affecting the lives of the poor are discussed in the weekly meetings. An issue-based meeting is held once a month where various social and economic issues are discussed and analyzed by group members.

Training of VO members: building capacities

Training is one of the key components of BRAC's development activities. It aims to build the capacity of the poor and thereby enhance their ability to achieve specified objectives or to perform specified tasks. The broad objective of BRAC's training programme is to facilitate BRAC's goals of poverty alleviation and empowerment of the rural poor by bringing about positive changes in participants' knowledge, skill and attitudes.

Depending on the particular need demand of training, a tentative schedule is made for sending group members for training. To make the selection process participatory, group members sometimes volunteer and/or a VO small group leader nominates trainees and the PA passes on these nominations to the PO who makes the final decision. There are no specific guidelines for choosing group members. Usually members aged between 25 to 40,

who received the permission from their husbands and respective household heads, and who are considered good citizens are chosen.

Two types of training are arranged for group members: 1) Human resource development, and 2) Occupational skills development. The former includes functional education, consciousness raising, leadership development, project planning and management. Occupational training helps members in upgrading their existing skills for carrying out employment and income generating schemes. The Training and Resource Center (TARCs) of BRAC provide continued support in the training of group members. A total of 38 different training courses are offered through RDP to VO members, of which 33 are on skills development and 5 on human development. These courses are offered at different TARCs and AOs in the field (2).

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to explore the process of capacity development of VO members through training and other inputs of RDP and to assess whether these inputs helped them to perform better in VO related activities. More specifically, it aims to study:

- the process of selecting the trainees, the sociodemographic characteristics and the types of training received,
- the performance of the trained members in the VO and in income generating activities compared to those who did not receive any training; and
- The perceptions of VO members and BRAC staff about training and the problems faced by the trained members in using the skills and knowledge acquired in income-generating activities.

Rationale

Training is an important means of enhancing the capacity of members, and contributing to the effective and efficient operation of the VOs. This study, by exploring the role of training promoting better participation and performance in VO activities, was expected to help the policy planners in making BRAC programmes more relevant and effective for group members.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Background: BRAC-ICDDR,B joint research project at Matlab

The introduction of BRAC's RDP in Matlab thana during early 1992 where ICDDR,B had been monitoring demographic and health data for almost 35 years provided an unique opportunity for prospective research on the relationship between socioeconomic development and well-being. Accordingly, in the second half of 1992, a joint research project was initiated by both the institutions (3). On the part of ICDDR,B, there was a

desire to evaluate the extent to which socioeconomic development might enhance the effectiveness of its health intervention. BRAC, on the other hand, grasped the opportunity to draw on ICDDR,B demographic and health surveillance data to assess the health impact of RDP and to evaluate and refine its rural development programmes. Common to both organizations was an interest in understanding the pathways through which socioeconomic development works to influence the health and well-being of the rural poor. The project employs an iterative approach to study design which permits the development of innovative qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods to investigate the pathways through which changes in health and well-being occur (4).

In addition to baseline and longitudinal survey, a series of in-depth studies aim to elucidate the socioeconomic and environmental context within which RDP operates, and to evaluate specific BRAC inputs in terms of their content, implementation and adoption by rural people. Most of these studies are conducted on small samples in the vicinity of the project research station located in Uddamdi village. This study is one in the above series.

The study area: profile of south Uddamdi

This study was carried out in the village of South Uddamdi of Matlab thana located within the BRAC/ICDDR,B joint research project area. Uddamdi is located in the Baradia union and is 5 km away from Matlab sadar. The east boundary is defined by Shilmondi village, on the south lies Munsubdi, the river Dhonagoda separates the west side and the north of the village is surrounded by the Satrari canal. There is one Y-shaped road which includes a few bamboo and wooden bridges. During the rainy season the village is accessible by boat but within the village people commute by foot. In places where water is high, temporary bridges are made.

All the dwellers of Uddamdi are Muslims. The residential part stretches along the northern side of the road and homestead lands are raised artificially to keep the flood water away. The houses are made of bamboo, with a tin roof. The farm land lies on the south side of the road. Most of the dwellers are involved in farming and others are involved in daily labor, fishing, rickshaw pulling, small business, service and boating. During the rainy season, agriculture becomes very slow and the crops remaining in the field are jute and 'aman' paddy. Work availability is very low at this time for day labourers although fishermen and boatmen are reasonably well. There are several kin groups in Uddamdi. Some are rich and influential, some are poor, some belong to the very poor category. The overall economic condition of the village is however, good. The village has one primary school, two NFPE schools, one ebteyayee madrasa, two youth clubs, one govt. *samity* (BRDB), three BRAC *samity* (VOs), six mosques and one mazar. BRAC intervened in this village first in 1992 and two VOs were formed in the same month. Almost after ten months the third VOs was formed. After the VOs were formed the village gained three poultry workers, one shasthya shebika (SS) and a paravet who are active in their respective fields.

The village organizations in south Uddamdi

In December 1992, two VOs were set up in south Uddamdi: the *Pub Kandi* VO with 21 members and the *Madhya Kandi* VO with 41 members. In November 1993, seven members of the *Madhya Kandi* VO initiated another VO in *Naya Kandi* and took a transfer. The total number of members in this VO was 22. Credit programmes in the first two VOs started by June 1993 and the loan amount ranged from Tk 500 to Tk 3,500 at a time. New VOs initiated credit programmes in May of 1994. All members received Social Awareness Education (SAE). Other training was also offered in these VOs.

Despite eligibility criteria a small percentage of the non-target group¹ (NTG) population were found in the VOs. These NTGs got included in the VOs in two ways. In the older VOs, RDP intentionally recruits influential NTGs to bring back discipline and realize overdue loan while in the younger VOs, NTGs usually get recruited because there is insufficient time to motivate TGs to form a VO.

Study design

This study used mainly quantitative methods for data collection. In addition some qualitative methods such as key informant interviews, focus group discussions and occasional case studies were also used. The approach of mixing both qualitative and quantitative methods was found to be useful in gaining an in-depth understanding of group members as well as the service provider's perception of VOs and the problems associated with utilizing the training in income-generating activities.

Sampling

The study was done in south Uddamdi village of Matlab thana during the latter half of 1995. This village was chosen purposively because of the physical facilities available here and the presence of BRAC's RDP for the last three years. There are three VOs in this village and all members of these VOs were interviewed. We went through several stages of primary data collection. First, a semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect general information from 115 group members of three VOs in Uddamdi village. Then, in-depth interviews of 13 drop out members were conducted to understand if they had any opportunity to receive training before they decided to leave BRAC. If they did not, would it have changed their decision if they got the chance? Members who received training and those who did not were also interviewed.

Data analysis

Analysis consisted of comparing the overall credit and savings status of members who received training with members who did not receive training. Attendance was also compared to assess whether training had effects on the regularity of attendance and obedience to BRAC rules. Information from in-depth interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

Limitations

As this exploratory study focuses on three VOs of one village only, it presents in-depth views on one village and thus cannot be generalized. No training sessions could be observed since RDP had stopped offering training to VO members during the study period.

RESULTS

The area office staff of Matlab RDP came up with some indicators by which the VOs of south Uddamdi were categorized (Table 1). According to them VO 1 was ranked highest when measuring VO strength. It was also found that VO 1 received most varied training, thus increasing access to all other development inputs like programme related loans, awareness, etc.

Table 1. Categorization of VOs by the area office of Matlab RDP.

Criteria	Indicators of a sustainable VO	VO 1	VO 2	VO 3
a. Credit	a1. Be able to receive and utilize loans effectively	A	C	B
	a2. Members will be able to use the loans themselves	B	C	B
b. Savings	b1. Will understand the importance of savings	A	C	A
	b2. Be motivated to increase savings	A	C	B
c. Attendance	c1. Participate regularly	A	B	A
	c2. Motivate others to attend constantly	A	B	A
d. Training	d1. Understand the importance of training	A	B	A
	d2. Be mobilized to participate in	A	C	B
	d3. Successfully implement knowledge	A	C	C

* A= good, B= fair, C= poor

Distribution of training

It was found that all members chosen for training from the VOs of south Uddamdi were selected by the VO management committee assisted and motivated by their respective PAs and POs. In south Uddamdi, 7 skill development and 2 human development training courses were offered to 38 members from three VOs. Table 2 shows the distribution of training received in the three VOs studied. It can be seen that the proportion receiving training was highest in VO 1 (38.5%) and lowest in VO 2 (25.8%).

Table 3 shows various types of training received by the VO members. It should be remembered that in many cases a single member received multiple training. Indeed, in one instance, one member attended 5 training courses. However, few could use more than two skills despite

receiving multiple training. The three most frequently received training were poultry rearing, vegetable growing and VO management.

Many members from these three VOs received multiple training (Table 4). The maximum number of multiple training received was reported to be five.

Table 2. Distribution of VO members who received training among the three VOs studied.

VO members	VO 1		VO 2		VO 3	
	No.	%	No	%	No	%
Received training	20	38.5	8	25.8	10	27.0
Did not receive training	32	61.5	23	74.2	27	73.0
Total	52	100	31	100	37	100

Table 3. Types of training received by the members of the three VOs of south Uddamdi.

Types of training (duration)	No. of training	%
Key rearing (3 days)	19	32
Vegetable grower (3 days)	15	25
VO and credit management	12	20
Poultry worker (5 days)	3	5
Fish culture	3	5
Leadership development (6 days)	3	5
Restaurant training (2 days)	2	3
Paravet (22 days)	1	2
Shasthya shebika (15 days)	1	2
Total*	59	100

*multiple training received

Table 4. Distribution of multiple training among VO members in the three VOs.

Number of training	No. of members from VO1 (%)	No. of members from VO2	No. of members from VO3 (%)
2	4 (11)	-	3 (8)
3	4 (11)	-	2 (5)
5	1 (3)	-	-

Household economic status of the trained members

Table 5 shows the socioeconomic condition of the households of VO members who received training. It shows that quite a substantial number of members receiving training came from non-eligible households.

Strong kinship exists in all the three VOs in S. Uddamdi. In these VOs, the strength and sustainability is largely determined by kinship network. The strongest VO has more related members than the other ones. Relationship varied from sister to sister in laws, mother in laws, aunts, nieces etc. However in VO 2 no kinship was found. In VO 3 the relationship was found to be mostly in-laws.

Table 5. Distribution of training among VO members by BRAC eligibility status of the household.

VOs	Trainees from BRAC eligible households		Trainees from BRAC non-eligible households		Total member % (n)
	%	(n)	%	(n)	
VO 1	60.0	(12)	40.0	(08)	100.0 (20)
VO 2	62.5	(05)	37.5	(03)	100.0 (08)
VO 3	40.0	(04)	60.0	(06)	100.0 (10)

Demographic characteristics of the trained members

Table 6 presents the marital status, education and age of the trainees from the three VOs. Majority of the trainees were over 40 years of age, illiterate and ever married.

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of the trained members by marital status, education and age.

VOs	No. of trained members	Current marital status		
		Currently married	Abandoned	Widowed
VO 1	21 (100)	14 (67)	03 (14)	04 (19)
VO 2	08 (100)	07 (88)	01 (12)	-
VO 3	10 (100)	10 (100)	-	-
all	39 (100)	31 (80)	04 (10)	04 (10)

Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages.

Performance of the trained members in savings and credit activities

Till the time of data collection, the VO members of south Uddamdi village had saved an average amount of Tk. 1,164 per member. Total savings of the three VOs stood at Tk.64,841. Total loan disbursements was Tk. 430,500. There were no overdue loans from these three VOs. The maximum number of loans taken by an individual member was four and the maximum amount disbursed at any one occasion was Tk. 7,000 only. The total amount of loan taken by the trained members was Tk. 205,000 or 40% of the total loan disbursed. Also, the total savings of trained members was Tk 28,291 or 44% of the total savings. Table 7 shows the status of loans and savings by VOs. In VO 1, the major proportion of the savings made and

loans taken was by the trained members. The mean savings and loans of trained and non-trained members is shown in Table 8. It is evident from this table that the savings and loan of members who received training were much higher than those who did not receive training.

Table 7. Savings and loans taken by the trained members of the three VOs.

VOs	Total loan (Tk)	Total savings (Tk)	Percentage of loan taken by trained members	Percentage of savings by trained members
VO1	198,000	30,162	51	52
VO2	70,500	12,453	44	39
VO3	162,000	22,226	40	35

Table 8. Mean loans and savings of trained and non-trained members.

Characteristics	Trained members	Non-trained members	t-test value
Mean loan in taka	5421	2719	4.83*
Mean savings in taka	744	449	5.15*

*p<0.001

Use of training and earnings from training related activities

The most frequent training received by VO members was on poultry rearing. As per BRAC rules the poultry rearers are supposed to own 2 roosters, 8 high yielding variety (HYV) and 7 local variety chicken. But unfortunately none of the 19 members who received training on poultry rearing were able to comply with. The next most frequently received training was on vegetable growing. It was found that a lot of members were interested in this training as there was a loan attached to it. They also said that although they already knew most of the things taught in the classes the seeds provided an incentive to grow vegetables in their yards which were later used for home consumption. Some members reported that they grew vegetable to sell. Table 9 shows earnings from activities where the utilization of training occurred. It can be seen that the poultry rearing and vegetable growing skills were used by less than 50% of the trained members. Also, the poultry workers earned the least amount of money.

Human development training like VO and credit management and leadership development were reported to be used by the VO management committee members only. The idea that trained management committee members would further disseminate information among their non-trained fellow members did not work as they could not transfer the knowledge and experience due to lack of formal literacy and absence of written material hampering effective

communication. During discussion, the members opined in favour of VO & credit management and SAE training for all.

Members' perception about training

The findings from group discussions and in-depth interviews with trained members reveal that training was thought to be 'bad' at first as there were rumors about converting the members into Christians, and also long absence away from home disrupted household activities and daily wage earning. However, after a while when members started getting the benefit of the training in the form of skill development and programme loan, they grew confidence and got interested. Human resource development training was considered to be helpful as it developed consciousness and self respect, and skill development training helped increase income. The members who got this training, considered themselves better and stronger members. Once they went to the TARC and got exposure to the BRAC activities, they became more convinced about the benefit of joining BRAC VO. A Member who did not receive any training remarked,

Table 9. Use of training knowledge and earnings from various training related activities by the trained VO members.

Types of training	No. of members received training	No. of members using training knowledge	Earnings from training related activities in 12 months (1994-1995)
Poultry rearing	19	7	4,295
Vegetable growing	15	8	4,860
Shasthya Shebika	1	1	2,930
Restaurant	2	1	–
Poultry worker	3	2	980
Paravet	1	1	1,000

“We will pay installments and savings in exchange we will take loans. So what is the problem with samity management (includes both RDP staff and management committee)? What is this deal with regular attendance? If I send the money on time then why do I have to come? We have other work to do and we do not have time to spend on these meaningless meetings.”

Trained members think that if the members get the VO and credit management training then the VOs will run smoothly without disruptions. Members also think that the Social Awareness Education (SAE) training was good for them, as they learned how to write their names which is necessary to get loans and which earned respect from their children. However, now this training is no longer offered and they have to turn to their kids to learn how to write. Members said that the SAE training was very important for them. One member who dropped out because she did not know how to write her name, explained,

"I joined the samity when I saw my sister-in-law getting various type of education from the samity. The samity also provided her with loans. These two things together gave her the knowledge and the capital to improve her condition so much that from eating twice a day now she can afford food three times a day, and she can buy clothes. Even, this year she bought a boat and took mortgage of cultivable land. All this really inspired me but when I joined they did not offer me the SAE training. For three months I tried but could not learn to write my name and I know the promises by heart. When it was time for my loan I did not get it because I could not write my name. I have tried to learn from my nephew but it was of no use. The samity did not serve my purpose so I left. But I think that if I could get the SAE training then I would not have faced this problem and did not have to leave."

DISCUSSION

The success of BRAC's training programmes depends largely on the participation and performance of members. This requires that letting participants take responsibility at all stages including the selection of trainees and providing them with opportunities to choose the type of training according to their need and interests.

In this study, we found that the selection of members for training was affected by a number of factors. Because of time constraints, trainees were often recruited from BRAC non-eligible households. Influential VO members dominated the VOs and these members were very active in the selection process. *"The reason behind recruiting BRAC non-eligible members was due to the short time given for motivation and VO formation by the area office"* states the RDP staff. As a result, sometimes illiterate elderly members were sent for training and the output on returning was less than expected. Since most of the small group leaders and VO management committee members were the ones who participated in training, the retention of knowledge and enthusiasm to disseminate it to fellow members were low. Members remarked that if younger, literate and preferably single ever married women (such as widow) could be sent for training, the performance and dissemination would be much higher. Currently married women usually have a lot of liabilities in the household which makes it difficult for them to leave the family for long period. VO leaders opined that members who receive training understood the rules and regulations of the organization better. According to them, if all members could get training on VO and credit management, the *samity* would become stronger and also BRAC staff would face fewer problems, with respect to loan procedures, frequent policy changes, etc.

Adequate supply of needed materials (e.g., vaccine), positive interactions between the group members and RDP and access to and control over resources are important factors in determining member's performance in income-earning activities. However, trained members did significantly better in savings and credit activities compared to their counterparts, this was not the case for income-earning activities. In some instances like poultry and vegetable growing, almost half of the members did not use their training knowledge. This was because the programme occasionally failed to supply regular inputs.

Again, the members did not always get the training they felt useful. Herein lies the gap between the felt need of the members and the programme priorities.

The dissemination of knowledge gained from training did not happen in practice as desired. Being mostly illiterate, they could not effectively communicate to their co-members. Also, they could not maintain an acceptable level of knowledge due to the absence of re-training or refresher course. This is not the case with other RDP programmes. For example, the EHC programme of RDP appeared to satisfy the need and expectation of its members. The SSS reported that they had regular refresher courses and supplies of medicine and the members had good retention of knowledge and performance.

In general, training has been viewed positively by members as an opportunity to better life. According to them, it helps members identify their problems and support the organization's goals and objectives. The newly acquired skills improve the group's credit operations and other sector programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made:

- During VO formation a clear concept of mobilization should be provided to the field staff of BRAC. They should refrain from giving false hope and thereby losing respect and trust of members. This is required for building trustworthy relationship;
- Selection process should be more participatory and based on the felt need of the members, not oriented to fulfilling the programme's target for the year; and
- More follow-up is necessary to ensure that the knowledge gained from training is retained and properly disseminated to fellow members.

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