

# Revisiting Group Dynamic and Legal Rights

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November 2010

**Working Paper No. 15**

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November 2010

Published by:

BRAC  
75 Mohakhali  
Dhaka 1212  
Bangladesh

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Printing and Publication

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Layout and Cover Design

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BRAC/RED publishes research reports, scientific papers, monographs, working papers, research compendium in Bangla (*Nirjash*), proceedings, manuals, and other publications on subjects relating to poverty, social development, health, nutrition, education, gender, and environment.

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*Printed by BRAC Printers at Tongi, Gazipur, Bangladesh*



## Acknowledgements

This study is initiated by Research and Evaluation (RED) with the generous support of Human Rights and Legal Services (HRLS) Programme. We are particularly grateful to Dr. Mohammad Rafi, Head of Research (SD and HR), RED for providing his feedback and suggestions and fine-tuning of this report. We express our heartiest gratitude to Dr. Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Professor, Department of Sociology, faculty of Social Science, Dhaka University, for reviewing and giving invaluable comments on the report. We also wish to thank all the PO's, RSS of HRLS and LRIC members in the study area for providing necessary supports. Sincere thanks to Mr. Hasan Shareef Ahmed and Mr. Altamas Pasha for editing and final proofing of the manuscript. Mr. Md. Abdur Razzaque formatted the report for publication also deserves thanks.

The Research and Evaluation Division (RED) is supported by BRAC's core funds and funds from donor agencies, organizations and governments worldwide. Current major donors of BRAC and RED include AED ARTS (USA), Aga Khan Foundation Canada, AIDA (Spain), AusAID (Australia), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (USA), BRAC-USA, Campaign for Popular Education (Bangladesh), Canadian International Development Agency, Department for International Development (UK), DIMAGI (USA), EKN (The Netherlands), Emory University (USA), European Commission, Family Health International (USA), Fidelis, France, Government of Bangladesh, GTZ (Germany), Hospital for Sick Children (Canada), ICDDR,B (Bangladesh), Institute of Development Studies (UK), Inter-cooperation Bangladesh, Karolinska University (Sweden), Land O Lakes (USA), Manusher Jonno Foundation (Bangladesh), Micronutrient Initiative (Canada), NORAD (Norway), OXFAM NOVIB (The Netherlands), Oxford University (UK), Plan International Bangladesh, Rockefeller Foundation (USA), Rotary International (Bangladesh), Save the Children (UK), Save the Children (USA), Scojo Foundation Incorporation (USA), Stanford University (USA), Swiss Development Cooperation (Switzerland), The Global Fund (USA), The Population Council (USA), UNICEF, University of Leeds (UK), World Bank and World Food Programme.

## Abstract

BRAC Human Rights and Legal Services Programme (HRLS) has initiated to form ward-based Legal Rights Implementation Committee (LRIC) comprised of 19 members to ensure justice for the vulnerable women of community. The study is to explore the dynamics of the committee formation, the strength and weakness of HRLS and to analyze the nature of performance and sustainability in achieving justice for the women. The study was exploratory in nature followed Tuckman's four stages group dynamics model to achieve the basic objectives of the group. The study investigated the activities, performances and contribution of seven committees in Khulna, Moulvi Bazar and Jamalpur each over seven months period. The findings showed that as the LRIC committee constituted of different professional groups, therefore, it became more effective to protect the interest of most vulnerable groups by providing the legal support to them. A number of collective actions visualized the potential contributions of the members of LRIC. But at the same time the study shows how the LRIC faced the sub-group syndrome among the members because of their hierarchical position in social strata. However, inadequate group cohesion and lack of intra-group bond and interactions constituted a comparatively weaker social space for LRIC group. The women members were seemed to be proactive in their individual and group level performance. Moreover, the community people acknowledged the necessity of LRIC but they had no basic knowledge on its modality and activities. Finally, it can be said that despite some limitations of LRIC, it has proved its potential capacity and contributions for the most disadvantaged group members as an effective group for protecting their legal rights.

## Background

*'Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him'* – (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

BRAC Human Rights and Legal Services Programme (HRLS) is promoting legal empowerment as a pathway out of poverty and utilize the legal system in making of a just society. Demystification of law, capacity building of community, and raising community awareness are some fundamental objectives of HRLS programme to establish a just society (HRLS brochure 2008). NGOs often direct their efforts towards development of the poor by organizing them into groups as a collection of individuals that can accomplish some objectives otherwise unattainable working alone (Rafi and Mallik 2002). The long tradition of BRAC village organizations (VOs) and its success in mobilizing, concretizing and empowering the poor has gained enormous respect from development experts (Mannan and others 1995). Following a long history of success through group performance, Legal Rights Implementation Committee (LRIC) is initiated to serve the poorer section of society especially vulnerable women who have problems originating from marriage, family, and patriarchal structure of social system. LRIC is a group formed by BRAC-HRLS programme, mobilizing 19 people from different segment of a society to protect the legal rights of the poorer section of the society especially the women. The intention is to gather the members of LIC (Law Implementation Committee) and HRIC (Human Rights Implementation Committee) of HRLS in the same platform to work for some objectives.

HRLS programme initiated to formulate LRIC in ten pilot districts covering a unit of each 3 wards<sup>1</sup>. HRLS started to form LRIC from the mid of January, 2008 and the process is going on wards to cover rest of areas as programme decided to cover earlier. Formerly, the dysfunctional performance of two committees named HRIC and LIC made the authority to decide otherwise. But the worst while experiences from both HRIC and LIC makes HRLS to become more careful in formulating such committees like that. However, HRLS learned a lot from its previous experiences and accelerate the formation of new committee at micro level to protect the legal rights of poorer section of the society.

Usually legal rights are, clearly, rights, which exist under the rules of legal systems (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2005). We talk of legislatures having the legal right to pass laws, of judges to decide cases, of private individuals to make wills and

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<sup>1</sup> Lowest administrative unit of Local Government, usually an elected member of union *parishad* governs the ward. A union is divided in to 9 wards. One female member is elected from each 3 of the wards.

contracts; as well as of constitutions providing legal rights to the citizens against fellow citizens and against the state itself. Yet, it has been suggested that even some sophisticated earlier systems, such as Roman law, had no terminology which clearly separated rights from duties (Maine 1861). Thus, legal rights cover a vast area of both rights as well as duties of the people. However, it is very difficult to speak about anything on a newly formed committee or group for protecting legal rights. The existing theories and methods on group study permits to initiate a scheme based on exploring the group dynamics study to understand various aspects of a group or committee. But most of the group dynamics studies are primarily applicable to naturally formed group study. Therefore, some complexity might arise to study an injected group like LRIC. Considering these complexities, this study takes a scheme to understand LRIC from group dynamics point of view. Usually group dynamics is defined in a couple of ways by different sociological schools.

**Table 1. Structure and composition of LRIC**

Composition of LRIC group	
Women UP (union <i>parishad</i> ) member: 1	
Ex-Teacher/Member: 2	
General member: 3	LIC Member: 6
School teacher: 2	Qazi: 1
Imam: 3	Upgrade <i>Shebok/Shebika</i> : 1
Total: 19	
Executive Committee (Total: 5 Members)	
President: 1, Secretary: 1, Vice- President: 1, Cashier: 1, and Coordinator: 1	

Each LRIC orientation will be held in area/branch office (Table 1). 6 LRIC committees are formed in 2 unions under a section office of BRAC. It means 1 LRIC committee is formed in each reserved ward (former ward) basically comprised by 3 general wards. President will be able to call for a special meeting if required. A LRIC committee usually includes 19 members from different socio-occupational categories. A committee comprises 1 female member of ward, 3 general members, 2 high or primary school teachers, 3 progressive *imams*, 1 upgraded *shebok/shebika* (comparatively better), 2 *Gram Daridra Bimochon* Committee (GDBC) member or former member, retired teacher (women are proffered), 1 qazi and 6 from LIC committee (2 from each ward, if there is any HRLE *shebika* found, she must be included whereas 1 LIC member will be excluded in this case. But an executive committee of 5 members is elected comprising president, vice-president, secretary and executive member: one from upgraded *shebok/shebika* and the other from LIC members. A meeting is held once in every three months from the date of the group formation. The President presides the meeting and the PO (HRLS) whereas organize as the scene. The local school is selected as venue of meeting as the committee decided. Meeting is to be held between 3 and 5 p.m.

LRIC as a group has several objectives such as - to cooperate in bringing women's rights to ensure justice, to stop illegal *shalish*, to generate social movement, to

implement the laws and assist to implement for building civil society, to create consensus and to identify strategies for problem solving and to aware people about laws. To achieve these core objectives, LRIC suggested some expected duties and responsibilities to be performed such as –to inform nearest BRAC office if such inhuman incidents like rape, acid throwing, women and child trafficking, suicide etc. happened in her/his locality. Moreover, LRIC would explore to stop and protest *shalish* for inhuman incidences, to encourage the victims go for formal court in case of inappropriate *shalish* for inhuman incidences; to bring the victims in nearest BRAC office for legal aid; to participate in both BRAC, ADR (alternative dispute resolution) and traditional *shalish*; to stop injustice, undue marriage, *talaq*, dowry, and polygamy etc. Furthermore, the LRIC assigned to communicate/coordinate and mobilize chairman, thana nirbahi officer (TNO), local administration, and medical authorities for taking and to increase massive publicity of BRAC legal aid activities. LRIC has to organize a meeting in every three months after the formation of the committee and to arrange special meeting if the chairman deems urgent and essential.



# Methods

Seven LRIC committees from three districts have been selected randomly. Both the qualitative and quantitative techniques have been followed in collection of data. Various data collection tools including content analysis, meeting observation, interviews, case studies, process documentation and focus group discussion (FGD) have been used in different phases of data collection following the adopted model of group dynamics of this study. A short structured survey has been conducted in the very initial phase of group formation to understand the socio-demographic information of the group members. Data was collected considering the aspects of both group and individual level. Finally, collected data have been analyzed using conventional approaches of qualitative data analysis and SPSS in case of quantitative data.

## Rationale

LRIC as a group has been initiated by BRAC-HRLS to protect legal rights of the poor people which is basically injected in nature. An understanding of group dynamics is essential for effective practice with any type of task or treatment group (Toseland *et al.* 2004). Group dynamics is certainly important to study group because it deals with some initial to complex elements of group, which can provide some concrete direction about group even on its future. To practice effectively with groups, social workers should be able to (1) understand group dynamic processes as they emerge during the ongoing interaction of group members, (2) consider the impact of these dynamics on members from different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, (3) assess the impact of emerging dynamics on current and future group functioning, and (4) guide the development of group dynamics that facilitate member participation and satisfaction while simultaneously enabling the group to achieve its goals (Toseland *et al.* 2004). Therefore, group dynamics study of LRIC will be helpful to understand interaction, functions, goal, achievement and emerging difficulties that may provide significant insight to overcome the problems and to take new step to make it more effective to protect legal rights of the poor.

## Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to understand the dynamics of LRIC group in protecting legal rights of the poor people. The specific objectives will be - to explore the stages of LRIC and to assess the sustainability of the LRIC group regarding its performance, impact and acceptance.

# Group Dynamics of LRIC

## Selection of a model to study the group

A committee likes LRIC, as a group is not static by nature and eventually to be changed after formation. In most of the cases, it follows some predictable patterns that consist some stages and phenomena of group development. The same sorts of issues arise over time in most groups and once resolved the group can develop further. There are several models like group socialization, group development to study group dynamics, by which it become easier to gather knowledge on the prospect of a group.

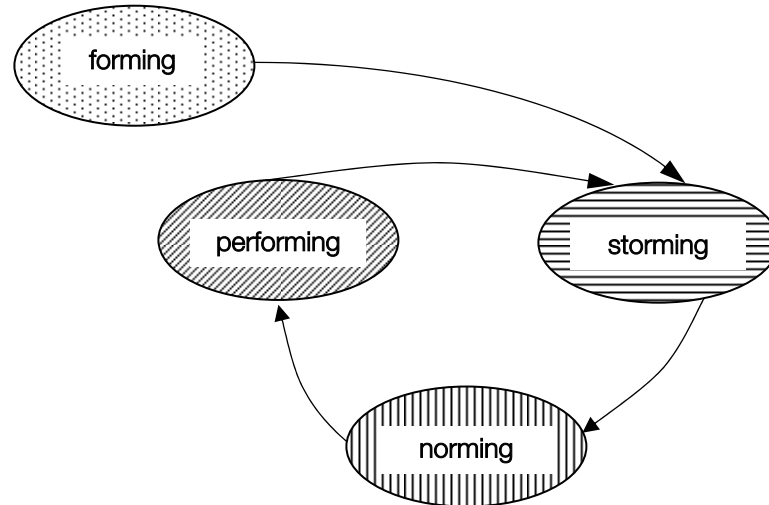
Group development model introduced by Bruce W. Tuckman often offers five phases (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman *et al.* 1977) relating to their maturation to study group dynamics. This model assumes that a group has to pursue the stages one after another –

1. In the forming phase the group members become oriented towards one another
2. In the storming phase the group members find themselves in conflict, and some solution is sought to improve the group environment
3. In the norming phase, standards for behavior and roles develop that regulate behavior
4. In the performing phase the group reaches a point where it can work as a unit to achieve desired goals
5. In the adjourning stage, the sequence of development ends and the group disbands.

Through out these stages groups tend to oscillate back and forth between the task oriented issues and the socio emotional issues and the members of the group strengthen their interpersonal bonds. (Bales 1965)

Tuckman's model (Fig. 1) is also effective for zero history groups like newly introduced LRIC having no previous experiences or activities to work as a group until it was formed. Moreover, this model put more emphasis on each and every stages the group whether socialization model only focus on interaction and group cohesion to understand socialization process.

**Figure 1. Tuckman's model of group development**



**Relational analysis of the content of LRIC**

At the very beginning of the formation of LRIC, a guideline has been provided to the Programme Organizers (POs), which basically includes its key objectives, expected roles and responsibilities of the group members and some suggested activities. It might be considered as the constitution of the group which prescribes the possible directions for the group to achieve the core objectives. The LRIC guidelines provide list of pilot project areas, implementation schedule, objectives, roles and responsibilities, distribution of the members and structure of the committee. LRIC has two basic phases: first quarter is for orientation operated by Divisional/Staff Lawyers and the second quarter is for meeting operated by Programme Organizer (PO) of HRLS programme.

The guideline mentioned six objectives are to be achieved through LRIC committee. Among the objectives, two are very specific and rest four is quite ambiguous to follow. To stop illegal *shalish* and to aware the people about law are pretty logical objectives to understand for the LRIC members rather some others like to cooperate to protect women's right in bringing justice, to erect social movement, to implement and cooperate to implement laws in establishing civil society, to build consensus and to find out the strategies to solve problems.

A relational schema (Table 2) has been developed to show the relationship among the objective of LRIC group. Firstly, LRIC group has some objectives and to achieve these, it has roles and responsibilities. But these would be accomplished if some specific tasks would be performed. These tasks are germane to some demonstration strategies i.e., how the tasks would be followed by the group or the member and what kind of strategies would be fruitful to conduct the tasks. And finally this schema relate the component of responsibility that analyze who would be responsible to find

and follow the strategies as well as to determine tasks, roles, responsibilities to achieve the core objectives of the group.

If we take a look on the objectives of LRIC, we can broadly categorize them as long term and short-term basis considering the time required to achieve the objectives mentioned. However, four objectives including the agenda of bringing women's rights to ensure justice, social movement, civil society and awareness of people would be considered as long term objectives as because of these require huge time. Moreover, these issues are more or less related with broad cultural values of a community which need time to transform or change. In contrast, rest two including the agenda of illegal *shalish* and strategy to solve problems are short-term objectives which require immediate actions. The long term objectives may seem to be ambiguous to the members of LRIC according to their background.

In three objectives, guideline prescribes possible roles and responsibilities at a glance whereas in another one, these are absent. As example, no roles and responsibilities has been prescribed to meet the objective of erecting social movement within the community. In the case of short-term objectives, objective of identifying the strategies to solve the problem receive less priority and how the objective would be achieved is not mentioned.

Specific tasks are indispensable to follow the rules and regulations and at least in four cases, it has not assigned. Only arranging a meeting in every three months and some specials can hardly accommodate the role of mobilizing networks to build civil society and to participate in traditional and BRAC *shalish*. But only meeting mobilization process received a complete strategy prescribing the way to organize a meeting. Rest three including ensuring justice for women, stopping illegal *shalish* and the agenda to aware people lack any strategic plan. Finally, the agenda of social movement and how it is to be organized receive less attention.

The guideline only enforce maximum responsibilities to the POs who are supposed to organize a regular meeting through mobilizing the group members once in every three months on behalf of the elected president of LRIC. It is expected that the rest of tasks mentioned have to be performed by the group members but the tasks are not defined clearly and not even explore the strategy how to perform the tasks?

### **Social composition of LRIC committee members**

LRIC is formed taking the members from hetero socio-economic/socio-occupational groups. At least 10 among the 19 members came from upper middle or middle class background and rest 9 came from lower income family or poorer section of the community who have also low social status. Among the members, 8 positions are reserved for women and another one position gives priority to women. But structurally most of the women member experience lower income or poor family background. As a consequence they receive lower social status than their male counterpart within the group. Moreover, there are 6 members in this committee who were member of Law Implementation Committee (LIC) coming from Village

Organization (VO) of BRAC. They are happened to be women. In that sense LRIC represents 35% participation of LIC members. Moreover, in case of mentioning the criteria for the members guidelines use some adjectives like `progressive *imam*` and `comparatively better upgraded *shebok/shebika*`. But on what basis the conclusion can be drawn about the progressive mind of *imam* or comparatively better upgraded *shebok/shebika* are not clear enough. All the members of this group do not have the same socio-professional background regarding their status, income, education, interest, culture, network and influence. It is difficult to consider them as a homogenous group even if all of them are gathered to implement the same purpose. So, there is a possibility for the group to contain some natural subgroups (at least three in numbers may vary) like UP members, *imam* and *qazi*, and LIC members including upgraded *shebok/shebiaks* determined by nature of their socio-occupational background. Another valid dimension of the structure of the group can be raised by the way that how come it is possible for a LIC member to play the same role as UP members/teachers/*qazi/imam* do or can they raise their voice as a united group? Definitely the group provides the opportunity to the poor members to sit together with the opinion leaders or to discuss on same matter rather building group integration. More-over the willingness of different sub groups to work with such agenda like legal rights would not be the same. The poor members associated with BRAC programme are bound to join this group, as because of they are the direct beneficiaries of BRAC whereas others are not. But the guideline for the group supposed to expect participation of all members without addressing this constraint.

**Table 2. The relational schema on the components of LRIC in achieving objectives**

Objectives	Roles and responsibilities	Specific task	Demonstration process	Responsible
1. To cooperate in bringing women's rights to ensure justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To bring the victims in nearest BRAC office for legal aid.</li> <li>To stop illegal marriage, <i>talaq</i>, dowry, and polygamy.</li> </ul>	Not mentioned	Not clear	Members of LRIC
2. To stop illegal <i>shalish</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To stop and protest <i>shalish</i> for inhuman incidences</li> </ul>	To arrange special meeting if the chair require.	Not clear	Programme Organizer (PO)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To participate in both BRAC-ADR and traditional <i>shalish</i>.</li> </ul>			

Table 2. (Cont...)

Objectives	Roles and responsibilities	Specific Task	Demonstration process	Responsible
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To inform nearest BRAC office if such inhuman incidents like rape, acid throwing, women and child trafficking, suicide etc. happened in her/his locality</li> <li>• To encourage victims go for formal court where the case is inappropriate for <i>shalish</i> as because of it is germane with inhuman incidence</li> </ul>			
3. To erect social movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not mentioned</li> </ul>	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Members of LRIC
4. To implement and cooperate to implement laws in establishing civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To communicate/ coordinate and mobilize Chairman, TNO, local administration, and medical authorities.</li> </ul>	To organize a meeting in every three months after the formation of the committee	Through meeting	Programme Organizer (PO)
5. To build consensus and identify strategies to solve the problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not mentioned</li> </ul>	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Members of LRIC
6. To aware people about laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase massive publicity on BRAC Legal Aid activities.</li> </ul>	Not mentioned	Not clear	Members of LRIC

# Stages of Group Dynamics of LRIC

## **Stage 1: Forming**

Groups spring from many sources and serve many purposes. But this lecture examines three sets of factors that can create a group which does not exist before: the personal qualities of the people who are seeking membership, the nature of the situation that prompts people to affiliate with one another and the feelings of liking that draw members to each other.

## ***Beyond the Formation***

Programme organizers (PO) are assigned persons who mobilize early initiatives as first step of group formation following the programme instruction. Usually PO receives a format of invitation letter from Head office and then s/he finalizes the letter by which the members are invited in the inaugural meeting of LRIC group formation. But the letter constitutes only the invitation issue to participate in a discussion session and totally unnoticed about the formation of a group. However, PO starts to communicate with the respective members mentioned by the manual and distributes the invitation letters. To organize a meeting POs has to use her/his motor-cycle and mobile phone to remind the members about time, date and location of the meeting frequently. The venue of the formation meeting is supposed to be held at BRAC office on the scheduled date and time preferably in the first half of a day. It was observed that POs had to work hard to convince and manage all the members to ensure their presence in a meeting. But the meetings were delayed up to 2 hours from its scheduled time to start in all the spots due to unpunctuality of the participants. Moreover, all the members were not equally interested to attend the meeting, whereas some of them could not recognize the importance of the meeting properly. The other reasons for the delay might be taken place for rigorous engagement of opinion leaders in professional and socio-religious activities, and involvement with some other committees driven by Local Government Offices and NGOs.

## **Socio-demographic profile of the group members**

Seven committees have been followed constituted by 123 members in lieu of 133 according to the manual of LRIC (Table 3). Among the committees Nandina and Phultala is composed by 19 members whereas in Jamalpur Sadar, it is – 21, in Satgaon, it is – 15, in Rajnagar – 16, in Barolekha – 18, and in Bhanubir –15 members respectively. The average member size of a group is 17.60, which is essentially less than the recommended number. Data shows that almost 61 percent of the female members and 48 percent of the male members are in the age category of 31 to 50 years. A significant portion of the members including both female and male completed less than 10 years education. More than 30 percent of the female members had no or signatory education which represented women lack of access to

basic primary education. On the other hand 18 percent of the male members successfully completed 12 years of education and unfortunately no female member was found belong to this category. Women's occupational diversity was found to be restricted and 57 percent of them were involved in household activities. This picture indicated that almost two third of the female members were not involved in income generating activities and this distinct feature constituted the lower social status of women within households due to their income incapability. A significant portion (34 percent) of male members had affiliation with political parties whereas women's had less participation in political activities (only five percent). It is evident that women members (89.3 percent for female and 42 percent for male) were two-times more involved with BRAC activities than their male counterpart. Most of the women members (84 percent) recognized themselves in lower class resulted in lower social status whereas more than half among the male were in middle class position which gave them the position to enjoy better status than female. It has been reported that most of the group members whether they were male or female were not affiliated with other NGOs committees. A significant portion of the members was present in only one meeting and this trend was however found mostly among the male members (43 percent). On the other hand, female members (77 percent) were observed to participate more in both the meetings than their male (66 percent) counter part.

### **Social network of members within the group during formation**

In a group, the communication status of members follows the interaction process of the members by which it would be understand whether it is working as a group or something else. Interaction increases the group cohesion that is most important to perform expected group activities. Moreover, interpersonal communication might have a significant impact on group consensus. No member was found in a single group who had communication with all the members. Mostly *imam*, *qazi*, schoolteachers, and UP members were the known face within a committee and professionally they were involved in such activities by which they had to interact with more people in the areas. In a community, they were found to be more influential in making societal decisions.

Following meetings in most of the cases, it had been observed that males were more vocal than the female and most often very few of the female members could pass any comments unless they were requested to put their opinions. From most of the observation, it was very common scenario that male members occupied most of time (almost 90 percent of total meeting duration). Only in two spots, three female members participated in general discussion though they had to face rigorous difficulties from the patriarchal outlook of the male members. All of the female members who had a background of former Law Implementation Committee (LIC) were found to be getting silent in all the spots and they lacked power and participation as they belonged in lower social strata of that particular area. Another interesting aspect was, most of the female members including teachers and UP



**Table 3. Socio-demographic profile of the group members**

	Female	Male	Total (n)
<b>Age category</b>			
15-30	17.9%	14.9%	20
31-45	60.7%	47.8%	66
46-60	21.4%	23.9%	28
60+	0%	7.3%	9
<b>Educational Status</b>			
Class 1 - 5	33.9%	28.4%	38
Class 6 - 10	30.4%	37.3%	42
Class 11 - 12	5.4%	17.9%	15
Class 12 +	0%	16.4%	11
Can write	17.9%	0%	10
No education	12.5%	0%	7
<b>Occupational Status</b>			
Farmer	8.9	16.4	16
Businessman	7.1	26.9	22
Teacher	5.4	17.9	15
Housework	57.1	0	32
<i>Imam</i>	0	20.9	14
Others*	21.42	16.41	23
<b>Political Affiliation</b>			
Yes	5.4	34.3	26
No	94.6	65.7	97
<b>BRAC Affiliation</b>			
Yes	89.3	41.8	78
No	10.7	58.2	45
<b>Social Status</b>			
Upper	0	7.5	5
Middle	16.1	55.2	46
Lower	83.9	37.3	72
<b>Others Committee Affiliation</b>			
Yes	12.5	19.4	20
No	87.5	80.6	103
<b>Type of Committee</b>			
Village Committee	1.8	7.5	6
NGO/GO Committee	12.5	10.4	14
Not Involve	85.7	82.1	103
<b>Meeting Presence</b>			
Once time	23.2	43.3	42
Twice time	76.8	65.9	81
			n=123

\* Others include Amin (Surveyor), *Shashthya Shebika*, NGO Worker, Social Worker, Tailor, Rice Mill Labour, UP Member, Nurse, and Veterinary Doctor.

members considered themselves as 'Bou (Wife)' of the areas and that's why following cultural norms they were supposed to show sufficient respect to the older male members of the committee. Therefore, women's gender identity resulted as barriers to their effective participation in meetings and other activities. Among the male members, interaction was not found reciprocal because of unequal status of members and class hierarchy was maintained in all the groups. Very few of the male members either power elites or opinion leaders who had strong social and political power were seemed to be more vocal and played influential roles in decision making as well as to dominate other's opinions.

### **Perceptions and reality of members on group formation**

Most of the member of the groups recognized the significance and necessity of such group. Previously most of them were engaged in same activities traditionally at individual level. However, formation of the group provides them opportunity to work collectively, which would be considered, as a strong ground of all kind of social activities. The initiation of BRAC to conserve social fabric through forming a committee had been appreciated by the all the members. They were seemed willing to pay enormous support to achieve objectives of the group and few of them were confused whether BRAC had the legitimacy to operate such activities. Some of them also argued whether such groups like LRIC had the capability to achieve all the objectives.

Initially all the members were convinced to join the meeting after receiving the invitation from POs. But in most cases, they were not properly informed about the subject matter or basic agenda of the meeting. Most of them, in fact, did not have any idea on group formation because the formal invitation letter mentions neither the issue of committee formation nor the agendas of meeting clearly. One of the members said,

*'Before participating here I knew it is a discussion seminar where some social issues would be discussed. But after attending the meeting I understand the purpose of the meeting- formation of a committee rather than discussion.*

*However, I am happy to know that committee recruits it's members from all strata of society' (Sita Rani, Secretary, Phultala).*

Most of the members from these elite groups considered this activity as an extension of their traditional societal roles. One of the members stated,

*'Previously I was supposed to do the activities following my family tradition as my father was supposed to this. Now the shape of social activities became changed and therefore, I like many others began to involve with such activities. Though it is not a new event for me, but it adds something to my image which would be treated as effective tool to gain popularity' (Masuk Ahmed, UP Chairman, Rajnagar).*

Few others among the local elites considered their participation in committee would expand their networks, whereas some other mentioned it as reward or recognition of their social activities. But members came from different occupational groups analyzed formation of group from distinct religious-legal point of view. It has been observed that *Imams* were more critical on group formation even though having membership of the committee. They were not assured and had lack of knowledge on what kind of activities LRIC would perform. Another significant aspect of their arguments was man made legal rights might be contradictory with Islamic laws. One of them told,

*'We cannot give the legitimacy of practicing such legal rights which is controversial with Islamic laws. If we find such activities, we will protest first, and we will go against whoever in committee goes for so' (Imam, Rajnagar).*

But most of the *Imams* showed their interest to understand basic information of legal rights. Usually *qazis* having religious permission are supposed to perform pivotal roles in activities like marriage registration, separation etc which are related with the core agenda of LRIC. *Qazis* were found to be aware of the bad effects of early marriage, the importance of marriage registration, dower and other conjugal rights and they had attained couple of trainings on these issues. But they could not implement what they learned due to other social factors including societal norms, marriage related rituals and dogma, social pressure, economic condition of the clients, and greed for money or material gains. One of the *qazi* said,

*'All members of group have to take the responsibilities to help me out for implementing the legal rights.'*

Most of the *qazis* were agreed on the issue that society still now lacks adequate awareness on socio-legal issues which would be considered as fundamental barrier to implement legal rights. Teachers were found busy, burdened with huge workload, engaged in enormous activities along with their teaching and faced hardship to find time for meeting. In few areas, if any teacher wanted to join NGOs meetings, they must have to take permission from *upazila* education office. However, the misunderstanding of BRAC's involvement in primary education management has also declined BRAC's reputation among the teachers. As an immediate impact, LRIC received little participation from teacher's community and however, they were less interested in BRAC activities officially. Otherwise, personally they were interested to work with the groups.

UP members was one of the largest groups within LRIC. As elected public leaders, they were supposed to be involved with enormous committees by which they performed societal responsibilities. Most of them could not distinguish activities of one committee from another and it was interrelated and overlapping. It has been observed that UP members had no adequate time to concentrate more on meeting and their official activities interrupted them several times while they were in meeting.

One of them told,

*'It is good initiative but we don't have enough time to concentrate only on that. But time is valuable for me and BRAC should have to provide some remuneration or incentives for this committee, otherwise it would be difficult to carry out the activities for long time'* (UP member, Nandina).

On the other hand, female UP members were found to be reluctant on committee formation and their participations in general discussion were not frequent. LIC members were the largest identical group within LRIC, who had homogenous background to work together in such committees initiated by HRLS. Beside this, they were representative of the poorer and deprived section of society who had also lower social status in a highly stratified society. They had direct association with BRAC programme and therefore, they were supposed to follow the time line of formation meeting whereas others did not do it. But they were seemed to be less vocal and rarely passed any comments while discussion was going on. Only very few of them expressed their opinions when they were requested to do. Though they showed their enthusiastic attitudes on committee activities but it was very difficult to perform equally due to their economic and social dependency. However, it has been clear that they were the most appropriate persons to understand the difficulties with legal rights implementation especially in case of poorer section.

Most of the members stated that they don't have enough time to allocate for LRIC because of their professional, occupational, household activities and other social works. It was very difficult for some members to spend few hours for meetings. Some of them were not eager to come as it hampered their jobs. But most of the members showed their willingness to work though they were not sure about how many times they could allocate for committee activities. Therefore, allocation of time for group activities might be considered as significant barriers in performance.

Moreover, opinion leaders including *imam*, *qazi*, UP members, and teachers were previously involved with activities which LRIC also suggested them to do being a member of group? However, LRIC had replaced traditional roles of opinion leaders and therefore, they could not differentiate activities whether they did it being a member of LRIC or traditionally. This is why; activities they usually perform may have an overlapping impact on target achievements. One of the members argued,

*'If BRAC provides little incentives and take care of it, it would be sustainable and can perform for longtime'* (Female teacher, Sreemongal).

This statement makes echoes of all members. However, they are enthusiastic to drive such activities receiving potential supports from BRAC.

## **Knowledge and perceptions on legal rights**

According to Salmond legal rights has the five characteristics:

1. It is vested in a person who may be distinguished as the owner of the right, the subject of it, the person entitled, or the person of inheritance.
2. It avails against a person upon whom lies the correlative duty.
3. It obliges the person bound to an act or omission in favour of the person entitled. This may be termed the content of the rights.
4. The act or omission related to something which may be termed the object or subject matter of the right.
5. Every legal right has a title, that is to say certain facts or events by reason of which the rights has become vested in its owner.

According to these characteristics, legal rights in the context of Bangladesh only implies to the laws of Bangladesh including the Constitution. Data shows that LRIC was being arranged only to concentrate on the black letters of law. But to understand the implications of law, knowledge of the provisions of law or just the content of law is not enough. It should be understood how the interpretations of law should be made according to the given situations. Like restitution of conjugal rights is often an issue in *shalish* and ADR. Bangladesh apex court has judgments on restitution of conjugal rights giving interpretation under the light of the Constitution. The application of the laws regarding restitution of conjugal rights can be made pro woman if the judgments are followed.

It has to be considered that HRLS PO conducts LRIC meeting. So, dissemination of legal knowledge among the members is dependent on the profound knowledge of PO. But not all the HRLS POs have legal education background, even they don't get training from the trainers having legal education background (till now, HRLS has no trainers having legal education background or legal practicing background). Such inherent limitations in knowledge dissemination can be an obstacle to implement legal rights through LRIC for greater cause.

### **Stage 2: Storming**

Each meeting usually follows a three-month interval by provision unless a contingency situation emerges. Members of the committees, however, found to be scattered while attended the first meeting after formation. Most of them forgotten basic principals and objectives of LRIC due to a huge gap resulted distance from group activities. Some of members failed to mention even the name of the committee and their position. Some others had no fundamental idea on issues of legal rights. POs had to make extra efforts to organize meeting further which indicated that members were not much concerned with the agenda, though it was expected. Moreover, members had no formal communication over the time being a member of LRIC. Selection of venues as meeting place was been considered as one of the key

issues. Union *Parishad* buildings were such places where UP members were observed in engaging with enormous official activities even while meetings were going on. This particular situation interrupted meeting procedures and hampered concentration of other members. In this phase, most of members prescribed that community spots would be the better place to meet. Some of them considered BRAC offices as better venue even if alternatives were available. Timing was also observed as major constraint to organize a meeting. However, opinion of members were been ignored to set a suitable time for calling meeting. In most of spots, some members were absent due to either their jobs or meeting received less priority to them. It is expected that schedule of meeting would be decided based on members' opinions. In the first three-months meeting, the most significant phenomenon was two or three male members in all the spots seemed to be more vocal and they occupied two third portion of total time of discussion proceeded. At least half of the total members neither raised any point nor participated in general discussion session.

Another important aspect was the internal network of members within the group constituted weak reciprocal relationship among the members. Some members with lower social status had less mobility and communication among the other members. In fact, though they were part of same society, but a strong distance was found because of their heterogeneous social and occupational background. As a result, their informal relationship was shaped within the members having same status where they belonged. This situation might be constructed low level of social integration among the group members. Not only heterogeneity was only agent for this social distance but also power relation made such situation of inequality.

Moreover, weak ties among members would be recognized as important barrier to construct group uniformity. It was observed that members expected a regular supervision from HRLS but unfortunately received very little. Some of them were found to be unsatisfied on committee activities, as because they considered it as meeting based committee producing no result. One of members told,

*'As no activities is performed by us as a distinct group, therefore no formal and informal interactions are made based on group activities. It is producing no results and invoking conflicts among the members'* (Jahanara, general member, Nandina).

Another member described,

*'We did not arrange any discussion on group activities after formation. It is very difficult for me to speak about roles and responsibilities of the group'* (Abul Kashem, Cashier, Phultala).

Few members were critical on particular issue and give voluntary effort to implement legal rights. Some of them argued that it can not be continued for long-term basis because all of the members have their own occupational workload.

*'Who would be likely to spend conveyance money regularly or to allocate few hours for this purpose?'* (LIC member, Nandina).

Another significant aspect was some of the LIC members had not that much economic ability to bear transportation costs. In some cases, POs provided them the money to ensure their participations. In the first meeting after formation, there was no refreshment arranged from the HRLS side which was criticized by all the members including POs. In some cases, POs spent the money from their own pocket as s/he invited them. POs had to call several times using their cell phones to ensure one member's participation. This situation indicates that members lost their interest on group or they put less priority to attend a meeting. *Imams* were in dilemmas as usual whether legal rights are contradictory with Islamic laws. Most of the UP members prioritized societal norms and tradition more than the legal rights. In some spots including Phultala and Nandina, members considered community policing activities as major challenge as it does the same activities which LRIC is supposed to do. Few members of LRIC are also part of those activities and they considered this situation might have overlapping impact on programme activities. Moreover, community policing activities is patronized by government, directly supervised by Bangladesh Police and has better legitimacy which attracts more local opinion leaders than LRIC does. Some of the members mentioned that Bangladesh Police provides them more facilities including office rooms and recognizes them as signing authority that causes more powerful position within the society.

### **Problems with legal rights implementation**

As it has been mentioned earlier, LRIC has limitations in knowledge dissemination. There is little scope for the LRIC members to know how new interpretations of law are coming through existing legal structure to inject women rights and they may find difficulty to implement the laws giving a progressive application. No comprehensive legal manual has been developed yet for the guidance of POs and members in objective the programme.

Over observation identified lack of respect to the existing laws of women rights, specially from *imam*. It has also been observed that whenever *imam* dissented on some issue, others got an inherent tendency to keep quiet. In such circumstance, how the balance between religious sentiments and duty to implement rights be balanced?

Not only religious sentiments, clashes were also apparent between patriarchal norms and women rights. Women members were found to be silent when the males spoke up. How come the group will strike against the exploitation of the patriarchal society?

Legal rights implementation mechanism is related with formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions include court and *thana* and obviously police administration while informal institution denotes *shalish* and ADR. But there is no scope left to facilitate the interaction between the members of the committee and components of the formal and informal institutions.

If LRIC wants to assist to implement the rights, it has to have the acceptance of its activity to the community. But, such guidance and vision are absent in the meetings till now and LRIC has not yet succeeded to establish its acceptance.

If the committee will act as a social catalyst then will they just assist the implementation of existing laws or also raise questions about the laws which are discriminatory? For implementing the existing laws, there are other components – like the trainees from HRLE course and upgraded *shebikas*. Also, the work of the upgraded *shebikas* has redundancy with this committee, like to inform the BRAC office about the incidents like rape, murder etc or to work against illegal *shalish*. Then question arises – where remains the scope for the LRIC to make a difference as a necessary component of HRLS?

### **Stage 3: Norming**

According to the basic characteristics of this phase, it was expected that group would be shaped in a certain form where groups would have its own tradition and distinct culture constructing solid group identity. Despite some difficulties, LRIC has some strength. Few members were found to be dedicated to the group who owned the committee. One of them argued,

*‘We have to look after and continue our committee as we own it. We should think about- how it will be better performed, what are the problems the committee have, and how does the committee be regularized?’* (Shahidul Islam, Vice president, Phultala)

But a few of them put emphasize more on group activities was not only because of their social reputation but also part of their collective social responsibilities. Though no strategic plan was made by members to solve a particular problem, but individually some of them engaged themselves in such activities and subsequently involved other members, if necessary. Formally, no meeting was initiated by members except scheduled three-month meeting. But as members were inhabitant of the same locality and therefore, they made many informal discussions using the community space on legal issues which they previously learned from formation meeting. Though it was hardly found to follow a decision which was taken collectively. Few of the members were found to be critical on group activities as they found less scope to work. Another member replied,

*‘We sat three to four times on how can we make LRIC a more functional group? Unfortunately we have no issue to deal with, even BRAC office do not provide any tasks for us to do’* (Shahera Khatun, General Member, Satgaon).

This statement might be explained by the way that the members were found to be more anxious as they lacked activities and scared about whether this committee will be sustainable any more? This situation illustrates that they used to spend time to think about the prospect and potential adversaries on group’s sustainability. Most of



members became agreed with the fundamental objectives of LRIC. They considered it as necessary to protect basic human rights especially for the people from poorer section. Some of the members showed their willingness to work with LRIC agenda and they enjoyed such activities from the very basic spirit of charitable essence. One of such members mentioned,

*'As a president of Palli Shamaj, I have to interact with many women who are suppressed from their family and society. I always advice them to come BRAC legal aid services when they need'* (Rabeya Begum, General member, Phultala).

Some of the members were found to be proud to work with BRAC as they came to know that it works for poor people to build a just society. Therefore, the reputation and social recognition of BRAC provide them immense inspiration to work together. Most of them had adequate faith on BRAC activities. Women members showed their deeper respect to BRAC activities as it's mission was empower and encourage women to be involved in social activities utilizing community resources. A significant portion of the members considered their involvement in such activities to protect legal rights as the opportunity to serve the society and this consideration might be recognized as fundamental strength of LRIC.

#### **Stage 4: Performing**

Performances follow two distinct categories – collective and individual, based on the activities of group members whether they perform as social being or a member of LRIC.

Meetings were important activity of LRIC which could be judged as prior collective performance. Findings reported that two-third of the members was found to be present at both the meetings and rest missed either first or second meeting accordingly. Members previously associated with BRAC programme were observed to be eager to participate in the meetings. Unfortunately local opinion leaders were seemed to be more reluctant in attending the meetings.

The issues on legal rights were been discussed in the meeting sessions. It was expected that members would learn fundamental aspects on legal rights. In reality, some of them definitely learned few fundamental concepts of legal rights. But, very few of them participated in general discussion. However, local opinion leaders played significant roles in this session. Upgraded *sherbika* and LIC members were found to be less active especially on the issues of women rights. But most of the members except *Imams* agreed on the fundamental notion of legal rights and recognized the necessity of its practice. During meeting session, including few controversies, most of them showed their enthusiasm and willingness to work as a cadre to protect legal rights. A significant achievement is- most of the members are now aware on bad effects of early marriage, dowry, illegal *shalish* and physical torture on wives. Besides these they can recognize importance of birth registration, marriage registration and marriage related rights of women. But as a member of LRIC, most of the member

lacks integrity that often produces group isolation. If we consider sub group activities, role of BRAC related members perform well in comparison with others. Moreover, UP members and female UP members became more sensitive in dealing with cases germane to legal rights and they could recognize the learning from LRIC. Moreover, LRIC do not gather much popularity among community people yet and very small section of the people can recognize its function and activities.

In individual level, there are some achievements of LRIC members. Traditionally opinion leaders of villages used to perform such activities like to attend local *shalish*, advocacy for conflict resolution and extend their hand to help for poor people. Results explored that LIC members and upgraded *shebikas* performed very well at individual level as they mobilized the women and victims, and often informed BRAC HRLS office in case of necessity. Moreover, UP members were also supposed to deal with birth registration, local *shalish*, and resolution of disputes and responsible to maintain social environment. *Qazis* and *imam* were found to be influential for their socio-religious activities and professional responsibilities. They had direct link with implementation of legal rights. But few controversies in understanding legal rights might be considered potential difficulties to implement the core agendas of LRIC. Otherwise, some of them found to be liberal and had willingness to work with such agendas.

#### **Mostly performed activities at micro and macro level**

Not all the objectives, but some has been practiced by LRIC. But LRIC has already some achievements in implementing legal rights on such issues like:

1. To inform BRAC-HRLS in case of inhuman incidences.
2. To bring victim at BRAC-HRLS for legal aid.
3. Ensure presence of LRIC member in local *shalish*.
4. To stop early marriage.

To perform such activities, members including LIC member, upgraded *shebikas* and female members of UP were observed to play pivotal roles. In some spots, opinion leaders like schoolteachers, ex-teachers, and retired government personals were found to mobilize people regarding these issues through their consultative roles.

## Discussion and Conclusion

It has been expected that LRIC would perform at satisfactory level and able to generate significant impact on society. A certain level of performance requires personal endeavors to foster the group activities depending on group cohesion and its capability to make influence on social system. Individual performance has also significant influence on group activities where individuals are part of group and their collective attempts can help to construct a dynamic platform for group productivity. However, this study examined the group performance in two levels –collective and individual – to understand the dynamics of group. Actually collective performance visualizes the group activities from macro level whereas micro level put emphasis on individual performance. The fundamental critique of individual identity is – individual performances may not be always supportive for group identity, somewhere it may contradict with group philosophy. Another aspect is – if individual identity gather massive establishment, group identity may receive less priority than it deserves. Nevertheless, due to this dilemma, both micro and macro level performances have adequate importance to make a group functional and it is also related with the question of sustainability of the particular group. A study (Cartwright and Zander 1968) mentioned that in a large group a small section plays a dominant role in conducting group activities. Same situation has been observed in case of LRIC where two or three members played dynamic role to achieve its goals.

Findings showed that LRIC as a group gained less identity than it was supposed to deserve. Inadequate group cohesion and lack of intra-group interactions constituted a comparatively weaker social space for LRIC. But some performances, observed in all of the committees studied, brought some significant achievement in society. At least a shorter portion of the community people came to be informed that BRAC initiated to form a committee which would work to protect legal rights of the people.

Still now, individual identity dominates the group identity. Obviously, women members were seemed to be proactive to the group but groups were led by the opinion leaders. The most common dominant figures were the traditional leaders including *imam*, *qazi*, and UP members.

One argument is sub-grouping does not contribute to group effectiveness (Ratherford 1995). As LRIC was composed by different professional people who stood in different social strata, it constituted rigorous sub-grouping within the committees. This sub-grouping might be considered as barriers to develop group integration. Definitely group size does matter unless most of them are active. A large group with few active members occupying much time and resources often produce very few results. LRIC was composed covering most of the professional bodies and all of them were not dedicated and willing with such activities. Therefore, a question may be appeared that does the group need 19 people to manage its activities?

In formation phase, PO did not mention why members were actually invited in the first meeting. Therefore, procedure followed to form a committee and executive committee was not inspirable at all. Discussion on legal issues was very ordinary and POs were also seemed to be confused in some issues. As a result, members received inadequate information on legal issues. Moreover, participation of the members in the very first meeting were not frequent and only few of them could be able to concentrate on the issues to learn. POs had to face rigorous hardship to mobilize the members to form a committee. The interval between each third month meeting was obstacle to build an effective communication among the group members. No formal activities were found in the interim period which often produced frustration to the effective group members. Only BRAC beneficiaries were found to be eager and punctual to follow meeting. LRIC as a group could not even build its own identity to take a space in society. Lack of incentives was found as major difficulties to the members and POs had to suffer financially due to unavailability of entertainment cost. Beside these, Community policing activities attracted more the opinion leaders as it was initiated by local police station which also declined their attention towards LRIC. Without these difficulties, most of the members considered this as noble initiatives and showed their willingness to work with LRIC. Though the performance level of LRIC as a group is not at satisfactory level, but some individuals played important role, which might be translated into group effectiveness. But, LRIC has a significant scope to protect legal rights of the poor through developing a network between individuals and organizations.

### **Making difference by LRIC**

#### ***The scope of LRIC to make a difference- some steps HRLS can take to move further***

In the review report (Hossains *et al.* 2007) groups like Local Community Leaders, Human Rights Implementation committee has been termed as catalysts. Though LRIC was not formed when review report was made, from the objectives it can be assumed that this groups is also made to be catalyst. Cause the objectives of this group include intentions like making social movement, which goes beyond just implementing legal rights.

It cannot be expected that HRLS would take such drastic step that in overnight the group will work like catalyst. Instead on enforcing many things together, HRLS can proceed step by step to break the obstacles of the weakness of the group. The following suggestions may help the programme to mould a strategy:

#### ***Legal education knowledge through interaction***

Knowledge of law is important to implement the laws. At first, the knowledge of laws can be imparted among the group members through interaction, questions, answers or case study. The trainer PO must be skillful enough to captivate the attention of the trainees. The trainees may be offered small incentive which can add attraction to the class. HRLS can bring a lawyer to discuss on the recent changes of laws. Even, HRLS can appoint law students to do some tasks like that.

### ***Participation in the programme of social development and GQAL***

The privilege of HRLS is that it can cooperate with other programme as components of BRAC which other legal aids cannot do. Social development programme carry different programme which is more focused on social issues – like popular theatre. HRLS can encourage the members of the group to participate in such programme and gather opinion about it. GQAL programme of BRAC is working to eliminate the gender discrimination gradually. HRLS can ask this programme to involve the members of the group in their training. Such training can create a mindset which will ultimately assist the group to understand the value of women rights.

### **Group exercise**

Through group exercise the members of LRIC can create more comfortable relationship with each other. Like during the time of imparting the knowledge of divorce, small groups can be made among LRIC members. They may be given a small case study and ask to come up with the possible solutions and their potential role in it according to the instruction of PO. Such exercise can assist to perceive the knowledge from practical dimensions and mentality to work together.

### ***Special measure for imam***

The role of *imam* is going to be very crucial as data shows the non cooperative attitude of *imam*. One strategy can be, sometimes, the leading role of the meeting can be put on the hands of imam assigning him a duty to relate between religion and the theme of the meeting, for example, Islam and women rights. In this respect another question can come, how an *imam* of a small place is supposed to know what radical change has come in outside Islamic world to make Islam more prone to women rights?( progressive change in Tunishiya, Jordan's Islamic law of divorce, polygamy or some good scholarly articles on the islamic law) . In this respect what HRLS can do, they can supply some good resources of books and articles to the *imam* before he presides over the meeting. HRLS can invite any renowned person to hear the discussion in the meeting. When the *imam* will feel that his speech would be listened by the renowned persons (HRLS can invite judges, or other well educated person of that area), he would take preparations accordingly. Such reading may assist him to get rid of his prejudice through widening his vision

### ***Providing easily understandable books, attractive posters on rights and showing movies related to women rights***

There are number of books on rights which can be easily understood. A circle for reading books and discussion can be made by the active initiative of PO in the group. At the same time, attractive posters on rights can be provided to the group members to distribute within their community with explanation of the message. Several movies are coming out with very strong message of women rights which can be shown to the members of LRIC. After the movie a short discussion can be held to point out the message of the movie.

### **Putting short term and specific goal before LRIC**

Instead of giving a long term and very wide goal to the members of LRIC (like creating social movement which is too wide to perceive for the members of the group), the goals can be narrow down as short term and specific goal. Like, the group members can be told to prevent any *shalish* regarding rape (an illegal *shalish* but more specific), or they can be told to keep close observation of the local *shalish* and if it is found that *shalish* is not maintaining the law, then the group can encourage the parties to go for ADR in BRAC office. The group can monitor that whether a woman is getting her due maintenance after the *shalish*, if not then to create pressure on the parties to give that or encourage the women to move for further action, like to inform BRAC's legal aid. The group can give counseling to the family of the victim of any crime of violence and her family to give her mental support or to take notice of the case where the accused is intimidating the witness and in such case to inform the local police, or if the case is of BRAC legal aid, then inform the legal aid of BRAC, or use social pressure to mitigate the adverse affect of the situation.

### **Interaction with state components of law and order**

A workshop should be organized for the groups with the state actors like police, so that the members of the group can co-ordinate with them.

### **Giving incentive at the initial stage**

Findings show the reluctance of the group members to be present in the meeting. The trend to be present in the meeting is deteriorating enough to frustrate the goals. Under this circumstance, some sort of incentive can encourage the members to attend in the meeting at the initial stage. Then slowly and gradually, when the members start to realize their importance, such incentive may appear immaterial to them.

### **Other recommendations**

LRIC committee should have few sub committees who conducts meeting every week, interact with village people with certain issue, circulating poster, observing illegal or unusual events of the village and maintaining connection to the main committee. Therefore, develop a competition among the sub groups which will be more effective for the implication of the principal of LRIC committee. Other recommendations are given as:

- To enhance HRLS support including incentives and refreshment and transport cost
- Specify the role of each sub-group
- The interval between meetings can be revised
- The place of meeting can be revised

- Revise and simplifying the objectives of LRIC
- Specific fundamental understanding of Constitution
- Arrange training for POs to improve their legal knowledge
- To develop a system of rewarding the members like 'Best legal rights cadre of the year' may inspire the members.

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