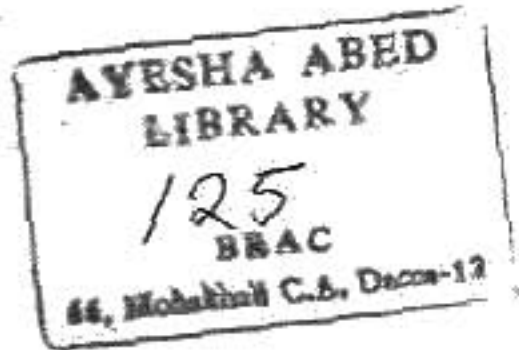


FROM PROGRESS TO DEVELOPMENT
IN SULLA



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1. Introduction

The Sulla Project of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has completed 15 years of its activities in seven unions of Sulla, Deraï and Banyachong upazilas of Sunamgonj and Habiganj districts (c.f. Map-I). During this period BRAC strategy of development has undergone changes which can be divided into three broad phases.

In phase I, which lasted for a period of nine months (February-October) in 1972, BRAC acted for the people. Rehabilitating the refugees of the liberation war was the objective of this phase. Community development was the goal of phase II which started in November 1972 and continued upto December 1975. People from different sections of the society were drawn into participation in BRAC initiated programmes.

Since then BRAC in Sulla was involved in organising the landless poor into organisations. The objective of this third phase was to raise consciousness and awareness level of the landless poor to enable them to improve their socio-political position in the society. Two major phenomena can be seen from an investigation into phase III: one is, the nature of BRAC involvement in this phase while the other is its achievements.

BRAC involvement in phase III can be divided into three sub-phases. After a one year period of institution building activities, it started to withdraw its support; the staff

* The report is prepared by Dr. Safiqul Islam and Dr. AMR Chowdhury of the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC. The first author spent several weeks in Sulla for a group evaluation study. The second author also undertook a week's trip for the study. They have been benefited from discussions with a number of persons who worked at Sulla some of whom are no longer working with BRAC. The authors are grateful to them. The authors remember with gratitude the help and cooperation of Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzam Ahmed of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad.

strength was reduced by 50 percent, the number of BRAC centres in the region was reduced from ten to seven. Economic support to the newly organised organisations continued up to the end of 1981. This was followed by a phase which lasted for two years (1984-85), where BRAC presence was minimal with 10-12 staff (i.e. about 10 percent of 1978 strength) in four centres. In this period BRAC acted rather as an adviser to the landless organisations. And in the latest sub-phase which began in 1986 BRAC is evaluating its past strategies and thinking about the future of the Sulla project.

BRAC efforts in phase III brought some results in the field of organising the landless poor into organisations. Some of the group members achieved quite "high" degree of awareness, the majority however are in "intermediate" stage^{*}. Economic position of the group members have deteriorated further which caused frustration among many group members.

The impact of this frustration on the organisation are already visible and will be more apparent in the coming years. The situation itself deserves quick intervention.

This paper makes an attempt to give some details on the above situation on the basis of some facts and figures, and on the impression which the present authors got during their stay in Sulla. The paper also reflects the view of many group members; present and ex-BRAC staff who even served in Sulla.

* For more details about the awareness levels in Sulla, see the "Sulla evaluation study results" (forthcoming)

II. From Initiation to Progress

1. The Beginning

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) was founded in Sulla in 1972. Initially BRAC was concerned with rehabilitating the returning refugees, of the Liberation War of 1971. Rehabilitation works lasted for a period of nine months, from February to October 1972. Under that programme it assisted about 14,000 families in Sulla, Derai and Banyachong upazilas with constructing and repairing houses and rehabilitating them in their respective occupations.

BRAC recognised that relief and rehabilitation are needed but its longterm impact on living of the majority people is not much. This prompted BRAC to redirect its policy toward a more development oriented programme.

2. One Step Forward: Development for All

In phase II which lasted for a three year period, from November 1972 to December 1975, BRAC organised rural development activities for people. These activities covered eight broad areas, namely, agriculture, fisheries, functional education, community centre development, health care, family planning and vocational training. Impact of the programme was unequal and the people in disadvantage benefited least*. This realisation led BRAC to focus on the poor.

3. Developing the Poor:

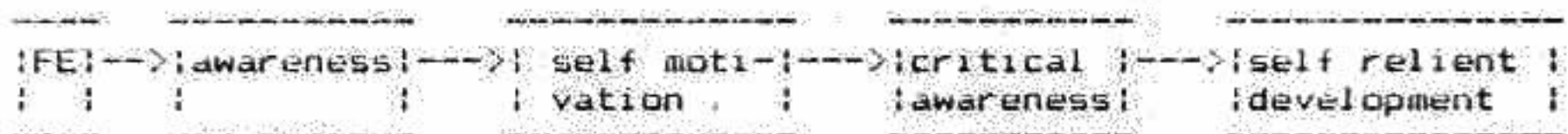
Phase III was originally planned to last for three years, upto the end of 1978. Activities were divided into four broad areas: capacity building and institutional development; health care, preventive medicine and family planning; economic support programme for disadvantaged groups; and agriculture including husbandry.

* Please see in, Barshik Pratibedhan (Yearly Report), Sulla Project, 1984

Progress of the programme was discussed in a review meeting held in November 1977. The meeting found that, "although the Sulla project was planned to be focussed on disadvantaged and exploited groups the actual implementation was not in strict consonance with the plan" [c.f. Annual Activity Report, Sulla Project, AAR-SP-1978]. Two far reaching policy emphasis emerged from the conclusion, namely, to work only with the landless and to work with them not on an individual basis but as a homogenous group*. Decisions came into force immediately and the year 1978 was devoted to translating the new policy into action.

This approach is known as Institution Building, or Conscientisation Approach. This is a process which in BRAC practice starts with Functional Education (FE) for illiterate adults and concludes by approaching social, economic and political development of the disadvantaged poor, via three intermediate stages.

The institution building diagram of BRAC can be drawn as follows:



BRAC believes that in 'critical awareness' stage responsibility can be transferred to the landless since in this stage they also become capable of planning their activities. A central body created by the landless themselves will take over the BRAC role of coordination.

Institution building activities in Sulla, as indicated above, started as early as 1978. Some details of it is given in the followings:

* The term homogeneous group included the followings: Peasants who sell their labour and have no significant assets; fishermen who do not possess fishing equipment; member of other artisan groups who do not possess equipment, or capital to practice their trade; and female members of the above groups of people.

3.1 The Year 1978:

Project activities in Sulla in 1978 was concentrated on institution building. With the help of meetings with groups and individual contact by BRAC Programme Organisers (POs), 204 landless groups were identified and formed. Besides, 269 group workshops, FE courses were also used to bring target group people into a conscientisation process where the need of unity, organisation, and cooperation among the landless was emphasized. A total of 207 FE centres were open where 3311 "students" enrolled and of them 270 received graduation (c.f. AAR-SP-1978). In addition to them, a good number of training courses on different subjects (e.g. agriculture, health, duckery etc.) were also organised for the group members to develop skills and knowledge.

The economic support programme introduced earlier, was "vastly increased" (c.f. ibid). An amount of Tk.1,409,575 was advanced in 1978 against 173 schemes covering 3713 group members. The objectives of economic programmes were to reduce their dependency on mohajans, to raise their income; to stimulate group position, group feeling and group management. Due to this, economic support programmes between 1978 and 1981 was implemented as a group programme in a sense that credit was disbursed not to the individual member but to the group

- † Note that FE courses in Sulla first was introduced under phase II activities, the content and objective was slightly different from the present phase. Group workshop means a workshop for a small number of people on a particular topic.
- ++ Our figures from two villages under Daudpur Centre suggest that only a very limited number (about 5 per cent) of group members can read and write, most of whom however had some formal primary education.
- * In this context one ex-Sulla staff pointed out the following: BRAC POs in 1978 ran after group members to give them loan and there was a competition between BRAC centres in respect of disbursing loans: "The more the better" was the principle. "Due to this", he went on saying, "BRAC needed the help of police force while realising the loan".

which, in turn, distributed the received amount to the sub-groups participating in the scheme, i.e. the scheme was implemented by small groups and not individually by member⁺.

Progress of the new policy was indicated in the Annual Activity Report, Sulla Project, (AAR-SP) of 1978: "The organisation of the landless, the marginal farmers and the women are already becoming quite strong Many of the groups are now in a position to ensure survival without BRAC support (underline authors'). BRAC staff strength will gradually be reduced over the next two years. During this period more attention will be given to upgrading the groups Although the phase III is extended for a further period of two years, additional fund is unlikely to be needed to finance the increasingly reduced commitment during the two year withdrawal period".

3.2 The Withdrawal Period

Consistent with the above, the activities of 1979 and 1980 were directed to strengthen the groups' position to promote responsibility transfer.

a. Focus in 1979 went to increase the political power of the groups by covering all target people from each project village. A total of 64 groups (31 male and 33 female) were created in the year^{*}. Existing groups, on the other hand, were differentiated: 39 male and 41 female groups which were found matured and active were

+ Some ex-Sulla staff now feel that group-wise implementation of the economic schemes is one major explanation to ineffectiveness of the schemes which in turn caused problems in realising BRAC loans.

* Most of the figures referring the year 1979 are taken from AAR-SP-1979.

designated as core groups. Members of the core groups took the responsibility (or, were given the responsibility?) to improve their strength also by creating new groups in their respective, or adjacent villages.

Simultaneously, efforts were made to improve the groups' position in other ways too: some project level workshops were conducted to develop advance group members ("cadre"). A total of 175 (143 male and 32 female) advance members* were drawn into these workshops. In addition 36 camp (i.e. Centre) workshops were also held in 1979. The objective of camp workshops was to create linkages between groups of different villages under the same camp. A total of 1,256 group members participated in these workshops. Some attention was also given to create ground to merge the groups of a village into a single village organisation. Towards this end, the group meetings were used as means.

Under the economic support programme, an amount of Tk. 103,296 was disbursed against 23 schemes covering agriculture, paddy husking, fishing, dry fish processing, small trade etc. It can be noted here that the amount of loan disbursed in 1979 corresponds to only 7 percent of 1978. A 'common risk' covering fund was introduced in 1979 with Tk. 41,358 by group members engaged in those schemes. The purpose of the fund was to support the group members financially who were in odd/emergency need (e.g. litigation). By the end of 1979, the project administration at Sulla found that a leadership was increasingly emerging in some

- † A group can be viewed as core if the level of discipline (i.e. regular meeting, regular saving: active participation of the members in the meeting) and awareness (i.e. their position in the society, exploitation by moneylenders etc.) attained by the group members are "high". The term "high" however is not identified, or defined.
- * Advance in view of their ability to perceive and comprehend problems and their confidence to plan and take action.

groups who would be able to organise other groups too. Under this circumstances it was decided to reduce staff and office strength: three BRAC centres (Shashkai, Boushi and Kagapasha) were closed down⁺ and staff strength was reduced almost by 50 per cent, from 89 to 48 (c.f. AAR-SP-1979).

- a. The year 1980 was a busy year in many respects. The process of merging the village groups (i.e. Hati groups) into a single village organisation (VO) which started in 1978/79 got momentum in 1980. It was felt that this will help the organisation in strengthening the group position significantly. Initiative was taken to register the groups (VOs) with the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) to enhance local resource mobilisation in order to reduce the dependency of groups on BRAC for financial assistance. As a result 25 VOs in 1980 received BRDB registration.

An economic programme, namely the Food Security Programme⁺⁺ (FSP) was launched in 1980: 15 organisation with 1,128 members were involved in the programme.

In 1980 an amount of Tk.326,250 was disbursed as loan against 22 short-run income generating schemes where a total of 2,162 members were involved. This amount of economic support programme is three times higher compared to the previous year but only 23 per cent if compared to 1978.

+ It would not be very difficult to see the impact of closing down of centres. Shashkai, among others, was closed down without informing the local people, including group members. In one monsoon morning village people noticed that the tin-roofed BRAC office building no longer exists and two country boats are loaded with parts of the decomposed office building. It was an unpleasant surprise for the villagers which was unexpected of BRAC.

++ The programme maintains a paddy store (Golla) from equal contributions of paddy from each member. During the lean months paddy from the Golla are distributed among the members with a certain amount of interest which is collected at harvesting period. The rate of interest varied from VO to VO which is either 50 percent, or 100 percent.

The year 1980 was a challenging year for many groups. The newly introduced Gram Sarkar elections were held in November 1980 which made people of all walks of life active. Many BRAC organised groups in Sulla participated in the elections to elect their own representatives in this local administrative body. In 16 villages BRAC groups occupied all seats and in 7 others the heads of the Gram Sarkar (i.e. Gram Pradhan) were elected from amongst the group members.

By the end of 1980, number of villages covered stood at 90 and landless coverage was as high as 100 per cent in 24 of them; in another 32 villages coverage was about 75 per cent* (c.f. AAR-SP-1980). Upto December 1980, number of core groups was 55 (32 male and 23 female) counting 1,945 male and 1,461 female members**. By the end of the year, Project Authority found that groups position has "improved" and decided to reduce further BRAC's staff position by another 50 per cent from 48 to 24 (c.f. AAR-SP-1980).

- a. The extended period was over by 1980, but the withdrawal programme continued in the following years, upto 1983.

Development ↓

The year 1981 was devoted to develop a new organisation to take over BRAC's hitherto coordinating role, to assist the VOs to obtain government services, including mobilising local resources and to establish the legal rights of landless people and to assist the groups when needed. Attention was given to make the newly introduced Central Conference only a coordinating and democratic body so that the VOs remain the powerful sovereign body of the landless people.

* Comparative figures for the previous years (1978, 1979) are not available.

** Decrease in the number of core groups resulted from merging groups into a single VO.

Organisational positions were improved by covering new villages. Number of covered village increased to 101, from 90 in the previous year. Landless coverage was, on an average, 61 per cent. A total 155 groups together counted 7,655 members of whom 54 percent were male. Number of core groups increased from 55 in 1980 to 65 in 1981. These groups altogether counted 4,380 members, i.e. an increase of 28 percent. Number of advance group member (i.e. "cadre") stood at 325; 167 male and 158 female (c.f. AAR-SP-1981).

Group activity in 1981 included some social actions: some groups acquired khas land hitherto illegally occupied by others. Some groups however were burdened with false litigations and subsequently economic hardships. These social conflicts, it was believed, rather improved the morale of groups and solidarity feelings (see AAR-SP-1981).

The year 1981 was the last one in view of BRAC economic support + programme. During the year an amount of Tk.184,200 was disbursed to 18 groups (12 male and 6 female). Besides 11 group received BRDB loan for the first time amounting Tk.143,000 against different economic schemes (c.f. AAR-SP-1981). Ten new groups received BRDB registration in 1981.

As the central conference was found active and viable in taking responsibility in mobilising and organising the landless, the BRAC vision of responsibility transfer to the landless got momentum. Staff strength was further reduced, from 24 to 13, number of BRAC offices however remained the same (i.e. 7) as in 1980.

o In many respects the year 1982 was a transitory one while 1983 was the final one in view of responsibility transfer to the landless organisations and BRAC withdrawal from the area.

+ This corresponds to 56 percent of the amount disbursed in previous year and 13 percent compared to 1978.

An extensive training programme was implemented during this period. Training on management and leadership received attention in 1982. Beside centre (i.e. camp) level training on management and leadership, 18 members were taken to Savar TARC for leadership training. Number of meetings with members particularly at area and centre level conducted during 1982 and 1983 was quite high. These meetings focussed on awareness and consciousness. In addition to them, some meetings were arranged only for advance group members, which highlighted their role on institution building.

All preparations were made in 1982 to introduce a Secretariat to the Central Conference. The Secretariat⁺ formally started its operation in March 1983 with the following objectives:

- arrange Central Conference meetings and communicate with groups for implementing the decisions of conference,
- communicate decisions of different forums and other important information to VOs,
- take necessary actions as per decisions of conference,
- and maintain liaison with government and other institutions.

Decision was taken to differentiate the groups and group members

* Note that no Annual Report for 1982 on Sulla Project is available. The 1983 report reports some figures for 1982 too. Is it possible that it had some relations with personal changes took place at project level.

+ In the first year, a BRAC workers was deployed as Secretary to the secretariat, but since 1984, the conference appointed its own secretary. An Advisor, paid by BRAC, now assists the Secretariat.

*
in a more comprehensive way. Groups and group members under new environment were divided into four categories, A, B, C and D. 'A' being the best and 'D' the worst. In this new system it became clear that not all members of 'A' category groups were necessarily 'A' category members. Groups belonging to category 'A' increased from 16 to 26 while the number of 'A' category cadres from 18 to 33 from 1982 to 1983 (c.f. AAR-SP-1983).

The year 1983 was a year of responsibility transfer in some other ways too: This was the year of Union Parishad elections. Two group members fought for the post of UP chairman, and both failed. Of the 40 members who ran for membership only 15 won. BKAC, as planned, sanctioned no loan to the groups in 1982 and 1983. Number of groups registered with BRDB increased from 43 to 48. The number of groups receiving loans from BRDB however decreased by 3, to 12 (c.f. AAR-SP-1983). This means that nearly a half of the groups in 1983 were registered with BRDB, but only one-fourth of the registered groups could mobilise BRDB credit amounting a total of Tk. 185,125/.

Number of group member decreased by 5.6 percent (from 7,655 to 7,148) from 1981 to 1982, though the number of groups remained the

* Evaluation was made on the basis of the following criteria, coverage, meeting, savings, FSP, health programme, secretariate contribution and group solidarity. For 'A' category group, coverage, meeting, savings, FSP and secretariate contribution was 75 percent, 50 to 60 percent for 'B' category groups, 30 to 50 for 'C' category and below 30 for 'D' category groups. A similar system was applied while differentiating group members. In addition, members in 'A' category actively took part in organising the own group and groups in adjacent villages. Members in 'B' category were not needed to meet the requirement of organising groups in adjacent villages. Members in 'C' categories have to meet 75 percent of the criteria. Others belong to category 'D'. Many BKAC staff at Sulla now, however are not aware of this.

same in this period. By the end of 1983, a total number of 168 groups in 103 villages⁺ together counted 7,225 members, i.e. slightly increased from 1982 to 1983, but remained below the 1981 level by 5.6 percent. Coverage of target household (HH) over total target HH in the working villages was 49 per cent in 1982, and increased to 53 percent by the end of 1983^{*}. This is less than the corresponding figure (61%) of 1981.

Under the above circumstances, at the end of 1983 BRAC decided to close down 3 more centres (Derai, Gobindapur and Atgaon) reducing the number from 7 to 4 (c.f. AAR-SP-1983). With this, BRAC in Sulla was reduced to an observer maintaining liaison with groups through a limited number of staff (about 10) in 4 centres (Markuli, Daudpur, Anandapur and Ghungirgaon).

3.3 The Observation Period

The observation period, in the strict sense of the words, covered upto the middle of 1986. This however does not imply that things did not move in Sulla during this period.

Number of VOs increased by 3, from 168 to 171, but total members decreased by 174, from 7,225 to 7,051, from 1983 to 1984^{**}. With disintegration of one male group, number of groups registered with BRDB decreased by 1, i.e. to 47, but the groups receiving BRDB loan increased from 12 in 1983 to 22 in 1984. In addition nearly one thousand group member in this year received some loans from Bangladesh.

+ Number of total villages in the project area stands at 170, which means nearly 40 percent of the villages were outside BRAC intervention in 1983.

* Coverage will be much lower if the figure is compared to the total target HH in all project villages. This figure however is not stated in the Annual Activity Reports of Sulla Project.

** Landless coverage in 1984 was 30 percent, i.e. in 1984 there were 23273 adult eligible for membership and of this 7051 were members (c.f. AAR-SP-1984).

Krishi Bank (BKB) too. BRDB and BKB loan in 1984 together amounted Tk. 442,125 (c.f. AAR-SP-1984).

The following situation emerges if one compares the year 1985 to 1984. At the end of 1985, number of VOs stood at 124 and group members at 3,478 (c.f. Report on Sulla Integrated Programme, January - December 1985). This is substantially lower than the corresponding figures of 1984. Number of working villages in the project area also reduced, from 108 (i.e. 64 percent of the project villages) in 1984 to 85 (i.e. 48 percent of the total project villages) in 1985. This above situation is caused mainly by disintegration of some groups. This undesirable situation, in view of many present and ex-Sulla staff and some group members, can be explained by the following factors: (i) most of the disintegrated groups had very little experience in the field of organisation building and much of these groups was formed under a certain flow (e.g. election), (ii) withdrawal of BRAC economic support caused frustration among many group members who expected economic betterment from their joining to the VOs. Groups formed in post-1981 period, on the other hand, received no financial assistance either from BRAC, or from other sources (e.g. BRDB+). Finally, due to limited number of staff, BRAC couldnot provide the groups with services (e.g. helping them in organising) which otherwise they needed at the initial stage of group activity. To put it otherway, much of the above explanations are directly related to BRAC withdrawal, which in view of many of our interviewees was too early. One group member went on saying that, "BRAC left us when we were child^{ren} and a child cannot grow without assistance from parents, or other". Another group^{member} explained BRAC policy in Sulla in the following: "BRAC started to cross a big haor with us on a mechanised boat. Suddenly they stopped

* It can be noted here that bulk of the groups registered with BRDB were formed before 1981.

the engine when the boat was right in the middle of the haor and threw
s in the haor to swim to the destination without teaching us how to
swim. BRAC knew it well that we will not survive".

Impact of the above factors on the existing groups are becoming
more apparent. Landless coverage over total target population was 30
percent in 1984 and went down to 21 percent in 1985 (c.f. AAR-SP-1984,
5). Only one-fifth of the groups in 1985 received BRDB and BKB loan.
The amount (Tk. 411,125) they received against 19 schemes (paddy
cultivations 8, paddy husking 10, and power pump 1) in 1985 was also
little less compared to 1984.

Details of the loan received in 1985 shows that groups under
Daudpur centre received the highest amount (Tk. 200,000, i.e. nearly
50 percent) while Anandapur received the lowest amount. Groups under
Shungirgaon centre received no loan at all. It is worth noting that
the groups under Daudpur centre performed best in respect of FSP (41%
of the total), number of group members (35% of the total); number of
covered villages (28% of the total). The Health programme in 1985
covered 24 of 85 working villages, and of this 10 belonged to Daudpur
centre (c.f. Report of SIP, 1985).

The post-1985 period is a period of re-thinking about BRAC's
involvement in Sullia. Some new thinking can be observed there
though the new policy framework is not yet known.

- Some steps are being taken to reintroduce economic support
programme to the groups. Loan now is sanctioned from the
Secretariat fund. The amount disbursed (less than one lakh)
remained far behind the requirements and the Secretariat fund is
indeed too small to serve the purpose. It can be noted here that
the Secretariat itself is not a self-reliant body: each group
member pays 2 seer paddy a year to meet the financial requirements

of the secretariat and the rest by BRAC+.

- In most recent time a livestock programme has been introduced. Under the programme vaccination services are offered to all cattles in the project area. The objective of the programme is to decrease the mortality rate of the cattles. In other words, to improve the economic position of the cattle owners. Project authority believes that the programme will contribute to raise the income of some group members too who work as Para-vet. They earn Tk. 1 from each pushing.

It is not difficult to see that the beneficiaries of the programme are mainly the better-off families, since number of the group members who own a cattle is very limited (less than 10 per cent).

o Before proceeding further a few words may be mentioned about the topographical background of Sulla too. The conditions which prevails in Sulla makes the region very different from the rest of rural Bangladesh.

- This is a haor area and is virtually submerged for six months of the year. Boro is the only crop produced in the region. Robi crop culture exists but in a very insignificant area. This means people in the region are kept busy only for four months and forced to sit idle during the rest of the year as employment opportunities in monsoon is virtually non-existent. Monsoon is the leisure and preparation period for the landed peasantry but a crisis period for the landless - the majority of the rural population. And in absence of employment opportunities majority of the landless are forced to starve.

+ Amount of BRAC contribution equals to the total amount of group members' yearly contribution.

- This is a low lying area where there is no road at all. In dry season the transport system is non-existent except in big rivers. Within the area even rickshaw and bicycle are unusable vehicles. The situation during monsoon days is little different. Launch and mechanised boats ply. Country boat is the most common means of transport for inter and intra-village communication. Country boat is an economic asset which is beyond the purchasing power of great majority of the landless masses⁺.
- People in Sulla region belong to two religious communities: Hindu and Muslim. Hindus are in majority. Most of the well-to-do families belong to the Hindu community.
- There is no electricity in the region, and the government programme of rural electrification is not likely to cover the region in foreseeable future.
- Newspaper is not popular. People do not subscribe the newspapers since it takes three-four days to reach there. Number of radios in the region is likely to be very small.
- According to government statistics there are two high schools and 46 primary schools in whole Sulla upazila⁺⁺. Number of students who passed SSC is very small.
- The postal system is not much different. A letter from Dhaka takes 10-15 days to reach the villages under Daudpur centre. Telegram simply does not reach to some parts of Sulla.
- Under these circumstances it is not surprising that even the term

How one can expect that they will actively take part in institution building activities. Most of them cannot move from their houses without a boat.

See in, Upazila Statistics, 1978/80 to 1982/83, Vol.1, BBS, January 85.

industrial units, including cottage industry, is not familiar in the region.

These are the conditions in which the people of Sulla live and BRAC POs work. In dry days, the POs are completely dependent on their foot, and often have to walk 7-8 hours a day⁺. In addition, since most of the group meetings can only be conducted only in the evening hours, they are forced to cross miles of boro land, often alone, in the evening. Situation in the monsoon, is not better either, moreover the risk of life is much higher. Country boat is the only means of transport for inter and intra village communication which does not save time, but saves energy. There are pleasures in a boat journey if the waters in the haors do not turn to waves, which however occurs quite often, particularly in the afternoons and evenings hours and not all the BRAC POs can swim.

* A phenomenon which is unknown to BRAC POs in RDP or other IDP projects.

III. Observations

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) started its journey in Sulla in 1972 as a relief and rehabilitating organisation and developed soon into an institution devoted to improve the lives of the rural poor by making them aware and conscious about their position in the society and rights and duties. This is known as conscientisation, or institution building (IB) approach.

The IB programme in Sulla was planned to last for three years, upto the end of 1978, but due to early flood in 1977, implementation started in 1978, and continued upto date. After a one year period of organising the rural poor into organisations the programme was given new emphasis. BRAC withdrawal from the area and responsibility transfer to the landless organisations were among the core components of IB programme, particularly between 1979 and 1983.

Withdrawal programme was implemented in three steps in 1979, 1981 and 1983. In the first and third step, BRAC reduced its office and staff strength: by 1983 office strength decreased by 60 percent while staff by more than 80 percent compared to 1978 position. Step taken in 1981 was decisive in view of the impact on IB: BRAC decided to discontinue its economic support to the groups despite the scepticism of some staff that the decision will have serious consequences. A study conducted by BRAC in Sulla in 1978 precisely pointed out the role of external economic support on the development of economically disadvantaged population (c.f. Ahmad M: 1978:10). The assumption that registration of groups with BRDB will help to meet the financial

* One ex-Sulla staff pointed out that they were aware about possible consequence of the decision but there was no fund to continue the economic support programme and finance other costs (e.g. staff salary). It is worth nothing that the volume of economic support also decreased between 1978 to 1981, c.f. Graph 3.

* See later on.

requirements of the groups, has been proved to be only partially correct, due to the following reasons: Number of the groups received BRDB registration was small (35 of 155 groups), and most of these registered groups were among the oldest. More importantly, it was not taken into account that this new involvement in such an early stage would create new problems to the groups which will hamper the IB process. Attention of many groups was diverted from IB building⁺ to mere resource mobilization. In some other cases, this involvement led to group conflict^{*}. There are also evidences that group members were infected with corruption. In addition, BRDB/BKB policy is not responsive to the situation; as credit is not always disbursed when the need is high and the disbursed amount, per recipient, is inadequate in view of surplus generating. No surplus means no prospects for betterment.

To put it differently under-estimating the role of some factors (time, BRAC support) and over-estimating others (BRDB registration) finally led to a undesirable situation which became apparent soon after 1981. Number of total group members substantially decreased in post-1981 period (c.f. graph 2). Similarly, all lines in graph 1 and 2 show a sharp decline in post-1984 period. What does it indicate? This clearly suggests that people in margin too favour quick actions, and for obvious reasons. Can they afford to wait to see what will happen tomorrow, when they are in crying need today? They can't. A too long waiting period is equally boring to them. The period between 1982 and 1983 in many respects was a waiting period for many of the group members in Sulla. And as there was no indication of changes, their disappointment with the organisation increased which in many

+ For example, group meetings became irregular and where the meeting was regular there credit got major emphasis.

* Problem of Shymerchar female group goes back to this issue.

cases was expressed in the form of "quiet violence" (i.e. disintegration of group). Graph 1 shows that most of the disintegrated groups in post 1984 were male. This is not inconsistent to the above that male lines in graph 1 and 2 show a rise in the waiting period while the corresponding female lines, a decline or about a stagnant, situation. Two conclusions emerge from that: women more quickly react than men but their reaction rarely appear in severe forms. They have more patience than men. This made possible for BRAC PGs in Sulla to maintain liaison with female groups in the post-1984 period, while the same was either impossible, or more difficult with the male groups⁺. A man, particularly in a poor family is more concerned with today while a woman, specially a mother, about tomorrow too. This is to say that those male members are active now bulk of whom, this, or that way experienced socio-economic gain, some others are active either because of a 'no-point of return' situation, or because there exists no better alternative than to 'wait and see'⁺⁺.

To put the aboves differently, an "outreach"^{*} approach can easily be transformed with "RCTP"^{**} but the RCTP approach cannot be transformed to outreach without serious consequences. Particularly this happened in Sulla. This however does not imply that all members were equally affected by the policy changes. They cannot be affected equally. Groups and group members significantly vary in view of their knowledge and experience on institution bulding. There are group members at a critical awareness level. Their number however is very limited (about **20-30** at Sulla project). Number of the member at "self motivation" stage is likely to be higher but not to exceed 3-4

+ Streetlands recent study on Sulla reached similar conclusion, Please see in Streetland (1986:148).

++ Please see the history of Karcha and Helalnagar male groups under Markuli centre.

* Mobilising the poor without financial support.

** Mobilising the poor with financial support.

percent. Members in awareness level will present a similar figure, roughly 3-4 percent. A good proportion (about 30%) of the remaining is rather in an intermediate stage toward awareness⁺. Graph IV which indicates the awareness level of some group members in three villages, suggests that members from different categories (awareness level) are not distributed equally among the groups. As a result the better will be the performances of a group where the number of advance group member (critically aware, or self motivated) is higher and in the same way, the worse will be the record of a group where such members are non-existent^{*}. In other words, most of the existing good groups are good mainly because of the existence of some advance group members, and not necessarily reflects the overall situation. This is an equally undesirable situation, which deserves quick remedy measures.

Undesirable because, real improvement in the position of a group assumes,

- insignificant differences between group members in view of awareness⁺⁺ - at a much higher level. This is crucial in respect of unity among the group solidarity, i.e. well functioning of a group.
- adequate coverage (about 75 percent) of target population in village level, in union level and in upazila level,

* If a weigh value is given to the members at the above levels, then the mean situation will be close to the awareness level. Figures presented in graph 4 also indicate a similar situation. It is however worth noting that it is very difficult to measure people in view of their awareness, since the above mentioned awareness levels cannot be clearly distinguished always and are relative. This limitation should be kept in mind.

† This, partly, explains better performances, particularly of female groups under Daudpur centre.

++ The ideal situation assumes that bulk of the group members (60%) are at a critical and self motivation stage while the rests are certainly in an awareness level, or in intermediate level toward self-motivation.

- continuous betterment in the economic position of group members at an individual level,
- positive changes about educational status of the group members and their school age children
- better health of all family members, including group member,
- and finally, higher (i.e. continuous improvement) access to local level (including union and upazila) political power.

That is, real changes in group position is conditional to economic, social, and political changes about the position of the group members at an individual level.

1. Impact: Sulla at Present

Looking at Sulla from the above angles, the following picture emerges:

- awareness level of the group members is not very satisfactory,
- landless coverage is 21 percent, number of covered village is also low (about 50 percent). BRAC is working in three upazilas, however all the villages are not covered in any one of them. Coverage in Sulla upazila is much higher than in two other upazilas.
- economic position of the group members (including advance members) did not improve, moreover deteriorated during the last years⁺. Their dependency on moneylenders for loan did not decrease. Their dependency on landed peasantry for employment in agriculture particularly in the dry season increased, as new labour force entered the market^x. Their dependency on the better-off neighbour household increased. The amount of loan that one

+ The prospect of movement for higher wages is gloomy. No group now thinks of such movemnt.

x Facts and figures will be presented in our forthcoming evaluation study.

group member receive from BRDB is inadequate to generate any reasonable income to support the family. And there exists no alternative source of employment for a great majority, particularly in monsoon.

- more than 95 percent of the group members are not even capable of putting their signature. Number of the group member who can read and write is even smaller (not more than 1, or 2 percent). They would like to educate their children, but circumstances do not permit.
- most of the group members are aware of better health, and have primary knowledge on health, but their purchasing power do not allow them to practice it.
- their successful participation in the Gram Sarkar election in 1980 indicates that they are able to elect their own representatives in the local administrative bodies. At this moment they however are not in a position to meet such challenges as successfully as they did in 1981.

Now one can raise the question what BRAC then achieved in Sulla. This question will immediately face another question, what BRAC wanted to achieve in Sulla? BRAC objective in Sulla in post-1978 period was to organise the rural poor into organisations; to make them aware about their position in the society and rights and duties, and to improve their social, economic and political position in the society. On the other hands, BRAC policy was not to provide them with the skill of literacy⁺. BRAC did not want to educate the children of the group member: this was not the objective of BRAC. Now it is safe to say,

+ BRAC policy toward literacy is well expressed by Rahat Uddin Ahmed, an ex-staff of Sulla, "In a lifetime, a farmer will use the skill of literacy may be two or three times. There is little use for literacy in the rural areas at the moment" (c.f. World Education, Nov. 1976, No.13). This implicitly, remained guideline of FE in the following years too.

that BRAC efforts in post-1978 period brought mixed results. BRAC however needs to be congratulated even for its mere presence in Sulla, where the government institutions are confined to some basic administrative units. BRAC needs to be congratulated for the followings too:

- BRAC demonstrated that the people in margin can be organised, even in a most dis-advantaged region,
- BRAC experiences clearly show that rural women in Bangladesh who are exploited by both men and society can be organised, and if due attention is given they are capable of making more progress than men,
- For the first time in the modern history of this region that landless elected their own representatives to some local bodies.
- Progress that the landless made particularly in the field of family planning in the BRAC working villages is appreciable. BRAC efforts here too did not go in vain.
- BRAC has much to share in that the group members are much better informed about preventive health care than the landless in BRAC non-intervened villages.

The above demonstrate well that BRAC achievements in Sulla is in no way insignificant. These would have been much more impressions if the tempo of 1978 could be continued. More important now is to identify the areas where remedy measures are needed and to chalk out necessary policy. First, the areas:

+ Also see in Chowdhury (1980)

* Many ex- and present Sulla staff pointed out that there exists two alternatives now to BRAC in Sulla: to close down the project activities or to work with a more comprehensive plan. We feel that BRAC indeed has no alternative but continue its activities in Sulla with a comprehensive plan. Apart from moral reasons, the achievements also need to be sustained.

2. Identifying the Areas of Intervention:

- Economic condition of the group members. Emphasis should be given to improve the economic position of the group members. It is now clear that socio-political environment cannot be changed without bringing changes in their purchasing power. Organising the rural poor into organisations is meaningful if it leads to economic betterment. Continuous betterment in their economic condition assumes that income earning sources are systematic and long term which in turn assumes professional skill and literacy.
- Literacy. Developing literacy skill therefore will be the another top-priority area. Organisational activities themselves require literacy skill of the group members. And this skill is virtually non-existence now. Socio-political status of the group members' families ~~is~~ unlikely can be changed without ensuring education for their children. This is an area where achievements are measurable and a successful programme will have high demonstration effect.
- Once the above two programmes are implemented successfully, efforts directed to improve the health are bound to bring results.
- + If these are accompanied by an intensive programme aims to raise the awareness level of the majority group members, then development is certain since this is making them aware about the need of their unity and effective solidarity.
- The village organisations will be a position to fight for better political access with bright prospects.
- Finally, the secretariat. On the basis of our limited information and a first hand impression it can be stated that the organisation

In absence of literacy, record maintaining at group level is extremely poor now (e.g., weekly meetings).

faces several difficulties. Much of its problems however dates back to its origin. The organisation was founded in an environment when great majority of the group members were at about the awareness level only, and not at the critical awareness level. As a result, many group members did not feel the necessity, and more importantly were not sure about the role of the secretariat. To most of the group members, the secretariat appears in the form of an economic burden. Half of its yearly budget is contributed by the group members while the another half by BRAC. Group members however do not see the contribution of the secretariat. Some group members feel that the recent credit programme (i.e. disbursing loan to the village organisation) undertaken by the secretariat is likely to change a little in this regard, but the amount is inadequate to attract the attention of group members.

This section may be closed by underlining major learnings.

3. Learnings

- + Landless masses in Sulla are in disadvantage, because both of their socio-economic position and the region.
- + People in poverty even in a most disadvantaged region can be organised around genuine problems related directly to their lives
- + Institution building is a long painstaking process
- + It is more difficult to organise the men than the women
- + Improvement in the position of women are more visible than men
- + Most of the results attained by women are collective and indivisible (Also see in Streefland, 1986)

Streefland (1986) reached similar conclusions. A separate study may be undertaken on the subject.

- * Role of literacy in IB process is very important
- * Changes about socio-political position of the group members are conditional to economic betterment
- * Adequate coverage (60-70 percent) is essential in strengthening group position
- * Role of economic support in the IB process is very important
- * Discontinuation and interruption of input elements are undesirable in the IB process
- * Longterm plan is desirable for IB activities.

IV. Suggestions

BRAC made substantial progress in Sulla, particularly in the field of organising the landless poor into organisations. These achievements need to be kept up. And there are some other areas where there was no progress at all, or extremely poor, either because adequate attention was not given, or their importance was not discerned. Progress in these areas however are very vital in order keep up the achievements, consolidating the group position and approaching development⁺. In other words, progress now should be transferred into development^{*}.

This however, assumes a comprehensive plan for future activities and more importantly long term BRAC reinvolvement in the region. Will BRAC go for it? If yes, what then are the rationals behind it?

(i) Sulla served BRAC as a learning laboratory for many years.

Experiences of Sulla contributed significantly to develop BRAC into a largest non-governmental development oriented organisation of the contemporary world.

(ii) Efforts made so far by BRAC brought substantial results.

However, this could not change the lot of the group members. In many respects they still live in as severe and vulnerable conditions as in the past. The group members, nevertheless, cannot believe that BRAC would leave them "in the middle of the way to their cherished liberation". BRAC need to respond to this situation positively, even for the sake of humanitarian ground only.

• Due to this situation a total withdrawal from the area, or to continue our involvement in the present form are not acceptable options. This view is shared by many of BRAC's present and ex-Sulla staff, and group members.

• The term 'progress' here refers to quantitative changes, while development to qualitative changes.

(iii) BRAC's hitherto involvement in Sulla did not bring yet enough results to develop any 'model' which may be suggested for developing other similar rural areas of Bangladesh. Past experiences and present state of affairs however can provide BRAC excellent bases for further work.

(iv) Finally, as mentioned, BRAC achievements in Sulla need to be kept up.

These factors together are imperatives for BRAC's reinvolvement in Sulla. Keeping them in mind we are putting forward a proposal for a planned institution building process for Sulla for the coming years.

1. Breaking the Isolation

Infrastructure building, particularly road network, is an important part of our proposal but it may require very little or no financial involvement of BRAC⁺.

Development of people cannot take place, if the region continue to remain underdeveloped. Experiences suggest that economic development of a region, and/or a country can closely be related to the development of road network and road transport alone. "It has been said of U.S.A that the country did not build its roads; rather the roads built the country"^{**}. This is especially applicable to Sulla, the development priorities in the region refer to flood control, creation of employment opportunities and good communication system.

In concrete terms, roads and paths in Sulla will serve at least the following purposes:

+ NGO involvement in infrastructure building is not new. Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS), for example, constructed many roads in the project area, and of them the 36 mile-long Kurigram pucca road may be mentioned.

** Quoted in, Rahman (1987)

- (i) Only roads and paths, i.e. a better communication network, can break the isolation in which the people of this region live and can bring the region and the people in the mainstream of country's development. This is definitely desirable for the landless masses too.
- (ii) Roads and paths themselves create employment and investment opportunities. Employment opportunities are very important particularly to the landless, and especially in monsoon when there is a crisis of employment. More importantly the better communication network creates more systematic employment than the traditional agriculture (i.e. in view of technology). Employment on the other hand is bound to give income. This is very important particularly to the group members, who in absence of regular employment opportunities are forced to undertake traditional economic schemes (small trades, paddy husking etc.) which are poor even in view of income generating.

The bamboo scheme (i.e. bamboo trade) implemented by Shahadevpasha male group in 1978 finished with extremely poor results: the scheme failed to provide enough employment to the group. It could provide an income spreading over the period (June-July '87) at the rate of Tk.3.42 per day per capita⁺. This amount is inadequate even to meet subsistence requirements. The picture of a most successful paddy husking scheme implemented by the Ujangaon female group in the same year ^{was} ~~is~~ not bright either, though this is a best group by many standard, including discipline, management and cadre. Only 26 percent of the available mandays were absorbed by the scheme. Earned income permitted a 2 percent saving only, which is too meagre and

+ Please, see in Ahmad (1987)

incompatible to the requirement of surplus generating⁺⁺ .

In other words, too small amount of income is inadequate for savings. No saving means no investible surplus. No surplus means no growth, and development cannot take place without continuous growth.

Indirect impact of the new employment opportunities created by better communication also needs to be mentioned: employment opportunities even in agriculture is likely to increase and so the daily wages. In addition, better communication network will create environment to economic investment, which can be exploited by groups, secretariat and even by BRAC. Competition may be obvious in this area.

- (iii) Not less important is the impact of road network (cum embankment) on agriculture. This can save thousands of acres from early flood and an expansion of HYV boro will likely to take place. It is difficult to forecast the crop diversification, the possibility however cannot be ruled out. This is equally important to our group members: their investment in agriculture will be economically meaningful and, in addition, the demand for labour will increase.
- (iv) The prospect of trade activities will be bright.
- (v) Better communication will substantially cut the time, and energy, needed now for intra-village communication. Its impact on groups' social actions and group solidarity will be certainly positive: the groups can quickly respond to the situation. Intra-group contacts can be made regular.
- (vi) Better communication network is the interest of government

⁺⁺ *ibid*

administration too. Government officials will be able to approach the villages easily.

This would not be an exaggeration to say that a better communication network can change the mode of life of people. Development in broad sense means the same, i.e. changes in the mode of life.

Building a communication network, particularly roads, however will be a costly undertaking in Sulla region: it is a low lying area criss-crossed by rivers, rivulets and khals. Its soil being loam and mostly clay, also makes the work costly.

BRAC as an NGO which has its own limitations. Fortunately EIP (early implementation projects), a joint programme of BWDB, SIDA and NTAP (Netherlands Technical Assistance Programme) took up an embankment programme for Baram haor in Derai-Sulla upazila last year, and has a plan to take up two more projects, Bhandra beel and Tangua haor in Derai upazila (see the map attached below). These haors cover BRAC working areas in Sulla. EIP indicated its interest to involve BRAC in these project activities and correspondences are being exchanged between EIP and BRAC.

The authors are of the opinion that BRAC should respond positively and efforts should be made to achieve the followings:

- (i) The projects, particularly baram haor and bhandra beel will be designed in such a way that the embankments themselves will become kucha, but all weather roads. The feasibility study of Bhandra beel project points out that, "If flood control measures, for instance, are taken by correcting embankment, or submersible embankments, these, if properly planned, can serve as roads..."

(C.F. Ahmed 1987:89).

BWDB (1987).

c.f. Erntoos (1987)

This is important to us, because the proposed projects stretches three of our four existing centres, viz, Markuli, Ghungirgaon and Anandapur. In addition, the above projects will link up Derai upacila HQ with Sulla, around which most of our working villages are situated.

- (ii) The embankment road will be about half a mile away from each of our three centres. EIP may agree to construct link roads to make the centres directly linked with the road, in respective points.
- (iii) A road between Derai and Shymerchar already exists, a half of which remain submerged for eight months of the year, and there hardly exists any prospect that it will be developed to an all weather road in near future. EIP may be approached to complete the work.
- (iv) And we feel that all works may be completed within a five year period of time, but Bhandabell within a three year period. The work will be started as early as possible, and preferably by 1989/1990.

2. A Ten Year Plan for Sulla

This road network is very important in view of our proposed institution building programme in Sulla, for the 1990s. The proposal includes 5 major phases over a period of about 10 years. The first two phases together cover a 2 year period, the third one another 2 years; while each of the 4th and 5th phases a 3 year period.

1. Preparation phase: (upto mid 1989)

All groups will be reorganised. All groups and villages will be surveyed.

2. Phase I: (mid 1988 - mid 1989)

a. Education: Here the objective will be to provide the group

members with literacy skill.

FE centres will be opened in 20 villages, i.e. 5 in each centre. At the end of the year at least 40 percent of the group members will be provided with literacy skill. Members at the age or above 40 will be excluded from the programme. Programme will continue in phase II.

- o Discipline: There will be an uniform system for group meetings. Groups may meet fortnightly. Attention will be given to regular meetings. In the second half of the year at least 50 percent will be attendance, while at the end of the year 60 percent. Records of the meeting will be maintained regularly.
- o Conscientisation: Beside FE courses, group discussion will be arranged to bring at least 70 percent of the group members into the conscientisation process. By the end of the second phase all group members (at least 70%) will approach the awareness level.
- o Economic support programme: Under the programme each recipient will have access to a reasonable amount (Tk. 1500 - 2000) so that the short gestation traditional schemes can generate sufficient income to promote savings and surplus. The amount is important. "In Sulia, it is a truism that the availability of external support is an important determinant for the development of the economically disadvantaged population", says Ahmad, who warns that, "if the amount of the loan falls short of demand, everything will be lagging behind the plan target" (Ahmad M. 1978).
- o Loan will be disbursed to individual group member, but via the group. Economic support programme will definitely cover all the villages where FE programme is going on, and will exclude all those which can make access to a reasonable amount of BKDB credit.

* Employment generation schemes:

(i) Embroidery project: Many people believe that an embroidery project has a good prospect in Sulla, if due attention is given to it, particularly at the initial stage. At the end of the Phase I, all arrangements (training) may be made to introduce the project, first in 2-3 villages, with limited number employee. This project may be linked with Aarong. If found economic, the project will be expanded in the next phases. Impact of the project on employment needs no comment, and not less important is the aspect of occupational mobilisation. In addition, this creates systematic employment.

(ii) Handloom weaving: We feel that the prospect of a handloom weaving project may be bright in the region. All textile goods (e.g. lungi, shari etc.) are now obtained mainly from Norsingdi, Bhairab and Fabna.

This project if found feasible can create employment for thousands, including women and children throughout the year and indeed can change the behaviour of labour market. We therefore suggest that BRAC may experiment the programme, before reaching further conclusions. A number of 5-10 group members may be trained up and initiate the project on pilot basis, at least for a one year period. This time is needed to indicate a mean cost-benefit situation. At the experimental stage, BRAC will provide them with all necessary inputs, including yarn and other technical factors. Yarn may be obtained from Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC) itself, or from the nearest market (Bhairab, or Norsingdi). The producers will be given the responsibility of marketing in local markets. Aarong in Sylhet also can take partial responsibility of marketing. The project

may start by the end of the first phase. It is obvious that all costs will be borne by BRAC, the producer (group members) in the experimental period will work as employee and there will be incentive for the producers, if the cost was minimised. If the programme found feasible, it will be transferred to the group members.

(iii) Many people (both local and BRAC staff) believe that the prospect of an iceplant is equally bright in the region. No doubt that there is a high demand for ice to preserve fish. Ice now is supplied by the iceplant in Ajmirigonj which is quite far away. This iceplant if found feasible may be constructed in Deral head quarter. A feasibility study may be conducted, preferably within the first phase. This will be a BRAC project. Impact of the programme, however, will be positive on the group members too: fish trade will flourish

Phase II (Mid 1989 - mid 1990)

- o Education: The programme will continue in the previous villages and 40 percent of the remaining group members will be provided with literacy skill by the ~~end~~ end of the year. In addition, 30 new villages will be brought under the programme, and 40 percent of the group members will be given skill, while another 40 percent will be covered in the first year of third phase.
- o Beside discipline (regular meeting, saving), attention will be given to conscientisation; the target is to upgrade at least 70 percent of the group members to the "awareness level".
- ✓ o Economic support programme will continue.
- ✓ o And we hope that embroidery and handloom project will already be in operation.
- o NFPE will start on pilot basis in some villages (one in each

centre) for the children of the group members. If the experiences are positive, then the programme will expand in the following years. The objective will be to provide education to all school age children of the target households. On the basis of our study we can state that there is a demand for such education.

o In the first half of the year, a house building programme will be initiated. The RDP experiences may work as guideline here, which are as follows:

- The member who saves Tk.500 in 25 weeks will receive Tk.2500 as loan from BRAC for a three year period.
- Group member saving Tk.700 in 25 weeks will be provided Tk.3500 as loan for three years.
- In the third group, those saving Tk.900 in 25 weeks will receive loan amounting to Tk.4500.

The programme in this year may be introduced for a limited number of members in 8 villages (2 from each centre) and will continue in the following years.

Phase III (mid 1990 - mid 1992)

- o Education: By the end of this phase at least 80 percent of the group members will be provided with literacy skill in all villages.
- o Conscientisation: By the end of this phase awareness level of the group members (at least 80%) will approach the self motivation level.
- o NFPE will continue, and by the end of this phase at least half of the villages will be covered.
- o Discipline: At least 80 percent of the group members regularly attend the meetings, actively take part in discussion. Savings are regular and the amount will be quite high (Tk. 20 per week per member).

- o Under the training programme new skills may be developed, keeping in mind that Bhandra beel works will be about completion at the end of 1993 which in turn will create new types of employment opportunities (e.g. rickshawpuller).
- o Attention will be given to management development.
- o Intra-organisation contacts will become regular and systematic.
- o Economic support programme will continue, we however hope that handloom and embroidery project will quickly expand.
- o There will be more landless representative in the local administrative bodies, and by the end of this phase, they will play an important role in these bodies.

Phase IV: (mid 1992 - mid 1995)

- o Activities in this phase will be concentrated on the following areas:
 - **Conscientisation:** Objective will be to achieve critical awareness: great majority of the group members will be at this level.
 - **Social and political confrontation within the legal framework.** Majority of the members and chairmen in the local administrative bodies will be from amongst the group members.
 - Bulk of the economic support programme will be directed to employment generation schemes. Note that ELF projects will be completed at this stage, and as a result there will be a good number of areas for economic investment and systematic employment. Groups in this stage can lease in big markets.
 - NPE will continue, and almost all the villages will be covered.
 - Landless coverage will be as high as 90-100 percent.
 - All villages of Sulla and about a half of Dera and Banyachong

upazila villages will be covered by BRAC. This means attention will be given, first, to cover Sulla upazila. It is very important particularly in view of demonstration effect. It would not be an exaggeration to say that much of our achievements in Manikgonj is directly related to the coverage. Dera and Banyachong will be next.

- Secretariat, which in the previous stages will take part in implementing the programme (e.g. FE, reorganising groups), will become economically self-sustained, if not a surplus generating body. It will have its own economic projects. Voice of the secretariate at this stage will reach almost every corners of Sulla and Dera and Banyachong upazila villages, and will take over total responsibility of organising the landless. BRAC will transfer its economic support programme to the secretariat.

Phase V: (mid 1995 - mid 1998)

- a BRAC will focus on industrial development in the region. Secretariate and the groups will act as partners of BRAC.
- a NFPE will continue under the auspices of the Secretariat.

Beside the above

A study may be conducted soon on health and secretariat.

- o At this moment it can be said that under the health programme attention will be given to preventive health care, and nutrition in the first two phases, and an incentive system may be introduced to promote the activities. The incentive system suggested recently for CSP may be applied to Sulla too.

* The village health committee will be asked to do some job within the stipulated time; if the job done, it will receive a certain amount of money. Please, see in, Chowdhury (1987): Trip Primary Health Care Programme of BRAC: Some Observations from a Trip to Santhia Upazila, RED, BRAC.

Attention however should be given to improve the curative services too. At this moment there exists no clinical facilities in the region including upazila headquarters. A self-sustained clinic^{*} with 5-10 beds, and pathology⁷ services may be opened in DeraI headquarter: cost for group members will be subsidised from the profit earned from servicing non-group patients. The clinic may be opened by the end of the second phase, i.e. by 1990. This means, preparatory works may be started as early as 1989.

a. As far as the secretariat is concerned, it may be pointed out that this body needs to be made effective, and economically self-sustained:

In the first two phases it will take part in reorganising the groups and in implementing other programmes. (By this time, the study on the secretariat will come out which will keep in mind our long term plans). The secretariat can increasingly be involved in administering the economic support programme. Initially it will be given the responsibility to administer credit programme in some villages with a certain amount, i.e. in some villages only secretariat will disburse loan⁷ at its own risk.

It will be encouraged to undertake profit oriented economic schemes to meet its increasing expenditure. This may initiate a motorised boat project, sometime during the next year. A motorised boat may ply between Shymerchar and DeraI, or between Shymerchar and Chantoghlat. Boats in these routes can ply throughout the year, except for a two months period (January-February). Beside this, the housing scheme suggested above may be administered by the secretariat, i.e. BRAC will give these loans to groups via the

* Phase II BRAC activities (1973-1975) included a health centre in Markuli which was closed down within that phase. The purpose of that clinic was to train health workers.

secretariat. More importantly, more autonomy should be given to the secretariat, and particularly to the advisor who informally is responsible for all activities. Under the present system, he is not allowed to leave the secretariat HQ (i.e. Anandapur Centre) without permission from the project administrator. This may not be viewed as consistent to the ideal of responsibility transfer. It is worth thinking whether the post should be upgraded.

Beyond the above:

Attention is needed in the following areas too:

20. An incentive system should be introduced for the most prominent group members, who spend bulk of their time for group activities. A monthly allowance may be given to them. At present, all "area workers" (i.e. advance group members) get Tk.100 per month from the secretariat. This is only a token. The amount should be raised to, say, Tk.500 per month and may be given to only a limited number of area workers who now see a good number of groups in a particular area. For the second rank workers the amount will be Tk.300 per month. In other words, the present area workers may be differentiated into two groups, and this will not be very difficult, since there are area workers who have proven to be better than others.

Beside it, the first rank area workers may be sent abroad for training and visits. Second rank workers may be sent to other BRAC areas for experience and to exchange views. These visits may be quite regular, and again not very difficult to arrange. Some of the area workers may be sent to centres like Monohordi; where the central body of the landless groups runs a good number of economic projects. Manikgonj, may be another area of interest.

o Incentive is needed to BRAC PDs deployed in Sulla. Working particularly in monsoon includes direct life risk, while in dry season energy and time consuming. It is noteworthy that PDs deployed in Sulla often consider their posting as a sort of punishment, mainly due to the working and living conditions. There exists no scope for entertainments even during the weeks holidays. They live and work in a difficult position, compared to their counterparts in well communicated urban or semi urban areas.

Changes therefore are most desirable in their working conditions too. Each centre should be provided with a motorised boat. This can ease their works, particularly in monsoon, and reduces dangers in crossing a turbulent haors. Changing the living conditions particularly in Daudpur centre may be viewed as an urgent task. The floor of the building may be developed to a pucca one. Conditions of two latrines, and the kitchen-cum-dining house should be improved immediately. This is the only centre where the conditions are extremely poor in view of living with family. This should be kept in mind while plans are made to improve the campus condition.

o. Conclusion

BRAC, which started its operation in Sulla in 1972 as a relief distributing organisation, was always responsive to the situation. In late 1972 BRAC recognised that relief and rehabilitation are needed but its impact on living of the majority people is not much. Between 1973 and 1975, BRAC responded to the situation by implementing a community development programme. It then realised that the poor benefited least from the programme, and decided to work only for the landless in the following years. It made substantial progress in post-1976 period in view of organising the landless poor into

organisations. It is now realised that these progress did not bring development for the group members, and development cannot be achieved without developing the region itself, particularly developing the infrastructure. BRAC will respond to the new situations too. And a ten year programme is suggested which, we feel, will be able to put the early progresses into development. Graph, 5, attached below, shows the plan, at a glance.

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MAP I:

Sulla Integrated Project



- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Joganuathpur | 10. Ajmirigonj |
| 2. Chutak | 11. Nabigonj |
| 3. Dwarabazar | 12. Bahubal |
| 4. Sunamgonj | 13. Lakhai |
| 5. Jamalgonj | 14. Chunarughat |
| 6. Dwarmapasha | 15. Madhabpur |
| 7. Madyanagar | 16. Habigonj |
| 8. Tahirpur | |
| 9. Bishmarpur | |





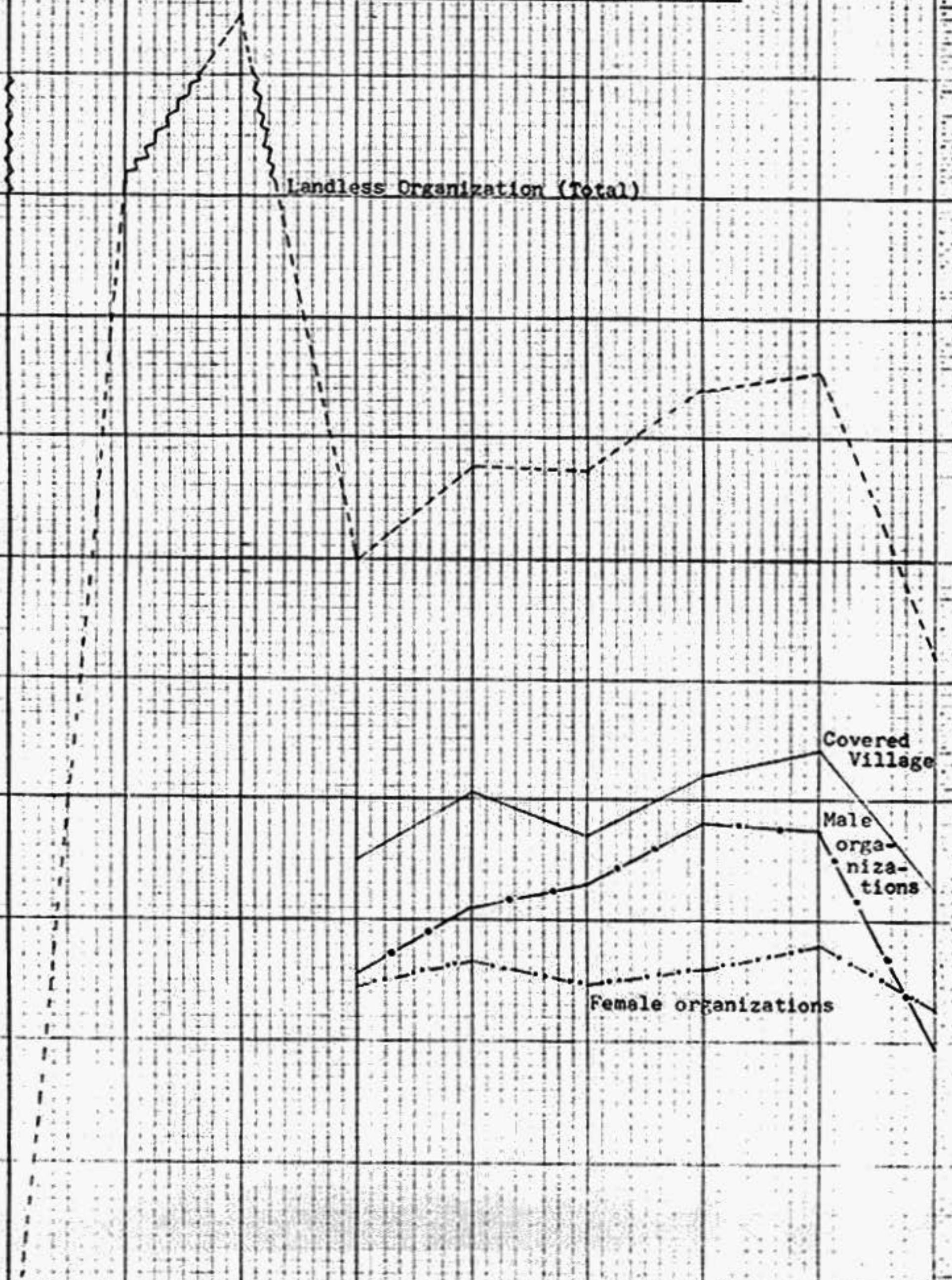
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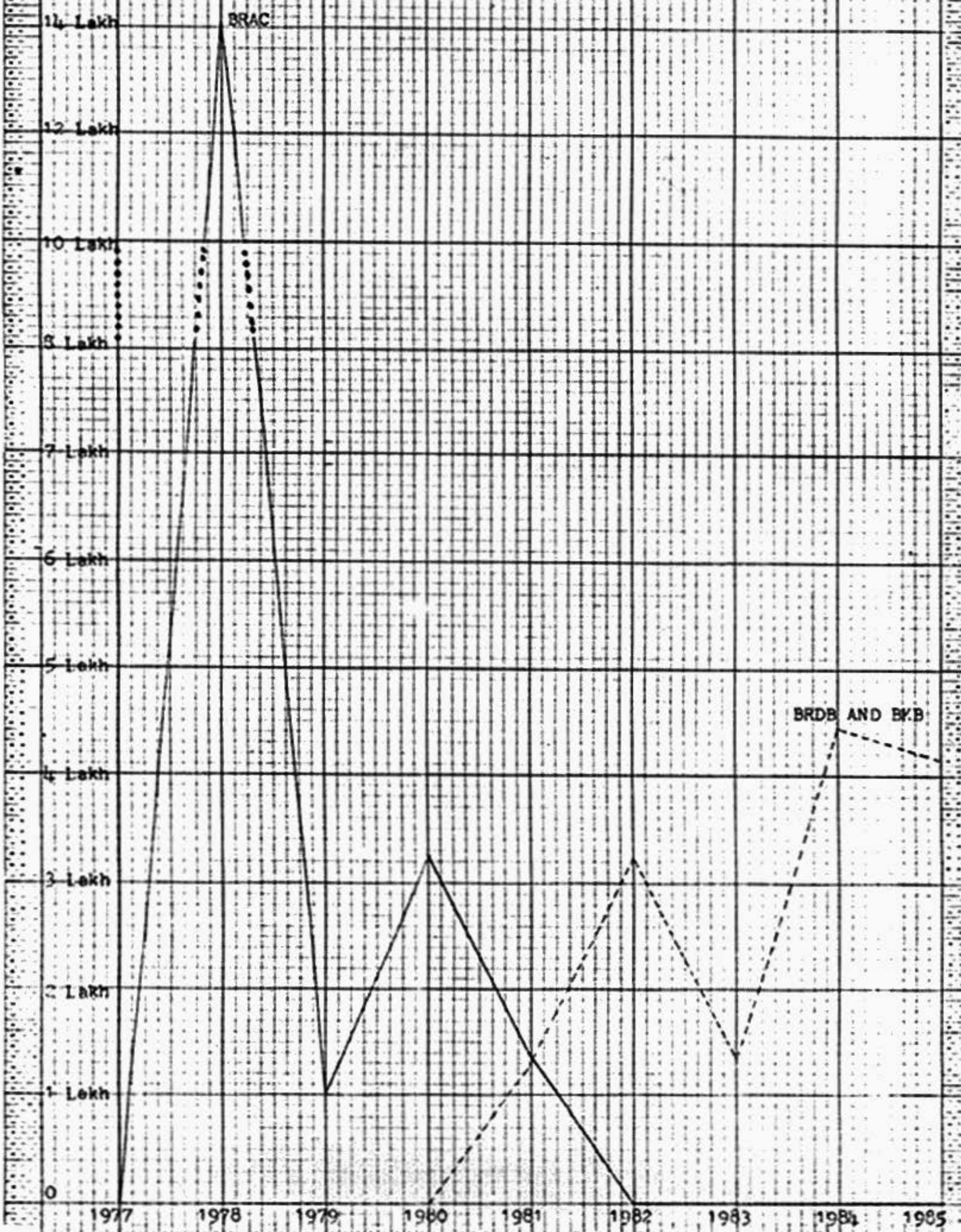
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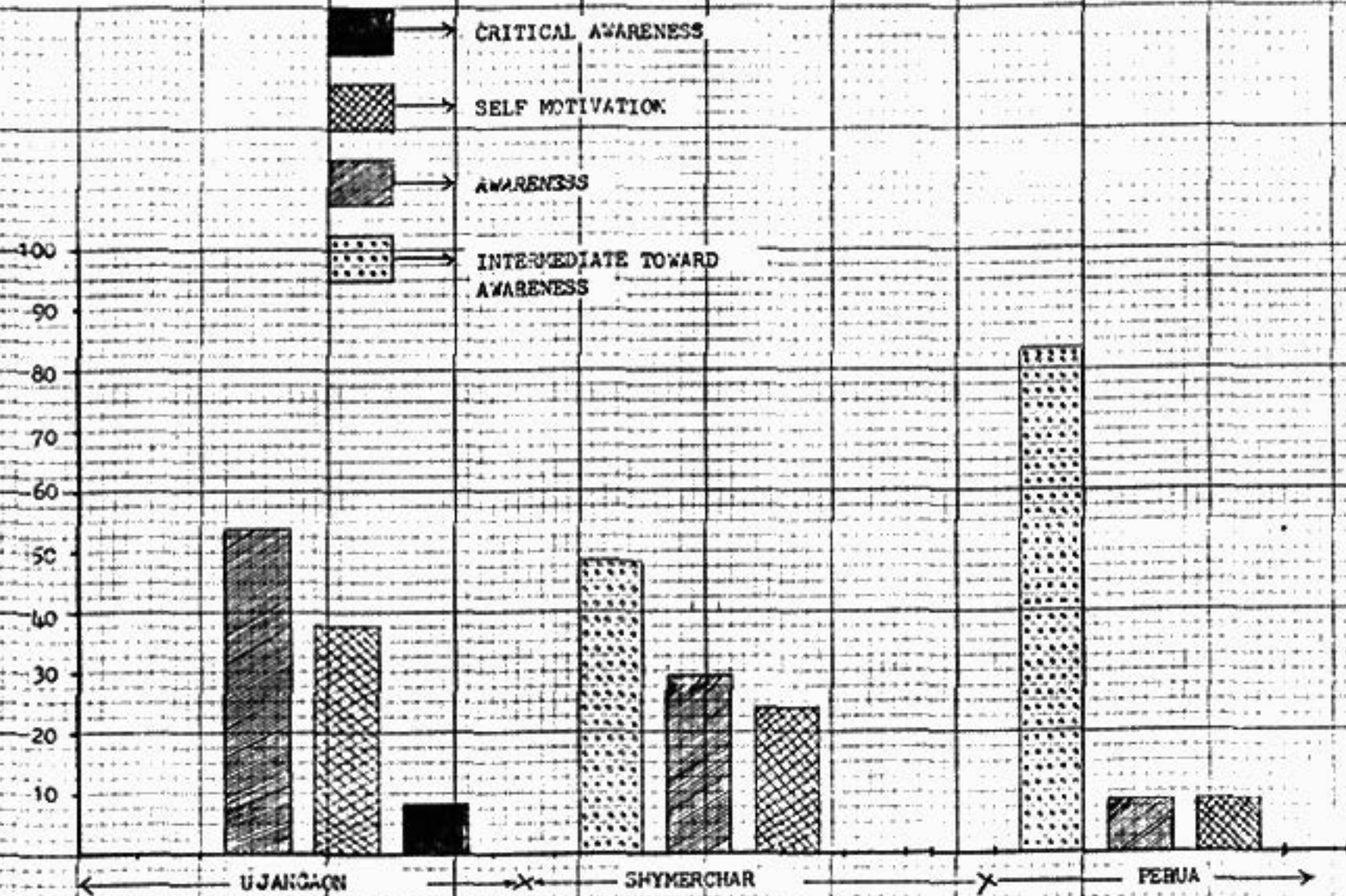
GRAPH 1 : NUMBER OF COVERED VILLAGES AND NUMBER OF LANDLESS ORGANIZATIONS IN SULLA BETWEEN 1978 AND 1985



GRAPH 3 : BRAC AND BRDB & BK.B LOAN TO THE LANDLESS ORGANIZATIONS IN SULLA BETWEEN 1978 AND 1985



GRAFIK 6 : LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF THE GROUP MEMBERS IN THREE VILLAGES (PERCENTAGES)



GRAPH 5 : INSTITUTION BUILDING IN SULLA : A PLAN

DEVELOP
MENT

CRITICAL
AWARENESS

SELF MOTI
VATION

AWARENESS

PRELIMI
NARY

