



BANGLADESH RURAL
ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

3, NEW CIRCULAR ROAD, MAGHBAZAR
DACCA-17 BANGLADESH

Sulla Project
Annual Activity Report
1977.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee began operation in February, 1972 in response to the needs of the returning refugees of the Sulla area in Sylhet, following the liberation of Bangladesh. Since then BRAC has undertaken other projects and activities, in addition to the Sulla Project.

The relief phase of our operations in Sulla lasted from February to October, 1972.

In Phase II, which lasted from November, 1972 until December, 1975, BRAC undertook integrated rural development activities in eight sectors: namely, agriculture, fisheries, functional education, community centre development, health care and family planning, and vocational and other training.

Phase III activities which were planned to last for three years, upto the end of 1978, were divided into four categories: i) Capacity Building and Institutional Development, ii) Health Care, Preventive Medicine and Family Planning Services, iii) Economic Support Programmes for Disadvantaged and Exploited Groups and iv) Agriculture, including Animal Husbandry.

This is the second annual report on Phase III and records the progress made during 1977.

I. Capacity Building and Institutional Development

As it has been stated in the Phase III Project Plan, no development activity can be expected to sustain itself until local institutions are created or strengthened which can take the ultimate responsibility.

BRAC's strategy is to help in the development of these institutions by creating awareness of the need for such institutions and providing guidance in this direction.

In addition to individual contact between the people of Sulla and BRAC's field workers, two important forums were devised to create the necessary atmosphere for institution building.

Over the years, BRAC developed its own approach and materials for adult functional education. Functional education centres provided a desired forum for 15 to 25 adults to discuss the issues which influence their physical and social standard of living.

In 1977, mainly during the months of February and March, 71 functional education centres were started. Each centre had an average of 20 men or women enrolled, or approximately 1400 adults. Over one hundred functional education teachers were selected from amongst the literate people of the villages where the centres were located. These teachers who worked as volunteers were given one week's training in conducting functional education centres. From time to time the teachers were given refresher courses and the field workers visited the centres to provide additional support.

Unfortunately, Sulla suffered from severe early flooding in April, 1977 just before the harvesting of the sole paddy crop of the area. This flood caused serious economic setback for the people and disrupted BRAC's programmes. The functional education centres had to close down as farmers busied themselves in salvaging whatever portion of the crops they could. Nearly 70% of the entire crop was destroyed. In some villages, the loss was total while in others a little less. The disruption caused by the flood continued as the people desperately sought other means of activities to feed their families. Attendance in the functional education classes became extremely irregular and remained so throughout the year. As a result, none of the centres could complete the hundred lessons, some centres closed down entirely, while others are still continuing.

In view of the peculiar topography of the area, which remains virtually submerged for eight months of the year, and the need to make the most of the remaining four months, running functional education classes is very difficult even in normal times. In 1977, the

difficulties were compounded by the unprecedented early flooding.

In order to circumvent the constraints on using functional education classes as the universal forum, a second forum called village workshops is used to bring as many villagers as possible into the conscientization process. The workshops are held on three consecutive evenings in a village and all the villagers are encouraged to attend. The village workshop method enabled considerably larger number of villagers to participate in deliberating over rural problems.

In 1977, one hundred and twelve workshops were held, despite the disruption of the flood, and over 3,500 villagers participated. It was felt that the workshops were more effective than other methods in making the people reflect on their problems and take action on their own behalf. In addition to a greater awareness of their environment and some action at gaining control over it, the villagers became aware of their common interests and some of the means of achieving them. Consequently, the workshops played an important role in the formation of groups to achieve goals which were common to all the members of a group. During the year, BRAC was involved with over 15 fishermen's groups, 51 women's groups, 39 landless farmer's groups and 40 youth groups, most of which are informal and not registered as cooperative societies. (Profiles of two such groups are given in appendix.)

BRAC continued its association with most of the 71 existing cooperative societies. From time to time BRAC workers attended the cooperative societies' weekly meetings and provided guidance to the members. BRAC workers who were elected in the Gulla and Dural Thana Central Cooperative Associations (TCCAs) continued to work as members of the Executive Committees of both of them. The Dural TCCA gave out loans amounting to Tk.500,000 to the members of its primary cooperative societies. The Gulla TCCA, which has a BRAC worker as the chairman of its Executive Committee, gave out loans amounting to Tk.700,000. Both the TCCAs are still functioning primarily as lending agencies of funds made available by the Government. Neither has yet approached viability as a self supporting association.

II. Health Care, Preventive Medicine and Family Planning

Services Programme

The cornerstone of the health care programme is the group Health Insurance Scheme. The scheme provides curative health service for 12 common diseases to members of a family which pays an annual premium of 4 kg paddy per head. If at least 75% or 175 persons in the village subscribe to the scheme, service is provided in the village through weekly visit by a paramedic and referral and clinic service at BRAC camps. Families from villages with smaller number of insured receive the same services with the exception of the weekly visit to the village by the paramedic.

Since premium is paid in paddy, collection is made in June after the harvest. Thus, 14,000 patients were insured from July, 1976. The scheme had overcome some of the earlier problems and there was expectations that the number of insured in the new insurance year (July '77 - June '78) would exceed 30,000. In keeping with BRAC's objective of gradually handing over the programme to the local people, discussions were initiated in early 1977 with three Union Parishads for getting the local self-government institutions involved in the Health Insurance programme. Agreement was reached with Habibpur Union Parishad for the coverage of the entire population of 13,000 under that Union. Once again, the effect of the flood washed away the progress made in this direction. Habibpur was the worst affected and could not go ahead with the plan.

Since the flood had destroyed or damaged three fourths of the crop of Sulla area, the health insurance premium had to be reduced in accordance with the severity of the damage. After a complete survey, villages were classified into three groups and premium rates, to be collected in cash rather than paddy, were set. Even with such modification, only 6,500 people could be insured.

The programme was further hampered by the resignation of the only MBBS doctor and non-availability of a replacement. Even under normal circumstances it is difficult to find qualified and motivated MBBS

doctors to live in the rural areas. The situation was aggravated by the exodus of young doctors for the Middle East. For much of 1977, Sulla did not have a MBBS doctor, which reduced the attraction of the health insurance scheme.

As a consequence the paramedical staff was reduced and some were temporarily transferred to other BRAC projects.

Despite reduction in paramedical staff over 175 health education were held in the local primary schools. There was an equal number of Mothers' Club (now renamed as Women's Club and open to all women) meetings, with an attendance of 1,500.

Preventive health care, namely BCG, TABC and Tetanus Toxoid immunization was continued.

The following data gives an idea of the cost of the health insurance programme for the year July, 1976 - June, 1977.

Total Number of Insured:	14,293
Total Number of Consultations:	28,998
Average Consultation per Patient:	2.03 times

	<u>Per Patient</u>	<u>Per Consultation</u>
Total Cost (Tk.3,58,725.25)	Tk.25.10	Tk.12.37
Cost of Medicine	7.82	3.85
Salaries & Overhead	17.28	8.52
Total Cost subsidised by BRAC:	72%	

The main cost elements were medicines and salaries of doctors and paramedics. The main income items were value of paddy received as insurance premium, token fee, emergency call fee and non-insured patients consultation fee.

Family Planning

The programme, started in 1974, made significant progress during the first two years. The service statistics and/or oral pill follow up survey in early 1976 showed that about 20% of the eligible couples in the programme villages had become acceptors. The survey on oral pill was undertaken because it was found to be most popular amongst the available devices (pill, IUD, Condom/Enko, Vasectomy). Th

survey conducted on a total of 2363 oral pill acceptors revealed a high continuation rate. 62% of the acceptors were continuing after 12 cycles and 54% of the acceptors were continuing after 18 cycles. The service statistics for the year 1976 showed a dropout rate of 20 per 100 acceptors per cycle, the major reason being symptomatic complaints (43%). The per cycle new acceptance was slightly higher contributing to a slight increase in the number of total acceptors which will be evident later.

The total number of acceptors of all methods of family planning stood at 2,483 at the end of 1977.

A major question, of course, is whether the integration of BRAC's family planning programme into its rural development programme provides any additional stimulus to acceptance and continuation in comparison to a vertical, independently operated family planning programme. The available evidence is inclusive. In the Sulla Pill Followup Survey Report, of major interest is the association between acceptance with BRAC's health programme (60.4%), cooperative programme (43.4%) and agricultural extension services (54.0%). It is difficult to conclude from such data that these other rural development programme either promoted acceptance or continuation: since health services for example, may have been prompted by side effects. Overall, only 21.5% of the acceptors indicated that they were not participants in any of BRAC's other programmes.

The service statistics available from Sulla in the past two years indicate that a plateau had been reached in the level of acceptance. At the end of the second year of the programme, each LFPO had under her an average number of 22 acceptors and at the end of the fourth year each LFPO is found to have an average number of 24 acceptors - a small increase over two years. The following table shows the number of acceptors of different devices in two different times.

Information	Pill 'Emko	Condom/ 'Emko	IUD	Vasec- 'tomy	Liga- 'tion*	Injec- 'tion**	Total	No. of 'LFPO
No. of acceptors 2 years after programme started	1872	22	74	34	-	-	2002	90
No. of acceptors 4 years after programme started	2157	67	42	130	4	83	2483	101

* BRAC does not encourage tubal ligation because of the fact that husbands in a male dominated society, wishing to avoid the much simpler method of vasectomy, prevail upon their wives to undergo tubal ligation.

**Injections (depo provera) as a contraceptive device has been introduced in Sulla only in early 1977.

The table indicates that in spite of sufficient effort and accompanying care, the programme could not progress much beyond a level of acceptance that was attained within two years of the programme.

What then were the fundamental characteristics of BRAC's family planning effort in Sulla? BRAC provided family planning within a community based integrated development context. BRAC used village women working in their own village as its frontline family planning workers. BRAC emphasized non-clinical techniques in a rural sector where only few clinics are to be found (and most of these BRAC run). BRAC was able to keep its family planning costs to a minimum.

What lesson can be learnt from BRAC's family planning efforts in Sulla? A low-cost, low-key, simple technology family planning project in an integrated development context using village women paraprofessionals gives more or less the same results as high-cost, intensive, sophisticated efforts in rural Bangladesh. It follows from this and other experiments that neither a low-cost nor a high cost programme with a choice of technologies and delivery system progress beyond a certain "plateau": roughly 20% of the fecund couples.

III. Economic Support Programme for Disadvantaged and Exploited Groups

The early flooding in April, 1977 affected the poor more severely than the better - off farmers. The prospects for the rest of the year looked bleak for them. Consequently BRAC undertook a Flood Loan Project to provide prompt interest free loans to the worst affected poor people. From June to August, 1977 loans in cash, fishing twine & fish hooks amounting to Tk.3,12,000 were given to 109 groups. The loans were of four to six months' duration and aimed at providing an opportunity to the borrowers to engage in small, short term ventures such as dry goods trade, paddy husking and fishing.

Further, the repayment date of agricultural loans given the previous year were extended to the harvesting season of 1978 and 1979.

As a result of the village workshops and functional education classes, a number of disadvantaged groups had emerged which sought economic support to start agricultural and related activities as soon as the water receded. Some landless farmers of Sulla had applied to the Government as far back as 1972 for lease of Government fallow land in the area. Some of them were finally given one or one and a half acres of fallow land either as permanent settlement or on yearly lease in 1976 and 1977. BRAC workers organised those holding contiguous plots into groups for joint farming. They were given constant advice and guidance to form strong groups which could withstand the pressures of some of the influential people who saw their unity and newly acquired land as a threat to their own supremacy.

Since virtually all the land leased from the Government were fallow, the initial cost of making the land cultivable is very high & well beyond the means of the group, not to mention individual landless farmers.

BRAC sanctioned loans and grants totalling Tk.4,20,000 to 32 landless farmers' and disadvantaged women's groups for the 1977 - 78 winter season. For the first time, all loans given this season are with a 12% per annum interest. Most groups have obtained Government

fallow land on permanent or yearly lease while others have leased land from the surplus farmers. Most of the farmers will grow local or high yielding varieties of paddy, while there are a few schemes for sweet potatoes and ground nuts. Women who were provided training in duck raising have been given loan for buying the initial stock.

IV. Agriculture

Seeds of nutritious vegetables were sold this winter as in previous years. Though some of the new vegetables are gaining acceptance, they are still grown in kitchen gardens which are small because there is very little space around the houses. Vegetable growing on commercial scale has not made much headway, primarily because of the high cost of fencing and the competing demands on the farmer's time to grow food during the winter. Some vegetables were grown commercially in one of BRAC's camps which resulted in interest and demand for seedlings among the people of the locality.

A senior BRAC worker was trained for four months at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute as a rice production specialist. He returned to Sulla in November, 1977 and embarked on a number of experimental and extension schemes. With support from BRAC he is experimenting with four varieties of rice which are suitable for the area to determine the optimum quantities of three chemical fertilisers.

With assistance from an agronomist from the Menonite Central Committee, he provided training to BRAC's field workers and the farmers of the area. They are also implementing the seed multiplication project. Better varieties of rice has been planted on three acres of BRAC's land and by a number of selected farmers. The yield will be preserved as seed for the next season.

Promotion of horticulture also continued. A nursery has been set up to supply seedlings of coconut, betelnut, papaya and bananas.

Business Ventures: A number of small business ventures were undertaken by BRAC in order to generate an income to provide a low level of support to the people of Sulla after the end of Phase III. These

include several ponds for fish culture, rice and wheat mills and horticulture. Though they have reached the breakeven point, substantial income from this source is still some time away.

Organisation and Personnel

The basic organisational structure remained unchanged but there was considerable personnel changes during the year. A large number of senior field workers resigned to take up more secure or better paid jobs with the Government and other organisations. Two personnel disputes, instigated by certain discontented field workers, took place in January and September. As a result the personnel strength was reduced substantially. Though new workers were taken in in several batches throughout the year, the disruption affected the project adversely.

The MBBS doctor in the Sulla Project resigned in the first half of the year to go to the Middle East. Despite advertising prominently several times in the newspapers and tapping other sources, no suitable replacement could be found. (One MBBS doctor finally joined in January, 1978).

Staff training was given more emphasis and a number of the new as well as senior field workers received training in occupational skills and human relations.

Two camps were merged with nearby camps, reducing the total number to ten. All BRAC staff live and work out of these camps.

Conclusion

1977 was a difficult year. Both Sulla and the BRAC project were plagued by a number of problems.

The early flooding caused wide scale loss of crops, cattle feed and grass for buttressing the village homes from the pounding of the waves. The flood, however, showed the human spirit as BRAC workers and volunteers joined hands with the villagers to repair embankments and contain the devastation.

In early 1977, BRAC office in Derai caught fire and was completely gutted, resulting in the loss, among others, of the medicine, refrigerator, equipments and office records. In late 1977 there was a small fire in which the Markuli Camp rice mill operator received burn injuries. (He has since recovered). The two personnel disturbances also caused disruption in the programmes. There was one docoity in a camp.

The compound effect of these incidents has caused a setback in the programme. However, towards the close of the year there were signs that the Sulla area as well as BRAC are recovering from the setback.

In October, 1977 a Sulla Review Conference was held in Dacca attended by the ten senior-most BRAC staff. The achievements and disappointments of the year were analysed in the light of the Phase III goals.

The desirability and soundness of the goals set in the Plan were confirmed. It was decided that there should be even more emphasis on working with the landless and other disadvantaged men and women. The encouraging response of these people, despite the setbacks mentioned earlier, led to the decision to focus on the poorest 40% of the Sulla population. The generally successful efforts in organising the landless and the poor women into small groups whose members have a specific common interest as a starting point has encouraged BRAC to step up these efforts. Consequently, it was decided to work with approximately 100 male and one hundred female groups in 69 villages covering a target population of 57,000 instead of diluting efforts in over 200 villages with a population of 130,000.

Implementation of the decisions taken at the conference was started immediately after the conference. Initial indications were that the increased emphasis in narrowing the focus of the programme and working more closely with the poor, through small groups, is bearing results.

In view of the setbacks of 1977, it was also decided to extend Sulla Projects Phase III by one more year, to the end of 1979. It is

hoped that during the next two years the newly formed groups and groups which will emerge in the first half of 1978 will become more cohesive and achieve a measurable degree of self-reliance.

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Statement of Loans sanctioned against Economic Support Scheme

3rd Party:

Sl. No.	Name of the Camp	No. of group			No. of people involved			Nature of the Project				Loan Sanctioned		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	paddy/s.potato/khara/other/				Principal budget	Supple-mentary Bdgt.	Total
1.	Latgaon	1	3	4	39	34	73	3	1	x	x	46,976/-	-	46,976/-
2.	Deudpur	3	1	4	78	13	91	3	x	x	1	41,259/-	2,000.00	43,259/-
3.	Derei	3	2	5	36	16	52	3	2	x	x	97,060/-	-	97,060/-
4.	Boushi	2	x	2	42	x	42	2	x	x	x	8,360/-	-	8,360/-
5.	Shashkai	2	x	2	65	x	65	1	1	x	x	52,920/-	-	52,920/-
6.	Anandapur	2	1	3	118	16	134	3	x	x	x	63,950/-	-	63,950/-
7.	G. Gaon	4	x	4	90	x	90	1	1	1	1	46,505.75	1,240/-	47,745.75
8.	Gobindapur	3	1	4	58	10	68	4	x	x	x	24,241/-	-	24,241/-
9.	Kagapesha	1	x	1	14	x	14	1	x	x	2(p.p)	17,100/-	-	17,100/-
10.	Markuli	x	3	3	x	124	124	x	x	x	3	20,120/-	-	20,120/-
TOTAL =		21	11	32	540	213	753	21	5			4,18,491.75	3,240/-	4,21,731.75

BRAC's Scheme:

1.	Shashkai Camp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,830/-	-	1,830/-
2.	Latgaon Farm	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,520/-	-	5,520/-
												4,25,841/-	3,240/-	4,29,081.75

Case Study of Atgaon Landless Cooperative Society

By - Lutfur Rahman.

Date: 4. 1. 78

INTRODUCTION

'Atgaon' is a Muslim-dominated village of Sulla thana in the Sunamganj sub-division in the district of Sylhet. The population is about 2,000. The villagers are mostly uneducated. Of the total population about 2% are rich (having 40-50 acres of land), 10% are big farmers (20 - 39 acres), 18% are medium farmers (8 - 19 acres), 30% are lower- middle class farmers (2 - 7 acres) and 40% are poor landless cultivators. In this village-mouza there are about 250 acres of government 'Khas' land. The Boro crop is main agricultural crop here. This is known as the 'Haor' area because during the monsoon season the whole area goes 10 - 20 ft. under water. Boats are the only means of transport during the monsoon.

HISTORY OF THE GROUP

According to the government decision of 1972 the 40 landless day-labourer families of this village individually applied to the government to get permanent settlement of the 'Khas' land, but they were not successful. Due to the lack of proper management and 'tadbir' (follow-up) the landless peasants did not make any further efforts in this direction up to 1972-74. The year of 1975 added a new chapter in their struggle for improved life. In this year Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) of Atgaon made an attempt to organise this 40 landless families in a group. Actually from this year onwards they started anew with new aspirations. They were given leadership by Sunus Mia (an educated young man) and Lal Khan (a member of that group).

In course of time these families became more and more organised and tried to get the land from the government. A cooperative society was formed by the name "Rajhasan Bhumiyn Samaboy Samiti" (Rajhasan Landless Cooperative Society). After a great deal of efforts and 'tadbbir' they succeeded in having the permanent settlement of about 60 acres of Khas land (each of the families got about 1½ acre). But due to lack of capital they could not manage to cultivate this fallow, uncultivated, rough land on their own. So in Boro season of 1976-77 with the help and cooperation of the ERAC, the members of the society cultivated the land collectively and planted HYV rice. This was the first collective farm of that area.

HOW THEY WERE ORGANISED

In 1974-75 when a Functional Education class was started in Atgaon, some members of the present society attended it. This helped them by increasing their awareness of surrounding problems. When they failed in their first attempt to get the Khas land from the government / ^{they were} plunged into despair. The ERAC workers contacted them individually and then collectively. Efforts were made to tackle the present problems. By this time they themselves realized that to get land from the government and to improve their conditions, in the future they must work collectively. For this to be achieved unity and brotherhood and their own organisation were needed. Keeping this in mind a meeting was called one night in 1975 and an unanimous decision was made to organise themselves in a group. This was the first time they were organised on the basis of a common interest and they continued to make efforts to get land from the government.

The ERAC workers helped to create their awareness of the surrounding social and economic problems by discussions in the

weekly meetings and later by holding village workshops. After they achieved government land in 1976 their initiative and enthusiasm was much enhanced and they organised themselves more and more. At present the organisation is becoming even stronger through collective work.

NATURE OF THE GROUP

All the members belong to the landless class. Their profession is to work as daily-labourers. Although some of them have a third of an acre of land or less, it is not of much help to them. According to age this group ranges from 25 to 70. Some of them are unmarried and rest of the people have got 2 to 8 children. The members belong to four or five clans.

ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS

1. In 1976-77 they made the fallow and uncultivated land flat and cultivated.
2. In the same year they cultivated the land collectively and planted HYV rice. But due to untimely flooding they could not get a good crop. Still they did not lose heart.
3. In the monsoon of 1977 the members used to do some business of fish and other raw-materials in smaller groups.
4. In the Boro season of 1977-78 they have again started to cultivate the land collectively.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

1. During 1975-76 almost all the members of the society got medical treatment under the Health Insurance Programme of the BRAC.
2. A mothers' club was formed by the female members of the families, the purpose was to make them conscious about the health of the mother and the child.
3. A wife of one group-member was employed as the female organiser of the family planning programme and health volunteer.

Now most of the landless families have accepted family planning measures and one member has undergone voluntary sterilisation.

4. At present some of the members have received training as the volunteers of the functional education programme and classes are going on with 30 members.

FACILITIES IN FUNCTIONING

1. The society received a grant of Tk.20 thousand (under the food for work programme) and a loan of Tk. 15 thousand from the BRAC. This helped them to organise the collective-farm. After harvesting they repaid the whole amount of loan in time.

2. During the monsoon season the members took various economic jobs in smaller groups. For this they took a loan of Tk.4,000 from BRAC and repaid the money after the completion of their work.

3. The society took Tk.36,000 loan this year for collective farming from the BRAC.

4. With the cooperation of the BRAC workers they could overcome many problems.

5. The power-pump scheme was approved this year by the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation. So from now they will not have further difficulty in getting power-pumps from the BADC.

6. The use of the tractor helped cultivate land which would not have been possible with draft animals or power-tillers.

7. The management improved this year from the previous year.

DIFFICULTIES IN FUNCTIONING

1. As the society could not get the power-pump scheme approved in the first year, it had to seek other ways of getting the power-pump, at a higher cost.

2. As the society did not have the power-pump of their own, they had to employ one driver from the outside and had to pay Tk.1,200/- for his salary.

3. Dependence on modern technology created some problems.

4. As they do not have the storage facility for seeds and fertilizer it was not possible to store seeds and to buy all the fertilizers at a time. Although each of the members individually had saved 15 seers of paddy for seed, it was also consumed later due to poverty.

5. The main problem during the working period was found to be the food-problem of the workers' family. Those families who have more than one working member managed the problem somehow but those who have only one working member suffered the most.

NATURE OF THE LEADERS

Eunus Mia is an educated young man and son of a big farmer family. He is about 30. He is working to liberate the poor from the exploitation. The landless class also has confidence in him as he takes their problems as his own. He is always with them economically, physically and psychologically. He has got a very close personal relationship with everybody in the landless class. I personally believe that Eunus mia has a hidden motive behind his activities; that is 'to establish himself as the leader of that area'.

Lal Khan is a member of the landless class and also a village 'matbar' of his class. From the very beginning of the society he is working for it as his own. Thus he has been able to make the landless class confident in him. Not only this, when the landless were overwhelmed with problems, his able leadership, stamina and timely decision-making helped them to solve the problems and move forward. He has got personal relationships with every one in the society. He is the most active and

foresighted man in the society. He has the capability of taking decisions. Sometime misunderstanding was created among the members about his individual decision-making. But the more the organisation will become stronger and democratic the less will be the misunderstanding among the leaders and members about the process of decision making. Lal Khan maintains a good relation with management committee to which he also belongs. At present most of the functions are done according to the decision of the management committee.

CLASS CONFLICTS

1. In 1972 when the landless class first proposed to demand 'khas' land from the government the rich class did not oppose very much as they thought that the landless class would not be able to get it. Afterwards when the landless class proceeded far in that direction and the rich class understood that the landless class was going to get the land, they stood against the issue. However, as the landless class maintained a good contact with the government employees the rich class could not do any harm. Moreover, the rich class also lacked able leadership.

2. The rich class then proceeded the other way. Their mentality was like this: "It would not be possible for the landless class to cultivate the land even if they achieve it. They will sell or mortgage the land to us." When the landless class got the land, government surveyor came and fixed their boundary. Within that boundary there was some land which was 'khas' but the government had no control over that, the rich class used to enjoy that. When the land was surveyed the rich people did not come forward directly but created trouble through their paid man. This man appealed to the court against the landless class. This case weakened the landless economically and psychologically. The

landless could acquire the land by force but they did not do so because that would have aggravated the situation more and they would have no time to cultivate other parts of their land. So they followed the path of law. Later there was a compromise and a boundary was fixed.

3. Another strategy followed to curb the power of the rich class was to create division in them. The rich people who had no land in the conflicting area and who were relatively honest and sympathetic to the landless class, were also utilised in favour of the landless class. When the landless peasants actually began to cultivate the acquired land with the help of the BRAC, the rich class again tried to distort the programme and wanted to prevent the landless cultivating the land. They called a general meeting in the village (other than these 40 families) and tried to excite the people by saying that there would be no land left for grazing the cow or harvesting the crop if the khas land were cultivated this way. They made a resolution to prevent the landless class from cultivation by breaking their irrigation drainage channel and by denying them river-water for irrigation purpose. But some of the rich people who were in favour of the landless class opposed these and in the end it was possible to prevent the resolution from being implemented.

4. Some two 'keyar' (two third acre) cultivated land (which was assigned to the landless by the permanent settlement) was under the occupation of a rich 'matbar'. At the initial stage the landless class tried to prevent him from cultivating that land to which he paid no attention. During the harvesting time the landless peasants applied their force and cut the crop. After that the rich man submitted and was given some maunds of paddy as his expenditure for cultivating the land.

5. The landless peasants became the members of the Thana Central Cooperative Society. To register this Committee they needed a certificate from the Chairman of that locality. But the Chairman being a member of the richer class of the village did not give them the certificate. The responsibility of enquiring into this matter was given to the Circle Officer (Dev) who also opposed the issue. The landless class of this village tried to keep contact with the same classes of the neighbouring villages. At last all the members together went to the S.D.O. in Sunamganj (30 miles from Atgaon) and informed him of their problems. This problem was published in some of the daily newspapers of Bangladesh.

CONFLICT WITHIN THE GROUP

1. The rich class tried to create division in the group by giving ill-advice to its members. Sometime, this created misunderstanding among the members. However, now the frequency of this sort of thing has decreased to a great extent.

2. Sometimes misunderstanding was created in economic and financial matters, which was solved when the management committee presented detailed accounts.

3. As the age of the members ranged from 25 to 70, sometimes there were conflicts among the young and the aged. But those were temporary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The landless people are always busy with their basic problem of getting food. So they are to be organised on economic grounds. Economic jobs and/or land settlement policies would facilitate the task. Social consciousness would follow it. Functional education programme and the village workshop could be used to achieve this aim. The more the economic capacity will increase, the more will be the social consciousness of the people. Sound management of

the economic activities will lead to more organisational strenght of the group. If the Society can show the real path of emancipation nothing will succeed in defeating it.

To my mind, during the initial stage of organising a group, it is worthwhile to accept every possible kind of cooperation. Confrontation with the jothars (landed people), mahajans (money-lenders) and touts at the first stage will create unnecessary trouble and vested interest group will try to disintegrate the whole programme. But while the group succeeds in getting itself established, in course of time it will get more organised and their power and courage will increase accordingly. At that stage they will have a capacity to overcome any conflict and contradiction that might come forward. However, everything will depend on the village, locality, nature of leadership and the relative problems of the landless class.

With the economic functions various problems may come up, e.g. the management problems. Here comes the necessity of a constitution which will minimise the conflict within the group.

The government finishes its function only by giving the land. But to bring those land under control and to make it cultivable is a difficult task. Often it is found that it is not possible to cultivate the land by the landless class themselves. Only the government or other credit giving organisations can solve the problem. In the present system of the government loan giving agencies, there is no provision for the landless class. As a result, there is every possibility that these land should again go to the rich mahajans (money-lenders). If BRAC. did not cooperate with this society it would not have been possible for them to cultivate the land within such a short period of time. So, the government should take care of this problem.

To keep the economic functions running it is often required to go to the various government employees, e.g., to get the power-pumps, tractors, fertilizers etc. It is helpful to keep good relationships with them. It is better to avoid confrontation with the government employees, Chairman of the Union Council and the like. To maintain balance is a good policy which helps considerably.

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The Women of Kashipur

Breaking Through The Barrier

Kashipur is a small Hindu village in Sulla. As in other villages, there are many women in Kashipur who are caught between age old tradition which shuts them off from making their own living and the absence or inability of their menfolk to provide for them. Driven by the instinct to survive in a society which is too poor to take care of them, ten of these destitute women decided to cross the bounds of tradition and make their own living by getting into farming. In the winter of 1975-76, the only time when farming can be done in an area which is submerged under 10 to 20 feet of water during the rest of the year, the women decided to cultivate sweet potatoes and wheat on less than an acre of fallow land near their village.

When the women started working on the land, it was a totally unexpected and unfamiliar sight for the men working nearby. The conservative men raised their eyebrows when they saw these women, aged sixteen to sixty, with their saris over their knees planting the seeds. The men talked but the women kept on working. At last the crops were harvested and the women brought home the fruits of their labour. It wasn't enough to feed them for the rest of the year but was enough to silence their critics and make them determined to keep on farming.

The following winter (1976-77), the women went a step further and leased two acres of land to grow IRB, a high yielding variety of rice. The women knew how to process paddy after it is harvested. They had thrashed, husked, winnowed and stored rice all their lives. But they knew very little about how to grow it. Still, they were determined to do it. Once again they proved the skeptics wrong and brought home a harvest of 100 maunds of paddy (nearly 4 tons). This too wasn't enough to feed 10 women, their seven husbands and 21 children for the rest of the year, especially after repaying Tk.2,500 they had borrowed from BRAC, and putting aside some as a fund for next year's farming. However little, it was still so much more food than

they would have had otherwise.

This season they have taken four acres on lease. They have borrowed Tk.6,375 from BRAC and put in Tk.2,200 of their own - the fund they had created the year before. The expenses are there - almost half of the money they put together has gone to the landowner as rent. Two cows to pull the plough cost another one quarter of the total. (Unfortunately, one of the cows died soon after they bought it.) They hired a worker to do what is still too much of a man's job cost another large chunk. Then there are seeds, seedlings, fertiliser, ploughing charge and the implements.

An Evening With the Women

I reached Kashipur with two colleagues late in the afternoon. We caught the women just as they were finishing their day's work, with the mellow sun slowly melting into the horizon. The women had been working since dawn, transplanting rice seedlings. They were tired and hungry having had nothing to eat all day. Some of the women were carrying a kind of tuber roots in wicker baskets. They had picked up the roots from the fields. After washing, boiling, scraping and pounding these little tubers, they would make a hash - their evening meal. I cleaned one and nibbled on it. One tuber tasted quite good but an entire meal from these is not anyone's idea of a ^{good} dinner. The women lingered for a while to talk to us but they were tired and hungry. They asked us to go to the village with them.

The common yard between the two rows of tiny bamboo and straw houses looked dirty, littered with garbage. But not a bit was garbage. The cowdung and the brambles and the sticks were all being dried in the sun for fuel.

The houses were too small for all of us to sit in. So we sat in the narrow yard, facing one row of houses. The women darted in and out of the houses and soon we realised that they were busying themselves to make refreshments for us. My protestations were cut short by an older woman of the group who wanted to know if I am hospitable to my guests.

When I answered in the affirmative, she said that she too was being just that. In a few brief minutes, three platters were put in front of the three of us, each filled with seven kinds of rice crispies and snacks. I ate a little with great difficulty while hungry eyes watched us. The women who only minutes ago had shown the miserable roots which would be their evening meal, kept up a chatter and urged us to eat more. Their hospitality, despite the poverty, made me feel very humble.

The women of Kashipur are not exuding enthusiasm, excitement or inspiration. They are not out to change the world of anybody, not even their own. They are just a handful of people trying desperately to make a living for themselves and their families. They are not aware of any social significance to their actions which could be glorified or photographed.

Kaiser Zaman
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