

HANIKGANJ PROJECT REPORT
April '79 to March '80

Bangladesh Rural
Advancement Committee
Dacca.

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GENESIS

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is a Bangladeshi rural development agency with projects in several districts of Bangladesh. BRAC's first and largest project, Sulla (Sylhet district), was begun in early 1972 in an effort to rehabilitate the people of the area who had been uprooted during the 1971 War of Liberation. BRAC has, since 1972, developed systematically its programmes and staff. Its activities now include agriculture, health, family planning, nutrition, education, rural credit, income generation, fishery and poultry with organised groups of landless or marginal farmers and women. BRAC currently operates three projects - Sulla, Jamalpur, and Manikganj; a training centre; and other development programmes.

After its initial efforts in Sulla, BRAC decided to transfer field staff trained in and translate programmes tested in the Sulla project to other areas of Bangladesh. To this end BRAC sought out during the fall of 1975 an area more typical of Bangladesh in demographic composition, topography, and cropping pattern than Sulla. BRAC chose Manikganj Thana (Headquarter for Manikganj Sub-Division) of Dacca District.

INTRODUCTION

Manikganj Thana lies 40 miles by motorable road west of Dacca city. A population of 163,000 lives within an area of about 76 square miles; a density of over 2,300 persons per square mile.

Most of the Thana is low land which becomes inundated during the monsoon months when the main broadcast aus/aman rice crop is grown. The sandy loam soil of the area is not particularly suited to rice cultivation; the yield per acre, therefore, is no more than 10 maunds (1/3 ton). During the dry winter months

most of the land remains fallow. But where irrigated water is available some rice, wheat, sugarcane, and oil seeds are grown. Dependence on the extremely limited land and water resources makes the people of the area one of the poorest in Bangladesh.

PREPARATORY PHASE:

BRAC decided a food-for-work programme would be the best way to provide a practical introduction of BRAC to the Manikganj people. BRAC staff met with village community representatives who were encouraged to design and execute the rural works schemes. BRAC provided wheat on payment for these schemes. Ten food-for-work schemes were initiated during this preparatory phase (November, 1975 to March, 1976).

The food-for-work programme demonstrated that if the people of the area cooperated to take decisions on their own behalf, BRAC is prepared to assist them. The programme also helped BRAC identify: 1) the poorest section of the community who were engaged in the manual labour of the schemes; 2) community leaders who assisted in planning and supervising the programme; and 3) community-minded youth who worked closely with BRAC staff. The activities during this preparatory phase established BRAC in Manikganj Thana and cleared the way for implementation of an innovative programme of integrated rural development designed to benefit the poorest section of the community.

MANIKGANJ PROGRAMME

The basic aim of BRAC is to assist the poorest sector of the rural community to gain control over their own lives through concerted action. The basic strategy to BRAC's Manikganj project is to develop the capacity for concerted social action by involving organised groups of disadvantaged men and women, who have completed BRAC's functional education course, in their own health, family planning, and economic

support services.

During Phase I (April 1976-March 1979) of the Manikganj project BRAC employed innovative methods and tested new strategies for development. A base has been created through the integrated programme which covers the important aspects of the social and economic life of the rural poor in Manikganj. BRAC proposes to consolidate the gains of its past endeavors while extending its coverage of Manikganj Thana during Phase II (April 1979-March 1982) and to transfer its programmes to and withdraw its support from the organised groups of disadvantaged during Phase III (April 1982-March 1984).

FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION

Functional education, as developed by BRAC, provides rural adults the opportunity to analyse their environment, deepen their self-awareness in relation to the environment, and build confidence in their own creativity and capabilities. Skills in numeracy and literacy are also developed. But what is most emphasized is a whole new way of looking at things.

BRAC built its Manikganj project around functional education. Functional education classes provide the initial forum for village level interaction. Through the classes BRAC staff are able to locate groups of poor people with like interests. BRAC staff work closely with those village level groups which grow out of functional education.

BRAC intends to engage roughly half - those who are more conscious and motivated - of its total target group into functional education. This half will form the core leadership for the disadvantaged. The others from the target group will be encouraged to participate in cooperatives, village workshops, etc.. BRAC supplies all the functional education materials and arranges the initial training and refresher courses for the volunteer teachers.

Volunteers from the area are trained and supervised by the BRAC field staff to conduct the functional education classes in their respective villages. These volunteers are called shikha sheboks/shebikas (education helpers). During Phase I, 338 male shikha sheboks and 165 female shikha shebikas were trained, and 116 male and 101 female functional education centres were opened in Manikganj from which 1,652 male and 1,005 female learners have graduated. Over half of these graduates have, subsequently, been organised into BRAC supported groups.

Over the past year (April '79 to March, '80) another 104 male shikha sheboks and 58 female shikha shebikas were trained and engaged in 50 new male functional education centres and 38 female centres. The progress of these centres was as follows by March 80,

TABLE I:

	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Total</u>
Centre opened,	50	38	88
Centre completed,	26	17	43
Centre Drop out ,	2	3	5
Centre running,	23	17	40

GROUP FORMATION

BRAC works closely with the most disadvantaged 50% of the population. BRAC's basic criterion for its target group is those who have no control over the means of production or distribution. More specifically, this criterion includes: landless or marginal farmers with no assets; fishermen with no implements; rural artisans who lack working capital or raw materials; families whose members sell their manual labour; women of the above groups.

BRAC attempts to organize as many of the functional education graduates who fit this criterion into ERAC supported groups. All BRAC programmes centre around these organised groups. Selected group members are trained as the primary village-level health and family planning workers. Most individual groups are engaged in economic activities of their own choice. Gradually individual groups are linked to organise and prepare for concerted social action.

BRAC aims to organise atleast 300 individual groups in 150 villages of Manikganj Thana. The individual groups are being linked into a central federation through selected representatives who attend regular meetings and workshops. This central federation will be developed to have the strength to pressurize for legal and economic rights and to demand access to services and inputs allocated by the public sector.

By the end of Phase I, 47 female and 71 male groups had been organised. An additional 50 male and 47 female groups were organised between April '79 and March '80; a total of 225 organised groups. All the groups are engaged in economic activities of their own choice. All groups have members trained in health and family planning.

ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Economic support is seen in BRAC's Manikganj project as a basic means to stimulate and strengthen individual group formation. The degree of interaction required in the designing and implementing of a joint economic venture reinforces the importance and advantage of concerted action and cohesion. All potential groups which have successfully completed over 1/3 of the functional education course are encouraged to undertake joint economic activities of the groups' own choosing. BRAC field staff help prepare and review individual group schemes. Those schemes approved as feasible are financed by loans at the rate of 12% per annum.

BRAC has an existing credit fund of Tk. 5 lakhs plus, if necessary, the facilities of BRAC's Rural Credit and Training project to draw upon for its loans.

BRAC staff help arrange training and inputs for the various schemes. Options for income-generation are continually being sought and developed. Leadership and management capacity within the groups are reinforced through a regular schedule of training and workshops.

By the end of March 1980 BRAC had disbursed loans amounting to Taka 1,215,000 to the 109 organised groups, of which 682,965 is now outstanding. Most of the male groups are engaged in agriculture: growing paddy, wheat, sugarcane, tobacco, sweet potatoes, etc. on leased land. The female groups are engaged in agriculture (paddy, sugarcane, jute), paddy husking, goat and calf rearing, and the manufacture of bidi (hand-rolled cigarettes), chanchur (snack-food), and achaars (pickles), block printing, and sericulture.

All of the income-generating ventures are currently being intensified and expanded. Additional income-generating options are being sought and developed. A few of the income-generating activities begun in Phase I but currently being expanded deserve special mention:

1. Agriculture

The economy of the Manikganj region is almost totally dependant on agriculture. Poor soil condition and lack of irrigation facilities renders the area unsuitable for intensive agriculture. A very high population density coupled with lack of alternative resources other than subsistence agriculture makes it one of the poorest regions of Bangladesh. BRAC has been seeking alternative employment opportunities for the poor and landless population of the Manikganj. Few areas other than sericulture (cultivation of a variety of silk worms which feed on castor leaves) offer a real alternative

to subsistence agriculture for a significant number of people. With a minimum of investment (25 castor trees, small space for housing, and a taka 250 spinning wheel), a woman who rears and spins 2,500 cocoons at a time can earn roughly taka 200 per month. BRAC therefore trained one female staff in silk worm rearing and spinning. She now runs an ericulture service centre. Groups of village women are trained in ericulture at this centre. Once they return to their village, inputs (worms, castor seeds, spinning wheels, etc.) at cost price on a loan basis, technological supervision, and marketing services are provided from the centre to the women who rear and spin cocoons in their homes.

BRAC aims to further develop this industry by training 300 women and helping them establish ericulture units in their respective villages. Four ericulture service sub-centres-staffed by one Trainer and her Assistant- provide the necessary support services. Moreover, BRAC has opened a silk weaving demonstration centre. Some of the traditional cotton weavers of the Nanikganj area (to whom BRAC has provided financial support) will be trained to weave this variety of silk thread. Surplus silk thread will continue to be marketed through the government's sericulture farm. To date, 116 women have received ericulture training and 185 women are rearing and spinning silk. Every Tuesday they walk to the central ericulture service centre to deliver and be paid for their hanks of thread. These women produce 3,500 hanks of thread per month. Beginners produce only a few hanks per month, but the skilled spin 150-70 hanks per month.

2. Poultry

Most villages keep a few chickens which scavenge around the home. But very little attention is paid to poultry rearing. With improved breeds, feed, and housing plus regular vaccination the poultry could be larger and lay more eggs. BRAC has,

... initiated a poultry programme in Nanikganj. BRAC

paramedics and trained youth volunteers conduct vaccination campaigns in interested villages. During Phase I, complete exchange of local cocks by some 500 white Leghorn chicks to improve breeds was conducted in 12 villages. And over the past year, another 200 cocks were distributed. Three staff and 21 group members received poultry training.

BRAC proposes to extend the coverage of its vaccination-plus-breed improvement programme in the future by introducing Rhode Island Red chicks and/or eggs together with regular vaccination drives to 100 women's groups.

3. Pisciculture

Pisciculture, like poultry, can both enhance home consumption and generate incomes for poor rural households. Ideally, a 1/3 acre pond can yield Taka 10,000 worth of fish per annum. During Phase I five BRAC staff and some 55 youth volunteers received training in pisciculture. Groups of villagers organised and supported by BRAC leased, reexcavated, and stocked (with roughly 30,000 rui katla and 5,000 nallotica varieties by the end of 1978) 15 ponds in Manikganj. And during the past year, the following occurred:

TABLE 2.

Pisciculture:

No. of people trained :	12
No. of ponds excavated:	2
No. of ponds cultivated:	21
No. of Fish fries distributed:	32,000

HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING

An initial survey conducted by BRAC paramedics showed the following disease pattern for the area:

Water borne	43.38%
Skin Diseases	12.79%
Respiratory diseases	12.02%
Viral infections	17.35%
Vitamin deficiencies	4.72%
Others	9.74%

100.00%

After the survey of the disease pattern, BRAC's Medical Officer and paramedics have trained the village-level voluntary health workers (chosen from the membership of organised groups) on preventive health for three months and the curative care of a few common diseases for one month. These workers are known as shaishta sheboks/shebikas. 34 male sheboks and 34 female shebikas had been trained by the end of 1978. Over the past year, another 25 males and 27 females in preventive health and 13 male and 8 female in curative health care have been trained.

TABLE 3.

NUMBER OF SHAIKHA SHEBOK/SHEBIKAS		
<u>Trained:</u>		
	M.	F.
Preventive:	25	27
Curative:	13	8
<u>Working:</u>		
Preventive:	16	25
Curative:	27	23

The paramedics supervise the village-level shaishta sheboks/shebikas, attend patients on one weekly rounds to each village, and conduct regular Mothers' Club meetings where they discuss issues relating to mother and child health and nutrition. At these Mothers' Clubs the paramedics vaccinate pregnant mothers against tetanus and provide treatment and keep weight records of children under five. They also provide children with high-powered vitamin A capsules twice a year to guard them against vitamin A deficiency blindness. The following numbers of patients were consulted over the past year:

Male	780
Female	1111
Under five	1204

BRAC has provided financial assistance (Taka 50,000) to the Manikganj Janasankha Samitikaran Samity, a local voluntary organisation which runs a family planning clinic. Moreover, the paramedics train and supervise village-level voluntary family planning workers in the motivation, techniques, and record keeping for oral contraception among group members. In the southern part of Manikganj Thana a small clinic established for sterilization operations. The clinic will gradually be introduced to government and other family planning agencies from which it can derive supervision and financial support. As of March 31, 1980 there were the following number of family planning clients:

TABLE 4

<u>No. of clients by methods</u>	
Pill	308
Emko/condom	93
I.U.D.	1
Ligation	689

In conjunction with the Janasankha Samitikaran Samity, BRAC runs a Child Welfare Centre where malnourished children (below 25% of the average) under five years of age are brought for a month's proper treatment and nourishment. Attending mothers are trained in food value, preventive care, etc.. Between April 1, 1979 and March 31, 1980 160 in-patients and 3503 out-patients were treated. 152 mothers attended their in-patient children and received training in horticulture, ericulture and child health care.

BRAC will continue to run this child welfare centre during Phase II. Attending mothers of malnourished children will be trained a number of income-generating activities during the period the children are under treatment. The skills of 100 additional traditional dais, (Birth attendants) will be upgraded at this centre. During Phase III, the centre will be transferred to government supervision as a health sub-centre.

Youth Organisation

BRAC believes that the youth constitute a potential force in country. BRAC, therefore, seeks ways to engage community-minded people of their respective communities. Interested youth are trained in poultry and vaccination, fish culture, and ariculture so that they can assist with BRAC's efforts in these areas with the disadvantaged. Other youth have received family planning and nutrition training. Youth are used to help conduct base-line surveys, fertile couple registration, and other surveys as required.

Because of social, personal, and economic pressures on the youth, most cannot be involved in activities requiring sustained efforts over several years. But in order to tap their zeal over a short time, BRAC proposes to involve youth in activities which inculcate a sense of patriotism and a fellow-feeling particularly to the disadvantaged of the society. The hope is that they can in the long run continue to respond to the problems of the disadvantaged. To this end, youth will be encouraged to take up the following activities:

- a) cultural : e.g. staging dramas reflecting class struggle or social characteristics;
- b) games and sports;
- c) work camps; and
- d) seminars, workshops, trainings

Field Organisation and Personnel

BRAC field staff operate out of four field camps (office-cum-dormitory) situated in four corners of Hanikganj thana: one in the town itself; the others at Betila, Gorpara, and Balirtek. Field staff cover villages within a radius of five miles from their respective camp - by bicycle or on foot.

The Programme Administrator lives in the Hanikganj camp but visits each outlying camp at least once a week. Sixteen Programme Organisers - four per field camp - supervise and carry out the education, group formation, and economic - support

Medical Officer and nine paramedics supervise and conduct the health and family planning activities.