

15/11/93
SL. No. 13
3
93/3
14

✓

DEVELOPMENT OF "ENTREPRENEURSHIP" IN

AYESHA ABED FOUNDATION, MANIKGANJ

A BRIEF ANALYSIS

**AYESHA ABED
LIBRARY**

**BRAC
24, Malibari C.A, Dhaka-10**

Naveeda Ahmed Khan
Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC
March 1993

Table of Contents:

Executive Summary

Introduction

Objective

Methodology

Limitations

1. "Entrepreneurship" in Economic Enterprises
2. AAF as Enterprise
3. Conflict in Goals
4. AAF's Working Definition of "Entrepreneurship"
5. Discussion
6. Challenges for Management

References

Flow Chart (1) AAF and RDP: a comparison
(2) Aarong

Executive Summary

The Ayesha Abed Foundation (AAF) was established in 1983 as a bold experiment to encourage women producers in traditional male spheres. A decade has passed and the Ayesha Abed Foundation has expanded into a large undertaking. It is time to appraise AAF's philosophy within the development schema, most particularly of involving women in economic enterprises.

The Ayesha Abed Foundation is a perfect site to formulate and test a theoretical connection between leadership and entrepreneurship. Secondly, we assess how receptive AAF's environment is to the emergence of "entrepreneurs." Since its inception the Ayesha Abed Foundation's institutional structure has included a women's federation named *Manikganj Shromojibi Mahila Shakti (MSMS)*. In theory this federation becomes the owner of the enterprise after loan repayments to the AAF are complete. For the purposes of evaluating the position of "entrepreneurship" within AAF's conceptual boundaries, I have taken MSMS to signify the leadership potential of the enterprise.

Most definitions of entrepreneur are restricted to a quality within an individual, and to his achievement of wealth, both entrenched in the Western cultural conception of an entrepreneur. Michael V. d. Bogaert's notion of *group entrepreneurship* has more relevance to a collective economic enterprise. In it the role of the individual is expanded beyond that of a self serving entrepreneur to incorporate the tasks of the *leader*. Thus leadership, which builds on the consensus of the group, is parallel to emerging entrepreneurship. Other valuable features which characterize group entrepreneurship include *group solidarity, habit of savings, management concepts of time, quality measurements and honouring one's commitment, management responsibilities of decision-making, execution and accountability, regarding production, marketing and expansion.* The realistic perspective is that the women may never be completely independent of the structural support of the escorting agency. The challenge to the escorting agency is to define each role explicitly and to delegate responsibility over time so as to reduce undue dependence of the participants on itself.

AAF has two stated goals:

- (a) to alleviate poverty of rural women
- (b) to make a commercial success of this enterprise for women producers

The first necessitates making each step in the production process as well defined and stringent as possible -- almost static -- to prevent fluctuations in the production cycle. Poverty alleviation, on the other hand, means the AAF has some responsibility to providing an atmosphere congenial to psychic and social development of these women. This presupposes flexibility in AAF's structures, increased experimentation to encourage participation through leadership roles, possible

mistakes and losses and monitoring of change beyond the workplace — which at once puts the goal of poverty alleviation in conflict with the above goal, with its stricter set of commercial transactions.

This tension in goals is reflected in the confusion over particular features of the AAF, such as the shareholding scheme, the role of MSMS and profit distribution. The lack of clarity over goals begs the question: "what has AAF's commitment to entrepreneurship been thus far?"

I found that AAF's successes with group entrepreneurship are largely at the structural level. RDP's practices of group formation have instilled within the women the habit of savings. AAF has also managed to impart strict discipline concerning management concepts of time, quality, measurements and honouring one's commitment.

However, the solidarity of being working women have been stymied largely through the weakness of MSMS. Feelings of collective ownership are slow in coming. A few women said they had heard that RDP would give them individual loans of TK1000/2000 to invest in the MSMS, but they feared to do so because it would just increase their personal indebtedness.

Similarly this weakness of MSMS is tied to the falling of leadership development. MSMS, in its present manifestation, is not functional. A few women remember it as a ERAC induced activity that they practised under an old centre manager which ceased two years ago. It may well be that the women do not have the full potential or are too fettered by cultural constraints to develop into independent producers or effective leaders for the collective. In that case promotion of leadership will be premature. But the battle is lost even before it has begun if the structure which was to encourage women in the first place is not given any basis in reality. MSMS's ambiguous presence point to institutional neglect of the development of "group entrepreneurship." The MSMS does not have a constitution or uniform election process, nor has its involvement in management been established. At present MSMS exists in institutional theory and as a faint memory among a few women.

In practice, the women put their inputs and impose their demands through informal consultation with the centre manager. This appeal to the sentiment in order to get sick leave, medical aid, re-appraisal of piece-rate and wage raises occurs as the MSMS does not have a defined employer-employee relationship with the legislative rights this imposes.

Both the AAFs have also been slow to pass over management responsibilities to the women. Most significantly, it has failed to set up a communication network with the women, thus,

considerably reducing the likelihood of increased knowledge of the full production cycle and economic acumen among the women.

In summary, the Ayesha Abad Foundation is found to be inclined towards an individualistic definition of entrepreneurship. Those rewarded with head positions and promotions are generally selected by the AAF management. There is the fear that the exceptional few who have been put in positions of responsibility without the endorsement of the collective may actually not represent the ethos of the whole.

AAF's commitment to its goal of poverty alleviation through empowerment is found wanting. Salma Omar Chowdhury's 1993 report on the women in the silk reeling center in AAF show that the women's contribution to family decisions is limited. (Chowdhury, 1993:19) The frequently cited case of improved appearances and confident attitude as examples of empowerment, therefore, have not translated into any serious structural transformations in women's socio-economic reality.

However, such a critique is not entirely applicable before AAF re-evaluates its development vision and its expectations for the future. It has to decide and define its midpoint between its two professed goals: poverty alleviation and commercial success. And it has to disseminate this vision uniformly to all the actors within its enterprise. Without clarity in goals, progress will be localized, and not socially significant.

Implications for Management

The recommendations are kept brief and general because it is felt that the real recommendations will emerge out of dialogue between management and the women.

.in the interest of a clear development vision and its linkages, a meeting between AAF management, trustees and MSMS women to reassess AAF's goals, its commitment to empowerment, and its guiding methodology.

.in the interest of empowerment, a monitoring cell to document the impact of AAF on gender relations and social, cultural and economic conditions beyond the work place.

.in the interest of institution building, a formal constitution for MSMS/JSMD with guidelines for its election processes, representation in AAF management and accountability to its constituencies. At present, MSMS exists as a memory in institutional history but has no formal basis in reality. This is one of the major causes for the confusion over its role and for it not being functional.

MSMS's ambiguous presence point to institutional neglect of the development of "group entrepreneurship."

.in the interest of "group entrepreneurship," a concerted effort by management to open up communication channels with the women and to share management responsibilities with them over time. Initially, management may well have to take responsibility to instill in the women the importance of MSMS by insisting on meetings, formal elections and leadership accountability.

If AAF declares that its first, most important priority is to provide meaningful employment to women, then

.in the interest of serving as an example for all economic institutions involving women, an application of a defined employer/employee relationship with fair legislations concerning age, wage, child care, health policy, working hours and legal rights that this relationship presupposes. This takes a holistic approach to women's multiple realities.

Introduction

The Ayesha Abed Foundation was established in 1983 as a bold experiment to (a) involve rural women in traditional male activities, such as, weaving, printing and tailoring and (b) to institutionalize management services and market conduits for these upcoming women producers. A decade has passed and the Ayesha Abed Foundation has expanded into a large undertaking. A 1992 BRAC published ACCESS newsletter reported that at present 4 such centres are functioning in Manikganj, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Jessore, providing employment to more than 5000 women through 110 sub centres. And the Foundation's connection to Aarong, a successful shopping chain, has assured it a strong and far reaching market. ACCESS cites the Foundation's sales as a measure of success of the experiment: sales have gone from TK 2.2 million in 1985 to TK 41.2 million in 1991.

Along side these financial considerations, it is also time to appraise AAF's philosophy within the development schema, most particularly of involving women in economic enterprises. This paper attempts a critique of the Foundation based on general observations of its whole operation, keeping in mind that the AAF is a highly complex structure. The guiding intentions of the paper are to

- (a) place AAF within a theoretical context of "entrepreneurship development"
- (b) identify some of the favourable and problematic features of AAF's strategy towards involving women in economic enterprise
- (c) provide concrete recommendations arising from the critique.

Objective

Our paper, titled "Institution Building and Development in Three Women's Village Organizations: Participation, Ownership, Autonomy," highlighted interesting aspects of leadership creation within VOs once we took the nature of participation of the women into consideration. However, it left untouched the crucial question of what the actual connection between leadership and participation was.

The Ayesha Abed Foundation is a perfect site to study this question. It is an enclave for women, formed to uplift them economically through their work as producers and socially through their development into enterprising entrepreneurs. Here the economic and social participation of women is sought, exclusive of societal male prerogatives.

Thus, the first objective of this paper was to sketch an useful definition of "entrepreneurship" which incorporates both leadership creation and participation. The second objective was to locate AAF's working definition of "entrepreneurship" within the former, in order to assess how responsive AAF's environment is to the emergence of "entrepreneurs." Some specific research questions which guided me were:

- (a) How is AAF connected to BRAC and Aarong?
- (b) What are AAF's defined objectives? its observed priorities?
- (c) What are its expectations for the future?

The ultimate objective of the paper was to document and analyze one case of leadership development to augment a larger, more theoretical study of the subject.

Methodology

My methodology was simple and consisted of:

1. reviewing relevant literature which included theoretical writings and case studies of women engaged in economic enterprise. I also used BRAC reports on the AAF as case studies to be re-interpreted along the general focus of my paper;
2. interviewing key management people within the AAF for their assessment of its progress and plans for the future. These included interviews with the General Managers of both AAF and Aarong, the Centre Managers of Manikganj and Jamalpur; and relevant Programme Organizers.
3. open-ended discussions with select women in the AAF, such as sub-centre in-charges and section-heads, assuming they would represent those with greatest potential for "entrepreneurship."

Limitations

This was a short one month long study during which time I restricted my research to interviews and conversations instead of cross checking word against action through observation and scrutiny of books. However, this sacrifice of detail was intentional because I wanted to do a general study of perceptions and practices of key actors to grasp AAF's philosophy at work.

I restricted my study to AAF, Manikganj, using AAF, Jamalpur for purposes of comparison. A study of all four centres would have given me a fuller picture of the interconnection between

institution, market and social factors.

I have also not been able to tackle the following questions raised by this research: what potential do the women have to develop into entrepreneurs? and, what are their specific social constraints? These deserve strong consideration to give us a fuller picture of the process of "entrepreneurial development."

Another line of questioning, although secondary to this study but interesting in order to show cross programme influences is: what is the correlation between VO leadership and participation in the AAF? Does greater job security and management experience in the job translate into local responsibility?

I hope that, despite its limitations, this paper offers some fresh insights into the workings of the Ayesha Abed Foundation.

"Entrepreneurship" in Economic Enterprises:

This section attempts to coin a workable definition of "entrepreneurship" most relevant to a collective economic enterprise. It also sheds light on common biases associated with the word which often distort our expectations of the participants involved in any economic venture.

Raka Rashid's report "Women in Local Markets and Commercial Areas" highlights clearly the blinders most assume towards the development of entrepreneurs within collective enterprise. Rashid's working definition of an entrepreneur is restricted to an individual, to the achievement of wealth and to individual acquisitiveness, all three entrenched in the Western cultural conception of an entrepreneur. This cultural perspective tends to narrow entrepreneurship to a quality within a person or a family. Moreover, the rewards of this type of entrepreneurship is limited to one person or a family. If we take the solitary entrepreneur as the focal point of growth, we risk feeling only fatalism about the progress of the group. Hence the need for a definition of "entrepreneurship" which involves the participation of the group.

Michael V. d. Bogaert's notion of *group entrepreneurship* has more relevance for understanding and critiquing economic enterprises involving indigenous people. According to Bogaert, group entrepreneurship

...is a process of growth in entrepreneurship and management by a group of producers, from the stage of absence of entrepreneurial and managerial skills, to a point where the

group has developed the necessary organizational structures, and fulfils practically all functions of a fully-fledged production, marketing or credit co-operative. This requires an enabling role, played by one or several organizations who escort the group through the growth process. (Bogaert, 1992:35)

The role of the individual is not excluded in this schema but expanded beyond that of a self serving entrepreneur to encapsulate the role of the *leader*.

Thus leadership development is parallel to emerging entrepreneurship. "It reflects the perception that effective leadership in women's interests is a necessary element in the successful promotion of women's participation in development." (Anne Marie Goetz, 1993:1). Furthermore Uphoff warns that leadership cannot be developed as an "individual capability," i.e. by arbitrary selection by a few. This would ignore the collective will of the group which create leaders, either through direct choice or through cooperation. He also stresses that the leadership role must be kept relatively free of power imbalances by making the leaders accountable to their constituencies. Provisions to rotate responsibilities will ensure that experience is widely shared within the group, reducing dependence on a few persons and increasing the potential leadership pool. (Uphoff, 1986:201)

Bogaert forwards other valuable features which characterize group entrepreneurship:

Solidarity, defined as the ability and readiness to place the good of the group before self-interest. If this stage is outgrown, the temptation to become individualistic, to compete and to renounce the group, grows strong. Therefore, a strong ideological base gives surest protection against this contingency. Echoing Michael Bogaert's perspective, Usha Jumani has also stressed: "The strategy of strengthening women's economic activities has to address the twin objectives of increasing income and increasing solidarity of women." (Jumani, 1991:12)

Savings is an integral part of a good group-entrepreneurship venture and it has to be enforced from the beginning until it becomes an established practice among the participants.

Management concepts of time, quality, measurements and honouring one's commitment: these are not the same among rural people as for organized market agencies. Only very strict quality control and the adoption of piece-rate payment at delivery introduces the necessary discipline.

Management responsibilities of decision-making, execution and accountability, regarding production, marketing, expansion and all the different features which make up the economics of the enterprise. The realistic perspective is that in all probability the women may never be completely independent of the structural support of the escorting agency. The challenge to the escorting agency is to define each role explicitly and to delegate responsibility over time so as to reduce undue dependence of the participants on itself.

Since its inception the Ayesha Abed Foundation's institutional structure has included a women's federation named Manikganj Shromojibi Mahila Shakti (MSMS). For the purposes of evaluating the position of "entrepreneurship" within AAF's conceptual boundaries, I have taken MSMS to signify the leadership potential of the enterprise. After a brief description of AAF's structure and goals, I will map MSMS against the framework for group entrepreneurship sketched above.

AAF as Enterprise

The institutional structure of Ayesha Abed Foundation defies strict categorization. It is best described as a canopy for a variety of forms ranging from corporate to co-operative. ACCESS has provided a brief description of AAF's present management structure and I have appended flow charts at the end of the paper.

It is headed by an Executive Trustee who is the Executive Director of BRAC. The General Manager is next in line. His role is largely that of a liaison office between BRAC, the donor consortium, the board of trustees, Aarong and the employees of AAF. He is seated in Dhaka and makes regular field visits to the four Foundations. Each of the Foundations is headed by a Centre Manager who is internally selected. S/he is responsible for the every day management aspects of each Foundation which includes: collecting/distributing orders from Aarong, production details, transportation, payment and employer/employee relations. S/he goes to Dhaka several times a month to collect orders from the Production Services at Aarong (at present the Foundation produces exclusively for Aarong). The Centre Manager also coordinates the activities of the Programme Organizers who are delineated by task: accounts, store and programme management.

As the AAF, Manikganj, is both a service centre and a production centre, it subsumes the following sections: weaving, embroidery, tie-dying, dying, block printing, washing, tailoring, twisting, ironing and quality control. A section head is responsible for each. The formal responsibilities of the section head include distribution of orders and raw materials among the women,

projection of daily production and quality control. As most of the section heads are illiterate, Gram Sheboks are employed by AAF to record daily attendance, usage of raw materials and daily output. Fifty two sub-centres are distributed throughout the field and each is headed by a sub-centre in-charge. The responsibilities of the in-charges are comparatively more than those for section heads because they include record-keeping and transportation of raw materials and goods to and from the Foundation. A PO hired by RDP oversees documentation in sub-centres at regular intervals.

All the women employed by the AAF automatically belong to the federation called Manikganj Shromojibi Mahila Shakti which is considered a partner in development by BRAC. When BRAC's 1976 Food for Work programme in Manikganj evolved into the Manikganj Integrated Project, the women's groups involved in different income generating activities were "brought under the banner of a higher level federation known as Manikganj Sramajibi Mahila Shakti. On September 3, 1983 the whole of these activities were brought under the central roof of the Ayesha Abed Foundation (AAF) Women's Centre in Manikganj." (Quoted in Khan:3) At present MSMS can boast a membership of 2000 women, i.e. all those involved in AAF.

In an innovative attempt to encourage the women to feel they have some stake in the Foundation, MSMS was loaned up to Tk 35 lacs by RDP (the loan was later bought out by AAF) as its original investment in the Foundation. Under this shareholding scheme, MSMS has to give AAF 16% from annual returns from sales for loan repayment. MSMS has also to give AAF 5% of its returns to pay for overhead costs and management help, once again to prevent the women from becoming dependent on outright grants. Some of the annual returns is distributed as Eid bonuses of TK 200 to each of the women in the federation. Any remaining profit at the end of these transactions are re-invested in the AAF. In theory this federation becomes the owner of the enterprise after loan repayments are complete.

AAF, Jamalpur was inaugurated in 1986 as the central organizing body for women producers in the area. However, the women had long been under the Jamalpur Women's Programme which started in 1976. Their goods, especially nakshi kantha products, were also supplied to Aarong since its inception. The Jamalpur Mahila Shromojibi Dal (JSMD) was created as the equivalent of MSMS with the expectation that it, too, would take on more and more responsibilities of running the Foundation over the years and eventually become the real owner of it. However, its loan from RDP was of a substantially smaller size than MSMS's with the obvious outcome that it would repay and assume ownership sooner than MSMS.

Each of these federations has the potential to develop group entrepreneurship through three obvious means: organizational, management and social. It organizes working rural women under one structure and, thereby, reduces their isolation from one another. Subsequently the leadership qualities of the women can be increased and feelings of solidarity encouraged through participation in organizational activities such as elections, meetings, formal representation etc. Presently there are two levels of leadership. Each section head and sub-centre in-charge is chosen by the women of that unit to make up a central committee. This committee in turn elects a 7 member executive body, headed by a secretary, to represent them within AAF management. Through working side by side with management, the MSMS/JSMD 7 member committee can also provide the women with practical experience, such as, on how to collect and distribute orders, oversee all aspects of production, mediate with Aarong and visualize expansion. Additionally MSMS/JSMD has the potential to operate as a social force since the women it encourages within its leadership ranks can have far reaching influence as role models for other women or as initiators of change in their communities.

Despite its formal financial separation from BRAC, AAF is intricately connected to BRAC through its commitment to hiring only women who are members of RDP VOs, usually on recommendation from VO/RDP leadership. The initial loans to the women in AAF to help them pay for raw materials come from the RDP. Even today the women are being encouraged to take individual loans from their VOs to invest in the AAF. The RDP is also currently paying the wages of programme POs who oversee activity at field level. This integral association between AAF and RDPs make AAF an important tool in the Institution Building process so central to BRAC's programmes. The AAF can serve both as the thoroughfare by which women learn to become independent economic agents, as well as a reliable institutional resource to provide women with practical lessons on how to establish their own VOs as institutions. There is also the expectation that once AAF becomes a self-sustaining commercial enterprise, it will finance some of BRAC's programmes and, thereby, reduce BRAC's reliance on external aid.

Lastly, AAF's connection to Aarong is historically established. When initial experimentation with making the women responsible for marketing failed, the lack of a market outlet was seen as a large cause of this failure. (Nann, 1989:152) Aarong was established in 1978. Later it was expanded and its market reach improved to enable it to absorb the crafts from AAF. At present, AAF's products make up 42% of Aarong's goods. Aarong provides AAF most of its raw materials because AAF has not as yet built up the financial base to do so.

Conflict in Goals:

AAF has two stated goals:

- (a) to alleviate poverty of rural women
- (b) to make a commercial success of this enterprise for women producers

Goal (b) is imposed by the demands of the market, i.e. Aarong. Aarong has strict guidelines. In exchange for the facilities it offers (exclusion of middlemen, payment on delivery....) it enforces its own design requirements, efficient conduits for order distribution, quality control and adherence to deadlines. Subsequently, the AAF is committed to making itself an efficient production centre in accordance with Aarong's demands. Besides AAF also wishes to make itself self financing and debt free. These commitments necessitate making each step in the production process as well defined and stringent as possible -- almost static -- to prevent fluctuations in the production cycle. Here the corporate side of the AAF predominates.

Poverty alleviation, on the other hand, imposes a different set of priorities. At its most superficial, poverty alleviation translates into providing regular employment to destitute rural women. At a more advanced stage, poverty alleviation means altering specific psychic, social and economic circumstances to secure real change in the lives of the women, i.e. encouraging the women beyond taking the job to sparking their self-empowerment. Although the AAF cannot be made solely responsible for initiating lasting change, it, as a tool of Institution Building, has some responsibility to providing an atmosphere congenial to the development of these women. This chain of development presuppose flexibility in AAF's structures, increased experimentation to encourage participation through leadership roles, possible mistakes and losses and monitoring of change beyond the workplace -- which at once puts the goal of poverty alleviation in conflict with the above goal, with its stricter set of commercial transactions.

With this tension in goals one finds wide differences in the representation of particular features of the AAF, with people representing those goals which most appeal to them or they understand to be correct.

SHAREHOLDING SCHEME

There are three common representations of the shareholding scheme:

- a. as "motivation" to the women to encourage them to establish some stake in the enterprise and not to see it merely as a job or a grant. The material expectation is that the women will own the equipment

loaned by RDP. Alongside, they will also have developed feelings of ownership and pride over their property and their products. The AAF will then function solely as a service centre, providing technical and accounting support at cost.

- b. as "financial aid" to the women to enable them to pay for raw materials immediately after the AAF started in 1983. After loan repayment, the 16% interest previously cut from the annual returns will be directed to a Fund for MSMS, to give it the means to buy raw materials.
- c. in Jamalpur where the RDP loan has almost been repaid, the commonly stated rhetoric is that the women are soon to become the real owners of the programme. However, it is unclear just what they will own after repayment. There is the expectation that the Jamalpur Shromojibi Mahila Dal (JSMD) will pay the wages of the AAF management as an assertion of their ownership.

MSMS

Although this organization has a history and an institutional place in the AAF, it has an unclear status in AAF's practices. It was described in the following diverse ways, pointing to people's confusion about its actual role:

- a. as "an association" which stresses its informality as it is not formally registered with the government. This informality also marks its election process and its practices.
- b. as "a trade union" which stresses its bargaining position vis-a-vis Aarong and AAF towards wages, cost price, working hours etc. Although no-one blankly stated that MSMS operated like a trade union, anecdotal evidence point out that some see more potential for MSMS in this role rather than as a partner in development.
- c. as a "BRAC conducted activity," frequently confused with RDP samiti meetings.
- d. as a "minor management partner" with the potential to gain knowledge and mastery only until the sub centre level.
- e. as a "formality" to keep the identity of the women employed by AAF separate from their identity within RDP Village Organizations.

ANNUAL PROFIT

We know that AAF is given 16% from annual returns for repayment of loans and 5% for payment on overhead and management support. However, people seem unclear to whom the rest of the money belong after the above transactions are complete. This confusion is depicted in the following set of answers I received:

- a. AAF management re-invests it in the AAF to pay for raw materials.
- b. a portion of it is re-distributed by AAF management as Eid bonuses among the NSMS women.
- c. it will be directed into an independent fund for the MSMS to pay for raw materials.
- d. all of it will be equally distributed among the women in the future when profits are good.
- e. it will be converted into shares and given to more women to enlarge the collective ownership .
- f. it will help BRAC finance its programmes.

Although it is clear that presently the AAF management decides how the annual returns get apportioned, it is not as clear just who owns the returns and who will decide, in time, what to do with the money.

AAF's Working Definition of Entrepreneurship

This confusion over representation of goals begs the questions: "what has AAF's commitment to entrepreneurship been thus far?" and "what is its working definition of entrepreneurship?" This section is an exploration of these questions through an application of the framework for group entrepreneurship I have detailed above.

I found that AAF's successes with group entrepreneurship are largely at the structural level. RDP's practices of group formation have instilled within the women the habit of savings. The AAF has also passed a resolution allowing the women to attend their samitis' weekly meetings without discrimination. Here AAF has effectively coordinated its policies with RDP's.

AAF has also managed to impart strict discipline concerning management concepts of time, quality, measurements and honouring

one's commitment. The women are conscientious about quality control, policing themselves effectively so as to minimize loss. Some women take the initiative to go to Aarong in Dhaka to find out more about design requirements and quality control from the design section. The general manager of Aarong reported that rejection rate had fallen to less than 2% from an initial 25%. Similarly, the women are also very conscious about daily time management. Since the switch from day wage rate to piece-rate, efficiency is reported to have gone up. In the same line, the women are quick to transport finished products to the Foundation weekly on prefixed days and equally quick to notify the Centre Manager in case deadlines cannot be met. At present Aarong sends a van twice a week to AAF, Manikganj to transport the goods. In Jamalpur, the women have become wholly responsible for transporting goods between the Foundation and Aarong.

AAF has created the opportunity for the women to develop social solidarity by providing them access to FE classes within the Foundation. However, the solidarity of being working women have been stymied largely through of the weakness of MSMS. For example, when asked the women in the AAF washing section had no knowledge of the existence of MSMS, confusing it with their samitis. Asked about their future expectations, most of the women placed individual goals before that of the group. They viewed their progress along lines of job security and higher wages. Feelings of collective ownership are also slow in coming. A few women said they had heard that RDP would give them individual loans of TK1000/2000 to invest in the MSMS, but they feared to do so because it would just increase their personal indebtedness.

Similarly this weakness of MSMS is tied to the failing of leadership development. MSMS, in its present manifestation, is not functional. A few women remember it as a BRAC induced activity that they practised under an old centre manager which ceased two years ago. According to the present centre manager of Manikganj, elections are initiated entirely by the Executive Trustee. On the other hand, a section head reported that last elections for the central committee held two years ago was precipitated by the departure of the previous secretary. The present secretary expects that she will stay in this position permanently, although she is uncertain what her position entails.

Also, in the past when monthly meetings between AAF and the MSMS general body were held, the centre manager usually called for them and initiated discussions in the meetings. The women recalled that most discussions concerned problems with production and, intermittently, an update on their loan repayment. Since the meetings have been discontinued the women have not received any information on the loan repayment status. Nor have they dared to ask about their loan, fearing knowledge of a responsibility they feel forced to shoulder. Most prefer to

1940

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

TO THE PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
FROM THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES
The Faculty of the Division of the Physical Sciences of the University of Chicago, in a meeting held on the 15th day of May, 1940, at the University Club, Chicago, Illinois, considered the report of the Committee on the Proposed Changes in the Constitution of the University of Chicago, and the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Faculty of the Division of the Physical Sciences of the University of Chicago, in a meeting held on the 15th day of May, 1940, at the University Club, Chicago, Illinois, considered the report of the Committee on the Proposed Changes in the Constitution of the University of Chicago, and the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Faculty of the Division of the Physical Sciences of the University of Chicago, in a meeting held on the 15th day of May, 1940, at the University Club, Chicago, Illinois, considered the report of the Committee on the Proposed Changes in the Constitution of the University of Chicago, and the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Faculty of the Division of the Physical Sciences of the University of Chicago, in a meeting held on the 15th day of May, 1940, at the University Club, Chicago, Illinois, considered the report of the Committee on the Proposed Changes in the Constitution of the University of Chicago, and the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Faculty of the Division of the Physical Sciences of the University of Chicago, in a meeting held on the 15th day of May, 1940, at the University Club, Chicago, Illinois, considered the report of the Committee on the Proposed Changes in the Constitution of the University of Chicago, and the following resolution was adopted:

in the commonly held vision that those entrepreneurial will one day spin off the AAF and set up independent production units to provide to Aarong directly. Although this is a reasonable hope, exclusive focus on it leaves one unable to assess the development of entrepreneurs within the collective. Also, the women's disapproving attitude towards Alikja, a woman who did leave to become an independent producer, well reveal what value the women themselves place on such individual acts. A definition of "entrepreneurship," one which does not incorporate all the elements I have outlined but reflects a consensus between management and women on how much can be expected from the women, has yet to emerge.

Discussion

It is not surprising that the tension detected in the goals have not necessarily led to any contradictions in practice. I found that the focus is almost exclusively on ensuring the efficient running of the AAF. Recent improvements point to this commitment -- there is better documentation of transactions, the wages are being paid on time and orders regularly collected from Dhaka and uniformly distributed. Furthermore, two women have been employed by the MSMS in Dhaka to receive, record and store goods coming from the various Foundations. The women's attitude towards their work reflect this emphasis on commercial considerations. They view themselves as employees of the AAF and their critique of their situation revolve around improving their individual lots -- wages, working conditions etc. Mahmuda Rahman Khan's 1990 report well document this attitude towards the AAF. (Khan:26)

Conversely, AAF's commitment to its goal of poverty alleviation through empowerment is found wanting. Salma Omar Chowdhury's 1993 report on the silk reeling centre of AAF raise some fundamental doubts about the assumption that a regular job translates into improved economic and social status for the women. She shows, instead, that most women's contribution to the family pot is considered secondary and their participation in family decision making is limited. (Chowdhury,1993:19) The frequently cited case of improved appearances and confident attitude as examples of empowerment, therefore, have not translated into any serious structural transformations in women's socio-economic reality.

There is a real danger of us falling in with the belief that mere participation in economic production equate progress for these women. Although there are no doubts that AAF has brought women into untraditional employment spheres and escalated its reach very rapidly, AAF cannot claim to have created independent women producers or developed local leaders. Instead, there is the danger that it may well have replicated the purdah system in a large scale by bringing the women within the walls of the AAF,

in the commonly held vision that those entrepreneurial will one day spin off the AAF and set up independent production units to provide to Aarong directly. Although this is a reasonable hope, exclusive focus on it leaves one unable to assess the development of entrepreneurs within the collective. Also, the women's disapproving attitude towards Alikja, a woman who did leave to become an independent producer, well reveal what value the women themselves place on such individual acts. A definition of "entrepreneurship," one which does not incorporate all the elements I have outlined but reflects a consensus between management and women on how much can be expected from the women, has yet to emerge.

Discussion

It is not surprising that the tension detected in the goals have not necessarily led to any contradictions in practice. I found that the focus is almost exclusively on ensuring the efficient running of the AAF. Recent improvements point to this commitment -- there is better documentation of transactions, the wages are being paid on time and orders regularly collected from Dhaka and uniformly distributed. Furthermore, two women have been employed by the MSMS in Dhaka to receive, record and store goods coming from the various Foundations. The women's attitude towards their work reflect this emphasis on commercial considerations. They view themselves as employees of the AAF and their critique of their situation revolve around improving their individual lots -- wages, working conditions etc. Mahmuda Rahman Khan's 1990 report well document this attitude towards the AAF. (Khan:26)

Conversely, AAF's commitment to its goal of poverty alleviation through empowerment is found wanting. Salma Omar Chowdhury's 1993 report on the silk reeling centre of AAF raise some fundamental doubts about the assumption that a regular job translates into improved economic and social status for the women. She shows, instead, that most women's contribution to the family pot is considered secondary and their participation in family decision making is limited. (Chowdhury,1993:19) The frequently cited case of improved appearances and confident attitude as examples of empowerment, therefore, have not translated into any serious structural transformations in women's socio-economic reality.

There is a real danger of us falling in with the belief that mere participation in economic production equate progress for these women. Although there are no doubts that AAF has brought women into untraditional employment spheres and escalated its reach very rapidly, AAF cannot claim to have created independent women producers or developed local leaders. Instead, there is the danger that it may well have replicated the purdah system in a large scale by bringing the women within the walls of the AAF,

of collective leadership and, thereby, not challenging gender divisions of space. Here Usha Jumani's words have special relevance:

"When the larger goal is not clear and articulate then some change does happen, but the existing system gets reinforced more often than not and women's representativeness [sic] in the economy is not ensured." (Jumani:10)

However, it may well be that the women do not have the full potential or are too fettered by cultural constraints to develop into independent producers or effective leaders for the collective. In that case promotion of leadership will be premature. But the battle is lost even before it has begun if the structure which was to encourage women in the first place is not given any basis in reality. MSMS's ambiguous presence point to institutional neglect of the development of "group entrepreneurship." The MSMS does not have a constitution or uniform election process, nor has its involvement in management been established. At present MSMS exists in institutional theory and as a faint memory among a few women.

There is also the fear that the exceptional few who have been put in positions of responsibility without the endorsement of the collective may actually not represent the ethos of the whole. Take for example the case of Sufia, the secretary of MSMS and the head of a sub-centre in Nobogram. She is comparatively wealthy woman whose husband owns over 16 acres of land, two rice mills, flourishing fish culture in a pond and producing "gur" trees. He has a monthly income of TK2000 and Sufia brings in TK1200 from her work as sub-centre in-charge. They employ a small maidservant for their infant son. Her personal development is not in any way connected to the progress of the collective.

As practice, the women put their inputs and impose their demands through informal consultation with the centre manager. Although the centre manager's approachability is commendable, the informality of the negotiations cast some doubts as to whether the women are being treated fairly in employment terms. They have to appeal to the sentiment in order to get sick leave, medical aid, re-appraisal of piece-rate and wage raises as the MSMS does not have a defined employer-employee relationship with the legislative rights this imposes.

However, such a critique is not entirely applicable before AAF re-evaluates its development vision and its expectations for the future. It has to decide and define its midpoint between its two professed goals: poverty alleviation and commercial success. And it has to disseminate this vision uniformly to all the actors within its enterprise. Without clarity in goals, progress will be localized, and not socially significant.

Such an evaluation will be a natural outcome if AAF changes from its present "blue-print" approach to development to the "learning-process" approach. The assumption in the "blue-print" approach is that "all problems and goals can be identified and agreed upon clearly enough for precise interventions to be specified and carried out" from the start. (Uphoff:192) This rigidity to a particular course, in this case job provisions to destitute women/commercial success, has prevented a reassessment of AAF goals and its effectiveness in initiating change. However, by the "learning-process" approach, AAF can assess its programme and re-define its priorities in line with the lessons it has learnt. It can make flexibility and innovation natural elements of its structure. This dynamic approach is currently being employed by BRAC and has helped to bring BRAC's programmes closer to the needs of the people.

Challenges for Management

I keep my recommendations brief and general because I feel that the real recommendations will emerge out of dialogue between management and the women. I recommend

- .a meeting between trustees, management, Aarong officials to reassess AAF's goals, commitment to empowerment, its methodologies and time frames.
- .in the interest of Institution Building, a monitoring cell to document the impact of this work on social, cultural and economic condition beyond the work place.
- .in the interest of improved group entrepreneurship, a formal constitution for MSMS/JSMD with guidelines for its election processes, representation in AAF management and accountability to its constituencies.

If AAF decides that its first, most important priority is to provide meaningful employment to women, then

- .in the interest of serving as an example for all economic institutions involving women, an application of a defined employer/employee relationship with fair legislations concerning age, wage, child care, health policy, working hours and legal rights that it presupposes. This takes a holistic approach to women's multiple realities.

References

- ACCESS, 1992. "Ayesha Abed Foundation."
- BRAC. 1984. *Ayesha Abed Foundation for Women, Manikganj.*
- Michael V.d. Bogaert, 1992. "Group Entrepreneurship - a way of banking on the strength of the rural poor," *Small Enterprise Development*. Vol.3.
- Salma Omar Chowdhury, 1993. *Manikganj Silk Reeling Centre: Financial Aspects and Employment Generation*. Dhaka: Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC.
- Anne Marie Goetz, 1993. Research Proposal "Women's Leadership in Rural Development: A Conceptual and Analytical Introduction." BRAC Seminar Presentation, 18/3/93.
- Usha Jumani, 1991. *Women in Business: Strengthening Women's Economic Activities*. India: Jumani Foundation.
- Naveeda Khan and Aline Stewart, 1992. *Institution Building and Development in Three Women's Village Organization: Participation, Ownership and Autonomy*. Dhaka: Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC.
- Mahmuda Rahman Khan, 1990. *Production and Employment Aspects of Small Enterprises for Women: A Case of Betila Production Centre*. Dhaka: Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC.
- Raka Bashid, 1990. *Women in Local Markets and Commercial Areas: A Report and Handbook*. Dhaka: Pact Bangladesh.
- Norman Uphoff, 1986. *Local Institutional Development: An Analytical Sourcebook of Cases*. U.S.A.: Kumarian Press.

