

Backlash Against Posters of BRAC's Human Rights & Legal Education Program

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Executive summary

The Human Rights and Legal Education program of BRAC was initiated with the assumption that if the legal awareness of its clients was raised they would be able to protect themselves from illegal, unfair or discriminatory practices in the villages. But it was observed that the rights of these clients were in occasions infringed because those who infringed the rights were themselves not legally aware. Thus, BRAC was convinced to believe that the rights of its clients would be better protected by raising the legal knowledge of the non-clients. As a result, the HRLE program added a poster component to its activities.

In April 1997 the HRLE program took up a policy of fixing a 7-set poster in the villages and in the towns within the BRAC activity areas. The posters pictographically and in writing presented some of the legal rights and duties of the citizens of Bangladesh and indicated what could be the consequences of violating those rights. Some 700,000 posters were posted so far.

This venture was not without a hitch. Some in the community reacted against the posters. These backlashes have encouraged us to conduct this study. The objectives of this study were to: (1) investigate nature of backlashes; (2) find out how the Rural Development Programme (RDP) field staff handled the backlashes; and (3) investigate the causes for backlashes.

A qualitative approach was adopted in conducting this study. The study was conducted in the catchment of RDP areas in Kuliarchar, Sharail, Kachikata and Puthia. Data were collected based on checklists through individual and group interviews. The interviewees included RDP staff, RDP's village organization (VO) members, people working/living at the vicinity of the spot where posters were fixed, clergymen, and local influential.

The backlashes included verbal condemnation against the posters, tearing down the posters, teasing and rebuking BRAC staff for fixing posters and organizing demonstration against the poster program.

The reaction of RDP offices against the backlashes varied from area to area. Its staff did not make any effort to prevent the ripping off the posters. In the case of organized and not severe backlash BRAC tried to convince those who reacted against the posters but where the backlash was severe BRAC compromised with them. The RDP staff took a pragmatic step against the backlashes in order to avoid any harm done to the smooth functioning of the Program and for the success of postering in the long run.

The different sections in the community viewed the posters from different perspectives. Those opposing the posters took the statements in the posters only literally and analyzed those from a theoretical perspective based on the holy Koran. In analyzing these they mainly considered whether the posters contradicted with the dictates of Islam or not. In contrast, those supporting the posters emphasized on the practical implication of the posters. They evaluated the posters based on the extent to which these were considered relevant to the day-to-day problems in their society. They did not think about whether the posters would contradict with Islam or not. They viewed the content of the posters independent of their religious belief.

III

The study indicated two important reasons for backlashes against the posters, these are: misunderstanding about the posters and professional interest was affected by the posters.

Based on the observations number of recommendations are drawn.

- (1) The HRLE program may continue its policy of postering.
- (2) The posters may be modified to avoid or minimize the backlashes.
- (3) The posters may be pilot tested – modify the posters in the light of the reactions in the test area before postering in a large scale.
- (4) Before postering in the towns the local elite should be convinced about the posters.
- (5) The posters made out of tin may be posted to increase their durability.

The poster is a very powerful tool for mass education within a short time and with a little resource. The success of the effort lies in making it acceptable to most people in the community. If the poster backfires in a large scale considerable damage can take place in the program activities. Thus the posters should be handled with care.

Introduction

An overwhelming portion of the rural poor in Bangladesh are unaware of their legal rights. This ignorance allows others to exploit the poor and, in particular, women. BRAC, a large non-government organization in Bangladesh, has observed this situation across the villages of Bangladesh and has developed a program to redress it.

In 1989 the Paralegal program, later named as the Human Right and Legal Education (HRLE) program, was launched under the aegis of BRAC's Rural Development Programme (RDP). The goal of the HRLE program is to empower the members of BRAC's Village Organization¹ (VO) through educating them on human rights and some essential laws (BRAC 1995).

The human rights and laws which the program educates the VO members can be grouped under four titles:

1. Citizen's Right Protection Law -- laws on the basic human rights and the duties of a citizen in Bangladesh;
2. Muslim Family Law -- laws related to matrimony, the guardianship of children, and the relations among family members;
3. Muslim Inheritance Law -- laws on the inheritance rights of heirs and heiresses; and
4. Land Law -- laws related to land agreements and instructions on procedures to be followed to preserve the ownership of land.

Training is the crux of the HRLE program. In order to enhance the legal knowledge of the VO members the program organizes legal education (LE) courses in the villages. By 1996 the program have trained 560,066 VO members and intends to expand it considerably by providing training to 1 million VO members by the end of 2000 (BRAC 1996; BRAC 1995; BRAC 1993).

"BRAC initiated the program [HRLE] on the assumption that raising legal awareness among the VO members would help them to protect themselves from illegal, unfair or discriminatory practices" (BRAC 1996 p. 59). It was observed that the rights of VO members were on occasions infringed upon them because those who infringed the rights were themselves not aware of the laws or the rights of the Bangladeshis'. Thus HRLE program was convinced to believe that the rights of the VO members would be better protected if the level of legal knowledge of the non-VO members could be raised. Therefore, the program in the recent past undertook two measures to upgrade the knowledge of the non-VO members in the villages on the citizen's rights and on the laws of Bangladesh.

Starting in 1996 the program took up the policy of organizing local community leaders' workshops (LCLW) in RDP area offices (AO) where LE course was already begun. The government representatives (i.e., chairman and members of the union parishad), religious

¹ The VO is an organization of the poor, supported and patroned by BRAC. Villagers who own less than half an acre of land and at least one member in the family sold manual labor for at least 100 days in a year are eligible to join it.

leaders (i.e., *imam*, *kazi* and other opinion leaders), primary school teachers, VO leaders and HRLE Shebikas (trainer conducting LE), all belonging to the locality, participates in the workshop. The main objectives of this workshop are: (1) to orient the participants about the existing laws of Bangladesh covered in the HRLE curriculum; (2) to convince the participants that these laws are not contradictory to religious laws (*Shariah*); and (3) to facilitate the cooperation of these groups in the implementation of LE in the village.

In April 1997, the program took another policy of fixing a 7-set poster in certain locations in the villages and towns within the catchments of BRAC activities so that the message might become visible to a greater section of the community. The locations included the VO meeting spots, Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) schools, union parishad offices, health centers, markets (hat and bazaars), RDP area offices and RDP regional offices.

Some 700,000 posters, each costing Tk 2.80, have been posted. The posters had BRAC's logo printed on it. The posters pictographically and in writing presented some of the legal rights and duties of the citizens of Bangladesh covered by the LE curriculum and indicated what could be the legal consequences of violating these rights. The statements in the posters were in Bangla and were rhymed in some cases. The translations of the statements are as follows:

1. We have built this world and this civilization; men and women contributed equally to it.
2. Many brides are crying because of child marriage; nobody pays attention to the flood of their tears.
3. Facing jail and fine for remarrying without the consent of present wife or for ignoring her disapproval to such marriage.
4. Those who torture women send them to lock-up.
5. Married by reciting *kalema* only but without registration; husband divorced, what to do now?
6. Have to pay the bride money whether dead or alive.
7. Divorce is not effective if given verbally.

Displaying the posters was not without opposition. These oppositions could be referred to as backlashes (i.e., undesired social reaction against an innovation) against the posters. The opposition included verbal condemnation of the poster program, tearing down the posters, teasing and rebuking BRAC staff for putting up posters, and organizing demonstration against the poster program.

The opposition against the poster program encouraged us to conduct this study. The objectives of this study were to:

1. investigate the nature of the opposition;
2. find out how RDP field staff handled the opposition; and
3. investigate the causes for opposition to the program.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted in the catchment areas of RDP in Kuliarchar, Sharail, Kachikata and Puthia. The HRLE program have long been introduced in Sharail, Kachikata and Puthia but has yet to be initiated in Kuliarchar. The areas were selected in consultation with the HRLE Program to cover variety of opposition against the program.

Data were collected based on checklists through individual and group interviews. The group interviews included 4 to 10 interviewees. They were purposively selected keeping in mind that they were sufficiently informative about the poster program. The interviews represented different sections of the community involved with or aware of the postering.

1. BRAC staff -- Four group interviews were conducted with BRAC staff. The groups included area managers (AM), program organizers (PO), program assistants (PA) working for the RDP areas offices.
2. Village organization members: The members from three female VOs were interviewed at the end of their monthly meetings. The information from the VO members' husbands who were present in the meetings were also tabbed².
3. People working/living at the vicinity of the spots where posters were fixed: These groups included shopkeepers, barbers, tea stall owners, mechanics, and residents. Six interviews were conducted with this group.
4. The Clergy³: Three group interviews were conducted with the clergies. The group included imams and instructors from local mosques and madrassas, respectively. BRAC staff helped in organizing these meetings but they were not present in the interviews.
5. Local citizens of influence: Two local elite from Kuliarchar and Puthia were interviewed. They represented the richest section in the town and actively participated in local politics.

Findings

Fixing the Poster

The RDP area offices were instructed about posters through a circular (Appendix 1) and through RDP regional meetings. The postering was done in the first week of July 1997 over a 2 to 3 days period. The RDP staff along with mulberry tree guards, in some cases, participated in postering the public places in the town. The posters were also handed over to RDP VO leaders and NFPE AOs for displaying in the VO meeting locations and at NFPE schools, respectively.

It was observed that the posters were fixed in the strategic and conspicuous locations so that they might be visible to most people in the bazaar. The posters were fixed in the outer walls of

² As a part of the monthly meeting policy VO member's husbands were expected to remain present in the meeting.

³ The clergy has been considered as a generic term in this study referring to religious officials authorized to conduct services in the Mosques, instructors imparting training required to conduct such services and students undertaking the training.

the NFPE schools. In contrast VO leaders, in most cases, hung the posters inside their house. In these cases only those having access to their house could view the posters.

The posters in the bazaar and in the NFPE schools were not fixed above a secure reach. Besides, most of these spots were not protected from rain and direct sun light. Consequently, the posters still existing in those locations have been damaged to an extent. It was also observed that some HRLE posters have been covered by other posters fixed later there upon.

Initial reaction after postering

It was mentioned by the interviewees that people present inquisitively looked at the posters while those were in the process of fixing in the bazaars. So long the posters remained intact a group of 3 to 10, have always gathered and glanced at the posters. The group included all sections of the society -- students, teachers, store owners, villagers coming to the bazaar, service holders, businessmen, clergymen, etc. They stopped in front of and discussed about the posters. Those who could read helped others who could not understand the posters correctly. Their discussions indicated that they could correctly interpret the posters and understood the intended messages. In one case an onlooker, as an exception, after seeing the poster on 'abuse of women', thought that it suggested that husbands should beat their wives if they disobeyed. On viewing the posters for the first time the onlookers always asked who did the postering? They were told by the fellow onlookers that BRAC was behind it or the themselves figured it out by seeing BRAC's logos in the posters.

The onlookers both supported and opposed the posters. The reactions were both against the whole set or part of it.

A school teacher praised the posters by remarking that these represented the real problems of the society, and BRAC did a good job by pointing out these through posters. On 'verbal divorce' it was remarked that the statement was correct and was the most important of the whole set. According to a BRAC staff the group supporting the poster usually remained silent while the group opposing the posters always expressed their reactions. Some of the reactions against the posters were:

1. On verbal divorce -- If divorce could not be given verbally then how was it to be obtained? The statement was against Islam. BRAC through this poster have done harm to the society. Most of the discussions were on this poster.
2. On abuse of women -- The women in the poster have been drawn nude. The poster was considered obscene.
3. On whole set of posters -- Through these posters BRAC as a representative of the West is trying to convert people to Christianity.

In Sharail, an hour after the posters were fixed in a location in the bazaar the onlookers supporting and not supporting the posters started debating on the posters' contents. The debate became heated and at one point turned into a fight. The shopkeepers stopped the fight and ripped off the posters fearing that, these if kept intact, would lead to further trouble in the area.

In the evening when the area office staff were returning to their base through the bazaar they noticed a group comprising mainly of clergies standing in front of the posters and vehemently criticizing them. After seeing the RDP staff they teased them. Some from the group even came forward and asked the staff where from they had got the idea that divorce could not be given verbally. The staff did not answer and quietly avoided them. At Sharail some of the RDP staff were teased for the posters by the youths when the staff were seen at their village.

Action against the posters

Shortly after the posters were fixed the verbal condemnation turned into actions against the posters ranging from individual to organized group actions.

In Kachikata bazaar for about a week after the posters were fixed people's discussion continued in the tea stalls. The participants were the regular customers of the stall who usually spent their evening there and the local clergymen who, unlike the former group, were not regular visitors to the stalls. They discussed on each of the posters and placed their arguments both in favor of and against the posters. The clergymen strongly criticized the posters from an Islamic perspective.

A day after the posters were fixed in the bazaar a poster on verbal divorce was ripped off after sunset when nobody was around. The interviewees suspected that the clergymen might be behind this act. A LCLW was organized in the RDP area office a few days after posters were fixed. The discussion on posters was one of the agenda of the workshop. The discussion included the objectives of the posters and the messages that the posters intended to convey. The chairman of the local union parishad, one of the participants in the workshop, praised BRAC for the poster program and asked the clergymen and others present in the workshop to support the BRAC's initiative. After the workshop the posters were not publicly criticized in the bazaar.

The opposition against the posters in Sharail was a little more organized compared to that in Kuliarchar. A day after the posters were fixed in the town some *imams* of the mosques and instructors of the madrassa in the town met in a mosque after *esha* prayer to discuss about the posters. The clergy avoided discussing this issue in our meeting with them. Next morning it was observed that all the posters on verbal divorce were ripped off.

A set of posters fixed on the wall of the RDP area office lobby however remained intact. On these posters, some of the local friends of the RDP manager informed him that the clergymen had decided to take action against the office for not removing the posters from the lobby. They also advised manager to take down the posters to avoid any harm done to the office and its staff. The manager mentioned to them that he was interested in meeting the clergymen to explain the posters. The proposal was though conveyed but the clergymen did not respond to the proposition.

A nation-wide lockout was held on July 15, 1997 to protest against the defaming of the Prophet Muhammad in Israel. On that day a group of 40 to 60 madrassa students came to the area office to check whether the office was cooperating with the protest by keeping it closed. The group was approached and stopped by the manager at the outer gate of the office. But 5 to 6 of them managed to force themselves into the office and came to the lobby. After seeing the posters they remarked that these were against Islam. One of them ripped off the poster on 'verbal divorce'. At that time the group standing in front of the gate started throwing stones at the office building. Seeing this, shopkeepers and college students hanging around in the nearby bazaar came forward and drove the madrassa students away from the office.

A day after the posters were fixed in Kuliarchar the principal of a local madrassa met with two of the influential elite (economic elite affiliated with major political parties) in the town after *magreb* prayer in a mosque to discuss the posters. A number of religious people were also present. They wanted to know from the principal the dictates of the holy Koran on divorce. The Principal when responding to their questions mentioned that BRAC made a grave offense by fixing the posters. He managed to convince the group and the elite that they should stand against any misinterpretation of the holy Koran and Hadith. As a step in doing so it was decided that next day they would hold a protest rally against the posters in the town and take it to the RDP area office.

On that day the decision to hold the rally was abandoned instead number of instructors from madrassa filed a First Information Report against the posters in the local police station. On the same day, sometime in early afternoon, the officer in charge (OC) of the police station and an elite, with whom the principal had a discussion on the previous day, visited the area office. The elite rudely criticized the conduct of the office staff and BRAC's policies. At one point the OC requested the elite to leave the office mentioning that he would be able to handle the situation and the elite left the office. The OC told the staff that by fixing the posters they had attacked the religious sentiment of the town. He advised them to take off all the posters fixed in the town and pacify clergymen and local influential. He further mentioned that if it was not done the police department would not be able to protect them from any undesirable action taken against them. The respective regional manager was informed about this incidence. He suggested that the OC's advice be followed. Accordingly staff went out to take down all the posters but none of the posters were found intact. Some of the walls where posters were fixed were covered with mud and cow dung.

When the OC visited the area office, a group of madrassa students went around the town and ripped off all the posters. In general their action was, but for a few cases, unopposed or protested. An interviewee observed that when the students were ripping off the posters in a spot a passerby tried to discourage them from doing so by telling that there was nothing wrong in the posters and every citizen had the right to fix the posters.

In the same evening a group of POs met with clergymen and one of the elite after *esha* prayer to discuss about the posters. The female AM did not accompany the group as her presence in the meeting could have produced an outcome not desired by the Office. The POs managed to

pacify them by confessing that by fixing the posters they did wrong. In that meeting it was decided that in future BRAC should take their permission to fix any poster in the town.

For about a week after fixing the posters in Puthia a local community leaders' workshop was scheduled in the RDP AO. Just before the meeting a group of 20-25 clergies came to the AO and rudely demanded the office to take down the posters fixed on the office. The area manager was forced to take down the posters. When they were making the demand, a number of invitees to the workshop reached the meeting. The group requested the invitees to join them in their demand and a portion of the invitees joined the group. Next, the group went to the nearby bazaar and held a meeting on the posters. The meeting was joined by some of those hanging around and working in the bazaar. In the meeting it was repeatedly mentioned that the posters were anti-Islamic and it was decided that those should be removed from the town. After the meeting the clergies went around and removed all the posters in the town. Later in the afternoon the AM informed the Assistant Superintendent of Police and Thana Nirbahi Officer about the whole incidence. They assured them that the area office would receive their protection in future if any harm was attempted on them.

Arguments for and against the posters

The BRAC staff and the VO members interviewed approved the posters. The clergy also expressed their consensus but that was in disapproving the posters. Although the posters were disapproved in general there were some in this group who approved a number of the posters. The elite and the interviewees from the spots where posters were fixed represented both opinions.

The interviewees rationalized their stand for supporting or opposing the posters. Their arguments are given below.

Statement in the poster: We have built this world and this civilization; men and women contributed equally to it.

The group opposing this poster mentioned that Islam recognizes equal rights to both men and women but suggests different responsibilities to each of them. A poster showing both male and female doing similar kind of work contradicted this dictate of Islam. In connection with such poster they stated a number of negative implications of BRAC's activities.

1. Crimes or antisocial activities like rape, throwing acid on women were increasingly taking place in the society mainly because females are venturing out of their homes. BRAC, through its programs was encouraging women to come out of their home thus making them an easy prey to those crime and antisocial activities.
2. BRAC was creating employment for female. According to the prevailing social norm males were supposed to work and earn. Presently a significant portion of the male folk is unemployed in the country. BRAC could have done good to the society by creating employment for these unemployed males. These unemployed, out of their frustrations are doing antisocial activities.

3. God created males physically stronger than females. Female should not be employed to such jobs where males can be more productive. BRAC by employing females in such jobs were not harvesting the potentialities of our society in a most effective manner.
4. Some opposing a poster argued that the females in the poster were drawn offensively.

Thus, the posters were opposed mainly for three reasons: contradicting Islamic values on responsibilities of the genders, harming the society by encouraging women to work outside and cladding women improperly in the poster.

In contrast, those who supported the posters did so because the poster encouraged women to participate in the productive activities; which would lead to more income for the family.

Statement in the poster: Many brides are crying because of child marriage; nobody pays attention to the flood of their tears.

It was mentioned that according to Islam child marriage was allowed in special situations. A father unable to support his daughter can marry her to an able husband. In citing an example it was mentioned that one of the wives of Prophet Muhammad was only 6 years of age at marriage. In contrast another group (smaller in size) supported the poster. According to them child marriage brings unhappiness in the family. Every parent should be aware of it. A clergyman supported the poster believing that Islam did not support child marriage. He contradicted others interviewed from his group.

Statement in the poster: Those who torture women, send them to lock-up.

The poster on the abuse of women was supported by all groups interviewed. The VO members considered it to be the most effective one in the set. In spite of supporting the message in the poster most of the interviewees were of the opinion that the abused women in the poster was not properly dressed.

The clergymen strongly objected to drawing a women without sufficiently covering her body in the poster. Most of the elderly who were interviewed at the location where posters were fixed also had opinion similar to the clergies. The VO members mentioned that the women who are abused usually are not given enough saris and blouses to wear so the picture was okay. They were also of the opinion that the woman was a little under-dressed⁴. A clergyman mentioned that when a women was abused it might not have been possible to keep her body covered, therefore he was of the opinion that the poster was correctly drawn.

Statement in the poster: Married by reciting *kalema* only but without registration; husband divorced what to do now?

It was mentioned that according to Islam, marriage was conducted by pronouncing *kalema* (i.e., *izaab* and *kabul*). Registering marriage is not a requirement in conducting marriage. It was thought that the statement in the poster have been so framed that it gave more importance

⁴ The VO members expressed their opinion only after they were pointed out about the way the abused women have been drawn in the poster.

to registration over *kalema*. By making it insignificant or subordinate to registration the poster made mockery of *kalema*. Another reason for opposing the posters was that if registration became a part and parcel of a marriage that would mean that all the marriages that took place without registration since the revelation of Islam, were conducted incorrectly. This group recognized the advantage of documenting marriage but they did not use the word registration.

A group, most of whom received LE, supported the poster because they considered registration of marriage significant as it made divorce difficult. Making divorce difficult would save lot of marriages from breaking-up.

Statement in the poster: How to pay the bride money whether dead or alive.

It was mentioned that according to Islam there were circumstances when the wife needs to provide bride money to her husband after divorce. Since the poster dealt with the bride money for the wife only, it was thought that the poster failed to provide complete information on bride money. To some, Islam did not say anything about repaying the bride money, therefore the statement was not according to Islam.

The group supporting the poster felt that bride money could be a big economic help for the divorced women. Thus, it was very important for the village women to know the laws on bride money. They were of the opinion that the poster did a good job of conveying the message about bride money.

Statement in the poster: Divorce is not effective if given verbally.

The group opposing the posters made a number of citations from the holy Koran indicating that divorce can be conducted verbally. It was also mentioned that we might cross-check their citation in a recently published article on BRAC posters by Billah (1997). According to them the poster had two problems. First, according to the holy Koran divorce could only be conducted verbally. Which means if it cannot be conducted verbally, the marriage would be left without a scope for conducting divorce. Denying the concept of verbal divorce would also mean denying marriages which was conducted verbally. This would mean that establishing a marital relationship conducted verbally would be ineffective. Denying verbal divorce would also mean that all divorce conducted verbally since the introduction of Islam were illegal. Second, since verbal divorce was correct according to Islam, marital relationship after such divorce would be tantamount to adultery and children born out of such relationship would be illegitimate. It was felt by them that the poster stating that divorce could not be given verbally was, in fact, encouraging marital relationships after such divorce.

There was another group who supported the poster. According to them abolishing verbal divorce would make divorce difficult and more infrequent than it was happening at that time. By making it so, lot of families could be saved from breaking-up and from its evil consequences, e.g., economic hardship for the divorced wife as in many cases she was left without an earner in the family.

Why opposition to the posters

The clergymen stated that it was their moral obligation to preserve Islamic values in the society. The posters attacked the *iman* of those having it, thus they had to stand against it.

The VO members and BRAC staff had different interpretations of the clergy opposing to the posters. According to them after a verbal divorce, the husband usually becomes repentant and intends to reunite with the divorcee, who may also be willing for such a reunion. For this reunion it is customary to conduct *hilla-nikah*⁵. To make the reunion socially acceptable without going through *hilla-nikah* the separated couple needs the help of the clergymen. After receiving money the clergy makes a public statement (usually in a village court) that when the husband pronounced verbal divorce he was not with a sound mind therefore, the divorce was not valid and their reunion without *hilla-nikah* would not be a violation of any Islamic code. After the announcement the couple reunites. The VO members were of the opinion that the poster on verbal divorce would gradually stop this practice, in which case the clergymen would be deprived of an income. Apprehending such a situation arising from the poster they opposed it.

BRAC staff also pointed out a number of causes for the opposition to the posters.

1. The presence of BRAC is widely felt because of its wide scale and multidimensional involvement in the village. There is a section in the community who are of the opinion that what ever BRAC does is harmful for the society. Just as the posters were BRAC's they opposed to the program.
2. A smaller group, comprised of the clients or previous clients of BRAC who did not want to comply with RDP policy were unhappy with the organization and thus acted negatively against the posters. They joined clergymen because of their grudge against BRAC.
3. The clergymen felt that they were the only group in society with training and competence to deal with issues related to Islam. The posters, having religious connotations, was considered as an intrusion into their professional domain so they reacted against the posters.
4. Another group acted against the posters because their religious feeling was influenced by the clergies. This group, though religious, in most cases was illiterate and had very little or no understanding of Islam.

Suggestion from the interviewees

Though some of the interviewees objected to the theme of the posters, none was against the policy of postering. They all agreed that posters could be an effective tool for educating the general mass in Bangladesh. To make the initiative successful the interviewees came up with a number of suggestions.

⁵ A matrimonial dictate on the reunion of the divorced couple. The wife needs to marry another person, live together with him for a minimum of four months, get divorced and then remarry the previous husband with whom the reunion is intended.

The clergies felt that to achieve the development of Bangladesh, the NGOs and the religious community should work hand in hand. The NGOs should establish policies and the methods for implementation according to the suggestions of the religious scholars (*ulamae-e-keram*). Only then the NGOs would receive the cooperation of the religious community. They also felt that the posters should uphold Islamic values which could be best done by discussing with the religious scholars.

BRAC staff were of the opinion that similar posters would create further opposition in the town. In order to avoid this they came up with number of suggestions about future posters.

1. The posters received the most criticism, i.e., on 'verbal divorce' and on 'women abuse', should be removed from the set.
2. The statements in the posters which were objected may be rephrased. It was suggested that the statement 'Divorce is not effective if given verbally' can be rephrased as 'According to the civil law of Bangladesh divorce is not effective if given verbally'. The female figures in the posters should be drawn in such a way that those might not become objectionable to any onlookers. For example, the women in 'the abuse of women poster' should be drawn wearing a blouse.
3. The VO members and those interviewed where the posters were displayed suggested that the posters should be fixed at a higher place so that those could not be easily ripped off. Even though the posters were not torn down those could not have sustained for long under the rain and sun. Thus, they came up with number of suggestions to make the posters long lasting. (i) Fix posters inside the shops and stores. In this case the owner of shop/store would be able to protect the posters while allowing people to see them. (ii) The posters would be drawn on tin plates. Such posters would be more durable and would be difficult to ripped off.

The group supporting the poster program suggested that the posters should be displayed in a larger scale. They also came up with number of strategies in postering.

1. The posters made for this purpose may be fixed on a billboard at every road crossing.
2. A husband of a VO member suggested that calendars having the posters may be made and circulated throughout the country.
3. The poster on 'the abuse of women' should be displayed more often in greater number as it was thought to be a common social vice in the society.
4. Some of the VO members suggested that postering should be done around the mosques and madrassas so that the clergymen could learn from the posters. On the other hand, BRAC staff advised that the posters should not be posted around those places as it would agitate the clergymen.
5. To avoid conflict between clergymen and BRAC staff a VO member suggested that they should be given the responsibility of displaying the posters.

Conclusion, discussion and Recommendations

The postering brought both VO members and the whole range of non-VO members under the scope of the Program. The poster program was intended to empower the whole of Bangladesh

with legal knowledge. For a policy having such an involvement it was not unlikely that there would be a section in the community who would not support the posters program and oppose it.

The agitation against the posters ranged from verbal condemnation of the poster to organized action against it. The group supporting the posters placed their arguments in support of the poster against those opposing the poster, but in the case of ripping off the posters they did not come forward and resist such action. This indicates that there is a possibility that the group opposing the posters will be able to jeopardize the objective of the program by ripping off the posters.

The reactions of RDP staff against the opposition varied from area to area. They did not make any effort to prevent the ripping off of the posters. Such an effort, most probably, would have flared the intensity of the opposition. Staff held meetings with those opposing the posters to explain the objective of fixing the posters and the actual meaning of the posters. Where the meeting was held, the effort appeared to have produced desired result. There were also cases where meeting could not be held because the party opposing the poster did not attend. In a situation where severe opposition was expected RDP staff compromised by surrendering to their apparent interest. The RDP staff took a pragmatic step in order to avoid harm done to the functioning of the RDP activities and for the success of postering in the long run.

Different sections in the community viewed the posters from different perspectives and accordingly rationalized their support or disagreement of the poster program.

The section opposing to the posters took the statements in the posters literally and analyzed them from a theoretical perspective based on the Koran. In analyzing these they mainly considered whether the posters contradicted with their interpretation. In their evaluation of the posters they also considered whether those contradicted with Islamic practices both at present and in the past.

The section supporting the posters emphasized their practical implication. They evaluated the posters based on the extent these were considered relevant to day-to-day problems. In supporting the posters some of them thought whether the laws of Bangladesh were properly reflected not whether the posters contradicted Islamic laws. They viewed the content of the posters independent of religion.

Although the study focused on the opposition to the posters, the findings revealed that there was also a support for the policy. The VO members supporting the policy represent 53% of the rural population owning less than 0.50 acres of land (BBS 1996 p. 35). During the opposition against the area office in Sharail a group came forward to assist the area office; indicating that there was also a section in the local town who supported the policy. The group supported the policy was larger by many fold to one opposed to the policy. These supporters were of the opinion that the program should go for a wider circulation of the posters in the

future. The study also shares their opinion on circulation but only after taking a number of measures.

The study indicated two important reasons for opposition against the posters: (1) misunderstanding about the posters and (2) professional interest affected by the posters. The section opposing the posters can be divided based on these considerations but with some exceptions.

It should be the program's strategy to reduce the size of the group opposing the posters. Two strategies may be mentioned.

1. In the case of those misunderstanding the posters it can be removed by modifying the statement and pictures in the posters. For example, the statement on verbal divorce in a poster, i.e., 'divorce is not effective if given verbally' can be rephrased as 'according to the law of Bangladesh divorce is not effective if given verbally'.
2. In the case of those whose professional interest is hampered it is believed that so long the posters will affect their professional interest they will keep on opposing the posters. In such cases, measures should be taken so that the scope for their opposition is minimized. For this anything in the posters which is objected should be removed from the poster if possible, but without diluting the objectives of the HRLE program. For example, in 'the abuse of women' poster the picture of the women may be drawn more moderately dressed so that the clergy may not have objection to it in the future.

The opposition primarily took place in local towns. It is considered imperative to poster these towns, as it will not only give the towns' an opportunity to view the posters but also villagers who during market day and other occasions visit the towns. In order to avoid oppositions in the towns, before poster, the local elite may be informed about the posters through personal contact. They in turn, will convince the section of the community who might oppose the posters.

After developing the new posters, they should be pilot-tested in a small area to observe the community's reaction on those. Based on the reaction the posters may be modified if needed. This policy is likely to cut down the probability of opposition after large scale poster.

Illiterate onlookers were helped by those who could read and understand the posters. They needed help because the meaning of the poster could be best understood by making a connection between the picture and the statement in the posters. It is suggested that the drawing in the poster may be modified so that their meaning can be derived independent of the statement in the poster.

It was observed that the paper-made posters were not durable. To make the posters long lasting it should be considered to make them from tin.

The poster is a powerful tool for mass education within a short time and with a limited resources. The success of the effort lies in making its message acceptable to the maximum

number of people in the community. If the poster is rejected in a large scale considerable damage can take place in the program. The posters should be handled with care. Fortunately the opposition against the HRLE posters was limited.

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