

**ACCELERATING THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT:
THE CASE OF A POULTRY PROGRAMME.**

MAHMUDA RAHMAN KHAN

JUNE 1995

**(The Paper will be presented at the workshop on "Case Studies About
Success Stories of Women in Agriculture.)**

**Research And Evaluation Division
BRAC
66, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka 1212.**

1. Introduction

In Bangladesh, since 1972, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been working for social development at the grassroots level. It soon became apparent to these NGOs that women are the key agents of development yet they are the most powerless and disenfranchised. Since then many NGOs have focused on integrating rural women into mainstream development by involving them in various types of income generating activities.

Over time many feminists, based on their experience of working with women at the grassroots level, have developed frameworks for obtaining long-term gender equity and women's empowerment. These frameworks suggest that, to do so, women's common interests popularly referred to as 'gender interests' have to be taken into account. Molyneux (1985) classified gender interests as "practical" and "strategic" interests. But when Moser translated it into gender planning, she called them practical and strategic needs. Practical needs are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. "Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender division of labour or women's subordinate position in society..." (Moser, 1994:40). On other hand, strategic needs are those which originate from women's subordination to men in a particular socio-cultural context. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles and therefore challenges women's subordinate position (ibid: 39).

Because women in developing countries lag behind and are deprived in every aspect of life, -- they lack knowledge, education, skills and health facilities -- a major social transformation is needed to achieve gender equity. To accelerate this social transformation, development interventions should be multi-dimensional and each intervention should be in the form of a complete package programme which includes training, credit, logistic support and marketing facilities.

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, internationally known as BRAC established in 1972, is a private sector development organization implementing multi-sectoral programmes to achieve two major goals: poverty alleviation, and empowerment of the poor, especially women. The poultry programme is one of BRAC's sectoral projects under the Center's Rural Development Programme (RDP). This paper will document how this poultry programme helps in empowering women.

1.1 Background.

Poultry rearing, a predominantly rural activity, is an integral part of the farming system in Bangladesh. Rural women rear poultry using their own techniques and knowledge. Poultry birds are certainly counted as assets that belong to village women themselves. A BRAC study on 104 key poultry rearers, for example, showed that 94% of poultry birds were owned by women and only six

percent were owned by the household as a whole (Amin, 1994). It appears, therefore, that poultry rearing is an income generating activity almost exclusively for women and that the poultry bird is the only asset within the household which she can claim as her own and use as she wishes. Men are not involved in this activity at all, other than, asking their wives for accounts of income and expenditure from the sales of poultry and eggs (Selim and Hasan, 1995). However, the number and size of the birds reared by women is very small and subject to seasonal variation and there is considerable room for improving the size and productivity of these enterprises.

Taking into account that poultry birds can provide protein to improve nutrition among the poor, while generating an income for those who rear them, in 1979, BRAC, in collaboration with the Department of Livestock (DOL), initiated a poultry programme for poor landless women. High yielding varieties birds (HYV) were introduced to increase the production of eggs and meat, with the intention of enabling women to increase their incomes.

However, as the weather, especially the heat and humidity, is not very suitable for rearing HYV poultry birds, special care, additional money, extra time and skills are needed to enable these enterprises a success. As rural women are particularly lacking in these, BRAC provides support services to help women overcome these obstacles and make poultry rearing successful. BRAC's Rural

Development Programme (RDP, Phase II) shows that the rural poor can be successful in rearing HYV poultry birds and increase their income if the required support and assistance are provided.

2. BRAC's Poultry Programme.

The poultry programme is designed to generate employment and income opportunities for the rural landless, particularly women. The programme operates under RDP, Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development Programme (IGVGD) and Smallholder Livestock Development Programme (SLDP). In 1979 this programme first started on an experimental basis in Manikganj. In 1983, BRAC designed a viable model for poultry development in collaboration with the government. This model includes eight specific activities:

- Training of cadres as poultry workers;
- Regular vaccination;
- Establishment of day-old chick rearing unit;
- Development of key rearers;
- Establishment of feed sales centers;
- Egg collectors;
- Credit; and
- Follow-up on regular basis.

The objectives of the programme are to:

- * expand income, particularly for women, by providing them with credit and training in poultry rearing;
- * reduce poultry mortality through regular vaccination;
- * increase poultry populations by establishing day-old chick rearing units, training key rearers, egg collectors, and providing follow-up;
- * increase protein intake of the rural poor.

Beneficiaries of the poultry programme are selected from among the Village Organization (VO) members¹. The personnel in the programme include the following: poultry workers, chick Rearers, key rearers, poultry hatcherer, feed sellers and egg collectors. In this paper we will be dealing with first three groups.

Poultry Workers (PWs)- Pws are selected on the basis of physical capacity, enthusiasm, and reputation/acceptability within the community. These women receive five days of training that enables them to vaccinate and treat poultry birds. Once a month they attend a one day-refresher course. They receive vaccines and medicine for distribution to twice a month. The vaccine is provided free of cost but medicines have to be purchased at cost price. They are allowed then to sell medicines with a 10% mark up. The Pws

¹ As a part of the Institution Building process, the formation of village organization is the first step. After identifying BRAC's target population through survey, groups are formed through group discussion as well as personal contacts, which are called the Village Organizations.

also disseminate information on general health, nutrition, etc., to rural women by organizing group meetings twice a month.

Chick Rearers (CRs)- The Crs are selected on the basis that space is available to them for building chick rearing units for 300 chicks and their willingness to rear chicks. The Crs are given 7 days training on chick rearing. They rear 300 one-day old chicks up to eight weeks and are given a loan of approximately Tk.7000 for chick rearing. The one-day old chicks are supplied by DOL. Crs have an assured and stable market because they sell their products to the key rearers.

Poultry or Key Rearers (PRs)- Key rearers are selected based on whether they are interested in rearing poultry. They are given three days of training on ideal methods of poultry rearing. These women are considered as demonstrators at the village level who will, ultimately, encourage others to rear HYV poultry birds.

This paper aims to document participants' experience in poultry rearing to examine the extent to which it has been successful and has enabled them to raise their income and to analyze how it affects their lives from a gender perspective.

2. The Operational Aspect of the Poultry Programme.

After identifying the target population of landless women through surveys, BRAC organizes them into Village Organizations (VO). All

development inputs are then channelled to the participants through the VOs. BRAC also provides human resource and skill development training and has credit programs for VO members aimed at income generation and employment. Once a group is formed, "Social Awareness Education, (SAE)" a community based training is given to all members to help them become aware of their hidden potential and find solutions to everyday problems.

All the Pws receive free training on poultry rearing, management, vaccination and treatment. They are also given a certificate of attendance, some equipment, and medicines for the poultry (Hyder, 1993). After training, the Pws provide services to vaccinate and treat poultry birds in their respective villages.

Chick rearers buy chicks from BRAC at Tk. 6 each. Ninety-one percent of the one-day-old chicks and vaccines are supplied by the government office and the remaining 9% BRAC supplies from its own sources (BRAC 1993). Key rearers are developed by providing training to some on ideal methods of poultry rearing. Key rearers must have one hybrid cock; ten hens, of which 4-5 should be HYV; and a good housing system (Amin, 1994). Feed centers are available from which key rearers can buy balanced feed for their birds. Typically, the key rearers sell eggs and poultry birds for income. Egg collectors, who are also BRAC members, normally collect the eggs from the key rearers and sell them to poultry hatcherers.

Tab 1. No. of Women Involved in BRAC's Poultry Programme up to December 1993.

	RDP	IGVGD	SLDP	Total
No. of Poultry workers	8,284	13,515	989	22,788
No. of Poultry rearers	265,859	185,720	3,862	455,441
No. of Chick rearers	2,966	2,545	325	5,836
Total	277,109	201,780	5,176	489,901

Source: BRAC Annual Report, 1993.

Note: RDP- Rural Development Programme, IGVGD-Income Generation for Vulnerable Group development and SLDP-Smallholder Livestock Development Programme.

By end of December 1993, 489,901 women were actively participating in the poultry programme under RDP, IGVGD and SLDP. Among them, 455,441 are poultry rearers and 22,788 and 5,836 are poultry workers and chick rearers respectively.

2.2 Income from Poultry Rearing.

Tab 2. Average Income per Month from poultry for Different Cadres.

Particulars	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
RDP						
Poultry Workers**	75.50	120	120	129	155	155
Chick Rearers*	525	580	650	724	672	431
Key Rearers	75	110	145	114	157	165
IGVGD						
Poultry Workers**	74	96	120	133	161	180
Chick Rearers*	480	652	655	686	684	596
Key Rearers	80.38	147	158	205	207	240
SLDP***						
Poultry Workers**	-	-	-	-	-	113
Chick Rearers	-	-	-	-	-	717
Key Rearers	-	-	-	-	-	84

Source: BRAC Poultry Programme report 1994.

* Affected by Gumboro disease during 1993-94.

** Income of Poultry workers is shown only from vaccination.

*** SLDP started in August 1993.

Table 2 shows net income for each cadre of poultry worker in each program. Income data are net of the cost of feed, medicine, and loan interest payments. Poultry income is about 25-40% of the total household income but varies cadre to cadre (BRAC, 1994). It is apparent, chick rearers are most successful in raising their income, perhaps because they have a fixed market (i.e, key rearers). Key rearers have to rely on the open market (a restricted

sphere for women in Bangladesh) for selling their birds. Moreover, sometimes HYV birds die due to the lack of specialized care, and sometimes, the rearers sell immature birds for low price because they do not want to incur the loss of the birds not surviving. Also, some eggs and birds are used for household consumption. In fact, data shows that out of one month's production of 2,171 eggs, 33% is consumed within the household. Household consumption is not regarded as income.

It is evident that women involved in different activities of the poultry programme have been successful in raising their income by a small amount. This is significant when viewed in the context of the fact that these landless destitute women did not have any source of income before and had to totally rely on their husbands.

Next, is the issue of who controls this money and how it is spent. Since poultry rearing is exclusive a women's undertaking, income generated from these activities is controlled by them. In a recent study, 5% (among 104 respondents) of the rearers mentioned that their husbands spent their poultry rearing income. The rest had control over their own income (Amin, 1993).

This study also shows that in most cases the income earned from poultry rearing is spent on children's education, loan repayment, medical treatment and clothes, particularly for themselves and their children. Children's education and clothing were given

priority. These women also managed to create some durable assets out of the savings from poultry rearing which included house repair, land mortgage, purchase of trees, goats and cows (Amin, 1994).

2.3 Change in Social Status.

The social impact of poultry rearing is more prominent in the case of Pws in comparison to CRs and Key rearers. The PWs normally visit every household in their respective designated areas (villages) to vaccinate the birds; provide counseling on poultry rearing; and sell medicines for different poultry diseases. They charge Tk.0.25 per vaccine. As the PWs collect vaccines from either Union Parishad (UP) or BRAC, this provides them an opportunity to interact with BRAC and/or UP office staff.

The PWs organize meetings twice a month with other beneficiaries of this programme where they discuss issues related to poultry rearing, health and sanitation, nutrition and any other subject brought up by the participants. In terms of counselling, the PWs have not limited their range of services only to programme participants, but include other villagers. Because of the range of services provided by the PWs, they are considered to be knowledgeable and called "murgir daktar" (poultry doctor). As a result, other village women visit them for counselling on cow and goat rearing, family planning, health and other issues related to

every day life in the village (Hyder, 1993).

In addition to changing her status among the villagers, the PWs ability to earn an income and contribute to the financial welfare of her family has helped in transforming her status within the family (including in-laws). As these women have to leave their home frequently to carry out their duties as poultry workers, they need help in their household work. In one study it was found that the husband and other members of the family always extend their helping hands to a PW in taking care of birds, maintaining chick rearing units, hatcheries, and preserving vaccines and medicine, etc. Moreover, in some cases husbands also do the cooking and take care of the children (Hyder, 1993). This might well be the first step in changing traditional gender roles.

2.4 Difficulties Women are Facing in Running the Poultry Programme

From the above description it would appear that women are doing well in this programme. However, since the whole range of poultry rearing activities are not controlled by the women themselves, they often face different problems. Women receive loans from BRAC for their chick and poultry rearing units, the equipment for vaccination, vaccines, and one-day old chicks are supplied by DOL. Firstly, DOL often fails to supply one-day old chicks and the required number of vaccines per the demand of the programme. Secondly, the BRAC feed center is not always successful in

supplying good quality food essential for rearing HYV birds. Thirdly, even though women receive loans from BRAC to make poultry sheds, they face problems in maintaining hygienic poultry sheds for HYV birds. This is mainly due to the lack of proper supervision from programme staff, specifically Programme Assistants (PA) who are found to be overloaded with work (Amin, 1993). Additionally, the lack of knowledge and skill of the rearers contribute to the mortality of HYV birds. In some cases women sell HYV birds before maturity and lose out on making a profit. Because not all the PWs are well informed to conduct groups meetings on health, nutrition, and hygiene, this also contributes to the difficulties faced by the rearers. Finally, the long distance from the home village to the UP office and lack of transportation facilities in the rural areas forces women to be unable to travel to obtain the services provided by the government offices. They, therefore, may not be able to maintain their poultry in the desired condition (Amin, 1994; Hyder, 1993).

3. LESSONS LEARNED

An important lesson learned from the BRAC experience is that, despite the socio-economic impediments prevailing in the rural areas, women can be successful in improving their lives if necessary support and opportunities are made accessible to them. However, another important lesson is that providing only credit is not enough to empower women when they lack education, knowledge,

skill and health facilities as well. They also need other services, skill and training and BRAC has provided this through the total-package programme for poultry rearing. In addition to providing credit the package also exposes women to new technology through skills training, monitoring and supervision, and the supply of inputs such as vaccines, one-day old chicks and poultry feed. Moreover, the program involves women in a chain of activities, so that they do not face marketing problems.

BRAC's multi-faceted interventions that include social awareness training, health interventions and, legal education along with increased mobility and interaction with UP and BRAC staff make the women aware and confident. Even the women themselves feel that visiting UP office and interacting with the staff is regarded as a symbol of "prestige" among them.

"Like other elites and UP members we also visit the UP office regularly.." (cited in Hyder, 1993).

"We discuss problems and different issues in order to improve our life...." (ibid).

It is also evident that having an income of their own make women economically independent as, in most cases, they decide how to spend the money. This is how women express their freedom and economic relief: "We earn money and share family expenditure with

our husbands. We do not have to put pressure on our husbands to buy clothes" (ibid).

Another study (Amin, 1994) shows that whenever women earn, they spend their income on children's education and family welfare, which indirectly helping to build the nation.

Therefore, the main lesson to be derived from the poultry programme is that an intervention directed towards improving the socio-economic status of women should ensure that the necessary support and services are delivered in a timely and efficient manner to prevent recipients from incurring economic losses because once the recipients incur an economic loss they may loose interests in the program and not be willing to participate.

3.1 Recommendations.

The BRAC poultry programme model has opened up possibilities for the development of rural destitute women by providing them access to technology on HYV poultry rearing, along with credit and other support. The following recommendations are made with a view to strengthening the programme in meeting its objectives.

1. In order to ensure smooth and sufficient supply of one-day old chicks, BRAC should strengthen its own source of supply (private sector). As recommended in one study, BRAC should

consider establishing its own hatching plants to cover DOL's supply gap. (Hyder, 1993).

2. BRAC should examine the reasons for the poor quality of the feed supply and steps should be taken to improve quality.
3. For reducing HYV mortality rate, hygienic physical facilities are important. Intensive supervision should be provided by the PAs so that rearers can make efficient use of BRAC loans to develop and maintain hygienic poultry sheds.
4. Similar to the follow up training of PWs, refresher training should be arranged for the rearers, so that they can continuously improve their skills in rearing HYV birds.
5. BRAC should work more intensively with government agencies to improve the infrastructure.
6. Women should be encouraged, through BRAC's programmes, to discuss a wide range of issues pertaining to their every day life. These discussions would help in improving the overall quality of their lives.

5. Conclusion

Through this poultry programme the rural poor women have been

successful in raising their income and increasing their skills and knowledge as well as augmenting their social status, even though they face certain problems. Women participating in this program are now able to control and spend their own money to improve their and their children's lives. It can, therefore, be concluded that this intervention has been successful in meeting the practical needs of its participants (basic needs), which according to Molyneux (1985), is the first step in women's emancipation.

Then comes the question of their strategic interests. By strategic interests, Molyneux meant the abolition of sexual division of labour -- the alleviation of domestic labour and child care. In other words meeting strategic needs means change in existing roles, and ultimately, challenging women's subordinate position (Moser, 1993). To move towards meeting strategic interests from meeting practical needs, according to Young (1988) "Transformatory potentials" are required within the intervention. This, in fact means that there should be space for discussion, exchange of experiences through which they can find out the root cause of women's ^{subordinate position} ~~poverty~~ and build up the collective strength among themselves to transform the society.

In the case, it is apparent that there is scope for moving towards strategic interests, as women meet together on regular basis and discuss different ways to improve their lives. Because involvement in the project enhances women's mobility (which is very important

for women in the context of Bangladesh), it also increases awareness. Because they are able to earn an income and contribute to the family expenditures, change in gender roles becomes more feasible. For meeting strategic needs, Moser (1993:49) argued that it is important for women to be involved in men's work. However, this poultry programme shows that even traditional activities help women feel a sense of achievement. The important thing is women should be given choices.

The poultry programme has opened up choices for poor landless women. Despite the problems encountered by women in developing countries such as, illiteracy, lack of skill and knowledge, high fertility, lack of access to credit and other socio-cultural constraints, they can be successful, if necessary support and opportunities are made accessible to them. These women, though illiterate, certainly have latent potentials which they can not demonstrate due to lack of gender sensitive projects and policies. To achieve the long term gender equity and women's empowerment researchers, scholars, policy makers, bureaucrats, and development workers must work together from a gender perspective. Training, educational and advocacy activities should be carried out to educate development researchers, policy makers, bureaucrats and practitioners.

References:

Amin, M. N (1994): Poultry Rearing by Rural Women: Case from Five Villages, BRAC Research Report.

BRAC (1993): BRAC Annual Report.

Hyder, S.M.Z (1993): Destitute Women and Sustainable Rural Development: Poultry Workers Of the IGVD Programme Of BRAC, Research Report.

Molyneux, M (1985): ' Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interests, The State, and The Revolution in Nicaragua' in Feminists Review 11 (2).

Moser, C (1993): 'Practical and strategic gender needs and the role of the state' in Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice & Training. Routledge.

Young, K (1988): Reflections on Meeting Women's Needs in Young, K (Eds): Women and Economic Development: Local, Regional and National Planning Strategies. Berg/Unesco Studies in Development Theory and Policy.