

Assessment of Workshop and Activities of the BRAC Local Representatives

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to evaluate the BRAC Local Representative (BLR) workshops and to assess the activities of BLRs. The assessment of the activities included inter-programme coordination meetings and government coordination meetings. We assessed 12 workshops attended by 441 BLRs. Although the workshops were facilitated efficiently but suffered from time constraints. In many cases the BLRs activity schedules could not be maintained for variety of reasons. In most cases the local government authorities were positive about the performance of BLRs. The study recognizes the importance of BLRs and suggested some recommendations for qualitative improvement of BLRs and conducting more effective workshops.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study aimed to assess the BRAC Local Representative (BLR) workshops and to evaluate the activities of the BLRs. The BLR workshops are designed to review and increase the capacities of the BLRs. So, the evaluation of the workshop became the major focus of the study. A team of researchers observed seven BLR workshops and carried out a quick survey of the BLR participants in these workshops. The information was collected from 441 BLRs who attended 12 workshops held in different districts in August 2005. The study also collected information on the inter-programme coordination and government coordination meetings through review of documents and interviews with various key stakeholders. Three Deputy Commissioners, two Additional Deputy Commissioners and four *Upazila* Nirbahi Officers were interviewed on their views on BLR activities.

Some of the key findings are as follows:

- BLRs did not have any real incentives for their role as a BLR, which was generally viewed as secondary to their core programme responsibilities. The lack of incentives is compounded by hard monitoring indicators of BLR activities. This is bound to affect their performance in the workshop as well as the coordination meetings negatively.
- The facilitators were observed to be efficient and tried their best in holding the attention of the participants throughout the workshops. They were clear in delivering their materials. They were organized and well prepared. The workshops were largely interactive. As a whole the facilitations in the workshop were observed to be effective.
- Typically, a BLR workshop includes 15 sessions spread over 8 hours and 15 minutes. It seemed that the time allocated to many of the sessions were not enough given the subject matter being covered and the participants' needs, resulting in overloading the sessions. More attention to structuring the sessions in view of the time constraints is therefore needed.
- BLRs concentration in the workshop was hampered due to their tiredness in the later sessions, interruption by mobile phones they were carrying, pre-occupation with their base office and their lack of preparation for the workshop.
- Facilities were not of the same standard in all the workshops particularly in terms of equipments used in conducting training and seating arrangement. Some of the microphones used were malfunctioning. The workshops did not have any evaluation mechanism either for the facilitators or the participants.
- As per policy, the inter-programme coordination meeting is to be arranged within the first week of the month or as needed in response to the government coordination meetings. But, in most cases the policy could not be followed. In few cases the meetings were held as decided by the local programme heads but more than one meeting had to be held at different programme offices. All these reflect the lack of proper planning and seriousness in implementing the BLR policies.
- The inter-programme coordination meeting records were not uniformly maintained by the BLRs. The issues discussed in the inter-programme coordination meetings could be grouped into two – issues related to BLR objectives and not related to BLR objectives. It

was seen that almost half of the issues discussed in the meetings were not related to the BLR objectives.

- The impression of the local government authority was mixed. A good number (5 of 9) of the government authorities had a positive impression about the presence of BLRs in the coordination meeting. However, most also said that the BLRs were not adequately informed about BRAC, providing information only about credit and education programmes.
- The BLRs were of the impression that they had improved their presentation skills but a lot still have to be achieved. The BLRs were also of the opinion that they did not have sufficient knowledge about different BRAC programmes to present in the meetings.
- Findings also indicate that BRAC still has a lot to do to change the impression of the government officials towards BRAC and a long way to go to change the government-NGO relationship. The BLR initiative, if properly implemented with seriousness and hard monitoring, can go a long way towards achieving better relationship.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The non-governmental organizations (NGO) are emerging in a large scale in Bangladesh contributing to the country's development in general and poverty alleviation in particular. The relationship between the NGOs and government can be divided into three phases – coexistence without interaction, relationship of suppression and rapprochement, and relationship of cooperation and coordination (Ahmed and Rafi 2002).

In early 1970s the size of the NGOs were small in relation to their coverage in the rural areas for different community development programmes like agriculture, health or education. The activities of NGOs neither overlapped nor contradicted with the government because the development initiatives of the government in the rural areas were few. In late 1970s and early 1980s, the NGOs grew bigger because of the channeling of funds in diversified programmes. The government saw this as a threat to their monopoly in power and the NGOs became proud of their performance. The government commissioned Foreign Donation Regulation Ordinance in 1978 through which it becomes mandatory to have registration of the NGOs and obtaining prior approval of the government to introduce a new programme and on the budget. The ordinance was perceived by the NGOs as the government attempt to restrict the efforts of NGOs. The policy was seen by NGOs as a deliberate harassment on them. As a result the relationship between the government and NGOs became constrained.

In the second half of 1990s, both the government and NGOs realized that if both the sectors worked together than it would not only be a better approach for alleviating poverty but also had a higher chance of success. That leads to the partnership between NGOs and several of its departments like rural developments, health, population control, agriculture and forestry. BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, has emerged as an independent, virtually self-financed paradigm in sustainable human development. It provides and protects livelihoods of 110 million of the 141 million people of Bangladesh (BRAC annual report, 2004). BRAC was not immune to the changing relationship between the government and NGOs. In 1990s, when BRAC went into diversification and extension of programmes, it became imperative to coordinate with concerted body within and outside of the organizations mainly with the government more closely. At this junction, some difficulties arose in representing BRAC to different government departments particularly at the district and *upazila* levels by the local BRAC staff. This was because BRAC had variety of programmes and the knowledge of staff was very much focused on the particular programme they were involved with. To overcome this difficulty BRAC decided to appoint representatives of BRAC called BRAC Local Representative (BLR) in 1994 to coordinate and represent BRAC to the local government bodies and other local NGOs.

BRAC LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE (BLR)

As a policy the BLRs would be the most senior staff in their respective location. In addition to their regular duties they are expected to coordinate and maintain liaison with district and *upazila* government authorities as well as with other government offices and private organizations. The BLRs are, therefore, expected to be well conversant with the philosophy, vision, mission and overall objective of BRAC. It is imperative that s/he will have a through knowledge of BRAC's programme activities in her/his respective location.

When BLR was introduced in BRAC, the executive director issued a circular where it was mentioned that, ‘All BRAC staff will extend their fullest cooperation to these representatives in the performance of their responsibilities.’ It may, however, be noted that these representatives will have no inter-programme administrative or supervision responsibilities. It was also mentioned that, only the executive director had the authority to issue the transfer order of the BLRs. But in the sake of programmes BLRs could be transferred by special order instantly.

The objectives of BLR

There are four main objectives of BLR:

- To improve the quality of BRAC programme through inter-programme coordination,
- To coordinate and develop positive relationship with local government and NGOs,
- To develop communication skill, and
- To update the BLRs with new initiatives of BRAC.

Although the objectives of BLR are definitely categorized, the last two objectives are the facilitator factors in achieving the first two objectives.

Roles and responsibilities of BLR

The roles and responsibilities of BLR can be grouped under four broad heads:

Inter-programme coordination

One of the major responsibilities of the BLR is to improve the quality of BRAC programmes by increasing the inter-programme coordination in the field. BRAC has issued a guideline to the BLRs to do the inter-programme coordination as follows:

- Know about all the programmes and employees in his/her assigned area,
- Arrange at least one inter-programme coordination meeting in a month with the head of each programme in that area. Fix the date of the inter-programme coordination meeting in response to the date of government coordination meeting,
- Preserve the minutes of the inter-programme coordination meetings, and
- Send the minutes of the inter-programme coordination meeting at the head office.

Coordination with the local government authority

The BLRs should establish relationship with the local government authorities through distributing leaflets and brochure and organizing annual workshops on BRAC programmes at *upazila* level. More explicitly the coordination activities include:

- Participate in fairs at *upazila* or district level like population day, immunization day, AIDS day, family planning day, etc.,
- Send reports to the government officials on time if asked for,
- Help local government authorities in achieving some of their programme goals like EPI,
- Help in proper distribution of *khas* land,
- Coordinate or join the *upazila* disaster committee of the government and initiate joint programme with the government during disaster situation and distribute relief, and
- Coordinate the work of *upazila* forestation committee.

Coordination with local NGOs

Another role of the BLRs is to establish relationship with the local NGOs, including Federation of Non-government Organization in Bangladesh (FNB), in attaining their objectives and help those organizations in their crisis period, and participate in the rallies organized and celebrated nationally.

Other responsibilities

Other responsibilities include keeping relation with influential body and media within their assigned area, such as

- Participate in the workshop/meeting initiated by the Chairman or *Imam* for social development, e.g. Human Rights and Legal Aid Service,
- Inform the reporter of the dailies on BRAC programmes and provide them with reports,
- Join in the meetings against terrorism,
- Invite the government and NGO personal to visit BRAC programmes, and
- Participate in the meetings held at the *upazila* level or send representative.

At present there are 500 BLRs working at BRAC. Among them 64 are district BLRs i.e. they are responsible for coordinating with the government and NGOs at district level. The other 436 BLRs are called *upazila* BLRs. They are responsible for coordinating activities at the *upazila* level.

THE BLR WORKSHOP

The BLRs are trained in conducting 'BLR workshop' held in every four months. The Director of BRAC Training Division supervises the workshops as well as the activities of the BLRs. Programme Manager (Service) of the same division coordinates the BLR workshops, fixes the topic for discussion in the workshops and is also involved in the decision making process regarding any changes in the workshop agenda. BLR workshops are facilitated by TARC in-charges who work as cluster coordinators.

Primarily the BLR workshops were focused only in the development of communication and presentation skills. However, over time, several changes were made in the content and nature of the workshop. For instance, a separate session on discussion of the current issue of BRAC, using video camera for improving presentation skill was included. At a later phase different senior head office staff were invited as resource persons in the workshop to discuss about their divisions, programmes or current topics of BRAC. Realizing greater need and the demand from the BLR, a few years back, English language skill development session was included in the workshop. Usually, a local resource person from an educational institution is invited for conducting the English language session. Recently, the chairperson of FNB was also invited to share the activities of other NGOs. The Deputy Commissioner or other senior government officials are invited to conduct a session in the workshop. The BLRs maintain a file known as BLR file in which they keep invitation letter for workshop from TARC, all sorts of information provided from the workshop, minutes of the inter-programme meetings, etc.

Almost a decade back, the concept of BLR was introduced. Now time has come to know to what extent BLR activities are successful and how does the BLR workshop played its role in preparing the BLRs for performing their responsibilities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study has two major objectives: a) to assess the BLR workshop; and b) to assess the activities of BLR. The activities assessment includes assessment of inter-programme coordination meetings and performance of BLRs in government coordination meetings.

METHODOLOGY

The activities of BLR can be divided into three broad categories – attending workshops, inter-programme coordination, and interaction with stakeholders outside BRAC. All these activities were assessed. The nature of these activities demanded the adaptation of a blend of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Accordingly number of research instruments was used in the collection of data as was appropriate for different BLR activities. The instruments included participant observation, in-depth interview, and questionnaire survey. In order to design the instruments a BLR workshop, held in Dinajpur TARC in August 2005, was observed. Besides, extensive discussion was also held with relevant staff of BRAC head office.

OBSERVATION OF BLR WORKSHOP

Seven BLR workshops held at different TARCs (Bogra, Chittagong, Pabna, Barisal, Jessor, Modhupur, Srimangal) were observed using a checklist. The observation checklist included the following issues:

- Time management i.e. the scheduled time and the actual timing of the session,
- Presentation skill of the workshop coordinator,
- The reaction of the participants on the topics discussed,
- The interaction of the participants in the session,
- Any expression of exercising power among the participants and the coordinator/invited resource person,
- The outside and inside environment of the classroom, and
- The level of satisfaction of the participants in that session observed from their expression

It was also observed whether any agenda were added or discarded from the workshop. A note of the discussion of the participants during the tea and lunch break was also made.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Twenty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with seven junior BLRs (those who were working as BLR for 1-2 years), seven senior BLRs (those who are working as BLR for more than 5 years) and seven TARC In-charges. Nine in-depth interviews were done with the government officials [Three Deputy Commissioners (DC), two Additional Deputy Commissioners (ADC) and four *Upazila Nirbahi* Officers (UNO)] of Sreemongal, Modhupur, Rangpur, Barisal, Chittagong and Jessore. In-depth interviews were conducted with the help of a checklist.

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Altogether 441 (88%) BLRs participated in 12 BLR workshops held at different TARCs were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaire. The questions tabbed opinions on issues like workshop, inter-programme coordination or problems that they faced in the government coordination meetings, etc. In-depth interviews were also conducted based on a checklist.

REVIEW OF THE MINUTES OF INTER-PROGRAMME MEETINGS

Minutes of the 45 *upazila* level and three district level inter-programme coordination meetings were reviewed to understand the topics/issues the BLR's discussed, to know about the actual date of the meeting, types of participants attended in the meeting, etc.

A team of six researchers were involved specially with data collection. Another two research assistants were also involved in data collection. One of the major reasons for the involvement of large number of researchers was to follow/observe the maximum number of workshops. There was limited time for this study. The short span of the study strict the study in getting more analytical view.

FINDINGS

BLR WORKSHOPS

Background

The BLR workshops are organized at BRAC TARC after every three months to prepare, update, and enhance the skills of the BLRs. More specifically, the workshop focuses mostly on the development of presentation and communication skills of BLRs. Besides, it gives the participants an overview of recent changes and developments of BRAC. In addition, participants share their news, views, opinions, and experiences and expectations in the workshop. The workshop ensures accountability and provides inspiration to BLRs.

This chapter delineated the workshop as was observed and presented the perception of the facilitators and participants about the workshop.

A structured but tentative schedule was developed to be followed in the workshop. The schedule was planned and circulated by the Training Division of BRAC (BTD). The TARC In-charge (TIC) who is also a district BLR facilitates the workshop by following a guideline. BTD, in consultation with the TICs, fixed a date for the workshop at TARC. TIC invited the participants through mail. S/he also kept contact with the regional BLR (*Upazila* BLR) regarding the workshop over phone. The BLRs were supposed to be present in respective TARC on the night before the workshop. Usually a senior resource person from the BTD or other departments of the head office attends the workshop. A resource person was also invited from the local government authority.

Profile of workshop participants

The total number of BLR as reported was about 500. Of them, 441(88.2%) participated in the workshop. Most of the BLR were male (93%). On an average the BLRs were in the pay level 8. The BLRs were mostly from BRAC Development Programme (BDP). Findings also indicate that BLRs were mostly young (average age 28 years), 61% were working for 2 years or more (Box 1).

Box. 1. Profile of BLR workshop participants

Total number of BLRs	: 441
Male	: 93%
Female	: 7%
District BLRs	: 12%
<i>Upazila</i> BLRs	: 88%
Average age	: 28 years (range 26-47)
Mean level	: 7.62(range 5-12)
Participate $\leq$ 4 years	: 57%
BLR for $\leq$ 2 years	: 61%
BLR from BDP	: 85%
BLR from BEP	: 12%
BLR from BHP	: 4%

Preparation for workshop

TARC's preparation

TIC usually takes the overall managerial decisions regarding the BLR workshop preparation at TARC. Preparation for the BLR workshop starts since a date is fixed for the workshop at that particular TARC. TARC authority starts the preparation by inviting the participants as well as the government resource persons and making sure of their presence. Secondly, preparing the workshop hall by cleaning and decorating, and manage accommodation and food for the participants. Thirdly, arrange, prepare, and conceptualize/memorize relevant material to be discussed in different sessions of the workshop.

TIC invites the BLRs and the government resource persons about 15 days before the workshop. Some documents like "BRAC at a glance", content focus, session schedule, are sent etc. with the invitation letter. However once the copies of 'BRAC at a glance' reached late from the head office and the TARC authority sent the old issue to the participants. However, TARC authority asserted that there was no shortage of needed material and usually the materials from head office reach on time. Again, inviting the government officials and making sure of their presence are not easy tasks. Most of the time, officials are very busy and fail to attend the workshop. According to TICs, they call on the officials physically to invite them. They have to do it repeatedly. Moreover, TARC have to keep a close contact with them over telephone. Sometime they demand honorarium also.

TIC had to plan for facilitating the workshop. In several places TICs were found preparing them for workshop by conceptualising or memorizing the papers (materials) sent by the HO. In all places, these materials were photocopied for dissemination in the workshops.

In some TARCs transparencies and OHPs were used. But in most of the places there were no such device. The trainers prepared all the write-ups and decorating tasks and TICs supervised those. Except in few TARCs, there was no name card for the participants. Clean room and systematically arranged chairs and tables particularly an U-shaped were found in all places. They decorated the room with posters that contained many statements of renowned persons. In one place the room was decorated with flowers. At the entrance TARCs hung a poster which showed 'Welcome to 21st BLR'. But this welcome poster was absent in two TARCs. In one TARC, they arranged Computer and a multi-media projector for using in the workshop. In several places TICs even visited the workshop venue for the last time at around 10 p.m. on the night before the workshops held. With some exception, however, the overall preparation undergone a careful process and the authority seemed to take it sincerely. The night before the workshop they gave a last touch to workshop hall by cleaning and decorating. Concerned people in TARC seemed busy to do their respective tasks. In the meantime when these preparation were going on they received the BLRs and arrange their accommodation and food.

Participants' preparation

Preparation of the participants started with receiving the invitation letter, reading materials, and supplementary papers including the workshop agenda. BLRs were always instructed by the TARCs to have some preparation before they participate in the workshop that included learning objectives, roles and responsibilities of BLR. They were also suggested to know the vision and mission of BRAC as well. They were also asked to bring information on different programmes in their respective areas.

Some junior BLRs went through the content of the workshop. They also collected updated information on different programmes and filled out the format of performance. At the

end they arrange their BLR file to be brought to the workshop. One senior BLR mentioned that he prepared himself mentally first. However, another BLR told that they often could not prepare themselves properly due to heavy workload at office.

Many of the participants didn't report to the TARC the day before workshop. In fact, due to inadequate accommodation, some TARC authorities asked the participants not to report at night before the workshop. Participants were advised to come early in the morning from their base or stay at hotels in the town. Some BLRs whose base is in and around the district town they themselves decided to report on the day of the workshop. Some of the participants came late. These latecomers had an expression of tiredness in their face and mentioned about the problem in coming to TARC on time.

Topics covered in the workshops

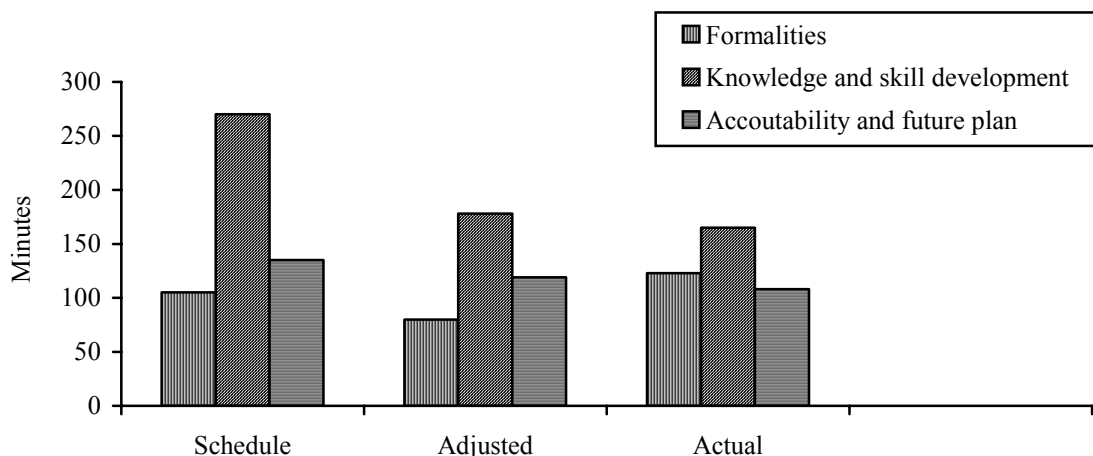
The workshops that were observed had 15 sessions. The total workshop consists of 8 hours and 15 minutes where 7 hours are contact time and 1 hour and 15 minutes are for tea and lunch break respectively. The participants had to spend an hour in filling out the questionnaire for this study, which was not in the original workshop agenda. As a result the time allotted for the agenda had to be adjusted. Table 1 indicates that actual time spent for each session is different from the adjusted time and also the actual time.

Again, it is evident from the Table that the allocation of time got more favour in the first half which had to adjust from the second half. Some sessions were given undue preference at the cost of some other important sessions like 'presentation of BLRs'.

The allotted time was not followed systematically and in many cases not maintained according to the importance of the topic. Like, in the schedule more time was allotted for knowledge and skill development but actually less time was spent in those sections and more in formalities (Fig. 1). There had a tendency of reducing time more in the second half of the session than the first half. Some salient topics, which had very close relations with the BLR's knowledge and skill development, did not have enough time on an average. 'Roles and responsibilities of BLR' and 'Presentation of BLR' suffered time shortage significantly.

In a number of workshops, some sessions originally planned were skipped. In fact, some sessions have been skipped in all the places except one (in Barisal). Two to five of the sessions

Figure 1. The distribution of scheduled, adjusted and actual time spent in formalities, knowledge/skill development and future planning of the BLRs works



were not discussed in those areas. Even session like ‘Role and responsibilities of BLR’ skipped in some places. The government (GO)-NGO relationship’ and some tips on communicative English’ were not touched in two places due to the absence of resource person. But there were two TARCs where sessions were not skipped and covered everything but in short form. Moreover, in two cases ongoing sessions were intervened or postponed to give the floor to the resource persons came from the government offices. Again, some sessions were shifted from first to second half and vice versa. First two sessions were cancelled in most of the workshops. For better understanding, some of the sessions are described below.

Introduction and objectives of BLR activities

The session started 5 to 30 minutes late due to late attendance of the participants in most cases. On average, this session continued for 15 minutes although the adjusted time was 13 minutes. Two workshops started 5 minutes after the schedule. Except in two places, almost half of the participants came in the morning hurriedly. On average, 11.8% of the BLRs were absent in the workshops mainly because of illness. Few sent their representatives which seemed very odd.

In more than half of the workshops, the facilitator started the session by reading the programme schedule and welcoming the participants. The participants were attentively listening. However, the facilitators described briefly the objectives of BLR workshop. Two-thirds of the facilitators described the effectiveness of GO-NGO coordination without being much analysis. The deliberation, personality, voice, and gesture and posture of the facilitators gave a gentle, welcoming look. The facilitators used simple language. The participants were in formal dress. In a workshop, the participants mentioned that they did not bring their diaries or any notebooks to write on. The facilitator was not willing to supply them notebooks/papers and pen but when about half of them were asking for, he gave a pen and a notebook to each of them.

Getting to know each other

In more than half of the workshops the participants were introduced to each other in the second session. In all the workshops except one, everyone was asked to introduce him/herself in English. In a workshop the facilitator wrote five items on the blackboard – name, designation, name of the programme, length of service, and number of BLR workshops attended. Then the BLRs were asked to introduce themselves telling these information only.

In one place there was an innovative self-introduction session. The facilitator asked the participants a simple quiz. One who gave the right answer was presented with a flower bouquet. Then he was asked to give a self-introduction. Then he passed the bouquet to one who sat beside him. Small cards were kept hidden under the table for each of the participants. Different information about BRAC was written on those cards. The participants were asked to find and read out the cards and pass the bouquet to the next one. It was an interesting way to give introduction and know each other.

The participants were interested to tell their designation (like, manager *dabi/unnati*). Two-thirds of the participants seemed enjoyed the session and they seemed keen and positive. The presentation skill of the facilitators was better and the participants were more or less attentive.

Review of previous workshop especially implementation of previous action plan

The duration of the session varied from 10 to 40 minutes. On average, it took 24 minutes where the adjusted time was 23 minutes. In one TARC it was not performed at all. However, this session was performed in different ways in different places. All the participants brought

updated BLR file with them. In a workshop, an *upazila* BLR was invited to conduct the session. He opened his diary where he summarized all records of individual BLR regarding implementation of previous action plan. He seemed well prepared and systematically announced the record of organizing inter-programme meetings, government coordination meetings and NGO level meetings. Then he asked all to share the problems that happened in respective fields. Afterwards, the participants discussed some of the problems and their solutions were suggested.

In another workshop the facilitator informed the participants that DC complained that three of the *upazila* BLRs did not attend the last meeting. One of the participants mentioned that he did not get the invitation letter as sometimes the UNO's invitation letter did not reach BRAC office. Whatever was the case, the facilitator asked the participants to get information from the UNO office at their own initiative. The facilitator also mentioned that he heard that in an instance a BLR came out of the GO-NGO coordination meeting by back door, which was totally unexpected. Then the facilitator suggested that all should attend the government level meeting regularly so that they would not have to complain to the Executive Director of BRAC. The facilitator also proposed that they all should prepare minutes of the meeting and to send that to the head office as a proof of attendance in those meetings. The facilitators emphasized on learning English in almost half of the workshops. One of the facilitators said about learning English:

‘We should learn English not only for going to Afghanistan or Sri Lanka. But to work in the country properly.’

In another workshop the facilitator with the help of a trainer presented the implemented and non-implemented actions of the last BLR workshop (Table 1). The presentation was made with the help of an overhead projector (OHP). Again in another workshop, each BLR was asked to read the action plan of the last workshop. The facilitator inquired whether they sent all official documents regarding BLR to the head office.

Quiz on BRAC vision, mission and values

The duration of the session varied from 10 to 45 minutes in different workshops. Though the adjusted time was 13 minutes, on an average it took 22.5 minutes. In one TARC, the session was discarded.

Table 1. The percentage of implemented and un-implemented actions of BLRs

Actions	Place of action	Implemented (%)	Not implemented (%)
BRAC inter-programme coordination meeting	Area office	96	4
NGO coordination meeting	<i>Upazila</i> NGO Bureau	81	19
Govt. coordination meeting	Office of the <i>Upazila Nirbahi</i> Officer	100	--
Coordination meeting with local representatives	Area office	83	27
Meeting with co-workers on BLR	Area office	98	2
Discussion on PRSP	Area office	62	38
Discussion with UP chairmen and members	<i>Union Parishad</i> Office	76	24
Discussion on FNB	Area office	40	60

Except one workshop, all participants were supplied with the printed questions and answer sheet. The questions were about BRAC vision, mission and values. In other TARC along with vision, mission, and values, the participants were also asked to write down about other BRAC-related issues like responsibilities/objective of BLR, major programmes of BRAC or five main donors of BRAC, number of feed mills in BRAC, percentage of portfolio at risk and the stages of loan disbursement or the name of the DC and Superintendent of Police (SP) of their respective areas.

In one of the workshops all the participants were joking and laughing while they were asked to write mission, vision and values of BRAC. In almost all of the workshops the participants were talking, copying from each other/from diary, files, etc. It seemed that the BLRs were not prepared for the test. Some were seen going very fast through the diary to find out the answers, but could not. The BLRs became disheartened when they were said to stop copying from diaries. But, they did not pay heed to them and continued watching the diaries keeping out of the facilitators' sight. The participants were repeatedly asked to be quick in completing the assignment.

In more than half of the workshops, all were said to exchange their sheets to each other and check those and to rank the performance of the BLRs in three categories, viz., excellent/very good, good, and bad. More than half of the BLRs could not complete their writing within time but the examiner-BLRs filled up the unwritten portion of their fellow colleagues. To check whether the BLRs had copied, a facilitator asked someone to come to the board to write those answers again. But nobody responded.

Although most of the BLRs wrote mission and values openly by copying from diaries, they were assessed in a workshop by marking on the answer sheets. In one workshop, 36% did not write anything on the answer scripts, which manifested that the participants did not take the session seriously at all. In one workshop the participants were asked to write the responsibilities of a BLR, but no one could write more than two responsibilities.

In all the TARC the facilitators drew the triangular gist notification (easy method to memorize) of values on the black board or by using OHP they described the meaning of the alphabets of the triangle. The method was interesting and more than half of the participants participated with enthusiasm. However, observing their performance, it seemed that participants were not well prepared.

Mobile tour on BLR performance

Major objective of this session was to hang the information of several *upazilas* and districts on the boards so that all the participants of the workshop could share. These sessions were not conducted nearly one-third of the workshops. Where conducted, the duration of the session varied with a large range of 5 to 50 minutes. Though the adjusted time for this session was 13 minutes, on an average it took 23 minutes. In another TARC it was found that the BLRs came few (1-2) minutes earlier to hang their respective field reports on the board placed outside the room.

In almost all the workshops it seemed that the BLRs went to the boards and looked at the cards. They did it with a discipline. In one workshop, 2/3 BLRs did not fill up the formats. Some told that they forgot to bring their information formats. In this situation they were given the sheets again. Then they began to fill up those by district wise. However, the Regional Managers (RM) were consulting among themselves and were instructing their managers to fill up the sheets. It takes 40 minutes for them to fill up the formats.

In another workshop, the session was nicely presented. The facilitator inquired the BLRs if there was anything to share in the session. Nobody responded spontaneously though he

repeated the queries for several times. At last an *upazila* BLR responded and told that as a part of world micro-credit year, the UNO officials wanted to know the number of BRAC's beneficiaries who took micro-credit. The BLR added that they sent the list to the UNO accordingly.

There was no discussion on the format in most of the sessions. It seemed just like a formality of the workshop.

BRAC at a glance

This session was escaped in one TARC. The duration of conducting the session varied from 5 to 35 minutes. On an average it took 20 minutes though the adjusted time of the session was 13 minutes.

In almost half of the workshops, one of the BLR was selected to speak on different BRAC activities. There was no time restriction for the presenter. When an assigned BLR was delivering lecture with the help of a chart all were found very much attentive. In one-third of the workshops, the facilitators circulated 'BRAC at a glance (June 2005)' among the participants. It seemed that most of the BLRs did not read the handout earlier. In one TARC the facilitator also discussed some other matters which were not included in the handout, viz., appointment of Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed as pro-vice chancellor, appointment of ombudsman, etc.

An innovative approach was adopted in one workshop. Four groups were formed on the basis of the participants from four districts. The groups were asked to present four separate topics from 'BRAC at a glance'. Two from each group presented the programme in English but, due to lack of enough skills in English two of the groups begun to deliver in Bangla from the middle of the presentation. But, in each and every group only 2/3 members seemed active. The district BLRs summed up and gave feedback after each presentation. After presentation the facilitators inquired whether any clarification was needed or not. In more than half of the workshops the participants asked questions regarding the programmes, like GPP, BEP, pre-primary education, BRAC's launching in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka or about BRAC International.

More than half of the presenters presented nicely and elaborated everything to the point in an attractive way but many of the BLRs suffered from pronunciation problem. Two-third of the participants were found attentive to listen and enthusiastic enough to ask questions. But, the other participants were talking to each other which interrupted the workshops.

Presentation on new BRAC procedures

This session was performed in all TARCs and appeared to be the main focus of the workshops. The duration of the session varied from 20 minutes to 2 hours. Though the adjusted time was 69 minutes but on an average the session took 16 minutes (Annex 1). In half of the workshops the session was interrupted for launch break or other activities. That makes the 'BRAC procedure session' confusing and uninteresting to the participants. In one of the workshops the session started after 5 p.m. when all of the participants were very exhausted and impatient. The session was chaotic as participants were talking to each other about returning back to the base.

This session was performed differently in different workshops. In more than half of the places, the human resource (HR) officials analyzed the HR policies and facilitated the session. In two-third of the observed places, all BLRs were divided into four groups and in one TARC six groups to present the HR policies. All groups were given 3-20 minutes to discuss among themselves. One representative from each group was asked to discuss their part. They read

from the sheet not prepared earlier. In a TARC, the participants were given three minutes to present, which was not sufficient at all.

In one of the workshops an innovative approach was introduced for conducting this session. Four groups were formed from four regions to participate in the quiz competition on BRAC policies on human resources. The facilitator with the help of an assistant trainer conducted the competition. The HR official worked as the judge to ensure whether the responses were correct. The groups were given the HR policy booklet to find out the answers. All were enjoying and was very much enthusiastic to attain their best. There was some chaos in the room as participants were seen talking and whispering among themselves.

In some workshops the participants along with the facilitators read out the topics and the participants were asked to raise questions for clarification on any topic from the HR staff. Many asked questions and the participants especially the senior participants also answered the questions of the juniors. The discussion was basically on staff facilities, rights of the field staff, inequalities between the facilities of field and head office staff. The participants also wanted to know about how to deal with their subordinate staff. Some of them complained that they were deprived of the 'inflation allowance' on the current year. The HR representative tried to calm them down. New rules and regulations of holidays and increment of salary were also discussed. In one of the workshops, the facilitator also discussed about different changes in BRAC, especially increase of salary by 20%. He also discussed about the decentralization of HR division and showed the old and new versions of HR procedure. In all the workshops except one, the participants showed keen interest in these discussions and they demanded that a similar session should be included in the following BLR workshops. In nearly one-third of the workshops, the participants performed different cultural activities specially singing songs.

GO-NGO relation/sharing with government officials

The adjusted time for the session was 26 minutes. On average, the session continued for 37 minutes. This session was not held in two workshops. In one of these workshops, the invited Assistant District Magistrate refused to attend the workshop at the last moment. It was reported that the DC of the respective district was not positive about BRAC activities and he could have forbidden the magistrate not to attend in any BRAC programme.

The attraction of the session was the presence of a resource person from the government and his speech. As a resource person, DC in Sreemonghal, UNO in Rangpur, Assistant District Magistrate in Jessore, ADC in Barisal, District Education Officer in Chittagong, and the DC, the UNO and a magistrate were present in Bogra.

TIC received the government officials and arranged everything in a formal way. The facilitator of the respective workshop introduced the guests and the participants introduced themselves. In most of the cases it was noticed that, the BLR participants introduced themselves as PO/Manager/Regional Manager of some programmes like *Dabi*, *Progati*, *Unnati* along with their names. These designations were unfamiliar to the government officials. In one instance, a DC asked, "What is *Dabi* and *Unnati*?"

The audience was very much attentive during the speech of the resource person. Besides the GO-NGO relationship, the speech also included other topics like the quality of BRAC graduates in primary school, uni-track education system, importance of NGO and 100% sanitation (a top government issue), etc. One of the DCs started to speak about one of the statements of Macnamara (ex-president of World Bank) and from there he related the evolution of NGO activities all over the world. He tried to explain why the leftist called NGOs as neo-colonial. He asserted that the NGOs are needed for development in the current situation of the

country, as it was the British for development of India. He said, “If British and NGOs were not here, people of this land would have been stayed as *Bonmanush* (primate) of African jungle.”

‘GO/NGO relations’ was an after-lunch session. So, in most of the workshops few participants became drowsy. During his speech, the UNO of Rangpur noticed it and exclaimed, “Does BRAC staff sleep in daytime? As far as I know they work all the day.”

The government officials admitted that they had lack of human resources and the NGOs were very much complementary and contributory to the government development initiatives. A UNO asked the participants to know the basic laws of the country and keep a good relationship with local politicians as well as government bodies. He suggested, “In course of your duties, you should keep good term with all, talk with everybody, it requires no cost. In effect you would get everybody by your side whenever you need.”

After the lecture of the resource persons, the facilitators summed up what they said. However, the invited officials seemed supportive as they assured that they would help BRAC wherever possible. One of the DCs finished the session through an encouraging statement to the BLR workshop participants, “See me whenever you fall into a problem.”

Presentations of BLRs

This session was skipped in five workshops. On average the sessions were conducted in 10 minutes whereas the adjusted time was 53 minutes. The session suffered from time constraints and in most cases was conducted at the end of the workshops. In a workshop four presentations from four different programmes were planned. But the participants became impatient for leaving. As such, instead of four, one presentation was held for 10 minutes. The presenter finished his presentation within 3 minutes by describing the total number of borrowers, amount of disbursement, VOs, etc. The facilitator was disappointed and exclaimed, “Is that all that you are presenting here?”

It seemed that the presentation ended before it begun properly. However, all clapped when the session was ended. The presenter’s pronunciation was incorrect and the voice was unclear. Due to time constraints, in one of the workshops, the facilitator asked some of the participants to make a presentation. But, due to lack of proper preparation they could not give complete information as was expected. In another workshop, the session started at 2.30 pm just after the lunch break. The facilitator asked the participants to divide into 4 groups and one from each of the group was selected for presentation. But, instead of giving presentation on any of the programmes, all of them presented on new BRAC procedure. They discussed on the discrimination between the head office and field offices in work time, leave, etc.

Some tips on communicative English

This session was held in all the workshops except one. On an average, the sessions lasted for 35 minutes, the adjusted time allotted for this session. English teachers from both non-government/government colleges were invited as resource persons in Rangpur, Madhupur, Barisal and Chittagong. The sessions were of great interest and importance for all of the participants.

Resource persons were supposed to give some tips on communicative English. But, in practice, most of them described how to increase the reading, writing, and speaking ability in English. In Rangpur, the resource person conducted the session through question-answer and lecture method. But, some of the resource persons were pronouncing wrong English and some of them were making grammatical mistakes. For instance, one of the resource person used, ‘from where you have come?’ instead of ‘from where have you come?’

In one workshop, six BLR participants spoke in English for few minutes as instructed by the facilitator. In another workshop, in addition to conversation practice by the participants, they were also instructed to write down about one memorable event in life. However, four of the writings were picked randomly and those were read out loudly for the whole class. The facilitator gave feedback on those writings and also gave tips on how to develop English writing. He asked the participants to write at least one page in English everyday. BLR seemed very enthusiastic to the feedbacks. In another workshop, although all the participants seemed to have enjoyed the session very much, they tried to copy each other when the facilitator/resource person gave them an assignment on writing.

In all the workshops, the participants were very much attentive in this session. Some of the resource persons add some tips about improving the session Like, role playing, dialogue and conversation, etc. One of the resource persons from BRAC Training Division also gave some tips to the participants for improving their English, like, a) Buying a radio that can broadcast BBC, b) use of English-English dictionary, or c) Use of English grammar book, etc.

Roles and responsibilities of BLRs

The session was conducted in all the workshops except one, but within a very short time. On an average, the duration of the session was curtailed from 15 minutes to 8 minutes in one place.

In different workshops different techniques were used in conducting the sessions. In one workshop, a BLR participant was asked to come in front to speak about the roles and responsibilities of BLRs. He went to the flip chart where the roles and responsibilities were written. The words of the flipchart were very small to read out clearly, moreover, he presented very shortly in a very low voice. The facilitator asked all to discuss critically about his presentation and give their feedbacks. In another workshop, the facilitator spoke on the roles and responsibilities of BLRs in an attractive way and everyone listened to him attentively. But, when the facilitator informed that, BRAC was going to take a language and other type of skills tests of its employees then every participant became very quite. In Rangpur, the participants were talking and gossiping during the session.

New action plan for next three months

This session was conducted in two workshops. In Rangpur, it was for five minutes instead of 30 minutes. The facilitators gave papers to the participants to write their action plans (attaining/organizing the GO-NGO and inter-programme coordination meetings). In the other workshop, the participants formed small groups and write about their action plans within half an hour.

In another workshop, the facilitator asked the participants to write suggestions/opinions for further improvement of the BLRs. The participants were very serious in giving their opinions. Among the opinions, 10 were announced to the audience and the following four plans were declared to be fulfilled in next three months:

- a. Inter-programme coordination meetings must be held by 10th of each month,
- b. The minutes of the meeting should be sent to the head office and respective TARCs,
- c. Should maintain close working relation with government departments and other NGOs, and
- d. The experiences of BLRs have to be shared with colleagues at least for 5 minutes in the inter-programme coordination meetings.

In Barisal, the facilitator spoke about BRAC international and many other topics for 30 minutes and then he invited queries and feedbacks from the participants. One of the

participants said that the BLRs did not have any identity as BLR in different government offices. He also said that the BLRs were not recognized and acknowledged. As such, the BLRs are not invited to attend different meetings where they are supposed to be invited.

However, at the end of the session the facilitator took a small written test for ten minutes. In the test the facilitator asked the BLRs to write about their ideas on BRAC and BLRs. Afterwards, these were read out loudly. The expectations from the answers were to generate new ideas on BRAC and BLR. But, the BLRs wrote about the facilities that they want from BRAC as its employees.

Closing

In almost all the workshops, the closing session was very short. The facilitator thanked all the participants and wanted to hear their reaction about the workshop. A participant of the Chittagong BLR workshop said that the workshop was good specially due to the presence of resource persons from government offices and for the session on English. He mentioned that they had been demanding this for long time, but there were no such provision in the previous workshops. In another workshop, a participant said that they were happy to be in the workshop because of the presence of resource persons from RED, HRD, and government organizations. They also liked the communicative English session. He also mentioned that, if the duration of the workshop was longer then it would be much more helpful for them. In another workshop, the participants said that they enjoyed the sessions on English and BRAC 'Human Resource Procedure'. They also mentioned that they felt very much inspired as they got the opportunity to meet the director of BRAC Training Division.

In another workshop there was no separate closing session. The participants requested the resource person to end the workshop in time. Because, almost all the participants came from remote and hilly areas and it would be difficult for them to reach their base if they start late. So, the resource person tried to end the workshop in time.

Tea and lunch break

Although the allocated time for health break was 15 minutes, in most workshops the time spent ranged from 15 to 30 minutes. Snacks like cake, banana, *samucha* and tea were served during the tea break. In some workshops different tables were arranged for the organizers, resource persons, researchers, and the participants. Participants exchanged greetings and discussed about their personal affairs, but none looked cheerful. It seemed that they were doing some routine work.

In some places, lunch break started early (12.30 pm) and in some places late (1.56 p.m.). In most workshops different seating arrangements were observed for the organizers and the participants. In one place, all participants could not seat at a time what made them really disappointed. The participants were talking about their family matters at the time of lunch. It was interesting to note that none of the participants were discussing about the BLR issues or any of the incidents of BLR. Close interaction among the participants was also missing.

In Barisal and Madhupur, the participants were in panic as the countrywide bomb blasts happened at that time. They discussed this issue. The participants informed that the quality of food was better than the earlier BLR workshops. They liked the vegetable that was served in that meal. However, the food in Barisal and Bogra was better than that of other places. In some workshops, the participants immediately came back to the classroom just after the lunch to fill up the District Performance Report. Some of the managers were busy with their supervisors regarding signing of some bills that were not related to any BLR activity.

Factors contribute to the learning in the workshop

Classroom environment

Difficulty was found in using the microphone. Either the microphone was defective or the participants did not know how to handle the microphone well. The hallrooms in two workshops had air condition facility. In one of the workshops, the facilitator stopped some of the fans so that the lecture could be heard clearly, but that made the room hot and suffocated. In most of the workshops the classrooms were not comfortable. However, there was enough light in the rooms.

In almost all the workshops the seating arrangement was not comfortable. In some workshops the chairs were arranged in two rows around the table. So, those who seated in the second row faced difficulties in taking notes.

In many of the workshops, the cellular phones and the latecomers made the workshops very chaotic. Many of the participants were found talking to their base offices through cellular phones while the workshop was going on. Being so much disturbed, a facilitator rebuked the latecomers by saying, "Don't you think that BLR workshop is an important work for you?"

In TARC Rangpur, the local UNO told the participants to turn off their cellular phones. In almost all the workshops, the cellular phones interrupted the sessions.

In Barisal the TIC had designed the introduction session in an innovative way which everybody enjoyed. However, such innovative practice was not seen at other places. Many of the participants had a tendency to discuss about their programmatic problems. In almost all the workshops, one-third of the participants were seen writing the BRAC mission/vision in their notebooks (as they didn't bring dairies) by taking the dairies from others.

Presentation

The presentation of the facilitators was attractive. They tried to make their sessions participatory and enjoyable. The participants also cooperated. The tools mostly used were flipcharts, microphone and OHP. The letter-size on the flipcharts was not large enough and these were difficult to read from a distance. Though some of the workshop sessions were a bit boring, everybody was trying to be attentive (may be because of the presence of senior personnel from the head office). In a workshop 2/3 participants were found dozing and kept quite even after asking any question by the TIC. It seemed that they woke up very early in the morning to come to the workshop and that made them unmindful. There was little scope for the participants to play any role other than listening.

Participants' perception about BLR workshop

BLR workshop helps the participants to develop skills in presentation and communication. They think that the workshop gives them a clear perception on different BRAC programmes and the latest information about BRAC. Suppose, a participant said, "I did not know much about the Fisheries Programme. I am now informed about this programme from the workshop."

They also felt that from these workshops they had learned how to develop/increase GO-NGO relationship. For example a BLR told, "Now I have such a good relationship with the UNO that he calls me frequently."

However, many participants felt that the duration of the workshop is short. They also thought that they could not share everything they wanted to share in the workshop. Sometimes

the presentation session seemed also short. If they had more time to participate in presentation, their skill could be improved more. Again, sometimes the resource persons acted like a teacher which they did not like much.

Strengths and weakness of BLR workshop

According to the participants and TIC, following are the strengths of a BLR workshop:

- i. Participants have an opportunity to express them and know their shortcoming
- ii. Know about different BRAC programmes in more detail and develop themselves as competent BRAC staff
- iii. Get solutions to their problems
- iv. Get opportunity to learn communicative English
- v. Participation of resource person (BRAC senior management and government official)
- vi. Increase inter programme communication
- vii. Meeting with various programme personals
- viii. Get opportunity to increase presentation skill
- ix. Forum for open discussion

According to the participants and TIC following are the weakness:

- i. Time constants
- ii. Contents are so large that it reduces the discussion time
- iii. Not effective to invite DC/UNO in the workshop
- iv. Lack of required facilities in rented training center
- v. Do not provide much updated information of BRAC
- vi. Skilled resource persons are not invited
- vii. Workshops are not very much organized
- viii. TARC cannot accommodate all
- ix. Participants do not give priority to the workshop as they do not have to report about BLR to any supervisor
- x. Attendance of the government official is uncertain

The participants generally perceive that they gain much experience and skill through participating in the workshop. Their presentation skills, analytical skill, speaking skill, and leadership quality have been enhanced. As a result, they achieved more confidence in presentation and communication. Now they think they can better communicate with their stakeholders particularly with the government officials. The following comments are some indication of their achievement from BLR workshop:

“It is a small get together. It is different from our daily routine life. We discuss many topics and it enhances our experience. It also helps learn how to speak better. After becoming a BLR I could speak without hesitation.”

“In the past, I could not speak in front of other people. But now I can talk for 2/3 hours. I gained confidence on myself. My English has been improved a lot. Now I can motivate VO members, and my way of giving motivation has increased.”

“I could not speak fluently. I could not give proper information to the government officials. Now I can speak better as for getting different update information it becomes easier to talk with the government officials. I can give answer to many questions of other BRAC *kormi*. Even it becomes easier for me to act as programme coordinator.”

Whatever the participants said, when asked what have they learned from the last BLR workshop, they could say only few things like they came to know about BRAC International, abbreviation of BEP and BDP, some topics from BRAC at a glance, BRAC university, BRAC tea garden, PRSP, MDG, programmes like TUP, PACE, etc. However, they could not give detail of their learning.

In general the BLR workshop tries to achieve some targets like, developing presentation skills, increasing the knowledge of BLRs, creating a meeting place for sharing news and experience with other colleges, and developing skills to create a relation between the GO-NGO in the local level. The study sought to find out the assessment of BLRs on how far does this target is being fulfilled by the workshop (Table 2).

Table 2. Opinion of BLRs on the skill and knowledge development through the BLR workshop

Criteria	Opinion of the participating BLRs				Total
	Not achieved	Moderately achieved	Achieved partially good	Achieved excellently	
Presentation skill development	2.0	51.0	25.6	21.5	99.5
Accruing knowledge of contemporary issues	1.5	40.5	34.7	23.3	99.0
Meeting and sharing with colleagues	0.9	32.3	23.6	43.2	100.0
Skills in coordination and cooperation within BRAC and GO-NGO body	0.6	37.0	30.5	31.8	99.9

The Table shows that according to majority the ‘presentation skills/new knowledge and skills for coordination and cooperation within BRAC and GO-NGO body’ were achieved moderately. Only ‘meeting and sharing with colleagues’ has been achieved excellently.

When asked about the number of such workshops they expected to be organized in a year, 57% respondents thought that it should be four times in a year. This four times in a year is an existing practice. However, there were a substantial number of the BLRs (14%) recommended for six times in a year. On the other hand, about 28% of the respondents wished that the workshop would be three times or less in a year. Again, about 50% of the respondents agreed with one-day workshop. However, about 45% of the respondents wanted two-day workshop.

INTER-PROGRAMME COORDINATION

BACKGROUND

One of the major responsibilities of BLR is to improve the quality of BRAC programmes by increasing the inter-programme coordination in the field accordingly a guideline is given to the BLR to work for the coordination. It is expected that a BLR should have full understanding of the BRAC development programmes in their assigned area. The objective is supposed to be achieved through inter-programme coordination meeting/interaction. It is expected that the BLRs should arrange an inter-programme coordination meeting within 10th of each month. And it is also expected that the BLR will arrange the inter-programme coordination meeting in response to the date fixed for the government coordination meeting.

INTER-PROGRAMME COORDINATION

One of the major roles of the BLRs is to conduct and enhance the inter-programme coordination through inter-programme coordination meetings. To understand the inter-programme coordination meetings, questions were asked to the BLRs in the in-depth interview session. The minutes of the inter-programme coordination meetings were reviewed from both the district and *upazila* level to know about the issues discussed in the meetings. Jessor, Pabna and Netrakona were covered under the review of district level inter-programme coordination meetings. At the *upazila* level the total areas¹ covered were 31. All the inter-programme meetings reviewed both at the district and *upazila* levels were held in 2005.

The BLRs were asked about their opinion on how much improvement was achieved in coordination through the inter-programme coordination meetings. The findings are presented in Table 3. Half (50.5%) of the BLRs said that the coordination of different programmes of BRAC were poor while a quarter (26.2%) of the BLRs said that the inter-programme meeting could make high coordination.

Table 3. Opinion of the BLR about the achievement of inter-programme coordination

Coordination achieved	No. of respondents	Percentage
No coordination	2	0.4
Poor coordination	204	50.5
Moderate coordination	92	22.8
High coordination	106	26.2
Total	404	100

¹ Ranirbander, Bochaganj, Birganj (Dinajpur), Gophorgow, Haluaghat (Mymensingh), Nagarkandha (Faridpur), Bhoirab, Kuriarchar (Kishorganj), Atgharia (Pubna), Ganjmi (Meherpur), Harinakunda (Jenidah), Meherpur sadar, Chowgacha, Debhata (Satkhira), kardkhali, matiranga, kaptai, Phulpur (Mymensingh), Alpara, Nandail, damurhuda (Chuadanga), Chuadanga sadar, shombhuganj, katiadi, Pakundia, Muktagacha, Hossainpur, Chatmohor (Pubna), Kishorganj sadar, Pabna sadar, satkhira sadar, dinajpur sadar etc.

Inter-programme coordination meeting

Date and frequency of inter-programme coordination meeting

A good majority of the BLRs informed that they arrange the inter-programme coordination meeting. But, the review of the inter-programme coordination meeting documents confirm that the meetings were held but not within the scheduled time i.e. the 10th of every month and sometimes irregularly. Most of the BLRs also could not arrange it in response to the date set for government coordination meetings. Only two BLRs fixed date for the inter-programme coordination meeting as per schedule. One of them mentioned, “We have a schedule that in every month on a particular date we should hold a meeting. I convey that meeting in different office by rotation, like once in BEP, TARC (Training and Resource Center) or regional office, etc.”

Six BLRs said that they usually arranged meetings after going back to their base from the BLR workshop. They had to arrange the meetings according to the convenience of all programme staff.

In arranging the inter-programme coordination meetings it was seen that in few cases the BLRs could follow the policy. In some cases the BLRs had lack of control in arranging the inter-programme coordination meetings because they need to ask their supervisors like area manager or regional manager about arranging a meeting. In some cases they need to ask not only their higher authority but also need to go to other offices for holding the meetings.

Keeping the records of inter-programme coordination meeting

The records of the inter-programme coordination meetings are not kept uniformly. In some records it was mentioned that the meetings were arranged by the BLRs and the title of the meeting was ‘Monthly inter-programme coordination meeting’ arranged by the BLRs. It was seen from the records that though those were arranged by the BLRs but in few cases were devoid of any issues/few issues related to BLR. In some records it was written that the BLR monthly coordination meetings were held just after the weekly meetings of the office. In these cases, some meeting records reflected that there was some discussions about BLR-related activities and in some cases no issues were discussed about BLR. In other cases the records simply mentioned about weekly meeting and nothing about BLR. So, there was no scope to find out whether there were any BLR-related meetings held after that meeting or not. In those cases, very few minutes were related to any BLR-related issues/discussions. Some of the meetings were named as ‘Important meeting’, ‘Meeting of office management committee’ or ‘Staff meeting and inter-programme coordination meeting.’

More than half of the meetings did not mention the name of the BLR, and others mentioned that the meeting was chaired by the BLR or held together with the area or regional manager. More strikingly, it was seen from the records that very few BLRs wrote that they were the ‘BRAC local representative’ beside their designation what they hold for the programme.

Topics of inter-programme coordination meeting

Twelve (out of 14) of the BLRs informed that they shared the issues discussed in the BLR workshop in the inter-programme coordination meeting. Six BLRs said that they discussed about new initiatives, updated information or any change (suppose change in BRAC ‘paripatra’) at BRAC in the meeting. Some (4 out of 14) BLRs said that they shared the information received in the government coordination meetings and GO-NGO activities of the region. But most of the BLRs said that though they did not discuss most of the information of

government meeting but shared the complaints made in the meeting about BRAC programmes with the programme head. So, the heads could be aware of those issues.

The documents of the inter-programme coordination meetings were reviewed. The topics that were discussed in those meetings were divided into two groups – a) topics related to BLR objectives, and b) topics not related to BLR objectives. Table 4 shows that almost half of the issues discussed were not related to BLR issues. At the *upazila* level meetings, 22 discussions were held on programme-related issues, 25 about the coordination of different programmes and programme staff, 10 on communicative English and presentation skills, and 9 on GO-NGO related issues.

Table 4. Topics discussed in inter-programme coordination meetings

Issues		Frequency of discussion	
		District level (N=3)	Upazila level (N=50)
BLR-related	Programme related issues	2	22
	Coordination in different programmes/staffs	2	25
	Discussion about GO/NGO connection	1	9
	English/presentation skill	0	10
	Others	1	17
Not related to BLR	Discussion regarding the problems of programme	1	24
	Staff related problem	0	14
	Office related problems	1	27
	Accommodations related (office/residence)	1	11

The topics that were not related to BLR objectives were problems related to programme, staff, office, and accommodation.

The discussions on BRAC programmes mainly were about the latest information on different programmes. Coordination with different programmes were about asking for help from other programmes, preparing field visit schedule in consultation with others, coordination in field, etc. Under the GO-NGO coordination and English/presentation skill development they discussed about talking in English in the inter-programme coordination meetings, decision about keeping English newspaper in the office, etc. The ‘others’ category include discussions on ‘BRAC *paripatra*’, BRAC procedure and HR rules and regulations, millennium development goals, PRSP, BLR letter or the importance of BLR, BRAC at a glance, BRAC mission and vision, and culture and values.

The issues discussed that were not related to the BLR objectives were problems of the programme and staff, and accommodation and office-related issues. The programme related issues covered the problems of EDP programme. Some of the examples could be problem in loan disbursement and realization, discipline in VO, sell of seedlings, savings, remittance, overdue collection, NIBL issue, bad debts, overlapping and admission of members, etc. The staff-related problems include not getting benefits according to BRAC procedure, station leave, behaviour, safe journey, etc. The office-related problems include cleanliness of the office and toilet, staff motorcycle, administration and security, and dining-related problem, furniture, repairing, etc.

Only one BLR said that he discussed about the venue of their next meeting. One of the BLR said that he never restricted his discussion on any particular issue. When asked to say in detail the issues discussed in the last meeting he told not much about what was discussed in the last meeting.

Type of staff attended the inter-programme coordination meeting

The distribution of staff shows that 550 staff were from EDP, 393 from the micro-credit programme, 87 from BEP, and 37 from BHP attended the coordination meetings. So, the distribution of staff supports that the EDP staff could dominate the BLR meetings. So, if the higher authority of the credit programme is not convinced about the duties of BLR then it will become difficult to carry on the duties of BLR.

Dissemination of inter-programme coordination meeting

Five (35%) respondents told that, the programme staff who participated in the inter-programme coordination meetings usually share the minutes with their subordinate staff. The BLRs make sure of the sharing of the outcome of their visit of field offices. The field staff were inquired about the topics discussed in the inter-programme coordination meeting to check as to what extent they were updated about the information on BRAC and government offices.

Some of the BLRs informed that the programme staff did not discuss anything that discussed in the meeting after returning to the base. They got that impression by talking with the field level staff. They could not tell anything that discussed in the meeting or regarding that meeting. Some BLRs said that they never enquired whether the BLRs discussed about the topics of the meeting or not. Many of the BLRs were under the impression that the field staff did not understand the BLR issue or BLR workshop. Few BLRs said that they saw positive attitude among the staff of other programme regarding BLR workshop. One of the senior BLR said, "While I was conducting an inter-programme coordination meeting the programme heads became enthusiastic to know about the discussions held in the BLR meeting. They (the programme heads) also said that the field staff were also so eager to know what had been discussed in the inter-programme meeting." He also said that after going back to the field the programme heads shared what he told them.

Usually the BLRs preserve the minutes of inter-programme coordination meetings in their file, but did not send those to the head office.

INTERACTION WITH THE OUTER STAKEHOLDERS

BACKGROUND

One of the mandates of the BLRs is to coordinate with the outer stakeholders like different government offices and NGOs. They are also supposed to attend the government coordination meetings. Usually the government coordination meetings had to be held once a month. The meetings held at two levels i.e. one at the district level which is facilitated by a DC and the other one at *upazila* level facilitated by the UNO. In this chapter we would like to delineate the forms and outcomes of the BLR interaction with the outer stakeholders.

GOVERNMENT COORDINATION MEETING

In the government coordination meetings, the NGOs including BRAC inform the government about their activities in the region and also about the progress they have made. They also inform about the problems they are facing in implementing their programmes and seek necessary government support. The coordination meetings help resolve contradictions, if any, among the NGOs at the local level. It also helps reduce overlaps between the different development programmes of the government and NGOs. On the other hand, when there is any government notice for the NGOs, the DC office informs them about it. The local government office sometimes also asks to take part in different government activities like victory day celebration, arrangement of national immunization day, for doing any survey, or for fighting against the natural calamities together with the government. So the government officials believe that having regular communication between the government and different NGOs is a necessity for both. The local government office sends invitation to BRAC for attending government coordination meeting. The letter of invitation also includes the agenda to be discussed in the meeting (like legal aid, acid throwing, law and order, public health, tree plantation, celebration of Independence Day, etc. In some cases, government officials send a letter by asking the BLR to submit updated information about different BRAC programmes within the area.

Problems regarding the government coordination meeting

Many BLRs informed that the government coordination meetings were not held regularly in their area. Moreover, in almost all the cases the local government authority did not send the letter to BLR's office. In some cases, even the BLRs did not receive the invitation letter from government in time. Almost all the BLRs said that usually the government office sent the letter of invitation for government coordination meeting just 1 or 2 days before. Because of these problems many BLRs could not prepare themselves at all or could not prepare a report with updated information for the meeting. Moreover, in the meeting each NGO gets only 2-5 minutes to discuss or provide information on their activities in the region and that does not really help the BLRs to build a proper image of BRAC, particularly when it has so many programme components.

Another major problem for the BLRs is to handle the demand for donation or subscription by the local government authority for organizing different national days. Sometimes BRAC was also asked to bear the cost of meeting or related expenses. Since there is no such allocation or fund, the BLRs have to refuse payments and manage the local government authority. But all these create a negative attitude towards the BLRs by the

government authority. Some of the respondents from the government office said that BRAC officials keep good terms with the government and they said that it was their policy to keep good relation with the government. But when they asked for any assistance from BRAC for celebrating our national days, BRAC refused to offer that with the excuse that it would not be allowed by the head office. But the government officials do not take it easily and they expect BRAC to offer them the assistance they want as they have the capacity to do that. A UNO said, "They observe the 'days' themselves as directed by their head office, but this is an example of misconduct."

The image of BRAC to the outer stakeholders

BRAC as an 'alternative' government

A few government officials we interviewed said that BRAC officials used to visit the government offices more frequently in the past. But as now BRAC was getting bigger and bigger, buying the most lucrative land all over Bangladesh, making their offices in each and every *upazila*; it had formed itself as an 'alternative government' i.e. "They have created a government within the government." Therefore, it did not care about the government anymore, they complained.

BRAC breaks the chain of command

Some of the respondents complained that even though BRAC is doing good for the people, they do not bother to inform the government at the district or *upazila* level about their activities and this is so because the high officials of BRAC have good connections with the higher authority of the government and they can seek their assistance whenever they want. But, sometimes in future BRAC might need the help of the local government and then they will not get that. One UNO also complained against BRAC for breaking the chain of authority by saying that BRAC people always go to the DC office overriding him, which he did not like.

BRAC as 'negligent'

Some of the UNO even portrayed BRAC as 'negligent' while citing an example when one of them had selected BRAC representative a few months back as the secretary of all NGOs to oversee the activities of the NGOs sanitation programme, but BRAC did not perform the responsibility. Another UNO complained that BRAC 'manager' was given charge to arrange monthly meetings where they could discuss about the relationship between the government and NGOs, but the manager did not bother to arrange the meeting.

BRAC does not care about government funding

The respondents expressed that small NGOs frequently came to government offices and invited the government officials to their offices in order to get financial assistance from the government. But BRAC is the largest NGO and they did not care for government fund and as a result they did not bother to pay any attention to the government officials.

Big, successful and different from others

All the respondents see BRAC as something very big and very successful. At the first glance to the complimentary packet that the researcher offered to the DC of Barisal, he appreciated the envelope, which was made of recycled paper and then said in an appreciating voice that everything was different at BRAC. It was perceived from the local government authority that the BLRs could not establish themselves as the representative of BRAC. So, the government official always tells a BLR in their other designation like BRAC manager. The local authority

also demands a lot more time from the BRAC representative. Like, as a big NGO the local government authority wants to involve BRAC in many activities. But most probably for the programmatic work BLRs could not involve themselves with those activities. Because, many of the BLRs said that the regular work of the BLRs is an extra burden for them and for that they had to work even in holidays. So, it becomes impossible to perform any added responsibilities from the local government office. But, in those cases the BLRs need to clear themselves to the local government authority instead of avoiding the assigned work.

Constraints of BLR identified by the local government authority

Irregular attendance

The majority of the government officials interviewed complained that BRAC was irregular in attending coordination meetings. One DC said that BRAC representative did not attend the last coordination meeting held at his office. He also added that BRAC officials hardly visit his office. The DC further complained that even though BRAC was carrying out a number of programmes in his area, he was not being informed about those by BRAC. Another DC said that BRAC representative hardly used to attend coordination meetings in his previous workstation. He even said that BRAC was a member in the district committee for acid survivors there, but they never attended any meeting during his tenure. He remarked that, "They had no time to come to us...they were too busy with their micro-finance".

The DC of Rangpur shouted at the district BLR in presence of the researcher, referring an incident where the BLR of Pirgachha misbehaved with the UNO and did not attend the coordination meeting.

One ADC told us that once his supervisor DC commented in a forum at BRAC TARC that BRAC did nothing in that area and later he himself informed the DC about different activities of BRAC. He said, in relation to that incident, "I think BRAC representatives do not meet the DC regularly."

Another ADC showed the researcher the evidence of absence of different NGOs including BRAC at coordination meetings by opening the official records. He even instructed his office assistant to take necessary steps against those NGOs who were irregular.

One UNO complained that a number of NGOs visited his office, discussed about their problems and sent reports every month, but BRAC officials hardly visited his office. He continued that even though he went to BRAC TARCs on different occasions, they did not even send programme reports to him.

Two out of three DCs mentioned about regular presence of BRAC in government coordination meetings. But one of them said that BRAC representatives hardly attended any coordination meetings in his previous workstation and he was transferred to his current workstation only one and half month back. One out of two ADCs and two out of four UNOs confirmed BRAC's presence in these coordination meetings. One of the UNOs who said that BRAC never visited him, mentioned about a few NGOs who visited him regularly and complained that the BRAC people always went to the DC office overriding him. Another UNO also complained that BRAC officials only came when they were invited.

So, almost half of the local government authority said that the BLRs attended the meeting regularly and another half said that, they are irregular in attending the meeting. But, in those cases where the BLRs did not attend the meeting the local government authority reacted badly.

Representatives provide less information

Some respondents complained that even though when BRAC representatives were present in coordination meetings, they did not always provide enough information about their programmes. When asked the local government authority about different programmes of BRAC seven out of nine respondents told about the micro-credit programme of BRAC, while five out of nine said about BRAC schools. Some of the local government authority mentioned about other programmes like nutrition, health, sanitation and TB. One respondent also mentioned about poultry, fishery and agriculture programme. It should be mentioned here that all these programmes have partnership with the government.

Frequent change of BRAC representatives

Some of the government respondents complained that BRAC representatives were changed so frequently that it hampers the interaction with them. It takes time for the representatives to get experienced in doing their duties and also for the government authority to become familiar with them.

Strength of BLR identified by the local government authority

Skilled presentation

Some of the respondents said that there were distinctive difference in presentation skill between BRAC and other NGO representatives. They also said that usually BRAC representatives were comparatively better knowledgeable about their programmes, they were informative and spontaneous while presenting their activities at a meeting.

Some perceived BRAC officials as very hard working and they also believed that BRAC was doing a lot to improve the condition of the poor. Some of the respondents also said that they were happy with the performance of the BRAC officials (not necessarily BLRs, whoever visited them from BRAC) because they maintained regular contact.

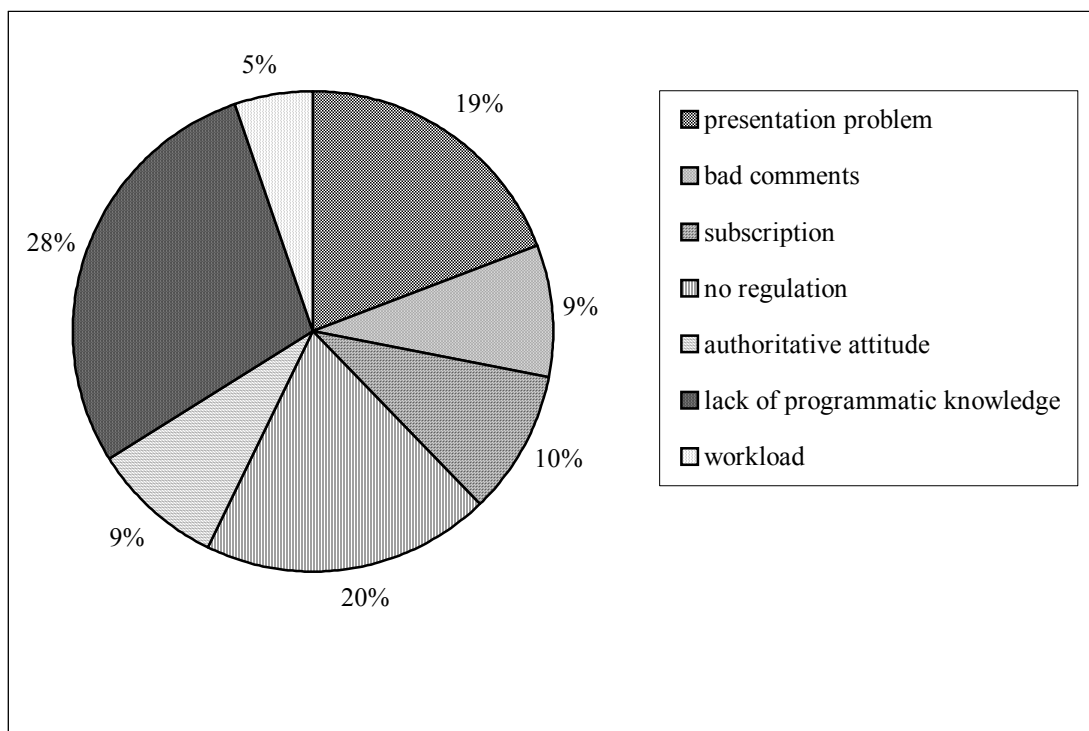
So, it seems that other than the BLRs there are many sources for knowing about BRAC activities. The government coordination meetings are not held regularly, and in fact there is no regularity in meeting schedules even. Some said that the coordination meetings were held quarterly, while some others said that once in five or six months. Only two of the respondents said that they called the coordination meetings bi-monthly. Some local government authority even said that only NGOs who were working in partnership in any development programme with the government were invited to participate in those meetings. All the respondents said that they arranged coordination meetings when they need NGO support for undertaking different government programmes, like celebrating any national day or for coordinating a national survey or immunization programme. So, it implicates that the responsibility of the ineffectiveness of government coordination meetings does not always goes to the NGOs who are not regular in participation. The concerned government authority also has some responsibilities. So, the BLRs are not always responsible for lack of knowledge of local government authorities about BRAC.

The BLRs also faced difficulties in participating government coordination meetings. More than a quarter (28%) of the BLRs suffered from lack of knowledge on BRAC programmes. The BLRs explained that they were very much busy with their own programmes and they had time constraints due to workload (Fig. 1). Moreover, even if they knew then it became more difficult to remember all the programmatic knowledge in mind.

Another difficulty that the BLRs had to face was the presentation-related problems (19.1%). In many cases the BLRs perceived that there are deficiencies in presentation skill. Around 19.5% of the BLRs said that they faced problems due to irregularities of government coordination meetings. Irrelevant discussions took place in the government coordination meetings and all participants did not get enough time for presentation. The other problem that the BLRs informed was the demand for subscription for celebrating different festivals (9.9%). Around 8.8% felt offended on the bad comments of government officials in the meeting.

Another 8.8% did not get enough time for presentation because the government officials took most of the time. Other 5.3% found their workload as a problem for attending the government coordination meetings (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The problems of BLRs faced in the government coordination meeting



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This was the first study, which attempted to explore the usefulness of BLR workshops and the activities of BLRs. The session covered in the workshops was quite intensive. The facilitators were efficient in delivering their materials. But, lack of preparation for the workshop and engagement to the office work through the cellular phones by most of the BLRs gave the impression that they were not taking the workshop seriously. There were also lack of adequate accommodations, modern equipments and proper seating arrangement in the classroom.

Typically, a BLR workshop includes 15 sessions distributed over 8 hours and 15 minutes. It seemed that the time allocated to many of the sessions were not enough to complete the topics of that session. So, the topics of a session should be selected with the time allocated for that particular session. There found no mechanism for formal assessment of BLR workshop or the participants. However a quiz test was taken where the participants were mainly asked to write about the mission, values and vision of BRAC.

The BLR arranged inter-programme coordination meetings but the frequency and timing of the meeting was not appropriate in many cases. The major drawback of the meeting was little discussion about different programmes of BRAC. But, it was expected that the BLR would be familiar with different BRAC programmes through the inter programme coordination meetings. Only in few cases the BLRs mentioned about inter-programme coordination meetings as a source of knowledge of different BRAC programmes. The other BLRs named other sources for knowing about different programme related issues of BRAC.

It was also observed by talking with the government officials that, the BLR was not update them with all of the programmes that are running in their locality. The highest numbers of programmes that were mentioned by the BLRs was micro credit and education programme of BRAC. Because, most of the BLRs were from BRAC micro-credit and Education Programme. So, they basically gave information to the government authority about their own programme. But, in almost all of the districts other programmes like agriculture, health, education, sanitation etc were also there. All this reflected that, the BLR were not equipped with enough programmatic knowledge to represent BRAC properly.

It also came out from the study that, the BLR do not attend the government coordinating meeting regularly. The cause could be the special duty or the subscription that were charged by the government authority in some special occasion. Lack of any system to fulfill those demands made the BLRs reluctant to attend the government coordination meetings. The lack of programmatic knowledge probably was another major cause for not attending the government coordination meeting

Overall, it was found that the outer stakeholders have ambivalent conception about BRAC, which was a clear shortcoming of BLRs. It was also found that the impression of the local government authority was mixed. A good number of the government authorities had a positive impression about the presence of BLRs in the coordination meeting. The BLRs had the impression that they have improved their presentation skill. But, the BLRs also mentioned that, they did not have sufficient knowledge about different BRAC programmes to present in the meetings. Findings also indicated that BRAC still has lot to do to change the impression of GOs towards BRAC and long way to go to change the GO-NGO relationship. To achieve better performance of BLR, it also required several interventions both in the workshop and otherwise.

BLRs did not have any real incentives for their role. This affected their performance in the workshop as well as the coordination meetings negatively.

The BLR participants, workshop facilitators and outer stakeholders made some suggestions/recommendations to make the BLR more efficient in representing BRAC at local levels. The recommendations were:

- i) Ensure the presence of BLR in the day before the workshop,
- ii) Designing the workshop in more interactive way,
- iii) Selection of different topics for a session in accordance with the allocated time,
- iv) More sessions has to be incorporated on different BRAC programmes,
- vi) Specific agenda should be fixed for inter-programme coordination meeting,
- vii) The work of the BLR should be properly follow-up and coordinated,
- ix) A remuneration package should be offered to the BLRs,
- x) More workable and practical agenda for the BLRs should be given so that they could mange their programmatic duty as well as their job of BLR, and
- xii) Establish more coordination between one programme to another programme of BRAC.

References

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Time distribution of the session

Name of the session	Schedule time (m)	Adjusted time (m)	Ave. actual time (m)	Diff. (m)
Introduction and objectives of BLR activities	15	13	15	+ 2
Getting to know each other	15	13	17.5	+ 4.5
Review of previous workshop especially previous action plan implementation	30	26	23	- 3
Quiz on BRAC vision, mission and values	15	13	22.5	+ 9.5
Mobile tour on BLR performance	15	13	14	+ 1
BRAC at a glance, March/July Issue 2005-08-31	15	13	20	+ 7
Health break	15	13	24	+ 11
Presentation on new BRAC procedure	120	106	69	- 37
Lunch Break	60	53	66	+ 13
GO-NGO relation/sharing with government official	30	26	37	+ 11
Presentation of BLR	60	53	10	- 43
Some tips on communicative English	60	53	35	-18
Role and responsibility of BLR	15	13	6	-7
New action plan for next three months	30	26	18	- 8
Closing	15	13	8	- 5

m = minute