

# Human rights and religious backlash: the experience of a Bangladeshi NGO

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*As part of a human rights education campaign, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) fixed 700,000 posters throughout Bangladesh. This met with opposition from the religious organisations. This paper investigates the nature and cause of the backlash and sets out strategies for how development organisations can achieve their objectives in the face of opposition. The opposition was found to be in response to interpretations of the posters based on the Holy Koran and Islamic practices, and a perceived intrusion into the professional territory of religious organisations, which affected the socio-economic interests of these organisations' representatives. It was therefore concluded that development organisations should pre-empt such opposition by spelling out their objectives to potential critics, and formulating programmes that do not provide scope for opponents to undermine their development activities.*

## Introduction

The individuals who belong to social organisations may also form part of a broader group. Social organisations do not always coexist in harmony. When the tensions are so great that one organisation does not want the other to achieve its aims, it may even take violent measures to prevent its 'opponent' from functioning.

The organisation that faces such resistance may or may not react against it. If it is prevented from working but fails to react, its objectives will be frustrated. In contrast, if the organisation reacts to and overcomes this resistance, it will be able to meet its objectives, albeit at the cost of extra resources, energy, and time. Thus, for an organisation to be successful and cost-effective in its work, it must frame its objectives and activities in such a way that it does not encourage resistance from any other social organisation. Where resistance cannot be avoided, it is important to establish the reasons for it and take remedial measures.

Two important elements in the social fabric of Bangladesh are the religious organisations and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). The mosques and *madrassa* (Islamic theology schools) are here taken together to constitute the religious organisation.<sup>1</sup> For centuries, since mass conversion to Islam, this organisation has been in charge of Muslim religious expression in Bangladesh (Khan 1996). Its prime functions are to ensure that the Islamic faith is believed in and properly practised. Any idea that is considered not to be in

accordance with the tenets of Islam and any practice considered contradictory to its dictates is opposed by this organisation. BRAC, by contrast, is a recent introduction to Bangladesh. It has been developed to promote welfare and development of the poor through a range of programmes to alleviate poverty and empower poor people. Its activities mainly involve training, providing resources such as loans, and facilitating occupational changes to create opportunities for people to employ the training and make use of the resources provided. By the end of 1997, BRAC was working in 57 per cent of the villages in Bangladesh (Freeman 1996; Agricultural Census 1997).

An overwhelming percentage of the rural poor in Bangladesh are unaware of their legal rights. This not only prevents them from defending these rights but also allows others to exploit them. This is particularly true for women. BRAC thus decided to take measures to redress this problem and in 1989 launched the Human Rights and Legal Education (HRLE) programme which aimed to empower the members of Village Organisations (VOs)<sup>2</sup> formed by BRAC through educating them about human rights and some essential laws of Bangladesh (BRAC 1996b, 1997).

The rights and laws addressed in the programme concern four areas:

- Citizen's Right Protection Law
- Muslim Family Law
- Muslim Inheritance Law
- Land Law

The training of VO members is the pivot around which the whole programme revolves. By 1996, 560,066 VO members had been trained, and BRAC intends to reach one million members by 2001 (BRAC 1996b, 1997).

BRAC's assumption was that raising legal awareness among the VO members would help them to protect themselves from illegal, unfair, or discriminatory practices (BRAC 1996a). But the rights of VO members were sometimes infringed by individuals who were themselves not aware of the laws or of people's rights. In addition, VO members were sometimes compelled to violate certain laws, again by people who were not aware of these laws. BRAC therefore concluded that the rights of VO members would be better protected if non-VO members were also more aware of the relevant laws. This is what BRAC set out to do, as described below.

The local community leaders' workshops (LCLW) were organised for the élite<sup>3</sup> within each catchment area and sought to advise participants of the laws covered in the HRLE curriculum; inform them that these laws do not contradict religious laws (*Shariah*); and facilitate their cooperation in the implementation of HRLE training in the village.

BRAC developed a set of seven posters representing some of the contents of the HRLE training curriculum. These were fixed in VO meeting places, BRAC schools and field offices, government offices, health centres, and in the bazaars located in administrative towns (*unions* and *thanas*). Short descriptions and translations of the statements shown on the posters are presented in Box 1.

Some 700,000 posters were put up in early July 1997. These poster displays immediately provoked a good number of unwelcome social reactions (i.e. backlash). These included verbal condemnation of the posters, tearing the posters down, and organising demonstrations against the posters and BRAC. In addition, BRAC staff were teased, rebuked, and physically assaulted for putting up the posters. Poster campaigns are widely used to convey information and encourage attitudinal change at a community level. Although they had been effective in achieving these objectives earlier (Musaiger 1998; Lyttleton 1994), which is what encouraged

**Table 1:** The human rights and legal education posters

|   | Title                                        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Statement                                                                                                                   |
|---|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <b>Contribution to development</b>           | Shows both men and women together participating in the development work, i.e. cutting earth to build a road.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | We have built this world and this civilisation; men and women contributed equally to it.                                    |
| 2 | <b>Child marriage</b>                        | Points out a series of undesirable consequences of child marriage—child-birth at an early age leading to ill-health because of which she fails to carry out family responsibilities; this failure leads to bad relations between her and other members of the family which eventually can result in divorce. | Many brides are crying because of child marriage; nobody pays attention to the flood of their tears.                        |
| 3 | <b>Violation of multiple marriage policy</b> | Indicates that it is essential for a husband to have the approval of his existing wife before remarrying. Without this, he may have to face jail and/or pay a fine.                                                                                                                                          | Facing jail and a fine for remarrying without the consent of present wife or for ignoring her disapproval of such marriage. |
| 4 | <b>Abuse of women</b>                        | Abuse of women is a criminal offence; one can be sent to the lock-up for such an offence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Those who torture women, send them to the lock-up.                                                                          |
| 5 | <b>Registration of marriage</b>              | Indicates that it is important to register marriage as women are often left helpless after divorce.                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Husband divorced, what am I to do? Married by reciting <i>kalema</i> * but without registration.                            |
| 6 | <b>Bride money</b>                           | Indicates that in case of divorce, the husband must refund the bride money in all circumstances.                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Have to pay the bride money whether dead or alive.                                                                          |
| 7 | <b>Verbal divorce</b>                        | Indicates that a marriage cannot be cancelled by verbally pronouncing divorce three times.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Divorce is not legal if given verbally.                                                                                     |

\* Verses from the Holy Koran that are recited in conducting a marriage.

BRAC to go ahead this time, they sometimes fell short of the objectives or had an undesirable impact (Wienrawee 1995).

This paper investigates the nature and the cause of the backlash against the posters, and outlines strategies that would allow development organisations to pursue their objectives without provoking such hostile reactions.

## Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted in August 1997 in the catchments of three BRAC field offices—Kachikata, Sharail, and Kuliarchar. The areas were selected to cover various forms of backlash. A checklist was administered in group interviews in order to collect data, with between four and eight interviewees per group. These were deliberately selected in order to obtain sufficient information about the poster programme and the backlash to it within each group. The interviewees represented different social sectors—BRAC field staff, VO members and their husbands attending monthly VO meetings,<sup>4</sup> people working/living near to where the posters were put up, clerics,<sup>5</sup> and the élite. Four to eight interviews were conducted for each of these groups. Information provided by individuals was corroborated through cross-checks.

## Reaction against the posters

After the posters were put up, people from different social sectors gathered around them. The BRAC logos indicated who was responsible for them. Some onlookers refrained from passing any opinion, but others did not. A schoolteacher remarked that the posters pointed out the real problems of the society, and that BRAC had done a good job by displaying these problems in the posters. On the 'verbal divorce' poster, some remarked that the statement in it was correct and the poster was the most important in the set. However, some reacted negatively. For example, it was said about this same poster that the statement was against Islam and that BRAC was harming society.

Within a short while, the verbal condemnation gathered momentum and turned into organised group reaction against the posters. The backlash took place mostly in small towns. Three instances are discussed below.

### Case 1

A day after the posters were fixed in Kachikata bazaar, the one on verbal divorce was ripped down after sunset when nobody was around. For about a week after the posters had gone up, debate on them continued in tea stalls among the regular customers who usually spent their evenings at the stall, and the local clerics who, unlike the others, were not regulars. They discussed each of the posters and placed their arguments both for and against. In general, the clergy strongly criticised the posters from an Islamic perspective.

A LCLW was scheduled in the local BRAC office a week after the posters were fixed. Discussion of the posters was an agenda item. In the workshop, BRAC clarified the objectives of the posters and how the messages depicted did not contradict Islam. The local *union parishad* chairman praised BRAC for the poster campaign and asked all present in the workshop to support BRAC's initiative. After this, the posters were no longer publicly criticised in the bazaar, and no adverse reactions were noticed.

### Case 2

An hour after the posters were fixed in Sharail bazaar, supporters and opponents of the posters started debating the contents. Discussion became heated and at one point turned into a fight. The shopkeepers calmed down the two groups and ripped down the posters fearing that, if they remained in place, there would be further trouble.

The same evening, when BRAC staff were walking through the bazaar, they observed that a group (including clerics) was vehemently criticising the posters. Seeing the BRAC staff,

they teased them. Some of them even came up and asked where they had got the idea that divorce could not be given verbally. The BRAC staff avoided them and did not respond to the taunt. Later in the evening, a group of clerics visited the house of a member of BRAC's staff and rebuked him for fixing the posters.

The next day, a number of *imams* and *madrassa* teachers met in a mosque after late evening prayer (*Esha*) to decide what action to take against the posters. Accordingly, a group of *madrassa* students went early next morning and ripped down the posters on 'verbal divorce' from all the locations in the town.

A set of posters in the lobby of the BRAC office, however, remained intact. In reaction to this, some clerics decided to take action against the office staff. To pre-empt such an attack, the BRAC manager proposed to meet the religious leaders and explain the posters to them. This offer was turned down.

On July 15 1997, a nationwide lockout was held to protest against the defaming of Prophet Muhammad in Israel.<sup>6</sup> That day a group of 40–60 *madrassa* students came to the same BRAC office to check whether it was observing the protest call by remaining closed. The office manager stopped the group at the outer gate of the office, but half a dozen of them forced entry into the building. After seeing the posters in the lobby, they remarked that these were against Islam, and objected to their being displayed. One of them ripped down the poster on 'verbal divorce'. When this was going on inside, the students standing in front of the gate threw stones at the office. Seeing this, the shopkeepers and college students in the nearby bazaar came forward and drove the *madrassa* students away.

### Case 3

A day after the posters were fixed in Kuliarchar, the principal of a local *madrassa* met with two members of the town's élite (actively affiliated with two major political parties) in a mosque to discuss the posters. A number of devotees were also present and asked the principal for the teaching of the Holy Koran on divorce. When responding to the question, the principal remarked that BRAC had committed a grave sin and offended Muslims by displaying the posters. He convinced the group that they should stand against any misinterpretation of the Holy Koran and *Hadith*. As a first step, they decided to hold a protest rally against the posters in the town next day and take it to the BRAC office.

The rally was later abandoned, but the teachers from the *madrassa* instead filed a 'first information report' against the posters in the police station. Afterwards, the police officer-in-charge and one of the élite with whom the principal had spoken the day before, visited the BRAC office. The élite rudely attacked the conduct of the office staff and BRAC's policies. The staff remained calm by not retorting. At one point, the officer politely requested the élite to leave the office as he was capable of handling the situation alone. The élite complied. The police officer told BRAC staff that they had hurt the religious sentiments of the townspeople. He advised them to take down the posters around the town and to pacify the clerics and influential local people by talking it through with them. He also warned that if they did not take his advice, the police department would be unable to protect them from any undesirable eventuality against them.

The BRAC manager, realising the gravity of the problem, asked for guidance from her superior, who instructed her to follow the advice. Accordingly, the BRAC staff went out to take down all the posters, but none was found intact. Not only that, but some of the walls where posters had been fixed were covered with mud and cow-dung. In fact, when the police officer was in the BRAC office, some *madrassa* students had gone around the town ripping down all the posters. Their actions were not resisted by any witnesses.

That evening, a group of BRAC staff met with the clerics. The staff managed to pacify them by saying that it had been a mistake to put up the posters, conceding to a request in future to seek the clerics permission before fixing any posters in the town.

### Who opposed and who supported the poster policy?

It is apparent from these incidents that the clerics were against BRAC's point of view. They were supported by a small group of devout Muslims with only a shallow knowledge of Islam, along with some misconceptions, and little or no schooling. They were in close contact with the clerics, who in fact stirred up their religious sentiments against the posters. A number of ex-VO members who bore a grudge against BRAC also opposed the poster campaign.<sup>7</sup>

The group who supported the rights education policy included BRAC's field staff, the VO members and their families, and educated sectors of the community who had attended secular school and were below 45 years of age. It was also observed that non-VO members whose socio-economic status was similar to that of the VO members also came out openly in support of the poster campaign. These groups together constituted the overwhelming majority of the population of the rural areas and small towns in Bangladesh.

### Why oppose or support the poster campaign?

The supporters as well as the opponents of the campaign rationalised their respective positions through their analysis of the posters (see below). These rationalisations were not always based on correct interpretations of the Holy Koran, and respondents did not comment on Poster 3, on 'violation of multiple marriage policy'.

#### *Poster 1: Contribution to development*

Opponents mentioned that Islam recognised equal rights for both males and females but bestowed different responsibilities on each of them. By showing both sexes doing similar work, the poster contradicted Islam. Besides, the women in the poster were considered to have been drawn obscenely. For these reasons they opposed the poster.

Supporters believed that the poster encouraged women to participate in productive activities which would lead to more income for the family.

#### *Poster 2: Child marriage*

In justifying the opposition to this poster, it was mentioned that Islam allowed child marriage in special situations—a father not able to support his daughter can marry her to an able-bodied husband. For example, one of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad was only six years old at marriage. The poster was thus considered to have contradicted the dictates of Islam.

Supporters argued that child marriage brings unhappiness in the family. They emphasised that every parent should know the minimum age of marriage. The poster was important because it told people what that age was.

#### *Poster 4: Abuse of women*

There was no opposition to this poster as such, and the message was considered significant by all interviewees. The problem lay with the way the abused woman was depicted. The

clerics strongly objected to the abused woman being shown without her body being sufficiently covered. They therefore considered the poster to be obscene and that it should not have been displayed.

The VO members agreed that the woman was a little under-dressed but did not object to this. Some, however, remarked that women who were abused seldom had enough sari and blouses to wear, so the picture reflected the context and there was nothing wrong in displaying the poster.

#### *Poster 5: Registration of marriage*

The group opposing the poster said that, according to Islam, marriage was conducted by proposing marriage, acceptance of the proposal, and recitation of *kalema*. Registering marriage is not a requirement. They thought that the statement in the poster had been so framed that it gave more importance to registration than to *kalema*. By making *kalema* insignificant or subordinate to registration, the poster made mockery of it. It was also felt that if registration became an integral part of marriage, that would mean that all the marriages that took place without registration since the revelation of Islam had been conducted incorrectly. Consequently, the group opposed the poster.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, supporters considered the registration of marriage to be significant as it made divorce difficult and so would save many marriage break-ups.

#### *Poster 6: Bride money*

Two arguments were voiced against this poster. Some believed that according to Islam there were circumstances when the wife needed to repay bride money to her husband after a divorce. By dealing only with the bride money for the husband, the poster failed to provide complete information on the issue as stipulated in Islam. Others, however, argued that Islam did not say anything about repaying bride money after divorce, and so rejected the poster on the grounds that it was not based on the dictates of the *Holy Koran* or *Hadith*.

The other group considered that bride money could provide real economic assistance for divorced women. They considered it important for rural women to know the laws on bride money and so felt this poster was useful in providing such information.

#### *Poster 7: Verbal divorce*

Two technical problems were identified in denying the right to verbal divorce by those who opposed the poster. First, according to the *Holy Koran*, divorce could only be conducted verbally so to deny this right would leave the marriage with no scope for conducting divorce. Denying the concept of verbal divorce would also mean denying marriages that had been conducted verbally. In other words, to establish a marital relationship verbally would be illegal. Denying verbal divorce would also mean that all divorces conducted verbally since the introduction of Islam were illegal.

Second, since verbal divorce was acceptable according to Islam, any marital relationship after such a divorce would be tantamount to adultery and children born of such relationship would be illegitimate. It was felt by the opponents to it that the poster stating that divorce could not be given verbally was, in fact, encouraging marital relationships after such a divorce.

The group supporting the posters felt that abolishing verbal divorce would make divorce difficult and less frequent. This would have the effect of saving many families from break-up

and from the consequences of such a separation, in particular the economic hardship faced by the divorced wife and her children, as such women were often left without an earner in the family.

## BRAC's reaction to the backlash

The poster policy brought both VO members and others in the community within the scope of the HRLE programme. Since the posters were intended to empower ordinary people by giving them some knowledge of the law, it was likely that there would be some social sectors who would not appreciate this policy and would oppose it.

BRAC's reactions were pragmatic and depended upon the nature of the backlash. BRAC staff did not make any effort to prevent the posters being ripped down as it was assumed that to do so would have heightened the intensity of the opposition and put BRAC in the firing-line.

Staff attempted to meet with those opposing the posters to explain the objectives and meanings of the posters. Where such meetings could be held, they produced the desired result. But there were also cases where meetings were not possible because the opponents of the posters did not wish to cooperate.

Where severe opposition was encountered, staff compromised by surrendering to the apparent interests of the opponents of the poster campaign. This decision was taken to avoid immediate harm being done to BRAC's activities and to ensure the success of the policy in the long run.

## Causes of the backlash against the posters

There appeared to be three interlinked reasons that led the clerics to react against the posters.

### *Different perspectives*

Past experience, self-interest, and the objectives of the organisations to which they were affiliated, all influenced people's response to the posters. Since supporters and opponents differed on these fundamental issues, it was likely that they would take different stands concerning the posters.

BRAC initiated the poster campaign with a view to bringing about a positive change in society by ending a number of unjust practices or social problems. It believed that an end to such practices would not in any way contradict the dictates of Islam. The group supporting the policy emphasised the practical implication of the posters. They judged the posters according to their relevance to day-to-day problems and their solutions. They were also concerned with whether the laws of Bangladesh were properly reflected, not so much with whether the posters contradicted the dictates of Islam. Essentially, they analysed the content of the posters from a secular perspective, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

The clerics made a literal reading of the statements in the posters and then analysed whether those contradicted the dictates of the *Holy Koran* and Islamic practices past and present. After such scrutiny, they concluded that some of the posters were incompatible with Islamic teachings and were a real threat to existing Islamic practices in Bangladesh.

The clerics, whose training and profession are involved with religion, want to see that society functions according to the dictates of Islam. The introduction of any new idea or practice that was not considered to be in accordance with Islam or which posed a threat to existing Islamic practices, was likely to be resisted. As one cleric commented in the group

discussion: 'It is our moral obligation to preserve Islamic values in society. The posters attacked the iman [belief] of those having these values, thus we had to stand against them.'

### *Encroachment on professional territory*

The clerics were well aware that they were the only ones with formal Islamic training. They were therefore of the impression that they were the only group competent to deal with the issues related to Islam. Psychologically, then, they developed a territory for their professional activities. This is not unusual as all social groups have the tendency to possess, acquire, or preserve territory and territorial rights (Andrey 1967). Thus, it is quite likely that the groups who represent particular organisations may experience internal conflicts concerning the scope of the organisation's activities.

A number of issues the posters dealt with, such as marriage or divorce, had religious connotations. Hence, the clerics considered that the issue fell within their exclusive professional domain: *Marriage and divorce are decided according to Islam, thus it is only we who have the right to say anything on these issues*. When BRAC dealt with these issues, the clerics therefore considered it an intrusion into their territory. Thus, they reacted against the posters to protect their territorial right and professional domain.

### *Upholding socio-economic interests*

There were also socio-economic reasons which prompted clerics to oppose the posters. The respondents noticed that after a verbal divorce, the husband usually became repentant and intended to reunite with his former wife, who might also be willing for such a reunion. For this reunion it is customary to conduct *hilla-nikah*.<sup>9</sup> To make the reunion socially acceptable without going through *hilla-nikah*, the separated couple needs the help of the clerics. After receiving money, the cleric makes a public statement (usually in a village court) that when the husband pronounced verbal divorce he was not of sound mind, so therefore the divorce was not valid and their reunion without *hilla-nikah* would not violate any Islamic code. After the announcement, the couple reunites. The VO members believed that the poster on verbal divorce would gradually stop this practice, in which case the clerics would be deprived of an income.

Besides, the abolition of verbal divorce would mean that the role of clerics in relation to a marital problem (i.e. verbal divorce) would become obsolete. Consequently there would be a decline in their functional importance in society. Grasping that this was a possibility, and because of their interest in maintaining the status quo, they opposed the poster. It is likely, after all, that the group that stands to lose if change takes place will resist the change agent stubbornly (Allen 1971).

BRAC seeks to empower the poor, which in turn affects the existing power structure (Chen 1991). The clerics are often part of this power structure in villages and small towns. In empowering the poor, the poster programme would disempower the clerics in socio-economic terms and so destabilise their position in the existing power structure. BRAC's catalytic role in promoting such change prompted religious organisations to react against it.

### *How to avoid negative conflict*

It appeared that the police department was under the influence of the local power structures and did not respect BRAC's legitimate and justified development efforts. The shopkeepers and college students in Sharail (Case 2) supported BRAC when *madrassa* students attacked

the office, as most of its staff were personally known to them. As they thought well of BRAC they wanted no harm done to it. But this support was not unconditional, as some of these shopkeepers ripped down the posters to avoid further trouble in their area.

Although there were more villagers in support of the posters than there were opponents to them, the ripping down of the posters was not resisted, even when it was done in broad daylight in a public place (Case 3). Besides, the indifference of the police department to development efforts, and the reservations even among those who supported the poster campaign, indicated that it was not difficult for an organised few to foil this development initiative. To ensure the smooth functioning of development organisations, a number of strategies may be recommended in the light of this study.

The resistance that resulted from attitudes and conclusions based on different premises can be resolved or minimised by establishing effective communication between development organisations and those which resist their efforts. Development organisations might choose to explain their objectives and mode of action to other social organisations ahead of time, in order to clarify their position. Through dialogue, it might be possible to diminish any false impressions concerning the development organisation that might lead to opposition. Although a little late in the day, BRAC correctly sought to establish a dialogue with the clerics, and this may have prevented the intensification of the backlash in some areas, e.g. Kachikata (Case 1). (However, a similar effort in Sharail (Case 2) was in vain.)

Any programme that takes a holistic approach to development is likely to cut across the territorial boundaries of other social organisations. But one can enter another's territory only by being invited, as nobody likes to see their 'patch' getting crowded (Andrey 1967). The opposition resulting from the infringement of an organisational boundary may be minimised by incorporating the opposing organisations fully or partially into the process of formulating and/or implementing the development programme. It is important to take care that such a course of action does not dilute the objectives of the development organisation. A positive relationship is only likely to develop among groups that are working towards a common goal (Sherif et al. 1961). BRAC's decision to contact the clerics and the élite before finalising and fixing posters in future in Kuliarchar (Case 3) was a process of including the opposing group into the activities of the HRLE programme.

As an alternative, or in addition to the above strategies, the development organisation may convince and mobilise the support of influential members of the community to its cause. For example, in Kachikata (Case 1) when the chairman of the *union parishod* urged the participants in the LCLW to cooperate with BRAC, the policy did not face any opposition in the area.

In those cases where threats to one group's socio-economic interests underlie the resistance, it is likely that this group will oppose the development organisation for as long as the threat exists. In such a situation, measures should be taken to stop the group in question having a pretext for mobilising resistance against the development organisation. Development organisations, for their part, need to analyse the social organisations from which resistance may be expected, and to think about the likely nature of that resistance. This should help the development organisation to fine-tune its objectives, but without diluting them. For example, the statement 'divorce is not legal if given verbally' could have been formulated as 'according to Bangladesh law, divorce is not legal if given verbally'. Had that been done, the poster could not have been turned into a protest issue through being linked to Islam, but would still have achieved its objective.

Development organisations may also form an alliance with similar-minded groups. It was observed, for instance, that the clerics were not homogeneous in their belief and action as there were some who considered verbal divorce incorrect (Rafi et al. 1997). Certain clerics

and certain members of the elite could thus have been included in a pro-development alliance. Any major alliance is likely to discourage opponents from taking any action against the development effort, and may even put up a joint counter-resistance to such opposition.

Development organisations will often face resistance by others in society. It is likely that there will be sectors which will not appreciate endeavours to bring about social change. The resistance that development organisations face in working for the welfare of the poor should not be underestimated. To be effective, they should work out strategies to avoid or minimise any such resistance in the process of formulating their development programmes.

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## Notes

- 1 The mosque and *madrassa* are traditionally considered to be two separate organisations as they function with distinctly different objectives. For convenience of expression, the organisations have been referred to as one in this paper.
- 2 An organisation of the poor, supported by BRAC. Female villagers whose family owns less than half an acre of land and whose members sell manual labour are eligible to join. A VO is formed with 45 members.
- 3 That is, elected local government officials—chairmen and members of the administrative units (*union parishad*), preachers of the mosque (*imam*), marriage registrars (*kazi*), primary school teachers, and other influential people.
- 4 The policy is for the husbands of VO members to remain present in the monthly meetings held in VOs.
- 5 'Clerics' has been used here as a generic term to refer to religious officials (*imam*, *moazzine*) authorised to conduct services in the mosques, instruct in Islamic theology, and students at religious schools (*madrassa*).
- 6 Posters of a pig with 'Muhammad' written on it were fixed on the walls of Jerusalem.
- 7 These ex-VO members defaulted in repaying BRAC loans and BRAC therefore cancelled their VO membership—something they resented.
- 8 Although the group recognised the advantage of documenting marriage, but they did not use the word registration.
- 9 A matrimonial dictate on the reunion of the divorced couple. The wife needs to marry another person, live together with him for a minimum of four months, get divorced, and then remarry the previous husband with whom the reunion is intended.

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