

Mobilising for Women's Rights and The Role of Resources

Synthesis Report - Bangladesh

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAB	ActionAid Bangladesh
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AL	Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association
BOMSA	Bangladesh Obvibashi Mohila Sramik Association (Association of Female Migrant Workers of Bangladesh)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DP	Development Partners
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JSF	Joint Strategic Framework
LCG WAGE	Local Consultative Group: Sub-Group on Women's Advancement And Gender Equality
LCG	Local Consultative Group
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PD	Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness
RNE	Royal Norwegian Embassy
Shiree	Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Growth
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WRO	Women's Rights Organisations

Executive Summary

Women's rights are central to achieving gender equity. Mobilising for such rights is an important strategy which Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) often adopt. Generating resources for such mobilisation work and sustaining it can be difficult. This can considerably influence the direction of women's rights work, and ultimately the specific pathways that are created for women's empowerment.

Women's rights work in Bangladesh is witnessing significant changes to the aid scenario. Over the past ten years or more several donor organisations have had to revisit and revise their missions and strategies. The most obvious changes are visible amongst bilateral donor organisations. Women's organisations and small non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had been mainly dependent on the small grants programmes and civil society grants from bilateral donors. But leading up to the Paris agreements on aid effectiveness and consequent to it, bilateral organisations have had to downsize their in-country operations. Governments and multilateral organisations have now become the main conduits for donor money. Support to the NGO sector is being increasingly channelled through trust funds set up for this purpose. The changed aid architecture has made it difficult for women's organisations to access funding in their own right, and for the specific issues that they have worked on.

We undertook country level research in Bangladesh to clarify the conditions under which external financial support to women's mobilisation has a positive impact on women's empowerment. We also look at the conditions under which successful women's organising can be achieved without such support. Five case-study organisations were chosen to capture the diversity of different types of women's organisations in Bangladesh which include small associations, professional networks, and NGOs. After having collected data from the case-study organisations, we mapped the donors in Bangladesh to identify the common as well as important donor organisations. These included bilateral and multilateral organisations, trust funds and International NGOs.

All five organisations were started before they received foreign funding. Their 'raison d'être' was to respond to women's rights issues that their founder members had identified as burning issues. As they began to receive donor funds all organisations had to go through a process of formalising their ways of working and establishing organisational procedures. The change in aid policies, the resulting reduced funding flows to NGOs, lack of core funding and 'projectisation' had affected the way the case-study organisations worked. With donor funding inflows, voluntarism became less important, especially amongst younger members who approached the work as a 'profession'. Interestingly, project funding allowed women from less economically privileged backgrounds also to participate in the social movement activities carried out through project. External funding has influenced the WROs' agenda setting and mobilising strategies, and hence has affected their style of advocacy. The case-study

organisations chose to work on issues that were closely linked to their founding principles or those that seemed important in the context of changes at the national or international levels. All organisations adopted certain issues, which gained priority in the gender and development (GAD) discourse internationally. We also noted a recent trend towards an excessive focus on advocacy for policy and legal reform. This could be a result of what donors count as 'success', but this could potentially divert organisational activities away from focusing on wider structural changes.

The nature of partnership between donors and recipient organisations had changed over the years. Foundations such as the Ford Foundation and the Asia Foundation, that had played a crucial role in supporting innovative ideas put forth by WROs, had either moved away from Bangladesh or had become limited in their funding. International NGOs too were not able to have long-term funding relations with WROs. Long-term funding, which used to be the practice, has been phased-out by bilateral donors and there has been a shift to project based funding. Previously, a greater importance was attached to the solidarity of the relationship between donor staff and the WROs. Donor agency staff had been creative in ensuring funding for innovative approaches that may not have otherwise received funds under mainstream schemes. In general this practice has been replaced by a more business-like approach which that emphasises 'value for money'.

The WROs were not entirely project based in their activities and in their way of conceptualising work, even when they had been receiving significant amounts of donor funds. They had had alternate funding sources and could think of different ways to raise resources. While financial resources were important, they were not the most important resource for the WROs to achieve their goals or have an impact. The leadership of the founders of the organisation; membership strength, time and commitment were resources that were crucial to their work. These were in fact prioritised as more important than financial resources. Some organisations have also explored private sector contributions, bank loans, assets building as other sources for raising money. WROs are considering mobilising resources from the private sector, while being conscious that private firms and individuals might have their own agenda that may not necessarily match with the WROs. Participating in tenders and bids for various donor and government calls for proposals was also an option that one organisation had taken up. WROs have also developed several relationships and partnership with the government. Regional and international networking; alliances and local coalitions for constituency building have all become increasingly important.

We also examined how donors viewed the changing situation. We found that although bilateral donors insist that gender equality was a priority funding area, gender funds or funds for small and medium sized NGO/ WROs were being phased out. The relations between the donors and the WROs, such as the balance between support and instructions, the solidarity that has existed, and the role of national staff in donor agencies, emerge as important influencers. Bangladeshi women, working in donor bodies, for example, have helped legitimise gender issues and the role of WROs, by supporting the issue in donor forums and channelising donor support to these organisations. Many of these women had been involved

in women's movements earlier, but now find themselves in opposition to the organisations that they had previously partnered with.

WRO leaders were conscious that their mobilisation strategies had been affected by the availability of external funding. They now seek to sustain themselves by generating and accessing other types of funds. Scarcity of and competition for resources has challenged them to think of adopting new ways of working and raising funds. WROs have adopted alliance formation and coalition building and have also strategically joined other social movements which could further their cause. They are aware that sustainability and leadership are key concerns for the future, and building a second generation of leaders who would help build organisational capacity to weather various crises, and flourish was needed.

There is a greater understanding and awareness of the changes in aid structures and flows. WROs are interested in protesting against changes that have negatively impacted them and challenging the way in which government and donor resources were to be allocated and distributed. Access to and use of government resources is another area that WROs could challenge, to ensure equitable distribution.

Most WROs have a different standing, legitimacy and identity from other development NGOs. They are a recognised and valued part of society. It is this as well as their commitment to establish gender equity and creativity in resource mobilisation that may help them tide over the constraints of reduced external funds and encourage different forms of mobilisation and sustainability.



Validation Workshop held on 30 August 2010 with the case-study organisations and 31 August 2010 with the donor organisations

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Section 1. Introduction, Background and Objectives

The Research Programme Consortium (RPC) on Pathways of Women's Empowerment undertook an inter-country research on 'Mobilising for Women's Rights and the Role of Resources'.¹ The project, which took place between May 2009 and March 2011 used participatory methods of critical reflection, and involved donor staff as well as representatives from women's rights organisations and regional and global networks operating in Bangladesh and Ghana. Resource mobilisation and financial sustainability for women's movements worldwide has been a significant research issue for the Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC. Hence the proposed research sought to clarify two key aspects:

- the conditions under which external financial support to women's organising has a positive impact on women's empowerment, and
- the conditions under which successful women's organising can be achieved without such support.

The specific research questions that shaped the project include:

- Under what conditions has bilateral and/or multilateral funding *supported* transformative changes in societal structures as distinct from instances in aid dependent countries where women have successfully organised *without* recourse to external funding? What has the effect been on women's organising when they secure external funding (i.e. the 'NGOisation' of women's movements)?
- Bearing in mind the changing nature of aid regimes and consequent funding of women's rights organisations and organising;
 - how have these changes affected women's organising at global, regional and national levels
 - what (if any) changes are emerging in the concepts and strategies to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality
 - whether and how different aid regimes can support societal and state efforts as pathways of women's empowerment.
- Are new articulations or pathways to women's empowerment emerging as a result of these changes?

This report focuses on the results from the research conducted in Bangladesh. We chose five organisations as case-studies, based on criteria decided at the project's inception workshop. All case-study organisations were women-headed, worked on women's rights, and were established before 2000. The case-study organisations were chosen to capture the diversity of organisations in Bangladesh which range from small women's associations, professional women's networks to women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These organisations included:

- Doorbar Network - an independent network of women's organisations
- Banchte Shekha - a women's NGO
- Bangladesh Mohila Obvibashi Samity (BOMSA) - an association of migrant women workers
- Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA) - an association of women lawyers
- Karmojibi Nari (KN) - an organisation working with women labourers

¹ Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC is a multi-country consortium which includes the BRAC Development Institute at BRAC University as the South Asian consortium member, University of Ghana as the West African consortium member, and IDS, University of Sussex serving as its secretariat. This specific research project included the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) as a research partner. The principal researchers were Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Area Leader for Social Development and Gender Equity, Department of Development Policy and Practice, at the Royal Tropical Institute, Netherlands and Rosalind Eyben, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies. Principal Researchers based in Bangladesh were Maheen Sultan, Coordinator, Pathways of Women's Empowerment at the BRAC Development Institute and Sohela Nazneen, Research Fellow, Pathways of Women's Empowerment, also at BRAC Development Institute and Associate Professor, Dhaka University. The study was jointly financed by Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNIFEM.

We collected data through participatory exercises, group discussions, in-depth interviews and secondary document analysis. In order to develop a pictorial history and baseline data for these organisations we used participatory timeline and ranking exercises (Annex 3). This allowed us to develop an organisational timeline, and identify changes in their agenda, relationships and resources. It also created a scope for participants to reflect on what the turning points were in their organisation's history. We identified data gaps based on the information from the workshops with the organisations, and asked for their feedback. We also analysed secondary documents to collect quantitative information and fill in data gaps. We used field reflections diaries and had extensive discussions within the team. This allowed us to identify issues for further analysis as well as mitigate personal biases in interpreting findings.

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We also did a donor mapping exercise after collecting data from the case-study organisations to identify the common and important donor organisations (see Annex 1). We interviewed relevant donor staff for their side of the story (Annex 4). These included mainly bilateral and multilateral donors, trust funds and international NGOs (INGOs). Donors interviewed included: Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Norwegian Embassy (since the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation – NORAD – in Bangladesh was a part of the embassy), International Organization on Migration (because an ex-employee of NORAD from the 1990s now worked here), Oxfam GB², Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), The Asia Foundation, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). These interviews with donor staff focused on three themes:

- shifts within these donor organisations and the impact of the Paris Declaration
- the relationship between these donor organisations and women's rights organisations (WROs)
- the changes in aid structure and how it affected WROs in Bangladesh.

In addition to these primary data collection methods, we reviewed documents on donor funding and women's mobilisation in Bangladesh. These reviews served as the base for developing questions/issues we wanted to explore with the case-study organisations and the donors.

Separate validation workshops were held with the case-study organisations and donor agencies to discuss findings, and their feedback has been incorporated into this report.

This report synthesises our findings and reflections based on the above case-studies, around three key questions:

- How have donors affected women's organisations' work and ways of working?
- What are WROs doing to raise resources outside of donor funding, and what are the types of work they do which is not donor funded?
- What are the emerging pathways?
-

² Our interviewee was from Oxfam GB which in the 1970s and 80s, used to be known as Oxfam.

Section 2 of this report provides an analysis of Bangladesh's context and developments from 1995 till current times, the national development-aid scenario, the influence of the Paris Declaration and attempts towards donor harmonisation. Section 3 presents the five case-study organisations. Section 4 analyses the experiences of the organisations before they received donor funding. Section 5 deals with "Life with Funding" and Section 6 focuses on "Life Besides and Beyond Funding". Section 7 presents the situation from the perspective of the donors and Section 8 - "Staying Alive" - draws conclusions from the research and presents issues of sustainability.

Section 2: The Bangladesh Context

2.1 History of Women's Mobilisation in Bangladesh

Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan's economic exploitation, political and cultural suppression in 1971, through an armed struggle. The country is relatively homogeneous in cultural and linguistic terms. Strict social hierarchies such as caste are absent but state and society are divided by gender and class hierarchies (Goetz 2001). These hierarchies have influenced the types of demands and the strategies women's groups use for mobilising (see below).

There is a wide range of women's organisations,³ including small women's organisations operating at the local level, women's development organisations, and national level advocacy and activist organisations. Many of these organisations explicitly claim to be feminist organisations. We focus on women's mobilisation to capture different forms of women's activism, including those that may not necessarily aim to change gender power structures.

Bangladesh has a long history of women's mobilisation which can be traced back to the anti-colonial nationalist movement: against the British and the Pakistanis. Women actively mobilised in the anti-colonial struggles (activities included protest marches, demonstrations, picketing, etc.) and they participated in various social welfare activities. Various national level women's organisations and small charities which were mainly composed of elite and middle class women undertook such activities. Women's education and legal reforms were the key areas on which these organisations focused.

Post-independence (i.e. after 1971), women's organisations focused on a broad range of issues such as political empowerment, economic equality, legal reforms of customary and gender biased laws, violence against women, reproductive rights, etc. (Jahan 1995; Kabeer 1989). Ethnic minority women who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as well as in the plains have actively participated in struggles for collective rights over land, and armed conflict in the CHT.

How women's organisations choose to mobilise support and who they chose as allies is influenced by the specific social and political context within which they operate. This includes a repressive pattern of politics,

³ By 'feminist organisation' we mean those who explicitly state that they are feminist and focus on changing gender power structures. Women's organisations may work for addressing women's practical gender interests (Molyneux 1985) and may not have aims to change gender power structures.

polarisation of civil society actors along party lines, the role of religion in politics, the existence of a large development NGO sector and the influence of donor funding in promoting the women's rights agenda (the latter two are discussed in Section 2.3).

Bangladesh went through alternating periods of democratic (1971-1975; 1979-1982; 1991-2006) and military rule (1975-1979; 1982-1990; 2006-2008). This has resulted in the politics of engagement between the state and people becoming one of repression and confrontation. Fewer women were active in formal party politics during the periods of military rule. However, women's organisations have been active in pro-democracy movements and have established strong links with human rights, cultural and other social movements during these periods (see Annex 2). The two major political parties - Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) - do not differ significantly in terms of their social and economic agendas, including their position on gender equity. Their programmes mainly focus on areas such as women's education, income generation and quotas for women in elected bodies.

The Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, was reinstated into mainstream politics during a period of military rule. In 1988, General Ershad, a military dictator, introduced Islam as the state religion. Women's organisations protested against this and the use of religion in politics. They also formed various coalitions with other civil society organisations to resist religious fundamentalism during this period, and these activities continue in the present decade. The 1980s also saw women's organisations campaigning for legal reforms on dowry related violence and other forms of state violence. WROs also actively participated in the democracy movement during the 1980s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s many women's NGOs were formed which led to a focus on women's economic empowerment and changes in how women's organisations work (i.e., increasingly taking a professionalised NGO approach as opposed to voluntary or social movement approaches). Demands for gender mainstreaming in government policy also became strong during this period.

In the post-authoritarian period, both AL and BNP entered into overt or tacit alliances with Jamaat-e-Islami to form coalition governments. This has created difficulties for women's organisations to negotiate with the government on women's rights issues that are linked to religion (for example, reforming religious personal laws).

Both major political parties - AL and BNP - have managed to penetrate many significant civil society organisations ranging from professional groups such as doctors associations, and NGOs to organised groups such as trade unions, university teachers associations, etc (Nazneen 2009). This has significantly undermined the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs)⁴ to articulate their collective interests and increased clientelist control by the ruling parties. All these factors have affected which actors women's organisations choose as allies. The fear of being perceived as an appendage to political parties and of losing credibility and autonomy has influenced women's organisations to choose to negotiate directly with the state. Also, the state was seen as the ultimate actor responsible for

4 By CSOs we refer to all civil society organisations - and this includes NGOs, small community based organisations, professional based organisations, media and WROs. All these types of CSOs may or may not be donor funded. WROs may or may not be registered as NGOs.

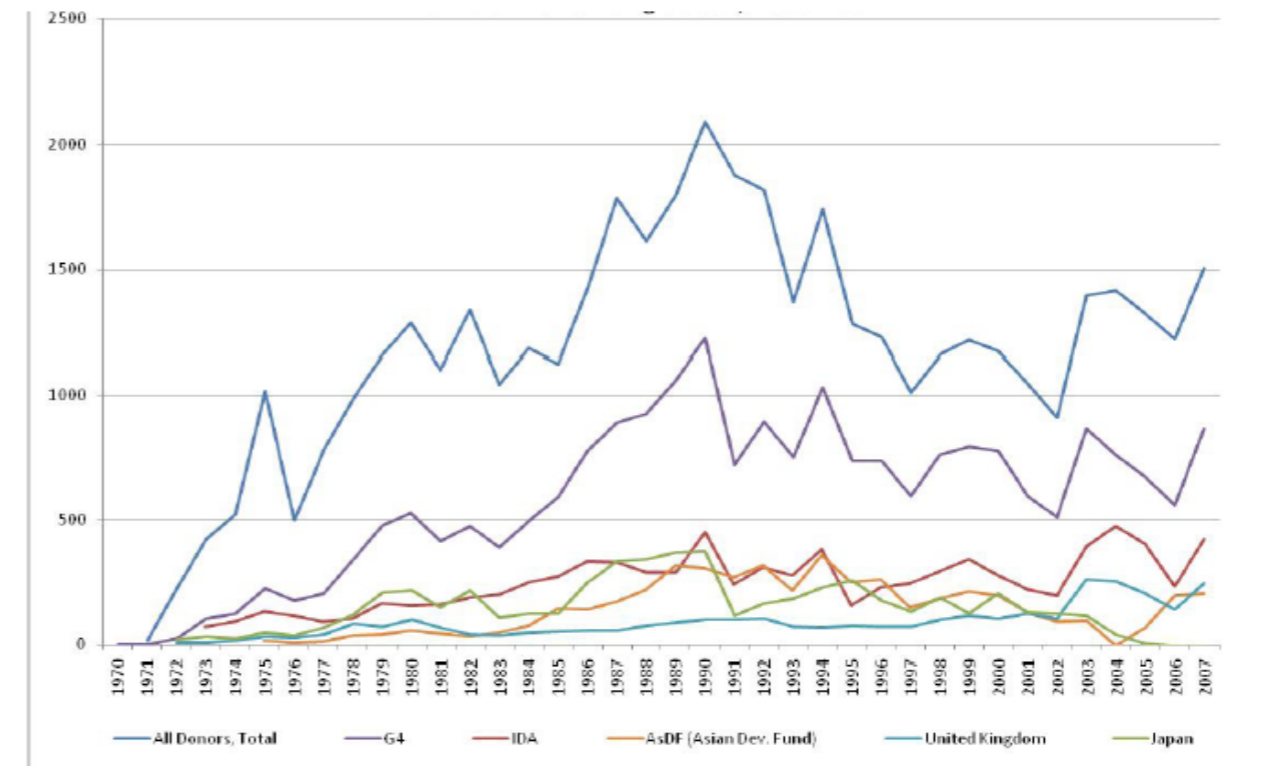
ensuring equality and rights. This led women's organisations to choose legal or policy reform as one of their major goals since the 1990s.⁵

In the 1990s and the present decade, the women's movement has campaigned against violence against women, which includes "fatwa" (religious edicts), violence in police custody, sexual harassment, trafficking of women, domestic violence, acid violence,⁶ and violence against women from ethnic minority groups in conflict zones. Women workers movements in the formal and informal sector also gained strength during this time. A noticeable trend of these times was the expansion in the number of actors in the women's movement and the issues women's organisations mobilised around.

2.2 Donor trends

Trends in Foreign Aid, Changes in Aid Regimes and the Paris Principles

Figure A1.1: Total Net Disbursements of ODA and Official Aid to Bangladesh, 1970-2007



Source: Thornton et al. 2010

The figure above shows the trends of disbursement between 1970 and 2007. Throughout the first two decades of independence, Bangladesh was heavily dependent on donor financing. Foreign official development assistance (ODA) inflows averaged about US\$1.5 billion per year through the 1980s and increased to about US\$2.5 billion in 1990. This was equivalent to around 10 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). ODA flows have since declined and remained in the range of US\$1.0 - 1.5 billion. With sustained GDP growth, Bangladesh's aid dependence has dropped sharply and ODA is now only about 2 per cent of the GDP (JEP 2010: XII).

5 The present report is a synthesis of five separate reports on the case study organisations. These can be requested from the organisations or the authors.
6 Acid throwing is a form of violent assault. Perpetrators of these attacks throw acid at their victims (usually at their faces), burning them, and damaging skin tissue, often exposing and sometimes dissolving the bones. In Bangladesh women were targeted because of denying romantic proposals. Women are no longer the only targets of such violence as it has now become associated with family and land disputes as well.

Net foreign financing of the government plays a relatively small role in Bangladesh. It comprised only 4.7 per cent of GDP in 1991 and fell to 1.2 per cent in Fiscal Year 2006. Net foreign financing comprised 21 per cent of government expenditure in 1997, 14 per cent in 2002 and declined to 9 per cent in 2006 (latest available). Net foreign financing is also now equivalent to 20 per cent of expenditure in the Annual Development Plan. Although Bangladesh is still 'heavily aided', the reduction of overall aid has raised questions about whether donors leverage has reduced accordingly (Hossain 2004).

The four big donors in Bangladesh are the World Bank, UK Department of International Development (DFID), the Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The total funding from these four accounts for nearly 80 per cent of the ODA that Bangladesh currently receives.

Aid Mobilisation and Coordination

The Bangladesh government's development strategy has been guided by various documents over the years, and most recently by the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) of 2003 and the PRSP (2005). The Economic Relations Division (ERD) within the Ministry of Finance is the lead agency for aid coordination and maintaining donor relations. Relationships were guided by annual meetings of the Consultative Group until 2005 and subsequently by the Development Forum (led by the Government of Bangladesh), when the location of annual meetings shifted from Paris to Dhaka. A Local Consultative Group (LCG) of which donors and the government are participants, has monthly meetings, and includes 30-35 subgroups to manage the work of specific sectors and sub-sectors. The LCG sub-group that deals with gender equality issues is known as the LCG sub-group on Women's Advancement and Gender Equality (WAGE).

Development Assistance to NGOs

Development aid to NGOs in Bangladesh has to be approved by the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) which is under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Secretariat. NGOs must be registered with the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Women's Affairs, the Department of Cooperatives, and the Department of Youth, or as a trust, a foundation or a society under the Societies Act of 1860. This is considered their primary registration and to receive foreign funding they must also have a secondary registration with the NGOAB. The Bureau also approves each foreign funded NGO project as well as their annual budgets. At present there are more than 1100 NGOs registered with the NGOAB.

Sources of funding for NGOs have evolved over the years. It started primarily with small international charities and foundations and larger INGOs entered the scene later. International foundations such as Ford Foundation and The Asia Foundation played an important role till the 1990s. Strategies of INGOs such as Oxfam GB, AAB, and CARE also evolved from direct implementation in the 1970s, to increasingly working through partnerships with local NGOs. However, their access to funding



Diagram from the Doorbar Network Workshop held 5 September 2009

has become more dependent on competitive bidding for projects. While direct bilateral funding for NGOs became important in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this has decreased and NGOs have become more familiar working with contracts within larger government programmes (funded nationally or internationally). INGOs and Foundations provided not just funding but were also sources for ideas, exchanging experiences and sharing technical expertise.

Even as the total aid to Bangladesh over the years fell, the share of total aid to NGOs as a percentage of GDP remained constant, which the World Bank estimates clearly show. Total aid to Bangladeshi NGOs rose from an average of US\$233 million (0.7 per cent of GDP) between 1990–95 to US \$343 million (0.7 per cent of GDP) between 1996–2005; the share of total aid to NGOs in the total aid to Bangladesh however increased from 10.5 per cent in 1990/91 to 27.8 per cent in 2004/5. (World Bank, 2006: 65). Supporting NGOs was attractive as they seemed to provide opportunities for direct interventions to reduce poverty. A sizeable portion of external funding to NGOs is channelled through government agencies, and is typically part of larger projects that combine funding for government agencies and NGOs. These projects are recorded in the government's Annual Development Programme, but it is difficult to provide accurate estimates of these flows as the amounts that are channelled to NGOs are not recorded in the budget (World Bank 2006: 41).

The New Aid Regime: Paris Declaration, Gender and Bangladesh

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, agreed in March 2005, aims to reform the delivery and management processes of international aid. It seeks to determine how and to whom aid is delivered, and redefines relationships between donors and aid recipient countries. The primary aim of aid effectiveness is poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It emphasises country ownership and focuses on realigning power relations and leadership between aid recipients and donors. The five pillars of the Paris Declaration that aim to shape the aid delivery framework are:

- Ownership
- Alignment
- Harmonisation
- Managing for Results
- Mutual Accountability

WROs have asserted from the beginning that the Paris Declaration is a gender blind document and hence inadequate to address women's concerns. One criticism is that it neither mentions any measures to promote and ensure women's rights, gender equality or human rights, nor does it acknowledge these issues as important for a country's overall development. Gender equality is mentioned in just one of its 50 paragraphs and categorises it along with human rights and environment sustainability as cross-cutting issues. Women's rights, environment and human rights are therefore marginalised as accessory issues to the core development goals and subsequently to the 'new aid effectiveness agenda'.

Aid coordination has been a complicated task for the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), with a large number of donors, who sometimes have, if not competing, alternative priorities and approaches. In 2005, a joint Country Assistance Strategy between the World Bank, ADB, JICA and DFID was adopted as a new approach. This Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) informed donors' individual Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) and Country Assistance Plans (CAP) between 2006 and 2009. The general principle behind the joint approach was to bring together four donors (D-4) so that they would develop shared analysis and views of the challenges facing Bangladesh and the priorities to be addressed. However, recognising their individual organisational needs, they maintained separate business plans and business processes.⁷

A joint evaluation carried out by the World Bank, ADB, DFID and JICA in October 2008 found that:

“The evolution of the development assistance context since 2001, including the introduction of the joint country strategy by the G4, has influenced how the civil society and NGOs have been able to articulate voice and demand accountability in an indirect way. Little has been known in civil society about the joint country strategy of the G4. There is a feeling in the NGO community that there is a reduction in direct funding to NGOs and that the bilateral donors' sources are reduced. (...) Civil society organisations are being referred, by DFID, the Norwegians and others, to the Manusher Jonno Foundation – MJF (Challenge fund for rights and governance programmes by NGOs) and Shiree (Challenge fund for reaching the ultrapoor). However, MJF feels that it is not capable of responding to the sheer size of the demand for support that it faces. This evolution of the donor context is felt to be a threat for the medium and small NGOs.” (Sultan 2008)

Most donor agencies have felt the need to ensure alignment with GoB priorities and harmonise efforts. The state became the preferred interlocutor again for the donors, and NGOs began to lose the favour they had enjoyed thus far. Donors also assessed how their funding was being divided between the government and NGOs and made deliberate attempts to reduce the proportion given to NGOs (Chapman et al. 2006; Thornton et al. 2010). Donors interpreted the principle of alignment in the Paris Declaration as alignment with national budgets. Hence, different types of budget support were the cardinal tools that aid experts proposed. In an attempt to harmonise and coordinate aid, donors have been trying to promote Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) and have hence focused on increasing funds to the government service delivery system. This move towards a more programmatic support has posed challenges to the survival of many CSOs that were previously donor dependent. Aid agencies have been facing reductions in their own administrative budgets and have thus preferred to reduce the number of separately managed projects.

The Accra Agenda for Action and Implications for Bangladesh

Compared to the Paris Declaration, which was gender blind, the Accra Agenda for Action, 2008 (AAA) made some improvements. The 11th

clause of AAA states that, “developing countries and donors will ensure that their respective development policies and programmes are designed and implemented in ways consistent with international commitments on gender equality, human rights, disability, and environment sustainability (13c)”. It also emphasised the need to have sex-disaggregated data. Nevertheless, the AAA still falls short of recognising the need to make specific resource allocations and ensure binding support from the donor community.

In August 2008, fifteen donors signed a Statement of Intent with the GoB to develop a Joint Cooperation Strategy (JCS) and this was presented by GoB at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra. A new LCG configuration was set up with an executive committee comprising of the UN, the World Bank, ADB and four rotating bilateral donors - initially Denmark, UK, USA and Canada.

The influence of the AAA was seen in the last Bangladesh Development Forum which took place in February 2010. Various consultations with CSOs and the government, on aid effectiveness and harmonisation had preceded this. Women's rights organisations, however, did not participate. One of the donor interviewees (at CIDA) mentioned that although LCG WAGE had tried to include gender as an agenda item in the Forum, it did not happen. Bureaucrats, politicians, civil society leaders and donors participated in the Forum. The Joint Cooperation Strategy was signed in June 2010. As stated in the document which was signed by GoB and 19 donors:

“the overall objective of the JCS is to improve the way we work together in order to make aid more effective in Bangladesh. The JCS is expected to result in better harmonised and streamlined programmes supporting Bangladesh's development plans and strategies by providing a common platform for inclusive partnership between all development actors, including civil society. In this respect, the main purpose of the JCS is to institutionalise a mechanism by which GoB and its development partners hold each other accountable for making concrete and measurable progress towards greater aid effectiveness”.

The JCS does not mention gender inequalities or women's rights and development. The Development Results Framework does not seem to have any indicators of women's advancement or inequalities.

In fact neither GoB nor the donors monitor the provision of development funding to NGOs or gender related programmes in terms of aid flows. Our research therefore could not find such figures. Section 7 provides further insights and views, from interviews with certain donors agencies, on the role of resources in mobilising for women's rights.

2.3 Gender and Development agenda, NGOs and Women's Movement

Different actors in Bangladesh promoted the women's empowerment agenda: women's organisations, local and international NGOs, the government and donors. In the 1970s and 1980s, the availability of

⁷ Within the total aid picture, the D-4 has accounted for 67 per cent of gross disbursements from FY97-05. Of this subtotal, IDA has accounted for 37 per cent, with an increasing trend, and reaching as high as 50 per cent in FY05. Japan has accounted for 31 per cent, though 2005 was exceptionally low at about 10 per cent of the total. The ADB accounted for 18 per cent, though in 2004 it accounted for only 8 per cent. DFID has accounted for 14 per cent, with an increasing trend. (Source: 'Bangladesh: Joint Country Assistance Evaluation'. Background Paper, 26 December 2007)

donor funding for gender related projects had created an incentive for the Bangladeshi state to promote the gender and development (GAD) agenda (Goetz 2001). This led to the development of a particular type of women's empowerment discourse that promotes women's productive role, economic empowerment and family welfare (Nazneen and Sultan 2009). The state's attitude towards gender equity and women's rights has been contradictory (Jahan 1995) at times enacting progressive laws and at other times reinforcing patriarchal values and norms. The proliferation of donor funding for GAD created a context where women's organisations strategically used their links with the donors to engage the state on different issues. The flip side of this promotion of GAD agenda and gender mainstreaming is that, though aid dependence has decreased significantly over the years, women's empowerment/rights issues are largely interpreted by some scholars, government officials and the general public as a 'Western import' and a development issue promoted by donors, the state and many development NGOs (Nazneen and Sultan 2009).

The interpretation of women's rights issues as development issues has also been fuelled by the availability of donor funding which led to the growth of a large NGO sector since mid 1980s. Civil society space therefore became dominated by NGOs (Rahman 2006). These NGOs created the scope for feminist and women's organisations to increase their number of allies and exert pressure on the state. Forming partnerships with NGOs is a strategy employed by all the case-study organisations in our study. However, the 'NGOisation' process and the use of external funding also pressurised many women's organisations to design their activities in particular ways that it affected their autonomy and programmes, and in many cases it also led to a de-politicisation of their agenda (Nazneen and Sultan 2009).⁸ The process also compelled feminist organisations to differentiate themselves from mainstream development NGOs. All case-study organisations (other than Banchte Shekha) of this study stressed that they were not NGOs though they are registered with the NGOAB.⁹ They stress on their identity as membership organisations and social movement based organisations.

The 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, too, was influential at national level, when the state was more open to working with NGOs, CSOs and WROs on activities before and after the conference. New energy and interest was created for work on women's rights. There was more attention at international, national and local levels and a greater commitment was generated.

The presence of a large NGO sector and the influence of 'NGOisation' on women's organisations have affected how social mobilisation on women's issues is undertaken in Bangladesh. NGOs have shifted from consciousness-raising activities of the mid-1980s towards a service delivery oriented and advocacy related work now. The NGOs have also created networks that focus on demanding better service delivery or on monitoring state accountability (engaging in local government created committees, information dissemination, etc.). The membership of many of these networks is largely drawn from microcredit groups. However, there are a few membership based NGO/CSO networks which do not draw on credit-based groups and focus on environment, corruption, local

8 Some of the larger, well resourced and 'politically conscious' feminist organisations have been able to retain their autonomy and control over their activities (see Nazneen and Sultan 2009).

9 Which is a requirement to receive foreign funding.

government etc.¹⁰ This form of apolitical mobilisation (and participation and consultation for service delivery or accessing information) remains the dominant form of engagement that organisations have with wider public. The members of these organisations are organised to engage with the state and other actors in an apolitical manner which is distinct to how they would be mobilised by movement oriented NGOs which are few. Survival for small local-level women's organisations calls for a fine balance between activism and service delivery work. The nature of activism demanded by women's rights work does not fit within the type of 'advocacy and awareness raising' activities that dominate the donor funded mid-sized CSOs. This has therefore created difficulties for small or medium-sized women's rights organisations to accomplish their work.

Section 3: Case-study Organisations

3.1 Introducing the Case-study Organisations

The table below provides the profiles of the case-study organisations.

Table 1: Case-study Organisation Profile

Name	Focus	Date established	Membership/ staff	Budget	Main Donors
Banchte Shekha (BS)	Poor rural women's economic development	Started work in 1976 Registered in 1981	250,000 rural men and women 227 staff	86 Million Taka 2009/10	NORAD, NOVIB, Ford TAF, Oxfam, MJF
BNWLA	Women lawyers and women's human rights	Started work in 1979 Registered in 1981	1200 members Approx 250 staff	125 million takas in 2009	NORAD, MJF, USAID, TAF, CIDA
Karmojibi Nari	Women labourers rights	1991	450,000 group members	36 million takas in 2009	NORAD, MJF, Oxfam, GTZ, AAB
Doorbar Network	Violence; political participation and organisational capacity building	Started work in 1995 Registered in 2007	550 women's orgs	No external funding	NORAD, Danida, CIDA, British Council
BOMSA	Women migrant workers	2000	7000 Staff 10	2 million takas in 2009	CIDA, MJF, IOM, UNIFEM

Banchte Shekha, was established in 1976 in Jessore, to improve women's socio-economic status through poverty alleviation and women's empowerment programmes. This was the only case-study organisation in our study which was based outside Dhaka and it carries out a range of activities at the rural level. Banchte Shekha works on reducing violence against women, promoting women's empowerment and developing leadership. It does so through awareness raising programmes on different

10 For example, organisations such as the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA); Sushanoer Jonnyo Nagorik (SUJON), TIB's YES forum - are not funded by donors and are membership based.

rights and public services issues. It also helps its intended beneficiaries to increase their family incomes. Other activities include emergency programmes, disaster management and addressing climate change impacts. In the past it has developed innovative approaches to setting up and running self-reliant women's community based organisations. Banchte Shekha is known for its approach to community based, women-led, alternative dispute resolution activities. The organisation was initially registered with the Department of Social Welfare, but later in 2007 it was registered under Joint Stock Companies Law. It currently has a general body of 17 members of which nine are women. Banchte Skekha directly serves more than 500,000 women of Khulna, Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions with the help of 271 staff members who implement its various programmes. Its income comes from a number of sources such as project grants, member subscriptions, earnings from training programmes, research programmes, publications; profits on investment and demonstration income generating activities projects; bank loans and interest from bank term deposits. Its present donors are Danida and Oxfam and a number of other small donors. Previously it was supported by a donor consortium which included NORAD, NOVIB and Ford Foundation.

BNWLA

Founded in 1979, BNWLA is one of the biggest and oldest women's professional associations. The founding members were a group of prominent women lawyers. BNWLA prioritises capacity development of its members, legal aid to women and children, and advocacy for legal reform. In recent years BNWLA has become well known for its work against trafficking in women and children. It has developed close working relations with the Government due to its work on the Multi-sectoral Project on Violence Against Women, as well as on repatriation of women and children. It had 1200 members in 2008 and in subsequent years members from districts outside Dhaka have been recruited to help deal with cases from outside Dhaka. Membership also grew because BNWLA became better known outside the capital. BNWLA's governing body – the Executive Committee is elected every two years through direct votes of its members from across the country. The committee has eight members – a President, two Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, a Joint secretary, a Treasurer and eight members. It currently implements a large number of projects; undertakes training, consultancies (when contracted), and Public Interest Litigations; formulates legal reform proposals and drafts laws. It has many regional and international partners. They are funded by NORAD, USAID, DANIDA, the British Council, etc. NORAD was a former large and important donor for BNWLA too. Members bring in income for the organisation through training and consultancy work.

Karmojibi Nari

Karmojibi Nari is an organisation of women workers, striving to establish rights, dignity and the authority of women workers both as women and as labourers. It was founded by activists from the labour movement who had leftist beliefs politically as well as by cultural activists. Hence its approach to women's organising and the choice of agenda has been



Diagram from the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association Workshop held 16 September 2009

very different from other women's or labour organisations. It brought women's issues to the centre-stage of the labour movement and labour issues to the mainstream of the women's movement. Karmojibi Nari has been working on organising women workers and developing their leadership by promoting cells.¹¹ It encourages women's participation and leadership in Trade Unions, campaigns on implementing the country's labour laws and ILO Conventions, and the rights of women agricultural workers. It has been active in the critique of economic globalisation, free trade, privatisation, structural adjustment, and WTO negotiations and its national repercussions. Karmojibi Nari was formally set up in May 1991 and at present it has a membership of 500,000 women workers and is governed by an executive committee. The organisation currently receives funding from MJE, Oxfam/Novib, and GTZ. Previously, NORAD was an important and large donor.

Doorbar Network

The Doorbar Network (DN) is comprised of 535 women's organisations and functions as an autonomous and independent platform for combating violence against women (VAW) and promoting women's political empowerment. In 1995, a feminist activist organisation, Naripokkho, facilitated the establishment of the network. Doorbar Network operates in 57 districts. Organisations which are headed by women, registered with the Department of Women's Affairs or the Department of Social Welfare, and share the same agenda as the network can apply for membership. The network's decision-making functions are located at three levels – the district, regional and central levels. The central committee is comprised of all elected regional heads and the convenor of Naripokkho. Regional committees have three elected officials – a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. District members can run for elections in each region. District level heads are also elected by the members of their respective districts. Different issues such as budgets, work-plans, etc are discussed at the district level and information is then sent to regional committees and subsequently to the central committee. Doorbar Network received funding as a network project of Naripokkho from DANIDA, NORAD, CIDA and the British Council. The regional committees of the network are funded by Naripokkho. Members also pay an annual fee into a regional fund. The member organisations have their own sources of funding through subscriptions, donations, project funds, etc.

BOMSA

BOMSA is a membership based organisation that promotes the rights of female migrant workers. It represents their interests in policymaking spaces and in the wider society. BOMSA was founded in 2000, by a returnee female migrant worker and a female worker who was a victim of recruiting agents' fraudulent practices. BOMSA works with not just female migrant workers and their families, but also with recruiting agencies, communities and policymakers. It focuses on awareness raising and capacity building. It supports migrant workers for example, by providing legal aid or financial help for income generation projects. BOMSA has 7000 members¹² and is currently active in 11 districts of Bangladesh.¹³ Migrant workers are elected to form a nine member

11 Leftist strategy of organising workers.
12 Number provided by BOMSA at the workshop, 5 October 2009
13 BOMSA Constitution

executive committee that runs BOMSA and elections are held every three years. BOMSA has an advisory committee composed of five members and a general body composed of 35 members. BOMSA has received funds from IOM, CIDA, ILO and UNIFEM for training, awareness-raising and other projects. It also received funding from Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and Dan Church Aid (DCA) for advocacy related work.

Section 4: Life Before Funding

This section of the report focuses on the identity, structure and methods the case-study organisations use for mobilising, before they received donor funds. The information here is based on the interviews and the workshops conducted with them.

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The *raison d'être* of the case-study organisations was to respond to women's rights issues that the founders had identified as burning issues. All these organisations were founded because the founder members were passionate about the particular issues that had not been addressed within the women's movement or by other CSOs, or supported by donor funded development projects. Before they had started receiving donor funds they relied on voluntary labour and had informal structures. All of them set up more formal structures, mechanisms and office spaces after they received funding (this is discussed further in the next section). The initial years of these organisations were used for building up membership, identifying core principles and setting up institutional rules and regulations. In fact, donors actively sought them and supported them specifically because they were vibrant organisations doing innovative and effective work, had committed members and a vision for social change (see Sections 5.3 and 7.3).

Doorbar Network was the result of a demand raised by small WROs at the local level who wanted to set up an alternative platform for the women's movement in 1995. Their demand was unique in the context of Bangladesh as the women's movement is Dhaka (capital city) centred. This was facilitated by the Dhaka-based organisation - Naripokkho - as they prepared for the Beijing conference. Initially, the network used Naripokkho's office, relied on voluntary labour, and created an ad hoc committee to decide the network's core values, agenda and structure. These were decided through a series of experiential workshops, which created strong bonds among the member organisations and established the key values based on which they operate. This took place over two years, by the end of which, the network received funding through Naripokkho. Voluntarism continued to be an important element as only a part of their activities received financial support. Member organisations had their resources, which were sometimes supplemented by other sources of funds, including that from external donors. The members were therefore used to activism and mobilisation drawing from their own resources, which involved activities such as protests, putting pressure on the local administration and locally elected representatives for the redressal of rights violations and access to services.

For a long time Doorbar Network functioned as an informal network. The decision to have a separate legal identity was taken much later.

Two migrant women workers started BOMSA, in 2000, when they realised that there were no organisations which advocated for the rights and needs of migrant women workers. They actively recruited members for their informal organisation from two districts, and used their income from their work with research organisations, such as the Refugee Migratory Movement Research Unit, to fund their activities. Initially, they focused on awareness raising at small gatherings, and in the long-term aimed to set up training and advocacy activities. The links they established, through their work, with officials at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) later led BOMSA to apply for funding and set up an office with their help and advice (discussed in Text Box 5). They were very effective in raising the issue of women's rights to safe migration, with various civil society groups, international organisations and labour groups even before becoming a formal entity. They were successful in convincing various people and organisations about the importance of setting up an organisation that would specifically focus on the rights of women migrant workers. The response and support BOMSA received from the early stages showed their effectiveness and abilities in advocacy. The founders had strong relations with the trade union movement and were familiar with such methods of outreach and organising, which they used to develop their own strategies.

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BNWLA was set up by women lawyers in 1978, to build the capacities of women lawyers and to fight the discriminatory practices they faced. Several women entered the legal profession in the late 1970s and there were no organisations or government mechanisms which catered to their needs. This made BNWLA a unique professional association when it started. The association later moved on to providing legal aid and advocating for legal reform. Similar to other organisations in the initial years they relied on volunteers and held meetings in members' houses. Their activities were focused on training and mentoring young female lawyers, pro bono legal aid work and solidarity network building among members. For their early activities members' professional skills were the most important resource that helped with providing legal aid and counselling. The confidence and skills they were able to develop among members came from close interactions between members themselves, with senior mentors as well as through exposure to the work of similar networks of women lawyers in other countries. When their kind of work became attractive to donors, they were offered funding making them realise that their activities could be externally financed. It was only after a number of years of functioning independently, that their work on anti-trafficking and advocacy on legal reform led them to seek external funds.

Banchte Shekha's founder¹⁴ began work in 1976 by setting up small, income generation pilot projects for women at the local level in Jessore. She began working with poor women in the villages as an individual and only later did she decide to continue her work by founding an organisation. This organisation is different from other mainstream NGOs such as BRAC¹⁵ as it is headed by women, is a regional organisation, has a clear focus on empowering poor rural people (especially women)

14 Angela Gomes is the Founder and Executive Director of Banchte Shekha.

15 BRAC is the largest NGO in the world and one of the leading NGOs in Bangladesh working on women development issues.

and has a long history of prioritising 'bottom-up' decision-making. The founding member used her connections and networks with the local church and some government officials to acquire material and the technical 'know how' for these projects. The main goal was to empower women economically which would then allow them to fight other forms of discrimination, including violence. She faced strong resistance from the community and had to engage in various strategic negotiations to build their trust and ensure the support of key actors in the community, including religious leaders.

A unique feature of Banchte Shekha's 'life before funding' was the direct role that village women played in implementing and managing the programme, and the supportive role of some local people and government officials in providing resources and training for women. This integral role of the village women in the initial years was acknowledged and a governance role in the organisational structure was envisaged for them. However, subsequently, as the organisational structure changed when the programme expanded, this was lost.

Karmojibi Nari's founder members were involved in left politics and realised that the government industrial policies and traditional trade unions did not address the discrimination that women industrial workers faced. The organisation's focus on women workers in formal and informal sectors makes it unique. They initially had an informal structure. Similar to others, they too relied on voluntary labour and tried to organise women workers into small cells to raise their awareness on their rights through meetings, discussions etc. Later, they also addressed issues that linked workers rights to the international context. In the 'life before funding' period, Karmojibi Nari's founding members explored what women workers' concerns and priorities were, what the trade unions could and could not address and what the new opportunities the 1990s democracy movement had opened up. Various seminars and conferences with women workers helped to bring out women workers demands, which later served as Karmojibi Nari's agenda. During this period, the main members of Karmojibi Nari were employed elsewhere. They volunteered their time for Karmojibi Nari, as a part of their social and political commitment to the cause.

Although all five case-study organisations have evolved and changed since their early days the experience and agenda setting of the founding period - 'life before funding' continues to set the frame/ tone for their identity, work and also future planning.

Section 5: Life with Funding

An analysis of funding trends shows that donor funding to the five case-study organisations increased in the 1990s and continued till the present decade. This section highlights how donor funds and funding policies have affected these organisations, especially their ways of working. The issues discussed here were identified as common to all the five organisations.

5.1 Institutionalisation

Structures, Processes and Procedures and Resulting Difficulties

When they started receiving donor funding, all five organisations went through a process of formalising their ways of working and setting up organisational procedures. This included hiring new staff, designing monitoring and reporting structures, creating financial and audit systems, etc. These organisations had to learn specific skills and develop the ability to use the development discourse and jargon for example, to talk to donors or write funding proposals. Both Karmojibi Nari and BNWLA were able to manage this process better than others because their members came from more privileged social and educational backgrounds. A pilot funding phase from NORAD helped Karmojibi Nari identify their organisational weakness in management including finances. Sufficient qualified staff was then hired, supported by the project funding. Doorbar Network was able to deal with donor requirements through its reliance on Naripokkho. These three case-study organisations – BNWLA, Karmojibi Nari and Doorbar Network had mixed feelings about institutionalisation. They acknowledged that the new procedures such as keeping records or financial audits helped better planning and improved efficiency. These organisations also felt that it was fair for donors to ask for reports as they had provided the finances. However, they found the paperwork to be time-consuming and reporting back on multiple donor funds and activities, diverted their energies away from the movement related work. Similar views were expressed by Banchte Shekha and BOMSA. For example, an interviewee from Banchte Shekha said that their Project Director had to spend a lot of time filling in very complex forms for the funds they received from USAID.

Banchte Shekha and BOMSA, felt more vulnerable as they were not very confident with the 'donor speak' and in understanding the complex formalised procedures. Banchte Shekha pointed out that donors insisted and funded for an office building to be constructed. This was useful as it created a permanent base for the organisations. In a context, where most development organisations have to find their own resources for office space, donor funding for this form of institutionalisation was helpful. Donors also provided technical support for organisational capacity building to both organisations. CIDA provided a VSO volunteer to BOMSA to build their technical capacity. IOM encouraged BOMSA to hire a coordinator to handle project work and to liaise with donors and policymakers.

"It is not that donors should not ask for reports; it is their money after all. However, having different donors asking for different things, using different formats, particularly if they are as complicated as USAID forms, translates into having someone glued to the desk filling in forms. And if you are as small as we are, doing the kind of mobilising work we do, this means people having less time to work on the ground." (Interview, Banchte Shekha project co-ordinator, 21 January 2010)

Some misunderstandings and misinterpretations when the formal process and procedures were introduced could not be avoided. For example, MJF and CIDA reported difficulties in conducting audits of one of the case-study organisations which they did not face with others. At times, these different understandings led to difficulties in how the work was done and created tensions between the donor and the recipient.

The following incident (Text Box 1) illustrates the differences in how the donor and recipient organisations understood audit procedures, defined ‘corruption’ and identified benchmarks. It also demonstrates how the differences in understanding institutional procedures and donor-speak led to miscomprehensions and tense relationships.

Text Box 1: Differences in Understanding between X and Y

When donor X started funding organisation Y, the founding members, were not paid for their time. The funding rules stated that as they were the founding members they were not entitled to a salary from the project money. The founding members, however, deducted a small amount from staff salaries, which went towards a contribution for the development of the office. Staff were informed about this and money was used for the said purpose. During the second funding phase, they informed the person-in-charge at X, about this practice. They were then asked to include the cost of their time so that their living expenses were covered. When X audited Y, the founding members told the auditors about this practice. They felt the auditors would not have known about this practice from the accounting books. However, after the audit, this was identified as an ‘irregularity’ and the funds to Y were frozen. The audit report was circulated at the donor’s meeting without having given Y a chance to explain. At our study workshop they said they were not upset about the audit. However, they felt they did not understand the rules of how donor funding should be handled. They also felt that their project had performed well and this positive achievement needed to be highlighted along side any irregularities. They were also proud that they were able to save money from different budget line items/salary and were able to deposit this to their general fund. They argued that as the money had been allocated to them, they made efforts to save from this allocation (with staff consent on salary deductions) to increase their general fund. This, according to them, did not tantamount to stealing as they had not used the money for personal benefit.

An interviewee at X mentioned that they had shared the audit information with two other donors who had also funded Y. They had not shared the report with any other donors as it would reduce Y’s chances to secure any funding. X also pointed out that they had not terminated Y’s contract but had asked them to withdraw. Termination could be even more detrimental as it would be in their records permanently. X also stressed that they helped small organisations to write proposals and manage finances. The interviewee stressed that she had arranged for their finance person to look through Y’s records ‘to fix it’ (interview, March 2010). She also agreed to Y’s claim that they had returned unspent money on other occasions. However, the reason for the withdrawal was that Y had billed X and another donor for printing the same set of training manuals. This surplus money was placed in Y’s general fund. She also insisted that this was an irregularity as it had been done deliberately and not out of ignorance. Given that X had stringent financial audit and accountability policies there was no room for flexibility on what Y had done. This perhaps explains why X had shared the information with other donors and the funding was withdrawn.

(Please note: We have not seen the financial records and the details of the incident presented here are what we were told by X and Y. Names of organisations are not mentioned for confidentiality reasons.)

In addition to illustrating how audit processes and corruption are differently conceptualised, the above incident demonstrates two other issues too. Firstly, donors fail to comprehend the financial difficulties small organisations face in terms of lack of surplus or core budgets, which would allow them to tide over difficult periods or when funding is yet to be released. Secondly, donor financial systems and funding cycles are unable to address problems of smaller organisations in trying to cover fixed and overhead costs (which larger organisations are able to).

Two case-study organisations argued that the social class of members influenced how donor investigation on financial irregularities was carried out. An interviewee from another case study organisation felt that their organisation was audited because of allegations of financial corruption that some staff and community members had made. She stressed that it was not upsetting that the donor chose to conduct an audit, as this was within their purview, but the rudeness of the donor staff member who initiated the investigation and accusations of stealing prior to the investigation, were unacceptable. (The investigation had cleared this organisation of any charges.) “*They gave us money, but we paid the price in tears,*” said the interviewee. The interviewee also emphasised big NGOs with more clout usually do not face such problems.

BNWLA felt that some approaches and processes that donors insist on are not appropriate for the issues being addressed. This leads to conflict over how things could be implemented. For example, court cases and legal processes are lengthy and time-consuming, and project time-frames can be too small to showcase ‘successes’. Processes promoted by donors and/or funding intermediaries can lead to conflicts. For example BNWLA has been asked to be a channel for funds and to work through partner NGOs. It thus, puts them in the role of a ‘donor’ vis-a-vis their partner NGOs, instead of being implementation partners.

Projectisation and Sustainability

In recent years, the lack of core funding and ‘projectisation’ has affected the way organisations work. In addition, there was a pressure on the organisations to sustain activities after the project funding ended. Karmojibi Nari participants said, “Since our fund is project based we cannot go beyond the TOR. But, rights related work does not end at what the TOR says. Neither does it stop after the project ends.” See Text Box 2 for a detailed example of their experience.

Text Box 2: Karmojibi Nari's Tale of Woe

Karmojibi Nari was supported by NORAD on a comprehensive and long-term basis. This enabled them to build their urban outreach programme to women labourers. NORAD's policy was to support organisations through core funding and develop their capacities in various areas such as finances, planning and reporting. They made deliberate attempts to work with the key national level women's organisations such as BNWLA, Naripokkho/Doorbar Network and Karmojibi Nari. Due to the gradual withdrawal of funding in 2009 Karmojibi Nari has had to lay-off staff and oblige remaining staff to do the same work for less pay to compensate for this. MJF also was a large donor and their funds could have compensated for the shortages. However, MJF funded Karmojibi Nari for working with women agricultural workers whilst NORAD supported activities for urban women workers. The groups and geographical areas covered were different and funds could not be spread out. Despite a constant overall budget, the organisation therefore faced a crisis in sustaining the activities carried out under its integrated development programme for women industrial workers. One of the founding members has publicly criticised NORAD for helping Karmojibi Nari grow into becoming 'a Titanic' and then letting it sink when international policies required NORAD to reduce their number of projects.

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Impact on Voluntarism

Availability and increases in donor funding has affected four case-study organisations (all except BOMSA, which was established in 2000) in terms of:

- monetisation of members' time
- creating a division between paid staff and volunteer members.

Case studies show that all five organisations relied on voluntarism during their inception stages. Interestingly, in organisations such as Banchte Shekha, BNWLA, Karmojibi Nari, and Doorbar Network, senior members continue to devote a substantial amount of voluntary time. Many a time they also secure training and consultancy work for the organisation and contribute the earnings towards organisational funds.

The organisations pointed out that there was an inter-generational difference in how members perceived voluntarism. While voluntarism played a key role in developing the organisation, younger members have a more professional approach towards investing their time. The reasons for this difference are illustrated by examples on BNWLA and Doorbar Network (see Text Box 3).



Banchte Shekha Workshop held on 20 October 2010

Text Box 3: Voluntarism, External Funding, and Intergenerational Difference

BNWLA members at the workshop said that while everyone acknowledged that voluntarism had been important for developing the organisations, younger members were more professional about their time. BNWLA felt this was a result of two factors. First, donor funding had allowed BNWLA to hire staff as well as create budgets which then led to monetisation of the time spent for the organisation. Younger members, who are more recent additions to the organisation, find the staff being paid and expect to be compensated for their time too. Younger members of BNWLA who are based at the district level, were also said to have been more influenced by the 'gender and development' discourse. Their approach to the women's rights work therefore takes on a more professional standpoint than a movement orientated one. Moreover, younger women with less family support and greater financial pressures also required financial compensation. This reduces the voluntary time they might devote for the organisation.

Interestingly, similar views were echoed by the Doorbar Network member organisations too. Older member organisations felt the newer ones in the network adopted a more professional approach and expected to be funded. They also felt that with availability of donor funds the voluntary spirit had been lost. However, the spirit of voluntarism is not dead as many founder members continue to volunteer, which is seen as a major asset for the organisation (see Section 6).

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There is a socio-economic class dimension, as well, to voluntarism. Members of BNWLA or Karmojibi Nari can afford to volunteer their time since they hold other regular jobs. However, although BOMSA members have high commitment levels, they find it financially difficult to volunteer their time. Initially, the donors had not taken this class dimension into account and had expected members to work unpaid. However, once the financial aspects were explained, IOM and MJF were willing to compensate BOMSA members' time. One advantage of this was that donor funding, to some extent, made it possible to bring women from the lower-middle socio-economic classes¹⁶ into women's rights work, who otherwise may not have had the opportunity.

5.2 Influence on Agenda setting and Mobilising Strategies

Style of Advocacy

A certain advocacy style has emerged over the current decade which all organisations use. Although this cannot be directly attributed to donor funding, in an overall context where donors measure an organisation's influence and impact through particular types of indicators, it could be argued that the indicators have influenced how things are done. Frequency of engagement with the media, number of dissemination seminars and roundtables organised, and policy relevance of their work were some measures of success for the case-study organisations. They have also engaged extensively in creating networks, particularly at the national and regional levels. While network partnership increases strength and visibility, it has also been seen as a key indicator for measuring

¹⁶ This would correspond to lower socio-economic groups in the West.

influence of an organisation. Publications, research, needs assessment, success stories and good practices have all become a way to advocate for their cause. Perhaps it could be argued that these organisations use the instruments that normally an international or national development organisation would use, to advocate for their cause in Bangladesh. Also, these would only make sense within a developmentalist discourse which recognises only certain types of indicators and success criteria. Though some of these organisations engage in street level activism, it did not feature as a measure of success in their interactions with the donors.

Choice of Agenda

The case-study organisations chose to work on issues that were closely linked to their founding principles or those that had to be addressed, in light of any national or international developments. This is contrary to what has happened in the NGO sector in Bangladesh, where agendas depended on donor funding priorities. This does not imply that the women's organisations were not affected by the funding scenario, or that they did not add issues to their agenda to secure donor funds. Our findings show that the case-study organisations have tried to negotiate and manoeuvre funds in a manner that their priority areas could be addressed.

Several key issues emerge from the data on how and why these organisations chose to focus on certain issues. First, agendas of some of the organisations are linked to their founding principles. These organisations design and shape any agendas that follow or develop over the years to address their primary principles and goals. For example, BOMSA was primarily founded to raise awareness and build capacity amongst female migrant workers. Hence all its activities, including lobbying the government, were geared towards addressing this goal. However, other case-study organisations, for example, BNWLA have been unable to sufficiently address their primary goal of building the capacities of women lawyers. In their own words, this was because "...we had taken on issues such as trafficking and violence against women, which took up our time".

Second, many a time a case-study organisation took on an agenda in response to issues that arose in the national and international context. For example, Doorbar Network included communal harmony as a key agenda after incidents of violence against minority groups during the 2001 elections. It continued working on this when communal violence broke out against Ahmediyas, a small Muslim sect, in 2005. Karmojibi Nari, chose to work on fair-trade issues when the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) was being phased out and garment workers were under threat of redundancy. The case-study organisations have therefore strategically chosen supplementary issues that allowed them to work on their core agenda and at the same time ensured funding. Banchte Shekha too, for example, has focused on climate change and community fisheries, but by linking these to their core agenda of women's economic empowerment. They have also strategically raised funds for community empowerment which allowed them to carry on their alternative dispute resolution (ADR) activities, when the funding for it was stopped.

However, this does not mean that availability/non-availability of donor funding had no influence at all on how the organisations worked. Organisations either tried to find alternative sources or negotiate alternative solutions with the donor when funding became difficult. 'shopping' for other donors was therefore not uncommon as Text Box 4 illustrates.

Text Box 4: Shopping for Donors

IOM refused to fund BOMSA's mobilisation activities, because their policy/mandate did not allow them to fund such activities. BOMSA then actively 'shopped' for other donors and managed to secure funding from ActionAid for the same activities. One of the interviewees said, "It was a blessing in disguise that the IOM funding ended. They would not let us carry out mobilisation activities and only wanted us to do training — but how could we secure our rights?. So we strategically went to ActionAid — who wanted us out there... (i.e protesting on the streets)" (BOMSA workshop, 5 October 2009)

Workshop participants from the case-study organisations and donor interviewees reported different incidents of conflict and contention about the way organisations planned and chose to use their funds. Doorbar Network is an example of this. Doorbar was being supported as a 'network project' of Naripokkho, and the funding for the third phase of the project was approved on the condition that it would be made independent at the end of the phase (mid 2007). This was agreed to in the project document by both Naripokkho and the donors, including DANIDA, one of the major donors of Doorbar network. Although institutional development of the network in order to function autonomously did not progress as fast as planned,¹⁷ HRGG/PS Unit of DANIDA felt that independence from the "mother organisation" would be to the benefit of the network members. This perception was influenced by the following: a) widespread demand among the network members to become independent; b) HRGG/PSU felt Naripokkho's control over the network and dependence of the other network members on the parent organisation had obstructed the dynamics within the network (see Text Box 10). However the transition process gave rise to internal conflicts about leadership and control over resources.¹⁸ Our interviewee at HRGG/PSU reflected on the fact that DANIDA's commitment to support the network once it became independent may have inadvertently aggravated the existing conflict within the network (see Text Box 10). In a subsequent review of Naripokkho's networking strategies and projects, Naripokkho members stated that the pressure to adhere to the original schedule for becoming independent and Doorbar's (including Naripokkho) agreeing to it was a mistake as its capacity to function independently without Naripokkho's help had not developed fully (George and Nazneen 2010). Naripokkho members felt that they had not been able to explore different types of transition plans that had earlier been developed with the Doorbar Network member organisations and that the rushed process fuelled conflicts within the network.

¹⁷ See Young et al (2007)

¹⁸ See case study report for details (September 2010). Also Annex 5

Homogenisation of Agenda

Although this report points out that the organisations chose their own agenda and were not greatly influenced by donor funding, it should be noted that certain issues, which had gained priority in the international gender and development discourse, were picked up by all these organisations. This points to the epistemic powers and influence that donor discourses have over international development agendas, which then are picked up at national levels. The influence of international donor discourses is not unique to Bangladesh, but this has led to the homogenisation of the types of agenda that many WROs focus on, and in the ways they engage to advocate for them (see above sub-section on style of advocacy). During the workshop the case-study organisations also referred to international donor discourses and conventions such as the CEDAW or MDGs to justify the importance of the issues they took up. Undeniably, these were conscious decisions to advocate and/or link to the particular issues and conventions. This helped to create the space and legitimacy for each organisation's demands, such as those on labour rights, migration, prevention of trafficking or domestic violence, etc. However, a contingent risk of the homogenisation of agenda was that it was difficult to cover issues that did not come under its purview.

Excessive focus on State and Legal Reform

There seems to be a shift among some of these organisations from general advocacy and awareness raising towards demanding specific policy changes and legal reforms. Although organisations want to build social movements, their activities in recent years have had an excessive focus on lobbying the state for policy change or legal reform and a certain style of advocacy (i.e., roundtables, seminars, workshop aimed at policy change). For example, Karmojibi Nari worked on the labour code based on the ILO convention; Doorbar Network monitored the Nari o Shishu Nirajton Domom Ain (Prevention of Violence against Women and Children) policy drawing from the National Women's Development Policy; BNWLA drew on CEDAW in preparing the domestic violence legislation and on the anti-trafficking convention work; BOMSA worked on policy changes for migrants and used ILO conventions, etc. A focus on the state is not new, given that 'gender' does not carry much currency in politics. However, the shift also indicates a qualitative change, where the emphasis on constituency building for structural change, receives less attention.

The shift is primarily a result of the overall context where influence and success are measured through legal changes and policy gains achieved, where other types of WRO work does not count (see Section 8). While these policy or legal changes may contribute to wider migrant or agricultural labour rights movements, the focus is more on the legislation or policy rather than the wider structural changes which are needed to establish gender equity and equality.

5.3 Nature of Partnership

Change in Long-term Funding

The nature of partnerships with foundations, international NGOs and bilaterals changed over the years. Foundations such as the Ford Foundation moved away and the Asia Foundation's total funding availability became limited. International NGOs were no longer able to have long-term funding relations with WROs. Long-term funding from bilaterals, which used to be the practice, was phased out and there was a shift to project based funding. How previous donors chose to phase-out varied. Some were sensitive to the changes in the funding scenario and helped the organisations to cope with them and plan for the future. They helped in planning for transition and/or finding another donor, and provided evaluation materials and reports that could be used for applying for future funds. This was greatly appreciated by the recipients.

Solidarity Based Funding

One of the most interesting stories that emerged from the time-line exercises conducted with the case-study organisations was - how donor agency staff had been creative in ensuring funding for innovative approaches that may not have been funded under mainstream schemes. Donors expressed this form of solidarity in others ways too. For example, they were willing to take risks and provide small funding to WROs to try out new approaches, assist in writing the project proposal, help secure other funding, or as individuals help the WROs by lending money or paying government fees needed for registration. See Text Box 5 for details.

Text Box 5: Solidarity in Funding WROs

In the beginning, all the case-study organisations received small grants from foundations (such as Ford Foundation and Asia Foundation), the British Council or INGOs (such as Oxfam) to help them start. These funds had helped to develop ideas and try out activities on a small scale. Later, when the organisations were more established, the funds helped to bridge any gaps and/or sustain the organisations. The Gender Fund of CIDA or DANIDA/ NORAD were key sources in the 1990s for supporting women's rights work, particularly in providing early support to Karmojibi Nari and Doorbar Network. Interestingly, the then staff at these organisations came from an activist, social or women's movement background. At times, for example as with BOMSA, certain individuals from donor agencies, were willing to help with writing funding proposals, as well as providing money from their own pocket to help the organisation register with the NGOAB. DANIDA went out of its way to hold funds for Doorbar Network for an extra period of time to enable them to receive funding as independent network (i.e. from being a Naripokkho project).

All this indicates that solidarity played a key role in sustaining women's rights related work, and this may not be possible under the current aid structure. In fact, similar stories are fewer in the present decade, especially in relation to bilateral donors.

The Ideal Donor

From the discussions with organisations on their relationships and experiences with their donors, we can put together a picture of what they expect an 'ideal donor' to be. We identify a few 'desirable characteristics'. Respect for what the women's organisation stands for and does and mutual respect seem essential. Solidarity - working together and being supportive through good and bad times - is also important. Banchte Shekha felt that the Asia Foundation and Oxfam fit this description well. They had continued their funding and responded to the new problems Banchte Shekha and people in the area faced. An interviewee from Banchte Shekha said "*The Asia Foundation continued to fund Banchte Shekha even though they have had policy shifts which should have resulted in funding being discontinued... they have continued with us even if there was no policy (i.e. despite policy shifts)*".

Responsiveness and helpfulness of donors was also appreciated. Karmojibi Nari and BOMSA appreciated how some donors had provided them guidance and advice on how to approach the government with their demands or how to prepare various documents.

Some negative (undesirable) characteristics were also pointed to: being 'top-down', not giving the organisation a "*decent hearing*"; not being transparent about the decision-making processes; wanting too much publicity; imposing decisions; being bureaucratic and inflexible and having an inflated sense of self-importance.

Mutual Accountability

Mutual accountability emerged as a key issue. The case-study organisations repeatedly questioned whether the mutual accountability principle stated in the Paris Declaration would be effectively practiced in reality. They also raised questions about how decisions were taken at international levels, particularly those which had repercussions on smaller organisations in the developing world. They were very critical of the fact that small, local organisations did not have effective representation at the decision-making table. They also pointed out that decisions to change funding processes without effective transitional plans for recipient organisations, affected their accountability to their clients. One of the Banchte Shekha interviewees put this cogently.

Section 6: Life Besides and Beyond Funding

Organisations are not dependent on donor funding for everything. There are areas of work which they take on with different resources and processes. Some of these were reinforced after donor funding became scarce. We would like to emphasise that the women's organisations we studied had an existence and identity beyond donor supported projects and activities, ('life besides donor resources'). Although their ways of working and institutionalisation have been affected by donor funding, they are deploying various strategies to sustain their programmes and organisations and move forward on their specific women's rights agendas.

"What I do not understand is why donors start to fund something and then stop funding it half way through. I am not suggesting that we should be funded forever. Neither am I saying we are the best way to do things... However, if because of Paris Declaration funds are being diverted to multilaterals and the state, it is not enough to let us know that they would stop funding us after two years. If it is about accountability, should we not have a voice and present our case in the arena where these decisions are taken? Who spoke for us there?... I understand donors would need to show their tax payer's results, and it is their money, but have the taxpayers been told that you started a small project on ADR in some corner of Bangladesh, and that communities (not us) were promised help? Are donors thinking about the fact that we are accountable to our clients too? What are we supposed to tell them now?" (interview, Banchte Shekha staff, 21 January 2010)

The points discussed in this section indicate how and why WROs might survive even as external funding decreases over time, although the scope and nature of some of their activities will be affected. The WROs selected for this study are well known as autonomous organisations defending and promoting women's rights and "doing good work" that is different from the myriad others NGOs that exist in Bangladesh. The existence and work of WROs dates back before the "gender and development" discourse and goes beyond it as WROs are an integral part of the wider social movement for realising women's rights. We highlight the points presented here as these seem common to all the five organisations.

6.1 Alternative Ways of Thinking about and Raising Resources

Understanding of Resources

All the case-study organisations concede that financial resources are important, but feel they are not the most important resource for the organisation to achieve its goal or make an impact. While Doorbar Network ranked financial resources in second place, BNWLA and BOMSA ranked it third, and Banchte Shekha and Karmojibi Nari ranked it fifth. For all five organisations donor funds are not the only source of finance.

Both Banchte Shekha and Karmojibi Nari felt the founder of the organisation/leadership was the most important resource. The founder-leaders of these two organisations¹⁹ provided them with their vision, strategic direction and political analysis. They brought with them a sheer determination to pursue the work through any adversity. Doorbar Network also acknowledges the role of Naripokkho and certain Naripokkho members in providing leadership. However in the case of Doorbar Network, BOMSA and BNWLA, the participants felt that leadership roles were shared by a wider group of members.

Member profiles (i.e. expertise, skills, experience) and strength (in terms of numbers) are an important resource for membership organisations such as BOMSA, Doorbar Network and BNWLA. Having large numbers of members is a source of pride and strength and most importantly such numbers help when exerting pressure on government and others. BNWLA members being lawyers are useful for the organisation as they provide all the legal services and advice they need or provide others.

Doorbar Network and BOMSA members felt that the solidarity or sisterhood among members was a great source of confidence and courage. Doorbar Network members appreciated the professional skills that Naripokkho members could provide them in terms of project proposal preparation, report writing, dealing with donors, planning and designing campaigns, etc.

Organisations that engage in street activism value the strength of numbers that they are able to mobilise. Being able to bring out processions with thousands of women on an issue not only challenges gender stereotypes but is also an empowering experience for the women themselves. Both BOMSA and Karmojibi Nari mention this.

19 Angela Gomes of Banchte Shekha and Shirin Akhtar of Karmojibi Nari

Membership time and commitment are seen as important resources too, particularly in Doorbar Network, Karmojibi Nari and BNWLA where the founders and members in the early years put in a lot of voluntary time and effort. Despite the relatively less importance accorded to voluntarism in recent years, older members in these organisations continue to provide voluntary time. Participants felt their personal commitment to the cause and the organisational agenda ensures sustainability and credibility.

Banchte Shekha and Karmojibi Nari staff also volunteer time and effort. In both cases this has been the result of a fall in donor funding. As fewer staff are in place, longer hours at work without additional compensation, has become necessary. Volunteering time is part of the organisational culture at Banchte Shekha, as the founder member and the rest of the management contribute their labour to farming, fisheries, poultry and livestock rearing.

Three case-study organisations mentioned that the reputation/good-will they had gained was an important resource, which they felt they had earned through their hard work and commitment. The reputation of the organisation is an important asset in their relations with the government, for their position in networks and alliances, and gives them weight and credibility in their advocacy and influencing work.

All the organisations identified partnerships as an important resource and this is discussed below. (A different kind of partnership that was undertaken for joint implementation of projects has been discussed in Section 7 as these were in response to donor demands).

Non-Funded work

All case-study organisations mentioned activities they had undertaken that did not require internal or external financing. These included members carrying out Public Interest Litigations²⁰ (BNWLA), following up individual cases of violence against women (Doorbar Network), bringing in women labour rights issues into political party and trade union discussions (Karmojibi Nari) and organising protest marches and press conferences (Karmojibi Nari, Doorbar Network). Their reputation gives them the credibility to be heard and taken seriously. Hence, some of the influencing or advocacy work is also done through the various informal and formal networks the organisations and their staff and/or members belong to. Such influence could also be through the media (such as talk shows or interviews on various issues – especially the national level organisations) or using the ‘space’ that the membership of various committees and advisory bodies provide.

Private Sector Contributions, Bank Loans and Asset Building

Some of the case-study organisations have been actively raising funds from sources other than just external donors. These include private sector funds, bank loans, and through assets. They have had a varied success in securing funds from such sources, and for most of them these sources may not be sufficient if large sums are needed (see Text Box 6).

20 Public Interest Litigations (PIL) are litigations for the protection of public interest by the court itself or any other private party (besides the court party)

Text Box 6: Other Funding Sources

The case-study organisations raise funds from many diverse sources.

Karmojibi Nari's funds included donor funds, income generating projects, donations and subscriptions. Donations included government and non-government donations, personal donations as well as grants for emergencies. Karmojibi Nari used to have two income generating projects to raise funds for the organisation. However, they admitted that these sources gradually had become less important when sufficient donor funds were available.

Doorbar Network had raised financial resources by encouraging membership savings, sale of publications and encouraging contributions from trainers who were compensated for carrying out training. It had also encouraged membership to raise local resources such as community contributions for events even during its funded phase.

BNWLA has been very successful in exploring and ensuring that other sources of funds were being mobilised. Members listed membership fees, income from carrying out training and consultancies, donations and sale of publications as their sources. BNWLA actively encouraged its members to carry out consultancies or training to earn money for the organisation. BNWLA office building was purchased through funds from such sources and is a symbol of prestige, strength and sustainability for the organisation. Various individual members too had contributed to buy the office building. BNWLA also requested and obtained permission from its donors to use money allocated for office rent, to pay for the building. They were able to buy the space at a lower cost and in instalments, because of its location.

Banchte Shekha has been particularly successful in building assets such as land and buildings which have then been put to productive use. Its income includes its earning from its farms, handicraft products and publications. It owns land on which it has training centres, demonstration farms and ponds. Its total land owning is 124 bighas (about 40 acres). The farms and ponds serve a dual purpose. They are places to try out and demonstrate appropriate and new technology, as well as generate produce for sale. When it faced the donor funding crisis this strategy was ‘stepped up’ which enabled Banchte Shekha to generate income that covered about 40 per cent of its overall costs. Banchte Shekha was the only organisation that listed commercial bank loans as a source of funds. It had used bank loans to pay for the land for its big training centre as well as run its credit programmes.

Competitive Bidding

Banchte Shekha was the only case-study organisation which had participated in bidding for various donor and government calls for proposals. However considerable time and resources had to be invested in preparing the bids. Also, bids for government projects needed to be followed-up and the competition was not always fair. Banchte Shekha was quite proud that they had prepared their own proposals and had not hired consultants. They were, however, considering hiring a full-time person who would be responsible for proposal and report writing. There are problems with the competitive bidding process such as not having feedback and the donors wanting large projects that are scaleable and replicable. The text box below illustrates such issues.

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Text Box 7: Difficulties with Competitive Bidding

Banchte Shekha participated in several bids: an EU project, the National Nutrition project (World Bank), the Climate Change project (government and DFID) and the DFID Poverty Alleviation Scaling-up Challenge Fund. The first two bids were rejected but Banchte Shekha was not given any feedback. With the EU project bid, they were aware that it had been selected in the first round and had got the qualifying marks for management. However they did not know what had happened in the subsequent rounds. The results of the bid for the Climate Change project were not declared yet. With the DFID Poverty Challenge Fund, Shiree and Banchte Shekha were selected till the second round. They were then told that their proposed approach to the project did not have a scope for expansion and therefore could not be considered any further. (Interviews, Banchte Shekha staff, 20 January 2010)

Several other concerns were expressed about bidding. Organisations were uncomfortable with the idea of participating in competitive bids as it is seen as being similar to building contractors bidding for construction work. Such bidding is locally associated with corruption, rent seeking and a lack of ethics or commitment. Recent experiences of BNWLA or Banchte Shekha seemed to confirm this to them. They also felt the procedures were unclear and biased against small organisations. Some projects, require the money to be spent upfront and expenses are reimbursed after a certain period of time. Although organisations have tried to learn the rules of competitive bidding and follow them, in general there is a lot of discomfort about the process and there have not been opportunities to express this in appropriate fora.

6.2 Increased Relationship and Partnership with Government

All the case-study organisations valued their relationship with government and assessed themselves on how successful they were in working with various government ministries and departments, local line departments, local administration and locally elected bodies. Over the years, relationships have moved from being confrontational to being more collaborative. In their analysis of their relationships with government, most case-study organisations admitted that establishing and maintaining such relationships was an uphill task. It needed constant follow-up and often by the head of the organisation. Doorbar Network and Banchte

Shekha emphasised about relations at the district and local levels (where they are the most active) and BNWLA, Karmojibi Nari and BOMSA focused on relations at the national levels. Text Box 8 highlights the different experiences of the organisations in setting up partnerships with the government.

Text Box 8: Partnering with the Government

Experiences of partnerships with the government vary, but all of the organisations felt that being able to develop relationships with the government was important for the type of work they engaged in.

BNWLA focuses on developing partnerships with the government at the national level. They explained that their experience showed that there was more politicisation and corruption at the local level than at the national level. One of BNWLA's district chapters/offices had been affected by the attempts of a local branch of a national political party to bring it under their control. BNWLA had to contemplate closing the office altogether. Banchte Shekha on the contrary had an example of extensive corruption at the national level which they encountered when trying to bid for a project. In this case Banchte Shekha's strategies of community mobilisation and their regional reputation and credibility did not help in their efforts to counter demands for bribes.

Karmojibi Nari felt that maintaining relationships with the government were the founder member/head of the organisation's responsibility. She had the interest as well as enjoyed a good reputation and recognition in the government circles. Similarly the head of Banchte Shekha felt a strong need for good relations with the local administration and local government. She was willing to invest the time and energy needed. Banchte Shekha has also had to face harassment at the local administration level and has had to deal with several legal cases filed against it. However, it is crucial to maintain a good relationship with the government as there are certain advantages. For example, Banchte Shekha has to acquire government land on lease (Khas) and water bodies for some of the programmes it implements.

Membership of various government committees is valued. It is seen as a sign of recognition from the government and as an opportunity for influence. For example BNWLA has become a member of various government committees at national level. Although earlier it had to lobby to become a member, it is now included by the government itself, without the need to lobby.²¹

The organisations feel that some ministries are easier to work with than others. BOMSA and Karmojibi Nari found the Ministry of Labour and its departments to be receptive to their demands. The Ministry had even proactively asked for help such as technical advice, documents, training, etc. The case-study organisations were generally disappointed with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, perhaps due to expectations being higher than the Ministry's capacity to deliver.

A few of the organisations have begun to access government funds. Although the grant amount is small, it has a symbolic value. It proves that the organisation has gained recognition and allows it to engage with the government on closer terms. Karmojibi Nari, for example, has received a small grant from the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. BNWLA benefited as well as suffered from being chosen as a partner for the Multi-sectoral Programme of Violence Against Women, implemented by a 'consortium' of eight ministries and led by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. This created jealousies though the overall impact was positive.

21 See BNWLA case-study report for more detailed information.

The case-study organisations very clearly realise the advantages and disadvantages of having close relations with the government. BNWLA admits that as they work with the government now, they cannot be as vocal in opposing or critiquing various government initiatives and policies. However, their legal activism has not been hampered, for example, litigation against sexual harassment in public institutions including educational institutions, continues as ever. Karmojibi Nari also felt that the formal registration with the NGOAB caused them to lose their independence and constrained them “to be accountable to the state” (*validation workshop, 30 August 2010*).

The difficulties in relating to and working with the state as well as the positive value attached to these relations forms a part of the reliance women’s organisations have on the state. Policy influencing work thus gets priorities, often at the detriment of other kinds of activism. This has been discussed in Section 2.1 where we have analysed the country context.

6.3 Constituency Building

Membership

We discuss membership as a resource under Section 6.1 and this section discusses membership as tool for constituency building. Karmojibi Nari, Doorbar Network, BNWLA and BOMSA placed great value on their membership and its growth. Their membership size enables them to claim that they represent a particular constituency. With a larger membership size, more vocal and visible is the constituency and greater is the influence of the organisation. Some of these organisations have also built their constituency as a result of their mobilisation activities such as street protests, campaigns, mass meetings and even ‘gheraos’.²² While project resources have helped strengthen or expand it, constituency building is considered to be beyond a project’s purview. It forms a part of the core organisation: who it is, who it works for and what will sustain and take the organisation’s agenda forward.

Distinct from the other case-study organisations, Doorbar Network membership comprises women’s organisations and not individuals. The size of its membership makes it the largest network of women’s organisations in the country. Older members of this network felt that if they had had other women’s organisations’ support during various protests and advocacy campaigns in their own areas, they would have been able to achieve better impact. The constituency strength becomes visible at the biannual general conferences, and when petitions, signature campaigns or letter writing campaigns are run.

BNWLA membership has also expanded from the handful of Dhaka-based women legal activists who founded the organisation, to more than 1200 individual members across the country, the majority of who are from outside the capital. BNWLA has also involved them in its projects and hired some as staff lawyers to provide legal services. As its members are professional lawyers, it receives special recognition as a professional organisation.

Karmojibi Nari claims that it has a general membership size of 500,000 loosely affiliated women workers who are organised into cells and

committees, although they are not legally registered. Its urban projects enabled it to maintain close relations with these members and organise regular activities with them. However, in rural areas the membership of women agricultural workers is still supported by the MJF funded project. Karmojibi Nari is planning on how to maintain its grassroots membership active when the project support is withdrawn.

BOMSA claims a membership of 7000 women migrant workers in eleven districts. Similar to Karmojibi Nari, BOMSA finds it hard to bring its membership together for regular meetings, without financial support. Their members are not only financially constrained but also being migrants they are not always available in the country. The members fill in forms and pay a subscription fee but it is difficult for BOMSA to maintain a regular contact. However, since BOMSA claims to be a membership organisation and represent a substantial number of women migrant workers, their claims, demands and critiques get a serious hearing.

Although, Banchte Shekha initially tried to be a membership-based organisation by including rural community members in its governing structure, it opted for a more traditional ‘NGO governance structure’ later on. But numbers are still important to them too, as they talk of their outreach in terms of how many people they have reached and how many people they work with in their programme. Banchte Shekha reported that currently it directly works with more than 500,000 people (indirectly with more than 2.5 million).

Regional and International Networking

As mentioned above all organisations identify partnerships as an important resource. These were seen as sources of information (e.g. War on Want for Karmojibi Nari), and those which provided platforms for mobilisation at international, regional or national levels. Partnerships allowed the organisations to establish and build their reputations at various levels. Forming alliances and coalitions is seen as an important strategy for constituency building, because it enables the organisations to mobilise a large number of organisations to support their cause or agenda.



Bangladesh Ovbashi Mohila Sramik Association Workshop help 5 October 2009

22 A form of public protest where a government office, official or any other individual in power, is encircled until a demand is met. This form of protest is typical to South Asia.

Text Box 9: Networking as a Key Resource

All three organisations, except Banchte Shekha and Doorbar Network have extensive partnerships at all levels. Banchte Shekha has fewer international partnerships, probably due to its location outside Dhaka-the capital; and the international and regional networking for Doorbar Network was mainly done by Naripokkho. A small organisation like BOMSA too is a member of various international and regional networks and its members travel abroad frequently. Attending international meetings is not only an opportunity for networking and raising the profile of the organisation, but also allows a chance to interact with the Bangladesh government delegates attending the same meetings in an informal environment (e.g. in airport lounges).

Karmojibi Nari and BNWLA are the most active in extensive international networking. There are limitations around language and their ability to articulate issues in the style and 'format' required for such international platforms. This is a factor which determines whether organisations are present in more or fewer international networks. Karmojibi Nari also mentioned that projects and staff too had helped them create various networks and maintain them (e.g. by ensuring contacts through e-mail). But when staff numbers were reduced, ensuring such correspondence became an additional burden to the existing workload.

Some case-study organisations referred to formal membership when reporting on the numbers of networks and partnerships they were involved in. Some others have taken more active roles and have even become chairpersons of committees or associations. Karmojibi Nari, for example, was able to mention some networks which have helped them to gain knowledge and learn about strategies. It cites its partnership with War on Want and Labour behind the Label in reference to this. BNWLA reports having gained insights on legal and street activism from the International Human Rights Network.



Doorbar Network Workshop held on 5 September 2009

Section 7: Life on the Other Side

In Section 2.2 we described the changes that took place in the aid regime in Bangladesh (as well as globally) since the Paris Declaration. Two important questions were explored: first how has the new aid regime affected the funding for programmes and activities which aim to meet women's needs and demands; and second how has it affected the financing of NGOs, CSOs and WROs working outside government?

We saw that resources for NGOs, CSOs and WROs separately are shrinking. Donors that had formerly provided support are being obliged to downsize their offices and staffing, and harmonise programmes, and increase support to the government. Funding for NGOs services and programmes is being allocated to large government programmes, for which NGOs have to compete and bid. Development agencies emphasise they are committed to gender equity and women's empowerment, but without allocating separate resources for this. This section uses information from interviews with staff in the donor agencies that funded the case-study organisations. We explore their own perspectives on their role in supporting WROs and the role of resources. Annex 1 maps the donors who had supported the case-study organisations. The themes of the interviews were mentioned in Section 1. Table 2 below is a summary of the interviews with the agencies and their key characteristics.



Doorbar Network Workshop held on 5 September 2009

Table 2: Donor Profile

Name of agency	Type of agency	Which WROs supported (of case studies)	Characteristics/relevance
Norwegian Embassy	bilateral donor	Doorbar Network (DN); BNWLA; Karmajibi Nari (KN); Banchte Shekha (BS)	Their funding and support was key in developing organisation and capacity for each of the case-study organisations. Norwegian Embassy set the trend of supporting women's organisations in Bangladesh. They were implicated in the funding crises that occurred in BNWLA, KN and BS
CIDA	bilateral donor	The gender fund of CIDA was especially important for small grants to Bangladesh Obvibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA) & DN. It also gave grants from the Gender Fund to BNWLA and KN.	CIDA was very relevant for our study because of the changes in their funding strategies and the disappearance of their small funds and gender funds (being phased out end 2010) which had been critical for our case-study organisations
DANIDA	bilateral donor	DANIDA Human Rights and Good Governance (HR & GG) programme was important for DN growth and transition and supportive to BS in a time of crisis.	The DANIDA Human Rights and Good Governance (HR & GG) programme was the main channel through which funds were disbursed to civil society. Played a critical role for women's organisations and human rights organisations. Major shift in DANIDA policies and funding strategies consequent to restructuring and the Paris Declaration. The HR & GG separate programme support unit was about to disappear at the time of the interviews with a smaller programme being absorbed into the Embassy.
Manusher Jonno Foundation	Intermediary organisation	They provide funds to four case-study organisations.	MJF was set up to channel DFID funds in Human Rights and Governance. Intermediary agency that supports small grants for civil society organisations. NORAD also channelising funds for civil society through MJF. Existence related to restructuring of the aid scene consequent to the Paris Declaration
IOM	international agency	IOM has been extremely supportive of BOMSA and helped formalise it.	IOM is not an important donor but interesting because one of the key Bangladeshi nationals responsible for helping women's rights organisations to access funding from bilaterals is at present based here.
The Asia Foundation	INGO/ Trust Donor as well as a implementer	Supportive of BS since their inception One of the earliest donors for BNWLA	Supports civil society organisations through partnership, has some money of its own but also raises money from donors.
Oxfam	INGO	KN and BS	Used to be a major source of small NGO funding. Retains some of the previous characteristics except that now it is tied to their major strategies Seen as being supportive and involved
ADB			Multilateral organisation and one of the big four donors. Do not directly support NGOs but may involve them in technical assistance

7.1 Shifting Goals and Strategies in the Era of the Paris Agenda

The first three questions in the interviews related to the first theme, which was to learn about - the main shifts in the mission and goal of the donor organisation in the previous five years; changes in funding strategies, especially strategies to support women's rights organisations; and the impact of the Paris Declaration on such shifts and changes. The aim was to identify the shifts and gain an insight into what it meant for the reorganisation of aid in Bangladesh, and its impact on small and medium sized women's organisations.

The largest shifts were amongst the bilateral agencies. In some cases, such as NORAD, whose mission as a bilateral development agency has undergone considerable change, there is no longer a development programme for Bangladesh. This programme has been absorbed by the Norwegian Embassy, and is now an integral part of its foreign policy. It is also very small.

DANIDA's development mission has also changed. The Human Rights and Good Governance (HRGG) programme which was the main source of funding for NGOs is being downsized and restructured and the Programme Support Unit (PSU) is being abolished.

The main change for the bilateral organisations is their funding strategy: who they fund, what they fund and how they fund. Besides the Norwegian Embassy and DANIDA the changes also include CIDA and DFID. The major support from bilateral donors is for governments and multilateral organisations, which is considered to be in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration. Support to civil society is being organised through trust funds set up by a consortium of donors, such as MJF, and through large international tenders for specific themes (e.g. the justice sector).

DANIDA is moving towards supporting local civil society through the Danish NGOs it funds, who in turn are supposed to partner with Bangladesh NGOs. However, according to the Programme Director of the HRGG programme there is not much money for Danish NGOs either, due to local politics within Denmark. Under the new HRGG-III programme the number of partnerships will be fewer and staff size will continue to shrink.

The Norwegian Embassy's NGO support portfolio has shrunk. At present, they have 30 projects under this portfolio and only two WROs continue to be supported. This is accompanied by a reduced staffing structure. Soon after the Beijing conference, the number of women's organisations supported had increased to eight and there were as many as 60 projects. The former Gender Advisor at the Norwegian Embassy reflected that the phase of increased availability of financial resources may have raised the expectations of WROs, which are now having to face a different reality. The number of projects and organisations they would support in the future is set not to exceed six. The earlier budget of US\$15 million is being halved. Support to WROs and NGOs in future will be organised through the Norwegian Embassy's support to MJF.

DFID representatives were not interviewed because they were not direct donors to any of our case-study organisations in the recent years (although they currently fund MJF). However, DFID is seen as a major and influential donor and particularly because of their role in setting the scene for changes to the aid environment in Bangladesh. Their role was mentioned several times in many of the interviews, especially with regard to the impact that they have had on the NGO sector in Bangladesh. Our background research showed that DFID too had taken a policy position to reduce the number of NGO partnerships and lessen the proportion of its budget devoted funding to NGOs. Direct projects have been replaced by various sectoral challenge funds which are managed by consultancy firms and which invite competitive proposals from NGOs (e.g. the Challenge Fund on Poverty, SHIREE). Resources for sectors such as health are also channelled through SWAp where some funds are earmarked for NGOs and contracted out through various competitive procedures.²³

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With the exception of the Canada Fund, CIDA no longer funds NGOs directly, but has NGO partnerships (Canadian and Bangladeshi) for their major programme areas. As they fund the education sector in Bangladesh, they tend to work with BRAC. Although BRAC is an NGO, its unique characteristics and status sets it apart from other NGOs in Bangladesh. It is reputed to be the largest NGO in the world, works internationally, and in Bangladesh their operations are more intensive for their membership, than that of government. However, CIDA's small fund on gender, specifically for projects on women's rights and women's participation in decision-making came to an end in November 2010.

There were shifts also in the approach and mission of the INGOs and trust funds. Manusher Jonno Foundation was started as a project of CARE and became an independent organisation four years later. Although this was termed as management shift it actually entailed a shift in their mission and role. Whereas initially they were mainly channelling donor money to CSOs, as an independent Bangladeshi organisation they also took on the role of policy advocacy, and kept open the option of doing action-research.

The Asia Foundation (TAF) initially implemented programmes and projects but no longer do so. They now work in partnership with Bangladeshi NGOs who they support on programmes that TAF has designed. Oxfam GB has also shifted policy from supporting NGOs based on what they expressed as their own needs, to partnerships with NGOs as implementers of their strategic programme objectives. For all these organisations service delivery projects and organisations are no longer a priority. In fact, they do not fund service delivery.

Paris Declaration and its Impact

When questioned about the Paris Declaration and its impact, everybody had a lot to say and most of what they said was very critical of present trends and was about the future of funding support to CSOs.

The Senior Advisor HRGG/PSU of DANIDA interviewed was quite clear that the Paris Declaration agenda was the main issue for DANIDA at

present. The Paris Declaration, according to him, was about government-to-government development support. Besides governments, the other major recipients of funding would be multilateral organisations, and trust funds (set up specifically to support specific programmes and organise support to NGOs). Donors justify this arrangement in terms of donor alignment. Independent NGOs and those involved in social mobilisation will have to find a way to advocate for their role in the new aid scenario. According to the representative, DANIDA's profile as a development organisation has diminished. The changes consequent to the Paris Declaration could mean that CSOs may not receive any support in the future. He acknowledged that CSOs played an important role in society in that they could become important interlocutors of the state. However, with dwindling support for this role the strength and importance of civil society was bound to suffer. Although gender continues to be high priority as a cross-cutting issue, support to programmes for empowering women has and will be reduced. The new strategy will support CSOs mainly for advocacy activities.

The Norwegian Embassy representative attributed changes in their structure to the restructuring of Norwegian foreign policy, rather than to the Paris Declaration. He felt that the Paris Declaration was positive, because donors in Bangladesh were coming together on a joint strategy in order to harmonise their efforts.

"We are, of course, hopefully in line with all those principles; and right now we are about to sign a joint cooperation strategy with 17 donors.²⁴ They have drafted the joint cooperation strategy with the government. So, through that strategy we will align ourselves with the government strategies. Hopefully this joint strategy will be signed during this Spring and it will then support the poverty reduction strategy of the government. It will try to harmonise the donors a little bit, so that the donors can work more efficiently. Part of this exercise has been to make a matrix of all the activities that all donors have. We see they are sometimes overlapping, where it is not necessary that all donors are in all sectors all the time. So to make it more effective we can try to have a couple of lead donors in one sector and try to prioritise a bit more. Hopefully something good will come out of this joint cooperation strategy. That is directly linked to Paris Declaration." (interview, representative of Norwegian Embassy, 2 February 2010)

This positive portrayal of the benefits of the Paris Declaration was not echoed in all quarters. For example, the Executive Director of MJF was explicit in her analysis of the downside of the Paris Declaration and its potential impact on CSOs.

²³ DFID's Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) carried out in 2006 (Chapman et al 2006) indicated that the proportion of DFID's funding going to NGOs rose from 30 per cent in 2000 to 40 per cent in 2005. The DFID CPE indicated that, in certain sectors, including health, the balance has shifted towards increasing support to and through government (including local government) and less direct funding through NGOs. It explains this as a change intended to provide funding for services through government mechanisms or in a donor basket arrangement where NGOs can compete with other public and private sector agencies (Chapman et al. 2006). This was seen as an important aspect of strengthening Government and its systems and addressing the Paris principles of ownership, alignment and harmonisation. (JEP)

²⁴ This has since been signed in June 2010.

“But I find two things are big constraints now. One is the Paris Declaration and donor harmonisation. That’s absolutely a very, very big threat to civil society organisations getting funding, because all the funding is going into UNDP (...) Big funding is going there, going to government, and now for example, this community leader service project that DFID has put out. It’s a £30 million project, and £25 million will go to the government. And that is the policy – I don’t know who (this) is helping, this whole Donor Harmonisation – I don’t understand. If you want to give something to government, fine, give it. Of course! But the fund meant for [civil society]? I see the danger in these big donors, like DFID and USAID, contracting consulting firms, contracting out development work to these consulting firms. That is another threat. And I don’t know, I say it to the best of my abilities, but I don’t know if I’m able to influence that. The only thing I can do is really do such a good job that they can set up two or three more Manusher Jonno Foundations; and not give out to consulting firms.” (Interview, Executive Director, MJF, 1 February 2010)

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MJF feels pressurised to meet donor expectations in showing impact (for which it needs to support large organisations and projects). However, it works closely with NGOs and civil society and is aware of the resource requirements and access constraints of smaller organisations.

The downsizing of bilateral aid organisation staffing and the Paris agenda has implications for the way CSOs can access funding. The CIDA representative said that one of the main reasons for cutting down funding for CSOs, and especially small organisations, was that it was far too expensive for bilateral organisations to administer such small grants.

“Disbursement becomes a real challenge for small organisations like these. Even development partners like DFID – why do they go for Manusher Jonno Foundation type mechanisms – as others are not cost efficient. So, they are channelling through endowment funds or these sorts of organisations. CIDA is also seeing the same thing because small organisation... you have to give the same level of effort for managing the bigger projects. Our strategy focuses on fewer bigger projects now. If any organisation comes, minimum 5 million has to be disbursed in a year for a particular project and if it is less than 20 to 30 million, it will be very difficult. But how many women’s organisations in Bangladesh do have the capacity [to absorb large amounts]?” (Interview, Senior Development Advisor, CIDA, 2 February 2010)

To summarise, there have been significant changes in Bangladesh in the past decade, to the aid environment and to the mission and strategies of donor organisations. The most obvious changes were in the operations of bilateral organisations whose small grants programmes and civil society grants were often the mainstay for women’s organisations and small NGOs. Leading up to the Paris agreements and consequently, bilateral organisations have cut down on their in-country presence. Some attribute this to the reorganisation of the aid sector in their own countries as for example the Norwegian Embassy. Others clearly attribute the changes

to agreements reached as part of the Paris agenda. In either case the outcome is a leaner presence of these agencies on the ground, a greater insistence on donor harmonisation and alignment with the government development priorities and programmes. Governments and multilateral organisations have become the main conduits for donor money. Support to the NGO sector is being increasingly organised through trust funds set up for this purpose. Whether the amount of aid available to the NGO sector in Bangladesh has grown or shrunk is not immediately relevant for the survival and sustenance of WROs (most of who are medium-sized and often small or have modest requirements). Rather, the relevant issue is whether the changed aid architecture makes it more difficult for WROs to access funding in their own right, and for the specific issues that they work on. The quantity of aid may have grown but the organisation of aid through trust funds, tender consortiums and other means makes funding for small and medium-sized women’s organisations harder, and in some cases impossible, to access.

7.2 Support or Instruction: Donor and Women’s Organisation Relations

The second interview theme focused on the relationship between donor organisations and the WROs they have funded; the extent to which organisational missions, goals, and programmes have been influenced and shaped by donor expectations on what and how they should be doing it, and the standards to be adhered to.

Donors were asked whether support to WROs was a means to shape their agendas or whether the level of professionalism donors expect changed the very nature of these organisations. All donor representatives interviewed vehemently denied that they were shaping the agenda. Most respondents saw professionalism (regularising accounting and management systems) as not just a requirement but also as a good thing for WROs generally.

To the Norwegians, supporting professionalism (according to their standards) seemed the most important contribution they had made to small NGOs, especially to WROs.

“But when that is said, on the challenging side, when you are working with small organisations, and they are working in the countryside, they do not have the computerised auditing system in the village. A lot of things are done by books or hands and so on. It becomes a challenge then when you decide to work with the grassroots organisations as you have to actively work with them to increase their capacity. So you have to offer them technical assistance and training or you have to go through the reports and just try to improve in general. They will probably never be perfect like multilateral cooperation agencies, but they are all improving. All of the ones we worked with are willing to learn and listen, to get better and improve. And I think they have been very grateful to us as we have been very patient to them. We are generally regarded as a good donor in that sense” (Interview, representative of Norwegian Embassy, 2 February 2010).

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A former Gender Advisor in the Norwegian Embassy, who as programme officer had been the main architect of NORAD's support to women's organisations said:

"Where the women's organisations were weak is management capacity. Financial systems, this is the only weakness. And for sustaining one's organisations you need it. This is what we worked on to build through review, trainings audits etc. We tried to develop the organisations, check with many organisations that we funded. Check whether they have computerised records, they hired accountants, this institutionalisation process helped. So what I am saying is that the principles created the organisation. However the need for resources led organisations to donors and funding process created these structures and procedures that developed capacity." (Interview, 1 February 2010)

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'Guidance' and 'capacity development' were the most frequently used terms to persuade organisations to align their agendas to the donor requirements, to take up projects that reflected donor priorities or to adopt management and programme tools that donors required. Donors see themselves as having brought order to and developed the capacities of the NGO sector and especially of small women's organisations.

The Executive Director of Manusher Jonno said:

"I really don't think we should shape the agenda of organisations. I think we can guide them to implement their project, the one they've given to us, to guide them and make it more efficient or to get better results and outcomes. If they have said that okay, we are going to work with 2000 women and the output at the end of three years will be this, and as we go along, we know that this will never happen, unless they redesign the project a little bit, or they make some adjustments here and there, or they get better link ups with public institutions, or whatever. That is the kind of input we give to our partners." (Interview, ED, MJF, 1 February 2010)

Despite denials from donor interviewees that they were interventionist in some way, their interventions have had profound effects on the case-study organisations. Some were 'positive' effects, as they helped improve WROs' capacities to become better clients to donors, which in turn helped them to raise money. However, the 'negative' effects included organisations taking on work and themes that originally were not a part of their mandate. Often with growing institutionalisation and professionalism, organisations had increased staff numbers which they could not sustain when the funding scenario changed.

Two organisations, Doorbar Network and BOMSA, talked of the 'negative' effects they have faced. Text Box 10 illustrates Doorbar Network's story.

Text Box 10: How Donors Contributed to Doorbar Network's Crisis

Doorbar Network went into a crisis while becoming independent from its parent organisation (Naripokkho) and negotiating direct project funding (see case study report for details, also Annex 5). The existing conflicts and tensions within the network and with Naripokkho were further aggravated by donor views that it was to their advantage to be independent as soon as possible. The offer of support to Doorbar Network directly rather than through Naripokkho was made by DANIDA based on their analysis that Naripokkho's control over this huge women's network was unhealthy. They felt that progress on substantial aspects to facilitate this independence process was slow (such as change of internal structure and regulations as well as legal NGO registration). Also there was a widespread demand among Doorbar Network members to become independent.

The Senior Advisor HRGG/PSU interviewee pointed out that they felt there was great potential and a strong dynamic in the network, which could be further developed if it became independent. In his view, the commitment of possible funding may have contributed towards the existing conflict in the organisation over leadership and control over the network, which later escalated to a legal battle (see Annex 5 for details).

DANIDA pulled back from the commitment when it was clear that the conflict could not be resolved.

The support to Doorbar Network was influenced by the Senior Advisor, HRGG/DANIDA's previous experiences. He had worked for Danish International NGOs in Latin America and said that he was surprised by the number of NGOs in Bangladesh being funded by donors, but that there did not seem to be any strong social movement. He felt that the networks in general lacked representativeness unlike other social movements, such as the indigenous peoples movements in Latin America. He saw the support to Doorbar Network as a way to develop the democratic role of NGOs. He saw them as representatives and accountable to those for whom the programmes were being run. Doorbar as a network was comprised of several small and medium-sized NGOs, but most were small women's organisations which represented or were in close contact with target groups.

Although DANIDA was unable to fund the network that led to a financial crisis, the Senior Advisor, HRGG/DANIDA nevertheless felt that it was an opportunity for the network. He opined that it was best for Doorbar Network to go through a transition in order for them to discover who they wanted to be rather than be funded to fulfil donor expectations.

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Another case is discussed earlier in Text Box 1, the nature of relationships between small WROs which have humble beginnings and donor representatives (especially Bangladeshi nationals working in donor agencies) have been complex. Bangladeshi nationals helped in developing Y and everyone empathised and made efforts to save the organisation when irregularities were detected. They, however, had to give up, with great regret, because they could no longer justify the anomalies. This was particularly so as they had clear expectations on financial and managerial procedures. Founders of Y however, did not perceive what they had done as 'irregular'.

Given the complex and unclear justifications for Y's actions (there are different versions of the 'truth' and it depends whose perspective one accepts), it is difficult to find a single explanation which most donors want to hear. One set of explanations could be that while supporting women's organisations, there is, through the funding process, a reproduction of class and gender relations. Often, we 'judge' those who look like us and subscribe to the same behavioural norms, as credible. The class background of Y's management went against them in being able to 'live up' to donors' expectations.

7.3 Solidarity in Donor-Recipient Relationships

The third theme related more directly to the funding of WROs in Bangladesh consequent to the changes in aid practices. It was also related to the quality of relations between donors and the women's rights organisations. A key question in this theme was whether the strategies of donor organisations to support WROs and women's empowerment had in any way been influenced by learning from the strategies and practice of women's organisations in Bangladesh.

There was a difference between bilateral organisations and other donors in the way they articulated and practiced support to women's organisations. Bilateral agencies have, as has been discussed, nearly withdrawn all direct support to NGOs. They have also, therefore, withdrawn direct support to WROs as a vehicle for focusing on women. This support, however, in some cases has been channelled through MJF and other arrangements. Bilateral agencies interviewed, however, remain committed to gender equality. Text Box 11 presents the views of bilateral donors on gender equality.

Text Box 11: How Bilateral Donors View Gender Equality

The CIDA representative explained the importance of gender equality in the following manner:

"Promoting gender equality is one of our corporate missions and vision, a corporate commitment, you can say. We have a long history globally as well as in the Bangladeshi context. We have a gender corporate policy that has three dimensions - the first is the promotion of women's rights, the second is the access dimension, access of resources and service delivery also falls under it and finally, participation in decision making. Keeping those in focus of our gender policy across the globe we wanted to implement these policies into action. Regarding this policy commitment, as you know, earlier we used to focus on cross-cutting ways as well as on gender specific programming. But due to changes in policy direction, CIDA's focus in recent years has shifted towards fewer and bigger initiatives through a harmonised approach with other development partners. In this context, we are not encouraging gender specific programming at this stage. We are taking an integrated approach towards gender equality now. We are not encouraging a gender specific approach at this stage" (Interview CIDA representative, 2 February 2010).

According to the Senior Advisor HRGG programme of DANIDA, gender equality remained a high priority for them. He stressed:

"It's still a very, very high priority - gender equality. Just that it is more like a cross cutting issue in the sector programmes. But it is very much stressed over and over all the time. It's probably the highest priority beyond even environment, well it's about the same but it's certainly one of the top priorities and it will remain a top priority within other programmes (Interview HR&GG representative DANIDA, 2 February 2010).

Similarly, gender remains a top priority for the Norwegian Embassy:

"There was a white paper on women couple of years ago. But women have been there as an issue, a focus for Norway for many years. I think the reason goes back to Norway itself where we have women's rights and women's issues. The women there have fought for these rights for many years. It has been under domestic policy as well as a part of foreign policy. So based on that then, and with the latest white paper that we got from Norway, the previously established policy of gender equality and women's rights remain. So, this Embassy then had women's issues as one priority area always" (Interview Norwegian Embassy representative, 2 February 2010).

However, as the representative of the Norwegian Embassy explained, while the commitment to gender equity remains, cutting down support to women's organisations and mainstreaming gender happen simultaneously, in the sectors that Norway supports the government, multilateral organisations, and large NGO partners for. As explained by the former Norwegian Embassy Gender Advisor, WROs were prepared for the phasing-out of Norwegian funds as they were encouraged to think of long-term sustainability in the absence of donor funding. They were also asked to develop their relationship with government so that they would be able to access resources from the government well. The representative of the Norwegian Embassy further explained that support to rights organisations is channelled through MJF which supports as many as 120 organisations working on rights-based issues.

MJF thus, has become a very important conduit for funds to smaller NGOs and WROs. The funding, however, is project based and not for core expenses. Therefore their commitment and strategy in supporting WROs, also comes into question. According to the MJF representatives interviewed, gender equality is a core value in all their work.

MJF has tried to actualise its commitment to gender equality in several ways. First, it has tried to correct gender imbalances in its own staff structure and provide opportunities to women professionals to develop and flourish. The same standards or quality of work is expected from both women and men staff members. Second, as a policy commitment they promote gender equality in all the organisations receiving support. Gender is a criterion for selecting organisations to receive funding. The capacity building unit of MJF helps train staff in funded organisations and develops gender policies with them. Finally, and after a long process of discussion MJF formalised its commitment to support WROs while formalising the themes that they would work with.

Oxfam GB works with the concept of gender justice, and its organisational commitment to gender equality remains high. Since 2009 they developed a direct focus on supporting women's rights. This, according to them, is because many decades of gender mainstreaming had still not brought the desired changes. Oxfam GB has its own themes on which they work and programmes are implemented through partners. Women's economic empowerment is one such theme which directly focuses on women's rights. However, in all the other themes too they focus on the position of women.

There is a difference between the MJF and Oxfam GB strategies to support women's rights organisations. Both work on specific themes and organisations are funded on the basis that their profile and project objectives fit the areas MJF and Oxfam GB support. MJF helps women's organisations to develop their own priorities into a programme to be supported, while Oxfam invites implementation partners (who may be women's organisations) to work on the programmes that they support. The latter has meant that WROs have been supported to undertake projects although they may not be synchronised with their mandate, but because they have had a long and trustful partnership with Oxfam GB. MJF too has sometimes persuaded women's rights organisations to take on roles that they themselves may not have come up with. However, these roles are directly related to the issues and expertise that particular organisations have and prioritise.

The last point highlights a difference in approach. Given the experience and expertise that many WROs have, funding women's rights work and gender equality has to be supported in a facilitative manner. Imposing donor 'blue-prints' could cripple the dynamism and validity of social movements that WROs are a part of.

"So last year we made this more specific - instead of gender we say that the women have to be in the heart of every work that you do. So when we develop any programmes now, from context analysis to objectives to indicators to monitoring mechanism, we try to very clearly observe the state of women in these affairs based on which we advance with our work" (Interview, Oxfam representative, 4 February 2010).

7.4 Bangladeshi Women in Donor Agencies

Bangladeshi nationals, especially women working within funding bodies, have played a remarkable role in legitimising gender issues in the local funding environment. They have buttressed the role of women's organisations by supporting the issue in donor forums and channelling donor support to these organisations. Bangladeshi aid workers in bilateral organisations, for example, spoke of their experiences in trying to include gender issues in donor coordination forums, such as the Local Consultative Group (LCG) on Women and Gender Equality. It is worth noting, for this research, not necessarily the success these women had in mainstreaming gender in the donor agenda (because there were many failures due to the nature of mainstreaming) but the way that the LCG and other forums were turned into terrains of struggle.

A second remarkable aspect of the work of Bangladeshi women advisors in donor agencies is how they had worked to identify and legitimise women's organisations. They identified them as 'capable' to receive and work with donor funding, as well as highlighted issues WROs raised as projects that were worth funding. They were able to identify potential initiatives and organisations, many a time because they knew the founders' backgrounds. In other cases where a WRO founder's background was different from their own urban, educated, middle-class background, they were able to bridge differences and develop solidarity for the cause. However, this kind of solidarity and understanding has its limitations. Located within donor agencies, these women (who often come from women's movements themselves) sometimes find themselves in opposition to the very organisations with whom they had developed partnerships. They would have to disagree, criticise or withhold support from them. Section 7.2 raises the question whether, in spite of support and solidarity for the cause, socio-economic class had an influence on the manner in which donor agencies dealt with conflicts.

A third feature of the relationship between WROs and Bangladeshi women working in donor bodies is - how sensitively have they dealt with funding rules so that WROs who were unaware of the rules could receive support. Even as donor strategies shifted in response to the Paris agenda, many such women tried to work creatively within the rules to be able to support women's organisations. For example, when direct funding to WROs was stopped in some donor organisations, these women workers tried to allow the funding to WROs through other appropriate channels such as NGO support programmes. However, this role has now become limited as donors, particularly bilateral organisations, have reduced their NGO and gender specific programmes and programme staff.

MJF and Oxfam GB clearly say they have learnt from the strategies and practices of WROs in Bangladesh, and that their work has been influenced by them. As explained by the Oxfam GB representative.

Many women professionals, especially those in MJF who 'belong' to women's movements in Bangladesh as well perform their jobs as staff of the large Trust Fund, have been greatly influenced in their latter roles by the understanding, commitment and strategic thinking that they developed in the former.

"If we take the whole of women's movement together, then definitely there is some influence. Because when we prepared the strategic document this time for the next five years, we strongly identified where we have gained and where we can contribute the most. So while preparing, we brought some people from the women's movement into our team and we told them that the more you can influence us, the more it will be beneficial to you. We ask them what they want in our programmes that are being planned. Once the document was completed, we sent that to them and asked what they thought about it; we tried to get some sort of endorsement from them whether we are going in the right track or not. That's the sort of strategy we follow to capture their views." (Interview Oxfam representative, 4 February 2010).

Section 8: Staying Alive

The research results presented in the sections above lead us to several conclusions.

8.1 Shifts and Trends in the Development Agencies

Major shifts in the mission and strategies of bilateral aid donor organisations have had consequences for WROs that they have supported. The Paris Declaration and re-structuring of aid bureaucracies in donor countries have caused these shifts. As bilateral aid organisations coordinate their agendas and harmonise them with government priorities, most small and medium sized NGOs are being dropped from their support. Most bilateral agencies have ended their NGO grants, small grants and women's funds programmes or are in the process of doing so. Some of the large NGOs have benefited in this new aid scenario because of their absorption capacity and size of their programmes.

The support for local 'home-spun' methods of development has therefore ended with the withdrawal of support to NGOs. This has been replaced largely by programme funding on themes that are being promoted internationally and based on frameworks and 'blue-prints' that are donor driven. The immediate fall-out is the homogenisation of discourse on how development should be done, and the further empowerment of international bilateral donors and multilaterals, in setting the parameters of such discourse.

Support to the NGO sector is being increasingly organised through trust funds. Although the overall quantity of funds for women's development and rights may not have decreased, it is more difficult for small and medium WROs to access funding in their own right and for the concerns and issues that they have worked for.

Although all donors deny having directly influenced organisational agendas, in reality most have been instrumental in shaping priorities and organisational methods. Most donor respondents saw professionalism (accounting and management systems) as not only a requirement but as a 'good' thing for WROs generally. Women's organisations, however, questioned donor interpretations of 'professionalism' and how far it captured what was important for them (validation workshop, 30 August 2010). 'Guidance' and 'capacity development' were the terms the funding agencies used most often, to persuade organisations to align with their priorities. Donors see themselves as having brought order and developed the capacity of the NGO sector, especially of small women's organisations. Donor requirements have had profound effects on the case-study organisations both positive and negative.

Bilateral donor representatives said gender equality was a top priority for their organisations. While this commitment is expressed, ending of direct support to women's organisations has happened simultaneously, thus leaving gender mainstreaming as the only way for WROs to access funding. Since some of the bilaterals are channeling their support to

WROs and small and medium organisations through MJF, the role and performance of MJF becomes important. Another route for accessing funding seems to be through bidding for tenders on specific themes. The tendering process brings into play large INGOs (both Oxfam GB and The Asia Foundation mentioned their participation in international tenders floated by EU and DFID for Bangladesh) who the national NGOs may have to compete with. Oxfam GB argued that their participation in tender processes has helped their local level partner NGOs to access resources, rather than the large national NGOs who have the capacity to respond to such tenders.

8.2 Future Trends for WROs

Changes in Mobilisation Strategies

The case studies and discussions showed that the WROs were conscious that their mobilisation strategies had been affected by the availability of external funding. However, the positive aspect of this realisation is that they are now aiming to sustain themselves by accessing other types of funds. Scarcity and competition for resources has challenged them to think whether they could do things differently. Donors and project frameworks had privileged a certain kind of advocacy (with workshops, glossy publications and media coverage). Other types of activism by the WROs neither got similar visibility nor was it documented in reports to donors. This included activism that aimed to influence key people on a one-to-one basis; accessing local government or political leaders to petition and influence decisions; challenging religious or conservative community leaders on their interpretation of rights; ensuring women's involvement and participation at local level dispute resolution; etc. Our previous research on WROs studied showed numerous instances of such activism. Although such activism has been overshadowed, the shrinking of external resources could potentially bring it to the forefront now.

As discussed in the Section 6 – 'Life Beyond Funding' the WROs have whole-heartedly adopted the approach of forming alliances and building coalitions. These are not feminist or specific to women's rights mobilisation. However, in some cases their objectives, structures and processes are influenced by women's rights values, principles and objectives. Strategically, they have also joined other social movements which can further their cause and create greater awareness and sympathy for their demands. For example, Karmojibi Nari is active in the Fairtrade movement, and Banchte Shekha is active in the Climate Change movement. While resources can facilitate such networking the most important partnerships can be sustained without external funds.

While being conscious of the media's own agenda and biases, there is a greater realisation of the need to work with them as well as an increased capacity to do so. The local and national press are seen as partners and as a force that can be influenced in what they disseminate and how they do so. While workshops and seminars are used to attract the press, the one-on-one interactions and joint investigations have strengthened working relations with the media.

Sustainability and Leadership

In light of the changes in aid structures and social political context, sustainability was a key issue that was discussed by all case-study organisations. Interestingly, this did not refer to monetary concerns but concerns about building a second generation of leaders who would ensure organisational ability to weather various crises and to flourish. A key issue the case-study organisations debated was how one could create new leaders and whether existing leadership provided sufficient space and mentorship for younger members. The case-study organisations also highlighted that at times members, including current leaders, relied on the staff for building movements. This reliance was because: a) staff could be easily given the responsibilities for specific tasks and called to account (which could not be done with a member who was a volunteer) and b) members' time was limited. Some organisations also felt that at times donor policies require a strict division between the duties and activities of salaried staff and members, which results in an inflexible situation. Members who accept a salaried post for project management or administrative roles find themselves unable to facilitate various processes to build movements. Some case-study organisations have suffered at times because of weak/ineffective leadership or leadership perceived by other CSOs as politically partisan. Weak or partisan leadership had adversely affected their 'goodwill' and reputation, which is a key resource for alliance building and for securing funding. This had implications for sustainability.

During the validation workshop, all case-study organisations agreed that a key aspect of leadership and a requirement for sustainability was to learn from other WROs. This learning had to focus not only on how other WROs mobilised resources but also on how they created new leadership to sustain the organisation. The organisations felt that many of them have been reactive in planning future activities. They stressed the importance of WROs being proactive and having a long term vision ("we should plan on being around for 200 years", participant, validation workshop, 30 August 2010).

8.3 Challenging the Rules of the Game and Questioning the Distribution of, and Access to, Resources

Women's access to external development resources is part of women's overall access to resources, whether financial, land, property, etc. With a greater understanding and awareness of the changes in aid structures and flows, there is an interest in protesting against the changes that have negatively impacted the WROs and in challenging the way the government and donor resources were being allocated and distributed. Holding a mock tribunal was suggested. The possibility of sending representatives to the Bangladesh Development Forum to raise issues relating to access, distribution and use of government and donor resources, was discussed. This could be a part of WROs organising themselves as a body or fora on issues of access to resources, and could be one way to influence decision-makers. Development partners would like to have greater civil society involvement, as part of the Joint Cooperation Strategy, and those promoting gender equality would welcome other voices to strengthen their own. This could be a strategy that would benefit both sides.

"If I were financially compensated for the time and effort I have put in voluntarily for all these years then that would be enough to run my organisation for years! Otherwise I could use that money to make contributions to other small women's organisations" (participant, validation workshop, 30 August 2010)

In the meantime, while having to work within present frameworks of aid, WROs can also strategically deal with competitive bidding and the tendering process. This can help them access necessary resources while using their strength as WROs. They work differently and avoid falling into the trap that other NGOs have been victims of: competing against each other, having to pay bribes or losing their social movement focus. They can collaborate in preparing proposals or submit joint proposals. Various women activists with expertise in such processes can volunteer time and effort for these. These ideas were proposed at the validation workshop and are similar to strategies being promoted by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).

In their efforts to increase access to resources WROs are already actively considering how best to mobilise resources from the private sector. This comes with the awareness that private firms and individuals could have their own agenda which may not match with the WROs. There are an increasing number of women entrepreneurs at senior levels in big businesses who can make substantial donations. There are also separate women chambers of commerce where corporate social responsibility can be promoted. The will to access the private sector and the knowledge of how to do it exists. How far this can be actualised remains to be seen.

Access to and use of government resources is another area that WROs can challenge to ensure equitable distribution. The Bangladeshi government has only marginally provided support for civil society, NGOs or WROs. However, with reducing aid dependency, economic growth and an increased recognition of the role civil society plays, a more proactive role of the government can be conceived. The Department of Women's Affairs already provides nominal grants. With concerted action this could be scaled-up to organisational grants. Other sources of government resources include the Legal Aid Fund which is largely un-utilised and organisations offering legal services are now trying to access. While there is a risk of politicisation and control over the WROs agenda, Bangladesh could learn from other country experiences where governments have expanded services by bringing in other providers.

Finally, we would like to reiterate that most WROs have a different standing, legitimacy and identity from other development NGOs. The case-study organisations were formed in response to specific women's rights demands and external funding followed. They have enjoyed support from the wider society for "doing good work" as autonomous organisations defending and promoting rights (even if their demands can sometimes be controversial). They are a recognised and valued part of the Bangladeshi society. As already stated, the women's organisations studied had an existence and identity beyond the donor supported projects and activities, ('Life besides donor resources'). Although donor funding affected their ways of working and institutionalisation, they are deploying various strategies to sustain their programmes and institutions and move forward on their specific agenda. It is this, as well as their commitment to establish gender equity and the creativity in resource mobilisation that may well see them through the external foreign funding reductions to different forms of mobilisation and sustainability.

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Annexure - 1- Donor Map

	KN	BOMSA	DN	BNWLA	BS
1.				Ford Foundation	CUSO
2.				TAF	TAF Later consortium, and beyond
3.				SIDA (97 onwards) realisation of human rights	Ford Later Consortium (up to 94)
4.					Interpares
5.	OXFAM (94, 97 – 2009 OXFAM,GB)				Oxfam (90s to now)
6.	CIDA (2009)	CIDA (2004 - ..) Gender Fund and follow-up	CIDA (95- 97)	CIDA (till now)	
7.				Unicef (98 for research and training)	APS - (Italian) Later Consortium
8.	ILO (93 onwards)	ILO			
9.			Danida (95- 2009 June)	UNESCO (or was it UNICEF) (police training, 95)	Danida (2007/8)
10.	NORAD (92 discussions) 93 – 96 (pilot), continued later up to 2004, 2008		NORAD (1995 – 2008 June)	NORAD (left end 2003)	RNE over end 2002 Consortium
11.	NOVIB		British Council (1998- 2000)	NOVIB (till now)	NOVIB (end 2002) Consortium
12.			Naripokkho	UNDP	
13.	MJF (2005 – now)	MJF (2005 – 2007)		MJF	MJF (2004 to now)
14.	GTZ (2008)			GTZ (2006)	
15.	OXFAM/Novib (2009)			USAID (2000, no longer)	AED (USAID, 2004)
16.	INFANS (France) – current			Save the Children (Sweden and Denmark 98 fund for trafficking survey)	World Fish Centre (DFID)
17.		IOM (2004 onwards)			CARE-BD
18.		DenChurch Aid (DCA) 2007-2009		British High Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small funds from Lillian Fonds (small but long-term) • Amader Gram • Freedom Foundation • BCC Foundation • Christian Aid
19.		UNIFEM		Plan Bangladesh	
20.		AAB (maybe not funding)		NETZ	
21.			DWA grants	MSP-VAW (contracts)	
22.				Camel Jockey	
23.				DSS (contract, 2007)	

Annexure - 2

The following table shows key national events and key events in women's movement and gender and development in Bangladesh.

YEAR	GOVERNMENT	KEY NATIONAL EVENTS/ TRENDS	KEY EVENTS IN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT/ AND GAD
1972-1975	Awami League	Constitution, 1972 First Parliamentary election 1973 First Five Year Plan Nationalisation of Industries Clash with the left and the left parties suppressed Army coup in 1975	Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, mass level women's organisations very active in raising various issues Rehabilitation of survivors of rape during the war Women for Women, first research and policy study group on women, publishes 'Situation of Women' in Bangladesh in 1975
1976- 1981	Military Rule (up till 1977), then general Zia forms BNP	Series of military coups in 1976-1977 Jamaat e Islami rehabilitated in politics in 1977 Denationalisation and privatisation of industries Secularism removed from the Constitution as a key principle through amendment in 1976 BNP formed in 1977 Elections in 1979 Aid dependence Increases Burgeoning NGO sector, focus on consciousness raising (such as BRAC, PROSHIKA, Grameen) Hasina returns from exile in 1981 Chittagong Hill Tract conflict starts	Women's organisations working in rural areas such as Banche Shekha established in 1976 Professional associations such as Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Associations, established in 1978 NGOs start targeting women for credit and services Government focus on family planning and IGA for women Reserved seats for women at the local elected bodies in 1978 Reserved seats for women in parliament First international conference on women organised by Women for Women bringing government, donors, and CSO together in 1978 Ministry of Women's Affairs established in 1979 Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980 (movement spearheaded by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad)
1982-1990	General Ershad	Military rule, Ershad forms Jatiya Party in 1985 State sponsorship of violence on campus Aid dependence increases Islam made state religion in 1988 NGO sector expansion and focus on service delivery since mid 1980s Anti authoritarian movement towards the end of 1990s topples government	Cruelty to Women Deterrent Punishment Act, 1983 Family Court Ordinance, 1985 Activist groups such as Naripokkho formed, 1983 Many NGOs start exclusively targeting women towards end 1980s and also employing of women staff increases Protest by Naripokkho of Constitutional Amendment that made Islam the state religion Garment industry boom and women's involvement in industrial sector increases Export industry such as frozen food, shrimp etc expansion, and involvement of women increases Formation of Women's Coalition to contest fatwa related violence (Oikko Baddho Nari Samaj)

1991-1995	BNP rule	<p>Caretaker government formed for transition to democracy</p> <p>BNP forms government</p> <p>Fourth Five Year plan</p> <p>Donor funding starts decreasing</p> <p>Anti NGO movement by Islamist groups</p> <p>War crimes trial movement (Ghatok Dalal Nirmul committee formed)</p> <p>Fatwa against Women</p>	<p>Karmojibi Nari formed to promote women workers rights</p> <p>First women advisor in caretaker government</p> <p>Bangladeshi woman (Salma Khan) becomes members of CEDAW committee</p> <p>Stipend for Girls up to secondary education</p> <p>Bangladesh government seeks help from women's groups for Beijing preparation</p> <p>Gender mainstreaming key issue in Fourth Five Year Plan (women for women and others take the lead)</p> <p>Local NGO women mobilised to protect their property and NGOs; women also take a strong role in anti shrimp farming movement</p> <p>Women lead the war crimes trial movement; public discussion on rape during war</p> <p>Anti fatwa movement particularly because of Noorjahan's case who committed suicide after a public trial</p> <p>Yasmeen murder case galvanises women and other CSO and public to protests violence by police (also seen as violence against domestic worker)</p> <p>Movement for a uniform family code coordinated by Mahila Parishad</p>
1996-2001	AL	<p>Caretaker government amendment, so that it takes over three months before each election</p> <p>AL enters into tacit agreement with Jamaat to stay in power</p> <p>CHT peace treaty in 1997</p> <p>Vested property act repealed in 2001 (Act which allowed for seizing of enemy property, largely used against minority groups)</p> <p>Aid dependency falling</p> <p>NGOs moves towards a rights based approach</p> <p>Violence against minority groups during elections</p>	<p>National Action Plan for Beijing Follow-up prepared in collaboration with Government and participation of women's groups and approved in 1996</p> <p>Direct elections to reserve seats for women at the local elected bodies in 1997; government circular denoting the duties and entitlements of female UP members</p> <p>National Women's Development policy launched in 1997</p> <p>Government removes some reservations on some of the articles of CEDAW before presentation of period report at CEDAW Committee in 1997.</p> <p>Networks such as Doorbar formed</p> <p>Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain, 2000 (Prevention of Violence Against women and Children Act, 2000); women's groups consulted and involved in formulation</p> <p>Anti- Acid Movement (led to creation of burn unit, changes in criminal justice procedures)</p> <p>Sex-workers movement after brothel eviction in 1998, supported by solidarity movement lead by Naripokkho.</p> <p>Anti Sexual harassment movement in universities</p> <p>Seema Murder case galvanises people and women against violence against women in safe custody</p> <p>Trafficking in women and related issues raised by BNWLA and others</p> <p>Samajik Protirodh committee formed (coalition to resist violence against minority groups)</p> <p>High Court bans Fatwa, 2001</p> <p>Violence against Ahmediya community by reactionary groups. Protested by DN and other HR groups.</p>

Violence against minority groups during elections	BNP	<p>BNP forms an alliance with Jamaat and forms government</p> <p>Aid dependence falls</p> <p>Anti NGO movement</p> <p>Terrorist attacks on cultural groups, educational institutions</p> <p>Big four donors sign JSF to ensure harmonisation and alignment.</p>	<p>Post election violence against minorities, especially women. Women's organisations react strongly.</p> <p>National women's development policy revised and sidelined</p> <p>Government renews reserved seats for women in parliament</p> <p>Anti sexual harassment movement in universities</p> <p>Female migrant workers movement and garment workers movement takes hold; organisations like BOMSA formed</p> <p>Anti Acid Act</p> <p>Trafficking Convention</p> <p>Gender sensitive PRSP. Women's groups have input into process</p> <p>Gender budgeting initiatives begun</p>
2006-2008	Care taker government	<p>Care taker government (CTG) takes over backed by the military because of instability created by both political parties</p> <p>Corruption and abuse of power investigated by the CTG</p> <p>Food price hike and fuel crisis</p> <p>Donor dependency falls</p> <p>Statement of Intent signed by Government and various donors before Accra conference.</p>	<p>National women's development policy reintroduced which leads to controversy and resistance from the conservative quarters</p> <p>Electoral reforms and women organisations proposals for representation being considered under reform of the Public Representation Ordinance (which later gets watered down under next government).</p>
2008- present	AL	<p>AL wins majority</p> <p>War crimes tribunal formed</p> <p>Bangladesh Development Forum, February 2010 with civil society participation</p> <p>Government and 19 donors sign Joint Cooperation Strategy for aid coordination, alignment and harmonisation, June 2010</p>	<p>More women nominated by AL for direct elections and more are successfully elected.</p> <p>Four women cabinet ministers appointed</p> <p>Upazila Vice Chair posts reserved for women and UP elections in 2009</p> <p>Domestic Violence legislation being drafted in collaboration with Government and human rights/ women rights groups</p> <p>Seats for women in the parliament are 45, no discussion on direct election. PM verbal commitment to consider direct elections.</p>

Source: Authors

Annexure 3

Workshops with Organisations and Validation Workshop

Organisations	Date
Doorbar Network	5 September 2009
BNWLA	16 September 2009
BOMSA	5 October 2009
Karmojibi Nari	26 October 2009
Banchte Shekha	20 January 2010
Validation workshop with all these organisations	30 August 2010
Validation workshop with donors	31 August 2010

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Annexure 4

List of Donor Interviews

Designation	Organisation	Date
Executive Director	MJF	1 February 2010
Director (Rights)	MJF	1 February 2010
Head of PSU	DANIDA	2 February 2010
Senior Development Advisor	CIDA	2 February 2010
Deputy Head of Mission, and Senior Advisor (Development affairs)	Norwegian Embassy	2 February 2010
Senior Country Specialist and Senior Social Development Officer (Gender)	ADB	3 February 2010
Deputy Country head	The Asia Foundation	3 February 2010
Programme Manager	OXFAM, GB	4 February 2010
National Programme Officer and Team Leader	IOM	1 February 2010

Annexure 5

Doorbar Network's Internal Crisis

The current financial crisis is a result of how Doorbar Network was registered with the NGO Bureau and other directorates. It was registered under individual members' names (those in the central committee). Some members allege this was motivated by greed. Others say the government rules do not allow for an organisation to be registered whose member organisations are scattered all over the country and require specific addresses of those residing in Dhaka for registration under the Dhaka office. Another aspect of the crisis is that the central committee formed in July 2007 felt that their term was not over. The convenor and the co-convenor did not recognise the new central committee formed in July 2009. There was also a divergence of opinion between the last Naripokkho convenor and the organisation about the rotation of leadership and the terms of the registration of the Doorbar Network. These various factors contributed to the crisis. A lawsuit was filed but withdrawn only towards the end of 2010. It was clear that the activities of the central committee and its office bearers were not closely monitored and information flow between members and the committee was flawed.

