

**Sulla Project
Annual Activity Report
1979**

**Bangladesh Rural
Advancement Committee
Dacca**

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Introduction:

With the end of 1979, the Sulla Project of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee has completed 8 years of operation in rural development. Starting as a relief and rehabilitation effort it has matured into an integrated development programme aimed at developing human and institutional capacities for improving the quality of life of the disadvantaged rural poor.

Phase I from February 1972 to October 1972 was concerned with rehabilitating the returning refugees of the war of liberation. 10,200 houses were constructed and 3,900 houses were repaired. An attempt was also made to rehabilitate the refugees in their respective occupations. Fishermen Cooperatives were supplied 4,500 lbs. of nylon twines and 169 fishing boats. Seeds and fertilizers were supplied to the farmers. To provide medical care, 4 rural clinics were established and a child feeding programme was carried out to improve the nutritional condition of the children.

Resettlement provided immediate relief to the war refugees but did little to change their condition of lives. They remained as ever, victims of injustice, exploitation, poverty and disease. This prompted BAC to redirect energies to a more development-oriented programme. Thus Phase II, covering the period from November 1972 to December 1975 was a period of integrated rural development activities consisting of a number of sectoral programmes: agriculture, fisheries, functional education, community centre development, health care and family planning, and vocational and other training.

Phase III activities, which were planned to last three years upto the end of 1978, were divided into four categories (i) Capacity Building and Institutional Development; (ii) Health Care, Preventive Medicine and Family Planning Services; (iii) Economic Support Programme for Disadvantage Exploited Groups; (iv) Agriculture including Animal Husbandry. Thus, a shift was made from sectoral programme approach to a more people-oriented approach.

A meeting of senior ERAC workers was held in late 1977 to review the achievements, failures, approach direction of ERAC's activities. As a result of the deliberations two far-reaching policy emphasis emerged, namely the decision to work only with the landless and near landless (who sell their labour for survival) and to work not with individuals but with homogenous groups of the above criteria. Consequently, with the shift in emphasis from community development to group development, efforts were mostly directed towards identifying, organising and supporting groups of homogenous disadvantaged people in 1978.

1979 was devoted to consolidate the efforts of group organisation by engaging in group action.

This 4th Annual Report on Phase III records the progress made in 1979.

1. Capacity Building and Institutional Development

ERAC's strategy being to develop local level initiative and institutions of the disadvantaged rural people to take both economic and social action to ensure their survival, whole of 1978 was devoted to identifying organising and supporting such disadvantaged groups. In 1979 efforts were

made to strengthen the power of these groups by covering all the disadvantaged people of each project village. Thus, work in confederating groups, initially at village level and later at thana level is going on. On the level of awareness attained by groups and their ability to provide leadership, the groups were divided into three different categories. 39 male and 41 female groups covering 1079 and 1122 members qualified to be in the first group or the 'core' group. Members of these core groups took upon themselves the responsibility to increase their strength by creating new groups. A total of 64 (31 male and 33 female) groups were created during the last year.

Various forums such as group meeting, group workshop (within village), camp workshop (covering all villages under camp), project level workshop, interproject level workshop etc, were conducted. To raise awareness and identify problems some 1698 group meetings with 31,846 participants were conducted. A total of 8(5 male and 3 female) project level workshops were conducted where 175 (143 male and 32 female) members participated to share ideas, build up confidence, locate issues pertinent to their lives, inspire and activate with a view to create cadre and link up groups for greater solidarity. These participants were considered advanced elements because of their ability to perceive and comprehend problems and their confidence to plan and take action. The objective of camp workshop is basically creating linkages between groups of different villages under the same camp. 36 such workshops were held with 1256 participants. Similarly, 44 group workshops were conducted where a total of 1368 members attended. National level workshops were held at BRAC's Training

and Resource Centre (TARC), Savar, Jacca, to raise the confidence of the group members, to increase solidarity and to discuss national problems. 23 male and 13 female members from different groups attended the 3 workshop

In addition to such group meetings functional education courses were conducted with the group members. Over the years, BRAC has developed its own approach and materials for adult functional education which provides a forum for 15 to 25 adults to meet and discuss the problems and issues pertinent to their lives and the need to unite, organize and cooperate. Total enrolment of learners to functional education course was 681 (379 male and 302 female) in 25 male and 23 female centres, of whom 94 have graduated. Out of these 48 centres, 26 were run by Shebok/Shebikas (volunteer facilitators, male and female) and the rest by BRAC staff. 14 new Shebok/Shebikas were trained adding to last year's number of 252. In comparison to 1978, fewer centres were opened in 1979. In the past more attention had been given to numbers but last year only interested and self-motivated learners were enrolled and staff members were encouraged to conduct courses.

In 1979, a large number of the groups were involved in action - both economic and social to establish their legitimate demands. Some examples are given below to illustrate the nature of these actions.

- a) The disadvantaged members of some villages were not included in the voters list on the instigation of some influential villagers. They succeeded in getting their names enlisted by pursuing the matter upto the sub-divisional officers' level.

- b) Female group members of a village 'gheraced' (surrounded) the money-lender of their village and compelled him to give loans at a reasonable rate of interest.
- c) Most of the male group members have succeeded in increasing their labour wages to a certain extent by bargaining with land owners and withholding labour at the most critical time of cultivation.
- d) A female group is pursuing the local Chairman to arrange homestead land for them as their homesteads have been washed away by the river. They have even made a representation to the Deputy Commissioner.
- e) All members of a female group 'gheraced' (surrounded) the local U.P. Chairman with demands of rationing facility, enrolment in Food-for-work programmes, sanction of tube-well, and agricultural loans.
- f) All groups have reached a stage where they try to mitigate their internal conflicts amongst themselves without seeking redress from the elite dominated shaleesh (traditional local level conflict resolution body).

2. Health Care and Preventive Services:

The main objective of the BAC health programme is to create awareness regarding basic health problems and help the people to find ways and means to solve these problems themselves. This necessitates a self-sustained programme which the disadvantaged can manage themselves. With this end in view, group members are trained to provide health services to their group. A Health Committee is created from amongst them to look after the management, group members are required to raise funds for curative services provided by the Jhaistha Shobok/Shobika (Health Worker).

43 male and 55 female members from different groups received extensive training in 5 most common ailments, of whom 32 male and 43 female members qualified. To improve the quality of the Shebok, 46 refresher courses were conducted and close supervision was provided by our skilled staff members.

31 groups raised funds covering 3713 members under their health schemes managed by 31 Health committees. 1147 patients were treated by the Sheboks throughout the year.

Emphasis was not lacking in preventive care. A total of 5551 persons attended 380 health education meetings on different health aspects. BCG injections were given to 182 children while a total of 137 received TABC. This year a programme for Vitamin - A distribution to children was taken and a total of 3189 tablets were distributed.

To ensure better maternity care 60 dais (traditional birth attendants) were trained in addition to last years number of 53. Of them, a total of 99 have attended refresher courses.

TB programme was also taken up from mid'79. Sputum tests were conducted for 61 patients, of whom, only 16 were found to be positive cases and of potential danger to their neighbours. They are being treated free of charge.

Family Planning : In family planning, maximum emphasis is given to cover fertile group members. Sheboks (local level health workers) were trained in most popular devices. In addition to this, BRAC workers are engaged in motivating as well as directly supervising those clients who take injections.

At the end of the year, a total of 1137 acceptors are still enrolled amounting to nearly 20% of fertile registered couples. Mention may be made here that BRAC provides direct family planning services only to its group members. Non-group members seeking service are put in contact with government family planning workers by BRAC staff.

In spite of sufficient effort and accompanying care the family planning programme has not progressed beyond a certain level of acceptance. Drop out rate is higher than new acceptors because of the fact of severe complications, particularly in the case of pills. It is found that not only do clients with complications drop out but their experience creates an adverse effect on potential acceptors.

3. Economic Support

Groups emerging from BRAC's conscientisation process organise themselves collectively for both economic and social action. On the economic side, BRAC's support programme consists of credit financing, training and providing logistical support to these groups in mostly agricultural and some non-agricultural activities. The objective of this programme is to ensure short-term employment to create self-generating common funds, to raise consciousness through collective action and increase ability in planning, management, accounting, leadership etc. of the group members. In 1979 loans were provided for agricultural as well as non-agricultural schemes such as paddy husking, fishing, dry fish processing, small business etc. In agriculture, groups cultivated land collectively by leasing khas land from government or private land from land owners. In fishing, they took sub-lease from non-fishermen who lease it from government.

A total of Tk.1,03,296.00 was given to 23 groups (9 male and 14 female) for 23 projects. All the groups were able to repay the loans except an amount of Tk.1,798.00 which remains outstanding. Out of the profits made by the groups, a certain percentage is being kept in savings amounting to Tk.49,517.00.

Groups engaged in these economic activities were motivated to create a common 'risk covering' fund out of their profits which amounted to Tk.41,358.00. Since members have started to take group action to establish their legitimate demands, they are often made victims of unwarranted harassment and suffering. To help them and their families during these times the group members have created a common 'risk covering' fund. Tk.41,358.00 was put aside from their profits for this purpose. It was also decided that this risk covering fund created by each group will be made available to other groups in case of need.

Thus, the objective of the economic programme is not merely to increase individual income but to create common fund to support group activities and actions.

4. Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Special attention was given to see that those farmers who received training in 1978 were utilising their skills and extending their services properly. In 1979, a new batch of 18 farmers were given training followed by refresher courses. Two paramedics received extensive training in animal husbandry from Dacca Dairy Farm and have so far treated 1209 bullocks.

15 maunds of HYV seeds were distributed to 9 farmers. An Agricultural demonstration plot of approximately 3 acres was also taken up under the Aatgaon Camp.

88 female group members were trained in duck rearing. 273 ducklings were distributed to 8 female groups. 2,500 eggs were sold for hatching to individuals. 458 ducks were vaccinated.

5. Oral Therapy Programme

BRAC has developed an effective, safe, cheap, simple, acceptable and readily available method for the treatment of diarrhea after 6 months of field trial in Sullia. The requirement of the therapy are Lobon (salt), gur (molasses) and water called Lobon-Gur mixture. A concise educational message and simple organisational framework are the essential elements of this programme.

An experimental operation of the programme was started from June, 1979, in Sullia, Ajmiriganj and Banyachang Thanas of Sylhet District. 25 female workers were recruited and trained as Oral Replacement Workers (ORW) whose job was to visit each and every household in those thanas to teach the mothers to make the lobon-gur mixture and to teach the ten essential points for the treatment of diarrhea.

Till end of 1979, whole of Sullia and Ajmiriganj thanas and 7 Unions of Baniachong thana have been covered covering 26,835 mothers. The programme closely monitored by a batch of monitors and supervised by BRAC staff.

Organisation and Personnel

As groups are becoming more mature and self-reliant and are increasingly taking on the role of organising other disadvantaged people, the need for BRAC staff is gradually declining. As a result, three camps (administrative units) were withdrawn, reducing the workers strength from 89 at the beginning of the year to 48. It is further expected that the number of staff will be substantially reduced in the next year.

Staff training was given more emphasis in 1979, and workers received training on various aspects. 25 Oral

Replacement workers were recruited and trained last year. BRAC workers Convention, the first of its kind, was held in July 1979, where 16 workers from Julla project participated. Weekly meetings were held in each camp regularly. These meetings provide a learning session as well as help staff to evaluate their work during the week and decide on next week's work schedule. Project meetings were held every month where large of workers from all camps reviewed their activities and discussed future actions with the Executive Director.

Conclusion

1979 was an exciting time for Julla. Groups that were mobilised and organised in 1978, went into both social and economic action. All actions were taken with a view to increasing the power of the disadvantaged people and reduce their dependence on systems which have been exploiting them traditionally. These actions have enabled the groups to create certain support structures for themselves as well as given them the power to bargain for their legitimate demands.

a) The power of the moneylenders has been minimised as the landless are now providing consumption loans to their fellow group members from their joint savings. Credit related to productive pursuits are still being given by BRAC.

b) The groups have strengthened their ability to sustain themselves in the face of conflicts by creating a risk covering fund from savings generated from joint economic activities.

c) The groups are partially supporting a health delivery system which is also operated and managed by them.

d) Group members are now being included in the shaalish. This social recognition is a reflection of their power.

It is expected that this process of linking up the powerless disadvantaged in support of each other will lead to the creation of viable village level institutions which will ultimately lead to thana level associations in 1980 - 81. This creation of a strong people's organisation will help to counter exploitative systems and reduce the power of the exploiters .

HULLA PROJECT (PHASE III)
Receipts & Payments Statement,
From 1st January, 1978 to 31st December 1979.

RECEIPTS:

Fund from phase - II		2,01,915
Donation received from-		
CIDA - CANADA	15,36,100	
OZFA - OXFORD	19,87,900	
Bread for the World	17,50,250	
Community Aid Abroad-Australia	4,30,149	
	<hr/>	57,18,999
		TN. 59,20,914
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PAYMENTS:

CAPACITY BUILDING & INSTITUTIONAL DEV.

Functional Education	2,02,131	
Training A/C.	1,37,768	
Village Workshop	13,733	
Staff Salary	4,41,852	
Travelling & Transportation	70,317	
	<hr/>	8,74,801

HEALTH & FAMILY PLANNING:

Training & refresher courses	56,085	
Medicine & Curative service	1,89,921	
Store house (construction)	1,02,379	
Other Supplies	22,538	
Salaries & Expenses	7,53,526	
Travelling & Transportation	1,27,307	
Public Health (Tube well)	6,753	
	<hr/>	12,58,505

Balance carried over 21,33,306

Balance B/F			21,33,306
<u>DISADVANTAGED GROUP:</u>			
Grant for land levelling & Dev.	82,954		
Loan to land-less for Agriculture:-			
Total amount disbursed	19,11,715		
Less amount realised	15,75,340		
	<u>3,36,375</u>		
Less interest received	50,439	2,85,936	
Women group grants		2,865	
Staff Salaries		4,42,804	
Travelling & Transport		58,851	8,73,410
<u>AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME:</u>			
Seeds & Multiplication	29,828		
Veterinary Service	8,222		
Agriculture equipment	1,754		
Travelling & Transportation	59,717		
Staff Salaries	3,02,602		4,02,123
<u>ADMINISTRATION:</u>			
Field Administration	8,05,263		
Field Establishment	3,99,917		
Head Office Support	5,44,474		
Organisational requirements	35,696		
Stock & Prepayment	1,05,095		18,90,445
Balance in hand			6,21,530
		Tk.	<u>59,20,914</u>

Ashram: Landless groups struggle for higher wages

Last December (1979) the Ashram Landless Association gave a call for action to the entire landless labourers of that area. The action was for increasing wages. The season for transplanting boro was just beginning. The wage was Tk.20/- for one keyar (1/3 acre). This was hardly enough for survival and resentment was gradually building over this issue. Some of the landless started discussing it amongst themselves. They were Ishaqullah, Asgharullah, Nazimuddin and others - all members of the Ashram Landless Association. Finally, they discussed it with the other members in their weekly meeting and all of them jointly agreed to take action that season. They also decided to establish contact with all the groups of the adjoining areas. A recent incident had increased their confidence. During a food-for-work program the group members had confronted the local magistrate with their legitimate demands and succeeded. This gave them courage and confidence to think of taking more action in the future.

Once the decision was taken, group members Jafar Ali, Ishaqullah, Azbarullah, Nazimuddin, Ataraj Mia, Raslemuddin and others quickly established contact with all the other landless groups of the adjoining villages and informed them of their decision. Earlier, all these groups had been organised by the Ashram landless group. The groups started to think seriously about the decision and agreed to attend an emergency meeting to be held at Atarullahs house.

The meeting was duly held. An unanimous decision was taken to raise their wages from Tk.20 to Tk.30. If the landlords did not agree to this, they would withhold labour. They also discussed the successive steps they would take to create pressure on the landlords to accept their demand. They planned to start working for Tk.20, the strategy being to withhold

labour at the crucial stage of cultivation. Meanwhile, they would start negotiating with the landlords. 142 members from all the groups unanimously decided on this course of action. There was some opposition from members who did not work as day labourers.

According to the plan, the landless labourers started negotiating for a higher wage with the landlords but the landlords refused to concede. So the labourers struck work on the date fixed previously. The landlords were placed in great difficulty. On the one hand, their lands were left uncultivated and on the other, the seedlings were withering. Finding no solution, the landlords started visiting the labourers individually in their homes trying to persuade them to return to work. But the labourers remained united and unshaken in their resolve. The landlords started contacting labourers in the adjoining area. But they were all group members and all the groups of the area had taken the joint decision to strike work. So none came. When there was no option left, one of the landlords, decided to pay Tk.25/-. The labourers started to work in his field. The fields of the other mohajans were left uncultivated. Yet they did not relent. The labourers raised their demand to Tk.30. At last, when the prospect of cultivating their fields that year was almost gone, they started negotiating and settled at Tk.28.

Meanwhile, almost half the lands were becoming unsuitable for cultivation. The landlords started competing with each other in trying to save their lands. Their main concern was to get their lands prepared as quickly as possible. Around the same time some food-for-work projects were starting. The labourers started joining these. There was a desperate need for labour. The labourers took this opportunity to create more pressure on the landlords and ultimately succeeded in raising the wage to Tk.30.

Why did the group succeed?

Because -

1. All the landless of the area had united together for a definite and real problem.
2. Appropriate actions were taken at the right time.
3. Good leadership
4. Decisions were taken on consensus of opinion.
5. No body betrayed the group by giving away information.

What did BRAC learn?

1. That people can be organised very quickly around genuine problems related directly to their lives.
2. Right action at the right time under right leadership is crucial for success.
3. The need for uniting the poor and disadvantaged.
4. The need for a greater organisation
5. Need for participatory decision making.