

# **Evaluations and Studies of RDRS Programme:**

## **A Compilation of Conclusions and Recommendations**

Volume V

**January 2003**

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## Preface

RDRS Bangladesh contemplates, lays out plans of actions and implements diversified project/programmes for improving the living condition of the disadvantaged people in the community in its working area in northwest Bangladesh. In order to assess performances and impacts of the projects/programmes, RDRS invites independent external consultants to conduct studies, reviews, and evaluations from time to time. These exercises help identify strengths, weaknesses and emerging challenges in fulfilling the project targets.

The key findings, important corrective suggestions and major recommendations are compiled in a summarized form in this volume the fifth of its kind.

This volume consists of:

1. Findings & Recommendations by national consultants,
2. OD process and MCU of RDRS by international consultants and
3. Feedback reports from external interns and students

We trust that RDRS staff, researchers, academics and other development agents will find our efforts helpful.

Any constructive suggestions and recommendations will be highly appreciated for guiding our future endeavours.

Sufia Nurani  
Research Coordinator

# Index

Sl. No.	Contents	Page Number
<b><i>Part - 1 Findings &amp; Recommendations by local consultants</i></b>		
1.	IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME	1
2.	Learning About Capacity Development Through Evaluation:	5
3.	DOCUMENTATION OF ROADSIDE TREE PLANTATION PROGRAMME(RTPP) OF RDRS/ICCO	8
4.	Enterprises Developed by RDRS Bangladesh in its East Zone.	16
5.	PROFILE OF BILATERAL PROJECTS IN RDRS Bangladesh. (1996-2001)	19
6.	Effective Partnership of Stakeholders for Poverty Alleviation: Policy Research on Strengthening Seed Up-take at Grassroots Level	23
7.	Capacity development training (Pre-service Training) <i>for the Women</i>	32
8.	Reference Manual for Torben V. Petersen Library North Bengal Institute (NBI)	36
9.	Audit Report on Monitoring of RDRS Development Programme	38
10.	Role of SODEOs in strengthening Union Federations	42
11.	FEDERATION ELECTION 2002	48
<b><i>Part - 2 OD process and MCU of RDRS by foreign consultants</i></b>		
12.	The Organizational Development Process of RDRS	54
13.	RDRS Technical Assistance : Visit Report	67
<b><i>Part - 3 Feedback reports from external interns and students</i></b>		
14.	Communication for Change	78
15.	Report of Internship with RDRS Bangladesh	82
16.	Promoting Community Initiatives through People's organization	86
17.	Internship Report	89
18.	Partnership Relation in RDRS Bangladesh	93

# **Findings & Recommendations by national consultants**

# IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

by Naved Ahmed Chowdhury  
March 2002

## Background

In Bangladesh, growing interest in adolescents and their problems has triggered a significant increase in programs for adolescents over the last decade both at the government and the non-governmental sector. A trend is emerging where it is being increasingly recognised that individuals as well as the society has not been able to adequately provide for the specialised needs of adolescents. In this process, the needs of adolescent girl have emerged as a priority concern

RDRS has, as part of its development interventions, initiated various projects in order to address specific issues which affect the lives of adolescents, e.g. early marriage, polygamy, divorce, reproductive health, personal health and hygiene, opportunities for employment, etc. Girls also receive information on family laws, marriage registration and personal health care.

The present study explores the impact of several projects undertaken by RDRS in the past years to improve the socio economic situation of adolescents in various thanas of Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon districts.

## Observation

1. None of the girls who received training agreed to marry at a young age before completing studies. The girls, interviewed, were very aware of their rights and they knew about the necessity of registering marriages. Nonetheless Child marriage has only seen a marginal reduction and certainly not eradicated as a practice in the target areas.
2. The program has had very little impact on the practice of dowry. While some members arranged their daughters' marriage without dowry, almost all agreed that it was impossible without some form of dowry. The girls said that the best way to stop dowry and strengthen status of women in the family and the society is to be economically independent so they can contribute to the family income. Providing the girls with knowledge and skills on some income

generating activities (tailoring, poultry) are therefore considered being essential.

3. The girls from both groups, who received training and those who did not, said that the information on personal hygiene issues, especially regarding menstruation was very useful for them.
4. The girls were aware that apart from the health consequences, early childbearing has an adverse effect on a young mother's socio economic status. Participating and non-participating adolescent girls of both groups were clear that they would like fewer children, preferably not more than two. But the girls who attended the training were far more forthcoming and candid in their answer.
5. Some of the Federation members (mainly women) have mediated successfully in stopping and in some cases deferring early marriages of girls of their locality. The role of Federation for social mobilisation, however, can be improved further.
6. The girls, who received training in adolescent issues, have become more vocal about their rights, influencing their parents not to take dowry and demanding opportunity to study further.
7. Social practices like early marriage, polygamy, dowry are deeply ingrained in traditional practices, poverty and power relation between men and women. Therefore addressing these issues through social empowerment of women and girls is not enough. This needs to be mitigated by equipping them with economic empowerment so they are able to contribute to the family income thus being less vulnerable to the whim and expectations of their husbands or fathers.
8. Adolescent friendly health services are essential for providing the right services to the adolescents and to make them interested to use these services. Such services need to be accessible to all, especially in terms of location and timing, be affordable, confidential and delivered with care and trust.

## **Recommendations**

- Although Women's Right Officers (WRO) are genuinely concerned about the problems of the adolescents and try to impart knowledge and information

with care and affection some basic training on adolescent psychology and counselling could be useful.

- The Para Legal Volunteers(PLVs) should make the Bengali version of the Universal declaration of human rights available for common distribution.
- The issue of HIV/AIDS needs to be addressed with more importance in the training manual. User-friendly training materials, containing practical information on programme strategies should be developed to help programmes co-ordinators.
- The doctors of health program of RDRS who visit the satellite clinics can provide services to the adolescents of the locality on different days of the week, when only the adolescent patients will be treated. This will not entail huge costs but rather make use effective and sustainable use of the existing facilities.
- There is a clear and urgent need for more focus on men and boys as target audience, emphasising adolescent's males' responsibilities at home and society at large. The issues for male adolescents should be addressed in the future. In this context, intervention for adolescents must have particular focus on adolescent's male in order to change their attitudes. A guide can be developed through which male attitudinal changes will be separately monitored both by the staff and the community.
- There is need for transferring clear, candid and understandable messages about adolescent roles and how these can be addressed through cost-effective approach. Young girls and boys and their parents can be assisted and motivated to understand that longer education for girls leads to having less children at later age and helps in providing less dowry because of investments in terms of education and income generating capacity of women. All these, obviously, contributes to higher socio economic status of women.
- Participatory monitoring and follow up can help to identify indicators to monitor achievement, application and practice. Indicators for measuring outputs, particularly changes in numbers of marriage, incidence of dowry should be collected. Both qualitative and quantitative data need to be gathered to measure the impact of the projects. Adolescent themselves should be involved in designing, planning and implementing programmes for them.

- Information on various issues concerning adolescents can be disseminated through village theatre and other cultural programs. RDRS already has a cultural team, which disseminates information on health, and hygiene and therefore the expertise of this group can be used to present information to the adolescents.
- Interaction with other government and non-government organisations needs to be more collaborative. In this connection if any other organisation has module prepared for adolescent male these could be collected, modified and customised by RDRS to be used in its working area.
- Federation leaders need to be given some training on issues related to adolescents, not only woman but also men members of the federation should be involved.
- PLVs, SODEOs, and WROs should be provided with continues training on adolescent issues and the module used in the past should be updated through active involvement of the WROs and PLVs. PLVs are experienced in working as facilitators on legal issues. Involvement of PLVs, who are members of the local community, will, therefore, further enhance community participation and ownership.
- More dialogue with local elite, teachers and guardians can be arranged by RDRS on gender, legal and human rights issues, which will have, direct consequence on socio economic development of adolescents.
- As the project is significantly contributing to developing awareness among adolescents concerning various issues which effects their lives, the activities or at least some of them i.e. training and health services, should be continued, if necessary from core funds of RDRS. If needed, some of the activities can be assimilated into other on-going projects.

# Learning About Capacity Development Through Evaluation:

Perspectives and observations from a collaborative network of national and international organizations and donor agencies

by ISNAR  
September 2001

The International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) is based in the Philippines and practices a people-centered and sustainable approach to rural development. In January 2000, ISNAR began an ambitious project entitled evaluating Capacity Development in Research and Development Organisations: Towards more Effective capacity Development Efforts. The project seeks to contribute to the effectiveness of capacity development through the use of evaluations.

This study explored the process of capacity building in Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) through the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction's (IIRR) international training courses. RDRS fieldwork is conducted in northwest Bangladesh where, based on principles of democracy, gender equality and environmentally sustainable rural development. RDRS works to empower the rural poor politically, socially and economically. It does this through a various of program which focus on building people's organisation, social mobilization, creating equal opportunities for women, encouraging environmental sensitive and disaster preparedness, improving agriculture and community health and providing micro-finance.

This case addresses the capacity building efforts of RDRS between 1996 and 2000 and examines the role played by IIRR's Education and Training program. **Learning About Capacity Development Through Evaluation** both organizations to re-assess their respective approaches to capacity development and to make better-informed decisions about future initiatives and collaboration. It was hoped that this study might change and enrich the relationship between RDRS and IIRR a relationship between purchaser and service provider.

Five questions were directed at the organization:

1. Based on a detailed retrospective reflection, what are its intentions, assumptions, and the degree of fit between their perspectives: ,
2. What processes have been employed in their capacity building efforts?

3. How might the organization improve the effectiveness of its capacity development strategy and what would it require to develop complementary strategy to enhance future collaboration: ,
4. What lessons have been learned about how best to evaluate organizational capacity development?
5. How has participation in this evaluation exercise contributed to the capacity of each organization?

### **Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation**

Each organization conducted a self-evaluation to determine and assess the effectiveness of the theory of action underpinning its capacity development and the administrative and cognitive processes employed. Information was gathered from RDRS managers who had received training from **IIRR**. Data were collected by means of document reviews, a survey, key informant interviews, vignettes prepared by trainees, small group workshops, and participant reflection. The IDRC-Universalia framework for organizational analysis was used to classify the capacities RDRS was developing over the study period. This framework, overlaid by well-defined behavioral categories associated with the training of individuals, was also used to analyze the efforts of IIRR's Education and Training Program. Analytical categories and the resulting interpretations and conclusions of the data sets were tested with the appropriate stakeholder group to establish credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### **Results and conclusions**

As a result of its capacity development efforts, RDRS has made a highly successful transition from being a branch of an international charity to being a strong, self-administered national NGO, respected for a wide range of relevant work with the rural poor in northern Bangladesh.

Despite the basic purchaser-training provider relationship that existed between RDRS and IIRR between 1996 and 2000, a high degree of fit was found between the capacities required and the capacities delivered. This was due to similarities in the underlying philosophies and experiences of the two organizations. The administrative processes they had adopted to facilitate the development of capacity were also found to be complementary, despite the fact that there was no routine undertaking of gap analysis in RDRS or identification of the job-related skills delivered by the training courses in **IIRR**.

Both organizations acknowledged that taking action to improve performance in areas would be to their separate and mutual advantage. Evaluation of capacity

development requires key personnel to have prior conceptual, substantive, technical and management knowledge and expertise if the results are to be trusted and acted upon by stakeholders. This study provided a learning opportunity for both organizations and they now have a better understanding of the knowledge and skills required for an evaluation of this kind.

Participation in this study has provided RDRS with the confidence to engage in human resource-based strategic planning (Grant, 1995). Both organizations are now more capable of planning and resolving complex organizational capacity development issues, and appreciate the value of undertaking future evaluations. They have a better understanding of how to manage the relationship between the organization planning its own capacity development and the organization delivering training and support to help build this capacity.

# **DOCUMENTATION OF ROADSIDE TREE PLANTATION PROGRAMME (RTPP) OF RDRS/ICCO**

**by Dr. Mohd. Shamsul Alam  
October 2001**

## **Background**

RDRS (Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service) has a long history of involvement in roadside tree plantation activities. During the first decades of RDRS's involvement, tree plantation was done more from the supply side, saplings which included fruit, timber and mulberry was planted on the roadside, in school compounds and public areas. The survival rate was satisfactory as evident from the existence of trees covering both sides of the roads in the areas where RDRS works. The important roads of the RDRS working area with tree plantation included the Rangpur-Kurigram Road, Lalmonirhat-Patgram Road, Pagalpir-Chilahati road, Rowmari-Rajibour Road and many other rural roads.

RDRS implemented the RTPP from May 1995 till April 2000. The Government of the Netherlands through the co-financing agency, Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO). The project covers 29 Upazilas/Thanas of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur Districts. The overall aim of RTPP project was to achieve sustainable improvements of the natural environment and economic life of the rural poor (especially women) in RDRS working areas through massive tree plantation.

## **RTPP target group**

The original target group of the programme was 2,000 poor rural households. The RTPP was to create work for 2,000 poor rural women for 2 years, employing them as care takers for the saplings planted. With the extension of the coverage, the number of caretakers has increased to 2500 and the person-years have increased from 4,000 to 5,000.

## **Purpose of the present documentation**

The purpose of the documentation was to gauge the overall impact of the project on the environment and income situation of rural poor. Furthermore, to develop the project document with description of the framework, the activities, resources, development relevance, sustainability and management of the implementation including logical framework.

## **Factors Favouring the Social Forestry Programme**

The factors, which are supporting and contributing to developing social forestry, are among others as follows:

- RDRS has been the pioneer in roadside plantations in Bangladesh.
- Caretaker's concept was introduced by RDRS, which has later on adopted as policy, by the WFP.
- RDRS has an integrated approach to develop the areas.
- It has the flexibility to respond the local needs.
- RDRS follows a process orientation and has participatory approach.
- Poor groups are focused.
- Presence of people's organization likes Primary Groups, Federation in the project area.
- The existence of credit mechanism by RDRS and the presence of union organizers as well as volunteers.
- The caretakers/primary group members/Federation people have acquired good knowledge and skills in tree planting.
- RDRS has different age structured plantations. Already it has harvested a few strips of the roadside plantations.
- Visible impacts of roadside planting are reflected in the occurrence of increased number of younger trees planted afterwards in the adjacent homesteads.
- Tree planting is a popular practice now considered by the people.
- The existence of the environmental sector services & hard working operational field personnel.

## **Conclusions**

### **Key findings and implications**

#### **Achievements**

1. The RTPP has created social awareness regarding tree plantation in the Project area. This has been reflected in the homestead tree cover. The overall tree cover has substantially increased both in the roadside and in the homestead in the area over the last two decades. One of the most important spin-off benefits of the project is that a large number of local nurseries have developed due to the large demand of d saplings.
2. The most other important positive aspect is that 2359 women caretaker's were directly benefited from caretaking job. A large number of them have built their own houses, and/or bought cow/goats or started small business.
3. The innovative RTPP has also been successful to prove that with a social commitment and sincerity, deprived section of the society can be united under a common platform (such as, Federation) to reach to a common goal,

economic emancipation of the poor. Besides, through RTPP RDRS has also successfully brought Federation, UP and Upazilla parishad including UNO, Forest officer, LGED staff to a common cause, sustainable development of the rural area.

4. The un-priced ecological, environmental, and aesthetic values of RTPP are yet to be fully emerged. But, there appears to be some indications that the RTPP has added greenness to the local landscape and during field visit flock of birds taking shelter on the roadside trees was a common sight.

However, the field evidence suggests that there are some shortcomings in the procedural and tree management aspects of RTPP which need to be mended.

**Some of the important findings include:**

1. The overall observations indicate that irrespective of road sites the number of quality trees are relatively few. The actual survival rates as observed in the surveyed road sites are below than that of the recorded rate as observed in the earlier assessment (Appendix-8). Actual mortality rate is quite high, perhaps due to the time gap (about one year) of the assessment. The previous assessment was done at the time of caretakers handing over the trees to the federation.
2. Regarding caretaking neither Federation nor RDRS staff monitors the roadsides on a regular basis. Due to these lapses, the local community members at large take the advantage of illegal thinning and pruning, which in most cases are found to be damaging for the normal growth of the trees. Particularly, at the post-caretaker's hand over phase, the local Federation seems to be indifferent to take up the responsibility of care taking the planted saplings. The Federation Chairman and their general members have not yet been able to develop a workable mechanism through which at least minimum care taking is possible. The Federation has failed to anticipate the possible damaging effect of not having any body designated to take care of the trees. It was reported that uprooting of trees, breaking main stem and cutting branches are common form of problems occurred. The Federation with the active participation of UP members and RDRS local representative could not create any effective awareness against these evil doings. The community at large is still missing in the whole process (at least as a sense of participation) of tree plantation, protection and its associated benefit achievement.
3. Most of the good and moderate quality trees are not timely pruned. As a result, the base log has branched out, thus degraded the main log, and

resulted in poor economic return. Besides, in some cases over pruning have caused serious damage to the growth of trees. In some cases, despite caretaker's sincere effort, some trees were pruned illegally and intentionally damaged by the roadside landowners and by the cattle grazers. Caretakers are helpless, neither Federation chairman, nor UP Chairman come forward in time to assist in this regard.

4. Plantation spacing of the short cycle trees appears to be very close in some sites as a result most of the plants are undernourished and of poor growth. Besides, as the Ghora Neem plants have light crown cover and branches are illegally harvested, there is very little litter fall at the ground. Thus, long term tree, Kahtal do not get any nutrients from its neighboring plant. Despite caretaker's sincerity the local people illegally cuts the branches of Kathal trees for fodder on a regular basis, risking the tree's very survival.
5. Practically, no intercropping activity was observed along the road side due to narrow road side, and the roads are being public property, security are not guaranteed. Therefore, intercropping is not practised.
6. There appears to be lack of confidence among the caretakers regarding future of their benefit sharing. Several reasons are cited for such apprehension which include: benefit sharing documents have not reached to them yet in most cases; caretakers on their own can not stop the illegal cutting and theft of the tree branches and the mature trees; and lack of contact with federation.
7. There exis a conflict with road ownership between Zila parishad and Union Parishad, and Union Parishad with LGED; as a result consensus on benefit sharing rate has been complicated. When plantation was done, the concerned road was under Zila parishad, whereas the benefit sharing agreement was signed with the UP. In some cases, same thing happened with LGED road. These issues were not given enough attention when plantation was done, but now the problems are real therefore, immediate mitigations are necessary.
8. The predominant species planted was Ghora Neem and unfortunately although it grows very well and rapidly, it is very much vulnerable to branch cutting to use as cattle fodder. In the absence of caretaking, those trees are mercilessly debranched. Another important aspect of this plantation site needs to be mentioned that due to predominantly monotype species (Ghora neem) and all planted in the same year, these trees would reach to harvestable stage at the same time. Thus, the whole road stretch would be

cleared off plant, which means there will be no tree cover on the road as it was before. Clearly, species selection for plantation was not followed.

9. The litter fall's of the roadsides trees add extra organic matter to the field trees, enhance crop yield. Besides, due to light shade, soil moisture is better preserved than other parts of the field, which is an advantage for some crops.
10. Thefts of mature trees are rampant, causing serious concern for both the Caretaker and Federation; so much so, there is a tendency to sell trees which are yet to be fully matured. In some cases, where Federation has received sale proceeds proper accounts are not maintained, high incidental expenses are reported for which records could not be furnished. This is indicative that Federation's activity regarding RTPP needs to be closely monitored, it should not be allowed to fall in a let lose situation.

### **Block Plantation**

11. In comparison to roadside plantation, block plantation appears to be relatively better in terms of planting arrangement. However, caretaking remains neglected. Close supervision by federation on timely pruning and monitoring of the caretaker's tree nursing activities and helping her in augmenting/enhancing her potential income using the vacant space has not been done.
12. In the conceptual phase, there was no provision for a set aside fund to follow-up activities until some return generate from branch sale proceeds which includes limited manuring, replacement of saplings.
13. There is no site specific guiding manual to the Federation based upon which site preparation, plantation, use of underlying vacant space with appropriate crops, manuring, pruning activities, live fencing and other associated activities may be done. These needs to be done by RDRS at the early stage, once agreement is signed among the parties involved.
14. There exist scope for extra-crops in the tree gap-particularly crops like Turmeric, Chili, Zinger and Potato. These were not practiced in the block. These intercropping practices would generate cash for the caretaker who is no longer in the pay roll. Therefore, caretaker will be benefited from the crop and the tree would be protected due to these crops and litter falls will stabilise the soil and when decompose it will increase productivity of soil thereby enhance tree growth and soil stability.

## Recommendations

1. A quarterly report of the tree survival list of the individual road sections should be done and sent to the Unit headquarters for reviewing and evaluation. This would enable the RDRS to understand the species wise number of trees available and to estimate the actual volume of harvestable timber; so that expected valuation may be estimated on a realistic sense. This should be done before the workshop is convened.
2. Regular Monitoring of the sites from Federation is essential and measures should be taken to motivate the caretakers by the Federation, RDRS and UP in order to ensure caretaking. In this regard, reviewing of caretaking and monitoring activities should be a mandatory agenda at the monthly SODE meeting.
3. When Federation Chairman supports a specific political party and some of his members support a different party then all activities of Federation suffers a collusion course. This has happened in one of the surveyed union Federation. The local RDRS has failed to anticipate the impact of the problem to the Federation and its associated effect on the welfare of the plantation program. Measures should be taken to avoid such situation.
4. Regarding the fate of replantation in the gap created due to short rotation trees in some road sections are an important issue to be considered by RDRS urgently. It appears that federation intends to stay in plantation activities but not willing to investment from the benefit received. On the other hand, the concerned UP office do not care much, once the benefit share is received. Now what RDRS can do? In my opinion, RDRS should raise this issue in the Thana level work shop and discuss with the concerned Stakeholders to keep the plantation process going with a more transparent and realistic guidelines emphasizing on tree management. One thing must be ensured that in future replantation (at least where Stakeholders received sale proceed) the Stakeholder participation must be contributory so that a sense of ownership develops among the stakeholders.
5. RDRS need an urgent effort in mitigation the loopholes in benefit sharing issues and standardising the selling processe. It should convene a meeting with TNO, UP chairman, LGED, Forestry people and Federation chairman to standardise the existing guidelines related to benefit sharing and associated complexities. These include:

- Procedural aspects of tree selling;
- Replantation responsibility in the gaps of short rotation trees;
- Involving landowner's in benefit sharing as part of greater community participation.

The last issue was echoed in the RDRS sponsored Lessons Learnt Seminar, where in UP Chairmans also observed that land owners inclusion in the roadside plantation programme through benefit sharing would help in caretaking and ensure better protection of young trees (RDRS 2002)

6. Raising flood shelter cum plantation on raised land at the char areas and/or flood vulnerable areas could be a option. Here, species selection must be carefully done, it could be several types and strategically site specific. For instance, at the outer ring kashbon, then bamboo, then murta and then the species, which grow quickly and can be used as fodder i.e. Ipil Ipil. Here seasonal bee keeping may be encouraged based on mustard & til crop. Besides, char houses should be encouraged to plant kul tree that will also enhance cash income as well as provide nutrients to the family. Besides, seasonal apiary will flourish. Here, again kul based processing plants should be established by RDRS.
7. In future RTPP, healthy saplings of mixed species should be planted. Experts from Forestry Department is of opinion that well selected healthy saplings may easily grow to a safe height in one year. In that case, two year care taking is good enough for the sapling. The participants also emphasised that there should be an attempt to work out the cost of plantation. Considering unabated theft of mature trees participants suggested forming a tree saving committee at local level.

## **Induction of new approach in RDRS Tree Plantation Policy**

1. Instead of roadside plantation, RDRS should give more emphasis on block plantation. From management and economic point of view, block plantation option would be more beneficial in a longer term. For this option, RDRS can buy several pieces of 5-10 or more acares of land in its command area and start agro-forestry. In this approach, several combinations of plantations may be done, depending upon the suitability of the local conditions. For instance, the possible combinations may include:

Block Plantation with a combination of Fruit bearing Plants and bee keeping Plants to be selected in such a way that it gives return quickly, at the same time it supports bee keeping/apiary. Possible fruit trees could be: Lichi, Kul,

Mango and Jackfruit. Plantation arrangement may be in such a way that fruit bearing flowering may be year round, Thus apiary will continue. Moreover, at ground level turmeric and zinger cultivation should be practiced. These should be supported by installing fruit based and other processing plants; so that agro-based manufactured products may be supplied to the market either through its own retail centres or through other organisational arrangement.

Plantation with short and long term trees (preferably Shegun, Telshur, Garjan, Mahogani, Chapalish and Jarul), and Plantation of Bamboo groves.

2. Homestead Plantation- Family centered plantation with emphasis on fruit and vegetables should be encouraged. Fruits plant like Papaya, Guava, Coconut, Bettle nut, Mango, Black berry, Jackfruit, Ata, Sharifa should be planted. These plants should also be used with creeper type hurbs, which gives fruits that are used as vegetables. Plants like Shajna should be encouraged to plant. RDRS may help its clients to select species (trees), their planting techniques and harvesting techniques. RDRS should also give its client a buyback guarantee. These products could be used in its processing plants.
3. RDRS should develop agro-forest product cold storage & processing related infra-structure, so that its federation can store their agriculture produce like banana, Papaya, Cauliflower, Tomato, Cucumber at a reasonable price and then sell when price is up. Processing Plants like, processing timber (seasoning) could be a very profitable venture, as there is a great market demand for seasoned log/wood panels. At present, only BFIDC is doing this job & they are unable to cope with the demand. The planted trees of RDRS could be used to start with.

Whatever RDRS does in plantation or agro-based plantation, target should be to add value to its products and ensure maximum benefit to its client and to the RDRS itself. The product should not go to the market unprocessed or in raw form. The future of RDRS lies in enterprizing attitude not in service orientation as it is now.

# Enterprises Developed by RDRS Bangladesh in its East Zone

## *(A situational analysis of ongoing enterprises)*

Bhabatosh Nath  
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December 2001

### **Background**

RDRS has been implementing socio-economic activities for the disadvantaged, particularly in the northwest region of Bangladesh – the most vulnerable area of the country. The agency's enterprise development activities operate under various social and economic development programmes. RDRS is committed to the project beneficiaries at grass-roots level, as well as it to meeting the conditions and criteria of its donors.

RDRS initiated some of the enterprises to demonstrate profitability and reliability, so that the beneficiaries could accept and replicate them according to their own capacity. RDRS took responsibility to transfer the requisite skill and technology to the potential entrepreneurs. Its management believed, it is now time to assess the initiatives so as to design future programmes on the basis of lessons learned.

In this regard, the present Programme Audit for the last quarter of 2001 covers the situational analysis of the enterprises run by RDRS and/or Union Federations in the East Zone covered by RDRS's unit offices for Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Nageswari.

### **Observation**

- RDRS has developed 75 (73 ongoing and 2 defunct projects) can be classified under four overall types:
  - Self-financing
  - Demonstration
  - Action Research
  - Commercial
- Among these four types, 26 of the schemes belong to the self-financing type, 46 to the demonstration type, 3 are action research, and none are commercial. 31 of the projects are new, 36 have been profitable, 6 have been loss making, and 2 have been abandoned.

- ❑ RDRS has been providing both financial and non-financial services to the entrepreneurs –training, credit, accounts maintenance, and to some extent, marketing. Training is given for all types of enterprises. Credit and accounts facilities are also provided to most of the enterprises.
- ❑ RDRS recently initiated a model training programme developed by GTZ-PPS-B – a high quality programme capable of enabling participants to achieve their potential as entrepreneurs.
- ❑ It has been well proven that women are usually very sincere in implementing enterprises of their own, and regular in repaying the loans. Diversifying women’s activities has increased their income and occupational opportunities.
- ❑ Group members' involvement in economic activities has to some extent uplifted their social status. With enhanced income, the participants are now more able to meet their basic needs by themselves.
- ❑ Currently monitoring is not regular, in most cases the participants do not maintain their own records, and these are kept with RDRS field staff, in their respective offices.

## **Conclusion**

- Sustainability is a prime strategy of any worthwhile development initiative. Mere income enhancement of a participant cannot ensure sustainability at either project or participant level; it depends also on socio-economic and other factors.
- The success of an enterprise is very much dependent on whether it is really appropriate. While the wrong choice of an enterprise fails to uplift participants economically, and makes them more impoverished and vulnerable.
- A grant is viewed mainly as a humanitarian release of money aimed at helping beneficiaries to be at least at subsistence level. A loan aims at making growth; generally it is intended for investment and generating income. As loans are refundable, beneficiaries prefer grants. But the reality is that there is a scarcity of grant money, and grants are not good vehicles for promoting genuine development.
- RDRS group members represent the disadvantaged class of the society. Most males are labourers, and others are sharecroppers. Most of the women are occupied with household activities. As a result of RDRS intervention, many of these people, both male and female, have gained access to capital and

economic activities. They are now more self-dependent and more effective in dealing with issues relating to their class. They now share in many aspects of the society to which they were earlier denied access.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations cover the enterprise programme as a whole:

1. **Choosing an appropriate enterprise:** More care is needed to ensure that appropriate enterprises are selected, and feasibility studies must be included.
2. **Flexible Implementation process:** So as to meet the changing needs of the participants, the implementation process of RDRS should be made flexible.
3. **Training:** Enterprise development training should be done in a more planned way, so that the participants can follow it up immediately by launching their own businesses.
4. **Ownership:** RDRS should reflect on the issue of ownership and management of the enterprises developed by the Union Federation, individual house so as to structure them in a durable way.
5. **Loans instead of grants:** The economic activities should be funded through loans so that, other things being equal, sustainability and self-reliance will be promoted in the right way.
6. **Sustainability and planning:** RDRS should develop a strategy for long-term sustainability by ensuring that all enterprises have realistic, well-focused long-term plans, action plans and financial plans.
7. **Commercial enterprises:** Small and medium level commercial enterprises run by RDRS could bring positive change for the area's poor by generating employment for the disadvantaged. It would also be a way of developing small entrepreneurs in the rural sector.
8. **Selling services [Business Development Services(BDS)] type:** In some cases, technical services provided by RDRS could be transferred to the village level workers/cadres/UFs, whose services would be sold to successful entrepreneurs.(Livestock Field Workers developed by RDRS have already been selling their services to cattle rearers at their doorsteps).
9. **Regular monitoring:**The participants should conduct regular monitoring, especially of financial and technical aspects, with RDRS following up the situation periodically.

# **PROFILE OF BILATERAL PROJECTS IN RDRS Bangladesh (1996-2001)**

by Bhabatosh Nath  
Consultant

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

RDRS, since its inception in 1972, has been implementing numbers of need-based development programmes and thus covered millions of poverty-stricken women and men in the northwest region of Bangladesh. These programmes are categorized in four major components as i) Institution building, ii) Social awareness and establishment of 'Social Rights', iii) Economic Promotion, and iv) Civic engagement. Under each of these components various types of small, medium and big size (in terms of budget volume) projects have been undertaken to fulfill the needs of the target people of this area. These projects are classified under four major heads, which are a) Core Programme (funded by RDRS core partners/donors), b) Partnership Project, c) Bilateral Project, d) Other: cost sharing and recovery through self-financing, income generating activities in RDRS. Among these, bilateral projects have important role in development fields to change the socio-economic condition of the target people within RDRS working area.

It was an earnest need of RDRS to prepare a database on the Bilateral Projects, which were implemented in the years 1996 to 2001 at different locations under its project area. During this period a large number of bilateral projects were undertaken. In this regard RDRS decided to accomplish the work by an independent consultant. This report comprises of complete list of bilateral projects, major findings on those projects, and conclusion drawn by the Programme Auditor.

## **2. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

Documents of bilateral projects are lying with different cells/units. Some are with financial department; some with respective programme cell; some with RED, Dhaka and some are with monitoring unit at Rangpur. Documents are not kept 'centrally', at a point from where all data/information could be available. So it took a long time to coordinate everybody.

It was not possible by the Programme Auditor to complete the list, even after several visits and meetings with the related personnel in different

units/departments. Some names of projects were put in the list, but against those names related data on budget, donor, area etc. were not available. Nevertheless, in those cases Programme Auditor collected information on separate forms and then consolidated those in one sheet.

### **3. FINDINGS**

#### **a) Type of Bilateral Projects**

A total of 95 bilateral projects are listed in this report. These are all separated projects, some of which were started in 1996, some in 1997 and so on. Both medium-term and short-term projects were undertaken in this period. Duration of medium-term projects are generally fixed for 3 - 5 years, and short-term projects are for only one year, even less than that (3 months, 6 months). In this regard it has been found that RDRS undertook 95 different bilateral projects within this 6 years' period. Bilateral Projects also represent a major part of total RDRS projects in each year. Bilateral Projects could also be classified by nature of supports provided through a project by a donor. In some projects only credit support (from PKSF) has been provided, in some projects fund has been allocated only for training/capacity building of the beneficiaries and staff, some projects are known as 'research project'.

Most of the projects (35%) are fallen under agriculture unit, which is quite normal as the people under northwest project area basically depend on agriculture work to lead their livelihood, irrespective of socio-economic classes. RDRS provides large inputs in areas such as crop diversification, seed production, irrigation development, homestead production, integrated homestead farming, extension of the school gardening etc. Agriculture projects also include fish culture, poultry rearing, cow rearing and other related activities. Activities under environment and disaster preparedness include awareness building, disaster management, tree plantation, agriculture rehabilitation, housing, training/capacity building of the group members etc. Activities under these projects include training to adolescent girls, democracy, advocacy, livelihood development etc. Projects under 'People's organization and mobilization' have been designed to develop capacities of the group members under primary, secondary and especially for Union Federations. Same for the projects under Economic Development cells. It contains activities like micro-credit, enterprise development and training. Least number of projects under 'Employment Generation & Credit Assistance' cell include housing loan programme activities, which have been initiated by Bangladesh Bank under the Government of the People' Republic of Bangladesh. Projects on skill training and Income generation activities are also fallen under this cell. Most of the projects under 'Health' are

implemented in Lalmonirhat, Kurigram districts. Activities under these projects include MCH care, nutrition education, research etc. Projects under 'Education' cell contain activities on non-formal education for adults and children in the rural area.

## **b) Type of Donors**

Donors of bilateral projects could be classified into six broad categories. These are :

- a) Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh (GOB),
- b) UN Organization,
- c) Church-based Donor agency,
- d) Foreign Embassy/Government from other country,
- e) Other Development Organization,

It has been discovered that RDRS proved its credibility to do work closely with the Government of Bangladesh. It has also been noticed that the Government is always happy with the work performed by RDRS.

## **4. LESSONS LEARNED**

Resources available under bilateral projects enabled variety of training, extension services to the participants under core programme. At the same time it should be expressed here that some programme activities under bilateral project also created problem in programme implementation system for future course of time. For example, credit distribution in aquaculture activities under KfW and DFID added to the load of the credit field staff, but not system. Some problems have arisen, as the various bilateral projects have different credit provisions, but RDRS did not view these as major hurdles at that time (in 1996 - '99). In 2000 RDRS initiated micro-credit programme professionally. But those problems created under bilateral projects also formed lots of disturbance in running micro-credit programme smoothly. Observing the situation, RDRS thought it better to design bilateral projects without seeking credit funds from the bilateral donors with different credit provisions, rather it concentrated its all credit activities following a uniform system under the micro-credit unit.

Earlier, during 1996 to 1998 / '99, there had been provision to organize and conduct numbers of training courses, workshops etc. more on social issues, and budget was put in the proposal in that way. It had been observed that lots of money was spent in those sectors but compared to expenditures, results were not that lucrative. MRS found that, with skill training being linked to credit, beneficiaries were less eager to attend other training courses, which offered no

immediate benefit for the time they spent at the training courses. If beneficiaries did not attend these courses, it was felt in MRS that they could not benefit fully from the comprehensive development package. This problem has been likely to continue to disturb RDRS development work and goals for some time to come. Realizing the fact, RDRS changed its policy and started to design projects more on enterprise development, infrastructure building and procurement of materials in connection with enterprise creation, and institution building. It has been found that project participants get more permanent benefits through these types of projects and physical existence of project activities become more visible.

It has been found that RDRS as organisation gathered a vast knowledge through implementing numbers of various projects. It learnt lessons from each project that has been implemented in any year. At the same time beneficiaries got experience from most of the projects. Regarding replication of projects (basically project activities), RDRS also succeeded in many cases to replicate systems/processes, activities through gathering experiences from the projects it undertaken in different years. From the profile it is seen that out of 95 cases (projects) it could replicate its project implementation system and /or activities from 34 projects (36%). It was found that agriculture-based project activities were replicated more than other activities.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Bilateral Projects, initiated in 1988, continued with emphasis on development of vulnerable groups in RDRS project area. Since then there have been organisational and methodological shifts in response to changing demands from the people, the government and donor agencies. In line with those changes, bilateral projects have been designed and implemented. It is an important task for RDRS to maintain proper documentation system of bilateral projects. These are also treated as 'Experimental', 'Research-based' projects. So, to keep a regular track, and to have update status it is needed to develop inventory of bilateral projects. Standard reporting tools/formats have to be developed as per nature of project.

It has been a troublesome job for the consultant this time, to develop this profile correctly. Efforts have been given to coordinate all concerned units/departments, review documents several times, visit field areas, and finally the profile turned into this shape. The consultant is hereby thankful to each concerned personnel in RDRS to cooperate him in all regards. Full satisfaction should remain with the fact that, the profile would be treated as a useful material in designing new development products, which would ultimately be benefited for the target people in the northwest project area of RDRS.

# Workshop on Effective Partnership of Stakeholders for Poverty Alleviation: Policy Research on Strengthening Seed Up-take at Grassroots Level

*(a brief synopsis of the proceedings)*

by NBI  
May 2001

## Introduction

Sponsored by **DFID** (Dept. for International Development) through **PETRRRA** (Poverty Elimination through Rice Research Assistance), the workshop was organized by RDRS Bangladesh at North Bengal Institute at RDRS Rangpur from 18-19 May 2001.

In Bangladesh, although there is a declining trend in the population growth rate, its population is estimated to reach 182 million, from its present 125 million, by 2025, most of whom will continue to live in the farming households. The small and marginal farmers and landless farm labourers are involved mainly in rice production, which covers more than 75% of the total cultivated land. Inadequate skills, lack of quality inputs and insufficient and ineffective post-harvest drying and storage facilities hamper the production. In addition, due to the lack of technical "know-how" and storage facilities at the farm level, seed quality is deteriorating and rice production reducing in quality and quantity every year.

To address the marginalisation of small farmers through improving rice production and strengthening of quality seed storage systems at the village level, DfID has supported **PETRRRA Project**. They commissioned research-sub-projects to Government and non-Government organizations dealing with poverty alleviation through effective partnership and collaboration with farmers. In the context of improving livelihood, a Seed Up-take Programme has been undertaken by RDRS in collaboration with the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) and Allied Agro Industries. The primary objective of the Seed Up-Take Programme has been to create modernised delivery systems to encourage up-take of improved rice technologies and thus ensure more sustainable livelihoods among resource poor farmers.

Fundamental requirements for the enhancement of livelihood activities among the resource-poor include strengthening the farmers' capabilities, assets and

activities; expanding human, natural, financial, physical and social capital. To do this effectively, members of the resource-poor community need to cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or expand their capabilities and assets both now and in the future without undermining the natural resource base.

**Alternative research and advocacy efforts:** To reduce the vulnerabilities in the long-term in Bangladesh, research and advocacy is required. RDRS, in its 2001-2005 Strategy, aims to develop the capabilities of the recently established North Bengal Institute (NBI) to strengthen the voice of the vulnerable people in its own working area.

**Application of Livelihood Approach in the Seed Up-take Programme :** Livelihood asset building by shocks, trends and seasonality in the farming environment as well as by changes to the policies, institutions and processes of participating partners.

**Alternative Organic Seed Storage and Techno-Economic Implications:** In Bangladesh, grains as well as seeds are normally stored in traditional godowns, which do not have adequate facilities for adequately maintaining stored commodities. Consequently, post-harvest losses are high in Bangladesh.

To reduce storage loss, a US company, *GrainPro*, has developed a unique technology for long term storage of grain, called hermetic or air-tight organic storage technology which has proved capable of reducing post-harvest losses to less than 1%. The cocoon-style equipment has been successfully tested in a variety of countries, including Bangladesh (through RDRS, Directorate of Food, CIMMYT - Wheat Research Centre, **BARI, BRRI, ACI, private seed companies, Square**, etc).

**The Cocoons:** the equipment is commonly called cocoons, air tight, using a special advanced grade, and flexible (PVC) material and zip system. The cocoons are available in capacities ranging from 5 to 150 tons for bagged grains, but loose grains can also be stored in the granaries called *Grainsafe*. This Grainsafe is designed to allow small amounts of commodity to be removed safely, easily and frequently without affecting the hermetic environment.

### **How does the technology fit into Bangladesh food security needs?**

At the operational level, use of the cocoons will:

- Maximise food supplies by eliminating post-harvest storage losses.

- Allow storage of all food commodities (grains and seeds: paddy, wheat, maize, milled rice, beans, oilseeds, sunflower, pulses, spices, tea, dry fish, sugar) as well as fertilizers.
- Eliminate all chemical insecticides and fumigants.
- Be more environmentally friendly because there is no need for contact insecticides (which leave residues in the grain) and fumigants (which are of immediate danger to warehouse staff and the local environment).
- Be easy to manage compared to traditional godown storage systems.
- Not be contaminated by rodents.
- Be flood proof (up to 1.75m of water).
- kill insects. At a liner thickness of 0.83 mm, the concentration of oxygen becomes depleted with the increase of carbon dioxide, leading within 7-10 days to complete absence of live insects, well below 1 insect/kg of stored commodity.
- Safeguard seed quality by maintaining moisture content and, thereby, good germination.

**At the economic level, this form of storage will produce.-**

- a positive economic impact through raising farmers' income
- Positive social impact through improving access to quality seeds at the grassroots level
- a positive environmental impact through reducing use of chemical pesticides
- Immediate reduction of quantity and quality loss
- a flexible food security system, and do away with need for static godowns storage. The cocoons are easy to transport to wherever needed (for sale or emergency distribution).
- reduction of operational costs through reducing levels of stored revolving stocks
- Remove the need for fumigation and spraying, reducing costs further

**The Need in BAU for Partnership Development with Rural based GO and NGO:**

**The PETRRA Research Study** – the PETRRA sub-project cooperation between BAU and RDRS is one such of jointly working together for effective partnership and technological development. In this exercise, 4 students conducted research in partial fulfillment of their MS degree. The students from the Extension

Education Department conducted research to determine farmers' attitudes, perceptions and skills in respect of organically stored seeds, and 2 students from the Department of Crop Botany were testing the efficiency of the organic cocoon in maintaining seed quality.

**Focus of studies and outputs:**

- Women in rice post harvest activities and their training needs
- The role of NGOs in transferring technology: an appraisal of storing HYV rice seeds in the organic cocoon promoted by RDRS through the PETRRA sub-project.
- The effect of storage in organic cocoons on seed health, growth and yield of rice
- The effect of seedling rate and variety on the growth and yield of boro rice.

**Impact of joint advocacy and study activities at policy level:**

- BAU and RDRS staff are involved in both inter- and intra-advocacy through MS internships in research and development
- Recognition of MS thesis supervisor and co-supervisor through partnership
- MoU signed at local level
- Increasing awareness among BAU teachers through frequent field visits
- MoU for implementing students' internship programme and staff exchange signed by the executives of BAU and RDRS (Executive Director)

**Restraint on effective partnership and collaboration:**

- There is limited scope for BAU thesis supervisors to gain experience outside the university campus
- Changing the attitudes of teachers and students towards staying in remote areas may be difficult
- There is limited scope for RDRS staff involvement in the research and development programme.

**Women's Post-Harvest Activities and their Training Needs: A Study In Collaboration with RDRS - Findings:**

- **Women were greatly involved in cleaning of the threshing floor, collection of threshing materials and preservation of rice but had least involvement in rice threshing.**
- **The greatest training needs recognized were regarding control of insect pests in stored rice, preservation and taking care of seeds and selection and collection of seeds.**

- **The high price of a rice threshing machine significantly affected the involvement of women in threshing activities. Women stated the need for cost-effective threshing machines and soft loans to purchase these.**

In discussing problem confrontation, respondents gave the following suggestions about probable solutions:

- RDRS should disburse credit among a few Groups on easy terms and conditions for them to purchase power threshers, paddle threshers, winnows, drier, etc.
- Group Members should be encouraged to construct cemented drying yards
- RDRS should provide group loans for the installation of rice mills in the centre of the village, to be managed by the Groups Members
- The majority of the respondents requested modern inputs and technologies in rice post harvest activities.

## **Recommendations**

a) Recommendations for policy level Needs-based training programmes should be developed and implemented extensively by RDRS, BRRRI and DAE to improve the knowledge and skills of rural women in rice post harvest activities.

The important areas of training are:

- Storage of rice, and knowledge about insect pests in stored rice
- Improved techniques for seed preservation
- Use of improved smokeless chula for parboiling
- Determining proper moisture to stored rice
- Understanding and handling of modern threshing equipment

**RDRS, BRRRI and DAE** should take the initiative to make required inputs and technologies available for rice post-harvest activities in the rural areas.

- RDRS should provide group loans on easy terms and conditions to women for the purchase of modern equipment for rice post harvest activities and for the installation of rice mills in the centre of the villages managed by the Group Members,
- For better understanding of the Group Members (concerned with PETRRA project), motivational tours should be arranged by RDRS with the help of DAE.
- RDRS should discuss frequently with the women's menfolk to ensure full co-operation in development activities.

- Because of traditional social and religious systems, rural women are reluctant to come into contact with male extension workers. So, more female extension workers should be engaged by RDRS and by DAE for effective and successful implementation of development activities.
- Extension staff of DAE should help the supervisors of RDRS organise needs-based training programmes. From time-to-time, these training programmes should be monitored to improve effectiveness. At the same time, their impact should be assessed jointly by the partners.
- RDRS, BRRRI and DAE should organise functional education programmes for women members of farming households through a non-formal education system.

### **Recommendations for future studies**

- The present study was carried out in a small area of one district. Similar studies of this nature should be conducted in other parts of Bangladesh to provide further information about the participation of rural women in rice post harvest activities.
- The study was limited to post harvest activities of rice. In future studies, other crops or homestead activities could be chosen to assess the extent of participation, training needs and problem responses of rural women.

As the PETRRA project started only in June 2000, a similar study should be repeated by RDRS to measure the impact of the project activities after a reasonable period of time. The study to conduct in-depth impact analysis of the project activities through action research should be undertaken independently by external agencies (possibly using MS/Ph.D. students' interns).

### **Opinion Sharing between Partners and Beneficiaries**

The second session shared opinions between beneficiaries and partners' representatives. The beneficiaries raised points of concern and partners provided their views.

#### **Beneficiaries concerns:**

- During the rainy season it is difficult to dry the paddy for seed preservation.
- As farmers faced a labour crisis during the harvesting of *BRRRI Dhan 28*, as it matures earlier than other varieties, a rice-cutting machine may be helpful.
- Since the cocoon is costly, how can the Federation get more?

#### **Partners' responses:**

- Machines can be imported for drying paddy for seed preservation (*Mr Shahjahan, Allied Agro-Industries*)
- RDRS will request BRRRI/BARI to supply new technology of low-cost machines for the farmers (*Dr Zaman, RDRS*)

- A harvesting machine, rice-cutting machine and others will be demonstrated to farmers by BARI after it signs an agreement with RDRS very shortly (*Dr Abdur Razzak, BARI*)
- There are machines available in the local market in Lalmonirhat town. Farmers are requested to collect and use local ones and try to find more for the next season (*Mr Fazlul Haque, DAE, Lalmonirhat*)
- We have to import the cocoon from the USA, and pay custom duties and VAT. If we can produce the cocoon on our own, the cost will be less. If there is enough demand, better to go for cocoon production (*Mr Shahjahan, AA1*)
- Cocoon-preserved seeds cannot enhance rice production but can ensure the germination of seeds (*Mr Shahjahan, AA1*)
- The sowing of 1, 2 or 3 seedlings are good not only for yields but also for the reduction of seedlings per unit area. There will be fewer pest attacks if farmers use 1-2 seedling per hill (*Dr Mosharraf, BRRI*)
- The use of 1-2 seedling is good but given the situation where the season is appropriate if it is late cultivation, tillering will not be same, especially for *BRRI Dhan 28*. In that case, we need to transplant more seedlings per hill (*Dr Mosharraf, BRRI*)
- We would like to assess the traditional seed preservation techniques (polythene bags) practised by the farmers against the cocoon storage system to see which one is most effective in terms of seed quality and cost of storage (*Dr Zaman, RDRS*).
- We need to check whether polyphene bags are airtight before we preserve seeds. (*Dr Mosharraf, BRRI*).
- Farmers, before preservation of seeds, make sure that the moisture level is less than 12%. Also, the polyphene bag must be dry and cool before seed preservation (*Dr Abdur Razzak, BARI*).
- We strongly support conducting a survey to find the most effective methods for seed preservation (*Mr Fazlul Haque, DAE, Lalmonirhat*).

#### **Issues emphasized by the experts:**

*Mr Sheik Muzibur Rahman* (DAE, Rangpur) stated that as farmers now know how to preserve rice seed, we should encourage them to preserve other, costlier seeds, e.g. oil, wheat and vegetable seeds, to help the farmer to make greater profits.

*Mr Abdul Aziz* (DAE, Gaibandha) asked the question that, as the cocoon is costly, why go for rice seed? As rice seed is not profitable to preserve, farmers should be trained how to preserve other seeds, which are profitable but expensive to import.

*Prof Dr Md Gias Uddin Miah*, BSMRAU pointed out that beyond processing and production of rice, we should think about the protection of soil fertility. He mentioned that we should go for organic farming to protect the soil fertility. He drew the attention of the participants to the fact that, if the farmers do not accept some varieties, we should find out the cause. He requested BRRI to do comparative studies of different varieties to help the farmer in selecting appropriate varieties. He further mentioned that *BRRI Dhan 28* would never go for long.

*Dr Sadrul Amin* (Agriculture Advisor, RDRS) pointed out that discontinuation of the present partnership could damage the progress of the research and continuation towards sustainability.

*The Farmers Representatives* said that though they were being trained in rice production, they wanted training in production of other crops also.

*Pro Dr Abdul Mannan* (BSMRAU), in his speech to the workshop agreed that the experts and the students need to come to the field to learn. He suggested not imposing high-risk techniques on marginal farmers.

*Dr Noel P Magor* (PETRRA) said that he did not believe that the partners should go for poor technology for poor farmers. He recognized the contribution of the Federation as the local organization. He encouraged the partners' representatives and officials to sit together, if necessary to change policies and would like to see farmers work jointly with others for mutual support and participation of others.

*Dr Md Mosharraf Hossain* (BRRI), said that BRRI is in a position to extend support to this project. He further added that BRRI could supply the breeder seeds to Federation or RDRS.

*Mr Sheikh Muzibur Rahman* (DAE, Rangpur), mentioned that, as seed preservation is costly for poor farmers, the partners *in* the sub-project should target rich entrepreneurs to expand the seed preservation business. He also supported use of low-cost preservation by poor farmers. He also mentioned that the age of seedlings should be taken into consideration in the case of 1-2 seedling per hill.

*Dr Abdur Razzak* (BARI), welcomed this opportunity to work with people from the private Sector, teachers and researchers. He said the country needed to diversify crop

Production and requested further promotion of other, crops, and closer work with farmers for Policy adoption. He also said BARI would continue its co-operation with RDRS and mentioned the signing of the MoU for five years.

Professor Dr. Lutfur Rahman (BA U), Chief Guest of the Workshop, described the seed as an expression for socio-economic aspiration:

**S - for Social**  
**E - for Economic**  
**E - for Environment**  
**D - for Development**

He said that the farmers will chose seeds and technologies according to their own needs and for their own benefit. He stressed that the partners should be careful in designing the project, particularly in regard to the cost of the innovation. He encouraged farmers and their Federation to collect foundation seeds, breeder seeds and certified seeds from **BRRI/BADC** while receiving support from RDRS in seed marketing and crop diversification. He said that BAU would send students for higher study to RDRS but that RDRS should consider the number of students to be involved, and also the quality. Finally, he asked the Federation to continue their efforts and assured everyone of the support of BAU.

# **A Brief Report on Pre-service Training For Capacity Development at North Bengal Institute (NBI) RDRS Bangladesh**

*(For the Women University graduates to help them grow as development  
activists in Northwest Bangladesh)  
(April – June 2002)*

## **Introduction**

As continuation of organizational commitment towards women empowerment in northern Bangladesh, RDRS emphasized gender development in its strategic plan 2001-2005 as one of the crosscutting issues. To pursue the objective of gender development at regional level, RDRS decided to create opportunities that would enhance gender equality among staff within RDRS as well as in other organizations working in the region. To promote gender empowerment in the north, the North Bengal Institute (NBI) of RDRS designed a special training course for educated women who intend to work but do not have required skills, confidence and access to work with NGOs and other development organisations. The training programme was aimed at increasing human potentials and functional skills of women university graduates in northwest Bangladesh to help them grow as development activists. The 1<sup>st</sup> round of the training was implemented for a batch during 21 April – 20 June 2002.

## **Objectives**

The main objective of the training course was to stimulate and sensitize educated women with necessary knowledge, skills and attitude so that they gain potentials and confidence to take on challenging career with NGOs and other development organizations. The course was also expected to create social awareness at various levels and facilitate more women employment in northern Bangladesh.

## **Course Design**

The overall training programme had three major components covered in two consecutive months. The components were as follows:

- ❖ **Classroom training:** This component was the central activity in the whole training programme. It was a continuous month-long training in classroom situation and was implemented using modern techniques and participatory approaches. The course contents included development theories and practices, issues of poverty alleviation, NGO working modalities and

development programmes, management principles and functions, potential development approaches including advocacy. Senior Executives of RDRS were used as resource persons. A detailed curriculum was planned and followed with flexibility.

- ❖ **Field orientation:** After completion of the classroom training, the trainees were sent to different places in the field for practical experiences. They were given field attachment for a month to learn from RDRS field-based staff about the practical ways of doing various development works. During the month-long stay in the field the trainees changed their attachment every week to different kind of work to increase diversity of their knowledge and skills on fieldwork.
- ❖ **Extra curricular activities:** This was a complementary part to the main training activities. Participants were given some practical skills what they would certainly need in addition to their main professional skills. Predominantly, the training on extra curricular activities included motorcycle driving and computer skills. This part was implemented after classroom training in the afternoon and during weekends.

### **Supplementary activities**

Apart from the main academic activities, the training programme also included a number of supplementary activities. These activities were designed to minimize monotony in the training progression, increase group bondage among participants and improve relation between the trainees and trainers. These activities were recognized to be very useful and had significant bearing on making the training programme vibrant and participatory. The main supplementary activities were as follows:

- ◆ Field trip (excursion) during classroom training
- ◆ Focus group discussion with beneficiaries
- ◆ Visit to Groups and Federations (CBOs)
- ◆ Cultural/social events (during weekends)
- ◆ Visiting tribal families and learning their culture

### **Selection of trainees**

Following announcement about the training course, a total of 55 applications were received. Minimum requirement for the training was postgraduate degree in any discipline. Some applications were below criteria and finally 48 applicants were short-listed and called for an interview. A total of 26 applicants were selected for the 1<sup>st</sup> batch out of which 22 actually attended the training. Among the applicants 81% had no working experience at all and 95% were unmarried.

## **Performance of the trainees**

At the beginning, the trainees took a few days before they could adapt to the training and physical environment. As soon as the induction was completed and the trainees came to know each other, the whole group became extremely enthusiastic and attentive. They were serious about and concentrated well to all the assignments and group works and improved presentation skill through presenting their group works on day-to-day basis. Participant constantly evaluated performance of the trainees in terms of learning, confidence, skills and attitude themselves at the end of each training day. Course facilitators monitored the learning trend every week and provided feedback to the participants as appropriate. At the end of the classroom training, the trainees were evaluated through a comprehensive examination. After month-long field exposure, the trainees appeared to be quite confident, potential and ready for employment.

## **Achievements**

- ◆ The training tremendously changed participants' traditional attitude, removed their apparent shortcomings, widened professional outlooks, broadened understanding about rural development work and gave clear understanding on gender development perspective in rural Bangladesh.
- ◆ As part of the achievements, the training induced and activated lot of human qualities and self-discipline among the trainees what they were likely to follow during rest of their lives. Some of the qualities improved included fellow feeling, confidence to speak freely, fairness in discharging professional responsibility, self-help adaptation and reduced dependency.
- ◆ Participants were highly motivated to work with and for the poor people and take employment with NGO. They were ready to go and work in any remote areas. Such readiness was simply beyond their imagination before the training. Their commitment to work for the cause of women was significantly raised.
- ◆ All the 21 participants who completed the training were given a short-term employment with RDRS. The employment opportunity coincidentally emerged under a bi-lateral project supported by WFP. The project aimed at supporting the specially disadvantaged women (ultra poor) in two vulnerable districts within RDRS working area.
- ◆ Parents/guardians of the trainees who were initially hesitant to allow their daughters undergo this training (living away from them) were highly pleased looking at the improvement and changes that happened to their wards.

- ◆ Because of clear visibility of the outcome of the training, demand for such training in the region increased. The NBI/RDRS authority has been informally approached by new graduates/guardians for more courses.

### **Lessons learnt**

1. If women graduates are given opportunities, they can develop their hidden potentials to become effective human resource as good as men even sometime better than men.
2. Success of an exceptional new training, to a large extent, depends on the relationship between participants and facilitators and the overall training environment produced with active participation of both trainers and trainees.
3. Implementation of relatively longer training should embrace a wide range and appropriate mix of learning and facilitating processes that are innovative, interesting and demanding to the participants.
4. Prior to devising or engaging in a non-traditional training, it is important and required to have a proper analysis and projection of skills, understanding and attitude to be raised.
5. Participant-oriented approaches especially the technique of self-evaluation make significant contributions to individual capacity development as well as provides useful information necessary for formative adjustments and decisions for improving processes.

### **Future improvement**

- 1) Some adjustment will be made in terms of duration and lesson-plan on various issues covered in the classroom training. Some topics need more time while others less. The overall balance in time allocation and the lesson progression will be reviewed and improved based on past experience.
- 2) Some adjustment will also be made in the overall duration of classroom training and field orientation. In the past, duration in both cases was equal. In future it will be slightly relocated for optimum utilization of time and other resources.
- 3) Materials used in the training will be further standardized. Use of equipments in the training sessions will be re-planned to improve presentation by respective facilitators.
- 4) 25 participants will be included in one batch to improve cost effectiveness, while training room and other physical facilities will be reorganized. A certain percentage of cost sharing by the participants may be tried out.

# **Reference Manual for Torben V. Petersen Library North Bengal Institute (NBI) RDRS Rangpur**

by Mr. Nur Mohammed  
Library Consultant

## **Background**

RDRS Bangladesh is a long-established Integrated NGO, working in northwest Bangladesh for the past 30 years serving around 4000,000 of the disadvantaged rural poor. The RDRS Strategy 2001-2005 represents a logical extension of programme operation up to tertiary/regional level focusing on advocacy, research, networking and regional capacity development. TO pursue the objectives of tertiary level operation, RDRS has initiated establishment it resource center known as North Bengal Institute (NBI) particularly for promoting alternative research and advocacy. The North Bengal Institute (NBI) will not only focus on researching regional aspects of the north environmental, poverty trends, status of indigenous people, women, Issues of democracy etc. and Impact of NGOs - but also to provide facts to key opinion-formers and policy/decision makers. As part of the resource center a modest library (yet to be upgraded) has been established with limited resources. The library is named after one of RDRS's former Director- Mr Toben V. Petersen and is expected to serve information needs for advocacy, research and development work by both internal and external users.

## **Objectives**

The main objective of the proposed constancy assignment is to help RDRS organize and strengthen its library at Rangpur compound with necessary systems and procedures so that proper utilization of the library can be activated and promoted.

## **Specific Tasks**

- Review present status of the library including physical resources and identify operational needs and systems to be adopted for easy and efficient day-to-day operation of the library.
- Review the present stock of books, reports and other materials as they are and plan their organization (coding, cataloging, placing etc) for easy access by users.

- Design a cataloging system to be operated by computer software or specially designed computer systems and complete cataloging of the current stock of books and other materials.
- Plan and organize physical placement of the books and other documents on shelves according to plan and systems proposed for this purpose. Physical placement of tile books should preferably be guided by computer-aided systems.
- Suggest an efficient display plan including guidelines for journal/periodicals produced in-house and received from outside organizations for regular display of the library.
- Design necessary systems to facilitate temporary borrowing of books from the library by authorized users including easy monitoring of return of the books by the borrowers.
- Train/equip RDRS/NBI Staff on all operational systems includes Coding and Cataloging for virtual continuity, trouble shooting and Updating the management systems.
- Prepare a brief operational manual for operation and day-to-day management of file library. Description of all sub-systems Including computer aided systems must he included in the manual.
- Suggest RDRS management what other potential materials (other than books, periodicals, newspaper, reports) should be given space in the library, which also serve as information source.

In the light of the above, three reports in full details (computer software{CDS/ISIS} Programme, Database) have been produced by the consultant:

- a. **REFERENCE MANUAL**
- b. **TITLE INDEX**
- c. **SUBJECT INDEX**

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTER SERVICES OF THE LIBRARY:**

1. Library personnel should be trained in modem library technology including library services or appoint a professional librarian.
2. For better library management, library rules should be prepared.
3. Formal lending systems should be maintained.
4. Library should be dust free and insects free.
5. Online network for library services should be implemented in future.

# **Audit Report on Monitoring of RDRS Development Programme**

by Bhabatosh Nath  
Development Expert

## **Background**

RDRS was initiated in the year 1972 following the Liberation war in Bangladesh. Its operational areas are backward and poverty stricken rural areas of Rangpur and Dinajpur region, which were so far almost unheeded and remained undeveloped. Over the years, the grim situation is gradually improving. Through continuous learning and experimenting for more potency as service provider, RDRS has come up with many innovative approaches to improve the standard of living of the beneficiaries. There have been changes in organisational and methodological shifts due to the changing responses of the target groups but the aim remains the same: to improve the lives of the down trodden people.

In RDRS, modifications to the programmes were taken place in last decade. The key elements of new strategic plan (2001-2005) are as follows:

- Different categories of disadvantaged/target groups would be selectively addressed.
- The type of interventions would be different for specific target groups.
- Group formation and cohesion would be placed centrally and an integrated approach has to be promoted.

The overall development objectives of RDRS are:

- To increase institutional capacity and quality to deal with the future challenges of programme development at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and
- To sustain organisational efficiency and effectiveness in programme implementing, adapting, responding to new challenges and in promoting innovation and organisational sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

RDRS's movement in Bangladesh re-affirms to work with the people in order to restore the distorted image of humanity through building People's Organization. Various development projects has brought the scope for RDRS to materialize its thinking in assisting the poor to uplift their socio-economic condition and thus to 'empower' them in their own society. It has been found that the nature and potential of the integrated programme activities taken by RDRS is impressive. The interventions have surely transformed individuals and groups to a new

height from nothingness. To see the positions of the project participants, it is a must to monitor programme activities through which the 'changes' are occurred in the lives of those participants (beneficiaries). In accomplishing the job RDRS has set up monitoring unit within its management structure. At a stage RDRS has felt it necessary to see the present trend of programme monitoring in each field of activities.

## **Recommendations**

- Monitoring needs and priorities have to be identified based on the overall programme strategies of RDRS and objectives of each development project. RDRS management has to define the role and responsibilities of monitoring cell in relation to those basic issues. Professional guidance is a must for monitoring cell.
- There should be a system of shift monitoring and nurturing the groups, as they are the backbone of the developmental process.
- To measure the livelihood status of a beneficiary or to see the influence of a particular programme activity, it is needed to standardize the monitoring of development programmes from a common management platform. MES could play the role as an 'independent unit' to deliver such service in a professional way.
- It may be suggested that, if possible, impact monitoring should be conducted at regular intervals, centrally. It would be better if the indicators are well defined with reliable variables. In micro-finance unit, the database has got a universal system of identifiers, who can monitor individual beneficiary and groups.
- Monitoring related knowledge and understandings should be at the project level also. Annual action plan should be linked with strategic planning. A visible correlation should be there. Broad objectives, primary objectives and linked activities should be clearly shown and disseminated.
- RDRS did not establish any "in-built" monitoring system within its overall programme management structure. The core management personnel in RDRS should think this out.
- Sectoral monitoring system, controlled by central management may be a welcome idea provided professionals are included in the monitoring unit.
- Periodical impact monitoring on empowerment of beneficiaries under different bilateral projects, especially under the micro finance unit should be conducted.
- It is hereby suggested that monitoring unit should have more research work on different social and empowerment issues. There has been a heed of monitoring in this aspect also. They are doing on their own skill but it would be more purposeful if further studies would be organised in a participatory

way, and demands should come from the programme personnel, even from the beneficiaries themselves.

- In almost all the resolution books of primary /secondary or federations economic issues are primarily discussed (savings, credit, business) but social issues are kept in abeyance in most of the cases. In one federation, the members informed that they had reconciled at least 4 cases so far but there was no such documentation. This should be encouraged.
- A substantial amount of money had been spent for the asset creation for the federations, a strict monitoring should be done as vested interest groups/ persons may damage/ sabotage the efforts internally or externally.
- The baseline survey (Baseline information in the group record book) should be reintroduced and updated. There would be visible changes seen over a period of time. The monitoring indicators should have representative characteristics.
- Concept of voluntarism is no more entertained. Economic opportunities have been increased day by day. The group members can not give substantial time for hour-long deliberations. A cost effective and participatory mechanism has to be developed to meet the needs at grassroots level.
- It is the general demand of the federation members that field volunteers should be reintroduced for regular interactions. There should be regular nurturing of primary groups both activated and defunct. Group bondage is missing uniformly at all levels.
- Monitoring unit should have more research work on different social and empowerment issues. There has been a heed of monitoring in this aspect also. Demands should come from the programme personnel, even from the beneficiaries themselves. Periodical impact monitoring on empowerment of beneficiaries under different bilateral projects, especially under the micro finance unit should be conducted.
- Co-ordination amongst different programme sectors has to be achieved. All steps are moving towards the same direction but the approaches are different. Well-defined coherent approach should be embarked on between SODECU and Micro-finance units.
- Unit-wise monitoring with proper documentation is needed, which would be disseminated to others also. A global report (quarterly /six-monthly) of all ongoing projects should be available at unit office level.
- In AEES, peer group sectoral monitoring has been introduced. If successful, it may be introduced in other sectors as well.
- Federations should be capable enough to proceed towards self-sustenance so that they do not have to look for external help/assistance all the times. They would be able to monitor themselves (peer group monitoring) and their own members. Growth of local people's organisations is crucial. Such skills have to

be developed for self-monitoring and eventually to others as well and linking up the out comes in outreach services also.

### ***Issues on Proposed organogram on development programme***

#### ***Monitoring:***

- There would be an in-built mechanism within the project units. Internal monitors (Proposed) would be placed at unit offices and accountable to the director development programme through the PCs at unit offices. These monitors would monitor the **"What's"** of the project activities. The **"Why's"** of the non-achieved targets should be dealt by issue-based demands to be placed at independent monitoring cell (proposed).
- To bridge the gap amongst RED, different sectors, unit offices, internal monitors, a uniform policy has to be taken centrally. It is urgently called for to strengthen the independent monitoring cell. It would take time and learning by trial and error would create an effective system.

# Report on Role of SODEOs in strengthening Union Federations

by Bhabatosh Nath  
Consultant, Development Programme  
August 2002

## Background

The overall development objective of RDRS at the Federation level is to achieve the sustainable development of Union Federations and their secondary member groups through their own efforts, initiatives and available resources. RDRS has been doing this by providing guidance, capacity building and extending opportunities to the Federations. The institutional aspects of Federation development to be dealt with include leadership; Federation operating systems; use of federation Centres; access to local resources; advocacy, networking and arbitration by the Federation. In order to keep right track of the above activities and strengthen the Federations, RDRS appointed SODEOs (Social Organisation and Development Education officers) to do work with Federations at field level. Their task is to ensure the Federation has the skills and confidence to manage its affairs, conduct meetings, control its budgets, develop income-generating activities and be able to represent the members as per need. At this stage RDRS has felt it necessary to measure the present status of SODEOs, their capacity to support Federations, needs to further develop skills etc. To carry out this job, RDRS has appointed the 'Programme Auditor' to measure the existing situation independently. This report has developed on the basis of information collected from the field through visits, discussion sessions with various groups of stakeholders, individuals related to Federations. This particular section describes the major findings and recommendations in brief.

## Objective

The main objective of the study is to collect management information on Federation activities, roles and responsibilities of SPDEOs, their capacities, type of support needed from RDRS, feedback and suggestions from Federation learders, SODEOs and their supervisors.

## Major Findings

*Number of Federations and SODEOs:* In RDRS, a total of 256 Union Federations were formed up to December 2001. These Federations consist of 7,904 groups, of which 4,310 (55%) are female and 3,594 (45%) are male groups.

A total of 34 SODEOs are now engaged to do work with Federations, of which 10 (29%) are female and 24 (71%) are male. There are 8 Union Federations under one SODEO on an average.

*Nature of activities performed by SODEOs and involvement of Federation EC members:*

One SODEO has to spend 36% of his/her total working time for fulfilling 'Administrative' tasks (deskwork). Rest 64% time is spent in the field to do field works like attending Federations' GC/EC meetings, conducting training sessions, ensure technical support etc. Indirect supervision to the members groups as mentioned in the Job Description is not done by SODEOs at this stage.

For conducting training and orientation sessions, workshops and awareness building sessions, SODEOs spend only 9% of their time. It has been revealed that SODEOs, in this way, are giving less time in capacity building process of the Federation Leaders.

In the Job Description, a total of 15 specific tasks are set for SODEOs to accomplish in a regular way. It was checked with the SODEOs and found that some tasks were performed accordingly with the set target, some were not at all touched. Some could not be done because the respective SODEO was not trained up or skilled enough on that particular subject and s/he did not take any initiative on that.

According to the priority list, it is found that most of the SODEOs put highest score for the activities like federation's 'Record keeping'; 'Establishment of profitable IGAs' and 'Group visit'.

It is interesting to observe that maximum 26 SODEOs (79%) don't feel comfortable to conduct audit work of Federations. They expressed that it should be done independently by a third party.

It has been found that, out of 30 Federations under this study, leaders from 5 (17%) federations put their opinion that, respective executive committee members have taken full responsibility to follow up all activities under their jurisdiction. The consultant feels it as a positive sign to become self-dependent in managing Federations in the long run.

In relation to routine work, SODEOs expressed that sometimes they have to carry out other activities under other programme units, which are not in line with their regular job.

*Capacity building for SODEOs:* Almost all the SODEOs got training on only two types of courses such as i) Group Dynamics and Management, ii) Management Development. Out of 34 SODEOs, 24(73%) and 27(79%) got training on the above two courses respectively.

There had been no 'training need assessment' process to identify need-based training courses for the SODEOs.

*Constraints to carry out job:* Most of the SODEOs (24= 73%) admitted that Federation Executive Committee members (the leaders) lack knowledge on Organisational management.

There exist internal conflicts among the leaders in many Federations. 18 (55%) SODEOs have to face problem due to the above situation. Two major reasons have been identified for this situation. Such as: **i) The previous committee members can not tolerate the new members. They are always in behind to create 'chaos' unnecessarily, which sometimes are beyond the control of the SODEOs, even RDRS thana or unit office personnel; ii) Inter-personal conflict exists within the new committee members about monetary transaction, running group business, distribution of responsibilities etc,**

Some SODEOs (30%) experienced that as the Federation leaders don't see any 'cash' benefit from the Federation, so they lost their interest to do group work.

There has been a trend of 'drop-out' of general members in the secondary group. This also makes a Federation 'weak'. If the trend continues, in future other Federations would be with neglected number of members from some 'inactive' secondary groups, which is not at all in favor of 'strengthening people's institution'.

At Thana and Unit office level, two major problems as identified by the SODEOs are:

i) Lack of co-ordination among programme units(almost 50% of SODEOs agreed on this); ii) In the unit office sometimes there exists 'duel' administration system, one from regular administrative unit of the respective unit office (district level), another from the 'technical' programme unit (Rangpur office level). This situation creates confusion among the programme implementers, and causes setbacks in programme implementation level.

Frequent changes of Organisational decisions affect badly on on-going programme activities

*Assets building under Federations (Strengths):* It has been found that most of the Federations have their own land, building, other physical infrastructures, economic setup etc. Through these interventions a Federation is able to generate its own fund, at the same time it can provide extension services to the community people as a whole.

It shows that 80% of Federations have their land and building, most of the federations (63%) have tree nursery, and many of them have economic enterprises.

Now the question is- whether the Federation leaders could maintain these assets and could make better use of those. If the Federation Leaders could keep their morality on the top, dedicate their labour and time to do the best for the people and their groups, it would lead the Federation to become a 'community-based people's Organisation'.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Role of SOIDEOs in developing Federations is very intensive and most of their tasks are so mandatory that they have to present themselves with confidence, depend themselves consciously with strong argument in many crucial situations, which they often face during their work in the field. They have to do work not only with the Federation members, but also with all segments of community people as a whole. Social and even political issues are sometimes related to the Federation's development work. So, SODEOs need to handle those situations very tactfully. In this regard requisite skills needed to be achieved and they should be developed with proper guidance.

It is to be mentioned here that, there needs a special thrust from the development Organisation who likes to establish 'people's Organisation /grassroots level institutions under the existing sociopolitical situation of our country. In line with that, staffs also to be selected in such a manner that they would be able to institutionalize the model successfully. In this regard staffs should have some basic knowledge on people's mobilization, Organisational development, social system analysis etc., which are relevant with their nature of job. Over and all, staffs should be committed enough to accomplish their assigned job perfectly.

### **Recommendations**

- There is no way to ignore the existence of Union Federations. There are also competent leaders, resourceful Federations. They have innovative ideas to mobilize local resources. It is now necessary to review the policies in order to

define new or extended role for the federation leaders, SODEOs, other related staffs; and there is a need to think how these should be promoted in a wider space.

- It is very important to provide 'Foundation training' on social and human development to each and every SODEO immediately after his/ her joining. This is an area where they could accommodate themselves from the starting point of their job with the community.
- SODEOs are giving less time in training / capacity building process of the Federation leaders. According to SODEO's nature of job, this should be given the highest value. They spend only 3% time for 'group visit'. It is an important factor, which the SOIDEOs also expressed that, without regular visits to 'Secondary groups' it would be a threat for a Federation to exist as an apex body of the member groups under a union.
- The RDRS/Federation policy should be re-designed and secondary groups should be visited by SODEOs at least at a regular interval. For this, SODEOs need to re-allocate their time to perform their work in future as per the 'needs' to institutionalize the People's Organisation both at grassroots (secondary group) and at higher level (union and thana level).
- SODEOs would have to think more on the issue to transfer their skills to the federation members /leaders so that in absence of them respective leaders/members could run their organisations independently.
- Isolation among the development staffs, different policies in implementing programme activities within a Federation hamper its institutional growth. In this case, SODEOs would have to play the major role to integrate different programmes, ensure coordination with all related staffs and to activate federation leaders in that way. This could also be solved by the respective Programme coordinators through coordination meetings, and through regular monitoring of ongoing activities.
- There is no way to ignore other programme administration and managerial job done by SODEOs in Thana office level. In fact, these are all related to programme management and area office administration, which should not be treated as 'isolated' from integrated development programme under which SODEOs are working. They should accept the challenge and prove their capacity in managing such situation.
- Any development activity designed for Federations and to be implemented in the field should be coordinated earlier with them and should be informed in the field 'through' them.

- Top-level managers/decision-makers should supervise the staffs at field areas more frequently and advise them on the spot. This would be a part of building capacity of SODEOs in a pragmatic way.
- Most of the SODEOs expected that the management authority would move forward to design and develop training curriculum on 'institution Development', 'Leadership Development' on the basis of practical situation of 'People's Institution' /Federation within the field context of RDRS.
- Advanced Training to the SODEOs on Institutional Development, Leadership Development should be ensured by the policy-makers.
- In order to strengthen institutional base, Federation leaders would have to build up trust among the general members first. They should have regular communication with the secondary groups. Their role is also to satisfy secondary group members through providing advice to strengthen their own groups, ensuring need-based social and financial services to the individual members and to the groups, etc.
- Federation leaders also have to maintain liaison with the other social leaders, public representatives, local level government officials. Leaders need to be tactful to build relationship with those persons. In order to have recognition of Federation, leaders should spare no pains to do work with them with a careful discharge of their duties.
- SODEOs need to work closely with the Federation leaders to widen their (leader) discernment so that they can administer programmes neutrally. As a catalyst, they could arrange both formal and informal discussion sessions with the leaders, when and where appropriate.
- Any intervention, if the SODEOs feel it could not bring any positive result for the Federation, they should immediately disclose their opinion supported with valid reasons. It should be realized that they are the grass-root level stakeholders who are aware on the existing socioeconomic and other relevant situations in the area where the programme likely to be implemented. RDRS management should honour their contribution, and thus make them happy and prosperous to carry out their job confidently.

## **FEDERATION ELECTION 2002** **(A Review of empowerment at the Grassroots)**

by Naved Ahmed Chowdhury  
May 2002

### **Introduction**

RDRS seeks to improve living conditions of the rural poor in Rangpur Dinajpur region of Bangladesh by supporting and implementing development programs for poor and marginalized men and women as well as promoting justice, equity, gender equality and democratic process at the grassroots. All development interventions are deliberately implemented through groups and these are considered to be 'Peoples' Grassroots Institutions'. RDRS at present works with around 250,000 poor people through around 16,000 primary and secondary groups in its core and bilateral programs.

Federations are formed at the union level comprising of graduated primary groups (also called secondary groups) from the local villages. After five years of intensive group activities under direct supervision of RDRS a primary group is graduated or fully affiliated to a Union Federation which represents the interest of primary groups, provide support services and act as vehicle for carrying forward development activities by and for the poor. In a nutshell, therefore, a Federation is an 'apex body' of groups, which are self-managed and mandated to carry forward the development activities for the rural poor. At present there are 256 federations, one in each of the 256 unions where RDRS's development activities exist.

RDRS has been trying to strengthen capacity of this federation for last several years. It was felt that all group members must be able to exercise their voting rights for electing executive committee of federation to ensure greater credibility and make leadership accountable to all. The election was held for 228 Federations. In 23 federations election was not held for various reasons while election was postponed or deferred in 5 federations. The election was completed between 13-18 April 2002. Total number of vote cast in the election was 54, 841 with the total number of voters being 69,734 which shows a very impressive 80% voter turn out.

The main objective of the report is to detail the electoral process of the union Federation election 2002. In this issues include total number of vote, capacity of executive committee, participation of local govt. authority, law and order

situation etc. Two external monitors, one development specialist and one journalist critically observed the election process.

### **RDRS Federation Election: At a Glance**

**Chairperson:** Total number of candidate for the post of chairperson was 426 (378 male and 48 female). A total of 226 federation had their chairperson elected. Of these only 13 were women (6%) and the rest 213 (94%) were men.

**Vice Chairperson** (reserved for women): Total number of candidates was 325. 216 of these candidates were elected; showing overwhelmingly large (two-thirds) number of women being elected (66%).

**Secretary:** Total of number of candidates for the post was 344. A total of 186 men and 32 women were elected. The women elected a dismal 9% of the total. The highest number of women elected was in Panchagarh (7) and the second highest is Nageshwari and Lalmonirhat where a total of 5 women were elected.

**Cashier:** The total number of candidate was 346. A total of 183 male and 36 female candidates were elected (10%)

**General Member:** The total number of candidate was 762. The number of female winner was 187 (25%).

**General Member** (reserved for women): Every federation had two seats reserved for women. A total of 452 women contested and 403 were elected. It seemed that the women candidates were elected without much difficulty as 89% of them were elected.

The total number of candidates was 2661 of which there were 1462 male and 1199 female candidates. The male and female ratio is also almost equal, 54% male to 46% female candidates. A total of 1021 male and 887 female candidates were elected that is 53% male and 47% female. This clearly illustrates that although almost equal number of women were elected, the women made up the number through their election in reserve seats and that they are mostly in lower end of the hierarchy, therefore not much involved in the decision making process.

### **Lessons learnt/ Recommendations**

- The most effective mode for undertaking any evaluation, was simply by talking openly with the candidates, voters and other officials present at the

centers. When time is limited, meeting with groups of voters together is a useful strategy. Not only this makes it possible to gather numerous views simultaneously, but also the interchanges, which take place between participants in the meeting or discussion, may throw upon new issues or indicate points of disagreement. This is only way in which it is possible to explore the competing views which may be held between different sectors of the voters, such as between men and women, elders and youth, those who receive direct support from RDRS and those who do not.

- The inclusion of local elite and local government officials contributed hugely in lessening the conflict between federation committee members and local authorities. The local government administration (UNO, OC, UP chairman) and local elite were very cooperative and provided necessary support for conducting federation election successfully. This also shows increased importance the Union Parishads attached to the federation as a grassroots institution where people actively participate and make their voices heard. This support of domestic non-partisan election monitoring should be continued.
- Many federation leaders have cleared their overdue credit to RDRS and federation fund. This election has encouraged them to set example for the members. As far as the local capacities for operating and maintaining institutions are concerned important positive effects of this election are likely to be continued. However, it will not be easy and in some cases it will be impossible, to institutionalize social responsibility of the executive committee members through only one direct election. But this election has gone a long way in creating local ownership to ensure sufficient commitment among local stakeholders.
- Training of the SODEOs should be organized in the future where they can get training from external organizations specialized in election monitoring and management. In this respect efforts to develop better relationships with other NGOs and national and international organizations should be undertaken.
- The evaluation team was convinced that RDRS as a result of its interdependent relationship with the federations, as well as its advocacy and interventions with the beneficiaries should undertake activities in order to create increased awareness of candidates about their responsibilities after election. In this respect the candidates should be encouraged to concentrate on issue oriented campaign. EOs and SODEOs need to be given orientation for conducting the field level orientation of the newly elected Executive committee members on federation development and management.

- Creating an atmosphere conducive to democratic elections is one of the prerequisites for election, which is credible and transparent and acceptable to all. RDRS has made significant efforts to address this concern particularly through developing and institutionalizing various regulations and making active effort for developing close collaboration with various stakeholders. This collaboration should continue.
- The operational structure of RDRS (for successful execution of this federation election) has proven to be effective and efficient. Nevertheless when the next election will be due in three years time, the federations themselves should be able to take more responsibility. RDRS at that time should only collaborate as a facilitator. The evaluation team found communication between RDRS and federation without any tensions or frustration. In the future clear division of labor and responsibilities between RDRS and federation, with RDRS responsible for policy and program strategy and federations for program implementation should be the direction.
- The evaluation team feels that the election will lead to a degree of fragmentation, with the work of different federation reflecting the personalities and profiles of the individuals elected there. This is not necessarily bad but at a stage where the democratic process is being institutionalized slowly, this need to be closely observed by RDRS. Continuous and regular visits by the EOs and SODEOs to the federation could help ensure consistency, as could greater opportunities for federation executive members to develop their own skills through exposure visits to other NGOs or RDRS operation in other areas.
- Removing impediments to women's participation is essential for greater number of women to participate in the next election. Although participation of women in the election was found to be enthusiastic, the number of women elected was negligible and this needs to be increased further in the future through motivation and awareness building activities.
- More support is needed from RDRS for enhancing capacity building process of the federations. Steps should be taken to identify and develop further mechanisms of support for income generation by the federations. A coherent medium and long-term programme strategy for strengthening the institutional and development capacity of the federation should be defined as well.
- Conversations with elected candidates demonstrated lack of understanding of their mandates. While requests for the effective and timely delivery of the

assistance, which RDRS does aspire to provide, are reasonable, the federations will find it hard to live up to far reaching beneficiary expectations if they are not clear about their role and objective. RDRS in this regard can organize special training/seminars/ workshops where the role and mandate of the federation executive members could be discussed. This will help the members to implement programs and provide proper leadership as is expected from them. Moreover special training on issues for effective management of federations can be arranged by RDRS. Capacity building of women leadership should be given added importance in this regard.

- Given the complex and politically charged nature of local politics in Bangladesh, it is suggested that RDRS should undertake more beneficiaries based evaluations in the future and link it to regular program audits. This will help to enhance and ensure financial transparency as well as participatory decision-making process of federations.
- Budget and bookkeeping is one main competency lacking in the federation members. Many of the executive committee members well as the members of the past executive committee said that they are not very competent in managing the financial transaction of their federations. This has lead to misunderstanding between the executive and general members and gave rise to accusations of corruption and financial mismanagement. RDRS should make an effort to address this at the earliest by arranging short financial management courses for at least the cashier of each federation. The other members can be trained at a later stage.
- Election for the remaining federations was to be completed by 25<sup>th</sup> June 2002. RDRS also planned to do the following: a) arrange three day training for newly elected members of the executive committee on federation management, b) steps to be taken to maintain overdue free status of the newly elected EC members, c) updating the list of group members, d) federation by laws to be strictly followed, e) updating federation by laws as per amendment made for the election, f) recovering outstanding (overdue) federation money from the ex federation executive committee members, etc.

## **OD process and MCU of RDRS by international consultants**

# The Organizational Development Process of RDRS

by Pieter Damen & Fulco van Deventer

I/C Consult

September 2002

**1. Introduction:** After discussions, RDRS, ICCO and CORDAID desk-officers agreed to invite I/C Consult to conduct an organizational assessment. The purpose of present mission two-member team of I/C Consult is part of an ongoing process of organizational change and development of RDRS. RDRS felt a strong need to adjust the organizational set up to reflect changing development priorities and approaches as well as declining funding and considers such an exercise as an integral part of its Strategy.

**2. Transfer from International NGO to Local NGO:** RDRS has transformed itself into local organization in 1996/97 from originally part of the Lutheran World Federation. Although many difficulties had to be taken, the organization succeeded relatively well in the continuing it's programmes and maintaining its structures. Most crucial in this type of processes is the change of leadership and acceptance of employees of the new situation. For RDRS new leadership seems to be incorporated in various persons and is definitely not related to only one person, i.e. the director. This can be interpreted as a good sign. In the choice for the new executive director, RDRS gave preference to someone with long experience within the organization instead of an outsider with good qualifications.

Many of the old values still prevail. One of the dominant expressions we heard is 'in principle RDRS works in all the region'. We can understand that this value has its origin in the first days when the RDRS was coming into the regions together with and for the refugees early seventies. But today it might be worth to study if this axiom is still true. With the limitation resources, more actors that are appearing and changes in global development paradigms, it might be useful to come to priorities and selections, as well as of activities as of target groups.

In its new constitution as a local NGO, RDRS has spent a good time-on re-inventing itself. We were impressed by the amount of work and internal capacity RDRS has showed by facilitating its own strategic planning process. And it did result into some remarkable conclusions. Like the organizational separation between the Credit and the Social Development units and the decision to change from educating primary groups into facilitation of higher-level target groups like the Federations. RDRS made us aware that this part of strategic thinking has been done, and now it is time for structural changes in the "being" of the

organization, like the structures, the people and the culture as well as the procedures.

As can be seen with other organizations that stem from International NGO backgrounds, the technical side of the organization is mostly well developed (and sometimes overdeveloped compared to the spiritual aspects). Also RDRS gave us the impression of an organization where many procedures, systems, checks and balances are in place, from high to even the lowest levels. Although Government and Donor Agencies require lots of procedures, RDRS' organizational development should not prioritize this direction. Hence an adaptation of the structures, the staff and the working culture seems urgent, as we will explain further in this document.

### **3. Business Approach**

RDRS has a lot to offer in terms of infrastructure, knowledge and experience. There is definitely an awareness of the economic value of its assets (physical and intangible). To a certain extent mechanism have been developed to create financial partnership with Federations and Government regarding small investments. Also the exploitation of training facilities and guesthouses is high on the agenda. As recent experiences show there is certainly a market and even more important, RDRS seems to understand well how to approach that market. We experienced many examples of business thinking, whether it is regarding the professional set-up of the guesthouse and NBI, the cooperation in programmes of others (like the WFP to whom RDRS offers part of their infrastructure against a realistic cost price) or the maintenance of vehicles.

It is for sure that the different kind of commercial based activities should be worked out more precisely into business plans and that those activities should be organized apart from activities that are financed out of donor funds. In this document we will suggest a more transparent structure.

### **4. Core funding, Bilateral funding & Generating Income**

There is mechanism that brings RDRS in a certain state of financial panic. Without any doubt we can say that RDRS is a big NGO, although Bangladesh has a reputation in this sense and bigger ones can be found. With approximately 1500 paid staff members, the cost is high. Also the extensive infrastructure has its financial requirements. Core donors are not any more willing to pay a huge 'overhead' that are not clearly related to the core programmes. This makes RDRS looking intensively for bilateral programmes that can cover a part of the overhead or absorb staff capacity. But unfortunately these programmes require

different administrative approaches by which overhead costs are even increasing. And these bilateral programmes will not solve the problem of redundant staff capacity since these as well require high qualified and sometimes specialized staff. It is highly recommended to look for bilateral programmes that contribute to the mission of the organization. Programmes that are alien to organizational goals finally will cause loss.

Another pitfall is that NGOs put their energy in creating IGA's (income Generating Activities) aiming for funding social activities. Donor agencies re-enforce this by emphasizing the financial sustainability of the NGO without clarifying why NGOs have to be sustainable in their own existence, and why certain development programmes cannot proceed on a funding base. Experiences show that very little IGA's finally generate profit, while they are absorbing most of the managerial capacity. The proposition becomes vital that if the same amount of energy were spent on the improvement of the core programme, core funding would have been more assured by the donor community.

## **5. Shift from Educating to Facilitating**

RDRS proposes, in its strategic plan, a shift from the level of working with primary groups towards higher levels, like secondary groups, federations, co-federations and advocacy. Taking this as a starting point, we could say that RDRS is at the brink of 'a major change in its organizational approach. We will explain this here below the basic assumption is that Federations will take up the education of new unit-level groups in their area. RDRS will focus at the level of Federations and above only.

In the successive steps of development of an organization (in this case the organization(s) of the target group; unit-level group, federation, co-federation) a certain pattern of required support can be found.

In the first phase (1) there is a need for basic training and expertise on various items and skills related to specific topics of the group interest, but also basic organizational aspects. It is the phase in which the supporting organization (i.e. RDRS) can supply all the answers and can design a learning curriculum by which the beginning organizations can graduate. RDRS has provided this support quite literally by providing very intensive and standardized training & constancy to the various primary groups in the region, in order to let them graduate to secondary groups. This has resulted in a large quantity of "more or less" the same secondary groups. For RDRS' own organization, this has led to a large staff of

junior trainers and experts, guided by a much smaller amount of senior staff, that was in charge of conducting the curriculum. In terms of culture RDRS has become an organization that is working with precise instructions to its staff. This for instance is reflected by the detailed job instructions for field workers and the standardized requirements for organizational graduation.

In the next phase (11) the target group organizations will express a need for coaching. The organizations will define their own path of development and may encounter obstacles of various natures. The support to be given needs to be 'tailor-made facilitation'. The facilitator should establish a close relationship with the organization, but also ensure a certain distance, in order not to become part of the client's problems. Sometimes it is required that the facilitator is out of sight for a while, so the groups grow on their own. It is obvious that the facilitator does not have all the answers, since every step of development is new. Next steps have to be sorted out and the facilitator will guide the organization along the way. Good facilitation implies the contracting of certain trainers and experts for giving focused inputs at the right time. RDRS has indicated in its strategic plan the shift to supporting secondary organizations and federation. This means the shift to facilitation. Can RDRS be a facilitating organization? This question seems to be the biggest challenge at this time. It requires basically quite a different staff capacity. Facilitators are people that have gone through different stages of development themselves, are respected not only by their knowledge but probably more by their wisdom, seniority and attitude. They are best characterized by 'people who give the right questions instead of answers' best characterize them. Hereafter we will describe our idea about the organizational consequences for RDRS concerning this matter.

In the third (111) phase the need for coaching declines. Organizations will be able to guide their own development. Now a new kind of input is requested concerning highly specialized knowledge. Target group organizations (Federations, Co-federations) need expertise for instance on land right issues, environmental or agricultural issues, advocacy services, conflict mediation or vertical linkage to other organizations. Supporting organizations will have to make up their mind whether they want to shift to a knowledge organization and if yes, which specialization should logically follow from their history. For RDRS this might be something to think about as long term strategic planning. This will also imply big changes in its principles, since knowledge organizations generally do not have a strong regional orientation, but see their market broader and more flexible.

## **The arena model**

Hereunder we will then describe an organisation model that is appropriate for facilitation. As we have stated before, it is based on the idea that RDRS will change from its support to primary and secondary groups towards the level of federations, which makes them the direct target group for RDRS. On this level the effect of its intervention will be measured. Most of the federations now exist for approximately 10 years. Although it is possible, they are not registered legally because the political climate has not been found appropriate. Hence some of the federations (RDRS supports over 250 federations) certainly are vital and articulated organizations (see Bright Pattern on Dark I Clothes, Roberto Benini 1999). They already encounter the challenges and problems of being a social membership organization, which means attempts of political involvement, being active in conflict mediation, taking responsibility over economic projects, etc. The requirements for support are becoming every day more complex. If RDRS will be able to coach their target group in its development, it should start organize itself in a different way. The Social Development unit will be seen as the core unit of the organization. This unit is organized as an arena in which three roles can be distinguished: facilitation, training and offering expertise. The principal objective of this unit will be defined in certain end qualification of the federations (see chapter monitoring). Although the whole unit will be responsible for the end-results, the facilitators will be the principle responsible. Each facilitator will be assigned to 10 federations with various levels. With each federation the facilitator makes a plan for the long-term development and one for the coming year. These plans stem from a joint analysis of the capacity and requirements of the federation in its own local context. Based on the annual plan, the facilitator can indicate when trainers and experts need input. He/she will make a year contract with training and expertise capacity, so that they can start to develop specific material. In this way Facilitation can be seen as a demand group. Training as a demand/capacity group and Expertise as a capacity group. Where facilitators are connected to approximately 10 federations in a specific geographical area, the trainers and experts will work over whole intervention region of RDRS. Each facilitator against the background of each federation-development plan will monitor the quality of the input given by them and their contribution to the end goals. In terms of structure and procedure this model means a reduction of complexity. It is based on the principles of internal market, which has proved to reduce hierarchy and procedures. The checks and balance take place mostly within the direct relationship of demand-capacity. PME-systems should be translated to the level of the individual development plan and aggregated to institutional level (see chapter monitoring). In terms of staff and culture this model implies a big change. Finally RDRS will count with a group of approximately 50 facilitators, who all need to be of senior level. They must have an exploring ability, which means being able to work without instruction on

operational level, as a professional. These facilitators will take a principle role within the organization and can be held accountable for reaching the major institutional goals. In order to fulfil this role well, they have the position to assign or contract internal capacity. If this capacity eventually does not contain the required quality, the facilitators can get inputs from outside RDRS. Finally this model should reduce the large quantity of staff, because trainers and experts can rather decide to offer their services partly to an outside market, Eventually these capacity groups will function as profit centres.

#### Facilitation

a.. Facilitation <-> *training*

The facilitators can contract training capacity, based on the development plans they have established with each federation. Trainers can be hired in principle for each federation over the whole region.

b. *Training* <- > Expertise

In their role as trainers they can hire expertise as input for training materials.

c. Facilitation <->) *Expertise*

The facilitators may need expert consultancy on certain areas in their process of coaching the federations. This input can be planned in advance, but also emerge at certain moments. Flexibility should be build into this relationship. The experts will work over the whole region.

### **6. The Organization as a whole**

In line with the outcome of RDRS strategic planning process, the Social Development Unit can be seen as the principle unit. But RDRS is carrying more activities, all with an objective linked to social development, but basically with different target groups. In the following picture we give an example of a structure that is related to the various target groups. RDRS distinguishes within its region, In the line we see the following units:

#### **a. Health unit**

We experience the health unit as from a different nature. In the first place because this unit is working directly with the population, providing services like antenatal care and eye care. The development paradigm here is different from Social Development, where the idea of empowerment and handing over is dominant. Activities within the health centre would not lead to the same objectives as set elsewhere in the organizations, although it is true that good health is a basic condition for human development. The health unit is placed in some of the district centres. As this unit is organized well and independently

from the other units and because funding is not interfering with other programmes within RDRS, we support the idea of creating a "status apart". Make it an independent unit under the RDRS umbrella that is having its own funding lines, management, objectives. Treat the relationship with RDRS and the Health Unit as if were a partnership, with transparent contracts.

**b. Microcredit unit**

As we have understood, the micro credit unit has just been separated from the Social Development programme. The reasons were of an administrative but also development kind. At grassroots level the staff found it more and more difficult to combine these two. The separation means that Micro Credit has its own staff, is working with its own credit groups (not any more related to federations), is having its own fund and will strive to function as a micro credit bank with sufficient coverage rates and return on investments. The credit unit is in the process of writing a comprehensive business plan. During our mission we have not been able to give a closer look at this unit.

**c. Social Development unit**

The social development unit is placed in the centre of the organization, because it is carrying out RDRS' core programme. We have described this unit in chapter 4.

**d. Exploitation and Asset Management**

RDRS is carrying out activities that are not directly related to social development of target groups, but enable conditions on which the other units can function. This condition can be financial or infrastructure. We encourage RDRS to create a separate unit ' in which all activities of this nature are organized in a transparent way. The activities are seen as separate profit centres, for which its costs, expenses, income and profit are clearly allocated towards the various users (as well internal clients that are the other units, as the external clients). In other words, each profit centre has its own business plan and is budgeted independently. As profit centres we see the guesthouses, the real property, the financial partnerships with federations and government and various income-generating activities.

Further we would like to elaborate more on the support and strategic units, which are the support unit and the monitoring & evaluation department. The support unit is taking care of the administrative task for all the units. What is missing in the current situation is a central Human Resources Department, in which all administrative tasks related to personnel take place. At the scale of RDRS it is definitely an advantage, to centralise these tasks, in order to release the individual unit managers. Another important task of this HR-department is

the Human Resource development. RDRS is taking care for recruiting, training but also creating its own staff.

There is policy involved: what kind staff do we need in the coming years, how do we attract people to come to the North, how do we encourage women to work within RDRS, etc. All these questions could be dealt with in this department. In this sense it is quite a strategic topic. Within the support unit we also find the monitoring function. As can be seen in chapter on monitoring, here we speak about monitoring the process, collection of data, statistic processing and analyses. Taking the Social Development Unit as an example, it is seen as a support to the facilitators who need to monitor the activities with their federations, which is in the first place monitoring their processes. In the second place we speak of another level of monitoring. This is the monitoring and evaluation of the change that takes place at federation level. It is done mostly by evaluation at larger time intervals. We have put this on another organization level, since the results may lead to changes in strategies and objectives, probably at corporate level. Therefore the monitoring & evaluation office needs to be free to carry out studies and feed back results to all levels of RDRS.

### **Where is NBI?**

In our approach we split up NBI in three main functions. The first function is knowledge centre. Learning creates knowledge and takes place when there is place for reflection on practice. That is why we believe that the knowledge centre should be placed within each line unit. For making knowledge vital a good library or database is not enough. It requires a direct interface with the developmental practices of the units and should be facilitated by its managers. The second function is providing infrastructure for guests, meetings, events, etc. This is placed in the exploitation and asset management unit for reasons we have discussed under item d. The last function is the one related to Human Resources. NBI is used as attraction and incubator for future staff. This function is well placed in the Human Resource Department, as described above.

### **7. Monitoring on two levels**

During the interaction with RDRS staff, in Rangpur and in Dhaka and while visiting the programmes we discussed and exchanged facts and opinions on Monitoring & Evaluation. RDRS has established a wide range of monitoring and evaluation activities, predominantly to respond to the queries and exigencies of their donors for information on the activities that RDRS has implemented and on the results that have been achieved.

In the programmes a lot of information is collected on a monthly base. These information and data are aggregated into 3-monthly, 6-monthly and annual

reports that will be forwarded to the various donors. When data are incomplete or do not respond the specific purpose staff of the monitoring and evaluation units, in Rangpur and in Dhaka respectively travel to the field to collect the additional information. Of course the nature and the number of data vary per sector and sometimes per donor.

Realising the amount of energy and staff-time which RDRS spends on data collection the picture emerged of having a 'monitoring dashboard of a Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet' to drive a number of cars. Of course this picture exaggerates but it shows that the data collection might not be in tune with the need for monitoring data and other information needed. It is, of course understood that monitoring encompasses the whole specter of data (well-defined) collection, analysis and action taken.

All over the world there is a drive in the NGO world to expand the monitoring domain in order to respond to more and more queries and formats of donors. Looking at a distance this seems not the appropriate answer. In the first and second place a monitoring system needs to produce those information - at regular intervals, which enable an organization to follow and measure its progress in achieving its targets and objectives. These are defined at the appropriate level and indicators are chosen accordingly. It is our opinion that this monitoring information should also provide enough material to satisfy the demands and exigencies of donors. The sequence is first monitoring for one's self and secondly reporting to donor. If so required additional data and information is collected to enlighten the reports to donors and to other interested parties.

### **Monitoring Hierarchy and Logic**

In IRDRS two levels of monitoring & evaluation can be distinguished, (1) the strategic level and (2) the level of programme- a/o project-implementation.

(1) The strategic level is located at the interface between 'learning & thinking' and 'doing' (see the *Organisation Balance*). The collection of data on qualitative / quantitative indicators at this strategic level deals directly with progress of the major programmes in achieving the strategic objectives of RDRS at large. Monitoring is done at an interval, e.g. 6-months or annually, which makes sense to analysis and to take appropriate action.

(2) The monitoring at implementation level will focus on output as a result of activities, and on outcome as an (aggregate) result of output.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation of Interventions In Social development**

The ultimate aim of RDRS in this domain is to have an impact on the quality of livelihood with their primary beneficiaries i.e. the population which are organized in unions respectively federations and confederations. For the present Strategic Plan RDRS is focussing primarily on the Federations. It is assumed that strong Federations are reaching out to their Members (Unions) and ultimately the populations which adhere to a union.

The Monitoring and Evaluation of RDRS basically looks at four levels: (1) the RDRS intervention, (2) the change at the internal level of the client and (3.a) next at the internal level of the unions and (3.b) ultimately beneficiaries (population who are members of unions).

### **The monitoring system is able to monitor:**

- quality of RDRS interventions (facilitation; training, expertise) - the output of RDRS;
- changes in Federations (partially) the outcome of RDRS.

The evaluation system needs to look at the whole picture:

- quality of RDRS interventions;
- changes in Federations;
- changes in Unions;
- changes at beneficiary level - ultimate impact of RDRS;
- changes at government (policy and practice) due to interventions by federations:
- context of NGOs and Federation Building in Northwest Bangladesh;
- RDRS's own development (in the domain of Social development) and the influence of other stakeholders - landscape.

The above issues to be looked at through the evaluation system are not exhaustive, and can be shortened or extended as deemed necessary.

### **Possible performance indicators for Federations**

The Benini report (1999) highlights a number of areas where Federations, according to RDRS, are to perform well. These areas can be developed into indicators for the monitoring of the process of growth or disintegration of a federation. In the approach whereby the facilitator is coach and sparring partner of a particular federation he will be able to monitor and report on the (positive / negative) growth of the federations under his responsibility, to analyse these processes and to adapt his approach.

At the strategic level the monitoring and evaluation unit will commission a study on the growth of the federations at large. Such a study might be done by RDRS staff which was not engaged in the actual facilitation, or outsiders might be

contracted. The purpose is to evaluate the results at large and derive lessons on the applied approach and strategies.

The performance areas of federations are:

- "Articulation of common interests and solidarity: the groups are relatively homogeneous and share similar objectives and concerns. By affiliating and meeting regularly under the umbrella of a unified association, groups reaffirm their goals, share their problems and seek to achieve solidarity and empowerment.
- Representation: Federations can articulate the needs and represent the interests of their members and the poorest groups in rural society. For example to press Government for local health services, to obtain government land for cultivation and ponds for fish farming.
- Advice and problem solving: federations will be increasingly important sources of information and advice for the member groups across a range of activities. Federations can also act as arbiters or advisors to resolve problems facing individuals groups.
- Education, social and community development: Some federations are already taking a lead in organising educational classes whereby they perceive a strong need and demand, as in literacy. Other community tasks, ranging from arranging community houses, road repairs and tree planting are also task assumed by some Federations.
- Emergency and relief and social welfare: Federations are serving an important role in providing relief or welfare support to individual groups and group members in difficulty, for example through flood and fire damage".  
*(the above points are quoted from the Benini report)*

The above points highlight the areas at large where Federations might be or become active. These areas can be taken as objectives for so called final situations for support. It is necessary to specify more in detail these major areas and to develop specific indicators accordingly. Questions like " how could we see progress towards these situations and how can we measure if these situations are met?" have to be worked out closely.

### **Support by I/C Consult**

In this field of Monitoring & Evaluation some support might be provided by I/C Consult. In the beginning of 2002 staff of RDRS participated at a seminar on PME systems. This seminar was also co-facilitated by an advisor of I/C Consult. In follow-up of this seminar and the present mission a seminar with RDRS staff can be held to explore and to specify together with the RDRS management and staff the ins and outs of an 'intelligent' Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation system which responds to needs of RDRS for the future.

By analogy a similar models can be developed for the other domains where RDRS intervenes even with internal domains such as Exploitation and Asset Management, and the internet support.

## **8. The OD Process: How to Proceed ?**

Originally this mission was planned with the purpose of preparing a long term OD process. A next mission was already scheduled for focussing on detailed issues. The findings of this mission have made us to change our minds on the follow up. In the first place we were impressed by the intern capacity to guide and interpret RDRS' own OD process. During the strategic planning process various groups have been working on different items and came up with critics and ideas. The strategic plan is logic. An OD process should continue the work that has been done and not turn into vision & mission discussions again.

The biggest step to take now is translating the strategic plan into more appropriate structures and culture. In this report we have given an example of how to understand and approach a facilitating organization.

### **Important conditions to make this step are:**

- management is aware of how facilitating organizations function and is fully supporting the shift: we think the awareness and support is present in RDRS. The management has to carry out the transformation. Outside consultants can only support the process by coaching the management;
- the transformation should go step by step. Not the whole RDRS can change over night. Within the social development unit, some staff members could be identified that already have the best abilities to work as facilitators. Form a pool of these people and let them cooperate in a pilot approach, which means working experimentally, spending learning and sharing days together (1 day a week), giving possibilities for training the facilitation skills. Translate positive experiences into the broad organization;
- reduction of complexity; the emphasis is on the facilitation, which gives the functioning of the arena the primary attention. All other activities can be organized separately and transparently.

It is of big importance to identify a training institute (preferably not too far from RDRS' location) that can provide training courses on facilitation skills and coach the pool, as suggested above, in its development. We have good experiences with the 6-week course on facilitating from CDRA in Cape Town (SA) and university institutes in India, but possibly it could be found closer to RDRS.

We can imagine a role for I/C Consult in coaching RDRS management over a longer period and look to the whole process of transformation. Also we can

organise smaller workshops on topics that have a central role in the OD process, for instance on PME or learning organizations.

RDRS has already contracted a consultancy office on the matter of business planning. Seeing the need for this subject, we encourage RDRS in this initiative.

As a final remark we would like to stress that RDRS has leadership capacity to lead its own change process. It is certainly a difficult and careful process, but we appreciate RDRS managerial capacity. We strongly believe that RDRS can and should keep the lead in its transformation. It is a pitfall to contract outside consulting capacity for such processes. Consultants can do excellent jobs in detailed areas and some of them are good coaches, but the lead should stay within the organization.

In the end of November the director of RDRS will come to Holland. We arrange a meeting with him, ICCO, Cordaid and I/C Consult to know to reactions from RDRS on this mission. In this meeting we will elaborate on the next steps.

# **RDRS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: VISIT REPORT**

**EDA team:** Niraj Verina

The focus of this visit was to assess the degree of progress achieved by the MCU and observe the impact of the staff assessment and incentive system and other restructuring related changes on field operations. This being the last but one visit by EDA under the present contract, the future course of action and an outline for a business plan for the micro finance programme were also discussed with the MCU.

EDA's observation from this visit is that there is a perceptible and measurable improvement in the quality of operations at the unit level and portfolio quality on recently disbursed loans is much better than for previous periods. Given the difficult initial conditions that the programme inherited, RDRS' MCU has performed reasonably well in terms of tile performance parameters for which targets had been set in December 2000 before tile start of the restructuring. In a sense, the first-level of improvements have taken roots. These are broadly in terms of a stable organizational structure, improved quality of staff and relatively more disciplined operations. Thereby, the fundamentals of the microfinance operations are more or less in place.

However, this direction of change needs to be sustained and improved over time even while higher-level changes - in terms of more efforts and increased attention - are developed further in the coming year. Apart from the focus on portfolio quality and sustainability the other areas that need increased emphasis now are product design, competition and growth strategies, assessment of impact, more sophisticated and regular financial and management analysis, streamlining operations to make them more efficient (possibly through detailed time and motion studies and reviews of existing systems), improving systems further and fund utilization.

The outcome of the field visit by the EDA team, and work progress and discussions with the management are summarised below along with a list of recommendations.

## **1 Organisational issues**

### **Head office staffing and organizational restructuring**

Based on previous discussions with EDA, four Credit and Enterprise Development Officers -designated as credit supervisors/credit (CEDOs) were to be transferred

to the MCU and re-designated as credit supervisors/credit monitoring officers. This restructuring is important so as to supplement the head office capability to monitor field operations. However, the transfer has taken longer than envisaged earlier and it is now expected that the change will take place from 1 January 2003.

Further, as suggested in its May 2002 visit report, EDA reiterates the need for inducting a Human Resources Manager (preferably through internal recruitment so as to save on costs). This would assist the MCU management by freeing the time of key head office staff.

EDA recommends that all these changes be assigned top priority and are introduced at the earliest possible time. After induction of these staff, communication and training in their new roles will be critical.

EDA had also recommended earlier the allocation of greater authority to the core management team for micro finance, especially at the Assistant Coordinator level. This is still under consideration by the top management of RDRS. EDA continues to feel that greater authority for these positions is critical for ensuring control over the micro finance operations at the field level. Specifically, the Assistant Coordinator need to have authority over all programme staff including the Programme Managers. Such a change will facilitate operations, enhance monitoring and control ability of the head office and be beneficial for **risk**

## **Management and internal control**

In addition to providing greater authority to the Assistant Coordinators, RDRS should consider creating an extra position at this level. While two Assistant Coordinators would be responsible for field operations and have the entire programme staff report to them and the Micro finance Coordinator, the third Assistant Coordinator would have the four CEDOs working under him/her and be responsible solely for internal control and monitoring. This clear allocation of responsibility for a critical management function would result in more efficient and clearer role definitions for all three Assistant Coordinators. EDA bases this recommendation on its experience of working with a wide range-of MFIs and from its knowledge and understanding of best practices in organizational structuring, internal control and monitoring.

Even if RDRS is not keen to increase the headcount, the creation of specific responsibility for internal control and monitoring can be undertaken by reallocating staff to this position or, alternately, allocating one of the Assistant Coordinators to this position and the other to head overall field operations.

The Microfinance Coordinator (Mr Tapan Karmaker) agrees that there would be considerable benefit in such a move and that much of the restructuring could be undertaken, simply by reallocating existing staff positions within the organization. Such reallocation could be made possibly by merging a relatively small unit located close to a medium size unit or two small units into one unit (the Thakurgaon and Pirganj units and/or the Nageswari and Kurigram units). Such a merger would result in one/two Programme Managers being available for other functional responsibilities.

EDA agrees with this idea and suggests that rationalization of the unit structure for the micro finance operations should be undertaken. From discussions at the field level during this visit, EDA clearly felt that internal control and monitoring need to be strengthened in order to improve portfolio quality and the culture of discipline further.

## **1.2 Field operations**

EDA visited the Thakurgaon Unit to review operational progress through a meeting with the supervisory staff - the Microfinance Managers (MMs). The **observations** from this visit are:

- Staff members are more aligned to microfinance operations than before
- Discipline in operations has increased in relative terms though minor deviation is still accepted particularly when related to reporting - this is an area where further measures need to be taken
- The idea of maintaining portfolio quality and sustainability are better ingrained in staff members than before and this is being reflected in improving portfolio quality.
- The staff incentives provided earlier in the year generated considerable interest amongst staff members -however, improved communication on the incentive system and wider application of the incentives to cover all levels of staff at the units were suggested by the Microfinance Managers (refer also to Section 2.1)
- There may be redundancy in maintaining loan ledgers - these do not seem to be adding to the level of information or control (refer also to Section 2.2)
- Other reporting formats appear to be working well and the recently produced unit and *Thana* level Income and Expense statements along

with key ratios such as the Operational Self-Sufficiency have been well received and understood by unit level staff.

**EDA's view is that overall field operations have improved significantly. The reasons behind this are:**

- efforts of the MCU
- Organizational restructuring and the consequential clearer staff role-definition improved control mechanisms and reporting and analysis formats
- training imparted to all MMs and Programme Managers in delinquency measurement and control (two training programmes conducted by EDA) as also in other operational issues (on a regular basis by the MCAJ)
- rewards and punishment systems established by the MCU (incentives for performance including cash and promotion; reprimands and termination of duties)
- increased focus on maintaining portfolio quality through better loan appraisals, more follow up and increased efforts at enforcing discipline at the group level

However, EDA is also of the opinion that the improvements that have taken place could have occurred faster and more positive signals of revival should have been evident by now. Part of the reason for the slower rate of progress lies in the fact that it has taken a long time to improve and implement the proposed changes.

Given the immense challenges that the programme faced at the time of initiating the restructuring at end-2000 and those it continues to face now, a quicker response time and increased flexibility from the top management to undertake decisions, is required.

In addition, the innovative use of tools such as recovery drives as well as incentives and disincentives, needs to be initiated by the MCU.

## **2. Management factors**

### **2.1 Staff assessment and incentive system**

The staff assessment system is working well with unit level performance assessment data being sent on a quarterly basis to the head office. The MIS staff person (Sharafat) at the head office is generating regular and accurate reports

after tabulating and analysing the staff assessment information for all Field Officers (FOs) and Microfinance Officers (MOs).

However, no incentives have been offered to the staff after the one time bonus that was announced in the first quarter of 2002. Based on discussions at the head office and in the field, it was clear that the incentive system would be an effective motivation and performance enhancement tool provided a decision to implement it was taken and adequate communication - on the frequency and the basis of determining incentives - was communicated clearly to all staff.

In consultation with the Micro finance Coordinator, **EDA recommends** the following course of action:

- Regularize the individual incentive system - as designed earlier - with effect from September 2002 with a review scheduled one year later
- Offer incentives on two occasions in a year - after the September and December assessments - based on the incentive system developed by RDRS and EDA
- Offer relatively high incentives in two slabs so as to increase coverage and motivate a larger number of staff who miss the slabs by a small margin
- The two slabs for MOs could be Tk1,800 and Tk3,500 per incentive and/or FOs the slabs could be Tk2,800 and Tk5, 000 per incentive
- Individual incentives should not be linked to interest earned for now though this decision should be reviewed around September 2003.

EDA recommends that in addition to the individual incentive discussed above, a **group incentive** should be provided to the staff and Programme Manager of profitable Thanas once a year after finalisation of accounts in January - February. Such a measure would ensure that incentives can be earned by all operational staff and would help communicate the message that good performance can result in attractive monetary rewards. The first occasion for distributing this could be in early 2003 using the 2002 financial statements for basing the decisions on group incentives.

## **2.2 Accounting and financial control**

Regular accounting and financial analysis - undertaken by the Accounts Manager (Subroto) is proceeding well. Quarterly preparation of balance sheets and income statements is undertaken for overall operations along with a unit-wise disaggregating. Moreover, *Thana* level income statements are now being prepared and shared with the operational staff. In addition, quarterly ratio analysis is

being undertaken. This achievement is significant since operational staff have now started to understand the basic financial performance issues.

Another issue that should be considered by RDRS is the question of whether to maintain loan ledgers. The Field Officers undertake this task and is quite time consuming. In terms of information, the loan ledgers that are prepared on the basis of the money receipts have the same information heads as in the collection sheets. From an internal control perspective, since the Micro Banker staff members at the units also input and computerize the data from the money receipts, a check on the Micro finance Organizers' is anyway undertaken.

EDA's opinion is that at present neither the collection sheets nor the loan ledgers are prepared very well. In this scenario it may be worthwhile to consider doing away with the loan ledgers provided that the collection sheets are maintained well and tally with the money receipts and the Micro Banker data. The approach should be to ask Field Officers to use the extra time available to ensure the proper maintenance of collection sheets and to follow up on recoveries and undertake monitoring. Any movement in this direction should be piloted in one or two Thanas before larger scale replication.

In terms financial statement preparation, EDA suggests that, in 2003, Thana level balance is to complete the sheets should also be prepared. On other fronts related to accounting, efforts to reconciliation of accounts need to be continued.

In addition, EDA suggests that RDRS prepare a business plan for the next five years. The actual performance of each quarter in 2003 and later years should be compared with the business plan. This variance analysis would feed into management decision-making and enable better planning and control of operations. Other measures to improve financial control lie partly in the organizational structure changes discussed in Section I and in suggestions made in earlier EDA reports related to internal control and risk management.

EDA also recommends that a decision on write-offs should be taken immediately. As mentioned in previous reports reporting that Part of the portfolio that is not likely, to be recovered overstates assets and distorts operations and performance analysis. Staff are allocated to groups where no loans are likely to be recovered resulting in inefficient utilisation of time. Productivity ratios and financial performance also cannot be analysed correctly on account of this distortion.

One option for writing-off loans could be to adjust them directly against the retained surpluses and not reflect the write-offs in the income statement. If the auditors agree to this approach, it may well be justified since the bad loans

ideally should have been written-off and provided for in previous periods and do not reflect the performance of the current financial period. An early decision on this issue is required. Alternately, the write-off could be adjusted against reserves and the portfolio in the current year. For now all profitability analysis can be undertaken in two ways - performance with write-offs and without write-offs.

## **2.3 Management information systems**

Comprehensive monthly reports are being generated in the MIS template developed by EDA. The reports being generated are quite extensive and reflect the status of the programme.

With the Windows based software likely to be implemented January 2003, the software codes for generating ageing of arrears need to be rechecked. The best way to do this is for the MIS In-Charge (Muzzammel) to verify the reports being prepared by the existing software and programme with that produced by the Windows based software.

In the quarter-end reports, the data on OSS relates ' to the previous quarter rather than the present quarter since finalisation of accounts takes some time. The fact that the OSS is of the previous quarter should be stated clearly in the quarter-end report.

## **3. Financial performance**

### **3.1 Overall financial performance**

While a detailed financial performance analysis will be undertaken in the last visit of EDA, a quick analysis based on the 30 September 2002 financial statements shows that the Operational Self-Sufficiency (OSS) is 74.1 %. This compares to a level of 69.6% a year ago.

This performance needs to be viewed in the light of the following:

- annualised operating costs in 2002 are 32% higher than the level in 2000 on account of restructuring and increase in staff costs (primarily to supervise the erstwhile, under supervised and under-performing secondary groups)
- growth in costs has occurred with a low gross portfolio growth of 16% in the same period
- yield on investments of RDRS in fixed deposits (29% of total assets) provided only a nominal return (5.5-6%) as the income on investments

has so far been recognised on a cash basis even though bank fixed deposits interest income can very well be recognised on an accrual basis - therefore, investment income is under-reported in the current income statement.

EDA's view is that over the next few years, increases in costs should not and need not be as large as in the last two years since the organisational structure is by and large stable now and productivity in terms of gross performing portfolio per staff member needs to increase significantly.

Therefore, the challenge for the MCU is to continue increasing the yield on the recent portfolio (yield on loans disbursed in 2002 is 19% giving a yield to APR ratio of 73% much higher than the global yield to APR ratio of 40%) and increasing disbursements. At the same time, efforts to maximise recoveries on the old portfolio should be made and really old loans that have had little or no recoveries should be written off.

A quick analysis of recent trends shows that disbursements in some under-performing units with falling yields were higher than for the better performing units. Rationalising disbursement decisions towards units based on portfolio quality should be undertaken - this is also likely to improve overall yield on loans.

### **3.2 Treasury management**

In terms of **treasury management** RDRS needs to review its strategy immediately. Given that the market in Bangladesh provides other higher return fixed deposit options, the present fund management can definitely be improved.

RDRS' final management and finance team needs to undertake the following changes on a priority basis:

- recognise investment income on an accrual basis since the investments are safe and assured in nature - if RDRS had done this for the year 2002, the OSS would have been around 78% (rather than the reported 74%)
- reallocate funds from the existing low return deposits (such as those in Grindlays Standard Chartered Bank) to the selected higher return deposits including Sonali Bank or post office fixed deposits
- explore whether societies can invest in government securities - even if this is not allowed at present, it may well be allowed at a later stage and given the high returns and safety of these instruments, RDRS should keep its options open with regard to these

- since withdrawals of savings are not significant and asset-liability matching concerns are not that important, funds should be invested in deposits or instruments with varying maturities, maybe from 1-3 years
- over time, as the portfolio quality improves, RDRS should consider liquidating some investments and reallocating them to the loan portfolio.

### **3.3 Financial projections**

In order to estimate the likely impact of the changes in disbursement and treasury management strategy, EDA prepared a draft financial projections format and worked with the MCU in preparing a first draft of a five-year forecast of operations. These projections will need to be fine-tuned and finalised over the next month or so by the MCU and can be reviewed at the time of EDA's last visit to RDRS. It seems evident that with a sustained improvement in yields and increased disbursements and productivity, RDRS can attain an OSS greater than 100% within two years. For a programme that had severe problems two years ago this would be a creditable achievement. Further, if write-offs of old loans are adjusted against the retained surpluses and therefore, do not affect the projected year's income statement, this could possibly be achieved even over the next year.

EDA recommends that financial projections for the next five years should be finalised 41, the RDRS management over the next month.

### **3.4 Portfolio quality**

The Portfolio at Risk at 60 days (PAR60) for the overall portfolio is 63% on 30 September 2002 as compared to 61.6% on 31 December 2001. However, for loans disbursed since 2001, PAR60 is much better and is around 30%. For loans disbursed in 2002 PAR60 is quite good at 6.6%.

However, for 2002 loans PAR, is 27.2% and the danger is that much of this may translate into PAR60 over time. An illustration of this is the fact that PAR, for end-June 2002 was only 14.6% and PAR60 1.7% - within a quarter the movement of delinquent loans to higher age categories resulting in PAR60 being 6.6%. Therefore, a concerted recovery effort needs to be undertaken. The MCU needs to take immediate steps to improve the early delinquency signs in the recently disbursed loans.

#### **4 The future course of action for RDRS**

Though the efforts of the MCU in revitalising the microfinance programme are showing signs of improvement the pace of change needs to be increased. Immediate steps to improve performance as outlined in this report especially in terms of portfolio quality maintenance, organisational structuring and treasury management need to be undertaken. The incentive system and financial projections need to be used to improve and monitor performance.

The EDA team, comprising the Managing Director and the Team Leader will focus on all the issues discussed in this report during their next and last visit to RDRS. This is likely to be undertaken in February 2003. Specifically, the team will review the overall performance of RDRS for the year ended December 2002 and compare this with the targets set in December 2000 for the microfinance programme. The team will aim to assess the progress made and suggest the key steps that need to be taken up by RDRS to sustain and increase the rate of progress achieved so far. EDA will also aim to comment on ways to increase focus on operational issues that have so far been a relatively lower priority for the MCU on account of the focus on fundamental improvements in the RDRS microfinance programme.

**EDA Rural Systems Pvt Ltd**

27 December 2002

## **Feedback reports from external interns and students**

## **Communication for Change**

### **- Meeting RDRS Bangladesh**

by Bergit S. Svendseid,  
Intern, Norwegian Church Aid

Eirik and I came to Bangladesh in late September 2002 for three months internship with RDRS. RDRS Bangladesh is a big NGO with many activities and projects. It is essential to have a good communication between staff and interns about the program and for good stay.

During our field visits we always had someone from the office accompanying us. Of course the language barrier between the beneficiaries and us was a problem since we couldn't talk to them directly and always had to have a translator. However, by using body language and a few key words in Bengali, we came a long way.

When an organization is showing visitors their work, it is easy to just focus on the projects that are going well. But some people in RDRS were good at pointing out the difficulties it is facing concerning for example the federations. Seeing both the positive and negative sites of the work of a development organization helps you to get a better understanding of development work in general. Development is not easily done and it takes time, and as an Intern you need to understand that also.

The purpose of our trip was not to evaluate the work of RDRS or to do research on a particular topic, but to visit a country in the south and get to know it and its people, to see and learn about the challenges development countries are facing and to see how one of NCA's partners are working with these challenges. Still, I would like to mention a couple of the projects and areas that we found interesting, and why.

HIV/AIDS is one of the main focuses of NCA these days, and I selected HIV/AIDS as the topic of my article. Though the situation in Bangladesh is far from a catastrophe like the one we see in India, the country has every risk of becoming another AIDS-nation. Unlike many other countries, you still have the chance to prevent it from becoming a big epidemic here. This is a chance that mustn't be missed. And as an NGO working in the high-risk border areas, RDRS have a special responsibility in this matter. I enjoyed very much getting the chance to see how you deal with this challenge, visiting trainings and talking to beneficiaries etc

In Thakurgaon and Pirganj we got to learn about the tribal project, which we found very interesting and important. Visiting the Char area and seeing the work of RDRS there, was also a great experience. Eirik chose the Char Development Project as the area he wanted to look especially into. In the same way as the tribal groups we visited In Thakurgaon, these people are one of the most marginalized groups In Bangladesh. In a country with as big a population as Bangladesh, these groups are easily neglected both by the government and NGOs. We are glad that RORS is taking the challenge. It is to be working with these groups. Meeting the people of the chars and hearing their stories certainly made an impression that will not be easily erased.

None of us had visited Bangladesh or Southern Asia before, and we had many questions when we arrived here. We found that the differences between Norway and Bangladesh are enormous. The culture, the climate, the landscape and the living conditions of the people were all new to us. Adjusting to these differences took sometime. And at the end of my stay, I feel very comfortable in my Bangladeshi surroundings. I know that I have only started to understand the culture. We enjoyed very much visiting private homes, gave us a better insight in the daily life of Bangladeshi people. We appreciated the fact that you didn't only show us the work of RDRS, but also urged us to explore and get to know the culture.

### **'Of Course We Can Change the World'**

These words are the slogan of Change-maker, NCA's youth movement. And it is with these words in mind that we next year will prepare and implement information tours in Norway. The aim of the information tour is to contribute information, engage and create alternative actions for Norwegian youth, and to mobilize them against international Injustice. We will tell the people we meet about what we experienced in Bangladesh, and tell them the stories of people we have met.

It is really important to tell Norwegian youth about what the people of Bangladesh are doing themselves to increase their standard of living. Most people in Norway associate the country only with floods and other natural catastrophe. And that's why I think It is important to tell them that the people of Bangladesh aren't just helpless victims of catastrophes and poverty, but people that, despite all their difficulties, are working hard to do something about their situation.

### **Know AIDS for no AIDS**

I first spotted these words on a RDRS office desk, in the beginning of my three-month stay as an RDRS intern. I had arrived in Bangladesh a week earlier

as a part of the NCA (Norwegian Church Aid) internship program I am attending. NCA is focusing on HIV/AIDS this year, and I became eager to find out more about the situation as it affects Bangladesh, and what RDRS is doing about it.

HIV/AIDS is becoming a catastrophe of global dimensions. Young adults and young women in particular seem to be especially vulnerable to the epidemic. AIDS has become the fourth biggest killer in the world, and in more and more development countries; it is staggering the entire development of the country.

The government is saying one thing and the United Nations something else. According to the government of Bangladesh there are 210 HIV/AIDS affected people in the country. On the other hand UNAIDS statistics claims that there are 13,000 Bangladeshi AIDS patients. The truth is rather that nobody knows how many people who have been affected by the disease, and in most cases they don't know it themselves. And when many people are carrying the virus without knowing, it is hard to keep it from spreading.

There are many factors that make Bangladesh very vulnerable when it comes to HIV/AIDS. The country surrounding Bangladesh, India has the highest number of HIV count of any country in the world. This alone is reason enough to take the issue very seriously. Other risk factors such as low condom use, sex workers, unsafe practices in health service and many others, are also to be taken seriously. But most importantly, poverty, illiteracy and ignorance are the biggest threats in the fight against the epidemic. In this connection, women are especially vulnerable because of their lack of sexual power. And it is important to promote women's right to protect themselves from AIDS and other STD's (Sexually Transferable Diseases).

Many people I have talked to, say that it is easier to talk about STD's and AIDS now than before. But still these issues are surrounded with superstitious beliefs and taboos, not only in Bangladesh, but also in many other countries. Stigmatization of the AIDS-victims is also a big problem. Many AIDS-victims chose to keep the disease a secret in fear of being looked up on as an immoral person. To break down these attitudes, everybody has to be engaged in the fight against AIDS; religious leaders, the government and NGO's, as well as the people itself. By giving people knowledge about how the disease is spread, you are also fighting discrimination and stigmatizing of the AIDS-victims. Keeping mum about the subject will only make things worse.

Working with poor people in the border areas, RDRS has a special responsibility to spread the knowledge about the disease in these high-risk areas. Using an awareness and social mobilization approach RDRS is dealing with the issue in different ways. The main objective is to spread knowledge. Perhaps you'll catch

a glimpse of the billboard placed along the roadside in the town of Lalmonirhat, or you may be enthusiastic play out a story about a man who got AIDS, on one of the shores in Kurigram district. In addition to this, leaflets, posters, workshops, seminars and rallies have been used to spread information. Through several clinics run by RDRS, pregnant women and TB/leprosy patients are also getting information on the subject. Still I find that the training of federation members and awareness building in the primary and secondary-groups is essential.

I visited one of these trainings in November. Members of a Federation had attended a weeklong training, which among many important issues had dealt with HIV/AIDS. As I entered the room, a federation member was summing up what she had learned about HIV and AIDS. It was clear that she had gained a lot of knowledge about the subject. "This is a very important issue!" she stated. Later, at one of my many field visits, I met a man named Mohamed. He was a member of a secondary group and had recently attended one of these trainings on HIV/AIDS. He told me all about what he had learned about the disease, how it is spread and how to protect yourself from it. The next Wednesday he was going to share this new gained knowledge with the other members of his group. "It is important to give information on how AIDS is spread, and to make them conscious about the disease, he answered when I asked him what his main message would be.

The words that first got my attention on that office desk may sound a bit NAIVE. Is it really that simple? No, it is not. But the first step towards escaping the catastrophe is to spread knowledge about HIV/AIDS to the people of Bangladesh. Though neighboring countries such as Thailand and India seems to have missed the opportunity to reduce the rate of spread of the epidemic, Bangladesh still may have the chance to stop it from becoming a catastrophe.

Bangladesh is facing the risk of becoming a new AIDS-nation of many reasons, first of all because of its great poverty. To fight poverty is also to fight AIDS. At the same time AIDS creates even more poverty and is an obstacle to development. If RDRS wants to keep on fighting poverty, it also has to keep on fighting AIDS.

**Bergit S. Svendseid, Intern, Norwegian Church Aid**

Sources:

- -The Independent, 27.10.02
- - UNAIDS website
- - My own interviews

# **REPORT OF INTERNSHIP**

with RDRS Bangladesh

1<sup>st</sup> of February - 9<sup>th</sup> of March 6, 2002

**by Gunhild Kvaale**

The School of Theology and Diaconal Ministry  
Diakonhjernet College, Oslo, Norway

I will divide this report in three parts. First what I've learned from visiting a different culture than my own. This is also first point of my three objectives for this internship. The second point is what I've learned of RDRS as a national development organization and as one of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) partners. My third point is to focus on the Disaster Preparedness program.

## **1) Bangladesh - a different culture from that of Norway**

A lot of impressions have been gathered here during my stay. The most emotionally and toughly is to see and talk with the poor people. The distance we had in Norway from them is gone here. I can't just switch off the TV if I don't want this reality in mind. This impression will always be a part of me.

The food is also different, of course. When life is so different here from home I really appreciate a European meal, when I get it. much more than home! Maybe this is similar to how it is to be an immigrant in Norway? When everything is different, small things mean a lot. The Bangladeshi food is simply good!

People of Bangladesh are more hospitable than Norway. We have been invited to several homes, even if we don't have many things in common. We were even in a part of a Muslim wedding (not tile ceremony). This happened just after some days we arrived in that area. The Bangladeshi people are very social. Maybe it is natural. There are so many people here, that the opportunity to be alone is much lesser than in Norway. Tile family seems very important for people here. It seems like tile society is built on fellowship and not individual persons. Almost everyone ask us about our family at home. Their interest about these things is quite big. From my point of view this is an important and valuable part of the culture. In Norway the individualism has given us many problems for example loneliness and very separated generations. A "living" culture is always changing. But I wonder what the culture here will be like in 20 years. What will be the result of the globalization? I hope people in Bangladesh will be aware of the negative things that follow this development.

## 2) RDRS – a National NGO in Bangladesh

In this part I'll give a short presentation of RDRS and try to give a picture of what I've learned and give some reflections about RDRS and their values.

RDRS is an organization for the poor people in rural area of northern part of Bangladesh. It works in 6 districts. RDRS have developed programs in health, micro-finance, agriculture, livestock, fish rearing, disaster preparedness and response and other things. It's an organization that tries to meet the community in a totality way. These types of projects (integrated projects) have more chance to succeed than others do (Nordstokke, 1994). "Its development aim is to achieve sustainable increases in their living standards" "RDRS reaches some one million villagers through its integrated development program, through a Group approach, working directly with Primary Groups and, through Federations, with more developed groups." (From a RDRS-brochure)

During this weeks we have visited 4 districts: Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh. In these districts we visited both Primary and Secondary Groups. In Kurigram we focused special on the Disaster program, which I will return to in part three.

One group can consist of 20 group members. There are criteria for being a group member. It can be just one member from each family; the person has to be over 18 years, owning not more than 1.5 acres of land among other things. It exists male, female and mixed groups. One group is first Primary Group, then Secondary Group. The groups meet regularly and have some rules they suppose to follow. This is a good example on "social group-work" - a way to do social work. One in the group is chosen to be the group leader, one secretary and one cashier. They discuss all type of issues: health, family planning, economy, agriculture and other things. The micro-finance organizes visits each group every week to collect money for repay the loan, which they have separated/divided to the group members. After some years (3-5 or more) the group will be federated from Primary Group to Secondary Group. And it'll be a part of the federation in the union they belong to. Every union has one federation. The aim is to empower poor people through being a participant of one federation. RDRS have done a lot of work for empowering women. We have seen women participating in federations meeting, and different types of training.

After these weeks I think RDRS are doing a great job to empower poor people. Because of the micro-finance program they can get a loan and learn how to earn and use money and after a while be self-financed.

This is also a kind of deacon. RDRS started as an organization in Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Still they get support from organizations in LWF, for example NCA. Their values are also very similar to our values in the Lutheran Church. As long as the view of human being is the same, and as long as RDRS are helping people that really need it; I will call this work deacon. RDRS became a national -organization in 1997.

It is an organization based on humanitarian values. I have done some reflections about these values that I hope can be useful for RDRS in future.

First I will mention some of their values:

- relatively participatory/democratic
- relatively less hierarchic
- liberal Christian/humanitarian values reflected in the new secular RDRS
- Humane, principled
- honesty, integrity, openness and transparency
- adoptive, learning, innovative.

Many of these are important values. I recognize the openness and learning values. They seem really open for feedback. It is a great thing! They are also honest and innovative. But they have one value about hierarchic. The culture here is more hierarchic than we are used to. Also in RDRS there are some hierarchic. My hope is that RDRS can be a good example for others in encouraging each other across the levels in the organization. The people in top can encourage people in lower level. They have liberal Christians and humanitarian values. Their view on human are always reflected in their way to treat each other. How people in top "commands" "servants" (tea man, worker in the guesthouse) -reflect their view on human being. Of course, my perspective is from outside, so I don't know if there had been any change. The word "relatively" is a wide notion, I'm not sure what this exactly means for RDRS. Anyway I think it might be a good idea for RDRS to stop, and make some reflections on this issue.

### **3) Disaster Preparedness**

The main office for this program is in Kurigram. The worst group in Kurigram is maybe the people who live on the islands in the rivers, called "char". But whole Kurigram is really exposed for flood. And most of the poor adult persons are illiterate. So when they teach people how to prepare disasters they use pictures and explain them. They train "volunteers" which again teach secondary groups. The volunteers are not what I will call volunteers. They get paid for 35% of their work and do rest free.

The pictures show very basic how to simply minimize tile damage of different types of disaster. For example that children should not play with fire (for avoid fire in the dry season), keep food in a higher level among other things (to prepare for flood).

The people I've met told me that they are now better prepared. Some people on the chars have got their ground raised; they are not so frightened to lose their house in the flood. They have been living on the same place for last 13 years

I am surprised that the training was so useful and it has been really adapted by tile people, RDRS intended to help. I am thankful to RDRS Bangladesh. To live 5 weeks in a different culture and also to see how the poor people can be empowered. My total impression for the period has been full of learning. I was taken good care of both while in the field and in the guesthouses.

Ms. Gunhild Kvaale,  
Student

# **Promoting Community Initiatives through People's Organization**

## **- To Support the Development of Union Federation**

by Ms. Sawako Asano  
George Warren Brown School of Social Work  
Washington University  
May 2000

This is the final report of my practicum project at RDRS Bangladesh in the Spring semester from February to May 2000 as a part of my social work education at the Master's level. This practicum was conducted in order to deepen my professional knowledge and skills learned in the classroom and combine them with social work practice in the real world. This study aims to assess the participatory approach in rural development adapted by RDRS and to make policy recommendations.

As one of the largest NGOs in Bangladesh, RDRS, has been struggling for improving the living conditions of landless and marginal farmers in North-West Bangladesh since 1972. Developing a traditional group-based approach, RDRS created a unique concept of Union Federation, a village level apex body of RDRS secondary groups, in the early 1990s; and more than 250 Union Federations have been organized over the RDRS working area by 2000. In June 1999, the new policy, which highlighted intensive support for Union Federations, was put into implementation. Now, RDRS is trying to shift its strategy in community development from direct support to indirect support through Union Federations. Union Federations are expected to promote initiatives of beneficiaries in developing their own communities, and it is an urgent task for RDRS to establish an effective support system for Union Federations.

### **Findings**

Case analysis revealed significant findings.

First, RDRS staff members who work with Union Federations, especially SODEOs, need to take a critical role as a facilitator. In a very successful Federation, the leaders of the Federation worked for their own Federation voluntarily and independently. Like this instance, Federations may be able to make a great success when Federation members have the sense of ownership and willingness to work hard with their own Federation. However, it was often observed that RDRS staff members tried to lead Federations by themselves and to educate

Federation members directly. In order to facilitate the sense of ownership among Federation members, they need to let Federation members take 'initiatives and to support Federations from the backside. The intensity to educate Federation members among staff members is related to their negative view on beneficiaries.

Staff members tend to focus on beneficiaries' weakness -- such as poverty, illiteracy and the lack of formal education-- without paying attention to their strengths, including their knowledge and experiences. Indeed, such weakness of beneficiaries is an undeniable fact. However, we have to be aware that staff members' negative view on beneficiaries would psychologically damage beneficiaries' willingness to work with their own community. In addition, case examples show that timely small intervention can help Federation members effectively in conducting their meetings by themselves. In fact, experienced and skilled field staff members entrusted Federation leaders to lead Federation meetings and supported them properly, helping participants to make clear critical points in the discussion and giving some suggestions.

Second, although Primary Groups are a foundation of Union Federations, the character of Primary Groups has been changing. Basically, Primary Groups have two functions: collecting money (savings and loan repayment) and raising social awareness through discussion. As RDRS expands its micro credit program, the former function is eroding the latter gradually. In a well functioning group meeting, group members behaved voluntarily and participated in discussion actively. In many observed group meetings, however, most of time of group meetings was spent for money collection, and satisfactory discussion was rarely observed. Compared to savings and loan repayment, the importance of discussion gathered less attention of both Union Organizers and group members. Moreover, the relationship between Union Organizers and group members varies. Some Union Organizers successfully kept a close relationship with group members, but -others did not. The relationship between Union Organizers and group members however, affects the atmosphere of group meetings, which influences group members' participation in the group meetings. The Union Organizers' self-image is also confusing due to the expansion of micro credit. As a case example shows, a Union Organizer who had pride as a social worker did an incredible job. As Union Organizers' responsibilities in credit management and their pressure of the loan recovery rate increase, it becomes difficult for them to keep a positive self-image as a social development officer at the grassroots level, and they wonder if they are just a bill collector.

Third, micro credit caused unpredicted serious problems Though micro credit is widely expected to empower the rural poor economically by offering them capital

for investment, it does not always function well. First, like Union Organizers, SODEOs are also under heavy duty of credit management and severe pressure of the recovery rate. Accordingly, such situation makes it hard for them to concentrate on the organizational development of Federations. Next, **micro credit is changing the relationship between field staff and beneficiaries. Once default or irregular payment happens, field workers can be seen as an "enemy" by beneficiaries.** The relationship between field workers and beneficiaries is ready to become one of business between bank tellers and customers. Finally, the expansion of market mechanism in NGO sector, which is typically shown by rapidly growing micro, credit-changes the relationship between NGO and beneficiaries. As the number of NGOs that provide micro credit increases, micro credit tends to occupy the interest of beneficiaries. In addition the heating-up competition among NGOs over their members gives beneficiaries an opportunity to select a NGO to belong to based on the accessibility of credit. Therefore, NGOs and beneficiaries are changing into moneylenders and customers.

## **Recommendations**

As a conclusion, the following measures could be considered to support the development of Union Federations more efficiently.

- RDRS can offer the field workers who work with Union Federations, especially newly appointed SODEOs, the training to help them to understand their task as a facilitator and to learn basic intervention skills. Besides formal training, learning from peers and experienced colleagues would be productive as well.
- The qualitative change of Primary Groups should be more concerned because the success of Federations depends on active group activities.
- The working environment of Union Organizers needs to be improved to allow them to keep positive view of their profession. For example, the following actions would be useful introducing other evaluation indicators than the loan recovery rate; offering opportunities to experienced Union Organizers to share their experiences with others, and raising awareness of the role of Union Organizers among senior staff.
- It would be better to release SODEOs from credit management.
- It is required to be more careful about transferring credit management to Union Federations. Other functions of Federations such as advocacy and cooperation with the local government need to be more strengthened rather than transferring credit management so that Federations can attract local people and can work creatively to develop their own

# **INTERNSHIP REPORT**

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International Diaconal Practice, Internship in RDRS Bangladesh  
1<sup>st</sup> February – 9<sup>th</sup> March 2002

After spending five weeks as an intern in Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service Bangladesh (RDRS) I got a lot of impressions. The weeks have gone fast, and there are still much left to see and experience more of the organization and the country. But I am satisfied with what I have seen and learned. It has given me memories that will stay in my mind and heart forever, and the lessons I learned, is immeasurable. I am very thankful to everybody in RDRS, both in the guesthouses, in the offices, and out in the fields for the friendly welcome and good guidance.

Our studies of diaconal ministry focus on helping people in need. During our internship with RDRS we have seen a lot of people, many of them poor, and many suffer from different disasters. It has been a challenge for me to see all this, and interesting to see different ways of providing help. It has also been nice to be two students in the same program, something that gave us the opportunity to share experiences and reflections. We did not get time to do a great research, but I will give a little report of my learning according to the objectives we had for the internship.

One of our objectives was to experience another culture and get a feeling of being the minority. The first impression of Bangladesh was the people are everywhere. The society seems very social, and the fellowship with family and neighbors are important. People are very friendly, and they do not seem to be afraid of strangers at all. Instead they give us a warm welcome and find the best chair for us.

The culture in Bangladesh is very different from what we are used to in Norway. The traffic seems like chaos, there are a lot of sound from horns, prayer mikes, and the language that we do not understand. The meals are different with spicy food and eating with hands. Not knowing the customs and norms, we were even more like strangers. It was difficult to know how we should behave, what was appropriate and what was expected from us. Also the code of dressing took time to understand and get used to. These experiences of a different culture are great learning for me as a person and with my profession as a social worker. It can help me to better understand immigrants in Norway that come from other

cultures. I have got a feeling of being different and a stranger, that find it hard to fit into tile society. The struggles of life people are dealing with are so different, and in most cases very unfair. The reality to people in Bangladesh is much severe than the Norwegian reality we are used to.

Our second objective was to gel to know RDRS as a national organization and as a partner of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). During the five weeks we have visited different parts of RDRS working area. We have spent several days in Thakurgaon region in west, Kurigram region in east and in Rangpur (by the head office). During these visits the conversations with staff and from different reports of RDRS, we have gathered impressions of the work of the organization. RDRS is a large NGO in Northern Bangladesh that does a lot of work to empower the rural poor people. With a 30-year-old history, the organization has developed many different programs. In tile working area about 1/4 of the population are beneficiaries through 7842 federated secondary groups and 8348 primary groups (Annual Report 2000). The programs include education and training, health, agriculture, environment and disaster preparedness, and micro-finance. Through these programs RDRS provides knowledge, training and credit to give people an opportunity to improve their livelihood. RDRS has played an important role in many of the disasters that have affected Bangladesh, also outside of its working area in the north.

The vision of RDRS says that the achievement of empowerment in political, social and economic areas, equality in gender and democracy and a sustainable environment through individual and collective efforts are by and for the rural poor (RDRS vision, mission strategies 2001-2005). The importance of not only do something for the people, but train them and let them do something by themselves, give the power to those who are affected and are able to make a difference in their own lives.

When RDRS cut the links with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1997, tile organization became more autonomous. It became a new secular organization with liberal Christian/humanitarian values. During any emergency call, RDRS does something for their own people of whom they know the culture and ways to meet the needs, then the help can be more effective. The number of natural disasters that Bangladesh faces are enormous, and create a large amount of needs that make the nation and organizations incapable to manage. RDRS is still not economically sustainable, but dependent on partnership with donors. One of the core partners is NCA, who also supports the maintenance of emergency relief.

Due to our studies of Diaconia, helping people in need is one of the main objectives. A lot of the people we have met in the rural areas are struggling to meet their daily basic needs such as food, clean water, housing, etc. This is where RDRS does an important job to help people of finding ways to manage their own living through training in different areas, and by providing micro credit.

The last objective we chose to focus on was to see how RDRS works especially with disaster preparedness program. We got a view of a lot of RDRS' work through workshops, training and field visits. RDRS imparts training in different sectors, like agriculture, small businesses, health, and disaster management, to empower people with knowledge and opportunities to make an earning. It was interesting to see what people in the fields had learned and how they had used the learning to find ways to support themselves. They were proud to show their 'business' and 'achievements', that was everything from chicken rearing to tailoring.

RDRS focuses on gender issues to get women more involved and empowered in tile society. This was also effective visible in most areas of the work. In 2000, 63% of the households and 80% of the beneficiaries were women (Annual Report 2000). The proportion among the staff is still dominated by men, but more women are entering in higher positions. In tile future, I believe that the males have to give away more power to women.

The participation of people at tile workshops and training centres was impressive. The facilitators were good at involving the participants in the discussions to share experiences and thoughts. This gave the participants the main position and "owners" of the meeting and the issues they were discussing.

We got a good impression of the work of the disaster management. Especially the visit in Kurigram and on the chars which are the most disaster prone areas, gave a valuable learning of this program. From what I saw, people in tile villages seemed to be aware of what to do practically to be prepared for disasters. Many places like the homestead grounds were raised and they had made a higher level in the house to keep things from the flood. They had removable ovens that they could bring on the float, and clothes in bags under tile roof. All these preparations we could recognize from what we learned at the training on disaster preparedness. The posters also told us a lot, even though we are illiterate in Bengali language.

The different levels of people that were trained on disaster preparedness, as beneficiaries in primary and secondary groups, federation leaders, volunteers and staff-members, gave a view of the importance of knowledge on all levels.

The most vulnerable and affected people as well as the workers who are going to help , need to know what to do so that they can work together to minimize the damage.

We even got an experience from a little kind of a disaster when the storm caught us while visiting the chars. We got a feeling of the sudden change in weather and acted quickly to escaped it by changing our plans. The experience was a good personal lesson for learning in such a situation.

Altogether, I am very satisfied with the internship in RDRS Bangladesh. It has been a valuable and good experience for me as a person. I will always have my western background and white skin, but the learning from meeting people of other cultures can change my mind and view of the world. The overall learning that I will remember is the many ways to empower people so that they might in tile future can get a better life with improved livelihood. Basic needs have to be met, and to help people on the way to sustainable living gives a hope for a better society for all.

I am thankful to everybody that helped and given us necessary guidance for the successful and great visit to the organization.

# **PARTNERSHIP RELATION IN RDRS**

by **Thomas Skov-Hansen**  
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July, 2000

This report is the product of my three-month internship with RDRS at Rangpur, Bangladesh, from April to June 2000. The internship was an informal part of my education in International Development Studies at Roskilde University in Denmark

The use of partnerships in today's development work is a very common phenomenon. This is also the case for NGOs like Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS). Partnership is a term used describing all sorts of different relations between stakeholders in the world of development work. It is a term, which is often applied uncritically and without much thought about what is the content of the partnership.

The purpose of this report was to critically analyze different kinds of partnership relations in RDRS. My aim was not to give an all-embracing picture of partnership relations in RDRS, but by use of some examples, to make a contributory factor - to a much-needed discussion of the partnership issue in RDRS.

## **Partnership**

The report is treating the partnership issue in two ways. One is partnership as a way of thinking about development or a way of knowing how to foster development. The second partnership is as a way of working with development or practice. It may be argued that embedded in the concept of partnership are some rationales of how to achieve development and a notion of what is good development.

The report sets out by outlining what these rationales are and what is their content. A Pivotal element in the notion of partnership is the idea of development with and not for inclusion and participation of the poor in the development process. But also a matter of empowerment understood as the ability and capacity to participate. Following participation and empowerment is a third: social capital. Social capital is about having some trusted partners with whom you can rely on in good as well as in bad times. It is about partnerships based on mutual trust and understanding. In this report participation, empowerment and social capital are considered as the three main rationales

embedded in the notion and practice of partnerships. When analyzing the practice of partnerships in RDRS, these rationales were as analytical tools.

Throughout the report it was analyzed and discussed how the rhetoric of partnership or partnership as a way of knowing how to foster development is transformed into practice or non-practice in the work of RDRS. For this purpose three different examples of partnership relations in RDRS were chosen as they support RDRS **through Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**. Another is **bilateral partnership**. It was chosen to concentrate on the Participatory Livestock Development Project (PLDP) as one specific relationship. This part also represents the in-depth part of this report. Third is the **relationship with the beneficiaries** as members of People's organization.

In all three examples the traces of the rationales of partnership in the actual practice of partnership were found. This is most clear in the case of the relationship with the core partners. These relationships have developed through many years of close cooperation and still after the localization the ties between RDRS and its core partners are strong. But unequal power relations due to RDRS' strong financial dependency on the core partners also characterize the relationship.

In relation to the bilateral partners - PLDP (Participatory Livestock Development Project), it revealed some gaps between the rhetoric and the practice of partnerships. The idea and the concept behind the PLDP are very much within the rationales of partnership. But the reality sometimes fails to live up to the beautiful rhetoric.

In the third example - People's Organization - it appeared how RDRS is building up. Partnership through their group approach. As the Federations are growing in number and strength they are considered more and more as a partner organization in the battle against poverty.

RDRS uses the term partnership to describe the relationship in these three examples. They do this regardless of the big differences, which is outlined in the report, but also despite the gap between rhetoric and reality, which were found in the research. Encouraging RDRS to start a discussion of the use of partnership in the organization is concluding the report. RDRS should discuss what the premises are for when one can talk about the existence of partnership relations. This is a discussion, which can only benefit RDRS in its future work on a hard and competitive development market.

**Summary:** Working through and thinking partnership should be seen as a consequence of "new" development architecture. Partnership reflects the will to include and empower through development. It reflects an attempt to rethink development and oppose a top-down and non-inclusive way of doing and thinking development. The notion of partnership draws on the rationales of participation, empowerment and social capital and also the contents of these rationales. These rationales will be the analytical tools for the discussion of the conduct of partnership in RDRS.