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Non-Formal Education and Grassroots Development

A Case Study from Rural Bangladesh

Bijoy P. Barua

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Educational Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 1999

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Abstract
Non-Formal Education and Grassroots Development
A Case Study from Rural Bangladesh
Bijoy P. Barua

Through the case study of Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), a Voluntary Organization (VO) operating in rural southwestern Bangladesh, this thesis explores the role of non-formal education for empowerment and socio-economic development. The issues examined are the mobilization process and the grassroots organization of disadvantaged women, education for regenerative agriculture, functional literacy and women's health. The case study focuses mainly on two women's groups. During the field work part of the study, most men were away from the villages in pursuit of salaried jobs or carrying out their small trades.

The study adopted the framework of analysis proposed by Moser (1993) about the *productive, reproductive and community* roles of women in the context of their practical and strategic needs. The data indicates that due to the extreme poverty situation in the study area, addressing practical needs is considered more urgent by the women who were interviewed. Furthermore, they indicated that the center-based functional literacy training is less effective than the home-based training related to health and agriculture issues. It also was observed that the *gosthi* (lineage), *shanskriti* (cultural) and *para* (neighborhood) identities are essential elements in mobilizing the women's groups in the villages. After 25 years of GUP's activities, grassroots women's organizations are yet to be self-sustaining in the villages of Rajoir.

The women participants in this study understand the importance of learning how to sign their names for access to small loans, although they indicate that further functional literacy does not meet their immediate practical needs. They are aware of the value of literacy and formal education for their children. Even then, the immediate projects they finance with small credits and loans available to them are still distributed along traditional gender roles; seed money for starting small businesses for their sons or dowry needs.

DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to the memory
of
my late teacher P. Ghosh,
my late father, P. Barua and my late father-in-law, A. Barua

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my Advisor, Professor Arpi Hamalian, for her invaluable consultations, guidance and comments in sharpening my writing and enhancing my theoretical understanding on education, grassroots development and gender planning throughout my research work.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Professors Ailie Cleghorn and Paul Bouchard for their consultations, encouragement and help during my research work. I also acknowledge the assistance of Professors Harold Entwistle and Riva Heft during my studies.

I deeply thank the contribution of the research participants in my study. Without their cooperation it would have been impossible for me to learn things from their perspectives. I am also grateful to Mr. Mohammed Atuar Rahman, Mrs. Sultana Rahman, Mr. Nasir U. Ahmed and Mr. Nurul Halim and all the staff members of Gonno Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) for their support and cooperation during my field research in Rajoir, Madaripur, Bangladesh.

My sincere appreciation goes to Mr. K. P. Barua, Mrs. Sulekha Barua, Mr. Hasanul Haque and Mrs. Suriya Hasan for their encouragement, help, hospitality and transportation while doing my research in Bangladesh.

I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to Ms. Theresa Poirier, Dr. Elizabeth Cockburn, Dr. Rosalind Boyd, Ms. Sigrid Joss, Mr. C. A. Ribaux, Mr. Henri F. Morand, Mr. Jacques Mader, Dr. Rudi Baumgartner, Mr. D. P. Barua, Prof. B. P. Barua, Dr. Zahir Sadeque, Mr. Dilip Barua and Mr. Goswer Reza for their help and inspiration during my research.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Inter-Library Loan Department of Concordia University and the Center for Developing Area Studies (CDAS) of McGill University for their assistance. I am also grateful to the Asia and Europe Division of International Cooperation of the Swiss Red Cross, Bern, Switzerland as I was able to gain grassroots development experience while working with them in South Asia from 1988-1994.

I would also like to express my thanks to my friend Mr. Wayne A. Kennedy for his time in discussing philosophical issues while writing my thesis and for his help in the proof-reading and page setting for my thesis.

I appreciated the encouragement of Mr. Sujit Shaha, Mr. Golam Mahamood, Mr. Shamsul Islam, Alin, Dipu, Barun, Satyajit, Swapan and Sumon during my research.

Finally, I am very thankful to my mother Aruna, my wife Shipra and my two children Shourov and Kaushik for their constant support and encouragement during my study at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

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List of Abbreviations

ADAB	Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh
AFSC	American Friends Committee
AID	Agriculture and Industrial Development
AUPMS	Amgram Uttarpara Prantik Mohila Samity
BA	Bangla Academy
BARD	Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRDB	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
CFSC	Canadian Friends Service Committee
DAWN	Development with Women for a New Era
DTWs	Deep Tube Wells
ECNOG	Environmental Coalition of NGOs
ED	Executive Director
EED	Education for Entrepreneurship Development
ESCAP	Economic Social Council for Asia-Pacific
FFYP-4	Fourth Five Year Plan
FFYP-5	Fifth Five Year Plan
FIVDB	Friends in Village Development in Bangladesh
FREPD	The Foundation for Research on Educational Planning & Development

GAD	Gender and Development
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
GUP	Gono Unnayan Prochesta
HKI	Hellen Keller International
IDR	Institute of Development Research
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPHN	Institute of Public Health Nutrition
MCH	Maternal Child Health
ME	Ministry of Education
MOP	Muriate of Potash
MSS	Mohila Swasthya Shebika
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PEP	Popular Education Program
PO	People's Organization
PRIP	Private Rural Initiatives Program
QPS	Quaker Peace and Services
RTAD	Rajoir Thana Agriculture Department
RTSD	Rajoir Thana Statistical Department
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
SNMLC	Sindia Nakshikanta Mohila Literacy Center
SNMS	Sindia Nakshikanta Mohila Samity
SSP	Single Super Phosphate

TSP	Triple Super Phosphate
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDW	United Nations Decade for Women
UNESCO	United Nations for Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
VFLT	Volunteer Functional Literacy Teacher
VHSS	Voluntary Health Service Society
VO	Voluntary Organization(s)
WB	The World Bank
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WFP	World Food Program
WID	Women in Development

Chapter One

Background of the Study

1.0.1 Introduction

Non-formal education is considered to be an important pre-condition for the meaningful participation of people in rural development programs directed at alleviating poverty and making social change towards a better quality of life. Non-formal education has contributed to improvements in the health, nutritional status and social position of rural disadvantaged people in developing countries (Caldwell, 1979; Fink, 1992; Kindervatter, 1979; Torres, 1990; VanDam et al, 1992) In these countries, illiteracy is considered to be the main hindrance facing the further development of rural poor. The struggle against illiteracy has become part of the global agenda with the objective to alleviate the poverty of the disadvantaged people in the entire world. *Education for all by the year 2000* has been declared as a 'goal' with the view that this will improve the conditions of the rural poor in developing countries. Consequently, Bangladesh mobilized its non-formal education program for the rural disadvantaged groups through the various actors in the 1990s (Kamal, 1992; UNESCO, 1990; UNICEF 1992 and Sharafuddin, 1995).

In recent times, the terms "partnership," "people's participation," "civil society", "democracy" and "sustainable development" have been widely used for the socio-economic development of poor people in Bangladesh. In light of these key words, development researchers, policy planners and practitioners often discuss poverty alleviation, people's empowerment, grassroots mobilization, people's organization,

people-centered development, gender development, micro credit and education within the context of Bangladesh (United Nations, 1995 and Task Force Report, 1990). While discussing these issues, emphasis is generally placed on the active role of voluntary organizations (VOs). At the same time, people criticize the role of the Government of Bangladesh for disenfranchising the rural poor. In doing this, people assume that participatory socio-economic development activities cannot be implemented and attained by the Government of Bangladesh. Indeed, the negative opinion which is expressed is that “the reasons for past development failures are deeply imbedded in the structures of the Government and the elite culture” (ADAB, 1988:8). In response to this, the donors focus has been on the involvement of the VOs to ensure people’s participation in the rural development programs of Bangladesh. More specifically, the people and outside donors assume that the VOs are very innovative, dynamic, flexible and active in the promotion of democratic education and the establishment of citizenship rights at the grassroots level (Clark, 1991; Korten, 1990; Oakley et al, 1991; Gezelius and Millwood, Undated). Consequently, many bilateral and multilateral donors are actively involved in supporting the VOs as an alternative to supporting the Government. In other words, this alternative means of support is being used to create conditions that provide opportunities for the poor people. Interestingly however, the VOs of Bangladesh cannot implement their development programs without the consent and approval of the Government. The operational policy of the VOs cannot go beyond the legal framework of the country (GOB, NGO Affairs Bureau, undated).¹

¹ Government of Bangladesh, NGO Affairs Bureau, Rules and Regulations

Since the independence of Bangladesh, VOs have been involved in promoting non-formal education for empowerment in order to change the socio-economic and political conditions of the rural disadvantaged groups within the villages. Since the VOs have been involved in the improvements of the living conditions of these people for more than two decades, there is an increasing need to examine the initiatives of the VOs in the context of the society and culture in Bangladesh.

1.0.2 Context of Rural Development in Bangladesh

The people of Bangladesh were ruled by a military government for about 30 years beginning in 1947. The participation of people in the political process was not a regular event. Bangladesh emerged as an independent country through a war of liberation in 1971. It has a total area of 56,977 sq. miles or 147570 sq. km and 111.4 million in population as of 11 March 1991 of which 57.3 million are male and the remaining 54.1 million are female. The population density is 755 per sq. km. Ninety percent of the population lives in rural areas and over 60% lives from agriculture alone (BBS, 1996). Sixty five percent of the rural population are functionally landless (owning less than 0.5 of an acre) and a further 20 % are considered to be marginal farmers. Over 50 million people are living in absolute poverty and of these more than 25 million are living in extremely harsh circumstances. Rural people are more than twice as likely to be poor compared to those living in the cities. Continuous migration from rural to urban centers is a common event in Bangladesh due to the poverty (Saddi, 1998).

Bangladesh is divided into six administrative divisions. Each administrative division is comprised of a number of districts which in turn are sub-divided into a number of *thanas*². There are 64 districts and 490 thanas at present. The literacy rate in Bangladesh is 37 percent. It is estimated that the total adult population over 15 years old is 60 million. Of these, about 65% are illiterate of which 56% are male and 74% are female. The mortality rates among the infants, children and mothers are quite high. The infant mortality rate in rural areas is 79 per 1000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is 5 per 1000 live births (BBS, 1996; Chowdhury and Khandker, 1995; FFYP-5, 1997; Khandker, Alam and Greancy, 1995 and ME, 1995). About 94% of all children in Bangladesh are considered to be malnourished. Every year, 30 thousand children suffer from blindness due to insufficient vitamin A intake. Over 600 children die each day from malnutrition related to diseases (Saadi, 1998). The poorest 32% of people have an average per capita calorie intake of 1500 calories. The reasons for such a low intake is due to the decline in production at the household level and the low purchasing capacity (Kabir and Bhuyan, 1991). The underdevelopment of Bangladesh is characterized by high illiteracy, high mortality, high fertility and the poor health of its population. Bangladesh is mainly dependent on foreign aid and each year it receives about 2 to 2.5 billion US dollars. About 85-100% of the country's development budget has been supported by foreign aid (Dove, 1980 and Jansen, 1993).

² Lowest administrative unit consisting of 10-15 unions

The *gosthi* (lineage) networks are considered to be the dominant indigenous social institutions in rural Bangladesh. This *gosthi* networks play an effective role in maintaining group solidarity and mobilizing people of their own lineage for any socio-cultural or political movement in rural society (Mashreque and Amin, 1995). In other words, this indigenous social organization is a strong social institution in determining the socio-political behavior of the rural people.

1.0.3 The Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the existing popular/non-formal education interventions and the role of development agencies in rural Bangladesh. The objectives of the study are:

- (1) to describe and explain the popular/non-formal education in rural areas among the disadvantaged groups.
- (2) to document the implementation process of popular/non-formal education programs of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in rural Bangladesh.
- (3) to study how popular/non-formal education programs work towards socio-economic development.

1.0.4 Research Questions

- i) How is popular/non-formal education perceived within the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh by the Grassroots Development Organization?
- ii) What were the contents of popular/non-formal educational programs and how were these determined by the Grassroots Development Organization?
- iii) What are the implementation methods adopted by the Grassroots Development Organization involved in popular/non-formal education for socio-economic development?
- iv) What are the instructional media being used by the Grassroots Development Organization in popular/non-formal education?
- v) How does popular/non-formal education contribute towards socio-economic development?

1.0.5 Non-Formal Education, Development Policies and Women: Review of Literature

In this section, I will define the concept of non-formal education and development and then review literature of the development programs and their approaches in the area of gender development. I will propose a conceptual framework in order to examine my case study experience in the area of gender planning and grassroots development.

1.0.5.1 Concept of Non-formal Education

The non-formal education and development programs in developing countries are closely linked, if not inseparable. In other words, non-formal education is a necessary and indispensable component of the development programs.

The terms *non-formal education* and *popular education* are used interchangeably in developing countries. However, there is a clear distinction between these two terms. “Non-formal education tends to focus on the individual and specific technical skills development; popular education looks at community and organizational training needs, emphasizing the skills needed to bring about improvements in economic and social well-being as a whole” (Fink, 1992, p.174). Philip Coombs et al. (1974) defined non-formal education as; “an organized systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal schooling system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population” (p. 8).

Popular education, on the other hand, is considered to be an alternative educational approach that is directed toward the promotion of social change through a process of conscientization. The notion of popular education is a process of collective learning where educators and educatees learn together through group action in order to make social change. In addition, popular education is politically radical and attempts to mobilize the disadvantaged groups for empowerment through grassroots organization. It promotes a “bottom up” approach instead of “trickle down” approach. “It has opted for

the transformation of an oppressive social structure instead of merely changing values and attitudes of individuals” (Prajuli, 1986:33) Freire advocates the importance of not only becoming critically conscious, but also the importance of linking consciousness with political action (Freire, 1970). Therefore, an important element of popular education programs is their liberating perspective. Popular education can be described in the following manner: (i) a pedagogical ideology that aims at contributing to the raising of consciousness and to the participation of people in society. (ii) a pedagogical practice that emphasizes the uses of participatory methods and the analysis of technical tools that are linked to solving problems in participants’ lives (iii) a political agenda for strengthening the social identity of popular sectors, valuing and preserving their culture, and linking educational activities to the social organization and mobilization of popular sectors (Freire, 1973; Kindervatter, 1979; Magendzo, 1990; Torres, 1990; Van Dam et al, 1992).

1.0.5.2 Non-Formal Education and Empowerment of Women

Kindervatter (1979) defined non-formal education for empowerment as: “People gaining an understanding of and control over social, economic and/or political forces in order to improve their standing in society” (p.13). Over the years, this definition has been extended to the lives of women in order to facilitate social change and ensure the participation of women in the development process in developing countries (Lephoto, 1995). The non-formal education programs for women are organized to raise

consciousness about social injustice and inequality in developing countries. In other words, they provide knowledge and skills to the disadvantaged women in order to emancipate them from insubordination and exploitation. Awareness about women's subordination is raised through the popular culture, the mass media and education. Non-formal education considers a progressive social transformation as one which promotes the participation of women through a network of disadvantaged women's organizations that build upwards from the grassroots level. The experiences of women from their daily lives are used to mobilize them to obtain their "rights" in the society. It is believed that such women's organizations act and challenge injustices for the benefit of the women. This strategy of organization is taken in order to bring women together and out of their social isolation. More importantly, women speak collectively in making policies for development through their own organizations.

While imparting popular education programs in the developing countries, the VOs mainly emphasized the building of organizations through the *target group* approach. This approach organizes and mobilizes poor and disadvantaged women in order to change their socio-economic status and political power in the society. In other words, these women's organizations act as bargaining agents for the equal rights of women.

There is a growing belief that women receive critical knowledge about their condition of "subordination" from the VOs. The disadvantaged women were empowered in a way that their participation would provide socio-economic and political rights in the society.

as a whole. Specifically, the VOs mobilized and educated women on leadership development, dowry, child marriage, domestic violence, divorce, family and inheritance laws in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Ellis, 1995; Fink, 1992; Sen and Grown, 1987; Stromquist, 1986; 1988 and 1993).

1.0.5.3 Development Policies, Women and the Implications

The model of *modernization* in international development was adopted from the 1950s to the 1970's with an understanding that it would improve the standard of living of all people within the developing countries regardless of their gender. In other words, it was believed that the growth-centered development would 'trickle down' to all segments of the population, including the women. This growth-centered development model was further supported by the 'human capital' approach of Schultz who believed that it was necessary to invest in the education system of the country and develop strong human resources (Rathgerber, 1990). It was generalized that modernization would equally benefit men and women. Although "education witnessed a golden period during the 1960s", this educational investment could not address the issues of women in an appropriate way (Tilak, 1997:85). Despite an adaptation to the modernization model in the development process, it still did not involve women as active participants. Women became passive recipients in the programs and their distinct identity was lost. Women were considered to be victims in the society (Moser, 1993 and Townsend, 1993). Welfare oriented policies did not address the issues of women's poverty (Buvinic, 1983;

Moser, 1991, 1993) By the late 1970's, the role of the modernization theory was questioned by many scholars and researchers. There was agreement among these experts, scholars and researchers that development models and policies had marginalized the women in the developing countries. They argued that the position of women within the model of modernization had declined rather than increased. Among the critics, Ester Boserup (1971) reflected the negative effect of development on women in developing countries. She explicitly mentions that the development model did not recognize the role of women in the agricultural sector. Rather, this modernization model undermined the economic autonomy of women in relation to men in these developing countries. Her works significantly influenced the first *United Nations Decade for Women* (UNDW) in 1975 that officially launched the *Women in Development* (WID) model.

Equality was regarded as the main agenda of First World feminism, the socialist bloc who wanted to preserve social peace, and the developing countries. "All three groups wanted recognition that women are active, not passive" (Townsend, 1993: 171). As a result, a large number of projects were designed during the *women's decade* (1975-1985) for poor women in developing countries in order to integrate women into development (Buvinic, 1986 and Townsend, 1993). Projects were designed to provide information on child care, maternal care, family planning, hygiene, nutritional education and home economics. In addition to this training, projects were organized in order to change women's stereotypical skills, such as knitting and sewing, for other income generating activities. These technical skills and health education messages were disseminated to the

women to strengthen their capacity as the mother of a family (Buvinic, 1983, 1986). In many cases, such training or education was directed at upper and middle class women. Despite the integration of women in development, under this equity approach their role was confined to the home. Although women's development programs were created to improve the conditions of women, they became problematic at the bottom level. No one in these societies was interested to transfer the power to women. As a result, equity programs eventually turned towards a top-down approach. Although several regulations and laws were adopted with regard to women's rights in the developing countries, they were ineffective in practice and action. Moreover, the governments of developing countries considered this approach to be an imposition of Western feminist ideology over the culture and society of the developing countries (Buvinic, 1983; Moser, 1993; Sen and Grown, 1987 and Townsend, 1993).

Although the WID program was launched with the objective of equity, the international and national organizations have now shifted their focus towards the *anti-poverty* approach (Buvinic, 1983, 1986 and Moser, 1991, 1993). This approach was introduced with the understanding that it would create opportunities for the women in order to attain equal rights in the society because of their economic independence. However, "anti-poverty schemes tended to remain small projects, run by aid agencies, trying to meet the needs articulated by women themselves without threatening social change" (Townsend, 1993:172). The projects were supported by grants instead of credit money. There were no standard criteria or indicators to measure success or failure of equity programs.

Moser assumes that anti-poverty approaches normally departed from equity issues. In other words, anti-poverty approaches preferred to escape the sensitive political issues in the development process (Moser, 1993; Townsend, 1993).

The *efficiency* approach entered into the WID program at the time of the economic recession in the 1980s. With the introduction of this efficiency objective, the emphasis in development shifted to the participation of women in economic activities with the assumption that this would eventually promote their equity within the society. Despite this belief, the economic crisis of the 1980s forced women to take on additional responsibilities both on the job and in the home in order to rescue their families while the men migrated from the rural to urban areas in search of jobs. This situation was the result of the withdrawal of government spending on social services. Women had to spend additional time with their families increasing their workloads in unpaid labour. Women suffered severely in the developing countries during this time as a result of the efficiency approach paralleled with the recession and the crisis of the world economy (Braidotti et al, 1994; Moser, 1990, 1993).

With the introduction of the *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAPs) by the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) and the *World Bank* (WB), the socio-economic conditions of the developing countries became even worse (Sen and Grown, 1987; Harris and Crow, 1990). Because of the structural adjustment policy, the developing countries returned a net amount of US \$163 billion to the industrialized countries between 1984 and 1985

(Young, 1993). Furthermore, these countries handed over US \$52 billion more in debt payments than they received in new credits in 1989 (US Debt Crisis Network, 1990). As a result, the developing countries reduced their budgetary allocation for education and health. Consequently, women in these countries were affected severely. Nzomo (1993) describes the Kenyan situation: "SAPs do not yet address the power and property inequalities between men and women. Rather, they seem to reflect a dominant male ideology in the international political economy that ascribes to women a role subordinate to, but very supportive of, the male gender" (p. 69).

More importantly, the growth of the women's movement in the 1980s took on a new importance in the developing countries with the emergence of *Development with Women for a New Era* (DAWN). With the emergence of DAWN, a group of women activists and researchers started to criticize the dominant Western model of development as well as the WID approach. These women who were from the developing countries, wanted to formulate their own design for the women of developing countries within an alternative development model. DAWN members played an active role inspiring Northern women to look at alternative views of development from a feminist point of view (Braidotti et al, 1994). Moser (1991,1993) defined DAWN's notion as an "empowerment approach" in the area of women's development in developing countries.³ The notion of women's empowerment for equal rights was adopted at the 1990 *Social Summit* and the 1995 *Women's Conference in Beijing* (UN 1990 and 1995). Interestingly, the concept of

³ I have explained the concept of non-formal education and empowerment in this chapter in section 1.0.5.2.

gender and development (GAD) became the common agenda among the development actors in the later part of 1980s and 1990s. They emphasized the empowerment of women within the framework of economic development. Many development agencies begun gender literacy training within their organizations for the development experts (Braidotti et al, 1994 and Moser, 1993)

Often, the distinction between women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD) is unclear. However, these two terms are usually used interchangeably in the literature on women's development. Braidotti et al (1994) pointed out that GAD "does not fundamentally question the assumptions of the dominant development paradigm itself, which is firmly rooted within the logic of modernization and the economic growth model" (pp. 82-83). Tinker (1990) more explicitly mentions that; "Development assistance which responds to women's practical or material interests may help them to survive and fulfill their gendered roles, but they do nothing to change women's subordination and may in fact perpetuate it" (p. 50)

Having reviewed the literature on gender development, it is obvious that the development concept, models, policies and approaches have changed over the years in order to promote the interests or empower the disadvantaged women in the developing countries. Despite all efforts, these concepts and approaches were unable to provide gender based development in the rural societies of developing countries. Specifically, these development concepts and approaches failed to yield constructive development for the

women (Moser, 1993) As a matter of fact, the changing of concepts, policies and approaches by the international development agencies with regard to women's development or gender development had profound effects on the implementation programs. In many cases, implementing agencies will need to spend an enormous amount of time to conceptualize and internalize new concepts, models and approaches in order to act appropriately in the context of the local culture and society. Moreover, educational materials can be effectively developed only if the proper internalization of concepts is made in the context of the local culture. Bangladesh has also experienced such changes of concepts, policies and approaches in the implementation of development programs for women. These will be further explained later in this thesis.

1.0.5.4 Gender Development and Planning: Moser's Conceptual Framework

The concept and process of empowerment cannot help but shape the direction of development policies in women's development. This empowerment can only be implemented through the mobilization of grassroots organizations. Since empowerment became the key requirement for women's development in the mid 1970s, gender researchers and scholars constantly emphasized the issue of participation of women in development planning (Bunch and Carrillo, 1990; Braidotti et al, 1994; Longwe, 1990; Moser, 1991; Munro, 1990 and Stromquist, 1993). Bunch and Carrillo (1990) mention that; "there can be no successful development without equity" (p. 71). If the gender issue is not specifically addressed in the planning and implementation process, then a welfare

oriented approach will dominate in the women's development programs despite any intentions related to the self-sufficiency and participation of women (Tinker, 1990). Women's needs are not always the same as those of men. In order to devise successful planning for women's development, one has to be sensitive to the gender issue (Moser, 1991,1993). "It [planning] has to develop the capacity to differentiate not only on the basis of income, . . . but also on the basis of gender" (Moser, 1991:159). Gender planning for the disadvantaged women must be based on their needs. It does not ignore the issues of race, ethnicity, class and religious structure in societies. Despite adaptations to several approaches for women's development, policy planners have ignored the triple role of women as defined by Moser. When planners are blind to the *triple role of women*, they fail to see the need of relating planning to women's specific requirements (Moser, 1993).

Moser's *triple role of women* refers to women's reproductive, productive and community management functions. She points out how all women's needs arise from these three. She builds her model on the distinctions between "strategic gender needs" and "practical gender needs". She appears to have developed this model from Molyneux's concept of "practical interests" and "strategic interests" (Molyneux, 1985). Moser explains that strategic needs arise from an analysis of women's subordination to men. In contrast, practical needs are drawn from a women's immediate experience and her perceived necessity for survival. The planning framework of Moser offers the possibility to sustain the partnership between the women concerned and the implementing agency by first identifying the "strategic" and "practical" needs that are required for women's

development. However, the key to Moser's model is to work extensively and closely with the participants in order to understand their environments, daily living conditions and needs so as to better reflect this in their development program's planning and implementation (Moser, 1993).

In this study, I use the notion of *non-formal education* for the empowerment of women as it relates to this concept. This type of empowerment education has been practiced by Voluntary Organizations in Bangladesh since the mid 1970s to bring equality as well as a democratic learning environment to the rural disadvantaged groups. More specifically, I consider non-formal education for empowerment within the context of women's mobilization, organization and grassroots development for social and economic change. In my study, I will use Caroline Moser's conceptual framework of gender planning in the Third World (1991,1993) and draw on my own research experience from a Voluntary Organization (VO) in Bangladesh. This study will contribute to the growing body of literature that examines the role of VOs in the promotion of non-formal/popular education for disadvantaged groups in South Asia.

1.0.6 Non-formal Education in Bangladesh

Non-formal education programs in Bangladesh can be traced back as early as 1909. These were initiated in the form of night school in order to ensure that reading and

writing of the Bengali alphabet was taught to illiterate people⁴ in the villages as well as the urban centers in Bengal (FREPD, 1979)

During the last three decades, Bangladesh has experimented with various approaches of non-formal education in an attempt to improve and change the life of the rural people.⁵ Organized non-formal education began in 1954 through the village AID (Village Agriculture and Industrial Development) programs to educate and mobilize rural masses and improve socio-economic conditions in Bangladesh. However, after the establishment of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development-BARD (then called the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development) in 1959, an experimental non-formal education program with a new dimension was launched in the Comilla district. In order to strengthen the effort of BARD, the Government established an Adult Education Division in 1963 under the Directorate of Education (Ali 1973; FREPD, 1979; Momin. 1984 and Qadir et al, 1985). During that period those programs mainly focused on the increase of agricultural production and illiteracy was considered as one of the barriers to modernization of the rural society. The major non-formal education program launched in Bangladesh after its independence was the 'Mass Education Program' in 1980, which aimed at imparting education to 40 million illiterate people.⁶ Although huge funds were put into the program, only 0.7 million adults were enrolled instead of its target of 10 millions (Tilak, 1995)

⁴ Those who were unable to read and write the Bengali alphabet

⁵ Srinivasan, L. (1989) "Non-formal Education: Instruction," In Titmus, Colin (Ed). *Life Long Education for Adults, An international handbook*. Oxford: Pergamon, 1989: pp. 212-216 for an explanation of concepts and approaches.

⁶ Those who were unable to read and write in the Bengali language

Non-formal education for the empowerment of rural masses was initiated by the VOs in the mid 1970s in order to improve their socio-economic and political conditions. VOs generally spoke about empowerment, which mainly focused on consciousness raising and the formation of people's organizations in villages through imparting development education. While conducting popular education programs in the rural areas, the VOs mainly emphasized the active participation of disadvantaged groups at learning sessions in order to make them more active citizens in rural society. Such education programs for the disadvantaged tended to use dialogical/democratic processes based on Freire's model. By providing education to a disadvantaged group of people, the VOs attempted to make them into concerned citizens and to establish their rights in society. The VOs generally facilitated education dealing with group dynamics, rural power structures, social stratification, leadership development, collective savings, cooperative management, organization of meetings, accounts management, credit operational policy, legal rights and health and nutrition etc. (Chowdhury, 1989 and Hasan, 1983). While facilitating these non-formal/popular education programs, the VOs and Government Agencies initiated the policy of *food for education*⁷ for the disadvantaged people during the early 1980s. This was done to ensure greater participation among the disadvantaged groups. This type of program was implemented both by the Government and by the VOs with the support of the World Food Program (Shana, 1995). Usually however, the VOs facilitated

⁷ Food (wheat or rice) is distributed to the disadvantaged people to ensure their participation in the education program.

adult literacy,⁸ functional literacy,⁹ skills development training,¹⁰ agriculture education and health education

1.0.7 Voluntary Organizations and Rural Development

The term VO in the context of Bangladesh is defined as, “an association of persons formed voluntarily through personal initiatives of a few committed persons dedicated to the design, study and implementation of development projects at the grassroots level” (Huda 1984:27). VOs have adopted several approaches and strategies in order to reach the rural poor. These may be grouped into two categories: (a) VOs as development catalysts acting as an external change agent at the micro level by using the strategies of conscientization, people’s mobilization and development and service delivery; (b) VOs as development catalysts working with the strategy of networking and policy advocacy (Sultan, 1991)

VOs in Bangladesh are governed by the “1961 Voluntary & Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance ” This ordinance prohibits the establishment of a voluntary agency without registration. There is also a required registration to receive external assistance, which was imposed by the Foreign Donations (Regulation & Control) Ordinance of 1978. This legalization has subjected the VOs to the control of a number of Government Departments/Organizations, such as the Ministry of Home, Finance and Social Service.

⁸ Ensure reading and writing skills in the Bengali language

⁹ The functional literacy program facilitates basic literacy by presenting new ideas on social issues and that also provide new skills and perceptions.

¹⁰ Training on jute handicrafts, batik, tube well repair and embroidery

Currently about 19,000 VOs are registered with the Department of Social Services under the Act of 1961. However, most of these organizations are small clubs and claim to be involved in socio-cultural activities. In reality, most of them are defunct or not involved in development activities. Government reports show that there are about 986 VOs (138 foreign and the rest are national), receiving foreign donations and registered under the Foreign Donations (Regulation & Control) Ordinance of 1978 (NGO Affairs Bureau, 1996 and Hallway, 1998). These VOs are involved in 490 thanas (sub-districts) of Bangladesh to help the poor and disadvantaged people with the financial support of foreign bilateral and multilateral donors. It is estimated that about 24 million people in 78% of the villages in Bangladesh are covered by the VOs (ADAB, 1994; Sultana and Abdullah, 1990 and World Bank, 1996). In 1993, VOs employed more than 100,000 paid staff to implement their programs in villages (Karim, 1993) and this number is still expected to increase.

Voluntary activities have a long established tradition in Bangladesh. Voluntary organizations have emerged in order to ameliorate the low standard of socio-economic conditions and to ensure legal and civil rights as well as to extend relief assistance to the disadvantaged. In early times, voluntary activities were exclusively linked to charities around the temples, churches and mosques through the *waqfs*¹¹ to provide financial assistance for constructing and establishing charitable dispensaries or schools in each of their localities. Voluntary activities as a forum of charity were the coming fashion

¹¹ Charitable grants for a religious purpose

among the landed elite who used it in their constituencies for their advantage. Before the war of independence in 1971, only a few VOs were working in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The Kumudini Welfare Trust, the oldest national organization, started its operation in 1944. With only this exception, all other VOs at this time were foreign missionaries. The Baptist Missionary Society is probably the oldest of these and can be traced back to 1794 (Ahmed, M. U., 1990). During the pre-liberation period, VOs were mostly active in urban areas and predominantly engaged in women's handicrafts, literacy, health and/or family planning. The members of these organizations were mostly people from the *bhadralokh class*¹² and/or high Government officials, their wives and other city elite. This basically provided them with a forum for social gatherings.

More recently and with the changing environment, practices and beliefs, the concept of voluntarism has moved in the direction of professionalisation which has invited specialization and formal management structures. This can be observed in contemporary VOs operating in Bangladesh (Task Force Report, 1990). Most of the big local and foreign organizations situated in Bangladesh date back to the liberation war and started by providing relief activities and subsequently moved toward development activities. The activities of VOs on a large scale only started after the devastating cyclone of 1970 and the liberation war of 1971 (Chowdhury, 1989; Huda et al, 1990 and Schoch et al, 1992). Among those VOs that work in Bangladesh, "it is possible to identify three

¹² Educated upper/middle class people

distinctive orientations in programming strategy: (a) relief and welfare; (b) local self-reliance; and (c) sustainable systems development” (Korten, 1987:147).

During the post-liberation period, Bangladesh experienced the emergence of VOs in an increasing trend to provide relief and rehabilitation services. Initially, the task of the VOs (both national and foreign) was confined to the distribution of relief materials, such as food, medicines, blankets and clothes for disadvantaged and affected people. The charity and welfare oriented program continued in massive scale until 1973. In the course of time, VOs realized that such efforts could only provide consolation to the victims for a short time and foster the people’s aid dependence. Based on their experiences, VOs changed their strategy in 1973/74 to integrate rural development programs encompassing a range of sectoral activities such as non-formal education, vocational training, health development, income generation and agricultural development, etc. Having pursued this strategy for a couple of years, the VOs realized that their efforts had failed to achieve the desired goals due to socio-economic and political constraints (Chowdhury, 1989; Huda, 1984 and Westergaard, 1996). Despite these constraints, VOs embarked on a social analysis that focused on the dynamics of the rural power structure and the root causes which hinder rural development.

Various studies reveal that the VOs have now paved the way for the transition into a new orientation of social development. This new orientation emphasizes the target group (disadvantaged poor) by adapting Freire’s concept to enhance the consciousness of the

poor and sensitize their latent potential through the building of people's organizations (Hasan, 1983). The *target group* approach was adopted in the mid 1970s giving VOs an entry point into these development programs. The VOs organized groups to undertake social action such as social and economic justice, including a better deal in share cropping with the land owners, access to *khas land*¹³, and gender issues (protection against dowry, polygamy, divorce, rape, child labor, etc).

While implementing social development programs at the grassroots level, they also realized that their efforts only extended to limited areas, thus failing to exercise any visible impact at the national level (World Bank: Bangladesh, 1996). "The actual impact of NGO efforts has been far too limited relative to the nature of the need" (ADAB, 1988: 8). Thus, VOs have become a part of the political process; one of the actors to organize the rural poor as an alternative to a political party which many of the people consider inefficient and corrupt. VOs realized that;

Development must come from the people themselves. People cannot be empowered by the outsiders. Neither the government, NGOs nor political parties can empower the poor of Bangladesh. Therefore, the poor must empower themselves through their collective action - in particular through organization and education (Ibid, p.8).

In response, many VOs started to expand their programs on a large scale in the late seventies initiating systemic changes toward sustainable development by building alliances with other institutions. In the course of time, these VOs adopted development approaches to complement the Government's efforts in the field of education and family

¹³ Land belonging to the Government

planning programs, including MCH¹⁴ and nutrition activities¹⁵ (Barua, 1988; Chowdhury, 1989 and Schoch et al, 1992)

1.0.8 GO's-VO's Cooperation and Challenges

The relationship between the Government and the Voluntary Organizations has always been ambivalent in Bangladesh. The situation is more complicated when VOs are involved in the mobilization of the rural poor in order to enable them in social and civil rights in the villages. Despite this ambivalent relationship, there are cooperative relations between the Government and the VOs in the field of community health care, education and micro credit programs (World Bank: Bangladesh, 1996 and Rahman, R. I., 1996). In many cases it has been observed that the VOs complement the Government's programs. Although the role of VOs has been clearly recognized in the *Fourth Five Year Plan* (FFYP) (1990-1995) of the Government of Bangladesh, their direct involvement in the democratic political movement in 1991 on behalf of disadvantaged groups raised some criticism; specifically, whether VOs could and should legally be able to participate in such events. Although VOs have denied that their political roles were similar to the political parties, they welcomed the re-installation of parliamentary democracy with the hopes of gaining more freedom in their operation so as to ensure the participation of

¹⁴ Maternal Child Health

¹⁵ It was observed that the VOs concentrated their focus on children's education programs instead of functional/adult education programs in the 1980s. In the 1990s, they realized that children's education programs could not be implemented effectively if the education for the disadvantaged adults was not ensured in the rural areas.

disadvantaged citizens. The participation of the VOs in political movements in 1991 was not only to restore parliamentary democracy for the disadvantaged people, but also to establish their supremacy over the Government's administrative structures for their own political gains. Despite their efforts and hopes, the VO's activities were questioned in 1992 by the new democratic Government in regard to corruption and irregularities. The NGO Affairs Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh clearly stated that VOs are out of control and do not follow the Government's rules and regulations. During that period, questions were raised about the democratic practices of VOs within their own organizations and their management structures. As a result, distrust and suspicion as to the role of VOs developed among the fundamentalists and liberals as well as radical groups of the urban educated class (Hashemi, Undated; Holloway, 1998 and Tandon, 1996). With the assistance and guidance of the donor countries, the VOs were able to resolve their initial power conflict with the Government.

Considering the initial crisis within the new democratic Government, the VOs adopted an alternative mandate to find new ways to ground their work in the Country. Over the course of time, the VOs gradually established and developed contact with opposition political parties as an alternative way of preserving their role in the political sphere. Consequently, VOs were also forced to participate in the mass movement and in a *Janator Mancha*¹⁶ in 1995 and 1996 along with the other political parties and members of the civil society in order to ensure a free and fare democratic election (*Adhunu*, Vol.3,

¹⁶ Public forum

1996) In all the movements, the VO representatives played a leadership role and the vast majority of the disadvantaged population marched forward under their guidance with festoons, placards and banners. Since 1996, the VOs have also extended voting education to the disadvantaged groups in order to improve their participation as well as to elect “the right person” in the Parliament and in their local councils. Despite all these efforts, the participation of disadvantaged citizens has remained low. Nevertheless, the VOs have been able to establish a dominant role in State affairs. Representatives of the VOs have been included on several Government sponsored National Committees such as Health & Family Planning, Land Reformation, Natural Disaster Management, Social Welfare, Education, Labor & Manpower, Agriculture and Environment. Interestingly, no members from the poor or disadvantaged groups were included on these National Committees or even on any of the local thana committees. However, members of the VOs were also included on these thana committees on behalf of the poor people.

1.0.9 VO-VO Relations and Conflicts

The enormous expansion of programs has resulted in much competition and confrontation among the VOs and this has also gradually divided the people in the villages. It has been recognized that “the relations among the large NGOs in Bangladesh have characteristically been distant, even competitive.” (ADAB, 1988:1). Despite several efforts to formulate strategies for cooperation and even collaboration, there is still confrontation among the VOs due to either their ideological differences or to their

political influence over the poor people in the operational villages (ADAB, 1988) Ribaux and Barua (1995) further describe that “a feeling of competitiveness prevails and cooperation between the organizations is rare” (p. 31).

Furthermore, it was observed that the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures were gradually developed within the organizational structures of the VOs. The role of the VOs is now primarily confined to “power” and “authority” rather than the “educative process” with its related notion of “collective learning”. The workshop report of ADAB/PRIP/TDR (1992) mentions that;

Through examining the clarity of visions, missions and strategies of many VOs in Bangladesh over time, it is obvious that they have not gone through an evaluation of their own development process. As a result, they now implement a variety of different activities which are not coordinated, not consistent with each other, not well thought through, and are thus, not as effective as they might be (Ibid. 1992:2).

In the Rajoir area alone, it was observed that about 10 VOs were involved in a conflicting situation to control the poor people through the power of *micro credit*.¹⁷ The disadvantaged people have been considered as “target beneficiaries” by the VOs as they provide them with relief and financial support. As a result, these disadvantaged people were mainly used by the VOs for their own ambitions to obtain power and position. Consequently, the policies designed to give the people “empowerment” through conscientization and education have turned towards “empowerment” of the people through capital building and money transactions. In such a situation, the participation of disadvantaged people has often shifted towards capital accumulation and money

¹⁷ Credit (paper money) is provided to the disadvantaged groups (women/men) without collateral for a small business in a village. The credit has to be repaid in 50/52 installments

transactions rather than education. One can assume that such rapid expansion of micro credit programs may decrease the creativity of the people by causing indebtedness to VOs. A similar observation is reflected by Chambers, Saxena and Shah (1989) in the Indian context. They mention that;

Direct targeted programs against poverty, like the IRDP, have as we have seen, at best a mixed record, while programs to reduce vulnerability and powerlessness have mostly been less prominent and less successful. Programs which are directed against one aspect of deprivation may also aggravate another: the IRDP can increase vulnerability and even powerlessness, by entailing indebtedness and new obligations to patrons who arrange the loan and the transfer of the assets (Ibid. 1989:11).

Although the investment in micro credit contributes to economic growth, it is also recognized that investment in education plays an important role in developing the skills of the target participants and helps them to use money effectively in their economic ventures. In other words, the educational programs play a complementary role in building a productive economy. Education is considered to be the key tool for the empowerment of women (Tinker, 1990). More importantly, the World Bank itself proposed six key reforms for the developing countries' education systems so that education could contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 1995 and World Bank, 1998).

1.0.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have introduced the research topic of non-formal education for grassroots development in rural Bangladesh and described the particular field work area

of Southwestern Bangladesh. I have discussed the three objectives of the study: (1) to describe and explain the popular/non-formal education in rural areas among the disadvantaged groups, (2) to document the implementation process of popular/non-formal education programs of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)/Voluntary Organization (VO) in rural Bangladesh, and (3) to study how popular/non-formal education programs work towards socio-economic development. I have also stated the main research questions: (i) How is popular/non-formal education perceived within the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh by the Grassroots Development Organization? (ii) What were the contents of popular/non-formal educational programs and how were these determined by the Grassroots Development Organization? (iii) What are the implementation methods adopted by the Grassroots Development Organization involved in popular/non-formal education for socio-economic development? (iv) What are the instructional media being used by the Grassroots Development Organizations in popular/non-formal education? (v) How does popular/non-formal education contribute towards socio-economic development?

The concept of non-formal education used for this thesis is the concept of popular education as a process directed toward the promotion of social change through conscientization along the lines outlined by Freire. Popular education can be described in the following manner: (i) a pedagogical ideology that aims at contributing to the raising of consciousness and the participation of people in society, (ii) a pedagogical practice that emphasizes the uses of participatory methods and the analysis of technical

tools that are linked to solving problems in participants' lives, and (iii) a political agenda for strengthening the social identity of popular sectors, valuing and preserving their culture, and linking educational activities to the social organization and mobilization of popular sectors.

Since the empowerment of women has been central to the goals of donor organizations supporting the local VOs/NGOs, I have looked at the relevant literature discussing the *reproduction, production and community* management roles of women in relation to their *practical and strategic* gender needs.

The brief summary of the role of the VOs in the study context reveals that VOs traditionally implemented Government efforts and policies to meet practical needs in the local communities. More recently, the VOs have adopted a more empowering agenda to work towards the support of strategic, long term development needs of the locality and the disadvantaged poor. Unfortunately, the declining level of financial support from international donors forces them to go back to acting as mere small credit and loan associations, diverting their attention from their educational and political empowerment agendas.

1.0.11 Thesis Organization

Following the presentation of the research topic and a detailed background of the study within the first Chapter, Chapter II describes the methodology of the study. Chapter III will outline the background of this particular case study, the socio-economic context of the project area, a brief history of the case and the organization's philosophy. It will also describe the organization's non-formal education concept, objectives, the approaches of various programs, program coverage and target participants, their communication practices and the culture within the programs. In Chapter IV, V and VI, I will present my findings and mini cases and then analyze the process of non-formal education and socio-economic development. In chapter VII, I will conclude this thesis by presenting a summary of the findings, a general conclusion of the study and recommendations.

Chapter Two

Methods of the Study

2.0.1 Introduction

This research focuses on a case study in Bangladesh where *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) have implemented *popular education programs* (PEP). This research is a documentation of the non-formal/popular education process of *Gono Unnayan Prochesta*¹⁸ (GUP) in Southwestern Bangladesh. I have chosen the Southwestern part of Bangladesh with the assumption that this area is widely covered by Government Agencies and VOs due to its high poverty level. This case study looked at the non-formal/popular education programs from a Freirian perspective. Attention has also been given to the socio-cultural context of this area, Rajoir in Madaripur, Bangladesh. In selecting this case study in Southwestern Bangladesh, I also selected the oldest organization in the area which has been implementing its programs since 1973. The reason for selecting the oldest organization was to allow examination of the process of change in regard to its policies and approaches of addressing the needs of rural disadvantaged people over an extended period.

¹⁸ People's development efforts

2.0.2 Access to the Field

“Access is also a process” (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992: 33). Gaining access to do field research with the Voluntary Organization and community was not an easy task for me. In order to gain access to information and data for this study, it was necessary to negotiate with several authorities and actors. Indeed, a great deal of time was spent with the organization and community people to establish contact and rapport. Since I planned to do field research in the Southwestern part of Bangladesh with the oldest Voluntary Organization, I first established contact with the *Executive Director* (ED) of Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) over the phone in August of 1997. He agreed to allow me to do this field research with the understanding that the findings and outcome would be available to the GUP organization for its own learning and growth. Since August 1997, I was able to continue dialogue with the ED through an e-mail and phone call in order to develop a more informal relationship and rapport in anticipation of my research work in Bangladesh. As a matter of fact, I did not have any problems in gaining access to the higher management level due to my long personal relationship with the ED of GUP

Having arrived in Bangladesh in December 1997, I spent the first two weeks with the program personnel of GUP at its central office in Dhaka in order to clarify the research issue and my role as a qualitative researcher. Although I explained the key issues with regard to my field research, I again had to explain these issues to the project personnel after my arrival in Rajoir in the Madaripur District. I had a very difficult time for the first week working with the project personnel because of my previous role as a

representative of a funding agency and also because of my personal relationship with the ED. More significantly, the project personnel in Rajoir were keeping their distance from me while discussing and sharing the issues at the beginning of each meeting since they treated me as they would treat an elder brother. In such a situation, I repeatedly explained my role in the field and tried to involve myself with them as a family member in order to understand the situation in the Rajoir area. As a result, I was able to form a meaningful social relationship and dialogue with the project personnel during my stay in the village of Rajoir Thana in Madaripur, Bangladesh from December 1997 to February 1998. Having established such a good social relationship with the project personnel, I was introduced to their *samity*¹⁹ members in Rajoir which is not an easy task in this social environment.

Within the village, research as a separate activity is not known and understood. It was very difficult for the villagers to understand the role of a researcher. Since the village people have witnessed several relief and other development activities over the years in Bangladesh, they initially considered me as the representative of a development agency. The study participants were hesitant to discuss openly when their views and statements were being recorded. However, they were more open and frank in discussing issues without the cassette recording. While working with them, I continuously encountered several questions regarding my role. They continued to ask until they were satisfied with my answers. Once they understood, I was adopted by the samity members as a brother.

¹⁹ Association/Society/Cooperative of disadvantaged people. Each samity is formed by 20-30 disadvantaged members with the assistance and cooperation of Gono Unnayan Procheta.

Due to such a relationship, I had very free entrance to the homes of these people during my field study in the villages. In many cases, the women who were members of the centers would always help me by sharing their experiences as well as making time for the study within their schedule.

2.0.3 Data Collection Procedures

I have chosen a *qualitative* research approach for this study. The qualitative approach to research is uniquely suited to uncover insightful information and explore patterns in the life of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Merriam (1988) clearly states: “qualitative inquiry is inductive - focusing on process, understanding, and interpretation - rather than deductive and experimental” (p. 21). *Observational case study* was used as a research method to understand, document, describe and analyze the popular education interventions and the role of the VO in promoting popular education for the disadvantaged groups. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) mention that “a case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 58). As a qualitative researcher, I went into the context in which the process operates. According to Yin (1984), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23).

In order to understand the process of education and people's organization, I selected two women's learning groups (samities) in the Amgram and Khalia Unions of the Rajoir Thana in the Madaripur district. Despite my best intentions, I could not choose any male organized groups for this study since the men were generally out of their villages finding work opportunities during the research period. Male members of the landless families usually migrate out of the area temporarily for work or to attend to small businesses. The two selected learning groups were *Amgram Uttarpara Prantik Mohila Samity*²⁰ (AUPMS) and *Sindia Nakshikanta Mohila Literacy Center*²¹ (SNMLC). The AUPMS was chosen with the understanding that all of its 30 members had received education on the *total development* concept of GUP. On the other hand, the SNMLC was chosen because its 20 members were attending the functional literacy classes with assistance from UNESCO under the *Education for Entrepreneurship Development* (EED) project.

Having established my base in the villages, I started to attend the weekly group meetings and regular functional literacy classes of these groups with the extension workers of GUP and a *Volunteer Functional Literacy Teacher* (VFLT). By doing this, I was able to establish social contacts with all the members of the AUPMS and SNMLC. While attending the group's meetings and functional literacy classes, I was allowed to talk to small groups of learners about their views of the *Functional Literacy Program* (FLP), the group's formation, the educational process, micro credit, income generation and health issues. I was able to chat with all the members during their time off.

²⁰ Amgram North Neighborhood Marginal Women Cooperative

²¹ Sindia Nakshikanta Women Literacy Center

I selected eight study participants on the basis of their willingness to participate. Among these eight participants, three came from the FLP. In addition to these eight participants, two others were selected from the agriculture program in order to understand the dimensions of the *total development policy* of GUP in the Rajoir area.

The main sources of data in regard to the research questions was collected through the in-depth interviews of the ten study participants. In-depth interviews were done at the home of each study participant and recorded on an audio cassette. These interviews included their views and statements as they spoke. After questioning each participant in the study, I would rewind the tape, let the person listen and then give them the option whether they wished to include the statements as they were recorded. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. All the interviews were conducted in the Bengali language. I generally discussed issues with the study participants in their local dialect which eventually helped me to understand their expressions and perceptions. Before each interview, I sought their formal consent by reading a consent statement and having this signed (Appendix C). This consent statement explained the purpose of the study, insured confidentiality and asked their permission for a taped interview.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, I also conducted numerous casual conversations and semi-formal interviews with the study participants at their homes in a more private environment. For these, I used the research techniques *of group discussions, informal interviews, in-depth interviews, personnel observation and review of documents*. I also

interviewed 16 program personnel, two traditional midwives (*dhais*), village health volunteers and the Executive Director of GUP in order to understand the concept and implementation process of non-formal education in the Rajoir Thana. Moreover, I attended daily morning, weekly and monthly meetings of the program staff during my stay at the Rajoir campus. Besides this, I attended an annual program review meeting of the Rajoir project in December 1997.

2.0.4 Reducing Bias and Preconceptions

The qualitative research approach assumes that human beings are not mechanical tools. They are unpredictable, act differently in different contexts, change their behavior over time and are unique within their context. In this situation, the qualitative research approach makes sense of changing contexts through close observing eyes in a complex environment. In order to avoid biases as much as possible, I made every attempt to remain open minded, non-judgmental, and respectful of cultural and individual differences in every interaction with study participants. Although I began my field work with somewhat flexible and unsure intentions, I utilized my past experience of conducting field research among disadvantaged groups to help ensure the process of data collection was done through a systematic inquiry. I used the *triangulation* research method which involved checking and rechecking my observations and findings and then attempting to neutralize any biases and also reinterpreting the findings systematically.

2.0.5 Data Organization and Analysis

In order to organize data for the thesis, I listened to the recorded interviews several times. Having analyzed their statements thoroughly, I then visited the participants of the study many times to clarify their views as well as my own understanding of the context. Once I completed an interview with a woman, I reviewed the data and categorized certain key issues within the content of the messages such as their functional literacy, educational process, income, mobilization, group action, health, regenerative agriculture, micro credit, entrepreneurship development and program approaches, etc. While categorizing the themes, I was able to generate new problems that related to the original categories and context. Moreover, the regular discourse and reflection with the program personnel enabled me to understand their alternative views on popular education in light of the existing socio-cultural context in Rajoir. I also maintained a diary of my observations of the classes, educational processes of the participants and the facilitation process of GUP's program personnel. In this study, I used pseudonyms for all the study participants instead of their real names in order to protect their privacy.

2.0.6 Limitations of the Study

I have conducted this study with one particular VO in the Rajoir area of Bangladesh which has been in operation since 1973. Since I have conducted this study in a specific context and environment, I have reflected my observations based on the culture and context of this particular case study. There are nine other VOs in operation in this area

organizing various projects and their experiences may not be similar to GUP's due to their own philosophical position and working strategies. However, none of the VOs can ignore the unique culture, customs and context of rural development in the Rajoir Thana in the Madaripur district of Bangladesh.

2.0.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described the *participant observation* method which I used to examine the *Popular Education Program* (PEP) implemented by a particular VO - the *Gono Unnayan Prochesta* (GUP). I explained how I established contact with the participants through my personal acquaintance with the Executive Director and the initial problems that I encountered during my field research in the Rajoir area. Once my relationship as “brother” was established with the villagers, I could pursue my research goals with their cooperation. I have also elaborated upon the procedures of data collection and their related problems, access to the field, categories of the data and data organization and analysis. In the data collection procedures, I explained how I chose the research participants for this study. I had to concentrate on two women's groups since the men were generally away from the villages looking for work opportunities. I also mentioned how I attempted to check for bias and preconception. This study is an observational case study of only one of the 10 VOs in operation in the same area.

Chapter Three

Context of the Case Study, GUP's Philosophy and Concept of Education

3.0.1 Context of Rajoir and History of Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP)

Rajoir Thana is situated in the District of Madaripur (Madaripur was a sub-division of the Faridpur district until the 1980s) 250 kms Southwest of Dhaka, the capital city. It is a low lying deltaic area prone to flooding (GUP Brochure on Peace Center, Undated). Floods are regular events in the area. People of this area have faced serious floods in 1974, 1985, 1987 and 1988 (Akther, Hussain and Begum, 1991 and Timm, Rahman and McCord, 1980). Such natural disasters are usually considered to be barriers to socio-economic development. Rajoir Thana has a total area of 240.96 sq. kms having 204,356 in population of which 102,792 are male and the remaining 101,564 are female. Rajoir Thana consists of 10 *Unions*²². The present literacy rate in Rajoir Thana is 27.4 percent of the population (RTSD, 1998). The main occupation of the people in the area is crop cultivation. Seventy-two percent of the population belong to the group of landless, marginal and small farmers and the remaining 27.8 percent are middle and rich farmers (RTAD, 1998). Historically, the greater Faridpur region was a poor area with a high percentage of landless population. The migration of people in search of employment from Rajoir to southern districts, such as Barisal and Khulna, as well as to the capital city is common. Permanent migration to the urban areas normally occurs since the migrants can find work as small traders, domestic workers and rickshaw pullers. Traditionally,

²² Administrative jurisdiction comprising of 10-15 villages

Rajoir was a Hindu area dominated by the upper class, Hindu Brahman *Zamindars*²³ who actively controlled the socio-political life of the area. The wealth was also mainly concentrated in the hands of the Hindu Zamindars before the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947. However, due to the political changes within the sub-continent in 1947, the Hindu Zamindars eventually settled in the West Bengal area of India which is still very close to the greater Faridpur district in Bangladesh. As a result of this social vacuum, new social groups have emerged in the society (Timm, Rahman, Rahman and McCord, 1980). The Hindu lower caste people are treated as *namasudras*.²⁴ Locally the *namasudras* are known to be *namu*. Although today the *namasudras* are not treated as bad as they once were, there is still a great social disparity between the upper and the lower classes within the Hindu communities in the Rajoir area. It is also noteworthy that when there is any confusion or conflict between the Hindu and the Muslim religious populations of the area, solidarity among the different Hindu casts is increased substantially in order to minimize internal social disparities.

The present socio-political affairs of Rajoir are mainly dominated by the “Molla” and the “Hawladar” *gosthis*.²⁵ These *gosthis* belong to the Muslim community of the area. Although the Hindu communities emigrated after the partition of 1947, the businesses of the area are still controlled by the Hindu business communities with the socio-political support of the “Molla” or the “Hawladar” *gosthis*. There are no separate statistics on

²³ Landlord

²⁴ Lower class

²⁵ Lineages/Clans

Muslim and Hindu communities in the area, but it is unofficially known that the Muslim community forms the majority. (Extension Workers, Personal communication, January, 1998). However, in certain unions of Rajoir about 80-90 percent of the population are still of the Hindu religion (Timm et al, 1980). Although the Muslim communities have a clear majority in the area, the Hindu communities also play an important role during the national and local elections since the Muslims are greatly divided because of their social identities and ideological differences. Adding to this diversity, there is also a small number of Christian communities in Rajoir who originally converted from the Hindu lower caste. However, they still maintain a social connection with the Hindu communities. Although they are not as politically active, they have been able to develop their own social identity through their network of churches and missions

In 1971, Rajoir was severely affected by the War of Liberation of Bangladesh. Houses in the area were completely destroyed. Agriculture suffered and people were forced to flee the disaster area in order to save their lives. Thousands of people took shelter as refugees in the camps and the houses of relatives of West Bengal in India. People were killed by the Pakistan military. Many people also died because of starvation. There were many orphans and widows. After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1972, the area was then faced with the severe malnutrition of children. About 33,000 severely malnourished children were identified in Rajoir. The people were homeless and without any food. A high rate of night blindness was also observed among the children. Small-Pox was widespread. Diarrheal diseases became epidemics. People who migrated temporarily during the War

of Liberation returned to their homes. They found their homes in dilapidated conditions. Most agricultural productions had collapsed. During this period, the literacy rate of Rajoir was 20% and about 45% of the households were landless. There were hardly any resources for the people to rebuild their lives (Akhter, Husain and Begum, 1991 and Timm, Rahman and McCord, 1980).

In such a deplorable situation, the *Quaker Peace and Services* (QPS) began an operation in the Rajoir area with relief and emergency health care at the request of the Government of Bangladesh. The initial task of the Quaker Peace and Services (QPS) was to integrate the people who were refugees and those who had remained at home in 1971 (Anderson, 1993). More specifically, QPS provided an intensive feeding program for the malnourished children during this period. Having completed the intensive relief operation for a year in Rajoir, the QPS decided to leave in July 1973, since they thought there was no longer any great role to be played by a foreign organization in the villages of Bangladesh (Rahman, A, 1997).

Since QPS decided to phase out its activities in Bangladesh, it was believed necessary to build a replacement organization by the local communities in order to facilitate a creative development program and help the rural people of Rajoir. Subsequently, GUP was created in 1973 with the intention to “bring the people and government face to face, show leadership where the people and officials were uncertain, and survive confrontations, floods, cyclones, military coups and martial law” (Anderson, 1993:7).

Considering the situation, the Quaker Peace and Service (QPS) along with the *American Friends Committee* (AFSC) and the *Canadian Friends Service Committee* (CFSC) collectively came forward to assist and develop GUP for a five year period in order to establish its organizational capacity for future growth (Rahman, A, 1997)

The main focus of GUP in 1973 was to provide immediate relief and rehabilitation and build people's confidence enough to become self-sufficient. The broad objectives of GUP were to erase the fatalistic and relief mentality of the people and to inculcate a spirit of self-help and cooperation among the people and to restore their dignity. However, it is evident that the organization has changed its program objectives over the years in order to address the specific needs of the people within the various contexts of the villages. In observing the programs of GUP, it is obvious they have passed through phases in their program approaches from relief and rehabilitation [1973]²⁶ to a process of integrated programs/participatory development [1974-1989]²⁷ and then to sustainable development [1990]²⁸ (Annual Reports, 1994-1996; Akther et al, 1991 and Timm et al, 1980).

Rahman mentions that;

As the time passed by, we definitely had to change our programs. Times changed, needs changed, people also made progress, the organization also made some progress and a new vision came in and a new enthusiasm was also there. The needs were also different, so we had to have different strategies at different times. Normally, GUP works on a five year work plan basis. Every five years we have to redefine our goals and objectives taking into

²⁶ During this period, GUP distributed houses, seeds for agriculture, extended medical care and distributed food to the villagers.

²⁷ In the beginning of this period, GUP launched programs of traditional cooperative agriculture, adult education, community health, youth activities, women's and food for works programs with the goal to help the people in Rajoir. In the later part of the 1970s, GUP adopted the participatory approach to work with the people in Rajoir.

²⁸ With the sustainable development approach, GUP was devoted to harmonizing itself with the context, nature, society, local knowledge and the people in Rajoir.

account the reality. Our vision and mission are still the same. (Personal communication, December 1997)

3.0.2 GUP's Philosophy, Non-formal Educational Concept, History and Approaches

GUP's Philosophy is embedded in a belief in the intrinsic value of each individual. GUP believes that no individual lives in isolation from the rest of the community and hence, the development of the individual is intimately linked with that of the community in which she or he lives. GUP believes that development takes place only when the people involved can see the result of their efforts and when the changes for improvement take place as a result of their active participation in those endeavors. In keeping with this philosophical notion, GUP's concept of non-formal education focuses on social justice for human dignity, civil rights, ecological balance and development of communal harmony and peace in the community by reducing the social exploitation, gender disparity, poverty, illiteracy, health problems and unemployment through non-violent actions within the villages. In the view of Rahman (1993) GUP's non-violent approach to community development activities was illuminated by the Quakers from UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Considering this notion, GUP²⁹ seeks to empower the powerless through the process of conscientization in order to increase the individual's strengths and decision making power (Akhter, Husain and Begum, 1991; Brochure on GUP, Undated;

²⁹ GUP is one of the oldest VOs which started a non-formal education program in the 1970s. GUP also took part in establishing the Campaign for Popular Education (Gono Shakkharata Ovijan) in Bangladesh in the early 1990s.

Morshed, 1997, Rahman, 1993, Schoch, Barua and Chaudhuri, 1992 and Timm, Rahman and McCord, 1980)

Non-formal education is considered to be a basic input toward this empowerment of the rural disadvantaged people by GUP. GUP values education and realizes its worth in life. GUP gives priority to the functional literacy component in its non-formal education program prior to facilitating the other educational components for the disadvantaged people in the Rajoir area. In other words, GUP considers that when functional literacy is ensured to these rural disadvantaged groups, their self initiatives will be strengthened in the villages and thus lead to a healthier community and a better way of life. GUP started its non-formal education program in 1974 with the *Comilla method*³⁰ that uses 3-phased readers for which a teacher is also necessary. There are 20 simple readers on practical subjects³¹ that are used in follow-up activities for the new learners. The program consisted of classes that were held for 6-9 months. By 1975 there were 32 *Milan Kendras*,³² as the education centers are referred to in the 10 unions. There were 9 women's and 23 men's centers. These centers were administered by the village managing committees composed of one primary school teacher, one union Council member, one Youth club member and 2 local village leaders.³³ This method was

³⁰ Coombs, P. H. and Ahmed Manzoor describe the Comilla Model in *Attacking Rural Poverty: How non-formal education programs can help*, 1974, New York: World Bank.

³¹ Perhaps issues of health, nutrition, vegetable production and cooperatives were covered. The evaluation report of 1973-79 and other reports did not clarify this fully.

³² Meeting places/learning centers for the target participants.

³³ These were mostly male members of the villages who took part in the local committee(s). There was gender disparity and it was severe in the 1970s.

discontinued in 1977 as it gradually became no longer culturally suitable for the Rajoir area.

In 1977 GUP introduced the *BRAC*³⁴ (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) *method* which combines the components of literacy and awareness building. A set of 100 charts (later reduced to 60) are used to bring social change based on the Freirian concept. By initiating group discussion and dialogue the people were able to identify their problems and the causes and then propose their own solutions. Group action was considered to be the main ingredient in order to build up the groups confidence.

Eventually, the BRAC method was replaced by the *FIVDB* (Friends in Village Development in Bangladesh) *method* of functional literacy in the mid 1980s to provide social adjustment. It has three modules and consists of 60 lessons. Each course is followed for 6 months (Akther et al, 1991 and Timm et al, 1980). Although the FIVDB method is similar to the BRAC method, it is considered to be less radical and provides more balanced training [to avoid conflict] for samity members. In the views of R. K. Chowdhury (1997) and A. N. S. H. Rahman (1997), the BRAC method is considered to be revolutionary. In many areas, it has created conflict among poor people, the local power structure and project members of VOs due to its radical approach. As a result, the existence of VOs became fragile in some parts of Bangladesh

³⁴ BRAC developed the non-formal education program based on the *Freirian concept* for adults in the 1970s for the first time in Bangladesh. Many VOs used this method. But BRAC itself discontinued its own non-formal education program for adults in its operational area in the mid 1980s.

GUP now mobilizes the rural people in groups not only to provide functional literacy but also to facilitate non-formal education programs related to people's development, self-reliance, community health, regenerative agriculture, sustainable development, community harmony and peace. They use the *target group* and *community* approaches based on existing social conditions and realities. More specifically, GUP concentrates its non-formal education in the following areas: (i) *samity*,³⁵ (ii) agriculture, (iii) and *jano shashthya seba*³⁶.

3.0.3 Samity - Development of People's Organizations

In order to assist disadvantaged persons, Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) organizes landless, small and marginal farmers, destitute groups and disadvantaged women through the formation of people's organizations in the villages. Gono Unnayan Prochesta generally speak of "empowerment", which mainly focuses on awareness building and the formation of *people's organizations*³⁷ in the villages through the *target group* approach. This orientation emphasizes working with these disadvantaged people in order to raise their consciousness and sensitize their latent potential in order to improve their socio-economic conditions through non-formal educational programs. More specifically, Gono Unnayan organizes the poor people into samities (consisting of 15-30

³⁵ Society/Association/Cooperative.

³⁶ Community Health

³⁷ David Korten described the concept of *people's organization* in his book *Getting to the 21st Century Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. USA: Kumarian Press Inc., 1990.

disadvantaged people who are economically homogeneous) and their apex bodies (village federation and union federation) in order to change their socio-economic status and political power within their village. Gono Unnayan then facilitates courses on functional literacy, group solidarity, social harmony, peace, leadership development, gender development, legal rights, voting education, entrepreneurship development, samity management, poultry rearing, pisciculture and agriculture development through these organized samities. Most importantly however, Gono Unnayan ensures education to the samity members on awareness building and human development to enhance their capabilities so they can create their own organizations as well as plan, manage and mobilize resources for self-reliance and sustainable development. Moreover, the samities reinforce individual's bargaining power for equality and civil rights in the villages. The rural poor people and farmers are educated and mobilized in such a way that their participation would also provide socio-economic benefits for their survival (Akther et al, 1990, GUP Annual Reports, 1994 -1996 and VHSS, 1993).

3.0.4 Agricultural Development- Crop Diversification and Regenerative Agriculture

GUP also promotes regenerative agriculture education through the organization and coordination of the samities with the contact farmers with the purpose to increase food production, reduce malnutrition and make agriculture more profitable for the villagers (Prochesta, 1995). More specifically, GUP organizes agricultural education so as to make agricultural production a year-round activity. It also introduces new crops and

techniques in order to diversify the traditional crops through organic farming (4th Draft Memorandum of GUP, 1998). In addition, GUP facilitates education on homestead gardening/vegetable cultivation, afforestation, nurseries, producer's cooperatives, organic manure preparation and its use, seed collection & preservation, soybean, sugarcane cultivation and sustainable agriculture (Prochesta, 1996).

3.0.5 *Jano Shashthya Seba*³⁸ - Development of Existing Health Resources and Empowerment of Women

GUP adopted the concept of *health for all by the year of 2000* in the mid 1970s. The main strategy of this health education program was to make health care sustainable at the community level by providing health information to women of reproductive age in each village. In keeping with this view, GUP prioritized four key issues in their health education program: (i) promotion of community participation through existing social networks such as lineage and clan; (ii) development of locally available human resources like *Dai*³⁹ and *Gram Mohila Shastay Shebika* (GMSS)⁴⁰; (iii) facilitation of extensive education on maternal and child care, communicable diseases, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and food, antenatal care, safe delivery and postnatal care to the rural women of reproductive ages based on the existing socio-cultural context through the *shebika* and *dai*; and (iv) promotion of herbal medicine (*Ayurvedic*) along with modern health care methods. (Barua, Ribaux and Rahman, 1994). GUP then mobilized this

³⁸ Community Health Service

³⁹ Traditional village midwives

⁴⁰ Village Women Health Volunteers - VWHV

intensive health education program for the village women through the dais and GMSS with the understanding that the village women would introduce and disseminate these messages within their homes. Moreover, it was assumed that the village women would be available all the time at home doing household work and that their husbands or male members would not be a part of this educational process since most were employed outside the home.

3.0.6 GUP's Target Participants and Program Package

Since GUP adopted both the *target group* and the *community* approaches, it developed programs for the disadvantaged groups as well as for the community people regardless of their financial status. The samity programs are exclusively designed to cover the poorest segments of the population. GUP mobilized a total of 282 samities in the Rajoir area of which 64% were women's groups and those remaining were male (GUP Internal Report of Cooperative Program, February, 1998). On the other hand, GUP mobilized its health education program for both rich and poor women of reproductive age within the villages. In the agriculture programs, GUP mobilized both landless women and men and small and marginal farmers in order to create social harmony and disseminate their message in an effective way within the villages. GUP also included rich farmers in their agricultural development program as *contact farmers* where they attempted to develop a cooperative environment between both the rich and the poor farmers. *Table 1* gives a comprehensive picture of GUP's target participants and their program package:

Table 1:
Target Participants by Program Package

Program	Target Participants
Agriculture Education	Landless, Small and Contact Farmers
Functional Literacy	Disadvantaged Adults
Children's Education	Disadvantaged Children
Fisheries & Livestock Training	Disadvantaged Groups
Health Education	Women of Reproductive Age
Peace Education	Youth, Community Leaders & Social Workers
Micro Credit	Disadvantaged Groups
Entrepreneurship Education	Women and Disadvantaged Groups
Samity (people's organization)	Landless and Disadvantaged People

3.0.7 Development Process of Educational Content, Instructional Media and Participation

Educational content cannot be separated from the life of the target participants (Freire, 1970). In the past it was only the *Karmis*⁴¹ who contributed to the design and development of the project. Today, members of the samities informally share with the karmis about the problems, the solutions and the contents of the messages. The Karmis listen to the samity members and get their ideas and their expectations. Having learned from the samity members, GUP's central office then reviews and analyses the problems and solutions and modifies the educational content in accordance. Finally, they consult

⁴¹ Project workers/Staff members

the donors and the Government to obtain funding and approval prior to the implementation of the program activities in the villages (Rahman, Ataur, Personal communication, December 1997).

There are several constraints that limit the amount of local input into these programs. For example, GUP is dependent on the donors' contributions for the implementation of specific projects and in most cases these are directed toward the achievement of short term outcomes or results due to the funding limitations. As a result, the programs are often unable to generate adequate learner-centered educational materials for the disadvantaged people during this time period. In spite of this fact, GUP has attempted to blend both the expert-centered and learner-centered educational messages into its non-formal educational programs in the villages. While observing the material and content development process on *education for entrepreneurship development* in Rajoir, it was noticed that the material developers and trainers were involved in constructing a module using secondary material with the advice of an external expert. Despite this fact, the trainers and material developers had a very short period to engage themselves in the field in order to observe and learn about the life experiences of the target participants. However, this material will inevitably be tested with the people in the villages in order to revise and standardize them further. Freire (1985) mentions that "action must be dialectical from the beginning" (p. 33).

The messages and media are shaped in respect to the context and the specific project activities. For example, the content of health messages was developed and then blended together in a local dialect and culture. This involved a continual interactive learning process. On the other hand, the functional literacy educational materials of *Friends in Village Development in Bangladesh* (FIVDB), which are used by GUP, were designed and developed in the northeastern part of Bangladesh and later it was produced in standard Bengali by FIVDB. Anisur Rahman (1994) mentioned that; "There is no self-reliant way of development without primary reliance on people's resources including their own knowledge, and professional knowledge has to play a complementary but not dominating role in such development" (1994:70-71). I have also observed that when the educational messages do not fulfill the needs and aspirations of the target people, their course participation is low. This situation is reflected in the functional literacy classes of GUP. While describing the indigenous knowledge in the African context, Dei (1995) confirms that; "It is the product of the direct experience of nature and its relationship with their social world; this knowledge is essential for the survival of many indigenous and rural peoples"(p.150).

GUP emphasizes the necessity of dialogue regarding problems, social issues and educational content before implementing its programs and activities in the villages (Roy 1993). The daily morning meeting in the Rajoir project office is considered to be an effective and stimulating information sharing session among the karmis where they review programs and problems and announce an action plan for the day. This morning

meeting can perhaps be compared to Gandhi's daily prayer meeting⁴². In the view of Parikha, GUP's environment is similar to a real Gandhian organization in a humanitarian way which involves eliminating social discrimination through cooperative relationships within the villages (Parikha, 1993)

The non-formal educational messages are designed to be disseminated and communicated to the rural people and farmers by *sebaks sebikas*,⁴³ extension workers and motivators with the participation of the samities and the existing social networks in the villages. The messages are disseminated through interpersonal communication, story telling, informal discussion, group discussion, farmer to farmer exchange visits, demonstration plots, village box libraries, wall magazines, posters, newspapers for new literates, slides, video films, pictorial illustrations (i.e. flip charts), *Jari* (folk songs), role play and folk drama (Akther, et al 1990; Barua, 1997; Project Coordinators, Personnel Communication, January, 1998 and Target Participants, December, 1997). Although GUP intended to use folk media/indigenous forms within program activities (Bhola, 1989; Colle et al, 1986; Dissanayake, 1977; Freebody et al, 1993; Kidd, 1981; Kidd and Byeam, 1977; Lent, 1982; Ranganath, 1982 and Wang et al, 1982), it could not incorporate such media as first expected.

⁴² Bhola briefly described Gandhi's prayer meeting in Chapter X in *World trends and issues in adult education*, Paris: UNESCO, 1988, p.127.

⁴³ Male volunteers/Female volunteers

Historically, the Rajoir area is rich in folk culture which is mostly in an oral form. People used to enjoy such media as folk songs that reflected the life experience of the rural people. In other words these folk songs sensitized and made the rural people aware of the socio-political and cultural problems of the village. The folk songs have been passed on from one generation to the next. These folk songs and the cultural festivals are people oriented (Karim, 1993 and Rahman, 1994). I also observed that the people were involved with the *grameen mela*⁴⁴ folk drama and songs in the winter season after the harvesting was finished. Freire (1985) states that “the person lives in a culture whose communication and history are, if not always, at least mostly oral. Writing does not bear any meaning here” (p.13). More importantly, it was observed that the development of new media and materials needs more research, time and money to be used in the implementation process. It has been very difficult for GUP in this regard since it is mostly dependent on donor funding.⁴⁵ In many cases, a particular project has been limited to a specific time period and has had little funding for further research to explore culturally based media or adequate communication with the target groups. In other words, most of the program activities seem to be project-oriented rather than learner-oriented due to their dependency on external funding.

Having observed GUP’s educational programs, I recognize that if the content of educational messages and media for samity activities are not constructed in light of the

⁴⁴ Rural fair

⁴⁵ Rahman, Aatur (January 1998) stated that 65-70% of GUP’s expenses are covered by the donors’ contributions.

existing socio-cultural context, the participation of the target people is poor in the classes. Dei (1995) believes that; “What is needed is a critical integration of such indigenous knowledge for the sites of social empowerment and human upliftment“ (p.151) It is essential to generate existing knowledge and cultural media in order to integrate these with new knowledge for sustainable development within the villages.

3.0.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described the context of the case study, its environment, the history of GUP, their philosophy and concept of non-formal education, the target participants and the content and development of educational messages and media used for these programs. GUP's programs evolved from the functional literacy model to focus on cooperatives, health education and agricultural support. I have critically examined the Freirian concept of conscientization and the non-violent approach used in GUP's concept of non-formal education in promoting social development for disadvantaged people in the Rajoir area. Most importantly, I have focused on the role of GUP in building knowledge and using locally effective channels such as fortnightly coordination meetings with the volunteers and the use of local dialects and traditional fairs for the sustainable development of Rajoir's disadvantaged people. The move from top-down to more grassroots approaches and vice versa, depending on the political climate and lessons learned, explains the relative success of some programs over others, if we take the high or low attendance rate at different meetings as an indicator.

Chapter Four

Samity⁴⁶ - Development of People's Organizations

4.0.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will record the views and statements of five women of the *Amgram Uttara Para Prantik Mohila Samity*⁴⁷ (AUPMS). These five women provided a considerable amount of data and information for this study through in-depth interviews and discussions.⁴⁸ I will analyze all the views and statement of five study participants based on my own observations and the conditions of the social context. While analyzing, I will focus my discussion on the people's organization, savings generation, micro-credit and culture.

4.0.2 Samity - Development of People's Organizations and Women

Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) has been involved in organizing people through the samities since 1973. Initially, GUP used the Comilla/BRDB model for organizing the rural people (Akther et al, 1990). The objectives of the samities were to motivate people towards cooperative efforts in order to develop capital resources among the communities for the promotion of economic activities, create exploitation-free societies and train people as potential leaders (Rahman, 1980). The initial experience in 1973-74 was not successful in mobilizing people and forming samities due to limitations and weaknesses

⁴⁶ Cooperative/Association/Society

⁴⁷ Amgram North Neighborhood Marginal Women Cooperative

⁴⁸ Methodological issues are described in Chapter Three

in the approach and methodology. Most of the samities were formed by ordinary people in order that they might receive massive relief and material assistance. However, many privileged groups also entered into the samities. Despite their best intentions, GUP was only able to organize 8 samities in the early period of its operation. By the end of 1974, it managed to keep only 5 samities, 3 of which were having serious problems. Atiqur Rahman (1980) confirms that; "The cooperative movement in Bengal/Bangladesh has never been a complete success. Although it has a long history, the true sprit of the cooperative movement could not be sustained over a long time" (p.58). He further elaborates that the illiteracy of the common man and factional conflicts are responsible for such problems (p. 58). Realizing the situation and condition of the people in the Rajoir area, GUP felt it was necessary to inculcated the spirit of cooperation among the people. GUP's Annual Report of 1974/75 mentions that; "If the vast majority of the poor people were not cooperative in forming capital by thrift saving and were not prepared to work together, it would be impossible to make headway" (Cited by Atiqur Rahman, 1980 in *Prochesta* 73-79, p.58)

With this understanding, GUP primarily emphasized this spirit of cooperation by mobilizing the rural women of Rajoir. Non-formal education was organized through the *milan kendras*⁴⁹ in the villages to diffuse the idea of cooperatives among the rural women. Realizing the limitations and constraints of the samity program, GUP changed both its objectives and its approaches in 1978. This change in orientation was toward the

⁴⁹ Meeting Centers for learners or disadvantaged groups in the villages.

mobilization and education of landless and marginal farmers and destitute women within the villages on the need and value of cooperative efforts and the elimination of narrow-minded and selfish attitudes. Eventually, GUP formed programs for both of these groups separately with the intention to empower them through the samity.

After gaining experience on the formation and organization of groups within the samity over the years, GUP again reorganized its group structures by merging the landless farmers and the destitute women's program with the regular samity program in 1985. This reorganization had been conducted with the intention to organize economically homogeneous groups so that they would receive effective leadership development and cooperative management training and also attain self reliance. More importantly, GUP would facilitate economic activities in order to raise their income and socio-economic status while providing education to the samity members (Akther et al, 1990; Rahman, A. December, 1998, Personal communication and Timm et al, 1980). Proceeding through trial and error over the years in mobilizing the samities, GUP was able to organize a total of 282 samities in the Rajoir area as of December, 1997 (GUP Internal Report of Cooperative Program, February, 1998). In the following section, I will further examine one particular samity in order to understand the process of the people's organization in mobilizing a rural disadvantaged group within the context of this culture and society.

4.0.3 Amgram Uttarpara Prantik Mohila Samity⁵⁰, Amgram, Rajoir

Amgram Uttar Para Prantik Mohila Samity (AUPPMS) was established in 1986 by the women of marginal families in the Amgram village with the goal of improving their socio-economic status as well as receiving various educational opportunities from the Gono Unnayan Prochesta. Initially, 13 women were actively involved in forming the samity. The women of the samity live in *Uttar Para*⁵¹ of Amgram village. The samity is known as *Bara Jatir Kendra*⁵² as the members are from various religious groups. The samity is very unique in the sense that it promotes multi-religious understanding and the development of communal harmony within an area where people have been in conflict through riots since the early 1940s. At its beginning, the samity was called *Mitali Mohila Samity*⁵³ (MMS) and its present name was given in 1996. In 1987, the AUPPMS increased its membership to 21 members. In mid 1996, an additional 8 members joined from *Amgram Uttarpara Kapali Mohila Samity*⁵⁴ (AUKMS) due to GUP's reorganization and restructuring policy and plan in regard to samity formation and organization. Currently, 30 women are members of the AUPPMS. The AUPPMS is managed by its executive committee with the assistance from the extension worker. The AUPPMS members meet every Monday in order to discuss issues, share experiences, generate savings and settle credit transactions with the extension worker. A savings account is maintained by the AUPPMS through the Krishi Bank in Rajoir. The bank account is

⁵⁰ Amgram North Neighborhood Marginal Woman's Association

⁵¹ A northern neighborhood

⁵² The center of many religious communities

⁵³ Friendship Women's Cooperative/Society/Association

⁵⁴ Amgram North Neighborhood Kapali Women Society

accessed with the signatures of two members and the extension worker of GUP. The AUPPMS has generated *Taka*⁵⁵ 65,000 (C \$2,200.00) (Extension Workers, Personal communication, January, 1998). The members of the AUPPMS received education on functional literacy, human development, group management, pisciculture, agriculture gardening, health education, poultry rearing, primary accounts management, leadership development and awareness development from the GUP program. Moreover, GUP's aim was to educate the members on a regular basis at weekly meetings. The members of AUPPMS could bring an educational experiences from their daily lives for discussion at each weekly meeting. I will now present the experience of five of these women. Their experiences will be presented here exactly as they were told.

Story 01: Jarina Begum is 53 years old. She married Azam Bepari of Amgram in 1973. At the time of their marriage, she was 19 years. She has five girls and two sons. She does not have any agricultural land except for a homestead. Recently, she leased a piece of her agricultural land. She joined in the samity in 1986. She elaborates:

I did not discuss with my husband prior to participating in the samity in 1986. If I would have discussed, he would not allow me to join in the samity. People used to think; "What can women do in the samity?" It was a difficult for a women to go out of the home. Even, it was impossible to talk with an outsider. I disclosed the matter to my husband after six months. He was critical of that but, I brought financial and material benefit. When I joined in the samity, we did not have tin roof house. We were really poor. It was hard to survive with the income of husband. He did not have any regular income. He used to work as daily labor. I took part in the functional literacy class after joining in the samity. Now I can sign and read. I got training and education on pre-membership, homestead gardening, tree plantation, poultry rearing, pisciculture and health education. I also received training on how to utilize credit for income generation. I have received credit from Gono Unnayan.⁵⁶ When I first received credit from Gono Unnayan, it was

⁵⁵ Currency is called *Taka*

⁵⁶ Gono Unnayan refers to Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP-People's Development Efforts)

only Taka 500.00 (C \$16.50) which I repaid by 50 installments. This year I have received Taka 6000.00 (C \$200). With the present credit my eldest son started a small business. My husband has been ill for last three years. In the past we used to discuss about *aaya*⁵⁷ and *unnati*⁵⁸ in the weekly group meeting of the samity, but we do not do now. In the samity, more members are from *mridha bari*⁵⁹.

Story 02: Rasheda Begum is 40 years old and has two daughters and two sons. One daughter and one son are studying at the local Rajoir College. Her husband works as a supervisor in the local bus service. She states;

Women cannot go to the beach to work. That is why, we have organized this samity. Earlier, I could not do enough. Now I have two cows which I bought through credit money. If I can repay the loan to Gono Unnayan, these two cows will remain with me. If I deposit Taka 5 each week, I will be able to save Taka 5000/10,000 in 5/10 years. This money I will be able to use for the marriage of my daughter. This is my development. If I do not have any money, what will I do? I joined in the samity in 1986. My present family condition is better now than in the past. I received training and education on how to cultivate vegetables, poultry rearing, health education and functional literacy.

Rasheda also mentioned when I was not recording that; “I am presently a member of four NGOs and I have taken credit from all of them.”

Story 03: Angela is 50 years old. She has three sons and one daughter. Her husband is a fisherman. Angela says;

I got the idea of the samity from the extension worker of Gono Unnayan in 1986. In that year, I joined in the samity along with other members with a view to get *shushikka*.⁶⁰ When joining the samity, I did not encounter any opposition from my family. I got an education and training in personnel hygiene, sanitation, vegetable gardening, leadership development and functional literacy.

⁵⁷ Income

⁵⁸ Development

⁵⁹ Here, *hari* (household) refers to the extended family of Mridha

⁶⁰ Better education

We need money for education as it will give us *alo*.⁶¹ Since I have joined in the samity, I was able to save Taka 2500. I took a loan from Gono Unnayan. At the beginning, I started a paddy husking business with the loan money, then I did a wheat selling business. I earned profit while doing these businesses. Consequently, the socio-economic condition of my family has improved. To be honest, my children did not even use sandals and shoes in the early days, now they use them. My children go to school regularly.

We do not discuss or share our experience in the weekly meeting of the samity. We now mainly concentrate our time on credit repayment and the deposit collection at the weekly meeting. Only money cannot improve our life. Education is also required for the development socio-economic conditions.

Story 04: Sonali is 42 years old. She is the mother of one daughter and two sons. She does not have any agricultural land. She joined in the AUPMs in 1986. She explains;

When I joined in the samity, my family conditions were normal. At present, my family condition is better than at the earlier time. This happened due to my joining in the samity. I have received education and training on sanitation, cleanliness, saline preparation, leadership development and vegetable gardening. I have also received training on fish cultivation. More importantly, I attended courses on functional literacy which helped me to read and sign.

We organized the samity with the support and assistance of Gono Unnayan. I joined in this samity to improve my economic conditions. In fact I had a house with a straw roof, now I have a tin roof house. I save Taka 5 weekly. I generated Taka 2500 in a savings account. I got a loan of Taka 6000 from Gono Unnayan. With the money I purchased a cow. I shall have to keep busy myself to pay the installments of the loan. I pay the installments of the loan from the income of agriculture. To maintain a family it is very difficult. But where shall I get the money? I do not purchase vegetables from the market since I cultivate these at my homestead, which meets my family's consumption.

I am able to provide education to the children. My daughter is going to appear for her Higher Secondary Examination. One son goes to Class IX and my youngest son goes to Class VI. I myself did not attend formal school as well as my husband. The samity is a symbol of development. If I would not participate in the samity, how could I get such benefit?

In the past, people used to say that Gono Unnayan would convert people to Christianity. We did not care about that. Women cannot go without consent of their husband. If their husband disagrees, we must convince him in order to participate in the samity.

⁶¹ Light

Sonali also said after I had finished recording that,

I have been searching for money for the last couple of days to deposit the examination fees for my daughter. I could not manage. I even brought the matter to the weekly meeting of my samity and it was turned down. Finding no other alternatives, I suggested that my daughter should join in any samity of the BRAC or Nilmati organizations. That participation would help to obtain credit. Subsequently, my daughter did so and managed to collect a loan. This ultimately helped her to deposit the examination fees.

Story 05: Dulali is 35 years old. She joined the samity in 1987. She married in 1974 and she has three daughter and one son. Her eldest daughter studies Higher Secondary and her son and one daughter read in Class VII and her youngest daughter reads in primary school. She says;

I had a straw roof house, when I joined in the samity. At that time, the condition of my family was bad. I joined in the samity with the understanding that I would be able to make *aaya*⁶² and *unnati*⁶³. I was inspired by Gono Unnayan to provide education to the children. I did not have any formal education. I did not get any opportunity to go to school. Now I can sign. I got an adult education from Gono Unnayan. I did only a thumb impression at the time of my joining in the samity. I received education and training on pisciculture, vegetable gardening, poultry rearing, health education, adult education and leadership development from Gono Unnayan. Such education and training was organized by Gono Unnayan with our consent.

In our samity, we have members from three religious groups. Most of the members of our samity are from the *Mridha bari*.⁶⁴ We are from the same bari. We sit and discuss together at the weekly meeting. Initially it was a problem. We do not have any problem now. It is better to live together. I got an invitation at the time of *Eid festival*⁶⁵ from Muslim members of our samity, but I did not go. How could I eat? We are two different *jat*.⁶⁶

People did not like my joining in the samity in the beginning. They discouraged me to join in the samity. My father-in-law and mother-in-law were critical. They did not like that. I did not even tell my husband. I disclosed this to my husband after I generated savings of Taka 50 with my samity. He was not happy. Now, he

⁶² Income

⁶³ Development

⁶⁴ Here, *hari* (household) refers to the extended family of Mridha.

⁶⁵ A festival of the Muslim community which they celebrate after Ramadan (one month of fasting).

⁶⁶ Religions/Communities

does not say anything. I bring money home. Since I participated in the samity, the conditions of my family have changed. I keep the house clean. In the past, I could not speak in an organized way. It was difficult to speak with an outside man. Now, I can speak properly. I do not find any problem to speak with a man. This year I got a loan of Taka 6000. I will buy agricultural land. I pay weekly installments. Although it is difficult to pay the weekly installments, who would ever give Taka 6000 at one time. In an earlier time I used to pay monthly installments, it was more difficult to pay such a big amount at one time. The weekly installment is easier to pay. Since I rear poultry, I earn money. I pay weekly installment out of the poultry income.

The *karmis*⁶⁷ of Gono Unnayan visit us often. They discuss about our *shuk-dhuk*.⁶⁸ They always give us time. Gono Unnayan organized education and training. While providing training, GUP's trainers used pictures, posters and group discussions.

4.0.4 People's Organization, Mobilization and Culture

The non-formal educational program of people's organizations tends to replace the existing indigenous social organization and develop organization which is based on economic homogeneity. It is believed that the existing indigenous social organization is 'oppressive' and does not allow any social and physical mobility within the society. It is also thought that the majority of the rural population are exploited by the small percentage of the population living in the villages. The separation of women from men through the *purdhu*⁶⁹ is also prevalent in the villages of Rajoir. These conditions eventually allowed GUP to mobilize samities in the villages in order to create an "exploitation free" society through a social movement. Initially, GUP had great difficulty to mobilize women's groups in the predominantly Muslim areas due to their

⁶⁷ Project workers/Extension workers

⁶⁸ Happiness-Sadness

⁶⁹ Seclusion

fear of conversion into Christianity. There was also fear among the Hindu communities that the woman's role as a mother would be disrupted due to her involvement outside the home (Extension Workers and Study Participants, Personal communication, December, 1997). In fact, the formation of the samity has brought women into the open environment and it has inevitably encouraged the physical and social mobility of the women in the village. Since the women participated in the samity, they were also able to receive monetary benefits from GUP.

While observing the Amgram Uttarpara Pantik Mohila Samity (AUPMS) however, I noticed that this new form of organization also maintains a new form of social norms, regulations, administrative responsibilities and record keeping which are new to the samity members. These norms, regulations and responsibilities, in most cases are practiced by the extension workers in order to maintain reporting procedures. Even the minutes of the weekly meetings are tabulated by the extension workers since the executive members of the samity are unable to maintain such records and notes. I observed that the village people generally maintain their social responsibilities through an oral record keeping procedure or informal documentation. In spite of this situation, the members of the samities are not able to liberate their minds or thoughts from their traditions through critical consciousness. Moreover, the relationship between the extension workers and the villagers is often developed towards a didactic mode. Consequently, the sustainability of such people's organizations is mainly dependent on the extension workers.

More importantly, it should be recognized that the Indian sub-continent was known as a land of villages with cultural achievement centered around the village life. The pre-colonial villages were autonomous and self-sufficient *little republics*. Political instability rarely disorganized the placidity of their socio-economic life (Lal, 1963; Karim, 1996 and Siddiquee, 1993). The village system maintained an independent identity and a distinct life. The village community life was based on hand-weaving, hand-spinning, hand-tilling agriculture, pottery, black smithing and gold smithing. Nevertheless, the colonial power overturned the village communities and their society “by uprooting the native industry” (Marx, 1936: p.658). The class based *zamindari system*⁷⁰ was established in 1793 by the colonial power after the introduction of the *Permanent Settlement Act* that was designed to institutionalize the private property of land (Kalam, 1993; Marx, 1951 and Saquai, 1986).

Interestingly, I observed that the cohesiveness and solidarity of members in the samity is mainly based on their *gosthi*,⁷¹ *shanskriti*⁷² and *para*⁷³ identities within the rural society of Bangladesh. These three key elements have also been essential in mobilizing samities in the villages, whatever the form of educational activity. I noticed that these three elements were dominant among the members of Amgram Uttarpara Pantik Mohila Samity (AUPMS). For example, most of the members of AUPMS are closely connected through a network of para where they live and interact continuously with each other

⁷⁰ Landlord system

⁷¹ Lineage/Clan/Kinship Ties

⁷² Cultural identity that refers to religious fleeing and language ties

⁷³ Neighborhood/Geographical boundary

everyday. Besides the network of para, the gothi and shanskriti identities among the members of the samity were also evident. The members of the samity were first considered according to their own gothi and shanskritik identities, despite GUP's insistence on non-formal education through people's organization based on economic homogeneity and a secular approach. More importantly, it was observed that the religious institutions, such as *maktab*⁷⁴, *madrassa*⁷⁵ and *mashjid*⁷⁶ are deeply rooted in the villages. In Bangladesh, there are 200,000 mashjid, 100,000 maktab (Shaidullah, 1997) and 5,766⁷⁷ madrassas (Rashiduzzaman, 1994) which are involved in the mobilization of the people through their educational programs. The 'religious institution' (mosques, temples, churches and maktab) and 'social organizations' (kinship ties/networks) have a strong hold in determining socio-political behavior in the rural socio-cultural life. The social and political bonds among the rural people, whether poor or rich, are based on kinship ties and religious affinities within Bangladesh. The extension workers of the VOs also have religious and kinship ties which they would not easily abandon in spite of these same radical expectations from the Bangladeshi people. The extension workers of GUP admitted that they are more accepted in the villages if they go to the mosques and the other religious organizations. As a result of their participation, the villagers are much more open with the extension workers. When I discussed the issue of religious, social and cultural identities with the members of the AUPPMS during my field research the women expressed their deep respect for their

⁷⁴ Islamic religious community school where the children learn the Koran

⁷⁵ Islamic religious school or college where degrees are awarded

⁷⁶ Mosque

⁷⁷ I could not verify this data at the time of writing.

religion, social and cultural identities. They confirmed that regardless of the circumstances, they would want to maintain their identities based on their own religion, society and culture. Nevertheless, they intended to participate in GUP's programs to receive economic benefit and support.

More importantly however, I observed that although GUP was involved in the mobilization of disadvantaged groups based on economic homogeneity, its on-going relationship with the formal and informal leaders of the community within the Rajoir area helped them to avoid social and political conflict. Such relationships have been maintained over the years through personal contact and the facilitation of workshops and seminars in the project area. Moreover, all the extension workers of GUP were recruited locally. Since they are rooted in the Rajoir area, they were able to sustain social relationships with the existing social groups in the villages because of their established ties. Perhaps such a strategy was taken by GUP in order to reach the disadvantaged groups through a non-violent approach.

When looking at the socio-political situation in Bangladesh in the 1990s, it is evident that religious organizations have challenged the VOs involvement in women's education, grassroots development and income generation programs. The VOs have labeled these groups as hegemonic groups. The VOs are also critical of social and religious institutions within the village. Consequently, thousands of the VO's Non-formal Education Centers were vandalized and burnt by religious groups in the rural society.

Rashiduzzaman (1994) mentions that, "Religion has taken a front seat more as a cultural challenge than as the real political threat in Bangladesh" (p.984). Even the *Fourth Five Year Plan (FFYP-4)* (1990-1995) of the Bangladesh Government could not ignore the role of mosques in promoting education in the country. This Fourth Five Years Plan explicitly mentions that, "Sound moral and ethical values are prerequisites for proper utilization of the resources and the healthy economic growth of every society" (p.207). More importantly, it was observed that the introduction of the democratic process has virtually allowed each and every group to bargain for their social, cultural and political identities. Despite this fact, even the liberal and secular socio-political groups could not avoid the appeal of using socio-religious and cultural identities in Bangladesh in order to win the National elections of 1996 (Rashiduzzaman, 1994).

Since the *gosthi* and *shanskriti* networks are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural environment of the village, it is probably impossible to ignore such social networks within the *para*⁷⁸ of the villages in Bangladesh. With this assumption, one cannot deny the role of the existing *gosthi* and *shanskriti* networks in the culture of Bangladesh in mobilizing the disadvantaged groups of people and making people's organizations. (Barua, 1990, 1994, Ribaux et al, 1994,). Such *gosthi*, *shanskrit* and *para* networks virtually act as an informal educational forum in sharing the information and messages within the villages. This type of educative sharing takes place spontaneously in the villages through everyday social and emotional relationships and interactions rather than

⁷⁸ Neighborhood/Geographical area

through institutionalized and bureaucratic structures. Incidentally, while implementing education for disadvantaged groups in Latin American Society, Paulo Freire also could not ignore religious institutions. Rather, he was involved in these in order to promote education for the benefit of disadvantaged groups. Considering this fact, VOs, Islamic schools, trusts and social service groups would be more productive if they could work together collectively rather than with hostility in promoting education for the villagers in Bangladesh. In Rasidzumman's view; "The NGOs (VOs) will lose their 'popular base' in the civil society if they become entangled in the religious right vs. liberal controversy in Bangladesh. By antagonizing fundamentalist politicians and the *ulama*⁷⁹ in the villages, the NGOs may also undermine their relationship with the government, which would affect their capacity to work in the civil society" (p. 988).

In 1940-45, Bangladesh also experienced a peasant mobilization (with Bengal undivided from India) for social rights against the money-lenders and the rich classes within the villages. This was organized by the *Kisan Shaba* or *Krishak Praja Party*⁸⁰ (Dhanagare, 1983, Hashmi, 1994) and was based on radical and liberal political ideology. These parties were voluntarily involved in educating and organizing the peasants in the villages into their political ideology. Although these parties were politically committed and active in the villages, perhaps the reason why they could not organize the masses of the poor farmer/peasant majority was either because of the strong hold of the indigenous social networks or the lack of a broad range of economic support.

⁷⁹ Islamic religious preacher

⁸⁰ Kisan Shava: Peasants' Council and Krishak Praja Party: Peasants and Tenants Party

However, it may be of some benefit to refer to an example from the African context. In Tanzania, the Government and the VOs have been able to mobilize and educate the people through the traditional organization of *ujamaa*⁸¹. Nyerera (1968) believes that;

By the use of the word "ujamaa," therefore, we state that for us socialism involves building on the foundation of our past, and building also to our own design. We are not importing a foreign ideology into Tanzania and trying to smother our distinct social patterns with it. We have deliberately decided to grow, as a society, out of our own roots, but in a particular direction and towards a particular kind of objective. We are doing this by emphasizing certain characteristics of our traditional organization, and extending them so that they can embrace the possibilities of modern technology and enable us to meet the challenge of life in the twentieth century world. (Cited by Denis Goulet, 1974: 96)

Despite their best efforts in this case, people's organization within the target group could have easily helped the people to become alienated from their community or encouraged them to depend on the implementing agencies. Furthermore, given their continued dependence on these catalytic forces, it would have been very difficult for the poor and disadvantaged groups to develop their own people's organization as well as independent leadership necessary to develop democratic rights in the rural society. Such people's organization usually remains only as long as the VOs remain in the village. David Korten (1990) mentions that, "Social movements have a special quality. They are driven not by budgets or organizational structures, but rather by ideas, by a vision of a better world. They move on social energy more than on money" (p. 124)

Having analyzed GUP's or the VO's implementation processes for people's organization in the rural society, I believe it is appropriate to now raise a few important questions such as the following: (i) Was it reasonable or even possible for the VOs to organize poor

⁸¹ Familyhood

farmers or disadvantaged homogenous groups by passing and ignoring the existing indigenous social networks (lineage/clan that have been deeply rooted in the society for thousands of years)? (ii) Would they be able to sustain their sponsored people's organizations (samities) in the phased out areas without the presence of the VOs? (iii) Would they be able to abolish religious faiths and beliefs from the rural people? (iv) Would they be able to ignore the formal and informal leaders in the villages while implementing the development programs? (v) And, would they be able to reach all the landless farmers or poor people in a given society? In reviewing these questions, one might conclude that such economic based samities or people's organizations could possibly be implemented in urban settings where people are organized on the basis of income or social class rather than indigenous ties which is the case in the area of our study.

4.0.5 Savings, Micro Credit and Empowerment

GUP facilitates education on the generation of savings among the group members. The saving of money through collective action occupies an important role in mobilizing the samity within the villages. A group is not really considered to be a samity by GUP until the members have generated a substantial amount of savings, availed themselves of their training and stayed together for a specified period of time. Women generate the savings by preserving a handful of rice each day (Roy, 1989). The generation of savings in fact allows them to enter into GUP's network through the organization of a samity.

Moreover, the collective saving of the samity is used for social security instead of collateral in order to provide them with credit. Although members of the samity are supposed to use their own savings in sustaining the organization, they cannot in turn utilize or withdraw their money without the signature of an extension worker. Consequently, their freedom in the use of their own savings is restricted. The current belief is that if any amount of money is given to one member of the samity, this privilege would have to be given to all the members which would defeat the intention or cause conflict between the members of the samity.

It was also observed that the women participated in the samity in order to alleviate chronic economic suffering. They considered their time and involvement in the programs worth the monetary return which was covered by Gono Unnayan. The members of the samities were more concerned about their *uayu*⁸² and *unnati*⁸³ and immediate benefit while attending the courses. I noticed that the disadvantaged groups or landless farmers attended the educational programs with the hope of getting some socio-economic benefits. The study participants of AUPMS mentioned that; "We need money for our family, if we have money we can send our children to school or college. We learned how to sign and we got training. We need education for our children" David Korton (1990) states that; "The family unit is essential to the healthy development and functioning of any society" (p.170). The physical mobility of women for economic development in the study village is widely accepted. Perhaps such conditions allow

⁸² Income

⁸³ Development

women to contribute economically to the family and thus, gain a relatively higher status in poorer households.

The participation of samity members at the weekly meetings is limited mainly to loan collection and generation of weekly savings instead of leading educative discussions. In earlier times, they were able to learn about various issues through the weekly group meetings. Jarina, Rasheda, Angela, Sonali and Dulali confirmed that,

In the past, we used to discuss issues related to daily experiences and could learn many new issues from each other while attending the weekly meeting. But now days, we do not have enough time to learn and share as we are confined to savings deposit and loan refund. Extension workers visit us every Monday to collect savings and credit installments. We feel that education is important for our children.

These statements indicate that women could not organize their own initiatives through a samity. In other words, they were not independent and autonomous. David Korton (1990) explicitly confirms that people's organization "must be self-reliant in that its continued existence does not depend on outside initiative or funding" (p. 100)

Although the micro credit scheme was considered to empower the women economically (Amin, 1997), women were rather used as an intermediary between GUP and the male members of the house in this situation. More specifically, it was observed that some of the samity members were also acting as *mahujan*²⁴ in the villages. In many cases, they provided loans on a short term basis to other poor people and even to the wealthier

²⁴ Money lenders

people in the villages. They would even take *bandhaki*⁸⁵ from other people in order to make a profit. Micro credit has been mostly channeled into small scale businesses in order to create additional income within the villages. *Table 2* gives information on credit disbursement among the samity members of GUP:

Table 2:
Credit Disbursement among Target Participants from 1993-97

Year	# of Target Participants	Amount (Taka)
1993	3568	7,591,580.00
1994	2282	3,702,368.00
1995	3590	9,653,977.00
1996	2962	8,927,000.00
1997	4010	13,994,500.00

Source: Cooperative and Credit program of GUP, January 1998

Although micro credit is able to channel money into alternative income, its focus on agricultural development in this agricultural society is minimal. Moreover, the time spent in the weekly repayment practice does not allow the farmers to invest their time and energy in the agricultural sectors.

Micro credit also brought competition and confrontation between the VOs in the villages. In Rajoir, it was obvious that the bigger NGOs [VOs]⁸⁶ were engaged in gathering poor people to expand their micro credit scheme. In such a situation, the middle ranking VOs such as GUP have difficulty to implement their development programs. As a result, less priority is given to education and more to the contentions in the villages with the other

⁸⁵ Provide money in lieu of property, material or gold

⁸⁶ About 9 big NGOs receive a major percentage of foreign donations

VOs. Interestingly, Rasheda of Angram Mohila Samity mentions that, "I am presently member of four NGOs [VOs] and I have taken credit from all" Considering her statement, one can draw the conclusion that her participation in the samity is for the purpose of securing the loan. As long as she can continue to do so, her family will allow her to join in any samity to bring cash into her home. In this case, the primary reason for the samity is to obtain money. The samity will remain as long as the money is there. In addition, micro credit eventually helps the VOs to perpetuate their operation in the villages, as they receive the interest for their cash disbursement from the target participants on a regular basis. They also charge 15 to 22% interest rates (The Economist, July 25th, 1998) in order to maintain their own financial sustainability. In many cases, coercive means are adopted by the VOs in order to recover loaned moneys (Amin, 1997). On the other hand, educational programs do not bring any income from which the VOs can sustain their programs within the villages. Perhaps this change of strategy has taken place among the VOs because of the depletion of grants from donor agencies since the mid 1980s in favor of other social development programs. As a result, mobilization for social movement through the power of people's organization has been limited to cash and service disbursement. David Korton (1990) considers that; "The power of people's movements has largely been ignored in the field of development. Attention has been focused on money rather than social energy as the engine of development. The irony is that the surest way to kill a movement is to smother it with money" (p.124). More significantly, I observed that both VOs and poor people are

usually desperate to obtain the monetary resources rather than the educational component from any source to secure their own existence and survival in the villages.

4.0.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the experience of five women. Their stories have been relayed as they were communicated to me. I have described and analyzed the experiences and views of those five women on the issue of people's organization based on my own observations and the context of Rajoir. While analyzing the issue of people's organization and education, I looked at the issues of culture, society, the mobilization process, income generation and the environment. More importantly, I described how non-formal education has failed to address the socio-cultural and educational concerns of the villagers while trying to maintain the cash disbursement base for VOs due to diminishing input from international donor agencies and some persistent constraints such as the absence of men from the family unit (away seeking gainful employment) and the continuing role of local money lenders and "middlemen". Women are very conscious of their practical and strategic needs, but they are equally aware of their constraints and limitations. They nurture hopes for a better, more formal education for their children.

Chapter Five

Agricultural Development - Crop Diversification and Regenerative Agriculture

5.0.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the experience of the education for agricultural development program. While presenting this, I will document the views of two landless farmers. Their opinions and statements will be examined critically from my own observation and from the socio-cultural context of Rajoir. While analyzing these views, I will mainly concentrate my discussion on the area of agricultural modernization, the environment, landless farmers, regenerative agriculture and women's issues.

The agriculture program was initiated by GUP in 1974 with the objective to increase agricultural production in order to reduce malnutrition and poverty in the Rajoir area. GUP initially started its agriculture program by distributing material inputs (seeds and seedlings) and organizing training on the production of new crops and technology to the farmers. For effective farmer training programs, GUP was initially assisted by *The Mennonite Central Committee of Bangladesh*. In the beginning, they encouraged the farmers to cultivate high yielding varieties of rice and to use fertilizers to grow more food. This was discontinued after the realization of its adverse consequences in the farming sector. Over the years, GUP observed that the cultivation of high yielding varieties of rice was not feasible and also expensive for the landless farmers. Moreover,

the costly practice of using chemical fertilizers was considered to be one of the causes of landlessness.

In spite of this fact, GUP instigated regenerative agriculture to rescue and protect the small and landless farmers from severe and adverse consequences. In other words, regenerative agriculture was considered to be ecologically appropriate, economically viable and relevant to the poor farmers with a very limited land area and little access to irrigation and credit (Ahamed, 1995). It is more economical and therefore less dependent on external material and financial input. In addition, it is more natural and sustainable. Farmers are provided with the knowledge on how to make compost and on its utilization. While promoting education on regenerative agriculture, GUP has focused on crop diversification and advises farmers to make bedding instead of broadcasting in preparing soils for vegetable gardens. GUP sensitizes the farmers to the use of biological pesticides and encourages them to do inter-crop farming. Interestingly, GUP has not directly prepared any demonstration plots in recent times, although it used to have these in the Rajoir area. In recent times, such demonstration plots are generally organized by the farmers of Rajoir. The intensive regenerative agriculture program was initiated by GUP in this area in the early 1990s. This program involves both female and male farmers from the Rajoir area. A total of 264,000 farmers were trained by GUP before 1990 (Akther et al, 1990 and Agriculture Extension Workers of GUP, Personnel communication, January, 1998). In the following section I will relate the views of two farmers:

Story 01: Sona Mia, who is 58 years old, was born in the village of Charkashimpur in the Paikapara Union of the Rajoir Thana. He is a landless farmer and has six children.

He expressed the following views:

When I joined in the producer samity in 1998 after the severe flood my economic condition was bad and it was hard to manage a family. Having participated in the training program of Gono Unnayan Procheta (GUP), I learned how to grow and produce vegetables all year round without chemical fertilizers. I learned how to make and use the organic fertilizers. Since then I do not have any problems. In the past I used chemical fertilizers. If one used chemical fertilizers and pesticides for agriculture he would have to distribute this every 16 days. In such a situation, one would only be occupied with the 'purchase' and 'distribution' of fertilizers and pesticides. If this continued his life would be ruined. Now I use organic fertilizers and I do not need to buy fertilizers every 16 days. I use the organic fertilizers which I can produce in my courtyard. I mix up the compost with the soil prior to planting vegetables. Once things are mixed up properly with the soil, it produces better vegetables. If insects attack, I use botanical pesticides which are available locally. My wife helps me in making compost and irrigating the garden. With this type of vegetable gardening, I manage my family and helped my eldest son to start a small business. I took a lease of 63 decimals of land from a distant relative in 1993 with Taka 2700 (C \$90) for three years. I again renewed the lease in 1997 with the Taka 10,000 (C \$330) for three years. I invested Taka 4000 (C \$130) for seeds and other things in the winter season and I have earned Taka 20, 000 (C \$660) within three months.

I do not like to take any micro credit for agriculture due to the weekly repayment policy. How can I pay the weekly installment from agriculture gardening. I cannot generate income from agriculture gardening within a week. It takes at least four weeks to grow and produce. If there is a monthly repayment policy, I would definitely consider receiving credit for agriculture.

Story 02: Jarimon is 40 years old and a mother with four sons and two daughters. She is married to Jashim Sheikh of the Paschim Rajoir village in the Rajoir Union. She stated the following:

Five years ago, I could not feed even one meal a day to my children. My husband used to cultivate a high yielding variety of paddy, but he had to discontinue because it was too costly to produce and it was difficult to survive. In the past, we also used chemical fertilizers and pesticides for the production of paddy but we could not afford it because of the high price of fertilizers. I joined in the producer

samity in 1993. In the beginning, I took a loan from the Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) with the view of using this for agriculture production as well as for the education of my children. After joining in the producer samity, I received training on agriculture gardening, organic farming and the process of soil preparation from the GUP. The training was facilitated by practical demonstrations, classroom discussions, flip charts, pictorial presentations and video shows. I work as a farmer. Since I have been involved in agriculture production my husband goes to *bazaar*⁸⁷ and *hat*⁸⁸ to sell our vegetables. We grow cabbage, cauliflower, radishes, egg plants, green chilies, potatoes, and all other tropical vegetables. This season I spent Taka 500 (C \$20) for seeds only and organic fertilizers which are produced from the waste of vegetables and cow dung. It is difficult to find cow dung since people are not able to pasture cows due to the non availability of green grasses. I earned Taka 6000 (C \$200) in this winter and had an average annual income of Taka 30,000 (C \$1,000). Moreover, I do not need to buy anything from the market except fish and meat. In fact, this season we could have earned more if we could have spent more time farming. I produce vegetables all year round. I did not have this home on this land. I used 37 decimals of land for vegetable cultivation.

5.0.2 Agricultural Modernization and Rural Farmers

Education for agricultural modernization emphasizes a capital intensive methodology in a labor intensive society. In Bangladesh, farms are typically small and there are many landless farmers and laborers because the ratio of agricultural labor to land is very high. The majority of people have little access to land ownership (Griffin, 1974). The average land holding size in Bangladesh is 3.5 (three & a half) acres (MacDonald, 1989). Non-formal education for agricultural modernization was initiated in the 1960s to educate and train rural farmers so they could attain high economic growth and increased agricultural production as a result of the success of the “green revolution” in the North (World Bank, 1972 and Varies, 1978). This *growth-oriented* agricultural development program

⁸⁷ Daily market

⁸⁸ Weekly market

encouraged the rural farmers to increase rice production through the use of mono crop. This strong trend in favor of rice production eventually led to its occupation of up to four-fifths of the cultivated land in Bangladesh. However, this crop bias not only failed to provide benefit to the country, but it also acted as an obstacle to the attainment of total socio-economic development (Ahmed, 1988). Jarimon (1998) describes that;

Five years ago, I could not feed even one meal a day to my children. My husband used to cultivate a high yielding variety of paddy, but he had to discontinue because it was too costly to produce and it was difficult to survive. In the past, we also used chemical fertilizers and pesticides for the production of paddy but we could not afford it because of the high price of fertilizers.

Despite this growth oriented model, such non-formal education programs for agricultural modernization could not include the small and landless farmers (Chowdhury, 1989) where 65-70% of the rural population are in this category (Adhuna Development Quarterly, 1996 and Jansen, 1990). Rather, this education helped the rich farmers and money lenders. Subsequently, it also helped to introduce chemical fertilizers and pesticides to the farmers in the rural society for the production of their crops. Such efforts ultimately increased the overall use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on the farms of Bangladesh, since modern intensive agricultural production requires inputs of both pesticides and inorganic fertilizers (Imbulana et al, 1996). The use of chemical fertilizers to boost agricultural production has increased from 2 million metric tons in 1990/91 to 3.02 million metric tons in 1995/96 (FFYP-5, 1997-2002).

In more recent times, sustainability of high growth production and environmental safety have become the main concerns. More significantly, modern agriculture has completely

replaced the local crop varieties by introducing the *mono crop* to the farmers. Due to these efforts, Bangladesh has lost about 7,000 local varieties of rice. This use of chemical fertilizers has gradually diminished the natural fish stock that live in the rice fields, canals and rivers by 18% over the last 10 years. This has substantially deprived the rural people of protein and other necessary nutrients. Millions of poor fishermen have completely lost their income (ENCNGO and ADAB, 1992). In many cases, the natural fisheries were also a major source of income and self-employment for the poor landless and marginal farmers. The consumption of urea has increased tremendously from 559 thousand metric tones in 1980/81 to 1.7 million metric tones in 1994/95 (Mahamood, 1995).

This enormous use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has also reduced the soil's fertility. "Fertilizer use at farmer level is dominated by urea (70%) followed by TSP and SSP (20%) and MOP (10%) causing damage to soil structure and thereby reducing per acre production of various crops" (FFYP-5, 1997-2002: xiii-11). Bangladesh is currently having problems with severe organic matter depletion and deficiencies of secondary and micro nutrients in the arable lands due to intensive farming. More than 60 percent of the fertile lands have organic matter content, although it is still below the critical level. Annual depletion of nutrients in the areas under intensive farming range between 180-250 kg/ha/year (Karim et al, 1994).

The price of fertilizers and pesticides has now become more expensive, which is a real burden for the small and landless farmers. The consumption of chemical fertilizers has increased 7.5 times in the last twenty years. The price of chemical fertilizers has increased 4 times in the last twenty years. In accordance, the cost of pesticides has also increased 10 times in this same period. Despite the great increase of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the production of boro in Bangladesh has actually declined 22.2 times in last 10 years (Editorial, Adhuna, 1997). These statistics indicates that the production of *boro*⁸⁹ declined at a rate of 3 percent per year. Further, this indicates that the production level of HYV rice per acre in 1986 was reduced by 10 percent from the 1972 level, despite a 300 percent increase per acre in the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides (ENCNGO and ADAB, 1992). Evidently, the inorganic fertilizers have displaced the locally available organic fertilizers in the villages. Such a transition has not only created dependency on external aid in the subsistence agricultural society, but also increased the percentage of landless farmers in Bangladesh. Sona Mia (1998) mentions that;

If one used chemical fertilizers and pesticides for agriculture he would have to distribute this every 16 days. In such a situation, one would only be occupied with the purchase and distribution of fertilizers and pesticides. If this continued his life would be ruined.

A similar observation is reflected by Miah (1983) in the southwestern part of Bangladesh.

He describes that,

HYV seeds are demanding of heavy doses of fertilizers, a good amount of irrigated water, and readily available pest control measures. Not only is it [that] the price of each of these [is] beyond the poor peasants' reach, but their agricultural holding is dependent on HYV's cultivation and they face possible starvation in the case of crop failure due to their inability to procure the necessary accompanying inputs in a timely way (p.62).

⁸⁹ Winter rice

The trend of irrigation programs in the rural society has encouraged the increased installation of *deep tube wells* on the farmland. The installation of these deep tube wells (DTWs) by the Agriculture Extension Department of the Government has created disasters such as increased salinity on the farm lands of the Rajoir area. Moreover, the topsoil of agricultural land was damaged. For these reasons, the agricultural lands have often become non-cultivable. Eventually, this condition also created an ecological problem within the village. In Bangladesh, “more than three million hectares of land are affected by salinity” (Islam and Sadeque, 1992: 75).

The implementation process of modern irrigation systems has gradually contributed to a major health crisis reflected by increased cases of schistosomiasis and malaria among the people. These diseases have increased due to the salinization, alkalization and water logging in farmland areas (ESCAP 1985; ENCN/ADAB, 1992 and WCED 1991). It was revealed that 1.2 million hectares of land suffer from sulfur deficit and 1.6 million hectares have a zinc deficit mostly because of water logging (Islam and Sadeque, 1992). Since irrigating systems are dependent on oil consumption which is imported from abroad, an increase in the price of oil has severely affected the agricultural industry in Bangladesh. The price of oil increased from US \$21.71 per metric ton in 1972 to US \$163.00 in 1992 (BBS, 1973 and 1996).

Besides this, a gradual withdrawal of subsidies (Ahmed and Rahman, 1992) also affected the price of agricultural inputs. “Most of these reforms were either loan conditions

imposed by the World Bank and the IMF or were conditions imposed upon long term food aid contracts by USAID” (Harris and Crow, 1992: 217). Education for these mechanization and modernization processes are found to be inappropriate for the conditions of complex, diverse and risk prone agriculture (Oakley et al, 1991). I observed that the poor farmers could not afford to bear the higher expenses of irrigation, manure etc. necessary for using high yielding crop varieties. In addition, there is no system of crop insurance programs in this disaster prone Country by which the poor farmers can mitigate the adverse effects of modern technology and disaster. The household income in a highly irrigated village is actually less than that of a village with low irrigation. It was also observed that the *robi shasya*⁹⁰ of mustard seed, oil seed and pulse yielded a negative return in all the irrigated areas. Because of these negative returns of pulse and oil seed in the country as a whole, Bangladesh now needs to import these for consumption (Quasem, 1994). “The production of pulse has been on the decline over the past few years mainly because of the increased emphasis of high yielding varieties of rice and wheat” (FFYP-5, 1997-2002: xiii-8). This reduction of pulse and oil seed production again leads in the same direction. It results in the reduction of the nutrition and health of the poor people in general and particularly, that of the women and children.

⁹⁰ Spring harvest

5.0.3 Agricultural Modernization and Women

Although agricultural modernization was originally considered to ensure benefits in the rural economy, it actually became a great impediment to the rural disadvantaged women in maintaining their daily lives within the villages. “Women are conceptualized as passive agents impacted on by agricultural technologies and not as active agents in the food production” (Khan, 1992:79). As a result of technology, the participation of women in economic activities sharply declined in rural areas between 1961 and 1981. More specifically, their participation in economic activities in 1961 was 17.93%, but this declined to 4.0% in 1981 (BBS, 1981; Salahuddin, 1992). Obviously, this decline of women’s participation in rural areas has occurred because of the promotion of male dominated agricultural modernization and entrepreneurship development programs in Bangladesh.

The introduction of mechanization in an agricultural society like Bangladesh is difficult where lands are fragmented in relation to the changing patterns of family ties and relationships and this usually leaves women with the more labor intensive jobs. In the Rajoir area, it was noticed that the disadvantaged women were hired by the rich farmers to work in the fields on a daily basis with lower wages than the men. On the other hand, mechanization in the agriculture sector has displaced the women’s work-forces in the other direction in the rural society. The introduction of mechanized rice mills virtually up-rooted the rural poor women from the traditional paddy husking business of *muri*,²¹

²¹ Fried rice

*chira*⁹² and *khui*⁹³ and established the male entrepreneurs in the rural society. McCarthy (1977) described that; "Exposure to machines, urban life, consumer goods and changing agricultural occupations are relevant dimensions perhaps for men in a developing nation, but not for women" (p.369). Because of the technology, the rural poor women either became dependent on low paying manual work in the agriculture fields on an irregular basis or survived on vulnerable group feeding.

Since the introduction of mechanized irrigation systems, the amount of land for pasturing animals has been reduced. It is hard to produce green grass due to the intensive irrigation of mono crops. In earlier times, the disadvantaged women generally pastured cows in the villages in order to generate enough income for their families. More recently, they have been unable to feed their livestock properly due to the shortage of green grass and other food in the village of Rajoir. Consequently, the number of cows has fallen significantly among the villagers. Because of this situation, the rural disadvantaged women virtually lost all of their income, as they previously earned money selling cow's milk. Moreover, it was observed that the use of cow dung sticks (made of jute straw/tree branches and bamboo sticks plastered with cow dung), which were common in the Rajoir area for cooking fuel, are now hardly available because of the scarcity of cow dung. In many cases, women once sold the cow dung sticks to generate income for their family. Because of the scarcity of cow dung, these disadvantaged women of the Rajoir area are not only deprived of their income, but they also have to buy fuel for cooking from the

⁹² Pressed rice

⁹³ Popped rice

market. As mentioned previously, the natural fish stocks have been diminished significantly due to the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in the farmland causing a protein deficiency and this has also added to the cost of women's living expenses. Many women of Bangladesh are now "suffering from goiter because of an iodine deficiency which in turn causes the birth of still-born or deformed babies" (Ahmed, 1992: 98)

5.0.4 Regenerative Agriculture, Landless Farmers and Development

Regenerative agriculture embraces natural practices and seeks friendly coexistence with the environment and all creatures. By providing education on regenerative agriculture, GUP gives emphasis to alternative agricultural development processes in which local resources can be used effectively by the small and landless farmers. Such initiatives do not encourage the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides among the farmers. Rather, farmers are encouraged to use organic fertilizers and botanical pesticides on their farm land (GUP Annual Reports, 1994, 1995 and 1996). I observed that the landless farmers are becoming actively involved in the planting of vegetables in Rajoir. They are enthusiastic as they see their gardens now covered in green vegetables. The production of vegetables can be seen physically since the results are in the open air. These vegetables are visible, touchable and eatable. The farmers produce cabbage, cauliflower, radishes, egg plants, green chilies, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, sugarcane, and many other tropical vegetables". Jarimon mentions that:

I earned Taka 6000 (C \$200) this winter and have an average annual income of Taka 30,000 (C \$1,000). Moreover, I do not need to buy anything from the market except fish and meat. In fact, this season we could have earned more if we could have spent more time farming. I produce vegetables all year round. I did not have this home on this land. I used 37 decimals of land for vegetable cultivation.

The farmers now see realistic hopes and dreams. It is not a question of ideology, rather it has become a matter of survival and satisfaction in their life. The farmers do not need to use large amount of land, but they can use a small piece of land to cultivate vegetables all year round. Their investment is less, they earn more within the short period of time. They do not need to buy vegetables from the market. Rather, they sell their products and meet their family's consumption. "For small farmer's survival, vegetables and quick-growing fruits are very appropriate tools, and so are potatoes. The small farmer gets the opportunity to engage himself, together with the members of the family, fully, his land cropping intensity is maximized, and then he chooses the production of such commodities that engage him pretty well" (Ahmed, 1988: 14).

Furthermore, I noticed that this knowledge was shared with the farmers in such a manner that these practices would maintain harmony with nature and the community as a whole. Farmers could utilize their experience within their social context and according to their own needs and aspirations (Agriculture Extension Workers, Personnel communication, January, 1998). Attention is given to the use of the local social context rather than creating new infrastructures. Consequently, farmers can produce varieties of vegetables in each of the six different seasons of Bangladesh. These varieties of vegetables could

eventually enrich the soil's fertility as well as meeting the nutritional requirements of the rural people.

Moreover, farmers did not have to spend their time, money and energy diluting chemical fertilizers and pesticides for the farmland. In many instances, it was seen that farmers using chemical fertilizers and pesticides were either using an excessive dose or contaminated fertilizers and pesticides on their farmland. Since varieties of vegetables are now produced within the context of the six seasons, the farmers are inclined to use intercropping patterns for the benefit of the land as well as for their own economic gain. Sona Mia confirms that: "I invested Taka 4000 (C \$130) for seeds and other things in the winter season and I have earned Taka 20,000 (C \$660) within three months." Landless farmers are not trapped into the vicious cycle of the purchase and distribution of fertilizers to ruin their livelihoods. They are not dependent on outside forces. They are actively engaged in improving their own conditions. They have found their means and ways to survive comfortably within their unique social context. In other words, the landless farmers can generate an adequate income in the disaster prone Rajoir area where even rich farmers are struggling for their survival.

In my field observation, I found that landless farmers are also generally encouraged to work on the farm with women without any gender bias as they intend to improve their economic conditions. They work collectively in regenerative agriculture to provide for their family. For them, it is not a question of men or women, but rather a matter of life

and survival. They realize that if both the husband and wife do not work together on the farm land then their survival will be in danger. Jarimon says: "I work as a farmer. Since I have been involved in agriculture production, my husband goes to *bazaar*⁹⁴ and *hats*⁹⁵ to sell our vegetables." Similarly, Sona Mia clearly voices that: "My wife helps me in making compost and irrigating the garden." The contribution of women among the disadvantaged groups is considered to be "essential for the survival of their families" (Salahuddin, 1992: 42). The number of women participating in vegetable gardening through regenerative farming in Rajoir is growing (Alam, R.K., January, 1998 Personnel communication). I observed that the relationship between the husband and wife in the landless families in the Rajoir area is considered to be complimentary while at the same time, they are improving their economic conditions through regenerative agriculture. Members of poor families are less concerned about *pardha*⁹⁶ and more concerned about their economic well being.

GUP is now faced with a great challenge in facilitating education on crop diversification and organic fertilizers to enhance the people's income and improve the nutritional levels of the landless farmers in the villages. At the same time, pesticide companies and other agricultural extension departments are actively engaged in advertising the benefits of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and mono crop in the villages of Rajoir through a comprehensive media campaign. The promotion of these opposing messages could

⁹⁴ Daily market

⁹⁵ Weekly market

⁹⁶ Segregation/Seclusion of women

obviously create a dilemma among the farmers. In this circumstance, the positive message of the VOs can probably be implemented in the country only if the State takes initiatives through policy and action. Otherwise, the initiatives of the VOs will be confined to a limited area and population.

5.0.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described and analyzed the regenerative agriculture program of GUP by examining the views and statements of two landless farmers of Rajoir, a man and a woman. While examining the issues, I reflected on the negative consequences of agricultural modernization and mechanization based on the poor farmers' views: the returns do not justify the high investment costs. I also explained how the mechanization and the high use of chemicals has displaced the work roles and income of disadvantaged women and damaged the environment. Finally in this chapter, I discussed the efforts of GUP in implementing regenerative agriculture for the landless farmers. These efforts seem to generate positive results at the village level and therefore, the educational programs for regenerative agriculture deserve serious consideration by the State for policy and action.

Chapter Six

Literacy, Health Education and Women

6.0.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the issue of literacy, health education and women's development within GUP. In order to reveal a clear understanding of this, I present the experience of three women of the *Sindia Nakshikantha Mohila Literacy Center* (SNMLC) in their own words. Their views and statements are then analyzed on the basis of my own observations in Rajoir.

In the early days, the system of *purdha*⁷⁷ affected women severely in terms of their physical mobility, their educational opportunities and their access to health care facilities in the Rajoir area. Women's participation in education was very low and the plight of the rural women in the past was much worse than it is today. It was from this situation that GUP mobilized a program for women by providing services in the form of *child health care* and *mother's education* in the early 1970s while also implementing an intensive feeding program in this region. Initially, GUP helped Rajoir pass through a very critical transformation stage because of its socio-cultural environment where the mobility of women was severely limited and restricted. Despite this situation, GUP adopted different strategies over the years in order to reach the rural women within the villages. As time passed, GUP eventually succeeded in implementing programs of literacy and health education for the women of Rajoir (Rahman, Ataur, Personnel

⁷⁷ Segregation/Seclusion of women

communication, February, 1998) Literacy and health education programs are considered to be a central part of the non-formal education program of GUP. The literacy program was exclusively designed to help the disadvantaged groups through the literacy centers, whereas the health education program was implemented only for women in the villages who were of a reproductive age with the cooperation of all the villagers

6.0.2 Literacy and Disadvantaged Women

The literacy program of GUP started with a night school in early 1974 in order to make people literate in a systematic way so that the society could become free from the “bondage of illiteracy” (GUP, 1998). With this mandate, GUP organized its literacy program through village-based centers with the cooperation of the villagers in the Rajoir area (Akther et al, 1990 and Timm et al, 1980). Initially, the literacy program could only be provided to the men due to the socio-cultural conditions of Rajoir. However, GUP gained experience over the years and gradually was able to mobilize in order to reach the rural women. The literacy program for women advocated the elimination of early marriage, polygamy and the dowry system. Early marriage among girls in Bangladesh was found to be 73 percent before reaching 15 years of age (Stromquist, 1990). As a result of early marriage, the maternal mortality was found to be higher among the rural women. GUP has provided literacy to over one hundred thousand⁹⁸ landless and

⁹⁸ I could not verify the data with regard to gender participation. However, I calculated that participation of women in the literacy program was 431 as compared to 1394 male counterparts in 1974. It was reported that the participation of women in literacy classes in the 1990s was more than their male counterparts.

marginal women and men in Rajoir. More specifically, GUP has concentrated its literacy program on the disadvantaged women in the Rajoir area. About 400 *shebak*⁹⁹ and *shebiaku*¹⁰⁰ have been trained in the area to facilitate the literacy classes. These shebak and shebika are all originally from the project villages (Rahman, A., Personnel communication, December, 1997). GUP has also organized mosque based education programs in villages in addition to the village based literacy program. Over the years, GUP has used various methods of literacy programs¹⁰¹ in order to reach these disadvantaged groups. In the 1970s, GUP used the functional literacy primer of BRAC which was developed by adopting Freirian generative words. This primer was discontinued in order to avoid contradictions and conflicts between the elite and the disadvantaged group in the villages (Akther et al, 1990 and Timm et al, 1980). Moreover, it was observed that direct adaptation of the Freirian method in the context of Bangladesh was difficult because of its implicit language and cultural expectations.

6.0.3 Health Education and Development of a Women's Resource Group

GUP concentrates its health education efforts on the local women in the villages of the Rajoir *thanas*¹⁰² through health resource groups that facilitate learning of maternal care.

⁹⁹ Male volunteer

¹⁰⁰ Female volunteer

¹⁰¹ I have already discussed these in Chapter Three, 3.0.2 GUP's Philosophy, Non-formal Educational Concept, History and Approaches, p.48.

¹⁰² Lowest administrative unit consisting of 10-15 unions

In order to do this, GUP tried to empower and train the local *dais*¹⁰³ as health educators in addition to their role as midwives to reach the women of reproductive age. These local *dais* were provided with an extensive knowledge of maternal care, child development, safe delivery process, immunization, nutrition and sanitation. This was done in order to provide health education to the rural women. In other words, these local *dais* acted as a resource group in a *purdha* dominated society where women's physical mobility, educational opportunities and access to health care facilities were limited. GUP also realized that a mother's health education has a great impact on children's health. Rahima, a local trained *dai* and health educator stated that;

In an earlier time, I used to advise a pregnant mother to stay in a sitting position at the time of delivery. But, I do not follow such a process now during the delivery of a child. In the past, I suggested that mothers give cows or goats milk or honey to a baby after the immediate delivery of the baby. After my training, I advised mothers to first give breast milk immediately after delivery.

Undoubtedly, the training of the *dais* in the promotion of health care was considered to be effective in rural Bangladesh where 95 percent of deliveries are carried out at home (Hossain, Huq and Alam, 1989). More importantly, the *dais shebika*¹⁰⁴ are treated as the local resources in their villages where trained hands for maternity services and health education are non-existent (Nessa, 1995).

Unlike other programs, the health education program was developed in the context of the existing socio-cultural situation. In other words, GUP designed a training curriculum for the *dais/shebika* on the basis of the existing social and cultural realities. The objectives

¹⁰³ Midwives

¹⁰⁴ Midwives/Women volunteers

of the training were for the women to develop a critical understanding of women's health problems and to enhance their social and communication skills. The training was participatory and focused on the sharing and learning from experiences. For the shebika, GUP organized a 30 day basic course and for the dais the duration of basic training was 15 days. The training was non-directive and focused on sharing and learning. Emphasis was placed on dialogue and exchange of ideas rather than the didactic approach. The courses were facilitated through group discussions, role play, games, practical demonstrations and field trips.

In the Rajoir area, GUP was able to train 100 shebika and 250 dais who lived in the villages in order to provide education to the rural women. These shebika and dais were selected by GUP with the help of the villagers and these were people who were already engaged in indigenous health care delivery practices in their villages. (Akther et al, 1990; Barua, Ribaux and Rahman, 1994; GUP 1996; GUP: Internal Report of Health Program, 1998 and VHSS, 1993). Although Rozario (1995) observed that the dais had a low status in the rural society due to their close connection with the removal of birth pollution, I observed that they gained a significant position in the Rajoir area because of their skills and expertise in the field of maternal care and child birth. For example, the men and women of the village wanted to maintain a continued relationship with the dais in order to get services at the time of their need and showed her great respect by treating her with dignity and honor as a technical resource person in the village

In order to update their knowledge, GUP organized reflection sessions on a regular basis as a tool for the continuing education of the dais and shebikas in its project area. Reflection sessions were held not only to generate new ideas but also to improve the skills of the dais/shebika. Reflection sessions involving critical group discussions between the dais/shebika, the project staff and community members were conducted as a learning tool in the education program. Such reflection sessions significantly reinforced the capacity and skills of dais and shebikas in the Rajoir area. More importantly, these sessions allowed them to learn collectively from the people and thus stimulate action in their social context (Barua et al, 1994; Bhuiya et al, 1990 and GUP: Annual Report, 1993).

6.0.4. Sindia Nakshikantha Mohila Literacy Center¹⁰⁵ (SNMLC)

*The Sindia Nakshikantha Mohila Literacy Center (SNMLC) was organized by The Sindia Nakshikantha Mohila Samity¹⁰⁶ (SNMS) with the assistance of GUP in November of 1997 in order to ensure a functional literacy program to the members of the samity in Sindia Village in Khatia Union. The Sindia Nakshikantha Mohila Samity (SNMS) was organized in 1987 also by a group of women from Sindia Village with the support of Gono Unnayan Procheta (GUP) in order to improve their skills of *nakshikantha*.¹⁰⁷ During my field research, it was reported that 20 women from SNMS had enrolled in the*

¹⁰⁵ Sindia Embroidery Women's Literacy Center

¹⁰⁶ Sindia Embroidery Women's Society/Association

¹⁰⁷ Embroidery

functional literacy program who had not attended these courses at the beginning of their participation in the samity. However, these 20 women had been able to receive health education from the MSS in their villages. Having organized the Centers, GUP provided training to the volunteer teachers, books, blackboards, pencils and a monthly allowance of Taka 500 per teacher. At the time of my field research, GUP was using the Functional Literacy Method of Friends in Village Development in Bangladesh (FIVDB) for its samity members (Assistant Coordinator of the Adult Education Program, December, 1997; Assistant Coordinator of the Women's Development Program, December, 1997; Volunteer Teacher, December, 1997; Learners of the Center, December, 1997).

Classes at the SNMLC were facilitated by a *shebika*¹⁰⁸ who was hired locally with the consultation of the learners. The shebika was then trained by GUP in order to facilitate classes at the SNMLC. Classes were held five days a week from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. The shebika also worked as a *gram shaystha shebika*¹⁰⁹ in the health education program of GUP

The material of FIVDB consists of 60 primers. Each primer continues for two days. On the first day of each primer, the shebika facilitates the lesson through the presentation of sentences, words, the alphabet and symbols while reading through a flip chart. On the second day of the primer, the shebika facilitates the students in writing the alphabet, symbols and numbers and in general accounting. The shebika initiates discussion by

¹⁰⁸ Women volunteer

¹⁰⁹ Village Health Volunteer (VHV)

presenting a picture on the flip chart. Eventually, she helps the learners to identify the theme and then she reads a story related to the picture in order to create content. The shebika then creates an environment among the learners where they must develop a sentence based on the picture. The learners start to learn the words, alphabet and symbols after repeating the main sentences a couple of times. Afterwards, the learners reinforce their knowledge through an exercise book. Finally, the shebika evaluates them with flash cards on words and symbols.

In the following section, I will look at the views of three research participants in reference to literacy classes and health education:

Story 01: Aruna is 36 years old, married and has three daughters and one son. Her family owns 5 *katas*¹¹⁰ of land. Her husband works as a daily worker on the agricultural land. Aruna joined the Sindia Nakshikantha Mohila Samity (SNMS) in 1987 to improve the economic conditions of her family. She joined the literacy classes in November of 1997. She explains her position in the following words:

I can sign my name. The instructor of the center helped me to learn how to sign. Before learning the signature, I asked my husband a couple of times to show me how to sign. One day, the instructor of the center said that if you are unable to sign on the paper, how could you draw your money? In fact, I learned the signature after joining in the samity. I could not go to school in my early days. I had to do household works at my father's home. My father's family was economically poor.

I joined in the samity in order to learn nakshikantha making and find income. Since I started work in nakshikantha making, I could provide clothing for my children. I was able to buy a saree¹¹¹ and a blouse for myself. If I would not

ⁱⁱ⁰ 3600 square feet

ⁱⁱⁱ Women's cloth

purchased this myself, my husband would have spent money for such things. Since I was able to earn some money, my husband greatly benefited. While making nakshikantha a year ago, I earned a good amount of money. Payment was regular. I used to get paid every fortnight. In recent times, payment has become irregular.

We do not have enough agricultural land. Since I was able to earn some income, my husband has been doing share cropping. I took a loan of Taka 4,000 from Gono Unnayan. If I could refund the remaining four installments, I would finish all my installments.

I got a lot of training. But I do not remember all this by heart. If I could read and write properly, I would have written systematically all those contents. Health education was provided by the shebika at our home. Mohila swasthya shebika taught us how to maintain cleanliness and to use a *pakka paikhana*¹¹². Dai provided education on safe delivery, child care and maternal care.

I attend the functional literacy classes. The classes were good in the last two months. I went regularly in the beginning. Later I did not attend. I did not attend because of my other preoccupation. I went to the house of my daughter to help her during her first delivery. She gave birth to a son. Moreover, I was busy with my old mother. We were not sure whether my mother would survive or die! We are old. What will this education give us? I learned how to make nakshikantha. If I could find more work, I could produce more nakshikantha. I feel that money is essential for a poor family. We always think that if we could work, we would earn money. If I was able to earn even Taka 2 that would benefit my family. It also helps my husband's income. If we could find further training on how to improve our nakshikantha, we would be able to earn more money. I would consider such training to be better.

Story 02: Urmila is 36 years old and married. She has one son and three daughters. She has been in the Sindia Nakshikantha Samity for the last five years. Before her marriage, she could not go to school. Now she can sign her name. She joined literacy classes in the month of November of 1997. Her husband studied up to Grade Five and is a carpenter. Her family has 2 *bigas*¹¹³ of land. She describes this here:

¹¹² Slab latrine/One-ring sanitary toilet

¹¹³ 0.66 acres of land

I am doing samity and making nakshikantha in order to earn *du paisas*¹¹⁴. These *du paisas* would benefit my family. We are not *dhani*¹¹⁵. For our survival, we must give our labor. I feel better in joining the samity. I found work. If I can work, I will manage to earn money. During our scarcity of income, we get benefit from Gono Unnayan. There is no questions of liking and disliking this. If I can work, everything is good. If I do not work, everything is bad. I like everything in the samity. For example, I attend functional literacy, but sometimes I cannot attend the classes. I have never attended training at the Rajoir office of GUP. I received training on how to make embroidery in our Sindia center.

The *karmis*¹¹⁶ of Gono Unnayan visit our *bari*¹¹⁷. They came to us prior to the implementation of the functional literacy programs. They discussed this in our samity meeting. We gave our consent to participate in the functional literacy classes. Besides, *mohila swasthya shebika* visited us regularly. She suggested to drink water from the tube well and maintain cleanness. She also advised us to eat green leafy vegetables. We eat vegetable that would prevent diseases. The *dai* of our village provides messages on antenatal care, child care and safe delivery practices.

By joining the samity, I fulfilled my dream. I learned how to make nakshikantha. I thought that if I could learn such things I would be able to earn money and I would get a loan. I got this loan. I took a lease of agricultural land where I planted vegetables. It is also difficult to pay weekly installments from the income of agriculture. But this is a rule of Gono Unnayan. When I first joined in the samity my mother-in-law and other members of my family did not like it. They said it would hamper my family. But I did not listen. I made nakshikantha while doing work at home. I did not loose anything. In the past it was difficult to handle both jobs. Over the years, I gained experience. I do not have any problem.

In the past, we had a belief that women should not go out of the home. People did not like to see women out of the home. At the present, people do not raise such issues. We do not do any bad work. If we could earn some money, it is good for the family. Since I joined in the samity, I have been able to send my children to school.

I can do sewing while doing household work, but if I participate in the functional literacy classes then I cannot do any work at home. Because I have to leave home to attend functional literacy classes and this is difficult, it would be good if I could get education on sewing. That would bring some income. I attend the functional literacy classes, but sometimes I cannot attend the classes because of my work with the family. The teacher always attends the classes. I got education on health issues while working at home. On the other hand, I have to go to the center for the functional literacy.

¹¹⁴ Two coins

¹¹⁵ Rich

¹¹⁶ Project workers

¹¹⁷ House

Story 03: Binita is a 46 year old women and has 8 children. She completed Class Three. She also joined the literacy classes in the month of November in 1997. Her husband works as a carpenter. Binita is also the cashier of her samity. She has been in the samity since its inception. The center was established on her homestead.

Certainly I have been able to make *aaya-unnati*¹¹⁸ by joining the samity. For example, my eldest son started a small business with my loan. I do not have any assets that I could use for business. Since I joined in the samity, I was able to receive a loan for such a business. Having participated in the samity, I got training on *nakshikantha* making. Moreover, GUP's trained *mohila swasthya shebika* gave us education on sanitation, cleanness, use of slab latrine, antenatal care, child care and vegetables gardening. They advised us to wash our hands after defections. They also told us to use wastes of vegetables for preparing organic manure. The trained *dai* of our village extend help at the time of child delivery. *Dai* also make suggestions about breast feeding to newborns. I could learn these health education messages in our local language.

I have fulfilled my desires by taking part in the samity. I am able to send my children to school. I got a credit. I save weekly Taka 5. I refunded my loan money to GUP. My family's condition has been changed. Now I plant vegetables in the courtyard which I used to buy from the market in the early days.

We discuss our *aaya-unnati* at our weekly meetings of the samity. We elect our committee members through the election process at the annual general meeting of our samity.

Everybody can sign their names in our samity. Because of this fact, people do not come to the classes of functional literacy. We have to do more work at this time. Moreover, we have a season of rice planting. We have to look after our home. We have our *poush parvan*¹¹⁹ in this month. I did not read or learn anything on our *poush parvan* in the functional literacy classes. I attend the functional literacy classes, but I do not attend all the time. If there was training on *nakshikantha*, there would be more income. Since I knew how to sign my name, I do not go to functional literacy classes.

¹¹⁸ Income-development

¹¹⁹ A cultural festival that is held in the month of Bengali Poush (from January to February)

6.0.5. Literacy, Culture and Participation

GUP believes that literacy will create self-respect, confidence and self-reliance among the disadvantaged groups and that eventually, they will gain legal and socio-economic rights within their own villages. The literacy program was organized by GUP with the goal to change the 'fatalistic' belief of the disadvantaged people (GUP, 1998). GUP uses the method of FIVBD in order to provide basic literacy and numeracy education to the members of the samity in Rajoir. The functional literacy material of FIVDB was based on the Freirian concept and was developed in the northeastern part of Bangladesh in 1981 (Gono Shakarata Ovijan, *Shakarata Bulletin*, 1996) where the language of the people is different from that of the Rajoir area. Literacy classes at the Center were facilitated through a "culture circle" (Freire, 1992: 44). Although the shebika was regular in her facilitation responsibilities, the attendance of the learners was irregular. The average number of learners in attendance at the classes was 4-5 persons. However, there were more at the beginning of the course. Many were unable to attend because of household work (i.e. cooking, take care of their family and poultry rearing). They also mentioned that it was difficult to leave home in the poush parban season. More importantly however, the learners considered that the distance to the Center was too far from their home. It was also observed that although the literacy center was situated on the homestead of Binita, she did not attend the classes. On the contrary, she mentioned that, "since I knew how to sign my name, I did not go to functional literacy classes." While sharing her experience in the center the shebika mentioned that; "When I was facilitating health education in the village, I could provide messages in their homes. There was

peace. Now I run after them in order to bring them to the Center for a group message, but I cannot bring them to the Center” (Shebika, Personal communication, February, 1998)

I observed that the process and content of the functional literacy program of FIVDB was not designed for the specific needs of the target participants and the context of Rajoir. Rather the FIVDB method was used in the Rajoir area with a general understanding that it would serve the needs of the Rajoir people. Alan Rogers mentions that there is a general trend of using the same material by the various development agencies in Bangladesh to avoid duplication of materials, despite differences in culture and oral language (Ibid, 1992). I observed that the FIVDB material did not reflect the culture and language of the rural people of Rajoir since it was developed in the northeastern part of Bangladesh. Moreover, the content of the language was made in standard Bengali. This is the language of great literature which is different from the colloquial language of common books (Jennings, 1990). The language of the primer was standardized based on generalized needs in order that it could be used throughout Bangladesh. In many cases, material was produced according to the experience and needs of the implementing organization. During the time of my field research, I observed that the people of the area were enthusiastically celebrating their cultural festivals like poush parban and *Eid*¹²⁰ since these festivals were considered to be an important part of their lives. In order to celebrate the poush parban, the learners of the SNMLC were usually occupied with

¹²⁰ A festival of the Muslim community which they celebrate after Ramadan (one month of fasting).

cleaning their houses and making *pitha*¹²¹ for their kin and relatives in the villages. This festival has a great social value in the lives of the villagers. Binita mentioned that; “We have our poush parban this month. I did not read or learn anything on our poush parban in the functional literacy classes” (January, 1998). I further discussed this issue with a group of learners and shebika at the Centers, they reflected that; “Poush parban is very important for us in the month of poush. In this month we need to clean our houses and make sweet and pitha for our relatives. We receive guests. We celebrate *poush mela*¹²² in our village” (Group of Learners, Group Discussion, January, 1998)

Freire and Faundez (1989) describe that, “literacy and post-literacy campaigns should begin from an understanding of everyday life, an understanding which should be arrived at by the people themselves” (p. 28). Since FIVDB material was not written in the context of Rajoir, its language could not really reflect the tone of the literacy participants. For example, in the primer of one, the words: (i) *shakti*¹²³ (p.25), (ii) *nongra*¹²⁴ (p.42), (iii) *tukri*¹²⁵ (p.48) and (iv) *ilhi*¹²⁶ (p.82) were used to construct the sentences. Instead, the people of Rajoir use the words: (i) *hal*, (ii) *moyla*, (iii) *jhuri* and (iv) *shesh*. There are several other words used in the primer of the FIVDB that are not familiar to the learners. For example, the Hindu communities of Bangladesh do not use the words:

¹²¹ Cake

¹²² Poush fair which is held during the time of poush festival.

¹²³ Strength/Power

¹²⁴ Dirty

¹²⁵ Basket

¹²⁶ End

*salam*¹²⁷, *dhau*¹²⁸ and *puni*¹²⁹. As a result, the shebika were faced with a great deal of difficulties in translating and interpreting the content of the primer into the local language while facilitating the lessons. Specifically, it was found that when the shebika was facilitating the 42 lessons of the primers, she had a very difficult time to read and understand each lesson as it was written in standard Bengali. In Freire's perspective; "Any educational practice based on standardization, on what is laid down in advance, on routine in which everyday is predetermined, is bureaucratizing and thus anti-democratic" (1989:41). As a result of this standardization, the participants of the Literacy Center were mostly occupied with memorization and internalization rather than reflection. In this case, the role of the shebika apparently turned toward a traditional teacher which eventually hindered the dialectical movement between the shebika and the literacy participants (Freire, 1970). I also observed that the shebika of the SNMLC tends to play the role of a "traditional teacher" despite her new orientation and training on democratic learning. To add to this, the shebika of the Center is also a product of the "traditional school" and this makes it difficult for her to educate differently.

A gender bias also exists in the primer of the FIVDB. Alan Rogers (1992) states that; "The FIVDB primer particularly reveals this, not simply by the stereotyping of the activities of men and women but more particularly, by attaching a name to the man but only a role to the women" (p. 136) We should also recognize that when people are

¹²⁷ Respectful greeting. The Hindu community uses *Pranam Namashkar*.

¹²⁸ Blessing. The Hindu community uses *Ashirhad*.

¹²⁹ Water. The Hindu community uses *Jal*

desperate for their survival, they have less time to think of gender and disparity at the literacy classes. Stromquist (1990) mentions that; “Gender consciousness does not necessarily depend on literacy. It is clear that the development of greater levels of gender consciousness will require information that can exist independent of time and place, information in written form” (p. 107). It was revealed that the use of generalized media or materials does not necessarily create reflective learning environments among the participants. However, the disadvantaged group participates in the Learning Center in order to break their chain of poverty as the struggle in their lives: Learning to sign your name leads to loans and therefore, meets some immediate practical needs.

6.0.6. Literacy, Poverty and Economy

The study participants of the literacy program were more concerned about their income and family and less interested in becoming literate. The literacy participants were often raising the issue of “credit” and “sale money” from their products even during their class facilitation. The literacy participants considered that the literacy program would not bring any immediate income to their family. Moreover, they had to leave home for literacy classes and during this time they could not do any household work. Rather, the classes would take energy and time. They felt that money would benefit their family. This was needed for their family’s survival and development. “The problem of literacy and education cannot be solved. This is only possible by improving their economic conditions first” (Suratwala, 1992: 122). Aruna also stated that; “If I was able to earn

even Taka 2¹³⁰ that would benefit my family. It also helps my husband's income." While I was talking with the literacy participants at the Center, they mentioned that; "Literacy for us is too late, but it could help our children (Group Reflection, Literacy Participants, February, 1998). Although they showed less interest in their own literacy classes because of their economic situation, they were concerned about their children's education and future. For them, the immediate priority was money, their children and family. If they could produce more nakshikantha they would be able to earn more money. Money is essential for poor families. In the view of Nelly P. Stromquist (1997); "Among the poor women, literacy is not always their first priority. They may find it more urgent to improve the quality of the products they sell in order to increase their income more quickly "(p 17).

The functional literacy program for the participants was organized based on generalized needs and not the specific needs of the participants. Since it did not serve their needs, their participation was not spontaneous. In general, I observed that in Bangladesh the disadvantaged people of the villages participate in development programs only with the understanding that they will profit economically while attending the educational classes of VOs. Considering the learning environment and the context of the literacy participants, I raised the issue of their training and educational needs. They quickly responded that they really wanted education or training that could improve their products so they could eventually sell these in the market for a better price. Specifically, they

¹³⁰ Currency is called *Taka*

mentioned that they would be interested in learning about nakshikantha which would help them make better quality products to sell at higher prices. For them, work and money are important for the survival of their family and children. More importantly, it was revealed that they really wanted production-oriented education or training in order to make money and earn profit from this program. Aruna, Urmila and Binita mentioned that if they could find training for nakshikantha making, they would be able to earn money and profit and that would help their families. Aaur Rahman confirms; “We realize that if the material is not developed within the local context, we will not be able to make any social change among the disadvantaged groups” (Personnel communication, February, 1998). Although the literacy component was not the primary focus, the literacy program of GUP reflected the disadvantaged people’s will to change their economic condition and ensure a better education to their children.

6.0.7. Health Education: From Samity¹³¹ to Community

Health education was initiated in the early 1970s with the aim of reducing malnutrition in Rajoir. In the beginning, the health education was confined to the Clinic and Health Center. From the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, health education was provided to the samity members (McCord, 1980). While mobilizing and facilitating the health education program in the villages, GUP initially tested the *target group* approach (only within the samity) in order to form a village committee. Through this approach, health education

¹³¹ Association/Cooperative/Society

was confined to a few groups in the villages. As a result, it could not mobilize or implement the health education program effectively in the villages despite the best efforts of GUP. In other words, the health education program failed to reduce epidemic diseases in the villages. More significantly however, GUP faced severe difficulties in implementing health education for all members of the various communities in the villages through the target group approach.

In spite of this fact, GUP redesigned the health education for villagers in 1989 with the goal to eliminate communicable diseases in the villages. GUP mainly included women of reproductive ages as potential resource agents within the family. Over the years, it observed that the health program could only be effective within the villages if the process of education was ensured to all women regardless of their wealth. More importantly, it was noticed that the women of the village regularly interacted within their own *para* or *bari* where they shared available information. In this sharing process, they would enrich and reinforce their knowledge on an equal level with one another. This was superior to any socially isolated approach since it gave strength to the people and avoided the social alienation of individuals (Midgley et al, 1986). An effective and efficient organization of the community will create a powerful community network to share and devise socially appropriate programs within the villages.

Having learned from their experience, GUP had to organize a *gosthi*¹³² and *para*¹³³ based village committee to make effective health education programs in the context of socio-cultural practices (Barua, 1997). Re-organizing and re-mobilizing the community under the umbrella of the *gosthi* networks, achieved great success in developing community groups, training human resources, disseminating health messages to women and solving problems related to the project. These *gosthi* and *para* based village development committees are formed in the communities out of their own initiative. Such *gosthi* and *para* networks are very effective within the villages of Rajoir because they help to develop solidarity through a non-violent approach. These networks are very useful since they are able to use the existing available local resources appropriate to the programs as well as being instrumental in conveying the message to the people of the village. These committees are mainly responsible for the mobilization of the community, selecting Mohila Swasthya Shebika (MSS) for message delivery within the vicinity, monitoring the project activities, and identifying existing resources appropriate to the programs. (Barua, 1990, Barua et al, 1994; Bhuiya et al, 1992; GUP: Annual Report, 1993 and Extension Workers of the Health Program, Personnel communication, January, 1998).

6.0.8 Health Education: From Center to Home

The Mohila Swasthya Shebika (MSS) mainly provided messages to women through home visits. Each Mohila Swasthya Shebika (MSS) visited 8-10 households per day

¹³² Lineage/Kinship ties

¹³³ Neighborhood

within their own jurisdiction. Dais visited the homes of pregnant mothers on a regular basis in order to provide education and counseling on pregnancy care. Ten specific messages were given in the local language by showing a flip chart or a picture where the adult village women could participate in discussion more openly in their own social environment. Moreover, the messages were reinforced through story-telling and folk drama that created an interesting recreational atmosphere among the villagers and reflected their own lives. There was no pressure to read and write since the healthcare messages were completely tuned into their lifestyle. More importantly, the local language was used instead of the standard language. The health education messages were provided through personal communication where the rural women could share and learn these without the bureaucratic and formal environment. Because of this, the participation of women was spontaneous in the health education programs. GUP did not use the decontextualized language in the health education program like the literacy program did. As a result, the participants could use their lessons easily within the context of their lives. Aruna, Urmila and Binita confirm that since health education was provided by the shebika and dais at their home, they did not need to come to the Center for learning. They learned how to prepare oral saline and antenatal care and child care. Hall (1975) mentioned that; "Adults learn those things which are interesting or those things which improve their lives" (p. 65). I observed that research participants were more in favor of such an education in their community life. They were interested in learning about health education since these messages served the purpose of their daily needs.

Moreover, while receiving health information, they did not need to abandon their homestead where they could look after their cows, goats and chickens. The rural women were mobilized in a way that their participation would provide socio-economic benefits within their social environment while receiving the health education at the same time. On the other hand, for the disadvantaged women attending literacy classes at the Center, leaving their home caused great anxiety. I observed that the disadvantaged women equally contributed to the development of their family along with their husbands in the Rajoir area, especially when the husbands are away from home in search of income through employment. In this situation, leaving the home for education creates a net economic loss in a Country where there is no system of family benefit or allowances. While having health education, the rural disadvantaged women could gain knowledge of preventative health through which they could save their family expenditure. More importantly, they could spend their time raising their cows and goats and doing other activities such as vegetable gardening, etc. which would eventually bring income to their family

6.0.9 Health Education and Women

Health education has played an important role in reducing infant and maternal mortality rates in the Rajoir area since the women have become concerned with receiving antenatal care and other clinical services from the health centers. I observed that the health education program of GUP has been able to generate a significant amount of decision

making power among the rural women in the field of healthcare. In other words, women are empowered to take leading roles in their family affairs in the absence of their male partners. Furthermore, the increased role in the utilization of curative facilities by the women in the Rajoir area has been attributed to the intensive health education program. More importantly, women are found to be responsive to the health educational content in order to resolve the health crisis.

In the process of providing education on prevention of night blindness and the use of a *slab latrine*¹³⁴ for the rural people, the organizations constantly motivated them to use the slab latrine for diarrheal control and to eat vitamin A capsules for the prevention of night blindness. Interestingly, Nutritional Surveillance Reports showed that the majority of rural areas have less than 50% vitamin A capsule coverage, whereas within the urban areas it was found to be 93% (HKI and IPHN, 1993). Although education for night blindness prevention is tailored to promote vitamin A capsules in the Rajoir area, the supply or distribution to rural people could not be ensured by GUP due to the shortage of supply. On the other hand, it was observed that the incidence of night blindness among the children of the area was eradicated because of the promotion of locally based education to the rural mothers of Bangladesh. This included nutritional information to the villages in which the mothers were informed to eat available green leafy vegetables and papaya. Moreover, the severe rate of malnutrition was reduced to less than 6% from 33%.

¹³⁴ Sanitary toilet

Another noteworthy improvement occurred in the attendance rate of pregnant mothers for antenatal check-ups (98%). Only a single maternal death had occurred and the coverage of tetanus toxoid increased to 98% from almost zero. In regard to the drinking water, about 90-95% of the target groups were using tube well water and as a result the diarrheal disease rate was reduced (Barua, 1994; GUP, 1993 and Rahman, 1998). Despite the incidence of diarrheal disease reduction in the Rajoir area, an increasing number people have encountered arsenic poisoning. “The unfolding crisis is the unintended consequence of a colossally successful safe-water program” (Bearak, 1998: A25). During my field research, I observed that people have recently become reluctant to drink the water in Rajoir since a few were affected with arsenic poisoning due to their drinking of tube well water in the villages. Perhaps, women are the most vulnerable and more often victims of this poisoning since they usually drink water from the same tube well since they spend more time in the home. In other words, the men of the Rajoir area suffer less from arsenic poisoning because of their absence from the home due to their employment or work in small trades.

6.0.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I examined literacy and health education and women’s development within GUP. In order to examine these issues, I recorded the views of three research participants. I have interpreted and analyzed their views based on my observations. In this chapter, I mainly attempted to focus on reasons why the disadvantaged women are

reluctant to participate in the literacy classes (distance from home) and also why they prefer to participate in the health education classes (practical gains). However, it was understood that these women would participate in the educational process if this learning could help them to gain economic benefits. Although women prefer practical income-generating training for themselves, they readily acknowledge the importance of literacy and formal education for their children.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

7.0.1 GUP's Programs, Women's Practical and Strategic Needs

Having examined the non-formal education programs of GUP, I found that there is no easy way to address either the practical or strategic needs of the disadvantaged women in the villages of Bangladesh. While attempting to meet disadvantaged women's needs, the VOs have had to deal and negotiate with various external and internal factors while implementing the non-formal education for the empowerment of these women. The external and internal factors, such as funding agencies, government departments (within the National head quarters and the local levels), local government agencies and various socio-cultural, political and economic organizations, could not be avoided while promoting programs in the villages. Over the years, GUP has had to deal and negotiate with various actors and diverse circumstances in order to reach the disadvantaged women in the villages of Rajoir. Despite this fact, they have adopted different approaches in the villages of the Rajoir area to meet the needs of the target participants. Since the Rajoir area is particularly disaster prone as well as poverty stricken, GUP combined the *welfare*, *anti-poverty* and *empowerment* approaches in its programs for the women of the area. In other words, GUP attempted to address the practical and strategic needs of the women in its programs by combining these various approaches. GUP promoted non-formal education for social justice on gender issues, such as protection against social discrimination, dowry, polygamy, divorce and, discriminative health care, through constant dialogue and cooperation in the villages of Rajoir. Messages against any form

of social discrimination were disseminated to all segments of the population within the villages in addition to the members of the samity. In order for any effort against social discrimination to materialize effectively in the villages, it requires the involvement of all villagers. GUP tried to sensitize the target participants on the issues of social justice through promoting social harmony in the villages. As a result, GUP was able to increase the physical mobility among the women's groups, despite several constraints and limitations. The empowerment of women in the villages of Bangladesh cannot take place instantaneously and is a long and slow process. While implementing non-formal education for the empowerment of women, one has to consider all the socio-cultural factors and the local contexts within the villages. Such empowerment cannot take place by using radical action in a traditional society like Bangladesh. Any type of "short cut" methods to empower women such as this would not be sustained. The sustainability of any efforts will only remain if the process is meaningful to the community and the target participants.

7.0.2 Grassroots Organization, Empowerment and the Anti-Poverty Approach

Non-formal education for grassroots organization is geared towards political education which attempts to mobilize the disadvantaged women into collective action in hoping to replace the indigenous social systems in the villages of Rajoir. Although GUP intended to focus on the issue of empowerment against discrimination and social injustice through non-violent action, in recent times it also intensified its anti-poverty efforts through a

micro credit program to empower women economically. Since micro credit has become the dominant program, the notion of collective learning for empowerment has become less important in the weekly meetings of the samity.

Moreover, these grassroots organizations are yet to become self-sustaining in the villages of Rajoir. Without the presence of GUP, they would not likely survive since social bonds are generally linked to indigenous social networks and systems. I observed that they cannot be continued or maintained within village communities if the external funding is not available. In many instances, these women's organizations are confined only to the distribution and collection of credit in the intervention villages.

Furthermore, the dominant micro credit schemes of other VOs constantly lure the village people into participation. After all, this was the incentive that originally motivated the disadvantaged women to organize grassroots groups and collect money for small businesses. The policies designed to give the people empowerment through conscientization and education have gradually turned towards capital building and money transactions. Although the micro credit program was tailored to empower women economically, it actually encourages them to act as an intermediary between the VOs and the male members of the families. In this instance, women do not have any control over their money or capital. Rather, they simply act under the control of the male family members.

In this case, the VOs need to reconceptualize their approach to the mobilization and organization of grassroots people's organizations in the context of the rural culture and society of Bangladesh. Social change and sustainability of rural life can only be possible if the educational process and content are built into the context of the socio-cultural setting and reality. Micro credit alone will not empower the disadvantaged women within their families. Instead, it will only push women into more desperate conditions.

7.0.3 Regenerative Agriculture, Building Knowledge, Economy and Women's Power

GUP's non-formal education for the regenerative agriculture program attempted to harmonize the local socio-cultural and environmental context of Rajoir and the well being of the community. Obviously, the farmers have their own way of understanding the issues within their socio-cultural context. The non-formal education program can only be effective if the participation of the farmers is ensured. GUP's education for regenerative agriculture incorporated the modern techniques of making seed-beds and planting vegetables all year round using organic manure. These approaches also provided net profit to the small and landless farmers where land was scarce.

Moreover, GUP's regenerative agricultural programs created an opportunity for the women farmers to take a leading role in their families. When the women accumulate knowledge and financial power simultaneously, they are able to make decisions and create a strong position for themselves within their families and the society.

Regenerative agriculture exclusively provides knowledge to small or landless women farmers in a manner that they are able to accumulate resources as well as guide their children to the attainment of further education and development. I observed that regenerative agricultural farmers are mainly engaged in cultivation around their home. While interviewing a women farmer, I noticed that she was confident, well organized, active and capable of leading and guiding her husband. Her husband respected her views while she was discussing the issues during my interview. Landless male farmers are generally encouraged to work on the farm with women without any gender bias as they strive to improve their economic conditions. They work collectively in regenerative agriculture in order to provide for their families. For these men, it is not a question of gender, but rather a matter of survival. They realize that if both the husband and wife do not work together on the farm, then their survival will be threatened. Regenerative agriculture tries to address both the practical and strategic needs of the disadvantaged women within their families and the larger society. Although the regenerative agricultural program was able to create a model to provide for the practical and strategic needs of the women, its impact is limited in the Rajoir area.

7.0.4 Center-based Literacy, Gender and Empowerment

The functional literacy program of GUP clearly indicates that the course curriculum was designed within the framework of pre-defined National goals and objectives. This was developed without an understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of the Rajoir people.

The literacy programs used in Rajoir neglects the needs of the participants. The specific context and the socio-cultural aspects were not reflected in the curriculum of the functional literacy program. In this respect, disadvantaged groups often found the content not to be meaningful. They were unable to participate on an equal level with others in literacy or functional educational courses despite the introduction of the dialogical process in the classroom. Their primary concern was for their own funding or income. For example, the village women specifically mentioned that they would be interested in learning about nakshikantha which would help them make better quality products that would sell at higher prices. For these women, work and money are important for the survival of their family and children. They actually wanted production-oriented education or training in order to make money and earn some profit from this program. Leaving home for the Literacy Center also causes the women great anxiety and a net economic loss since their cows and goats and other activities, such as vegetable gardening, are unattended.

A noticeable gender bias also exists in the primer of the FIVDB. Stereotypical activities of both men and women were illustrated in the primer. Nevertheless, this may partly be explained because the curriculum planners often work in a crisis situation where they have little time to think of gender and disparity issues with the literacy courses. The center-based literacy program did not help the literacy education participants to achieve their practical or strategic needs.

7.0.5 Health Education to Resolve Crisis, Gender Disparity and for Economic Benefits

Women participated enthusiastically in the health educational activities in order to deal effectively with the health crisis in their homes. While receiving health education in their homes, the rural disadvantaged women could gain knowledge of preventative health measures through which they could save their family expenditure. More importantly, the research participants mentioned that they were able to learn within their social environment and also in their own language. The women could internalize the content of the messages easily and this eventually helped them to utilize this in their daily lives. As a result, gender disparity in the area of health and nutritional care was reduced significantly within their families. Similarly, the attendance of women for antenatal care during pregnancy increased in Rajoir. Since the women were receiving health education at their various locations in the villages, they could contribute to raising their cows and goats or other homestead activities such as gardening which would eventually bring more income to their families.

In addition to this, the women and men were equally represented in the gothi and para based village development committees that mobilized health educational activities in the villages. Women's active leadership was observed in mobilizing the activities in the villages of Rajoir. They assumed the role of educators, midwives and leaders in the initiation of these programs and activities. Interestingly, these trained women's groups also acted as mechanics to repair tube wells in the villages. In the 1970s and 1980s this role for women would not have been accepted by the local people.

7.0.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Having spent time in the field, I believe that the VOs have the ability to develop innovative learning models to empower the disadvantaged people in Bangladesh. Despite this fact, the time and effort of the VOs is usually confined to dealing with conflicts and contradictions within the operating villages. The VOs either have less time to facilitate an educational program based on the actual social conditions of the villages or they are too busy with only the expansion of a micro credit program and trying to lure the disadvantaged people into this. Similarly, it is understood that the VOs also cannot ignore the State mechanism while implementing their programs in the villages. At the same time however, they have the potential to create an innovative and new model of society for the people as well as for the state to follow.

Considering all of these factors, I believe that effective social change will only take place among the village people if they participate spontaneously in the educational programs. Meaningful education can only be ensured if the local socio-cultural context and the specific needs of the participants are integrated into the educational messages during the learning process. Otherwise, the disadvantaged groups will develop a dependency on the implementing agencies rather than autonomy or freedom. In this research study, I also observed that indigenous social networks and other cultural issues have played a significant role in mobilizing and disseminating educational messages in the intervention areas of GUP. Considering these issues, there is a great need to conduct further research in the following areas:

1) In order to devise an effective and cooperative development environment, it is essential to facilitate an action research study on how to develop partnerships among the VOs in implementing development activities without competition and contradiction. This deserves special attention in Bangladesh in order to promote grassroots development education as well as to avoid duplication and overlapping activities in the operating villages. Such research would definitely help to utilize external resources effectively towards the development of the disadvantaged groups in the villages.

2) A research study is necessary to examine the role of indigenous organizations in disseminating educational messages in the villages. Within this study, it is essential to examine how local knowledge could possibly contribute towards the well being of the community.

3) It should also be a priority to conduct a research study on how education for strategic gender needs can be developed to improve the social status of women and to sustain women's groups within the local socio-cultural context.

4) Furthermore, a long term ethnographic research study should be considered which deals with the participatory planning process and the management of VOs in the area of women's development in order to determine strategies leading to positive empowerment in the context of local culture and society, especially in the absence of adult males who

are pulled away from their families by economic imperatives as a result of ill-designed structural adjustment efforts

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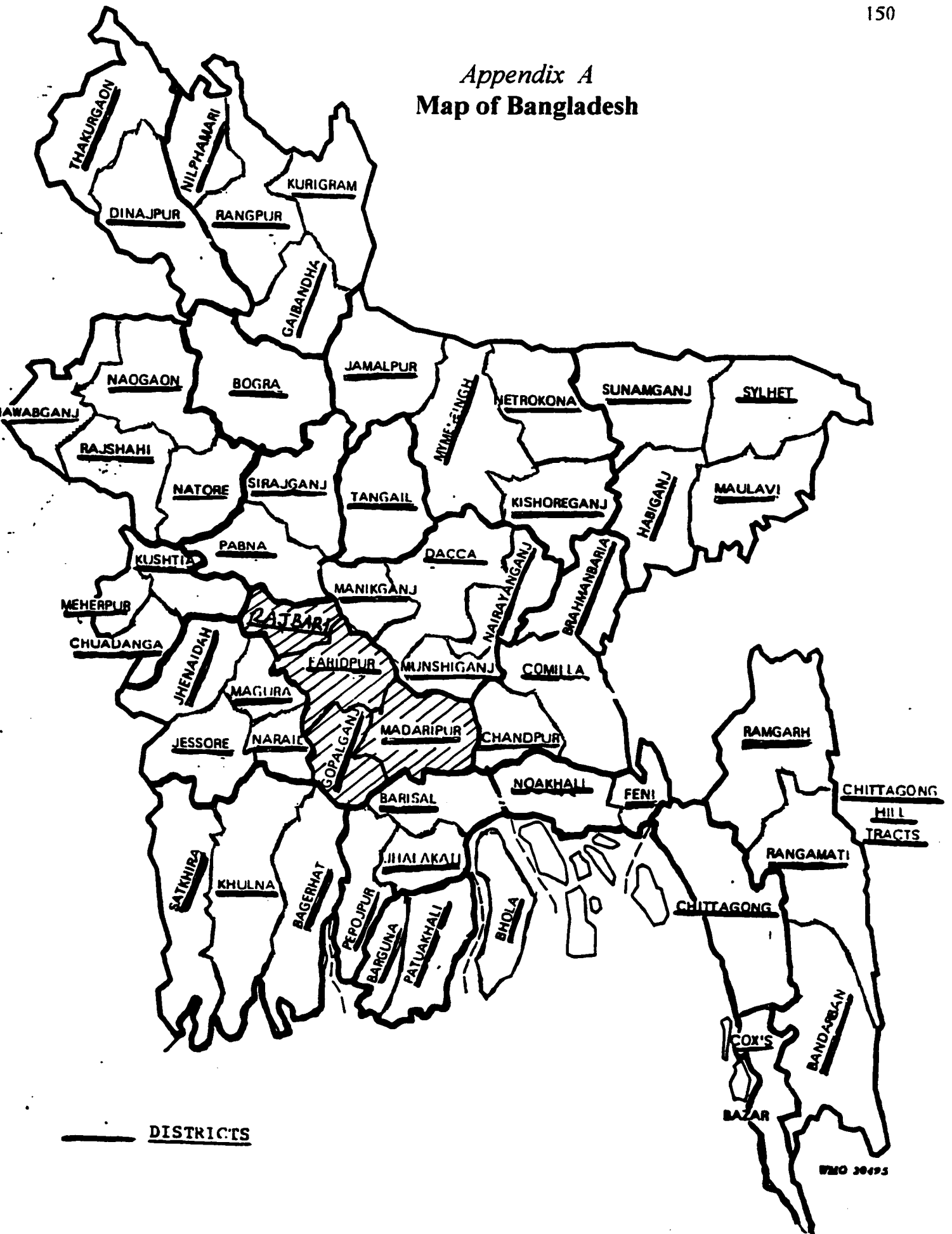
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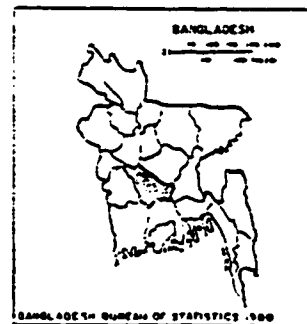
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Appendix A Map of Bangladesh



Appendix B Map of Greater Faridpur District



Appendix C
Information and Consent Form

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Bijoy P. Barua of the Educational Studies Department at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

A) PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research study is to look at the non-formal/popular education projects which rural disadvantaged people have mobilized and organized.

B) PROCEDURES

As a participant in this research, I will be asked to answer questions and tape record an interview. I will be observed during group work and lesson learning sessions.

C) CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is beneficial to develop new findings in the field. However, I would expect that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.
- I understand the purpose of this study and know that there is no hidden motive of which I have not been informed.

I have carefully studied the above and understand this agreement. I freely consent and agree to participate in this study.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

WITNESS SIGNATURE _____