ENGENDERING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: THE BRAC CASE

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the start-up phase of an on-going structural intervention which works at the nexus of gender relations, organizational change and quality improvement. Articulating this nexus and its specific relevance to the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and acquiring and deploying knowledge around it within the organization has involved definition and continuous reiteration of basic premises concerning gender, individual learning and systems development; an organization-wide knowledge building exercise facilitated by a series of structured diagnostic processes; negotiating premises and visions, transferring ownership, and building on related organizational exercises in strategic visioning and planning. This article reflects on these processes and discusses some critical dilemmas: expanding parameters versus boundary maintenance; the prerequisites for innovation versus institutional bargaining; and change options versus change realities.

2 BRAC AND ITS GENDER PROGRAMME

2.1 An overview of BRAC

With approximately 11,000 staff servicing 1.2 million village-based members, BRAC is now the world's largest indigenous private sector development organization. BRAC has two major goals: poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor. BRAC's history reflects less smooth transitions than strategic learning points and concomitant policy and programming shifts. From an initial focus in 1972 on relief and rehabilitation, the organization took on a community development approach to poverty alleviation but quickly graduated to a target-oriented approach to sustainable development and empowerment while also experimenting elsewhere with credit delivery. In the last decade, BRAC's credit programme has predominated though it has also taken on a host of supplementary social services ranging from income generation skills training – paralegal training, a women's health

programme, to non-formal primary education, and higher-order economic enterprises. Since the mid-1980s, BRAC has undergone a tremendous expansion in area coverage and staff strength. In the late 1980s, fuelled by its Executive Director's growing commitment to gender equity – a direction which has been encouraged over time by donors and numerous evaluation and appraisal missions – BRAC began actively recruiting women staff. At its highest, the ratio of female to male staff in the organization was 1:4; currently females comprise approximately 15 per cent of all regular BRAC staff (this excludes its primary school teachers who are part-time, 'contract' staff). Currently, the bulk of BRAC's programmes are directed to women – 85 per cent of credit is targeted to women and girls comprise 70 per cent of all students in BRAC primary schools – and women constitute 85 per cent of members in BRAC village organizations.

2.2 Why now and why gender?

BRAC's expansion together with its interest in recruiting more women staff, and its commitment to women's empowerment currently pose considerable challenges organizationally and programmatically. Over the past three years, BRAC has developed policy incrementally in response to specific women staff-related issues and problems as they came up. In 1991, it appointed a Women's Advisory Committee to advise on women staff issues and in July 1993, it piloted its first staff gender training programme. However, at the time the gender team began its work in January 1994, a broad consensus had yet to emerge in BRAC on what the real problems were: what were problematic attitudes and behaviours on the part of male staff? What was the adequacy of the organization's response? What aspects of BRAC's target-driven organizational culture hinder advances toward empowerment of women members? What special provisions, if any, do women staff require? What gender-sensitive planning and programming skills are relevant to BRAC staff? Which of these problems are amenable to a training solution?

Before the Gender team began its work, a broadened brief was negotiated with senior management – from the development of training-centre based courses for staff in gender analysis to (i) building staff capacity to plan, deliver and monitor gender equitable programming, and (ii) to work with managers and staff to strengthen organizational systems, policies and procedures in support of BRAC's gender goals. Implicated in this approach is the need for BRAC to evolve an organizational culture and arrangements that attract and retain high quality women and men staff and allow them to be their most productive. This goes beyond the issue of gender parity to gender relations within the organization which is itself a determinant of female staff retention. It is important to note that changes were already underway: four of BRAC's 20 senior managers are women, the Executive Director has committed to equality of men and women staff, the number of women area managers is growing, and there is a fast track to make women managers.

3 THE NEXUS BETWEEN GENDER, ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

3.1 Transformation of gender relations
We start with BRAC's stated goals of gender equity and women's empowerment. But just what is meant by 'gender' and 'women's empowerment' has not been clear. To guide our work, the Team engaged in a process explicating these concepts in terms and language relevant to BRAC programmes and BRAC as an organization. In the process we attempted to identify areas of overlap and synergy between these two concepts and their programmatic and organizational change manifestations.

We define women's empowerment as the capacity of women to be economically self-sufficient and self-reliant with control over decisions affecting their life options and freedom from violence. Thus, we conceptualize programming for women's empowerment goals as being constituted by three broad strands: (i) increasing women's ability to be economically self-sufficient (i.e. earn an income, own assets and manage their own finances); (ii) increasing women's confidence and ability to know and negotiate for their rights in the household and community; and (iii) increasing women's control over their bodies, their time and their movement, including freedom from violence. We conceptualize

working toward gender transformations in terms of (i) increasing women's and men's ability to analyse and reshape socially constructed gender relations in order to transform power relationships; (ii) equitable access and control over both public and private resources; (iii) equitable participation in household, community and national decision making; and reshaping social institutions and organizations to include women's and men's varied perceptions to benefit both. We understand that these strategies sometimes work as means to women's empowerment as well as to move beyond the male-female power nexus toward gender transformation. Implicit in them is engagement with issues of class which both unite and divide men and women.

A key idea in our dialogue with BRAC is that gender does not mean 'women'. Moreover, we are not simply concerned with empowering women, we are also trying to alter the relationship between men and women so that the relationship is characterized by more equity and an ability to negotiate and agree on the needs of both. Compared with other thinking this may seem unambitious. Acker, for example, challenges one to deal with larger and more systemic issues:

> 'Long term strategies will have to challenge the privileging of "economy" over life and raise questions about the rationality of such things as organizational and work commitment as well as the legitimacy of the organization's claim for the priority of their goals over more broad goals. The gendered structure of organizations will only be completely changed with a fundamental re-organization of both production and reproduction.'
>
> (Acker 1992)

Nevertheless, we choose to define 'gender' in terms that make sense to BRAC. The essence of the normative change strategy that we are using demands that the issue be defined in the client's terms. (In fact, we are still involved in a dialogue with BRAC to build a joint agreement as to what is a gender issue.) This definition is, however, quite wide-ranging and allows a broad spectrum of intervention targets. Once you admit that a gender issue is anything that hinders, prevents or restricts women's (either staff or programme beneficiaries) involvement in the delivery, analysis and improvement of programme, there is considerable scope for thinking. Some of the things which prevent women's

full participation in quality programme delivery and improvement are cultural, some are attitudinal and some are organizational. For example, we know that women's effective participation means that they need the opportunity to earn the respect of their male colleagues, that men in BRAC need to be able to understand the situation faced by both village women and women in BRAC, supervision needs to consistently encourage inputs from staff at all levels and open discussion of problems so that positive programme outcomes can be achieved. Also arrangements like leave and having overnight guests at the area office need to be improved so that women can better integrate their work and their family lives and so on.

In order to translate these ideas into organizational practice, we need to consider the questions of organizational change and quality improvement.

3.2 Organizational change

Our change strategy is grounded in the practices and assumptions of collaborative change described in Bennis, Benne and Chin (1968) as normative and re-educative. This means that it is neither a coercive strategy that attempts to pressure or guilt managers into change nor a rational strategy that attempts to convince them to change using what has been called brute rationality. A normative, re-educative approach works with the heart and the head by supporting a learning process that accepts the psychological resistance to the change of fundamental attitudes. This strategy for organizational change can be described as having the following aspects:

1   The client must 'own' the change goals. The goals cannot be imposed by the change agents. The role of the change agent is to help the client achieve goals she/he has chosen.

2   The process is long-term. (2-5 years.)

3   It is both systemic and personal. It concerns itself with systemic changes of culture and norms and it concerns itself with the individual learning of organizational members.

4   It is data-based. In other words, it is not informed by universal prescriptions but the specific requirements of that organization as demonstrated by a collaborative data collection and analysis process.

5   The change agent is not expected to enter as an expert and prescribe the nature of the change. The primary role is one of a facilitator or catalyst, although from time to time she/he must be prepared to give advice, particularly in the process, timing and staging of the change.

This approach to change has resulted in a number of assumptions that guide our work. For example:

1   Within the scope of the intervention, managers and programme personnel will define the priority problems and targets for intervention.

2   We hold a belief in the value of action learning for bringing about individual and system change and a concomitant belief in the ineffectiveness of training that takes place out of the setting in which the changed behaviour is expected to be applied.

3   Although we are committed to this approach, we are not committed to any particular configuration of intervention elements.

3.3 Quality improvement

Quality Improvement or Total Quality Management (TQM) grew out of the need in the private sector to respond to intense competition by constantly improving production systems to provide customers with what they want when they want it. Companies found that they needed to focus not on profits but on the customer. It eventually meant a restructuring of the relationship between workers and management.

For an organization such as BRAC quality first and foremost means quality of programme outcomes and impact. Its very existence is premised on its ability to support poor women and men in their individual and collective efforts to better their situation. In the final analysis, its worth is measured in these terms. In BRAC, TQM could provide a balance to the focus on quantitative targets and measurements. It would focus on constant improvement of the quality of service to members, continue to push the boundaries of empowerment beyond delivery of services to strengthening women's self-reliance. It would stress involving members in programme design and monitoring, exploring avenues of strengthening the collective organizations of members and their participation in community decision making bodies, and the role of men

in this process. It would involve the staff who deliver service in an on-going structured analysis of how the service could be more effective and delivered at less cost.

We have discussed the 'pieces': gender, organizational change and quality improvement; how do these pieces fit together? Our current thinking can best be summed up in three assumptions about gender, quality improvement and organizational change.

3.3.1 Assumption 1

In order to deliver a quality programme that empowers women, you need the perspectives of various kinds of both men and women staff and primary stakeholders (Village Organization members in BRAC's case). Men and women staff share common skills but because of their socialization and the culture surrounding them, they also have particular strengths related to their gender. Male staff may have some strengths (mobility, collection of loans, more available time) and women have other strengths (a capacity to understand the perspectives of women in the villages, the possibility of talking to them directly). BRAC realizes this and has been working to hire, retain and promote large numbers of women to build a gender-balanced workforce.

But, BRAC like all organizations is 'gendered'. The processes of interaction and systems for doing the organization's work were decided upon by men and although they considered the needs of women, these considerations were dominated by men's perceptions. Because of this, working in the organization is easier for men than for women. For example:

a   Men's ability to spend long hours at work is subsidized by their female partners who attend to children and home responsibilities.

b   By being part of BRAC and functioning like the men, women's security may be threatened as they work in the field. For example, they may be pushed off bicycles by villagers who feel they should not be working in this way.

c   Being away from their families makes marriage more difficult for women.

There is a deeper, more pervasive issue. Globally, women are de-valued *vis-à-vis* men. This sense of women's de-valuation is an important part of men's socialization and may mean that certain men do not respect women staff and may even 'tease' or psychologically harass them. The socialization of both men and women result in tension between men and women as they learn to work together as colleagues. Even when special arrangements are made for women's biological differences, women are reluctant to take advantage of some of these special arrangements because, as they say, they will be viewed as not good enough or somehow disabled and therefore requiring special attention. All of these and other factors make the task of working effectively in BRAC more difficult for women than for men. These factors make hiring, retaining and promoting female staff difficult and ultimately problematic.

3.3.2 Assumption 2

A hierarchical target-driven organization will focus on accomplishment of numerical targets related to programme inputs. An organization with a directive supervision ethic will focus on those targets to the exclusion of other, more subtle measurements. Problem-solving will not extend beyond the accomplishment of the quantitative targets to actual programme impacts. Therefore, if you want to deepen the quality of the programme and build a greater responsiveness to members (particularly female) you need to balance the target culture with a concern for quality of programme and its impacts on empowerment of women.

This does not mean ignoring targets like the number of loans made or amount of money loaned. It means adding other measurements like the percentage of women who retain control over the income or the numbers of women who become more influential as a result of income generation. It also means facing the issue of perhaps decreasing the target for loan disbursement in order to allow staff to focus on increasing the impact of the programme on women's empowerment.

3.3.3 Assumption 3

If you are going to improve quality than you need to engage men and women front line staff and members in the task of analysing the process and outcomes of programme delivery so as to continually improve the depth and quality of programme and its ability to actually empower women. This requires skill in programme analysis, time to do it, a climate of acceptance of new ideas and the

respectful collaboration of men and women staff and members.

As can be seen, these assumptions mean that gender work must go beyond training programmes. If BRAC is to become capable of retaining women, focusing on outcomes beyond loan disbursement and deepening the ability of the programme to empower women, then we must understand which organizational dynamics are facilitating and blocking this development.

Working at the nexus of the three domains (gender, organizational change and quality improvement) means that the project must deal with some contradictions and some questions – for example, if BRAC is a gendered organization how will a strategy that leaves the choice of goals up to the organization have any impact? Is everything a gender issue? How do you know where to start? At the same time this nexus provides us with some strong advantages. If the gender work is tied to an organizational change strategy it stands a better chance of being more that an isolated training programme without a clear plan for the implementation of actual change. By linking gender with quality we demonstrate (or not) that an attention to gender dynamics results in qualitatively better programme in BRAC's terms. Gender work will not be at the margins but an integral part of programme development.

4 KEY FEATURES OF THE START-UP PHASE
At the outset, three features of the BRAC case should be noted. First, organizational entry was initiated by the Executive Director of BRAC, not imposed by outside interests. Second, the issue of gender was not new to the organization though generally it was more narrowly conceptualized (gender equity means bringing more women into BRAC) and in more women-specific terms. Third, the Gender team consists of both outsiders and insiders: four BRAC staff all drawn from the Training Division (this is consistent with the initial outputs expected of the programme), and three external consultants who together came with credentials respected by BRAC and close knowledge of the organization.

In this section, we discuss three issues concerning the start-up phase of the structural intervention in BRAC focused on gender, organizational change and quality improvement: (i) the process of diagnosis and knowledge-building on gender in BRAC;

and (ii) the process of building a shared vision for change and transferring ownership. These are preliminary to designing elements of an action-learning process to explore quality issues through gender and testing the relevance and replicability of learning's across BRAC. This type of intervention is being planned for implementation during 1995.

4.1 Knowledge building: the needs assessment process and findings
Diagnosis for organizational change is a collaborative attempt to aid a system to understand itself in its own terms that uses social science techniques and pays deep attention to the client's perception of what needs to change and how. Working with gender complicates the process because we are not simply responding but we are teaching and learning as well. In this work we draw on a specialized field of knowledge and experience as well as creating new knowledge through the process of collective engagement in conceptualization and implementation.

In the spring of 1994, the Team conducted a series of consultations and 23 needs assessment workshops with 400 BRAC staff at all levels, from part-time teachers to senior managers, across the three programmes – Rural Development, Non-formal Primary Education, and Women's Health and Development. The purpose of this exercise was to provide valid and compelling data for gender-related strategic planning by managers, to provide an orientation to gender thinking to a cross section of BRAC staff, and to deepen the Team's own understanding of gender issues relevant to BRAC. Informing this exercise was our own work deconstructing theoretical formulations on women's empowerment and gender.

In July, the Team held a strategic planning meeting over two and a half days with all senior BRAC managers to systematically analyse the needs assessment data, develop a vision of what BRAC wants to accomplish in terms of women's empowerment and a strategy for accomplishing that mission. The visioning and strategizing work continued as BRAC underwent its own internal strategic planning exercise for the fourth phase of its Rural Development Programme in August.

4.2 Diagnostic tools
Each two day needs assessment workshop addressed empowerment issues related to programmes on the

first day, and gender issues related to organizational life on the second. In addition, we administered a staff attitude survey on the gender dimensions of BRAC's programme and organizational processes.

4.2.1 Staff Attitude Survey
The staff attitude survey was administered as part of the gender consultations and needs assessment exercises conducted by BRAC's Gender Training Team over the period March to May 1994. It consists of 22 questions divided into two sections aimed at gauging staff attitudes and values regarding gender dimensions of BRAC's programme and organizational processes.

4.2.2 Empowerment: Conceptual Clarity to Field-level Application
The first two exercises aimed at assessing: (i) the quality of BRAC staff's conceptual understanding of women's empowerment issues, (ii) how and to what extent staff apply these concepts to field level situations, (iii) staff's ideas on how BRAC should change or improve its programme in order to further the empowerment of women, and (iv) what kinds of support staff need to implement these changes. The first exercise, Gender Analysis, required participants to articulate key differences between poor women and men in rural Bangladesh along the three major dimensions of empowerment: access to and control over income and resources; knowledge of and the ability to negotiate for one's rights; and control over one's own body and security of movement. Then, participants were asked to probe the reasons for these differences and to suggest what should be done to make the situation more gender equitable.

The second exercise required participants to analyse the key empowerment dimensions through case studies. A total of six cases were developed by the Gender Training Team for use in this exercise. The first three cases focus on the three empowerment dimensions mentioned above; the last three focus each on health, education and income generating skills.

4.2.3 Inside BRAC: Conditions and Relationships
Three exercises were developed to assess internal organizational issues. The first encouraged participants to write individually and anonymously positive as well as problematic aspects of working in BRAC. The 'problems' were later redistributed to the group which categorized them by type of problem (living conditions, working conditions, relationships with supervisors, colleagues and Village Organization (VO) members, and career development), chose the most important, and discussed what could be done to deal with these. In the second exercise participants were given two cases for discussion, both of which focused on intra-organizational gender dynamics. One case illustrates women's lack of voice and the other, norms of purity and appropriate behaviour for women. (The cases were based on taped interviews of staff from BRAC and the Bangladesh government poverty alleviation programme RD12, conducted by Anne Marie Goetz and Rina Sen Gupta in the course of their study on Women's Leadership in Bangladesh carried out in 1993.)

The third exercise, asked participants to pictorially and verbally describe their preferred organizational shape for the future based on their conceptions of appropriate gender roles and appropriate organizational responses in support of these.

4.4 Findings
The findings of the needs assessment exercise fall into three broad areas: staff attitudes about women's empowerment and female staff, gender analysis and programming, and gender and organizational issues.

4.4.1 Staff Attitudes
Staff, both male and female, at all levels and programmes, believe BRAC should pursue women's empowerment and change men's attitudes and values as a prerequisite to accomplishing this goal. Beyond this however, there are uncertainties and disagreements on programming strategies, particularly in the areas of women's mobility, intra-household decision making and conflict, and ensuring freedom from violence. The majority of staff also believe that women should be promoted up the management ladder because they can do the job and do it well. But there is a good deal of disagreement over questions of reconciling women's family and work responsibilities, special provisions and an accelerated career path for women. Gender relations in the workplace are often not smooth and women face varying levels of teasing and/or harassment. Thus, while conditions have improved for women in the last few years, a great deal is left to be done.

4.4.2 Empowerment

Three issues stand out regarding BRAC staff's conceptual understanding of gender issues and application of this understanding to programmatic situations. First, staff's intuitive understanding of gender differences does not translate often into creative strategic solutions for dealing with the core issues of empowerment. Instead, proposed strategies and solutions either tend to reflect system imperatives of achieving targets, a process through which empowerment goals can be sacrificed in the name of efficiency, or standard supply side responses to problem symptoms. Second, while conflict inheres in common conceptualizations of empowerment, staff lean toward searching for harmonious solutions to problems of women's subordination in the family and community rather than confrontation. In the Bangladesh cultural and political context this is instructive and strategic and at the same time worrisome because it leaves the power imbalance and gender ideology intact. And third, BRAC staff place inordinate emphasis on, and have enormous faith in, the ability to change behaviours and values through training. To this extent, they discount (and therefore inadequately address) the tremendous impact of forces external to the individual (family, kinship, factions, cultural norms, gender ideology etc.) in shaping individual behaviours.

4.4.3 Inside BRAC

Put together, staff responses paint a complex picture. BRAC is an organization in transition from a collective to a corporation pursuing empowerment goals in a volatile socioeconomic and political environment. Externally, it is grappling with an enormous expansion in area coverage and an increasing complexity and technical sophistication in programme content. Internally, organizational complexity is enhanced by a series of features: a race for target achievement that leaves experienced supervisors with little time to nurture and guide newer entrants; newcomers fresh out of the universities who are moving up the corporate ladder and are being handed programme responsibility quickly; a management style geared toward target achievement which militates against the search for lasting solutions to difficult problems of women's subordination and gender equitable change on the ground; an organizational environment in which opportunities for open discussion on personal and professional issues are becoming scarce; a brewing conflict between traditional patriarchal norms and behaviours and a nascent culture of gender equity

supported at the very highest levels of policy making within the organization; a need to forge ways of working between men and women in an organization that espouses countercultural values but among people who do not necessarily believe in them; and a fatigue among long-standing cadres to the front-line fight and a desire for work-family balance among men and women alike.

4.5 Strategic issues

How do BRAC's dual goals of poverty alleviation and empowerment of women play out on the ground? The evidence suggests that participation in BRAC's programmes has strengthened women's economic roles and to some extent, increased women's empowerment measured in terms of mobility, economic security, legal awareness, decision making and freedom from and violence within the family (see for example Schuler and Hashemi 1994). However, widely acknowledged among BRAC staff is the fact that the imperatives of credit delivery are eclipsing the objectives of social change.

Moreover, the complexity intensifies the closer you look. A recent study examining women's high demand for credit and access to loans in Bangladesh found that in close to one-third of cases, BRAC women members have little or no control over their loans (Goetz and Sen Gupta 1994). By excluding, for the most part, men from credit access, is BRAC merely setting women up as conduits for credit to men and if so at what cost? What does BRAC do with the knowledge that many of the loans given to women are hijacked by men? Can it enter the conflictual household arena through programme interventions and re-emerge relatively unscathed having achieved useful outcomes? What other responses are possible? BRAC now believes that working with men to bring about changes in the perceptions and valuations of women is essential and that men should be included in small numbers in the female village organizations. This may help to counter opposition to BRAC from husbands and village élites, as men will be able to present BRAC in village fora from which women are excluded, but it opens up a host of complications for building women's self-reliance and solidarity as well. How can BRAC work to build women's capacity to pursue their strategic interests including security, and freedom from violence – issues which a majority of staff believe BRAC should focus on. How can BRAC re-focus its institutional development work to build the organizational effectiveness

and public bargaining strength of women?

Has BRAC as an organization come to terms with its corporate nature? For the most part, its systems and standard operating procedures, including level of autonomy for decision making among staff, are ones that worked well when the organization was a fraction of its current size and during a different era of the organization's history. These very systems and procedures are straining now with negative consequences for work quality and staff morale. BRAC's human resource function for example, is atomized among different line functions and is perceived by staff to be an arcane process in which they have no voice. Moreover, the current breed of recruits come to the organization with a different set of motivations from those that shaped it in its early years. Livelihood issues predominate over ideology creating new demands from staff on working conditions and career development issues. The changing gender mix within the organization is also throwing up new challenges to standard practices and cultural norms.

Must women become men to succeed? Over the course of the last two years, BRAC has made a series of special arrangements to accommodate women staff's needs (such as giving them the option to work at their desks rather than do field work during menstruation). While the organization is attempting to accommodate women's needs, it is doing so in an incremental fashion essentially leaving intact the dominant organizational culture, space, and ways of working which are themselves gendered. Thus, women in effect have to fit into a system that was made to fit men. In the Bangladesh cultural context it is easy and acceptable for men to carry out field work at night, ride bicycles and motorbikes, and live singly in villages; for women it is not. Women face harassment from villagers and from their own male colleagues. If they protest, they are blamed as weak and inefficient, with the strong implication that they are themselves responsible for behaviours which are forced on women by patriarchal norms that sort out what is appropriate and what is not, and for their own vulnerability to physical violence. Thus, most women are faced with the difficult choice of conforming to counter-cultural values without the support of their male colleagues within a system that espouses them but in effect practices the opposite. Those who have fought their way up the system have proven they are as good as any man but are their struggles

organizational requirements? Must women become men to succeed? Most male BRAC staff say that is not the case but many women contest that.

4.5.1 Ownership, Visioning and Negotiating Next Steps

Coming up with a series of issues is one thing; what an organization chooses to do with them is quite another. Although the findings of the needs assessment were not unknown to BRAC senior managers, coming together the way they did caught them off guard. Reactions ranged from shock and denial to quiet contemplation and thoughtful attempts at distilling implications for BRAC and its work. The meeting did not result in any common visioning or conclusion about next steps.

But BRAC has moved quickly from its initial response to serious grappling with the issues. In a second round of internal meetings chaired by the Executive Director to plan the organization's strategy for the next five years, the gender needs assessment findings were once again discussed. The strategy document summarizing those discussions states the organization's commitment *inter alia* to 'deepening existing programmes, with greater responsiveness to target group needs and expectations', and improving 'the internal organizational culture' – issues raised as well by the gender needs assessment.

When after a hiatus of two months the team leader went around to each senior manager to ask what they thought and how they felt about the work of the Gender team, they gave three messages: first, that the team had done a useful task in putting important issues on the table; second, that BRAC as a whole and specific programmes in particular are committed to addressing specific aspects of these issues; and third, that most of the second tier of management had internalized these issues and articulated them as their own. During a second round of one-on-one's, it became clear that while senior managers remained interested in the issues, they were uncertain about what exactly gender meant to organizational development in concrete terms including areas of overlap and distinctions. They were also uncertain about what an intervention aimed at creating organizational spaces for learning through doing on issues of gender, programme quality, and organizational change would look like, and what resources it would require at what cost. These are legitimate questions to which these are

no easy answers. In the next phase of our work, the team plans to organize a series of work sessions with senior managers to collectively address these questions and come to agreement on an intervention design. Part of what we shall have to learn is that while we have a conceptual basis for starting, BRAC-specific solutions will emerge from the intervention process itself rather than precede it.

5 DILEMMAS AND CAUTIONS

5.1 Expanding parameters versus boundary maintenance

Expanding parameters in this case means three things. First, it means expanding an understanding of gender as a synonym for women and referring to women's specific needs within the organization (such as separate living facilities and arrangements for desk rather than field work during pregnancy) to gender as referring to the social construction of what is male and what is female, as a way of signifying power relations and organizations as gendered spaces. Second, it is related to broadening understanding on how individuals learn – by exposure to relevant concepts and tools, applying them in one's work setting, and reflecting on problems and outcomes in an iterative fashion – rather than classroom learning alone. Third, it means understanding that the application of concepts and tools leading to new ways of working will become institutionalized only when they are supported by a range of other policy, institutional, and advocacy interventions, aimed at bringing about organizational change. Pursued alone their effect will remain limited. BRAC needs both committed individuals and a strategy for change; when the two come together change takes place. At the same time however, three other related processes also have to occur – making these concepts real to BRAC and its programme processes, drawing boundaries around gender work in BRAC so that it retains meaning and is not subsumed for example under 'management', and delimiting the scope of the intervention to what is manageable within a specific period of time and to one that will show results. These two sets of processes pull in opposite directions and managing them centres on conceptualizing and concretizing the boundary areas.

5.2 Innovation versus institutional bargaining

Organizational theory suggests that innovation requires influence but that institutional bargaining requires contractual rather than confrontational terms. In the BRAC case this plays out in two ways. First, the Team's credibility built as it is on its own merit and through support from the Executive Director strengthens its potential to innovate. But bringing senior managers on board involves not only discussions/clarifications/and one-on-ones, but in a hierarchical organization like BRAC in which the Executive Director has an extensive hand in setting policy directions, it also requires clear signals from the very top that this programme deserves attention. This poses a dilemma because it reinforces a models of organizational behaviour which is at odds with our conception of individual and systemic learning for organizational change. This irony is not lost on a number of senior managers who nevertheless believe that it is one we have to live with especially in the start-up phase of the programme. The second way in which this dilemma plays out is that because gender relations as constructed within society, and mirrored to a greater or lesser extent within the organization, are to men's advantage, the institutional learning process which we are promoting requires men to collaborate in a process aimed at dismantling their privilege. We believe however, that this does not explain the whole picture, because men's gender roles stereotype them as well in some ways which are disadvantageous to them. Getting both men and women beyond this may point to directions for different ways of conceiving and structuring power in ways that takes in differences. But developing processes and attitudes that deal with men's jealousy without alienating either women or men, and bringing both into a learning process, is a constant challenge.

5.3 Change options versus change realities

The third fundamental dilemma in the work on quality improvement in the BRAC context which we face is distinguishing what is theoretically desirable (e.g. pushing the boundaries of women's empowerment) and what is programmatically possible at what costs and with what effect in a sociopolitical environment wherein demand for changing gender relations is weak, fundamentalist forces are increasingly dominant, and where existing structural realities ensure that the process of women's empowerment is both non-additive and non-linear. What to do about the dilemma of women's lack of control over BRAC loans is a case in point. Given that entering the household into the arena of power relations drawn on lines of gender and age is a path fraught with pitfalls, does BRAC leave well

enough alone? If it can work for change in a small handful of households, can it replicate small-scale change experiments across all areas without losing the quality? And how does BRAC support people's struggles over resources and ways of thinking *vis-à-vis* larger and more powerful groupings in the community? How does an organization like BRAC sort out what it wants to keep in itself from what it wants to change? Some things are clear: BRAC can deliver credit and a range of social services. But are deeper qualitative approaches feasible, at what cost and with what effect? Answers to these issues are possible only by creating organizational learning spaces for creating and testing innovations. That is the proposal of the Gender team for the next phase of work.

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