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## **Demanding Values**

### **Participation, empowerment, and NGOs in Bangladesh**

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DEMANDING VALUES



Malin Arvidson

# Demanding Values

*Participation, empowerment, and NGOs in Bangladesh*



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January 2003

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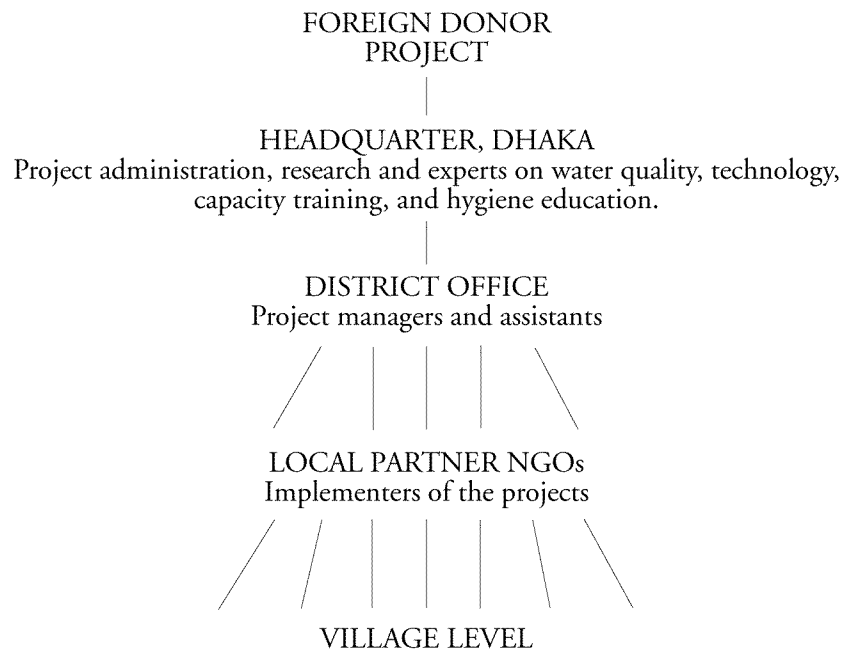
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### **Geographical location of the study**

*Geographically the study has been located to two different areas of Bangladesh: Comilla in the south-east, and Rajshahi in the north-west (see circles on the map: Comilla southeast, Rajshahi northwest, and Nachole north of Rajshahi). The two areas are of rather different character. Comilla is prosperous with three crops a year. Most villages included in the study are easily accessible from Comilla (up to one hour by bus on tarred roads). Nachole, the town in the district of Rajshahi where the other part of the study was conducted, is located in an area of dry plains, with yearly problems with droughts. Most of the villages included in the study are in remote areas, isolated from the busy markets of Nachole and the university town Rajshahi, with dusty roads allowing only rickshaw or oxen to travel.*

*Approximately 85 interviews have been conducted: 45 interviews with villagers, 20 with local NGO staff, and the additional interviews have been made with administrative staff within the projects, and a few with distant stakeholders (government officials, doctors) of the projects. The field work has apart from interviews consisted in systematic observation while in the villages and with the NGOs, participant observation during VDC-meetings, training of villagers by NGO staff, informal meetings between staff and villagers, meetings between government officials and NGO staff, village rallies, training of NGO staff, and monitoring and evaluation meetings with local staff and project administrators.*

***Actors in the water supply and sanitation projects***



*The projects studied are financed by foreign donors, who are also involved with project design, and the continuing processes of planning, monitoring and evaluation. From the headquarter-level and down all staff are Bangladeshi. The staff working at village level come from local NGOs. Some of them are engaged solely for the water supply and sanitation projects, others are involved in several donor- or government-funded projects. The local staff are supported by the project district office who provide technical support (for tubewells, latrines, and arsenic mitigation) and advice on community involvement. The villages are engaged in the project during 2-3 three years.*

**PART I**

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## CHAPTER I

# Topic, approach and outline of the thesis

The initial aim of the research project has been to critically look into theoretical and practical aspects of the concepts of participation. The thesis also pursues a discussion concerning the characteristics of the development literature encountered, i.e. related to participation, empowerment and development NGOs. Furthermore, based on conclusions drawn from empirical material and literature studies of participation and empowerment as used in development projects, a particular focus on the local NGO staff implementing the projects has come to take up a central part of the analysis presented. The questions related to this key group in development projects concern staff motivation and performance, in the particular context of normatively oriented organisations, working with goals and strategies with strong normative characteristics.

## Introduction

In 1996 I was invited for a two-week visit to Dhaka, Bangladesh, together with two economists. The aim of the visit was to gather data on the water supply and sanitation (WSS) sector in the country, and, for my part, to look into what sociological aspects would be of interest to study further. The initial impression when looking into this sector is that it is mainly focused on technology – for appropriate tubewells and sanitary latrines – and health – to improve people's health standard through giving them knowledge and a possibility to practice better hygiene behaviour. However, the sector has been going through strategic changes in accordance with development policies in third world countries in general. These changes have involved a move from focus on improved technology as the main means to achieve development, to a focus on what is called human and social capital. The changes entail an increased focus on grassroots level involvement in donor assisted development projects, with villagers and local development partners (Non-Governmental Organisations, NGOs) as new and important actors. In the language of development theories and policy, this is more known as people's participation and empowerment strategies. While the water supply and sanitation sector necessarily involve technological development, the



sector is now also focused on improving community involvement through various participatory and empowerment strategies. From a sociological point of view, this opens up for an important field of study.

Based on this, the aim of my research project crystallised as follows: to critically analyse historical, ideological, theoretical and practical aspects of participation and empowerment strategies in development projects. The practical aspects have implied extensive fieldwork in Bangladesh. During nine months two water supply and sanitation projects using participatory and empowerment strategies have been followed, including interviews and participant observations at village, implementing and administrative levels. Although the theme of water supply and sanitation as such has been set aside to some extent, it does play an important role. In the two projects studied, the entering point for activities at village level has been problems related to water and sanitation. The participatory and empowerment strategies are therefore given an extra dimension, since they are used both with a very specific intent – to reach increased access to hardware (tubewells and sanitary latrines) and to change hygiene behaviour – and with a broad interpretation – to change social structures and attitudes.

The aim of the research project declared here indicates a clear focus of the study, but it also leaves room for considerable flexibility during the research process. While keeping this focus throughout the study, the research project has also come to include empirical and theoretical issues I did not consider from the beginning. The outline below constitutes the starting point of the project, describing the context concerning water supply and sanitation in Bangladesh. It also gives a short introduction into the subject of participatory strategies as used in development projects.

### **The setting – Bangladesh**

Bangladesh, being one of the least developed countries in the world, and the world's most densely populated country is facing challenges within many areas (Robinson, 1999). The water and sanitation area has been one area of great concern for several decades. Water and sanitation-associated disease is the major cause of mortality and morbidity in the country, due to lack of access to clean water, to sanitary latrines, and to inappropriate hygiene practice. Clean water plays a crucial role for the social, economic and health standards among the population. Improved access to clean water, combined with improvement of sanitary facilities, is seen as the key to ameliorate living standards in general, leading to enhanced health and economy for the individual family as well as for the country at large.

Access to safe drinking water increased from 37% to more than 96% in rural Bangladesh during the International Decade for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation<sup>1</sup> (Hoque, Ahmed, Munshi, & Hussain, 1995). Further statistics show that 16%

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers are fluctuating though. Due to cyclones and floods, or mismanagement, tubewells are put out of use. The recent discovery of arsenic contamination in tubewells has also affected the numbers of tubewells that provide safe drinking water. Hence, these numbers should be read with some caution.

of the households use tubewell water for drinking and other domestic purposes, as opposed to water from open sources (dug well, rivers, ponds). Improvements have also been achieved within sanitation, with 26% now having close access to sanitary latrines as opposed to open pit latrines or the field (Hoque et al., 1995). However, despite improvements of coverage of facilities such as tubewells and sanitary latrines this has not lead to concomitantly improved health. One clear indicator of this is the fact that water-related diseases remain the major problem. Literature on WSS-projects in Bangladesh reveals that improved technology in the sense of making clean water and sanitary facilities available, is not enough to reach the sought for health effects. Neither is it only a question of transferring knowledge and information of e.g. hygiene, sanitation, water and health (Aziz & Islam, 1991). In addition to this, experience shows that installed hardware has failed in sustainability, which means that coverage fluctuates from one year to the other and figures showing numbers of implemented hardware must be balanced with figures of hardware being put out of use. Due to natural disasters such as flooding and cyclones, which affect the country on a yearly basis, tubewells and latrines are being destroyed. Extensive use of the hardware also demands maintenance, a responsibility that needs to be assigned to the users. Knowledge concerning hygiene behaviour, preventive health and use and maintenance of technology needs to be incorporated in village daily life and habits, a realisation which has put new demands on work in the WSS sector. After more than a decade of experience and intensive work, it is clear that one of the reasons for failures with sustainability and health impacts is a neglect of involving the local community in planning, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of programmes.

### **The role of community participation in WSS-projects**

WSS-projects obviously demand involvement from the community's inhabitants to create confidence in the new material assets as well as in new knowledge. A review of literature on WSS-projects in Bangladesh shows that many projects have failed to understand and to involve the community inhabitants. Evaluations of projects point out that communication with households, participation in water-committees, involvement of women and training in use and maintenance of technicalities have been remarkably poor (Aziz & Islam, 1991; Bhuiyan, 1995; Hoque et al., 1995). In 1994 the Government of Bangladesh, in co-operation with other organisations, launched a programme called 'Social Mobilization for Sanitation' – SOC-MOB. The purpose of the programme was specifically to increase community involvement in both planning and implementation of WSS-projects, and to strengthen communication and training of staff (Hoque et al., 1995). But despite this emphasis an evaluation of the programme shows that contact and communication at household level throughout was very poor. Having identified a missing ingredient in previous programmes did not imply clear directions of how to proceed.

In many ways, WSS-programmes in Bangladesh display the effects of neglecting the role of community participation, as well as the difficulties in successfully opera-

tionalising the concept. A direct communication with villagers invites diverging interests and ideas, which is a new situation to handle for staff that have previously been mainly occupied with technical matters. From programmes within other sectors the inclusion of participatory strategies also revealed prevailing negative attitudes towards people at grassroots level among decision makers, administrators and implementers (Bhuiyan, 1995). Comments such as “involvement of so many agencies and local people, can only multiply problems and develop confusion”, are frequent in a report evaluating community participation in forestry projects in Bangladesh (Bhuiyan, 1995). A connection has also been established between the success or failure of participatory strategies and the socio-political context in which they are being planned and implemented (Aziz & Islam, 1991; Bhuiyan, 1995). This refers both to the socio-political context of the community and to the socio-political relation between the local and national level, the state and civil society, or the privileged social groups and the weak and excluded (Mikkelsen, 1995). In short, participatory processes may be challenging existing power structures. The processes risk being captured by powerful people with an interest to steer planning and decision-making according to their benefits, and participation risks causing severe conflicts due to differences in interests.

Despite the fact that in Bangladesh there has been a connection established between diseases and the cultural context of a community, scientists have paid little attention to this. As pointed out by other authors on the issue of participation in general, participation entails not only efforts from the community to accept new knowledge, but also, and perhaps most importantly, efforts by the programme implementers to find out about socio-cultural norms on e.g. the management of disease at the community level (Cernea, 1985; Midgley, 1986; Mikkelsen, 1995). Yunus et. al. (1994) writes in a report from Matlab in Bangladesh, that research has been much focused on identifying health risk factors. However, there has been relatively few studies looking into local knowledge of perceptions of illness and its management and knowledge and practice of sanitation and hygiene, which is crucial in order to adapt scientific knowledge to everyday rural situations. There has further on been too little focus on an understanding of social group formations and processes of decision-making, which is of great importance in order to find appropriate ways of arranging participatory activities. Aziz et.al. and Lissit emphasise the need for more research since the research conducted so far shows analytical and methodological imperfectness, and most literature concentrates on descriptions of projects instead of making attempts at developing analyses of effectiveness of community participation (Aziz & Islam, 1991; Lissit, 1993).

### **A brief background of participation in development**

Based on different motivations various concepts which entail people's participation has played important roles within development studies and policymaking. Examples of these concepts are community development, social mobilisation, popular, com-

munity and stakeholder participation, and participatory rural appraisal (1971). At first, these concepts may appear to be neutral and possible to accept by all parts involved in development projects. By grounding the arguments for a change in strategies on previous experience, it seems to make perfect sense to add a participatory dimension in order to improve impact of development endeavours. However, cultural, political and ideological aspects play important roles when interpreting and working with these concepts (Midgley, 1986; Mikkelsen, 1995).

In many ways, recognition of the importance of involvement of the community in projects is established among decision makers and researchers (Aziz & Islam, 1991). However, donor agencies are often accused of using the participatory technique mainly as a means of mediating knowledge in a top-down direction (Wignaraja, 1991). Initially, there has also been critique concerning a lack of specification of the meaning of the concepts and a lack in analyses highlighting practical aspects of the community participation-theme (Midgley, 1986). Since the 1980s though, there has been a continuously growing quantity of literature dealing with detailed definitions of participation, empowerment and adjacent concepts, building on experience throughout the development world. The literature does however contain restrictions. To a great extent the concept of participation has been treated as an abstract ideal, ignoring the fact that differing ideological beliefs, political forces and administrative arrangements may cause problems to realise the ideal. The concept also holds romantic or naïve assumptions that people will be willing to participate, and that giving the opportunity to do so, participation will be democratic, with a likewise democratic sharing of the benefits of development projects (Midgley, 1986). There has been a change though from seeing the community (as in community participation) as a collective and homogenous group of beneficiaries towards recognising important differences determined by power, religion, gender and age (Cernea, 1985; Mikkelsen, 1995).

The overriding goal of participation, as the word in itself tells, aims at involving people in issues that affect their daily lives and well being (Midgley, 1986). However, participation can be promoted through different strategies. While on the one hand we find strategies that aim at increasing people's *receptivity and ability to respond* to development projects, the strategy may also aim at capacity building leading to *empowerment* in order to make people take charge of processes of social change.

There is an ideological difference between those two interpretations. In the former strategy, we can detect an interpretation, which puts the development project in focus. In practice this means that stating a participatory approach does not eliminate the use of a top-down approach. It perceives participatory technique as a tool. Mikkelsen writes that it is used as a "management strategy through which the state attempts to mobilise local resources" (Mikkelsen, 1995:63). It does not only relate to the state as the main actor, but also to development agencies seeing participation as a tool, a means, to reach more cost-efficient, sustainable project outcomes.

Defining participation as a process on the other hand, implies an interpretation of participation as an *end* in itself. It emphasises empowerment as the aim of participation, interpreting the strategy as a way of achieving social mobilisation towards a so-

ciety with social justice, equity and democracy. This focus aims at an alternative development, defined by local people, local movements and organisations, as opposed to the former which is based on a state-building, top-down approach (Mikkelsen, 1995).

To use the tools-interpretation as a starting point has implications for how project failures are interpreted. Often, mistakes are being put down to technical, educational, or administrative insufficiencies, which can be remedied by improved management, and training. Using the end-interpretation though would point at rather different causes for failure. Problems would be viewed as an indication of social conflicts, which in turn would be calling for the removal of the anti-participatory social structures, implying a political reform or even revolutionary changes in society (Mikkelsen, 1995). It is important to bear in mind though that while these ideological differences may be clear when elaborated on in text, the differences are often blurred in reality, with seemingly opposing interpretations coinciding within one and the same project.

As we can see concepts can have political implications. Seeing participation as a tool could imply that it is used as a manipulative instrument by powerful decision-makers. By referring to people's participation governments and development projects gain recognition as being democratic, while in reality the nature of participation is strictly determined and may involve moving responsibility from government/donors to the grassroots level. Participation aiming at empowerment also has clear consequences from a political point of view since the boundaries of the foreseen implications of participation stretch far beyond that of the community or a project. The relationship between communities and the state has aspects of political nature where the question of democracy can influence the way states engage in participatory issues. Midgley illustrates this through four types of state response to community participation: the anti-participatory mode, with attempts to suppress community participation, the participatory mode, the manipulative mode, using community participation for hidden personal motives, and the incremental mode of reaction, i.e. simply failing to support the idea of community participation in practice (Midgley, 1986:147).

### **Outline of the field study**

The practical aspects of participation and empowerment strategies have been explored through two WSS-projects in Bangladesh (one funded by Danida, Denmark, one by Swiss Development Corporation). The two different interpretations of participation – i.e. defining participation as a tool or as an end – are both found in the projects. Participation is used as a tool, to create a demand from people who will then be willing to buy tubewells and sanitary latrines. This aspect of participation will both ascertain for cost-efficiency and improved sustainability. Participation is also used with an aim to empower villagers. The topic of water and sanitation is used as

an entry point, but the impact of participation is envisaged to reach far beyond this particular topic.

The two projects have been selected since they both have explicit although somewhat different participatory and empowerment strategies. The reason for using two projects has not been to make a comparative study to find out which strategy, which activities, will vouch for success. Instead, the idea has been to reach an understanding of issues related to my research questions through exploring two projects that appear very similar regarding rhetoric, but hold differences in project organisation and strategy.

Geographically the study has been located to two different areas of Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>: Comilla in the south-east, and Rajshahi in the north-west. Comilla is situated only 2-3 hours from the country's capital city Dhaka. The region is rather prosperous, with three crops per year. Markets are filled with a variety of vegetables and fruit. Near Comilla the Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development (BARD) is situated, an action research institute which since long has been operating in the area. Hence, villagers here are rather well acquainted with development intervention and visitors from outside. The villages included in the study in this area are situated 1-2 hours away from BARD and Comilla. The local NGOs included in the study are located in Comilla, or within reasonable communicating distance on tarred roads, from town.

The area around Rajshahi, located 8 hours by bus, or 1 hour by plane from Dhaka, has distinctively different characteristics from Comilla. The area is dry, with high plains, and considered to be much poorer compared to Comilla. With only two crops a year, the markets offers only a limited variety of groceries compared to those of Comilla. The area around Nachole has furthermore been significantly different from Comilla, from the aspect of development interventions and activities including foreign donors and NGOs. The area of the village field study is located 1-2 hours drive away from the district capital Rajshahi, in Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj. The villages visited are scattered around Nachole, some rather remote and isolated due to poorly maintained and dusty roads that allow rickshaw but no cars.

The study has mainly focused on two levels: village and implementing level. Occasional interviews have also been made with people at district and headquarter or administrative levels. All these levels include important actors to the project: villagers are both the target of the project, and participants in implementing the project. The implementing level refers to people working in local NGOs, who are important partners in development projects. Their geographical and personal links to the grassroots level are seen as reassurance that the project reaches and responds to the grassroots level it is aimed for, which is particularly emphasised in projects with a participatory approach. Finally, administrative and initiating level concern both foreign donors and the Bangladeshi staff working with planning, administrating and evaluating the projects.

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2 see map of Bangladesh on p. 10.

The empirical work has been conducted over a three year period (1998-2001), divided into three sessions. All in all, nine months have been spent in the field, with a majority of the time at village and community level (six months). Starting with a focus on village level, I stayed in two villages during the first three months. Both villages were involved in the activities of either of the WSS-projects. Since the underlying assumption of both projects is that there are considerable problems related to WSS in rural Bangladesh, the first aim was to investigate these issues at village level. Based on a rough acquaintance with the villages, I selected a few families, geographically spread as well as with slightly different socio-economic backgrounds (from farmers and landowners, to families leasing land, working as agricultural labourers or engaged in other labour markets, and families engaged in businesses other than agriculture). Interviews and discussions were held with these families (predominantly the women), with focus on what role water and health issues play in the families' daily life. The meetings with these families gradually grew to include neighbours, and people sharing tubewells or using the same water sources (dams, rivers) for household chores. Staying in the villages during these three months opened up for important opportunities to take part in village daily life. Through gaining personal experience of handling water for household chores, and through being able to observe people's behaviour, I could question and deepen an initial and rather superficial understanding gained through the first interviews. I could continue discussions and interviews from one day to the other, gaining more understanding of the meaning of water, sanitation and health, and other issues of importance to villagers in their daily lives.

The study gradually moved to focus on the WSS-projects. This focus was introduced during the three months in the two villages, and villagers and project implementers (local NGO staff) were interviewed parallel to each other, with an aim to grasp their respective perceptions and interpretations of goals and working procedures of the projects. The focus on the WSS-projects comprised of interviews with local NGO staff and participant observation of staff activities with villagers. Predominantly three groups of staff have been followed, with complementary interviews including further groups, from other local NGOs.

With focus on the NGO staff the study gradually came to incorporate more villages (all in all 13), following the staff during their work, and also taking the opportunity of interviewing members of the so called Village Development Committees set up by the projects. After the initial three months in the two villages, I stayed at what could be called community level (outside Comilla, and in Nachole). From there I travelled every day to different villages, following the NGO staff and interviewing villagers.

During the last field visit, the study focused predominantly on the local NGO directors. Altogether twelve directors were interviewed, all NGOs contracted for the WSS-projects, equally divided between the two projects. The aim of these interviews have been to capture visions and values of the NGOs, and the experience and views the directors had on the working situation of NGOs, relations to villagers, donors,

government staff and other stakeholders which affect their work. Only to a limited extent did the interviews deal with the particular work with the WSS-projects.

Throughout the study, interviews and discussions were held intermittently with staff at administrative levels. At this level, discussions were focused on descriptions of underlying motives for the formulated strategies, expectations about outcomes, explicit and implicit prerequisites for reaching success, and organisational aspects concerning the projects.

### **Character of the field material and methodological concerns**

The empirical material consist of interviews, notes recorded based on observations and informal discussions, and written material provided by the two projects<sup>3</sup>. Approximately 85 interviews have been conducted during the length of nine months. Out of this 45 interviews have been made with villagers, 20 with local NGO staff, and the additional interviews have been made with administrative staff within the projects, and a few with distant stakeholders (government officials, doctors) of the projects. All interviews have been semi-structured, i.e. providing themes presented by way of questions to the interviewees, but allowing for unexpected topics to be introduced in the discussion too. Although the interviews provide an important source of information, a crucial component of the material consists of systematic observation among both villagers and local NGO staff. Insights and experience gained during these observations have enriched the study. A deeper understanding on my behalf of both village life, and the work of NGOs, has provided a significant background from which to develop questions used during interviews and discussions. The field work has also, apart from the interviews and systematic observation, consisted of participant observation during VDC-meetings, training of villagers by NGO staff, informal meetings between staff and villagers, meetings between government officials and NGO staff, village rallies, training of NGO staff, and monitoring and evaluation meetings with local staff and project administrators.

As a complete outsider to the Bangladeshi society and culture the fieldwork naturally involved some cultural clashes. The main obstacles consisted of language barriers. Throughout the work I have used interpreters, who have also lived together with me and supplied me not only with interpretation during interviews, but also with invaluable explanations of habits and traditions unfamiliar to me. The language barrier nevertheless means clear restrictions when it comes to interpreting perceptions. It is difficult to guarantee that the interpreter has the same understanding as I do for what I aim at grasping through interviews and discussions apart from straightforward answers. There are subtleties in expressions, choice of words, and ways of interpreting questions that either cannot be transferred through translations, or needs a very de-

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3 In the presentation, all material has been anonymised. This is not due to requirements from the people involved in the study. The author has nevertheless decided to anonymise the material, in order to avoid a comparison between the two projects, or between local NGOs. A list of interviewees, NGOs, locations and written reports is kept by the author.



tailed understanding of language, methodological approach, and of the aim of the research project. My understanding can take very different directions depending on a simple but crucial word. One example of this is shown through a very particular way of using the English language in Bangladesh. Asking implementers and project planners about the participatory approach, I was often told (through the interpreter or sometimes directly from the interviewee) that “Participation, that means working with the people. That is too hard”. I took this comment as a dismissal of the whole participatory idea, and was rather astonished by this frankness from people who market themselves as essential actors in order to make participatory projects work. The meaning of ‘too hard’ was however of course not what I initially thought, but Bangla-English for ‘very hard’. During the days that passed before I realised this, analyses had taken certain directions, transformed into new questions asked in interviews, and made me draw conclusions about the implementing staff that turned out to be quite incorrect.

While I do acknowledge that these restrictions are present, I would also emphasise other aspects of the study that have hopefully remedied significant misunderstandings. Using a tape recorder gave us the opportunity to go through the interviews word by word during the evenings. This did not only give more justice to the richness of the information that came with the interview. It also gave the interpreter the opportunity to understand more and more about the research approach, making her more independent in asking follow-up questions. Furthermore, during the initial three months spent at village level, I shared more than just the odd hours for interviews with villagers. Discussions continued over time which meant that ambiguities that appeared due to difficulties with the language or poorly posed questions could, at least to some extent, be settled. Likewise, I spent an extensive amount of time with two groups of implementing staff, following them during their daily work. Gradually the relationship with the staff became relaxed, and initial doubts about my actual intentions seemed to fade.

The fact that I came back once a year over a three-year period to the same places, talking to the same people, was also important. Again, this gave me opportunities to clarify and follow up issues that seemed unclear while analysing previous material. More importantly, it added a time-perspective to the narratives of the projects from both villagers and implementers. Attitudes and perceptions changed, sometimes in directions I had not been able to foresee based on a single visit.

The character of the field work has been explorative, i.e. new questions have been added along the way. From this perspective, dividing the fieldwork into three sessions had further advantages. The breaks from the field work gave opportunities to reflect both on the information gathered, and to expand my initial theoretical reflections concerning participation and empowerment. This has been essential for the way the study has developed. But while an explorative approach towards the field study has its positive sides, it also provides problems, which in this study shows in the way the material has been presented. The initial part of the study had a clear direction. The focus on water and health in village life pointed at a distinct topic, and the introductory study of the projects could be guided by the WSS-project outlines. This part of

the study had also been well prepared through reviews of literature on the topics of water and sanitation and participation and empowerment. The empirical material related to water, sanitation and project activities, based on interviews with NGO staff and villagers, is presented through quotes and illustrating examples from the field, and the relationship between field material and the topics investigated is clear. However, new topics appeared during the study, i.e. the focus on NGO staff motivation and performance. While I found convincing indicators in the preliminary results of the study that this would be an important topic to pursue, the literature reviewed at that stage did not offer much by way of guidance as to how to approach these issues. Hence, the part of the study focusing on NGO staff was not conducted with the same preparations and clear directions as the initial part. As a result, the empirical material is of more suggestive character rather than clearly related to the topics raised in chapter 10. Despite this weakness in the material I have chosen to pursue a discussion of the motivation and performance of the local NGO staff, and of the meanings of visions and values of the local NGOs.

### **Sociology and analytical flexibility**

As is clear from the outline of the background for the research project, I have had an initial hypothesis from which to structure my fieldwork. In short this has been that the increasingly popular concepts participation and empowerment contain theoretical as well as practical dilemmas. The study did however present further dilemmas, linked to the character of development studies and the role of the researcher, that I find important to discuss.

The fieldwork contained temptations, and expectations, to solve practical problems since it involves close co-operation with actors within the projects. Also theoretically I have been faced with temptations to fall into the trap of argumenting for new solutions to development problems. There are both expectations that one should take normative, ideological, positions concerning which path to choose in order to reach development in third world countries, as well as expectations that the research should contribute with policy recommendations that are of practical use for the planning of future projects. While it is crucial to acknowledge and understand practical problems concerning how the strategies are being operationalised, one should be careful not to be caught with an assignment that aims at solving problems. Taking on the practical tasks of solving problems as identified by villagers, project staff, and development policy makers, the result would be a manual in how to plan and organise a development project in order to reach success. This is not quite what I see as the objective of this study.

Peter L. Berger, in 'Invitation to Sociology', emphasises that a sociologist, as opposed to e.g. a social worker, does not have a practical task (Berger, 1998). The sociologist's aim is not to conduct practical work in society, but to try to *understand* society. Berger points out that a 'sociological problem' is not necessarily something that others would call a problem. This might seem as very basic sociology. But while

it is indeed basic, it is still crucial and, I have found, sometimes hard to practice. Through constantly reminding myself of this 'sociological mission', I have tried to escape the predictability that a practical approach would have led to. From this point of view, I see the sociological approach as a way of avoiding predictability and allowing flexibility. Hence, following Berger's request – to look for the sociological questions – I have come across domains that were not included in the original outline of the research project.

Of the two main levels investigated in the field the implementing level has emerged as the core of my interest. This focus has developed equally based on analysis of the field material and the literature within development studies. Regarding the discussions of participation, empowerment and NGOs as partners in development, there appears to be a theoretical incoherence which I believe is linked to a bias towards a practical approach in analyses, as opposed to an academic approach. The arguments for this focus will be developed throughout the thesis.

### **Specified research focus and outline of the thesis**

As mentioned above, a striving to find a sociological approach and to pose sociological questions in relation to the material has come to guide this study. It is hence essential to give a thorough background of what my interpretation of a sociological approach entails. Chapter 2, called 'Sociological approach as methodology', develops the discussion concerning the posing of sociological questions, the role of the researcher, and the theoretical framework which, broadly interpreted, constitute the approach of this study.

In part 2 (chapters 3-5) of the thesis focus is put on the concepts of participation and empowerment. In the introductory chapter (3) I present a historical review, critique and debates that elaborate on problems and experiences related to the concepts as used in development projects that have appeared over time. Based on this, a presentation of the empirical material (chapter 4) illustrates how the concepts come alive in the two WSS-projects. The empirical presentation goes through perceptions given by villagers and implementing staff, demonstrating incoherence and contradictions that the participatory and empowerment strategies hold. Concluding part 2 of the thesis, chapter 5 elaborates on new perspectives that may enhance our understanding of the problems involved with realising these strategies.

The conclusion of part 2 puts forward arguments for the subsequent focus on local NGOs as partners in development projects of this type. The questions in focus for the remaining two parts will relate to the motivation and performance of local NGO staff, with part 3 focusing on the characteristics of the NGOs involved in the projects studied, and part 4 being dedicated to investigate theoretical perspectives on the relationship between organisational control and staff.

Part 3 of the thesis (chapters 6-8) – 'Visions and Values in the Work of NGOs' – begins with a presentation of empirical material gathered from interviews with twelve directors of partner NGOs, all contracted to work for either of the two WSS-

projects. The aim of part three is to elaborate on how we may understand the motivation and performance of NGOs. The presentation expands on issues concerning visions and values of the local NGOs, and on what possibilities or problems are being presented for the organisations to reach their goals. In chapter 7, the focus on local NGOs is expanded to include the context of Bangladesh as described in literature. Topics raised concern social, political and economic structures, the strong influence of foreign donors in Bangladesh, and how these issues are related to the work of NGOs. The chapter also reflects on discourses of analysis of the Bangladeshi society related to the role of NGOs in Bangladesh. Chapter 8 – ‘Placing descriptions in analytical frameworks’ elaborates on possible analytical frameworks that can be used to interpret what has been presented in chapters 6 and 7. The chapter introduces perspectives provided by theories of social movements, democracy and civil society, and theories of organisation, relating the perspectives to how we may interpret the visions and values of the NGOs, and to the questions concerning NGO staff motivation and performance that have been posed.

Part 4 continues with focus on staff motivation and performance. The approach has moved though from focus on the characteristic of the Bangladeshi NGOs, to the relation between organisational control and the individual. The characteristics generally ascribed to development NGOs are of a normative quality. In the context of the development projects that have been studied these qualities appear to be particularly important. With strategies that require certain attitudes and ideological adherence of the implementers, the implementing staff can be identified as key actors. It is of great importance that the staff possess the right motivation for working with the development projects or the normative impacts envisaged as results of the projects risk being lost. The question of staff motivation and organisational control is explored with the help of organisation theories, and the discussion continuously relates to the empirical material at hand.

A short final chapter will conclude the thesis, reviewing the results presented and pointing out the consequences of conclusions made in relation to expectations on participation and empowerment strategies, and on NGOs as partners in development.



## CHAPTER 2

# Sociological approach as methodology

The initial hypothesis influencing this project is that the increasingly popular concepts participation and empowerment contain theoretical as well as practical dilemmas. This chapter, however, leaves discussions of participation, empowerment, water and sanitation, and NGOs in Bangladesh aside. The chapter may raise discussions that appear to be rather distant from the actual topic and research questions, but it gives an important background from which to read and understand approach, questions, and analysis made throughout the thesis.

The chapter may be regarded as the methodological chapter, providing a discussion on issues that have influenced the way the study has been carried out. The definition of methodology here is not confined to the actual gathering of empirical data, i.e. to an interpretation of method as techniques used during fieldwork (see Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Rosengren & Arvidson, 2002 for further discussions). Rather, it consists of an overall approach to the whole research process, from defining the role of the researcher, formulating questions, conducting fieldwork, to analysis and presentation of data. The chapter raises two particular discussions. The first one focuses on the role of the researcher, and the second concerns what theoretical framework has inspired the overall approach of the study.

The discussion concerning the role of the researcher can be motivated in the following way. The theoretical realm of development, where this study is located, is directly linked to an aim at improving people's lives. This has a bearing on research conducted within this realm since it provides temptations and expectations for the researcher to change from a somewhat passive role as a distant observer to that of a participating actor attempting to solve vital, perhaps even urgent, practical problems. These temptations and expectations come from two directions. During the field work, through experiencing and listening to stories of villagers and NGOs staff, through being invited into people's lives and gradually understanding everyday struggles and problems, it is easy to feel a moral obligation (as well as a personal wish) to give something back. These expectations are not only imagined, but are often clearly expressed from interviewees. Although less so than in the field, literature on develop-

ment theories and analysis of development projects express similar expectations. From this perspective, the researcher should take on an active role, engage in normative, political arguments, give policy recommendations and hereby directly contribute to advance development in practice. I find this rather problematic. While it is crucial to acknowledge and understand the concrete problems in people's everyday lives as well as frustration over the operationalisation of development projects, one should be careful not to be caught in a role aimed at delivering solutions to problems as identified and experienced in the field. A remedy-seeking assignment, aimed at giving policy recommendations, does differ quite considerably from a theoretical, academic investigation, and it will have implications on how one poses questions and interprets empirical data.

As explained above, the encounter with the empirical field as well as literature within development studies raised some concern as to how to relate to people interviewed and to development studies. What role should I take on? This question seems to be of particular interest for research in development studies, since many academics combine scientific work with consultancies for development agencies. These consultancy assignments may consist of an outsider's expert evaluation, capacity building of practitioners, and also of close co-operation with and advocacy of the interest of certain groups (women, children, NGOs etc) within development. This provides scope for a discussion on its own, which will not be dealt with specifically here. However, I believe the issues raised in this chapter will provide some thoughts to the continuing debate on the topic.

Experience from the field and from literature studies during this research process has also influenced the second discussion raised. The topic relates to how we choose to perceive the constitution of society, and how this perception influences research. The call for such a discussion is in this chapter illustrated by the critique Long presents towards analyses conducted within development studies. In short, these analyses are characterised by a structuralist approach, and what may be called a 'fixing attitude', which tends to relate problems found within development intervention to external factors such as lack of resources, and to inadequately specified plans and policies. This means that the actors involved in development practice are being excluded from both analyses and empirical enquiries. The theoretical approaches of Giddens and Berger are delineated to clarify this discussion, and to specify the approach of this particular study. Both emphasise the importance of incorporating both structural and individual aspects when trying to understand aspects of society and social change. The purpose of outlining these theoretical frameworks is to present a general *approach* towards how I have explored the field in focus for the study, including both literature and empirical material.

### **In search for meaning: posing sociological questions**

Berger identifies a sceptical attitude as one important characteristic of sociological studies: the task of sociology is to sceptically scrutinise where ideas and beliefs come

from (Berger, 1966). Such an approach reflects a perception of knowledge as intertwined with the social position of a person, and an understanding that 'things are not what they appear to be'. Ideas are examined based on where they come from, guided by the question 'says who?' (Berger, 1966). This task involves not only a sceptical approach to what the sociologist reads or to information attained through interviews. It also involves a close scrutiny of the sociologist's own possible prejudices and preconceived ideas on the subject studied (Berger, 1966). The task of sociology is furthermore to show new interpretations to already known things, to question the taken for granted, to contribute with an interpretation that tells something more than just the sum of information acquired (Asplund, 1970; Bauman, 1990; Berger, 1966; Djurfeldt, 1999).

How then may we reach the knowledge sociology aspires to achieve? How do we transcend the already known and reach an interpretation of social life, which is more than the sum of experience of many individuals? In his book 'Om undran inför samhället' ('Queries concerning society', my translation) sociologist Asplund elaborates on the issue of posing questions concerning a social phenomenon (Asplund, 1970). The depth of Asplund's discussion is reflected in a cautious use of language. The author elaborates on definition of words in order to make the reader aware of essential differences between *describing* a social phenomenon and *problematizing* the very same. The discussion is, I believe, essential to social science, and despite the difficulties involved in giving a short account and interpretation of a very thoughtful text I wish to bring a few of Asplund's points to our attention.

One type of analysis may consist of elaborate *descriptions* of a defined phenomenon. Descriptions may involve historical accounts, delineation of its prevalence and contextual relations. Without claiming that such an analysis is false or incorrect, Asplund argues that if we intend to expand our understanding of any phenomenon such an analysis is *pointless*. An elaborate description will explain the phenomenon but in a limited way. It will give us the comfort of having achieved precise knowledge of the phenomenon in question, but it will not have enlightened us upon its *meaning*. A descriptive analysis is aiming at finding correct data in order to tell the truth about a phenomenon, while an analysis striving to understand its' meaning will try various interpretations in order to see the phenomenon *as something*. The latter type of analysis – seeing something as something – will not demand a different set of data compared to the former analysis. It does, however, aim at achieving a deeper understanding of what the phenomenon means. The strategy for achieving this goal is not to ascertain an abundance of exact and detailed data, but to acquire a flexible way of seeing. The ability to use various perspectives and to accept different explanatory models in order to understand a social phenomenon is crucial. Asplund refers to Wittgenstein who posed the rhetorical question 'Is it possible that some people lack the ability to see a phenomenon 'as' something?' A lack in ability to 'see something as something' is a sign of 'aspect-blindness', a sign of lack of flexibility to accept several solutions to one and the same problem. To a sociologist, this would be equivalent to being tone-deaf as a musician.



Asplund illustrates the 'seeing something as something' by saying that X becomes intelligible by comparing it to Y ('let us attempt to see X as Y...'). By likening or reflecting reality – X – to a theory – Y – we do not mean that theory is reality, but we make reality more intelligible through this comparison. X is not Y but we may understand (a dimension of) X better through this metaphor. Theories are not an identical image of reality. Rather, we should interpret and use theories as Weber's ideal-types: they are not an average of what we find in reality, but an exaggerated version of varieties found in reality. A search for the significance, the meaning, of a phenomenon leads to a type of interpretations that do not lend themselves to verifications since they are not (necessarily) based on empirical generalisations. These interpretations are exaggerations, and their value lies in the fact that *they present a point*.

The emphasis put on the importance of being flexible and trying many interpretations of the phenomenon should however be balanced by Asplund's comment that this type of analysis is but one component in a research process. His discussion springs from a critique of a sociology characterised by "a greediness over data" (Asplund, 1970:27). As said above, there is not necessarily anything incorrect or faulty about analyses based on measurement of data, on the use of data in order to elaborate on detailed descriptions that may enlighten us on the prevalence of a phenomenon, its history and relation to other phenomena. The issue of concern for Asplund is that the analysis should not stop here, but one must continue the inquiry by asking the question: *what does this mean?* It is crucial to find a balance between data-gathering and an aptitude for problematising data, for inquiring into the meaning of the data that has been found.

### **Dangers in encounters with the field and theory**

Djurfeldt explains that the relation between reality, concepts and theory is per se problematic, and the danger of confusing theory with reality will always characterise and follow the work of social science (Djurfeldt, 1999). Since the general relevance and usefulness of a theory depends on to what extent it is empirically grounded, the core of research activities lies in the meeting between theory and empirical practice. In order to avoid the danger of getting theoretically biased, Djurfeldt suggests that the researcher allows observations and experience from the field to intervene with theory, i.e. grounding theory in reality. Furthermore, it is essential, in order to achieve a grounded theoretical platform, to use a variety of alternative theories as a starting point when approaching empirical work. Hence, we are back again at Asplund's request for a multitude of aspects.

Apart from the danger of becoming theoretically biased, Djurfeldt sees further difficulties during the process of research. While it is important to continuously check the basic research questions that lie behind the study, one must be careful not to be devoured by empirical details that to some extent will always cast doubts on theoretical generalisations. The striving to avoid theoretical bias should in other words not

be traded for empiricism. Sociologist C. Wright Mills enlightens us on the problem of abstracted empiricism:

As a style of social science, abstracted empiricism is not characterized by any substantive propositions or theories. It is not based upon any new conception of the nature of society or of man or upon any particular facts about them. (Mills, 1970:65)

Abstracted empiricism does obviously not fulfil the criteria of finding new aspects and contribute with new knowledge. Behind such empiricism lies the ill founded assumption that 'more information gives better knowledge' and possibly also a mistrust against theories and a misconception about science and research.

Finally, Djurfeldt warns against a danger that consists of the researcher being blinded by the knowledge presented by his/her research object, and hence neglecting to problematise what is called the 'taken-for-granted knowledge' (Djurfeldt, 1999). It is easy to fall into either of these three traps – being theoretically biased, prone towards empiricism, or lacking in problematising what is studied – and hence betray scientific integrity. These dangers are however inherent in the process of research: they are there and must constantly be dealt with. The entire process of social science cannot be anything else than characterised by a precarious balance between theoretical generalisations and the empirically specific, between the basic sociological assumption that reality is unpredictable and analytical strivings towards structural and deterministic models of social change.

### **Detached observer or engaged advocate?**

While the presentation of the dangers encountered during the research process is valuable, it does perhaps not provide us with issues of controversies concerning the role of the researcher. As the headline above reveals there are however distinctively different views on the subject. The role of the sociologist has been discussed since the dawn of sociology as an academic discipline. Durkheim, Marx and Weber argued respectively for a sociologist playing the role of a social engineer, an advocate for the oppressed, and an academic who should be as detached as possible from political or any other active mission for social change in society.

Berger emphasises that the sociologist's aim should be to *understand* society. This is an aim, Berger argues, which does not involve practical work such as engaging in actual solving of a problem (Berger, 1966). While the object of study may first appear to be the same for a sociologist and, say, a social worker, their respective aims are different in that the social worker tries to solve what is experienced as problems in society (e.g. effects of high rates of divorce) and the sociologist investigates sociological problems (i.e. marriage as a social institution). Berger requests that for a sociologist, the attempt to formulate and investigate sociological problems should supersede any wish to fulfil practical tasks in society. Berger's position resembles that of Max Weber, who argues for a value-free social science, i.e. sociology should not impose upon society values of what is good or bad. I do not interpret this as if Weber is saying that

the researcher should be or can be objective and neutral. Rather, I interpret Weber's argument for a value-free social science as a request that the researcher reflects on his/her preconceived ideas, and that the researcher avoids taking on the role as a social-engineer. It is not the task of the sociologist to present remedies to social problems, although practitioners may use sociological knowledge for that very purpose. Berger, in a lengthy discussion of perceptions and roles of the sociologists (Berger, 1966: chapter 2), composes a sociologist 'ideal type', to whom he ascribes the following:

... the interest of the sociologist is primarily theoretical. That is, he is interested in understanding for its own sake. He may be aware of or even concerned with the practical applicability and consequences of his findings, but at that point he leaves the sociological frames of reference as such and moves into realms of values, beliefs and ideas that he shares with other men who are not sociologists. (Berger, 1966:28-29)

The claims made by sociology, that the knowledge it provides is something more than understanding and interpretation held by the ordinary citizen, may create the impression that the sociologist is a "self-appointed superior man", with a right to question people's interpretations of their own lives, as a "cold manipulator of men" detached from reality (Berger, 1966:26). The disputable role of a disengaged social researcher is further enlightened by the opposing views of Kuhn and Feyerabend. According to Kuhn, a scientist's activities are characterised by loyalty to the 'rules of the game', i.e. rules concerning methodology, analysis and presentation of results, as well as to certain concepts and theories (Kuhn, 1970). Loyalty towards the academic implies that the researcher is essentially restricted to follow predefined research questions, already accepted theories and to disregard theoretical anomalies. Feyerabend, on the other hand, claims that empirical facts and knowledge about reality must supersede theories. In a historical review of how new knowledge has been achieved through scientific activities he draws the conclusion that "insistence on the rules would not have improved matters, it would have arrested practice" (Feyerabend, 1975). Contrary to Kuhn, he argues that science should be characterised by criticism and scepticism towards theories, and not an obligation to confirm. Among more recent social scientists the discussion concerning the role of the researcher continues. Asplund remarks that while in the contemporary academic world innovation and breaking of rules is often praised, this ideal is rarely accepted in practice. Chambers, a social scientist working within the realm of rural development, discusses how "academics seek problems and criticise" (Chambers, 1983:33). The academic scepticism referred to by Chambers however, does not appear to be only of the refreshing type requested by Feyerabend and Asplund, i.e. a sign of freeing oneself from obstructing rules of science. Instead, Chambers claims that scepticism is part and parcel of the academic profession:

Academics are trained to criticise and are rewarded for it. Social scientists in particular are taught to argue to find fault. [...] Their mental state is evaluative. Their peers, too, award them higher marks for a study which points to bad effect of a project than one which highlights benefits. (Chambers, 1983:30)

Scepticism, Chambers argues, has been very valuable in the case of understanding rural development and development interventions. However, scepticism may also be misleading, once it has become the rule of the game since it may serve the interest of personal ambitions related to convenience and promotions of the researcher rather than the object of scientific interest. Chambers continues and expands his concern to involve also those who are being researched. The role and attitude of the researcher not only affects the research results from a scientific point of view, but is also related to any potential effects the results may have on those studied:

For the rural poor to lose less and gain more requires reversals:... Reversals require professionals who are explorers and multi-disciplinarians, those, who ask, again and again, who will benefit and who will lose from their choices and actions. (Chambers, 1983:168)

The researcher should not only be skilled in his profession including methodology and theoretical scrutiny, but also be working according the ethics of 'putting the last first'. In practical terms, the reversal of order entails an ethical guidance based on advocacy for the poor and powerless when choosing research questions, in presenting and being responsible for the use of produced results, and most of all, it implies new techniques for gathering data. With conventional methods realities that are of great importance to 'the last', the poor and powerless, risk being missed. This can be remedied by practising participatory research, in which the researcher not only goes to and experiences life in the field, but also transfers initiative as to what issues to investigate to the people in question (Chambers, 1983).

### **Observer in the field, engaged in the analysis**

As we see, there are considerable differences in perceptions of what role and responsibility the researcher ought to take on, with Berger arguing for a clear separation between the sociologist as a professional academic and a practitioner, and Chambers' request that the academic and the practical should to some extent merge. Behind Chambers' demand lies a call for change in research that would allow for the studied individual to have a voice and thereby inviting new and crucial information to have an impact on theories and policies alike. With that I agree, as well as with Chambers' concerns about the academic career being prioritised before anything else. Chambers' proposition goes one step further though, when he suggests that the researcher should actively advocate for 'the last'.

The way I see it Chambers' call, to become advocates for the poor in the research process, will jeopardise a sociological approach which aims at providing a perspective that is wider than the one expressed by the single individual, and of generating new knowledge without having preconceived ideas about what this knowledge should consist of. However, turning Chambers' proposition down does not lead us to a position in which the researcher is disengaged. Neither does it imply a belief that the social scientist can ever be entirely impartial or detached from either topic or field, as

suggested within a positivist tradition. I choose to quote Ferguson, who articulates this position in relation to his study of development in Lesotho in an excellent way:

The fact that this study does not aim to rectify or to correct 'development' thinking is not a sign of some sort of improbable indifference or neutrality: it simply reflects my view that in tracing the political intelligibility of the 'development' problematic, the question of the truth or falsity of 'development' is not the central one. (Ferguson, 1996:xv)

Being engaged and taking responsibility as a researcher does not need to be related to a consciously chosen positions that involves an active advocacy for 'the last'. Hence, and as Ferguson points out, an analysis of the kind I argue for should not be interpreted as indifferent to the topic studied.

The discussion presented so far can be summarised in three main points. The first one concerns the purpose of the research undertaken. Referring to Asplund, I believe it is essential to not only provide a description of the phenomenon studied, but also attempt to understand it. In order to do so, I believe the request to be inquisitive, to look for new perspectives, is important. This implies going outside of the particular discourse studied. The second point refers to the pitfalls presented to the researcher during the research process. The dangers of becoming theoretically biased, devoured by the empirical, or shy away from problematising what is being studied, are ever present, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to be constantly aware of these pitfalls. The third point concerns the actual role that the researcher chooses to take on. I am not comfortable with Chambers' proposition that the researcher should work according to the ethics of 'putting the last first'. As pointed out by Ferguson above, this rejection does not imply an indifferent attitude towards either the topic studied or the people involved. By aiming at understanding the phenomenon studied, and being well aware of the dangers inherent to the research process, the researcher takes on both responsibility as well as an engaged attitude towards her work. Through being engaged along the lines proposed, I believe knowledge can be produced that ultimately will benefit the recipients of development projects, through better understanding of their lives, priorities and perceptions of the world, and through a better understanding of what influences the interplay between local reality and development projects.

### **Structure, agency and society as drama**

Moving on to the second topic for discussion in this chapter, we will now turn to delineate two theoretical frameworks that have inspired the way empirical material and literature has been investigated in this study. First, just a few words on how I define a framework. The size of the social phenomenon a theory attempts to grasp may vary. A theory can be strictly conditional, bound by very specific circumstances that restrict the use of the theory. Such a limited theory could concern alienation in the workplace, the relationship between democracy and economic growth, or the effect of death penalty on levels of crime. Behind such seemingly limited theories lie basic

assumptions of society and relations between individuals that can lend themselves to application on all kinds of social phenomena. Those basic assumptions may be called theoretical frameworks, such as structuralism, functionalism or post-modernism. Below I wish to introduce the theoretical frameworks of Giddens and Berger. They present frameworks that deal with the concepts of society and the individual, and how the two entities are intertwined.

Theories that adhere to the traditions of structuralism or functionalism have been strong within sociology. These theories emphasise the social whole over the individual parts, the actors. Although it is easy to criticise these theories for both lack of acknowledging the actors as well as their deterministic tendencies, they have been of strong influence in sociology as a whole. Giddens' discussion, when introducing his theory of structuration, departs from a critique against a bias towards structuralism and functionalism (Giddens, 1984). Giddens argues that the focus of sociological studies should be "neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time" (Giddens, 1984:2). Giddens emphasises the duality of structures, i.e. the fact that structure shapes the behaviour of actors, and are at the same time created by these actors. This duality should however not be interpreted as *a dualism of subject and object* whereby structure is perceived as separate and external from the individual – the two are equally embedded in each other.

The distinction between duality and dualism is important to note. While Giddens argues for "the need to avoid impoverished descriptions of agent's knowledgeability" he also emphasises that it is important to "specify relevant aspects of the limits of agents' knowledgeability" (Giddens, 1984:284, 300). Social systems, or social relations and practices, are not created by purposive social action alone, but according to structuration theory "the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life" (Giddens, 1984:26). Rules and resources are both constraining and enabling, "they not only set limits, they at the same time provide the fundamental means for interaction and social construction in general" (Mouzelis, 1991:27). Duality, Mouzelis explains, refers to the fact that structure constitutes both the medium for as well as the outcome of social action.

An important element in the theory of structuration (and which marks a clear difference from structuralism and functionalism) is the perception of the actor as a purposive agent. The actor, or the agent, can elaborate on purposes for his/her actions. He/she monitors and reflects upon actions and shapes future actions based on this experience. Although Giddens recognises the implications of rules and resources of surrounding structures, actions should be understood as based on actor knowledgeability and capability. Taking a step outside of the perspective of the actor, we may see how actions have both intended consequences, i.e. lead to effects sought after by the agent, as well as unintended consequences.

The task of sociological descriptions, according to Giddens, is to mediate "the frames of meaning within which actors orient their conduct" (Giddens, 1984:284). A sociological approach should furthermore involve a focus on unintended conse-

quences of social action. To put it bluntly, a functionalist approach sees social activities as based on functional needs, and its results as logical, functional consequences. The theory of structuration sees social activities as based on individual's intentions, resulting in purposive action and possibly in planned results, but also in unintended consequences. Giddens concludes:

Social life is in many respects not an intentional product of its constituent actors, in spite of the fact that day-to-day conduct is chronically carried on in a purposive fashion. It is in the unintended consequences of action, as I have often emphasised, that some of the most distinctive tasks of the social sciences are to be found. (Giddens, 1984:343)

In 'Invitation to Sociology', Peter L. Berger unfolds his perception of the relationship between society and the individual. It resembles Giddens' theory of structuration, but is described in a slightly different way. Hence, I find it useful to include some of Berger's discussion here, to expand our understanding of this approach.

Berger uses three headlines from which he develops his sociological theory: 'man in society', 'society in man', and finally, 'society as drama'. Berger describes an image of society that holds structure, predictability and imposed control as well as individual innovation, drama and willingness to obey. 'Man in society' captures how we are ruled by a predefined structure, visible through social control and social stratification. In order for individuals to co-exist in a society some kind of social control is needed. Furthermore, in any society we will find a system of ranking, which places individuals in to some extent controlled relationships, characterised by certain degrees of power, privilege and prestige. 'Man in society' pictures society as a prison for man. To balance this pessimistic and deterministic image Berger continues by introducing 'society in man', an image in which he explains how "we ourselves desire just that which society expects of us. We want to obey these rules. We want the part that society has assigned to us" (Berger, 1966:110). Still left with a somewhat deterministic view of society, Berger finally presents the image of 'society as drama', which he explains in the following way:

...the actors on the stage are constrained by all the external controls set up by the impresario and the internal ones of the role itself. All the same, they have their options – of playing their parts enthusiastically or sullenly, of playing with inner conviction or with 'distance', and, sometimes, of refusing to play at all. Looking at society through the medium of this dramatic model greatly changes our general sociological perspective. Social reality now seems to be precariously perched on the co-operation of many individual actors – or perhaps a better simile would be that of acrobats engaged in perilous balancing acts, holding up between them the swaying structure of the social world. (Berger, 1966:159)

Berger hence claims that there are certain conditions that appear to rule society. Similar to Giddens though, he defies structuralist and functionalist interpretations of society. The three images presented by Berger do not compete as explanatory models, but rather complement each other. The last image though – 'society as drama' – is of particular importance since "the dramatic model opens up a passage out of the rigid determinism into which sociological thought originally leads us" (Berger, 1966. 160).

### Agency in development studies

The perspectives emphasising the purposive actor and society as drama are highly relevant in development studies. Being a sociologist working with development issues, Norman Long integrates a critical discussion concerning trends within sociology with a critique specifically aimed at development theories and practice (Long, 2001; Long, 1992). In both areas, he criticises biases towards structural theories, resulting in determinism concerning social change and neglect of the active individual.

Long is not alone in his critique against development theories. Many scholars and practitioners have expressed critique towards development theories and practices being dominated by modernisation theories, which has meant that neither theory nor practice has been able to take into account the heterogeneity of society and social change. In the 1960s and 1970s, Long writes, the emphasis on structural determinism was particularly apparent, with a linear, predetermined view of change. Planned intervention was based on a perception of underdeveloped countries as lacking in a number of elements that needed to be introduced – technology, resources, knowledge – in order to achieve change towards a more complex, productive and modern society. These policies and theories, Long continues, ignore social heterogeneity and cultural depth in the developing world, and they also fail to recognise the variegated history behind development in the West. Hence development projects are viewed as isolated and independent events, detached from time and space in which they have been introduced, neglecting power-relations and differences in interest and interpretations. Projects and theories, in other words, have to a great extent treated the recipients of development assistance as passive. The kind of isolated project-thinking that has been, and still is to some extent, dominating the development business, exposes a neglect of understanding of differences in life-worlds, and how this necessarily affects projects. Outcomes of intervention do not only depend on outsiders analyses and execution of plans. Rather, directions and pace of change is dictated by how recipients respond to and mediate this intervention to fit into their lives (Long, 2001).

Linking his critique of development theories to a general discussion about sociology, Long warns against any approach that is too focused on predetermined theoretical categorisation. Despite the fact that social life may present itself as homogeneous at first sight, social life is heterogeneous and diversity rules. Long calls for a “thorough deconstruction of the notion of structure in social science in general” (Long, 2001:61). This should be done through an actor-oriented approach, based on an emphasis on the concept of agency. Structure has been used as point of reference for explaining change, behaviour and knowledge. In the case of development theories, structuralism appears through a belief that external forces can steer change in a pre-planned and predictable way. This interpretation of society is misleading, and Long continues by arguing along the lines of Giddens’ theory of structuration, that neither structure, agency or social practice should be seen as an ‘explanan’, i.e. ‘that which explains’, but all of them share a duality of characteristics by being both ‘explaining’ as well as ‘explained by’ the other (Long, 2001:61-62).



There have been previous attempts at putting the actor (as opposed to e.g. structure, or ideas) in focus. These attempts have however been criticised for interpreting the individual as isolated, not considering the social, cultural, technical and economic contexts that shape options, knowledge and preferences. 'Methodological individualism' is in other words accused of focusing too much on the individual and, again, interpreting the individual as rational and isolated (Long, 2001). Long meets this critique by arguing that the actor-oriented approach he proposes attempts to take into account the "multiplicity of rationalities, desires, capacities and practicies" that are found within the realm of one and same individual, aiming at a complex and dynamic interpretation of the individual and his/her social and material environment (Long, 2001:15).

The actor-oriented approach has a particular relevance in the context of development studies. The individual in the context of the third world and development studies is mostly poor, deprived of resources in terms of both materials, power and knowledge. 'Deprived' has consequently come to mean a passive and neutral recipient, hence a perception of the individual as an active agent has been lost. Long writes:

In general terms, the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. (Long, 2001:16)

And Long continues...

... we must assume that actors are capable (even within severely restricted social and personal space) of processing (self-consciously or otherwise) their lived experiences and acting upon them. (Long, 2001:18)

Within development projects, as within life in general, groups and individuals form strategies according to a diversity of interests, and development projects cannot be seen as events that are isolated from co-operations or conflicts that run counter or parallel to the aims of projects. People's every day life is constituted by action related to multiplicity and fragmentation, Long argues, rather than a coherent system of beliefs and experience. Hence, heterogeneity must be the basis for our understanding.

### **Reflections on role and approach in this study**

Taking on a role as researcher that incorporates direct involvement in social problems, or advocacy for a particular solution or strategy, leads to a type of analysis characterised by a wish to contribute to the practice of development interventions. As will be elaborated on further in the thesis, this may lead to gathering of rather detailed data, on e.g. development projects using participatory and empowerment strategies, or on NGOs as partners in development. While this data may constitute the basis for valuable descriptions, the analytical approach often fails to problematise the social phenomenon studied. Using Asplunds expression, such analyses are pointless, since

they do not attempt to understand the meaning of the data and descriptions acquired. A descriptive approach implies a risk that the taken-for-granted is not being questioned.

A substantial part of the literature within development studies is characterised by to some extent predictable lines of arguments. The aim is often to advance policies or strategies, and it is sometimes part of conscious promotion of a certain strategy or focus. These types of analysis do have a value. They contain both critique and new information, based on experience from the field. However, they carry weaknesses in that they end in detailed descriptions, and miss enquiring into assumptions concerning e.g. expectations attached to strategies of participation and empowerment, or the character of development NGOs. The analyses appear to lack an aptitude for finding new ways of seeing the phenomenon investigated. Although the concept of participation has been used in other contexts than development projects, and studied within other discourses than that of development, experience and results from other fields are seldom mentioned (for further discussions see e.g. Cleaver, 2001; Cook & Kothari, 2001; Henkel & Stirrat, 2001). Likewise, discussions concerning development NGOs are rarely enriched with knowledge and practice from other fields than that of development projects and development studies (for exceptions see e.g. Brett, 1993; Fowler, 2000c; Lewis, 1999)

Giddens, Berger and Long have all reacted on a bias towards structure within social science, and they propose a different and more balanced theoretical framework as basis for social analysis. The framework emphasise the importance of incorporating the individual as a purposive agent in social analyses. Structure should hence not be seen as something static or dominant, but as an entity which is both a medium and an outcome of social action. In the case of development theories Long points out the negative effect the bias towards a deterministic structuralism has had, claiming that this has resulted in a belief that external forces can steer change in a pre-planned and predictable way. Long and Chambers both argue against such a perspective and request an inclusion of the individual, empirically as well as theoretically, in development studies. Long emphasises that the agent must be understood as involved in social, political, material and economic contexts that are complexly related. While development projects, the social phenomenon in focus for this study, are often analysed from an evaluative perspective, I believe the guidance of Giddens, Berger and Long is of great importance. With the aim to identify problems in order to improve interventions, project-studies are often characterised by an overbelief in structure. The result of such analyses often consists of suggestions for review of policies and project plans, and hence neglects the negotiations of various kinds that go on within and between actors. Project results are related to project plans, rather than to the actions and reactions of the involved people, to how they mediate the projects with their ongoing lives.

The analysis of the material of this study has been divided into two exercises, inspired by the discussion presented in the first section of this chapter, i.e. to both give a descriptive analysis and to try to understand the social phenomenon in focus. The descriptive analysis, including search for data, details and different layers of knowl-

edge is important in an initial stage of a project. Through a review of literature and a presentation of the field material in chapters 3-5, and later 6-7, we acquire information and descriptions of concepts and phenomena of relevance to the study. Such a presentation is important since it gives a background from which to see how a particular set of questions gradually have evolved.

The second exercise aims at going outside the descriptive analysis, and focus on the meaning of data. It also aims at practising an approach towards the analysis which is characterised by curiosity, i.e. a wish to look at the phenomenon studied from various perspectives. This has implied an attempt at finding new perspectives, i.e. going outside the common framework of theories used in analyses of participation, empowerment and NGOs in development. This has been important for two reasons: first of all, to inquisitively practice the method of 'seeing something as something', and secondly in order to see inherent assumptions in theories commonly used that make us blind to the particular object we are studying. The use of theoretical frameworks found outside of the development discourse may help us to pose new questions that examine the taken for granted. This exercise is primarily practised in chapter 10, where the motivation and performance of NGO staff is being explored through the use of organisation theory. By using analytical frameworks usually applied on public social service organisations and business organisations, we may reveal aspects of voluntary NGOs that have previously not been clear to us.

The theoretical framework and critique against biased analyses offered by Giddens and Berger have influenced the study in a broad sense. They have served as reminders that structure and the individual should both be included in analyses of social phenomenon. Long's critique has also served as words of caution concerning problems with analyses provided in development studies. This has both influenced the way I have attempted to come to grasp with literature related to the concepts of participation and empowerment, as well as the focus put on NGO staff which appears in the latter half of the thesis. Focusing on the question of how we may understand NGO staff motivation and performance, I attempt to use theories that depict the inherent ambivalence within individuals, in the context of normatively oriented organisations. This endeavour aims at describing the relationship between organisational control and individual behaviour, motivation, and performance, based on a dualistic perspective on structure and the individual. Furthermore, when applying the different perspectives offered by organisation theory, I attempt to be cautious and pay attention to the importance of finding a balance between structure (organisational control) and the individual (staff motivation in the context of the local NGO).

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**PART 2**

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## CHAPTER 3

# Participation in development: a historical and critical review

## Introduction

Participatory strategies, in most contexts, implies activities that are being orchestrated for a particular purpose. In the context of development, the general purpose is to achieve economic growth and social change, through a participatory, grassroots level approach. The way participation has been promoted over time has varied considerably, from strategies aimed at increasing people's receptivity and ability to respond to development projects, to creating a dialogue between partners involved in processes of social change (Midgley, 1986). Today's rhetoric, which is not entirely new but has similarities with previous debates, argues that participation should involve a change in the way development projects have been practised from top-down to bottom-up practice, from things' centred to people's centred. Although there is widespread recognition of the importance of people's involvement among governments, international development organisations and financial institutes, experience shows that participatory strategies so far have not involved a great change from the traditional top-down working order (e.g. Wignaraja, 1991). When looked at from a theoretical point of view, the concept is challenging both in terms of practice – how is participation organised? – as well as politically – who at the top will reverse places with those at the bottom? The fact that relatively less than hoped for has occurred in practice reveals that these challenges are difficult to take on.

As these introductory comments reveal, an outline of 'participation' demands a review of experience gained through practice, a review of historical background, and of theoretical interpretations of its meanings, which is what this chapter intends to give. A historical outline of the concept will link interpretations to trends in development theories, political ideologies and to actors embarking on its use. Subsequently a review will be provided of critical analyses of the implications of the concept related to empowerment, 'community', the question of 'who participates', the ideas of good governance and democracy. The analyses that are being referred to here are based on analysis of practical experience, from participation and empowerment in development projects. The intention is to provide a background understanding of

the different practical, theoretical, and political dimensions involved in both participation and empowerment, so that the reader can follow the subsequent chapter which describes the concepts as they are being used in the two Bangladeshi projects studied.

### **From 'added ingredient' to basis for democracy**

The use of 'participation' in international development curriculum can be traced back to the 1950s, and over time it has been endorsed based on various motives, for various purposes. While one may detect historically related trends in interpretations and use of participatory strategies, differences are also related to actors, ideologies, and social theories. Hence, differences are not only associated with a development in interpretation over time but are also found between historically corresponding actors. In its early use, it was perceived as part of modernisation of society (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994). While economic growth and transfer of technology was seen as essential for development to take off, social, cultural, and political change was to complement an overall change in society. From this perspective, modernisation of society would involve democratisation, following the footsteps of economic, political, and social evolution in the West. Steifel and Wolfe write:

Popular participation then became a therapy, to transform 'backward', 'traditional', 'unresponsive' populations into citizens ready to assume their duties and seize their opportunities in a pre-determined development process. (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994:25)

Participation can in this context be said to be perceived as a missing ingredient in development endeavours, in which change is an outcome of aggregation of development projects (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994). Participation was to be added to previous development formulas focusing on economic structures, state bureaucracy, and technology, in order to come to terms with problems of social equity and sustainability which had not been dealt with in development projects as practised so far.

The perception of participation as an added ingredient to previously inadequate development approaches failed to recognise that social change involved complex processes that could not be built up through logically planned projects (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994). Furthermore, theoretical changes called for a questioning of the modernisation theory in the 1970s, with the rise of the dependency school, which presented a radically different analysis of the processes of development and underdevelopment. The dependency school was based on a relational analysis, tracing the cause for underdevelopment to exploitative and unfair relations between nations.

Participation as the missing ingredient surfaced simultaneously with a reduced focus on the state as the driving force in development. Although not directly stated in such terms by practitioners at the time, people's participation is claimed to have been used as a means for destitute governments to find relief from expenditures (Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; Steifel & Wolfe, 1994). The idea of 'the self-reliant poor' indicates

a use of participation along these lines, with the government transferring responsibilities for survival and social change to the poor. The focus of people's participation as a consequence of diminished state power led to contrasting interpretations. Cornwall writes:

For some, it meant that services that were formerly the provenance of the state could be taken over by local people, shunting costs away from government. For others, the increasing role of local institutions offered the promise of giving people a stake in managing the resources and services on which their lives and livelihoods depended. (Cornwall, 2000:25)

While emphasis on local participation can be perceived as a strategy to make the state withdraw from being an interfering actor in development of a civil society and a free market, states and governments have also actively seized the rhetoric of participation in order to strengthen their positions. Authoritarian rulers have used participation as a technique to gain approval and respect from both its own citizens and donor-society. It has been used as a means for manipulating people into supporting authoritarian rulers, since calls for participation give citizens the impression that politicians are really listening (Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997). Moreover, call for participation in state-governed revolutionary movements of e.g. Marxist origin turned out to be rigid rather than flexible in terms of allowing for variety of interests, which caused them to "collapse[d] with astonishing rapidity", producing "psychological antipathy to innovation" (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994). Thus, participation has over time come to be associated with good intentions, as well as with authoritarian manipulation with outcomes that may foster anti-participatory attitudes among ordinary citizens and rulers alike.

Debates introduced in the 1990s concerned the scaling up of participatory projects, and were furthermore linked to debates on good governance, human rights, and civil society (Cornwall, 2000). Participation gained increasing importance in the development vocabulary by being associated with democracy, and so became not only a business of concern for the isolated project at community level, but also for states and governments. Naturally, a wide range of actors are being included as 'participants' here: from the individual at community level, to local government, and officials at national levels. From initially being treated as a neutral concept, participation gradually evolved as politically sensitive, exposing the political nature of the relationships between communities and states. Participation in the context of development constitutes a potential challenge or even a threat to governments, and hence governments have not been passive on-lookers during mobilisation for participation. Responses have come in different ways, and apart from embracing participation, state responses vary from what Midgley calls the incremental mode of reaction, i.e. failing to support participation, to an anti-participatory mode, with attempts to suppress community participation, and even in a manipulative mode, using participation for hidden motives, as mentioned above (Midgley, 1986).

Tensions do not only appear in relationship between community level and the state. The promotion of participatory strategies by international actors contains equally potentially sensitive issues affecting the relation between donors and receiv-



ing governments, which is clear from debates concerning the political implications of the concept among outside actors. The World Bank sees participation as a means to enhance state responsibility and accountability towards its citizens. Although this does have political implications, and reveals a clear preference of the World Bank for democracy as political system, the Bank also states that it is “explicitly prohibited from becoming involved in a country’s affairs [...] so the specific issue of democratisation is outside its mandate” (McGee, 2002:95). Locating individuals’ participation in a context of a democratic society here refers more to increased *influence* by people on the state, than to a transfer of control over decisions and resources to the people (Cornwall, 2000). Similarly the UN, although arguing strongly for democratisation, also clearly states that the UN’s promotion of democracy “must not become a means of intervention in the internal affairs of member States”. (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994:224, quoting speech by Boutros Gali). Further on, UNDP writes in their Human Development Report of 1993 that a strengthening of civil society and democratisation is perceived as crucial processes in order to create an environment in which the individual will be free to act according to her/his own choice in economic, social and political arenas (Cornwall, 2000).

While the sensitive political nature of the concept is being recognised, actors promoting it are trying to neutralise its impact by specifying the intended implications for their own particular practice. What in essence are political choices are “in the language of international development consensus” being “advanced as technical decisions” (Mosse, forthcoming:11 (in draft edition)). Nevertheless, different donors and institutes are advocating the pressure for democratisation in different ways, using conditionalities in which the importance of human rights, the free market, democracy and the freedom of speech, are being emphasised. These policy statements are in turn transformed to real projects, which with no exceptions contain participatory strategies, involving various actors. The fact that the concept is simultaneously being neutralised in rhetoric by the very same actors, both in terms of its intended outcomes as well as implications for actors dealing with it appears as rather contradictory. It furthermore suggests an underlying assumption that development and change are controllable processes (‘if we define it as a technical decision, we can steer away from political implications’), which resembles the way development and participation has been interpreted within the school of modernisation theory.

### **Grassroots movements from within**

As described so far, participation is a strategy used by outsiders (donors, international financial institutes, and governments) for various purposes. A major motive behind the use of participation in this context comes from a realisation that involvement of intended beneficiaries in projects will lead to more cost-effective and sustainable projects. There is however a radically different connotation of the concept, associated with Pablo Freire, which suggests a participation which has its roots among the people, local groups and movements (Fals Borda, 2001; Freire, 1970). Here, the aim is

to conscientize people, aiming at self-liberation. It argues for greater flexibility, leaving room for indigenous knowledge while striving for changes, as opposed to conformity towards a particular type of development in an a priori direction. This interpretation comes from a growing opposition to state bureaucracies and outside rulers, and as a response to failing political structures. Since the mid 80s the notion of people's participation as a grassroots movement, involving a radical shift in the way development policy and projects have been run, has become increasingly established. This change has been encouraged by NGOs in the south as well as in the north, opposing centrally controlled development projects and instead arguing for decentralisation, partnership and local control (see e.g. McGee, 2002).

Participatory methods, as interpreted above, are emphasised since it will lead to strengthened correlations between felt needs and project plans, between locals and development policy. Moreover, and essentially so, participation is expected to be of value for the development of the individual: participation leads to *empowerment*. Real empowerment is envisioned to involve "wider transformations in the ways in which people negotiate the institutions of everyday life" i.e. not only be restricted to project life-cycles (Cornwall, 2000:58, quoting Kesby). The Freirian concept of conscientization means freedom of the oppressed which entails an empowerment in which the individual gains new knowledge and confidence to act against oppressive actors and structures (Freire, 1970). Empowerment is not simply gained through sporadic participatory activities initiated by development projects, but implies a long process in which the individual gains a critical consciousness that ultimately will lead to radical transformation of society (e.g. Cornwall, 2000; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997). There is, in other words, a difference between participatory development and conscientization or people's self development, the former alluding to empowerment taking place within the frame of a project, and the latter including a more profound process of social change at individual as well as societal levels (Cornwall, 2000).

There are important ideological differences in perceptions of empowerment of the individual. The Freirean notion of empowerment and conscientization involves a development of a collective consciousness and a striving to use collective action for revolutionary changes in society. Another interpretation sees strengthening of institutions in society as crucial in order to give opportunities for the individual to act freely on economic, social and political arenas. Participation as interpreted within the framework of neo-liberalism has a particular focus on the individual. Different from other forms of all-inclusive community participation, this approach aims at creating social, political, and economic environments allowing the individual to "pursue his or her own interests" (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994). Cornwall comments on these two interpretations:

Where the 1970s alternative development discourses saw 'empowerment' as a process through which people actively engaged in struggles for increased control over resources and institutions, in this version, it appears to flow as an automatic consequence of economic and institutional reform. (Cornwall, 2000)

Cornwall uses an informing quote from a World Bank Report of 2000, in which empowerment is defined in the following way:

Promoting opportunity through assets and markets access increases the independence of poor people and thus empowers them by strengthening their bargaining position relative to state and society. Strengthening democratic institutions and empowering women and disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups – say by eliminating legal discrimination against them – expand the economic opportunities for the poor and socially excluded. (Cornwall, 2000:74, quoting World Bank Report of 2000:7)

Empowerment appears to be linked to the removing of obstacles in terms of structures and laws, which as if automatically, will lead to individual empowerment. Although empowerment, in the way it is being portrayed here, is associated with freedom, it lacks the conscientization, i.e. learning processes, found in its more radical interpretation. In whatever form presented, participation and empowerment have clear moral connotations, since the concepts hold aspiration to set societies and individuals free, from poverty, ignorance, oppressing structures and restricting laws, or from false consciousness.

### **The problematic community – participation for whom?**

The notion of ‘community’ has since long played an important role in directing the actual participatory activities to an identified entity. Both anthropologists and economists support the focus on community, forwarding the idea that the community as an entity can be trusted to overcome problems experienced in the state (too large an entity, too bureaucratised) and in the market (lack of trust, insufficiently institutionalised in terms of formal and informal regulations that enhance trust) (Abraham & Platteau, 2001). Abraham and Platteau argue that these assumptions, held by academia and practitioners alike, have made it natural to identify the community as the entity in focus for participatory development.

The community focus suggests that participation is intended for a deprived and homogenous entity, where participation is expected to be a voluntary, democratic involvement of local people, including marginalised groups, with a democratic sharing of the benefits of development projects (Midgley, 1986). However crude this interpretation may sound, the ideas of an inherently democratic and solidaric community have indeed characterised the way community participation has been practised. As many authors point out disappointing results “force us to call into question the optimistic view of communities’ operation in rural poor regions” (Abraham & Platteau, 2001:1). What one may call community imperfections (in relation to the ideal type ‘community’ as perceived in theory) has meant that participatory projects have been captured by local elite, with the main interest to personally secure resources made available through the project (Abraham & Platteau, 2001). Prevailing myths of community have in other words caused participatory processes induced through projects to exclude, and not only include people (e.g. Guijet & Shah, 1998; Nelson &

Wright, 1997). The excluded have often been the already vulnerable who initially were intended to benefit from the new participatory strategies.

The question 'who participates?' appears to be crucial and revealing in terms of the weaknesses of the participatory idea. To define the community inhabitants as a collective group of beneficiaries hinders an overall understanding of social groups, power, and interactions determined from economic, political, ethnical, religious, age and gender aspects (Cernea, 1985; Mikkelsen, 1995). Following a realisation that the question 'who participates?' is not easily dealt with, development projects have attempted to define more clearly whom they intend to include, and what possible side-effects in terms of exclusion projects may have. Concepts such as target groups, stakeholders, and partnership exemplify how participation in development projects has gradually been specified based on increased understanding of the differences in interests as well as relations ruled by power within communities. A discussion concerning narrow and broad participation is further evidence of this realisation (Cornwall, 2000; Cornwall & Jenkins, 1995; McGee, 2002; Michener, 1998). A practice of narrow participation is aimed at building capacity in one particular group. The risk of focusing on such a strict target though, is that changes within a group will have little impact once put in a broader context. Emerging as a parallel structure to existing traditional structures, the empowered target group may find it hard to sustain in an environment, which holds challenging and resisting power structures.

Similarly naïve assumptions as the ones underlying the concept of community may be applied to expectations about individual responses to the offer to participate. It is assumed that, once offered, people will be willing to participate and that people will participate in a right and just way, with the right motives. If so, participation will undoubtedly lead to positive changes, characterised by a democratic sharing amongst community members. However, experience has showed that the offer to participate in project activities will not always be met with enthusiasm and willingness to become a participant by all individuals. There is undoubtedly a cost to participation, in terms of time as well as in jeopardising social relations (Cornwall, 2000). The fact that invitation for participation can be met by self-exclusion from activities shows again that detailed understanding of power relations, priorities and calculations at the grassroots is important (Cornwall, 2000). Knowing how powerful groups may take control over participatory processes people may decide that project participation is "simply not worth bothering to engage in if the prospect of having any influence or indeed any share of the benefits might be limited" (Cornwall, 2000:57). Michener also reports from case studies how villagers "become weary of meetings and activities in the name of participation", suggesting that benefits seldom correlates with the time and energy demanded to participate (Michener, 1998:2115). Steifel and Wolfe argue that assumptions made by international organisations about local reality are faulty, since these organisations are unwilling to "understand the different survival strategies that determine different actors' behaviour" and hence they fail to understand that participation is not just a matter of opening up for opportunities, since for the individual it is linked to a careful calculation based on risk minimisation rather than optimisation (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994:229).

Over time experience of participatory strategies has pointed at weaknesses in the concept. Those weaknesses have sometimes meant that projects have simply failed to fulfil their goals, and sometimes they have even resulted in adverse effects, such as strengthening power-relations that have been perceived as a hindrance to development for the poor. Consequently debates have dealt with emerging problems concerning who participates, who do not, and why, through defining its meaning and use in more detail. This has resulted in an abundance of concepts linked to participation (gender awareness, stakeholders, partners in development, demand-driven, needs-assessment, self-help groups, etc) that appear in today's development vocabulary. Nevertheless, despite critique, debates and refined definitions, projects continuously seem to run into problems linked to the initial naïve assumptions of both community and people's participation.

### **Emphasis on method and new frameworks**

The methodological concerns related to participation have been an inspiration for a vast amount of literature, exploring new methods and reflecting on practice. Two particularly important contributions to participation the way it has been perceived and practised in the last couple of decades come from books by Chambers – *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* – and Cernea – *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development* (Cernea, 1985; Chambers, 1983). The motive for this focus was previous failure to take into account local priorities, knowledge and understandings of social change. Chambers and Cernea raise discussions concerning participation as practised in development projects, exploring techniques to allow for local knowledge to count and a room for people's own ideas about priorities and changes. The discussions also concern participation in research, emphasising an inclusion of sociological variables in development theories as crucial complement to economic and technical ones. The new methods for research and practice involved not only an inclusion of new variables, but also a change in relations between researcher/practitioner and the 'researched'/beneficiary. The formerly passive object became an active agent and hence perceived as an active contributor to the production of knowledge concerning poverty, farming, decision-making procedures and other issues on the agenda of development theories. The new approach furthermore involved new attitudes and organisational structure in development practice and academia. Chambers illustrates the change in practice in both development projects and research with an image of 'uppers' (donors, researchers) and 'lowers' (receiving countries, villagers, beneficiaries) needing to change roles, i.e. reversing the working order. The notion of 'uppers' and 'lowers' is closely linked to the philosophy of Fals Borda, who argues that participation and empowerment must include a change towards a true dialogue between subjects (Fals Borda, 2001). This opposes the object-subject relations that often characterise communication between the researcher and the researched, the development practitioner and the beneficiary, the policy-maker and the local citizen (Fals Borda, 2001; Rahnama & Bawtree, 1997).

Chambers' writings in particular involves not only pragmatic, technical advice but also moral arguments about attitudes and approaches of development practitioners and academics (McGee, 2002). The Participatory Rural Appraisal, PRA, as coined by Chambers, involves not just a technique to be practised outwards, but also inwards, i.e. a personal, self-critical awareness (Cornwall & Jenkins, 1995; McGee, 2002). Cornwall and Jenkins argue that

...the key element of participatory research lies not in methods but in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn determine how, by, and for whom research is conceptualised and conducted [...] ... central is an emphasis on changing the role of the researcher from director to facilitator and catalyst. (Cornwall & Jenkins, 1995:1668)

Hence PRA as used by Chambers and followers is linked to important principles of conduct, without which the technique falls short of original meaning and empowering impact. The participatory methods need to be used in a context, in which users' conception of development and its practice are as important as the technique itself.

Stirrat and Henkel point out several themes that summarise contemporary interpretation of participation, which claims to constitute an alternative way to development (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001:170). First of all, there is an emphasis on change from top-down to bottom-up approach, giving more room for empirical analysis to rule theories and policies. Secondly, empowerment as aim of participation is crucial. Thirdly, the approach emphasises the marginal, the excluded, involving focus on e.g. the poorest of the poor, women, or ethnic minorities. Fourthly, the approach holds a deep distrust of the state, resulting in the encouragement to co-operate with NGOs rather than state bureaucracies. And lastly, local knowledge should be made to count. Behind the emphases of these five themes lies claims that this approach is morally superior to previous approaches to development.

### **Means, ends and matters of genuineness**

The ways in which participation can be interpreted, and subsequently used, can be generalised as either a tool or an end. The tool, or means, interpretation implies "a management strategy through which the state attempts to mobilise local resources" (Mikkelsen, 1995:63). Participation is a means to extract information of importance for the planning of a project, or to extract contribution in terms of money or labour from participation, which will ascertain cost-efficiency and sustainability. Participation as an end on the other hand, implicates empowerment of people to challenge structures in order to reach social justice, equity and democracy. The former interpretation is associated with state-building and top-down approach, while the latter refers to an alternative development, defined by local people, local movements and organisations.

McGee refers to a similar distinction with 'participation for instrumental purpose' in projects, in which participation is used to verify predefined plans, and 'transformative purpose' which signifies the inclusion and enabling of people to plan and to act

in process and issues that affect them. (McGee, 2002). McGee refers to a third typology which relates to the intensity in which participation is used, varying from low-intensity e.g. information sharing or consultation, to high-intensity in which beneficiaries are in control, and empowerment is being emphasised. Similar to McGee, Cornwall refers to the depth and breadth of participation, typologies coined by Farrington and Bebbington (Cornwall, 2000). A participatory process may be deep, as in deeply engaging participants, but still narrow in its scope, meaning that only a small group of people participates. A shallow, or low-intensity type of participation may on the other hand involve a large group, in for example court yard meetings.

While the difference between the means-and-ends dichotomy may be seen as a definition along a continuum, it may also be interpreted as two fundamentally opposing views. As McGee importantly points out, this means-and-ends typology holds assumptions about the aim of development, which ought to be questioned. Some imply, McGee writes, that “the latter category (...) is more truly participatory than the former and that the former is in some way exploitative of ‘participants’ (McGee, 2002:104). Opposing views are hence not simply put down to lack of understanding what participation implies but a more or less deliberate misuse of the concept. It may, using Chambers words, serve as ‘a cosmetic label’, used with no other intentions than to give a ‘human face’ to an essentially technocratic project. Furthermore, Chambers describes how participation equals a ‘co-opting practice’, referring to participatory strategies being motivated by cost-efficiency and sustainability (Chambers, 1994:30). Neither of these ways entail a reverse in orders in development projects. It still assumes that ‘they participate in our project’. Using participation with the intention of empowering and enabling local people though, alludes to a step towards ‘we participate in their projects’ (Chambers, 1994)

Steifel and Wolfe, referring to the UNRISD inquiry into participation, argue that the mere reference to possible genuineness is misleading. The notion of genuine participation implies, following modernisation theory, that non-participatory societies will transform into participatory societies. Equally misleading is the notion of participation based on Marxist social analysis, claiming that genuine participation involves class struggle and individuals who have gained class consciousness. Nevertheless, literature on participatory processes and empowerment often contain comments about participation as ‘true’, ‘authentic’ or ‘genuine’ (McGee, 2002; Michener, 1998; Mikkelsen, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997). This refers to how participatory techniques are being used, and to the way information achieved through PRAs is allowed to influence policy processes. The use of PRA with the main intent of gathering information is ranked as less genuine than for instance participatory workshops which constitute the platform of the development of a project, since the former is perceived to be less engaging of participants. The genuineness does not only refer to a degree of intensity but perhaps more so to an underlying understanding of what makes methods participatory. Often investigative qualitative methods are being used under the headline of participation, without holding much difference to traditional research methods (Cornwall, 2000). Participatory techniques such as PRA may be used as ‘short-cut methodology of participation’, without recognising requirements of

critical reflection on what the processes initiated by PRA actually involve. If lacking prerequisites such as emphasis on empowerment and critical reflection, consequences of the use of PRA may turn out to be the opposite of initial intentions, (i.e. excluding instead of including, strengthening power structures instead of breaking them). Fals-Borda argues that the object-subject relationships must be replaced by “genuine processes of dialogue and interaction”, and it should not be biased towards an interest to access new information on behalf of researcher or policy-makers (Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997:121). Some information is being used as market research, confirming or fine-tuning projects that have already been planned without the involvement of stakeholders. Participatory methods are then, one may claim, being used in order to legitimate a project which in essence does not differ much from traditional top-down projects.

### **Participation and the role of NGOs**

The recent (renewed) emphasis on the use of participatory strategies has appeared partly due to active promotion for this approach by NGOs, who have been pioneers in practising participatory approaches both in action research programmes as well as for the purpose of project implementation. Present importance of participation as acknowledged by funding actors in development, and the need for a strengthened civil society has served as an invitation for NGOs to play an increasingly important role in development practice. Local NGOs also play an important role in the study undertaken here. A more in-depth discussion of the NGO-phenomenon is presented in a later chapter, hence I will settle with a few introductory notes on the emergence of the NGO sector here.

While the state as an actor has weakened, both in terms of real presence and in terms of being in focus for development policies, the NGO sector has increased in importance in many countries in the South. This is partly a result of an active promotion by the NGOs themselves, but also due to the fact that they are associated with an ideology which suits present focus of development policies. The NGOs have characteristics that fit well into grassroots participation and empowerment strategies, being part of civil society and geographically close to the grassroots, with flexible and low cost organisations, and highly motivated staff. The role ascribed to NGOs differs however, concomitantly with the different interpretations of participation. The NGOs often appear to be perceived as passive vehicles suitable to implement participatory strategies, which may be associated with a use of participatory strategies as tools to make development projects succeed. In other cases, NGOs are assigned a more dynamic role, actively participating in the mobilisation of people at community level, or advocating for change among local government administrators, pursuing the interpretation of participation as an end in itself.

While NGOs are being perceived as important for improved communication in development projects, it is also well recognised that there are risks of clientelism and patronage related to their work. The flourishing NGO sector, as a result of weaken-



ing state sectors, is a sign of increased freedom of practice for existing NGOs. However, it is also seen as a sign of increase in free-riding, with new NGOs emerging who should not be associated with real participation or local empowerment but which are being set up with the intent of “procuring funds from the international community” (Abraham & Platteau, 2001:22). Hence, the focus on NGOs does not necessarily lead to increased access to resources or decentralisation in terms of bringing local government closer to the grassroots level.

### **From literature review to field exploration**

Since the first appearance of participation in development, interpretations and expectations linked to the concept have varied. Differences are not only linked to a development over time, but, as the discussion about genuineness indicates, also to co-existing but different ideologies. Contemporary advocates of participatory strategies are opponents to previous approaches to development, characterised by modernisation theory and an economic approach to tackling underdevelopment. The new approach emphasises diversity, in culture, social structures, and political systems, and demands a change towards flexibility on behalf of development organisations and research according to this diversity. This has, as mentioned, been particularly emphasised in important books by Chambers and Cernea. We should also recall Long’s argument for the actor-oriented approach, which involves a change in research from using theories and pre-defined categorisations as starting point to allow for reality’s heterogeneity to inform our studies.

Stirrat and Henkel give a summary of today’s interpretation of participation and empowerment (p. 53 here). This contemporary call for participation, with emphasis on local knowledge, bottom-up approach, is hard to object to. In rhetoric it seems logically clear, fair, and well motivated based on previous experiences with strategies for development interventions. In practice though, interpretations and ideologies seem to be quite incoherent, with a flora of definitions and hazy assumptions of the implications of participatory and empowerment strategies within one and the same project. This, naturally, presents quite a few dilemmas. Organisational contexts seem to run counter to the rhetoric of bottom-up, with rigid time- and budget-frames ruling the day-to-day work more than ideological adherence. There are also inherent contradictions in these concepts, which when scrutinised show that the alternative approach may not be very different from previously criticised development approaches after all.

Before embarking on further theoretical investigation of these issues, part of the field-material based on the study of the two water supply and sanitation projects in Bangladesh will be presented. Referring to the discussion held in previous chapter, the initial presentation of the field-material constitutes the basis of the first analytical exercise of this study. The aim with this exercise is to give a descriptive account of perceptions as narrated by villagers and NGO staff. In order to get acquainted with practice in the field, this presentation intends to disclose layers of knowledge, or as-

pects of reality, that may be of importance in order to understand the negotiations among actors involved with the intervening projects. The narratives focus on how villagers perceive their daily lives, problems, and priorities in relation to water, sanitation and health. It will also focus on how villagers see the project activities, unfolding their experience of the meaning of participatory and empowerment activities as arranged by the projects.

As pointed out in the opening chapter, the NGO staff has been included as an important actor-group in this study since this is the first step where theory encounters practice. Under the headline 'Methods for participation' earlier in this chapter, the role of researchers in development is discussed. Here, it is mentioned how not only appropriate techniques are important but also the attitudes of the researcher, in order for participatory research to be successful. In general, one can conclude that matters of attitude not only apply to researchers, but also to practitioners involved in participatory and empowerment endeavours. The account presented here concerns NGOs' interpretations and experience as implementers of the strategies, what difficulties they confront and how they are handled.

The various dimensions of participation and empowerment consulted in this chapter should provide the reader with valid basis from which to interpret the following presentation. Compared to the rather abstract discussions of sociological approach as methodology in chapter 2, and the introduction to history and theory of participation in this chapter, next chapter is of a different character. The purpose is to give the reader an empirically grounded description and to show how subsequent research questions have evolved. The analysis of participation and empowerment will continue after the encounter with the field, with an exploration of a somewhat different character than the one just presented.



## CHAPTER 4

# Participation and empowerment in practice

Below, field material collected from several villages included in the two projects will be presented. The field in question constitutes of water supply and sanitation projects and the particular characteristics of such projects will first be introduced, followed by a summary of activities and concepts used in the two projects studied. Finally a short outline will be given of the geographical areas where the fieldwork has been conducted, before embarking on the presentation of material collected at village and implementing levels.

The material from village level is based on interviews and discussion concerning villagers day-to-day concerns, health issues, and their interpretations of what the projects are trying to achieve. The actual concepts of participation and empowerment have not been raised in these interviews, but discussions have focused on activities arranged by the project implementers. Similarly, the presentation of implementing, or NGO level, is based on interviews and discussions. This investigation has dealt with interpretations of concepts, how activities have been pursued, and staff interpretations of overall goal of the projects and of what problems they are facing during their work. In the field material use and interpretations of the concepts will be illustrated via villagers' perceptions of project activities and the experience of the implementing staff. The presentation will raise several issues that have been discussed in the previous chapter, and it will subsequently provide a summarising analysis based on both theoretical and empirical scrutiny of the concepts as presented so far.

## **Introduction to the projects and the field**

From the review in chapter 3 we have learnt that participation and empowerment is interpreted and practised in various ways. In Bangladesh participatory strategies were established at Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development in Comilla (BARD) in the 1960s when the institute strongly promoted development through community based organisations. The initial success of the programmes appeared to be much

linked with its initiator and promoter Akhter Hamid Khan, and after his departure from the institute the community development strategy began to fade. The present focus on participation in Bangladesh suggests a continuation of previous experience as gained through BARD, but also a new era in terms of actors involved and how projects are outlined.

As with development projects in general, water and sanitation projects have a history of strong focus on technology and top-down implementation. We may recognise several of the features discussed in earlier chapters concerning the bias towards emphasis on expert analysis, appropriate technology, and availability of resources as the most important elements to reach success with development projects. The problem in focus for these projects – availability of water in the rural areas of Bangladesh – has lent itself rather well to such planning, and important achievements have been made during the last two decades. Availability to safe water at household level has increased from 37% to 96% (Hoque et al., 1995)<sup>4</sup>. The success has not been undisputed though, with problems of sustainability of tubewells installed. Repairs have been needed over time, due to use, climate, and cyclones. Other problems concern the effect of increased availability to safe drinking water. It appears that the impact on health has not been as great as expected, which suggests that there is something more than availability that control the prevalence of water related disease.

Sustainability and health effects are strongly linked, it is now believed, to people's participation. First of all, through involving people in the process of choice and implementation of hardware, one may assure that the users have gained knowledge of how to maintain and repair the tubewells. Secondly, health is related to behaviour, and instead of perceiving it as a problem of availability only, projects are now emphasising knowledge as basis for change. In the case of water related disease, focus is put on knowledge concerning causes of disease, preventive action, and the importance of handling the safe water in appropriate ways (from tubewell to mouth). Both of these factors are used as motives behind the introduction of participatory strategies in water and sanitation projects.

The entry point of both projects investigated here is the problems of availability to safe drinking water and sanitary latrines, sustainability of hardware and lack of knowledge. The projects are hence built around appropriate and affordable technology of tubewells and latrines, hygiene behaviour change, and training in maintenance of tubewells. But furthermore, the projects also maintain that 'the user is the main player'. Participation of the user should be dominating planning, decision-making, implementation and monitoring of the projects. One of the project outlines envisages "...the development of empowered community based organisations that have self-help capacities of situational analysis project-planning and project implementation, to such an extent that they can be recognised as equal counterparts of the elected government bodies, NGOs and the public administrative system" (Report, project plans).

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<sup>4</sup> This figure has however not taken the rising problems with arsenic contamination of tubewell-water into account.

Both projects emphasise that it is crucial to address attitudes and relations which delay or even block economic development and social change in general, not only those related to water and sanitation. Villagers are believed to lack in capacity to analyse their situation, to realise how their own behaviour and traditional habits are related to their poverty. Consequently villagers are also believed to lack in capacity to realise how they themselves can affect and change this situation of poverty, dependency, and poor health. Villagers are caught in relationships of dependency of many kinds, within the community and on people or organisations outside the community. These inadequacies in understanding limiting relationships should be changed through *empowerment*. One step in this process is changing obstructing traditional relations within village society through making men and women meet, mixing people of all kinds in project activities, for discussions and joint solving of problems.

Relations with outsiders are also targeted through the empowerment strategies. Work with water and sanitation projects have previously been dominated by staff from the governmental Department for Health and Engineering (DPHE) which, it appeared from my talks with various actors in the sector, has a reputation for not favouring co-operation and participation, but are mainly interested in the technological side of problems. The relationship between village level and government officials in general is said to be characterised by distance, suspicion and lack of trust. As we will hear from NGO staff, the governmental officials are perceived as uninterested in villager's opinions and in visiting villages. This has since long created weak linkages between governmental institutions and village level. Another problematic element as identified by the projects, is expectations on behalf of villagers on what kind of benefits or service NGOs and development projects should provide. Previous experience of development projects headed by NGOs is believed to have fostered expectations that aid should be given in terms of gifts, loans, subsidies, and pre-planned solutions, which has generally enhanced dependency. Instead the two projects aim at creating interest, demand and capacity among villagers to take charge of their own situation through activities which make them identify their problems, and through cultivating new relations which will ameliorate possibilities for change.

Apart from identifying the users as the main players, local NGOs also play an important role in the projects. As contracted partners of the projects they are responsible for the implementation of the activities at grassroots level, with direct interaction with the villagers. They are in charge of initiating and guiding empowerment processes in the villages, and of initiating contact with important actors from the outside. In order to become a partner NGO in either of the projects, applicants go through a screening process in which the project head quarters assess their qualifications. The staff gets training, as part of the project goals to build capacity also among local organisations, and remuneration or salary for their work. They also take active part in evaluation and monitoring of the project outcomes.

### Participation and empowerment – motives and project activities

The use of participation in the two projects is being motivated in several ways, illustrating participation used as a tool as well as an end in itself. The projects are both using empowerment as a central concept, linked to a definition of participation as an end and showing that the projects have what Chambers calls a people's centred focus. The use of the participation and empowerment approach is illustrated in project plans through a list of activities that will give further ideas of how the concepts are being interpreted in these two particular cases. Below a summarising account of what these activities are will be given, with the words in italics being concepts that are frequently used by the projects.

Since participation is used to make sure the project is *demand-driven*, it is seen as a way of ascertaining *cost-efficiency*. Villagers buy tubewells and latrines themselves, in some cases for subsidised prices, and contribute with labour needed for installation of the tubewell, platform and latrine. The projects use *promotional activities* to encourage *motivation, awareness, demand and willingness to buy*. Participation is also motivated by the need for *sustainability*. By making villagers participate in installation, in sharing costs, and through training in maintenance a sense of *responsibility and ownership* is believed to be fostered which will form the basis for sustainability. The projects talk about *capacity building* of the villagers, which apart from fostering responsibility will also be a starting point for a decrease in dependence on outsiders.

While the use of participation so far relates to an interpretation of the concept as a tool, the participation strategy is also used with an aim to *empower*, as an end in itself. Through participation motivated by cost-efficiency and sustainability, a process leading to *community mobilisation* is envisaged. This incorporates that the community members, through activities mentioned above, develop analytical capability to see problems, seek for causes and solutions, and then feel confident to act on this knowledge. The projects use *local discussion forums, PRAs* aimed at enhancing *self-management and sensitisation*. Both projects also initiate the forming of a *Village Development Committee, VDC*, which is trained in organisational skills in order to take charge of discussions and plans in the village. To some extent (and with varying degrees in the two projects) increased coverage of tubewells and sanitary latrines and improved health are perceived as secondary goals. The projects see these issues as entry points that are used as a basis for initial discussions in the villagers. The primary goal is to create *empowered community based organisations*, which should deal with problems in democratic ways. While the VDCs are initially working to improve the water and sanitation situation in the village, they will attain skills that will empower them to continue with discussions, plans and joint activities regarding whatever they prioritise as important in their community. Through the VDC, the members receive training and meetings held by project staff that aims at creating *self-help capacity, self-management* and basis for *informed choices*. The parallel work with establishing contact with outside actors, such as government officials, hospitals, and actors on the market providing hardware, should also contribute to an overall capacity building.



*Water matters! Entering a village in Bangladesh, one is struck by the importance of water. It is not only its presence, but also the lack of water, and the difference in quality of water, that catches the eye. And water is related to all sorts of activities, from irrigation, to household chores, and play. Ponds are being used as 'bathrooms', with the muddy water conveniently making a shelter for anyone wanting to take a bath and change clothes. The far from transparent water also shelters waste from different sources. The ponds are used for washing the oxen, washing clothes, doing the dishes, as fish farms, and the water is used for cooking. Depending on water-availability and affluence of the village, there are usually a number of tubewells in the village providing fresh water for drinking.*



### **Two projects, one case**

The two projects have strong common denominators. Firstly, they both use strategies of participation and empowerment in order to reach envisaged goals, i.e. increased access to water supply and sanitation, change of hygiene behaviour, as well as institution building and empowerment of grassroots people. There are furthermore organisational similarities. Both projects have foreign donors, whose roles are crucial in order for the projects to run at all. Not only funding is linked to the donors, but also the policies which constitute the basis of the project plans. The donors play an important part, in collaboration with their local counterparts, in setting the agenda for the projects. Secondly, the projects rely on partner NGOs at local levels to implement the projects. The partnership with the local NGOs is described as characterised by a learning atmosphere, in which the local link of the NGOs is important in order for the project to fulfil its people's centred aspirations. Thirdly, both projects have as an initial goal to form a village development committee, a VDC, consisting of villagers, which will represent the villagers as partners.

There are however differences too between the projects, for example contracts with local partner NGOs, procedures of evaluation, internal project communication and training. This could be of great importance since these issues constitute variables that probably affect interpretations and use of central concepts in the projects, as well as motivation and performance of the local NGO staff. In other words, there are reasons to present and analyse the material with the intention of making a comparative study of the two projects. Since the study was not originally aimed at being comparative, details as to what exactly should be compared have not been spelled out or gathered. Furthermore, these differences might be of particular importance had the aim of the study been to make an evaluation of failures or successes of the respective projects. This, however, has not been the intention. The common denominators are used to identify a starting point for an investigation of the basic concepts of participation and empowerment, as used and practised in development projects. This platform is strong enough in order to highlight inherent difficulties in the project strategies and to elaborate on valuable discussions.

### **Villagers experiencing project intervention**

The participatory and empowerment strategies of the projects mainly evolve around activities related to water supply, sanitation, and change of hygiene behaviour. The emphasis on change of hygiene behaviour is tackled by the projects through participatory activities such as group discussions, special hygiene awareness education, and through activities aimed at children in school. The activities depart from the fact that there is a high prevalence of water borne disease such as diarrhoea and scabies, in rural areas. At the core of these activities lies a focus on preventive action, which in-

volves new habits for household chores. Naturally, women have been the main target group for this education, but the activities are also adapted for school-children and the village as a unit, including men.

In order for participation to work in the envisaged way, it is essential to reach an understanding of the actual meaning of these problems in village daily life in Bangladesh. The aim with my interviews has not been to elaborate on the scientific appropriateness of perceptions held by either villagers or the projects, but to grasp to what extent the project and the villagers' perceptions agree or disagree. The women and men taking part in the discussions have been involved in project activities. Although they have been so to different degrees my assumption was that the discussions would not present any difficulties in terms of understanding the topics I raised. This was not quite the case. Furthermore, discussing health and disease in a foreign context rather quickly reveals that our ideas of problems, analysis of causes and prevention in relation to these issues, are indeed very culturally embedded. Hence, the results of these interviews hold unexpected, perhaps confusing, but interesting findings. The interviews, and my close participation in village daily life during several months, revealed a picture containing layers of old and new knowledge, displayed in old and new habits, mixed together in a complex logic of which daily life is constituted.

### Health and disease in village daily life

Despite the fact that diarrhoea, in all statistics and literature treating the country's water and sanitary situation, is pointed out as highly prevalent, only rarely did anyone comment on that when giving a history of various disease they were struggling with. Most people did have a rich history of diseases, including tonsillitis, ear-problems for children, weakness, pain in the body and fever, gastric problems and complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Problems with disease are a reality faced by every family: "we are ill all the time, every month" said one woman. Only after asking specifically about diarrhoea did I get comments. I was then told that everybody suffers from diarrhoea, dysentery, and about a woman who recently died due to diarrhoea. I was also told that they used to suffer from diarrhoea but it is now gone in the whole area, because they now have new knowledge, and access to doctors. Despite a very successful implementation of the watsan-project, with subsequent propaganda that the purchase of a latrine would cure the problems of diarrhoea, it is highly unlikely that the effect would already be noticed and diarrhoea eradicated.

The fact that diarrhoea and other related disease (cholera, dysentery) was only rarely mentioned and yet all statistics show that they are highly prevalent diseases all over Bangladesh, could be interpreted in different ways. My impression is that in many cases diarrhoea is not considered a disease: you have some problems with your stomach during a day or two, you do not notice that your working capacity is affected, and it is rather easily cured with Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT). However, when diarrhoea develops into a serious health hazard due to dehydration and malnutrition, it is being recognised as a disease, and then perhaps under a different name.

The discussions about health also included questions regarding causes and prevention of disease. This opened up for interesting answers. People's perceptions of causes of disease, and the way diseases are described, display a wide mixture of traditional ideas, new knowledge and a lack of interest in discussing causes of illness. Despite the fact that the interviewees had taken part in project activities focused on these issues, and despite the fact that in most cases villagers were linked to a project that was considered to be particularly successful in this respect, the answers do not display a clear awareness of linkages between health, sanitation and safe water.

The first reflection here concerns causes of diseases. In many cases, the question 'why do you get this disease?' called for explanations of what was meant by 'why'. "Why do your children get scabies? Because it is a disease, It's God's wishes if we get ill. The real cause we cannot know, The evil wind goes through the village" are typical answers, or just putting the issue at rest by saying "Sometimes all people get sick – it is natural". Often the cause of diseases was explained by seasonal changes:

Weather causes disease. The winter is the cold season. Dirty water causes diarrhoea in winter-time. We use pond-water for washing clothes, bathing, that's why we get diarrhoea. (village woman)

Winter-season is bad. But it gets even worse during the rainy season. During summer scabies is bad. Rainy season and the flood season, then the stomach gets bad. The whole courtyard is mud-

dy, you can see the germs. The water spreads various kinds of disease, it carries germs from the cultivation. There are frogs, snakes, and mosquitoes are increasing during the rainy season, and more flies. (village woman)

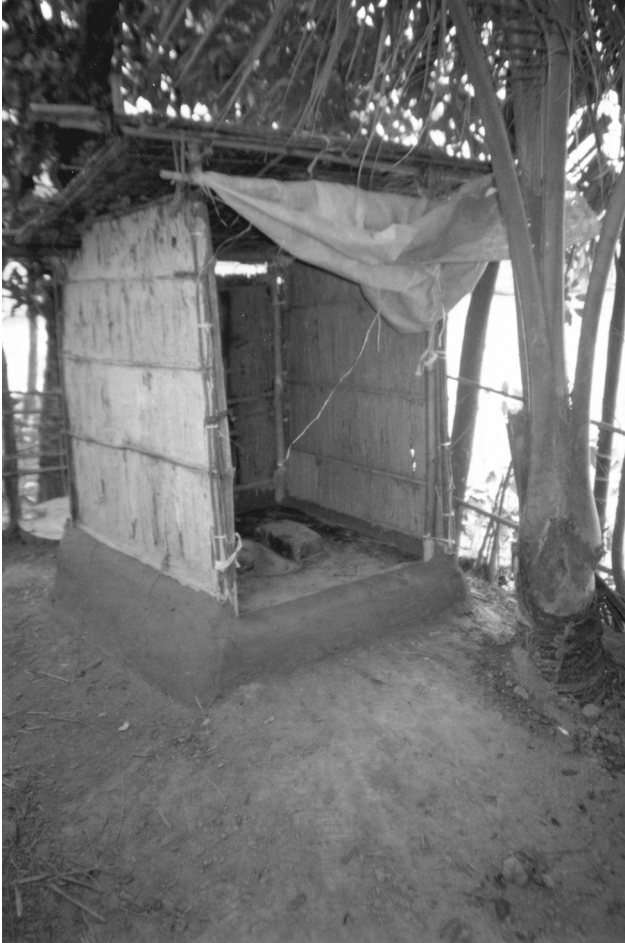
A second reflection concerns how one may prevent the family from getting ill. Again, an interesting array of answers appeared: “If we have no disease we can stay healthy”, or “When the evil wind goes through the village, there is no precaution. Maybe we can make sure the children are not running on the fields. And maybe with more knowledge it would also be better”. While many saw poverty as the root cause of bad health, further explanations showed that the relation between poverty and health/disease was being interpreted in a somewhat unpredictable way. Poverty meant lack of resources, with the implication that it was hard to afford healthy food. However, the main cause for poor health, was lack of resources to pay for treatment. Hence poor health seems to be interpreted as a result of illness which is not being treated, and not as linked to the fact that illness occurs in the first place. As long as they had money and could pay for treatment they could stay healthy. Questions concerning preventive methods were hence met by “I go to the doctor and take medicine”. Going to the doctor was in other words the same as preventive action.

A third reflection relates to the discussions following questions concerning household chores related to the use of water and to sanitation – to wash kitchen utensils, vegetables and rice in tubewell water, to wear sandals, to wash hands properly before preparing and taking a meal. Here, villagers showed a clear awareness of what could be called ‘the right behaviour’. However, while participating in village daily life I could observe that there was a clear discrepancy between people’s actual *practices* in relation to their knowledge. Daily I observed women and children washing kitchen utensils, vegetables, rice and fish in the pond-water although during interviews they persisted that they always use tubewell water for these purposes. Showing knowledge by giving a ‘right answer’ does obviously not imply that the person is convinced about the importance of also acting according to that knowledge. When confronting the villagers with my observations the response was basically that it is more convenient to use the pond than having to pump the tubewell. Convenience appeared to be more appreciated than the fact that safe water from the tubewell can prevent you from getting ill. It seemed to be a common opinion that e.g. scabies was not a difficult or dangerous disease, hence there was no need to take precautions, which meant a radical change of habits: i.e. to wash clothes and take the shower in the tubewell instead of in the pond.

The incoherence in the information about diseases, their causes and preventive methods open up for different interpretations. Statistics from the district show that prevalence of diarrhoea is still high, and it is unlikely that diarrhoea has *disappeared* in less than three years from this particular village. However, incidences may have decreased to a certain degree. The remaining problems seemed to be perceived by the villagers as not related to the use of safe water, latrines and hand-washing, but to things out of the villagers own control: seasonal changes which they cannot protect themselves from, what we would call unscientific ideas such as the ‘evil wind’, Allah decides when it is time for this or that disease, and habits linked to poverty. Further-

more, answers that link disease to poverty sometimes implied that poverty stopped them from getting treatment, but not from staying healthy in the sense they can afford food, soap, and have access to clean water in order to lead a healthier life. Poverty leading to lack of treatment is seen as the 'cause' for being ill. Not poverty as in lack of means to buy soap, cook fresh food, to use safe water for household chores or possibilities to change behaviour. It is also interesting to notice how many can easily tell about what is the right behaviour, but still find it difficult to understand the questions 'why do you get ill?' and 'what can you do to avoid getting ill?'. A reason for this could be that the knowledge about the right behaviour is not being linked to your personal health but more to a behaviour which shows e.g. social status. It could also be that many lack personal experiences of what good effects it could have on your health to thoroughly change your behaviour according to the new knowledge. In other words this is knowledge that has been told and not taught through experience. There are also practical reasons for not changing behaviour. Poverty can be a hindrance to organising daily life in order to adapt to new knowledge. For some of the families interviewed lack of household land made it difficult to find a place for a latrine. Further on, lack of resources combined with many needs calls for prioritisation, and water and sanitation seems to rank below e.g. costs for food, clothes, school and repairing the house. It should also be mentioned that it is hard to categorise different answers and relate them to people of certain background and status. Mixed and sometimes contradictory answers usually came from one and the same person.

The villagers account of how they choose water sources, of ideas about causes of disease, and what behaviour is important in order to stay healthy often contain contradictions. During most parts of my study it was wintertime and the level of the pond-water was low. Day by day the level decreased and at the same time leaves, algae and dirt increased and made the water unsuitable for use. The bad quality of the pond-water was blamed for the diseases at this time of the year, and they avoided using the pond water: "Now (wintertime) the pond-water is bad, its black. When the pond level is higher we use the pond". But the pond-water is also causing disease during the rainy season, they described, when the currents of rainwater flowing down into the ponds are carrying dirt from the field, and from open latrines surrounding the ponds. On one hand, people carefully explain how the quality of water shifts from one season to the other, and how this affects their health, and their use of the water. On the other hand, the very same persons also say that they do not use the pond at all, repeating the rhetoric that is being used by the project to convince people to change behaviour. New knowledge has been established, but not to the extent that behaviour has been changed.



*A decision to invest in a sanitary latrine is surrounded by many ingredients. Not only does the family need the means to purchase it, and to prioritise the latrine above other necessities. Once the decision has been made there are practical things to consider: transportation of the material from the market to their home, numbers of ringslabs that will be needed, and appropriate installation and maintenance of the latrine. Once put in place, it is however not certain the latrine will be used. A young teenage boy explained that sometimes, people do not want to use the newly built latrine since that will destroy it. It would be like having a castle that will only remain a castle as long as it is not being used and tainted by the wear and tear of everyday life. The sanitary latrine is in some sense seen as a symbol of a good household, but as a status symbol it will lose in value once it has become frequently used and turned into a common ingredient among the household assets.*

### **Identification of priorities and needs**

The identification of priorities and needs at village level at the start of the project differed considerably between NGO staff and villagers. This was manifested clearly in the village where the first period and most of the fieldwork was conducted. The villagers saw their daily problems with food, paying for children's school etc, as directly connected to money. Would they only have more money they could buy more land, increase their income and that would solve all problems. The first task of the NGO staff was hence to make people aware of the fact that lack of money is not the same as lack of income. Lack of money can be remedied by decreasing expenses on e.g. doctor and medicine, and by avoid getting ill and loosing working days. At the start of the project the sanitary environment in the village was very poor, few families had latrines, and knowledge about the importance of using safe water, proper sanitary and hygienic behaviour was inadequate. The reason for poor sanitary environment and problems with water related diseases are seen by the staff as mainly, if not only, linked to ignorance and not to poverty defined as lack of material assets. Based on this, participation by the villagers is necessary in order to increase awareness and recognition of the cause of their problem. Participation will make the villagers see how they can solve this problem. The main task of the staff is to make villagers recognise the improvement of their sanitary environment as a priority. With this comes a demand and a willingness to pay and to take responsibility for maintenance of installed hardware.

The initial study described above is important not primarily for its details about how to categorise diseases or to pinpoint actual causes and proper treatment. Instead I see it as significant in the way it reflects how knowledge, problems and priorities are practised, experienced, confirmed, and directing decisions made in every day life. It brings up the question whether people see water-borne disease as problems: is it a priority to make an effort to avoid them? Furthermore, it reflects a general attitude to possibilities for change in order to improve your health. Do the villagers see that solutions lie within their reach, can they themselves improve things? Or do they see themselves as victims of circumstances – seasons, the evil wind – they cannot do anything about? These two points are important from the aspects of participation in water supply and sanitation projects. A common understanding of what a project is trying to achieve (apart from hardware also change of behaviour) and an attitude that it is possible to change are both prerequisites for participation to succeed. Both the interviews about health and the general discussions with villagers about their priorities and needs illustrates a lack of such an agreement between villagers and project. Whether used as an instrument or a goal in itself, participation demands that the people believe their participation can make a difference. It is perhaps not necessary that this attitude is present from the start. However, if one overlooks the importance of ascertaining some sort of agreement about the state of things, and that it is possible to change, it can cause serious problems in establishing a common understanding of purposes of certain activities with the result that the goals of participation are not fulfilled.

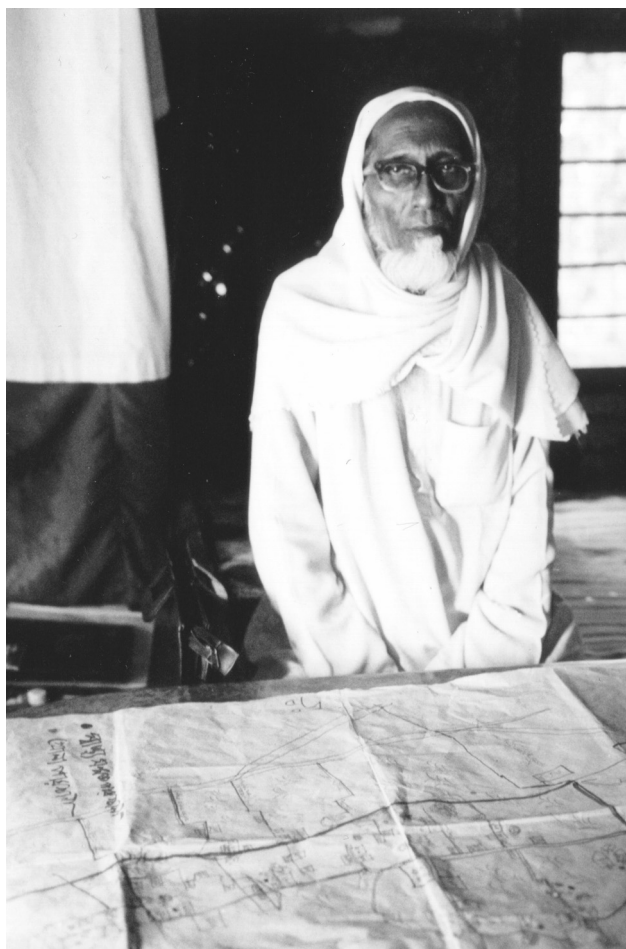
### Observing processes of empowerment?

In general villagers had noticed the activities of the projects. They associated the project staff with the people 'who come and tell us to wash our hands', or 'they come and talk to us about latrines', and that it was possible to buy tubewells and latrines from the organisations. The projects rely on the staff of the partner NGOs to build up a close relationship with villagers, in order to achieve the participation and empowerment envisaged. This is being done through meetings and informal discussions during regular visits to the villages. These two particular projects have a rather different approach compared to other projects introduced by NGOs. The staff comes primarily to talk, to encourage the villagers to get organised, but they are not offering any direct benefits like many other NGOs. Hence, it was not always clear to villagers what this NGO is actually doing. There were also quite often hesitations and scepticism on behalf of villagers towards the NGO, based on bad experience. A villager commented:

Whenever NGOs come to a village people think they will give them loan and they can advance through that loan. They always think like this. For that reason this is the first issue for villagers... that maybe the organisation will help me by giving a loan ... I never knew there was an organisation like this, this is the first time something like this comes here... The Grameen was working here but they never came to the village. Others came too... they installed two tubewells but now both of them are out of order. They only installed the tubewells but have not taken the initiative to look after them. And Proshika ruined our economic strength and left us with no money. We are now totally broken economically by the Proshika people... This organisation is doing work in a new way, they are using a new technique... when they first came they only held meetings, nothing else... (village man)

Approaching a community involves confronting prejudices, hesitations and expectations created through a long period of experiences with other development projects, other NGOs. Apart from dealing with these difficulties, the NGO staff also introduced a new way of doing things, which arose some suspicion. The goals associated with empowerment, i.e. goals of a normative character as opposed to the more quantifiable goals of increasing access to tubewells and sanitary latrines, are difficult to follow up. Apart from observing people's participation in courtyard meetings, VDC-meetings and promotional activities, it is hard to see the impact of the participatory strategy. And in regard to the relation between participation and empowerment, one cannot do more than assume a connection based on the logic of project plans. Further understanding of how the projects had proceeded and how impact was noticeable according to the villagers, was captured through interviews and informal discussions with members of the so called village development committees, the VDCs.





*Mr Ismael is a member of the village development committee (VDC) set up by the water supply and sanitation project operating in his village. Mr. Ismael is a highly regarded, old man in the village, and he is the president of the VDC. He talks with confidence and calm about his role in the VDC. He appreciates that the local NGO, where his daughter works, has initiated the VDC, but is careful in pointing out that it is the villagers who make the decisions, who run the committee now. With natural authority he seems to manage conflicts and unreasonable demands that appear among the villagers during talks about changes and improvements the village may achieve through the water supply and sanitation project. He has time, confidence and influence to deal with concerns that are being presented to him as a VDC president. In the picture he is presenting a map that shows the village, with water sources and hazards such as areas used for open latrines, and explains what plans for changes the committee has made for the future.*

## Villagers about the VDC

The experience of the VDC-members varies considerably, from very positive responses with great expectations about the future, to disappointments and frustrations regarding the communication with NGO staff, and also near to complete ignorance as to what the VDC is, despite being identified as a member of the committee by the NGO staff.

In one of the villages there had been significant problems for the NGO to get accepted. This was due to bad experience with previous NGOs, and a general sentiment in the whole area that NGOs financed with Western money should not be accepted. Despite this, through persevering talks with the villagers, the NGO had finally been accepted. After one year of slow progress a VDC member expressed:

From the start until now nothing is good. But we also think good things about the future. We have to find out our problems and we have to discuss the problems. ... We have to do good work all together. If we do it all together then there are so many benefits and it will bring profit and welfare as well. Nobody can do things individually can they? There are so many problems so it is not possible to do it individually. (male VDC- member)

These positive impressions, expressed in an interview, were also mixed with ambivalent feelings towards NGOs in general and the work of the VDC in particular. The committee only gathered for meetings on a sporadic basis, and they had so far, i.e. after one year, not been able to achieve any goals. The ambivalence towards the aim of the project and the VDC was evident also in other VDCs:

We decide depending on circumstance what is most necessary for society. ... when we go to people and want to do some work they say 'what is the benefit from doing this job. We don't need it. Where can I get money? We are poor.' Getting money ... this is the main problem. ... but some kind of solution we have reached, that is a dug well. ... we are starting to feel some hope and hoping to get some help from them [the NGO] soon... we have not got anything from them. ... through the VDC we are just looking for a possibility to develop the village ... if they can arrange some credit system, if they can arrange a cheaper price. ... without any kind of help we cannot develop ourselves. (male VDC-member)

Doubts concerning the project and the VDC seemed to be based both on the fact that they are introducing a rather new way of approaching problems, suggesting discussions instead of offering material support. It is also based on a difference in analysis of the root cause of the problems. While the empowerment strategy is emphasising capacity building, i.e. knowledge, change of attitudes and self-image, villagers emphasised other things as essential in order to achieve development. Without establishing an understanding of the project ideology amongst the villagers, the prospect of well functioning VDC appeared to be meagre. In some of the villages, there were hardly any traces of the VDC, despite the fact that the project had been working intensely there less than a year ago. The villagers commented that "if there is money then everybody can change", and agreed that had the project been able to provide cheaper latrines and better prices on tubewells, then they might have been able to develop some. But without that kind of support, they could not change.

Among some villagers, who initially had taken on work with the VDC, there was reluctance to admit they knew anything about it. One woman expressed:

There is no need to go there [to the VDC meeting]. I feel so ashamed over there so I should not go. In front of the villagers I feel ashamed. I promised them [the NGO] that we will do everything in a new way. But I can't do anything new, everything is as bad as before. If someone promises one thing and then cannot do this is that not shameful? I had to give up because of the bad economic situation in the village, it is not possible to achieve improvements. We want to make the future bright but it is not happening. We are not able to make it bright. (village woman)

The woman expressed how she felt pressure from the NGO staff to produce some results, to show a visible change to them. She had accepted the membership after some hesitation, and now felt it was too hard to convince the villagers to unite in the efforts of the VDC. And she did not agree herself that it would be possible to achieve any change under present economic circumstances. It was obvious that the communication with NGO staff was, in many cases, characterised by disagreement, as the comment by yet another villager exemplifies:

They are only discussing about these matters [water and sanitation] so where is the development? ... Only Mr X [project staff] and his co-workers are deciding what to talk about. They plan 100% success in one year. ... In fact we wanted the latrines for free. Our main problem is money. ... one day a person came on a Honda. He only talked about water and latrines too. He checked the tubewells but they are doing nothing in this area. The NGO is always calling the villagers to meetings instantly. (male VDC-member)

This was said by a VDC member in a village introduced as a success-village, where the project had been able to achieve very good results by increasing coverage of tubewells and sanitary latrines. The NGO staff were very pleased with the co-operation of the villagers:

There are no problems, the villagers always co-operate with us... when we want a meeting they always come directly... (local NGO staff)

The villagers were pleased too about the increased coverage. They had agreed on the importance of both tubewells and sanitary latrines, one may assume, since they had agreed to pay for the hardware. However, there was a clear disappointment among the villagers about the project. There seemed to be a silent dispute whether to see the project results as a success or a failure.



*Moni is a member of the same VDC as Mr Ismael. She comes from a rather different position though. She is a busy, hardworking woman, with children and a sickly husband to care for. Sometimes, when her husband is too ill to take his rickshaw to the nearby market centre, the family gets no income. Moni talks enthusiastically about her role in the VDC and is eager to discuss the concerns and reactions she meets when she rallies around her part of the village, encouraging her neighbours to unite in solving problems they all share. She is proud of her work. But, she is also tired. How can she make time for all these activities? She already has a busy life. And the encounters with her neighbours do not always end in appreciation. She is often faced with conflicts they present to her, and unless she can solve them she finds it hard to feel they trust and listen to her advice. And when she turns to the local NGO, who encouraged her to get engaged in these activities to begin with, she finds they show little interest in her troubles.*

In some villages, the setting up of a VDC had initiated a remarkable variety of activities. The VDCs were not only dealing with water and sanitation issues, but also with problems concerning children's education, income-bringing activities for the village. The results of an active VDC have in some cases resulted in villagers, who previously were not at all involved in politics, running for local elections. The work with capacity building through the VDC showed effects, and the villagers recognised that the introduction of the water and sanitation project had initiated something new:

Now we find that we are doing so many activities to improve the situation ... the village is now like an ideal village. During courtyard meetings we all sit together, mothers and sisters, and discuss. At first the women were irritated, but we made them understand that this work is very useful, valuable, because it is directly related to our health. ... village women and men, in our village, we make them understand. They listen to me and I listen to them, and we also discuss other matters, like how we can develop ourselves in the future. (male VDC-member)

Another VDC member, in a recently started committee is also convinced about the positive change the VDC will give:

They (the NGO) wanted to steer us towards a new wave and they will change everything within a short time. ... Actually even if they can't solve the problems they have done a lot. ... since long ago we have been following the older generations, that has been the problem. Now we are doing something new. They inspired us, they gave us some inspiration inside us which will make us strong mentally to go ahead. (female VDC-member)

In the former quote, the member talked about the VDC and their activities without referring to the initiating NGO at all. The VDC appeared to have become an independent group with its own visions and agenda, which could be interpreted as the project having reached the goals of ownership and independence through capacity building. However, the positive feelings of working with the committee were also mixed. During an interview one year later, with the same woman as quoted above, she still had positive experience from the work, but also mentioned that the work was time-consuming, and that it was very hard work, to try to make people listen and act together. Somehow, she seemed to carry an idea that she would be rewarded for her work, despite the persisting claims by the NGO that no such benefit could be given. The time aspects are important to bear in mind when trying to understand what is being said in the interviews. While in some cases, over time, the villagers have changed from being very sceptical to being positive towards having a VDC, other cases show that VDC members feel disillusioned. After promises of great changes, time and perseverance in the work with the VDC had not delivered any detectable improvements, leaving villagers feeling rather ambiguous about the NGO and their own future. Despite a change in attitude, this does not guarantee sustainable empowerment. Rather, it seems to be a fragile and uncertain basis from which to draw conclusions about self-management, self-help capacity. To a great extent, the success and sustainability of the VDC appear to rely on strong personalities who believe in the VDC as an institution. An enthusiastic and respected leader will make others support and contribute to the work for a change. Two such personalities, who together with their fellow members have been able to achieve a competent committee, express the following about their work:

We found a new way and technique from them [the NGO] which has helped us to proceed quickly. The NGO co-operate with us and help us advance. We just took some suggestions from their staff. We make decisions through our committee. If someone wants to come from the NGO we tell them about dates for the meeting. ... we will also ask other NGOs to co-operate with us. ... we just want these kinds of suggestions and advice, we don't want anything more. We don't want someone to come and give us a lot of money, we only want suggestions and advice and technology for a good way to advance, or for developmental work of the village. (male VDC-member)

For the development of the village we, all together men and women, do work. We talk about how we want to advance and then we make plans for the coming month. ... by calling a meeting we inform everybody about it. ... and we divide the work to people ... after they [the NGO] leave this village we will do work on our own, in our own way. They have one goal, that is water and sanitation. They are targeting this thing and besides this the VDC here is also trying to send the children to school. In this way we are now in a system so we can continue for further development and we will find the technique how to develop ourselves even more. (male VDC-member)

While many VDCs seemed eager to express success, that they were strong and capable of analysing and planning for their own future, although with some initial assistance of the NGO staff, they also expressed sentiments of despair: 'we cannot do anything without money, we need some support'. It is hard to know to what extent these comments declare the actual analysis made by the interviewees, in which they express what could be called 'true scepticism'. It may very well be that these are tactics used towards outsiders, attributed to the prospect of gaining assistance. Although that will remain a riddle, the voices of the VDC members do give insights to what participation and empowerment means to the villagers, as well as what interactions and negotiations the NGO staff are facing when implementing these strategies.

### **Pre-defined participatory choices...?**

The projects invite continuous negotiation concerning needs, problems and appropriate solutions between the interacting local NGO staff and villagers. Two particular examples from the field highlight the contents of such negotiations. The first case is about cost-sharing of tubewells, and the second deals with democratic choices of leaders of the VDC. They bring to light issues concerning whose knowledge counts and which choices are acceptable, or in other words to what extent the users indeed are allowed to be the real players.

#### *Cost-efficiency and ownership through cost-sharing*

Offering tubewells for free is neither a viable (too costly) nor a wise (lack of sustainability) way of solving problems with low access to safe drinking water in Bangladesh. The cost of the tubewells should be at least partly carried by the users, to ascertain cost-efficiency and sustainability. One of the investigated projects has special regulations concerning the selling of tubewells. Since the tubewells are being subsidised (part of the cost is carried by the project) ten families should share each tubewell. One of the implementing staff explains:

Ten families share the TW. The rich man can pay a lot, 2-3000 taka, and the poor man pays only 2-300 taka, some 50-100 taka, that is no problem. The main thing is that they all give some money. They have to give money because of the ownership. If only one person buys a TW he can sometimes say to the neighbours that they cannot come and use his TW. That is my order he says. If ten families are selected to share and one family is paying to me, some days later the person who has paid might say to the others that I paid the bill and you cannot come and use my TW. If the ten families all give some amount of money nobody can tell that 'I am the owner' because everybody is the owner of the tubewell. This is why we want everybody to pay. If there is a cost-sharing there is no problem. We don't sell the TW without seeing the 10 sharers. If I give the money, even if it is a small amount of money, I can still tell myself that I am the owner of that TW. (local NGO staff)

The cost-sharing rule is motivated by cost-efficiency, sustainability, empowerment of the poor, and by an attempt to break existing power structures. It is aimed at creating a sense of ownership among all, even the poorest who is only capable of contributing with a small amount of money. By creating ownership, one can prevent conflicts over the use of water, since everybody will be part-owners. The poor and resourceless, who is dependent on the benevolence of others, will also be given the opportunity of gaining another role than that usually ascribed, i.e. he/she will be an owner.

Among the ten tubewells installed by the project that I came to visit, only one had been bought according to project rules. In some cases the tubewell was owned by 3-4 families, and very often by only one family. These deviations from the rules were not immediately obvious, since the use of the water was open to everyone. It was also due, in a few cases, to rather lame attempts to cover up the deviations: the owners had been told that in case anyone asked about the tubewell they would have to say it was shared by ten families, or else they might lose the tubewell. Very often though, the cost-sharing rules seemed to be unheard of amongst owners and users alike.

When asking the villagers about the cost-sharing, whether it was a good idea, they said it would only create problems. They said it was better to have only one owner of the tubewell. This could create problems too, they admitted, with access to water. In case someone quarrelled with the owners they might be denied access to the tubewell. Taking that risk though was considered better than engaging in cost-sharing. But would it not be good then, if all could be part-owners? Yes, it was a good idea, but difficult to practice. First of all there would always be a problem to collect money. People would agree to pay first, but then never give the money and that would create conflicts. And if one person who is very poor only pays 50 taka you would still not be able to claim ownership: everybody would know who has paid the most. And if the tubewell breaks down, if owned on a cost-sharing basis, there would be more disputes as to who should pay for repairs and maintenance.

Hence, the procedures surrounding the purchase of tubewells seemed to have been made basically according to villagers' own wishes. The people paying for the tubewells were not upset about bearing the whole cost. It gave them benefits, such as being allowed to choose where to place the tubewell. Possibly, it was also a way of gaining or confirming status. Furthermore, the poor would be able to take advantage of the new tubewell, since people are rarely excluded from using others' water sources for drinking purposes ('water is for all!'). For the poor, the idea of paying in order to

attain what the project calls ownership, for something you would get access to anyway did not make sense. The villagers' own solution – one family pays and everybody can use – is to them obviously more convenient and without worrying conflicts. The idea of cost-sharing was pointless. In other words, indigenous knowledge and choice was allowed to matter.

Although the problematic situation was recognised among the project administrative staff, the failure to follow rules was not accepted:

I think we have some problems here. It is difficult for me to ensure that ... there is motivation for cost-sharing. ...but we don't show respect of that community people's decision. We should not respect that decision. 'I am a member of a community, I will provide the supports and I will bear all the costs' ... we shouldn't do it. If the beneficiaries, out of ten families most of them are grassroots people, those who are unable to bear the costs. Everybody should bear the cost uniformly, some who are able to spend some more and some maybe a little bit. We are always trying to discuss that you should ensure the cost-sharing. Maybe just a little bit for those who are unable to pay. But symbolic contribution is a must in that case. (project administrative staff)

The demand is there, as is the willingness to pay *among some of them*. But the suggestion coming from villagers – one pays, everyone can use – is not accepted. According to the logic as expressed by the project policy, and supported by the administrative staff, cost-sharing between ten tubewell owners should be achieved in order to reach the empowerment which is so important. The project must persist in following its' logic or envisaged normative goals may not be reached, despite the fact that the people who are thought to benefit clearly have different ideas. The implementing staff is apparently put in a difficult situation.

#### *Introducing democracy and achieving ... status quo of power structures?*

The underlying idea behind forming village development committees – VDCs – is to encourage and even institutionalise procedures leading to empowerment, independence, and self-management among villagers. The forming process includes training in organisational procedures, i.e. how to take notes, prepare and execute election of members, how to mobilise and communicate new knowledge to the rest of the village community, in other words building capacity and confidence amongst villagers to run their own development projects, according to their own agendas. In one VDC looked into, the forming of a committee had just started. A lot of work had been devoted to preparation of election of members:

This way of working is different in the sense that we are now addressing the total community and previous organisations address groups within the community. Also we address the project activities to the whole community and bind them under the VDC and the main actor within the community is the VDC ... and the community people mobilise themselves with the VDC and with their self-management and self-planning, self-implementation, they will implement the activities within the community under their leadership and their activities. All depends on the VDC, its management and leadership. (local NGO staff)

The VDC as a group is a key actor, and identification of problems as well as design of solutions rely solely on the VDC. It is important that it represents villagers of var-



ious statuses. In order to break the dependency structures that have been identified as detrimental for development processes in general, it is particularly important to encourage the villagers to make their own decisions, and not to rely on advice from either outsiders, or from influential and powerful individuals within the community. The implementing staff is making an effort to create the best circumstances possible for the VDC to have a good start. One of the first and most important decisions is to choose, through democratic procedures, a president for the VDC. In this particular village the villagers unanimously chose the village moneylender, a powerful and influential person (and moreover one of few with a sanitary latrine and a tubewell). They motivated this choice by saying 'he knows how to lead'. Based on ideas that there is a need to break power structures in order to reach empowerment and sustainable development, the project administrative staff did not agree that this was a good choice: "... we have to stop this process, delay it some time, kill some time and then try another time to organise the VDC". Accepting the moneylender as president would be to build on existing, non desirable power-structures, and it would risk leading the committee in the wrong direction from the very beginning.

Establishing good communication and trust among the villagers is a demanding task for the implementing staff. For several reasons villagers show suspicion and scepticism towards both the NGOs and the working methods they are introducing, and not accepting the decision made by the villagers in a case such as this, would jeopardise the trust and acceptance achieved. The staff is in other words again put in a difficult situation when they are required to negotiate between the choice of the villagers and the project policy.

### **Conclusion – village level**

Many villagers identify shortage of drinking water as a problem. Still, there seems to be very few initiatives to try to solve problems together. People are reluctant to co-operate in order to find solutions, because, they argue, they lack experience and fear conflicts if they start a process such as gathering money for a purchase of a new tubewell. It appears as if people prefer the present non-satisfactory situation they have, and wait until they can afford to buy a private tubewell, instead of finding a solution involving collective action. The only kind of collective action which seems to be practised on a regular basis is to put pressure on rich families in the community to arrange more tubewells, and to invest in irrigation pumps. As pointed out by one of the implementing staff, discussing attempts to make people co-operate within the VDCs: "They have unity but they don't have the unity for this kind of work". In this sense traditions clash with the idea of community participation, mobilisation and self-management, which at least to some extent presuppose the community to be a unit and that it will be the natural basis for action. These are very tentative results from a limited study, which does not look into collective action in particular. Other studies show that it is indeed common with collective actions, e.g. when arranging irrigation of fields. The lack of collective action found in this study could be related to the na-

ture of the problem. Although safe drinking water is seen as important, as is access to sanitary latrines, these issues have a different priority compared to that of irrigation for agricultural purposes. Again, priorities must be seen in a context. While irrigation and agriculture is linked to income, safe drinking water and sanitary latrines are not. In situations characterised by shortages of resources, activities that are directly linked to the family's source of income is likely to receive more attention and may inspire to different actions than activities linked to what may be perceived as convenience and social status. Furthermore, drinking water and latrines may be seen as goods of private interest, while issues related to agriculture is of more common interest. Although agricultural yield is privately owned, cultivation and irrigation are of common interest and high on everybody's list of priorities, and therefore co-operation is seen as a natural strategy for all.

As illustrated in the discussions concerning villagers' health and problems in daily life, there appeared to be a mismatch between project plans and villagers' ideas concerning identification of priorities, and understanding of problems and solutions. Being locations where projects had been established, finalised even, one would expect that there would be more coherence between these two perceptions. Clearly, participatory activities had had some impact, since villagers had agreed to purchase sanitary latrines and tubewells, and they had attained knowledge about appropriate hygiene behaviour. The findings do however, raise issues concerning project claims of putting local knowledge first, working with the villagers, and of practising a more flexible implementation than orthodox development projects. The examples of cost-sharing of tubewells and election of the VDC president raise similarly interesting issues concerning the actual practice of participatory and empowerment strategies. The first issue concerns to what extent it is possible to practice these strategies in a people's centred way. While emphasising that these strategies are allowing local knowledge to count, when practised, it appears that they don't. This seems to be due to an inherent contradiction in the concepts per se, at least when put in the context of a development project. It is natural that any project has some sort of predefinition of problems and appropriate solutions, that there is a logic between activities and expected outcomes of these activities. The purpose of the various participatory activities is to eventually break traditional structures of power. From that perspective it would be contradictory to expect these structures to be present even before participation has started. What is perceived to be the goals is also to some extent a prerequisite for the strategy to work at all. A democratic VDC which invites new people to come forward as leaders, or initiatives to solve problems through collective action instead of relying on traditional roles supposedly characterised by dependency, is obviously challenging traditional ideas, hence local knowledge cannot be allowed to count. The strategies seem to hold a rather naïve idea that participation simply opens up for people to voluntarily take part in development projects, and that once people are allowed to participate the right decisions, i.e. according to the project logic, will be made. A concluding remark suggests that claims about making local knowledge count should be questioned. It is assumed that 'local knowledge' will coincide with project plans. Once participatory activities have given villagers the chance to share problems and

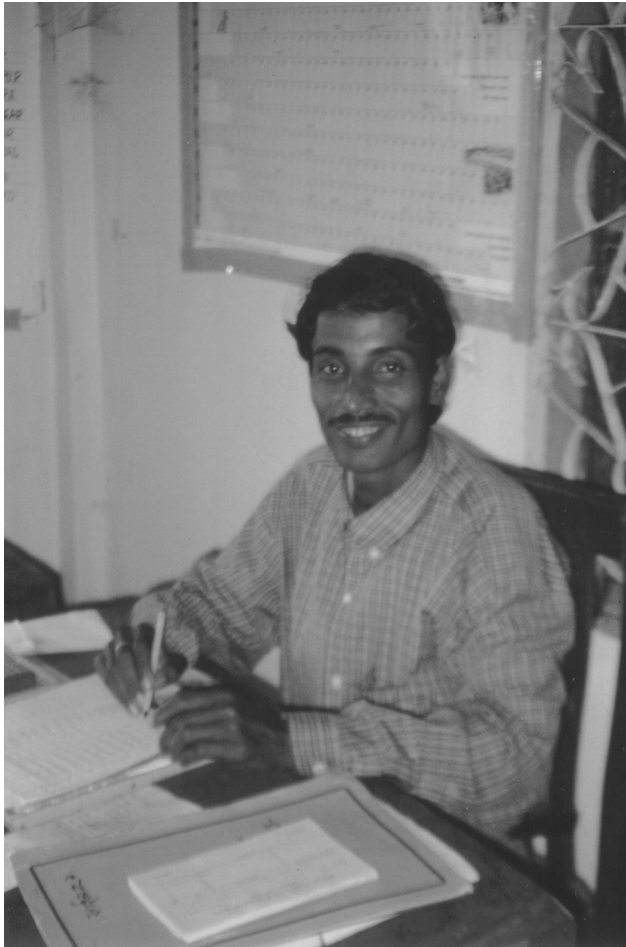
ideas in workshops and village development committees, villagers are expected to come to the same conclusions as those expressed in the projects.

A second issue raised through the two case studies above concerns the relation between project activities as such, and the normative values attached to them. Quantifiable goals, i.e. increased coverage of sanitary latrines and tubewells, are results of participatory activities. Apart from the noticeable results – installed latrines and tubewells – it is assumed that also normative results have been achieved, i.e. change of behaviour, new, institutionalised ways of making decisions through the VDC, empowerment through social mobilisation. Participatory activities are linked to increased coverage of tubewells and latrines, to change in hygiene behaviour, and to overall empowerment of the villagers. The tangible goal of coverage is left as the single sign of success for all kinds of aims with the participatory activities. However, there is nothing in the activities per se that automatically holds normative qualities such as empowerment and awareness. In short, *signs of* and *effects of* activities are not the same. The relation between the two is easy to simplify though, much due to the need to monitor and evaluate the projects.

The material presented so far suggests that there are puzzling ambiguities in the concepts of participation and empowerment per se. Does empowerment rely on a capacity and knowledge introduced from outside? Does participation only work if villagers understand democratic working orders? Or does participation per se lead to increased democracy? Is breaking of traditional and obstructing structures only a matter of finding new organisational forums? Will people behave and think differently once democratic working procedures have been offered to them? And what about making local knowledge count, if it turns out that knowledge is strongly linked with structure and relations of power? It seems as if the actual meaning and impact of participation and empowerment strategies depend on how they are being managed by the implementing NGO staff. In the following presentation, focus will be put on this group, continuing the investigation through looking into how interpretation and ambiguities of the concepts are being handled by the staff.

## Implementing level

As concluded above, the normative impact of participation and empowerment strategies seem to depend on how project activities are being interpreted and managed by the implementing NGO staff. The following presentation will focus on this particular group of actors. During interviews with the implementing staff questions were raised concerning the meaning of the various activities and concepts described in project outlines, including the concepts of participation and empowerment. Through this an insight into how the staff has interpreted the project philosophies can be grasped, and how ideological ambiguities that appear during implementation are handled. The interviews were combined with participant observation during project activities, and informal discussions while the staff was working.



*The local NGOs, sometimes located in very small houses, harbour many activities. The organisations need to be well acquainted with the dealings of development projects and networking and negotiations with potential partners often take up a lot of time for the director of the NGOs. The staff, like Mr. Elias in the picture, are responsible for the hands-on tasks of implementing projects. Every project demands paperwork, and recordings of achievements, pictures of project activities and of visitors cover the walls of the office. The walls communicate to outsiders that it's a well organised and qualified NGO, and pictures and charts makes it easy for the staff to monitor the ongoing activities of their organisation.*

### Concepts and activities

Some of the staff had great difficulties in explaining what activities and concepts meant. The interviewees continuously turned to other subjects, or asked me for definitions. This was rather unexpected since the concepts are being frequently used by all when introducing outsiders to their work. Although this confusion as one may call it was only applicable to a few, there did appear to be a lack in problematising the content of the concepts in relation to activities carried out, by a considerable group of the staff. Activities and impact were described simply through statements such as 'we do this and then they are empowered', as if empowerment comes automatically. One of the staff explained:

The meaning of 100% is that people know the right behaviour... it means if there are 105 families and we install 105 latrines for them... it means that the village is then perfect.<sup>5</sup> (local NGO staff)

Often normative aims were being verified by quantifying how many activities had been carried out. When pointing out the critical processes the activities allude to, what is required to achieve self-management, change of hygiene behaviour, a sense of ownership and responsibility, the staff simply referred to a report of all the activities they had conducted in one village. The staff in this group gave an impression of knowing the concept from how it is being popularly described in reports, without recognising the challenges they often constitute for both staff and the reality it is aimed to change. They appeared to be conducting their tasks as implementers in a rather mechanical way, carrying out the activities according to plan but not showing much flexibility in relation to problems or to the participants involved in the activities. To the extent the participatory strategy was being seen as a challenge, the question of how to make sure it works seemed to depend on a firm and authoritarian attitude on behalf of the staff towards the villagers:

... the VDC meeting is only arranged so that we can see how we can cover 100% and to make sure that villagers can install ring-slabs. We have to inspire them... still it is compulsory for you to set up a hygienic latrine and you have to use it we tell them. Sometimes the villagers sit in a tea-stall and I see them and call 'hey do you have a latrine? By tomorrow you have to go and buy one otherwise you will not be allowed to live in this village'. This kind of strict order we make... in this kind of meetings the VDC play the main role because I won't be able to solve this problem on my own... in this village the villagers are always co-operating with me. All of a sudden when I want to visit, I say to the president that I want to visit this village today and instantly he gathers the members. (local NGO staff)

It seems to be unlikely that the concepts have been transformed from project rhetoric to intended practice. There seems to be a tendency to put relation to staff at higher

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<sup>5</sup> The slogan '100%' refers to the project's aim to achieve 100% coverage of sanitary latrines in the village selected for the project. The slogan symbolises that participatory activities have been successful, a demand has been created based on new knowledge through hygiene behaviour education and promotional activities lead by the project partner NGOs.

level in focus, rather than focusing on villagers. The content of the activities is not considered, but they are simply seen as logical steps towards fulfilling measurable goals. One group of staff, however, showed a very reflective way of thinking about definitions, activities and what is needed to reach an impact.

Sustainability, it means long duration. The community people have to like the project from the start. We have to work slowly, to create proper contact with the villagers, to convince all to listen first, and then to convince them to follow. It means self-reliant. It comes from their own, we only give them the advice ... success gives self-confidence and then they will continue with new activities when they see they can handle this change. (local NGO staff)

Within this group, interviews and discussions often contained personal reflections of meetings with people, how they experienced communication with villagers, and how the staff and projects were being received. This group of respondents, which relate the concepts to the activities they are carrying out, explaining how they can achieve a value through these activities apart from just reaching goals related to hardware, show a much more profound understanding of what the activities mean and in what way they are challenging. They also recognise their own role – the way they handle relations with villagers and manage to create trust – as important and demanding.

### **Problems encountered**

While interviews give access to rather formal knowledge, spending time in the field with the staff gives a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in managing the strategies under scrutiny. The group which invited to little more than rather rigid discussions about concepts and activities eventually expressed problems encountered while working in the villages. However, here as above, a difference in how problems are being described can be detected between different staff.

Some of the problems raised are expected and directly addressed in the project itself, such as lack of awareness, lack of education, and poverty. The fact that people are illiterate e.g. constitute a problem when forming the VDCs, since illiteracy excludes people from certain positions and the aim of including all kinds of people in the VDC is complicated. I also came across answers such as 'people are lazy, they are ignorant', 'people don't listen', or 'it's their behaviour. They cannot change', linking these problematic attitudes to the fact that they are villagers and poor. There are furthermore problems which could be termed structural problems, such as social and religious obstacles. Structural problems refer to challenges found in a narrow context, such as attitudes, power relations, social and religious structures, within the village community:

Bangladeshi people are always calculating what they will receive, they always expect more than they are giving. They don't want to give something but always want to take something. (local NGO staff)

There are religious obstacles ... they did not want the women to participate. (local NGO staff)

Sometimes they say that if they are wearing sandals some other villagers will insult them, these are social obstacles. (local NGO staff)

In the village there are so many kinds of people, perhaps five powerful leaders. Perhaps we don't contact two of them. It may happen that later on these two persons destroy the VDC. (local NGO staff)

The structural problems also include dealing with the history of NGOs procedures within government institutions and attitudes of government officials, which has created unrealisable expectations or caused lack of trust. Mostly these experiences are causing and enhancing gaps in communication between village level and officials, but in some cases it has also led to fear of letting outsiders in to the village.

The main problem is that so many NGOs are working at the same time. They cheat people in so many ways... and the villagers ask 'in the future will you attack us on our religion?' (local NGO staff)

The government people... they co-operate cordially when they are invited for seminars and workshops. But they never appear when there is activity which involves meeting with the villagers. (local NGO staff)

While these structural issues also are being addressed by the projects they are not the most obvious targets, but more linked to what one might call preparatory work which is necessary to accomplish participation and start empowerment processes. The preparatory work aims at changing attitudes, showing the villagers how to take charge of the development of their personal lives as well as the advancement of the whole village, and at changing government officials' attitude, making them take responsibility and meet the villagers.

The problems are being described with different attitudes. By some they are perceived as part of project, considered as the actual tasks and challenges of the job. This group of staff seem to interpret their task and the goal of the project to be to create the best circumstances possible for people able to improve on their own, without being dependent on outsiders. The other group though, showed a tendency to put the blame on the villagers for not being able to achieve success with the projects. This attitude is linked to staff who appear to hold the quantifiable goals, i.e. completing and ticking off activities and installations in reports, as more important than the process leading up to the goal. This is the very same staff referred to above as conducting their tasks in a rather mechanical way. Apart from addressing problems by sometimes taking on an authoritarian attitude, suggestions as to how the projects could be adapted to ease those problems were also made. These adjustments would incorporate increasing subsidies, and adding elements in the project which would make it more attractive, such as a credit system. One could question these requests however. Perhaps they are not signs of innovation and responses to the villagers' demands, but more a sign of misunderstanding of what the project activities are actually meant to encourage, i.e. processes of new thoughts leading to independence on behalf of the villagers.



*The NGO staff need to foster many skills. Their work does not only relate to participatory activities such as courtyard meetings and training sessions with the villagers. They also need to be knowledgeable about health issues, and perhaps fishfarming, forestry, and the technology involved with a tubewell. Here, two NGO workers are testing a newly installed tubewell. Is the water of good quality? Does the pump work properly? Are the users looking after the surrounding area in a satisfactory way? The village woman in the picture is the caretaker of the tubewell. She has been given training in maintenance and repairs. The tubewell being new, she has not yet been required to test her skills, and she handles the tools she has been provided with uncertain hands.*



### Evaluation of project achievements

Discussions about encountered problems raise questions concerning roles and responsibilities of staff, villagers and project administration. These issues become particularly clear when debating evaluation of project activities. As mentioned earlier, measuring impact of participatory and empowerment strategies is very hard, and particularly so in projects like these, which apart from normative goals include clearly quantifiable goals. Both projects followed during this fieldwork are struggling with finding appropriate ways of monitoring and evaluating the project activities.

Similar tendencies to the ones mentioned above, i.e. one group reflecting over their work and the project strategies critically and another moving on with activities in a rather mechanical way, are being found here, although not quite as clearly as before. From the latter group we find statements such as the following:

We go in front of toilets and see if they are cleaning the latrines. We can see if the area is clean. If a person is irresponsible then we have not succeeded in making him understand. (local NGO staff)

Sometimes we go to the field and ask the villagers do you have any problem and they answer us no sir, we don't have any problem. Now we use the latrine and we don't have any disease. Some think about using sandals when they go to the toilet: 'what is going to happen?' but that is completely wrong to think in that way because they are careless and they have failed to understand the whole thing. (local NGO staff)

As previous experience shows, presented under 'Health and disease in village daily life', knowledge or statements expressed by villagers concerning proper hygiene behaviour do not always reflect what is actually being practised. Hence, it appears to be rather naïve to settle with villagers oral statements about changes that have occurred. These evaluation procedures do not help in assessing whether there is any connection between the project strategy, project activities and implementing procedures. Moreover, the statements seem to declare that the communication with villagers is only a matter of 'making them understand'. There is little reflection on what can be learnt from the fact that villagers, despite having attended workshops about hygiene behaviour, and despite being able to repeat the new knowledge attained through this, are not changing practice accordingly. Here, participatory strategies seem to hold a tendency to leave responsibility for mobilisation and empowerment to the people who are to benefit from the activities. The blame for not achieving the results hoped for are put on the community people: they are being blamed for not understanding and appreciating the new knowledge given to them.

Other statements do however represent more complex ways of understanding reasons for failure or success:

We count the people in the beginning and the end, who are listening, at the courtyard meetings. And we see – are they interested to learn anything? Are they listening attentively? From this I can evaluate myself as a speaker. I also pay attention to how women are talking to me when I go to the village, if they are asking me things, show me respect and trust me. If we fail, then I think that during our discussions we have not been able to consult people about their thoughts. (local NGO staff)

If the project fails? One reason is laziness on behalf of the villagers. It can also be due to insufficient staff support, and that funding is not sufficient. Another main reason could also be that I could not co-operate or come to meetings with them. That would be the first reason. I have to give more time and change this mistake, but there is lack of time. And the villagers are illiterate and lack knowledge. It would be good if more people could work for this programme. (local NGO director)

Several variables are touched upon here. While it is being recognised that it is difficult to make villagers listen and understand, the reason for this is not being put on the villagers. The staff evaluate themselves, reflect upon their own performance continuously during their work. Reactions and communication with villagers constitute a constant source for evaluation. We also see references to the organisational structure and the working situation of the staff. This concerns resources available, in terms of staff and time, that is necessary in order to make the strategies feasible. Although not directly referred to, organisational culture is also likely to play a role. Strongly success-oriented organisations leave little room for critical reflections to be heard or even raised by the staff amongst themselves. Similarly, evaluation procedures established by the organisation will foster different ways of defining success and failure. An organisation which emphasise quantifiable measurements is likely to encourage a different way of defining success than one who encourages personal judgements which allow for complicated understanding of the processes involved in participation and empowerment strategies.

### **The use of language as indication of approach**

Not only do interviews and participant observation give direct information, details, about procedures and interpretations concerning the projects. The way of *expressing experiences* also have a value in itself for the understanding of the process surrounding and affecting the implementation of participatory and empowerment strategies. Obviously, there are clear limitations for me to put the language used in focus, since the majority of the interviews have been made with the help of an interpreter. Nevertheless, certain comments from the local staff have been present in nearly every interview:

... we make them realise their situation.

We have already empowered them.

We made them understand how everything is related to their personal life, then they realised it...

Why are these quotes interesting? What do they tell us? The projects studied here, as participatory and empowerment strategies in general, state that it is the village participants who should be in focus. The quotes above, on the other hand, give the impression that it is the project staff and their knowledge which is in focus. There are however different connotations of these quotes, depending on context. When dis-

cussing the difficulties with making the system of cost-sharing among villagers of a tubewell, one respondent said “if it is not working then we have to make them understand”. This was expressed in a manner and situation which signalled that a top-down approach, i.e. imposing ideas about appropriate solutions, should be used. In another context, a fieldworker expressed: “... we can't decide anything, we have to depend on the villagers, on their opinion about what is good for them. Maybe we think it is good, but ... Not until they themselves say it is bad, then we can agree and say we also think it is bad”. While putting villagers' participation and initiatives in focus, the fieldworker implies that this does not mean that ‘anything goes’. Although the staff is convinced by certain ideas, what they believe to be appropriate solutions should not be imposed on villagers. Ready-made solutions are of no use, unless a realisation of what is a good and what is a bad way of moving forward has come from the villagers themselves. The question of how to facilitate choice but not imposing solutions is important here. Despite aspirations of breaking the traditional top-down manner of handling development project, there is I believe an almost unavoidable element of paternalistic manners – a belief that the villagers need to be enlightened, and that the project has already the formula for how to advance.

### **Concluding remarks**

The argument presented earlier, that the concepts of participation and empowerment hold inherent contradictions, is being strengthened when introduced to the views and work of the implementing staff. These contradictions concern the people's centred approach, the claim to make local knowledge count, and the fact that goals and prerequisites for the strategies to work to some extent are the same. The experience as delineated by the staff illustrates how this causes problems during implementation: when confronted with reality, the convincing strategies become complicated. Furthermore, the importance of finding suitable methods for evaluation, i.e. finding a balance between quantity and quality of project activities, has been illustrated. When a quantifiable outcome is too much in focus, when completing activities is seen as more important than tackling the challenges they inevitably bring out, there is a risk of surpassing obstacles instead of facing them during implementation. Consequently, impacts expected as results of participatory and empowerment strategies are jeopardised.

One may suggest a re-thinking of the logic of the project plans, improving methods and polishing definitions, in order to find ways of strengthening the relationship between activities and goals. However, we learnt from previous chapter that ability to achieve empowerment is not only dependent on appropriate technique and methodology, but on the person handling the implementation of participatory strategies. The normative content of the activities relies on the way they are being performed by the project staff. Participation can be used as an instrument in order to reach increased coverage, or it can be used with an aim at achieving processes of mobilisation and empowerment, leaving improved access to tubewells and latrines to be secondary

goals. Different interpretations give correspondingly different attitudes towards working with and listening to the grassroots. Consequently it is crucial that project philosophies have been correctly interpreted by the staff. As is pointed out above though, 'correct interpretation' does not lead to a straightforward process of implementation. Instead, re-interpretation and negotiations at various stages are necessary. It is at the stage of negotiation that project outcomes can be understood rather than through referring to project plans.

Not only individual interpretations but also project environment affect the performance of the staff. The partner NGOs contracted to work at the grassroots are often working under time pressure, with goals to reach increased coverage of hardware within a time-frame decided by project initiators. Convincing villagers of the project ideology, its benefits and working methods, can be time consuming. The partner organisation is forced to make priorities and navigate between goals, between those identified as normative, empowering, by the project, and those of a more tangible character. Activities with a purpose both to reach normative *and* tangible goals tend to lose the normative side in favour of those that are more obviously detectable. It is not difficult to perform the activities linked to participation and empowerment. Timing, attendance and topic of meetings are recorded, which all shows that project plans have been followed. But empowerment impacts can neither be *measured* nor *assumed* to have been reached based on these records. The normative content of project activities risk being lost due to a striving to reach goals linked to hardware.

The field material presented here does not contradict what has been said in previous chapter on participation and empowerment. It illustrates the issues raised there concerning difficulties involved in the practice of participation and empowerment in development projects. Two imminent questions hence arise: how can these difficulties be resolved? and: how can we understand the conceptual ambiguities? Referring back to the discussion in chapter 2 – 'Sociological approach as methodology' – we may conclude that the former question is likely to be asked by a social practitioner or an activist, while the latter question may be identified as a sociological question. Both questions are valuable, but it must be recognised that they have different aims and hence lead to rather different discussions. At the risk of repetition, the aim of this study is to identify sociological questions in the material at hand, and to avoid engaging in a debate concerning the appropriateness of policies.

While in theory we may separate the discourses of development in practice (the former question) from the discourse of sociology/academia (the latter question), this is not always easily done in practice. In fact, they often merge in a rather delusive way. The literature concerning participation and empowerment often emanates from an academic environment, with authors of academic profession. However, this literature also appears to be strongly linked to the advocating of participation and empowerment in development projects. This is not due to a confusion of roles, but, and as illustrated by Chambers earlier, due to a conscious choice to actively engage in the

politics of development and with a concern for the less powerful<sup>6</sup>. Much of the discussion found in this literature is based on the former question posed above. It aims at describing and prescribing the use of participation, reflecting on experience with an aim to improve its practice. An abundance of texts are devoted to refining and re-defining concepts and methods related to participatory strategies, displaying renewed understanding of complexities of power relations at various levels that need to be understood in order to make participation work. This set of literature does present insightful and critical analyses of participation, but the critique has mostly been elaborated on with the intention of improving definitions and methods. However, the further one pursues some of these detailed definitions and prescriptions, the more contradictory and problematic the strategies appear. While analyses are aimed at criticising previous simplifying assumptions they are still based on the hypothesis that participation can work, it can lead to empowerment and increased equality and equity. It is mainly a matter of getting definitions, techniques and attitudes right, and to defend the concepts against co-optation and misuse.

The latter question posed above – how can we understand those conceptual ambiguities? – aims at detecting the hidden assumptions that the practitioners' discourse, or a descriptive analysis, of participation is based on. Recently, a new type of critical literature has appeared, devoted to analysing participation as a phenomenon, scrutinising the concept from theoretical perspectives rather than from practical experiences. The following chapter will provide an introduction to this literature. The hidden assumptions discussed here concern people's participation and the function of democracy, the assumed empowering and democratically educative effect of participatory activities, the basis of individual motivation, and the effect of collective action. It also introduces a discussion concerning the particular organisational context of development projects, and the joint interest of rather disparate actors in ensuring that participatory strategies continue to dominate.

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6 A concern for the less powerful, or the individual, can be expressed in different ways. While Chambers' position is expressed based on a normative, political conviction of the responsibility of the researcher to change in order to make development theories and policies really become 'alternative', Long's position appears to be less politicised. Long argues for a focus on the individual, using Giddens' concept of agency. The main argument for this position seems to be not political, but rather coming from a concern of a social scientist who wishes to include a layer of reality that has previously been neglected.

## CHAPTER 5

# Participation and empowerment: adding new perspectives

The concept of participation is by no means new or exclusive to the development discourse. It has e.g. been subject for debates and analyses within politics, civil society, and management theories. The analyses of the concept found within these different discourses reveal important considerations of the contradictory nature of participation. The discussion below will look into some of these debates, and link them to participation as perceived within the context of the development discourse.

## **Actor-orientation in democratic structures**

We may recall how Long argues for a new focus on the individual as a purposive agent in development studies, and how he disputes the unreflective use of predefined categories when trying to understand social action and social change in any society. Increasingly, emphasis is being put on agency in order to understand processes and outcomes of participatory projects. From this perspective, one could say that focus of interest has been moved from community, as in community participation, to individual level, from a perception of community as homogenous to that of heterogeneous individuals. Simultaneously, a focus on structures in terms of institutional environment has emerged in development studies, with emphasis on good governance, human rights, and a society supporting democracy. With insight based on previous experience, it is understood that a democratic society cannot solely be based on a strong state. Participation by the individual, combined with appropriate institutional support, is seen as two sides of the policy of good governance. However, policies encouraging participation by the individual in concerns that go beyond the boundaries of the strictly personal must be carefully tailored. In a paper by the World Bank it is argued that...

...policies that help the poor but impose costs on the non-poor will encounter resistance... Since political power tends to reflect economic power, it is important to design poverty reducing policies that will be supported, or at least not actively resisted, by the non-poor. (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994:156)

Policies ought to be sensitive to the political nature of participation and to the fact that conflicts may cause policies to be counterproductive. In another World Bank report, referred to by Steifel and Wolfe, the potential conflicts of interests are seen as part of the democratic system:

Participation in the political process means much more than the opportunity to exercise the vote. It means having a political climate that not merely tolerates dissent but welcomes it. Dissent is at the heart of participation, for participation must imply the right to say to the establishment in all spheres – 'yes' or 'no' or 'but'. (Steifel & Wolfe, 1994:156)

There is a close relationship between individual participation and overall democracy, and at the same time participatory strategies invite tensions of political nature affecting the whole of society, perhaps even jeopardising the very system that encourages participation. The World Bank points out that participatory democracy opens up for conflicts based on inequality. Abraham and Platteau point at a general problem inherent in participatory democracy and write:

In effect, the democratic concept is not straightforward since it implies that one is ready to act according to the will of the majority and not necessarily according to one's own belief or perceived self-interest. (Abraham & Platteau, 2001:10)

The quote implies that democratic participation demands profound knowledge and acceptance on behalf of citizens of the rules of the game involved in democracy. An introduction into the debate concerning people's participation and democracy gives us further understanding of the difficulties involved here, pointing at trade-offs between full participation and a stable democracy. While some theories of democracy argue for full participation, below referred to as classical theories, others warn against the totalitarianism and risks of political instability involved in such a democratic system. In the latter case the assumption of the natural 'democratic man' is seriously questioned, partly based on negative experience of the expansion of fascism and the Weimar Republic, both based on substantial people's participation in politics (Pateman, 1970).

### **Learning from participation in democracy**

In an analysis of participation in theories of democracy Pateman discusses what she calls the classical theory of democracy, which places participation at the core of democracy (Pateman, 1970). Rousseau, representing this classical theory, argued that participation was crucial as a means for decision-making in society and for ensuring good government. He also considered the more profound effects that participation per se has on the individual, seeing participatory activities as an end in themselves. Through taking part in discussions and decision-making procedures citizens were educated. Pateman writes:

Rousseau's ideal system is designed to develop responsible, individual social and political action through the effect of the participatory process. During this process, the individual learns that the word 'each' must be applied to himself: that is to say, he finds that he has to take into account wider matters than his own immediate private interests if he is to gain co-operation from others, and he learns that the public and private interests are linked. [...] ... through this educative process the individual will eventually come to feel little or no conflict between the demands of the public and private sphere. (Pateman, 1970:24)

The argument of the educative qualities of participation involves an investigation of the interlinkages between individual character and institutional environment. While Rousseau placed participation at the core of the democratic system since it involves certain political behaviour and attitudes, he also appreciated that these values are not inherent but need to be taught through and supported by appropriate institutions. Pateman, referring to theory of participatory democracy in general, describes that the theory...

... is built round the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy: for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialisation, or 'social training', for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. (Pateman, 1970:42)

The dilemma of people's participation has been an issue of theoretical elaboration in theories of democracy since long. Schumpeter argued for participation being restricted mainly to voting and stated: "The electoral mass is incapable of action other than stampede" (Pateman, 1970:5, referring to Schumpeter). He argued that the core of democracy is free competition for leadership, which does not incorporate open participation for all citizens. Classical theory of democracy rests on false assumptions of the 'democratic man', which has been proven to be an illusion. A background to this argument comes from what may be called a scientific definition of democracy, as opposed to a classical normative definition. The scientific definition was based on empirical large-scale studies that showed widespread undemocratic, authoritarian attitudes in society, in particular among lower socio-economic groups. Allowing full participation would mean allowing these values and attitudes to weaken the democratic system. Pateman delineates how Berelson continues Schumpeter's discussion. Berelson maintained that reality reveals that any assumption of an inherent democratic attitude among citizens are faulty. However, he continued, democracy seems to survive despite the practice of a rather unrestricted participation in many societies. The lesson learnt from this paradox, Berelson claims, is that the individual participant should not be in focus of a theory of democracy, but rather the political system. Empirical studies show, according to Berelson, that active participation in political life from a minority of people, and disinterest from the majority, is required for a democratic system to remain stable. The political system did not seem to be threatened by authoritarian values, since people who held those values did not, by their own choice, participate to a great extent in political life.



In Pateman's discussion we furthermore get acquainted with Dahl's arguments on the topic. Elaborating on Schumpeter's definition of democracy as a political system or method, Dahl also includes normative aspects by discussing 'social prerequisites' for the political system (Pateman, 1970:9). Although Dahl is not very specific he refers to the need for a consensus of norms, that may be obtained through training, or mere active participation in society through family life, churches, schools, reading of newspapers et cetera. Dahl emphasised that what is required is not a unified personality, but "personalities that can adopt to different kinds of roles in different control systems" (Pateman, 1970:10). It appears that Dahl refers to a normative system that citizens can relate to, but not to a normative interpretation of democracy in the sense that there is a 'single democratic character' as in an inherent democratic man. The paradox pointed out by Berelson still remains though, and this is noted by Dahl, in that while the system requires political activity this also poses a risk. In practice this risk is not so imminent though since the groups harbouring authoritarian attitudes, i.e. the lower socio-economic groups, are also the least politically active ones.

Pateman is critical against what she refers to as contemporary theories (Schumpeter, Berelson, Dahl) of democracy for not questioning the relation between attitudes and socio-economic status. The theories of Schumpeter, Berelson and others portray the character of individuals as static. Rousseau on the other hand offers a perception of individual behaviour and attitudes as intrinsically embedded in structure, and where a change in structure consequently leads to changes in individual character. Contemporary theory, according to Pateman, has wrongly dismissed the findings of socialisation, which are expressed by Rousseau and others after him. Rousseau's emphasis on socialisation into democracy has been mistaken in contemporary theory for an argument about the inherent democratic man. The result of this inattention is a non-participatory democratic system, as suggested in contemporary theory, where participation is either actively restricted or simply not encouraged. In such a system authoritarian and undemocratic values will only be perpetuated, since the group holding these values will not be invited to take full part in the democratic system and learn from this participation.

### **Fostering or liberating democratic attitudes?**

Although referring to theories established quite a while ago, the dilemmas related to the risks of an open democratic society, inviting ideas and interests that strongly conflict with each other, are well known in contemporary society. The introduction to this topic here has no intention to form the basis for conclusive comments about appropriate degrees of or methods for participation, political and otherwise, in democratic systems. The intention is merely to give an indication of the inevitable conflicts that participation opens up for, among leaders and participating citizens alike. The myth of the true democratic, homogenous community as well as that of the inherent, democratically and voluntarily participating individual, as imagined in the participatory theories under scrutiny here, can be related to problems which are at the core of

Schumpeter et al's concern. Their argument, based on empirical experience, is pointing to the risk of full participation leading to the overthrow of a democratic system, since it invites authoritarian values to come to rule society. The suggestion for restricted participation, or even a non-participatory democracy, is a rather harsh and unsatisfactory solution though. While it is argued that the idea of an inherent 'democratic man' is naïve, this line of argument also denies that knowledge and values required for democratic participation can be attained. In other words, it presents a rather unsatisfactory static view of the individual. The classical theory, on the other hand, claims that values and knowledge are acquired through participation. Rousseau argues that individuals and society need to go through a process of socialisation. Hence he does not assume that democratic values are inherent. It is not enough to make way for the liberation of the democratic man, but he/she must be fostered and guided to become a democratic citizen. Rousseau does however make assumptions concerning the outcome of socialisation. His image, it appears, is that of a pre-modern society to which appropriate institutions must be added that will foster and transform citizens and society to a modern democratic one. It seems as if there is a predetermined direction for change: with certain institutions come co-operation, democracy and a modern society. But how can we know that the "individual will eventually come to feel little or no conflict between the demands of the public and private sphere" (Pateman, 1970:25). When and how do democratic values replace predominantly authoritarian ones?

As mentioned earlier, development policies today aim at strengthening institutions of formal as well as informal character, based on an emphasis on democracy, civil society and good governance. This demonstrates a view that grassroots democracy cannot develop in an institutional vacuum. Institutions and networks are here given a fostering, guiding, or stabilising role in emerging democratic societies. The underlying implication of participatory approaches appears slightly different. We may start by saying that, as opposed to Schumpeter et al, there is a basic assumption that people's attitudes can change. Earlier, in the presentation of the field material, it was described how the purpose of the various participatory-activities is to eventually break traditional structures of power and authoritarian attitudes, and in this way leave way for more democratic decision-making procedures. However, in the following analyses it was argued that what had been identified as goals were also to some extent prerequisites for the strategy to work at all. This contradiction may be explained by the fact that the basic assumption made, although not explicitly so, in participatory strategies is that democratic attitudes are inherent, but have been hindered by structures. Hence, while the discourse does not endorse the schumpeterian view, neither does it endorse Rousseau's theory of socialisation, that democratic attitudes need to be fostered through participation. Strategies of participation seem to be based on the idea that democratic values need *not to be learnt* by the participant, but are rather *freed* through participatory activities. Claims that PRA is a key to empowerment of the excluded continues to be repeated, e.g. in statements such as "illiterate, poor, marginalised people could represent their own lives and livelihoods through [PRA], do their own analysis and come up with their own solutions" (Cornwall,

2000:43). Participation appears, as Cleaver points out, to be the beginning of a process that will 'unleash latent capacities', mobilising collective action based on consensus, that will lead to development in the interest of the whole community (Cleaver, 2001:46). So called 'facilitators' from outside will set the process in motion, but apart from this initial activity no additional, external assistance should be needed.

Although participation in rhetoric is portrayed as simply a key to unleash existing capacities, we find concepts used in relation to participatory strategies that cause some confusion. The concept of 'capacity building' is clearly indicating that something needs to be 'built'. However whether this refers to a capacity that is already present but hidden to its possessor, or something that needs to be added, is not quite clear. Interestingly, and argued here in earlier analysis and which goes counter to the rhetoric, there is also an element of paternalistic manners in the way participation is described and carried out, with a belief that the villagers need to be enlightened. Adding to the confusion, the idea of 'indigenous knowledge' lends itself to the interpretation that participatory activities should give opportunities for local demand and local knowledge to determine project outlines. By making local knowledge count, and emphasising that projects in this way become demand-driven, it is believed that projects will be more appropriate to local heterogeneity as well as more democratically founded. However, as with participation assumptions underlying the concept of 'local knowledge' and 'demand-driven' are hazy, and seem mainly to have been established since they symbolise the opposite of ethnocentric and supply-driven, which has previously dominated criticised projects. Below follows a critical discussion concerning the actual meaning of these concepts, which further disturb any initial uninformed praise of participation and entailing concepts we might have held.

### **Making local knowledge count**

Calls for increased participation are often accompanied with claims that projects should be 'demand-driven' and that they should make 'local knowledge count'. In several articles Mosse shows, based on empirical findings, that assumption that participatory planning processes would lead to the unfolding of local knowledge and demand based on felt needs ought to be redefined (Mosse, forthcoming; Mosse, 2001). Mosse writes: "The critical point is that what is taken as 'people's knowledge' is itself constructed in the context of planning and reflects the social relationships that planning system entails" (Mosse, 2001:17). Mosse further on refers to Long and Villareal who emphasise that knowledge is not a commodity, but must be seen as a product of relations and hence looked at relationally. Pointing again at the heterogeneity of community, Mosse argues that participatory activities are often public events, and therefore invites existing power-relations to be reflected also in these activities. What is called 'local knowledge', attained through workshops using participatory methods, may mainly be the expression of the interest of strong and powerful people in the

community<sup>7</sup>. Even though a project attempts at making local knowledge count in planning processes, a project per se has some sort of predefined idea of causes of problems, what solutions are preferable, and what resources, assistance and expertise ought to be made available as a consequence of this logical reasoning. However, Mosse claims, this outside knowledge clearly influences the way local people put forward their needs and priorities. Focus has been on avoiding projects to impose predefined analysis and solutions. While this seems to have been the dominating concern, an understanding of the villagers as agents, implying monitoring and calculation of resources and options available, has been neglected. Mosse even argues that one may talk of the manipulation of planning by the locals. Perceived availability pulls demand and shapes the way need is voiced. The public characteristics of participatory activities causes dominating interest to hide the interests of less powerful, or of those who do not participate. But locals also tailor how they express knowledge and demand according to perceived expectations and availability of resources. This streamlining of an interest to fit a particular purpose also conceals the heterogeneity, which the strategies are supposed to encourage. Mosse writes:

... participatory techniques allowed the development priorities conveyed by the project (...) to be mirrored back to them ... Self-interested villagers would of course collude with project staff in endorsing external assumptions and programme priorities where this guaranteed benefits... (Mosse, 2001:21)

On behalf of the villagers, learning to listen and think according to project-logic is rewarded through access to resources (hardware, credit, networks etc) that are being offered through projects. The notion of the villager as an agent, a purposive actor, is confirmed although perhaps not in an entirely expected way.

There are further aspects of the 'local knowledge' focus that may be questioned. Cleaver writes that accompanying the assumption that participation will set local knowledge and action free, there is a definite risk of 'swinging from the position of 'we know best' to an equally untenable and damaging one – 'they know best' (Cleaver, 2001). Such a position disregards the fact that the poorest may not only have been deprived of resources in terms of hardware, but also in terms of vocational skills and education. Brett, using the example of preferences in development projects to set up co-operatives of various kinds, emphasises that one must not underestimate the technical and organisational knowledge required for such enterprises (Abraham & Platteau, 2001; Brett, 1996). "Some encouragement and a sack of cement is not enough to get co-operative organisations started!" he argues, but one must recognise that certain skills are needed in order for these enterprises to be run and these skills may need to be provided from outside expertise. Brett warns that starting participatory projects and handing over decision-making, planning and the running of an organisation may only end up in demoralisation and disappointments among participants. Abraham and Platteau discuss similar experiences with people's planning projects (Abra-

7 Bearing in mind the warnings that Schumpeter puts forward this may not necessarily mean that authoritarian values are being perpetuated. On the contrary Schumpeter suggests that it is through an informed elite that democratic values are introduced.

ham & Platteau, 2001). While the aim of such projects has been to reflect actual needs and valuable existing knowledge, the unintended consequence has been that they also have reflected lack of capacity and inadequate skills among locals running the projects with the effect that people become disillusioned and the project risks being co-opted by local elite.

There is a fine line between facilitating choice and imposing solutions. Putting indigenous knowledge and local demand in focus is a way of directing participation and staying clear of a patronising top-down project implementation. However, when looking into what happens in practice, this strategy appears to be rather delusive. Despite claims made on behalf of participation, Stirrat and Henkel argue that participatory approaches...

...presuppose and shape 'participants' from the very beginning. But this is done in ways not always foreseen by exponents of participation. It is in this sense that we suggest that participation, counterintuitive though it may seem, is a form of governance – in fact the ultimate modern form. (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001:179)

And they continue:

Empowerment in this sense is not just a matter of 'giving power' to formerly disempowered people. The currency in which this power is given is that of the project of modernity. In other words, the attempt to empower people through the projects envisaged and implemented by the practitioners of the new orthodoxy is always an attempt, however benevolent, to reshape the personhood of the participants. (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001:182)

It is important to note that this delusive character of participatory strategies should not, I believe, be interpreted as revealed hidden intentions. Rather, it appears to be the result of lack of insight into the problematic of holding a vision or wish about the what participation should lead to. A strong promotion of participation may end up in strong supervision of participation, which goes counter to the rhetoric that participation should imply flexibility, reversal of orders, and a true bottom up approach in development projects. While this seems to be an inherent contradiction in the concepts of participation and empowerment per se, it does not need to lead to a rejection of participation and empowerment strategies altogether. However, the implications should be recognised regarding analysis of the concepts. Referring to the discussion in chapter two, analysis combined with advocacy may obscure such conceptual contradictions, which I believe may lead to a dramatic clash between expectations and real achievements.

### **Mutual deception in joint decision-making**

Having dealt with participation in the context of democracy, and the inadequacies in assumptions that participation leads to democratic decision-making and manifestations of heterogeneous local knowledge and demands, we will now turn to how the individual is portrayed in the discourse of participation in development. The basic

characteristics and myths of community have been rather thoroughly discussed in literature on participatory strategies<sup>8</sup>. Increasingly the concept of 'agency' is being emphasised as an important entity, to see beneficiaries not as objects but as subjects. Despite this, and compared to the way 'community' has been scrutinised, the individual, or the agent, seems to have attained very little attention from a theoretical point of view. Some arguments forwarding the logic of using participatory approaches in development use an economics framework, departing from the individual's self-interest as the driving force making participation and co-operation a preferred way of operating at community level, while others refer to compelling norms as basis for participatory action. Cleaver argues that the participatory approaches hold traits of both under- and over- socialised views of the individual<sup>9</sup>, but rarely shows analytical understanding or modelling of linkages between the individual and social structures (Cleaver, 2001).

In an article by Cook the author departs from literature and theoretical framework usually consulted when participation in development is being discussed, and introduces theories of social psychology to delineate some illuminating aspects of participation (Cook & Kothari, 2001). Cook describes how individuals who take part in group decision-making may come to make decisions that are considerably more risky than if they would have made decisions individually. He furthermore shows, by referring to findings in social psychology, that groups may come to decision that go counter to what any of the individuals want to do due to fear of being excluded. Neither of these decisions reflects individual control, or what one refers to as 'felt needs' in development projects. They display a false consensus, or, what Cook calls 'mutual deception' (Cook & Kothari, 2001:110). Participation in group decision-making hence may lead to raised consciousness, but this does not necessarily lead to individual empowerment. Indeed, it may lead to adverse effects such as 'wrong' decisions. Through an introductory discussion of well established theories in other disciplines, Cook challenges assumptions about participation, empowerment and a transformed consciousness: "there is nothing in participatory processes themselves that brings about a particular state of consciousness: rather, that state is shaped by the interventionist" he claims (Cook & Kothari, 2001:120). Both Cleaver and Cook call for attention to the fact that integration of classical social theory, and established theories of participation in other fields than development, has been ignored, which leaves participatory approaches in development with insufficient theoretical grounding. Cook even argues that citizens of the third world "are victims of a disciplinary bias" (Cook & Kothari, 2001:121). Again, I see this as a result of analysis being combined with advocacy or promotion of the concept of participation. An aim at influencing policy-making tends to emphasise a clarifying rhetoric, that refer to immediate difficulties experienced during practice. While it is indeed important to feed these experiences into refined policies, it appears, as Cook points out, as if existing theoretical frame-

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8 To what extent this has led to these naïve assumptions being rejected may be disputed though. As the discussion following participation in democracy suggests the notion of the democratic community still appears to be valid in the discourse of participation in development.

9 The concepts of an under- and over-socialised individual are discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

works are being neglected. Hence, while new policies are being informed by practical experience directly linked to development in practice, they are lacking in theoretical insights which could be provided from existing social theory.

### **Evidence of successful use of participation?**

The fact that participation, as noted by Cook above, is void of normative impact without a proper implementation has also been suggested in the empirical analysis in previous chapter. This has been illustrated by the difficulties involved with finding suitable ways of evaluating project with focus on participation and empowerment. Flattering evaluations should be interpreted with due scepticism, bearing in mind that signs of activities may have been mistaken for normative impact. However, scepticism comes not only from the fact that empowerment, as a result is very hard to assess. As observed by Mosse, there are other reasons for hesitancy.

Following Mosse's analysis of participatory projects, although interpretations of and interests in the use of participation in a project may vary considerably among stakeholders, all may have an interest in claiming success for the strategy. This, however, does not at all mean that a project is implemented according to claimed participatory approach, but merely that "enough people firmly believe that it is" (Mosse, forthcoming:35). Apart from oral assessments verifying success, formal evaluation reports confirm success by referring to "unassailable quantitative record" of participatory activities (Mosse, forthcoming:21). Mosse writes:

What is characteristic of a 'successful' project is a high degree of convergence of disparate interests in priorities onto a single validating and interpretive model: and therefore a shared interest in reaffirming and protecting it. (Mosse, forthcoming:14)

The reason for being cautious about evidence of success of participatory projects is also based on the fact that it is clearly difficult to control variables outside of the project. Changes may be dependent on strong local individuals or domestic changing circumstances rather than project intervention. Furthermore, any possible normative project outcomes are per se very evasive (Abraham & Platteau, 2001).

The concepts of participation and empowerment and adjacent methodologies give promises of improvements concerning both project efficiency and sustainability, as well as an overall empowerment leading to mobilisation towards social change. However, due to the inherent difficulties to identify normative changes, little evidence has been able to be produced concerning its latter claims (Cleaver, 2001). There appears to be something mysterious about 'participation' that causes us to accept its claims without calling for evidence. This is a mystery that appear not only to be valid for participation in the development context, but also in literature treating organisations and management, where theorists Clegg and Chester wonder why "a device which is given almost universal public approval has met with such limited success" (Tayler, 2001).

In the context of development projects, the need to be able to demonstrate success is valid for several actors, including donors, implementing NGOs, and villagers. This

may be one of the reasons behind the mysterious praise of participation in this particular context. Staff working with the implementation may be 'too participatory', as Mosse calls it, which is met by objection from both other staff as well as from villagers (Mosse, forthcoming; Mosse, 2001). A participatory approach performed too thoroughly may leave villagers without gains, the implementing organisations being discredited, and donors with difficulties in raising money for succeeding projects. The pressure on organisations to perform, within strict time and budgetary limits, combined with evaluation systems favouring quantitative measurements makes it hard for results of participatory strategies to actually show any impact. The organisational context on behalf of donors appears to lag behind with changes in routines according to the new, alternative participatory strategies. For example, the use of PRA may appear to be rather meaningless, when information attained is compiled in charts, not allowing any room for local interpretations and narration (Cornwall, 2000). In other words, participatory techniques do not lead to any changes in terms of bottom-up approaches without concomitant changes in donor organisations and development programmes as a whole. Although this may be recognised by individuals working within a project, organisational hierarchies makes it difficult to protest against structures that go counter to principles of participation (Mosse, forthcoming).

Abraham and Platteau ascribe external intervention an important role in realising the rather radical, even revolutionary, changes in society to take place. However, they also recognise that these changes must be allowed to take time: "This is because what is at stake is nothing less than a radical transformation of deep-rooted institutions, values, beliefs and practices that have to do with the mode of social relations, the power structures, and the source of legitimacy, and the perception of the outside world" (Abraham & Platteau, 2001). Due to the radical character of changes envisaged, the authors call for institutional support, from donors and governments in question. However, both these groups of actors suffer from needs for 'rapid and visible results', as well as being over-ambitious and preferring innovation rather than critical trials (Abraham & Platteau, 2001; Mosse, forthcoming). This 'diluted approach' to the participatory programmes, i.e. constraints in resources in terms of money and time due to too vast geographical spread and too tight time-frames, creates very unfavourable circumstance for the programmes to succeed. The time-factor causes organisations to take short-cuts, with no time to gain understanding of anything that comes outside of project frameworks, and with sometimes unproductive or even counterproductive results.

### **From conceptual dilemmas to key actors**

Through the discussion concerning participation in democracy, we have been introduced to some essential dilemmas involved in people's participation. It is not at all clear that participation goes hand in hand with democratic decision-making, and furthermore, when participation is based in a democratic system, the outcome may be raging conflicts of interests between groups or individuals who find themselves



discriminated against by the system. From the way participation in development is portrayed in rhetoric, it appears that participation and empowerment involves a removal of structures resisting people's participation, and the introduction of new decision-making structures. Once this has been established, the course of change should be towards an increasingly empowered and democratic society<sup>10</sup>. The idea of making local knowledge count and ascertaining that the projects are demand-driven do appear appropriate and sound, but as Mosse shows, the expectations concerning the results of participatory activities in this respect ought to be revised. The power of the majority, as in a democracy, or the power of the strong and influential, whose voices will be heard in projects, will obscure the diversity of interests which the participatory strategies are trying to grasp. Adding to this, the nature of development projects will unknowingly invite villagers to unite in manipulative strivings to reach resources. There are furthermore theoretical inconsistencies concerning what constitutes the individual, which means that assumptions concerning group-based decisions, the expression of felt needs, and individual empowerment ought to be questioned. Participatory group activities may not at all be liberating and empowering for the individual, but may cause oppression, and lead to decisions that are not desirable for anyone involved in these processes.

It is clear that participation and empowerment are highly problematic, especially so in relation to the claims attached to the concepts within the development discourse. While the ideas of democratisation, empowerment, and liberation for the individual from obstructing structures are so strongly attached to the idea of participation, the concept is simultaneously linked to oppression, manipulation by groups or dominating individuals, and to the use of participation in order to transfer responsibilities or to consciously manage a group of people. In the context of development projects the concept appears to be very fragile, and to adhere more to ideological conviction than to a well founded theory on how to make development work.

The problems that are being faced with the use of participatory strategies in development projects are tackled in different ways. Sometimes (e.g. quote by the World Bank in previous chapter) problematic conflicts of political nature are believed to be neutralised through a careful definition of participation as a technical instrument. Critique against participatory strategies is aimed at inadequate understanding of social structure and lack of proper definitions of concepts associated with participatory strategies. The remedy suggested is more and appropriate research with agency, social structure and a flexible understanding of change in focus. Based on increased understanding of local priorities and structures of power more specific definitions will be made, which will constitute the basis for proper methods for practice.

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10 One may say that this is confirmed by the villagers, who, as has been illustrated, on several occasions have claimed that the NGOs implementing the project has showed them, the villagers, the way, and now they will be able to cope on their own. The only thing the NGO had to offer was to show them how to start a new way of doing things, and after that they knew any changes would depend on their own initiatives since the NGO would not be in power to provide them with any more assistance or resources.

One may suggest that the precarious balance between conflictual meanings and implications of participation should be solved during the actual implementing process. In the introductory chapter on participation, it is mentioned that the key elements of participation are not found in project plans, but in the way participatory activities are carried out. The attitudes and understandings of researcher or implementer of participatory methods are crucial in order to fill the strategies with intended meaning when practised. While one may claim that a considerable amount of power is hereby put in the hands of the implementer it is important to note that the attitude that must be acquired for this task should be that of a facilitator, not a director. With all the detailed definitions surrounding participation and empowerment today, and with the different interpretations of aims of the strategies available, it demands skills and training by not only planners but also those who implement projects in order for the strategies to work and project to reach expected outcomes.

Throughout the presentation of the field material, we have met implementing staff that one could say have made wrong interpretations of project philosophies, or behaved in non-participatory ways. Interpretations and behaviour sometimes illustrate a top-down, authoritarian manner, the opposite of what is being stated in reports and plans outlining project activities and underlying philosophies. Choices made in circumstances of negotiation that inevitably appear during implementation may to some extent be ruled by knowledge, understanding, and capacity of each individual staff. However, the failure to comply with project intentions should not be interpreted as mainly a failure to understand or agree with the strategies (or as conscious fraud by the NGOs). Rather, I believe the ambivalent behaviour expressed by the staff is an expression of the conceptual ambiguities inherent in participation and empowerment. Their ambivalence is also a sign of the difficulties involved in their situation rather than of their particular, individual capacities. The staff is often positioned in an organisational environment with pressure to be flexible – attend to reactions from the grassroots level – and yet make sure the project is progressing – pleasing project administration and initiators. There are further circumstances influencing the staff performance in relation to the strategies stated, which will be looked into in following chapters.

By making the implementing level of participatory projects the key to successful projects in terms of envisaged empowerment a new arena for investigation is opened. Many concepts introduced in relation to alternative development approaches have today been incorporated into orthodox development theories and practice. Some claim that alternative concepts have been transformed to concepts suitable for mainstream practice, and hence have lost its original 'alternativeness'. Agreeing with this one could argue that a critique against participation and empowerment is unfair, since it has been practised under circumstances that basically makes it impossible to realise the underlying philosophy of these concepts. They are being used by people, organisations, institutions who do not have the right pre-requisites in terms of attitudes and structures. Consequently, attitudes and organisational structures need to be changed, or corrected. Training and capacity building of staff, increased responsibility to change by donor organisations, selection of appropriate partner NGOs, and

the adoption of more suitable evaluation methods will hence be needed. Training, supervision, and the right incentives, are believed to be the key in attempts to come to terms with the precarious balancing act that implementation provides. This new arena invites, again, two main sets of questions. The first one concerns how one may solve problems in participatory development projects through focusing on the implementing staff. The second question concerns how we can understand motivation of the staff, which guides their behaviour when navigating and negotiating the project ideology during implementation. It should be clear by now which question I would propose to investigate: the following part of the thesis is devoted to the second questions. In order to do so, we will however need to describe the context a bit further.

To begin with, the following part will provide a presentation based on interviews with twelve NGO directors, focusing on visions and values of the NGOs, the possibilities of fulfilling these visions, and the role of the staff within the organisations. The subsequent chapter will continue with delineating the social, economic and political environment, as described in literature, of NGOs in Bangladesh. In the final chapter of part 3, the descriptions given will be put in analytical frameworks, with the aim to find appropriate ways of pursuing the question of how we may better understand the motivation of NGO staff.

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**PART 3**

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# Introduction

Through the discussions in previous chapters we have become acquainted with the concepts of participation and empowerment, in rhetoric and practice as well as theoretical aspects of the concepts. Based on this presentation I have argued for a focus on the implementing NGO staff. As concluded in previous chapter such a focus will aim at *understanding the motivation* of the NGO staff, related to the values of the NGOs, the organisational context, and the working conditions of the staff.

Previous presentations have given voice to experience and interpretations coming from the NGO staff themselves. The empirical material presented below (chapter 6) is based on interviews with the directors of local NGOs. This may appear as an odd choice, considering the focus being on the staff. There is however a reason for this. The material based on individual staff interviews and behaviour clearly show ambivalence among the staff in relation to what is required and desired from them. However, as explained, this ambivalence should not be interpreted as a problem stemming from individual inadequacies. Rather it should be viewed as a sign of a general dilemma, an expression of the difficulties involved in work which aims at creating social change and which depends on a certain type of attitudes from the staff handling the actual implementing phase. This dilemma is not confined by individual boundaries, but should rather be related to a wider organisational setting. Hence, the NGO directors constitute a suitable source for the empirical inquiry since they give us insight into the visions and values of the organisations, as well as what practical difficulties they are facing during their work.

The result of the interviews with the NGO directors is presented in chapter 6. The starting assumption is that performance can be seen as determined by a variety of factors. Visions and motivations presented by the NGOs will give an important starting point from which we may understand their work. But this must be put in a context, which will reveal something about the possibilities of actually fulfilling these visions. Such a contextualisation is given by the NGO directors, who refer to the dependency on foreign funding and the relationship with the government sector. The context in which the visions are put to work also concerns internal organisational culture, including the relationship between employees and the organisation.

While describing their working situations the directors not only invite us to an understanding of the NGOs' visions and what determines their performance. They also, to different extents, present an accepted discourse from which to interpret the relationship between analysis of social structures, development and the role of NGOs in Bangladesh. The contents of this discourse are outlined in chapter 7. This presen-

tation provides us with useful additional information about the socio-political context in which the Bangladeshi NGOs are operating. The material presented in chapter 7 is based on secondary material, and the aim of giving a review of literature is not to assess to what extent conventional analyses of social, economic and political structures in Bangladesh reflect reality. The purpose is rather to elaborate further on the contextual importance when understanding NGOs, translating 'context' at this point as accepted and established interpretations of what is required for successful development intervention in Bangladesh, and interpretations of the role of NGOs in Bangladesh.

Based on the empirical and the secondary material presented in chapters 6 and 7 we are able to form an understanding of what affects the performance of the NGO staff. The descriptions provided in these chapters are in a concluding chapter of part 3 put in an analytical context, referring to the sociological approach delineated in chapter 2. In chapter 8 I also present a discussion of how the analytical frameworks of social movement theories and conventional organisation theories can be used when defining NGOs and understanding their role in society. The frameworks will in particular be assessed in relation to how they may help us to develop further understanding of NGO staff motivation and performance.



*This newly started NGO is located adjacent to a village. Set up only a couple of years ago, the organisation has been run on private funds before sufficient contracts with donors have been secured. The future looks good though. The small business – a nursery – brings a bit of income, and the organisation has received appreciation and praise from contracting donors. The director, who gave up his job in the private sector to work in the NGO, is busy creating networks with potential partners. The staff run the daily business of the organisation. They implement and supervise the projects, and attend training to become fully skilled NGO workers.*





## CHAPTER 6

# Local reality and local reflections of twelve Bangladeshi NGOs

The directors of the twelve NGOs interviewed for this part of the study belong to partner NGOs of the two water supply and sanitation projects. Half of them operate in the area around Comilla in the southeast, and half in the area of Rajshahi, in the northwest of Bangladesh. All organisations are local, which means they are covering rather limited areas. There are however differences in size and scope among them, which will be described below.

As contracted partners for the two projects all organisations have been subject to a process of selection. The project staff have ascertained that the organisations are well established within the community area where they are working, and that they are well regarded among community members. The organisations also need to be registered as an NGO at the governmental NGO Affairs Bureau in order to receive funding and contracts from outsiders. Although some of the organisations are very small, they have experience from running donor funded projects with all the organisational matters involved, such as keeping a budget and reporting back to donors.

## Background of the local NGOs

All of the twelve NGOs included in this part of the study have been started on private initiative. In some cases, people from the local community – so called ‘well wishers of society’ – have set up an NGO to do something for their close community. Some of the founders have an intellectual background, with high education and previous involvement in politics, social welfare work, or business. The idea to start NGOs comes from frustrations over inadequate efforts and incompetence on behalf of the government to seriously deal with the difficulties the country has been facing since independence. Recently, since the last two decades, changes in positive directions have been noticed. The NGOs see these changes as their accomplishment, and claim that they could not have been achieved had they not been accepted as important partners in development work in the country. The quotes below illustrate the agenda advertised by the organisations:

In 1989 [this NGO], a private development organisation, emerged as response to basic needs and aspirations of people... [the NGO] pursues a bottom-up participatory development approach

acting as catalyst with its concerned stakeholders. It solicits help through self-help involving beneficiaries to serve their own needs. It offers a wide spectrum of services and training from basic needs response. (NGO, Annual Report 2000)

[this NGO has as] overall goal of emancipating the rural poor and destitute from the clutches of poverty, malnutrition and poor health conditions. ... Among others, the specific objectives of [the NGO] are to organise rural masses into groups for motivation, awareness building and savings generation. (Information book, NGO)

The organisations are working with an aim to change social, economic and political structures. They engage in various activities in their strivings to eradicate poverty, such as education, micro credit, fisheries, forestry projects, health, and water supply and sanitation. Some of the organisations have focused on special groups in society, e.g. tribal groups, women and children, while others work with villagers in general. Others also include local government officials and students at universities in their projects that aim at changing oppressive structures and attitudes that rule present society. The organisations clearly work with long-term perspectives in order to achieve a 'release' and not just a temporary 'relief' from poverty (local NGO, Comilla). Although it is recognised that there are constraints due to lack of resources and technology in rural areas, the organisations emphasise the need for a change in social structures in society as a whole in order to come to terms with poverty.

The organisations describe themselves as private, non-governmental and non-political. The physical base vary from small one-room offices to big houses with facilities to cater for training of staff and villagers, schools and home for orphans. The organisations are well established and have rather formal structures, with executive committees, financial auditing, and with paid personnel. Their staff are referred to as 'professional volunteers', or 'professional social workers'. The salaries come from funding, through contracts for projects, from national NGOs such as Proshika or BRAC (themselves often financed by international donors), international NGOs or donors (Sida, DFID, Danida), international financial institutes such as the World Bank, or the Bangladeshi government<sup>11</sup>. Although defined as local or community based organisations some of them have up to 130 employees, and hence cover a rather large geographical area as well as operate with many different programmes simultaneously.

### **Realising visions through external contracts**

The fact that foreign funding is increasingly being directed to Bangladeshi NGOs is interpreted as a sign that the NGOs are professional in their work. They are capable of delivering what the donors ask for: accountability in terms of economic transparency, and they are keeping project time frames. Through their particular work skills and closeness with the grassroots they also achieve real development. The directors

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<sup>11</sup> Funding from the government usually comes from international financial institutes or donor agencies though, and should therefore not be seen simply as government support but rather as external funding channelled through the government, often with conditionalities that NGOs should be included as partners.

ascribe their own role as crucial for the participatory projects to succeed. Organisational professionalisation, encouraged through requirements made by donors, is seen as an important recent feature within the NGOs which has helped them to improve the work for development. However, without the input provided by the NGOs, based on skills, closeness to the grassroots, and ideological commitment, the donor-run projects and organisational professionalisation would mean nothing when it comes to real achievements to come to terms with poverty and exclusion.

The Bangladeshi government also run development programmes that they channel via NGOs, much due to pressure from donors to do so. There appears to be a difference though between receiving funding from foreign donors and from governmental institutions. Several of the NGOs object to working with government projects, and defy having the government as partners. The NGOs work hard to set up governmental education centres for non-formal education, but after the end of the programme nothing happens. There is no commitment from the government, and these projects are bound to be left without prospect of sustainable impact. When funding and project has ended, and the implementing NGOs are leaving, there will be nothing left. Government projects leave little for the local NGOs to add when it comes to planning and, it is claimed, they see NGOs not as partners but as a cheap way of implementing projects. Stories flourish among the NGO directors and staff about how government officials, having received contract and budget from foreign donors, do nothing but sit in their offices until the projects urgently need to be implemented. Once they have reached this urgent stage, local NGOs are contracted to take over an impossible task: to implement a project within far too short time, much less than originally planned, and with very little of the budget left. While the NGOs are struggling with an impossible mission, the governmental officials have managed to squeeze money out of the project for their own benefit, and they have managed to engage someone from outside they can blame should the project fail. The benefit for the NGO on the other hand, is if any at all, negligible. Furthermore, differences in character of projects give different experiences, which, some of the NGOs claim, shape different attitudes within the organisation. The lack of commitment to project goals, and failure to sincerely engage in participatory techniques create slack behaviour and authoritarian attitudes, which are being spread from the government to the NGOs.

The NGOs need to attract continuous interest from outsiders in order to secure funding and contracts. In order to defend their position as crucial development actors the NGOs do not hesitate to assert themselves through claiming success. One organisation bluntly states that through their "high-quality socio-economic services" they have "achieved splendid growth during last few years" (NGO, Annual Report 2000, preface). Success and position is not only asserted through stating success though, but also through careful descriptions of the hard work behind the success, and through pointing at weaknesses in other actors on the development arena. Many refer to the difficulties they were initially facing when trying to convince villagers to join them in their projects, but now the villagers are easy to cooperate with due to the persisting and convincing work of the NGO. They often ascribe changes in their particular areas to their own work. It is also often described how local government

officials used to be disapproving of the NGOs, and how remote they are from villagers. Recently however, they are showing increasing interest in the work and ideas of the NGOs, which is interpreted as an important change in attitude within the local governments. The NGOs do not only refer to their own work but also compare their achievements with that of government institutions and other NGOs. They discuss government officials as less sincere and capable than themselves. Other NGOs, in particular organisations working for government projects, are portrayed as less sophisticated or genuine than themselves, and directors of certain other NGOs are described as having the wrong attitudes and motivations for running an NGO. Further on, many NGOs refer to a list of funders they have been working with, to overseas visitors that have come to learn from their work, and to close contacts with project headquarters in Dhaka, as a way of demonstrating success. These assertions are expressed in various situations, with different audiences (not only during interviews) and they seem to fulfil three purposes: to ascertain their role as important actors in the eyes of visitors, to convince villagers that the NGO is essential for them to prosper in the future, and the assertions are directed at their own staff or colleagues as slogans in order to enhance team moral and maximise performance.

While the funding makes it possible for these organisations to operate, the external dependency this implies also creates problems. Donors only contract NGOs on project basis, seldom for more than 2-3 years at a time. This short-term partnership is criticised by the NGOs since working on project basis, with short time frames, is not enough to be able to create sustainable social change. Moreover, the rather short-term project-based contracts create problems for the NGOs since the organisations cannot secure jobs and salaries for their employees for more than short periods.

### **Claiming success and high standards**

Apart from claiming neutral grounds, i.e. being non-political<sup>12</sup> and non-governmental, the NGOs define themselves as honest and committed organisations. They put great emphasis on describing themselves as sincere and professional organisations with professional staff. With the increasing accessibility to funding, organisations with dubious intentions have begun to emerge though. They have been set up by people who have nothing to do, no income, no job, and see an opportunity in earning some money and respect through starting an NGO. But such organisations seldom last. The increase in funding and in number of NGOs has created a competition for funds, which has come to function as a way of separating the good NGOs from the bad ones. Although the competition increases the pressure on all NGOs, the effect of this is experienced as positive since only the committed and sincere will pass the test of monitoring and evaluations done by funding organisations.

The twelve NGO directors refer to a good track record of contracts with donors as a way of verifying their claims of being professional. They are sincere and work

<sup>12</sup> Non-political means they are not affiliated with party politics. The work per se of the NGOs though is politically challenging since they aim at changing social structures.

close to the grassroots people and being able to secure funding is interpreted as a receipt that they are doing a good job. In order to maintain a good quality of the organisation several of the NGOs emphasise the importance of having committed staff.

... the staff who is working here, they should own the organisation, the staff should feel the ownership. Then the organisation will sustain. The staff, if they think about the organisation that if it is doing well then my future is also good... this thinking is very positive for the organisation. (male NGO director, Comilla)

The director quoted above explains that they have as a specific goal to build up capacity among its staff, and make the staff feel ownership of the organisation. Individual motives, such as personal career and income to support a family, must be integrated with organisational goals to ascertain continuity and sustainability of the NGO. The organisation cannot rely on the leadership of one person, often a charismatic founder, but must make sure the philosophy behind its work is grounded in its staff too. If the organisation can offer ownership, responsibility and participation to its staff, it will be rewarded with good quality work from committed employees. A few of the NGO directors, like the one just quoted, make direct references to relationship between the rhetoric of participation and good communication with the grassroots, and organisational integration of the staff. The NGO ideology is in other words not only seen as the basis for an instrument or technique to reach the villagers, but also as a basis for the relationship between staff and the NGO. In order to ascertain continuing funding, and to fulfil the organisation's own aspirations, it is not possible to leave rhetoric about participation and social commitment without also fulfilling these claims. However, funding and partnership based on short-term contracts is seen as jeopardizing organisational continuity since the NGOs cannot guarantee secure jobs. The risk of loosing staff is seen as very problematic. It is essential that the NGOs show commitment, responsibility and sincerity in their work, but with disruption in payment leading to the loss of staff this is hard to establish.

One NGO-director quoted above described how they have consciously tried to create a working environment which is to inspire people to do a good job, and to make the staff feel responsible towards each other. The director explains that in government institutions there is no system for punishment. Staff can fail to fulfil their duties, without having to face any consequences. They may risk being put on temporary suspension in a rural area but they do not risk loosing their job. Nobody reacts on latecomers, nobody encourages people to engage in their work – the whole system is essentially encouraging slack behaviour. In this particular NGO though, they have introduced a system of punishment. After coming late three days, one day's payment will be deducted from the paycheck. The director also makes the staff aware that slack behaviour from one individual affects all, hence the staff all rely on each other's performances for the whole organisations to succeed in their work. The director has her own philosophy of how to encourage responsibility and commitment:

If the NGO finds out that their staff is in any way corrupt they will loose their job. Because of this the staff is scared and this makes the staff honest. They always work very hard... in case the staff is making a mistake they will loose their job. (female NGO director, Rajshahi)

While the NGO director just quoted uses supervision and punishment, others emphasise the sharing of responsibility, or work consciously with the structure of the organisation to secure commitment and integration of the staff. One of the organisations has set up a special fund for the staff, for pension and health insurance, to demonstrate the responsibility the organisation has as an employer hoping that this will ensure loyalty from their staff also when the organisation cannot offer salaries.

It is interesting and important to note that the NGOs appear to consist of two categories of people: the NGO founders and the people who work for the organisations. While the emergence of the organisations are often linked to a response to crises and the initiator's personal urges to do something for others, the staff that carry out the work of the NGOs have often joined the NGOs on a slightly different basis than their initiators. This does not necessarily mean that the staff does not have a strong commitment to the visions of the organisations. However, it may affect the organisation since the contract within it is based on an employer/employee relationship rather than a less formal voluntary contract with few formal rules regulating the relationship. This will have implications for what frameworks we may use in order to better understand how the NGOs function, a topic that will be the focus of discussions in chapter 8.

### **Local NGOs and the government**

We can mix with the locals easily, but the government people cannot do this. They have a bossy attitude... a bossy tendency and NGOs don't have that, they are corrupted and NGO people are not, NGO people are working hard, government people are not, NGO people have a human side but the government people have not, they are not that type. (female NGO director, Rajshahi)

As the government has continued to be a disappointment and has failed to contribute to improvements, the NGOs distance themselves from whatever characterises government behaviour. The reason for the weak performance by government institutions is partly 'the system', as it is called by the NGOs. The system involves excessive paperwork, endless administration, and a top-down bureaucratic approach, resulting in very few practical achievements. There is no system for promotion based on sincere work, no incentives for the staff. Moreover, the staff has the wrong attitudes, as opposed to NGO staff that as one director put it, are people of the 'right human quality'. The government people are careless: they ignore people, they are bossy and order people around, and are sometimes even corrupt. Although the government claim to be reliable and sincere it does not show this in practice. And although there may be individuals who have a sincere commitment to do a good job, the system and surrounding attitudes are so discouraging that only rarely do they succeed in changing old patterns. All agree on the fact that the government institutions – with staff attitude as well as surrounding structure – has deeply embedded deficiencies, that it lacks in capacity and skills needed to plan and conduct genuine development work. The failures of the government constitute an important source for debate among the

NGOs, both to boost the spirit of their own staff and to create a common understanding that NGOs are indispensable:

The government is doing 'total literacy programme', conducted by bureaucrats speaking very highly talk, but really they are not working well, wasting money... 'Total-money-waste-programme' we call it. On the other hand the NGOs are doing very good work in the non-formal schools. (male NGO director, Comilla)

The NGOs are identifying themselves as being everything the government is not, as having all the features that the government institutions and staff are lacking, but which are needed in order to be able to create a sustainable change and get the country's poor population permanently out of poverty. The NGOs do not let personal interests rule but prioritise the work and the people the projects are aimed at. They are flexible and work quickly, i.e. go from planning to execution without delays. And, their way of working is participatory, both within the organisations as well as with villagers, working close to the people and with no hesitation to mix with anyone.

While these features are the NGOs attractive partners for foreign donors, their challenging position vis à vis the authorities also creates problems. When trying to communicate with local government, NGOs say they often experience difficulties. The government officials gladly show up at meetings that attract visitors from outside and journalists, but meetings with only villagers always appear to be less appealing. One of the NGOs explained that they see their role as being a voice of the people and mediator between the people and surrounding decision-makers, but when pursuing this in practice the community elite and government people often resist co-operation and fail to listen. Now there is a gap between the people and the power, and the government must be criticised for this, both at national and local levels. There is both tension and competition between the public sector, i.e. government institutions, and NGOs, and although this is a well established fact, and something the NGOs thrive on, some of the directors are hesitant to talk about it. Comments were made off the record, after the formal interviews. Although the NGOs in one sense benefit from the poor performance of the government, they cannot afford to be too expressive in their critique since open conflicts may affect the NGO negatively.

It is obviously important for the NGOs to challenge the government administration, both in everyday discussions as well as in real action. However, co-operation between the two is also important partly since foreign donors actively promote that NGOs be included as partners in development projects. For NGOs this co-operation can symbolise coercion as well as recognition. To some, those who earlier expressed the dangers of working for government programmes, NGO-government co-operation is being judged as a sign that the collaborating NGO is losing in commitment and sincerity. Others see the new relationship between the two actors as a sign of a growing recognition from the government that the work of NGOs is valuable, and that the government has something to learn from them. Co-operation hence becomes a sign that the NGO strategy has won, after long initial resistance from government officials. The government has now given in, accepted defeat, and see that they must change.



### **Mixed motivations and restricted rooms of manoeuvre**

The NGOs talk about their work in text as well as during interviews as based on a mission to change patterns in society in order to achieve sustainable improvement for the country's poor. Working in an NGO is seen as a conscious choice to follow this mission to do well in society. The staff shows loyalty to the cause through working for free during periods of financial constraints of the organisation and through accepting working situations they see as rather harsh (long working hours, living in remote areas, far from their families, and having to walk or bicycle long distances from one village to another). While this is the declared and most explicit motivation for the work of the NGOs, the staff as well as the directors also talks about other sources of motivation. The staff commitment is not only based on doing something good for society, doing better than the government, making a difference to the poor, but also on bringing an income to their families. Feelings of loyalty to the organisations and to the poor are mixed with a pressure to make a living.

As expressed above, the staff are referred to as 'professional social workers' or 'professional volunteers', which means that they are paid a monthly salary that may vary in size from one organisation to the other. It also implies that the jobs they perform require a professional attitude and certain skills. An additional driving force is to have a working career and secure claims for a respectable social position. With few jobs to choose from, young university graduates see work in an NGO as a wise step in order to gain experience for further advancements. As NGO workers the staff acquire skills that are essential on the labour market, which NGO workers of different background use to make advances on their career, either by moving within the NGO sector or to other sectors in society. Income security and strivings for social status as basis for motivation becomes particularly clear as staff sometimes leaves NGOs to work for the public sector, the government. This is not unusual, despite the government being despised by NGOs, and the NGO identity to a great extent being built around a negative image of the government. Again, since the NGOs rely on funding from outside, it is difficult for them to guarantee long-term employment for their staff. Hence, being offered a position within a government institution, which is a permanent job, is difficult to decline. Accepting a governmental job could be a matter of survival, and sometimes there are issues of social status attached to government positions. Being elected for a government post, after elaborate and highly competitive procedures of tests and interviews, vouches for high social status. As will be discussed further in the coming chapter, Bangladesh society is claimed to be highly marked by hierarchical thinking. Social status and prestige is a matter of great importance to many. A post within a government position offers economic security through life-long contracts, as well as a social position that opens private and professional opportunities. Hence, it is not uncommon that also people who criticise state administration for being insincere, corrupt and inefficient accept to join the force of government officials. The attraction of governmental administrative positions is well recognised by the NGO directors, and they do not appear to condemn staff who choose to accept jobs within the public sector. They do however, as discussed earlier, attempt to find strategies to keep their staff through incentives of various kinds.

We can see how the basis for motivation to work in NGOs is mixed and how the organisations are struggling to establish commitment from the staff to the organisation and its work. There are further balancing acts required. The NGOs' relationships with funders and donors are complex: the prerequisites needed in order to be able to work, i.e. resources, also represent constraints. Funding makes it possible for the NGOs to employ people and to work with development to the extent they do today. Without the resources provided the NGOs would have had considerably less impact in Bangladesh. But the room for manoeuvre in accordance to the philosophy of the NGOs is being restricted through the dependency on outside funders. An NGO director expressed his frustration with donor-funded projects:

The donors have their ideas, and they give fund and think that we should say 'please wash your hand before taking food and after the latrine'... sometimes I think this is strange... but your people are providing fund, and I know that sometimes school children in your country take their tiffin-money (pocket-money) and donate it so the government gives it and we shall say 'please set up a latrine'. So many programmes they provide with fund just to say 'wash your hand, wash your hand'. (male NGO director, Rajshahi)

The NGOs must agree to take on projects they do not fully endorse. Competition for funding and external dependency is a source of concern for some NGOs, but we have also heard that it is being put forward as something valuable since it gives credibility to the NGOs who do survive the competition. However, the monitoring and evaluation exercises that follow with the involvement of external actors may serve as a downfall of the organisations. The strict monitoring directs the activities of the NGOs to comply with organisational exercise, such as writing reports, and demonstrating accuracy and efficiency in handling budgets and timeframes. The goal of most projects are very similar: disregarding what issue is in focus – education, micro-credit, fishery, water and sanitation – they often aim at initiating social mobilisation through participation. But since the work of an NGO often consists of a patchwork of contracts for different partners, the exercise of composing initial bench-mark studies, mid-term reports and forms of evaluation, becomes counter-productive. Through the overwhelming, and what the directors sometimes feel unnecessary, administration in terms of reports and paperwork demanded, the donors make it impossible for the NGOs to do a proper job. Several directors commented on the incoherence of donor work, that the effect of lack of co-operation between donors becomes a burden for the NGOs. While the donors make demands of professionalisation on the NGOs, they feel that their request on donors to accept reciprocal demands is being neglected. As commented upon before, the main reward for work well done according to donor demands comes by way of more contracts of similar kind, not invitations to closer cooperation in project planning or secure long-term contracts of partnership.

Apart from hearing directors interpreting the organisational professionalisation as a welcomed outcome of cooperation with donors, we have also heard them expressing concern over the risk of administrative exercises becoming counter-productive to development work. There is yet another reflection to make concerning the process of

professionalisation of the NGOs. A visit to an NGO means confrontation with charts, pictures, case studies, and statistics presented in various forms, all to verify activities and success. But using such a basis for judging success could be very misleading, since it comes from fragmented performances. It tells us very little about the long-term impacts in relation to the organisations' visions and ideologies. The critique aimed at donor monitoring does however not essentially question the forms of monitoring, i.e. the use of numbers and statistics as basis for evaluation. Rather, the interpretation of the relationship between numbers and qualitative outcomes of projects, encouraged by the forms of donor evaluation, appear to be accepted.

### **Meeting challenges with old or new visions?**

The NGO directors describe frustrations and challenges related to how they can ascertain an impact according to their visions and goals. Several directors raise the importance of well motivated and committed staff, and they are working with strategies that will come to terms with faltering staff responsibility and competing offers from more attractive jobs. The directors are also concerned about the side effects of being dependent on external funding. They all present different strategies for how to come to terms with their problems, ranging from scaling up the organisation to ascertaining staff integration. Critique and concerns expressed by the directors appear to be mostly related to management of projects and management of the NGOs. Very few seem to reflect on the development work they are involved in with critical eyes, questioning the future roles of NGOs, government and foreign donors. The ones who do, though, present interesting suggestions and visions for the future.

I think the donor support is needed for a certain period, for twenty or ten years, but the government funding is more needed in our country ... I think donors should reduce their activities, not suddenly, not now, but after ten or twenty years they should plan for that. We are trying to manage our own income ... and I think that those NGOs who have not the capacity will phase out. (male NGO director, Rajshahi)

If I say the true thing, it is important with NGOs for a certain period but not for a long period because it makes us dependent... so NGOs for a certain period then day by day the government should tackle these things. The government have a role to the people, they must do something, they have a responsibility. (female NGO director, Rajshahi)

Both directors quoted above aim at starting a business within their organisations, as a way of avoiding problems with dependency on outside donors. The purpose would be to get an income to support the main activities, i.e. the social work of the organisation, and not to make a profit. Through finding ways of financing their own activities they will gain independence and possibilities to work in their own ways, without having to follow the directions that come with external dependency. Their vision about the future is not about growing as an organisation, but to gain strength and independence, and to continue with social development work on a rather limited scale. The boom in the NGO sector, being included as essential partners in the de-

velopment business, has created jobs and success for many organisations in Bangladesh. However, a development continuing along these lines, with a growing NGO sector and declining governmental responsibilities, is not seen as the right way to go by all. A few, like these two directors, express that they hope the balance between the three actors – NGOs, government and donors – will change. Their vision is that donor support will gradually phase out, and that the government will by then have learnt to take responsibility and perform better. The role of the NGOs will be important, but the sector cannot and should not take over that of the public sector.

The visions of future roles and activities are not at all unanimous among the interviewed NGOs. The strivings expressed above come only from a few of the organisations. When discussing future plans most of the directors describe how they want to grow, become as big and important as Brac and the Grameen, or become head organisations of national NGO networks: “We have made as a milestone to become as large as NGO Forum!” (male NGO director, Comilla). Some have visions of becoming leading organisations within the educational sector, others are aiming at the credit market. The challenges for the future consist in getting funding by continuing to claim the necessity of NGO involvement. Becoming big enough to be a permanent partner for the foreign donors would, it is believed, cure the dependency problem. The government has been ruled out as actor on the development scene, and the future is for the NGOs.

### **Subtle but important differences**

The account of the interviews of the NGO directors does not help us in making *judgements* about the performance of different NGOs, and that has not quite been the aim. It does, however, provide us with important insights into what aspects must be included when *trying to understand* the performance of these organisations. Apart from learning about visions and strategies as stated by the NGOs, we also need to learn what the visions mean when they encounter reality. Such an encounter involves negotiation with villagers. The encounter also includes the organisational context, which to some extent determine how and if these visions can be realised. The organisational context is constituted both by contracts for projects outlined by foreign donors, and by the relationships between NGOs and the government sector. Rules and regulations set up by the government affect the room for manoeuvre available to the NGOs, as does competition and feelings of animosity between the two sectors. Apart from these externally imposed structures, the organisational context also consists of inter-organisational relationships. It is, as emphasised by some of the directors, essential that the staff working with participatory and empowerment approaches, share the ideology of the organisation. Without integration of staff and ideology, the visions stand little chance of being realised.

Faced with challenges due to donor dependency, NGOs' ambiguous relationships with the government sector, and organisational interruption due to turnover of staff, the organisations seem to have come up with slightly different strategies of how to

proceed with their work. One group of the organisations present a rather straightforward analysis. Since the rise of the NGO sector, and the increase in NGO co-operation with governmental organisations, the country has begun to take promising steps towards sustainable change. This achievement is attributed to the NGOs, by themselves as well as by outsiders. Hence, continuous changes will depend on further increased inclusion of NGOs in development work. The NGO sector in general should expand, and personal visions of the directors hold that their now local NGO should grow to become nationally recognised and even internationally renowned. Success is equivalent to scaling up, and sustainable and real change relies on expansion of possibilities for NGOs to operate. The relationships between donor, government and NGO sectors in terms of dependency, accountability and responsibility, are not being questioned.

Some of the directors though, present somewhat more hesitant and sophisticated analysis of the present situation. Although important changes have been achieved through the work of NGOs, future changes must involve greater responsibility from the government sector. The NGO sector will be there to support government organisations, but the main role of NGOs should be to contribute to a strengthened relationship between the Bangladeshi citizens and the government sector, not to take over the role of a state administration. As an organisation they do not wish to strive towards increased funding from foreign donors. Future challenges, for the country as well as the individual organisations, should be met through careful consideration of what roles different sectors ought to play. The long-term plans of these directors reflect their critical thoughts about an ever-growing NGO sector. Their interpretation of organisational strength and appropriate strategies for the country as a whole does not involve scaling-up of the NGO activities, but rather restricting the size and increasing independence for their individual organisation, and leaving room for the public sector to grow in scope as well as in responsibility. The differences in how the two groups of NGOs interpret their present situation, and in their visions for the future, gives us an indication of their actual and fundamental differences behind the apparently similar starting points.

Apart from contextualising the NGO visions and work through the descriptions given by these twelve NGO directors, we may expand our understanding of these organisations by looking into secondary material that concern the environment and analyses of NGOs. In the chapter to follow, a review of literature is given that treat conventional social analysis of the Bangladeshi society and relations between actors involved in development work in the country. Here it becomes clear that the interpretations and visions held by many of the NGOs are deeply embedded in an analytical discourse of social structure and development in the country. The emphasis is on delineating this discourse, rather than assessing its value in relation to reality.

## CHAPTER 7

# NGOs amongst patron-clientship, donor requirements and inefficient governments

The presentation above has brought us closer to reality as perceived by the NGOs themselves. The following chapter will continue the discussion on social structures and the need for social change, on the country's dependency on foreign donors, and delineate views on relations between donors, government and NGOs in Bangladesh. By expanding our knowledge of the contextual setting of NGOs we will gain further understanding of the complexities ruling their actual basis for performance. The discussion will further constitute an important basis for following arguments concerning the performance and motivations of NGOs.

## **Social structures in Bangladesh**

The social structures of the Bangladeshi society have been touched upon earlier. The NGOs themselves refer to established social structures, characterised by hierarchy and inequality, as one of the reasons for the country's precarious situation. Furthermore, the implementing staff expressed how their work involves confrontation with traditions and habits related to hierarchical relations and prestige among villagers. The NGO directors addressed the difficulties in dealing with local government officials and rural elite. The structures are not passive targets, but present active resistance in various ways for the NGOs in their work. This is important to take into consideration when trying to understand the actual performance of the NGOs and their possibilities to achieve change.

There are reasons to delineate further aspects of analyses of social structures. Not only do these structures constitute a target for the NGOs, who are aiming to achieve long-term social change, but they also constitute the social context in which the NGOs work. As pointed out by several authors, it is likely that these hierarchical structures are present within the organisations themselves, and affects motivations and behaviour of the NGO staff. Furthermore, a review of literature on the subject

shows an established analysis of Bangladesh social structures, its history, possibilities of change, and what role the country's NGOs may play in that change. This established analysis is of great importance for the NGOs, since it provides them with arguments for their inclusion as important partners in development projects, and debates emanating from these analyses give them credit for development achieved in the country.

Islam describes that historically, the social structure of Bangladesh has mainly consisted of two groups with a relationship characterised by domination and subordination (Islam, 1997b). At the core of the difference lies access to land. While one group owns the bulk of the land, the other group is what Islam calls the productive group, working as labourers within agriculture, deprived of the surpluses they produce (Islam, 1997b). The characteristics of this social structure can be traced back to the British colonial era (prior to 1947) when the British introduced ownership and leasing of land, with an aim to commercialise agriculture (Hartmann & Boyce, 1979). Despite being subject to turbulence, due to change in policies or famine and depression, this structure has remained over a long period of time (Islam, 1997b).

After independence from Pakistan in 1971, the strictly land-based social structure has been replaced by a more heterogeneous system with increased social mobility. Now, status and power cannot only be obtained through land, but also on basis of religion, through documented revolutionary activities, or through education and business outside of agriculture. However, farming and landholding is still ranked very high, and it is determining the social structure to a great extent since land and land-based relations lead the way to important political contacts. Westergaard notes that the ruling rural class coincides with the political elite at state level, before independence as well as after, and despite challenges to the structure it has remained the same due to strong national interests to some extent backed up by foreign aid policies (Westergaard, 1985). Increased social and geographical mobility has not profoundly changed the structure based on land-ownership. A minority is still in control of resources such as land. As agricultural production and other activities have become more and more commercialised, credit has become increasingly important, which again, Islam argues, has reinforced the subordinate-dominant structure (Islam, 1997b). Although credit gives the poor and resourceless new possibilities, it also continues to build relationships of dependency and subordination.

### **Inequalities of divine will**

Despite continuous inequalities and exploitation, Islam argues that there are few conflicts between the two groups. The structure has created a "moral regime of the ruling class", with a relationship-culture characterised by obedience and loyalty (Islam, 1997b). Although subject to severe distress, such as during the great famine in 1943, the subordinates have never opposed the ruling class: "Starving people preferred death to food riots" writes Islam (Islam, 1997b:7) and describes the history of the depressed classes in the following way:

Deprived of education and enlightenment and immersed in numerous negative cults, beliefs and practices the depressed classes themselves never consciously sought any change in their status and no progressive change was ever attempted on them from above. ... as a downtrodden class they never tried consciously to emancipate themselves and improve their lot. [Islam, 1997 #178:6]

Inequality among people was perceived as divine will, and any kind of conflict originating in discontent among the subordinates would be unexpected under such circumstances. Hence, the ruling groups did not have to exercise violence to support their position: fear expressed through belief sufficed. Hence, the difference between the two groups is not only institutionally grounded, Islam claims, but also psychological (Islam, 1997b).

Conflicts do however occur in rural areas, but then mainly between fractions, i.e. between established patron-client groupings (Lovell, 1992, note: based on study made in 1977). Lovell describes how, within a group, relationships are characterised by dependency, by “deeply embedded asymmetrical relationships” with “exploitation in every aspect of the economic sphere” (Lovell, 1992:31). However, the group also share solidarity and provides security and protection for the vulnerable. Jansen argues along similar lines and writes that vertical patron-client relationships have characterised the relationship between the rich and the less well off. The poor have a submissive attitude towards the rich which is explained by the idea that “one’s economic interests are best served by becoming attached to a patron” and, Jansen continues, “there is a clear notion of reciprocity in a relationship where a poor man shows respectful behaviour towards the rich person” (Jansen, 1993:31). The fact that very few conflicts have erupted between rich and landless is due to a peasant ideology, which prioritises patron-client loyalty rather than class loyalty. In a study made by Westergaard in northern Bangladesh during the 1970s this picture is verified (Westergaard, 1985). Conflicts mostly concerned power struggles among the upper peasantry. There was nothing that resembled class conflicts, which implies that class-consciousness and unity among the poor was generally very low. The poor and landless sought to establish relationships with powerful and prestigious people, instead of seeking political mobilisation along class lines.

### **Change encouraged by increased marginalisation**

The lack of any real changes in this hierarchically characterised social structure is not only attributed to a silently operating system, which discourages any protests from below, but is also due to active resistance to change from the dominating groups (Islam, 1997b). The dominating classes “wage wars in medieval style in order to resist change”, and this resistance, Islam argues, is a major cause for the lack of development in the country (Islam, 1997a). Since the 1990s, conflicts have been increasing between powerful fractions and NGOs, with open attacks on NGOs working for the empowerment of women (Sobhan, 1997). Furthermore, there has been a strengthening of religious elements such as the party Jamaat-e-Islam, which emphasise these conflicts (Islam, 1997a; Sobhan, 1997). Westergaard presents arguments along sim-



ilar lines, although she does not only link this resistance to isolated groups with fundamentalist tendencies, but claims that behind an ideology presented as national unity based on religion or the Bengali culture, the government has a hidden goal to “neutralize potential antagonism” (Westergaard, 1985).<sup>13</sup>

The illustration given so far attributes a rather passive role to the subordinate groups. Some authors however do identify tendencies towards activism and fundamental changes. The traditional clients, those owning no more than household land, are getting more and more marginalised. Land-ownership is getting more unequally distributed, argues Jansen, with many poor not owning any land at all (Jansen, 1993). Hence, while patrons previously competed to secure good relationship with the poor in order to secure possibilities of obtaining more land, they have no longer an incentive to do so. Instead, Jansen believes, patrons will turn their interest towards government officials and the urban elite. From the subordinates’ point of view, the ideology related to patron-client structure is also losing in importance. Unattached labourers no longer have to follow rules of respect and obedience. In other words, Jansen interprets increasing marginalisation and pauperisation of the already vulnerable as a potential good. Slowly, horizontally based relationships among poor, among the rural elite, and among bureaucrats, are replacing a structure built on vertical relationships. While previously dominating vertical patron-clientship hindered class-consciousness, there is now room for such a consciousness to get established. The fact that the poor and destitute are increasingly being excluded from clientship makes them join together as a group who can strike back against exploitation (Jansen, 1993).

Jansen describes the traditional patron-clientship as multi-stranded, involving transfer of land, credit, employment and political and physical protection. It is often complex and has been built up over a period covering several generations. For the patron-less marginalised poor though, relationships are single stranded which, Jansen argues, means they are in better bargaining positions than before. The poor are no longer putting themselves at risk to the same extent as when economic relationships were deeply embedded socially and historically. Although there may still be fears of retribution, a safety-net is no longer linked to only one patron but is built on a multitude of independent relations, and personalised relationships for trade et cetera are being replaced by a market with anonymous relations (Jansen, 1993). Based on fieldwork conducted in 1987 Jansen argues that an increasing unity can be detected within the group of the poor and marginalised, which leads to new predictions about social change and new attitudes.

### **Pessimism despite changes**

Contemporary analyses suggest that the social structure of patron-clientship has been and still is a hindrance for development. Not only has the structure been detrimental

<sup>13</sup> The country gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, and is now proclaiming in its state constitution ‘*high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice*’ ([www.bangladeshgov.org/pmo/constitution/index.htm](http://www.bangladeshgov.org/pmo/constitution/index.htm))

since it has involved exploitation, leaving one group destitute and with no encouragement to any side in the dyadic relationship to be innovative. The structure has also created expectations and behaviour that is deeply rooted in the Bangladeshi culture, prevailing also when the patron-client relationship per se has lost some of its domination. As previously noted, the hierarchical structure is referred to as a moral regime or a peasant ideology, pointing at its psychological implications. A consequence of the long-term relationship of domination-subordination, an established hierarchical thinking saturates the Bangladeshi society (Jansen, 1993; Maloney, 1986). Although relations and hierarchy are based on diversified sources of power and prestige today, several authors emphasise that hierarchy is a fundamental part of all aspects of life in Bangladesh (Bloem, Biswas, & Adhikari, 1991; Lovell, 1992; Maloney, 1986; van Schendel & Westergaard, 1997; Westergaard, 1985). Although Jansen has identified processes of change in a positive direction, he too agrees that there are deeply rooted effects of the long-term domination of patron-clientship in terms of an obsession about hierarchy.

Maloney describes how patronage and authoritarianism has come to constitute a major obstacle for creativity and progressive development in the country (Maloney, 1986). He describes how patronage is based on an entitlement ideology, which involves a system of distribution of wealth, entitling everyone a share of any wealth acquired. Apart from serving the role as a safety net, a way of coping with resource restraints, it is also a way of building and maintaining hierarchy. The ideology is prevalent at all levels, within households, between households, and between larger groups. Maloney claims that while traditionally patron-clientship has been linked to land-ownership, today it is directed towards officials working in state institutions. Officials are expected to profit, and disperse their acquired profit to clients. If he fails to do so, he will lose status and prestige. With this mentality dominating behaviour of potential clients and patrons alike "... the whole of politics is characterized by this endless rivalry of micro differences in rank." (Maloney, 1986:p)

Maloney sees three ways in which patronage expectations and authoritarianism affects the development process. First, the seeking of patronage substitutes for the creation of new wealth. Secondly, the personalization of authority leads to fluctuating policies and weakness of institutions. Interest is not primarily directed towards institutional goals since goals change according to personal interests. This is demoralising for any staff that has sincere ambitions to work for the institutional goals. Finally, the focus on hierarchy weakens institutions, since it distracts attention and efforts from stated institutional goals. Maloney explains how interpersonal relations hinder fulfilment of organisational goals, and that "dynamics of dyadic relations acquire more importance than the subject of the discussion in office meetings" (Maloney, 1986:49). In society as a whole, this culture of individualism allows for very little ideologically motivated behaviour. This is reflected in the daily business of government institutions or state bureaucracy. People are rarely motivated by ideological institutional goals, but rather by an interest to protect themselves and to climb the hierarchical ladder (Maloney, 1986).

### **Interpretations of causes of poverty and prospects for change**

Analyses of social structures play an important role when trying to determine causes of poverty in Bangladesh. With each analysis follows a hypothesis of what strategy is most suitable in order to change society and achieve sustainable growth. Maloney's analysis emphasises the deep effects the patron-clientship structure has had on culture and attitudes in society. Social reforms encouraged by international development agencies, aimed at strengthening the changes identified by Jansen, will not be enough to profoundly change these for development detrimental features. The only route to sincere change, according to Maloney, is through a major crisis caused by population growth, natural disasters, world wide economic collapse, or the withdrawal of donors. Only an intense crisis would cause enough disturbances in social structures to create a new starting point from which to rebuild the country. Maloney is sceptical about the long-term influence of international aid and donor pressure through conditionalities, and likewise to prospects of long-term changes through the work of NGOs. Although changes have been achieved through various development programmes these changes will remain isolated. Dependency on external funding, on charismatic leaders, and on predictions based on successful programmes that are vulnerable to processes of scaling up, makes it unrealistic to think NGOs will be able "to lead the mass of the rural people in a country to a state of relative prosperity" (Maloney, 1986:12).

Maloney's analysis is of a rather rare kind, possibly because of its pessimistic outlook and since it does not encourage any interventive action from either outsiders – international donor or financial agencies – or local actors, such as NGOs. Maloney explicitly says that a belief in social reform along neo-Marxist ideology is unlikely to succeed, since Bangladeshi's are not prone to follow ideologies, and due to the fact that hierarchical thinking saturates society in all aspects. In contrast to Maloney's negative forecast, a class-based analysis offers room for action and intervention. The concept of class and class-consciousness is important in many analyses of the social structure in Bangladesh. Strategies for change based on such an analysis aim at conscientising the poor, or in Marxist words create a class for itself from a class in itself. Concepts connected to a class-based analysis are frequently used by NGOs, who refer to their work as aiming for empowerment, social mobilisation, conscientisation, and awareness training.

One of the first and now well established NGOs in Bangladesh – Proshika – proclaims its ideology as based on an understanding of the situation of the rural poor along the following lines:

... the familiar Marxian problem of class in itself needing to become a class for itself as a precondition for its own effective action...

with a subsequent strategy:

... the jump from individual perceptions of injustice to collective action to rectify that was considered too great, and certainly clearly required leadership external to the peasantry ... the prob-

lem then is not the awareness of the poor of their exploited condition but the degree of sophistication in that awareness together with the objective capacity to act on it. (Kramsjö & Wood, 1992. 6, 8)

Although the poor and exploited in Bangladeshi villages can recognise inequality, this does not immediately lead to collective action. As expressed in the quotes above, and similarly by the NGOs interviewed for this study (see previous chapter) the poor do not recognise their own capacity to change. NGOs hence see as their task to empower this group, and through capacity building encourage them to take action against oppression. Through social mobilisation advocated by outsiders, the poor will gain strength to oppose and break with social structures that do not only exploit them as individuals but also obstruct society as a whole from development<sup>14</sup>.

NGOs are by many seen as role-models in their strivings towards achieving social change and democracy. As pointed out earlier, the rural elites have strong links with the political elite, at local as well as state level, and interests at national level has supported the status quo of this power structure (Westergaard, 1985). The gradual development towards a more democratic society is believed to have been managed well by the NGOs, whereas the state sector has difficulties in adapting to democratic working procedures (Kalam, 1996)<sup>15</sup>. The relationship between the NGOs and the state sectors is complex, mixed with pressure from outsiders to co-operate, and with prestige and resentment towards each other.

### Politics and the state bureaucracy

During the long period of outside domination, under the British Empire until 1947 and then under Pakistan until 1971, there has been little continuity in terms of political parties or administration in the country. The only permanence at national level in terms of institutions has been a state bureaucracy, passed on from one dominating power to the other. Kalam argues that the main characteristics passed on through this continuity have been corruption and mismanagement, which has all played an important role in the country's failure to achieve sustainable development (Kalam, 1996). The state sector has, before as well as after independence, continuously lacked in accountability. Persisting problems with financial irresponsibility and corruption has nurtured a free-rider phenomenon and hindered any development from taking place (WorldBank & Studies, 1999).

The distance between the state and the people is described as deeply rooted and the colonial administration is often referred to as the source of this conflict. Attitudes fostered during the British era are still prevalent among administrators who have a "common tendency of not showing proper regard to the general public, rather they prefer to remain far apart from the reach of the public masses" (Asaduzzaman, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> See reference to Cleaver's comments about the unleashing of latent capacities, in chapter 5. So called 'facilitators' from outside will set the process in motion, but apart from this initial activity no additional, external assistance should be needed.

<sup>15</sup> see also Hoque & Siddiquee (1998) who argues otherwise.

However, considering what has just been said about the social structure of Bangladesh and its psychological effects on people, these attitudes appear to have been supported by an existing hierarchical system. Lack of accountability towards civil society is not only found within state administration, but also within the banking system, where similar attitudes of disregard towards the public are found, as well as corruption and mismanagement (Lovell, 1992). The political, judicial, distributive and policy making system in Bangladesh is being described as highly biased and is in practice doing little else than preserving status quo despite rhetoric that claim otherwise (Lovell, 1992; van Schendel & Westergaard, 1997). Since independence, attempts have been made by several leaders to improve matters, but with little effect (Ahmed, 1996). Changes of policies have not implicated change in philosophy, and attitudes falter at central as well as district level. Actions and decisions are still highly influenced by patron-client relations, and allocation of development funds and projects is to a great extent decided on the basis of political loyalty and power (Jahangir, 1997). Decentralisation of resources and decision-making has inspired a change towards a more diversified social structure but this diversification is mainly a sign of the rising of new groups aspiring to take advantage of the decentralised system (Sarker, 1992). Important political and administrative positions are often used to strengthen relationships with powerful and influential people to serve individual advancement and consequently there is in all respects very little grassroots involvement. Numerous reports reveal a total failure despite explicit policies in bridging the gap between government officials and the public. One example which clearly illustrates this comes from a report published by BIDS<sup>16</sup>. The report gives a systematic review of six projects implemented by government institutions, with an aim at increasing local democracy through the use of participatory methods (Bhuiyan, 1995).

BWDB [Governmental] Project Office did neither consult with the thana or district level officials of BRDB, BADC&DAE [local government organisations] nor involve the local people who were intended to be the beneficiaries after implementation of the project. BWDB officials are of the view that involvement of so many agencies and local people, can only multiply the problems and develop confusion. (Bhuiyan, 1995:19)

The involvement of local people in the project activities is nil and they were never consulted by BWDB either before or at the time of initiation of the project about its objectives and positive and negative impact of the project. The land dispute crisis has emerged due to the lack of involvement of local people in the project activities and failure of BWDB in contacting people at project area by and large before the initiation of the project. (Bhuiyan, 1995:64)

Not only do prevailing negative attitudes *hinder* processes of democratic decision-making, involving people at grassroots level. They also *create conflicts* and *reinforce* the distance between state officials and civil society instead of changing a rigid structure.

Bureaucrats are described as being, at all levels, hesitant when it comes to supporting the poor: the system invites them to follow traditional routes of building relationships and changing these routes might jeopardise their careers. After numerous

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16 The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka

attempts at decentralising decision-making and government administration in order to reach the majority of the people, Sarkar argues that “The Bangladesh experience suggests that the rhetoric of decentralisation such as ‘popular participation’, ‘local democracy’, ‘relevant development’, ‘power to the people’ and so on fast erode when confronted with an oppressive rural class structure” (Sarker, 1992:18). In the case of Bangladesh, Sarkar continues, history shows that although the basis of power has become more diversified, attempts to decentralise administration in order to make it more responsive to local needs have only resulted in strengthening the position of the already powerful. Hoque follows the same argument pointing out that participation of the poor has appeared to be a difficult task, since socio-cultural, institutional and environmental factors create limitations to the participation of people at lower levels (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998).

### **Democratisation, local participation and hidden agendas**

There is a growing realisation in Bangladesh that in order to achieve political stability and economic development at all levels in society, democracy must be rooted at local level, and not only at institutional governmental level: “...true democracy can only be achieved by extending the process of democratisation to the grassroots level and through genuine and active participation of the common people in this process” (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998). Hoque and Siddiquee argue that the whole process of institutionalising democracy has failed since people have not been invited to get involved in the creation of new democratic institutions (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998). Attempts to enhance democratisation in Bangladesh has raised several questions concerning both underlying motives from governing and initiating party, and concerning the strategies chosen to realise grassroots democracy (Crook & Manor, 1997; Jahangir, 1997; Westergaard, 1985). In the case of decentralisation under General Ershad, some claim the reform was made purely with the intention to make the regime appear more democratic. In effect it would not put General Ershad’s position at risk through increasing the level of democracy (Crook & Manor, 1995). Failures cannot be blamed only on hidden agendas of the ruling party though, but are also caused by inadequate understanding of the economic and social embeddedness of processes of democratisation. Crook and Manor emphasise that democratisation is unlikely to take place, despite administrative decentralisation, if social structures are not tackled (Crook & Manor, 1995). Projects with an aim at increasing political participation at grassroots level, which are solely concentrating on activating one target group, can easily fail when trying to incorporate the isolated project into a broader context. In Bangladesh, historical evidence demonstrates that attempts to decentralise and encourage popular participation and local democracy have failed when being confronted with the national context, constituted by an oppressive rural structure (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998).

### **International donors: catchers in the rye?**

Between 80-100% of Bangladesh's national budget for development is financed by external funding (Jansen, 1993). The total amount of aid to Bangladesh has been rather stable since the late 1980's, reaching figures around US\$1,600 million (Stiles, 2002). The effect of the country's dependency on foreign aid is mainly commented upon in negative terms, claiming that the foreign funding has become a substitute for domestic savings (Rehman, 1996; Westergaard, 1985). Critical voices claim the government is no longer paying attention to actually alleviating poverty, but to make "poverty a sustainable condition to ensure continuing supplies of such aid" (Sillitoe, 2000:30). Donors and international financial institutes are seen as bluntly demanding commitments to reforms and policies by the Bangladesh government, hence outsiders direct the path of development. The need for external resources has put the government in a position where they have been forced to accept structural adjustments and thereby lost in autonomy. The government is furthermore put in a problematic position, due to contradictory ideological strivings of their different donors (Kalam, 1996). While the country is dependent on economic assistance from the US, Saudi Arabia has recently come forward as an important donor. The ideological clash is obvious, with Saudi Arabia stating Islam as a guiding framework and strivings to strengthen an international Muslim community are motivating their actions as donors (Kalam, 1996).

The amount of resources available through aid and foreign funding does not only affect behaviour and rooms for manoeuvre at government but also local levels. People of all backgrounds try to link themselves to networks where they can benefit from the flow of development funding (Jansen, 1993). This diverts people's interest from investing capital in local business and enterprises, which would create jobs. Hence, it is claimed that foreign aid strengthens networks of already influential people, and nurtures rent-seeking and free-riding behaviour which distracts potential investments in domestic businesses (White, 1999).

The government's position and behaviour in relation to its dependency on foreign aid seems to be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand the government is portrayed as a passive marionette in the strings of powerful external actors who include strong conditionalities in any contracts for financial assistance. Very little room is left for independent actions or policy-making. As mentioned, this creates a situation which is far from satisfactory from the perspective of democratic accountability on behalf of the citizens of Bangladesh. On the other hand the government is also portrayed as cunning in the way it is handling the flow of money and conditionalities attached to contracts. The quote above from Sillitoe suggests that the government has made poverty into a commodity, used as guarantee for continuous financial support (Sillitoe, 2000). White exemplifies how the government is skilfully calculative by describing how international focus on gender issues has been misused to serve political interests (White, 1999). The hidden intention of reserving seats for women in parliament has been to strengthen the position of the ruling party, rather than to contribute to gender equality. White suggests that the government is using catchwords

and concepts for a dual purpose: to in rhetoric satisfy donors, and at the same time moulding strategies based on the rhetoric with the intention of securing personal interests.

### **Entering the stage: a growing NGO sector**

The general opinion is that governmental organisations, in Bangladesh and in the Third World in general, have failed to realise expectations of development programmes. Experiences reveal problems with mismanagement, lack of accountability as well as corruption. A shift in focus from state-building to interest in human rights and civil society has further contributed to diverted attention from governments as partners (Stiles, 2002). Hence, governmental organisations are today less desirable as partners in development and donor agencies are turning to other sectors in the hope to meet more reliable and co-operative partners. In Bangladesh, strong focus has been put on NGOs, which is evident from a sharp increase in aid directed to this sector. Figures show that levels have risen from US\$ 150 million in 1990 to nearly US\$ 450 million in 1995, with funding being distributed to a large number of small and large scale NGOs (Stiles, 2002). One of the largest NGOs in Bangladesh, Proshika has grown immensely during the last decade. From 1989-1998 the number of programme participants has increased by 350%, staff numbers by 460%, and its operational budget has increased by 40 times (BRAC study from 1998). The variations in size in terms of capacity, geographical coverage and resources among the NGOs are great, and generalisations about the sector should be treated with some caution. However, a comparison between the major NGOs in Bangladesh and corresponding NGOs in India reveal "that Indian NGOs seem more modest, down-to-earth and resource scarce" (Hashemi, 1998). According to Hashemi this is a result of the abundance of foreign funding available to Bangladeshi NGOs.<sup>17</sup>

The growing interest in the NGO sector in Bangladesh is not only noticeable in terms of numbers and a growing proportion of funding directed to the sector. In 1990, the government of Bangladesh set up the NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB) after pressure from donor agencies and international financial institutes to facilitate the operation of NGOs through improved rules and regulations (Siddique, 1996). Hence, the room for manoeuvre has increased not only in terms of financial backing but also with improved and facilitating regulations. The institutionalisation of the NAB may however also be interpreted in terms of increased governmental control over NGOs (Hashemi, 1998).

The NGO sector in Bangladesh has been given an official status as important partner in development. Despite increasing possibilities for action, this process has been met with some ambiguity, as pointed out by the NGO directors interviewed. One aim of the NGOs has been to stress the conflicting effects of development policies, pointing out that a bias towards focus on economic growth has had dubious effects for the

17 However, Hashemi also emphasises that a study shows that in terms of salaries and other benefits, high-level government functionaries are better off than top-level NGO staff (Hashemi p. 105).



poor (Siddique, 1997). In other words, the NGOs and international funders have taken opposing positions, advocating for different analyses and strategies of how to approach problems with continuous poverty. On the other hand, the support from external actors has been welcomed, since it has provided the NGOs with a shield when expressing challenging critique against the country's governments (Siddique, 1997). The NGOs are in other words caught in a rather confusing position, with relationship with donors characterised by dependency, antagonism and welcomed support.

The relationship between NGOs and the government and its state administration is marked by tensions too, stemming from both historical and recent events. Historically, the NGOs have presented critique against continuous failure on behalf of the state sector to achieve sustainable change in the country. Outsiders help in strengthening the image of the state as incompetent and the NGOs as dynamic and commendable. While the government lately has reached some success with development programmes, this success is attributed to the co-operation with NGOs. Tension of more recent date is caused by competition for funding and prestige. While foreign funding has remained virtually the same over a long period of years, its distribution has during the last decade been clearly favouring the inclusion of NGOs, which has spurred competition (Stiles, 2002). Since failure by the government is in some ways a guarantee for financial support to the NGOs, actors promoting NGOs as important partners are likely to encourage the image of the government as slack and unreliable and NGOs as committed and innovative. Similarly, NGOs themselves often use the illustrating image of the corrupt and inefficient government versus the honest and hard working NGO as a way of marketing themselves. At the same time, the two sectors are encouraged to co-operate by the World Bank and foreign donors.

The relationship between NGOs and the government has been subject for ongoing conflicts. A continuous suspicion on behalf of government officials led to open confrontation in 1992, when the NAB sent a secret report to the Prime minister, accusing the NGO sector as a whole for 'irregularities and corruption' and that their activities were 'anti-state and dangerous' (Hashemi, 1998: 104). This conflict was founded both in resentment over the recognition and resources given to the NGOs, and more so in fear over the political unrest and structural transformation induced through NGO activities. The NGO activities are welcomed providing they remain within the domains of "traditional (charitable or welfare) efforts to assist the poor" (Hashemi, 1998: 105). Any activities that aim at organising the poor to "articulate their demands, fight for their rights and struggle to change the structural basis for their subordination" (Hashemi, 1998: 105) would on the other hand be seen as a threat since it contradicts the government strivings to maintain law and order. Despite the fact the government managed to officially settle the open conflict that arose with the NAB report, it has had repercussions in terms of clear but informal political boundaries being set up for the NGOS (Hashemi, 1998). Similar reports continue to make accusations against individual NGOs, with the result that NGOs take on strategies that are less confrontational.

Critical voices are being raised concerning the close financial and moral relationship between international actors and national NGOs (Siddique, 1997; Stiles, 2002:

White, 1999)<sup>18</sup>. The NGOs are claimed to have lost their close relation with the poor. Furthermore, the sector has failed in linking up with other civil society sectors, such as the business community, the labour movement and the Islamic right-wing (Stiles, 2002). Stiles writes:

In Bangladesh, the growth of the NGO community has generally not coincided with the strengthening of civil society. Quite the contrary. ... This stems in part from the natural rivalry that one would expect from one segment of society securing privileged access to external resources. But it also stems from suspicion on the part of the NGOs relative to the rest of society – suspicion that is reinforced by donor attitudes and priorities. (Stiles, 2002: 839)

There is in other words a clear notion of rivalry between different actors, within civil society as well as between government and non-government sectors. The effect of the dependence of the NGO sector is being increasingly highlighted, and as a result the NGOs develop rhetoric to defend their position as crucial partners in development. Stiles concludes that NGOs

... simply divorce themselves from civil society in practice while at the same time taking on its mantle in principle. The NGOs have been accused of ‘monopolizing’ civil society, diverting attention from other associations. ... [and of] subverting civil society with inauthentic, foreign-funded mobilisation to the detriment of genuine grassroots activism. (Stiles, 2002: 840)

The NGO sector is being portrayed as a necessary ingredient in Bangladesh’s active strivings for development. The sector is perceived as a contrast to the inefficient and corrupt government sector. Furthermore, the NGOs are not only seen as more reliable and honest in their work, but they also carry the image of representing the micro-level, actively promoting grassroots level involvement instead of previous focus on macro-level. Historically, political involvement among rural groups has been restricted to the rural elite (van Schendel & Westergaard, 1997). The elite has provided support to political parties and in return acquired legal sanctions and financial means to support their own dominant positions, and there has been little room for grassroots movements with political aims. In other words, the grassroots level has remained politically void and the NGOs capture important issues of political nature, although not under the banner of party politics (van Schendel & Westergaard, 1997). The fact that NGOs have succeeded in getting established at this level is seen as proof that this level has been lacking channels to voice social and political issues, and that the NGOs fulfil an important role (Westergaard, 1996).

There are voices objecting to this picture though. Hoque argues that although NGOs in rhetoric emphasise empowerment of the poor through raising awareness of patterns of exploitation, most NGOs “compromise with the existing power structure” (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998: 61). BRAC is one example of how NGOs avoid direct confrontation with local influentials, and therefore their impact is rather marginal despite great coverage in terms of numbers of people and geographical areas (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998). The critique is not only aimed at the biggest NGO, but

18 In the early 1990s the budget of the nationwide and well established NGO BRAC was to 85% dependent on donor money (Lovell 1992).

Hoque claims that the introduction of NGOs as partners in development in Bangladesh has not at all implied alternatives to traditional, exploitative patron-clientships. In fact, the NGOs are part of the very same structure and they have developed new patron-client relationships at local level. Linking poverty reduction programmes with strivings for grassroots democratisation is all very well but the NGOs have not showed capacity to include new actors in more than isolated activities at rural level (Hoque & Siddiquee, 1998). Bloem et al make similar conclusions and claim that the hierarchical thinking, which is present in the Bangladeshi society in general, is likewise present within the NGOs (Bloem et al., 1991). This results in staff dominating villagers with controlling and patronising attitudes which contradict the ideology of participation as a whole. On the other hand, the authors continue, staffs that have different ambitions have difficulties in expressing what may be called genuine participatory strivings. The staff fear they will loose their job should they take on the participatory way of working, since this may result in critique at project activities and suggestions to change working procedure within the NGO (Bloem et al., 1991). In their study, Bloem et al notice that staff at lower levels appear to take on a rather passive attitude towards participatory approaches, possibly due to social structures, in general as well as within the organisations, being marked by hierarchical and factional thinking.

### **Rhetoric, environment and performance**

It is rather odd to note that while the NGOs are appreciated for being dynamic and flexible, for having important links with and experience from grassroots level, they appear to be treated as rather passive partners in project descriptions. In a report published by the World Bank and Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (the World Bank & BCAS, 1999), discussing prospects for development in Bangladesh NGOs are emphasised as important partners. However, the NGOs are being discussed in terms of being the 'implementing agencies', or the best 'instruments' to carry out projects. In the report it appears that aims of development projects in various sectors have already been determined. Statements such as "policy emphasis should be" is combined with comments such as "the private sector and NGOs are the best instruments for advancing these goals" (the World Bank & BCAS, 1999: 63). The NGOs are not included as active initiators or contributors to development projects, or as partners in analysis, sharing knowledge with project funders in order to reach more appropriate approaches. Sillitoe interprets the new focus on NGOs in Bangladesh as an invitation to make indigenous knowledge, voiced through the NGOs, to be included in project initiation, planning and execution (Sillitoe, 2000). However, the strictly limited role NGOs are often ascribed in reality shows that the expectations of Sillitoe and others will hardly be fulfilled. In a study made by Siddique it is verified that NGOs are perceived as service deliverers and not as sources of knowledge or as active partners, by project funders (Siddique, 1996). Hence, concludes Siddique, the gain made by NGOs from being recognised as partners is not at all clear. While do-

nors have found cost-efficient and more appropriate ways of implementing their projects, NGOs are still being left out from the agenda setting.

The dominating analysis of the Bangladesh society, which is the basis of the work of most NGOs in Bangladesh, has similarities with the rhetoric of participation. The key to development is found in social change, which incorporates a removal of hierarchical, exploitative structures. The poor have been subject to material exploitation and a culture which has hindered them from even thinking of rebelling against their oppressors. It is through empowerment – help through self-help, emancipation, awareness building, release – that the poor will take command of their own lives and eventually lead the country to economic growth with social equity. The poor must, in other words, be *freed* through participatory activities. The role of the NGOs is to enlighten the poor about their capacities, to help them move from individual experience to collective action. The difficulties involved in practising this rhetoric have already been discussed in relation to the concepts of participation and empowerment (part 2). It will here be sufficient to say that building an understanding of performance on this rhetoric will be inadequate since in practice meetings and even conflicts of various kinds will determine the actual performance rather than the stated strategies.

The role of the NGOs, as described by themselves, should be that of initiators of social mobilisation. The power to change lies in the hands of the poor. However, the NGOs also need to promote themselves as crucial actors in society. The role as advocates for the poor, as actors who are mainly interested in promoting change towards a better society for all, is however inevitably mixed with a need for organisational survival for many. The organisations are becoming increasingly skilled in marketing themselves, through pointing at problematic social structures, and at inadequate bureaucratic government organisations that are too remote from the people to be able to achieve real social change. But while they are pointing out the immense obstacles, they also hasten to say that recently positive changes have occurred. By referring to their own experience and achievements they put themselves in the directing role in the processes leading to these changes. Even though there are differences between the NGOs in how they reflect on their own positions and future roles, one may assume that the need for promotion and success affects not only their rhetoric to outsiders, but also their relationships with villagers. The actual performance of the NGOs may in other words reflect the need to convince donors of their crucial role in development work which may mean that critical voices directed towards the working procedures of donors are being marginalised.

The NGO rhetoric and performance must also be related to the fact that their work is often strictly ruled by contracts determined by outsiders. Again, competition and need for survival through external funding affect priorities made during work. As pointed out by some of the NGOs, the requirements for organisational professionalism made by funding donors have contributed to an improvement in the work of the NGOs. We have also noted that there are risks involved with these requirements, since the goals of organisational efficiency may come to supersede those of the initial goal of social change.



## CHAPTER 8

# Placing descriptions in analytical frameworks

This chapter, which summarises part 3, aims at elaborating on possible analytical frameworks that can be used to interpret what has been presented in chapters 6 and 7. The discussion below refers to theories of social movements, democracy and civil society, and to theories of organisation, relating the frameworks offered by these perspectives to the empirical material we have access to and to the questions concerning NGO staff motivation and performance that have been posed. Hence, the discussion provides both a conclusion to part three as well as an introduction to the following and last part of the thesis.

## Viewing material with a sceptical eye

In the chapter ‘Sociological approach as methodology’ I refer to Berger who argues that one of sociology’s task is to scrutinise where ideas, beliefs or analyses come from. This is motivated by a general understanding that knowledge is embedded in the social position a person holds, and an understanding that things are not always what they appear to be. The presentation in the two previous chapters has aimed at delineating how organisational objectives and external setting may affect the performance of NGOs. We may see this presentation as descriptions of NGO agendas and experience of their work, and reviews of existing analyses of social structures. While this constitutes an important *account* of aspects of aims and environment of NGOs and their role in the Bangladeshi society, it does not suffice as sociological *analysis*. Therefore it is crucial to continue the investigation by adding further aspects to the analysis. In order to do this it is useful to ask Berger’s question ‘says who?’.

Reports produced by researchers, donor agencies, and international financial institutions present a coherent perception of why NGOs should be promoted. We find that analyses repeat arguments for why NGOs need to be included in endeavours to strengthen civil society and democracy in Bangladesh, for how important NGOs are in order to make up for a failing state sector, and in order to make development projects work. There are frequent examples in literature on Bangladesh of close links

between development research and development in practice with the result that analyses are affected by a striving to be directly useful for development in practice. In the book 'Internal Dynamics and External Linkages', edited by Kalam, we find that virtually every chapter has a concluding section commenting on the bearing of the analysis on policy recommendations (Kalam, 1996). Comments such as *organizations should undertake more policy oriented research* are frequent, implying that research should aim at results that are directly applicable in policy making processes. It often appears as if research is being conducted with the main aim of producing material for modification of policies and development projects, headed by foreign donors, sometimes together with the government of Bangladesh.

Donors frequently demand evaluations and reports related to projects. They are "concerned with results which can quickly be fed into the administration of development projects" (van Schendel & Westergaard, 1997: xi). It is believed that donors' interests are to a great extent setting the agenda and studies are rarely conducted with long term perspectives. White concludes that reports concerning gender issues, often funded by foreign aid, provide *information* rather than *analyses*, and claims that research in general is characterised by positivism rather than a hermeneutic approach aimed at understanding the dynamics of society and social change (White, 1999). The critique of the quality and aim of research and evaluation made by White and van Schendel/Westergaard is highly relevant when describing literature discussing NGOs in Bangladesh. Relationships between researchers or authors of project reports and NGOs appear at times to be very close. It is important to bear this in mind when reading material that present the government and the state bureaucracy as deceitful, the foreign donor agencies and financial institutes as careless, while simultaneously promoting NGOs as the key actors in development. The dominating analyses of social structures that were reviewed in previous chapter fit very well with the promotion of NGOs as empowering agents. These analyses and the promotion of NGOs appear to be intimately linked to the same discourse. As a result of the policy- and practically oriented approach, material produced contains analytical limitations. From this perspective the analyses reviewed in previous chapter should be interpreted with some scepticism. While this is so, it still provides us with an important dimension from which to base further analysis of the performance of NGOs.

So where does the sceptical attitude encouraged by Berger lead us? What does the conclusion about the material presented here mean? The paragraphs above are not suggesting that narratives and descriptions should be seen as false, untrue, or deliberately skewed. But the conclusion does mean that there are other sides to the story that need to be highlighted in order to further our understanding of NGOs. Such 'other sides' can be found through a look at the meaning of goals and values in organisations, and at theories that focus on how the relationship between organisations and their environment may be interpreted. Below some theoretical insights into how to interpret organisational visions, the use of organisational goals, and the role of organisational environment will be presented: this will provide us with a broader perspective from which to interpret the empirical material at hand.

## Social structures and organisational culture

The analyses presented of social structures in Bangladesh indicate that structures constitute hindrances to the work of NGOs. We have previously heard how prestige and hierarchy, or what may be referred to as part of Bangladesh culture, hinders villagers to change their behaviour. Staff working with the implementation of the water supply and sanitation projects, as well as the villagers themselves, comment that it is hard to initiate change. Wearing sandals when nobody else does, or taking on the role of reminding people to use soap and to wash their hands, may provoke negative comments which deter villagers from taking on leading roles in processes of change. The staff also note that resistance to change come from groups or individuals in villages and at local governmental level, should they perceive project activities as threatening. Any threat to individual power-holders may trigger opposition. An established hierarchical culture also seems to implicate reluctance to do anything that may be seen as critique or comments to existing traditional practices.

It is important to recognise that NGOs' work is not only ruled by their stated goals and visions. These organisations must not only adapt to the larger system including physical, technological, social, cultural, economic and political environment, but they are also part and parcel of this environment. It would in other words be naive to ignore the possibility that social and cultural structure may not only constitute external structures but are also part of whom the organisations' members are. Scott writes on organisational structures in general: "Employees come to the organisation with heavy cultural and social baggage obtained from interactions in other social contexts" (Scott, 1992: 20). In a study of Bangladeshi NGOs, referred to by Bloem et al, it is noticed that staff take on rather passive attitudes towards participatory approaches (Bloem et al., 1991). The authors relate this behaviour to the hierarchical structure in society, implying that not only government officials but also NGO staff have difficulties in relating to villagers on villagers' own terms. Furthermore, should staff object to performance or attitudes that are anti-participatory, hierarchy is likely to prevent them from raising their voice against superior staff. Hence, to presume that NGOs are themselves exempt from the problematic attitudes fostered through a deeply rooted hierarchical structure would be a mistake.

The links between organisational structure and social environment has been investigated within theories of organisation. In a study made by Hofstede of IBM – a large, multinational company – staff at similar levels but in different countries were investigated, highlighting the meaning of cultural dimensions within organisations (Hofstede, 1991). Despite a homogenous formal organisational structure, individual patterns linked to cultural differences were noted in his study. Hofstede points out that we should not interpret culture as mental programming that is entirely determining our behaviour, but we may find cultural dimensions that explain differences in organisational structures. Hofstede brings up four dimensions, based on his IBM-



study<sup>19</sup>. He calls the first one power-distance, referring to how different cultures perceive inequality and hierarchical order. With great power-distance, leaders are perceived as definite bosses, while with less power-distance, leaders are seen as advisors. Secondly, there is a noticeable difference between collectivism and individualism. The third dimension refers to female versus male culture, which Hofstede summarises as a dimension that are not only related to gender relations but also to how individuals think about possibilities to advance, and at the same time have good cooperative relations with fellow employees. The last and fourth dimension is called 'uncertainty avoidance', defined as the extent to which members of a group or culture feel threatened by uncertainty and unpredictability. People from different cultures show different needs regarding certainty, something that presumably affects their way of handling flexibility and innovativeness.

Within social movement theories we find further analysis of the internal structure of the organisation of movements (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1999). The overall social stratification or class structure, as well as political structure, are reflected within movements. This association becomes particularly important if the movement in itself is addressing issues related to these structures. Rucht discusses a study of social movements' development in three countries, where he concludes that only to a minor extent did variations in organisational patterns result from deliberate choices made by the movements (Rucht, 1999).

The discussion concerning the four cultural dimensions raised by Hofstede is hard to elaborate on in relation to the NGOs presented in this study. Our findings are too vague, since the fieldwork was not focused on this particular issue. It is similarly difficult to draw conclusions related to the study referred to by Rucht. However, the studies point at important relations between general social structure and the likelihood that it is reflected also in the organisational structure, despite claims that the organisation sees hierarchical structures as problems. We should in other words presume that although NGOs are consciously trying to work for an open and non-hierarchical structure within the organisation, in accordance with their ideological basis, people carry within them traits of hierarchical thinking related to the cultural and social structure in which they live. In the empirical material presented in chapters 4 (part 2) and 6 (part 3) we can find comments that suggest this may be so. The staff do not always succeed in balancing between facilitating choice and imposing solutions according to prescriptions given by the NGOs and the projects. While this has previously been explained by the inherent ambivalence of participatory and empowerment strategies, it is also possible that cultural factors play a role. Hierarchical thinking may suggest that NGO staff is prone to authoritarian manners in their communication with villagers. Staff tend to refer to outsiders, actors of greater authority than themselves, when emphasising the importance or success of their work. The fact that staff accountability sometimes appear to be directed upwards rather than to the grassroots, for whom they are supposed to be the advocates, may be seen as a cultural

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19 These four dimensions were identified by Hofstede in his own study. He later added, based on findings from another study, a fifth dimension which relates to differences in time orientation in different cultures.

trait of hierarchical thinking and not only an expression of an unintended consequence of donor dependency. In a very recent study by Ahmad on NGO fieldworkers in Bangladesh the author adapts Hofstede's dimensions to characteristics he finds among Bangladeshi NGOs. Ahmad's conclusions support the tentative analysis of NGO culture made on the basis of this study. With a high acceptance of power distance, and acceptance of unequal distribution of power, directions coming from staff at higher levels are interpreted as orders and not advice. Hence, staff do not get involved in policy discussions, or question directions that come from the NGO directors. Ahmad also concludes that the organisations are characterised by uncertainty avoidance, implying that there is in practice little encouragement for flexibility and personal judgement on behalf of the NGO field-worker<sup>20</sup>.

### The role of espoused values

It is important to note and understand the values claimed by the organisations. The values and organisational strategies of NGOs have been developed in relation to a social structure that is problematic, even detrimental. It is therefore only natural that the work of the NGOs entails meetings characterised by resistance and struggle, since they are aiming at profound changes in what constitutes the social world of people's daily life. However, as the discussion above implies, understanding what these claimed values mean and how they relate to a social context does not necessarily give us a clear picture of how these values affect the operation of the organisation. With the help of the concept of espoused values, used in organisation theories, we may elaborate on this further (Jaffee, 2001: referring to Epstein).

The core characteristics of the NGOs that have made them attractive as development partners are their values and ideological background, as opposed to technological or material assets. Hence, the normative characteristic is very important, but it is not tangible or observable. The NGOs' visions and values, as claimed by themselves, may be called *espoused values*, i.e. they communicate what ought to be (Jaffee, 2001). Jaffee explains further: "A firm may claim that it is devoted to continuous innovation and lifelong learning. There is no reason to assume, however, that such espoused values are actually translated into organisational behavior and processes" (Jaffee, 2001: 166). Hence, we cannot use these espoused values to draw conclusions about our initial question, i.e. how we can understand performance and motivation of NGOs and their staff. In order for these values to be real in practice, there are certain requirements, such as conducive environment and internal organisational structure, that encourage performance along the lines of the ideology promoted. The concept of espoused values also refers to something that gradually comes to be taken for granted. The espoused values become rhetorical hallmarks that are not questioned. Concepts come to serve, one may say, as myths that are of importance both for integration of

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20 The book presenting this study (NGO Field Workers in Bangladesh, by M M Ahmad) has only recently been released (23<sup>rd</sup> December 2002). Hence shortage of time before the printing of this thesis has made it impossible to look more closely at the findings presented by Ahmad.

staff, and for building of an identity of the organisation, which is crucial from a marketing perspective.

Fyvie and Ager give an excellent example of such a myth in a study of Gambian NGOs and the concept of 'innovativeness' (Fyvie & Ager, 1999). The concept is being hailed by donors, as well as it is being used in NGO pamphlets describing organisational values and characteristics. The authors write that "although donor governments and multilateral institutions now routinely pay tribute to the assumed innovativeness of NGOs, the assumption has rarely been tested" (Fyvie & Ager, 1999: 1384). The study reveals an interesting diversity of interpretations of innovativeness. The concept can apparently be interpreted in different ways depending on to which group, or whose strategy it is compared: new to whom? Perhaps the NGO way of doing things is new compared to bureaucratised procedures of government organisations. Donors and NGO staff interpret innovativeness in rather different ways. While donors tend to relate innovation to flexible organisations, NGO staff appears to relate "innovativeness of projects in terms of their 'newness' to beneficiaries" (Fyvie & Ager, 1999: 1390). Looking at innovativeness within NGO work, the study shows that "most NGO activities in The Gambia fell within a predictable range" (Fyvie & Ager, 1999: 1387). Working procedures may be different compared to that of other sectors, but looking at NGOs alone, they more often used orthodox methods than they developed new techniques. The espoused value of innovativeness is discussed, highlighting ambiguities in interpretations, organisational structures and other organisational values that go counter to the valuable characteristic of being innovative. The authors conclude that while innovation is frequently claimed as a key attribute of development NGOs, there are internal and external factors that hinder this value from being realised in practice.

In the material presented in previous chapters, we see how NGO claims and donor expectations correspond to and nurture each other. Analyses of social structures in Bangladesh go hand in hand with NGOs' perception of what are the underlying reasons for the country's underdevelopment. In these analyses, the values associated with and promoted by NGOs fit into the image of a country in which the government is distant from the grassroots, where poor people lack the unity to form pressure groups and where donors do not have the capacity to reach and understand the local level. This image is further enhanced by analyses related to the work of the NGO sector, which often confirm failures of past development endeavours, point at the government sector as an inappropriate partner, and promote the NGO sector as reliable, flexible and committed to sincere development work. There is however, as in the case of NGOs and innovativeness referred to above, little evidence to verify this. Very little attention is paid to examining to what extent such claims and expectations are valid or appropriate.

### Values as framework for building identity and structuring relationships

The espoused values play an important role in the introspection of the staff and members involved in the organisation. In an interesting study of charity organisations in the States, Allahyari attempts to grasp how volunteers “learn and refine moral rhetoric” (Allahyari, 2000: 3). This is not only linked to the way staff or members relate to outside actors who have certain expectations of them. Through processes of what Allahyari calls moral selving, individuals attempt to create themselves “as more virtuous, and often more spiritual, person[s]” (Allahyari, 2000: 4). In her study she shows how charity organisations structure relations to the state “with significant moral consequences for both volunteers and recipients within the charitable relationship”, and continues by claiming that “the doing of charity structures moral selving and social relations” (Allahyari, 2000: 4). Allahyari’s study suggests that the individuals carrying out the work relate their charity work to a conscious striving for personal development. The new identity builds on an individual process, leading to personal satisfaction. It also affects the organisation internally, creating a feeling of shared values among members as well as it influences the way workers relate to clients and other actors in their environment. The process of moral selving occurs through internal, individual reflection, enhanced by a simultaneous process of creating relationships with outside actors, such as the state. Hence, the characteristic of relationships are not only a result of how charity workers perceive themselves: but the building of these relationships also play an active part in the process of moral selving.

Scott writes on organisations and goals in general that “goals may be employed as ideological weapons with which to overcome opposition and garner resources from the environment” and that “goals serve as bases for attachment for both organisational participants and external publics” (Scott, 1992: 285). The espoused values of the NGOs studied here, reflected in official goals, play an important rhetorical role in the relation between NGOs and their surrounding environment. The NGO identity is strongly linked to the image of honest and committed staff, and to visions to profoundly change restrictive and exploiting social structures, to the benefit of the poor. These characteristics are the keys to funding and contracts since they coincide with what donors look for. Hence, the values and organisational goals play an active role in building and maintaining relationship between donors and NGOs. We may furthermore note that the relationship with the government sector is structured by the fact that the values espoused by the NGOs are the antithesis of the values ascribed to government organisations. The continuous importance given by NGOs to the values of commitment and sincerity vis à vis their aims, and the repeated comparison with the government sector (and sometimes other NGOs that are perceived as less sincere) play an important function for two reasons. It constitutes a marketing strategy, on a market where the values of commitment and sincerity are highly cherished and where competition compels the NGOs to claim ownership of these values. The espoused values are also reflected in organisational goals, and as Scott points out “... goals serve as a source of identification and motivation for participants” (Scott, 1992: 285). The repetition of the image of the good NGO versus the bad government organisation

can be heard not only during interviews and interactions with outsiders. These issues also play an important role during internal meetings and informal discussions amongst NGO staff. Some of the directors emphasise the importance of getting their staff to identify with the organisation they are working for. Hence a second function can be distinguished. Through the use of espoused values and goals, the organisations try to establish a strong identity that staff can take pride in being a part of. The staff identity is moulded around a normative rhetoric, an image of the good NGO versus the bad government. In this way the NGO can secure staff integration, which according to the directors who discussed this, is of great importance in order to ensure that these values also adhere to reality.

However, the espoused values do not only serve as instruments to integrate staff and attract resources from outside, but also to structure the relation with villagers, or the recipients of charity as the quotation from Allahyari above suggests. Mosse refer to shared interests among different stakeholders when claiming that implementers (local NGOs), resource providers (local entrepreneurs and external donors) as well as villagers take part in ascertaining that the rhetoric of participation is being promoted (Mosse, forthcoming). In addition, as Lipsky argues, the local social worker, in his/her encounter with clients, “encourages clients to believe that workers hold the key to their well-being” (Lipsky, 1980: 15). Lipsky argues that social workers at the very low level of the organisation should not be seen as powerless, but on the contrary, as the actual policy-makers. Lipsky’s quote implies that the rhetoric of the social service is being used by social workers to mould clients’ ideas of what strategies would benefit them in their strivings for improved living standards

In the light of this, we may find an explanation of some confusing comments from villagers described in chapter 4. On the one hand villagers know the rhetoric of the water supply and sanitation projects very well, but on the other hand they had not changed behaviour according to this new knowledge. This could be explained by the common interest shared by NGOs and villagers in portraying projects as successful in order to ascertain continuous attention and flow of resources from the outside, to the benefit of both groups. Furthermore, we could hear the echoes of the NGO and project rhetoric when interviewing VDC members, and on occasions members had clearly been coached by the NGOs staff on what to say. An initial image of active VDCs sometimes faded when new impressions and information appeared through spending time in the villages. Again, the villagers quickly embraced knowledge and rhetoric, but the absence of actions suggested that it had not had any real effects on village daily life. Cases of active VDCs, the rhetoric of participation, empowerment, ownership and social mobilisation had made an impact which was evident from the narratives given by the VDC members. While these VDC members expressed pride in what they had accomplished, the stories contained a balanced image of active and responsible villagers as well as emphasis on the importance of the NGO as initiators, inspiring the VDC in their work. In the case of the successful as well as the less successful VDC we noticed that the NGOs had succeeded in establishing the espoused values and goals to thereby confirming the legitimacy of NGOs and the participation and empowerment strategies.

As pointed out by the directors, it is not enough to deliver only elegant rhetoric. In order to attain their vision, and to ensure funding, it is crucial to be seen to fulfil the claims made by the NGOs. The point of using the concept of espoused values is not to suggest rhetorical fraud by the NGOs. It is merely to suggest that one must look at surrounding environment, organisational strategies, modes of actual operation and structures, in order to get a holistic picture of to what extent and in what ways these values relate to what actually occurs. The discussion above shows that rhetoric fulfils several roles in organisations' relations with the environment as well as for the integration of staff. With a more complex picture of how rhetoric and organisational values can be related to organisational performance we establish an important basis from which to continue an investigation of our initial question: to understand the performance and motivation of the NGO staff in development projects. The discussion held so far also refer indirectly to general assumptions of how members of organisations relate to organisational norms. Different theoretical frameworks present different interpretations of this relationship. Below follows a presentation of social movement theories and organisation theories, which represent somewhat different types of such frameworks. The discussion will reflect on two issues. First of all, how do we define the NGOs referred to in this study, what organisational types are they. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks will be related to the sociological approach presented in chapter two, with particular reference to how the frameworks relate to issues of structure and agency.

### **Social movements and NGOs – common denominators and differences**

It is not uncommon that well known global NGOs, such as Greenpeace, the Red Cross, and Amnesty, are labelled social movements, hence it is quite natural to approach theories of social movements when analysing NGOs. Not only individual organisations but also the whole NGO sector may be defined as part of a world wide social movement. The emergence of NGOs in Bangladesh is describe, in interviews with the directors as well as in the literature, as a process similar to that of social movements or so called action groups (see e.g. Ahmad, 2002: Lovell, 1992: Wood, 1994). The NGOs included in this study refer to faltering economic performance, rising needs of a poor and powerless population, and people's demand for increased democratic space as reason for their initial formation. Action groups and social movements in the third world are seen as reactions to intensified or long lasting problems affecting the poor population in particular. Social mobilisation is furthermore seen as a sign of dissatisfaction with governments' failing competence or unwillingness to come to grips with problems that affect large proportions of their populations (Haynes, 1997).

Haynes sees third world action groups as vehicles for the rural and urban poor, with social and political goals (Haynes, 1997). The action groups referred to by the author have emerged as a result of economic, material and political oppression and exclusion, caused by authoritarian states. Hence, action groups are interpreted as "strategies of survival and the defence of group or community interests" (Haynes,

1997: 168). While Haynes writes from the perspective of analysis of emerging democracies, a glance at social movement theories refer to similar interpretations of collective actions. Many of contemporary social movements are characterised by being oriented towards obtaining collective goods, broadly defined as grievance or protest based organisations (McAdam et al., 1999). Social movements, of which action groups are one type, are collective action which encourage participation, or demonstrate “to others the possibilities of collective action and offer even resource-poor groups opportunities that are not predictable from their structural positions” (Tarrow, 1999). Although one may identify different types of collective action, such as grassroots movements, public lobbying, even revolutionary groups, a common denominator for contemporary movements appear to be that they are challenging existing political systems and power structures (McAdam et al., 1999).

Social movement theories may provide us with frameworks to understand the emergence of collective actions. Apart from a focus on motivation, there is also an emphasis on what circumstances – political opportunities – make the emergence of these movements possible. In the case of the NGO sector in Bangladesh we may note two phases of political opportunity for the development of NGOs. After independence, the need for action appeared to be particularly urgent, due to suffering caused by civil war and natural disasters following soon afterwards (drought, flooding, cyclones). Simultaneously, changes in social and political structures allowed space for new initiatives. Domestic changes that occurred with independence implied new room for manoeuvre for private and independent initiatives to work for relief for the poor. A second phase of political opportunities, starting in the late 1980s, has involved international actors. The institutionalisation of the NGOs Affairs Bureau in 1992 came as a result of pressure from foreign donors and the World Bank.

The definition of what constitutes a social movement is not entirely clear, which can be partly explained by the fact that the phenomenon has existed over a long period of time and hence have been allotted different interpretations depending on social and political climate. It may also be due to the evasive character of the phenomenon – as the word itself states a movement is the opposite of a fixed institution, and it is part and parcel of the movement to change and be flexible. Rucht states that “the ideal-typical form of a social movement, then, is a network of more or less informal groups, at least groups that are not formally and hierarchically co-ordinated” (Rucht, 1999). Social movements go through transformations with changes of goals and action repertoires, they are not static but should be understood as cyclical and dynamic (Kreisi, 1999; Tarrow, 1999). There are differences between what McAdam calls initiating movements and so called spin-off movements, i.e. movements that follow something which has already been started (McAdam, 1999). With these changes follow variations in organisational structure. Despite calling these action group movements, which implies a rather informal organisational structure, Kreisi means that what he calls *social movement organisations* can be formalised and professionalised. Kreisi argues that characteristics attached to a movement is more dependant on goals than on structure, and hence disputes Rucht’s definition above. What characterises a social movement organisation from other formal organisations is that the former “mobilize

their constituency for collective action, and [that] they do so with a political goal, that is, to obtain some collective good (avoid some collective ill) from authorities” (Kreisi, 1999: 152). Despite processes of transformation it is crucial that these characteristics remain. They differ from organisations characterised by aims to deliver services to community members, or at tending to the concern of interest groups without their direct participation. Kriesi identifies institutionalisation, commercialisation, and involution as different paths of transformation which all involve a redirection of movement goals from the actor oriented, participatory and more radical path that is associated with the social movement characteristics.

The Bangladeshi NGOs have gone through processes of transformation since they first emerged, after independence in the 1970s. The NGOs that originate from this era have changed from aiming to give relief, i.e. immediate assistance to the poor during famine and natural disasters, to aiming to achieve more profound and long-term social changes. The NGO sector has grown, with what may be called spin-off organisations following the example of existing organisations. There are also NGOs that, due to increase in resources available, have been set up with more dubious intentions. The transformation of the sector as a whole is perceived by many as characterised by a change from being a radical challenge to existing power structures, to becoming oriented towards service delivery or towards taking over service delivery that should otherwise have been delivered by the government sector. In this respect, one may claim that the NGOs should no longer be perceived as social movements, having lost their explicitly political goals. However, in a context such as that of Bangladesh one may claim that although explicit political aims have been marginalized in organisational agendas, the political nature of these organisations is still prevalent. They may be less openly challenging, but their existence and work at the grassroots level *per se* is of a political nature<sup>21</sup>. Their activities are more or less explicitly encouraging previously marginalized people to take initiatives and make demands for services from their local governments.

During processes of transformation social movements are constantly struggling to establish meanings of values, goals, and strategies. The struggle for meaning, termed ‘framing processes’ within social movement theories, goes on within the movement as well as in relation to outside actors and arenas (Gamson & Meyer, 1999). The framing process concerns the continuous interaction between opportunities and reactions in the movement’s environment. Looking at the Bangladeshi NGOs from a social movement perspective this process appears to suggest important analytical elements. While the NGOs are working to achieve social change and hereby have a politically challenging agenda, they also appear to navigate in such a way as to avoid confrontation. The social movement ideal-type appears to be occupied with making resistance, and to avoid being co-opted by their inherent enemies (state sector, classes or social groups). NGOs in Bangladesh on the other hand have taken the invitation presented by donors as an opportunity to be included as permanent partners in development and to continue their work for change from within. This new opportunity for co-operation is interpreted as a sign that the opponents have changed, and NGOs

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21 Political is here defined in broad terms, not associated with party politics.



in general interpret this as a victory on their behalf. Their concomitant strategy is hence to work for mutual understanding rather than to build up resistance and opposition. The close relationship with donors may however be characterised as either based on co-operation and partnership, or, which is the more common way of defining it, a relationship based on dependence in which the NGOs are the weaker partners. The dependency, many would claim, inevitably implies that NGOs lose their role as trouble-shooters, which is an essential characteristic of a social movement.

It is important to identify common denominators between the NGOs studied here and what is generally defined as social movements when considering to what extent social movement theories may be appropriate for further analysis of NGOs. The group of NGOs under scrutiny share a basis in grievance and opposition to established power-systems, similar to that of social movements. However, processes of transformation have rendered the NGOs' complex organisations with traits of service delivery- or business-organisations, and a striving for survival has made new organisational goals compete with initial visions of social change and commitment to social solidarity. As we could see in the interviews with the NGO directors, there are considerable differences in character between the organisations. Even so, the emerging organisational structures with employees, contracts with outsiders, and professionalisation appear to have made them rather distant from the image of a movement based on voluntary collective action and shared values. Although we may interpret NGOs as part of a wider movement, the NGOs themselves appear to have certain limitations when it comes to expressing protest and grievance. This is partly due to dependency on external actors, in terms of funding and contracts from donors. The fact that employees are recruited from outside is also an element that makes NGOs different from social movements. While the *initiators* of the NGOs in many cases motivate their engagement in social and political issues through frustration over inadequate or inappropriate action from other actors, *employees* may enter the organisations with a rather different background. Considering the value of social movement theories in relation to the question of performance and motivation of NGO staff, social movement theory appears to have limited relevance. The focus of these theories seems to be on the role of social movements in relation to socio-political climate and to actors on the public arena. This provides us with a broad and useful perspective when it comes to analysing the emergence of NGOs. However, it is inadequate in terms of focus on individual members. It is assumed that members join movements with the intention of working for the goals stated by the organisation, and although these goals may be contested, the relation between goals and member performance is not problematized.

The theoretical framework of social movements carries traits of an image of collective action and social forces as crucial in general strivings for a development which implies democratisation and social equity. A strong civil society, with democratic and active citizens is crucial for such a development, and social movements are perceived as central in a world where there is a constant struggle between the powerful and the less fortunate. This conflict perspective is clearly expressed in the following analysis of variations of types of NGOs as development partners. The consequences of such a starting point will be discussed shortly.

### Defining NGOs – genuine or fraud?

In order to accept a framework as appropriate for further analysis of the NGOs it is important to settle on a definition of what type of collective action, movement, organisation or group an NGO is. Korten points out that the term NGO contains a variety of different types of organisations and this needs to be reflected in how we choose to define them. Korten's main suggestion is that not all NGOs belong to what he calls the voluntary sector. He continues and terms some organisations GONGOs, indicating that a group of NGOs have been created by the government (governmental nongovernmental organisations) with the purpose of serving its own interest. The emergence of GONGOs is a result of donor pressure to include more NGOs and less government in development projects. Hence, creating GONGOs has been a way for governments to meet the wishes of donors, without losing control over donor resources. A second type of NGOs is called 'public service contractors'. These are non-profit organisations, closely linked to donor funding and preferences. They are portrayed as mainly fulfilling the needs of donors, prone to work on short-term basis, and their work does not contribute to any long-term changes in terms of social change and real development for the poor.

The third type is the voluntary organisation. Korten defines them in the following way:

Organisations created and maintained out of a true sense of value commitment range from Mother Teresa-type charities to social activist organisations that are on the front lines of such causes as environmental protection, women's rights, human rights protection, peace, and land reform. Voluntary organisations may or may not accept official donor funding, but when they do, it is on their own terms and only to support activities integral to their self-defined mission. (Korten, 1992: 74)

Korten makes a distinction between 'true voluntary organisations' and the other two categories. He relates the two former organisational types (GONGOs and service deliverers) to the growth-centred development paradigm, while the latter, true voluntary organisational type, is related to a fundamentally different, people-centred development paradigm.

Korten's discussion departs from the question of how to meet and solve an emerging world crisis. An imminent social and ecological collapse threatens future life and civilisation on a global scale (Korten, 1992). The crisis is if not created then at least supported by a growth-centred thinking, which must be replaced by that of a people-centred. A close relation with donors and governments is detrimental to NGOs, since the two former actors do not have any "real appreciation of the distinctive role of truly voluntary organisations" (Korten, 1992: 75). In Korten's discussion, true voluntary organisations are described as essential in the building of a new society, with focus on democracy, increased social justice, strengthened local economic and environmental self-reliance. Korten writes:

The voluntary sector defines a very distinctive force in society. Part of its essential dynamism comes from its few entry barriers. One needs only a social commitment. [...] If these people are

willing to volunteer their time, then even lack of money is not necessarily a barrier to entry. (Korten, 1992: 75)

And Korten continues:

One of the distinctive characteristics of voluntary action is that by definition it is not driven by expectation of economic or political reward, the two types of rewards on which the inventive systems of established institutions are most commonly built. The power of these reward systems is fundamental to the enormous resistance to any kind of fundamental change exhibited by established institutions. (Korten, 1992: 75)

There is common ground between social movements theories and the categorisation of different NGOs made by Korten. Both frameworks emphasise that the movement or organisation challenges existing power systems, expressed in governing authorities or systems of knowledge as in dominating paradigms. Should the conflictual relationship towards, in this case, governments and donors change and become a relationship characterised by co-operation, the movement or voluntary organisation is interpreted as having lost its role as challenger and opponent to the established power-structure, not as a sign that the opponents have agreed to change.

The ideas expressed by Korten and those found within social movement theories can be related to a broader discussion concerning the role of civil society in processes of democratisation. This can be illustrated through the analysis democracy in capitalist times by political scientist Dryzek (Dryzek, 1996). Dryzek discusses processes leading to a deepening and consolidation of democracy. He explains that in times when democracy appears to have been co-opted by capitalism, which distorts democracy's neutrality vis à vis society's different actors, democratic consolidation can still be gained through democratic movements outside of the state, within civil society. Consolidation and deepening of democratic values must be driven *against* or *apart from* the state. Democratisation against the state is, according to Dryzek, located to civil society, which he defines in the following way:

A narrower definition describes civil society as consisting of voluntary political association oriented by its relation to the state, but self-limiting in not seeking a share of state power. Civil society in this narrower sense constitutes a realm of freedom in which individuals are not forced to act in strategic pursuit of material reward (as required in the economy) or constrained by the power relationships embodied in the bureaucratic state. Perhaps the best definition of civil society in this narrower sense is in functional terms, as public action in response to failure in government and the economy. (Dryzek, 1996: 47)

State power constitutes an important opponent, and it is furthermore crucial to remain on confrontational terms with the state since that provides actors with a democratic space which is not available to or within the state. Democratisation through activities within civil society, that remains dissociated from the capitalist state, are highly valuable to the process of deepening and consolidation of democracy. Dryzek defines this process of democratisation as *authentic*, i.e. "democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic" (Dryzek, 1996: 59). Although this is a very short introduction to theories of democracy and civil society, it gives an idea as to where to

locate the origin of the importance given to civil society movements in struggles of power that are concerned with the political, economic and social areas. Expectations allotted to NGOs are not only linked to the discourse of development projects, but to a broader theoretical framework of democracy and civil society.

In social movement theories, Korten's discussion, and Dryzek's arguments we find that there is an emphasis on opposing and actively conflictual relationships between movements or organisations and certain actors in their environment. There are further similarities between Korten and Dryzek in that they draw lines between what is true and authentic and what is insincere and symbolic. The categorisation of what is a true or a false voluntary organisation, and an authentic or symbolic democracy, is very similar to that raised in the discussion of participation and matters of genuineness (see chapter 3). Certain ways of practising participatory methods are viewed as less genuine than others, and participation can serve as a cosmetic label, to add value to projects. The genuineness depends on both the understanding as well as the attitudes of the people involved in practising participatory techniques. This categorisation, one may argue, would also be possible to make among the staff and NGOs interviewed for this study. Some of the implementing staff appeared to have made dubious interpretations of what participation aiming at empowerment involves, and comments as well as behaviour of staff did at times appear to be rather non-participatory in nature. Among the NGO directors we find similar differences, between directors who in an unreflective way equal further success with scaling-up of their activities and directors who present a much more hesitant approach towards engaging in further activities with the government and donors. The latter group also appeared to have a more advanced understanding of what it takes in terms of organisational structure and leadership to create attitudes and commitment among the staff that would vouch for a realisation of the values the organisations hold.

Using definitions related to social movement theories, we may conclude that the organisations that have resorted to being service providers rather than trouble-shooters have lost their initial mission and values. Although the organisations themselves may not interpret the transformation as a change of goals – they would perhaps define it as due to true changes within the government sector – the interpretations presented by social movement theories and by Korten maintain that the change implies a loss of vision, a deliberate co-option on behalf of the government or donors, or that new NGOs are free-riders on a market where development rhetoric is used to get access to material resources. In Korten's words, true voluntarism has been lost, and replaced by market oriented behaviour and growth-centred visions.

There are qualities in the NGOs we have been acquainted with here that make social movement theories and Korten's definitions useful as frameworks for analysis of the organisations. However, in relation to our initial question – how can we understand motivation and performance of local NGOs? – these approaches provide some difficulties. In Korten's categorisation in particular, but also within the framework of social movement theories, definitions of what is a voluntary organisation, or a social movement, is based partly on *judgements* that label organisations as good or bad, authentic or inauthentic. Definitions are not being made along a continuum

but by using opposing categories, since the conflictual and trouble-shooting character is of such importance in these frameworks. The categorisations do not, however, problematise the difference between these opposing positions. There are important references made to interaction with external actors, which has been discussed above. However, there is little depth when discussing what makes an organisation change so drastically in character, from being what Korten calls an independent Mother Teresa-type charity, or a social movement based on discontent, seeing the state as opponent, to becoming a market oriented, politically co-opted organisation with members driven by expectation of economic and political reward. Social movement theories, Korten's analysis and the analysis presented by Dryzek all emphasise a voluntary membership. We find few references to individuals' motivations and behaviour related to other sources than ideology, as if by emphasising voluntary membership no other sources of motivation can be accepted. Feree and Roth comment that there is an emphasis, in theory as well as practice of social movements, on the organisation as an homogenous entity, based on members sharing experiences and feelings (Feree & Roth, 1998). The authors call this exclusionary solidarity, and argue that this leads to a denial of differences between participants. Within a social movement the basis for collectivity appears to be quite different from that found within more formal organisations. While the movement emphasises shared ideas, referring to an ideology and to a shared interest to make the organisation function, a more formal organisation also includes formalised rules such as systems of reward and sanctions as basis for entity. Some interesting comments are made by Korten and Dryzek in relation to such formalised organisational rules: Korten swiftly dismisses reward systems as corrupting, he suggests that true voluntary motives do not need economic or political rewards, argues that such reward-systems are corrupting. Dryzek makes an equally swift remark that voluntary action in civil society is not based on motivations linked to the seeking of power. Social movement theories, Korten's and Dryzek's analyses, are all based on more or less normative frameworks, appear to imply rather crude categorisations that come from an idealisation of a particular type of organisation and organisational member.

In Korten's analysis a quest is clearly spelt out to conquer a growth-centred development approach in order to create a new global society. In Dryzek's discussion we may also detect a quest to find ways for democracy, captured by capitalism, to deepen despite this identified threat to democratic values. In social movement theories it is more difficult to identify a specific quest, a certain enemy, but the assumption is that a movement is opposing and challenging oppressive structures. Hence, all three perspectives share an emphasis on opposition and conflict. We do find this conflictual perspective among the interviewed NGOs too. The discussion of how the organisations' rhetoric and identity builds on a representation of values that are the opposite of those associated with the government sector clearly shows the relevance of such a perspective. However, by using a framework based on a conflict the discussion of staff motivation and performance is likely to move towards a categorisation of individuals as good and bad, or as unconsciously co-opted by the bad or deliberately co-opting the good. It would be fruitful to move away from such conflict-based discussions and

invite yet another broad framework that allows for a more varied understanding of the individual, of people's motivations in organisations. Below I will give a short introduction to organisation theories, contrasting this framework with the ones discussed above.

### **Capturing structure and agency**

Through the reference to Hofstede and his research on organisational culture and through the concept of espoused values, we have been introduced to some of the discussions found within organisation theories. The focus in organisation theory relates to the relationship between the employee and the organisation, affected by various types of systems of control that are exercised in order to reach goals and motivate the employee. Such a theoretical framework appears to be touching upon the core of questions of NGO staff motivation and performance as posed here. Also from the perspective of the critique directed above to the oppositional and conflictual nature of social movement theory<sup>22</sup>, and Korten's analysis of NGOs the framework of organisation theory offers an attractive entry point from which to continue the analysis of NGO staff. This will be motivated below.

Scott gives three different definitions of organisations. A rational system-definition emphasises two characteristics (Scott, 1992). First of all, the organisation has specific goals with actions co-ordinated according to these goals. Secondly, there is a relatively high degree of formalisation. Co-operation among members is conscious and deliberate. Members have ascribed roles which they take on, and actions and roles are not bound to individuals or personal attributes. Comparing this definition to that of a social movement we may find clear differences, as Scott also points out: "It is the combination of relatively high goals specificity and relatively high formalization that distinguishes organisations from other types of collectivities. [...] [social movements] tend to exhibit low levels of both goals and specificity and formalization" (Scott, 1992:23).

The second definition does not depart from stated goals and organisational structure but from the behaviour of the participants. Staff behaviour cannot be fully predicted based on organisational norms, goals and formal structure. A definition of an organisation from this perspective hence goes as follows: "Organisations are collectivities whose participants share a common interest in the survival of the system and who engage in collective activities, informally structured, to secure this end" (Scott, 1992:25). Using such a definition it is more difficult to see the differences between a social movement and a formalised organization.

A third definition emphasises the fact that organisations are part of a wider environment, and is called an open system definition. Organisations are open and dependent on the outside, for recruitment of staff, for information and resources.

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22 The framework of social movement theory in itself should not necessarily be criticised. It is in the specific context used here, in order to understand local NGO staff, that such a perspective does not appear to respond to an understanding of the individual that is sought after.

Organisational systems are “embedded in – dependent on continuing exchanges with and constituted by – the environment in which they operate” (Scott, 1992:25). This does not only mean the organisation as an entity is affected by the environment, but also that for the individual, interests are directed towards and incentives come from various sources. What affects organisational structure and the individuals within the organisation shifts over time. At times, Scott argues, external elements may be dominating but this may change due to conscious internal management or unexpected external changes. Scott holds this dual perspective as crucial when analysing organisations, since it contradicts analyses that see organisational performance as mainly related to management effectiveness. We cannot only use organisational goals as starting point when analysing staff behaviour. Goals of a different kind are also brought into the organisation by the individuals, private goals and motivations that, as Scott puts it, “rarely coincide with those of the organisation” (Scott, 1992:314). Hence, individual goals, the individual’s general social context as well as organisational goals should be taken into account when analysing staff motivation and performance.

The weaknesses identified in Korten’s analysis and the framework provided by social movement theories are related to Scott’s line of reasoning concerning a dual perspective. Scott refers to Giddens’ structuration theory since this “helps us to correct for an all-too-common sociological bias: an emphasis on the power and weight of existing social arrangements coupled with a discounting of the importance of individual imagination and initiative” (Scott, 1992:19). We may hereby return to the discussion in chapter 2 about structure, agency and society as drama. By bringing in the actor as knowledgeable and innovative we avoid a bias towards structure. Giddens’ emphasis on a duality of structures implies that we acknowledge that structure shapes the behaviour of actors, but is at the same time created by these actors. Berger’s image of society as drama also, as he himself puts it, opens up a passage out of rigid determinism (Berger, 1966). The weakness in Korten’s analysis and social movement theories, from the perspective of the questions asked in this study, is a bias towards structure and a neglect of agency. The focus on organisations and movements as oppositional and on the organisational values and strategies that follow leaves little room for analysis of the individual actor. It is not acknowledged that the actor reflects on his/her actions in relation to the goals and visions of the organisation, as well as in relation to other social settings and is hence not entirely ruled by organisational ideology or rules. Seeing the actor as purposive and innovative means that we acknowledge that the individual has disparate interests that can at times conflict with goals of the organisations, without drawing the conclusion that the actor is disagreeing with a stated ideology.

The implications of a normatively based framework for problematising changes within the development NGO sector will be further discussed as an introduction to the next chapter. The following and last part of the thesis continues to elaborate on theories of organisation, investigating how perspectives offered within this theoretical framework can contribute to our understanding of NGO staff motivation and performance.

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**PART 4**

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# Introduction

Guided by the question ‘how can we understand motivation and performance of NGO staff’ chapter 6 presented visions and values of a group of NGOs, and under what circumstances the organisations work. The aim was to understand the performance of NGOs based on aspirations and on elements that constitute possibilities as well as hindrances for the NGOs to exercise those aspirations. Several factors and actors, such as donor dependency and antagonism with government institutions, in the close environment constitute obstacles for NGOs in their work for social change. In part 3 the focus has been on how these external elements have come to effect the performance and goals of the NGOs.

This part maintains focus on the question of staff motivation and performance, but looks at it from a slightly different angle. The ambivalence expressed by staff towards participatory strategies and commitment to work as volunteers, as well as the changing characteristics of NGOs that are debated and seen as sources for worries within the development world, should not only be interpreted as consequences of external pressure, of inadequate individual capacities or internal organisational reflection. Staff ambivalence and changing organisational characteristics may instead be seen as an expression of a general dilemma: that of the difficulties involved in work that aims at creating social change, that requires staff and organisations to have a normative orientation, characterised by a certain type of attitudes and values.

The starting point of this discussion, presented in chapter 9, is an inquisitive approach towards understanding altruism and commitment to work for a good cause. This emanates from three discussions: first of all, in part 2 of the thesis a discussion concerning attitudes and motivations that are *required* in order for participation and empowerment to work has been raised. This is furthermore supported by the empirical material presented in part 2, where the concluding remarks point out that participation and empowerment are not neutral instruments, but rely to a crucial extent on how the staff handle the strategies in practice. Secondly, as will be discussed shortly, debates concerning NGOs reveal motivations that we *ascribe to* NGOs and *assume* NGOs should hold. And thirdly, chapter 6 and 8 have raised discussions concerning motivations that NGOs themselves *claim* to have. The starting point is also that our understanding of altruism and commitment as basis for motivation (in the context of development projects and NGOs) seems to be rather limited. Moreover, attitudes and motivations required by, ascribed to and claimed by NGOs are frequently being contrasted with opposing, faulty attitudes and motivations held by staff within the governmental and business sectors. *Altruism* and *self-interest* are in this context por-

trayed as each other's opposite. When looking into these two concepts more closely we may however see that the two bases for motivation are complex to understand and may at times appear to be very similar, even intimately related. By examining the definitions of the concepts we may also reinforce previous critique against a conflictual framework, based on oppositional characteristics, as basis for analysis of NGOs. Furthermore, in discussions concerning NGOs, there appears to be an assumption that individual commitment and ideology can be controlled through organisational management. Management strategies and the concept of a learning organisation do hold important guidance as to how organisations can adapt to new circumstances without losing initial value basis. However, the assumption that a well-articulated ideology will provide enough incentive and direction to form appropriate staff motivation and performance appears rather naïve. It does not take into account a deeper understanding of the basis for individual motivation or of the complexities involved in organisational systems of control. Such an understanding would point at the inherent multitude of motives in any individual, at the unique nature of the human resource, and at the difficulties with trade-offs and unintended consequences involved with organisational control systems.

The following chapter (9) presents an examination of altruism and of self-interest as bases of motivation. Subsequently chapter 10 looks into different perspectives from which we may understand the relationship between organisational control and individual motivation. The discussion will continuously relate to the empirical material previously presented.

## CHAPTER 9

# Redefining concepts: altruism meets self-interest

## Ascribed characteristics of development NGOs

Within the international donor sector, NGOs are increasingly being chosen as the most appropriate vehicles to use for implementation of strategies with normative goals, such as participation and empowerment, due to their close relationship with grassroots level and their ideological orientation. The recent emphasis on both the use of participatory strategies and on the need for a strengthened civil society has served as an invitation for NGOs to play an important role in development practice.

Much of the literature on NGOs in the Bangladeshi context as well as elsewhere, portray them as empowerers of the poor and exploited, and run by people wanting to do well for society (Chowdury, 1990; Kramsjö & Wood, 1992; Lovell, 1992; Sil-litoe, 2000). NGOs are non-profit, voluntary associations of well-intentioned, committed people who have visions and values but no interest in power and coercion (Fowler, 2000a; Fowler, 2000b; Hailey, 1999; Haynes, 1997; Holloway, 1998; Korten, 1992; McAdam et al., 1999). The involvement of NGOs in development projects brings great expectations as to what goals will be achieved, such as increased social justice, self-reliance, and grassroots democracy (Brett, 1993). NGO staff is expected to be highly committed to a cause and to be guided by integrity in their work. A core concept which captures the essence of our assumptions and (wishful) expectations about the characteristics of NGOs is *altruism*: the work of NGOs should be based on altruistic motivation – i.e. the willingness to contribute to the common good in society, without expecting any calculated pecuniary or other reward in return (Brett, 1996).

Altruism is contrasted with a *narrow self-interest*, which is a driving force found in both private and public sectors, and seen as a detrimental factor leading to corruption, rent-seeking behaviour, and democratically inadequate procedures on behalf of institutions that should be serving civil society. In development projects, self-interest of project-staff may result in disillusionment among participants. In the context of the Bangladeshi analyses we can relate this to the picture of the committed and sincere NGOs contrasted with the corrupt and selfish government officials, and rent-seeking behaviour within the business sector.

Although NGOs are being perceived as important for improved horizontal communication and democracy in development projects, it is also well recognised that there are risks of clientelism and patronage related to their work. While the flourishing NGO sector is a sign of increased freedom of practice for existing NGOs, it is also seen as a sign of the emergence of new NGOs who should not be associated with real participation and local empowerment but which are being set up with the intent of making a profit. Increasingly, discussions about motivations and values of NGOs raise concerns regarding the character of NGOs and their staff. The valuable characteristics we ascribe to these organisations seem to be at risk. As in the case of NGOs in Bangladesh, the general debate of development NGOs concern how “over-reliance on public funds can and does alter NGDO nature and behaviour...” or that “... NGDO civic rootedness and values, such as solidarity, reciprocity, co-operation and collaboration are being overtly and covertly compromised. This is occurring because of external forces and because of inadequate internal reflection...” (Fowler, 2000b:591)<sup>23</sup>. It is recognised that our initial perception of development NGOs as indisputably benevolent must be reviewed (Clever, 2001; Folke, 2000; Fowler, 2000a; Fowler, 2000b; Hailey, 1999; White, 1999).

The call for a review of what characterises development NGOs come from a realisation that external elements have disturbed their valuable qualities: donors and the development industry has forced the NGO into a position where there is little room to genuinely practice altruistic values. The organisations have been coerced to compromise these values, with commitment to solidarity with the poor being replaced by profit- and success-seeking motivation. The debates hold a mixture of interpreting this as an unfortunate and unintended consequence of the focus on NGOs, and a deliberate coercion and misuse of NGOs by donor agencies, or by a growth-centred ideology of an elusive source that rules the world. A competitive market has developed within the NGO sector, which has caused visions of long-term social change to give way to short-term goals of securing resources and contracts. Contracts are characterised by tight time-schedules and bureaucratic-like organisational structures, which leave little room for time-consuming participatory procedures, and with evaluating procedures that go counter to any emphasis on slow, subtle and long-term social change.

### **Making policy or understanding social phenomena?**

In a review by Ferguson of development literature, the author describes part of the literature as characterised by a focus on “... what goes ‘wrong’, why and how can it be fixed” (Ferguson, 1996). Writers within this group identify development as a great collective effort to achieve progress, and analysis within this perspective are aimed at creating a basis for better performance. In the case of participation and empowerment in development, a majority of the literature presents discussions that are linked

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23 NGDO is short for non-government development organisation.

to the advocacy of these concepts in development projects. As argued before, these debates aim at prescribing the use of participation, resulting in texts devoted to clarifying concepts and methods related to participatory strategies. Although the literature presents insightful and critical analyses of participation, the critique has mostly been elaborated on with the intention of *improving* definitions and methods. Analyses are based on the hypothesis that participation can and should be made to work.

The discussions relating to development NGOs carry very similar traits. Literature often presents valuable descriptions involving historical accounts and contextual relations of NGOs. Debates, which critically investigate the national and international political and economic arenas in which we find NGOs, are of course equally important. But, using Asplund's rather strong expression, such descriptions are *pointless*, i.e. they are limited since they only help us to *see* the phenomenon, they do not help us to *understand* it better. What furthermore makes the mainstream discussions on development NGOs problematic is that the detailed descriptions are being elaborated upon with a certain intent, distinguished by advocacy for the inclusion of NGOs as partners and assuming the ideal – i.e. NGOs driven by altruism and commitment to solidarity – is attainable. This is illustrated by the focus in NGO literature on external forces or inadequate internal reflection as elements endangering the real values of NGOs, and by attempts to identify and separate the bad apples from the true and genuine organisations within the NGO sector. Such a focus leads the discussion into a direction that is mainly aimed at finding practical solutions to problems that hinder the realisation of the goals and values associated with NGOs. Lewis describes the literature in the following way:

Its tone, while sometimes critical of the attention currently being given to NGOs, is usually one which documents and suggests the potential of NGOs to transform development processes in positive ways. (Lewis, 1999:3)

Guided by visions or ideological convictions about how things should be may seriously compromise the analysis, since it risks to fail to scrutinise what these visions actually consist of in terms of underlying assumptions. In this particular case, the assumption concerns the values and characteristics associated with development NGOs.

The presentation of social, political and economic environment of the NGOs in Bangladesh should not be dismissed. While such a description may be called pointless and analytically inadequate, it does form an important background from which to continue our investigation. In addition to this description an analysis aiming at questioning assumptions will lead us closer to an understanding of performance and motivation of NGO staff. The emphasis made here on altruism as a main characteristic of NGOs may appear to be based on a somewhat crude interpretation of what values are ascribed or claimed by these organisations. The focus on this concept has however been chosen for rhetorical reasons, to develop an argument that I believe is valuable. Through scrutinising altruism, and its opposing concept self-interest, we can find another source for the ambivalence expressed by the staff in relation to the performance of participatory activities. This source is not constituted by faltering attitudes or mis-

interpretations of ideologies, but from the *dilemmas of altruism*. The following discussions will take this as its starting point, and continue with discussions based on organisation theories about staff motivation and organisational control.

### **Altruism – a gift for free?**

Altruism implies a willingness to make a contribution to others without expecting a calculable return, thus allowing interactions in which there need not be a direct relationship between contribution and reward. (Brett, 1993:283)

Although altruism is being referred to more or less directly in theoretical and other discussions concerning organisations and NGOs in particular, it is rare to find clear definitions of the concept per se. It appears that it has not been scrutinised to the same extent as the concepts of self-interest and rational, maximising economic behaviour. Brett is one of few who discusses it in detail, and he does not only associate it with voluntary organisations such as NGOs, but argues that organisations and society in general rely on people's altruistic behaviour. The conventional interpretation is that altruism is based on a willingness to do good for others, while self-interest is aimed at securing personal well being. However, Brett also argues that the two concepts can merge, writing that "altruism can be treated as a form of far-sighted self-interest: we recognise that we too will lose if everyone maximises short-term self-interest" (Brett, 1993:283).

We may recall the quotes by Korten used in chapter 8, in which he argues that voluntary action is by definition not driven by any expectation of economic or political reward, and that such reward systems can only be seen as corrupting the characteristics of voluntary action (Korten, 1992; and chapter 8 here). Korten's argument appears to be based on a simplifying and idealising understanding of people-centred voluntary action. By investigating the concept of altruism put in action we may develop a more nuanced understanding. Brett states that altruism does not imply expectations of 'calculable return', but he also recognises that such a pure kind of altruism cannot sustain over time. A chain of altruistic actions soon establishes an understanding that 'I give in order that you may give' (Brett, 1993). The fact that NGOs have developed to become formal organisations, with formalised goals and contracts with external partners, make them dependent on organisational continuity. Altruism becomes institutionalised, which means that some sort of system of reciprocity is established. There are expectations of a return both in the relation between the staff and the villagers, to whom they devote time and energy in order to improve their lives, and in the relation between the staff and the organisation. Focusing on the internal organisational aspects of NGOs, this has implications for what theoretical approaches we may use. The fact that a reward system is introduced makes NGOs similar to private and public organisations, in that there is an established relationship between organisational control and expected staff performance. We may see that relationships are not only characterised by a shared vision of social change, but also by negotiations over rewards and recognition to members of the organisa-

tion. Conflicts between individuals, or between employees and the organisation, can be found in both profit-seeking organisations and voluntary organisations. While in the former conflicts are often related to the pursuing of individuals' self-interest, in the latter it may be caused by a strong commitment to an individual interpretation of an ideology. Problems due to conflicts of interest and lack of integration between employees and organisational goals may hence be related to both business-like and voluntary organisations. Furthermore, behaviour interpreted as individual opportunism is not only related to material rewards, but also to non-material compensations of various kinds, such as social recognition, status and increased influence (Brett, 1993). In other words, strong commitment to either self-interest or a particular interpretation of altruism, i.e. what is the common good, may both lead to individual opportunism, creating conflicts. Hence, although these organisational types have considerably different agendas and goals, they share the dilemmas of controlling individual opportunism.

Political scientist Lipsky presents a study of employees in public organisations in which he discusses how altruism as initial work-motivation is being negotiated (Lipsky, 1980). The particular group in focus of his study is street-level bureaucrats, i.e. public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs. Lipsky uses the concept of altruism to describe the motivation of the street-level bureaucrats: the workers want to do well for society and probably enter their positions with a belief that this model – the public welfare system – benefits the clients. Lipsky does not dismiss of claims of altruism and solidarity as insincere, and he does not question the initial ambitions of the street level bureaucrats. Yet, he argues "... it may be called a myth of altruism because the assertion that agencies provide benefits and fair treatment is usually unexamined, not subject to falsification among people who believe it" (Lipsky, 1980:71). This myth does not take for granted an ideal policy implementation, but it uncritically believes the outcome will be beneficial due to staff commitment to fulfil the myth. They are allotted a rather ambiguous role though: "Street level bureaucrats are often expected to be benign and passive gatekeepers. They are also expected to be advocates, that is, to use their knowledge, skill, and position to secure for clients the best treatment..." (Lipsky, 1980:73). The organisation assumes, and relies on, the workers to be altruistic. However, it appears as if altruism should not be practised according to the social worker's own interpretation but according to an established understanding of what altruism implies in the context of social welfare work.

While accepting initial altruism Lipsky also explains what a fragile basis of motivation this is. The structure of work compromises altruism and causes workers to loose their devotion to be advocates for their clients. The process that changes the initial devotion and altruism is by Lipsky called a process of alienation, not unlike that described by Marx. Alienation, Lipsky explains, refers to how street level bureaucrats "are not able to express or need to suppress their creative and human impulses through work activity" (Lipsky, 1980:80). The process of alienation is caused by pressure for efficiency that results in specialisation, distancing the workers from involvement in various processes in their work (from policy decisions to evaluation).



Workers do not control the outcome of their work, neither do they control resources available to them. With increased alienation follows less concern with protecting clients and this relationship loses in importance. The working conditions give rise to alienation and contribute to a continuous separation of the street level bureaucrat from the client.

Lipsky offers a valuable and sympathetic way of understanding the dimensions of change in workers' motivation and performance, and how the working conditions alter the very necessary characteristic of the worker, i.e. commitment to work and a degree of altruism. His analysis of the street level bureaucrat illustrates how inherent tensions within organisations and pressure from outside influence the employees. These tensions are, I believe, not only applicable to public service organisations but also to private business organisations, and to so called voluntary organisations such as NGOs. Lipsky's account does indeed open up for suggestions to alter organisational structures, which appear to be a threat to workers' altruism. To some extent this may present solutions, but according to Lipsky such an approach neglects the actual nature of the problem, i.e. the dilemmas of altruism. Altruism in itself is of an evasive nature, as pointed out by Brett, and not only does it risk being alienated through organisational structures, but it is also very hard to find appropriate reward systems that have the intended effects of preserving this characteristic. The dilemma accounted for by Lipsky is further exacerbated by the fact that an important characteristic of the position of the street-level worker is *autonomy* from authority and *discretion* during work. Trying to control the worker, in order to discipline altruism and protect it from other types of motivations taking over, would imply that autonomy and discretion are being violated. Controlling altruism through systems of rewards and sanctions appear to be very difficult, lined with trade-offs and unintended consequences.

### **Self-interest and economic rationality**

Within the realm of economics we find several theoretical perspectives (New Institutional Economics, Collective Action theories, Common Property Resource Management) that present analysis of individuals' behaviour and institutions with the aim to understand how organisations work. Neo-classical economics can be used as point of reference to clarify some of the important traits of these new approaches. Typically, neo-classical economics has a somewhat hypothetical individual in focus: one assumes rational, self-interested behaviour which is affected minimally by social relations, and an individual who has access to perfect information which makes it possible to strive for maximisation. In the context of this paper, i.e. when trying to find new perspectives to look at NGOs, we can state that the neo-classical approach ignores altruism and voluntary work, and there is little scope to analyse actions where the profit for the individual is negligible.

Sociologist Granovetter calls the neo-classical approach 'under-socialised' since it does not take norms, culture or individual social relations into account (Granovetter, 1985). The approach neglects to see that most behaviour is closely embedded in net-

works of interpersonal relations. Motivation and rationality must be linked to other than pure economic goals, such as sociability, approval, status and power. Similar to Granovetter, Brett claims that there is in neo-classical economics a failure to acknowledge the importance of incentives and sanctions in organisations, based on a more sophisticated understanding of individuals' motivation (Brett, 1993; Brett, 1996)<sup>24</sup>. The neo-classical approach has been highly criticised, by other social science disciplines as well as within economics. The rational economic man and assumptions of perfect information are both being contested. More recently, economic theories emphasise the concept of uncertainty and imperfect information, which create a new basis for analysis of economic behaviour. It focuses on trust in relationships and the evolution of norms as a way of coping with ever-present uncertainties in daily life. It is not possible to maximise economic outcome as an idealised economic man since uncertainty is constant. Rather, one should understand individuals' behaviour as aimed at *satisficing* (Moe, 1984).

The fact that economists have recognised the weakness of under-socialised theories has not made the various social science disciplines to merge. Analyses of the phenomenon of collective action can illustrate the differences between economics and sociology when approaching an interpretation of individual behaviour. An analysis of revolutionary movements through social movement theories sees collective action as an outcome of commitment to a cause, of altruism and social solidarity. From an economics perspective though, collective action can *also* be explained by action based on self-interest. Mancur Olson (Olson, 1997) explains how the core of collective action theories takes the purposive individual as starting point, and then "assumes social outcomes based on their behaviour" (Olson, 1997). Collectiveness can stem from normative beliefs, but it can also be a result of collective understanding that this is the best way of promoting self-interest. Olson differs between a self-interest that is narrow and one which is encompassing, emphasising that we should allow self-interest more than one interpretation and accept that it can have different outcomes. From this perspective, the social consequences (collective action leading to collective good) are seen as side-effects or unintended consequences of a calculated optimisation (collective action to increase individual efficiency), and the basis for understanding social phenomena should be individuals' behaviour guided by an encompassing self-interest instead of using an ideology as point of reference for understanding performance.

### **Finding a balance between conflicting disciplines**

The concept of self-interest is often perceived as linked to the economic idea of the profit-maximising individual, whose only interest is to get "the best deal possible, by any means possible" (Jaffee, 2001:251). Such associations make it hard to see how the notion of self-interest can fit into the analysis of a voluntary organisation, such as an NGO. Acting in self-interest means to be selfish, and in relations ruled by self-

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24 see also Clague (1997); Granovetter (1985); Moe (1984); Wade (1992).

ishness there is little trust and generosity. Maintaining relations, building networks, following social norms are of secondary, if any, importance. This is, as has been mentioned already, according to Granovetter an under-socialised conception of an atomised actor, i.e. a socially isolated individual (Granovetter, 1985; Jaffee, 2001). In his discussions of motives for human conduct Granovetter also warns for tendencies in sociology to over-socialise the individual (referring to Dennis Wrong), i.e. seeing the individual as overwhelmingly ruled by an omnipresent system of norms. In the context of organisation theory the result of such an over-socialised conception of the individual would be that one assumes that organisational structures or ideologies can control individuals. The balance between an over-socialised and an under-socialised conception of the individual is a source of debate between different disciplines. While fierce critique is aimed at economics for its still idealised, simplistic way of treating the individual, economists criticise sociology and political science. Clague argues that the ideas presented by the New Institutional Economics are quite different from the “moral exhortations of incentive-free social engineering” (Clague, 1997:269), referring to sociological and political science theories of development. A social engineering approach which represent an over-socialised view of the individual, does not realise the complexity behind individuals’ motives, and hence, Clague argues, misinterpret organisational problems as due to simply inappropriate ideology and lack of commitment. Problems are addressed through convincing rhetoric and not through formulating incentives to encourage certain behaviour.

Granovetter calls for an alternative approach to the under-socialised and the over-socialised ones, which acknowledges “that most behaviour is closely embedded in networks of interpersonal relations” (Granovetter, 1985:504). Brett suggests that by redefining the concept of self-interest we may open up for a possibility to apply economic theories also on organisations that have traits of altruism, social solidarity, and voluntarism (Brett, 1993). Such a redefinition is exemplified by Olson’s theory of collective action and the encompassing self-interest, and by Granovetter’s concept of embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985; Olson, 1997). Similarly, a more in-depth understanding of altruism may help us see how the two bases for motivation can have very similar effects in terms of integration and commitment as well as tensions and conflicts in organisations. Through getting more acquainted with the concepts of altruism and self-interest, we begin to understand that these are complex bases for motivation, complicated to define and understand. They are also co-existing within the same individual. Contesting both an over- and under-socialised view of the individual the concept of dual personality and the unique nature of the human resource discussed below, will lead us further towards understanding staff motivation and performance in an organisational context.

## CHAPTER 10

# Controlling motivation of the multifaceted employee

The discussion of the concepts of altruism and self-interest has provided an initial understanding that it is not wise to separate the two appearingly opposite bases for motivation. They are co-existing within the individual, an argument which will be further examined in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter will examine how organisations may control staff motivation and performance. Suggestions concerning the reason behind changing characteristics of NGOs and ambivalent behaviour of their staff often point at detrimental external pressure, inadequate individual capacities or lack of internal organisational reflection. The purpose here however is to explore further perspectives that can expand our understanding of the general dilemma of controlling staff in normatively oriented organisations, including difficulties with trade-offs and unintended consequences involved with organisational control systems. The discussion will furthermore relate to the empirical material at hand.

## **The unique nature of the human resource**

In any organisation, the employee is more than just a neutral instrument. The 'unique nature of the human resource' makes it much more than a disengaged commodity (Jaffee, 2001). An organisation employs the whole person, with changing reflections and reactions which makes it difficult to control and ascertain access to the skills the employee has been hired for, being it commitment to a cause, technical skills or a striving for profit. Marx calls the employee a pseudo-commodity implying that the employee brings more than just the actual commodity labour into a contract (Jaffee, 2001). The individual as labour may change behaviour and attitudes over time due to change in environment, added experience or change in personal circumstances. While the signing of a contract between employee and employer fills the purpose of clarifying expectations and obligations, the contract does not take the uncertainties characteristic of the nature of the human resource into account. In other words, the characteristic of the employee being flexible and changeable makes the employee a source of tension.

Recognising the nature of the human resource means acknowledging outcomes as results of interactions and not as strict results of plans. It means recognising the dialectical process between structure and agent, and that processes hold unpredictable elements despite attempts to plan and control the individual within the organisational entity (see Jackson, 1997; Lipsky, 1980)). The classical Hawthorne experiments in the 1920's provide an excellent example of this. The results following the experiments mark an important change in organisation theory through the development of the human relations theory. The experiments showed that changes in physical conditions among workers in a factory did not affect the outcome in terms of productivity as much as attention paid to the interaction between workers. This opened up for an understanding of the impact of the nature of the human resource in organisations. Any introduced system of sanctions or incentives will be accompanied by random effects based on the human factor, i.e. social aspects of the workers. The results showed that the workers are socially responsive individuals who respond to social stimuli, in this case simply attention, rather than to non-social changes in their environment, e.g. changes of light and introduction of hourly breaks (Asplund, 1987).

David Jaffee brings to our attention the work of organisational theorist Chester Barnard. Barnard's work provides organisation theory with an essential contribution according to Jaffee who writes:

The break from the classical theory of the Taylorist school is based on the awareness that the human factor cannot be simply slotted into task assignments and motivated by external reward. The normative elements of social existence must be included in any theory and strategy of human social control.[...] ... organisations are constructed for particular purposes, but they employ individuals who may have divergent objectives and desires. Any inquiry into organisations requires, according to Barnard, a set of theoretical postulates about individuals or persons. (Jaffee, 2001:74)

Barnard grappled with the fundamentals of the nature of the individual, which was in itself a strong critique against primitive assumptions about the individual in previous theories of organisation. In his definition of the individual he notes its developmental nature, which is different from other elements of the organisation, and that the power of choice and purpose are important properties of the individual (Jaffee, 2001:74). Barnard interprets the individual as comprising of a *dual personality* who on the one hand is driven by "internal, personal and subjective factors", and on the other hand driven by the non-personal, i.e. "external, impersonal and objective" factors (Jaffee, 2001:75). In order for co-operation to take place in e.g. organisational forms, there is a need for an agreed upon common moral purpose that binds individuals together. This common ground constitutes a social control over the individual. Barnard's discussion of a dual personality brings us to the centre of the dilemmas of controlling the individual within an organisational frame. The quest is to find a balance between forceful intervention that prevents potentially detrimental self-interest, and a trust that the non-personal (the altruistic characteristic) will thrive from its own source (i.e. a striving to be socially included, to belong to a group). At the same time one should recognise that there is no such thing as a constant equilibrium: what

appears to be a solution to organisational conflicts at one point in time may not be the solution at another. Continuous changes at both individual and organisational level makes an ultimate solution a utopia.

### **Conflicts and tensions within the organisation**

The concept of a *dual personality* as delineated by Barnard, suggests there are potentially conflicting interests *within* the individual. Conflicts are furthermore found *between* individuals. Although we may talk about 'organisational goals', when they come alive, during implementation, they also belong to individuals, who define them, make choices and behave according to their ideas of how to best achieve those goals (Jaffee, 2001). Organisational goals may mean different things to managers and owners of organisations and to employees, and there is furthermore always room for interpretations of stated goals also within these groups.

Within any organisation, one can never take for granted that everyone's goals are the same. Claiming ideological grounding, such as prioritising a sense of sharing and solidarity before profit in a co-operative, for example, cannot be taken as a guarantee that conflicts about goals will not arise. Presuming that the individual's behaviour could be governed by a strong organisational ideology based on e.g. solidarity would be to underestimate the individual's capacity and possibility to interact in an individual way with social systems (Giddens, 1984; Granovetter, 1985). Such a presumption would exemplify an over-socialised view of the individual, equally simplifying as the under-socialised-view of the individual portrayed within neo-classical economics. There is also in ideologically committed organisations likely to be numerous interpretations both of the goal and the means to reach the goal. Hence, the problem of conflicting goals should not only be allotted organisations of certain structure or character, such as hierarchical organisations with strong emphasis on cost-efficiency, high productivity and profit, where differences in both power and individual gains can be assumed to be considerable. Conflicts of power may also be related to e.g. co-operatives, where self-interest and opportunism can take the form of individual strivings to ascertain that a particular and perhaps highly personal interpretation of goals and strategies should be prioritised over other's (Brett, 1996).

Conflicts are often found not only between actors but also internalised in the stated organisational goals. A social worker, for example, may be put in a situation where he/she must choose between prioritising goals to provide income support and the ultimate goal of decreasing dependency on social welfare on behalf of the client. Lipsky describes how goals of public social services tend to have an idealised dimension that make them ambiguous, confusing to handle, and virtually impossible to achieve. Lipsky quotes Landau who captures this dilemma in a descriptive way when claiming that such goals are "more like receding horizons than fixed targets" (Lipsky, 1980:40). Goal ambiguity, Lipsky continues, is caused by inherent conflicts. In this particular case client-centred goals, which emphasise flexibility in approach and a heterogeneous understanding of clients, are conflicting with social engineering goals, which are

based on a homogenous, ideal-type image of the client. Furthermore client-centred goals are conflicting with organisation-centred goals, aiming at efficiency and rationality. In practice this is noticeable when staff need to prioritise between treating clients as individuals, and the need for the organisation to also proceed quickly. A bias in either way would cause goal-displacement. In short: “effective management of the process preempts the purpose for which the process was developed” (Lipsky, 1980:44). Too much focus on the client would mean loss of focus on demands to fulfil organisational budget- and time-frames, while sole attention to organisational demands would cause rigid bureaucratisation. From the staff’s point of view, goal ambiguities present problems since it makes their different work tasks basically incompatible.

In the particular case of Lipsky’s street-level bureaucrat in public service organisations, there are additional characteristics that exacerbate conflicts. The street-level staff is working under circumstances of chronically inadequate resources, and the demand for service increases to meet the supply advertised. The problem can be clarified by defining demand and supply in this context. A demand-driven strategy in a public organisation not only requires a demander, but also a more or less encouraging supplier. Perceived availability ‘pulls’ demand. If additional services are made available demand will increase to make use of what is on offer. Hence demand is not only a function of expression of client needs and choices but also of government efforts to offer services they believe respond to client preferences. Lipsky means that resource problems are basically unresolvable in institutions like these<sup>25</sup>.

### Identifying the position of the NGO staff

So, what kind of conflicts and tensions can we identify among and within the staff of the partner NGOs? Lipsky defines street-level bureaucrats as public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their job (Lipsky, 1980). Examples of this group of workers are police officers, schoolteachers, health and social service workers. Through their interaction with citizens as clients, this group of staff structures and delimits people’s lives and opportunities. Lipsky sees the street-level bureaucrats as policy-makers, and not only workers who passively execute a policy formulated at higher level. The definition of this group as the actual *policy-makers* (and not implementers) is based on two characteristics that Lipsky sees as crucial of their position. Firstly, they have a relatively high degree of *discretion*, and secondly they are relatively *autonomous* from organisational authority.

Within the particular development projects that constitute the empirical material used here we find managers (the formal policy makers, the donors) at the top, administrators in the middle, and NGO staff at community level, equivalent to the street-level bureaucrats in Lipsky’s study. While the NGOs are geographically close to the

25 The effects of these conflicts and inherent constraints have been discussed earlier, using the concept of alienation to describe how the attitude and motivation of the worker is threatened by organisational shortcomings, see chapter 9.

grassroots level, there is a geographical distance from the official policy makers, the managers and donors. This distance gives administrators and staff rather different perspectives on problems and priorities in the projects. One group of the NGO staff expressed opinions repeated by many others:

We get frustrated when we find that we are working hard for a low salary. And this is a temporary project. If it would be longer than this short period we could enjoy it. Now we have just started it but in no time it will be finished. (local NGO staff)

And there were other, practical concerns within this group of staff.

Its about the transportation facilities... the main vehicle is bicycle. The female staff... for us, from a social and religious point of view the villagers don't accept it in a good way. And sometimes it affects us physically... in average we have to go 30-40 kilometres per day, so you can imagine...I think it is not possible for us to use a bike for a long time. The body will be ruined. (local NGO staff)

And they concluded:

Whenever we think that the price of our labour is too low, then it makes us sad and maybe it would be good if we could get higher salary. We could survive better, enjoy our lives better if we could get more. ...we discuss everything among us, but we don't even know if the higher levels think about these things or not. (local NGO staff)

The problems raised may appear to be related to the comfort and convenience of the staff, and not to a commitment to work for a participation and empowerment ideology. However, to the staff these practical issues were essential for them to, in the long run, be able to conduct their job in a satisfactory way. But while the staff point at practical issues they see affect their possibilities to perform well, the administrators are rather concerned with getting the message of the project ideology across. Budget constraints, fear of creating donor dependence, and a generally hesitant reaction to any demands that may be related to the comfort of staff as opposed to the project's impact on villagers, make the project funders meet these demands by emphasising project ideology and the importance of seeing villagers as the main players. The distance between staff and donors is presumably not only physical but also noticeable in interpretations of ideologies and strategies, since perspectives and background are considerably different between the policy makers/donors and the implementers/NGO staff. We can in other words conclude that *autonomy* from authority is a similar characteristic of both NGO staff and the street-level bureaucrat.

When NGO staff is interacting with village participants of the projects, elements of *discretion* are evident. The actual interaction with villagers brings a new dimension to the policies, in that the villagers accept or object to the purpose of project activities in individual ways: the strategies come alive. There is a strong element of personal judgement formally included in the task of the staff. They are required to be flexible in order to negotiate with villagers during participatory processes. When discussing with one group of NGO staff how the project design correspond with the felt needs and priorities made among villagers, they commented in the following way:



Actually we conduct our work through villagers and the VDC. Sometimes, when we feel it is necessary, we change programmes or plans. We discuss among ourselves, the staff... and we see that these are the problems and we discuss how we should proceed next time it occurs. Then, thinking about the situation and their ability, we proceed ourselves. (local NGO staff)

The projects tried to emphasise open communication between implementing staff and higher level staff. The communication did however appear to be rather formalised. While thoughts were exchanged during random visits by administrating or monitoring staff, ideas and reflections that made an impact on project records seemed to be mainly communicated during formal monitoring and evaluation meetings. Hence, the staff tended to act as an independent group, isolated from the administrating and directing level, when reflecting upon and finding solutions to problems they were facing in the field.

The flexibility and freedom available to staff is, as discussed before, exercised in different ways. Some staff solve problems with co-operation from villagers through exercising authority and almost threats: "If you don't buy a sanitary latrine by tomorrow you will no longer be allowed to live in this village!" As we have seen in the case of the sharing of tubewells, some solve the problem of co-operation between villagers through forging papers: while project procedures required ten families to share cost and responsibility of a tubewell, the local staff allowed private purchase by one family only, but put another nine families down on the contract for the project protocol to appear right. Still others approach difficulties by emphasising the importance of leaving decisions and understanding to the villagers, and oppose an interpretation of discretion and flexibility as giving leeway to authoritarian attitudes or falsification of reports. Through a process of waiting, communication and building of trust, the staff try to approach the problem of 'making villagers understand' with what the staff themselves have identified as appropriate priorities and solutions.

There are further characteristics used by Lipsky to describe the working situation of the street-level bureaucrats that are applicable also to that of the NGO staff. The staff clearly express frustration over goal ambiguities, an expression for what Lipsky calls *the idealised dimension of goals*. Client-centred goals (making indigenous knowledge count, practising participation in order to allow villagers to define their own problems, priorities and solutions) are conflicting with social engineering goals (based on a belief that there is a preferred and appropriate solution to the problems, and problems and priorities being set by the project a priori to the participatory activities) and with organisation-centred goals (emphasising organisational efficiency and rationality rather than allowing for time consuming processes aimed at by the project activities). The NGO staff clearly have to make priorities when they work, deciding whether to put project goals, people's preferences or a predefined agenda of activities first. This is not only a result of hidden contradictions in project goals, but the actual directions from project administrators are at times rather confusing. During staff training an emphasis on attitudes conducive to participation and empowerment strategies is being advocated. However, during some meetings aimed at supervising and reviewing staff performance, emphasis appeared to be biased towards the keeping of time-frames (following an agenda of meetings) and achievements in

terms of numbers (counting tubewells or sanitary latrines sold). One group of staff was often compared to other groups, emphasising a comparison of statistical achievements rather than reflecting on knowledge and experience gained by the staff during their work in the villages. The rhetorical guidelines and actual direction provided during supervision put the staff in a rather impossible position, where a choice in either direction would mean a compromising of goals. Adding to this, the encounter with villagers often presented yet another dimension of demands and priorities.

Some of the staff seemed to experience the frustration due to goal ambiguities more than others. They expressed feelings of great loyalty to the villagers, and how they after a rather long period of introduction felt they had achieved crucial acceptance by the villagers. If they would now proceed too fast with project plans, pushed by project administrative levels, but without due preparation and agreement among villagers, they would risk losing the hard earned trust, which is the basis for co-operation. On the other hand, being scolded and told off as lazy and incompetent by supervisors during meetings would present them with uncomfortable, discouraging situations. This ambiguity of goals and directions is furthermore linked to a problematic relationship between supply and demand, as discussed by Lipsky. The dilemmas of a never matching relationship between supply and demand is quite apparent from the interviews with many of the NGO staff. They express frustration because of a never-ending demand from villagers, and to some extent from the projects that require fulfilment of contracts in a satisfactory way. The better the staff perform, the more demand will be put on them by both villagers and project administrators. A development project, as within public organisations, must set up limits as to what needs and choices it can respond to. The staff directly interacting with people at street level, in villages, are being faced with complex realities of people and communities that are likely to include more needs and other priorities than the ones they, as policy executors, have a mandate to respond to. Hence, demand in terms of needs that go beyond the limits of the project/organisational goals, as well as increased demand based on good performance, will make the supply side always to be lagging behind. For the NGOs, there is demand coming from yet another direction. Donors who find NGOs to be performing well according to their more tangible goals – keeping time-limits, being cost-efficient, conducting the planned project activities with participating villagers – will increase their demand and possibly also pressure on the NGOs to continue to perform well despite resource constraints and demanding working conditions. The ‘reward’ from both villagers and donors for good performance (delivering services, listening to and understanding villagers’ priorities, being efficient development workers) will mainly come by way of more demand.

While autonomy and discretion are a necessity, intertwined with the tasks and goals of the staff, they also provide a challenge to managers and policy makers. The challenge consists of controlling the unpredictable, i.e. behaviour of the staff, without invoking high costs either in terms of money, trust, or unintended consequences such as goal displacement or even further distancing by the staff from the management. Based both on expressed hesitation on behalf of donors regarding the changing characteristics of NGOs, as well as ambivalence expressed by the staff themselves,

there appear to be a need for NGO supervisors (and donors) to control motivation of the staff in order to ascertain a performance that go hand in hand with the participation and empowerment ideology. However, it is difficult to find appropriate forms for such control, since discretion and autonomy of the staff are particularly important to the participation and empowerment ideology.

Having delineated some main characteristics of the NGO staff we begin to recognise how precarious and sometimes confusing their working situation is. Lipsky points out that most analysts take for granted that the work of lower-level staff will more or less conform to what is expected of them. The success of a project is consequently perceived as related to how well policy, rules, and regulations have been articulated. Should analysts recognise a gap between orders and implementation this is usually put down to faltering communication, which can be overcome rather easily by the organisation through management and training of staff. Lipsky objects to this approach and claims that slippage between order and performance should not be attributed to failure of information but to conflicting interests between workers and authorities, to the dilemmas of controlling these conflicts, and to inherently ambiguous goals (Lipsky, 1980). In the particular case of the NGO local level staff, we can see that they are struggling to make different agendas conform. The NGO staff are expected to use the discretionary room for manoeuvre to solve conflicts due to contradictory goals. However, when doing so the personal judgement implicated with flexible solutions is not always being appreciated. Personal judgement is confined to what may be called appropriate attitudes and moreover, there is in reality little opportunity left to exercise discretion if it includes solutions and suggestions that have not originally been recognised within the project framework. The conflicts presented to the staff do not only adhere to organisational ambiguities and idealised goals, but also to conflicting interests between staff from different groups. As pointed out by Lipsky, the problematic situation, which may lead to under-performance of the staff, cannot only be overcome through improved communication and refined agendas. The organisational problems come from a complex dilemma, which demands more than skills in how to manage communication, training of staff and refined rhetoric.

Taking the dual personality of any employee as a starting point, we realise both the importance of and the difficulties in finding appropriate systems of organisational control that may guide this personality in a preferable way. Such control systems may operate at different stages in the relationship between the individual and the organisation, such as at the stage of appointment or through supervision and evaluation of work performance. Such systems may also focus on the rewarding or disciplining of staff, or expressed through organisational structures, or in more or less conscious attempts at regulating identity as a way of practising organisational control. The following text will elaborate on the problematics of controlling staff in order to reach envisaged performance and goals. This is done by using a general perspective of organisation theories and by referring to the specific perspective of the investigated development projects.

## Preventing conflicts and encouraging performance

While the worker may be physically and mentally able, there is no guarantee that he or she will be willing. (Jaffee, 2001:22)

Control systems are motivated by a need to make the organisation more efficient in its strivings to reach its goals. They are also motivated by a need to control antagonism caused by divergent interests. As identified by Barnard, the dual personality implies potential conflicts within the individual, and furthermore one may expect potential conflicts and tensions between individuals within any organisation, partly due to differences in interpretations of goals and strategies. The quote by Jaffee above suggests a potential conflict between employer and employee, which may be ameliorated (or worsened) through various kinds of control systems. By using the principal-agent model as starting point we can elaborate on the dilemmas of control systems within the organisation. The model refers to a relationship in which one party, the principal (the employer), enters a contractual agreement with another party, the agent (the employee), in the expectation that the agent will choose to act in a way that will produce outcomes desirable by the principal (Moe, 1984; Scott, 1992). The agent has interest of his/her own, but can be persuaded to follow the principal's objectives when the incentive structure that comes with the contract gives such a behaviour an advantage. The essence of the principal's problem is the design of such an incentive structure. As mentioned in the brief discussion concerning the Hawthorne experiments, this is not always a straight-forward business. Not only is it difficult to decode what rewards will be encouraging a behaviour leading to a desirable effect, but one also needs to bear in mind the not entirely predictable response from the individual, and include trade-offs and analyse unintended consequences before embarking on any control system.

One way of controlling the staff, and of ascertaining a low level of conflicts due to differences in interest, is to carefully select the members or employees of an organisation. When advertising a job the employer will naturally try to appeal to a particular group of people that are seen as suitable for the job in question. However, employers are confronted with difficulties caused by information asymmetries. We cannot just assume that since e.g. a public agency is working with social issues, people applying for jobs in that agency will have as their main motivation to help solving social problems, and are driven by commitment to this task. Moe explains that for a public agency, as opposed to a private, profit-seeking business, this presents particular problems linked to information asymmetry (Moe, 1984). The person applying for the job should ideally be someone who sees a benefit in the job despite the fact that a public agency does not provide a high salary (assuming that a person focused on a high income would not have the right personal qualities for the public sector). However, this will not ensure that only a group of highly qualified, solidarity striving altruists will apply for the job. In a worse case scenario the result of information asymmetry may be that the person seeing a benefit in the job has rather low qualifications compared to the ideal situation. 'Seeing a benefit in the job' would in such a

case mean that the person hired sees an opportunity to get a good salary despite having qualifications that are below average. This phenomena is called *adverse selection* which captures a problem caused by information asymmetry between the principal and the agent. From the principal's position, information asymmetry makes it hard to find ways of recruiting desirable staff.

Control can also be exercised through reward systems. As a guidance to appropriate behaviour and good performance the principal can give the agent a share in the profit to which he has contributed. However, the possibility of doing this depends on what kind of resources the organisation provides. In a public bureaucracy there is a strict budget and good performance and commitment is not reflected in surplus that could come to the agent's benefit. Hence the reward system here is difficult to structure. There appear to be a major difference between private organisations and public bureaucracies in this respect. However, in principal the difference is only, or at least mainly, valid if we interpret incentives and reward in terms of monetary, economic terms. The absence of pecuniary rewards does not rule out behaviour and actions triggered by prospective rewards of other kinds. Public service organisations, such as the ones discussed by Lipsky, do not have the resources to use monetary gain as motivator, and therefore other types of reward structures must be created. Those could be career opportunities, increased influence on policy issues, but also more hidden structures. The difficulties to design appropriate reward systems are both linked to limits in resources in the case of the public bureaucracy, and to a heterogeneity of motivational basis among the staff. The staff are likely to have a variety of personal goals (career, help in society, to gain political power, to gain power over clients) and will consequently respond to different types of rewards. Both managers and staff will try to exercise control towards their own specific ends, depending on which motivational elements happen to be important for them.

Public bureaucracies, as described by Lipsky, rely on their staff to have some altruistic qualities. These agencies are trying to provide an avenue for people with altruistic orientations to enter the work force through offering secure jobs and promotional possibilities also to street-level positions. Yet another way of encouraging and giving status to this particular workforce is through professionalisation. A professional status shows the agency's appreciation of the street-level bureaucrats and gives them a recognised authority, which may help to remedy the damage done by alienation from the initial altruistic motivation (see chapter 9). There are however problems with such a 'professional fix' which we can relate to the dilemmas of controlling staff and the importance of acknowledging unintended consequences. Professionalisation, it has been noted in studies, may function as an incentive for change of goals away from focus on the clients to a focus on personal career moves (Lipsky, 1980). In practice, this could mean neglect of difficult clients in favour of more rewarding tasks. It may also be causing isolation of the staff as a professional group, making it hard to detect deficiencies in performance and behaviour. Lipsky also writes "... the careers of idealistic professional recruits are usually abandoned to processes that insure their socialisation to the dominant professional values. ... The education of new recruits as to what is acceptable, what is appropriate, and what will enhance one's career is an ex-

tremely powerful determinant of future professional behavior” (Lipsky, 1980:203). The aim with professionalisation was to increase client responsiveness, and to strengthen the altruistic behaviour and values among the staff, the results turned out to be rather the opposite. The adverse effect meant that the interest was turned from the clients towards protecting and strengthening the professional group.

In social movement theories as well as in relation to the voluntary organisations envisaged by Korten, there is an emphasis on low entry barriers for organisational members. As already mentioned, the relationship between the member, i.e. the employee, and the organisation is somewhat different in the case of the NGOs studied here. The employees are recruited from the outside, either through networks and informal channels, or via conventional advertisements and followed by formal interviews with the potential employee. There is in other words competition for the positions available, and compassion for work for the poor is not quite enough to be allowed entrance: the entry barrier is far from low. The staff have presumably joined the NGO out of a willingness to work with social issues and a commitment to engage in the problematics of development in Bangladesh. They are nevertheless employees and hence valued not only in relation to their willingness to do good but also in relation to how well they accommodate with the organisation. The relationship between the NGO founder and the employee is based on a formal contract. The actual appointment is surrounded by contractual arrangements, based on an assumption that the employee will provide skills and devotion, and be rewarded with a salary. The formalised principal/agent relationship discussed above does appear to be applicable here, as opposed to more movement-like organisations, in which membership is open.

The NGO staff are in one sense rather vulnerable. They are working on short-term contracts and worry about future unemployment. They are also concerned about the low income they are offered. Their status as NGO staff is from an economic and professional point of view lower than that of government officials, and quite different from that of development project staff at higher levels. The local staff often emphasise that they want to be regarded as ‘professional volunteers’, which may appear as a contradiction in terms. They appeal to a formal recognition within the world of development projects, which would entail secure working conditions and improved salaries. The appeal is directed not to the local NGO directors, but rather to development project administrators from overseas. From the perspective of promoting a particular development ideology and NGOs as important partners in development, donors and NGOs share interests. However, looking at the donor-NGO relationship from a principal-agent perspective, in which the two actors are bound together by a contract, there is apparently a conflict of interest between a rather remote employer and the employee.

### The problematics of supervision and evaluation

Evaluation of work performance is yet another way of controlling workers in order to make staff contribute in expected ways towards organisational goals. However, not all, or very few, types of achievements can lend themselves to exact and objective assessment. We may again refer to the principal-agent model and the problem with information asymmetry, since evaluation of performance often relies on information that only the agent/employee has access to. While monitoring and evaluation can be perceived as instruments controlled by the principal, such instruments may also, as in the case with adverse selection, expose his position as subordinate. Since part of the performance may be obscured to everyone else but the employee (and clients), the employees can decide what information they will feed their managers<sup>26</sup>. The employee has the power to adapt performance and information shared according to what is being monitored. Should the basis for evaluation (i.e. the variables in focus for monitoring and evaluation) be inappropriate this may cause the employee to under-perform according to the goals of the organisation (Moe, 1984). In economic terms this relationship between the principal and agent is characterised by *moral hazard*. Similar to the difficulties faced by the principal when recruiting desirable staff, information asymmetry implies that the principal's information about the agent's motivation or performance is skewed in favour of the agent. The relationship between donors and local NGOs is a good example of a relationship characterised by information asymmetry. While donors supply NGOs with contracts and resources to act, donor control is apparently rather feeble. Edwards and Hulme write "that assessing NGO performance is a difficult and messy business" (Edwards & Hulme, 1995:6). The same authors continue to argue that "Internal evaluations are rarely released, and what is released comes closer to propaganda than rigorous assessment" (Edwards & Hulme, 1995:6). Assessments will sometimes have to be based on assumptions, and on statistics on general national changes related to economic growth and democratic advancement.

The difficulties involved with evaluation of performance is not only related to asymmetric information and a possibly conflictual relationship between the agent and the principal. It is recognised that in non-market organisations in particular, it is difficult to find appropriate basis for measuring achievements (Scott, 1992). Scott points out that *process* is often confused with *substance* since emphasis is put on to what extent the employee has followed procedures ascribed by the project, and not on whether the procedures are appropriate for the original goals in the first place. Hence, Scott writes, "once these [i.e. process and substance, author's note] become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better the results" (Scott, 1992:356). Organisational goals that have normative or qualitative character-

26 This may be controlled in an indirect way, as in the case of street-level bureaucrats, where the clients are fostered to see the staff as indispensable. Hence, evaluating staff performance through clients may give an equally skewed image as when asking staff to report on their own achievements. See further in chapter 8, for discussion between employees and clients, characterised by both power and mutual interests.

istics are particularly hard to assess, and the effect of badly tuned instruments can be seriously counterproductive. In a study of interviewers handling job-seeking clients, Blau puts special focus on forms and effect of evaluation (Jaffee, 2001; Lipsky, 1980). When evaluation emphasised number of job-placements of clients, the effect turned out to be that interviewers consciously selected clients who were easy to place, or even placed clients in inappropriate work places and falsified figures in order to be able to show satisfactory performance on evaluation forms. The intended effect of motivating the staff to perform well resulted in unintended consequences, such as competition among staff and goal-displacement since statistical records came to supersede the goal of actually assisting job-applicants according to their needs (Jaffee, 2001).

Lipsky too describes how the behaviour of the street-level bureaucrats tended to drift towards compatibility with the ways the organisation was being evaluated. Evaluation was further complicated by the inherent conflicts and ambiguities in the goals of the public bureaucracy. We may also note that evaluation is related to accountability, i.e. to whom the organisation should be held responsible. In the case of a public welfare bureaucracy the basis for accountability becomes particularly complicated with stakeholders, such as taxpayers, managers of the organisation, clients, referring to rather different interests. While the street-level bureaucrat should be held accountable to the client, this presumably conflicts with accountability basis of other groups within the organisations (Lipsky, 1980). It is difficult to impose increased accountability towards the clients of the organisations, since this would jeopardise the discretion of staff. Hence, along with qualitative goals and goal ambiguities, the high degree of discretion in certain jobs may make evaluation and verification of accountability virtually impossible.

### **Tubewells, meetings and empowerment**

The meaning of 100% is that people know the right behaviour... it means if there are 105 families and we install 105 latrines for them ... it means that the village is then perfect. (local NGO staff)

What does the NGO staff actually say here? The slogan '100% coverage' is used by one of the projects to mark the overall goal of their activities: to make sure that, eventually, each Bangladeshi household will have access to sanitary facilities. As a slogan it depicts a clear message, easy to broadcast and with a goal easy to measure. The concept of '100% coverage' implies that more than the physical installation of sanitary latrines has been achieved. Following the logic of the project activities, 100% coverage should include extensive participation, change in hygiene behaviour, and empowerment through attained skills in decision-making and independent action among the villagers. It should mean, as the staff above expresses, that the village is 'perfect': in terms of raised household standard as well as from a normative point of view the project impact has been successful.

Numbers are being used by the NGOs as instruments to get contracts in the competitive development market. Hence numbers are lending strength to NGOs in striv-



ings to establish themselves as serious and professional organisations, eligible as partners in development. However, numbers are also being used against them. When attending organisational meetings held by the projects it became clear that numbers played an important role when encouraging and also punishing staff who had not been able to achieve according to plans. On one particular occasion the implementing staff of one NGO was compared to other NGO staff working for the project. The group in question was lagging behind the other groups in several aspects. They had not been able to sell as many latrines and tubewells as the other groups, and they had held fewer meetings and information-rallies than others. Since most other groups had been able to achieve better, this group was immediately seen as failing, even being called lazy and incompetent. Very little room was left for the staff to express their views on their apparent failure. It was recognised by administrative staff that this particular area in which the group was working had presented unexpected and rare problems (such as fundamentalist religious groups resisting the entrance of outsiders, especially NGOs). However, the final judgement was based on numbers: the group was demanded to improve the statistics by making more effort in their work, implying that so far, they had not worked hard enough. During yet another meeting, gathering several NGOs, numbers were indirectly being used as a means to compete against one another. Organisations that had reached high coverage of tubewells and latrines in villages where they had been working were being praised. Other organisations who had not been as successful were being discussed as if they had misunderstood the projects, or being new in the game, it was understood they had not been able to reach goals at the same speed as others. However, the newcomers and less successful organisations had opinions about the projects, and shared their views about what they thought could be improved. They had ideas they considered to be legitimate about why there were difficulties in reaching statistical success in their work. It appeared though that these opinions were not entirely accepted by other NGOs, perhaps since the critique put forward concerning the projects was indirectly undermining the success of the others.

Since normative goals are hard to evaluate the projects rely on numbers of various kinds: number of meetings, number of participants, number of tubewells and latrines sold, money saved in the cooperative savings fund, numbers of committees formed. However, since there is not necessarily a link between numbers and normative achievements, it is misleading to rely on reference to statistics as basis for evaluation. Output in terms of hardware is being confused with project impact according to the normative values of empowerment. There also appears to be a clear risk of, as Scott puts it, process being confused with substance: the more meetings we have, the more empowerment to the people. While the impression concerning project evaluations from the perspective of the local NGOs suggests a bias towards numbers and statistics as opposed to focus on impact in terms of social change, other perspectives may provide rather different impressions. In both of the projects followed there were extensive discussions concerning forms for evaluation. Previous procedures were being changed, based to some extent on trial and experimenting within the projects. Due to these changes, the fieldmaterial cannot present the formulas used in detail. It

is however possible to make some general observations. Project initiators and administrators of course recognise that there is more to project achievements than fits into statistical spreadsheets. It is also recognised that all kinds of stakeholders need to be included in the evaluation procedures and it should not be controlled from a headquarter, remote from village level. This means that the VDCs should be trained to do their own evaluation of their own work. From the point of view of the local NGOs though, their role appears mainly to be to provide headquarters with facts and figures, and with the evaluations made by the VDCs.

From a project perspective the evaluation procedures include more than statistical exercises conducted by the NGO staff. The normative impact is being discussed openly between project administrators and implementing staff. Evaluation reports do hold personal judgements of how numbers are actually related to normative impacts. But the judgements put in writing are made almost exclusively by outside monitor and evaluation teams, and from the somewhat restricted perspective of the NGOs, the emphasis is still on numbers. The message to local NGO staff is that it is not their role to make these assessments. The mandate to conclude what has been achieved is passed over to others. From the interviews made with the local staff it appears that measurement has precedence over judgement<sup>27</sup>. The impression that numbers count is also broadcast in a rather direct way when entering any NGO office. The local NGOs have charts with numbers on the walls and register numbers in books. This is what outsiders are being referred to when questions of achievements are being raised. Although not in every case, a considerable group of the staff interviewed for this study referred to numbers, or to the judgements of others (evaluation and monitoring teams, administrative staff, journalists and other outsiders who had visited their organisations) when discussion about organisational achievements were introduced.

In the cases referred to by Blau and Lipsky, staff accommodate with what is appreciated and prioritised in evaluations. A bias towards measuring achievements by numbers does however not necessarily mean that staff in practice lose aspirations to make an impact in terms of social mobilisation and empowerment. However, among the local staff there appears to be a clear risk that procedures are confused with substance, and that project output in terms of hardware is being confused with empowerment. This confusion should not only be attributed to the NGO staff but is also noticeable among some of the directors. Recalling how some of them envisioned the future of NGOs, the directors presumed that more resources to NGOs and an increase in size and scope of their own NGO would lead to more success in terms of development for the poor in Bangladesh. This interpretation presumes that impact in terms of profound social change simply relies on scaling up what has so far been perceived as successful on a small scale basis.

There appears to be both practical as well as psychological aspects linked to the processes of evaluation related to the NGO staff. As efficiency, administrative accountability, and quantifiable achievements are being emphasised in evaluations,

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27 Judgement defined as an understanding and assessment based on an individual's experience and knowledge.

there is from a practical aspect not much room left for activities based on the ideological strivings of either projects or NGOs. The normative goals are being pushed aside since little room and time is left for flexibility, empowering communication, and accountability towards villagers to develop. We may also note how pressure to adapt to forms of evaluation means, as Lipsky puts it, that newcomers are educated into understanding what is acceptable, what will enhance one's career and the success of the NGO, which is a powerful determinant for future behaviour (Lipsky, 1980). From the perspective of the project as a whole, assessment of evaluation procedures may look quite different. The projects include assessments that show a clear understanding of the difficulties involved in evaluation. But taking the perspective of the local NGO staff, the effect of the role allotted to them during these procedures appears to be contradictory to the initial emphasis on attitudes compatible with the participation and empowerment attitudes.

### **Balancing control and integration**

There is a paradox in that in any kind of organisation, control systems aiming at enhancing organisational efficiency may at the same time create processes that undermine the effect it was originally intended for. Etzioni terms the paradoxical relationship between control and integration *inverted symbiosis*. The organisation is striving towards both enhancing efficiency – control – and integrating staff with the organisational activities – commitment. While the organisation needs to find efficient ways of utilising its employees, it also needs to be able to make the individual's commitment compatible with the organisation's goal since bias towards control may diminish commitment (Jaffee, 2001). Etzioni's interest for this complex relationship brought him, Clegg writes, to...

...enquire[s] into both the nature of motivation in organisations, that is the type of involvement that people might bring to bear in their organisational life, as well as the different types of power that organisations might exercise over their members. (Clegg, 1990:42).

Etzioni's enquiry resulted in the conclusion that people may *comply with organisational discipline* based on fear and coercive power, on the seeking of profit, or on normative motivation (Clegg, 1990). There are in other words three different basis for involvement: alienative, calculative and normative. Similarly there are three different types of power, which organisations use to motivate and integrate its members, which Etzioni terms coercive, remunerative and normative. Clegg continues: "Etzioni believes that, typically, there tends to be a balance between involvement and power, so that coercive-alienative, remunerative-calculative and normative-moral couplings will be those which are most frequently encountered empirically" (Clegg, 1990:42). Hence we may conclude, based on organisational type, what kind of commitment brings an individual to join a particular type of organisation: e.g. persons with moral commitment are prone to seek normatively organisations. But the organisation also has the power to enhance or change basis for involvement through con-

trol systems. The organisational types identified by Etzioni will remain stable as long as other reward systems do not get introduced, since the reward system shapes the type of commitment held by staff. If material reward or threat of punishment is being introduced in an organisation building on moral commitment, the equilibrium risks being disturbed since a commitment based on calculation or alienation will be encouraged among employees. With a calculative commitment employees' achievements are related to expected reward, with the effect that the normative values striven for by the organisation risk being pushed aside. When a calculative commitment has been introduced, or resentment towards the organisation due to threats or punishments, employees or members will become alienated and disintegrated from the organisation.

Etzioni differs between economic rewards, suitable for profit-seeking private organisations, and normative rewards based on moral commitment which are suitable for organisations striving for e.g. social change, such as charity organisations based on a call or sense of mission to do good for others. There are further theories that refer to a relationship between type of reward and individual commitment. Kreps writes that "the presentation of extrinsic rewards communicates certain relational messages to organisation members that can influence their intrinsic motivation" (Kreps, 1990:156). The concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation refers to both the discussion concerning altruism and self-interest, and that of a dual-personality. The so called intrinsic rewards are associated with a human relations-perspective within organisation theory. Reward systems based on intrinsic motivators aim at emphasising values and beliefs held by individuals, building on a need for self-actualization. The concept of extrinsic motivators emanates from classical theory of management, emphasising a rational, economically motivated individual (Kreps, 1990). By providing goods, services or economic rewards the extrinsic motivators are encouraged and can be used as a means of organisational control. Within organisation theory and within modern organisation management there has been a long-term emphasis on extrinsic motivators (Kreps, 1990). A reaction and critique against this claims that this emphasis has led to theories of organisational control becoming "shortsighted, manipulative, and ineffective" (Kreps, 1990:156). Kreps refers to Deci who argues that extrinsic rewards can decrease intrinsic motivation. By emphasising extrinsic rewards, the focus is moved from the rewarded to the rewarder, and the reward can be used as an instrument of power over the employee. This will risk reducing the intrinsic motivation held by the employee since it may "weaken the rewarded individual's feelings of competence and self-determination" (Kreps, 1990:157). Similar to Etzioni the importance of balancing reward systems in order to appeal to appropriate source of commitment is emphasised. The balancing act is complicated by the fact that individuals relate to different intrinsic motivations – we do not all share values and beliefs, we all have different interests (Kreps, 1990). Furthermore, we may recall the argument against seeing altruism and self-interest as each others' opposite and Barnard's concept of the dual-personality, and recognise that intrinsic and extrinsic incentives are "not independent and additive but interrelated and often counter-acting aspects of human motivation" (Kreps, 1990:156).

### Rewards in and around NGOs

The local staff of NGOs constitutes a rather cheap workforce. This can both be linked to the high unemployment rates in Bangladesh, and to the fact that the organisations are in general not involved with activities aimed at achieving a profit. The staff salary is usually directly linked to donor contracts, and hence depend on budgets decided by outsiders. In general, the donors' grounds for giving no or a low salary to the contracted NGO-staff come from budget-constraints combined with a wish to target resources directly to the intended beneficiaries. Experience with corruption and critique against too much donor money being devoured by administration has put pressure on donor agencies to cut down on these costs. It also reflects a general weariness about creating relationships of dependence between donors and NGOs. Furthermore, the types of organisations we envisage as 'local NGOs – partners in development' are, using Etzioni's categorisation, of a normative type, driven by moral or altruistic commitment to do good for others. Hence, salaries should, in principle, not be a source of conflict.

It is somewhat complicated to link only one reward system to the local NGO staff, since we can identify different organisational units within a development project. The donor organisations constitute separate units, using their own specific strategies and budgets for salaries to various groups of staff involved in a development project. The local NGOs have their own individual reward systems, that apart from resources attained through donor contracts are complemented with means attained through micro-credit loans, personal wealth of the directors, or the income from small scale business attached to the organisation. Although the units are different, and present different reward systems, they become intertwined through project contracts. This has not only direct implications for the local staff, who's salary and income is dependent on project contracts. It also means that the staff gets to meet several different organisations, with concomitantly different reward structures. The categorisation into organisational ideal-types made by Etzioni presumes that organisations are closed units. In this particular case they are quite the opposite: different organisations and different types of reward systems are open and mixed. Hence, we cannot link control of staff motivation based on reward system to one individual system.

In the particular projects investigated for this study, the donors have different strategies to reward their local partners. In one of the projects, the budget does not allow for staff salary at all. Instead the project provides the staff with continuous capacity enhancing training and workshops. The implementers are expected to carry out the project activities while conducting activities for other projects, such as micro-credit, fishery- and forestry projects. The donor approach can be seen as a strategy to integrate separate issues and projects and move towards a more holistic approach to development also in practice. The group of staff does obtain a salary, but from other sources attracted by the NGO, such as interest rates acquired through micro-credit schemes. The other water supply and sanitation-project provides a salary to the local staff, who is assigned to work fulltime on the water- and sanitation project. The staff, young boys and girls with university degrees, have been especially recruited to work

for this project. They are responsible for the numerous activities in the villages and for reporting on the advancement of the project to administrative level.

As we have heard, the local staff interviewed for this study often expressed that the salary is not satisfactory. In their eyes, the quality of their work is the key to realising the projects. They consider themselves to be professionals, referring to the demands that the projects put on the staff to have a high capacity in order to understand the participatory and empowerment strategies, to follow strict time and budget-frames, to write reports and communicate with villagers. The staff demand a professional status, including salary according to their responsibilities and skills.

The group of staff employed by NGOs sometimes come from rather poor environments. There are two aspects of this that should be considered. From the point of view of the employer, the donors, remuneration can be kept at minimal level. For the employee though, the possibility to work as a volunteer is limited by personal economic needs. Among the staff interviewed the issue of making choices based on both ideological conviction concerning development work, and on personal needs, is clearly relevant. Although the staff explained that they were happy to work as volunteers, they also expressed that they would enjoy their work more if they would get higher salaries. Some also indicated that a higher salary would affect the quality and time put into their work tasks. The NGO staff, simultaneously engaged in several kinds of development projects, make priorities based on which contracts brings an income.

The staff of local NGOs are working in a lively environment, with consultants and workers from far away moving over extensive geographical areas. They get to meet people working in organisations with different structures and rewards systems. To the staff working at grassroots level it is quite obvious that a substantial amount of money is spent on monitoring and evaluation by outsiders, often coming from overseas. Since this implies high costs for the project, arguments declaring that a project cannot afford to pay for salaries is not seen as entirely valid. Local NGO staff express that they feel used. They contribute with an important share towards the success of projects, and they do not see their responsibilities and skills as considerably different from the experts or administrators they meet, but they do not get due reward either in salary or by way of secure employment.

The staff have a mixed basis of motivation with a commitment to contribute to the common good through helping others, a responsibility to find an income for their families, and a wish to get recognition for their efforts similar to other professionals within development work. This mix of motivations can be seen as an example of Barnard's dual personality. Through their work, including training provided through projects, the staff are gradually gaining skills and experience which is valuable within the development business market, and although competition is severe, those personal properties are useful for an advancement of a personal career which would lead to higher salary and secure employment. In a few cases amongst the NGOs studied there had been problems with high turnover of staff. This was mainly explained by staff choosing jobs, in other NGOs or in other sectors, that offered security, professional status and higher salary. With a high incidence of unemployment

we can see how staff get enrolled in NGOs as a wise move to gain skills that will later make it possible for them to apply for other jobs.

As already noted, relating to the analytical framework offered by Etzioni, we can see that ideally NGOs belong to an organisational type with staff commitment based on moral motivations, encouraged by normative rewards. While the staff interviewed for this study claim commitment to a cause as guiding their actions, they also call for recognition of their deeds by way of better salaries and secure employment. One may say that the staff, working in an environment which is far from isolated, has been inspired by other organisational types and hence want a share of the reward they see others achieve. One should also recognise that a striving for higher salary should not immediately be interpreted as greediness, but may stem from real needs to support a family. Inspired by Etzioni's model we can appreciate the importance of a balanced relationship between organisational type, reward system and individual motivation, and how this balance may be jeopardised with the introduction of new types of reward systems. However, rejecting the introduction of a reward system, i.e. refusing to give in to demands for higher salary, with the belief that a normative commitment would be strengthened and preserved, would be to simplify the relationship between individual commitment and organisational control. Interpreting Etzioni's model as anything else than based on ideal-types would furthermore neglect the presumption that individuals' motivations are always multifaceted, and it would lead to an over-socialised view of the individual<sup>28</sup>.

Clegg argues that it must be recognised in any kind of organisation, and any kind of employee is driven by some sort of calculative motivation for commitment (Clegg, 1990). This is also implicitly argued by Kreps who hold that intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are interrelated and coexisting. We should also recall Brett's discussion on altruism (see chapter 9). Brett points out that an altruistic motivation needs some sort of reward in order to sustain over time. In other words, the categorisation of organisational control and staff commitment as formulated by Etzioni must be treated with some caution. There could be further perspectives added to this discussion. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow differs between lower-order and higher-order needs. It is not until basic needs, such as survival needs and safety in terms of e.g. job security, have been satisfied that individuals may strive to satisfy beliefs and values (Kreps, 1990). In the context of Bangladesh one may hence ask the question 'who can afford to be a volunteer?'. With staff sometimes coming from poor circumstances, this question appears to be highly relevant, and a one-sided focus on ideology and commitment as basis for their work then appears to be rather remote.

Finally, and still referring to the relation between control and commitment, a reward system responding to the staff's calculative motivations does not necessarily need to be a formal one. As we can detect from the fieldmaterial, the staff appear to find their own ways of ascertaining rewards through e.g. making priorities among

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<sup>28</sup> A crude interpretation of Etzioni's categorisation of organisational types can be found in Korten's discussion where he defines varieties of NGOs (see chapter 8). Korten argues that introducing reward systems in charity organisations based on voluntarism would corrupt the characteristics of these normative based organisations.

contracts, or through finding their own solutions to achieve project success despite resistance from villagers to conform with the procedures ascribed by the project. Although these reward systems are of more informal character these systems may be just as determining as the formal ones. Hence, resisting the introduction of a reward system, based on e.g. Korten's argument that economic rewards are corrupting, suggests a lack of appreciating individual innovativeness and a neglect of a dual-personality, rather than a well-founded understanding of the power and limitations of organisational control.

### **Organisational structures and ideology**

The text so far has briefly introduced the subject of organisational structure. The relationship between principle-agent, characterised by divergent interests and power, is structured in a superior-subordinate-relationship (although allocation of power is not always fixed: the discretion and power of the subordinate can be substantial). The discussion concerning systems of control signals that relationships within organisations are to a great extent hierarchical, which always hold potential sources of conflict. We often associate hierarchical structures with certain ideologies: experience has given the concept of hierarchy a bad name through its association with autocracy and corruption (Brett, 1996). Hierarchy is associated with exploitation, one-person management, and misuse of power. Many see hierarchical structures as undemocratic, and emphasise the co-operative as a preferable organisational structure. Within social movement theories we find claims that it is likely that the ideology of an organisation and its structure are to be related (Rucht, 1999). Fascist movements are hence not expected to have a decentralised structure based on consciousness raising groups, but a strong hierarchical and authoritarian structure. Similarly a human rights movement, emphasising democracy and freedom of the individual, should be more expected to have a flat organisational structure.

However, interpreting hierarchical structures per se as undemocratic and hence not suitable in the context of participatory projects and NGOs, would be to jump into conclusions about the relation between ideology and structure. Hierarchical relationships need not always be based on authority and power. Moe illustrates this through a discussion of shirking in organisations (Moe, 1984). The problem of shirking in organisations may be dealt with through monitoring systems. Such a system is based on a hierarchical relationship between a supervisor and the employee. However, the system is based on shared interest among all parties, also the ones who are being monitored, since it will prevent shirking for the benefit of all. In such a case, Moe argues, the hierarchical relationships should not be interpreted as a result of "fat and dominance", but as a result based on consent among co-workers to avoid conflicts (Moe, 1984:751).

Within development theories in general as within management theories, participation of different stakeholders has become the leading concept as a way of lessening hierarchical and authoritarian structures. Co-operatives have become a preferred or-



organisational form, since it invites active participation in all aspects of organisational life. Brett however strongly argues that there is an overbelief in co-operatives, which appears to be based on the assumption that conflicts are mainly related to authoritarian and hierarchical structures of profit-seeking organisations. Similar to Lipsky's critique of a one-sided management approach to organisational problems, Brett criticises analysis that put organisational problems down to inappropriate values of staff, rather than focusing on ideological contradictions and short-comings. The assumption that workers in a co-operative have "a sense of mission, trust, fairness and comradeship" that will vouch for fair and equal contribution must be seen as rather dubious (Moe, 1984: referring to Wade). The egalitarian ideology of co-operatives assumes equal commitment, but in reality these organisations risk free-riding among its members (see Brett, 1996; Moe, 1984). A co-operative discipline puts great demand on its workers, relying on the staff to have skills and abilities that make them understand and accept both benefits and costs of co-operative organisations. Workers must e.g. continue to contribute with their work despite the fact that their individual objectives may not be prioritised. Brett writes that good intentions alone are not enough and argues that referring to a shared egalitarian ideology as basis for the co-operative cannot prevent conflicts between individuals (Brett, 1996). Instead of relying on ideological claims, a more realistic interpretation would be that also co-operative organisations must actively work to ascertain that the employees will maximise according to the organisation, and not according to their own goals. Conflicting interests can cause serious problems, perhaps even especially so, in co-operatives where collective decision-making is practised.

It is often experienced in development projects using co-operatives such as participatory volunteer organisations (e.g. the village development committees), that one group of members contribute more than others. The frustration caused by free-riders and, as the members put it themselves, the lack of benefit, was expressed quite clearly by some of the members of the Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the projects studied. The committees are open for all who are willing to become members, and they will be collectively in charge of running the committees. Initially, some of the interviewed members showed great enthusiasm over being a VDC member, and took on their different tasks with pride. After a year had passed, the enthusiasm of some of the members had faded though, and they expressed disappointment in the lack of appreciation they had received. Neighbours ignored them, or sometimes mocked them and they felt they got no encouragement from the local NGO. In some cases they had come to disagree with the whole idea of the VDC as an appropriate institution to boost development in the village. The lack of appreciation from neighbours and NGO alike, sometimes combined with free-riding among fellow volunteers, caused confusion and disillusion among the volunteers.

While many benefit from the commitment of a few, these few committed people risk losing their motivation, unless they can see some sort of reward for their efforts. Brett argues that "where this is not so, they will commonly adopt corrupt practices, which soon delegitimize the enterprise" (Brett, 1996:16). The NGO staff noticed the waning enthusiasm, which in some cases lead to the abandonment of the VDC, and

suggested that some reward must be linked to the work of the VDC members. However, from project initiators point of view, this solution is problematic since it may encourage people to join with the wrong motives. By institutionalising rewards the VDC would risk becoming dominated by already powerful people, or people seeing the benefit rather than prospective social changes as the driving force of their enrollment.

Brett criticises Chambers and other radical theorists within the development discourse “who privilege the value of indigenous knowledge over that of ‘western’ experts” (Brett, 1996:13)<sup>29</sup>. Radical theories, Brett claims, ignore the fact that the poorest have the fewest of skills. They have been materially exploited, as well as deprived from skills of how to run organisations. Claiming that co-operatives and making indigenous knowledge count would lead to better, more efficient and more fair organisations is naïve. Instead of giving profound support for sustainable co-operatives, these development attempts often end in failure and demoralisation of participants of such projects, due to the simplistic interpretation of the complexities involved in running co-operatives (Brett, 1996). We may recall examples from this study that provides tentative evidence for Brett’s arguments. The group of villagers who choose the moneylender as president for the VDC referred to his experience as basis for choosing him. But as the moneylender gains more leadership skills, other villagers are excluded from such positions and hence have no experience in how to run an organisation. In another case, both NGO staff as well as the villagers themselves, commented that they lack experience in uniting for certain kinds of collective actions. Although a co-operative would from the outsider’s point of view appear as a sensible way of solving the problem with access to safe water, the lack of experience made the villagers hesitant to organise themselves as a group. They seemed to prefer individual action since they perceived co-operation as risky.

The discussions concerning hierarchical and co-operative structures can also be related to the organisational structure of NGOs. The concern raised about the possibly fading values of local NGOs relates these problems to the fact that many NGOs, who advocate participation and empowerment, have themselves rather hierarchical and authoritarian structures<sup>30</sup>. The organisations are often headed by charismatic leaders, who have indisputable power over staff and organisational activities. This appeared to be the case also in the local NGOs of this study. But while some leaders try to hand over ownership and decision-making power to the staff, and donors emphasise the importance of democratic, flat organisational structures within NGOs, the pressure for organisational professionalisation seems to give contradictory results. Increased demand for accountability, organisational professionalism, and economic transparency encourages a transformation from informal to more bureaucratic like organisations. But while there is concern expressed about lack of transparency and charismatic leadership bordering to authoritarian rule in NGOs, the transformation to more bu-

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29 See also comments made by Cleaver in chapter 3 here: swinging from we know best to they know best.

30 See discussion on organisational culture and Hofstede in chapter 8.

reaucratic organisations is not entirely embraced either although they have come as a result of demands for more democratic organisations.

There appear to be numerous problems associated with the NGOs: fading values, undemocratic leaderships, increased bureaucratisation with fading accountability to the grassroots as a result. These problems are sometimes recognised by NGO directors, and certainly by donors, who discuss criteria for choosing the right NGOs as partners in order to ensure that democratic structures are encouraged. However, the linkages between fading values, leadership and organisational structure do not seem to be quite clear (see Boussard, 2001). References to linkages between ideology and organisational structure, both in the case of co-operatives at village level and flat organisations among NGOs, appear to be based on rather hazy conclusions. While hierarchical structures may indeed be linked to power and authority which can be misused, they may also constitute the foundation for democratically well functioning organisations. As in the case of altruism and self-interest, we may conclude that a simplified understanding of both hierarchical and co-operative structures, the relation between structures and ideology, and their effect on the individual, need to be re-examined. One should not mistake the pessimism over co-operatives expressed by Brett as a way of promoting autocratic management. Neither is the critique to be viewed as a way of discharging of participatory systems altogether, it is merely an “antidote to over-optimistic assumptions as to their effectiveness and to the difficulties associated with their operation” (Brett, 1996:p). The over-optimism leads to simplification through assuming that commitment to normative goals will be enough to prevent conflicts. It leads to a rejection of problems based on self-interest and opportunism, as if those problems are only related to hierarchical, profit-seeking organisations.

### **Disintegration and personality shaping structures**

The scepticism described above towards hierarchical organisations is linked to an association between this particular structure and ideologies that are undemocratic and hence inappropriate for organisations working for social change and democracy. There are further concerns raised in relation to hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations, that refer to goal-displacement and the impact of structure and bureaucratic working procedures on the individuals within the organisation. Merton identified what he calls a displacement of goals in bureaucracies, which he associated with the general aspiration of bureaucracies to rationalise in order to reach goals in more efficient ways (Jaffee, 2001). Procedures introduced to enhance goal-fulfillment can turn to live a life of their own, detached from their original purpose: “rules become an end in themselves, rather than the means to an end, organisational behaviour takes on a ritualistic rather than rational character” (Jaffee, 2001:95). What Merton describes as goal-displacement is equivalent to how the professionalisation of NGOs entail not only improved accountability and transparency, but also a shift in emphasis from focus on social change to organisational efficiency as the main goal.

In his analysis Merton furthermore concluded that the strict procedures and rules of a bureaucracy could be personality shaping (Jaffee, 2001). Weber similarly anticipated the superior organisational form of the rational bureaucracy to gradually influence life and personalities to such an extent that the world would become an iron cage of rationality. However, the forecast of an emerging bureaucratic personality has been contested. Both Blau and Gouldner argue against the assumption that bureaucracies dominate individuals (Jaffee, 2001). Gouldner presents findings that contradict a strict idea of a personality-shaping bureaucracy. Based on studies of bureaucracies he argues first for the capacity of humans to react to and in practice change rules and regulations. Secondly, he noticed in his studies that supervisors would choose not to enforce strict rules or monitoring since experience has shown that the cost would be loss of trust, hostility from workers, and a work environment characterised by animosity (Jaffee, 2001). One could say that organisations come to recognise that they rely on employees to “step out of their formal job-descriptions and respond flexibly to unexpected demands” in order to avoid goal-displacement as described by Merton (Jaffee, 2001:99). Blau similarly argues that individuals are too innovative to conform totally with rules and procedures, and he furthermore claims that the innovativeness originates from their individual interests, which mostly differ from that of the organisation.

Despite Blau’s and Gouldner’s conclusions, there is a widely held assumption that organisational rationalisation leads to routinisation, which will result in less engaged staff (Sennet, 2000). Consequently the flexible and flat organisation is held as the remedy to the detrimental effects of routinisation, although it is not quite clear how flexibility can make people more engaged (Sennet, 2000). The problem with lack of engagement from staff has already been touched upon under the heading of alienation (see chapter 9). Lipsky argues that the organisational circumstances of the street-level bureaucrat, including ambiguity of goals and endless demands, lead to alienation from his initial altruistic motivation. Similar to Durkheim’s analysis of changes in society during the era of industrialisation, organisations are undergoing processes of differentiation and specialisation in order to comply with demands to be more efficient. Using a Durkheimian language, a division of labour may lead to increased differentiation of interest and social disintegration.

The problem of social disintegration seems to adhere to two opposing aspects of organisational structures (Jaffee, 2001). There are apparently risks for disintegration within a highly bureaucratic and rationalised organisation, which presumably locks the individual in routines that are distant from both decision-making and the final product. But Lipsky also identifies worker-autonomy and discretion as playing a role in alienation and disintegration of staff from the organisation (Lipsky, 1980). Hence, flexibility and a flat organisational structure, which would allow worker discretion and autonomy, is not necessarily the answer to problems with staff integration and commitment.

The directors of the local NGOs talk of the importance of having committed staff. They use different means to gain this commitment. One director practices close supervision and punishment in an attempt to ensure that the staff take responsibility

for their own actions. The aim is to make the staff realise that the individual contribution affects all the others in the organisation, and that they are all dependent on each individual to be honest and committed. Other directors rely on capacity building and rhetoric, talking about transferring a sense of ownership to all staff, to make them feel that the future of the organisation is intimately related with their own future. Yet another director sees staff commitment as related to organisational responsibility. By offering social security, built on money put aside by the organisation to provide pension, bonuses, and money in case of sick leave, the director envisaged that the relationship between staff and organisations would build on trust and mutual obligations. Although conducted in a less systematic way, the directors of the very local NGOs sustain personal relationships with parents or other relatives of the staff, which has an integrating effect: the private and the professional is intertwined.

The relationship between staff and managers has previously been described through a principal-agent perspective. Negotiation and struggle for power taking place between the two parties have been emphasised. Scott points out that the use of a principal-agent perspective holds an underlying assumption "that both parties are motivated by self-interest, and these interests diverge" (Scott, 1992:105). Recalling Granovetter's request for recognition of social embeddedness we see how such an assumption is simplifying and lacking in in-depth understanding of the essence of the individual. The concept of integration, worries about disintegration, and the examples above portray the relationship as less calculative and antagonistic. Although conflictual elements are present between employer and employee, the relationship is also accompanied by reciprocity and a mutual wish for co-operation. Managers can control workers through sanctions, punishment and rewards, but all this is costly both in terms of money and trust. Workers can punish managers by refusing to work, but this, as well as efforts to try to avoid punishment, is equally costly to them. Hence a balance between potential antagonism, dependency and reciprocity in the relationship is preferred by both parties (Jaffee, 2001; Moe, 1984). This balance is not only based on a rational calculation, where different types of costs are being considered. As the Hawthorne experiments clearly illustrate, the search for established relations between behaviour and reward often reveal that reward-systems are combined and sometimes hidden. Asplund points out that one of the most common hidden source of rewards is for the individual to be accepted as a group-member (Asplund, 1987). In other words, the struggle to reach agreements between different parties is not only approached with caution and calculative strivings to make a good deal in terms of avoiding costs and ascertaining gains. Using Asplund's perception of the individual, being included in a group can be sufficient as basis for motivation.

### **Designed and unintended identity regulation**

Throughout the previous discussions in this chapter we find suggestions that the employee is indeed something more than just a commodity. Asplund implies that social inclusion, rather than a striving for organisational reward, is a strong basis for moti-

vation of the individual. Barnard highlights the dual personality of the individual (see earlier this chapter), suggesting that the individual also in organisations must be recognised as driven by the non-personal, i.e. a wish to be included and accepted by other individuals, and not only by task assignments and external reward. We may also recall Deci, who discusses the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of the individual, and how a bias towards extrinsic reward may cause the employee to lose confidence and self-esteem. In previous chapters we have furthermore come upon concepts such as moral selfing and alienation. And, in the description of NGO values, directors referred to their staff as being of 'the right human quality'. This alludes to something which is personal, related to identity and feelings, and rather different from the tone that the discussion about external rules and regulations refers to. An emphasis on personal values and identity seems to be particularly important to make in relation to organisations such as the NGOs, i.e. organisations that emphasise values of commitment to solidarity and altruism. These qualities are not only linked to certain skills, but to a type of personality, which is limitless and stretches outside of the boundaries of the job (Clarke, 1997). As described in relation to the concept of espoused values (chapter 8), these qualities are related to personal, internal reflection, and they affect relations in all directions. Reflection and the building of relationships constitute a socialisation process of the staff which affects the individual in a profound way and which does not only present itself in the following of rules and regulations.

In a paper by Alvesson and Willmott (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001), the authors use the concept 'regulation of identity' as a means of discussing a particular aspect of organisational control. The authors' starting point is, similar to that of Lipsky, a critique against conventional organisation analyses which focus on design, management and appropriate structures as controlling devices. The focus of their discussion is based on the idea that practices of organisational control...

... do not work 'outside' the individual's quest(s) for self-definition(s), coherence(s) and meaning(s). Instead, they interact, and indeed are fused, with what we term the 'identity work' of organizational members. Identity work, we contend, is a significant medium and outcome of organizational control. (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001:6)

It is important to note that identity regulation is perceived as a medium and an outcome and should be seen as an "analytical device intended to bring a degree of clarity to complex and pervasive processes of organizational control" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001:24). Although the authors do not take the normatively oriented organisation as point of departure but have a more general perspective, I believe the discussion they offer is highly relevant when trying to summarise an essential aspect of the discussion held so far. This relates to the specific characteristic of the relationship between the individual and the organisation within organisations such as development NGOs, and to the unintended consequences in terms of changes in individual motivation and attitudes as a reaction to various control mechanisms practiced within the NGOs. Alvesson and Willmott use several images around which they discuss identity regulation. I will relate some of them to the empirical material we have al-

ready reviewed, to clarify the dimension of identity work among the NGO staff and show how this is related to our initial question of staff motivation.

Through *defining the person directly* the organisation signals what expectations it has on its employees. Within the NGOs the implementing staff are repeatedly referred to as professional volunteers. The label 'professional' signals that the staff have both certain skills, as well as a work-morale. They know the bureaucratic ropes of writing reports, keeping time-limits and following agendas for project activities. The label 'volunteer' signals a type of commitment that is special for this workforce, which incorporates solidarity and a personal moral standing: the workers offer something for free for the benefit of others, and they put their own personal interests aside. Identity regulation of a person can also be achieved *by defining others*. We may directly refer this to the remark made continuously by NGO staff and directors alike about government staff as insincere, careless and bossy. As a result of increased scepticism concerning fraud and insincerity among NGOs, staff and directors also refer to other NGOs as less genuine and trustworthy than their own organisation. The reference to government officials and other NGOs as insincere may not have been a conscious strategy from the start, but rather used as a way of broadcasting a message to outsiders (i.e. potential partners). However, the *defining of others* definitely seems to serve as a means of identity regulation of the staff, creating a sense of unity and pride, as well as a personal guidance of what is acceptable and worthy. The authors Alvesson and Willmott furthermore identifies a provision of a *specific vocabulary of motives* which serves as a point of reference for the employees, guiding them to what is held as important and natural by the organisation. By emphasising certain motives – such as commitment and solidarity – and de-emphasising others – greediness and a bossy attitude – the organisation portrays itself and the ideal staff as being socially and normatively oriented rather than profit-oriented. Furthermore, the explication of *morals and values* is emphasised, and explained in the following way: “Espoused values and stories with a strong morality operate to orient identity in a specific direction or at least stimulate this process” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001:20). In a previous chapter we have heard how the espoused values of the NGOs can be interpreted as a framework for building identity. As suggested there, the espoused values provide a guidance to the staff, supporting an identity as an NGO employee with high moral values. The guidance offered is also important when forming relations with outsiders. The guidance does presumably not only play an important role when entering the organisation, but also as important check points along a process of identity forming. During this process, the individual, supported by the various identity regulating factors within an organisation, selectively chooses how to view the world and how to form relationships. Hence, the identity regulation is not only a question of an internal affair but one which involves professional and private spheres too. The characteristics of the relationships with others, e.g. government officials, play an important role in the process of identity work. This particular relationship seems rather complex though. While on the one hand *the other* is identified as fundamentally different from the NGO worker, the *morals and values* ascribed to the NGO worker describe an understanding, open individual, not prone to engage in conflicts of prestige. Hence the

NGO worker is also expected to show reconciliation and willingness to cooperate with the other. The relationship with government staff is characterised by almost mocking and offensive comments while the other is not present, but by a generous, understanding and respectful approach when confronted in reality.

We can find further phenomena in the empirical material presented that can be related to an identity regulating process. The fact that the staff are mainly involved in assembling statistical data during procedures of evaluation have unintended consequences of several kinds. Besides encouraging a particular way of understanding the relationship between activities and results, in which process is confused with substance, and quantitative results with qualitative impact, it also puts restrictions on the amount of influence the local staff may have during planning, monitoring and evaluation. The effect of this is similar to that of a bias towards extrinsic rewards, which risks making the individual employee feel he is lacking in competence. Furthermore, there are recurrent issues that causes frustration such as goal ambiguity, bossy attitudes from other staff, and lack of recognition of good performance, that may turn the individual against the organisation.

### **Results from the use of organisation theory: cautions and benefits**

In the introduction to part four the starting point and aim of chapter 10 is delineated. Focus is put on the ambivalence of staff, as expressed in the field material, and the changing organisational characteristics, as identified in literature on development NGOs. Both problems relate to the motivation of staff and organisations. The starting point of the discussions pursued is that staff ambivalence and what is perceived as changing characteristics of NGOs can be seen as an expression of a general dilemma: that of controlling staff motivation, attitudes and performance in organisations. This chapter has elaborated on this dilemma: what are the means of control, and what are the challenges and unintended consequences that constitute the dilemma?

Organisational management presents a wide range of organisational control devices. However, only rarely do these devices come with any guarantee in terms of staff performance. The control becomes particularly difficult in organisations that have normative goals, and which rely on staff that have a certain type of values or a commitment, as opposed to a particular skill such as carpentry, which is presumably easier to verify and control. The organisational control needs to be based on careful consideration of how to best enhance a particular behaviour, in order to reach foreseen goals. Mistakes can be made in terms of faulty conclusions about causality between e.g. reward, behaviour and results. Mistakes may also be caused by unintended consequences that counteract the initial purpose of control. We furthermore find that ambiguous goals, an inherent multitude of motivations within the individual, and conflicting interests between individuals, make the business of organisational control quite a complicated enterprise.

The framework presented by organisation theory holds different assumptions about the individual. Following Granovetter's request it is important to be aware of



the risk of seeing the individual as either under-socialised or over-socialised. The individual should neither be interpreted as solely ruled by rationality and calculation, nor should she be interpreted as ruled by social norms. We find a similar request in Barnard's concept of a dual personality, which expresses the fact that each individual holds a range of motivations with origin in both self-interest and altruism. The discussion on the concepts of altruism and self-interest (chapter 9) delineates an important point of reference, arguing for an understanding of the two concepts as closely related and coexisting within the individual instead of a perception of the two characteristics as each other's opposite. Unintended consequences found within organisations can often reveal so called hidden basis for motivation. One of the most common among such hidden bases relates to the non-personal, the altruistic, i.e. the fact that the individual is striving to be part of a social context. Scott and Lipsky both warn against a perception of organisational performance as mainly related to management effectiveness. Scott argues for a dual perspective when analysing organisational performance, which embraces the individual as active and reactive in order to avoid a bias towards structure as sole source of regulation and explanation of organisational performance. The presentation of the various organisational control mechanisms has been done carrying these calls for consideration in mind.

The perspectives offered by organisation theory have provided us with useful tools in relation to our initial question: they have provided a focus on the relation between the organisation and the individual, which is different from that of social movement theory and Korten's analysis of NGOs as presented in chapter 9. The perspectives have helped us to clarify the working situation of NGO staff. By using the concepts of autonomy and discretion of staff, we may understand how the position of the NGO staff is characterised by a considerable amount of freedom, but also that autonomy implies a rather different basis from where to interpret project outlines and problems that arise during implementation, compared to administrative or initiating staff.

The position of the NGO staff is characterised by a precarious interplay, in which the staff negotiates with villagers, with project administration, with the management of their own NGO, as well as with priorities that relate to their personal lives. There is an array of formal and informal guidelines, and several sources of motivation and demands, which makes it easy to see how a degree of confusion constantly seems to characterise their work.

When trying to grasp the motivation of the NGO staff we should bear in mind that such an understanding demands more than an insight into formal organisational controlling mechanisms. The focus on identity work and identity regulation of staff in organisations captures essential aspects of the interplay between the individual and the organisations, and between intended and unintended consequences. In the case of the local NGOs in focus for this study, it appears that the images of identity regulating devices, whether used consciously or not, coincide in a neat way and therefore give a strong supportive guidance to the identity work of the individual employee. However, there are evidently other identity regulating elements that appear as unintended consequences of various control mechanisms, that contradict this. All these

unintended consequences can be related to an alienating process, in which the staff is discouraged from nurturing altruistic attitudes.

The initial argument motivating this last part of the thesis, stated that the staff ambivalence exhibited in the field study needs to be investigated. Staff ambivalence should not be interpreted as dependent on individual capacities of the staff, as deliberate fraud by NGOs or NGO staff, and it cannot be fully explained by referring to external pressure or to inadequate internal reflection of the NGOs. Although all these elements may hold partial explanations to the problems with staff attitudes, analysis departing from these elements are often ruled by a fixing-attitude, i.e. a wish to identify solutions to problems. Hence, they miss the actual dilemma behind the problem. When striving to *understand staff motivation* the analysis should not identify what obstacles are found that hinder an altruistic motivation from being expressed. Instead, the quest must concern the general dilemma of altruism, expressed in this particular case in the striving to achieve social change through development projects, which depends on a certain type of attitudes and values of the staff implementing the projects. Hence, the results of this chapter shows that the contradictory and simultaneous processes, i.e. encouragement of an altruistic identity and alienation from the very same, constitute the core of the altruistic dilemma, and can explain staff ambivalence towards the attitudes prescribed in order to make the participatory and empowerment strategies work.



## CHAPTER II

# Concluding remarks

The initial aim of this research project has been to critically analyse theoretical and practical aspects of the concepts of participation and empowerment as used in development projects. The starting points of the analysis of the concepts have been contemporary interpretations as identified in literature, and as described by the two projects studied, in project plans and by administrative staff. The interpretations provided by these two sources coincide. To summarise, they emphasise that the participatory approach constitutes an alternative to previous development approaches. This implies a normative approach, with focus on local knowledge, bottom-up approach, the inclusion of local NGOs as implementing partners, and a strong emphasis on empowerment as the goal of participation.

The results from the empirical study suggest that the concepts contain problematic contradictions. Within the two projects studied, which I believe illustrate a general character of projects that emphasise participation and empowerment, problems and solutions have to some degree already been defined, prior to project implementation. Based on established knowledge and experience, development intervention per se holds an understanding of how to proceed to achieve development, empowerment, and, in this case, increased coverage of tubewells and sanitary latrines. This established knowledge emphasises that local knowledge counts, and that people's own priorities should be the basis for project agendas. However, the established knowledge is also the foundation for a predefined logic between activities, i.e. the project strategy, and expected outcomes of the projects. Furthermore, claims that participatory projects should be based on local demand becomes deceptive when in reality implementers can only offer assistance based on what supply the project can provide. The nature of these projects are in other words inherently contradictory.

Participatory strategies are foreseen to lead to a change from traditional, detrimental, power structures, to new structures characterised by a democratic working-order. However, the actual transition from undemocratic to more participatory and inclusive structures requires an existing democratic spirit: what constitutes the goal is also a prerequisite for the participatory activities to work. This conclusion comes from findings at village level, illustrated by the difficulties in making villagers realise what is in their own interest (i.e. not to choose the moneylender as president for the VDC, since he already holds a powerful position based on existing structure). The implementing staff also illustrate this puzzle, emphasising that the project should take as

its starting point the inherent capacity of the villagers, and simultaneously expressing great frustration over the difficulties in making the villagers see these capacities. Although the implementing staff is supposed to encourage and facilitate choice, the problems with 'making people understand' easily leads to staff imposing solutions instead. When scrutinised, it seems that the alternative approach claimed may not be very different from previously criticised development approaches. Similar to previous top-down approaches based on Western knowledge, when practised it is revealed that the strategies contain a patronising tone.

Contemporary interpretation of participation and empowerment in development, which emphasises a normative rather than an instrumental interpretation of the concepts, seems to be based on the idea that participation simply opens up for people to take part in development projects. And once people are allowed to participate, combined with capacity building activities, appropriate and democratic decisions will be made (according to project logic). The problem with participation in relation to democracy is enlightened by the discussion based on literature, which shows some of the deeply rooted dilemmas of people's participation and the controversies among theoreticians about how to interpret these problems (Pateman, 1970). It is not clear to what extent participation goes hand in hand with democratic decision-making, or to what extent it leads to counter-productive results. Decisions based on people's participation may obscure diversity rather than encourage a wide range of ideas and experiences to come forward (Mosse, 2001), and there are doubts whether or not collective decision-making empowers the individual. As Cook and Brett argues, it may instead lead to confusion and disillusion among participants (Brett, 1996; Cook & Kothari, 2001).

The difficulties involved with participation and empowerment strategies are well recognised, which is illustrated by the vast amount of literature on the subject. However, much of the literature is devoted to refining definitions of concepts, strategies and role-assignments, to ascertain correct interpretations and that problems are clearly identified in order to make it possible to avoid them in the future. The analyses are characterised by a striving to provide detailed descriptions and by a practical orientation, guided by a wish to solve practical problems identified in development projects. Although both detailed, well informed, and critical, these analyses often lack in questioning underlying assumptions of the concepts, e.g. the expectations and requirements attached to participation and empowerment. Debates concerning the misuse of the concepts of participation and empowerment illustrates this. Here, problems are being related to inadequate understanding or deliberate abuse by the people using the concepts (e.g. donors, governments, development organisations) or to the people handling strategies based on the concepts (e.g. NGO staff). Such a focus easily fails to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of the concepts, and instead directs the source of the problems to how they are being managed, identifying new requirements attached to the practice of the strategies.

Problems related to participation and empowerment can be clearly linked to the actual implementing phase. The results of the field study points to the fact that the normative impact of the strategies depend on how they are being managed by the

staff. It is crucial that project philosophies have been correctly interpreted, i.e. that the message of an alternative, people's centred approach is clear. The NGO staff studied in this project constitute the point of transition, where theory of participation and empowerment meets practice. They are in charge of transferring the values attached to the strategies, and of realising the activities. Experience from the field study show that the staff sometimes have authoritarian attitudes that go counter to the participatory and empowerment strategies they are implementing and advocating. The staff express frustration over problems faced during implementations and show ambivalence towards the participatory strategies.

Taking the ambivalence of the NGO staff as one point of departure, the study has attempted to investigate staff motivation and performance further. It is argued in the analysis that staff ambivalence should not primarily be interpreted as dependent on individual capacities, and that it cannot be fully explained by referring to external pressure or to inadequate internal reflections of the NGOs. These two sources of explanations may give some reason to why staff motivation and performance is sometimes faltering in relation to both their own claims and outsiders' expectations. However, discussions identifying faltering staff abilities or organisational weaknesses are often ruled by a wish to identify solutions, such as training of staff, organisational management, or listing criteria that NGOs must fulfil in order to become partners in development projects. As in the case of analysis of participation and empowerment strategies, such analysis may hold valuable information and descriptions, but they often fail in identifying problematic underlying assumptions.

The study has suggested that another point of departure than a practical orientation should be practised. Instead of focusing on staff behaviour as such, it is suggested that the dilemma of the concept of altruism, i.e. the characteristic of the motivation ascribed to and claimed by NGOs and their staff, is investigated. Using theoretical perspectives that focus on staff motivation in an organisational context, we may identify rather different explanations to the staff ambivalence found in the study. Instead of identifying faltering attitudes as problems that ought to be corrected, we seek to understand the concept of altruism as a social phenomenon.

We have seen how Brett argues that altruism in its pure kind is rather fragile and has difficulties in sustaining over time. Hence, the ambivalence of the staff can be interpreted as an expression of the nature of altruism rather than a misinterpretation or lack of ideological conviction. Furthermore, the motivation and characteristics of staff are exceptionally important in a context where organisational goal and project strategies rely on a particular attitude and motivation of the implementing staff. By using perspectives offered by organisation theories, we may investigate the general problematic involved in the relationship between organisational control and staff motivation and performance. In the case of NGOs, there are complex problems in this relationship, which combined with the effects of a problematic organisational setting, may lead to alienation from the altruistic motive initially held by the staff. In short, control mechanisms used by the organisation to secure a certain type of motivation and performance from staff, may lead to counteractive results that end up weakening the valuable characteristics desired. From this perspective, ambivalence in

staff behaviour can be interpreted as an unintended consequence, and as an expression of the precarious relationship between structure, as in formal and informal mechanisms of control, and the individual.

Concerns raised about the changing characteristics of development NGOs are relevant. However, we must try to see to what extent this perceived change can be related to an actual development or to a more sophisticated understanding of the real forces (real as in complex and not as in genuine and the opposite of insincere) driving NGOs. While a change in character of NGOs due to changes in circumstances (e.g. increase in donor support) appears to have taken place, I do not believe this change entails a radical move from being voluntary, normatively based organisations to becoming more business-like, profit-seeking types. I rather believe the changes reveal an inherent and pre-existing complexity in these organisations that has become apparent through processes of professionalisation, competition, and marketing. Hence, the concerns about characteristics of NGOs should not focus on how we may identify the good from the bad, or the genuine from the insincere.

The concluding part of the thesis illustrates what different results may be achieved by departing from conventional development discourses. The use of theoretical perspectives with references to empirical contexts that are not usually found within the discourses of NGOs, has enriched our understanding of staff motivation and performance. The results have profound consequences for what expectations we may attach to development projects based on local NGO implementation. It also has profound consequences for our expectations of participatory and empowerment strategies, which rely on implementing organisations that are characterised by altruistic motives. This should be seen as a general invitation to revise previous analytical approaches to understand characteristics and performance of development NGOs, as well as an incentive to revise convictions and expectations of participatory and empowerment strategies.

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