

ORGANIZING RURAL WATER SANITATION PROGRAMS IN BANGLADESH:  
DO THE METHODS OF THE BANGLADESH RURAL ADVANCEMENT  
COMMITTEE REALLY EMPOWER THE PEOPLE?

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of participatory education in rural development by NGOs has come into question by many researchers and scholars. Participatory education involves facilitators listening to and learning from the needs of beneficiaries. Once needs are assessed, facilitators work together with beneficiaries to find solutions to problems in the community. Scholars and researchers protest that these participatory education methods used by NGOs are not socially empowering their beneficiaries. Social empowerment involves assisting people to realize their individual and collective sense of who they are and their place in the society and their political power so that they can make positive changes in their society. NGOs in Bangladesh and other countries have come under scrutiny for their inability to socially empower rural beneficiaries.

A non-government organization known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) works with rural populations in Bangladesh. BRAC works to help alleviate poverty and empower rural populations through different programs such as microfinance and health programs. In addition, many of BRAC's programs address mitigating water sanitation issues in Bangladesh. BRAC uses participatory methods of teaching in their water sanitation programs to help build awareness of water issues in Bangladesh. These programs are supposed to offer beneficiaries a variety of different benefits such as health awareness. Another outcome of these programs, as stated by BRAC, is social empowerment. However, whether participants are in fact socially empowered by these participatory practices in water sanitation programs are in question.

This research is framed by two major questions. First, are BRAC's participatory methods actually participatory in nature? Second, do BRAC's participatory methods lead to social empowerment for its beneficiaries? It is

important that facilitators of these programs have a clear understanding of the effectiveness of their programs for social empowerment so that they can improve upon their teaching methods.

This study uses qualitative synthesis to gather data on BRAC's organizational and teaching methods as well as case studies on BRAC's water sanitation practices. First, a systematic review of available material on BRAC's educational practices and water sanitation programs was conducted. This review yielded various source materials from BRAC including field studies and data-based reports. After the review, data were gathered for a qualitative synthesis. This synthesis describes the combined effects from all the studies gathered. Using these resources, the nature of these participatory practices is examined as well as their effect on social empowerment. These resources include four case studies and descriptive reports on BRAC's organizational and educational methods.

The findings of this study reveal that the teaching and organizational methods of BRAC try to be participatory in nature. BRAC workers do in fact work with the beneficiaries to solve problems in the community. Yet some key components to the participatory approach are missing in their practice, such as allowing beneficiaries to tell their own stories during issue-based meetings. In addition, these practices do not seem to encourage any kind of social empowerment. In fact, there seems to be more emphasis on economic empowerment than social empowerment. Also, it appears that participatory practices are a way to control beneficiaries' behavior, instead of actually empowering them.

This thesis recommends that BRAC needs to clearly define its goals for empowerment including social empowerment. If evaluation data are gathered by outside evaluators, as well as those who are BRAC staff members, these data, would be more robust in gaining new perspectives on how to improve the effectiveness of

their programs. In addition, more research is needed to ascertain the meaning of social empowerment and participation in Bangladesh to help understand why BRAC facilitators practice as they do.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michael Gonzalez is originally from Meriden, Connecticut. He did his undergraduate work at Western Connecticut State University where he earned a BA in Anthropology and Sociology. Afterwards, he worked in the field of archaeology for a year before joining Peace Corps Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, he served as an English teacher for eighteen months. Michael also began to learn the Bengali language at this time to aid him in his Peace Corps service. Upon returning from Bangladesh, he obtained his teacher certification for middle school social studies. During his certification course, he held various different positions in the field of education. Then, finally, he entered Cornell University and joined the Asian Studies Program. Michael has since focused his studies on International Education and Community Development. In addition, he has continued to study the Bengali at Cornell. After graduating from Cornell, Michael hopes to return to Bangladesh to work in education and community development in rural communities.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Research Questions and Purpose	5
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	6
Adult Education and Empowerment	6
Transformational Learning	9
Role of the Adult Educator	11
Participatory Education	13
III. METHODOLOGY	16
Research Paradigm	16
Data Sources	17
Analysis	18
Limitations	19
IV. CONTEXT	20
Context of Bangladesh within South Asia	20
Sources of Water Contamination in Bangladesh	21
Cultural Challenges for NGOs in Bangladesh	23
V. RESEARCH DATA	28
Framework for Program Development	28
Methods and Practice	30
Organizational Practices from the Field	34
Organizing Local Villages	35
Case Study One: Issue-Based Meetings	36
Case Study Two: Health Forums	37
Case Study Three: Arsenic Program	38
Case Study Four: OTEP Project	39
Evaluation of Field Studies	41
VI. CONCLUSION	43
Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations	43
Implications for Research and Practice	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	53

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Bangladeshi government along with several NGOs (non-government organizations), have been working in local areas in Bangladesh with the goal of creating awareness about water sanitation as well as teaching villagers how to overcome these problems. Bangladeshi NGOs have ventured into these rural areas to help local populations mitigate the problems that they have with potable water. One such NGO is known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee.

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has been helping the rural poor of Bangladesh since 1972. BRAC first served as a relief organization, helping Bangladeshi refugees that had been displaced by the War of Independence against West Pakistan, the current day Pakistan. After the war, BRAC helped rural villagers reestablish homes and farm lands that were destroyed during the conflict. In addition, the organization began to assist local rural villages in such areas as education and health care. BRAC workers went out into these rural communities to work with villagers to start development in these crucial areas (Rohde 1). Since that time, BRAC has continued to reach out to the poor of Bangladesh with different community-based programs such as microfinance. Due to the Bangladeshi government's inability to administer for public health on its own, larger NGO's have taken the responsibility for improving public health in the nation (Haque 278). In cooperation with the government, BRAC has taken a leading role in the development of rural based health care programs and water sanitation programs (Haque 278-279). In relation to public health, BRAC has been helping rural communities overcome water related issues such as water sanitation. It has been able to assist rural communities in water related issues by using specific organizational practices in their work with rural populations. These various practices are also allegedly used to "empower" people to take control over

their lives. This thesis discusses the participatory practices used in these water sanitation programs and the role of these practices in social empowerment.

This thesis is divided into several different sections. The first section discusses the problems BRAC faces in using the participatory model towards empowerment. The second section of this thesis looks at the literature related to education for empowerment, the role of the teacher in education for empowerment, and participatory education. In the following section, the methodology of this study is discussed. Next, the context section discusses the environment in which these water sanitation programs are developed in Bangladesh. The fifth section presents data on BRAC's teaching and organizational practices as well as four case studies from BRAC's water sanitation programs. The thesis ends with conclusions and discussions on the data. In addition, suggestions for future research for practitioners in the field of participatory education for empowerment in Bangladesh are described.

#### Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of participatory teaching methods in the non-government organizations of Bangladesh and other countries has come under fire by many scholars and writers who believe the participatory method of teaching and development is not serving its intended purpose (Cooke and Kothari 5-7). The main question is whether NGOs are really being effective in terms of empowering rural people. Bangladesh has many NGOs working in many different sectors all over Bangladesh. Gains and benefits of rural communities with the help of NGOs have been well documented, yet it would seem that NGOs would put their efforts into new major problem areas or perhaps the number of NGOs would decrease if villagers were truly being empowered to do things on their own. This leads us to investigate the practices of (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) BRAC to find how they go about empowering rural communities through their participatory approach, programs, and teaching strategies.

The non-government organization known as BRAC in Bangladesh works in a multitude of projects for the betterment of society including but not limited to microfinance for the poor and health education for rural populations (Ahmed and French 36). These projects bring skills and knowledge to rural inhabitants that enables them to lead what should be a healthier and happier life. Each of these projects promises to socially empower participants through programs. Ahmed comments, “BRAC’s twin objectives are the alleviation of poverty and the empowerment of the poor, especially women, and its programs address a wide range of economical and social development issues (Ahmed and French 36).” It seems that it is deeply rooted in BRAC rhetoric, that education is the means by which people can empower themselves. It is true that local people are learning new skills and obtaining knowledge from the work of NGOs such as BRAC. The role of social empowerment, however, in developmental education has been called into question (Wickens and Sandlin 288).

BRAC uses a participatory form of education to train and educate participants. Participatory education under the BRAC system involves gaining the trust and respect of the participants in development programs. Once trust is established, development workers can easily listen and learn from the needs of the participants. Once needs are assessed, both parties work collectively to find solutions to these problems (Rodhe 6-9). The role of participatory education in BRAC’s approach is to help participants to take an active part in controlling their lives. As a result, empowerment is heavily emphasized in this participatory model. The concept of empowerment in BRAC involves assisting participants to become self-reliant both economically and socially (Khan 27). Here, BRAC states that part of its role is to socially empower rural inhabitants. Their methodology for increasing the power of villagers is dependent on the people. For this reason, BRAC works closely with its participants to find what

their needs are and build programs based upon those needs (Rodhe 4-7). They use hands on techniques to train participants how to take control of their environment for their own benefit. Through collective action, the hope is that NGO workers will help “empower” participants through their educational practices on various subjects ranging from microfinance, water sanitation, and disease control. It is clear that knowledge and skill transfer is taking place in this relationship. The participatory model described here does bear a resemblance to similar listening, learning and trust building practices emphasized by participation practitioners (Forester 129-130). Yet it is unclear as to whether the participatory methods described above are leading to any form of social empowerment on a political scale. The said programs do not seem to give participants any greater political power in their context.

Social empowerment involves aiding participants to realize their potential to make change in the political-social landscape. It entails helping people to become active participants in their own governance. In Freire’s model, this entails building a critical conscious in the people who are largely oppressed so that they can understand and react to the subjugation going on around them (Freire 29). This kind of empowerment could be achieved by helping people realize the power that they have as a community to positively effect change. This power could give communities the ability to have their voices heard and acted upon by politicians when there is a problem in the community. In addition, this ability could allow some individuals in the community to become a positive force in their communities and or within the wider political structure. The lingering question is whether this type of social empowerment is taking place in BRAC programs, especially in their water sanitation programs. Do the participatory methods used by BRAC in water sanitation programs achieve social empowerment for rural populations? Are the participatory methods of education used by BRAC conducive to promoting empowerment within the community?

Social empowerment via participatory education from NGOs could improve the lives of rural inhabitants in Bangladesh. This approach would help build leadership in rural communities to take on larger political issues that may affect their daily lives. It could give them a political space with which their collective voices can be heard and acted upon in the political world thereby giving them greater control over their lives.

### Research Questions and Purpose

This thesis will look at these organizational and teaching strategies that BRAC employs to teach rural inhabitants about water sanitation. It investigates how, through participatory methods, rural inhabitants are empowered by BRAC's methods for water sanitation programs. This research is framed by two major questions. First, are BRAC's methods of teaching in water sanitation programs actually participatory in nature? Second, do these methods of teaching lead to some type of social empowerment for the beneficiaries?

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a clear picture as to the educational practices of BRAC in water sanitation programs. It is important to have an understanding of practices used by BRAC in order to ascertain their effectiveness in accomplishing their goal of social empowerment. Knowing the step by step approach with which participants are educated may allow educators and facilitators in Bangladesh to understand how they can improve their pedagogy to encourage social empowerment. A clearer understanding of the methodology could be beneficial to practitioners in Bangladesh; giving them the opportunity to see what practices work best in empowering participants. Afterwards, practitioners can make adjustments to their programs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review presents several frameworks from both scholars and practitioners. The goal is to give different perspectives on the role of adult education in development as well as define social empowerment in education, the roles of adult educators and participatory education. The first section of this literature review looks at the role of empowerment in adult education. Examples from the literature expound different methods of educational practices that can be used to socially empower participants. This section includes a short discussion on the place of transformational learning. The second part of this review discusses the roles of the educator in adult education. The last section deals with theories on participatory education. These theories describe what participatory education is and how it is practiced. This section also gives some insight on the current views on participatory education and development.

#### Adult Education and Empowerment

Freire is one of the most influential adult educators of his time. His work has revealed another role of education besides simple knowledge and skill transfer. Freire believed the goal of education was to build a “critical conscious” in people who had been by and large repressed by those in power as observed by Freire, “...critical education which could help to form critical attitudes, for the naïve consciousness with which the people had emerged into the historical process left them an easy prey to irrationality. Only an education facilitating the passage from naïve to critical transitivity, increasing men’s ability to perceive the challenges of their time, could prepare the people to resist the emotional power of the transition (Freire 29).” In many areas around the world, people have been reduced to cogs in a machine. These people are seen as less human, nothing more than beings that produce more goods for a capitalistic society. It is in this way, men and women become dehumanized (Freire

31). Freire, therefore, believed it was necessary to educate people so that they might participate in their own self governing. Freire called for an education that helps people to better understand what is happening in their environment and form critical opinions on these topics so they might actively change their situation.

Freire's work discusses how adult education helps people realize their role and importance in their culture. After this realization, participants would be encouraged to transform their environment in a positive manner. The main goal of education is to empower people so they can recognize their collective potential. This empowerment can only occur through dialogue where both educators and participants work together in order to seek transformation (Freire 37-38). This type of dialogue can only be achieved by problem-posing in an equal and fair setting. In a problem posing scenario, participants build upon stories about problems, yet do not try to solve the problem itself. Participants simply continue to ask questions about these stories to come to the core of the issues. When seeking for transformation in their environments, Freire suggests that practitioners must not forget to make the transformation relevant to participants' own cultural ways. Freire's example of literacy classes are used not only to teach local people literacy skills, but also empower them to recognize their importance in the world and in their own culture. Freire used familiar, culturally relevant words and phrases with his participants. He used these "generative words" to teach students how to read, and also give them a social awareness (Freire 39-46).

Freire's work discusses the factors that make up the ideal teacher/student relationship which encourages independence and freedom on the part of both parties. He is against what he calls the "banking approach" to education which emphasizes a curriculum where knowledge is the most important goal but does not allow students to realize their ability to change their lives while at the same time gain basic knowledge

(Freire 75). He states that teachers should engage students in a mutual quest of critical thinking that will help those who are oppressed realize their humanity (Freire 74-75). This quest of critical thinking is accomplished by gaining mutual trust on the part of both teachers and students. Teachers create an environment where they and the students can see the truth of how they relate *with* the world (Freire 74-75). This environment can only happen in a classroom where students and teachers are equal (Freire 77). Education in many arenas only serves to “indoctrinate” students to living in a world of oppression (Freire 78). Therefore teachers and students must engage in the praxis of liberation based upon action, reflection and critical analysis (Freire 79). In this scenario, problem posing education becomes the method by which students and teachers can have a cognitive dialogue towards helping the oppressed gain a political foothold.

Much like Freire, Palmer also calls for a form of education that is transformational in nature. Palmer argues against any educational framework that seeks to dominate both students and the world with knowledge. He argues that we seek knowledge only to control our world (Palmer 7-9). Palmer states education should be relational, where the teacher, students, and subject are free to learn from each other in a safe and open environment. In this type of relationship, all parties would be drawn closer together to realize their relationship with their world. After this realization, all parties would seek to harmonize themselves in the world instead of controlling it (Palmer 37). The knowledge of individuals can be transformed into something more complete through this process of mutual consensus (Palmer 94-95).

Palmer calls for equality among the participants, teachers, and the subject matter. It is only through this unity and mutual understanding of each perspective that they can seek knowledge which will transform their understanding of the world. Palmer advocates people to work together to reach that state of transformation. Any

top down approach to education prevents students from understanding reality and the world as it is. Only then can a classroom become a community of truth (Palmer 88-89).

Empowerment is seen as real connection among educators, participants, and subjects. This unique triangular relationship can help empower all parties to seek balanced relationships instead of trying to forcibly control relationships in the world. This work takes a unique look at how all parties in adult education can be empowered and transformed through deep relationships with each other. His triangular relationship of subject, teacher, and student brings a new spin to the role of adult education and education in general.

#### Transformational Learning

It also imperative that educators discuss the role of transformational learning and the part it can play in social empowerment. Transformational learning techniques and strategies are vital in helping us understand how people can be socially empowered. Mezirow wrote extensively on transformational learning. In Mezirow's transformational learning model, there are four different aspects: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 133). Participants must have some sort of experience which they must reflect upon by their own means. This experience can be characterized as a problem or dilemma that a person may have. This problem forces the person to reflect and examine themselves and their experiences. This critical reflection seeks to question the interpretation of one's experiences. Mezirow discusses several different types of critical reflection including content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. Content reflection involves thinking about an experience. Process reflection entails thinking about how to manage an experience. Lastly, premise reflection is where one reflects on the values or beliefs involved in a particular experience (Merriam, Caffarella, and

Baumgartner 145). After critical reflection, participants can engage in a form of dialogue called reflective discourse. In this discourse, participants come into a dialogue about their critical reflections. The goal of these dialogues is not to debate the relevance of the experiences that different participants have had. On the contrary, this discourse allows people to build new understanding of themselves and the subject at hand (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 134-136). Discourse can happen in a variety of forms including group discussions and one to one discussions. Finally, the last stage calls for some type of action to take place where participants act upon their new found understanding. Although this action can be individualized, it can also manifest itself in the form of social action. Mezirow expounds in Merriam's text, "when the disorienting dilemma is the result of oppressive action, the person needs to take individual or collective action against the oppressor (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 135)." Mezirow's transformative learning model can be seen as empowerment where the end product can be social action.

Taylor conducted a study looking at various theories and practices of transformational learning. Taylor's study on transformational learning also reveals a heavy emphasis on self-reflection on the part of both facilitators and students (Taylor 178). Taylor's research suggests that teachers and facilitators should be engaged in reflection to gain awareness of the *why* they teach. Taylor's data also captures the importance of relationships in transformational learning. The ability to trust those that you have dialogues with has a great impact on transformational learning. By establishing trust, participants are better able to participate in transformative dialogues with others (Taylor 179-180). In addition, Taylor looks at some practices that are most effective for transformative learning. The characteristics of these methods of teaching include devising learning experiences that are "direct, personally engaging, and stimulate reflection upon existence (Taylor 182)." Lastly, Taylor remarks on the

importance of context in which transformation takes place, which has been largely ignored. Different social contexts as well as power structures can change the effects of transformational learning (Taylor 184).

### Roles of the Adult Educator

The role of the educators in adult education is also very important. Cervero and Wilson discuss the responsibilities of adult educators as planners in developing programs in adult education. Cervero sites four major aspects that all adult educators must deal with: negotiation, power, interest, and responsibility (Cervero and Wilson 8-9). In developing these programs, there are always negotiations between three interests: the interests of the planners, the interests of the beneficiaries and the interests of a variety of other stakeholders. In this negotiation, the relationships of power are constantly being structured and restructured by the two parties. Planners are constantly trying to find ways to use power to manage their programs wisely. Using their power in political organizations, planners must try to promote a democratic planning practice that includes all the interests of the parties involved. Other parties can only be empowered if they have a voice in program planning. The responsibility of the program planner is to help empower others so that their voice can be heard in the planning process (Cervero and Wilson 10-12).

Cervero and Wilson's *Power in Practice* seeks to flesh out the role of the adult educator in the planning process further. This book is a single-volume synopsis of previous works, yet offers up new major themes of power in the practice of adult education. The questions of "who benefits" and "who should benefit" from engaging in adult education pervades this piece. The foundation of adult education is a struggle for knowledge and power. The authors of this work argue that adult educators properly act as "brokers" of knowledge and power (Cervero and Wilson 276). It is the responsibility of the adult educator to administer social justice by justly brokering

knowledge and power to those who need it. Yet allotting some power to the adult educators as well is also necessary. Yet again, it is the job of the adult educator to redistribute opportunities and benefits to those who need it.

Sork critiques the adult education framework of Cervero and Wilson, described above, with views that are contrary to the idea that planning in adult education is a negotiation between actors vying for power. Cervero has largely held that it is the job of adult educators to facilitate the redistribution of power to their beneficiaries. Who has access to the negotiation table largely determines who will have access to power in the planning process. Sork looks at certain flaws in this framework. For example, Sork suggests that a good planning framework is not just about negotiations between actors, but also focuses attention on the outside factors of context, such as politics (Sork 82-83). Sork believes that focusing on the actors alone leaves out those other contextual factors that can have an impact on program planning. Sork also comments that the focus of empowerment in project planning is often lost in the complexity of actors and interests, thereby keeping some actors away from the planning table (Sork 84-86). Oftentimes, manipulation can take place in these power negotiations by those who hold more power. Lastly, Sork questions whether all program planning should be democratic. More specifically, he questions whether having a democratic planning is indeed feasible in all contexts (Sork 88-89).

In *The Deliberative Practitioner*, John Forester talks about many issues regarding program planning and the role of the facilitator in participatory practices. This seminal piece gives information on how program planners, facilitators or any organizers should conduct themselves with the goal of reaching transformational learning through dialogue and real listening. Forester suggests listening to peoples' stories to get a real feel for what their stake is in the planning process of any program. We listen with our heads as well as our hearts in a participatory setting (Forester 129-

130). After listening, it is important to critically reflect on the stories that we have heard. Critical reflection on stories is especially important for adult educators and facilitators. Forester's notion of the mediator acting as a critical friend helps to bring varying groups closer together in the planning process. Acting as a friend creates an environment of trust. Forester believes when we are in a trusting environment we are not afraid to state how we feel about matters in a deliberative process (Forester 194-196). Forester's main theme is to create an environment where all have an equal voice and power in the participatory process of planning.

#### Participatory Education

Hailey shows that many of the NGOs in South Asia are committed to helping the rural poor achieve social empowerment through a process of listening and working together. Yet, Hailey explains that these participatory systems can also serve to reinforce current social hierarchies in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, impeding rural empowerment rather than promoting it. In this social structure, the rich and the powerful tend to dominate the poor and powerless (Hailey 94). The practice of participation in development then reinforces peoples' powerless status as opposed to empowering them. NGOs' practices in name are meant to help rural inhabitants, yet rural populations are not given any power in terms of improving their social status. Rural inhabitants tend to defer power and controls to the developmental workers because they feel developmental workers are better qualified to make decisions. This deferment of power is contrary to what NGOs would like to achieve. Educators and trainers in NGOs should use participation to empower local people, but instead local people are not given an opportunity to increase their power in society.

Wickens' article exposes yet another side to the practice of participatory education. In her article, she discusses participatory practices of NGOs as a form of control through neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is seen as the domination of

industrialized nations over third world nations via development work and foreign aid (Wickens 276). Wickens describes how neocolonialism affects literacy programs in Bangladesh, using the example to demonstrate how contemporary participatory education functions. In her work, Wickens describes how educators cooperate closely with participants to help develop functional literacy programs. These programs are designed to garner peoples' individual productivity. Participants praised the assistance of the NGOs in helping rural women to learn how to read. In addition, villagers were encouraged to transform their communities through their newfound literacy. The program let participants share some measure of control over their own learning (Wickens 284-285). However, these programs are closely tied to helping people develop literary skills in order to gain better economic opportunities (Wickens 282). Throughout the text, literacy as a means to economic expansion is a common theme as opposed to social action and empowerment. Wickens goes on to say, "Education is no longer considered a social commodity by which individual might improve their lot; rather, it is now primarily a function of economic policy (Wickens 288)."

Youngman's work, similar to Wickens' findings, discusses how adult education is a primary shaper in many political economies. Adult education is seen here as a means through which countries can look to expand economical power. However, Youngman states that using participatory practices, in some cases, also has been responsible for social and social empowerment. In addition, he contends that participatory models of adult education are simply reproducing models of inequalities in many countries (Youngman 19). Taylor also goes on to argue that emancipatory practices have been neglected. Adult education, in this case, becomes an instrument of the state serving to reinforce these models of inequality (Youngman 16). These inequalities can occur in several areas including race, ethnicity, and or gender. As stated above, there are many ways in which participatory education and empowerment

are applied and defined. How these two terms relate to the educational practices of BRAC's water sanitation program can be determined using qualitative analysis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

Practitioners in BRAC's water sanitation programs should be aware of the effectiveness of the programs in terms of participatory method and social empowerment. First, they must learn if the participatory methods they are using are actually participatory in nature. Second, they must see if the participatory methods that they use actually lead to social empowerment. One method with which insight can be gained on these topics is by using qualitative research. The qualitative methods used to gather and synthesize data for this thesis are described in this section. The first section describes the overall methodology used for data collection. Afterwards, the data set and its method of collection is described. The third section describes how the data set was analyzed for use in this thesis. The last section discusses the research limitations for this thesis.

#### Research Paradigm

Qualitative synthesis is the qualitative approach used for this research. The first part of any qualitative synthesis begins with a systematic review. A systematic review is defined as an "exhaustive search for all available evidence" on a given subject (Fisher et al. 1). This information gathered on the subject matter looks at the research question from many different perspectives including BRAC's policies, practice, and history in water sanitation programs. This collective of different perspectives on the given subject matter facilitates creating a picture of the subject. Research collected for this review was gathered from various resources including resources from electronic data bases and printed texts. This analysis is not looking for positive or negative aspects of BRAC's practice. On the contrary, the researcher is reviewing the data and looking at the participatory educational patterns related to empowerment in water sanitation programs in BRAC that each study may reveal.

After completing a systematic review of available data, all the collective qualitative and quantitative data are compiled via a qualitative synthesis. Qualitative synthesis is “a descriptive account; it means using words rather than numbers to describe the combined effects from different studies (Fisher et al. 1).” Therefore, this thesis presents a “descriptive synthesis” of other qualitative and quantitative studies.

#### Data Sources

Data for this study was collected through independent research of the literature available at Cornell University, BRAC University, and the internet. A systematic approach to data search and collection is twofold. First, available printed sources were scanned for potential information at Cornell Library as well as BRAC University. Second, academic search engines and electronic data bases via the internet were searched. The effort was made to include quality data that were as recent as possible. The search resulted in two major data bases. This search yielded a collection of field reports, quantitative analysis and data based reports from different water sanitation projects implemented by BRAC. Four qualitative and descriptive based research reports were chosen for the findings section. Descriptive reports of BRAC’s general educational models and practices were also compiled as part of this research. The criteria for selecting these resources were as follows:

- The length and breadth with which the material discusses actually educational practices in water sanitation programs implemented by BRAC.
- The credibility of the source material based on the origin of data.
- The time of the study.
- Discussion on the goals of water sanitation programs in BRAC.
- Details on the organizational practices of BRAC educators and facilitators.

- Studies that discuss on educational policy.

These criteria above were used to judge which scholarly materials would be included for analysis. All sources included in this text had to meet a least two of the given criteria listed above to warrant its inclusion in this text.

### Analysis

The next step in this process entailed examining all the selected texts to look for emerging themes. The following questions, which are drawn from the two major research questions, were used as guides when analyzing the data from these different BRAC studies.

- What does this study tell about BRAC educational practices?
- How are BRAC water sanitation programs organized?
- What is the relationship between the instructors and participants in these programs?
- How are “classes” or “forums” conducted in water sanitation programs?
- How are local populations empowered via water sanitation programs?
- What participatory methods are used in these programs?
- How do these practices and methods empower local inhabitants?

After collecting the data, it was analyzed to find whether BRAC practices are conducive to social empowerment based on the evidence suggested in its practice, rhetoric, and educational goals.

## Limitations

The data for this research is largely based on previous case studies of BRAC's water sanitation programs to shed light on BRAC's participatory practices and procedures. This paper is not based on any original field research due to limitations in time. Therefore, this study analyzed previous case studies of water sanitation programs to gauge BRAC's overall practice and its role in empowerment.

One of the flaws in the research material is the lack of third party case studies on BRAC's organizational practices. There is a wealth of material published by BRAC detailing rural development programs and evaluations of those programs but there seems to be very little research on BRAC's rural development practices by those not associated with BRAC. The lack of outside evaluations calls into question the reliability of the accounts that are given by BRAC officers on the success and failures of different program. More research is needed on BRAC's educational practices by other parties to discover if BRAC's practices are truly empowering local villagers.

The availability of resources is also a major constraint in this research. There is a great deal of information available on the problems of water sanitation in Bangladesh. However, there are very few resources which discuss the practices with which these water issues are taught. Therefore, finding information on this specific subject is quite a challenge. In order to understand water issues in Bangladesh, one must first understand the context in which these problems take place.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTEXT

This section details the context in which BRAC has to administer its water sanitation programs. The first section looks at Bangladesh from the broader context of South Asia, especially its similarities with its neighboring country of India in terms of water sanitation. The second section looks at the sources of water pollution and contamination in Bangladesh. In the last section, the cultural issues that are prevalent in development work in Bangladesh are revealed.

#### Context of Bangladesh within South Asia

The geographic area of South Asia consists of several countries including Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Of these countries, India and Bangladesh share several river systems including the Brahmaputra, Ganges, and the Meghna. India and Bangladesh occupy similar space being that India almost completely surrounds Bangladesh's borders. Both countries share in part, a rich culture and history. The ancient region of Bengal was comprised of the land area in both India and Bangladesh surrounding the delta of the three major rivers discussed above (Husain 66-67). The entire region shared a distinct culture in part shaped by these large river systems. Since ancient times, villages and cities have been situated near the banks of these rivers (Husain 73-75). Much like today, ancient Bengalis were dependent on the rivers for agriculture and fishing (Husain 73). Unfortunately, India and Bangladesh today both suffer from poor water system management in several different areas including flood management and water sanitation.

Similar to Bangladesh, India has encountered many problems with water sanitation and water management. For example, it was found in some areas in India that tube wells used for obtaining clean drinking water had been over used and had thus drained their water tables (Conway 252). Bangladesh would also suffer from this

problem as well. The water tables were not given sufficient time to recoup their losses of water causing aquifers to dry up and an overall reduction in water levels in river to go down (Black 6). In India, this trend started to take place in the 1960's when the demand for water for both human consumption and farming activities grew. In response, the Indian Ministry of Rural Development started the building of tube wells and hand pumps all over India. By the year of 1994, the Ministry of Rural Development stated that over 95% of India's rural people had access to clean water. Unfortunately, the quality of the water deteriorated with the increased depletion of the water table. One such problem was the arsenic found in drinking water in West Bengal, India. Arsenic would also become a severe program in Bangladesh during the same period of time. Several tube wells in West Bengal were found to contain arsenic. "In 1997, WHO declared that arsenic poisoning was a major public health problem in the region, with eight districts and 13 million people at risk (Black 197)." Scientists believe that the arsenic started to occur naturally in the soil as the nutrients of the soil were slowly depleted by over usage (Black 197). It is important to understand that these problems are not endemic to India alone. Bangladesh also has similar problems in water sanitation as described in the following pages.

#### Sources of Water Contamination in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is seemingly teeming with an abundance of water. It is located on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. These three rivers together, along with tributaries and other small rivers, make up as much as 80% of Bangladesh's area (Hofner and Messerli14). This country is responsible for discharging and draining the massive amounts of water that originates from the Indian water basin (Hofner and Messerli 110). It is hard to believe that a country with such a large quantity of water could have such difficulty acquiring safe and healthy drinking water for its citizens. Unfortunately, providing sanitary water for the people of

Bangladesh has become a critical matter for the government of Bangladesh. Pollutants from various sources, such as arsenic and agricultural runoff, have polluted drinking water, especially in rural regions of Bangladesh.

The water management systems of Bangladesh have been a topic of great discussion for years. Floods, drought, water for agriculture, and drinking water have all been major concerns for the Bangladeshi government and NGOs. Water sanitation has also been a growing concern for Bangladesh for many years. One of the most critical events concerning water sanitation over recent years has been the emergence of arsenic in Bangladesh's groundwater. Over 97% of Bangladesh's groundwater is used for drinking. This water is accessed through a system of tube wells which extracts water from underground aquifers (Ahmed 49). Tube wells are the primary source of drinkable water for rural inhabitants in village areas because often surface water is far too polluted for human consumption (Hoque BA et al. 488). In the late 1980's and early 1990's, traces of arsenic were found in the local water supply of some areas in Bangladesh. In one study, over 42 districts were found to have arsenic in their water supply exceeding the World Health Organizations limit of 50ug/L (Chowdhury et al. 393). This was by far one of the worst cases of arsenic pollution to take place anywhere in recent history (Huda 112). It is surmised that the depletion of the underground aquifer has led to a natural occurrence of arsenic in the water supply (Ahmad 12). Groundwater contaminated with arsenic began to have a detrimental effect on the health of villagers in Bangladesh. Arsenic poisoning has been linked to the following health issues: skin cancer, skin lesions, melanosis, keratosis, hypertension and an increased possibility of developing other forms of cancer. (Hoque BA et al. 488)(Chowdhury et al. 395-396).

Bangladesh also suffers from a high occurrence of water-related disease stemming from the use of polluted surface water resources. Diarrhea is one of the

major water-borne diseases in Bangladesh. Diarrhea is responsible for about 11% of the deaths per year in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has a wealth of surface water resources, yet much of this water is undrinkable because it is polluted with fecal matter and other materials (Hoque BA et al. 488). This type of pollution is caused by the lack of sanitary hygiene in many areas. Some villages do not have access to sanitary latrines that can lead to fecal waste running off into precious water resources. The lack of sanitary facilities is one of the major causes of the spread of water borne diseases in village areas.

Yet another source of water pollution in Bangladesh comes from agricultural inputs such as fertilizers. After the Green Revolution in the early 1970's, Bangladesh along with other South Asian countries began to use chemical fertilizers to help increase agricultural yields and production. Unfortunately, the excess runoff from the usage of fertilizers can seep into the surface water supply as well as ground water. Huda describes the types of pollution that plague Bangladesh as follows: "Bangladesh has to bear the brunt of upstream pollution in the form of sediment load, industrial effluents, agro-chemicals, and domestic wastes that pass through her river network (Huda 118)." Chemical pollutants from agriculture as well as chemicals from industry continue to pollute Bangladesh's water supply. The examples of water pollution described here are but just a few examples of the challenges that are faced by both rural populations and NGOs. Later in this text, we will look at the ways in which BRAC and some other NGOs combat the problem of water sanitation in rural communities.

### Cultural Challenges for NGOs in Bangladesh

All NGOs in Bangladesh, including BRAC, face many challenges when trying to implement different community programs. The following section details some of the major cultural constraints that NGOs have to mitigate in order to be effective in

any rural community. This section provides examples from other water sanitation programs in Bangladesh that display clearly the cultural challenges working in rural Bangladesh.

NGOs have the difficult task of implementing development programs in rural areas. It can be very difficult to reconcile the goals of a NGO program and the culture and the traditions of village life (Pradhan and Meinzen-Dick 53). One of the chief complaints about NGOs is that they often try to supplant local water management systems of rural areas. Villages have been dealing with issues of water for time immemorial. Yet, some NGOs do not take into account the initiatives of local people and use their own plans to aid community development without consulting villagers. Dwyne observes that, “these organizations have externally defined functions and organizational structures, which are generally defined without consulting people at the local level on whether they conform with their own organizational practices (Dwyne 265).” Here, Dwyne expresses the importance of respecting a community’s own ideas and initiatives in water management programs. It is important that NGOs are aware of the complexity of water management systems in Bangladeshi villages. Local communities almost always have set traditions and laws that govern their use of water in the village (Huda 124). In order to be effective, NGOs must have knowledge of and respect the cultural beliefs of the village. However, when traditions are misinterpreted or ignored, the results can be harmful.

One study from a village in Bangladesh helps explain the complexity of the laws and values that govern water usage. In an effort to provide quality drinking water to local residents, UNICEF helped to provide new tube wells for local inhabitants. In order to pay for these tube wells, the beneficiaries of the tube well in the community had to share the burden of cost for these wells. While most of the families contributed in this village, one family usually provided most of the payment

for the well. As a result of their burden, the tube well was placed on the land of the family who paid the most for the tube well. This family was also charged with the responsibility of taking care of the tube well. Although the other villagers had rights to use the tube well, the family who bought the well held preferential rights to the water and decisions concerning its usage (Pradhan and Meinzen-Dick 53). This example is just one illustration of how cultural norms and rules for water usage affect NGO water sanitation programs. In this case, NGOs are providing new technologies for safe drinking water, but local norms still dictate who has the rights to water and when. These norms can cause possible problems with NGOs because it is their duty to ensure water equity for all participants in the village. But there are many more layers to the governance of water that often coexist with the regulations previously stated.

Religion also plays a role in determining which people have access to water and when. The largest religious population in Bangladesh is Islam. The other religions consist of Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. All have different perspectives on water rights (Pradhan 48-50). For example, Muslims are obligated to give water to any guest who comes to their home. On the other hand, the Hindu caste system determines who has the predominant right over the access to water. Generally, those who are from a lower caste have least rights to the access to water while those of a higher caste generally have more access to water in certain contexts. These religious rules about water coincide with local village laws as well as possible regulations imposed by NGOs (Pradhan and Meinzen-Dick 59-60). Pradhan writes, “Here, project regulations specifying a group of users, Muslim norms of not denying drinking water, and Hindu notions of caste purity and water used coexist with additional local notions that children should not draw water because they do not take proper care of the pump. Which law or regulation is used in a specific situation and for particular persons determines who will have rights, and which law is to be used is subject to

negotiation and contestation (Pradhan and Meinzen-Dick 53-54).” These examples help explain the complex environment in which most NGOs most work. Therefore, within the confines of the cultural context, NGOs must work in conjunction with local communities in order to ensure equity in water usage for everyone within the limits of the cultural context.

Women’s participation in water management and water sanitation is also a very important part of rural development. Women in rural Bangladesh are typically left out of decision making when it comes to water management even though they play a major role in the management of water resources at home and in the health of their individual families (Huda 125). In fact, women in rural villages are often marginalized because of their lower social status in comparison to men. Tradition and culture dictate that men handle matters such as water management and water sanitation. Agencies such as the World Bank have called for the advancement of women and their role in water management in Bangladesh (Huda 125). Women have access to knowledge about water in their area and are usually responsible for collecting water for drinking purposes. They also, as noted above, control the overall sanitary condition of their household (Ahmad 19-20). NGOs have recognized that including women in water sanitation programs is paramount in increasing awareness about sanitation issues. Pradhan comments on this issue: “Many drinking water programmes have made specific provisions for including women in organizations as caretakers of pumps or local infrastructure, in part because of donor pressures to include women, and in part because women are felt to have the greatest stake in the facilities and thus be the most diligent managers (Pradhan and Meinzen-Dick 55).” It is with this in mind that BRAC has tried to get village women involved in many of their rural development programs in order to empower women (Khan 27). How these

rural development programs are designed and administered is discussed in the following section.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESEARCH DATA

The data for BRAC's teaching and organizational methods in water sanitation programs are presented in this section. This information is presented in several sections. The first section of the findings discusses the framework that BRAC uses for program development. The second section describes BRAC's methods and practices for building trust in their programs. The third section explores four different case studies from BRAC's water sanitation projects from Bangladesh. The methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of each of these programs are detailed in the fourth section. Finally, an analysis of this data is embedded through the research data section and the conclusion section.

#### Framework for Program Development

In order to gain a clear understanding of BRAC's practices, it is necessary to look at the training modules that BRAC incorporates in its environmental practices. These training modules of BRAC lay out clearly the specific goals of BRAC's development workers. The following presents the components and objectives for BRAC's environmental educational programs.

Environmental education is directly related to environmental improvement and it is therefore necessary to urgently move towards developing environmental education programs. These programs should incorporate the following:

- Importance of mobilization and empowerment
- Importance of seeking cooperation and involvement with key actors
- Refraining from activities which adversely affect the environment
- Comprehension of what the environment is and the reasons for preserving and protecting it
- A concern for all material and concepts which constitute environment
- Taking positive steps to protect and preserve the environment (Akter et al. 48-49)

BRAC program planners use these objectives as the basis for the development of their programs components for environmental programs. However, these objectives are not well defined in this text. It is important that program objectives should be well defined and practical (Caffarella 160-161). For example, words such as empowerment and mobilization in this section are not clearly defined. In addition, it is difficult to understand whether these objectives are indeed achievable (Caffarella 160-161). In fact, it is possible that these goals may not be goals at all but rather simply ideals that BRAC is aspiring to achieve through their programs. This fact might explain why these objectives are not well defined. The next model shows the components of BRAC's environmental programs in conjunction with the sub-section of BRAC known as ERG (Economic Research Group). BRAC works in cooperation with this group to develop training modules for environmental programs that include health and water sanitation programs. The components are as follows:

- ❖ Research
  - Conduct environmental research related to BRAC's programs activities
  - New approaches to environmental sustainability
- ❖ Program Management
  - Incorporate environmental dimensions in ongoing BRAC programs
  - Develop Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) Guidelines/Checklist specific to BRAC programs and conduct IEE
  - Implement new environmental programs
- ❖ Monitoring and Evaluation
  - Monitor and evaluate impacts of BRAC's program activities
  - Develop indicator/monitoring criteria for environmental improvement
  - Develop internal standard when needed
- ❖ Training
  - Develop environmental training materials for BRAC staff and beneficiaries
  - Conduct training for trainers
- ❖ Communication
  - Establish environmental resources center
  - Establish a network between the ERG and environmental organizations
  - Establish a network between the ERG and other BRAC Programs/Division (Akter et al. 53-54)

This model provides the organizational components of one program in BRAC's environmental development sector. In this section, the intended outcome for each component is clearly defined. This example given above shows how BRAC, along with many other NGO's, works to organize their environmental and water sanitation programs. This model lays the groundwork for how BRAC conducts its development programs. Using these tenets as a framework, BRAC goes into different communities in rural Bangladesh to educate rural inhabitants as well as improve the environment of Bangladesh. The discussion moves now to a description of BRAC's methods and practices of education in the field of development work.

#### Methods and Practices

Trust within a small rural community is a very important aspect of the culture of Bangladesh. In order for a participatory program to be effective, trust must be built between the local community and NGO workers. NGOs throughout South Asia cite gaining trust in target areas as key to their success in development. NGOs, especially in South Asia, spend a considerable amount of time building a rapport with local people. Field workers go into the field to develop networks and connection with the local inhabitants. NGO workers develop personal ties with local inhabitants by "listening and learning" from the experiences of villagers. This approach to community development has its foundation in the cultural landscape of South Asia (Hailey 89-92). Rural communities, like the culture of most of the area in South Asia are collective in their nature (Hailey 96). Familial ties and friendships are reinforced by this collectivity, especially in village areas. This collective nature is reflected in how NGOs in South Asia approach community development. Close personal ties are developed between development workers and residents of the local community. Therefore, the development of informal relationships overrides the need to develop professional ties (Hailey 93).

BRAC's main tenet for developmental work has always been gaining the trust of the communities within which they work. Program planners and educators work with the community to achieve goals of development on the village level. BRAC field workers listen and learn from the experiences of villagers in order to create programs that will benefit local people. This emphasis on personal contact with the people is important to BRAC's success in community development. In one example of BRAC's commitment to one to one interaction with village beneficiaries, field workers were given motorcycles so that they could meet and talk with more people in other villages (Hailey 92). In this sense, the goal is that villagers become active participants with BRAC field officers to meet developmental goals. Indeed the very best ideas for program development come from the villagers themselves (Ahmed and French 36). In a study on BRAC's seven keys to success, Ahmed and French cite two important factors that lead to successful dialogue. "First, a relationship of trust is necessary to encourage open, honest communication. BRAC built such trust by establishing itself as a village institution running effective and helpful programs and reinforced this trust through responsiveness to comments. Second, listening to the people entails more than simple attention to individual conversations and anecdotes. Such personal communication is certainly necessary and often provides the first inspiration for new projects or reforms, but it must be complemented by thorough, systematized information-gathering (Ahmed and French 37)." This process of listening and learning helps to build trust between the field workers and the villagers.

The field workers' proximity to where they work also helps to garner trust. Often times BRAC field officers live in these villages. In this way, field workers are really able to live and work with the people they are trying to help. Field workers also maintain the cultural traditions of the village in their own lives as well. Field officers and villagers can easily share ideas by living, working, and even eating together. Such

an arrangement helps to generate solidarity and ideas for development. From these arrangements, BRAC field workers can ask questions and gain knowledge important to community development. For example, field workers can inquire about what problems are most important to the community and how these problems are traditionally solved in the context of the rural community. This type of dialogue is very important in BRAC's participatory process and it allows workers to understand what cultural implications can affect a given program. Workers can truly understand the complex dynamics of the village life, such as local and religious practices, which aids them in developing programs that are suited to the various needs of the community. (Rodhe 4-6).

Education, training, and development are also important aspects to BRAC's success in the field of health and water sanitation. BRAC trains local villagers so that they can pass on their knowledge to other villagers in the community. These villagers' educational background vary from having very little education to having completed up to nine years of schooling (Ahmed and French 38). With the villagers' educational backgrounds in mind, BRAC trains local villagers using a variety of different methods to overcome trainees' lack of education in the field of development. BRAC trainers engage new trainees in fifteen-day educational training sessions with additional refresher courses provided each month (Ahmed and French 38). These methods emphasize BRAC's commitment to developing personal relationships with the beneficiaries of their work. BRAC uses teaching methods such as story-telling, question and answer sessions, and active modeling to train villagers. Knowledge and skills are learned while on the job. Villagers learn from the experiences of program officers as well as the experiences of other villagers. For instance, this model is used to help train villagers to become village health workers who in turn provide health services to their fellow community members (Rodhe 15-16).

BRAC also recognizes the benefits of interactive educational practices in local villages. In one program, BRAC field workers went out into the field to train village mothers how to administer oral rehydration therapies to their children. They used pictures to help illustrate how to mix and prepare the therapy. BRAC field officers used these pictures as a point of discussion, engaging mothers in interactive discussions about the topic. The use of pictures combined with interactive discussion helped to engage these mothers in the learning process (Rodhe 16). In another example, when teaching village populations about the dangers of arsenic, organizations such as BRAC use cards, games, and posters to show ways to mitigate the arsenic problem (Hanchett et al. 394).

One of the important aspects used in BRAC training programs is their Functional Education system. The course is usually taught in conjunction with micro-credit programs. BRAC's model for development integrates "credit provision, social programs, and group organization (Khandker 12)." The Functional Education Systems course for which all of the Village Organizations must participate even includes the development programs in water sanitation, as well as the other programs. Twenty-five adults are engaged in a class which is based on the model of Paulo Freire (Bhuiya et al. 7). This course is important in developing consciousness that will help beneficiaries understand the issues that impede their development both socially and economically. Bhuiya refers to functional education, stating, "It plays a crucial role in conscientizing the target people and unlocking their hidden potential to tackle the problems they encounter every day (Bhuiya et al. 7)." Khandker also comments that "One of the basic objectives of functional education is to increase the members' social awareness and to motivate them to use their abilities through an environment of mutual and self help. The functional education course consists of two parts: social awareness and literacy (Khandker 15)." Although this educational program is not

directly related to water sanitation, it is an important part of BRAC's educational process which all Village Organization participants, that is the BRAC beneficiaries must participate in.

BRAC's educational practices, as discussed above, focus on the importance of the interaction of local people and BRAC field workers. It is through this process that BRAC empowers beneficiaries to work towards sustainable development. BRAC literature reiterates its commitment to active interaction with its beneficiaries in its reports, case studies and training modules. One such quote emphasizes, "active participation of local people in the entire project cycle, i.e. program identification. Study appraisal, planning and implementation should be employed as the way to achieving long term sustainability. People's participation should be developed as a bottom-up planning places is which real people are fully involved in shaping their own future, rather than being objects in a top-down planning approach (Akter et al. 47)." The next section presents actual cases studies from BRAC's water sanitation programs.

#### Organizational Practices from the Field

This section of the research data describes in detail various case studies from BRAC's water sanitation programs. The first, second, and third case studies come from the sub-district of Matlab in the Chandpur district of Bangladesh (Jakiriya et al. 319-321). The first case study discusses educational meetings designed to build awareness on various topics including water sanitation issues. The second case studies details the practices involved in conducting health forums. In the third case a study is presented on arsenic program. The last case study describes the OTEP project for prevention of diarrhea.

## Organizing Local Villages

Organizing the local villagers is important in BRAC's community development programs. It begins with a three pronged approach to development by providing three type of interventions which include "functional education, skill development training, and credit to rural poor (Khandher 12)." For example, BRAC started organizing programs in Matlab in the early 1990's to assist villagers in everything from microfinance to law and hygiene. Programs are designed to assist villagers in Matlab in these fields; institution building including functional education and training, credit operation, and support service programs. BRAC's work in Matlab focuses on education and gives a very good example of how BRAC organizes a water sanitation program. First, it is necessary to understand how the program in Matlab was organized.

One of BRAC's first priorities was to get villagers organized so that they could be included in their own rural development process. Rural villagers were organized into different village organizations through BRAC's Rural Development Program (Biswas and Ahmed 2). Area offices of BRAC then proceeded to send program officers to different villages in order to assess the needs of the villagers. The PO (Program Organizer) then asks villagers about particular populations in their area, all of which are rural in nature. After some discussion, these village groups are encouraged to organize what is known as a Village Organization (VO). Members of the VO are encouraged to start a savings program, depositing at least 2 Taka per week. The VO group members are then organized into elected members and encouraged to take part in BRAC's credit programs. Establishing credit programs and income generating programs seem to be the first priority in the VO. All participants in BRAC's VOs are women. The VOs can consist of up to 30-40 members within each VO (BRAC Centre 1) (Khan 28) (Mahbub et al. 12). It is through these VO programs

that BRAC seeks to empower women through integrated development programs that combine economic programs and awareness building programs (Khan 27).

As part of the VOs, village participants have two types of educational training programs that are made available to them. These training programs have the goal of eliminating poverty as well as empowering local participants through a transfer of knowledge and skill. One type of training is human resource development. Human resource development involves developing leaders in the community, raising important issues that affect the environment and the community and planning village projects. The second type of training is occupational skills development. This type of training helps village participants to develop skills in income generation (Mahbub et al. 12-13).

#### Case Study One: Issue-Based Meetings

The first case study discussed is the case on the effectiveness of meeting based education sessions in ten village organizations of Matlab in Bangladesh. In this study, researchers were collecting data on how these educational sessions were implemented and organized. There are two types of meetings described in the documents relating to BRAC's work in Matlab concerning water sanitation. The first type of meeting is known as the "issue based meeting" or "gram shava." In this meeting, male program assistants (PA) facilitate discussion between members of the village organization members; though it is noted that often the program organizers must introduce the topic under discussion. Topics in this type of meeting range from financial to legal issues. Sometimes issues of hygiene and latrine usage were brought up, although many of these questions were saved for the separate "health forum" meeting. All members of the VO were encouraged to attend these meetings. At this meeting, the VO members' husbands were allowed to attend as well (Khan 23-33).

The PA first takes a roll call to make sure that all involved VO members are present for the meeting. According to the text, the PA tried to encourage the participants to bring up issues of concerns. All subjects are welcome except topics on microfinance. It is not clear from this particular study as to why microfinance was not allowed as a topic for discussion. Yet, many times, participants questioned the PA about microcredit issues. The PA had to remind the participants that the meeting was not for the purpose of discussing microcredit. PAs also reminded participants that the meeting was for them and he only wanted to play the role of the facilitator. However, the PA found that the meeting had to be conducted in lecture style due to a lack of participation. Participants seemed more interested on what the PA had to say on certain issues. The PA finally did entertain some questions about microfinance. Only those who were leading members of the VO would actually engage the PA, most of whom would sit in the front row of the meeting (Khan 31-33).

#### Case Study Two: Health forums

The other type of meeting established by BRAC was the “health forum” meeting. The data gathered for this study came from the same ten village organizations as in the previous case study. This meeting raised issues regarding water sanitation, health and nutrition. What made this type of meeting different was that it was for women only. In this example, BRAC reveals its commitment to empowering women and increasing their role in decision making as it pertains to water sanitation. These educational sessions dealing with health topics took place in bi-monthly meetings with about 20 to 25 village members present at each meeting. During the health forum, women also worked on things from home, such as laundry. In addition, women moved in out of the session due to the amount of work they had to complete on that particular day. It was difficult for the PO to conduct the meetings when the participants were doing work during the meetings and coming and going as

well. These meetings were conducted, as in Case One, in a lecture format; although discussion in the meeting was encouraged it was difficult to encourage participation by all members in the group. These “health forums” were conducted by female program assistants with the goal of raising health consciousness among the villagers of Matlab. For example, during village organization meetings, the health benefits of latrine usage and procuring safe drinking water were discussed. (Khan 36-39).

BRAC was also involved in other side projects to benefit the villages of Matlab in the area of water sanitation. With the help of loans from BRAC’s Rural Development Program, members of the village organization were able to create small plants for making latrines. Local community-based health workers also made visits to households and assist in water sanitation awareness (Biswas and Ahmed 3-4).

#### Case Study Three: Arsenic Program

BRAC has also been active in the villages of Matlab by establishing programs that help to educate villagers about the dangers of arsenic poisoning in ground water. This case study was based on information gathered from 142 different villages in the Matlab sub-district (Jakariya et al. 321). In this example, BRAC worked in conjunction with the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research (ICDDR) to tackle the arsenic problem in Matlab. The arsenic problem was mitigated by testing tube wells for arsenic and identifying and treating those poisoned by arsenic as well as providing safe alternative drinking water for local residents. One of the most important aspects of this particular project was creating awareness among local people about the dangers of arsenic in their water supply. Development workers wanted to convey two major points to the local residents. First, they wanted people to realize the danger of arsenic. Second, they wanted to show how villagers can obtain safe and drinkable water. These two points were conveyed in several different ways. Theatre staging, videos, workshops, and meetings were all used to education people about

arsenic (Jakariya et al. 319-322). After this program was conducted researchers conducted their initial research on the arsenic and held focus groups with local participants to reveal the options they would have available to them to obtain safe drinking water. In these focus groups, participants were made aware of the potential costs and benefits of each type of filtration (Jakariya et al. 328). The focus groups determined what kind of filtering system the villagers would be most comfortable using. The study presents the results of the focus groups. It was determined that villagers preferred pond sand filters for water filtration. Many of the villagers began to use this filter and other types of filters (Jakariya et al. 327-329). However, very little is written on how these focus groups on filtration systems were actually conducted with local people.

#### Case Study Four: OTEP project

Another major program that BRAC implemented on a much larger scale is the Oral Therapy Extension Program (OTEP). This program was implemented throughout many villages throughout Bangladesh. Although the OTEP program is not essentially a water sanitation program, it still addresses treating diarrhea that is still very much a water-borne disease. The “OTEP” program started in the late 1970’s. The goal of this program was to teach rural inhabitants (namely mothers) how to effectively treat diarrhea in young children. This training not only reduced the amount of deaths caused by diarrhea, but served to empower local women to act independently when their child is sick instead of seeking outside help. By 1979, BRAC began to lay the foundation for the OTEP program. After thorough research, it became clear to the organizers of BRAC that a grassroots education program would be necessary to educate women on how to cure diarrhea (Ahmed and French 37). To that end, BRAC began to teach rural mothers how to make their own homemade remedies to treat diarrhea.

BRAC sent female representatives to individual homes in village areas to teach women how to recognize the signs of diarrhea, and also treat it with the use of household goods and material consisting of three main items: table salt, unrefined brown sugar, and water (Chowdhury 59). These representatives went over points on identifying and treating diarrhea. Then they physically demonstrated to the mothers how to mix and administer the treatment using these items to village mothers. These teaching sessions only lasted about 30 minutes and then the BRAC representative moved on to the next household. BRAC officials then visited these houses randomly and “tested” the beneficiaries’ knowledge of homemade diarrhea treatment to gauge the effectiveness of the program. BRAC officials made certain that the women were properly administering the remedy by making sure that the women followed ten different steps. Completion of these different steps demonstrated a woman’s competency to administer the oral rehydration solution. BRAC officials also facilitated meetings with other health representatives in the village, such as local village doctors, to make them aware of the alternative diarrhea treatments. Additionally, programs were taught in village schools (Zaman and Karim 79-90). Over 13 million women have been trained how to treat diarrhea in villages throughout Bangladesh through this program (Zaman and Karim 65-68).

BRAC of course has problems and challenges implementing its programs just like many other NGO around the world. For example in the first and second case studies, meetings had to be cancelled often due to natural disasters or political issues. Sometimes all the members would not show up at the meetings because of work they had to take care of in their homes (Khan 42-43). Drawbacks such as these are common when working in rural areas and BRAC engages in constant evaluation of their programs, as noted earlier in the case of the OTEP project, in order to develop the effectiveness of their programs.

## Evaluation of Field Studies

In all the projects discussed above, BRAC researchers and workers were the main evaluators. In the first two case studies, researchers from BRAC used three different methods to evaluate the effectiveness of their health forums and gram shavas. First, they met with ten different VOs in Matlab. These researchers conducted group discussions with each of the VOs to gain insight on meeting procedures. In addition, they met with BRAC staffs whom were involved in facilitating these meetings. Evaluators engaged in dialogue with these facilitators to gain more information on how classes and meetings were conducted in Matlab. Lastly, the researchers acted as participant observers in the meetings in order to collect data for their research (Khan 29).

The arsenic program in Matlab was also conducted and evaluated by BRAC researchers. In this study, a selection of water filters were distributed throughout the area of Matlab to find which instrument would be best suited for their community, taking into account, “community acceptability, technical viability, and financial viability (Jakariya et al. 319).” No clear analysis is given as it pertains to educating local populations on safe water options. However, this study does acknowledge the difficulty of convincing local people to use safe ground water as opposed to polluted surface water (Jakariya et al. 328-329). Yet, there appears to be no other studies available in terms of how this particular study was evaluated.

In addition, the OTEP program has also been evaluated and reevaluated throughout the years by BRAC researchers and program officers, with changes made in the program as a result of these evaluations. Since its inception, the OTEP program has used several methods to evaluate and upgrade its program’s methodology. The effectiveness of the OTEP program is checked by a group known as the reinforcement team. These teams visited random houses, checking how well local women

remembered the points for making the home remedy. These teams also sampled some of participants' homemade solution to check for quality. In addition, teams surveyed participants in order to gain information on usage patterns of the homemade remedy among participants (Zaman and Karim 82-83).

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to determine if practices used as a part of BRAC's water sanitation programs are participatory and to gauge whether these practices help participants achieve any type of social empowerment. A qualitative synthesis of available data on BRAC's participatory practices and water sanitation cases was conducted to shed some light on these research questions. The data gathered for this thesis can hopefully provide insight on how educators and practitioners can improve their programs. These insights are discussed in this section. The first part of this section provides analysis, conclusions, and discussions on the data presented in this thesis. The last section detail implications for future research and practice.

#### Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

The data clearly demonstrates a strong dedication to participation through mutual trust and respect. Organizers at BRAC do indeed spend a great deal of time listening to villager participants to gauge their needs and act accordingly to those needs. BRAC's focus on relationships is similar to Taylor's research on building trusting relationships which bring about transformational learning (Taylor 179-180). BRAC emphasizes the needs for both organizers and participants to work together in order to learn and grow together to form new ideas. Creating an environment of mutual trust should be conducive to producing some type of transformational learning experience for both parties. This environment of mutual trust, however, seems to be the ideal picture that BRAC represents in its literature. Yet, how close is this picture to the actual reality of participatory education towards social empowerment?

Another problem is the lack of detail that is presented about BRAC's actual educational practices. Before VO members participate in any type of meetings, they must first go through the Functional Education System. This system discusses how it

uses a Freire model in order to teach participants. However, very little detail is given on what the actual set up of such a class is like and if the participants actually follow the process of building a critical consciousness as espoused by Freire (Freire 29). The same problem was found in the study of the arsenic program in Matlab. As shown above, little is divulged about the actual practice of organizers in educating the poor. This study did not go into detail as to the methods used for educating local villagers on water sanitation and filter usage. Future research needs to focus on the actual procedures used for educating beneficiaries.

From the data compiled above, one could surmise that BRAC has done all that is necessary to create an environment for participatory education through trust and respect. As in the case of the arsenic program in Matlab, many types of educational practices and tools such as videos are used to educate the poor. In the example of health forums and gram shavas, participants in the VO are brought together to discuss various health and water sanitation issues. It seems that BRAC has taken all the steps necessary to create a participatory environment. However, this participatory environment can be misleading. When we look at the actual case studies from Matlab, we find that PAs strive to form participatory classes but fail to do so. The PA tries to create a space for dialogue but cannot get participants to buy into the structure of the forum. This failure is not completely the fault of BRAC organizers. As is shown in the data set, participants did not always want to participate or were preoccupied with other household tasks. This problem is present in the health forums and the gram shavas.

This example shows an attempt to create a space for some dialogue and mutual understanding of people's problems. It seems as though organizers made an effort to create an environment where beneficiaries are given a measure of control over topics discussed. The kind of equality between teacher and students as Freire mentions

(Freire 77) seems to be lacking, as the voice of the facilitators tend to dominate. Here, villagers are not given the freedom to tell their individual stories about these issues. They are not allowed to build upon their stories, as Freire suggests, in a collective manner in order to gain a clear understanding, for example, of their water sanitation problems (Freire 37-38). Therefore, participants are not allowed to realize their collective potential in these gram shavas and health forums.

The reality may be that, given the context within which they work, BRAC field workers, in this case PAs, are doing the best they can with the resources that they have. It is also quite possible that PAs, along with other BRAC workers, see their work as just their job. In addition, it seems that they try their best to provide good participatory programs. Yet, at the end of the day, they may be more concerned about doing their job and earning money than actually empowering their beneficiaries.

The Functional Education System that BRAC implements are also based on the Freire's model of creating an environment where the poor can realize their power to control their own environment. Little information is revealed on how this Functional Education relates to Freire's models of empowerment. Nothing is discussed about Freire's praxis of liberation (action, reflection, critical analysis) that could easily assist those who are oppressed gain social empowerment (Freire 79). The empowerment that is taught in these Functional Education programs may be occurring yet in a different form. It seems that this type of empowerment is geared toward income generation and microcredit rather than social empowerment. Though participants are being economically empowered, the social empowerment part of the process seems to be left out. A recent study by BRAC details this focus on economic empowerment versus social empowerment in greater detail (Hadi 332).

An evaluative study of BRAC's participatory methods yielded information on the progress that BRAC has made in its development programs. This study was

conducted in over 70 villages in 10 different regions within in Bangladesh on several different water sanitation programs conducted by NGOs including BRAC (Hadi 333). The results of the study revealed several different factors in BRAC and other NGOs' participatory models used in water sanitation programs. The study found that the use of sanitary latrines by participants varied widely depending on socioeconomic status (Hadi 334). Typically those who had more education and higher familial income tended to engage in sanitary behavior. Yet latrine usage by rural inhabitants who participated in development programs were significantly higher than these who did not participate in development programs (Hadi 334). Unfortunately, the poorest of the poor are not able to participate in BRAC or other NGO programs for various different reasons (Hadi 334). For example, it was said that the poorest of the poor were viewed as less able to run income generating programs than other rural participants (Hadi 334). The research also showed that participants involved in credit programs such as BRAC's bought more sanitary latrines than those who were not involved in the credit programs (Hadi 335-336). The study concludes that microcredit programs play a significant role in improving rural water sanitation (Hadi 336). Those who participated in microfinance saw a significant change in their sanitation practices as opposed to those who do not engage in microfinance. It seems that those who change sanitation practices are those who participate in microfinance. Yet, this focus on economic empowerment through microcredit seems to neglect social empowerment of rural beneficiaries. There seems to be no evidence of empowerment to increase the political power of participants.

The most successful modes of education discussed here had to be BRAC's OTEP project. Over the past twenty years, BRAC has cut in half the infant mortality rate of areas it has worked in Bangladesh through the OTEP program (Rodhe 27). This project, described earlier, relied on short one to one interactions with village

women, showing them how to mix homemade saline with household items. Again, in this educational process, skills were passed on that gave participants greater control over their environment in the field of disease control. However, whether these practices gained participants any kind of social empowerment in terms of other collective movements cannot be determined.

The lingering question though is whether BRAC is really “empowering” the people whom they serve. This question that is key to scholars in the fields of education and community development who are concerned with the use of participation in development. When scholars examine the practices that are described in the previous pages, do they see empowerment or do they observe something different? Are the participatory methods of BRAC really designed to empower their beneficiaries? There are arguments that would suggest that they are in fact not empowering the local people through their education and training programs. Authors such as Hailey comments that BRAC’s program hierarchy and participatory structure simply reinforces the current social hierarchal structure in Bangladesh where those who are on a lower social standing defer power to those in higher social standing. This deferment solidifies the NGOs workers’ overall control over the developmental situation of village communities. Hailey also believes that some NGOs take advantage of the trust they gain from the community and use it to control the decision making process of the community (Hailey 97).

Cooke and Kothari agree with Hailey’s statements. They believe that beneath the guise of social empowerment and participation is a rigid power structure where the NGOs are still very much in power. Cooke and Kothari also suggest that underneath the rhetoric of participatory process lies extreme inequality between the beneficiaries and the NGO workers. It is for this reason that the two authors’ coin participatory practices as the “new tyranny” because they see those who are using participation in

an unjust manner (Cooke and Kothari 13-14). This observation is critical for scholars studying the participatory practices of all NGOs because it calls attention to the possible hidden agendas of NGOs that normal NGO cases studies and evaluations do not address. NGOs are using their highly personalized form of participation to have some sort of control of the masses that they are in fact trying to help. Some forms of this control can be seen in BRAC's practices. For instance, in the Matlab case study program officers would often dictate what topics would be taught or discussed in their meetings. They would guide most of the discussions instead of engaging the people in dialogue (Khan 40). Even in the case of the OTEP program, BRAC was dictating what villagers needed to know in terms of how to cure diarrhea with household materials as discussed earlier. In all these cases, BRAC seems to be dictating the knowledge of what beneficiaries should know.

Sork echoes some of the concerns of Cooke as well. Sork feels that in the planning process of adult education, sometimes the beneficiaries can end up being manipulated by more powerful actors (Sork 86-87). Yet there are many actors who are currently influencing how the programs are taught and developed. Hailey states about the interplay of actors in NGO work stating, "This is a context partly shaped by the local culture and associated political systems, partly by their financial dependence on aid donors and government departments, and partly by their own [NGOs] ambitions, aspirations, and management style (Hailey 95)."

Much has been made of the collaboration between NGOs and government organizations as being a major hindrance to helping local participants achieve social empowerment. Although NGOs like BRAC have succeeded to a large extent in improving quality of life, social empowerment has been neglected. This collaboration, along with the pressure from foreign donors, has changed the priorities of many NGOs including BRAC. In looking at the relationship between NGOs and government

organizations, Haque writes: “In the past, the activities of NGOs were blamed for disuniting the poor by creating competition among them for microcredit, for depoliticizing them by diverting their attention away from broader political issues to petty monetary matters, and from reinforcing their dependence on NGOs controlling their lives. In fact, this process of disempowering the poor may have worsened due to the greater collaboration or partnership of these NGOs with the government and foreign donors (Haque 283).”

Feldman also sees this trend in the government and NGO relationships. She writes: “I argue that the growing tendency to mobilise money over people results from the need for sustainable funding, long-term employment for staff, and activities that ensure measurable results. Consequently, NGO’s become more focused on generic coverage rates than on long-term commitments to individual members; more concerned with compromise than with challenging structural and institutional problems that contribute to poverty and gender inequality; and unwilling to risk the loss of funding, even if it means losing legitimacy among their members (Feldman 22).” This quote reveals that NGOs like BRAC may not be so interested in social empowerment through education for local populations. Their main goal appears to be to sustain themselves as an institution rather than educate rural populations towards social empowerment. Feldman goes on to write, “Increasingly, committed to bureaucratization, professionalization, and members who satisfy the needs of donors, NGOs act as brokers speaking *on behalf of* their members rather than mobilizing people to speak on their own behalf. NGOs thus serve as buffers between citizens and states, militating against rather than encouraging people to struggle on their own together with others who share their interest (Feldman 22).”

## Implications for Research and Practice

All educators, planners, and those who work in community development must constantly evaluate themselves from many different perspectives in order to ensure they are both meeting their goals and the goals of their beneficiaries. What may seem like good practice in theory may also have detrimental effects that go unseen. The participatory approach seems perfectly molded for the culture of South Asian countries with its emphasis on community and trust. Nevertheless, we must look closely at these practices and evaluate them from other perspectives. If rural beneficiaries are not being socially empowered in the organizational structures of NGOs, then it is time for NGOs to consider different practices to engage rural populations. Changing these organizational practices would be no easy task for NGOs such as BRAC: in BRAC's case, these participatory practices have been a large part of its rural development program since its inception. As a result, changing to a more socially effective approach may be difficult. Yet changes in styles and approaches will be a necessity as researchers and scholars continue to scrutinize the negative effects of participatory practices in development.

In order to avoid confusion or misinterpretation, BRAC's goal of rural empowerment may need to be more clearly defined. There is no doubt that some sort of empowerment is taking place in BRAC's programs as evidenced by the findings in this study. Through participatory practices, selected rural populations are learning skills that will help them to live longer, healthier, and more economically sound lives. Yet, it is still questionable whether these practices lead to social empowerment. For example, economic empowerment seems to be more prevalent than social empowerment. This economic empowerment involves giving local beneficiaries the means to use microcredit as well as access to micro enterprise development programs such areas as livestock or poultry. These programs help to alleviate poverty by

empowering villages to take part in income generating practices (Ahmed and French 36). It appears that BRAC has done a good job helping people improve their economic well being via these microcredit programs. Health programs, similarly, have helped to lower the risk of death from diseases such as diarrhea. The next step for BRAC is to look at how it can reach the goal of socially empowering local villagers. This step would involve empowerment practices that could help local villagers realize and use their political power to make positive changes for their society.

This thesis presents a perspective on the role of participatory education and empowerment practices in BRAC from the point of view of someone who is not associated with the BRAC organization. From the studies this author was able to locate, BRAC appears to do its own evaluation studies on the progress and effectiveness of its programs, rather than those completed by external evaluators. While it is commendable that BRAC is diligent in monitoring its own programs, it would be advisable to have outside researchers and organizations also evaluate the effectiveness of BRAC's programs. Outside evaluators would give BRAC new perspectives and insights on their practices. In addition, this thesis also adds new insight on BRAC's participatory model. Outside evaluations may help to bring to light some ideas about practices that BRAC's evaluators have yet to consider.

Finally, we need to reevaluate what participation and empowerment means in the context of Bangladesh and, in particular, the NGO culture of Bangladesh. Literature of education from disciplines such as adult education and developmental sociology has always had its definitions of what participation, empowerment and education are. Yet how these terms are viewed, used, and practiced will inevitably vary in different contexts. It is important to understand how the culture of Bangladesh

defines and values these different terms. This understanding will help gain further insight into why practitioners in Bangladesh practice as they do.

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