

Case Studies from Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Since 90 per cent of the people of Bangladesh live in rural areas, it is appropriate that the five cases described focus on rural women, from the Mothers' Clubs which function over about 25 per cent of the country to the Swanirvar (self-reliance) Movement for training women in leadership skills which has operated in most areas from 1978.

The Indian studies examined in depth the planning and implementation of schemes in specific areas. The Bangladesh studies, in contrast, take a nation-wide view - understandable in a country so recently gaining its independence. Apart from the Jamalpur Project for rural cooperatives run by a non-governmental organisation, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), all are financed to some extent through governmental agencies. The national voluntary organisation, the Jatiya Mohila Sangstha (National Women's Development Academy), has governmental finance while the Mothers' Clubs are also managed under the Department of Social Welfare. Both of these schemes exemplify the top-down approach and indeed the Jatiya Mohila Sangstha Study is frank in suggesting that it has failed to meet the needs of rural women and to attract their participation in its activities largely because of its hierarchical structure.

The Mothers' Clubs Scheme aims at helping women in learning income-generating skills based on traditional crafts and extends into nutrition, health and literacy training. It targets on real needs of rural women but suffers from too few skilled instructors and lack of quality control on products made by the women. Two other programmes, the Rural Women's Cooperatives run by the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the Jamalpur BRAC scheme, appear to point the way forward in that through the cooperative movement they have enabled women not only to learn new skills for income generation, but also to organise themselves for self help, savings and investment.