

POPULARISING FAMILY PLANNING THROUGH A NON-FORMAL PROGRAMME - THE MOTHERS' CLUBS

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh came on the world map in December 1971. It covers an area of 55,598 square miles with a population density of over 1400 per square mile. The estimated population is 84.655 million, (1) growing at about 3 per cent a year. The population is heavily concentrated in the rural areas but ironically 45 per cent of the rural households are landless. (2)

The working population (ten years and above) constitutes 70.1 per cent of the total population but only 30 per cent are in the civilian labour force. The remaining 40.1 per cent are housewives and other dependent persons. The poverty of the country becomes obvious from the fact that the per capita income is only Tk.212 (US \$ = Taka 17, 1977-78). In the light of this low per capita income, unemployment and landlessness, over 75 per cent of the population of Bangladesh can be considered to be in absolute poverty.

Adding to the problems are the limited education opportunities, high infant mortality, and poor health services. In 1978 educational opportunities were estimated to exist for only 34 per cent of school age children, infant mortality was 140 per thousand, and health services covered only 10 per cent of the rural population.

In order to reach out to the rural disadvantaged people, the Social Welfare Department of Bangladesh launched in 1974 the Rural Social Services Project as a pilot project in 19 rural *thanas* (administrative areas), one in each district. The programmes of the project were and still are directed towards improving the social, functional and income capabilities of the target beneficiaries, identified as children, women, youth and landless tenants, as well as developing the physical facilities needed for overall development of the villages. The projects envisage the organisation of the disadvantaged groups who recognise their needs. On this basis the groups can be formed into units for action with the minimum of outside assistance. The groups would be assisted in organising village committees which in turn would serve as forums for other government departments/agencies as well as vehicles for planning and executing programmes formulated by union *parishads* (elected councils).

To date, the activities of the Rural Social Services Project extends over 40 thanas covering a population of approximately six and a half million. The programme at the thana level is implemented through a thana social welfare officer assisted by eight male and eight female social workers (VSWs). These young men and women serve as change agents, attitude modifiers and linking mechanisms.

As the VSWs are multi-purpose workers they have to undergo training for three months at the In-service Training Centre of the Department of Social Welfare before deployment. Here, they are exposed to the operational mechanics of programmes of other government departments/agencies operating at the village/union level, group dynamics, nutrition, skills of working with people etc. The female workers are high school graduates while the men need

to have two years of college education. The thana social welfare officers, who are postgraduates in social work, not only supervise the work of the VSWs but also maintain a close relationship with different community groups and village committees.

Owing to the non-participation of women in the economic mainstream of the country, many of the development programmes undertaken by the Government fall short of expectations. In addition, the effectiveness of the population control programme has been largely nullified by the non-acceptance of family planning by the majority of rural women. Recognising that economic emancipation is a prerequisite to effective family planning, the Mothers' Club was set up with the following objectives:

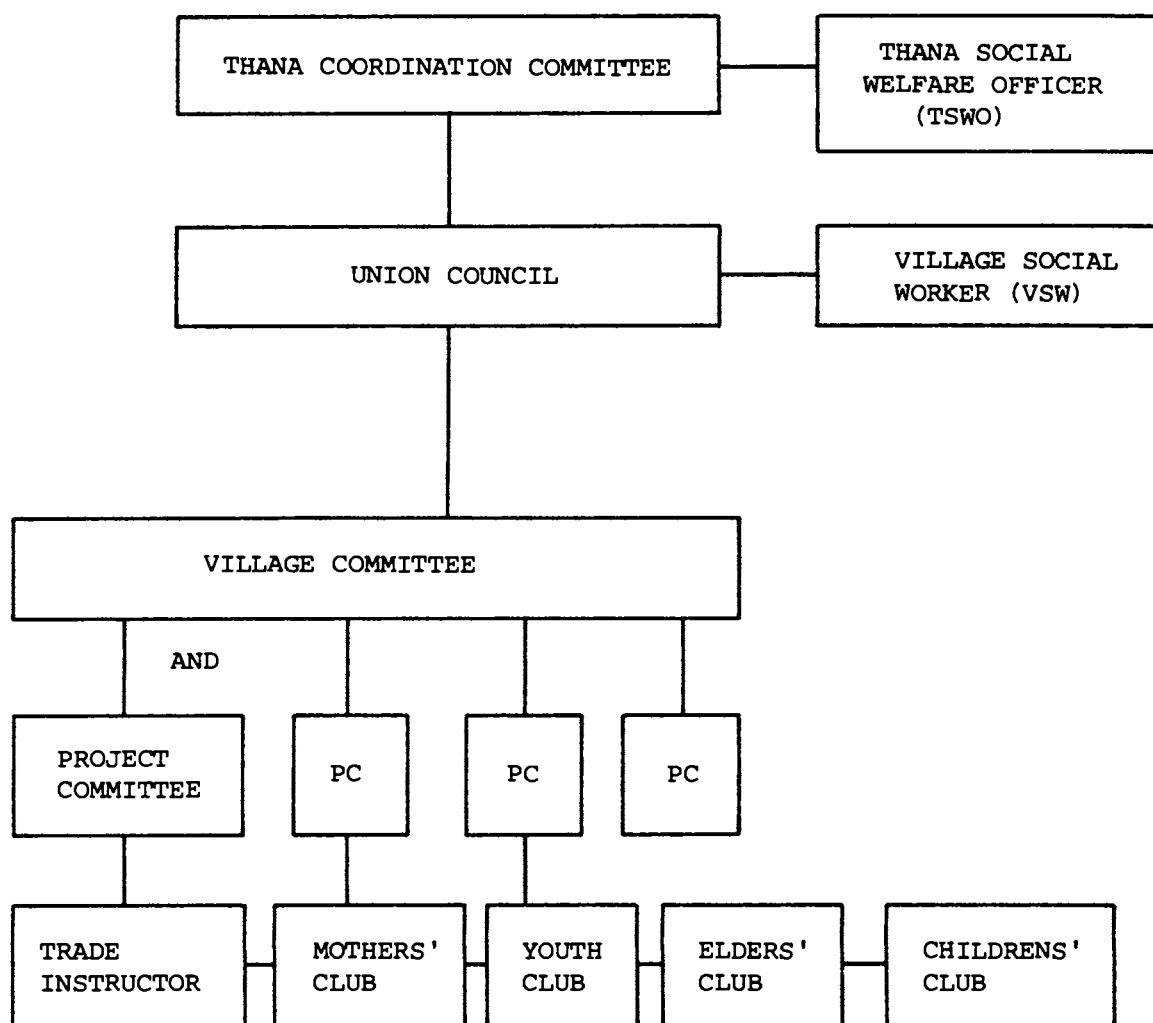
- to involve rural women in gainful economic activities and help them improve the quality of life, thus achieving status in the family particularly and society at large;
- to help them develop leadership skills so that they can play the role of change agents in the society;
- to equip them with skills so that they can be self-employed and thereby supplement family income;
- to provide them with functional education so that they become aware of their problems and take necessary steps towards solving them;
- to infuse the idea of family planning through information, education, communication and other supportive services, gradually motivating them to adopt a small family norm.

Through a multi-purpose approach, the members of the Mothers' Clubs became aware of their problems, learned skills, developed their income potential and ultimately accepted family planning as soon as they became earning members. It was found that the real moment of a woman's feeling of liberation comes when she touches the money she has earned by her own labour. Earning gives her the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process in the family. Once she is allowed to take part in decision-making, she can contribute a great deal in planning the family, and consequently her fertility pattern changes considerably.

The participants of Mothers' Clubs are today income-generating through different trades such as tailoring, knitting, jute and cane work, embroidery, poultry raising, pisciculture, plastic work, kitchen gardening, coir making, woodwork, rice-husking, fish-net making, mat making and various handicrafts. Since inception, out of 28,084 participants, 12,417 have become regular earning members. Their earnings have amounted to about Tk.2,413,000 since the time they started work. A recent study has indicated that sewing and tailoring are the most popular trades although members have earned more money through jute handicrafts.

To a very large extent the success of the programme is due to the VSWs (half of whom are women) who work as motivators and helpers. Although their training is only for a short spell, it is very practical in nature. Besides the VSWs, about 304 trade instructors (of whom 300 are women) are provided in the project for 764 Mothers' Clubs. Through the trade instructors, 940 sewing machines, 50 radio sets, 326 packets of seeds, 636 items of crockery and 306 pieces of indigenous equipment contributed by government and international agencies have been distributed.

ORGANISATIONAL AND COORDINATIONAL STRUCTURE OF
RURAL SOCIAL SERVICES PROJECT



EVALUATION OF CASE STUDIES

Sutidighalipara Mothers' Club: Gopalpur Tangail
(Combined Project - USAID/Social Welfare Department)

Recognising that population planning cannot be successful without improving the nutritional condition of children and mothers, emphasis in the project was laid on the nutritional aspect of the mothers and children. Considering that infant mortality was 140 per 1000 (0-1 year of age) per year, it was considered absurd to infuse the idea of population planning without taking care of the nutritional aspect. Therefore, it was recommended that nutrition education should be an in-built feature of the Mothers' Clubs activities.

A pilot project was started in Sutidighalipara Village of Gopalpur Thana, entitled "Incorporation of Nutrition Education into Mothers' Club". The project was approved by the Ministry of Manpower Development and Social Welfare on 18 July 1978 and became operational later that month. Its overall objective was to improve the nutritional condition of children and women in Sutidighalipara.

Since then it has been functioning with expert help from USAID. Personnel from the Nutrition Unit of USAID have also taken a keen interest in helping the project to achieve the desired success. Field experience and observation indicate that significant progress has been made; so much so that the project could now be used for demonstration purposes and for large-scale replication.

The Project has accomplished the following:

- It has elicited major community participation.
- Mothers themselves carry out the child-weighing record on growth charts, and can demonstrate and understand its significance.
- The Mothers' Club members distribute oral rehydration mixture for children suffering from diarrhoea and have been educating women of the village on the home preparation of the mixture.
- Vitamin A capsules are distributed to the young children through the Mothers' Club.
- Education on other aspects of nutrition, like the need for the early introduction of solid food, continued breast feeding, and adequate food intake during pregnancy and lactation, is being undertaken with the help of flip charts.
- Most significantly, there has been a marked improvement in the nutritional status of the children participating.

These accomplishments indicate that the incorporation of nutrition education in Mothers' Club is possible and can lead to highly positive results with minimal input.

For successful replication it should be noted that: there is need for VSWs and representatives of Mothers' Club to undergo one-day refresher courses. The training could be at the thana level and run by the thana social welfare officer along with other officers from the Social Welfare Department and USAID personnel. Also, equipment-packets need to be prepared, one for each Mothers' Club. Each packet should contain: a baby scale, about

75 growth charts, 150 packets of oralyte mixture, 75 vitamin A capsules, and a nutrition flip chart.

*Bhabanipur Mothers' Club**

Bhabanipur is a village situated in the Bhabanipur Union of Sujanagar, in the District of Pabna under the administrative jurisdiction of Rajshahi Division. It lies two miles from the thana headquarters, thirteen miles from the District Headquarters and 82 miles from the Divisional Headquarters. Therefore its environment is totally rural.

Bhabanipur has a population of 955 (490 male and 465 female). There are 120 families in the village, of whom 95 are still capable of producing children.

The distribution of population of the village according to sex and age group are shown in the tables which follow.

Of the 120 families, 45 are landless, while landholdings of 50 families are below 3.00 acres. The per capita income of nearly three quarters of the people is below poverty level**, and 17 per cent of the people are around poverty level.** The work of the villagers is primarily agriculture.

* This case study was conducted using two questionnaires developed at the headquarters on the guide lines of ESCAP/FAO, as it was meant for use in the national workshop in Bangladesh on income-generating group activities organised by rural women. The first questionnaire, which consisted of 102 questions, was designed to collect information through interviews with members of Bhabanipur Mothers' Club on different issues covering their pre- and post-membership in the centre. The second questionnaire, consisting of 140 questions, recorded answers to the questions on the basis of the thana social welfare officer's work experience, observational impression, information from government sources and local organisations, and records maintained by Mothers' Club.

** Below poverty level - per capita income below Tk. 800
 Around poverty level - per capita income between Tk.801/Tk.1300
 Above poverty level - per capita income above Tk. 1300
 Source: IUCW/BIDS study) (US \$ 1 = approx. 18 Takas).

TABLE 1

Population Distribution in Bhabanipur by Sex and Age

<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>			<i>Grand Total</i>
<i>Under 15 years</i>	<i>15 years and over</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Under 15 years</i>	<i>15 years and over</i>	<i>Total</i>	
250	240	490	240	225	465	955

TABLE 2

Distribution of Land Holdings in Bhabanipur

<i>Land</i>	<i>No. of families</i>
Landless	45
Below 3.00 acres	50
3.00 acres to 8.00 acres	15
Above 8.00 acres	10

Socio-Economic Condition of the Women

The socio-economic condition of the women of Bhabanipur, as in other areas of rural Bangladesh, is deplorable. In the rural areas, the female labour force is generally fully occupied with household chores. No opportunity for employment of female workers in income-generating activities can be developed in the country because of the existing social and economic constraints.

Before the setting up of the Bhabanipur Mothers' Club, the women of the village never thought of earning money as the men do, to build a better future for themselves and for their children. The married members of Bhabanipur Mothers' Club toiled at household affairs and the unmarried members used to help their mothers with daily routine work before they joined the Mothers' Club. Leisure time, if any, was idled away.

Establishment of Bhabanipur Mothers' Club

In view of the socio-economic backwardness of its inhabitants, the availability of training and production materials, and the scope for fruitful utilisation of untapped local resources, Bhabanipur Village was brought under the Rural Social Service Project of which the Mothers' Club is part and parcel. The Bhabanipur Mothers' Club was set up in October 1975 through local

efforts stirred up by the VSWs for improving the quality of life especially of women.

Plan of Action and Implementation

The programme of the Mothers' Club followed the principles of community development. A package programme of income-generating activities through vocational training, social and functional education, adult literacy, health, nutrition and child care, home keeping, cleanliness, etc. was introduced. Population control was a built-in feature of the programme activities. To ensure the involvement of the community and their participation, the programmes were developed at the community level. No programme was thrust upon the people from above. All the programmes were developed by the village committee and implemented through the Executive Committee of the Mothers' Club. The organisational structure of the village and executive committees was as follows:

Organisational Structure

1. *The Village Committee*

Chairman	:	a member of the Union Council or a social leader	1
Vice-Chairman	:	a member of the Union Council or a social leader	1
Secretary	:	from amongst the members of the Committee	1
Treasurer	:	from amongst the members of the Committee	1
Members	:	one representative each from:	
		1. Mothers' Club	1
		2. Youth Organisation	1
		3. Landless people's organisation	1
		4. Social leaders	1
			8
Advisory Members	:	from amongst the VSWs Representatives of other Nation Building Departments	2

2. *Executive Committee of Mothers' Club*

Chairman	:	from among the members	1
Vice-Chairman	:	from among the members	1
Secretary	:	from among the members	1
Joint Secretary	:	from among the members	1
Members	:	from among the members	5
			9
Advisory Members	:	Village social workers (female)	1

The aims and objectives of Bhabanipur Mothers' Club are:

- to organise the women folk through Mothers' Club;
- to help improve their living conditions through vocational training and income-generating activities, adult literacy, social and functional education, health and nutrition education, child care, cleanliness and home keeping programmes;
- to help them become self-aware, self-confident and self-reliant so that they can help develop their family and a better future for themselves and for their children;
- to help them acquire status in the family and in the society and become economically productive citizens of the country.
- above all, to make them aware of the grim consequences of the population explosion and help them gradually to adopt the small family norm.

TABLE 3

Bhabanipur Mothers' Club Membership by Marital Status and Age

<i>Unmarried</i>		<i>Married</i>			<i>Widowed</i>	<i>Divorced</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Under 15 years</i>	<i>15 years and over</i>	<i>Husband alive</i>	<i>Over 49 years</i>	<i>Over 49 years</i>			
		<i>Under 15 years</i>	<i>15-49 years</i>				
2	5	2	17	1	3	1	31

TABLE 4

Bhabanipur Mothers' Club Membership by Socio-Economic Condition

<i>Economic condition</i>	<i>Number</i>
Higher income group families	0
Middle-class families (around poverty level)	4
Low income group families (below poverty level)	5
Very poor families (much below poverty level)	22

Evidently a majority of the members lived in abject poverty. Nor was the life of the rest very comfortable either.

Income-generating Activities of Bhabanipur Mothers' Club

Nine trades were developed to help ease the poor women's grim economic hardships through self help efforts. The length of training for these courses ranged from three to five months, depending on the nature and importance of the trades. The types of work and the respective duration of the training are shown in the tables which follow:

TABLE 5

Bhabanipur Mothers' Club: Vocational Trades

<i>Vocational trades</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Duration of training</i>
1. Bags of jute cloth	26	3 months
2. Chatni making	8	3 months
3. Garment making (tailoring)	8	6 months
4. Mat/Pati making	7	3 months
5. Biddi making	6	3 months
6. Embroidery	2	6 months
7. Poultry rearing	1	3 months
8. Jute handicrafts	5	6 months
9. Hand fan production	1	3 months

TABLE 6

Bhabanipur Mothers' Club: Training Record

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of members trained</i>
1975-76	9
1976-77	13
1977-78	9
	31

Utilisation of Training in Income-generating Activities

The production programmes were conducted through the Project Executive Committee. The Committee procured materials with money from the funds under the supervision of the Village Committee and distributed the materials to the production workers according to their skills and capabilities. The workers came to the centre when convenient. They also took materials from the centre for work at home during their spare time. Every worker produced goods to a given sample and design, deposited these at the centre and received payment for them.

Training and Training Equipment

Only two sewing machines had been supplied to Bhabanipur Mothers' Club by the Department of Social Welfare. These were used for training and production activities on jute bags and garment making. The training and production work on the other seven items were done with simple indigenous equipment procured locally out of small contingent funds provided.

Only one part-time instructor was provided under the scheme and she was paid Tk.250 per month. Bhabanipur, like all other Mothers' Clubs, got only 40 per cent of the services of one part-time instructor. Two VSWs had to look after the affairs of as many as five Mothers' Clubs. Consequently, Bhabanipur Mothers' Club got only about one fifth of their time. Taking everything into consideration, Bhabanipur Mothers' Club cost the Government only Tk.300 per month.

Sources of Capital

The Mothers' Club was not conducted in the style of cooperative societies, although the spirit of cooperation was inculcated amongst the members. There was no share distribution in Mothers' Club projects. At the preliminary stage, a small lump sum from the development fund of the Rural Social Service Project was advanced to the Mothers' Club as a loan for initial capital. The capital was raised mainly by subscription from local people and savings out of the earnings of the working participants. Besides these, the International Union of Child Welfare (IUCW) supplied raw materials and received finished goods against supply orders from their agents. The production workers got only the labour charge. The capital for the production work remained, in fact, in the hands of the IUCW.

The production section of Bhabanipur Mothers' Club started functioning initially with Tk.1600 received as a loan from the RSS development fund for purchasing raw materials.

TABLE 7

Bhabanipur Mothers' Club: Sources of Capital Funding

<i>Source</i>	<i>Amount</i>
1. Local contribution	Tk. 1800.00
2. Loan from development fund of Rural Social Service Project	Tk. 1600.00
3. Accumulated savings of participants	Tk. 2500.00

Accommodation for the club was provided by local people. IUCW placed orders for finished products as orders came in to them. They supplied raw materials to the Mothers' Club to the value of some Tk.10,000 to 15,000.

Marketing of Products

Attempts were made to develop a marketing system for the products but without success. Moreover, the purchasing capacity of the local people was very low. Under the circumstances, goods produced in the centre were sold at a nominal margin in the local market. Goods ordered by IUCW were exported through their agency.

Impact of the Programme

Income of the Participants

Between 1975 and 1978 the production programmes at Bhabanipur earned a total of Tk.23,450. The major portion of this amount represented the cost of labour for IUCW contracts and worked out at approximately Tk.45 per month for each participant.

The major items produced by the participants for IUCW included different types of *shikas* (jute-made device used as a hanger) and other jute handi-crafts such as table mats, wall mats, floor mattresses, hammocks, etc.

TABLE 8

Bhabanipur Mothers' Club: Range of Monthly Income

<i>Range of income</i>	<i>No. of centre</i>
Tk. 1 - 30	11
Tk. 31 - 60	3
Tk. 61 - 90	4
Tk. 91 - 190	12
Tk. 121 - 200	0
Tk. 201 - and above	1
	31

Educational Programmes

Besides vocational training and production programmes, the following educational programmes were conducted:

- functional and social education and adult literacy,
- health education and child care,
- cleanliness and home keeping,
- family planning and population control.

Besides these, different cultural programmes were organised and conducted in the centre occasionally. The above mentioned programmes broadened the horizon of the women and motivated them towards the goal of a better life.

Family Planning

The majority of the 31 members of the Bhabanipur Mothers' Club were married. Of the 24 members who were married, one was divorced and three were widows. Among the married women thirteen had accepted family planning. Of the remainder, two were newly married, four had not yet been blessed with children, while two were already beyond child-bearing age. Those who refused to accept family planning did so because of their husband's resistance, though they themselves were willing to accept.

Education and Change of Attitude

Before joining the Mothers' Club only nine out of 31 members had received elementary education, while 22 members were illiterate. Of the illiterate members all but two could write their names and could also read and write a bit. The other two members were comparative newcomers in the club. The adult members, especially the married ones, did not dare to talk with outsiders or move freely beyond their homes before they came to the centre. Now, as a result of the fact that they are earning, they have gained status in the family and in society, and their attitude has changed remarkably. They have shaken off their shyness and now express themselves freely to outsiders.

Constraints of the Project

It was found from field experience that one part-time instructor cannot do justice to two and a half centres. Her contribution is too little to be of real use and the standard of training given and the quality of resulting production is not up to expectations.

Lack of facilities for marketing the goods produced was a common problem for all the Mothers' Clubs. There is therefore a need for:

- exploration at home and abroad of the market for each product;
- matching production with market demands;
- quality control and standardisation of products;
- convenient and reliable transportation for products to markets;
- revolving funds for capital, with a view to making the production process economically viable and profitable; and
- employment of the right number of suitably trained and skilled staff for effective production.

Notes

1. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (CBBS) 1974, National Volume, page 69.
2. BBS Summary Report of the 1977 Land Occupancy Survey of Rural Bangladesh.