

INTEGRATED PROGRAMME FOR RURAL LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

The Bangladesh National Women's Organisation known as Bangladesh Jatiya Mohila Sangstha, a voluntary organisation, was sponsored by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1976 with the object of ensuring the social, economic, educational and cultural welfare of the women of Bangladesh. It comprises experiments in working with the poorer sections of society.

Bangladesh Jatiya Mohila Sangstha today is the apex women's organisation of the country and is authorised by Bangladesh Government to federate various women's organisations. Its main objectives are:

- to inform women of their personal and socio-economic rights and privileges;
- to foster technical and vocational training for women and find job facilities for them;
- to formulate policies on women and children and adopt measures against discrimination, social and otherwise, for safeguarding women's rights;
- to encourage participation of women in cottage industry, cooperatives and marketing, sports and cultural activities;
- to safeguard women's rights as guaranteed by the Constitution and law;
- to popularise family planning and take steps to improve the standard of health, nutrition and child welfare and
- to assist and supervise the implementation of plans and programmes of the federating units.

In order to attain its objectives, the Sangstha has set up:

- 20 District Committees with offices in the district headquarters;
- 40 committees with offices in the sub-divisional headquarters;
- 350 committees with offices in police station headquarters. At an early date 44 more committees with offices are likely to be established.

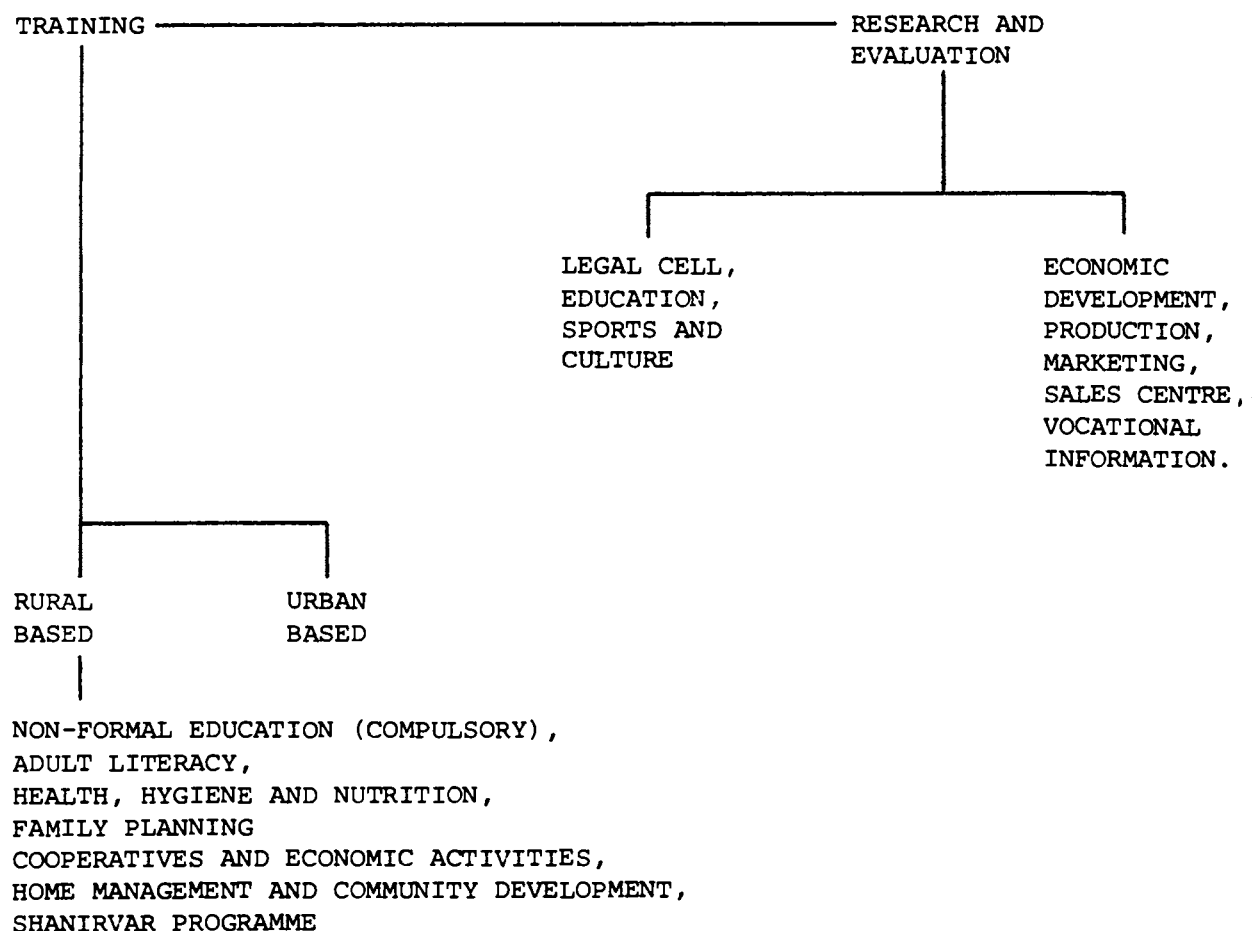
The Sangstha has offices with paid staff in the Headquarters at Dhaka and in all the district and sub-divisional and police station (thana) headquarters in the country.

The programme of work of the above mentioned committees seeks to:

1. eradicate illiteracy among women;
2. set up libraries in every village;

3. popularise family planning methods and distribute contraceptives among the rural women;
4. promote the growth of international outlook and understanding in women;
5. organise conferences and seminars to encourage women to participate in the development of the country;
6. encourage women to observe cleanliness and general rules of hygiene;
7. organise tree-planting weeks;
8. set up women's adult literacy centres in the villages;
9. encourage women to grow fruit and vegetables in kitchen gardens and market them on a cooperative basis; and
10. organise cottage industries in the rural areas.

The various committees soon realised that the success of their programme depended largely upon the workers at the village level. Recognising the need for motivated workers as well as trade instructors, it was found necessary to establish an Institute for Training. As a result, in 1977 the Bangladesh National Women's Development Academy was set up in Dhaka with the object of training village workers who would return and train groups of village women in various aspects of life. This Academy concerned itself with the following functions:



ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Other than the normal clerical staff, the Academy is headed by a Director who is assisted by eight tutors, five specialists and fourteen trade instructors. All these paid employees are highly qualified.

The trainees are women from various districts who are selected by the Union Development Centres. After receiving six weeks' training the trainees return to the Union and Employment Centres and are employed by the Sangstha. Those amongst them who are better educated are appointed as Union Directors on a salary of 400 Takas a month (US \$ 22.5). These Union Directors are in charge of 100 villages. Working with them are social workers who receive 200 Takas (US \$ 11.2) per month, three trade instructors (one for the compulsory trade and two for optional trades) at 250 Takas per month (US \$ 13.9), and voluntary social workers (three persons per village) at an honorarium of 50 Takas per month (US \$ 2.6).

At the Union Development Centre there is also a Coordination Committee which is an advisory body and consists of

- President - a woman member of the Union Council,
- Secretary - a woman member of the Union Council, and
- ten village social workers.

Each Union Development Centre is also furnished and equipped to give training in three trade courses to the local village women. Prospective trade instructors are sent for training to the Training Academy in Dhaka. After completion of their training, they go back to their respective unions and are employed as trade teachers in the Union Development Centres where they train the village women. Training for the selected women is offered for different periods according to the nature of the trade. At present the following courses are offered:

- handloom (compulsory)
- sericulture
- tailoring
- poultry keeping
- food preparation and preservation
- cane and bamboo crafts
- jute carpet making
- knitting
- batik and screen printing
- hosiery
- bakery and confectionery
- light electrical repairs

While in training the women are provided with free board and lodging. To date approximately 430 women trade instructors and village social workers have completed their training and have subsequently been employed by the Sangstha.

Urban Academy

The National Women's Development Academy also has an urban section attached to it. In January 1977 the urban branch of the Academy started classes in cooking and confectionery, tailoring, flower making and arrangement, English conversation, knitting and motor driving.

The duration of the training courses is one and a half months to six months according to the nature of the courses.

An instructor is in charge of each course. The Urban Academy is self-sufficient as the fees collected from the students are adequate to meet the expenses. Hundreds of students have so far successfully completed the courses.

Funding Agencies

Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha receives its funds for the running of its sub-organisations from the Bangladesh Government. However, funds for specific purposes received from USAID and NORAD by the Ministry of Women's Affairs of the Bangladesh Government are channelled to the Sangstha.

CONSTRAINTS

The experience of the organisers as well as the workers reveals that the programme has not been as successful as was expected. Undoubtedly, the women at the grass-roots level have become aware of their social and economic rights. Nevertheless, on account of the backwardness of the rural areas, the main problem has been that of recruitment of trainees. In addition, despite the enthusiasm to work, the village women coming to the training centres fail to reach the expected level of competence.

Again, in respect of the trainees acting as motivators in their area of work, very often the Muslim women appear hesitant to come forward for either literacy or income-generating activity classes. For one thing, culturally conditioned to purdah, their men are unwilling to permit their participation in such activities as the village social worker's classes/meetings which are in the open, under a tree or in empty sheds. Secondly, the family members feel that time spent in training has little relationship to the amount of money earned and that in doing their traditional jobs the women are better contributors to the home economy.

At times, the Union Committees themselves, in several of the villages, are uncooperative. This, again, is possibly due to the fact that the members of the *Parishad* (Committee) are men who do not consider the programme to be meaningful for the women. On the other hand, in the case of the Hindu rural women (who do not observe purdah) in the villages of Silhi, Jessore and Bakulia, the village social workers have been able to implement their programmes fairly successfully.

Regardless of caste or village, a fairly strong feeling seems to have developed among workers at the middle and lower levels that they have no say in the policy-making or decision-making stage. The hierarchical structure of the organisation tends to create a gap at various levels, and fails to give the workers a feeling of the programme being their own.

EVALUATION

Recently an evaluation was conducted by NORAD in 14 out of 38 Union Development Centres. Primarily, the evaluators feel that more competent village-level workers are needed and have suggested better recruitment measures, improved training syllabus and procedures at the training centres.

CONCLUSION

The programme as it stands, perhaps, cannot be replicated. But there are valuable lessons which can be drawn from the experiences of the organisers. One is that no programme can succeed which does not consider the need to consult, motivate and involve the field worker so that she is personally committed to the programme.

In introducing training for income-generating activities a prior knowledge of the market demands is necessary to ensure the profitability of the training to the village women.

Further, the cardinal virtue of non-formal education is flexibility. Rigidity either in organisational structures or in the learning process militates against effective results.