

030 **The Village Child Development Project: A Report of its Performance, Problems and Prospects**
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a) Researcher's Identity

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b) Objectives

The broader objectives of the project were as follows:

- i. Reduction of first degree-malnutrition (by 100%) and xerophthalmia (by 75%) in children and anaemia in women and children (by 25%);
- ii. Improvement of health status of the children and women through reduction of infant, child and maternal mortality rates and incidence of infectious diseases from the present rates;
- iii. Increased retention rate of the enrolled children in primary schools and enrolment of out of school children especially from disadvantaged families by utilizing and improving the facilities both at the primary schools and at the existing religious schools (Maktabs) within the project area;
- iv. Reduction of incidence of water and faecal borne disease;
- v. Increased production and consumption of nutritious fruits and vegetables;
- vi. Increased production and consumption of animal protein;
- vii. Increased awareness among the disadvantaged groups in identifying social problems and their status in the society through functional education;
- viii. Increased family income, particularly among the women of the disadvantaged groups; and
- ix. Creation of opportunities on self-employment for women, youths and landless labourers.

c) Executive summary

In this chapter the findings of the report are summed up as follows:

- i) 75% of the total target families have been covered under the project.
- ii) Among the target families covered, 60% are non-farm families and 40% are farm families which indicate that the non-farm families got the preference.
- iii) It is found that a total of 466 functional groups have been formed in the project villages with 18,582 members.
- iv) Examining some of the selected characteristics of the members of the target groups it is found that majority of the members of the Krishak and Sramik groups fall within the age range of 36-40 years, majority of the members of the women groups fall within 21-35 years. The age range for youth members fall within the age range of 14-25 years. The age range for youth and women was fixed in principle and in actual enrolment of members no deviation was observed. According to principles, people having more than 2 acres of land were not supposed to be included in the project but 5% of the members having over 2 acres of land have entered the project. The single majority (45%) of the members belonged to 0-.50 acres of land. It is further found that 79% of the members have big family size of 4 and above 14 members.
- v) The average members per functional group come to 41 and the women groups have enrolled the highest number of members.
- vi) The functional groups have saved Tk. 7, 64, 445/- up to August, 1983 with per member savings of Tk. 42 on average. The Krishak groups have saved Tk. 58/- per member which is the highest.
- vii) Total Tk. 16,03,715 was given to the members of the groups as starter capital and realization was 87% on average. The trend of realization is good.
- viii) In total 4,238 members were given loan and per member loan was Tk. 371 on average. Only 23% of the members were given loan and amount of loan per member was very little. The debtors utilized 70% of the loan for stock-businesses and goat rearing which seems to be very profitable economic activity. Among the debtors 65% were women which mean that women got preference over other members. The amount of starter capital was always little compared to the minimum demands.

- ix) The meetings of the functional groups were not regularly held because of some reasons. The women groups reportedly held the highest number of meetings with the highest percentage of attendance. But the attendance is above 60% in case of all groups which is a good indication.
- x) About records keeping at the group level, it is observed that 54% of the groups were able to maintain different records properly.
- xi) The paramedics reported to have rendered very useful services to the children and adults. Although immunization is yet to start officially under the project but the local project staff have been able to immunize 22% of the children and mothers at their own initiative and the help of the local health department.
- xii) So far 7,700 rural women and volunteers have been trained in nutrition. The nutrition volunteers are supposed to train other rural women in nutrition and it is found that the women volunteers have trained 10,034 mothers locally. On an average each volunteer has trained 6 mothers in the project areas. The dissemination of knowledge of the volunteers is not satisfactory.
- xiii) So far 421 children and 37 adults who reportedly suffered from malnutrition have been cured and 173 children and 66 adults who reportedly suffered from night blindness were cured. It seems that achievement in this respect is satisfactory.
- xiv) The target groups took interest to produce more vegetables to add to their nutritional status. Many of them sold vegetables for supplementing their income in addition to consumption.
- xv) Steps for development of horticulture nursery have been taken in all project areas and a youth from each of the project has been trained for the purpose. Each youth has been provided land for development of horticulture nursery.
- xvi) In order to provide better sanitation facilities, construction of water sealed latrines has started in all the project areas.
- xvii) Some tube wells for drinking water have been available which will be supplied to the project areas and the concerned communities will sink these tube wells by themselves and the preliminary steps in this respect have been taken in the project areas.
- xviii) Steps for development of pisciculture are on the way. The materials and fund have been made available to the project areas. Ten youths from each of the project areas have been trained for the purpose.

- ix) xix) So far, 37 youths have been trained for poultry rearing. Such training programmes are still going continuously. In some places the trained BPRS have already conducted survey of available poultry-birds at the home level in the villages.
- xx) The trained TBAs have been providing useful services to the rural communities. They have attended 31% of the pregnant mothers and performed the delivery cases successfully. Rest of the mothers was yet to reach the final stage of delivery and these mothers are under close observation of the TBAs.
- xxi) The TABs in addition to maternity services are working as motivators for family planning activities. It appears from the data that the TBAs are rendering very useful services among the women for adoption of family planning methods.
- xxii) In the project areas on average 37% of the eligible children have been enrolled in the Maktabs. Compared to rural situations, the enrolment appears to be satisfactory.
- xxiii) The performance of functional education seems to be discouraging. Only 16% of the eligible adults have been enrolled in the functional education centre.
- xxiv) Under the project a good number of people from the rural communities have been trained for different activities.
- xxv) A process of self reliance has started in the project areas. The SPICs and functional groups are accumulating their own fund by savings, income generating activities and sale-proceeds of various items supplied. Some of the beneficiaries have changed their begging occupation to workers as a result of the project.
- xxvi) A great enthusiasm has been observed in the communities. The concerned communities have been participating spontaneously in implementation of the project.
- xxvii) Except the SPICs. The other committees at the Thana and district levels could not hold regular meetings because of pre-occupations. The SPICs held more meetings than the actual number of meetings they were supposed to hold.
- xxviii) The committees of different levels have mentioned that the project was useful for the rural people. They have also offered a good number of suggestions for improvement.
- xxix) A variety of problems have been experienced in implementation of the project.

d) Observations

It has been stated in the introduction that the implementation of the project was delayed by one year because of lengthy process of finalization of plan document. The project actually has been under operation at the field level for 19 months. Some count the project period from 1978 when the project was under the direct implementation of the UNICEF district representatives as "Village base Project". But it should be noted that during that period there was no organizational framework, the project was implemented in one village and the project inputs were given at free. But when the project was undertaken by the Academies, it has been given organizational framework and there is no free supply of any input, 10 villages were selected in each project area and many of the project areas were selected as fresh. Therefore, the life of the present project should not be counted from the time of village base project.

The 19 months in the life of such a big project is too short a time. We can observe that within such a short period if not miracle is done, at least some visible achievements have been made under the project which may be summed up as follows:

- 1) Poor men and women under the target groups can organize themselves;
- 2) They are capable in planning their work;
- 3) They can utilize credit for increased production and income;
- 4) They have built up the habit of repayment of loan;
- 5) They are formulating their own capital through regular thrift;
- 6) They are observing group disciplines;
- 7) A great sense of awareness and enthusiasm have been created among these people about health, nutrition and education;
- 8) A process of self-reliance has taken its start within the target population;
- 9) They are utilizing the services to the fullest extent;
- 10) The participation of particularly the rural mothers is spontaneous and encouraging and
- 11) They are changing their Socio-economic conditions.

But it is necessary to reduce the activities of the project up to the capabilities of the beneficiaries. Only those inputs should be supplied which are demanded by the groups and no input should be imposed upon them.

Similarly, the various income-generating activities should evolve within the target groups. The activities of these groups should be closely observed and they should be assisted with experiences obtained from similar other projects from time to time. The four types of functional groups such as Krishak, Sramik Women and Youth groups are used as vehicles for development of target population under the VCDP. These groups have been formed from within the target families of the project. There are some opinions that formation of target groups of various types is not suitable for rural development, rather there should be one common organization for all types of people in rural areas. But the experiences under the VCDP suggest that it is easier to organize different groups of people separately to help the weak and depressed group of people develop their group character, group personality and collective voice for ability to bargain on a group basis with the government and vested interest groups. It is therefore more advantageous to organize the different types of people separately and try to integrate them centrally in an organizational framework for better co-ordination of supplies and services in future.

The experience of ASARRD Project also supports the above ideas. It is also found that target group approach under ASARRD Project in Bogra areas showed considerable success. In view of the extent of rural poverty and its continued growth a consensus emerged among the participants of various countries for taking a distinct target group approach for development of the rural poor.

Therefore, it can be argued that organizing the target people into various functional groups is convenient for reaching the rural poor under the Village Child Development Project.