

Evaluation of the “Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)”

Country Case Study: Bangladesh

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ACRONYMS

ACD	Association for Community Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASK	Ain o Shalish Kendro
BDF	Bangladesh Development Forum
BMP	Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
BWLA	Bangladesh Women Lawyers' Association
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
DFID	Department for International Development, United Kingdom
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GoN	Government of Norway
HR	Human Rights
IFC	International Finance Corporation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LCG	Local Consultative Group
KN	Karmojibi Nari
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MWCA	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSU	North South University
NP	Naripokkho
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RAKUB	Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank
SEDF	South Asia Enterprise Development Facility
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WAC	Women Action Committee
WAGE	Women and Gender Equality (Sub-Group of Local Consultative Group)

0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Country Study Evaluation Team consisted of Dr. S. M. Nurul Alam, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, and Marit Sørvald, Sociologist, Nordic Consulting Group Norway (NCG).

This country report is part of the Evaluation of the “Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)”. The evaluation was commissioned by Norad’s Evaluation Department, and carried out by Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and partners from May to November 2005. It is one of three country case studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Zambia. Both the main report (Norad Evaluation Report 5/2005) as well as the three country case studies are available at Norad’s web-page www.norad.no.

The data collection covers document reviews in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NORAD and the Norwegian embassy, including introductory interviews with key personnel in the MFA, NORAD and the embassy. The 14-day field work in Bangladesh was carried out in May-June 2005, in which interviews were conducted with representatives of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), co-funding partners within the private sector cooperation, multilateral and bilateral donors, and women’s and rights-based organisations (NGOs). The scope of the evaluation encompasses the dialogue between the cooperating partners and the implementation of the Gender Strategy and its relevance, and it is limited to the thematic areas of gender and rights, gender and economic participation, and gender and decision-making processes. An impact assessment is not included in the evaluation’s ToR.

The state-to-state development cooperation between Norway and Bangladesh, initiated in 1975, has been changing over the years, from substantial state-to-state cooperation in various sectors such as social sector programmes, health, infrastructure and education to a greater concentration on partners from civil society. Overall concerns and crosscutting issues have been women and gender equality, human rights, good governance and the environment.

Many stakeholders consider Norway to be a responsible and sensitive donor, paying attention to continuity in policy and continuity in cooperation. Norway is perceived as having played a lead role in the women and gender equality efforts in Bangladesh in the past two decades. This is explained in terms of Norway’s democratic traditions as well as local and Norwegian qualified gender expertise and personnel at the embassy, including women ambassadors since 1999. To continue the strong advocacy role in women and gender equality efforts, the Norwegian embassy is recommended to recruit embassy staff with gender specific expertise. The Gender Strategy’s relevance is documented by women’s activist organisations and other rights-based organisations, both through their constructive cooperation based on the Norwegian Gender Strategy and the partner organisations’ overall objectives. Some of the women’s organisations have expressed ownership of the Norwegian Gender Strategy. Their activities supported by the embassy are concentrated on women’s rights, women’s human rights, women and economic participation, and women and decision-making processes. Activities supported within the private sector have explicitly targeted women with micro credits and special facilities for women entrepreneurs, managers and women workers. The impact of these activities have not been assessed, as it is not part of the ToR. The upcoming review of the four women’s organisations covered in this study will include an overall impact assessment. Procedures for measuring improvements in rights, economic participation and

decision-making processes should be enhanced by both the embassy and the MFA and NORAD, and should be included as a specific issue in this planned review.

The respondents at the donor level have identified coordination among the donors and the GoB's willingness and ability to implement national policy as the most serious concerns in women and gender equality efforts. The donor groups Local Consultative Group (LCG) and Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) have highlighted women and gender issues, and influenced the GoB to mainstream gender in the process of drafting the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP). The Team concludes that the donors should be more ambitious in negotiations with the government to enforce the implementation of national policies, such as the National Policy for the Advancement of Women. It is recommended that the Local Consultative Group and its sub-group WAGE initiate a multi-donor impact evaluation of their women and gender equality programmes to identify what has been done, what the results are and what gaps remain in reaching the intended goals. There is a fear, especially among the women's organisations, that budget allocations for their activities may drastically be reduced due to changing aid modalities initiated by the donors, such as budget support and sector programme funding. However, it is the consultant's view that initiating new aid modalities could provide a new opportunity and enhance the implementation of the gender-based efforts in Bangladesh.

The scope of future donor cooperation in the area of women and gender equality should therefore be strengthened in light of the new aid modalities. Women's and rights organisations working in Bangladesh have developed their management capacity and institutional strength; however, financial sustainability will be an issue in the future. Although it is too early to know whether these organisations can become financially self-sufficient, there is a need to encourage and train the recipient partner organisations so that they can take steps to raise funds for their activities. Most women's organisations lack the capacity to financially support their activities. Therefore, the Evaluation Team recommends that the embassy continue to support these organisations while making it clear that this support is not permanent and in due time an exit strategy will be developed.

EVALUATION OF THE “STRATEGY FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION”

Country case study – BANGLADESH

1. INTRODUCTION

This country report is part of the Evaluation of the “Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)”¹. The evaluation was commissioned by Norad’s Evaluation Department, and carried out by Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and partners from May to November 2005. It is one of three country case studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Zambia. Both the main report (Norad Evaluation Report 5/2005) as well as the three country case studies are available at Norad’s web-page www.norad.no.

The evaluation is taking place as input to the revision of the present Strategy. The objective of the evaluation is to provide documentation and lessons learnt in the process of revising the Strategy. The ToR requests special focus on gender and rights, gender and decision-making processes, and gender and economic participation, three out of six key areas specified in the Strategy. Cooperation going on within the education sector, health sector, and natural resources and the environment, as covered in the Strategy, is not included in the country studies since relatively substantial documentation within these sectors already is available.

Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Zambia, three out of seven of Norway’s partner countries, have been selected for in-depth studies. In addition, the ToR limits the evaluation to bilateral development cooperation. Assessment of humanitarian assistance is not included in the ToR. The evaluation will concentrate on the period from 1997 to 2005, the duration of the Strategy. Another important aspect of the evaluation is its forward-looking approach, as input to the revision of the Strategy. The country studies do not include impact assessment studies that would have required more time and resources. The approach outlined in the ToR focuses on how the dialogue connected to women and gender issues have taken place over the years, how and who in the communication process raises these issues and in which contexts. This is also supposed to be an evaluation with a strong learning component. The evaluation is supposed to answer whether the Gender Strategy has had any relevance for the cooperation, and how the quality of the results has been measured and discussed through the dialogue.

The bilateral cooperation between Norway and Bangladesh is presently concentrated on the education sector, with an emphasis on basic education and private sector development, including trade. In addition to women and gender equality, the crosscutting issues of good governance, human rights and environment are selected priorities in the bilateral cooperation.

2. METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources consisted of document reviews in the NORAD and MFA archives in Oslo, as well as the archive at the Norwegian embassy in Dhaka. (See document list in Appendix III.) Introductory interviews

¹ A Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation 1997-2005, MFA, 1997.

with the MFA and NORAD staff related to the cooperation with Bangladesh, private sector development and special advisers with responsibility for gender issues in the two government bodies took place in Oslo in preparation for the field visit in Bangladesh. A similar process took place in Dhaka at the Norwegian embassy. During the introductory phase in Oslo and Dhaka, a selection of development partners and programme managers in Bangladesh were chosen for further interviews in Bangladesh. In accordance with the ToR, it was decided that the Bangladesh case study would cover a selection of partners from the private sector related to gender and economic participation and a selection of women's organisations working on gender and rights, decision-making processes and economic participation.

Accordingly, the four women's organisations Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Naripokkho (NP), Karmojibi Nari (KN) and the Association of Community Development (ACD) were selected. In addition, the Small Enterprise Credit Support (SECP) of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) were selected. Apart from these, representatives of women's organisations, representatives from the government sector, donor representatives, and representatives of other women's organisations were interviewed. SAMATA, an NGO working for land rights, was also included in the study, and a meeting with this organisation was held in Dhaka. In addition, an interview with the Centre for Policy Dialogue, a civil society think tank that carries out independent research, was consulted. (See "List of Respondents" in Annex I.) Fortunately, it was possible for the Evaluation Team to visit partners outside Dhaka. Rajshahi was selected for this purpose, and included visits to ACD and RAKUB for interviews and observation of their project activities. Data from these primary sources of the Bangladesh case study was collected during the fieldwork, lasting from May 21 to June 3, 2005.

Fieldwork was conducted in keeping with the main thrust of the study questions. These included: How has the Norwegian Gender Strategy been implemented? How does the embassy work with partner organisations (both GO and NGO)? Whose needs and interest are reflected in the Strategy and how familiar are the partners with the Strategy? And finally, is there any evidence that the Strategy could have contributed to changing institutional arrangements relevant to gender issues in partner countries? Several checklists were prepared to pursue the major study questions. (See Appendix II.) These issues were pursued with the respondents in two ways.

First, in order to minimise time and resources, representatives from different recipient organisations were invited to participate in a group discussion. The representatives from eight different organisations participated in the group discussion for about four hours. Other interviews were conducted face-to-face with individuals or small groups. During the fieldwork it was also possible to attend and observe one special event in which the Norwegian ambassador to Bangladesh made a public statement in support of NGOs.

3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

3.1 Prelude to Gender Mainstreaming

Gender relations in Bangladesh are influenced by worldviews and by values and attitudes derived from religious and patriarchal ideology. This indeed influences women's access to social, political, economic and legal institutions which are dominated and mediated by men. Not only do men have control of decision making in various areas of the household arena, but they also exercise control over women's income, their access to labour, their income, their assets, their bodies (sexuality) and their choice of marriage partners. Men in the family

are regarded as the breadwinners while women are treated as homemakers. This creates a dichotomy in the public and private domain of men and women, placing women in seclusion within the household arena. The emergence of the Islamic religious parties as important actors in the government and their possible influence on policies related to women's status should also be taken into consideration in the coming years. The challenge, therefore, will be how to transcend these constraints and create a congenial environment for ensuring equal rights for women and their participation in economic life and decision making.

In order to understand gender mainstreaming in Bangladesh, it is therefore important to be aware of the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has made commendable strides forward in areas of economic empowerment of women, spearheaded by nationwide micro credit programmes, participation of millions of women in the garments industries and other industries, and political empowerment. Education has been a priority of all governments since independence, and the donor community has provided support to large basic education programmes. Many donors, including Norway, have given priority to basic education for girls.

3.2 National Gender Machinery

The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MWCA) was established in 1995, and its mandate is to be the focal ministry for ensuring gender equality in various spheres of life. *"Mainstreaming of women has been a key element in the policies and strategies of the five-year plans. The Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95) placed women's issues in the context of macro framework with a multi-sector and mainstreaming approach."*² The GoB's strategic approach was to integrate women into mainstream economic activities, and the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) included strategic support to the macro objective of poverty reduction and human resource development by developing skills to increase women's involvement in economic activities and opportunities in the labour market.

Bangladesh is a signatory to international instruments, including the Beijing Platform, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, Bangladesh has made reservations regarding two of the CEDAW Articles which contribute to a continued lack of secular legal framework regarding inheritance and family law.

The Bangladeshi government has endorsed, without reservation, the Platform of Action (PFA) of the Fourth International Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995. Following the recommendations of the PFA, the government has prepared a comprehensive plan, "National Action Plan for Women's Advancement: Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action" (1998). This plan is a comprehensive document, which cuts across different sectors and areas of women's development and has been prepared through consultations and discussions with different stakeholders comprising government, local and national NGOs, women's organisations, civil society representatives and development partners. Fifteen ministries have been identified as line or sector ministries with regards to implementation of the PFA, and these include a network of 42 WID focal points. They have their respective Plans of Action for the implementation of the PFA. The overall coordination and monitoring responsibility lies with the MWCA, but all ministries and agencies have equal responsibility

² Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, GoB: Bangladesh Country Paper, Beijing+ 10 Global Review, High Level Round-Table of the Forty-Ninth Sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, UN, New York, 28 February – 11 March 2005.

for women's advancement. The MWCA's role is mainly focused on advocacy, policy leadership, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the NAP by all other sector ministries. In addition, a 44-member National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) chaired by the prime minister was established in 1997. In the country report presented at the UN Conference Beijing+ 10, the GoB presents progress achieved, but admits that "*much still remains to be done*".³

According to the women's movement, the positive achievements are overshadowed by confrontational politics, violence, corruption, violence against women and poor governance. In the so-called "shadow-report"⁴ presented in 2004 to the UN CEDAW, critical issues are raised. These present a general criticism of the government's actions in implementing the CEDAW and address several of the CEDAW's articles, stating that the GoB should take immediate action and withdraw their reservations. The "shadow-report" states that inadequate resources are provided for women's programmes and projects and that the impact of development plans on women has not been adequately assessed. The criticism addresses weaknesses in the legislation related to marriage, divorce, guardianship and inheritance. The lack of women in decision making and policy-making processes is a significant weakness in Bangladeshi society, and the "shadow-report" recommends affirmative action for political representation.

Even though Bangladesh has a National Action Plan (NAP) to improve conditions for women and for mainstreaming women and gender issues, the government's success in implementing the plan has been criticised in public discussions. As pointed out by many stakeholders, the NAP is an excellent plan, but it is poorly implemented. There is increasing violence against women in Bangladeshi society, which is related to women's economic participation in the export industry, trafficking, increased tension between different political groups in the society, and the result of poverty. The situation for many women is gradually becoming more difficult in Bangladesh. Relevant legal support is inadequate, and the low priority given women's issues at the national level does not make the situation better for vulnerable groups and categories of women. Nearly all the women's organisations and human rights organisations we met emphasised these conditions when discussing the situation of women in Bangladesh.

However, in the Bangladesh Country Paper presented at Beijing+ 10 Global Review⁵, the government expresses continued commitment to the empowerment and advancement of women with reference to the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA). This country paper also documents increased allocation to women's empowerment since 1995. "*The GoB is committed to the objectives of gender mainstreaming particularly in addressing the 12 critical areas of concerns expressed in the Beijing Conference on Women held in 1995. The government is also committed to the further actions and initiatives to accelerate the implementation of the PFA at local, national, regional and international levels as adopted in*

³ Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs: Bangladesh Country Paper - Beijing+ 10 Global Review, High Level Round Table of the Forty-ninth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations, 28 February – 11 March 2005, New York, USA, Dhaka, February. 2005.

⁴ Ains O Salish Kendra, Bangladesh Mohila parishad, Steps towards Development: Summary of CEDAW Report to Supplement the Fifth Periodic Report of the GoB – To the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Dhaka, May 2004.

⁵ Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs: Bangladesh Country Paper, Beijing+ 10 Global Review, Dhaka, 2005.

the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2000 as outlined in its Outcome Document.”(Op.cit.)

In spite of the government’s official statements, the women’s movement in Bangladesh is not satisfied with the present situation. Indeed, very recently a proposed revision of the National Policy for Women’s Advancement (1997) was conducted without any consultations with the major women’s organisations. According to the women’s organisations, the changes in policy formulations are a step backwards since the terms used are less specific and may indicate that the government is less dedicated to women and gender equality than expressed earlier.⁶ During our study we came across a news item stating that the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs had changed the National Plan for Women’s Advancement. It was also reported in the newspaper that many women’s organisations protested this unilateral change by the government without consulting women representatives. *“Authoritative sources said a number of changes have been made in the revised National Policy for Women’s Advancement, related to women’s economic, political and administrative empowerment where phrases like ‘equal right’, ‘equal and full participation’, ‘equal access’ have been either excluded or replaced with ‘constitutional rights’ ‘preference, greater participation’ which are tantamount to denying equal right to women.”*⁷

4. THE BILATERAL CONTEXT

4.1 Norway – Bangladesh Bilateral Cooperation

Since 1971, Norway has supported Bangladesh, which became one of Norway’s main partner countries in 1975. The major policy documents for the bilateral development cooperation between Norway and Bangladesh for this evaluation are the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) from 1995⁸ and the new MoU from 2003⁹. The MoU from 1995 stated that the cooperation was concentrated on the education sector and the productive sector, as well as on strengthening the democratic process. The overall aim was to reduce poverty for the poor population. Good governance and respect for human rights were included in the overall policy goals. Crosscutting considerations included in the policy framework were gender and the environment.

Revised in 2003, the MoU from 1995 is the present framework for the ongoing bilateral cooperation. In line with the MFA’s procedures, the bilateral cooperation was evaluated in 2001 as part of the revision process. One main conclusion from the evaluation was that there is a need to further consolidate the cooperation and reduce the number of cooperating partners. The evaluation concluded that coordination among the donors and with the Government of Bangladesh was a challenge and should be improved. As regards women and gender issues, the evaluation concluded, *“...both sets of partners have been effective in focusing efforts on women, but this does not mean that this is underpinned by good quality gender analysis.”*¹⁰ The evaluation report expressed satisfaction with the efforts made by the embassy to identify women in programme activities, but it requested more explicit analysis and impact assessments, emphasising the need to target the poorest segments of women.

⁶ The Independent, Dhaka, 31 May 2005.

⁶ Op.cit.

⁸ Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh concerning Development Cooperation, 1995.

⁹ Evaluation of Development Co-operation between Bangladesh and Norway, 1995-2000, MFA, Oslo, 2001

¹⁰ Op.cit.

The process of establishing a new MoU between the two countries started in 2001, and the new MoU was signed in early spring 2003. This MoU places an even stronger emphasis on human rights than before, and the fight against corruption and improved financial management are mentioned as crucial concerns. The sector cooperation is the same, but “productive sector cooperation” has been changed to “private sector development”, which is a departure from the earlier MoU.

A relatively limited focus has been given to issues of women and gender equality in the MoU, a tightly-worded document of only three to four pages: *“Other important concerns within the main areas of cooperation include gender equity, environment, institutional capacity building and HIV/AIDS control.”*¹¹

4.2 Volume of Present Cooperation

The size and volume of the bilateral development programme has changed substantially in the past decade. From being one of the larger recipients of Norwegian funds, the Bangladesh programme is now much smaller in size and has a more limited and focused portfolio. The volume of the ongoing bilateral programme between Norway and Bangladesh in 2003 was approximately NOK 123 million, including state-to-state cooperation as well as other allocations. The distribution of funds in 2003 was as follows: Health and Education – 43.4 %, HIV/AIDS 0.4 %, Economic Development and Trade – 29.8 %, Good Governance – 7.9 %, Environment and Energy – 18.4 %. In 2004 the volume of the budget allocation was increased to NOK 161.3 million, including state-to-state cooperation and other allocations such as private sector cooperation and NGOs. The general trend in the Norwegian cooperation with Bangladesh is that state-to-state cooperation has been reduced while support to NGO and private sector programmes has increased.

The estimate for 2005 is NOK 97.5 million. Fifty per cent will be allocated to the NGO sector and other non-public institutions, while the remaining 50 per cent will be disbursed to multilateral or regional organisations and banks with whom Norway co-finances programmes, representing indirect support to the GoB.

4.3 The Management of the Cooperation with Bangladesh

As part of the annual planning process the MFA’s Regional Desks¹² request embassies and NORAD to submit draft activity plans for the coming budget year. The embassies and NORAD present their draft activity plans, and these are subsequently reviewed and commented on by the MFA. The MFA must approve the activity plans. In this process, the embassy and NORAD identify the defined objectives, report on the results achieved the previous year and define the expected results and outcome for the coming year. The activity plan opens up the possibility for specific initiatives. Sometimes the MFA requests that the embassies pay special attention to crosscutting issues, such as the environment, women and gender equality, HIV/AIDS and the like.

5 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh concerning Development Cooperation, 2003.

¹² The division of responsibility between NORAD and MFA was changed in 2004. Until 2004 NORAD had the responsibility for the bilateral programme activities (Regional Desks), including approval of the annual plans. The MFA had (and still has) the responsibility for overall policy issues, including preparation of the annual budget (St. prp.1) that is presented and approved by the Norwegian National Assembly. The Regional Desks were moved to the MFA in order to strengthen the coordination as well as delegate more responsibility to the embassies involved in bilateral development cooperation.

The dialogue between the MFA and the embassy is based on the activity plan and budget allocation process. Gender issues will basically be raised in this connection on a general and regular basis in relation to individual programmes and projects. Women and gender equality concerns will also be brought up in connection with annual meetings and reviews of sector programmes, such as education sector programmes and private sector activities. The most recent instance in which gender issues were raised in the dialogue between the MFA and the embassy was the preparation of a review of the four major women's organisations supported by Norway, planned to take place during 2005. This planned review is intended to provide a summary of lessons learnt and an impact assessment to assist in formulating the future direction of support to women and gender equality in bilateral development cooperation.

The evaluation of the bilateral cooperation from 2001 was very clear in its recommendations for more consolidation and a reduced number of activities. This has been followed up by the embassy, and a reorganisation of the portfolio has taken place. In combination with the discussion on new aid modalities, the embassy is looking for new procedures for the administration of the portfolio. Support to NGO umbrella organisations, among others, has been discussed, while other activities have already been phased out.¹³ Harmonisation and budget support as part of the discussion on new aid modalities have explicitly been raised as issues in the dialogue between the MFA and the embassy. However, the framework conditions provided by the GoB have so far not opened up the possibility for substantial progress towards donor harmonisation and budget support.¹⁴

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENDER STRATEGY

5.1 The Donor Context

The major donors presently in Bangladesh are the United Kingdom, Japan, USAID, EU, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, various UN agencies, ADB and the World Bank Group. They participate in the Bangladesh Development Forum, a forum of all the donors previously known as the "Paris Consortium". The Consortium Group meeting led by the World Bank was held in Paris once a year and all the main donors participated. Later on, the group was renamed the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF). Its meetings are now held in Bangladesh.

In addition to multi-donor meetings, annual bilateral consultations between the individual donors and the GoB used to take place; these were referred to as the country programme negotiations. In 1998 the bilateral annual consultations between Norway and Bangladesh came to an end due to the substantial resources required from both sides, especially the GoB.

The Local Consultative Group (LCG), led by the World Bank until August 2005, is another donor forum that consists of bilateral and multilateral donors. It has now been agreed that the leadership should rotate among the donors (p.t. USAID). LCG has an Annual Development Forum/PRSP Implementation Forum with the GoB where they have been able to raise gender issues. Outside this annual forum it has not had regular consultation where gender issues are addressed.

¹³ Norwegian embassy, Dhaka: Activity Plan 2005.

¹⁴ Interview with donor representative, Dhaka, May 2005.

The LCG has 24 sub-groups, and the various donors are responsible for coordinating the sub-groups' activities. The sub-groups meet frequently, sometimes once a month. There is one sub-group on Women and Gender Equality (WAGE). Other sub-groups of relevance are Education, Private Sector, and Governance. Norway participates in these four sub-groups in addition to others, such as Finance, Energy and Macro-economy & Technical Assistance. Norway is the current chair of the LCG WAGE.

The donors' cooperation with the GoB has long been influenced by the lack of an approved PRSP. The LCG has been discussing new aid modalities such as harmonisation, sector programme support and budget support, but due to the inadequate framework conditions provided by the GoB, initiation of new aid modalities has not gained ground.

5.2 The Donors' Gender Approach

The LCG has been the GoB's counterpart in the Interim PRSP, involving all the LCG's sub-groups and providing comments during the drafting process.¹⁵ In the consultative process the Interim PRSP, WAGE was active and challenged the other sub-groups and relevant stakeholders to include gender mainstreaming in their comments to the Interim PRSP. Consequently, women's issues and gender mainstreaming were submitted to the GoB to ensure a more explicit emphasis on gender mainstreaming efforts.¹⁶

The LCG's general comments to the GoB were quite positive: *"Finally, crosscutting themes like gender and environment are better handled in this draft and a particular effort has been made to mainstream gender throughout."*¹⁷ Some donors and the UNDP expressed satisfaction with the role played by the LCG in the process of revising the Interim PRSP. Most of the respondents believed that the GoB has a sound document, but poor implementation will have to be overcome. The PRSP is likely to be finalised and approved by the GoB by September 2005.

Even though WAGE is perceived as having played a vital role in the final phase of the Interim PRSP, several respondents have questioned WAGE's contributions to women and gender equality in general. Some expressed frustration with WAGE and its work, emphasising lack of coordination and joint implementation by the donors, and lack of willingness by the GoB to take action. This could be interpreted as an indication that WAGE functions as a policy group with good intentions, but with limited ability to influence the government's commitment to implement national policy. One general comment repeated several times by the different sub-groups about the draft Interim PRSP was the importance of improving the GoB's action plans for the implementation of the PRSP. It seems that the implementation issue is a more general one, and not unique to the policy and implementation of gender-related efforts.

In analysing the dialogue between donors and the GoB and the efforts to improve women's rights and gender equality, it should be mentioned that younger members of WAGE expressed dissatisfaction with WAGE's role, arguing for moving gender issues up on the political agenda. The Norwegian embassy's representative in WAGE supported this opinion.

¹⁵ Op.cit.

¹⁶ Comments to the Interim PRSP to the GoB by LCG and the 11 sub-groups, Dhaka, April 2005.

¹⁷ Comments on the PRSP from the LCG, Dhaka, April 2005, page 2.

Discussions on coordination and implementation of gender strategies also focused on the results and impact of ongoing gender-related efforts. According to one respondent, there is a large gap in the documentation of the impact of current gender efforts in Bangladesh. “Everybody works on gender, but nobody knows what the impacts are,” stated one donor representative in reference to private sector development programmes.¹⁸

Gender mainstreaming is a term that has been used since the early 1990s. The term has been discussed by donors, by NGOs involved in the international women’s movement, and by academicians involved in gender research. The MWCA uses the term in dialogue with donors. However, there is great confusion about the meaning of the term. At the debriefing meeting held at the Norwegian embassy, the staff was not comfortable with the term gender mainstreaming. This is considered to be an interesting finding and highly relevant for the revision of the Norwegian Gender Strategy.

All the donors consulted had a corporate gender strategy, with “gender mainstreaming” as a key term. The UNDP’s corporate gender strategy is in the process of being reviewed by the UNDP Dhaka Office, and by December 2005 the UNDP’s country strategy plans are to be developed. A major part of the process will be the training of internal staff, including local employees. The UNDP’s key cooperating partner in gender-related programmes is the MWCA. The major ongoing programme objective is to improve gender mainstreaming in all government bodies, thereby providing a framework for awareness raising, training, and the incorporation of gender into all sector programmes being implemented by the government sector. Other sector programmes supported by the UNDP are within Health, Education, Social Sector Programmes and Trafficking.

With regard to GoB-NGO relations, there is by and large a consensus that the government’s role is not proactive in supporting the NGOs working for human rights, justice and democracy. Although the government has endorsed the Platform of Action of the Fourth Conference for Women, the government is not clear on what they mean by women’s empowerment. “The state is not clear about women policy and often contradicting in its statement. There is gap between what they say and what they do in reality”. “When a government comes to power it gets involved in politics and the result is nepotism. Whereas they advise the NGOs not to involve politics.”¹⁹

Both the GoB and the NGOs feel that it is important to improve the cooperation between them in terms of dialogue and sharing of views to improve the implementation of development programmes.

5.3 Norway’s Role in Advocating Women and Gender Equality at the Country Level

The Evaluation Team found that dialogue with the embassy takes place at two levels. The first level is the formal dialogue or the dialogue through official channels. This occurs when a partner organisation contacts embassy officials via letter or other means. These partners who contacted the embassy through this formal channel are aware of Norway’s interest in gender and human rights issues. Sometimes other donors also advise their partners to contact the Norwegian embassy²⁰. Informal contact occurs when embassy officials at different levels

¹⁸ Interview with a donor representative, Dhaka, May 2005.

¹⁹ This was revealed by ASK and BMP representative in the group discussion conducted during the fieldwork for this study held on 24 May 2005.

²⁰ For example, ACD was referred to the embassy by Swiss Development Cooperation

contact women's organisations to find out about a situation in the aftermath of certain incidents such as communal violence, human rights violations, violence against women, and law and order situation. Some partners revealed that this type of consultation is an ongoing process, and it is part of their regular dialogue that provides the opportunity to confer freely, become better acquainted and create a good environment for future collaboration. In other instances, embassy officials, because of their previous knowledge about the women's organisations, suggest that their partners apply for grants. This appears to be an effective way of working with local partners; however, the question may be raised as to what extent the organisations conducting high quality work outside the capital Dhaka have access to the embassy officials or knowledge about the embassy's activities.

The issue of women and gender equality was always raised by Norway in the bilateral annual consultations, both in discussions of sector priorities and in separate statements. It is difficult to document whether there has been a change in this respect. Other donors interviewed expressed the view that the annual multi-donor consultations have not changed Norway's position related to raising women and gender issues. Gender will be brought up in these consultations, but by different donor representatives, but according to our data, Norway still promotes these issues more strongly than most other donors.

All informants referred to the important role Norway plays as advocate and "watchdog". The UNDP country office stated that Norway has been the most important donor in raising gender issues in Bangladesh and has taken the lead in this area for a long time. The UNDP representative was concerned that Norway's position should be maintained in order to provide continuity. If Norway downplays this role, there could be a danger that the educational role played by Norway up to this point in relation to other donors could result in reduced focus on gender by the other donors. Bringing about change in the role of women in Bangladesh is seen as a very slow, long-term process, and it requires dedication if the objective is to contribute to making a difference.

One concern raised by many of the respondents in relation to gender equality is education. The achievements through donor cooperation in improving educational opportunities for all have been substantial, including the enrolment of girls in the educational system. The education sector programmes supported by the donor group are implemented by the GoB and the NGOs. However, the women's organisations are concerned about the quality of the education and the curriculum at all levels. Many suggest that human rights, including girls' and women's rights, should be brought in as part of the curriculum. Since support to basic education is among the major areas of cooperation in Bangladesh, the Norwegian embassy should take note of this concern and look into the possibility of strengthening women's and human rights issues within the education programmes supported.

5.4 The Embassy's Staff, Qualifications and Mode of Work

The ambassador has delegated the daily responsibility for the development programme to the counsellor. There are four national and four Norwegian advisers (secretaries/diplomats) currently engaged in development affairs at the embassy.

Reviewing the history of personnel at the Norwegian embassy in Dhaka, it is of vital importance to mention that for a long period highly experienced women and men from the MFA and NORAD have held key positions at this embassy. Women who had acted as gender advisers in NORAD, Oslo, also worked at the embassy during periods when gender-related efforts were built up as a major part of the Norwegian assistance portfolio. Even prior to this,

both male and female staff, ambassadors and NORAD resident representatives had actively promoted women and gender equality efforts.

Current Norwegian staff at the embassy consists of well-qualified advisers experienced within a wide range of fields, including the private sector, education, law and political science. Although the ambassador has delegated all responsibility for development cooperation to the embassy's counsellor, she is well aware of her political role as the Norwegian ambassador and takes part in important meetings in which gender issues are discussed or in situations in which Norway should take a public stand.²¹ The counsellor and the staff participate in meetings at several levels with donors and cooperating partners in which gender issues are raised as integrated concerns. One Norwegian embassy secretary, educated as a lawyer, has responsibility for gender issues. She is quite new at the embassy, and in this respect she offers a fresh approach and complements the local senior adviser on gender issues. Since Norway's development strategy in Bangladesh is based on a rights approach, her advantage of being trained as a lawyer is useful. These two women advisers represent the embassy in WAGE.

The local national adviser in charge of women and gender equality issues has held her position for 15 years. This has provided continuity within the context of cooperation as well as institution building within the embassy. Her major role as gender focal point has brought her in the past to NORAD regional gender focal meetings – an institutionalised meeting that took place until ten years ago. The output of these meetings was considered to be a valuable contribution to the monitoring and measuring of results since the agenda for the meetings made dialogue possible within the Norwegian bilateral cooperation. These annual or bi-annual meetings managed from the NORAD headquarters in Oslo came to an end in the mid-1990s due to priorities and changes in the implementation of the Gender Strategy. This meeting brought together representatives from the NORAD Asian Desk and respective gender focal points from other regions, built competence and maintained the institutionalised relations with the gender advocacy groups at the local level. Gatherings in Oslo with gender focal points from all NORAD delegations and relevant embassies also took place. The gender focal point system was no longer given priority, illustrating that to some degree the Gender Strategy for 1997-2005 has received less attention.

Since 1999 there have been women ambassadors who have assumed a pro-active role in gender and development. The first held in the position for nearly five years, until 2003. Her successor is also a woman. According to the partners within the NGO groups, the presence of women ambassadors has been important for the emphasis Norway has put on gender concerns. The message from several partners was that the status as ambassador has an impact when gender issues are raised and which should not be under-estimated when taking Norway's contributions into consideration.

In many cases, the embassy personnel do bring up gender issues whenever relevant, and this is documented in the annual activity plans, in comments from the review of the activity plans, and in mid-term reviews and meetings. Gender mainstreaming is taking place to a certain degree since women and gender equality is stated as an objective within the private sector development cooperation, as a target for the cooperation within the education sector and as part of the rights approach and human rights issues. However, the embassy staff, specially the

²¹ For instance the ambassador held a speech at the 14th anniversary of Karmojibi Nari in May 2005 while the field visit in Dhaka took place. Her speech was explicit and clearly supported the women workers' movement.

Norwegians, stated that they do not feel comfortable with the term “gender mainstreaming”. One adviser said that gender is brought up by Norway, but not as a core issue, and in a rather fragmented manner. *“Norway is not having an over-active role as other larger donors, such as for instance DFID. DFID is active and pushing.”*²² Some of the embassy staff members regard their role as generalists, and they believe it is the embassy’s job to identify competent partners that can implement the programme activities. *“The embassy’s staff has to question: What do we do to bring up gender issues?”*²³

In spite of the donors’ and partners’ positive view of the support to women and gender equality, and the role played by Norway in advocating gender issues, data collected indicate that these issues were received greater attention in the dialogue a few years back. This also holds true for the dialogue between the Norwegian embassy and the MFA/NORAD headquarters in Oslo. There has been very limited direct dialogue in recent years between the gender advisers in NORAD or the MFA and their counterparts at the embassy. A revitalisation of the regional gender meetings arranged in the mid-1990s by NORAD and the MFA, as well as gender gatherings in Oslo, has been requested by staff members at the embassy. *“Gender is one of the highlighted issues of MDG and PRSP, we need to follow those. For this gender meetings/seminars with the partners are highly required.”*²⁴

The interviews with the embassy staff indicate to a certain degree that there is a change occurring in the Norwegian approach, from being an active promoter of women and gender issues to a more passive one. However, the Team considers the situation to be a contradictory one. First, one must take into consideration that Norway was a more important donor in previous years and is now perceived to some degree as a minor donor by the GoB, the donor community and stakeholders. Simultaneously, Norway is still regarded as the most important donor in this field. Discussions on new aid modalities are also bringing in new management procedures at the embassy. The Team sees the present situation as one in which the embassy is moving towards a possible change in approach. In Bangladesh, discussions on women and gender equality issues might be even more important now than in the early 1990s, and the MFA should be aware of this in the forthcoming revision of the Gender Strategy.

6. BACKGROUNDS AND PROFILES OF THE ORGANISATIONS

Since the inception of Norwegian development cooperation with Bangladesh in 1971, Norway has been active in supporting programmes in social welfare and human development (i.e. education, micro credit, employment creation, private sector development) as well as in sectors for strengthening the democratic process, human rights, access to justice and good governance, and crosscutting issues in the area of gender and development. The areas related to human rights, access to justice, strengthening of women workers’ organisations and institutionalising women-based organisations have received attention from Norway, which has provided significant positive attention both in terms of funding and policy.

²² Interview with Norwegian adviser, Norwegian embassy, Dhaka, 23 May 2005.

²³ Op.cit.

²⁴ Interview with embassy staff, Dhaka, June 2005.

In reviewing the different projects supported by the embassy during the reference period for this study (1997-2005), the embassy supported projects in various areas. These are some of the topics covered by 15 organisations supported by the embassy in 1997-2005²⁵:

- Promotion and protection of women's human rights
- Networking women's organisations throughout the country
- Human rights development programme for grassroots women
- Development of women workers' movement
- Female industrial workers (training, advocacy and agitation)²⁶
- Violence against women
- Incorporating gender into the national budget (research)
- Promoting gender equity
- Human rights and democracy
- Trafficking
- HIV/AIDS in relation to female prostitutes
- Girls' access to education
- Girl/child labour rights
- Employment generation

Due to limited time and resources, four key women's organisations were chosen for our study. These organisations are the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Naripokkho (NP), Karmojibi Nari (KN) and the Association of Community Development (ACD). In addition, certain other programmes in private sector development were selected. These are the International Finance Corporation's South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF), the Small Enterprises Development Credit Project of Rajshahi Krishi Unnyan Bank (RAKUB), and the Global Civil Society Forum led by the Centre for Policy Dialogue. SAMATA, an organisation working for land rights, was also included.

A brief description of the organisations covered by this study is given below²⁷.

6.1 Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) - BGD - 2538

The BMP is the largest women's organisation in Bangladesh and has been active in different women's movements since the independence of Bangladesh. It is a membership-based organisation with more than 134,000 members organised through 59 district committees and 500 local units throughout the country. The BMP works with both grass roots women and national policy makers, and advocates for better implementation of relevant instruments of international law and legislation at the national level. At the grass roots level the BMP provides training in human rights and legal aid to its members with the aim of empowering women and increasing respect for women's rights²⁸. Norway is a long-time partner of the BMP and has supported its activities since 1990 with a total amount of approximately NOK

²⁵ NGO/WiD Partner Organisations (1997-2005). Undated write up received from the Norwegian embassy, Dhaka

²⁶ Reference is made in particular to Karbojibi Nari's activities. See Annual Report 2003-2004, Karmojibi Nari

²⁷ The following section has been prepared by quoting freely from the various appropriation reports, appraisal and annual reports.

²⁸ Appropriation Report, p.2. Project Implementation Document (Appraisal) 2004-2008. July 2003

7.4 million until 2004²⁹. The ongoing project is “*Promotion and Protection of Women’s Human Rights in Bangladesh (2004-2008)*”. The project was approved in April 2004. For this project Norway is providing a grant of NOK 14.5 million for a period of five years, from 2004 to 2008³⁰. The BMP plays a key role in shaping women and gender policy in Bangladesh and is represented as one of the Bangladeshi women NGOs at regional and international conferences.

6.2 Naripokkho (NP) - BGD 2537

Founded in the 1983, NP is a membership-based women’s activist NGO that initiated and conceived the Doorbar Network, a platform for rendering services to 450 member organisations. These are local women’s organisations located throughout the country. The member organisations are grouped under 16 geographical divisions, represented by 16 regional committees. The network project facilities support and train Doorbar members in working towards its primary goals of preventing violence against women and increasing political empowerment of women. It undertakes advocacy, research and training on various issues related to women’s rights and development. The main focus of activity includes media, culture, human rights, health and the environment³¹. NP has considerable experience in conducting workshops, seminars, training and national level conferences. The cooperation between NP and NORAD/the embassy started in 1996 after the embassy had supported preparations for and participation by Bangladesh at the Beijing conference in 1995³². NP has previously received funds from Norway, Denmark and Canada. The Norwegian contribution before the current project amounts altogether to NOK 2.7 million³³. The name of the current project is “*Doorbar Network*” (*consolidation of the National Platform for Women’s Movement*). The allocation of funds to the current Doorbar project amounts to NOK 12 million distributed over a three-year period, and was approved in April 2004³⁴.

6.3 Karmojibi Nari (KN) – BGD 2555

KN, established in 1991, is probably the first organisation in Bangladesh that promotes women workers’ rights and improves their capacity to bargain for their rights through various means and measures. These include the enhancement of awareness of working women, skills development, development of networking, organisation of rallies and sensitisation of policy makers, civil society, mass media and other stakeholders. The embassy has supported KN since the mid-1990s. KN has successfully transformed a small initiative into an organisation promoting and realising women’s rights. Its activities are currently limited to the Dhaka industrial area with target beneficiaries of 5000³⁵. However, KN plans to expand its activities to other industrial areas of the country. The name of the current project is “*Integrated Development Programme for Working Women*”. NOK 7.6 million is earmarked as a grant for five years for the period 2003-2008. The grant was approved by the embassy in October 2003. KN works for democratic rights in the expanding modern labour market and

²⁹ BMP’s appropriation document dated 5.10.04. p. 2. Indeed over the years the embassy started with a small amount, which is 7.4 million NOK, and on the basis of initial experience it awarded the current grant, which is large. The positive experience of the embassy with BMP was mentioned in the appropriation document.

³⁰ BMP, Ibid. p.2

³¹ Completion Report on Strengthening of a National Platform for the Women’s Movement: Doorbar. July 2000-December 2003.p.6

³² NP Appropriation Document.

³³ NP, Ibid. p. 1

³⁴ NP, Ibid. p.1

³⁵ KN Appropriation Document. p.-1-2

has the potential to become a major political force within the labour movement in Bangladesh.

6.4. Association for Community Development (ACD) – BGD - 2536

The ACD is a regional NGO based in Rajshahi that works with the poor and the most disadvantaged women in society. Established in 1989, it currently operates in eleven Upazilas in the Rajshahi, Naogaon and Chapai Nawabgang districts³⁶. A combination of programmes for economic development (credit, livelihoods and food security) with a rights-based approach addresses the ACD's objectives of poverty alleviation and gender justice³⁷. The ACD also works on violence against women and has published several research reports in this area.³⁸ Another noticeable feature of the ACD's efforts is that it works with different communities, both Bangla speaking and Santolas, a group of local indigenous population. Its intervention on women and child trafficking has also received wide attention from civil society and the general public. The title of the current project is "*Comprehensive Programme for Human Rights and Gender Equality*". The grant of NOK 6 million was approved by the embassy in April 2004 for a period of three years from 2004 to 2006.

The ACD is instrumental in identifying vulnerable individuals, and the organisation's integrated approach and methods to assist victims of violence, in addition to its publications and documentation activities, seem to be quite valuable although no impact analysis of its efforts supported by Norway has been carried out.

6.5 RAKUB-Small Enterprise Development Credit Project (RAKUB-SECP)³⁹

The Rajshahi Krishi Unnyan Bank is a regional agricultural bank with its head office in Rajshahi, and its activities are regulated by the banking rules and regulations of the Government of Bangladesh. SECP of RAKUB is implemented to alleviate poverty in northwest Bangladesh through direct increase of non-farm income of small entrepreneurs and indirect creation of non-farm employment among the population of the region. Initially, the project will be implemented in eight Upazilas in the Rajshahi district. Norway is providing NOK 38 million as a grant over a period of five years starting in 2002. The finance division of the Ministry of Finance is the national contract partner for the implementation process, while RAKUB is responsible for the local implementation of the project.

The target beneficiaries of SECP are "disadvantaged entrepreneurs" lacking access to credit from commercial banks and micro finance institutions. In general, preference is given to women entrepreneurs when processing the loan cases. The target is to have 20 per cent women clients. Emphasis is placed on training and skills development. All clients go through orientation training and entrepreneurship training. Skills development training is being planned, but so far has not been implemented. To reach the targets related to gender equality, special initiatives to identify women entrepreneurs are being implemented. The project management of SECP has one special adviser whose task is to identify women clients. Many of the businesses included in the area are family businesses. According to a recent mid-term review, one of "*the SECP successes have been the gender coverage that is assessed as highly*

³⁶ Jajajuddin Khan, Promotion of Human Rights for the Grassroots Women. Mid-Term Evaluation. ACD, September 2001. p 10

³⁷ Dr. Hamida Hussain et.al. Final Appraisal Report. Dhaka, July 2003.

³⁸ See for instance: Sarwar, Salima (ed): Types, Nature and Causes of Violence Against Women in Rajshahi District, ACD, Rajshahi, 2004, and Sarwar, Salima (ed.): Hillah Marriage – Humiliation of Muslim Women under Fundamentalism, Rajshahi, 2003.

³⁹ Agreement BGD-2524, Summary of Project Document. p.10.

satisfactory. More than one out of four borrowers is a woman client.”⁴⁰ One weakness identified by the Team is the weak links between production and marketing for the women entrepreneurs since marketing lies in the domain of men. However, the mid-term review of the SECP also states that *“being formally responsible for a loan has a number of positive effects on women, not least in terms of self-confidence.”*⁴¹ This is also in line with the situation of the women entrepreneurs we met during the Team’s field visit in Rajshahi.

6.6 International Finance Corporation (IFC)

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), established in 1956, is the World Bank's private-sector lending arm and offers a wide variety of financial products to private sector projects in developing countries such as equity, long-term loans, structured finance and risk management products, and advisory services to its clients. Although the IFC does not take any government guarantees for its financing, the IFC's work often requires close cooperation with government agencies in developing countries. Working with business partners, it invests in private enterprises in developing countries without accepting government guarantees and operates on a commercial basis. It invests exclusively in profit projects and charges market rates for its products and services. The IFC, which has been promoting private sector development for more than 40 years, is the largest multilateral source of loan and equity financing for private sector projects in developing countries. As a rule, the enterprises financed by the IFC must be majority private sector owned and controlled.⁴²

The South Asia Enterprises Development Facility (SEDF) is a service provider to small and medium-sized clients. No financial assistance or credit is covered under this programme, but it aims at improving the business environment in the region through technical and advisory support. Norway has been cooperating with the IFC in Bangladesh since 2002, and a grant of NOK 50 million has been allocated for the five-year programme 2002- 2007. Other donors contributing to the SEDF are DFID, Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Netherlands and the EU.

One of the programme goals is to increase participation and improve the performance of women as workers, entrepreneurs and managers.⁴³ The SEDF project has a gender component including employment, training and industrial production. The semi-annual report of 2005 on SEDF states that, *“The gender work undertaken by SEDF is currently channelled through women business membership organisation (WBMO)”*. The SEDF’s work with selected women associations is aimed at developing their ability to meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs and works towards removing gender barriers that prevent women-owned SME’s from developing further. This includes activities such as business counselling, membership drives, ITC, and developing products and services specific to women entrepreneurs. There are four major women business associations in Bangladesh, and the SEDF has been working with all the four organisations. These organisations are:

Chittagong Women Entrepreneurs, Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BWCCI), Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh (WEAB), and Women Entrepreneurs Association (WEA).

⁴⁰ Sigvaldsen, E. et al: Mid-Term Review of Small Enterprise Development Project, June 2005 (Draft Report)

⁴¹ Op.cit.

⁴² www.worldbank.org/ifc/

⁴³ Interview with Dag Larsson, Senior Advisor, NORAD.

An evaluation carried out by the DFID in 2004 found that the outcome was quite good so far, including in terms of institution building and capacity building for women.⁴⁴ According to the Norwegian embassy, more progress has been achieved beyond the defined targets.⁴⁵

6.7 SAMATA

SAMATA (from the Bengali word meaning “equality”) is an organization working for the landless poor in Bangladesh. It was founded in 1976 as a youth organisation, but was later established as an NGO that organised the landless poor to work for rights to land. The organisation works on rights-based social development with the aim of contributing to “qualitative positive political changes of society”.⁴⁶ SAMATA works in eleven districts and 47 Upazilas, and has 94 partner organisations as part of its national network. Its donors are Norway (since 2001), United Kingdom/DFID (since 2001), Sweden (since 2000) and Bread for the World of Germany (since the early 1990s). SAMATA has a five-year contract with Norway. The contribution for 2004 was approximately NOK 2 million (13% of the donor contribution), and a comparable amount will be allocated for 2005. The DFID is the largest donor, contributing 67 per cent of the donor funding in 2004.

In addition to land rights, SAMATA works within six other sector programme areas, including Gender Relation and Development, Democratisation, Land and Agrarian Network for Development, Production Support, National Policy and Advocacy, and Organisational Strengthening. The major success of SAMATA has been in the Land Rights Programme. As a result of the organisation’s efforts, government-owned land (khas land) has been transferred to the landless poor of both genders. Women and men have been trained in gender and development issues. Training, advocacy and awareness raising have been undertaken by the organisation, and many people have become conscious of their democratic rights through various motivational activities.⁴⁷ Building capacity, providing technical and legal assistance, and mobilisation of people at the grass roots level are key elements in the organisation’s strategy.

6.8 Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) is an independent policy research institute, established in 1993 with the support of civil society leaders, and it conducts policy analysis and socio-political and economic research, including governance. The CPD’s objective as a civil society think-tank is to bridge the gap between empirical research, analysis dialogue and networking. Most of the professional staff members, 52 in all, are economists. Their external collaborative international and national network includes researchers in other fields such as social scientists and gender specialists, and has connections to gender researchers who provide input to its publications upon requests. The CPD has also established close links to the women’s movement in Bangladesh. In one of its major publications, *“Developing a Policy Agenda for Bangladesh – Civil Society’s Task Force Reports 2001”*, there is a chapter on women and gender equality issues. It cooperates on gender research with the North South University (NSU)⁴⁸, the largest private university in Bangladesh. There is also direct connection

⁴⁴ Mid-Term Review, SEDP, DFID, 2004.

⁴⁵ Norwegian Embassy Dhaka: Activity Plan 2005 (including Report for 2004).

⁴⁶ SAMATA: Annual Work Report 2004, p. 1, Dhaka, 2005.

⁴⁷ According to SAMATA, more than 17,000 landless poor have become aware of their democratic rights through the organization’s training and awareness raising during 2004. SAMATA: Annual Work Report 2004, Dhaka, 2005.

⁴⁸ North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh, was established by the NSU Foundation on the initiative of a group of philanthropists, industrialists, bureaucrats and academics. The

between the CPD and the economist who is doing the consultancy for the Norwegian and Dutch embassies on “Gender Budgeting”, which will be finalized by December 2005⁴⁹. “A distinct feature in CPD’s research portfolio is that the research themes include both cutting edge issues of immediate concern and interest, and issues of long-term strategic importance for the country.”⁵⁰ The donor group cooperates with the CPD in analysing the national framework conditions, and the centre plays an important role at national level. Its publications are widely accepted internationally, including by the donors in Bangladesh. In addition, the CPD’s strength is its ability to carry out a combination of research and communication with key national stakeholders as well as with the donor community. It pays much attention to dialogue in the development process. The CPD plays a key role vis-à-vis the donor community and receives support from Norway and other donors to undertake studies of relevance for the development cooperation (Global Development Forum). These include private sector policy issues and analysis of macro-economic conditions. The support provided by Norway in 2005 is limited to approximately NOK 600,000, and covers reporting on development issues requested by the embassy.

6.9 Capacity Building

Capacity building is mentioned as an objective in nearly all the agreements reviewed. Overall, capacity building is found to be an important focus of Norwegian cooperation. The respondents interviewed also stated this. However, at the group discussion meeting held at the BMP’s office on May 24, 2005, with representatives from eight women’s and rights-based organisations, the view was expressed that Norway should focus more on training in the project design.

To maintain the embassy’s ability to work on women and gender equality, both with programmes and projects directed at women and within areas in which gender concerns must be integrated in accordance with the MoU, ensuring that embassy personnel has necessary competence on women and gender equality should be a priority in providing continuity in the role played by Norway in Bangladesh. This may be even more important with the expected changes through new aid modalities.

6.10 Strengthening of Institutions

A requirement is incorporated into the contracts with the Norwegian embassy that the partner organisations must endeavour to improve their administrative and financial management capacity. Indeed, all the appraisal reports place considerable emphasis on the importance of improving and updating the capacity of these organisations in the financial and managerial spheres.

It appears from the appropriation documents for support to the women’s organisations that the embassy has taken the issues of management and financial capacity building very seriously and pursued these in both the pre-contract and post-contract periods. The embassy officials also keep a close eye on the administrative and financial management and encourage the organisations to take steps in this regard. The organisations expressed satisfaction with

Government of Bangladesh approved the establishment of NSU in 1992. It was formally inaugurated in 1993. The President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is the Chancellor of NSU.

⁴⁹ Dr. Kaniz Siddique, Professor, Department of Economics, Head of Gender Budget Secretariat, Institute of Development, Environment & Strategic Studies, North South University, Dhaka, is in charge of the gender budget project supported by the embassy, whose objective is to provide information and analysis for the GoB to formulate a gender sensitive budget.

⁵⁰ Centre for Policy Dialogue: CPD Publications Catalogue, Dhaka, 2004.

the emphasis placed on these issues as part of the cooperation since it created new competence and increased capacity in their organisations. Improvement of financial, administrative, and research and monitoring capacity will require technical support from resource groups in Bangladesh and could possibly be funded by Norway or other donors. Technical assistance from local consultants on administrative and financial management might be useful. However, for research and monitoring capacity building the possibility of some external technical assistance might be explored.

In the case of RAKUB, there are elements of institution building and capacity building related to women entrepreneurs and women as business managers. To further strengthen institution building and thereby sustainability, links between the production and market must be strengthened.

The IFC, through its programme SEDF, provides technical assistance and enhances the business environment. One of the programme goals is to increase participation and improve the performance of women as workers, entrepreneurs and managers. An evaluation carried out by the DFID in 2004 found that the outcome was quite good so far, including in terms of institution building and capacity building for women. However, as mentioned earlier, links and coordination between various donor supported activities are weak, and very few impact evaluations have been carried out.⁵¹

It appears that the embassy is very much aware of the need to enhance capacity building in both the planning and implementations periods. The embassy has made capacity improvement a requirement for support to the recipient organisations. In one instance, the embassy made provision for technical assistance, and in other cases, the organisations have used their own resources to improve this. This support from the embassy is a significant contribution to strengthening the institutional capacity of some of the major women's organisations in Bangladesh. This is important because although Bangladesh has made good progress in women's activism, these organisations must improve their administrative and financial capacity in order to manage large funds and programmes.

7. RIGHTS, ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

7.1 Rights

The need to improve the rights of the vast majority of the Bangladeshi population became a theme that initiated a process for the Norwegian embassy around 2000. For some time the embassy had identified the need to focus more on rights, including human rights, and based on three separate studies⁵² produced by an independent consulting firm, the embassy developed an action plan in 2001.⁵³ This plan aims at promoting change with respect to human rights and democracy by increasing the interplay between the state and civil society, transforming popular awareness and perceptions, increasing awareness and accountability on the part of politicians, law-enforcement officers, judges and others holding public power, and

⁵¹ Mid Term Review, South Asia Enterprise Development Facility, DFID, 2004.

⁵² Verulam Associates: Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh – Context for a Strategy, Dhaka 2000; Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh: NORAD's Current Approach, Dhaka, 2000; Human Rights and Democracy – NORAD's Current Approach, Dhaka, 2000.

⁵³ Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh: A Plan for Norwegian Support, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Dhaka 2001.

by strengthening civic and public institutions as well as improved legal framework and practices.

The priority areas defined for support and protection of rights were:

- Right to Access: Justice
- Right to Liberty and Security: Trafficking of Women and Children
- Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination: Gender Discrimination
- Right to Livelihood: Land
- Right to Livelihood: Child Labour

However, the embassy considered the plan to be too ambitious since an increased effort to further consolidate the bilateral development cooperation had been stipulated by the MFA. Some adjustments had to be made within the rights and human rights approach. Women's rights and gender equality was a natural key issue, according to embassy staff. In addition, the embassy continued to support one project related to land rights, one child labour project, and one project focusing on trafficking. Elements of these three rights issues are integrated in other activities accordingly.

Norwegian development cooperation in Bangladesh has had a rights-based approach since the inception of this action plan⁵⁴. Partners working on rights issues are numerous, including several human rights organisations and women's organisations. Legal aid and legal assistance, awareness raising advocacy, workers' rights and land rights are the focus of project activities implemented by several partners. The rights-based approach is also a part of the private sector cooperation, with activities such as fighting corruption, improving framework conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises, developing facilities for women entrepreneurs and supporting legal rights for women workers. The rights-based activities have not been assessed in terms of their impact. However, in the process of developing improved conditions at many levels, some results could be seen as positive project outcomes in terms of improving rights at a general level. As actors at the local and national levels, women's organisations mobilise women and men in raising awareness for justice, human rights, and social and political rights. In this context, the women's organisations are political actors, and their efforts are visible in the media and on the streets, as well as at the grass roots level. The political processes they are involved in are difficult to measure in terms of their direct impact. The impact made by political actors takes time to measure, but indicators of their contributions should be developed in order to document their impact. Among the partners there are organisations with national and regional networks being supported by Norway and other donors. The positive attitudes and dedication of the cooperating partners indicate that their project activities are having an impact. The rights-based approach is in line with the overall goal of contributing to the democratic process in Bangladesh, as expressed in the MoU.

Significantly, SAMATA, one of the NGOs receiving support, has presented interesting measures and indicators of their impact. In its annual report for 2004, the organisation reported in a professional way on results achieved.. Other partners should review this report's mode of measuring results. The organisation works on both land rights and democratic rights,

⁵⁴ The rights-based approach was first introduced by the Government of Norway in the Report No. 21 to the Storting (1999-2000) *Focus on Human Dignity*. This was followed up in the Report No. 35 to the Storting (2003-2004) *Fighting Poverty*, 2004. The policy is implemented at the country level in the bilateral development cooperation in all partner countries.

including women's rights. Access to land is seen as the base of economic activity, for both women and men, and therefore the most urgent need for the landless poor. As part of its strategy, political mobilisation and participation is an objective and necessary to the process of mobilising land resources, implying that their activities linked to land rights are within the priorities for the embassy's work in Bangladesh.

7.2 Decision-Making Processes

Some of the organisations that play an important role in awareness raising and advocacy, such as BMP and KN, contribute to strengthening the role of women in the decision-making process. This includes decision making in the family as well as at the work place. Some of these organisations are indeed working on political empowerment and economic empowerment as well as on due rights at the work place. For example, KN has been working to enhance the bargaining capacity of working women through strengthening its networking, ensuring involvement of a cross-section of the population, and sensitising policy makers, civil society, NGOs and trade unions⁵⁵.

It is also important to examine the role some of these organisations play in the media relating to women and decision-making processes. These organisations are often cited in the Dhaka newspapers when women and gender issues are raised. KN, ASK and BMP are referred to as organisations that are challenging the government and the role of women's participation in decision making. In this sense, the organisations are presented to the readers as actors fighting for women and gender equality. These organisations have a "voice" in the media at the national level and are recognised as important, legitimate participants in the national women's movement.

7.3 Economic Participation

Private sector development is one of two main areas for the bilateral cooperation.

The small enterprise credit support (SECP) of Rajshahi Krishi Unnyan Bank (RAKUB) has been devised to provide credit to entrepreneurs without collateral who lack access to credit from commercial banks and whose need for credit is higher than that offered by the Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs)⁵⁶. It is stipulated in the project document that at least 20 per cent of the beneficiaries will be women, but the actual achievement as of March 2005 was approximately 26 per cent. SECP credit has been provided to numerous activities that are non-traditional, but in demand on the local market as well as outside the local market. Some of these activities include battery making, cap making, electrical goods production, button production etc⁵⁷. Until March 2005, 396 women entrepreneurs received credit under this project, and 2,367 people were employed by these women entrepreneurs⁵⁸. Marketing is a problem for many of these women entrepreneurs. The Evaluation Team believes that the project needs to link production with market access so that the beneficiaries may reap greater benefits.

Norway cooperates with the IFC and other donors⁵⁹ in the "South Asia Enterprise Development Facility" (SEDF). The programme goal is to promote sustainable economic

⁵⁵ Annual Report, Karmojibi Nari, 2003-2004

⁵⁶ Appropriation Document. p.3

⁵⁷ Meeting with project office, SECP, RAKUB, May 2005.

⁵⁸ Progress Report, upto March 2005. CPO, Rajshahi

⁵⁹ The donors are the Asian Development Bank, the Netherlands, EU, UK and Norway.

growth through an increased contribution of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to national economies, and is implemented in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Northeast India. Eighty per cent of the programme funding is used in Bangladesh. The purpose is to enhance the number, performance and competitiveness of the SMEs. The programme provides technical assistance and a business-enabling environment. SEDF has a gender-integrated perspective in terms of employment goals and increased women entrepreneurs and women managers, and it includes technical assistance to women business associations. In meetings with the Team, the IFC Bangladesh Office raised the issue of coordination and links between the various donor initiatives related to women's economic participation, wondering why links between different programmes were lacking since coordination is a prioritised issue. The IFC was critical of some of the women entrepreneur organisations due to the nature and backgrounds of the women who led these organisations. The IFC also brought up the fact that very few impact studies had been carried out to see what is actually happening on the ground within this field of cooperation. The IFC greatly appreciated the Norwegian support, and requested more information about Norway's policy and assistance to ADB and other multilateral organisations on women and gender programmes, which seemed to have been absent in its communication with the embassy.

Micro credit schemes are also part of the projects implemented by the Association for Community Development (ACD). The ACD provides support to women group members through micro credit, micro entrepreneurship and income generating activities⁶⁰. The purpose of this micro credit programme is to provide alternatives for women's livelihood. The Team had the opportunity to see some of their products such as handicrafts and silk products, which are of high quality and sold to markets outside Rajshahi. The ACD has formed 172 women's groups for multiple purposes of credit, awareness, water, sanitation and trafficking. The credit programme also includes other activities such as training and marketing.

7.4 The Gender Strategy's Relevance

Most of the donor group representatives interviewed reiterated that Norway and the Norwegian embassy play a leading role in raising gender issues. This view is also expressed by the women's organisations and human rights organisations. While emphasising the importance of the donor group, most of them agreed that the impact made by the Norwegian embassy is far greater than other individual donors. The NGO group's view is that Norway is a democratic partner that does not impose issues on them and provides support to what one of the key partners defined as "basic issues". When asked whether Norway was a "soft donor", the response was "no". Another partner expressed satisfaction with Norway because "we know that they have a gender strategy". Other respondents stated that the role played by Norwegians in promoting gender equality should not be changed, but continued. In particular, continuity of policy and continuity of partnership were mentioned by the women's organisations that have been receiving funds for a relatively long period of time. "Dedication", "sustainable partnership" and similar characterisations were used to describe their relationship with the embassy throughout the years.

It appears that all the respondents are familiar with the Norwegian Gender Strategy. Indeed, some of them even showed the copy of the Strategy during the discussion. One respondent stated that the contents of the Strategy reflect what they are actually doing as well as what they intend to do in future. One respondent even said, "This is our document". The

⁶⁰ ACD. Annual Report. 2004.p.24

Evaluation Team got the impression that partner women's organisations tend to express a sentiment that reveals a sense of ownership of the Strategy.

Respondents portray Norway as a "responsible", "sensitive" and "considerate" donor⁶¹. Some of the reasons for this are that "Norway does not leave partners when they are in crisis, and supports programmes which are not always supported by other donors, such as networking, advocacy and human rights. The embassy is accessible when they are in need".⁶²

In explaining why Norway has a strong, relevant gender policy and strategy, the women's organisations in Bangladesh referred to experiences with other women's NGOs in the Asian region. While attending UNIFEM's regional Asian meetings in previous years, the Bangladeshi women's organisations were quite impressed by the selection of Asian women NGOs supported by Norway. They were quite confident with the important role Norwegian support represented and attributed this "finding" to the Norwegian Gender Strategy. The Bangladeshi women's NGOs felt that they were a part of a regional women's network, providing evidence for their opinion that the relevance of the Norwegian gender policy is substantial.

The general consensus among the partners is that the interests and priorities of their organisations are well reflected in their respective project documents. The good thing about the Norwegian support is that the organisations have the opportunity to brainstorm, confer and debate, and then agree to work together⁶³. Partners mentioned that the appraisal reports indeed create the opportunity to enter into specific dialogue with the embassy. They feel that the appraisal reports help them to identify their weaknesses and address them in the implementation process.

Based on data collected from the partners and discussions with the donor community, it is the Team's conclusion that the Norwegian Gender Strategy has been relevant and important for improving the efforts for women and gender equality in Bangladesh. This broad conclusion is valid, even with one of the partners expressing frustration with the Norwegian embassy and stating that they would have appreciated continued support and cooperation.

7.5 Sustainability and Phasing-Out Issues

In the NGO development discourse on Bangladesh, sustainability is a critical issue for both the development NGOs and the women's organisations working on women rights, access to justice, violence and rights at the workplace. Although there is plenty of money for micro credit, education, health and similar issues, the competition between numerous NGOs for limited resources has led to serious financial trouble for the small NGOs. Ultimately, the large NGOs will survive this competition. There is a fear, especially among the women's

⁶¹ One partner mentioned that at the final stage of negotiation one co-funder had suddenly withdrawn, but they continued their negotiations and ultimately received funding from Norway.

⁶² This is a view which the Team discerned during the group discussion with several partners on June 24, 2005, at the BMP.

⁶³ However, there had been discussions on issues such as whether NP's Doorbar Network should be an independent entity. It was determined that the Doorbar Network could work initially at least for the first five years, and the Norwegian embassy did not object to this.. The BMP also mentioned that it disagreed on certain issues, including management of the programme, reporting and financial management, but these issues were resolved through later discussions. In this process the Netherlands, which was supposed to co-fund the project, suddenly decided to withdraw its support. The BMP management told the Evaluation Team that it did not know the reasons for such abrupt withdrawal. What we learnt, however, was that the Dutch were not actually interested in supporting this kind of project.

organisations, that budget allocations for their activities may drastically be reduced due to changing aid modalities initiated by the large donor groups, such as budget support and sector programme funding. Another possible identified threat was the initiation of newly established umbrella organisations, placing the responsibility for allocating funds to NGOs into the hands of competing NGOs. In recent years, less funding has been awarded, and sometimes funds are withdrawn from the NGOs in Bangladesh. For example, Christian Aid, a British NGO, and other NGOs have withdrawn or provided less funding to their partners.

Although the Evaluation Team strongly feels that the embassy should continue to support the women's organisations, the phasing out issue is important since these NGOs are not sure how long the embassy will provide funding and support in the wake of changing aid modalities. After long-term capacity development, especially of financial and administrative capacity, the embassy may discontinue support⁶⁴. The Norwegian embassy has supported some of its partners (i.e. BMP, NP, ASK, KN) for quite a long time. Among these partners there is a latent fear that the embassy might reduce their funding and in some cases even withdraw their support. In the interviews embassy officials mentioned the dilemma related to continued support to long-term partners versus initiating new partnerships.

Problems may also arise when some partners expand their programmes during the implementation beyond the contract mandate. Partners consider the expansion to be necessary because some of their activities cut across sectors, and they cannot always limit their activities stipulated in their contract⁶⁵. On the other hand, the embassy operates within the contract and advises the organisation to remain within the designated activities agreed upon earlier. One partner, the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA), views this as one kind of "imposition". Some of the partners regard their activities as part of integrated community projects. Sometimes they have to implement activities outside the contract to complete a particular task or project. When the partners spend money for components outside the contract, the embassy may raise objections. This does not necessarily conflict with Norwegian support but sometime infringes upon partners' freedom of operations⁶⁶. The BNWLA feels that the Norwegian embassy has been too rigid in the interpretation of its operations, but the organisation does regret that the cooperation with the embassy is coming to an end.

The hard reality is that in the absence of any secure and dependable income generating activity, there is little possibility for the women's organisations working on human rights issues to become self-sustained in the near future. It is likely that they will continue to depend on external sources of funding in the future. However, the question is to what extent (volume of assistance) this dependency should be encouraged. If we agree that it is not possible for the human rights organisations to attain long-term sustainability, then it is important to decide how and under what conditions the support will be given and what the magnitude of support should be. If the embassy plans to withdraw or phase out support from an organisation, the embassy should present a phase-out plan or what one partner called an "exit plan". The embassy staff members themselves recommended integrating fundraising as part of the

⁶⁴ Indeed, one embassy official revealed that in 1995 the embassy supported more than 40 projects, and currently in 2005 this has been reduced to 14, which correlates with the recommendation from the evaluation in 2001.

⁶⁵ BNWLA can be mentioned in this context.

⁶⁶ BNWLA can be mentioned in this context. It is true that the issues related to the implementation of different activities are discussed in the annual and semi-annual meetings, and the embassy officials appear quite open to this. But cross-cutting activities is an issue, and it is worth mentioning here in order to keep this in mind.

capacity building effort. Another issue raised in the discussion of future financing of NGO partners was the earmarking of funds and the possibility of establishing endowment funds, which could open up the possibility of new models of cooperation and provide a sustainable funding base for the NGOs.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The Concept of Gender

- The Team found that stakeholders perceive the term “gender” in different ways. To ensure a comprehensive implementation of the Gender Strategy, a concept based on consensus should be the base.
- At the debriefing meeting with the embassy, the Team also found that the embassy staff members do not like to use the term “gender mainstreaming”. This is an interesting finding due to the confusion regarding the term “gender”.

8.2 The Dialogue

- Norway is defined as a responsible, democratic and sensitive partner in women and gender equality efforts.
- The importance of the lead role Norway has played in Bangladesh on women and gender equality issues in the past two decades has been emphasised by various cooperating partners and stakeholders. Continuity in terms of policy as well as cooperation is considered by the recipient organisations to be vital. Sustainable partnership is appreciated.
- The Team found that the dialogue between the embassy staff and cooperating partners, especially the leaders and representatives of women’s organisations and human rights organisations, as well as other cooperating partners, provided the opportunity to exchange ideas and become familiar with each other’s interests and priorities. The dialogue provides an important instrument in reaching the objective of improved conditions for women rights and gender equality.
- The dialogue on women and gender equality takes place at several levels and in formal and informal settings. The dialogue takes place in a sensitive area of cooperation, involving different views by the various stakeholders. The sensitivity of the gender issues has recently been proved in the GoB change of the National Policy for Women’s Advancement, without consulting the national women’s organisations. This created strong reactions among the women’s organisations sceptical to the GoB’s intentions.

8.3 The Relevance

- The recipient organisations, cooperating and implementing donors, donor groups and the GoB have given a fairly good indication that the relevance of the Norwegian Gender Strategy is substantial. This is despite the fact that Norway is a small donor.
- The relevance is important in terms of the commonality of interests and priorities of both parties in the cooperation (Norway and the recipients).
- The embassy staff raised the issue of whether it was necessary to have a separate Norwegian Gender Strategy for the cooperation with reference to the efforts of coordination and harmonisation.

8.4 The Bilateral Context

- Funds are provided for a wide range of activities. Some of these activities include raising awareness of women in order to resist violence, reduction of discrimination against women, women's participation in politics, obtaining access to justice, legal aid, promoting women's workers rights, micro credit, network for women's organisations and small enterprise development.
- The organisations chosen by the Norwegian embassy as cooperating partners for different activities are appropriate and indeed reflect the needs and priorities of the Norwegian Gender Strategy.
- There are limited indicators for measuring the impact of the activities of various women's organisations. In future planning and reporting procedures, the embassy should develop some simple tools to improve the measurement of results.

8.5 Rights, Decision-Making Processes and Economic Participation

- The embassy's funding to different women's organisations on rights, economic participation and decision-making processes is appropriate, but in the absence of any indicators it is not clear how this has influenced the participation of women in the decision-making process. This might be due to the fact that strengthening women's rights improves their economic participation, and decision making consists of complex processes. Indicators for measuring these activities and processes are difficult to develop, but the issue should be discussed and elaborated on to improve the monitoring and evaluation of these organisations' activities.
- Promoting women workers' rights contributes to ensuring women's participation in the industrial arena. Karmojibi Nari has managed to increase the number of active women workers in fighting for their rights as employees. The organisation is getting stronger, and it is planning to work more actively on women's participation in decision making.
- The women's organisations, women workers' organisations and rights-based organisations are active at the local and national levels, organising women and men to increase awareness of their rights. The contributions of these organisations are evident by the number of women workers organised in trade unions (Karmojibi Nari), women and men claiming and acquiring access to land (SAMATA), and women participating in activist organisations (Bangladesh Mahila Parishad). Others take care of young women and men who are harassed and expelled from their local communities (Association for Community Development), and they support individuals in building up new lives, including income generating activities. Advocacy and networking that addresses social and political issues, including economic participation, are carried out by most of these organisations (Naripokkho, SAMATA).
- RAKUB (Small Enterprise Development Facility) has helped women credit recipients (26% of the total) to upgrade their small businesses or start new businesses. However, marketing is a problem, and the Evaluation Team believes that there is need to link production with marketing. If the linkages between production and marketing could be facilitated, the impact on the women involved would increase substantially.

- According to the review conducted by the DFID in 2004, the IFC has been quite successful. The defined targets related to women workers, women entrepreneurs and women managers have been reached. Norwegian cooperation was highly appreciated, but the IFC requested improved coordination among the donors and raised the issue of the need for impact assessments of women and gender equality programmes in Bangladesh.

8.6 Sustainability

- The embassy regards the women's organisations they are funding basically as human rights organisations, and it will be difficult for them to attain sustainability on their own in the future without subsidies from donors or the GoB.
- Although some organisations have been receiving Norwegian funding since the 1990s, no plan for sustainability and phase-out has been found in their project proposals. The recipients are apprehensive about the prospect of a phase-out in the near future.
- Our assessment from a review of various documents and interviews is that the financial sustainability issue has not received adequate attention from the embassy.

8.7 Institution Building

- The Team found that the embassy is very much aware of the need for enhancing capacity building (administrative and financial) in the pre-contract and post contract periods. The embassy made capacity improvement a binding requirement for the recipient organisations.
- The embassy has made provision for technical assistance, and in some cases, the organisations have used their own resources to make improvements in this area, as per the recommendations of the appraisal reports.
- This endeavour and support of the embassy may be seen as important contributions in strengthening the institutional capacity of some major women's organisations in Bangladesh. This support has been important as women's organisations previously lacked administrative and financial capacity to operate large funds and programmes.
- Leadership of the women's organisations lays mostly in the hands of a few senior women leaders within these organisations. There is no doubt that many of these leaders are dedicated and competent, but no plan for developing a cadre of younger leaders is noticeable.

8.8 The Donor Context

- Norway is a small donor. The Evaluation Team found that Norway is perceived to be a small donor, however rich. Norway is also regarded as an important actor among the other donors and recipient partners due to its ability to develop policies that are adopted by other donors. This is also the case with gender policy and gender strategy.
- "New Aid Modalities" is a theme for the evaluation. There is widespread acceptance of the new aid modalities; however, most would agree that gender could become more marginalised when budget support and sector programmes take over as the mode of aid.

- The donors have different opinions when it comes to how gender sensitive the new PRSP is. Some, such as the UNDP, believe that the PRSP has undergone a process in which the gender perspective has been included quite professionally. Others, such as the DFID, believe that gender issues are too marginal in the PRSP framework.
- The Local Consultative Group's subgroup for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) has been an arena in which Norway participates. Norway is regarded by other donors as an active member of WAGE. There are different opinions regarding the effectiveness of the interaction within WAGE.
- "Everybody talks about donor coordination, but no coordination takes place." This was expressed by one of the cooperating partners interviewed. The respondent was referring specifically to the LCG WAGE as well as to the situation in general. This opinion was based on the view that the donors should be more proactive when communicating with the government. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs should take coordination into consideration when revising the Gender Strategy.

8.9 The Government Context

- By and large there is a consensus within the women's organisations that the government does not play a proactive role in supporting the NGOs, which works for human rights, justice and democracy.
- According to the leaders of women's organisations, the government is not clear as to what they mean by women's "empowerment" or "gender equality". This has become empty rhetoric used by government to attract foreign funding. There is a lack of "conceptual clarity" among officials in the government.
- The National Action Plan for Women's Advancement is recognised by women leaders as the "best action plan in the world", but they are sceptical of the government's sincerity about implementing the plan.

APPENDIX I

List of Respondents:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

Sidsel Bleken, Adviser, Section for Asian Affairs
Ingebjørg Støfring, Senior Adviser, UN Section, Global Department
Guro Vikør, Ambassador, Senior Adviser Gender Issues, Global Department

NORAD, Oslo

Dag Larsson, Senior Adviser, Section for Environment and Private Sector Cooperation
Gerd Wahlstrøm, Senior Adviser, Former Ambassador to Bangladesh
Camilla Rie Hoe, Higher Executive Officer, Department of Rights, Agents of Change and Civil Society, Rights Based Development Unit
Harriet V. Solheim, Assistant Director, Department of Governance and Macroeconomics

The Norwegian Embassy, Dhaka

Aud Lise Norheim, Ambassador
Hans Peter Melby, Councillor
Trude Gjeldvik, First Secretary
Kristian Jervell, First Secretary
Wilhelm A Wiig, First Secretary
Zakia K. Hassan, Adviser, Development Affairs
Arup K. Biswas, Adviser, Development Affairs

Cooperating partners: Women Organisations, Human Rights Organisations, and Private Sector, Bilateral and Multilateral Partners

- Salima Sarwar, Director, Association for Community Development, ACD, Rajshahi
- Ayesha Khanam, General Secretary, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, BMP
- Taslima Parveen, Project Manager, BMP
- Dil Afroz Begum, Treasurer, BMP
- Maleka Banu, Assistant General Secretary, BMP
- Advocate Salma Ali, Executive Director, BNWLA
- Monjura Akhter Chowdhury, Program Manager, BNWLA
- Masud Karim, MLAA
- Syed Ziaul Hasan, Staff Lawyer, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, BLAST
- Mahbuba Mahmood, NP
- Gita Das, Naripokkho, NP
- Maheen Sultan, Naripokkho, NP
- Rashida Hossain, Naripokkho, NP
- Firdous Azim, Naripokkho, NP
- Falima-Tuz-Zabra, Naripokkho, NP
- Sultana Kamal, Executive Director, Ain o Shalish Kendro, ASK
- Shirin Akther, President, Karmojibi Nari, KN
- Rokeya Rafique Baby, Karmojibi Nari, KN
- Ziaul Haque, KN

- Mr. Eric Hanley, Senior Social Development Advisor, Department for International Development, United Kingdom (DFID)
- Dr. Najmus Sahar Sadiq, Assistant Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Deepak Adhikary, Program Manager, South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF), International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group
- Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
- F. R. M. Hafiz-ul Islam, Managing Director, Small Enterprises Development Credit Project (SECP), Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB), Rajshahi
- Md. Lutfur Rahman, Project Director, Small Enterprises Development Credit Project (SECP), Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB), Rajshahi
- Ms. Momtaz Khatun, Women Development Officer, RAKUB-SECP
- Mofizur Rahman, Deputy Project Director, RAKUB-SECP
- Sohel Ibn Ali, Director, SAMATA
- Zahedur Rahman, Coordinator, SAMATA
- Sukltana Aktar Ruby, Assistant Coordinator, SAMATA
- Nick Taylor, First Secretary, Head of Section, Governance, Human Rights & Economic Support, Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh
- Representative, Dutch Embassy
- Representative, Asian Development Bank
- Representative, from Mannusher Joynnaa (NGO umbrella organisation)

Representatives from the Government of Bangladesh

- Mr. Md. Abdur Rashid Sarkar, Secretary, Ministry of Women And Children's Affairs
- Md. Altaf Hossain, Deputy Chief, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MWCA)
- Md. Moksed Ali, Director General, Department of Women's Affairs
- Ms. Nargis Islam, Joint Chief in Charge of Nordic Desk, External Relations Division
- K.M. Iftekhar Haider, Deputy Secretary, External Relations Division
- Mustaq Ahmad, Director General, NGO Affairs Bureau

APPENDIX II

Sustainability and Withdrawal Issue

It can be surmised from a review of different documents and interviews that the financial sustainability issue should have received *more attention* from the embassy. It is important that the future collaboration should also include a plan to inform the partners of ways to generate funding. The embassy should encourage the recipient organisations to diversify their funding sources so that they become less dependent on Norwegian funding.

It seems that most of the organisations are aware of the need for and importance of economic sustainability, but in most cases they are not sure how to achieve this. Some of the organisations (for example, BMP and ASK) have a specific plan, and they clearly stated that they are not afraid of losing funding from donors. BMP has been working in the women's movement arena for the last thirty years and has been dependent on the voluntary activity of its members and also contribution of its members and civil society. The organisation reported that even the land on which its five-story building was constructed was donated by one of its well-wishers. BMP also wants to generate funding by organising and providing training to others in the women's movement⁶⁷. BMP appeared very confident of continuing its activities in a situation of reduced external funding or no funding. Currently, BMP's contribution to the project is approximately 15 per cent, which is considered by the embassy to be quite high.⁶⁸

The findings of the study reveal that the organisations are helping the women to gain their rights at the work place (KN), human rights, advocacy, awareness raising, access to justice, networking (BMP, ASK), human rights and economic participation (ACD) and networking of NGOs (NP). The organisations give support to women and children who are victims of trafficking, prostitution and violence (ACD, BWLA). Most of these organisations are based on voluntary labour, relying on the contribution of their members, donations from civil society and support from international NGOs and donors. The grants, which these organisations received from the embassy, are huge, and many of the organisations did not even think that they would receive such large amounts of funding. These organisations (BMP, NP, ACD and ASK) did not even have the administrative and financial management capacity to handle such extensive funding. Indeed, various appraisal reports contain recommendations on ways to improve the administrative and financial management capacity of the recipient organisations. The organisations are evidently improving their capacity in management procedures. They also expressed satisfaction with the educational value of their cooperation with the Norwegian embassy.⁶⁹

For example, appraisal reports contain detailed recommendations of steps that should be undertaken by these organisations to improve their systems of programme, administrative and financial management. This is further echoed in appropriation documents, which state, "The embassy feels that there is room for improvement and streamlining of administration and reporting including financial reporting"⁷⁰. Furthermore, on the question of sustainability,

⁶⁷ Interview with the BMP Secretary General at his office on 22/5/2005.

⁶⁸ Appropriation document of BMP, BGD 2528 dated 5/10/04. The embassy believes that if the contributions from the donor were to decrease, the organisation would still be able to continue its main activities through the income they collect and the voluntary work of their members.

⁶⁹ These issues will be addressed in more detail in the upcoming review of the organisations, according to a draft ToR presented by the Team in May 2005.

⁷⁰ See the appropriation document of ASK and the Appraisal Report of ASK dated March 2000 for details.

some organisations are recommended to raise a portion of their funding by selling their services. More emphasis should be placed on achieving cost effectiveness in its activities and on gaining long-term effects from the programme activities performed.

The recommendations of the appraisal reports are also reflected in the appropriation documents of the embassy as aid conditionality⁷¹, which is fair. It is expected that this will go a long way in capacity building efforts within the organisations that the embassy is supporting.

Although the organisations do not have any regular or stable income sources to cover their operational costs, they expect to be able to cover their costs through income generation from the following sources:

- Contribution from members (BMP, ASK, NP)
- Donations from civil society (BMP, ASK)
- Donations from friends (BMP, ASK)
- Income from training centre (BMP, ASK, KN)
- Income from community rehabilitation centre
- Raising a cadre of trainers who can provide training (ASK)
- Legal consultancy (ASK)
- Establishing chamber of lawyers (ASK)
- Income generating activities (ACD, KN)

However, the crux of the issue is that all the recipients interviewed in the study were uncertain about how they were going to be sustained in the future. The issues related to phasing out are regarded with *fear* and *tension*. Because the question was raised, some of the organisations (KN, ACD) wondered if Norway might be considering phasing out its programme. KN stated that in the event of a phase out or reduced funding, it would be required to scale back its activities and reduce staffing. This would significantly affect the scale as well as quality of its activity. However, others stated that they would survive by virtue of the quality of their work.

Since it is quite impossible for human rights and women's organisations to become financially sustainable the embassy should therefore continue to support these organisations on the following conditions, without infringing on their freedom of operation.

- The organisation would provide a “matching fund” of a certain percentage against support by the embassy.
- The organisation should show innovation and pragmatism in generating its own resources by expanding its income sources. The programme of funding generation should be incorporated into the contract and reviewed at regular intervals by the embassy.
- An *endowment fund* would be created.
- Administrative and other costs (overhead costs) must be kept to a minimum.

⁷¹ See the appropriation documents of BMP, NP, ASK and ACD. Also, appraisal reports of NP, BMP and ACD.

APPENDIX III

References

Project Documents:

Karmojibi Nari (KN)

Contract between BMP and the Norwegian Embassy

Appropriation Document

Appraisal Report on the Integrated Development Project for Working Women of Karmojibi Nari. Prepared by PRIP Trust, May 2003

Annual Report 2003-2004, Karmojibi Nari

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)

Contract between BMP and the Norwegian Embassy

Appropriation Document,

Promotion and Protection of Women's Human Rights in Bangladesh. Project Implementation Document (Appraisal) 2004-2008, July 2003

Naripokkho (NP)

Contract between BMP and the Norwegian Embassy

Appropriation Document

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