

A COUNTRY PAPER OF BANGLADESH

on

**Promoting Dialogue and Collaboration in
Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Development (SARD)**

Between

NGOs/RPOs and Government

Submitted to

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN)

Prepared by

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Manila, 1994**

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I. Introduction

Bangladesh, formerly known as East Pakistan, won its independence on December 16, 1971 after a long and bitter struggle against Pakistan.

Geographically, Bangladesh is located at the North-East of the South Asian sub-continent, bordered by India to its West, Northwest and Eastern frontiers, by Burma to the South-East and by the Bay of Bengal to the South.ⁱ

Bangladesh, considered as one of the poorest countries in the world, faces three major crises, namely :

Economically, Bangladesh is characterized by dehumanizing poverty with the vast majority of 60% living below the poverty line due to excessive landlessness (60% of all households are landless), endemic malnutrition (83% of all children below the age of five are malnourished) and massive unemployment (covering 30% of the estimated labor force of 36 million).

The Bangladeshi economy is predominantly agrarian. Its agricultural production represents a 44% share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), of which 31% is derived from crops, 6% from fisheries and 3-7% from forestry. The second sector of importance is the service sector which accounts for 42% of GDP, with the main subsectors being trade, transport and communications. The industry sector which accounts for 14% of GDP is basically derived from manufacturing (7.4%) and construction (6%).ⁱⁱ

Politically, the central government is becoming more autocratic and is regulating and restricting the development programs and activities of the NGOs. Its major thrusts and policies for the past ten years have been centered on greater food production towards self-sufficiency without conscious efforts to really protect the people and their environment. Henceforth, "this more growth

and more profit oriented development policy has been one of the root causes of environmental, agricultural and the community degradation in the country like Bangladesh".ⁱⁱⁱ

Environmentally, there is widespread forest destruction and environmental degradation. Numerous studies are readily available showing the depletion of soil fertility, erosion of bio-diversity, food imbalances, loss of fish populations, among others, as concrete symptoms of unsustainable agriculture. Researches have also shown that the remaining forested area of Bangladesh has dramatically been reduced from 20% in 1960 to 6-7% out of its present total proclaimed area; and 308 identified species are now considered rare and endangered.

This alarming situation of Bangladesh, caught in the ebb of these three major crises -- economic, political & environmental-- calls for a concerted response of the government (GOs), non- governmental organizations (NGOs) and rural people's organizations (RPOs).

However, traditional decentralized "top-bottom" approach of the bureaucratic government tends to inhibit people's participation in all phases of development activities from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This kind of approach has been proven ineffective and has resulted to the failure of many government development programs/projects due to the lack of people's support and participation.

The government must realize that its efforts alone are inadequate without mustering maximum people's support. Hence, this should be the starting point of any genuine dialogue and mutual collaboration among the government organizations, the NGOs and the RPOs.

For purposes of this report, what we refer to as NGO is "an association of persons formed through the personal initiatives of a few committed persons dedicated to the design, study and implementation of development projects at the grassroots level. They work outside government structures but operate within the legal framework of the country. They are also involved in direct action-oriented projects, sometimes combined with study and research. Their target populations are the rural poor."^{iv}

A. The evolution of NGOs in Bangladesh

Historically, the non-government organizations (NGOs) started shortly after the 1971 war of liberation, initially

providing relief services and rehabilitation assistance to war- ravaged victims. These NGOs then shifted their development programs and strategies towards community development, giving special preference to the poor and to the powerless segments of Bangladeshi society.

Dr. David Korten analyzes the evolution of the NGO sector in Bangladesh within the framework of the Four Generations of NGOs, to wit:

- oFirst generation: NGOs put emphasis on relief and rehabilitation work (1971-72);
- oSecond generation: developmental efforts of NGOs are aimed towards community development (1973-75) with a number of sectoral activities (e.g., agrarian reform, health, cooperatives, etc);
- oThird generation: also known as "sustainable systems development" where the NGOs extend the breadth of their programs, ensuring sustainability through undertaking large-scale programs, complementing the national development systems and involving various organizations and institutions (1976-to date); and,
- oFourth generation: which entirely depends on the development phase of NGOs in realizing their vision of society characterized by strong People's Movements.^v

Over the past two decades, since 1971, the NGOs have made significant progress and contributions to a country which is still struggling to survive and to rise as a truly independent nation. Through their various development programs and projects such as health, agriculture, agrarian reform, irrigation, credit assistance, among others, these NGOs have

served as catalysts, making their development interventions strongly felt in the urban and rural areas.

Despite the government's ambivalent attitude towards NGOs, there are still "windows of opportunity" for building meaningful dialogue and mutual collaboration between the government and the NGOs in the promotion of sustainable agriculture and rural development.

First of all, there are some officials in government who have been very supportive and have established good working relationships with the NGOs.

Secondly, there are concrete experiences and cases of NGO participation in national government programmes -- on which such GO-NGO dialogue could be built. For instance, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) alone had helped the Government Immunization Program to reach 4.5 million people and 30 million people. Immunization levels in BRAC assisted areas were found to be between 40% and 60% higher than in parts of the country where BRAC did not operate.^{vi}

It is also noteworthy to mention the Proshika Manibok Unnayan Kendra's successful experience with the government under its Social Forestry Program. Proshika's struggle to establish social forestry on government land has recently been rewarded by the Forestry Department to collaborate on a small pilot agro-forestry proposal. Degraded forest lands will be replanted by local landless groups.^{vii}

In addition, two more case studies are presented in the next section to highlight NGO/RPO initiatives on agrarian reform and sustainable agriculture, respectively.

Hopefully, through these case studies, we could cull out learning and insights for building a more meaningful GO-NGO-RPO dialogue and mutual collaboration towards sustainable agriculture and rural development.

B. NGOs working on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) In general, NGOs in Bangladesh focus their work on the very poorest sectors of society such as the landless, women and the rural poor.^{viii}

Undeniably, there is now a proliferation of NGOs in Bangladesh. According to the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), an apex forum of NGOs founded in 1974 with the objectives of facilitating information exchange among its member organizations, about 135 NGOs are presently involved in agricultural programs alone (see Table 1).

Table 1
NGOs with a Program on Natural Resource Management^{ix}

Name of Programs	International	National	Local	Total
1. Agriculture	12	22	101	135

2. Sericulture	3	6	19	28
3. Horticulture	0	2	2	4
4. Fisheries	7	15	96	118
5. Social Forestry	6	20	92	118
6. Land Reform	0	3	2	5
TOTAL	28	68	312	408

Source : ADAB, Computer Data Base on NGOs, ADAB, Dhaka, 1990

Table 1 indicates that there is an increasing trend of NGOs becoming more interested in the Natural Resource Management Program. One study stated : "In the field of Agriculture, NGOs have introduced new crops and cropping pattern. They have also been involved in large scale agricultural extension. Experiments in collective land use and testing of irrigation equipment as assets for landless are now going on".^x

However, there are only a few NGOs in Bangladesh that promote the importance of sustainable agriculture among the farmers such as PROSHIKA-MUK, Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB), CARE International and Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS). Their concept of sustainable agriculture "entails an eco- friendly agricultural system whereby people in the community optimize the use of their resources through traditional, indigenous, as well as modern science."^{xi}

Because sustainable agriculture is still a new concept which at this point in time, and is still at the experimental stage, NGOs' main strategy is directed at meeting the subsistence needs of the farmers (Hirschman 1984).^{xii}

II. NGO/RPO Initiatives in Sustainable Agriculture and Agrarian Reform

A. NGO/RPO Initiatives in Sustainable Agriculture

Poverty and environmental degradation are two related concerns affecting the lives of the poor people in Bangladesh both in urban and rural areas. And the Bangladeshi economy being primarily agriculture, most of the rural poor eke out their meager incomes and livelihoods from agricultural activities such as farming, fishing, gathering wood and other forest products.

Over the last two decades, the government has been consistently following only one major thrust : **Increased food production towards self-sufficiency**. As one NGO leader observes, "All the Five Plans drawn up since 1973 have one major theme : Increase in food production, thereby achieving self-sufficiency in food -- an obvious concern of an over populated and food deficit country -- by adopting the modern technology of agriculture. However, not until recently, have environmental concern associated with the use of modern technology in agriculture received any serious considerations."

"Analysis of the agricultural policies reflected in the plan indicates that they were formulated from the viewpoint of aggregate production. In reality, however, the utility of any agricultural policy aimed at sustainable agricultural development must be judged not only by its aggregate production efforts, but also by the impact it has on the different rural socio-economic classes, especially the vast majority of small farmers and agricultural labourers struggling at the edge of subsistence. Numerous micro studies have found with a reasonable degree that a large farmers have appropriated a much larger share of all the ingredients of modern technology --- fertilizers, irrigation and most of all, credit".^{xiii}

Bangladesh, as one of the poorest countries in the world, is heavily dependent on grants and aid received from foreign bilateral and multilateral donors. Donors' interests vary from privatization of input delivery system, crop diversification, agricultural pricing policy and its distributive implications, agrarian reform and others. Also, it is from commodity aid that most of the agricultural inputs are imported.

Today, there are two agricultural methods or practices in Bangladesh. The first is widely called Chemical

Agriculture promoting high yielding variety (HYV) with the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and other agricultural inputs while the second, is still under the experimental stage but slowly gaining wide acceptance called Sustainable Agriculture, combining modern science with the indigenous knowledge of the people through organic agriculture and adopting an integrated farming system for pest control that is pro-people and environment-friendly.

The former method otherwise known as the "Green Revolution Strategy" came into Bangladesh as a package deal consisting of high yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers, different types of pesticides, mechanized plow and irrigation. And because the term "HYV" spells a "miracle" boom of production, the government conducted a massive campaign promoting the HYV technology among the farmers, believing that this could be the cure that would address food insufficiency in Bangladesh.

As a consequence, the farmers of Bangladesh have been using fertilizers extensively. Comparing figures from the Statistical Pocket Book of Bangladesh 1981 and the Statistical Yearbook of 1990, the agriculture crop area in the country (1972-73) 29,039,000 acres has grown into 34,883,000 acres in 1986-87 -- a 20% increase in crop area over a period of 15 years. Yet, during the same period also, the use of fertilizers had dramatically increased by 334%.^{xiv}

Furthermore, these statistics matched with the experiences shared by the farmers themselves during the actual interview on the farmers using chemical fertilizers.

Mr. Kashem of Manikgonj district shared his experience that "For the first two years, the chemical fertilizer increased their production. But then, it stabilized and now started to fall. Yet, peasants are applying more and more fertilizers in the hope of rising production."

According to Mr. Sattan, another peasant from Comilla, the intensive use of fertilizers did not substantially raise their rice production but rather, made their soil hard and less capable to hold water. So what they did in their locality was to use manure along with chemical fertilizers. They tried to mix cow dung and rotten hyacinths which, based on their own observations, improved the quality of their soil.

Another 72 year-old peasant, Mr. Rahim, narrated that the use of HYV's have made them victims of a vicious cycle of fertilizers because in order to maintain production level, they applied more fertilizers which made their plants greener and softer, and thereby prone to attract more insects than the non- chemical fertilizers. Hence, he concluded that, the farmers became more and more dependent on using different types of fertilizers to combat harmful insects.

Consequently, these farmers' experiences have taught two important things, to wit : (1) the use of chemical fertilizer is not sustainable because it has negative effects on the people and environment; and (2) the traditional indigenous knowledge of the farmers enable them to adopt alternative ways of agricultural farming to solve their problems encountered in using chemical fertilizers. And in the process, they have slowly learned to combine modern technology and their traditional knowledge to make their land productive. Thus, these farmers' experiences became the basis for the birth of the new concept of agricultural development called Sustainable Agriculture.

Sustainable agriculture is defined as "an economically agricultural system whereby community people optimize the use of resources using traditional and modern science for their own food security and enhance quality of life for present and future generations."^{xv}

To date, one of the NGOs promoting sustainable agriculture supporting the farmers' efforts to increase their agricultural productivity with minimal use of fertilizers, is the Proshika Manabik Unayan Kendra (PMUK), founded in 1976, which has started building a demonstration plot at its center in Koitta and similar experimental plots in Bogra, Manikgonj, Kishoregonj, Joydevpur, Madavipur including Tangail district.

The comparative experiments of Proshika have been shown that organic farming can increase land production capacity similar to, if not more than, use of modern agricultural inputs and chemicals Based on this comparative study, Proshika is now promoting ecological agriculture and organic farming among farmers and advocating the promotion of sustainable agriculture policies to the government of Bangladesh. They are also introducing the multi-cropping pattern of mulberry trees, potatoes, vegetables and spices in rural areas (Proshika:1990 :16)^{xvi}

B. Case Study I : Proshika's Field Experiments in Sustainable Agriculture*

Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra (Proshika) is a non-government organization (NGO) in Bangladesh. Since 1976, it has been organizing the rural poor through education and training and by providing various other support services such as credit extension. In 1989 a similar process was initiated by Proshika in the urban areas.

Proshika's work priorities are grouped into themes which reflect a number of rural and urban development concerns. These are:

- 1) organization of the rural poor
- 2) development and education
- 3) employment and income generating activities
- 4) rural health infrastructure
- 5) social forestry
- 6) ecological agriculture
- 7) urban poor development and,
- 8) disaster management.

The Ecological Agriculture Programme was started in a modest way in 1978 concentrating on vegetable growing. From 1990-91, experiments on rice production were conducted.

Using organic fertilizers and a natural control mechanism, Proshika's experiments in "ecological agriculture" were designed to show that "organic" farming is capable of producing rice yields comparable with those chemical farming, prevents disease and pest infestation and enhances the soil's natural productivity.

Field experiments were conducted in selected "irrigation command areas" covering the different regions in the country. These were Brahmanbaria, Kalkini, Bhairab, Kuliarchar, Dhamrai, Doulatpur, Ghior, Gabtoli, Shibganj and Nagorpur. In each of these areas, demonstration plots for ecological agriculture and conventional, chemical agriculture were set side by side. In all, there were 92 demonstration plots for ecological agriculture. Selected rice varieties -- many of which were of the high yielding type -- were planted in the demonstration plots. The chemical agriculture was tended in a conventional way, that is, with the use of chemical inputs. On the "ecological agriculture" plots, meanwhile, experimental land preparations and agronomic techniques were utilized, and therein lay the difference.

Although the experimental procedure of planting rice somewhat varied from area to area, the following are the steps undertaken for the ecological agriculture plots:

1. In most cases, the plots had been left fallow prior to the experiment.
2. The plots were plowed from four to six times -- in what is called "optimum plowing" -- before irrigating them.
3. A "basal dosage" composed variously of decomposed potato leaves and water hyacinth, cow dung, oil cake and poultry droppings were mixed thoroughly with the soil during plowing
4. The plots were irrigated. They were then plowed a second time to make the soil muddy (a desired quality) and to mix the compost thoroughly with the soil.
5. Irrigation water in the plots was kept at a certain depth (usually 1") while the seedlings were transplanted. They were then maintained at depths which rang between 1 1/2" to 2 1/2" at the vegetative to the "milky" stage of the crops growth. This technique is called "optimum irrigation".
6. A "top dressing" made up of cow dung (in dustform), oil cake and poultry droppings was applied on the plots.
7. No "quick" composting nor green manuring was done. At times, however, azola was used to improve the soil's nitrogen regeneration capacity.
8. Disease and pest infestation were hardly recorded in the plots. However, a number of techniques to control the pests were used when necessary:
osimultaneous drying and "moisturing plots

** This case study was taken from "Sowing the Seeds for Our Future: Report of the Second Asian Development Forum. "Sustainable Agriculture Towards Food Security and Enhanced Quality of Life." Published by ANGO. -- Manila, Phils.

oapplication of a mixture of ash and neem powder

oUse of light traps

Proshika's Ecological Agriculture Programme revealed that the "ecological agriculture" plots required a significantly lower investment per acre while producing yields comparable to those of "chemical agriculture" plots.

Learnings and Insights

- 1.The government's agricultural policy promoting the use of chemical agriculture and HYV technology to address the country's food insufficiency has been proven to be ineffective by the NGOs and RPOs based on their comparative research and actual field experiments. Also, it is a well established fact that chemical-based agriculture has negative effects on the people's health and their environment.
- 2.An alternative way of doing agricultural development combining modern technology and the indigenous knowledge and practices of the people has been found to be very effective in increasing farmers' productivity. This has been called Sustainable Agriculture which utilizes organic farming and integrated pest management systems.
- 3.Consequently, the government must review its present agricultural policies based on these research findings. These experiments and other similar NGO/RPO field experiences could form one concrete basis and topic for building GO-NGO/RPO dialogue and collaboration.
- 4.The government must closely collaborate with NGOs like Proshika and other NGOs which have direct knowledge on organic farming and other forms of sustainable agriculture (e.g. regenerative agriculture, etc.). The government must recognize the indigenous knowledge of the people and therefore, consult them in programs and projects related to the promotion of sustainable agriculture and rural development.

C. NGO/RPO Initiatives in Agrarian Reform

Historically, Bangladesh has been acclaimed as the "Land of Gold" due to its affluence and the richness of its land.

Its natural resources are managed by the local communities themselves through their local representatives from all classes, called "panchayats", the local village council composed of 50-100 elders. During that time, the people directly exercised control over production and resources, and played vital roles in running the economy that was primarily agriculture in nature. The village people did not own the land they tilled nor exercised the right to transfer or sell the lands on will, due to their strong religious belief that their lands and other resources solely belonged to God. So much so that, everyone had enjoyed the right to the fruits of their labors. Under this traditional communal system, life was abundant and food was sufficient.

But this traditional village underwent significant changes during the Muslim Rule and British Colonialization, resulting in the creation of new landlords -- the "zamindars" by virtue of the proclamation of the Permanent Act of 1793 by the British Government. This had far reaching implications because the peasants who had traditionally enjoyed their hereditary rights over land and resources suddenly became landless and servants under the control of the new ruling class. Many of the peasants changed their traditional trades and took on different professions thus, resulting in the total disintegration of a once united communal village committee which lost its legitimate and hereditary rights to control and manage community-based natural resources.

As a consequence, landownership patterns became the new basis for determining social status, power and prestige in Bangladesh. With the control and management of these community- based natural resources on the hands of a few, the vast majority became landless and powerless.

The colonial rule of Bangladesh may be over, but the hierarchical agrarian relations based on ownership and capital remains. The skewed landownership patterns are evident from the 1984-85 Agriculture Census Report -- 70% of rural household own only 20% of land while 30% of the population own 71% of the land.^{xvii}

Today, rural Bangladesh that was once fabled as the "Land of Gold" has been, ironically, turned into a land of misery with a clear picture of abject poverty : people dying of cold and hunger in the midst of agony and

despair; unemployed and landless, yet, managing to survive at the barest minimum levels of subsistence.

It is in this context that the NGOs/RPOs took the initiative to assist government organizations in the implementation of agrarian reform in Bangladesh. In 1987, a Coordination Council for Land Reform was formally set-up under the Land Ministry Department. The government agreed to include an NGO representative, nominated by the NGO Coordination Council located both at the district and upazilla levels.

The NGOs made significant contributions in the areas of organizing the landless farmers, and of providing education and training to increase farmers' knowledge and skills to enable farmers to actively participate in the programs of the government. NGOs also provided some technical skills to increase the farmers' productivity. But more specifically, the areas where the NGOs contributed greatly to the government's land reform program were as follows:

o identifying government land

o identifying landless farmer beneficiaries

o preparing basic policy documents

o publicity campaigns

o holding divisional and regional conferences with NGO fieldworkers, landless group leaders and the government officials

o training of the landless men and women who received government land.

The NGOs and RPOs strongly believed that through the implementation of agrarian reform program, they would be able to ameliorate the hardships of the people. According to the government, a total of 16,843 acres of land have been distributed to benefit some 167,867 landless which include the landless organized by the NGOs.

Unfortunately, the agrarian reform program gradually lost its momentum due to the lack of political will and the wavering commitment of the decision-makers of the government

D. Case Study II in Agrarian Reform: Samata : A Struggle for Land Reform *

Samata Samaj Samity emerged as a local NGO of local youths and social workers. The work of Samata started in Sathia upazilla in Pabna district, located about 100 kms away from the capital city of Dhaka. Samata directed its activities to the organization of the landless poor, building social consciousness through a continuous process of education, and the promotion of social actions directed toward internal resource mobilization and income generation. Samata has organized about 300 male and 200 female groups with a total membership of 20,000 landless men and women.

The organized groups of the landless, with the active support and cooperation from Samata, took lease of 221 acres of land from the government located in the Ghugudahaw beel. But they faced stiff resistance in gaining actual control of the land from the powerful landed elites who were illegally occupying the land for a long time. The organizations of the landless then began to organize protest rallies against the illegal occupation by the elites and sought government support to oust them from the land. However, they received little support from the government for these local elites had the patronage of the ruling party and hence, the administration was reluctant to take any action against them. Finally, the landless decided to take possession of the land by force through organized actions. The actions led to a bloody conflict but the landless eventually won and took possession of their land. Women's groups also participated in the fight.

The groups held possession of the land for two years while intermittently fighting with the elites. Later, the groups were forced to give up a significant proportion of the land after the elites succeeded in having 400 of Samata workers and landless group leaders arrested. The

police arrested both the landless families and their supporters. Thus, they were all forced to leave their villages.

Out of the fifty-six (56) cases filed, fifty-five (55) were proven to be false. In one case due to the direct influence of

*** This case study was excerpt from the works of Dr. Khaja Shamsul Huda entitled: Community-Based Natural Resource Management dated June 1992. As his reference, the author referred to the works of Lanin Azad and G.S.A.M. Shamsuzzoha entitled: Uprising of the Poor in Sathia, Pabna: Samata, 1991.

the then Minister Mr. Manjoor Qader, four staff members of Samata, including the Director and two landless group leaders, were sentenced to imprisonment. Samata lost its leadership and thus, lost its strength. Today, its leaders are still in jail but the organizations of the landless are struggling desperately to survive and to keep Samata afloat.

Learnings and Insights

1. Because land itself is a major basis for determining social status, power and prestige in Bangladesh, control of and access to land and natural resources will always likely be confrontational between the landless farmers and the local elites and the government.
2. NGOs/RPOs see their roles not just as providers or implementors of the programs, but as countervailing civil society institutions for basic structural change. Thus, while equity-related issues such as land reform may be a sensitive topic, it must form part of GO-NGO/RPO dialogue and collaboration
3. Unless the government exercises its strong political will to implement genuine agrarian reform and equity-directed rural development programs, poverty and social injustice will continue prevail in the rural areas.

III. The Policy Environment for NGOs/RPOs in Bangladesh

The attitude of many government officials towards NGOs have been largely ambivalent. While official pronouncements highlight the role of NGOs/RPOs, government policies restrict the participation of the NGOs/RPOs in the mainstream of development.

"Government attitudes have been found to be ambivalent. While on the other hand, the government in their successive five year plan categorically emphasized the participation of NGOs in national development, they on the other hand, promulgated a number of regulatory laws to control NGO activities, inhibiting their smooth operation. The government bureaucracy and political elites tend to exhibit a strong bias against the NGOs and most often, create bottlenecks to impede their activities. Perhaps, this may be attributed to the very nature of the government and the existing socio-economic and political structures which have been mostly autocratic and non-democratic in nature. However, in recent years there have been some collaborative national ventures which have been successfully undertaken by both NGOs and the Government.^{xviii}

Apparently, government is afraid that the growing number of NGOs and POs may lead to the creation of countervailing power blocs and eventually, the take-over of government functions. But these negative perceptions towards NGOs/RPOs by the government have been unfounded.

Below are several government legislations and regulatory laws which exhibit government's strong tendency to regulate and control the activities of the NGOs/RPOs in Bangladesh.^{xix}

Table 2
Indicating the Policy Environment for NGOs/RPOs in Bangladesh

Key Issues/Legal Constraints	Year Initiated
1) Issues on Orientation o GO must approve any amendments to an NGO's constitution	1961
2) Financial Dimension o NGOs must formally register with gov't. in order to receive foreign aid 1978 o NGO must report any foreign aid received to GO 1978 o NGOs must obtain GO approval in order to use foreign aid 1982 o NGOs must file an annual report with the government 1961/1978 o Donors must obtain GO approval for any foreign contributions to NGO 1982/1983 o Foreign aid in foreign currency must be deposited with Central Bank or GO - specified Bank 1986/1988	1978 1978 1982 1961/1978 1982/1983 1986/1988
o Central Bank provides bi-annual report on all NGO foreign currency accounts to key GO agencies 1978 o GO has the authority to monitor and audit NGO accounts 1978 o GO review required for an NGO's annual budget 1988	1978 1978 1988
3) Organizational Dimension o NGO must formally register with GO to operate legally 1961 o GO project approval required for NGO operations 1986 o GO has the authority to monitor and inspect NGO projects and activities 1978 o NGO must report and get approval for any expatriate involvement in its operations 1982/1988 o GO has the authority to remove and appoint new board members to govern an NGO 1961 o GO has the authority to suspend and dissolve NGOs 1961 o Voluntary NGO resolution requires GO approval 1961	1961 1986 1978 1982/1988 1961 1961 1961

These aforementioned legal constraints initiated by the government to regulate and control NGO's development activities in the areas of orientation, financial and organizational dimensions seem to signify government's general lack of trust and appreciation of the developmental NGOs.

IV. Key Issues and Recommendations

The following are some key issues and constraints affecting current GO-NGO/RPO greater collaboration :

A. GO-NGO/RPO Relationship

1. **Absence or lack of clearly defined government policies.** This has caused unnecessary delays in the development and implementation of NGO projects; unclear responsibilities of some concerned ministries and department; and the negative perceptions of some government officials who create all sorts of problems and bottlenecks to impede NGO operations.

The government must come up with clear policies and operating guidelines to facilitate immediate processing of NGOs/RPOs registration and the development of their programs and projects.

2. **Absence or lack of a single, clearly defined body to assist the NGOs.** The NGOs/RPOs find it very difficult to deal with the different concerned departments and ministries of the government because there is no single body or a committee to assist them in their registration and program operations. This has also posed serious problems to NGOs' in dealing with their funding donors.

The need to create a body or a committee composed of GO and NGO/RPO representatives is important. This body or committee shall be responsible in reviewing and drafting NGO/RPO proposed laws for legislation, recommend policies and operating guidelines acceptable and workable to both parties.

3. The government claims that NGO/RPO development models are irreplicable. Because the NGOs/RPOs have worked in isolation, the government feels that the NGO development models are only good in so far as implementing them in the micro level but irreplicable in the macro level due to resource constraints and administrative bottlenecks caused by the existing structural bureaucratic rigidity of the government.

NGOs/RPOs must produce case studies and documentations proving the replicability and effectiveness of their development models both at the micro and macro level. Perhaps, a GO-NGO- RPO Visitation Exchange Program can be conducted to some selected project sites where NGO/RPOs programs and projects are being implemented. This will be a venue for the government to understand the NGOs/RPOs development programs in the field and appreciate their development models. This will also lead to mutual dialogue and greater

collaboration on how they can jointly implement and complement their development approaches and strategies.

4. Linkage between the government and the NGOs/RPOs has been poor. Only a few NGOs/RPOs are directly involved in the government programs and projects. Majority of them maintained a safe distance and are isolated working in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

NGOs/RPOs should strive to improve their linkage activities to the government so that, they can easily incorporate their development plans and programs in line with the government major thrust and priority. NGOs/RPOs must strive to win over some GO advocates who can give them information on possible GO-NGO/RPO greater collaboration.^{xx}

B. Agricultural Policies of the Government

1. Lack of integrated and comprehensive development policy on sustainable agriculture. The government agricultural research policy is strongly biased towards the economic aspects giving little emphasis on the social and the environmental aspects of agricultural development. Concretely, the government has adopted an approach of chemical agriculture and is focused on cropping systems rather than on integrated farming systems.

Therefore, the government and NGOs could conduct joint GO-NGO/RPO Consultation and Policy Workshops on Sustainable Agriculture to come up with a common understanding and development frameworks and approaches on sustainable agriculture.

The following could provide a common criteria for discussions on an integrated and comprehensive sustainable agriculture approach, namely : (a) productivity, (b) sustainability, (c) stability, and (d) equity.

2. Lack of farmers' participation in agricultural policy formulation. There is a strong tendency for the government to rely on the so-called "experts" in modern technology in formulating its policies.

Instead, the government must protect and respect farmers' rights and recognize the viability of their indigenous knowledge systems. The government should consult and actively involve the farmers and the NGOs in the agricultural policy formulation aside from the so-called "experts". The NGOs can assist in farmers' mobilization and advocate for alternative agricultural policies.

In essence, there is a need for an approach which combines an eco-friendly modern technology and the indigenous knowledge systems of the farmers.

3. The government's economic policy is inconsistent to its agricultural policy in improving the agro-eco system.

The government should strike a balance between economic growth and productivity by stressing equity through people's participation.^{xxi}

V. Prospects for GO-NGO/RPO Dialogue and Collaboration

A. NGO/RPO Strategies to Gain Greater Political Space

In general, the working relationships between selected NGOs/RPOs and the government have been limited to contracting and sub-contracting arrangements in the implementation of certain national programs. No co-equal partnership arrangement exists between the government and the NGOs/RPOs.

The government (GO) must be open to criticism and recognize the important role of NGOs/RPOs in the mainstream of development. It must make good its policies towards NGOs/RPOs and recognize them as equal partners in development.

On the other hand, the efforts of the NGOs/RPOs to dialogue with the government must be sustained and intensified. NGOs and RPOs must maintain a modest profile in order not to threaten GO in their perceptions. Below are some recommended strategies for NGOs and RPOs to gain greater political space:^{xxii}

1. The NGOs must identify strategic areas where they have comparative advantage over government organizations, namely :

a) **PROXIMITY.** NGO can work closely among the poor with intimate knowledge of local situations. Thus, they can be in a better position to deeply understand local realities and can easily adopt the lifestyle of the rural poor and speak their own local dialect;

b) **TRUST/CREDIBILITY.** Because NGOs are good integrators, they can be easily accepted by the local communities;

c) **FLEXIBILITY.** NGOs are more flexible in their approaches and are able to adopt to varying local environments due to their relative small size. They have little bureaucracy, having minimal gaps between planning and implementation, and this allows them to experiment with different alternative development models;

d) **COMMITMENT.** NGOs have dedicated and committed staff able to mobilize a vast reservoir of talents and experienced volunteers rendering needed services out of their sense of dedication rather than for personal gain;

e) **ABILITY TO STIMULATE A SENSE OF GENUINE SELF-RELIANCE.** NGOs are good organizers, trainers and facilitators. They are more capable of organizing the rural poor, provide continuous education and training (both formal and

non-formal) and facilitate RPO-level meetings and conferences for effective mass mobilizations and for issue advocacy; and,

f) **RESPONSIVENESS.** NGOs are good in research and documentation. Their presence at the grassroots gives them an advantage to closely monitor and document the experiences of the people. They can easily respond and develop appropriate and relevant programs/projects based on the needs of the people.

2. NGOs can work in areas where the government organizations can't reach. The NGOs are well known for its "niche" type approach of organizing small pockets of villages where the presence of the government organizations are not strongly felt.

3. NGOs can respond to local initiatives as alternative institutional channels. The NGOs can bridge the gap between the people and the government through linking and networking activities with the different sectors of society. They are in a strategic position to tap different resources -- financial, human and technical for the benefit of the poor.

4. NGOs can selectively collaborate with the government- assuming a modest profile i.e., "behind the scene". This also includes sub-contracting with the government for the implementation of small projects in rural areas e.g., credit intermediaries, irrigation schemes, training of agricultural workers and government personnel, feasibility studies, etc.

5. NGOs and RPOs can engage in direct and indirect policy advocacy. The NGOs can employ two tactics, directly and indirectly :

a) **Direct tactics.** NGOs can advocate policies publicly thru print, broadcast and media and through holding of press conferences and symposia towards greater political space for the NGOs and

RPOs.

On the other hand, the RPOs can assist in the advocacy through petitions, letter-writing, publicity campaigns, and lobbying.

Among the recommended issues that can be discussed are the following : (1) Greater NGO/RPO participation in government's project/program design & implementation; (2) flexible administrative arrangements and funding approaches; (3) maintaining NGOs' autonomy and self-identity, and (4) GO-NGO/RPO cooperation to avoid the "charity" or "dole-out" approach which promotes dependency; and (5) other development issues and concerns related to agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture and rural development.

b)**Indirect tactics.** NGOs and RPOs can cultivate allies and friends who will advocate in favor of a more favorable environment for the NGOs within the government bureaucracy.

B. Some Possible Approaches for Building GO-NGO/RPO Dialogue

The following are some possible areas for NGOs in Bangladesh, with the assistance of FAO and ANGOC, to promote GO- NGO/RPO greater in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development:

1.FAO and ANGOC are in a strategic position to open channels of communication between certain sectors in government and NGOs/RPOs in Bangladesh towards genuine dialogue and greater collaboration. There are several international agreements and mandates which could provide the basic foundation and principles for such dialogue. This includes agreements at WCARRD, UNICED, ICN, SARD and the Plan of Action on People's Participation.

Among possible issues that can be starting points for discussions, are : (a) NGO/RPO initiatives in Sustainable Agriculture (i.e., their experiments and other field experiences related to the promotion of Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development); (b) NGO/RPO initiatives in Agrarian Reform (i.e., their roles not just as providers or implementors of programs, but as countervailing civil society institutions for basic structural change), among others.

2.Dialogue must be based on certain working principles, i.e.,

2.1.Government must recognize the full autonomy of the NGOs/RPOs in the implementation of their development projects and programs. Hence, it is suggested that government must review its present legislation, policies and procedures restricting the activities of the NGOs.

2.2.Government must recognize the NGOs/RPOs as a third sector and therefore, the relationship must be one of co-equal partnership. The government must welcome the active participation of the NGOs/RPOs in all phases of its activities from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

2.3.Organization is a pre-requisite to effective people's participation and therefore, any effort that will lead to the promotion of people's participation must be fully recognized, protected and supported by the government. Hence, the government must recognize in clear terms the vital role which NGOs/RPOs have to play in organizing and mobilizing the people and communities towards sustainable agriculture and rural development. The government must be assured that the efforts of the NGOs and RPOs are not intended to take over its functions but rather, to complement its present developmental efforts.

3.FAO and ANGOC can jointly assist in networking and linkaging of activities of the NGOs/RPOs at the regional and international levels through information exchange, provision of development training curriculum and materials, organization of conventions and conferences in the promotion of sustainable agriculture and rural development.

4.FAO and ANGOC can open windows of opportunity to generate resources (financial, human and technical support) to help NGOs in developing countries in addressing problems related to poverty-alleviation, women, health and the environment. One possible approach to concretize this is to facilitate a dialogue among the Donor community, government and NGOs/RPOs in developing countries such as Bangladesh.

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