

Making Lives of Unsighted Meaningful

by Fedai Mawla

THE school that started with only five students and in a rented premises at Mirpur has had development in many ways by now. It was in 1976 that the Bangladesh Baptist Sangha felt the need of establishing a school for the blind girls so that they could attain fulfilment in life through wider participation. The initiative was well responded by Social Welfare authorities and the Christoffel Blinded Mission of Germany and as a result the Baptist Sangha school for Blind girls started its journey in 1977. A long time passed since then and the number of students went higher and higher by every passing year and the rented premises were not enough to accommodate so many students at a time. So, aided by the Christoffel Blinded Mission a piece of land was purchased and two impressive structures were erected. The school formally shifted to its present location at Senpara Parbata from its rented premises in 1983. Miss V.A. Campbell was the founder Principal whose initiative, service and dedication can only be described in the superlatives. She left not long ago and then Ms Manju Samaddar took over.

The school which was aimed at serving the blind girls in and around the locality now

receives students from all over Bangladesh. There are about 102 girls aged between 5 to 18 years. Most of the girls reside in a boarding attached to the school. It is worth mentioning that everything is provided free to the students. Besides formal education, they also learn music, dancing, cooking, physical exercise, handicraft etc. Emphasis is given so that these students can face the challenge in real life and thus can earn a respectful living in the society. They take part in

sports, cultural activities and have their own team of Girl Guides and Yellow Bird Company. One of the students took part in the 1st World Games for the disabled youth held in UK in 1986 and won a prize in one of the competitions. Besides the Principal, who looks after the day-to-day affairs of the school, there are about 11 teachers working in the school. Some teachers are unsighted themselves. Two of the teachers took special training abroad in teaching the

blind students. Moreover there are four weaving instructors for the vocational centre and 10 people working in the hostel including two house mothers and two cooks.

I accompanied the Principal to different sections of the school. The Braille press which is situated on the first floor of the administrative building is an interesting one. It is actually a small press run by three blind men and two sighted persons. It produces text-books for primary and

secondary blind students throughout Bangladesh and those books are distributed free. This hand-operated Braille press produces about 800 to 1000 Braille books per year.

There is also a vocational training centre for those blind persons who could not attend any school earlier or who have less interest in formal education. In the centre they learn knitting, weaving, carpet making etc. so that they can find some meaning in their lives. They are given stipend during the training period. They also earn money by selling their own products.

There is also a workshop for married women (handicapped and blind). After employment these women are trained in the vocational centre. In the workshop they produce woollen scarves, jackets, dusters and jute bags which are then sold in the local market or sent abroad. It is really worth mentioning that they exported some of their products to UK and New Zealand. What they need is a showroom of their own to show their own products.

The school, moreover, runs a Rehabilitation Project. It rehabilitates those poor students who pass out from the school. The school finds a suitable sutor and bears all expenses of the marriage. Later the couple

is provided with a finished accommodation.

As for the financial arrangement the Christoffel Blinded Mission of Germany has been providing assistance since the inception of the school. Besides Baptist Missionary Society of UK, National Christian Council and Japan, and the United Church of Christ in Japan are also providing much assistance. The Principal regretted that no local organisation came forward with any financial assistance. She said that Tk 300 is allotted for every student per month which is not enough compared to the recent price-hike of essential commodities. She is much concerned about that. She felt the need that there should be a permanent ophthalmologist who should regularly examine those blind girls. She mentioned with gratitude that some ophthalmologists helped them from time to time but not for long. She mentioned that her organisation has no co-ordination with other organisations working for the blind people.

As it was my turn to return I heard some students singing loudly and clearly "Dance in the sun.....". Perhaps they were having a music class. Let their joy be with them forever — let them feel the warmth of life.



Baptist Sangha School.

THE symbol of TCDC is two spheres with their southern halves linked by a bridge. Over the year, the pages of this magazine have contained many examples of technical cooperation which have flowed across that bridge: Nicaraguans using artificial limbs made in India; Yemeni mechanics training in Jordan; China and Argentina exchanging food technology. Each of these instances makes an eloquent case for TCDC, but none of them would have occurred without the bridge itself — that is, without institutions that support and promote co-operation. It may be useful, therefore, at this stage in the history of TCDC, to reflect on what institutional arrangements have evolved to foster cooperation, how they differ between countries and what problems have been encountered in making them work.

In most countries the cornerstone of TCDC is the focal point; a unit or individual officially charged with co-ordinating TCDC activities and liaising with international bodies and focal points in other countries. A text book arrangement for focal points would be roughly as follows. A TCDC unit is established with a generous government budget within an inter-sectoral authority such as the Ministry of Planning or the Prime Minister's office. This unit covers both incoming and outgoing assistance. Linked to it are sectoral and regional focal points, which continually consult with the central focal point on the country's technical needs and capacities.

In reality, countries are found to vary widely when it comes to such questions as: in which ministry is the focal point located? Is it covered by special legislation? Does the same focal point cover both

A Fresh Look at the TCDC

needs and capacities? Is there a separate focal point for conventional north-south technical assistance?

The choice of arrangements depends on a variety of factors, one of them being where a country stands on the development scale. All developing countries have both capacities to share and needs that can effectively be met under TCDC arrangements. However, owing to lack of information on the kinds of expertise, training facilities and equipment available from other developing

rectorate and technical advisory board drawn from different sectors. While Brazil has an excellent record as a supplier of technology and expertise to other developing countries, it has so far not exploited the TCDC option to any great extent for meeting its own needs. Christina Montenegro, TCDC officer at the office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Brasilia, Nesta and UNDP worked closely to prepare for the meeting. Initially, the Co-ordinating Committee

and UNDP reviewed and identified the projects which were to form the basis of the TCDC programming exercise. In making their selection, the officials took into account such factors as whether sufficient funding could be mobilized and whether the recipient country had the capacity to absorb a technology.

As the Director of the Special Unit for TCDC, Surinder MS Chadha, explained: "Those of us in the Special Unit are brokers and match-makers. We help match

of polio victims in Gambia — back into the working world."

Gambia recently opened a rehabilitation centre for the handicapped, but it lacks trained personnel to run it. Under the new TCDC agreement, two Gambians will receive technical training at Indonesia's Rehabilitation Centre in Central Java. Their two-month course will examine the medical and social aspects of providing rehabilitation services. Room and board will be paid for by Indonesia. Air travel will be arranged by Indonesia and paid for using Indicative Planning Figure (IPF) funds under a UNDP umbrella project for the promotion of TCDC.

"This programming exercise showed us that Guatemala and Indonesia have much to share in the field of herbal medicine," said Guatemala's representative Armando Caceres, who is Director of the National Commission of Medicinal Plants in Guatemala. "Both have a diversity of medicinal plants and both are at risk of losing them if environmental steps are not taken soon." The new TCDC agreement calls for each country to send an agronomist, a pharmacist and a physician to the other country to examine ways of upgrading the production and use of medicinal plants.

Nepal and Indonesia signed ten agreements ranging from seismic design of human settlements, soil erosion engineering and irrigation methods, to livestock development, improvement of textile industries and expansion of foundries. "It is much more cost-effective for us to tap Indonesia's technical expertise

in these areas, than it is for us to go to an industrialized country for training," explained Bhola Chalise, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Industry in Nepal.

"Indonesia is a leading Islamic country that has made tremendous progress in the area of family planning" said Safwat Ayoub, Deputy Director of Development Co-operation in Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "There is a success story from which we can learn a great deal." Under a TCDC agreement, Egypt will be sending a trainee to Indonesia's Education and Training Centre for the National Family Planning Co-ordinating Board to learn how to formulate and supervise family planning programmes.

Not all contacts were made across negotiating tables. Some discussions took place during excursions to Indonesian training centres, where delegates could get a first-hand glimpse of some of the areas of expertise which Indonesia has to offer.

Towards the end of the even, delegates were taken to the Bandung Conference Centre, the site of the first Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference held in Indonesia in 1955. At that historic gathering, representatives from 29 Asian and African countries addressed the need for technical co-operation among and within developing countries.

They discussed ways by which their people could achieve fuller economic, cultural and political co-operation. Thirty-five years later, 29 country once again sent delegates to Indonesia to seek ways of fostering mutual co-operation or, as the Indonesians say, gotongroyong. — (Coop South)

This article by Christopher McIntosh addresses some basic questions about the organizational machinery required for successful Technical Co-operation among Development Countries

countries, there has been a tendency for nations at an intermediate stage in development to be suppliers rather than recipients of assistance under the heading of TCDC.

Tunisia, for example, while being highly active as a supplier of TCDC, usually looks to the north for its own technical assistance, partly because of its long association with France. In Tunisia's case, therefore, the TCDC focal point, the Agence Tunisienne de Co-operation Technique, concerns itself solely with supply of expertise. Incoming assistance, whether from developed or developing countries, is dealt with through other channels.

In Brazil, another country at an intermediate stage of development, outgoing TCDC is handled by the Brazilian Co-operation agency, linked to the Ministry for Foreign Relations but with its own executive di-

rectorate for International Technical Co-operation (CCITC) of Indonesia contacted the country's public and private agencies and institutions which carry out TCDC programmes. From TCDC users, a compendium of Indonesia's needs and capacities was prepared. With the assistance of UNDP, the compendium was sent of all of the invited countries to help them identify opportunities to collaborate with Indonesia using TCDC methods.

Those countries interested in participating in the programming exercise then formulated specific TCDC project proposals. In some cases offering capacities and in other instances requesting expertise to fill needs. When necessary, advisors from Indonesia were sent to the invited countries to help them draft the documents. Following these consultations, officials from CCITC

the needs of one country with the capacities of another. But in the final analysis, it is up to the countries themselves to agree on the terms and conditions of technical co-operation.

A total of 219 projects of technical co-operation were discussed during negotiations. As with most programming exercises, the host country was the supplier in the majority of cases.

"Indonesia has a wide range of organized training institutions from which we can benefit," said Gambia's delegate Sola Mahoney, Principal Secretary in the Office of the President of Gambia. "At this meeting, we signed an important project agreement for the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped. It represents and major step toward bringing many of our disabled — particularly the large number

of polio victims in Gambia — back into the working world."

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UNESCO helps schools to prepare for disaster

UNESCO has approved a USD 50,000 grant to help cyclone-prone Bangladesh introduce disaster preparedness in primary schools.

enable children to learn how to be prepared and cope with disasters by integrating into the health curriculum such components as sanitation habits that do not pollute the water and how to seek refuge.

The grant, which is part of UNESCO's participation programme under which the organization provides emergency assistance to member states, is in response to an international appeal for aid following the disastrous cyclone which hit the country in April killing more than 140,000 people and causing damages to educational buildings, materials and equipment estimated at USD 898 million.

The second part of the programme will be follow-up action to a project under which UNESCO helped develop a prototype design of a cyclone resistant school building.

Under the grant, UNESCO will also help in the training of technical personnel to manage on-going action on the construction of cyclone resistant school buildings which can also serve as places of refuge during disasters.

The main characteristics of a cyclone resistant school building are a strong steel and cement foundation and structure and a strong flat roof, walled on all sides, that can hold as many people as possible.

Situated at the northern narrow end of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is directly on the path of the pre-and post monsoon cyclones generated in the tropical atmosphere conditions at sea. The April cyclone is about 54th major cyclonic storm to hit the country since 1797.

Beynon said the modified design is currently being examined under a 10-year general education programme in Bangladesh sponsored by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) which, among other targets, seeks to build about 100,000 classrooms in the country.

UNESCO's chief of the co-ordination, evaluation and operational activities section, John Beynon, said of all the schools destroyed by the cyclone, 60% were primary schools in the southern parts of the country.

UNESCO in September also undertook a mission to Bangladesh, at the request of the OPEC Fund for International Development, to prepare a project for the rebuilding of damaged schools and construction of new ones in cyclone affected areas. "We are going to submit the report which we hope will lead to assistance of about USD 8 million for the construction of school building in the south of Bangladesh," said Beynon.

He said the UNESCO programme will include development of curriculum modules to

— (UNESCO News)



Intent on learning

IT was only in al-Andalus that scholars of the early Middle Ages had access to the entire corpus of scientific knowledge of their time written in Arabic, Hebrew, Greek or Latin.

Confluence of knowledge: where scholars met

les in the Rhine valley, notably Saint Gall in Switzerland and Reichenau in Germany.

In the tenth century the natural passage still used by modern tourists travelling

from central Europe to Spain was the only means of communication between the peninsula and the rest of the continent. The route through the central and western

Pyrenees had been closed since the defeat of Charlemagne at the battle of Roncevaux in 778.

The importance thus accorded to Catalonia explains

why the oldest surviving astrolabe, a hybrid product of the Arab and Visigothic cultures, is set to function at the latitude of Barcelona. It was to the Catalan marches that the young

Gerbert of Aurillac, later to become Pope Sylvester II, travelled to study science. By the time he returned to France, he had learned so much that at first he was taken for a necromancer or magus. It was some time before the new knowledge that he helped to introduce to Europe — of such subjects as decimal numbers, the abacus, the construction of astrolabes, sun-dials, armillary spheres and other instruments — became widely available there.

When he quit the Iberian peninsula, Gerbert knew that he was leaving behind him not just a land whose scientific culture was vastly superior to that of Christendom but also one whose researchers (if one can use that word to describe tenth-century scholars) were making continued progress in their respective fields.

40,000 volumes, only one of which has survived. His bibliomania drove him to pay a fortune for any book that caught his interest. That is why the first copy of Abu al-Faraj Ali al-Isfahani's "Book of Songs", a collection of poems set to music that contains much information on social and cultural life during the first centuries of Islam, was known in Cordoba before it

Book of Maladies of Arif ben Sa'd, a doctor and civil servant who was his contemporary, contains popularized elements of Indian and Iranian astronomy as well as a mention of the great astronomer al-Battani.

A bridge between cultures, al-Andalus transmitted to Europe Arab science and philosophy as well as the work of Aristotle and other elements of ancient Greek thought

The Christian writer Orosius's Seven Books of Histories against the Pagans (Historiarum adversus paganos Libri VII) was translated into Arabic by two men, Qasim ben Asbagh, a Muslim cadí or judge, and his Christian counterpart, Walid ben Khayzurran. The treatise known as the Mathematica Alhendra probably had a similar genesis. A series of brief texts in Latin, it contains in more or less accurate form the Arabic names of many stars, among them Rigel, Betelgeuse, Altair, Vega and Aldebaran — appellations that are still familiar today.



Abulcasis, a distinguished Arab surgeon who lived in 10th-century Cordoba, is shown visiting the city's hospital in this late-19th-century engraving.

A fruitful partnership

In the same way, Christian envoys to Cordoba such as Gomar, the future Bishop of Gerona, profited from their residence in al-Andalus to cooperate with their Muslim counterparts. Gomar wrote a chronicle of the Frankish kings at the request of the future caliph al-Hakam II al-Mustansir. An edited version of this work was soon circulating in the Orient, and it has come down to us in the great Arab traveller and encyclopaedist al-Masudi's Murudj al-Dhahab.

The same ruler was also responsible for the enlargement of the palace library, which eventually contained some

was in the Orient.

Other, more technical knowledge was also propagated abroad. Maslama of Madrid, an astrologer at the Umayyad court, adapted the tables of al-Kharezmi, the great Baghdad mathematician, for the Cordoba meridian. He also wrote notes on the construction of astrolabes and carried out astronomical observations. His work soon became known in Europe, though not under his own name. Latin translations and digests also helped many Arabic words, such as alsumt, azimuth, to enter other languages.

It has been established from the dates at which some surviving works were imported that it was possible for books to make the journey from the Orient to Cordoba and then on into the Christian world in less than two years. The speed with which knowledge was transmitted can be explained by the close collaboration that existed between scholars of different religions and cultures. For instance the monk Recemundo, author of a celebrated liturgical calendar, was successively Andalusian envoy to the Holy Roman Empire, to Constantinople and to Jerusalem. His work, which was amalgamated into the

The new knowledge was also transmitted to Europe via Arab prisoners of war held on Christian territory. Ibn Hayyan, the greatest historian of al-Andalus, specifically refers to their influence. Some of these captives were men of great learning, and their captors