An Adarsha Gram through an

Australian's Eyes

Caitlin Douse is an Australian psychology student

had been in Bangladesh for about a week and this was only my second journey out of Dhaka. We drove out of the crowded city, across the Kanchpur Bridge, and stopped briefly at Panam Nagar where we saw the beautiful old buildings that people still inhabit today. We also walked around the grounds of the Sonargaon Folk Museum where we were guided by young children who beamed with delight at us and were full of stories and laughter as they showed us around the area.

Then, accompanied by officers from the Thana headquarters, we journeyed in a small motorboat across the Meghna River, watching the people fishing and all of the hustle and bustle that we had left behind in Dhaka seemed so far away. The water was so silky smooth that its calmness relaxed us all.

Eventually, we reached Shantiban Adarsha Gram, situ-

itouses are alike, but each has its indivisual character

ated on a sandy island, but

amongst trees and other

greenery. Twenty-six families

live here and, although their

houses are identical, the vil-

lagers have improved and ex-

tended them, and vines, plants

and vegetables are growing all

over their small gardens. The

homesteads are all kept in

healthy, clean conditions

which add to the attractive-

ness of the place. And, even

though all the houses started

off looking the same, each one

now shows the individuality of

Assisting the Landless

This village was founded in

1989 and the project has gone

through many names

('Operation Thikana', 'Cluster

each family within the village.

now holidaying in Bangladesh. Here she describes her recent trip to an Adarsha Gram in Sonargaon Thana.

Village', 'Self-Reliant Ideal Village') until this year, when it was given the official title, in both English and Bengali, of 'Adarsha Gram'. The idea is to provide Government (or 'Khas') land to groups of homeless, landless families in the hope that they might generate income and become successful communities.

It is an approach that, when applied to poor families. should give them much more hope and incentive than they have had before. Also, the children should all have a chance to attend school, something

their titles to the land; and There was no work and everyone was very poor.

In fact, most of the men worked as fishermen but only one woman had any income. It seemed to me that all of the young people spend their time playing and simply sitting around. One of the main concerns of the Adarsha Gram idea is to start generating income by families so that they may be certain of acquiring the simple, basic needs of a family In my view, one of these needs is that the children can be educated so that they are also able to earn basic require-

and a family in an Adarsha Gram should be strongly encouraged to have no more than 2 or 3 children if the whole family is to be provided for.

The Bangladesh Krishi Bank had given loans of Tk 10,000 to the families two years ago: These, have not been repaid This suggests that not enough income is coming into the families of this Adarsha Gram and that, maybe, they rely on the government too much for continual support, which it has no way of providing.

Who is Responsible?

The villagers expect "the government" to help them. They gathered round the thana officers and the Ministry of Land visitors saying that they need money for food, and grants of agricultural land, and training. While some help might be possible, the one thing that they seemed reluctant to do was to help themselves

I can understand this as the government has suddenly given them hope from nothing However, along with this hope should be the willingness of the people to do all they can so that they may continue to live with their new ways and surroundings. The government's aid was merely a stepping stone -the largest stepping stone for the people - and now it is necessary for them to repay the government by continuing to make use of what they have been given.

An Important Project

According to my enquiries, there are about 750 Adarsha Gram all over Bangladesh and by this time next year, there should be around 1,000: By then, over 200,000 people will be living in these villages. The European Community is giving over Tk 100 million to the project; over 50 Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have recently signed contracts to work with many of these Adarsha Grams, and most of them will soon be pro-

However, none of this will help the 26 families in Shantiban: The Adarsha Gram built before 1991 will not be receiving European Community assistance. Therefore it would be 'ideal' for them to be given some help from outside resources, such as NGOs, for a mosque, a school, a community centre and, above all, training

But, even more important, their problems.

vided with community centres.

and work for the people to do.

the families must be encouraged to do as much as possible for themselves. In a couple of years I would like to return to the Shantiban Adarsha Gram. I would like to see that, on my return, many of the worries they have today have vanished and that they look to themselves - and not to the government - for the answers to

Ignoring Peasant Women

T / ATER and fuelwood. These are needs which peasant women daily face, and whose supply and conservation is their pressing concern.

Sadly, however, peasant women are most likely to be missing in meeting on the environment.

Women are bypassed in consultations on development because they are poor and they are women, it was pointed out at a regional conference on women and environment held recently in Lahore.

The conference, sponsored by the non-governmental Aurat Foundation and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), is one of many efforts in South Asia to organise peasant women and give them a voice. It was clear from the meeting that rural women across the region are both keenly aware of environment-related problems and eager to do something about

Whether it is too little, too far away to dirty or too much, water is a burden left for women to bear. Julekha Begum from Bangladesh recalled that when devastating floods in 1991 hit her country, "the men ran away. It was the women who stayed to protect our homes, our children, our poultry, our cattle and our

But the men do not always like it when women decide to act. Chandika Shrestha, a community worker from Nepal, recounted her battle to persuade the men in her village to allow 500 donated saplings planted by the women to grow. Twice the men drove their herds through the fenced saplings, leading to charges from development authorities that the women did not know how to protect the saplings and should therefore be excluded from the reforestation

programme. On a third try, with the doby Cassandra Balchin from Lahore

The environment will suffer less harm if those in closest contact with nature's resources - rural women - are heard and heeded

nation now down to only 250 saplings, door-to-door persuasion by Chandika finally spared the saplings. "I convinced them everybody will benefit (from the trees), I explained the advantages of forests," she

which in the past night have

Problems and Challenges

Shantiban Adarsha Gram seem,

despite their obvious poverty,

happy. They were very wel-

coming and one thing that has

been achieved is a good

'community spirit': Everyone

living here seems friendly and

secure. Talking with the

women (through an inter-

There was no school for the

There was no community

There were no health fa-

They had not been given

preter) they complained that:

There was no mosque;

Certainly the people in

been impossible.

children:

cilities:

In many cases, the absence of women's perspective has increased women's workload.

Nepali participants spoke of how their search for firewood has been made more arduous by the passing of high-tension wires through their villages for electricity.

Although many areas through which the pylons pass still do not have power, for each pylon an unnecessarily large area of one square kilometre is cleared, reducing firewood resources.

Not that peasant women would rather live in the past. Sisilia Saren, a shy young woman from Bangladesh's tribal community, said she is aware that "sometimes you forego something to get something," she says. "It is the negative impact of development that has to be minimised.

Lack of information emerged, as the single factor preventing women from doing more for the environment. The conference's final recommendations made a strong call for the transfer of information about appropriate and environment-friendly, farming technologies.

This was particularly true in the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Not only as farmers and homemakers but also as mothers, women are placed at great risk by the

overuse and misuse of chemical farm inputs.

ments that they will share with

their own families in the fu-

were literate but I could not

establish whether this meant

only that they could sign their

names, or if they could - for

example - read a newspaper

and write a simple letter.

'Literate' means different

things to different people and

establishing the precise situa-

tion would require more time

was the lack of effective birth

control: Probably another 10

babies will be born in the com-

ing year, further increasing the

difficulties of parents without

skills or income. An appropri

ate form of contraception seems to be what is needed

Another apparent problem

than I had available.

I was told that two villagers

Pakistans Mumtaz Nizamani who is president of the plains area Sindh Women's Movement and Bibi Sultana who heads the Hunza village organisation blamed chemical runoff for a range of health problems in their communities, from stomach disorders to cancers.

The issue of information lack sparked a tense argument between non-government groups and government officials on whether enough agricultural services are being provided.

But despite the tension, the conference afforded all sectors - the peasant women, NOG activists, government planners a useful forum. For example, the Punjab Planning and Development Joint Chief Economist learned that the best time to broadcast agricultural information aimed at women was between 12 noon and six pm.

That development officials have little knowledge of the daily lives of rural women clearly showed that extent to which peasant women have so far been excluded from development programmes.

But this is changing. At the third session of the committee to prepare for the UN Environment and Development Conference (UNCED) to be held in Brazil in June, the UNCED Secretary General was asked that "women's critical economic, social and environmental contributions to sustainable development be addressed at the Conference as a

distinct cross-cutting issue." "A subsequent symposium jointly sponsored by several UN organisations on the impact of environmental degradation and poverty on women and children has also led to the acceptance of certain significant insights.

Among these are the recognition of women as active managers and users of natural resources and not simply passive beings on the receiving end of poverty and a deteriorating environment.

The Lahore conference recommendations will also be brought to the Brazil meeting to elicit women's voice on environment plans and policies.

Newspaper Develops a Dialogue Among Southern African NGOs

HE idea is so good and so simple it deserves to succeed. Instead of development workers dashing around the world re-inventing the wheel, why not save time, energy and resources by learning from the experience of near-neighbours?

Says Gama Mutemeri, the Harare-based coordinator of a new publication, "Development Dialogue": "It was simply ridiculous that the Basotho or Batswana were flying thousands of kilometres to China to learn about biogas digesters when a few hundred kilometres away - next door in Mozambique - they had 10 years earlier modified the same Chinese biogas digesters to suit local Southern African conditions."

Mutemeri says this sort of duplication is widespread in the development field, with well-tried approaches being re-discovered at considerable

To address the problem, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) launched a monthly newspaper aimed at providing a channel of communication among the roughly 4,000 nongovernment organisations (NGOs) in the region.

The first few issues of

A gh of a double-dip rece-

ssion, charity bosses are

advising the government that

it would be cheaper to pay for

unemployed workers to serve

on aid projects abroad than to

keep them on welfare benefit

government less to send volun-

teers overseas than to keep

them unemployed here," said

Earl Cairns, retiring chairman

of the British charity Voluntary

Service Overseas (VSO), which

operates in 50 countries

the cost of living between the

developed and developing

worlds that workers on a local

salary in many parts of the de-

veloping world would be earn-

ing less in real terms than

unemployed living below the

Britain are causing more and

more applicants to look for

voluntary work in overseas

by Alec Dixon. It is the main

arm of Britain's volunteer pro-

gramme and largely funded by

the British government. Major

contributions also come from

we are going to be obliged to

develop our skills to good ef-

feet. There must be, among

those employees now become

unemployed, great skills. They

must have an enormous

ing countries are increasingly

requesting volunteers, particu-

larly those with a trade or

skill, to help in aid pro-

development aid, and we still

cannot recruit enough trained

people-especially midwives,

physiotherapists or teachers -

to meet our needs," said David

VSO has recorded a dou-

bling in the number of appli-

cants for work overseas since

1988 - from 3,192 in 1988-

Green, Director of VSO.

89 to 7,392 m 1991-92.

"Skills are a crucial form of

grammes around the world.

At the same time, develop-

amount to give."

Dixon says: "It occurs that

VSO was founded in 1958

countries, according to VSO.

Lengthening dole queues in

poverty line in Europe,

Such is the discrepancy in

worldwide.

"It would cost the British

Simangaliso Ndhlovu writes from Harare

"Development Dialogue" have been well received, and the initial print run of 20,000 has ensured wide distribution in the 10 member states of SADCC. The publication's nonprofit publishers, the Development Media Organisation, has already received 800 subscri-

ption requests.

Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Mutemeri says that in addition to supplying information on how various NGOs are tackling problems in the region, the newspaper also hopes to provide a platform for debate.

"What people involved in

NGO news is a mainstay of the paper. A report in a recent issue on a meeting of NGOs and UNICEF in Zimbabwe on the plight of Africa's children was headlined: Endless Meetings. Where Are Results?

Conditions in SADCC states are obviously not identical but, with a couple of notable exceptions, the development concerns are much the same.

Apart from Angola and Mozambique, where destabilising wars have forced NGOs to concentrate on relief work. the chief concerns in the region include providing clean water, improving food production, conserving energy, creating jobs and promoting literacy. Health issues, especially AIDS awareness, are also paramount.

The other SADCC member countries are Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, development are doing is something which must be continuously redefined," says Mutemeri.

"Issues such as donor con-

trol, Third World debt, relations between governments and NGOs, and North-South dialogue are all matters on which different views, need to be expressed," he says.

"Development Dialogue" is produced in tabloid newspaper format, a maximum of 32 pages an issue, by four fulltime staff members.

Mutemeri says that at the moment the biggest limitation is money. "We should really be employing specialist writers in

the fields of environment and agriculture, health, economics and finance, arts and culture.

Editor Maxwell Chivasa now relies on stringers scattered across the SADCC region for his best stories. And, appropriately for a paper serving such a large region, these cover a wide range of topics.

NGO news is a mainstay of the paper. A report in a recent issue on a meeting of NGOs and UNICEF in Zimbabwe on the plight of Africa's children was headlined: Endless Meetings, Where Are Results?

The newspaper also covers general news from the region. It reported, for example, a serious outbreak of scabics- an infectious, itchy skin disease --among the rural poor in Zambia

Another story said that land mines left over from Namibia's war of independence were still killing and maiming children in the former battle zones.

Other articles report on political developments in the region, or give practical advice, such as tips on how to succeed at commercial rabbit-farming.

Supporters hope "Develop ment Dialogue" itself will succeed, so that it can continue to give an exciting lift to development efforts in Southern African. — PANOS

Jobless Britons Told: Offer Your Skills Abroad and governments turn their S the British economy enters the second trou-

by Charles English from London government salaries.

According to Green, "the recession is obviously one principal reason - people are less hopeful of finding work in Britain - but I also think that more people have a realistic idea of the developing world and the role of agencies like

Green told VSO's annual general meeting in London that the principle of employers abroad employing VSO workers is under threat as structural adjustment encouraged by the World Bank reins in

Charitable organisations may also face a cut if, as predicted, Britain's overseas development aid budget to the developing world is cut by to ip 15 per cent. Oxfam director David Bryant warned: "As nembers of the NGO community we need to act together." He appealed to people to write to MPs and cabinet ministers

about the rumoured aid cut.

Aid currently being provided by all countries is being stretched further as charities As the number of jobless in Britain grows, the government is being told it would be cheaper to pay for unemployed workers to serve on aid projects abroad than to keep them on welfare benefit

at home. One beneficiary, reports Gemini News

Service, would be Voluntary Service Overseas,

which pioneered the concept of volunteers from

developed to developing countries 35 years ago.



Javelin champion and now the new ambassador for Voluntary Service Overseas.

attention to Eastern Europe. Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the

Commonwealth Secretary-General, said: There is some concern in the Commonwealth because the situation in Eastern Europe has meant a diversion of resources which would be going to the developing countries. "Sometimes we hear that

this diversion of resources would not affect resources to developing countries but this is not credible. The number of resources in the world are finite." David Green was launching VSO five-year policy document, Investing in People: VSO's Strategic Plan for the

The plan projects that by 1997. VSO should be working in more than half the world's poorest countries (currently 40 per cent). The organisation intends to offer overseas partners a wider range of services in addition to its successful two-year volunteer programme - including shorter-term experienced volunteers, training opportunities and project

The plan also proposes trebling the number of return volunteers actively supporting VSO work on a regular basis. According to Green, shortfall skill areas will be helped by increased recruitment in Europe and possibly Canada. By the end of the five-year

plan, he said, the public should see VSO as the leading British agency providing a broad range of opportunities for people of all ages to serve overseas, helping to build a more equitable world. The programme will be aided by former British world record javelin thrower Fatima Whitbread, who takes over from pop star David Essex as VSO's celebrity "ambassador." Essex is leaving to help produce a British musical in Africa. "It was really quite easy,"

said Essex as he handed over the to Fatima Whitbread, "I feel VSO is a terrific organisation. The right way to help people is to help them to hep them-- Gemini News.

Farm Work Helps Colombo Addicts Kick the Habit

HE poster on the wall says: "Destruction is instant, growth is a slow process." The sign seems out of place

in the sprawling acres of coconut, 40 kilometres away from Colombo. The estate is dotted with pine shrubs, pepper climbers and brinjal plants. A nearby stream waters the

crops and offers a cool dip at the end of a hot day. Two dozen young men till the soil in the morning and learn job skills in the afternoon, before sweating it out on the volleyball court. The residents range from

teenagers to stalwart young men in the prime of their lives. They appear well-fed, comfortably clad and enjoying a lifestyle comprising hard work and play. Are they the lucky ones in a society fraught with youth unrest and frustration? A few months or weeks

back, these boys were sunned by their families and scorned by society as heroin addicts. Dropping out of school, they began to smoke cigarettes, sometimes progressing to marijuana, finally getting hooked onto heroin. Stealing from home or outside became I their lifestyle to buy the drug

which costs a victim 100 rupees (US\$2.50) a day. In desperation, their moth-

ers or fathers brought them to "Mcl Medura," the "Sumithrayo Anti-Drug Abuse Unit" down Horton Place, in Colombo's residential area.

Set up in 1984, the unit is an offshoot of the Sri Lankan branch of "Befrienders

the suicidal and the despair-

ber of callers and their families

were faced with problems re-

lated to abuse of alcohol and

narcotics," says Nalini

Ellawela, one-time director of

"Sumithrayo" (Good Friends)

and now honorary Executive

Director of "Mel Medura" (for

alcohol dependents) and

"Navadigantha" (for heroin de-

who just finished high school.

His parents gave Nihal, their

eldest son, enough money and

freedom to enjoy his youth. "I

Nihal is a drug dependent

pendents).

We found that a large num-

had no problems at home except that they my parents

were hardly ever around to spend time with us," he says. carefree. Curiosity and the

His friends were equally need to behave in what was considered a sophisticated, adult fashion drove them to try

by Sirohmi Botejue

the female family members in this traditional society were usually manipulated by the ad-

So Nihal came again with his disapproving father and the family were given instructions on care, medication and a

strictly monitored daily routine to keep Nihal away from his fix and his friends. A week

later Nihal had proved his ab-

lifestyle.

stinence and came willingly to request that he be housed at Navadignatha to begin a sustained effort to change his

So Nihal made the one and a quarter hour journey from Colombo to Mahahena Estate in Attanagalla in company with the Director herself. He was welcomed by the staff and senior residents as another "Malli" (term of endearment for younger brother).

'All the residents come here having been rejected by family and friends as drug addicts. So we try to make them feel accepted and loved," explains a social worker.

"When we first came, we did not like to do field work for we were not bred to it," says an eighteen-year-old resident, "But the Aiyas (elder brothers) who had been there before explained that we, too, must do our share."

After they became stable, some would find or be given jobs while others would opt for self-employment. The Centre already houses a lapidary as well as welding and carpentry

"It costs 3,000 rupees (US\$75) per month to house and work towards rehabilitating one youth. If we have the funds, "Navadigantha" can house up to 50 young men and it would also be more cost-effective," says Ms Ellawela, adding that she already has a waiting list of over 500.

This apparently is only the tip of the iceberg. According to a 1987 state survey, there were 30,000 heroin addicts in Sri Lanka and probably there are now 40,000. This means an annual drain of 200,000 million rupees (US\$5,000 million), apart from the invisible costs of family disruption, mental and physical degeneration and crime.

From smoking 'pot' for a dark, they graduated to heroin and stayed with it. Gradually, it was no longer Nihal taking heroin but heroin taking Nihal International," called "Sri cigarettes first. "When you are eighteen and Lanka Sumithrayo," to befriend

have no cares why shouldn't

you try everything ... from girls

to ganja (marijuana)?" From

smoking "pot" for a lark, they

graduated to heroin and stayed

with it. Gradually, it was no

longer Nihal taking heroin but

heroin taking Nihal. "I needed

more and more money because

I felt that my mind and body

needed a 'pull' to survive the

pawned the last of her jew-

ellery and offered Nihal 100

rupees to come with her to

"Mel Medura." "Bring him back

here with his father or

brother," was the injunction as

One day, his mother

day," he récalls.