

Feature

Development

An Adarsha Gram through an Australian's Eyes

Caitlin Douse is an Australian psychology student now holidaying in Bangladesh. Here she describes her recent trip to an Adarsha Gram in Sonargaon Thana.

'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 provided with community centres.

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 and work for the people to do. But, even more important, 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 their problems.



houses are alike, but each has its individual character

ated on a sandy island, but amongst trees and other greenery. Twenty-six families live here and, although their houses are identical, the villagers have improved and extended 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 attractiveness of the place. And, even though all the houses started off looking the same, each one now shows the individuality of each family within the village.

which in the past might have been impossible.

- There was no school for the children;
- There was no mosque;
- There was no community centre;
- There were no health facilities;
- They had not been given

Assisting the Landless This village was founded in 1989 and the project has gone through many names ('Operation Thikana', 'Cluster

Ignoring Peasant Women

by 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

WATER 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 meetings 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.

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 said.

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.

overuse and misuse of chemical farm inputs.

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, NGO 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.

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

Simangaliso Ndhlovu writes from Harare

THE 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?

'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 non-profit publishers, the Development Media Organisation, has already received 800 subscription requests.

development are doing is something which must be continuously redefined," says Mutemeri.

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.

Jobless Britons Told: Offer Your Skills Abroad

by Charles English from London

As the British economy enters the second trough of a double-dip recession, 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 in Britain.

Charitable organisations may also face a cut if, as predicted, Britain's overseas development aid budget to the developing world is cut by up to 15 per cent.

Such is the discrepancy in the cost of living between the developed and developing worlds that workers on a local salary in many parts of the developing world would be earning less in real terms than unemployed living below the poverty line in Europe.

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.



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

Lengthening dole queues in Britain are causing more and more applicants to look for voluntary work in overseas countries, according to VSO.

Farm Work Helps Colombo Addicts Kick the Habit

by Sirohmi Botejue

HE poster on the wall says: "Destruction is instant, growth is a slow process."

had no problems at home except that they may parents were hardly ever around to spend time with us," he says.

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.

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.

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.

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.