

PROSHIKA AT A GLANCE

(Upto December, 1993)	
Year of Establishment	1976
Area Coverage	
Number of Area Development Centres (ADCs)	
Rural	62
Urban	5
Total	67
Number of Villages	4602
Number of Unions	574
Number of Thanas	
Rural	79
Urban	12
Total	91
Number of Districts	
Number of Groups Formed	
Men	16,870
Women	18,404
Total	35,278
Number of Group Members	
Men	2,97,765
Women	2,83,630
Total	5,81,359
Total Number of Households	5,81,359
Total Number of Beneficiaries	34,88,154
Total Number of Workers	1,443
Number of Loans Provided to the Groups	
for Employment and Income Generating (EIG) Activities	41,500
Total Amount of Loan so far Disbursed for Groups' EIG Activities	Tk. 750 Million
Groups' Own Contribution for EIG Activities	Tk. 200 Million
Number of Participants Received Human Development and Practical Skills Training (Formal and Non-Formal)	1.1 Million
Number of Adult Literacy Centres so far Set up	7879
Number of Persons Provided with Functional Literacy Skill	1,41,567
Number of Non-Formal Primary Schools Established	121
Number of Trees Planted	26 Million
Number of House Constructed for the Poor	27,627
Number of Hand Tubewells Sunk	9255
Number of Low Cost Sanitary Latrine Distributed	69,795

A Laudable Experiment ...

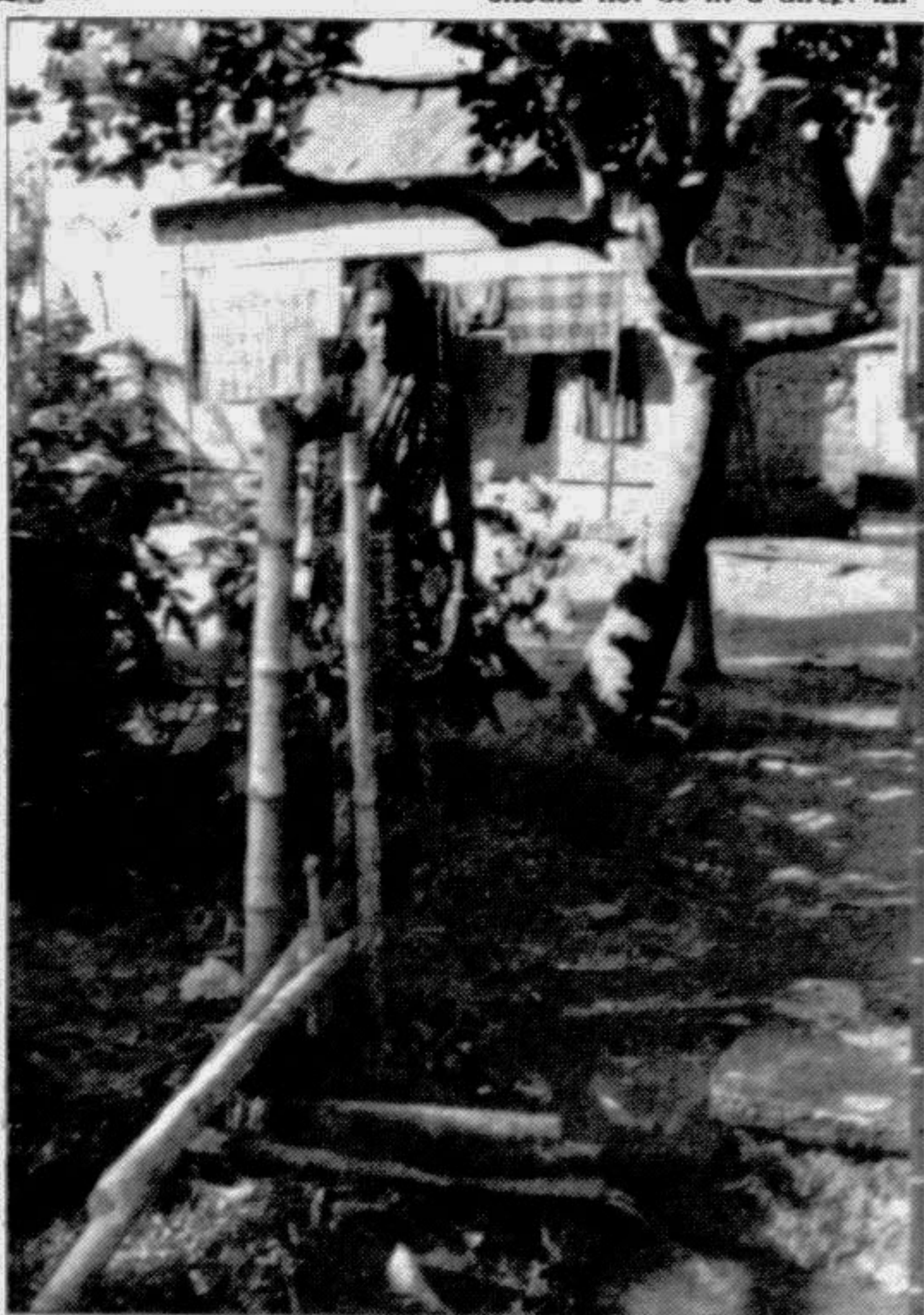
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taking place in Bangladesh: 1. Lack of access, ownership and control of productive resources; 2. A patriarchal social system which oppresses women; 3. Lack of participation in public institutions/access to public services; 4. Interlocked, imperfect and distorted market relations; 5. Mainstream development efforts benefiting a minority and bypassing the poor; and 6. Environmental degradation. All of these six reasons contribute to a society which is economically inequitable, unproductive and inefficient, socially unjust and discriminatory, environmentally unsustainable and politically undemocratic.

This society creates and maintains mass poverty. This poverty is expressed by hunger and malnutrition, unemployment and underemployment, illiteracy and high birth rates, fatalism, inarticulation and alienation. These are the symptoms. Manifestations are that all economic, social and political relations are vertical, such as powerful-powerless, dominant-dependent and patron-client.

Thus, empowerment of the poor in social, economic and cultural terms can have a successful impact on poverty, as evidenced by our participatory human development strategy. We want to contribute to a vision of society that is economically productive and equitable, socially just, environmentally sustainable and genuinely democratic.

Now our mission is to conduct a long term extensive and intensive participatory sustainable development process through the empowerment of the people. The objectives emanating from this are to achieve structural poverty alleviation and environmental protection and regeneration, improvement in women's status and improved participation in public institutions (together with improvement in human rights).



Rower pump for drinking water and irrigation for kitchen gardening.

To carry this out we need very concrete strategies and programmes: organizing the poor, providing development education, promoting self reliance through employment and income generation activities, environmental regeneration and protection, universal education programme, health infrastructure building programmes, urban poor development programme, integrated multisector women's development programme, policy advocacy programme and the disaster preparedness and management programme.

DS: OK, I have problem identification and I have an agenda. What then should we do as a nation?

QFA: Poverty alleviation should be the first priority.

DS: Would you suggest that the budget be recast in accordance with these priorities?

QFA: Yes. Because the development plans are not poor. The main concern is only with increasing GNP. Without a real attack on poverty not even GNP can be increased. Our national programme should be a poverty alleviation programme.

DS: You have identified that development education is important. What are the resource implications? Supposing the BNP government takes the Proshika agenda, are you saying that the Proshika agenda can be financed through an adjusted budget and, if not, where will the additional resources come from?

QFA: Allocation will not ensure resource delivery. For example we have more resources now for poverty alleviation. But we know that as in the past resources may be diverted to other sectors. The implementation capacity is not there. The political will is not there. It is not only by allocating the resources that development will be ensured. What is needed is a very comprehensive programme and implementation process. Here the government, as anywhere, should not be in a direct im-

plementation role, but in a position to enable the private sector or the people's sector to do this. I will say that because NGOs have a comparative advantage in poverty alleviation work, their capacity can be enlisted and the government can provide resources. NGOs need not all the time depend on foreign resources. For example, the whole credit management for poverty alleviation can be managed by NGOs. Primary education can be done in both quantity and quality by the NGOs.

DS: So are you saying that the whole budget for education should be left for the NGOs?

QFA: The Ministry of Education's role should be that of facilitator, policy maker and standard setter.

MK: Allocation is not enough. Involvement of NGOs is not enough but the participation of the whole of civil society through different institutions in the planning exercise itself is very important. Decentralization, together with more authority and resources should be given to local government.

DS: So the Ministry of Education becomes the policy formulator and facilitator. Not the implementer. Then who

will implement?

QFA: Specialized government agencies, NGOs and other groups from civil society and local government institutions.

DS: So the schools should be decentralized?

QFA: Yes.

DS: Denationalization should not be understood in a negative way. Instead of schools being run from Dhaka, they should be run locally, democratically, by the local people. It will be accountable to the local people and the government will provide the resources.

DS: If we can decentralize

Major Successes Achieved by PROSHIKA over the Last 18 Years

Even though poor are overwhelming majority of Bangladesh, they are bypassed, neglected and often adversely affected by the conventional development approach. As a result, very little benefit of development has accrued to the poor while major benefits have gone to a small minority of urban and rural elites. Against this backdrop Proshika innovated an alternative development approach in 1976, called Participatory Human Development model, where development benefits not only accrue to the poor, they also become active participants in their own development. The soundness and effectiveness of Proshika's development approach can be seen from the fact that nearly 3.5 million beneficiaries from nearly 6 hundred thousand poor families of 4600 villages have significantly improved their lives and livelihood by participating

in Proshika's development programme.

Poor organised as primary groups of 15-20 members and then federating into broader networks at union and thana level have mobilized their own human, social, economic and cultural resources as well as have accessed and managed effectively public and common property resources. Broader solidarity of the poor has led to greater participation in the local level public and social institution which are showing signs of being more efficient and just. Many forms of unjust treatment of the poor, exploitation and oppressions on them have been significantly reduced. Social status and dignity of the poor have risen considerably.

Promotion of employment and income generating activities (EIG) through building of savings, provision of credit, ex-

tension of technical assistance and marketing support has greatly improved employment, particularly self employment, and income situations of the poor which have resulted in their having greater food security, nutrition, wellbeing, self-reliance and dignity. The poor have freed themselves from the clutches of the moneylenders and now not only conserving their resources but also adding on new resources.

Provision of safe drinking water by installation of thousands of tubewells, wider sanitation coverage, massive health and nutrition education and proper housing have greatly improved health situation of the poor. Many communicable diseases, child mortality and maternal mortality have been reduced. Universal Education Programme has made a vast number of illiterate functionally literate, almost doubling the literacy rate in the villages

where Proshika is working.

Large scale environmental protection and regeneration programme through Participatory Forestry and Ecological Agriculture have succeeded in demonstrating that active participation of the poor is capable of halting many environmental degradation processes as well as regenerating many degraded natural resources. Through participatory forestry programme, organised groups have been able to plant and protect over 26 million trees in denuded forest area, embankment slopes, road sides and railway track sides.

Growing Ecological Agriculture movement initiated by Proshika is contributing significantly to non-chemical dependent, sustainable, low cost, pollution free and productive management of agricultural resources like soil, water and genetic biodiversity.

Irrigation service managed by organised poor after receiving training, credit and extension support has shown that poor can get irrigation water right and sell water to the landed farmers for a share of the crop, resulting in a significant income for the poor while farmers benefitting from much improved production through efficient management of water resources. About 25,000 acres of land has come under irrigation management of about 800 organised poor groups. This innovative programme has been able to demonstrate that in the absence of any meaningful land reform, agrarian reform strategy can still be advanced by giving the poor access to irrigation water which is as important an agricultural resource as land.

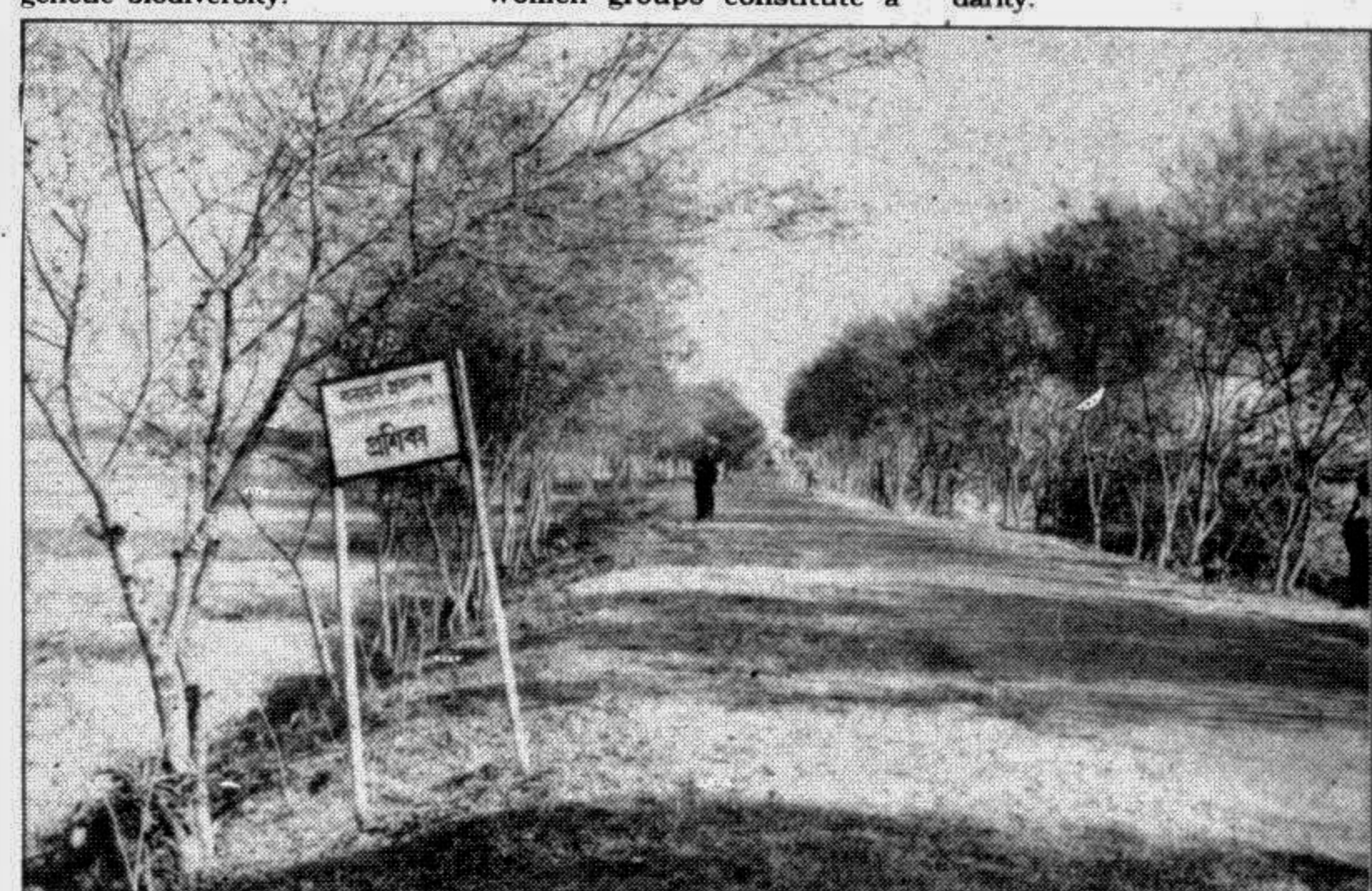
Women participate very enthusiastically in all of Proshika's programmes. Women groups constitute a

majority among all the groups. Greater solidarity, better income and employment opportunities and deeper understanding of their plight have contributed to significant improvement in women's status and marked reduction in many patriarchal forms of oppression, like dowry, polygamy, physical violence etc.

In an effort to mobilize and harness people's cultural resources for development, Proshika has pioneered people's theatre concept and practice where poor themselves depict events, issues and concern surrounding their existence using local folk media. So far 208 people's theatre groups have been organized in Proshika's working areas who select their own issue, prepare their story line and perform on a regular basis for enhancing social consciousness and solidarity.



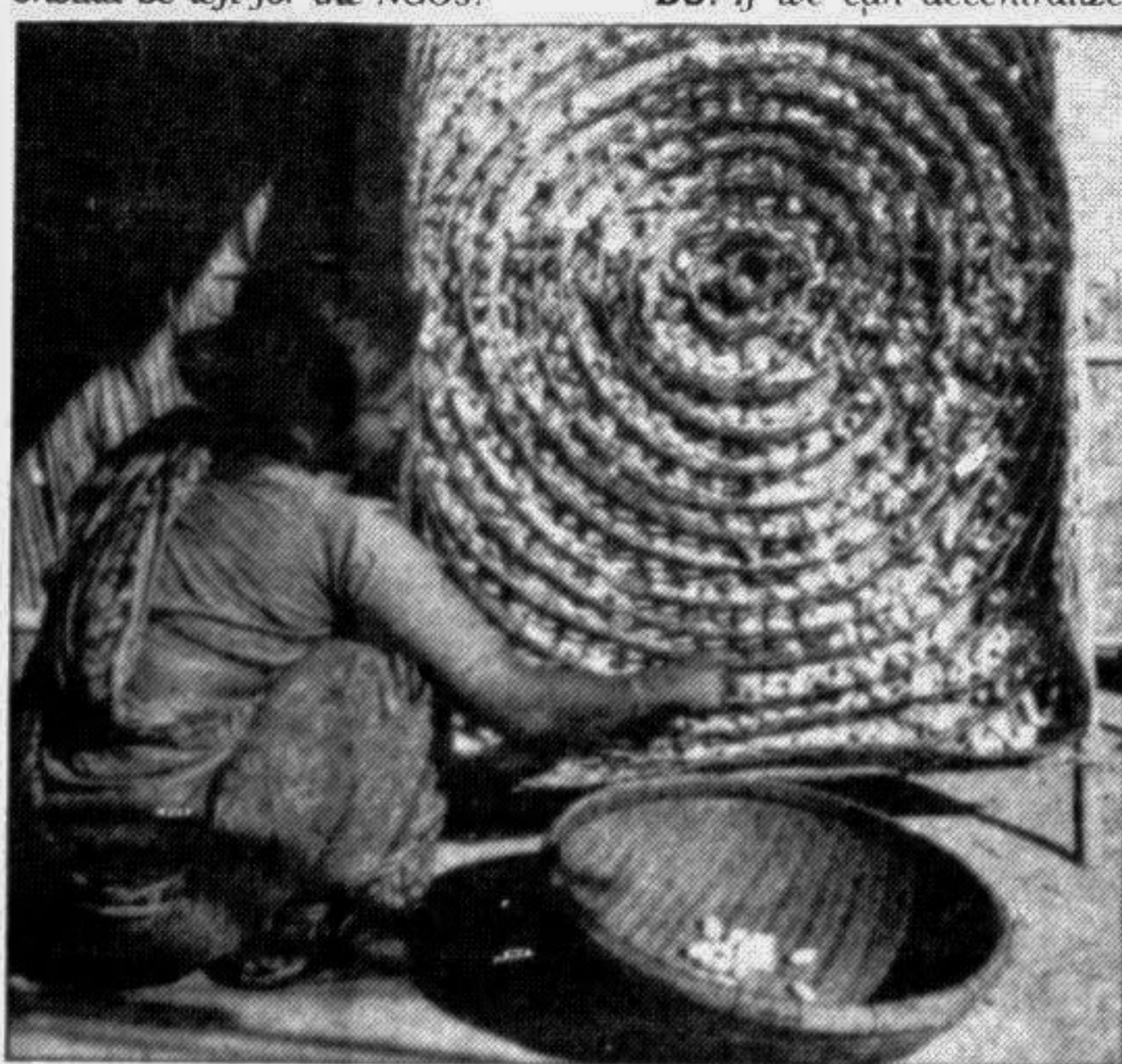
Women preparing concrete slab latrines — for sanitation and income generation.



Roadside plantation protects environment, creates employment and income.

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Sericulture: A very high value-added income generating enterprise for women.

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Ecological Agriculture: Vegetable gardening — low cost, high production.

will implement?

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DS: If we can decentralize

QFA: The development crisis that we are in cannot be solved only by the government. Secondly, all around the world, governments are withdrawing from direct involvement from the economy and development and leaving it to the people's sector and the people's sector, may contain both the private sector and civil society. The people's sector should take over the implementation and management of development, say as in education.

DS: Suppose we are in agreement that we should convince the government that their role is one of enabler and facilitator. What should we do?

the democratization of its institutions. For example the local institutions are very weak. They don't have sufficient authority. Unless they are given this authority they are unable to take up this decentralized mode of operation. So a thorough process of decentralization has to be undertaken by this government. This is of course a political agenda. If the government is serious about democratization.

Allocation for the prime sectors — poverty alleviation and education should be made. But also to be followed up by monitoring and assessment. I have heard of reports which

produced a statement, called 'A Minimum Demand for Democracy and Development'. We gave it to all the parties and we asked them to include points in their manifesto. Some took some of the points, others did not. Before the election, we met parliamentarians from all the parties and tried to impress upon them to include development issues in their political agenda. As you know ADAB has a programme of taking MPs and journalists areas of work to see for themselves NGO work. We feel as you feel that NGOs should be working towards influencing policy. At Proshika we work with other NGOs. This work should not be done by Proshika alone.

DS: Does this mean that you have already changed some of the ideas of politicians?

QFA: We have found that many MPs understand better now what we stand for and work for. For example we are trying to develop a process by which they are sensitized to these issues. One way is to give them reading materials, but also to take them to the areas where the NGOs work, show them what benefit it can have and what policies are required.

Some are willing to change their views. Many MPs have asked for briefs on some issues such as sustainable agriculture which explains that, without the use of chemicals, you can have an agricultural production system. We call it ecological agriculture. With low cost you can have high production. And this, of course, pollution free. This was not known to some MPs. Chemical-based agriculture has become very unsustainable. There is a lot of production but the farmers are losing. And the reason is the high cost of inputs. You can develop an agricultural strategy where you do not need to use so many chemicals. The alternative exists.

Another suggestion we gave them was that rather than giving subsidies to inputs, a programme that will only benefit the multinationals, you can give subsidies straight to farmers based on whatever land they have, not on what they have produced. I am not in favour of subsidies, but if you are in favour, then it should be done in this way.

DS: A lot of NGOs are involved in the development effort. As you say, the government should be induced to change its policies regarding development, participation and mobilization. Then how is it that, despite such widespread visible profiles, the NGOs are still failing to influence the government in matters of policy?

MK: NGOs have confined their activities to the micro setting in the rural areas. In Bangladesh they have not done much work in the macro sector. I would say that from 1990, after the change in the political situation, NGOs have started thinking of involvement at the macro level. ADAB, Proshika and others have begun to work in this field. We have begun collaborative pro-

grammes with government agencies in the field of education, environment, livestock and fisheries, where there have been significant policy changes on the insistence of NGOs. There has been some progress, though I wouldn't say enough. Without macro level influence, NGO efforts at the micro level will certainly be meaningless.

DS: What will be some of your major initiatives in the next five years?

QFA: In fact in the next five years we will do much the same thing but on a much larger scale. The analysis of society that we have done still remains valid. So do our responses of the last 18 years. Many of our programmes and strategies have proven to be successful and beneficial. So we have chalked out a 300 page document: Proshika's Five Year Plan 1994-99.

We will increase our employment and income generating activities almost five fold. We want to build on our success. We have seen in the past that groups become economically self-reliant if they're assisted with a greater volume of credit and technical assistance. We want to graduate about 75 per cent of our groups to that level. We have also outlined that income will be substantially increased from the present level.

We have been successful in connecting natural resource management and environmental protection. For example we have a large scale social forestry programme in denuded forest areas, strip plantation and agroforestry which have given people both short and long term incomes. We have protected the environment and at the same time alleviated poverty. These kind of opportunities exist in forestry, fisheries and livestock. Substantial expansion of these programmes will be undertaken to maximize the opportunities combining economic and environmental development, poverty alleviation and environmental protection.

We will be establishing about 20,000 adult literacy centres and 10,000 non-formal primary education schools so the literacy rate in the areas where we work will rise to about 60 per cent in the next five years. From 79 thanas, total programmes will cover 100 thanas in the next five years.

DS: You'll take up 100 thanas, more than one fifth of the thanas in Bangladesh?

QFA: Our expansion will be both in quantity and quality. Our main objective will be to create a total impact. By this we mean literacy rate rises, all forms of oppression of women and men reduce to a minimum. Income will rise to about US\$ 400. There will be greater food security, greater environmental protection and a significant reduction in disease and malnutrition.

DS: With that positive note we end this interview. Thank you very much for being with us and sharing your experiences and views with our readers.