

Across the Divide Quality Education for Girls and Women

GIRLS and women are still the main victims of illiteracy. Women make up 60 per cent of the world's illiterate adults, and out of the 130 million out-of-school children 81 million are girls. In most regions girls are under-represented in enrollments at every level of formal education.

Gender disparities are particularly visible in rural areas. In poor families in poor countries, boys are often given first claim on whatever limited educational opportunities are available. School authorities can influence this tendency by providing additional places, but there remains the problem of convincing the parents of the value of sending their girls to school.

The lucky ones who do start school will need all help they can get to complete their studies; drop-out during the primary grades is higher for girls than for boys in most of the countries in Africa and Asia for which data are available (World Education Indicators, Table). The pattern of gender disparity remains for adult illiteracy. One out of three adult women in the world today cannot read and write, compared with one out of five adult males.

Gap between rhetoric and action

Although education for women is repeatedly strongly advocated by international and many national educators and politicians alike, there is a wide gap between rhetoric and achievements. Women are in most cases absent from programme design, management and implementation. And even when urban educated policy-



Courtesy - BUSTI

Saptagram Nari Swanirvar Parishad

Main Educational Problem Tackled: Adult literacy; access to education; educational quality; disadvantaged groups; rural areas; life skills; income generation; community participation.

SAPTAGRAM is a self-reliance movement run by Women for Women of the landless and the land-poor class. The presence of women at all levels of the organization, from senior management to the field, is unique in rural development work in Bangladesh.

One of the project's most original features, introduced in the mid-1980s, is a gender-oriented syllabus, developed with the help of a specialist in adult education. Other NGOs have introduced these materials, that have won government prizes, into their adult literacy classes.

Education, that has become the major programme, grew from the women's demand for classes, as they came to realize the links between education, employment opportunities and basic human rights. Legal training, credit giving and small scale industry development are also part of Saptagram. Sericulture is the Saptagram's largest income-generating project.

In Bangladesh, one in five primary school teachers is a woman and female illiteracy, at

77 per cent, is one of the highest in the world. In 1989-90 the nutritional intake of women was 88 per cent that of men and they earned 40 per cent less. Twenty-two per cent of the country's 17.6 primary school-age children never attend school.

Of the 13.7 million who do enrol (67 per cent boys, 57 per cent girls), 60 per cent drop out before completing the five year cycle. Growing landlessness is slowly deteriorating the social fabric in Bangladesh, where 80 per cent of the population is rural. Nine per cent of the population own 80 per cent of the land.

The Dhaka head office has 19 people and there are 55 field workers. Project started by Mrs Kabeeb alone, planned for seven villages in Sadar Thana in Faridpur. Now it covers districts of Faridpur, Sadar, Rajbari, Jhenidah, Jessore and part of Kushtia, with about 100 staff.

Saptagram has for long time been run like a voluntary organization and needs to move towards professionalism.

— UNESCO

makers manifest progressive intentions, they may encounter resistance from parts of the rural population who sometimes see equal opportunities for girls and women as a threat to age old traditions.

While some progress has been achieved over the past decades, too often women's position in society and their education is far from being sat-

isfactory. Their lower status both in industrialized and in developing countries is rooted in economic inequality, discrimination with regard to access to power and resources and society's reluctance to change attitudes. Detrimental sexually discriminatory practices and habits hinder the full participation of girls and

Promoting Primary and Elementary Education

THE PROPEL project aims at universalization of primary and elementary education, within the framework of the broader objective of 'education for all'. The acronym PROPEL is derived from the initial letters of the project title 'Promoting Primary and Elementary Education'. The word PROPEL betokens a vigorous onward movement of the people for reaching the goal of education for all. Microplanning by the rural communities is visualised as the major means for achieving a self-sustaining process of permanent education managed by the communities themselves.

The project perceives social and educational change as an integrated process in which the latent human energy necessary for propelling change and development is released through mutual understanding and collaboration between the government and the people.

The project also affirms that, essentially, it is the people who are the makers of development while the government and other agencies are stimulators and facilitators. From this standpoint, the PROPEL project emphasizes a threefold approach towards community mobilization: (a) increasing the community's access to neces-

sary information, (b) building up its planning and action skills through participatory problem-solving and (c) taking care to see that inhibitory paternalism, whether exercised by government or any other agency, does not interfere with community decisions.

The PROPEL project constitutes the third phase of an action-research project for universalization of primary education undertaken by the Indian Institute of Education, Pune, Maharashtra State, in 1979 which was the International Year of Child.

The first two phases, covering 145 villages in different types of agro climatic areas, concentrated on non-formal primary education. PROPEL, which began in 1988, covers a much wider educational canvas.

In the PROPEL project, the alternative channels of full-time formal education and part-time non-formal education have recently begun to come closer together in a relationship of complementarity. The communities concerned are getting used to the idea of planning varied educational programmes for all the age-groups in the community. Learning programmes are being organized for youth, women and preschool-age children.

women in mainstream development.

The most influential investment

"Educating girls quite possibly yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world," says Lawrence Summers, chief economist at the World Bank. A World Bank Study (King and Hill, Women's Education in Developing Countries: A Review of Barriers, Benefits and Policy, 1992) of some 200 countries, shows a correlation between heavy investment in girls' schooling and lower infant and maternal mortality, longer life expectancy of both men and women, broader knowledge of good nutritional practices and lower birth rates.

UNESCO statistics show convincingly the crucial impact education for women has on social and economic progress. Thus broadening the base of education along with increasing its quality is an imperative for societies to cope with challenges of modern times and prepare the ground for development.

Resistance of parents

While a political commitment is a prerequisite for the schooling of girls, the final decision still lies with the family. Parents who shun education for their daughters are on important part of the problem. For many families in developing countries, the direct and indirect costs of schooling girls far outnumber the benefits they can see. This is why simply building more schools, relaxing admission policies and introducing quotas for girl students will not alone bring about change.

Advocacy and social mobilization are essential to raise awareness and demand. One of the keys to the success of the PROPEL project in India is that it has integrated education into community life. The community sees the PROPEL Apla Vargh ('Our Class') their own. PROPEL has shown that greater community awareness about the importance of education also can restrain drop out and increase the quality of education. When class hours are flexible and education is perceived as a way to a better life, parents may be convinced to send their girls to school.

School environment

When planning education for girls, it is important to ensure that facilities are culturally appropriate. Research shows that the school envi-

In 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand, 155 countries committed themselves to giving highest priority to education for girls and women during the decade. While many countries and donors are taking action to improve the situation, there is a need to guard against any second-rate solutions for girls and women. Formal and non-formal programmes must ensure the same quality for females as for males.

ronment has a stronger influence on girls' than on boys' attendance. To reduce parental fears about their daughters' moral and physical safety, countries have experimented with building boundary walls around schools, providing closed latrines for girls and establishing separate schools for girls.

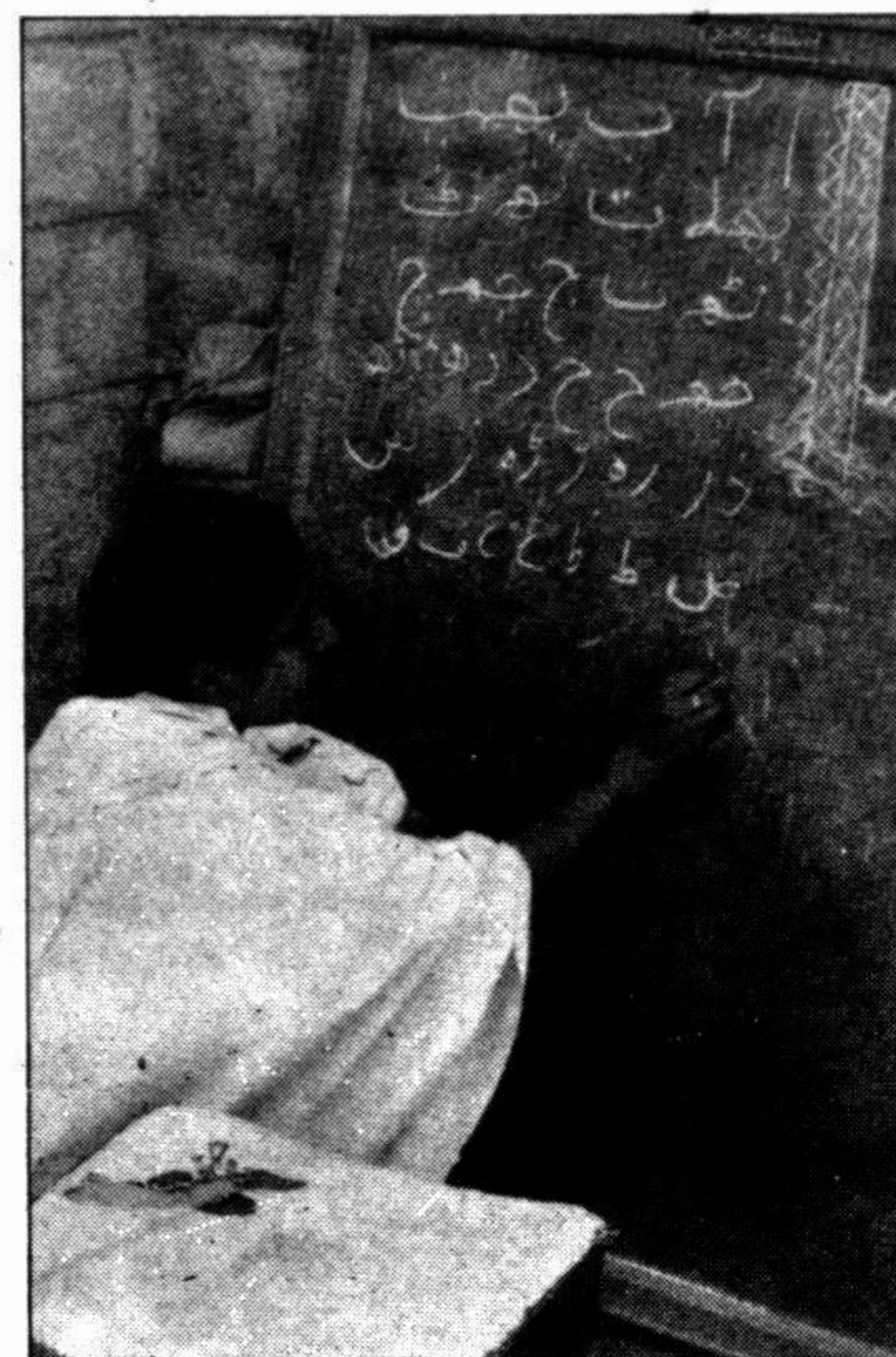
Girls who live in remote areas often fail to attend school because of purely geographical or physical barriers. To overcome this problem, education should be made available in the communities where girls and women live.

The creation of residential facilities for poor girls, especially at the secondary level, can be a definite incentive to enrol girls in school. Such families created in rural and mountainous areas in China increased girls' enrollment by 90 per cent. Several countries, such as Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal, have experimented with low-cost strategies for narrowing the distance between schools and homes.

Another approach is to introduce scholarship and special incentives to attract girls to school. In Guatemala, where only about half of school-aged girls attend school and only 17 per cent complete the primary cycle, a pilot scholarship programme was extremely successful.

Female teachers and administrators

Recruitment of more female



Courtesy - BUSTI

teachers for primary schools in those regions is generally considered likely to make parents feel more comfortable in sending their daughters to school also in giving girls more confidence while in school.

Providing residential facilities for female teachers in the communities where they teach can attract and retain women teachers and so raise basic education opportunities for girls.

More women administrators and supervisors may also help in its process. Pakistan and Nepal have developed a strategy that has proven successful in boosting the female teacher-training supply. BY creating teacher training institutes in rural areas, they have actively recruited female teachers and given special

BRAC is Making Headway in Spreading Education

THE Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) of the BRAC is making headway in spreading education in the rural areas of the country covering more and more areas, reports BSS.

Despite strain in the programme stemming from problems involved in such a crucial task like spreading rural education at the primary level, the NFPE seems moving well in enlightening the rural children with education.

A group of newsmen recently visited some of the BRAC primary schools in the rural areas. It appears that the rural children have accepted the programme with enthusiasm and zeal while further improvement of the system can be of greater benefits for them. The programme was launched in 1985 after it was

conceived in the preceding year and it focused exclusively on children from the poorest families.

BRAC sources say that the programme was never seen as an alternative or substitute to the formal primary education provided by the government schools but it is intended to be supplementary and complementary to the existing schools.

The NFPE is aimed at dealing with the drop-outs and non-starters among the poorest families.

While visiting some of the schools, in Trishal thana under Mymensingh district, the poor rural children were seen enthusiastically taking part in the school programmes. Children below the age of 10 — having come from poorest of the fam-

ily training to those with insufficient background.

Good teaching methods

Teacher-training should include gender sensitization so that teachers are aware of and ready to respond to the needs of female students. Otherwise the teacher may unconsciously pass on stereotypes of dependency and domesticity and discourage girls from taking scientific and technical subjects that have traditionally been considered "male".

Teachers are crucial as agents of change and should be recognized as such. Both male and female teachers should learn how to encourage girls to become more participatory in class and active members in society. The Aga Khan Field Based Teacher Development Programme in the Northern Province caters for female students, since the government provides education for boys in these parts of Pakistan. The programme has improved the quality of education by advocating child centred teaching methods, different from the often rigid methods of classroom instruction used by untrained or badly trained teachers. The Gonosjohajjo Sangstha (GSS) in Bangladesh has obtained promising results in child-centred teaching through crash courses given to graduates from teacher-training colleges and strong follow-up support.

The teacher is the key



Courtesy - BUSTI

over-emphasize the idea of "relevance." The curriculum should also provide equal opportunities. Parents may not view science, mathematics and vocational training as "relevant" to the traditional roles of women. Parents and teachers should be persuaded to encourage girls to choose traditionally "male" subjects and teachers should make these subjects attractive to girls as well as to boys.

In some cases, however, it may be appropriate to create special teaching materials for girls and women. Saptagram, for instance, started off by using existing literacy materials, and discovered that they conveyed a stereotyped and conservative image of women. Now the organization has designed its own gender-specific curriculum, that has received government prizes two years in a row. Practical skills such as book-keeping are the core of the programme. Vocational training and practical skills are essential to rural sustainable development, and should be integrated in both primary education and literacy programmes.

Should there be special programmes for girls and women? Flexible school hours and distance education are strategies that have been successful in some developing countries. While this may be a possible short-term approach, the obvious danger is that it may lead to a two-track education system of unequal quality for boys and girls.

School-community relationship

Building social awareness in the communities is the sine qua non of advancing education for women and girls. (GSS) in Bangladesh sees community involvement as critical in keeping attendance levels high and drop-out rates low. GSS has linked its primary education programme for disadvantaged children to its social mobilization, primary health education and legal aid and legal education programmes.

In Pakistan, the Asthan Latif Society has convincingly proved that education for girls is possible also in communities where there are no schools. In mobilizing the community and giving crash courses to women with at least an 8-year education, non formal programmes are successfully operating in rural Sind, unreached by the formal education system and with a female literacy rate of 1.5%.

Equal opportunities curriculum

The school curriculum can attract and retain girls, if in tune with the lifestyle and traditions of the community. There is, however, a risk to

GSS-Socialization of Children

Main Educational Problem Tackled: Learning improvement; repetition rate; educational quality; access to education; enrolment of girls; disadvantaged groups; rural areas; curriculum development; learning methods; teacher effectiveness; community participation.

GSS Primary Education Programme addresses two fundamental problems: outdated and inefficient teaching methods and active discouragement of creative thought and problem-solving abilities in children.

The programme wants to enable children up to the age of 12 to enter/re-enter the education system at their age level. GSS has developed learner-centred urban and rural schools with multiple entry points, flexible school hours and holidays, built on land donated by the community. Each school consists of three classrooms which can accommodate a total of 180 children in two shifts.

GSS emphasizes the role of the teacher as well in learning process as in socialization of child. It sees the key to the successful implementation of its programmes in the effective initial teacher training and strong follow-up support. The modern pedagogy used by GSS

areas; women's immediate concern is to improve their lives. Only after having started income-generating activities did these women realize the importance of education. When women get together, tells us Saptagram, they start to question their lives, gain strength and step into action. Then, contrary to widespread assumptions, these poor rural women will take their precious time to sit down and study. Saptagram's success in organizing and educating poor rural women has proved that once united, they can become a formidable force for development.

UNESCO and the Jomtien conference have clearly stated that a dual track approach is needed if education for all is ever to be achieved: universal primary education and massive reduction of illiteracy for adults. Both formal and non-formal approaches will be needed if we are to achieve education for all. For progress to be made, successful strategies to promote education for girls and women need to be more widely known. The successful projects PROPEL, Asthan Latif, Busti Home Schools, Aga Khan Field Based Teacher Training Programme, Saptagram and GSS have potentials in both the fields of quality primary education for girls and women's non-formal education.

The PROPEL project covers 137 contiguous villages under 85 Gram Panchayats (Village Councils), in three types of agro climatic areas. The total population of this area is about 1,20,000 contained in about

is new to Bangladesh and not even applied in private schools.

Bangladesh has a 64.7 illiteracy rate and 69 per cent net primary school enrolment ratio, barely half of enrolled children (47 per cent) reach the end of the primary cycle. 211 persons (182 teachers; 15 school supervisors; 3 field supervisors; 8 trainers; 2 coordinators; 1 programme head).

GSS sees itself as leading the way in Bangladesh towards the introduction of modern teaching methods. GSS is active in CAMPE, a national coalition of mainstream NGOs which aim for educational reforms involving NGOs, the Government and Civil Society.

The project is dependent on foreign funding, which is reported as the main problem. Another stumbling block is difficulty in the area of NGO/Gov relations. The evaluation recommended that GSS expand in urban slums to make its credibility felt on government schools.

— UNESCO

The pivotal role of women: a dual track approach

The support and recognition given to women is probably the most direct contributor to the education and advancement of girls. As the saying goes: "educate a woman and you educate a nation." How, then, can women be reached? As by Saptagram, in poor rural

18,000 households. For the purposes of micro-planning, this area has been divided into three educational sub-areas or circles with a population of 30,000 to 45,000 and each sub-area is further divided into about 5 to 6 Panchayat Clusters per planning sub-area. This decentralization facilities collective as well as village-wise action by communities.

Basic Urban Services for Katchi Abadis

BASIC Urban Services for Katchi Abadis (BUSTI) was formed in June 1986 with the belief that a non-governmental, non-political and non-profit-making organisation would be very sensitive to the needs, aspirations and potentials of the inhabitants of the Katchi Abadis. It is an organisation formed to encourage, support and facilitate awareness among community, individuals and organisations committed to locally-based development.

BUSTI's basic objective is to improve the poor conditions of sanitation, health, education and women's status by creating self-reliance amongst the people of the squatter settlements, through community involvement and participation.

Role of this NGO is to transfer of knowledge to the community, develop indigenous technology, as well as enhance skill and management capabilities.

Also assisting the community in identifying their problems and finding solutions to them. Encouraging decision-making at the grassroots level. Establishing links between active NGOs in the squatter settlements (Katchi Abadis), and attracting government, national and international agencies for the specific support of development activities in

Katchi Abadis.

Its aims and objectives are to sustain and strengthen BUSTI's ongoing programmes, to improve and adjust them according to area needs, to expand BUSTI's programmes in new areas, to continue capacity building of community-based women's NGOs, to promote development in the field of health sanitation, education and income generation.

To use BUSTI as a training ground for field workers and community workers.

Home schools project management

Plans and implements integrated health, sanitation, women's development and water & sanitation programmes also monitors and evaluates project and plans training programmes.

This social mobilizers are surveying the area establishing links with NGO establishing local NGO motivating community

Community organizers are motivating community identifying teachers and students assisting in setting up programmes assisting in problem solving.

Area motivators are also motivating local community supporting local schools by constantly motivating the community a assisting in problem solving.