F the eighties was the generation of yuppies then the nineties can be ealled the generation of "development types". At least this part of the world, for obvious reasons, is simply brimming over with people working in the field of gender. women's education, poverty alleviation etc. The fact that a huge amount of money and resources go into the education. health, empowerment of women of the rural peoples of Bangladesh is an undisputed fact. But what is the impact of all this donor work on the people it is meant for, say Sakina of Bhanga thana or

'Keramat of Mirzapur village?

So many NGOs work in Bangladesh: from BRAC. PROSHIKA and GRAMEEN to Women for Women and Saptagram One would gather, sitting in the NGO capital of the world, that a lot of good has been done in Bangiadesh. And yet, we constantly read papers and attend seminars that state that women's nutritional status is still very low compared to men's, literacy rates continue to remain abysmal, violence against, women is on the rise and that the average height of boys in this country is actually falling due to mulnutrition. If we were to look at things at the micro level however, we would probably see an increase in enrollment rates in a certain area, or the empowerment and solidarity of women in a village where husbands can no longer beat on their wives and get away with it. It is important that the impact of a certain NGO on a given community is studied and evaluated.

# Development Dogma and its Impact on Women's Lives

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif

This is exactly what BRAC is doing in Matlab Thana in Chandpur, known to many in the development world as probably one of the most researched areas in Bangladesh. and to many others as the place where the fambar mer-

(ICDDRB) in Matlab this could well change and if successful. be vet another milestone under its belt.

NGOs have made significant contributions to the well being of their target group but often public sentiment is negative

challenge will be to work out which of the inputs which the organizations deliver is really most significant in altering people's lives. Is it the much lauded Grameen style credit delivery. system or is it the training and educational skills imparted by an NGO such as BRAC? Or is it in fact, the social mobilization efforts which really affect the well being of the rural poor?" The BRAC-ICDDRB research findings aim to supply some

answers to the extent, if any, of this improved welfare and the pathways which lead to this change. The novel feature of the collaboration between the two quite distinctive instifutions is that the joint import of socioeconomic interventions by BRAC and health inputs provided by ICDDRB will be tested. The one hitch is that the research will be done in Matlab again! One can only wonder what the consensus is among jaded Matlab natives who have had to bear with the ICDDRB's demographic data collecting system for the past 30 years. Now they will be subject to yet a fresh round of extensive data collecting and survey taking. This time by BRAC researchers, studying

economic conditions, control

over fertility, lower mortality,

health seeking patterns, nutri-

tional status, and the general

Program activities range from

loans and livestock to savings

and sericulture. The real

This will be done with a mix of questionnaire techniques and participatory anthropological methods. Local women have been recruited in the massive survey taking venture of over 4.000 families.

One example of the dimensions of the project is the study of single mother headed households, an alarmingly in creasing trend in Bangladesh. One such case is that of Shahida who's only daughter ran away from home "because hunger drove her out." She has three sons, all under seven, to feed. Her husband, a small trader, one fine day went off and married another woman from the next village. Now Shahida works in other people's homes and basically does whichever job comes her way. She is victim to gossip and talk from her community because she lives alone and works outside her home. And yet, the depressing fact is that there is at least one Shahida in almost every village in Bangladesh today.

Another aspect of the survev asked elite women of a village how their lot was after the advent of BRAC and they seemed to feel that things were worse for them. "Now the poor women wear our san dals and work at their own in come schemes, we have trou ble recruiting workers for our homes to help with paddy husking." This particular side of BRAC's work is really not a bad thing at all.

If Grameen Bank is known for its credit schemes, BRAC is internationally known for its Non Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Program The women involved in BRAC's self income schemes (there are over 30 in Matlab alone) however, are for the large part illiterate. They can write their names but that is all. A woman's self income can only be sustainable, in the long run, through education: But BRAC seems to feel that in the state of the winners

lapsed back into illiteracy and therefore is now concentrating on reaching the target group of primary school age children and young adults. It is through the mother that children learn social and cultural skills there fore, one would think that a literate mother is essential in reaching universal primary education. Specefically because she understands the importance in sending both her son and daughter to school.

The project is a very ambi-

tions one, especially questionable because its venue is yet again Matlab thana. However. the multi disciplinary research team has impressive credentials on paper and are being further assisted by an external academic team of reviewers.

This project, if successful, will tell us whether a household name like BRAC really is achieving its much publicized goal of poverty alleviation and empowerment of the rural poor. One can only wait for the outcome and hope that the answer to the question turns out to be in the affirmative.



In sharpur, a husband and wife work together in their plot of land.

-BRAC photo

### Diahorreal Disease Research "BRAC's Rural Development improvement in women's lives. The Women Who Broke the Rules | Change for the Last and the Least

dents took place. BRAC has

never really been known for its

research. With its recent joint

collaboration project with the

International Center for

by Afroja Nazneen

Sawing wood for making furniture, traditionally a man's job.

TITHIN the walled 40acre complex, it is a world apart. Women here are engaged in every kind of job that had been the exclusive preserve of males and are breaking one social barrier after another. Their jobs include welding, plastic moulding driver and even driving the 'tempo' (three-wheeled motorised carrier of passengers and goods).

Gono Shastho Kendro (People's Health Centre) is a pioneering health, pharmaceutical and uplift project 50 kilometres north of Dhaka, on an arterial highway. About 4.000 under privileged women work in various projects of this complex. All are required to be upkeep. After a few years she or become literate, able to ride a bicycle and a motorcycle and develop one or the other of the

There is also a school where 450 girls study for five years and learn a trade. The students are mostly daughters of marginal farmers of the locality. The dropout rate is minimal. Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, director of the centre, claims that after studying in this school girls marry late and adopt family planning.

The women of the Kendro during working hours have to remain dressed in workadapted tight-fitting trousers and shirts, dispensing with the unwieldy traditional dress of sari and baggy 'shalwar'. Looking at the women operating welding guns, running errands on bicycle and making field trips on motor bikes one feels that women's equality is as good as achieved - if only it could be same out side the complex.

It was no easy job for the women to break the social barriers and some of them are still in the midst of a struggle with their families and their social situation. Happily, they are slowly winning the battle.

Such were cold to her winner is Meleka Begum (35), at first a women tempo driver her in-laws when she set out on her challenging career, but now they treat her with an added respect. Dressed in Gono Shastho Kendros uniform of trousers and shirt, Maleka said she also had problems in the beginning from her allmale professional colleagues of tempo-drivers and even passengers would hesitate to ride in her carrier. But now things are easy. She is a member of the brotherhood. She receives a monthly salary of Taka 1050 (US\$27) and hands over the. daily turnover of Taka 300 to 400 to the Kendro to which the tempo belongs. Maleka Begum has her husband and three daughters of whom two are married. At first she felt diffident when she was transferred from the centre's banking division and asked to drive a tempo. But today her confidence is as firm as her grip on the steering bar. She intends to break one more

Looking at the women operating welding guns, running errands on bicycle and making field trips on motor bikes, one feels that women's equality is as good as achieved.

barrier and become a bus them. Her monthly pay packet

Jamila Khatun (32) who was operating a huge machine in the antibiotic division of the Kendro is the first woman boiler operator of the country. The story of her life is full of vicissitudes. She was first married at the age of 10, to a man aged 70. He already had two wives. He used to beat Jamila and did not provide for her

of Tk 1900 (US\$50) should be viewed, she says, not only in terms of money but also in terms of the prestige and importance it has given her in her relations with her family

BRAC photo

toward NGO work, mainly dete

to the lack of knowledge as to

what their impact is. Accor-

ding to Hassan Zaman, Senior

Staff Economist at BRAC.

and surroundings. Jamila takes much pride in being the country's first woman boiler operator and says that since a woman can perform this kind of physically demanding task, she is fit for



came back to her fathers house any other job. She recalls that where she learnt that women before she joined work here were being recruited at the she used to have a veil drawn Kendro, a few miles away. low over her head. How fast Jamila joined the Kendro's in- everything is changing, she dustry division from where she ruminates. was later transferred to an-

Amena Begum, chief of a tibiotic division. Here she sub centre of the Kendro came married her colleague to the headquarters on a bicy-Mohammed Borhan (35). But cle. How old is she? Around the marriage was not a happy thirty she replied but in the one and Borhan left her and next moment corrected hertook a second wife. Jamila who self - I have no 'exact idea'. is childless, now lives with her She too had to learn bicycling ageing parents and looks after at the centre. Everyday she

commutes between her home in village Gaotie to the subcentre at Debai a few. kilometres away on bicycle, she can administer immunisation and I V saline. She has 15 assistants serving under her at the subcentre. With 15 years service and promotions she has become chief of the sub-centre.

In 15 years Amena has come a long way from the days when she had to put up with taunts, rebukes and even social boycott for daring to defy the elders of society who apposed women working outside their homes. Today she is not only tolerated but respected in her village and now stands at Taka 1500 (US\$39) with which slie has purchased, a piece of land.

She was married early to Mannaf, a jobless gambler. Burdened with four daughters and one son (another son was born later), Amena was forced to take up a job at the Kendro. But the going was though for her. Even her husband joined the village elders in censuring her actions. Mannaf later left her. She had to appear before an assembly of village arbitration where the headman of the village told her that she had committed a grave offense against social propriety and she was to give up her job and make amends for her conduct. At this she asked, drawing her strength from she knew not where that if she couldn't work how would she feed herself and whether the headman could ensure her livelihood. This of course the headman was unable to ensure and the assembly broke up. In the mean time, wife of the headman took her side and persuaded her husband to view the case sympathetically. Some other village elders also relented and decided to leave her alone.

Her husband, finding her somewhat rehabilitated and earning, came and rejoined her. Gradually she won for herself a position of influence and respect. Even after that, it took some time for the village people to accept her riding a bicycle. Today, Amena says, much respect is accorded to her - or more specifically to her purse, perhaps. Her opinion is heeded in all affairs of the village and she is the central figure in all gatherings of village women. "They invite me at wedding parties because I can give costly presents" she

Like Jamila, Maleka and Amena, many other once destitute women in Gono Shastho Kendro are earning a fair livelihood. In a country where the per capita income is 210 US dollars to 80 US dollars. the Kendro has given women a prestigious footing in the social system.

Development Features

Afroja Nazneen is a journalist with Dainik Banglar Bani.

# by Gertrude Mongella

Y grandlather was a man of considerable ↓ ▼ prestige, much sought after for his services and advice. The source of this prestige was not wealth; it was the fact that he had ten children, that all of them survived, and that eight of them were boys.

in that sense, little has changed in the decades which have seen so much change in other spheres. In Africa, as in many parts of the world, a. woman who gives birth to three boys will consider herself fortunate, and be much admited, while her neighbour who has three daughters will be an object of pity. If the two meet, both are shy and embarrassed at the great contrast in their fortunes. If the same circumstance arose in those many parts of Asia int which the dowry system still prevails, then the consequences would be even more severe; a family with three girl children might well face financial ruin.

The challenge we face is the challenge of moving to the point at which these allimportant differences are of no importance. If is an immensely long road to travel. The Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995, will be both a milestone and a signpost.

The Lever of Education

The challenge is essentially one of finding practical levers to bring about change in the years immediately ahead. And I think there can be little doubt that the most powerful of those levers is education. An educated woman almost always has more value and status in the eyes of her husband, her family, and her community. She is likely to have more awareness, more opportunities, more choice, and more confidence. Even if all else remains unchanged, and even if the educated woman still has no opportunities outside the home, her position is still likely to be transformed; she is more likely, for example, to share in family decisions about how many children to have. how to bring them up, how to spend money, how to organize domestic life, and how to care for her own and her family's health. Her husband will also treat her in a different, less dictatorial way, and she will be less susceptible to bullying and intimidation by her in-laws. All of this inevitably, if slowly, raises the woman's status, and makes it more likely that the gender conditioning of the next generation will be less severely discriminatory.

Family Planning

The second great force for transforming the lives of women in the developing world is the spread of family planning services. The number

of children born to a woman has a fundamental impact on her health, on her time and energies, on her freedom and

opportunities, and on the

chances of her children gro-

wing up healthy and educated.

This topic is also discussed by Margaret Catley-Carlson. I will only add that even the surveys which reveal so much unmet demand for family planning probably underestimate the real requirements. Women know the real cost of having too many children too close together; they know what it means for their health and their lives and their opportunities. And many women also know that every time they become pregnant, they are

wants eight children.

any woman in her right mind

Women's Health

A third lever is direct action to improve the health of women and girls. Too often, females eat last and least; and if they want to be well thought of and well treated, then they are taught that they must, in all circumstances, consider the needs of others first. When it comes to health, they are expected to simply put up with problems which, in males, would be complained about and acted upon. A girl or a woman is expected to work even if she is quite seriously ill; a boy with a headache will be told to lie down. A woman is expected to bear pain and suffering with fortitude. She is

In the developing world, over 40% of women suffer from iron-deficiency anaemia. In some, the lack of attention to health and nutrition during childhood and puberty leads to great difficulty during the years of childbearing and is a major cause of the low-birthweight syndrome which does so much to perpetuate malnutrition and poor growth from one generation to the next. Worldwide. 500,000 women die every year from the complications that arise during pregnancy and labour - and many times that number are left with injuries, illnesses, and disabilities which can be embarrassing, painful, debilitating, lifelong - and which undermine their health and their strength and their opportunities.

#### Women's Technology A fourth powerful lever is

the kind of technology that lightens the burden on women in the developing world rather than increasing it. These technologies are not usually expensive. Standpipes and handpumps, small ploughs and tools to help with the weeding and harvesting, powered graingrinding mills, and cooking stoves that mean that only half as much firewood needs to be collected - these are the technologies that could save millions of women hours of drudgery every day, improving health and releasing time and energy for more productive purposes.

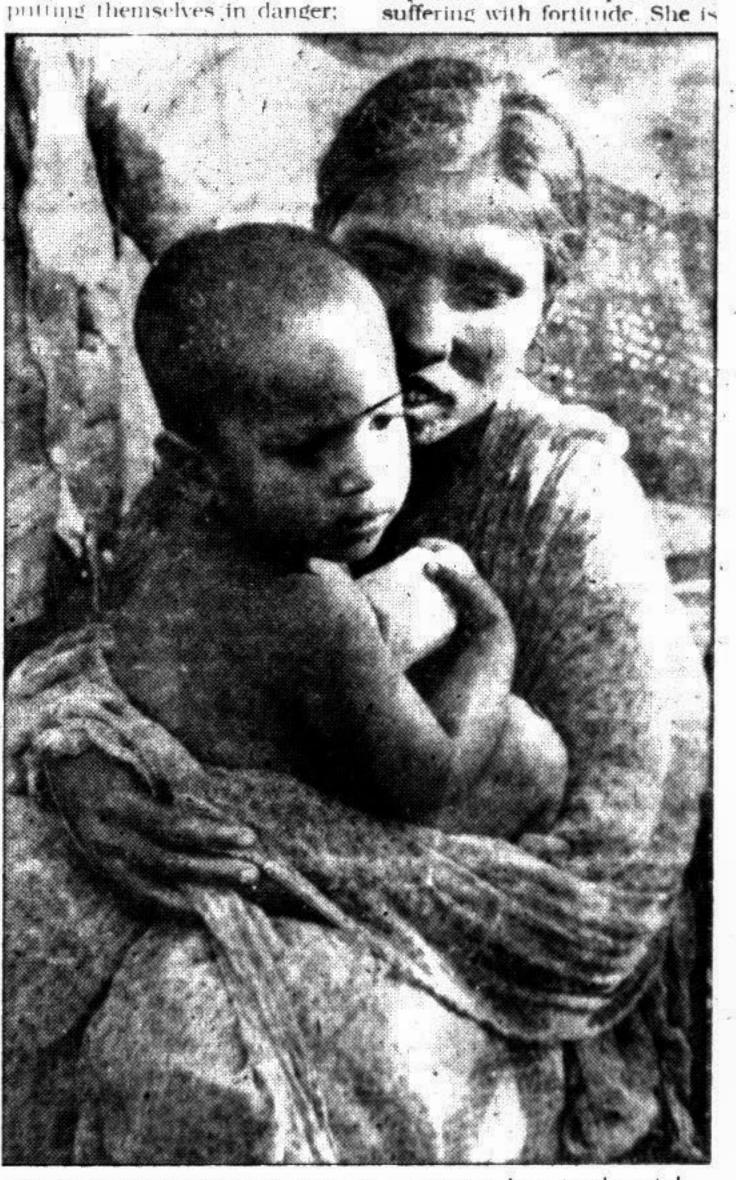
By and large, the technology already exists. But there is too big a gap between those who create it and those who need it, and there is too much bureaucracy in the attempt to make technology available to poor and often illiterate women.

The result is a plethera of appropriate-technology exhibitions and demonstration centres in capital cities - while millions of women expend their time. their health, and their energies in fetching and carrying and pounding.

## Synergisms

It is this powerful set of practical, affordable, and mutually reinforcing changes - in education, family planning, health, and women's technologies — that could do most to bring about the beginnings of a transformation for many millions of women in the developing world.

Gertrude Mongella is the Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beying in September 1995. After holding several ministerial posts in the Government of Tunzania she served as her country's High Commissioner to India before taking up her present ap pointment



. Coman has fundmental The mamber of children born to impact on her health.

a girl growing up in Africa today faces an appalling 1-in-20 risk of dying during pregnancy or childbirth. Society may tell her that she should have seven or eight children. Her husband and his parents may tell her the same

Her status may well depend upon it. And she may well declare this same wish to conform to prevailing social values. But without such pressures. I do not believe that

told she will shame her parents if she cries in labour. And she knows that the more suffering she can bear the more she will be praised. Boys - and often men too - are fussed over and attended to when they are the slightest bit

This neglect of the health needs of women leads to serious problems and to a further undermining of their position and their capacities.