

Promoting Self-Reliance of Rural Poor in Bangladesh

PROGRAMME EVALUATION NO 80

E. Bazalgette
W. Dechering

Library
IRC International Water
and Sanitation Centre
Tel.: +31 70 30 689 80
Fax: +31 70 35 899 64



Femconsult, Consultants on Gender and Development
Koninginnegracht 53
2514 AE THE HAGUE
The Netherlands
tel: +31 70 3655744
fax: +31 70 3623100
e-mail: gender@femconsult.nl

PROMOTING SELF-RELIANCE OF RURAL POOR IN BANGLADESH

"We will be self-reliant when we can eat 3 meals a day satisfactorily. Nobody will insult us and detest us just because we are poor. I have made a mistake by having 4 sons. One person earns, 6 depend on it. So my lack of education and awareness has condemned me to poverty."

Saful, samity secretary

Programme Evaluation PE-80

July 1999

LIBRARY IRC

PO Box 93190, 2509 AD THE HAGUE

Tel.: +31 70 30 689 80

Fax: +31, 70 35 899 64

BARCODE: 16725

LO:

E. Bazalgette
W. Dechering

FEMCONSULT, Consultants on Gender and Development

Koninginnegracht 53
2514 AE The Hague
The Netherlands

tel: +31 (0)70 3655744
fax: +31 (0)70 3623100
e-mail: gender @ femconsult.nl



Table of Contents

PRELIMINARY NOTE	i
GLOSSARY	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 CONCEPT OF SELF-RELIANCE	3
2.1 Organisational Self-Reliance	4
2.2 Service Self-Reliance	5
2.3 Target Group Self-Reliance	5
2.3.1 Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance	6
2.3.2 Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance	6
2.4 Considerations concerning the scenarios	7
3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE FIELD RESEARCH	8
3.1 Main Findings	8
3.1.1 Understandings of the concept of self-reliance	8
3.1.2 Sense of identity	9
3.1.3 Findings in relation to self-reliance scenarios	9
3.2 Bilance and promotion of self-reliance	13
3.2.1 Promotion of self-reliance and gender equality	13
3.3 Considerations concerning the self-reliance scenarios	14
4 CONCLUSIONS FOR IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15
4.1 Policy implications	15
4.2 Recommendations	17

Annex A/1:	Research Report
Annex A/2:	Matrices of factors of self-reliance
Annex B/1:	Terms of Reference
Annex B/2:	Technical Report
Annex B/3:	Guidelines for field work

PRELIMINARY NOTE

The consultants would like to thank all the NGO staff of ASA, BNRP, Caritas, DAM, DSK, LSSUP, TARD and local partner NGOs in Jessore, who made time to discuss different aspects of their work with the consultants and the field workers. Thanks is also due to the many community members who accepted to talk freely, and at length, with the field workers. It is impossible to name all those who made a significant contribution to the study. The decision not to name the NGOs specifically in discussion of the findings is due to the fact that the primary aim of the study is an evaluation of self-reliance policies, and there is no wish to make comparisons between specific NGOs. It does not reflect in any way on the level of active support and assistance provided.

Special thanks are due to Mr S.M. Alauddin of Caritas, for coordination and assistance with logistical arrangements, to Mr Mohamed Ayub of LSSUP who went far beyond the call of duty in ensuring the comfort of the field work team working in Lohagara, to Mr John Quiah and his staff of Caritas (Chittagong) for their hospitality, and to Mr Samad for having risen to the challenge of entering over 200 interviews in the computer within a very tight time frame, despite the problems of hartal (strikes) and electricity cuts.

Special thanks are due to the fieldworkers (Ali Ahmed, Fatima Begum, Joyanta Banik, Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury, Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury, Ziaul Haque Chowdhury, Kamrul Islam, Shamim Istekhar, Ali Sanwar, Reasmin Sultana, and Abu Hena Mustafa Zalal), who worked hard long hours and who did not allow obstacles such as hartal to prevent them from carrying out their work. Ali Ahmed, Ali Sanwar and Joyanta Banik provided invaluable help in solving a range of problems; without this, the work could not have been completed as satisfactorily.

Last but not least the consultants would like to thank DGIS and Bilance for giving them a chance for tackling such a complex concept.

GLOSSARY

Abbreviations used:

ASA	Association for Social Advancement
BNRP	Bangladesh Non-Local Refugee Projects
BGSR	Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance
DAM	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
DGIS	Netherlands Ministry of Development Cooperation
DSI-MY	Department of Social and Institutional Development of DGIS
DSK	Dushtha Shasthya Kendra
IBSR	Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance
IFADEP	Integrated Food Assisted Development Programme
IGA	Income Generating Activities
IGP	Income Generating Projects
LSSUP	Lohagara Shikka-o-Samaj Unnayon Parishad
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSR	Organisational Self-Reliance
SEG	Small Enterprise Groups
SR	Self-Reliance
SSR	Service Self-Reliance
TARD	Technical Assistance for Rural Development

Bangla terms used:

hartal	General strike
kisti	Instalment payments
samity	Association, usually village level, and often linked to a larger NGO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The present study aims to evaluate the implementation of a policy of self-reliance rather than to evaluate individual NGO partners of Bilance. Bilance has no specific definition of self-reliance, but has identified the need to evolve a dynamic definition which allows for identification of the different types of self-reliance concepts which exist in relation to different levels and different target groups. The Netherlands Ministry of Development Cooperation (DGIS), which has a co-financing agreement with Bilance, is also concerned to explore further implications of its policy to promote self-reliance. The present report and annexed research study are a response to these concerns.

Methodology

During a first stage, documentation was studied at Bilance and on the basis of this a study design was formulated. In a second stage, data were collected through respondent-led interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of six selected Bilance-supported NGOs (ASA, BNRP, Caritas, DSK, DAM and TARD) and with their beneficiaries at community level in three areas: Dhaka, Chittagong and Jessore.

Any policy can only be meaningful if it is linked to a clear understanding of the concepts which it covers. In the broadest sense of the term, it is assumed that self-reliance of the poor means that the beneficiaries no longer need support from external donors. A policy of promotion of self-reliance of the poorest of the poor (especially, but not only, those in rural areas) is indubitably of high priority in constructing a firm foundation for development. However, self-reliance is a complex concept, composed of a number of interdependent factors which take on greater or lesser importance according to whose self-reliance is being addressed. The concept of self-reliance is different for organisations than for beneficiary target groups, and for organisations it can vary according to level of organisation (national, regional or community level). This complexity has not been clearly identified in the past, and there is a notable lack of either definition of the term or any specific policy statement concerning self-reliance. As a result, there has been a tendency to interpret "self-reliance" in terms of financial self-reliance of the NGO (also referred to as "sustainability"), all the more so since concern about self-reliance of the NGO has been expressed by donor organisations.

On the basis of existing documents three types of self-reliance, which could be divided into four distinct scenarios, were addressed:

- * **Organisational Self-Reliance**, giving high priority to the *financial self-reliance of the whole organisation*. NGOs following this scenario are referred to in the discussions as OSR NGOs.

- * **Service Self-Reliance**, placing high priority on service delivery in a special field (e.g. health, education, training support) for target groups, and seeking to ensure the *financial self-reliance of services*. Such NGOs are referred to in the discussions as SSR NGO.
- * **Target Group Self-Reliance**, where the NGO places high priority on *enabling its target group(s) to become self-reliant*. There are two main categories, corresponding to two different levels of target group, which require different scenarios:
 - **Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance**: The priority is to develop the *self-reliance of organised groups*, e.g. local partner NGOs, community groups (samities), and beyond the groups, their individual beneficiaries. NGOs placing high priority on developing target group organisations' self-reliance are referred to as BGSR NGOs.
 - **Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance**: The NGO places high priority on developing *individuals' self-reliance* capacity. Such NGOs are referred to as IBSR NGOs.

These scenarios reflect main strategies. They are not mutually exclusive; some overlap is possible. They are not static; an NGO can evolve within a scenario of self-reliance, or can opt to develop towards another scenario. No single scenario is, of itself, superior to any other: they differ in terms of the type of self-reliance they prioritise, and consequently in their objectives relating to self-reliance.

The NGOs which participated in the research were classified according to the level of self-reliance ("self-reliance scenario") to which they officially give priority. These scenarios were used in the analysis of responses of both beneficiaries of NGO programmes and NGO staff. Particular attention was given to understanding of the concept of self-reliance, beneficiary sense of identity (as indicator of self-reliance), and impact of the different scenario types on activities and community beneficiaries. These data were then analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.¹

Key findings of the study

Beneficiaries of NGO services identified a range of factors which they see as necessary in order to achieve self-reliance. These include literacy, skills (especially for income generation) and knowledge which allow them to make informed decisions independently and thus make the best use of resources available to them. While access to funds was subsumed in their definitions of self-reliance, the financial factor was rarely specified directly. The beneficiaries consulted, clearly identified their felt need for increased knowledge and skills. While credit activities are a very valuable component of developing self-reliance of the poor, credit alone does not meet their identified needs. (The same comment was made in connection with sustainability, in DGIS's evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme in Bangladesh, 1972-1996.)

¹ Full details of the scenarios and the research findings are presented in Annex A/1; main findings are found in the report.

In the face of increasing competition for external donor funding and the call for demonstrating sustainability of their organisations, NGO representatives are strongly conscious of the need to develop their organisational self-reliance. As a result, they are tending to stress the financial factor of self-reliance (OSR) at the expense of other factors, even when they have officially given priority to the self-reliance of their target groups and/or their individual beneficiaries. This emphasis leads to greater investment of time and effort on credit-related activities and less on support activities, such as literacy and skills training, which correspond to the self-reliance factors stressed by beneficiaries.

One negative side effect of this trend is an effective discrimination against the hard core poor, who have difficulty saving a minimum amount on a regular weekly basis, and who certainly represent a risk concerning rapid and regular reimbursement of any loans. Therefore particular attention is needed to ensure that the hard core poor are not excluded from access to group membership and to particular types of programmes, notably credit and savings.

Another negative side effect is that even NGOs which have in the past made valuable strides towards developing and supporting target group self-reliance and self management are now - in the interest of accountability and efficiency - assuming responsibility for decision-making and management of credit activities.

Participation in groups is contributing to a sense of personal identity for group members. This is a necessary part of developing self-reliance, especially for women in a culture which has traditionally linked a woman's identity to her male relatives. There is a distinct gender differential influencing both sense of identity and identification of critical self reliance factors: women identify need for skills contributing to decision-making, while men (whose sense of identity is more linked to the community) tend to identify financial factors of self reliance.

NGOs offering multiple services to their group members contribute more to the development of a sense of identity than do those with a narrow range of services. In general, Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance NGOs offer a wider range of services, although recently even they have tended to increase emphasis on credit at the expense of other support services. It is important that NGO support to target groups ensures access to support services, either by direct provision of such services or by facilitating access to services provided by other organisations (NGOs, private or public organisations).

Organisational Self-Reliance NGOs have developed very effective systems, primarily through credit and savings programmes, which have allowed them to achieve relative organisational self reliance. However, this is at the expense of other support activities. While they provide a very necessary service, this service alone is not sufficient to ensure self reliance of the rural poor.

Service Self-Reliance NGOs choose to provide specific services which contribute to development of self reliance, but which alone are not expected to ensure self reliance.

Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance NGOs provide a range of services which, combined, can have a positive effect on development of self reliance of the rural poor, providing they

maintain a balance in the services offered. Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance NGOs provide services which are designed to equip individuals with knowledge and skills which can enable them to make better use of resources, thus contributing to self reliance development.

Bilance has provided support to NGOs representative of the four self-reliance scenarios. Princals analysis of both NGO and community data strongly suggests that no one scenario provides a master key to promotion of self-reliance. This confirms the appropriateness of Bilance's decision to support a range of NGOs. Bilance has taken steps to encourage cooperation and collaboration between NGO partners in Bangladesh, rather than supporting development of new activities in competition with other NGOs (particularly in relation to credit).

However, the growing trend among all the NGOs towards seeking organisational financial self-reliance means that it will be advisable to assess specific activities and projects in terms of the level and factors of self-reliance to be addressed by them, rather than merely being aware of the type of approach of the NGO.

Implications for funding of promotion of self-reliance of the rural poor

Achievement of self-reliance requires a balanced combination of knowledge, skills and control of the immediate environment, which allow efficient and effective use of available financial and material resources in order to meet the needs of the individual, the family and the community.

It is therefore essential that development aid through NGOs ensure a balance in the approaches taken. If the poorest of the poor are to develop the knowledge and skills which they recognise as necessary for them to make the best use of resources available; access to loans alone cannot ensure effective generation of income. Some support services (health, education) can cover part of the costs from token payments by beneficiaries, but the core NGO costs can only be covered either by setting fees which exclude the poorest or by support from donors.

Thus donors should be aware that promotion of self-reliance of the poorest of the poor requires support for NGOs, which provide training in health, literacy, income generating skills, basic management, social awareness concerning rights and knowledge of resources available and technical advisory services. These NGOs cannot become self-reliant in the foreseeable future without excluding the most needy, because total organisational financial self-reliance of the NGOs can only be achieved if funding can be generated from the group members and beneficiaries of the NGO. This is possible, but only by ensuring that the groups are reliant on the NGO, and by excluding the poorest. As a result, self-reliance of the poor would not be achieved, a greater gap would be created between the poorest of the poor and the rest of the society, and the demand on donors to assist the poorest would inevitably increase in the foreseeable future.

Recommendations arising from the study

Donors (DGIS and Bilance) should formulate a clear policy statement concerning promotion of self-reliance of the poor. This statement should reflect the complexity of the concept of self-reliance, and should also clearly distinguish between the financial self-reliance of NGOs, be they national or community level ("sustainability") and self-reliance of individual beneficiaries. The scenarios developed for the study could be used for this purpose.

Proposals for programmes and projects promoting self-reliance of the poor (rural or urban) should specify how beneficiaries will be enabled to develop both their capacity for informed decision making and the skills necessary for enhanced income generation.

Donors should support balanced promotion of self-reliance both by ensuring that funding support goes to a range of NGOs with different self-reliance strategies. In this context, it is strongly recommended that NGOs providing a narrow range of activities be encouraged to cooperate and collaborate with other NGOs providing other, complementary activities, and that they be encouraged to develop a flexible arrangement whereby beneficiaries be allowed to join more than one group where the second group offers services not provided by the other.

1 INTRODUCTION

The programme² evaluation "Promoting self-reliance of the rural poor in Bangladesh" is conducted under the joint responsibility of DSI-MY of DGIS and Bilance and focuses on article II of the co-financing agreement. This article refers to the promotion of self-reliance of groups and individuals, living below the poverty line, through *"sustainable improvement of the position of poor groups and individuals (art.II,1) and [...] the promotion of active participation of the target groups in [...] their society; enabling target groups to arrange for those facilities which are necessary to make both ends meet, also on a long term basis ...(art II,2)."*

The overall policy of Bilance³ is closely linked to the aims of the Co-Financing Programme and the objective of promoting self-reliance for its target groups. The terms of reference of the policy document clearly state that *"Bilance wants to strive for a world in balance, without social, cultural and religious polarization. Where people can live together peacefully in a pluralistic society with mutual respect for one another 's differences. Where government and private grassroots initiatives become increasingly interrelated. Where one can speak of equal rights for poor and rich, South and North, women and men, the environment and the economy, and the current and future generations"*.

The Bilance definition of its core business, Social Development, has been defined as *"the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity by empowering marginalised groups to undertake their own development, to improve their social and economic position and to acquire their rightful place in society"*. This definition contains quite a number of relevant elements, factors and indicators which, de facto, can be and are influencing the process of growth towards self-reliance, although the definition is not directly articulated in terms of self-reliance as a specific objective.

So far strategies and instruments have not yet been structured and systematized from the perspective of self-reliance (SR) promotion. Therefore, the present evaluation aims to contribute to the formulation of a consistent framework of self-reliance concepts and corresponding intervention strategies in the field of development. An important objective of this study is to enable a clear conceptualization of self-reliance as a dynamic process, with its own goals, stages and gradual redefinition of the relationship between NGOs and its target groups.

During a first stage, documentation was studied at Bilance and on the basis of this a study design was formulated. In a second stage, data were collected through respondent-led interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of six selected Bilance-supported NGOs (ASA, BNRP, Caritas, DSK, DAM and TARD) and with their beneficiaries (including local partner organisations) at community level in three areas: Dhaka,

² Despite the term "programme evaluation", it was clearly stressed to the evaluators that the primary objective of the study is an evaluation of the policy of self reliance, rather than an evaluation of the programmes being undertaken by the national NGOs covered in the study.

³ As laid down in the policy paper "Bilance stands for Social Development".

Chittagong and Jessore. Particular attention was given to understanding of the concept of self-reliance, beneficiary sense of identity (as an indicator of self-reliance), and impact of the different scenario types on activities and target groups. These data were then analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The full methodology and findings of the research are attached to this report in the Annexes.

The present study aims to evaluate the implementation of a policy of self-reliance rather than to evaluate individual NGO partners of *Bilance*. Therefore the NGOs covered in the study are referred to in terms of the type of self-reliance which corresponds most closely to their official priorities.

2 CONCEPT OF SELF-RELIANCE

While the principle of self-reliance is widely integrated into policy statements, from donor level to field office levels of NGOs, there is a distinct lack of formal definition of what each actor means by this term. Often the term has crept in as interchangeable with "sustainability" or "self-sufficiency", without further analysis. This has tended to place an emphasis on financial self-reliance. This focus on financial self-reliance has originated probably partly because concern about the subject from donor organisations, partly because lack of funding can seriously inhibit continued survival of organisations, and partly because "poverty" tends to be linked primarily with financial (and land) poverty. However, while finance is indubitably a factor of self-reliance, it is certainly not the sole factor, and any working definition of self-reliance which fails to take this into consideration is liable to be unsatisfactory.

Previous evaluations have similarly identified the lack of a clear definition of self-reliance, but have made little progress in finding one to propose.⁴ Some NGOs state clearly that they cannot place priority on their own organisation's self-reliance, but give higher priority to facilitating self-reliance of their local partners or target groups. Others have a clearly stated policy of developing their own organisation's self-reliance.

During preliminary study of documents available in Bilance offices, and on the basis of previous experience, the consultants presented a hypothesis to Bilance and DGIS representatives that the concept of self-reliance is different for organisations and for beneficiary target groups, and that for organisations it could vary according to level of organisation (national, regional or community level).

If this is so, no single static definition would be sufficient; self-reliance would need to be defined in the context of the process involved and in relation to the target group. As a first step towards formulating working definitions reflecting this hypothesis, (and building upon the listing presented in Wils' study⁵) potential component factors of self-reliance were proposed, and their relative importance to different target groups tentatively identified.⁶ There is a tendency to move from stronger importance of a financial component in the definition for larger (national and regional) NGOs, to a stronger social awareness and skills component in the local NGOs and for the poorest sector of the target population.

On the basis of the documented information concerning Bilance partners in Bangladesh and discussions with Bilance, three types of self-reliance, which were divided into four distinct scenarios of self-reliance policies and related strategies were formulated for use during

⁴ For example, in a similar study in India, formulation of a definition was postponed pending the field findings. However, even at that stage no distinct definition could be given, and the consultant effectively used financial self reliance as the focus, without clearly stating this.

⁵ Frits Wils & Shraman K. Acharya, "Promoting Self Reliance of the Rural Poor in India", ISSAS, The Hague, December 1997.

⁶ These are presented in matrix form in Annex A/2.

analysis. These are Organisational Self-Reliance, Service Self-Reliance, and Target Group Self-Reliance, of which the latter was divided into Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance, and Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance.

Although the formulation of these scenarios is based on certain assumptions concerning the factors which constitute self-reliance, it was important to ensure that the field study explored the *understanding of the concept of self-reliance* among both NGOs and target groups.

2.1 Organisational Self-Reliance

The NGO places high priority on ensuring the *financial self-reliance of the whole organisation*. This self-reliance does not exclude the possibility of seeking special project funding for such activities as testing innovative approaches, or for exceptional actions such as disaster relief. Such projects have clearly defined frameworks in terms of staffing and duration. However, the "core" programme, essential to continued activity of the organisation, is clearly identified, and funds necessary for its maintenance are generated within the main programme(s) of the NGO.

Credit and loans are the most clearly identified programme components which allow generation of sufficient funds for organisational self-reliance. With these, the effective source of funds for the on-going (core) costs of the organisation becomes the membership (or perhaps, more accurately, the clientele) of the organisation. The revolving loans fund, interest payments (better known as "service charges" in Bangladesh) and savings of the clientele constitute a growing funding base for the organisation's core activities, and over time can be expected to cover expanded activities also.

In discussion of findings concerning organisational self-reliance, the relevant NGOs will be referred to as Organisational Self-Reliance NGOs (OSR NGOs).

Where a specialised service, such as health care or education, is provided, self-reliance of this service requires a system of payment for services rendered. Most such specialised service charges, unlike credit, do not generate increasing funds unless the rates are set at a level which excludes the more needy. However, service charges, or fees, and "health insurance" systems can provide a steady level of income to contribute to the specific services' overhead (core) cost recovery. In this way the service is made financially self-reliant, but supplementary sources of income or funding are necessary for core costs of the organisation offering the services. NGOs stressing organisational self-reliance which provide services other than credit have not only to establish complex systems of charges for these services, but also to develop their own income generating projects and (effectively commercial) programmes to supplement the income generated by fees and service charges.

Not all NGOs, which adopt a policy of organisational self-reliance, are prepared to choose either to establish fees high enough to provide complete financial self-reliance of the organisation as a whole, or to focus on credit as their primary activity, or to develop a special income generating structure which inevitably increases also the core costs of the

organisation. They therefore aim for financial self-reliance of their service delivery, recognising that certain core costs of the organisation will therefore have to be met from outside. In discussion of findings, NGOs aiming at service self-reliance through specialised service charges will be distinguished from those working purely in the field of credit. These fall under another scenario than that applying to NGOs focusing on financial self-reliance of their whole organisation.

2.2 Service Self-Reliance

The NGO places high priority on service delivery in a special field (e.g. health, education, training support) for target groups, and seeks to ensure the *financial self-reliance of its services* through a combination of funds generated through credit schemes and funds generated through service charges and fees. Self-reliance of the organisation as a whole cannot realistically be anticipated in the near future since to place high emphasis on this would require setting service charges which would eliminate the most needy of the target population. These NGOs will be referred to as Service Self-Reliance NGOs (SSR NGOs) in discussion of findings. It should be noted that the SSR scenario could overlap with other scenarios, in function of specific target populations.

2.3 Target Group Self-Reliance

The NGO places high priority on *enabling its target group(s) to become self-reliant*. While financial self-reliance is one component of target group self-reliance, other components are also recognised as being important, and support activities are provided which are designed to develop these. Critical components of target group self-reliance include not only financing but also a variety of skills and at least basic knowledge and awareness of social factors, such as legal rights, resources available, risk reduction (e.g. with health education, promotion of safe drinking water and sanitation) and essential skills (such as literacy and numeracy) which reduce the need of the target group to depend on others.

There are two main categories, corresponding to two different levels of target group. On one level there is the organised group (e.g., local partner NGO, samity) which has its own beneficiaries. On another level, beyond the group, are the individual beneficiaries. While the self-reliance of the two levels can be closely interdependent, developing self-reliance of the organised group requires different inputs than developing individual self-reliance. These therefore require different scenarios.

NGOs placing high priority on developing target group organisations' self-reliance will be referred to as Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance (BGSR NGOs), while those placing high priority on developing individuals' self-reliance capacity will be referred to as Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance (IBSR NGOs).

2.3.1 Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance

The NGO provides support and assistance (technical as well as financial) to organised groups and/or organisations, with the intention of enabling them to become self-reliant and serve their members or their own target groups without dependence on external sources for their own core, on-going activities.

Since the priority of such NGOs is *self-reliance of organised groups* (e.g. local partner beneficiary group), the BGSR NGO assumes responsibility for seeking financial and/or human resource support from elsewhere rather than charging its target group more than a minimum contribution to the costs of providing support.

BGSR NGOs tend to be generalists rather than providing specialist support, since they have to respond to a wide range of possible needs of their partners. This can be ensured in a variety of ways, without overloading the BGSR NGO with a range of specialist staff. Extensive networking can provide a significant proportion of essential inputs without creating heavy core costs for the BGSR NGO itself. Similarly, in encouraging the beneficiary group to become self-reliant, the BGSR NGO promotes the idea of networking and mutual support among its partners in order that they can access support without incurring excessive costs for which they would need additional funds. Linkages with SSR and OSR NGOs can form part of such networking.

A common characteristic of BGSR NGOs is the creation, or promotion, of a federated structure whereby the beneficiary groups can work together and make their needs felt by those who could and should provide inputs. In principle, to be effective such structures evolve from the bottom up, ensuring that each group which becomes part of the federation has a voice in decision-making affecting the federated group as a whole. As the beneficiary groups evolve their federated structure, the BGSR NGO transfers responsibility for support services to the groups and their joint system.

2.3.2 Individual Beneficiary Self-Reliance

IBSR NGOs place their priority on promoting *individual self-reliance*, by equipping the target population with necessary skills, knowledge and/or access to essential services at a cost which they can afford (or at no cost). Rather than serving specific groups of individuals over a long period of time (as do the BGSR NGOs), IBSR NGOs release equipped individuals who may choose how to make use of the skills and/or knowledge they have acquired, whether it be through groups, institutions or individually.

Since it is logistically unrealistic to attempt to provide broad based services of sufficient quality to be of significance in enabling individuals to become self-reliant, most IBSR NGOs tend to specialise in the area of knowledge, skills or services which they offer. In this, there is some overlap with the SSR scenario described earlier.

While placing priority on contributing to individual self-reliance through specialist services or activities, IBSR NGOs recognise the individual beneficiary's need for access to other services. This can place considerable pressure on the IBSR NGO to respond by expanding

the range of services, which can only be handled effectively by grouping the beneficiaries. If an IBSR NGO responds in this way, it moves from the IBSR scenario into a BGSR scenario. However, alternatives do exist. By developing networks and agreements with other NGOs which have different specialities or which provide general support, it is possible for the IBSR NGO to facilitate access to services corresponding to the needs of the beneficiary without extending its own resources beyond a maintainable level.

2.4 Considerations concerning the scenarios

These scenarios reflect main strategies. They are not mutually exclusive; some overlap is possible. They are not static; an NGO can evolve within a scenario of self-reliance, or can opt to develop towards another scenario. No single scenario is, of itself, superior to any other: they differ in terms of the type of self-reliance they prioritise, and consequently in their objectives relating to self-reliance.

Each scenario has its strengths, and its weaknesses. Achievement of self-reliance of the most needy requires attention to all the aspects of self-reliance. In the total national picture, therefore, a combination of scenarios is not only possible, it is desirable. The overall policy of promoting self-reliance of the rural poor needs a multifactorial balance between strategies adopted by different actors - in this context, different NGOs. OSR NGOs provide essential specific services (basically, credit) while ensuring that they do not absorb part of the all too limited external resources available to the NGO sector. SSR NGOs provide access to essential services which can and do complement the more general services of the BGSR NGOs.

3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE FIELD RESEARCH

3.1 Main Findings⁷

3.1.1 Understandings of the concept of self-reliance

Community respondents are very conscious of a wide range of factors which they see as necessary for developing self-reliance. Although access to funds is clearly implicit in most definitions offered by them, it is rarely cited as the main factor: social awareness, skills (both basic and productive), knowledge, education and independent decision making are seen as more important.

Kulsum Begum is secretary of her samity. She thinks that literacy is the key to self-reliance for women, because illiterate people can't differentiate between good and bad, they don't know what is better for them, and they never understand their rights.

A number of respondents stressed their intentions to do everything they can to ensure that their children receive an adequate education so that they at least will be self-reliant.

Tofee Islam and her husband have a total income of about 1000 Takas a month. However, despite the economic strain it causes, she has hired a tutor for 200 Takas to help educate her sons. She says *"I want to educate my children by hook or by crook so that they can be established in society and be self-reliant."*

In marked contrast, NGO respondents are acutely conscious of the financial aspect of self-reliance. Not only do they tend to give a purely financial definition to self-reliance in general, and in relation to their organisation, but they also tend to see it as the primary factor of beneficiary self-reliance. This strongly reflects the fact that most of the NGOs covered by the study are rapidly becoming preoccupied with achieving financial self-reliance of their organisations. This trend is accompanied by an increasing priority being given to credit programmes and activities, at the expense of investment of human and financial resources in support activities such as skills development, leadership training and social empowerment of beneficiary groups. As a result, there is an increasing tendency of the NGOs to focus on Organisational Self-Reliance type strategies, and reduce time and resources allocated to interventions which address the other factors of self-reliance which are seen as important by the community respondents.⁸

⁷ Boxes in the text illustrate specific problems or common types of response; these are composite case studies, formulated on the basis of one or more respondent's comments. Taka is the local currency (1 USD = 48 Takas in 1999).

⁸ See Section 5.2 of the research report, Annex A/1.

These findings correspond closely to the findings concerning sustainability, in a DGIS evaluation of Netherlands-funded NGOs in Bangladesh, undertaken in 1997⁹.

3.1.2 Sense of identity

The way that community respondents perceive themselves varies considerably. Some have a sense of identity which is dependent on their traditional role and position within the family, often in function of male relatives. Others have a stronger sense of self identity, evolving mainly in relation to their group membership, while some have developed a sense of identity in relation to the wider community. The latter respondents are clearly more self-reliant. Active participation in organised groups appears to contribute to development of a sense of personal self identity, especially for women as it can give them an opportunity to see themselves as part of a larger environment, which is essential for development of self-reliance.¹⁰ A clear relationship exists between the type of NGO to which community respondents are affiliated and their sense of identity. It would appear that multi-service NGOs, working through beneficiary groups, are having greater impact on creating the basis for self-reliance of individuals than are those which provide narrow focus services.

There is a clear interaction between sense of identity and definition of self-reliance. Respondents whose sense of identity is linked more strongly to the organised group and community place greater emphasis on decision making capacity as a factor of self-reliance than do those who identify themselves more in context of the family. However, several respondents who see themselves only in their family roles are conscious of the importance of the decision making factor. Respondents who identify themselves primarily or completely in relation to their family tend to give greater emphasis to knowledge, either with skills and/or with education, as factors of self-reliance. Respondents who see themselves primarily in the context of the community are more likely to define self-reliance in financial terms. A gender differential certainly contributes to this pattern: There is a strong trend towards emphasis of decision-making factors among the female respondents. Male respondents identifying themselves in relation to the community account for all finance-only definitions in this group.

3.1.3 Findings in relation to self-reliance scenarios

Organisational Self-Reliance NGOs studied have developed very effective systems, which have allowed them to achieve to a large extent their objective of organisational financial self-reliance. However, in so doing, they have had to focus their activities on credit and

⁹ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), The Evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Bangladesh, 1972-1996, Volume 3: Sub-Report on NGOs, 1998.

¹⁰ See section 5.3 of the research report, Annex A/1.

savings¹¹, and to effectively eliminate most interventions which would contribute to beneficiary group and individual self-reliance. Although theoretically some elements of literacy and social awareness development are maintained, in practice field workers have little time available for these. As a result, the organised groups are becoming increasingly NGO dependent.

Alam Shamsul works for an OSR NGO in a rural area. His field office was opened early last year, with an initial advance of funds from Headquarters. They have succeeded in creating 73 women's samities and 11 Small Enterprise groups (male) in their area, which has made it possible to reimburse the funds advanced, with 7% interest. Since he moved to this office, he has not got his salary every month (although funds are advanced when he needs them) as cash flow from the samities' savings and group reimbursement payments are barely sufficient to cover the cash needs of the loans which are essential to the development of his unit's self-reliance. In his previous office, the reimbursements, charges and savings were sufficient not only to allow him to receive his salary, but the unit was also able to transfer surplus funds to headquarters. He visits 19 samities every week, and persuades samity members not to draw their savings when they need cash, but to take a loan instead, telling them "*Your savings are your only friend in times of need*". He says that it is not a problem collecting repayments: they check credit worthiness before accepting members and so do not accept people who cannot afford to save and pay, if the individual fails the group is responsible, and anyway, with offices all over the country one can find people if they run away.

The OSR credit programme ensures a flow of loan funds, but beneficiaries have no access to skills development which would enable them to maximise effective use of loans. Except in rare cases where the OSR NGO has a special agreement with another NGO, group members are not allowed to belong to other groups which might provide such access. Minimum savings levels and pressure to reimburse loans causes exclusion of the poorest sector of the population from OSR NGO target groups, either because the hard core poor themselves cannot face these or because they do not meet membership eligibility criteria. While OSR NGOs provide a very necessary service, it is not sufficient without other, complementary services, for ensuring development of self-reliance of the rural poor. Cooperation and coordination with NGOs and government agencies providing such services would allow improved impact of loans on self-reliance, especially if the cooperation provided special loan conditions for hard-core poor groups.

Service Self-Reliance NGOs are effectively covering service running costs through different mechanisms such as health insurance for group members and controlled service charges. Some work with organised groups; these NGOs are tending to develop credit programmes in response to requests from members. The basic organised group structure has allowed a channel for developing community awareness of health risks which the community can control.

¹¹ Including savings services for individuals who do not necessarily belong to organised groups, but do not have easy access to banks and wish to invest in longer term fixed interest savings. This is a valuable service for the less poor, while providing additional input to the NGO cash flow.

SSR NGOs have actively served as a link between community/samity groups and government, municipal and NGO services which have contributed to interventions reducing such risks, especially in the fields of water and sanitation; systems ensuring community responsibility and control have been developed. However, there are indications that, with the development of credit and savings programmes alongside the special services, there is a recent trend towards stressing this activity at the expense of other educative and sensitisation ones.

Amina lives with her husband Ali, their 4 children and his parents in a shack in an urban slum. They moved here when floods washed away their home and their small piece of land in Rajshahi. She does embroidery piecework, and earns 100-250 Takas per month. She belongs to an SSR NGO samity group and saves 10 Takas per week. Her weekly payment includes health insurance, which covers her and Ali, his parents and two of the children when they go to the NGO clinic. She thinks the savings earn some interest, but doesn't know how much. Her group meets every week, and the NGO worker comes to collect savings. Before they had savings, the worker used to talk about health, but now she explains about loans. Amina borrowed 6000 Takas for her husband's betel leaf trade, but he lost money and had to stop trading, he now drives someone's rickshaw. She barely managed to repay that loan. Now she has a new loan of 6000 Takas, to buy a rickshaw. She did not get all the money each time, the NGO keeps some as a "group tax"; she'll get it after 10 years, she thinks. She pays 40 Takas per month for water from a tubewell on her group secretary's land. Her NGO arranged with the Municipality to install it. She is worried as she can't afford to pay a dowry for her older daughter. When asked if she'd discussed this with the NGO worker in her samity meetings, she explained "*We never discuss personal matters*".

Beneficiary Group Self-Reliance NGOs have in the past provided a range of inputs to their target groups, contributing to the development of several factors of self-reliance, both for the organised group and for the individual members. As a result of this, organised groups and federated groups were developing a certain level of self-reliance. Recent developments, however, have seen considerable growth in emphasis given to financial self-reliance of the BGSR NGOs (leading to reduced time and funds allocated to investments in human development through skills training), and to credit activities.

Fatima describes herself as a "hen doctor", thanks to training from her NGO. She is chairperson of her samity, and also of the NGO Union group at Thana level. She proudly showed an invitation she had received to an official reception held by the District Commissioner. She explained that until recently her samity used to keep their own savings account, and decide who would get loans, but now there is a special unit at a federated level which takes care of savings and loans. Decisions are taken more rapidly, but the samity no longer decides about savings levels, loan approvals or time allowed for repayment.

In the interest of greater efficiency and risk avoidance, there has been more centralisation of management and decision making concerning savings and credit, standardising the systems and rules. This has a certain disempowerment impact on the organised groups and

federated groups concerned, although the resulting systems are indubitably more efficient in ensuring cash flow for loans. Part of the standardisation has led to changes in minimum savings levels, frequency of both savings and reimbursement payments, and time allowed for the latter. As a result, some of the poorest members have had to leave their groups, and among those remaining, the new systems present difficulties as they do not allow for local considerations which the previous group systems did.

Reasmin is 23 years old, and lives with her 2 small children in a one room home on a very small piece of land. She grows some vegetables and keeps 3 hens: in good months she can earn 450 Takas from the sale of vegetables and eggs, but sometimes she has to try to find work in other peoples' homes in order to have enough money to feed her family. Her husband abandoned her when their second daughter was born, 5 years ago. Until recently, she belonged to a samity, and used to save 10 Takas per month. 3 years ago, she borrowed 1000 Takas from her samity, and used the money to buy her hens and build a ring slab latrine. She repaid the loan in monthly instalments of 50 Takas over 2 years. It was not easy, but she paid everything in good time. Her NGO helped her get training in poultry care, and she also learnt to read and sign her name through the samity. She was very happy to be a member of her samity, but last year the NGO changed the system, and the samity members now have to save 5 Takas every week. She may have to leave her samity because she can't always afford to pay this much.

While the impact on financial self-reliance (especially of the organisation) is improved, the impact on self-reliance development of the target groups is reduced, if not negative.

Individual Beneficiary Self Reliance NGOs have a definite contribution to make towards achieving self-reliance of the rural poor. They are often an important resource for specialist skills training, and with careful coordination they can complement other NGOs' efforts. Their inputs stress the areas which community respondents identify as being the factors of self-reliance which they see as critical. Furthermore, the foundation which they lay for individual self-reliance can become a valuable resource for other types of NGOs when the individuals join beneficiary groups. They are working in two ways at present. On the one hand, they are providing technical and financial support to small local partners, who themselves are tending to evolve towards a BGSR scenario. On the other hand, they are undertaking interventions designed to develop the knowledge and skills of individual community members, who are thus being equipped to become more self-reliant through informed independent decision making. These beneficiaries become part of the human resource pool of their communities. In order to provide access to the financial resources required, IBSR NGOs have, with local partner NGOs, started a pilot programme of cooperation with an OSR NGO. Where this has worked, it has been effective in strengthening self-reliance. However, sometimes the local OSR NGO office has dominated the arrangement, absorbing eligible beneficiaries within its own samities. This has been less effective, creating some problems for the small local partners.

Samia Katun learnt to read and write through a local NGO, in a programme supported by an IBSR NGO. Her mother belongs to another samity linked to the same NGO. Samia's group has a room where they can go and read books, and have meetings where the NGO worker explains things, like how to start tree nurseries, build safe latrines, rear poultry and eat healthy food. They wanted to borrow money so that they could start their own businesses, so their NGO contacted another big NGO. This NGO helped them start saving, and is going to give loans, but they have to change the name of their group. Samia's mother's samity also asked for help, but the big NGO decided that most of the group could not afford to save and repay loans. Two members were accepted into another samity group of the big NGO, and now have loans.

3.2 Bilance and promotion of self-reliance

With funds from DGIS, Bilance has been supporting activities in Bangladesh which address a number of aspects of self-reliance. Some have clearly contributed to successful achievement of financial self-reliance of organisations providing a valuable service to community groups, although by their very nature these OSR NGOs do not and can not contribute to self-reliance of the poorest sector of the population. However, Bilance has also provided support to IBSR NGOs who focus on equipping individuals to become increasingly self-reliant through development of knowledge, capacity to access necessary information and to use such information for making independent informed decisions. Bilance has actively encouraged such NGOs to work in cooperation with other NGOs in order to respond to beneficiary needs, rather than be tempted into providing OSR NGO type activities themselves in order to respond to beneficiary requests and also contribute to greater organisational reliance. Furthermore, support has been provided to BGSR NGOs which are engaged in a process of community organisation self-reliance development - although recent developments have somewhat inhibited the pace of this process.

Princals analysis of both NGO and community data sets strongly suggests that no one scenario provides a master key to promotion of self-reliance. This confirms the appropriateness of Bilance's decision to support a range of NGOs. However, the growing trend among all the NGOs towards seeking organisational financial self-reliance means that it will be advisable to assess specific activities and projects in terms of the level and factors of self-reliance to be addressed by them, rather than merely being aware of the type of approach of the NGO.

3.2.1 Promotion of self-reliance and gender equality

In seeking to promote self-reliance of the rural poor in Bangladesh, Bilance is particularly concerned that gender be taken into consideration and that traditional gender differentials be addressed. Officially, all the NGOs receiving support have gender policies which are in line with this concern. Gender awareness is often included in staff orientation, and comments from respondents suggest that there is some integration of the subject in training provided to community members. Some NGOs have adopted policies stressing proportional

gender representation in activities, while some have opted for positive gender discrimination in their general community group programmes. The effective impact of such policies appears to be varied. Relatively few senior members of NGO staff are female. Despite gender awareness training and orientation, some NGO respondents reflected unconscious gender discrimination in comments made, even when they also quoted gender policy. Other NGO respondents have clearly developed a sense of gender awareness.

A similar pattern is visible among community respondents: some still reflect a strong assumption of female inferiority and incapacity to take responsibility for themselves and the management of their lives, while others clearly recognise that women can and do have significant roles to play, both within the family and within a larger context. Interestingly, there does not appear to be a strong gender differential in perception of gender. Although male respondents are more likely than female to refer to women (their wives) being ignorant and therefore less apt to contribute usefully to decision making, quite a number state that they consult with their wives concerning matters such as loan taking, children's education, and even voting in elections. Some female respondents still see themselves as inferior, dependent on more competent males (especially within the family) for decision making, while others indicate that they now are respected, have a role outside the family and at least share with husbands in decision making, when they do not take their own decisions. A number of the latter group see their ability to contribute to family income because of effective income generating activities as having been a key factor to their empowerment. Very few expressed the opinion that their access to loans was important here; the significant point was their earning capacity.

3.3 Considerations concerning the self-reliance scenarios

Although the NGOs studied were classified into different scenarios according to their stated self-reliance priority for the purpose of this study, in practice within a same NGO different activities (programmes, projects and project components) often reflect different scenarios. Although the findings do confirm that there are distinct differences in impact between the scenarios, the classification of the NGOs would be more useful if it were applied to the different programmes, projects and project components rather than to its general approach.

4 CONCLUSIONS FOR IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Policy implications

A policy can only be meaningful if it is linked to a clear understanding of the concepts which it covers. A policy of promotion of self-reliance of the poorest of the poor (especially, but not only, those in rural areas) is indubitably of high priority in constructing a firm foundation for development. However, self-reliance is a complex concept, composed of a number of interdependent key elements which have not been clearly identified and spelt out in existing policy documents. In the broadest sense of the term, it is assumed that self-reliance of the poor means that the beneficiaries no longer need support (directly financial or material, implying absorption of costs) from external donors.

Achievement of self-reliance requires a balanced combination of knowledge, skills and control of the immediate environment, which allow efficient and effective use of available financial and material resources in order to meet the needs of the individual, the family and the community. Development aid which addresses only certain elements of self-reliance, without ensuring an adequate balance, is liable to create different forms of dependence among the poor, rather than promoting their self-reliance.

It is of great importance to be aware of the different levels of self-reliance which can be promoted, and the different factors which influence these levels.

In choosing to promote any one single level of self-reliance there is an implicit acceptance of certain costs, not all of which are financial. Pure organisational financial self-reliance can only be promoted at some expense of the poorest sectors of the population, which tends to lead to their exclusion. Promotion of beneficiary group self-reliance requires investment in management and decision making skills, which cannot be expected to provide significant and direct returns contributing to the NGO's financial self-reliance. If self-reliance of the individual is to be promoted among the poorest, an NGO providing such services cannot achieve its objectives without being financially reliant on other sources of funding, at least within the foreseeable future. Self-reliance of special services being delivered can only realistically aim at covering service delivery costs, not general organisational overheads, without setting charges which exclude their priority target group.

It is therefore essential that both NGOs and potential donors be very clear as to which specific level(s) of self-reliance is being promoted by policy and by specific projects and activities.

There is no reason for an NGO to limit its objectives and strategies to one form of self-reliance scenario; indeed, a more balanced impact of NGO interventions on beneficiary self-reliance could well be achieved through consciously adopting more than one scenario. A same NGO may choose to address several levels of self-reliance through its overall programme, but in so doing care must be taken to keep a balance, so that achievement of one level of self-reliance does not undermine the impact of activities addressing another.

The findings clearly indicate a tendency of NGOs to move towards a strong emphasis on financial self-reliance in the programmes receiving greatest attention, often without being fully aware of the implicit choices being made.

The scenario/typology of self-reliance developed in this study in relation to NGOs should be refined and used primarily in relation to the programmes, projects and activities of the NGOs rather than to the organisations as a whole.

This might help NGOs (and donors) to develop a clear perspective on self-reliance policies and objectives of the NGO as an organisation.

Emphasis on finance, and particularly on financial self-reliance, appears to have been causing a certain "tunnel vision" on the part of NGOs, which has been aggravated by a feeling of competition with other organisations seeking sources of funds. Many services which should be contributing to individual and group level self-reliance development have recently tended to receive less attention than they deserve, while credit activities have taken a central position. As a result, loans are given without ensuring that the borrowers are well equipped with the skills and knowledge which would allow them to make the best use of resources available to them. It would appear that available non-financial resources (human and technical) exist which are not being explored and developed. For example, direct provision of loans is not the only possible mechanism for providing community members with funds needed to develop income generating activities effectively.

NGOs could usefully explore the possibility of serving as intermediary/guarantor for support from investors, especially for cooperative ventures by organised groups or sub-groups of members.

This would match the approach of the Islamic Bank, which underwrites economic projects as a partner. Advantages to the group members would be that there would not be the problem of having to find the money for repayment instalments within a few weeks of initiating a new or expanded income generating project, long before returns are coming from the activity. (In addition, the investors could provide technical assistance in ensuring that the projects have a good chance of success.)

Skills development and technical advice can be accessed from a number of sources; if an NGO does not provide these itself, it could coordinate and provide links to those who do.

Rather than requiring community members to choose membership of only one group, they could be encouraged to join several, in function of different services provided which promote different factors of self-reliance. Through cooperation rather than competition it would be possible to enforce a ruling concerning concurrent loan-taking.

Particular attention is needed to ensure that the hard core poor are not excluded from access to group membership and to particular types of programme, notably credit and savings.

In the workshop at the end of the study, NGO representatives discussed this matter together and proposed that special projects, possibly with special organised groups for such categories as beggars, "floating people" (homeless), female headed households, and people unable to afford to save 5 Taka a week, could be developed. Employment creation projects should be considered, including group cooperative ones. Within credit projects for hard core poor groups, minimum savings and their frequency could be adapted to members' situations, repayment of instalments could be spread out or better linked to seasons, and a repayment rate of about 50% be considered as an acceptable indicator of success. These suggestions merit further development; ability to move into "regular" groups could also be an indicator of achievement. Clearly, such projects cannot contribute directly to organisational self-reliance of the NGOs in a foreseeable future.

Donors should be aware that promotion of self-reliance of the poorest of the poor requires support for NGOs providing health, education, training and technical advisory services, which cannot become self-reliant in the foreseeable future without excluding the most needy. Even in Europe, such services for the poorer section of the population have to be subsidised. Total organisational financial self-reliance of the NGOs receiving donor aid can only be achieved if funding can be generated from the group members and beneficiaries of the NGO. This is possible, but only by ensuring that the groups are reliant on the NGO, and by excluding the poorest. As a result, self-reliance of the poor would not be achieved, a greater gap would be created between the poorest of the poor and the rest of the society, and the demand on donors to assist the poorest would inevitably increase in the foreseeable future.

Donors can support balanced promotion of self-reliance by both ensuring that funding support goes to a range of NGOs and self-reliance strategies, and by encouraging NGOs to cooperate and coordinate their efforts which complement each other by addressing different levels and/or different factors of self-reliance.

4.2 Recommendations

- ▶ It is strongly recommended that donors (DGIS and Bilance) formulate a clear policy statement concerning promotion of self-reliance of the poor. This statement should reflect the complexity of the concept of self-reliance, and should also clearly distinguish between the financial self-reliance of support organisations, be they national or village level ("sustainability") and self-reliance of individual beneficiaries. The typology developed for the study could be used for this purpose.
- ▶ It is strongly recommended that proposals for programmes and projects promoting self-reliance of the poor (rural or urban) be required to specify how beneficiaries will be enabled to develop both their capacity for informed decision making and the skills necessary for enhanced income generation.

- ▶ It is recommended that donors support balanced promotion of self-reliance both by ensuring that funding support goes to a range of NGOs and self-reliance strategies. In this context, It is strongly recommended that NGOs providing a narrow range of activities be encouraged to cooperate and collaborate with other NGOs providing other, complementary activities, and that they be encouraged to develop a flexible arrangement whereby beneficiaries be allowed to join more than one group where the second group offers services not provided by the other.

ANNEX B/1

TERMS OF REFERENCE

PROMOTING SELF-RELIANCE OF RURAL POOR IN BANGLADESH.

1. Aims and purpose of the PE.

The program evaluation "Promoting self reliance of rural poor in Bangladesh" will be conducted under the joint responsibility of DSI-MY and Bilance and will focus on article II of the co-financing agreement referring to the promotion of self-reliance of groups and individuals, living below the poverty line, through "sustainable improvement of the position of poor groups and individuals (art.II,1) and [...] the promotion of active participation of the target groups in [...] their society; enabling target groups to arrange for those facilities which are necessary to make both ends meet, also on a long term basis ...(art II,2).

2. Self Reliance: Bilance point of view.

The overall policy of Bilance as laid down in the policy paper "Bilance stands for Social Development" is closely linked to the aims of the Co-Financing Program and the objective of promoting self reliance for its target groups.

The terms of reference of the policy document clearly state that "*Bilance wants to strive for a world in balance, without social, cultural and religious polarization. Where people can live together peacefully in a pluralistic society with mutual respect for one another 's differences. Where government and private grassroots initiatives become increasingly interrelated. Where one can speak of equal rights for poor and rich, South and North, women and men, the environment and the economy, and the current and future generations*". Although not directly articulated in terms of self-reliance as a direct objective the Bilance definition of its core business, Social Development, which has been defined as "*the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity by empowering marginalised groups, to undertake their own development. to improve their social and economic position and to acquire their rightful place in society" contains quite a number of relevant elements, factors and indicators which, de facto, can and are influencing the process of growth towards self-reliance.*

3. Problem description and specific objective of the proposed program evaluation.

The above statements are indicative for the strategy Bilance has maintained with regard to the process of self reliance. On the one hand, it stresses the "entitlement and empowerment" strategy so that the target group can claim and obtain what is rightfully theirs. But it also implies that the promotion of self-reliance has to be seen as an integrated and dynamic process which, contextually defined, provides "the local community with the capacity to manage its own affairs".(ICCO, F. Wils, p. iii) Earlier seminars (Promotion of Autonomous Development, Noordwijkerhout, 1987)

and studies (Koen Verhagen, Self-help promotion, 1987) are, in a similar way, indicative for the efforts undertaken by Bilance in this field.

This however does not mean that Bilance can claim that the organisation has been successful in the translation of these general policy aims in a transparent and consistent operational policy or strategies nor has this policy or strategy consistently been communicated to the Bilance partners in the south.

Since factors which contribute to the process of self reliance at macro, meso and micro level, can readily be identified in all projects and programs supported by Bilance, an analysis of the factors which contribute to the process of self-reliance and a study of success and failures might provide Bilance with sufficient building stones to develop clearly defined policy guidelines and strategies to define self-reliance as an operational objective that can be implemented from the very beginning of the project cycle. In a similar way such a study could enhance PME techniques since self-reliance at target group level has mostly been neglected in midterm reviews and evaluations.

In order to obtain this objective the program evaluation will make use of; and try to build on the ICCO program evaluation "Promoting self-reliance of the rural poor in India"(December 1997), as well as the findings of the IOB case studies of NGO partners of Bilance in the study "Bangladesh, Evaluation of the Netherlands-Funded NGOs, 19972-1996 and the GOM "NGO Country Profile Bangladesh", 1995-2. A final study to be looked into is the Internal Program Evaluation of Bilance, People's Empowerment in Bangladesh (Een onderzoek naar organisatie opbouw en institutionele ontwikkeling bij 10 partnerorganisaties van Bilance in Bangladesh), Oegstgeest 1997.

4. Bilance policy and interventions in Bangladesh.

The most important policy goal for Bilance in Bangladesh is the empowerment of the poor and the excluded in order to improve their position by increasing their knowledge and skills, by fostering the joint defence of their common interests and by providing them with access to basic social services. The starting point for this strategy is to implement a sustainable programme to combat structural poverty aimed at improving the socio-economic situation and the social mobility of the poorest. Priority target areas are education, the labour situation, income generating activities, human rights and juridical assistance. Within all these programmes, the disadvantaged position of women demands a preferential option in order to improve their position and bring about changes in the unequal power relationship between men and women. In a significant number of integrated development projects constitute women the majority of the target population.

In order to focus the attention of Bilance on contacts with its most important partner and programme relations and to answer to the need for increased efficiency, the number of projects and relations has been gradually diminished. Important criteria for the selection of Bilance partner and program relations is the conformity with the major aims and goals of Bilance and their credibility and expertise in general. By providing support to the APEX organisations and other major intermediary organisations, indirect support remains assured for smaller development NGOs, either by financing their activities or by financing their capacity building. Fostering collaboration and network building between the development NGOs is aimed at increasing their level of knowledge, mutual solidarity and the strength of the development NGOs.

5. Major research question related to the program evaluation

5.1. At the level of Bilance

- a) How did the concept of self-reliance, implicitly as well as explicitly, evolve in the policy formulation of Bilance
- b) Has the concept of self-reliance, as one of the major aims of the co-financing program, been adequately defined and promoted by Bilance with regard to its partners and programs in Bangladesh?
- c) Did Bilance communicate this objective to its partners and did they, in turn, integrate this objective in their mission, vision and goals?

5.2. At the level of Bilance partners

- a) Have Bilance partners a clear perception of the concept and strategy of self-reliance, its elements and indicators and do they effectively promote self-reliance among their target groups?
- b) Which of the key factors that contribute to the process of self-reliance, as described in PE 73, Promoting self-reliance of the rural poor in India, are significant in the context of Bangladesh and can factors or strategies be identified that made the target groups less dependent on the supporting NGO?
- c) Do Bilance partners see the process of self-reliance as an integral policy and strategy in their relations with the target group or do they only stress some factors to make the target group more capable and a little less dependent?

5.3. At the level of the target group

- a) Do the target groups opt (claim) for self-reliance or do they prefer the relative security of an accompanying NGO as a guarantee to security and continuity of services'?
- b) Is self-reliance a viable option for vulnerable target groups?
- c) Is self-reliance, for the target group, an end in itself and what services can be rendered and are expected from NGOs or support organizations once a target group can move on its own.

d) Are significant differences observed when the gender composition of the target group are taken into account?

5.4. Lessons learned prospects for the future

- a) Can the different stages in the growth process towards self reliance be delineated and can on the basis thereof a strategy be developed both as an intervention model as well as an instrument for monitoring and evaluation?
- b) Can a strategy or model be developed which overcomes the apprehension of the target group that self-reliance could leave them in isolation.
- c) Are different strategies and models to be developed in terms of gender composition of the target group?

6. Expected outcome:

Since strategies and instruments have not yet been structured and systematized from the perspective of SR promotion (PE 73, p. 17) this program evaluation aims, based on the findings of earlier program evaluations and studies, to quantify achieved results and to contribute to the formulation of a consistent framework of self-reliance concepts and corresponding intervention strategies in the field of integrated rural development. This implies: concretization of an (often abstract) container concept, the formulation of strategies prior and during the implementation of the project and a change in the (financing) culture between Balance and the NGOs supported in Bangladesh. Starting from the observations and lessons learned in PE 73 (p. 26) this study aims to come to a clear conceptualization of self reliance as a dynamic process, with its own goals, stages and gradual redefinition of the relationship between NGOs and its target groups.