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CARE Bangladesh

CARE Bangladesh's FFS Approach: New Frontiers in Farmer Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

CARE Bangladesh began working with the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) approach in 1996. Initially, the FFS curriculum focused largely on rice field ecology and reduction of pesticide use. Since then, the FFS approach has evolved and is now the main project delivery methodology of five projects in CARE Bangladesh's Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector (ANR). The project's goals are not limited to improving the incomes of FFS members through ecologically sound practices, but building cohesive groups that can address their economic, social and political marginalization. This paper explores the ways in which CARE Bangladesh's agricultural projects are trying to build Community-Based Organizations, enabling the poor to participate in local democratic processes, improve their capacity to demand and obtain better services from the state, and have greater access to markets. It emphasizes that CARE Bangladesh's recent shift from a need-based approach to a rights-based approach (RBA) opens new and exciting possibilities to address the disempowerment of the poor. The paper discusses some of the innovative initiatives that CARE's agricultural projects have adopted to meet the challenges that RBA represents.

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1. Introduction

The Farmer Field School (FFS) approach has been recognized throughout developing countries, particularly in South-East Asia, as a useful approach to a) improve farmers' understanding of local ecological conditions and design appropriate agricultural practices, and b) build farmers' decision-making and analytical capacities in areas other than farming.

CARE Bangladesh began working with the FFS approach in 1996. Presently, five agricultural projects of CARE's Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector (ANR) (see Fig. 1) are working with FFSs to achieve their project goals.¹ Among these five, two projects are working with rice growing farmers and three projects are working with landless and marginal farmers to increase vegetable cultivation on homestead land. Common goals of all five projects are to a.) enhance households' income through ecologically sound practices, b) disseminate that knowledge to other members in the community, and c) build sustainable groups that can address the livelihood concerns of the community.

The FFS approach has been highly successful in terms of improving FFS members' agricultural practices leading to increased yields and reduced pesticide use. For instance, in 1998 the average net return from the rice crop of FFS participants in the New Options for Pest Management (NOPEST) project was Tk. 5,373 (US \$107), as opposed to non-FFS participants whose net return was Tk. 3,443 (US \$69).²

This success, however, has not been replicated in the area of group mobilization. In other words, CARE Bangladesh's ability to build sustainable groups that can address the social and political marginalization of its members has been limited. After graduation of the FFS groups, farmers tend to continue practicing improved agricultural methods and benefit from the income, but cease to invest the time and effort that is necessary to sustain groups.

This paper examines the ways in which CARE Bangladesh's agricultural projects are trying to build sustainable Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in the context of Bangladesh's social, economic and political conditions. It emphasizes that CARE Bangladesh's recent shift from a need-based approach to a rights-based approach (RBA) opens new and exciting possibilities for project staff to explore strategies within the FFS approach that have the potential to address the disempowerment of the poor. In the next section, we briefly highlight CARE Bangladesh's new strategy in light of the social and political conditions that prevail in the country. We also briefly discuss the class differences between Indonesian and Bangladeshi FFS members to elucidate the importance of a context specific FFS approach. Then we will provide the reader with an overview of the various FFS strategies that CARE Bangladesh's ANR Sector projects have adopted. This will be followed by a discussion of the new initiatives that these projects have incorporated into existing activities to make the shift to the RBA approach.

¹ CARE Bangladesh is presently reorganizing its organizational structure, which will eventually make the ANR sector obsolete. Instead CARE Bangladesh will be working through regional programs.

² Barzman, M. and L. Das. 2000. "Ecologizing Rice-Based Systems in Bangladesh" in *LEISA – ILELA Newsletter for Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture*. 16/4:16-17.

2. CARE Bangladesh's New Direction

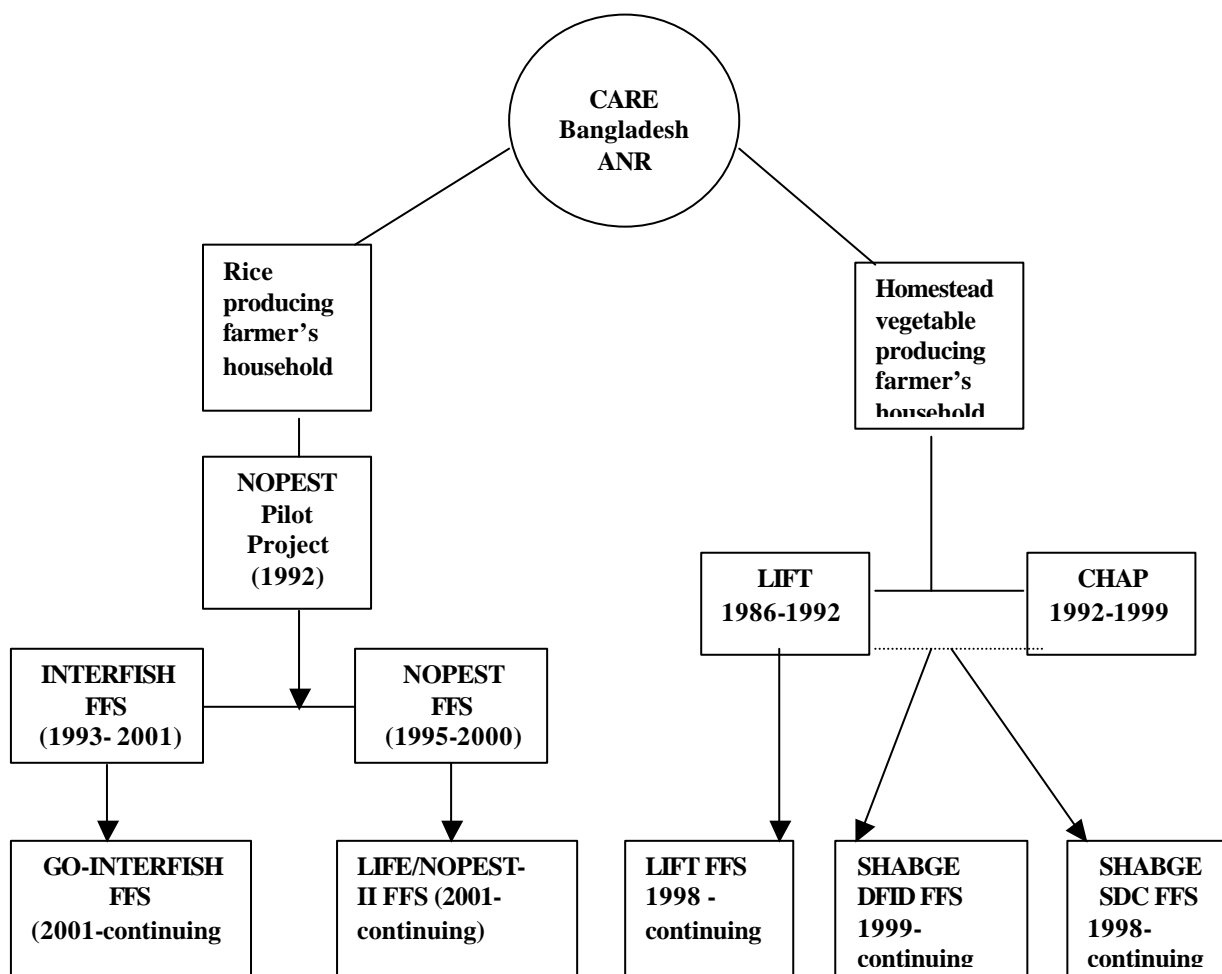
In 2001 CARE Bangladesh adopted its new Long Range Strategic Plan (LRSP), which outlines Rights, Governance and Education as key strategic directions. The new LRSP is a reflection of CARE Bangladesh's long experience (five decades) of working through a needs-based approach. An approach which has considerably improved the lived conditions of thousands of marginalized households, but has had limited impact in terms of ongoing democratization processes. Thus the new LRSP seeks to not only address the economic marginalization of the poor, but also their social and political disempowerment.

Although Bangladesh has had three free and relatively peaceful elections, the present political situation is far from desirable. Governance is characterized by patron-client relationships with widespread corruption. And despite state-funded economic programs and schemes to uplift the poor as well as an ongoing land reform program (referred to as *khas* lands), many Bangladeshi citizens lack access to clean water, education, health services and sufficient land or employment to secure a livelihood. In rural areas, state funded development schemes are often captured by wealthy households, who also control local political bodies.

3. The FFS Approach

Presently, there are two trajectories in CARE Bangladesh's agricultural projects: rice/fish production and homestead vegetable production. Projects working with rice/fish production are promoting fish cultivation in rice fields through Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Low External Input Rice Production (LEIRP) as well as vegetable cultivation on dikes and tree plantations on state (road-side) and common property. While projects working with homestead vegetable production are promoting the cultivation of vegetables through multi-storied cropping patterns (homestead space planting) and IPM, as well as fruit tree planting and improvement, on an extremely limited land-base – the homestead.

Figure 1: Evolution of the FFS Approach: Rice / Fish and Homestead Vegetable Production



These agricultural projects are working with FFSs involving 20 – 25 participants that meet bi-monthly in 2-3 hour learning sessions. Below, we outline the activities of FFSs working with rice/ fish. The homestead vegetable FFS activities do not significantly differ, except they take place over a longer period of time (see Table 1).

Table 1 Key differences between Rice/ Fish and Homestead Vegetable Projects

Rice/Fish oriented projects	Homestead Vegetable oriented projects
Target beneficiaries: Men and women from marginal (<0.49 acres) and small (0.50 – 2.50 acres) landholding households; illiteracy among marginal farmers is high. Fifty percent of target beneficiaries are women and 50% are men	Target beneficiaries: More than 80 percent are women from essentially landless (0.05 – 0.11 acres) households. This group is characterized by extreme illiteracy (93-96 percent) ³
Duration: 1.5 year FFS cycle	Duration: 2-3 year FFS cycle
Organizational Structure: <i>Farmer leaders (FLs) or Community Organizers (COs) are selected from among the FFS members in the 2nd season to assist in implementing the project activities</i>	Organizational Structure: Local Entrepreneurs (LEs) role is limited to ensure timely supply of quality vegetable seeds and seedling to the FFS members. <i>LEs are selected from within the larger community</i>

³ CARE Bangladesh – SHABGE-DFID. 2000. Baseline Report.

In Rice/ Fish projects, the FFSs are provided with project support for a period of three rice-growing seasons (1.5 years). All agricultural projects have developed wealth-ranking methodologies, appropriate to each project's goals that do not only consider the landholding sizes of households, but also emphasize food security and income. Equally important, wealth ranking is participatory ensuring that the communities themselves identify the 'poor'. Through a Participatory Monitoring Evaluation and Planning (PME) approach all FFS projects ensure that FFS members set the agenda by identifying their common problems and needs allowing them to develop a plan for action. To facilitate learning and provide the members with ownership of the groups and / or individuals' successes and /or failures, a literate member (or a literate relative) maintains the group's records.

During the first season the project Field Trainers impart their technical expertise on rice/ fish and vegetable production. During this time the farmers begin the adoption process of the improved technologies in their own fields. Each school also establishes a common study plot, in which the FFS members experiment with different techniques in the context of locally specific ecological conditions. In the second season, the FFS members identify a leader, who then with the support of the project staff, establishes networks and linkages with individuals and / or organizations that can provide agricultural inputs. Here each FFS member also identifies a 'buddy' (bondo sadasya) who adopts at least one of the technologies that FFS members are using and participates in the meetings. This secondary adoption approach is designed to disseminate the improved agricultural practices within the larger community.

During the past one and one half years, the FFSs are also beginning to discuss common social issues and strategize possible courses of action to improve their social and political positions in the community. In the third season, the field staff prepares the FFS members for their departure as 'facilitators' of the FFS community. Here the Farmer Leaders and Community Organizers take on a greater role strengthening the organizational capacity of the farmers' groups, which now include additional members from the community.

So far, this discussion has emphasized CARE Direct Delivery approach. An additional dimension within the FFS projects is the capacity building of local NGOs. Each project has established partnerships with local NGOs who are employing the FFS approach to deliver both technical support and explore advocacy initiatives. In this way, CARE's FFS projects are reaching a large number of target beneficiaries and at the same time are building capacity of local NGOs to become viable, well-governed, transparent and publicly accountable organizations. CARE is providing season-long training for its Partner NGO (PNGO) staff, funds for motorbikes, staff salaries, FFS materials, etc. CARE also provides training in the area of good governance and financial management. These partnerships are presently evolving from a system that could be characterized as 'subcontracting' to one in which these local NGOs are 'partners' in the development endeavor.

4. Class and Gender in Bangladesh – Comparisons with Indonesia

One of the most significant differences between the Rice/ Fish and Homestead Vegetable oriented projects is the socio-economic position of the projects' target beneficiaries (see Table 1). Rice / Fish projects, by nature of the technology they depart, work with men and women from marginal and small landholding households, while Homestead Vegetable projects work largely with landless women.

This is in contrast to FFS groups in Indonesia, the FFS example that has been internationally hailed as a success story. There, FFSs appear to consist largely of small farmers having access to land no less than 1 acre. The majority of Bangladeshi FFS members, on the other hand, are either landless or operate marginal holdings of less than half an acre. The class composition of the Indonesian FFSs and thus the interests their members share vis-à-vis the state may explain their ability to organize into a federated umbrella organizations, such as the *Ikatan Petani Pengendalian Hama Terpadu Indonesia* (IPPHTI) Indonesian Integrated Pest Management Farmer Association, a group that has gained considerable influence on a national level. Essentially, Indonesian FFSs have evolved into a farmer's union that is lobbying for the

1. right to cultivate land
2. right to get government services
3. right to be involved in price determination
4. right to get the right information
5. right to get a healthy environment
6. right to breed and propagate seed
7. right to be involved in water and irrigation management
8. right to product marketing
9. right to build an organization
10. right in expression (related to culture, religion, and art).⁴

As this list of demands shows, the Indonesian FFS 'rights-based approach' is dominated by economic rights that unite farmers: subsidized inputs and agricultural infrastructure, market information, and beneficial procurement prices. The class interests that prevail among the Indonesian farmers not only provide an incentive for FFS groups to organize, rally, and demand state-support in an organized and sustained fashion, but also draw into its fold farmers who were never targeted into the 'FFS system', but who could reap the benefits from the farmers' movement.

Furthermore, in light of the land holding size of the FFS members in Indonesia, their income portfolio is much less diversified than that of their Bangladeshi counterparts. This translates into free time not only during the agricultural off-season, but also during the growing cycle of the crop itself. In other words, once the fields are ploughed and the seeds planted, the farmers are free to spend time in Farmer Field School sessions until harvesting. Thus during part of the year, the Indonesian FFS member's opportunity cost of spending time in FFS sessions is therefore zero. It is not surprising then, that Indonesian FFS sessions are intensive, ranging from 2.5 to 5 hours per week over a period of 4 months allowing an intensive curriculum that emphasizes analytical skills.

The Indonesian FFS member is also in a better situation to absorb complex ecological concepts and to become an 'expert' rather than merely an 'adopter'.⁵ The literacy rate in Indonesia is 88 percent, compared to 55 percent in Bangladesh.⁶ The majorities of Indonesian

⁴ Field Foundation - Indonesia. 2001. Rural Epics (Educational Program for Improving Society). Project Concept Paper.

⁵ Bartlett, A. 2002. Impact Study on FFS Activities within SHABGE-DFID Project.

⁶ UNESCO, 2000. National EFA Literacy Assessment. UNESCO Website.

FFS farmers are literate, largely because the Indonesian FFS members have had longer schooling experiences and have had exposure to learning processes.

The situation of the groups that CARE is working with in Bangladesh is quite different from Indonesia. Not only are CARE Bangladesh's FFS members largely illiterate, but they also belonging to various economic groups engaging in highly diversified livelihood strategies. A recent livelihood case study found that landless households' as well as marginal and small farmers exhibit great diversity in their livelihoods strategies.

“Marginal and small farmers may combine agriculture with various forms of employment (for example as tubewell mechanics or maid-servants), whilst other pursue agriculture alongside self-employment (as barbers, carpenters, petty business people and traders). For the landless and near landless, day laboring may be undertaken in tandem with employment (e.g. as a truck assistant) or self-employment (e.g. as a rickshaw van puller), and each of these possibilities may also be pursued individually, or in combination with each other.”⁷

Table 2 and Table 3 below provide a glimpse of the diversity that characterizes the day-to-day activities of landless groups and members from marginal and small landholding households (in bold) in two *paras* (residential village neighborhoods).

Table 2: Livelihoods scenario of *Para A*

Category of livelihoods	A	B	C	D	E	Total	%
Only agriculture	1	7	10			18	29
Agriculture/service (a)	1	2				3	5
Agriculture/sell milk		1				1	2
Agriculture/barber		1	3	1		5	8
Agriculture/day labor			11	3		14	23
Agriculture/petty trade (b)			3			3	5
Agriculture/STW mechanic			2			2	3
Agriculture/carpenter			2			2	3
Agriculture/service/ labor			1			1	2
Agriculture/business			1			1	2
Agriculture/truck assistant				2		2	3
Agriculture/rickshaw van				1		1	2
Agriculture/sweet street seller				1		1	2
Day labor/barber				1	4	5	8
Construction worker				1		1	2
Clothes hawker				1		1	2
Rickshaw van					1	1	2
Total	2	11	33	11	5	62	100

Source: CARE Bangladesh – Go-Interfish Project. 2002. The Northwest Institutional Analysis
A= Large farm > 7.5 acres; B= Medium 2.5 – 7.5 acres; C= Small 0.50-2.49 acres;
D= Marginal 0.05-0.49 acres; E= Landless

⁷ CARE Bangladesh – Go-Interfish Project. 2002. The Northwest Institutional Analysis. Mick Howes.

Table 3: Livelihoods scenario of *Para B*

Category of livelihoods	A	B	C	D	E	Total	%
Only agriculture	4	6	4			14	23%
Agriculture/business	3	1	4			8	13%
Agriculture/service	1	1				2	3%
Agriculture/STW mechanic		1	1			2	3%
Retired		1				1	2%
Agriculture/day labor			6	1		7	11%
Agriculture/Rickshaw van			2			2	3%
Agriculture/servant			1			1	2%
Day labor / business				2	2	4	6%
Day labor					10	10	16%
Business					2	2	3%
Garment worker					2	2	3%
Rickshaw van					1	1	2%
Day labor/rickshaw					1	1	2%
Total	8	10	18	3	17	56	100

Source: CARE Bangladesh – Go-Interfish Project. 2002. The Northwest Institutional Analysis.

A= Large farm > 7.5 acres; B=Medium 2.5 – 7.5 acres; C=Small 0.50-2.49 acres;

D=Marginal 0.05-0.49 acres; E=Landless

These two tables indicate that in both *paras* about 70 percent of small holding farmers and 100 percent of marginal farmers engage in more than one income-earning activity.

Furthermore, these non-agricultural activities are highly diversified, including, but not limited to day labor, rickshaw pullers and shopkeepers. Small and marginal farmers do not share a common class interest. At the same time, landholding households do stand in contrast to landless households in that even a small plot of land provides a fall back position and capital that places these households in a better bargaining position vis-à-vis employers than the landless.

The lack of a class identity among Bangladesh's poor is also shaped by the social stigma that is associated with manual labor in South Asia.⁸ This goes back to the traditional sense of the deep status differentiation that is associated with manual work. No matter what situation of misery one may live in, to be above an unskilled day laborer is some consolation in itself. A pan or sweet shop owner or a rickshaw puller – both independent entrepreneurs – has little in common with a day laborer.

The atomism that characterizes the economic strategies of households is further entrenched through the investment strategies to build forms of social capital. Household members foster relationships and alliances within their extended kin group and / or with wealthier households and NGOs (largely credit and savings schemes) to mitigate their marginalized economic and political position, the latter often preventing them from accessing state relief and development programs. The strong ties that are built with wealthier households also solidify

⁸ Although Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim society, some of cultural peculiarities of Hinduism (for instance the negative connotations associated with manual labor stemming from the Hindu caste hierarchy) have been largely internalized.

the horizontal relationships and prevent vertical integration. Investing in forms of social capital are classic risk-aversion strategies of the poor.⁹

This combination of diversified livelihood strategies and linkages with other actors leaves little time for participating in FFS sessions, beyond the learning of new technologies to improve yields and reduce input costs. In this context, individuals carefully calculate the opportunity cost of participating in FFS sessions that have little immediate economic returns, as opposed to earning income or securing income opportunities through strong networks and alliances.

The FFS approach is further complicated in the context of working with women. This is largely due to the highly gendered division of labor and the limited mobility that women from landholding households enjoy. Just as in other countries of South Asia, women perform the vast majority of reproductive tasks. Among the many (time-consuming) activities that women engage in are cooking two meals per day, cleaning the house, fetching drinking water, washing clothes, looking after the children, taking care of the elderly, collecting biomass for fuel and shaping and drying cow dung cakes, rearing poultry and livestock, etc.

As many studies of South Asian gender dynamics have shown, the greater the economic marginalization of the household, the greater the likelihood that women are engaged in productive activities (selling of labor for wages in cash or kind).¹⁰ Thus women from poor households have little time to participate in FFS sessions. In addition, field staff have to be particularly sensitive to the special needs of women. For instance, the learning process in women's FFS groups can be interrupted by small children, who need constant attention and care, affecting the learning environment.

In terms of women's FFSs, projects have to consider an additional dimension, besides the economic differentiation we have outlined. Class mediates women's position in society in shaping the extent of *purdah* (seclusion). For instance, the better the economic positions of households, the stricter the form of *purdah* that women practice. Thus while women from landless households sell their labor power and enjoy considerable mobility, women from landed households tend to adhere to greater forms of seclusion and may avoid contact with men with whom they have no direct kinship relation or simply avoid public places altogether. CARE has addressed this challenge by having a gendered workforce (Nearly 100% are women on SHABGE-DFID project in Southeast). In more conservative areas, e.g. the Southeast of Bangladesh, female staff facilitates women's FFS sessions. This strategy has allowed CARE to alleviate the concerns of male household members who are reluctant to allow their wives to participate in these public forums.

This discussion shows that if we are to deliver more than just technology transfer, the FFS approach in Bangladesh should try to build solidarity on common political issues – negotiating access to state development schemes, land, markets, village infrastructure, and participation in the democratic process. While women's marginalized position in the public

⁹ For a discussion of social capital see CARE Bangladesh – Go-Interfish Project. 2002. The Northwest Institutional Analysis. Mick Howes

¹⁰ See the dozens of case studies cited in Agarwal, Bina. 1994..A Land of One's Own: Women and Land Rights in South Asia. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

sphere and thus their extremely limited participation in local democratic processes has to be addressed through specific initiatives.

5. “New Directions”

All of the five FFS projects are beginning to explore new directions, a reflection of CARE Bangladesh’s new LRSP. Although there is significant variation in the extent to which FFS projects are pursuing the rights-based approach, all of them are in the process of building staff capacity and addressing internal organizational hierarchy to incorporate Rights and Social Justice activities. Staff capacity building is taking place on two levels: inside the project to better deliver specific project goals and purpose and on a larger CARE Bangladesh level, directed through the headquarters at Dhaka, to build staff capacity in the areas of Rights and Governance. Thus the “New Directions” of the agricultural projects are inextricably tied to CARE Bangladesh’s LRSP. This section on ‘New Directions’ therefore begins with a discussion of the CARE’s Rights and Governance work and then focuses on recent ongoing initiatives and pilots.

A. Rights and Governance

CARE Bangladesh has created two strategic senior positions – Rights and Social Justice Coordinator and Governance Coordinator – who are tasked with building staff understanding in the areas of rights and good governance and guiding projects on how to pilot and mainstream practices which address rights and governance issues more directly. These strategic positions are not limited to working on rights and governance in the larger social context, but strategically address the ways in which CARE Bangladesh as an organization mirrors that of society at large. The Rights and Social Justice Coordinator and the Governance Coordinator therefore contribute to the process of reforming organizational culture. Furthermore, their Rights and Governance activities are underpinned by gender awareness and women’s rights training and procedures to ensure implementation of a ‘fair’ gender policy in the organization as well as Principles and Values training, both of which are areas that are being developed through CARE Bangladesh’s Human Resources Section.

The Rights and Social Justice Coordinator and the Governance Coordinator work on a national level as well. Project staff, in the process of learning how to identify and analyze rights, social justice and governance issues, will be able to provide ‘grounded’ information pertaining to rights and good governance to these coordinators. Both of these senior staff are building alliances with other NGOs, policy makers, and activists, to enable them to eventually become a lobbying force to work on implementation of existing laws and policies at the center. While individual projects are pursuing the rights and governance agenda to a greater or lesser extent by ‘piggy backing’ messages on to existing activities, CARE has recently won a large grant (UKL 18m) from DFID with the specific purpose of supporting civil society groups and NGOs in rights and governance work. It is anticipated that some of CAREs existing partner NGOs will be able use the capacity, which has been, developed to deliver activities under Human rights and Good Governance.

B. The Mainstreaming of Advocacy Work

The various areas of training (Principles and Values, Rights and Social Justice, etc.) that CARE staff have participated in have created an environment in which the staff is more likely to carefully listen to and learn from the FFS members. Thus staff is better positioned now than before to ensure implementation of the PME approach, mentioned earlier, where FFS members identify social and economic issues. PME is now becoming an integral part of the FFS curriculum.

The most common issues identified by FFS members and their ‘buddies’ are the prevalence of dowry, sanitation (access to clean water and latrine facilities), access to health services, adult and child education, poultry and livestock rearing access to khas land (Bangladesh’s ongoing land reform program), and the terms and conditions of sharecropping contracts. Some of these issues are highly contentious as their resolution (e.g. khas land and sharecropping contracts) directly challenges the status quo. Thus field staff need to be well aware of the potential risks that are involved when working on such issues.

FFS projects address these issues in the context of their staff capacity. For instance, projects that have the Logframe purpose of improving the overall livelihoods of their target beneficiaries have been able to invest a greater amount of financial resources in staff capacity building in the area of livelihoods or employing social development specialists or experienced consultants. For instance, one project has developed a methodology through which these social issues can be systematically analyzed, enabling work on a more strategic basis. Here staff are identifying the various positions taken on these issues by key political players, informal leaders and local government representatives in the to seek out potential allies and locate potential opponents. Project staff is encouraged to coordinate their activities with other NGOs in the area working on similar issues. Field staff is also learning the legal (statutory and customary) context allowing them to raise the community members’ awareness of their rights.

Projects where the logframes do not yet specify goal and purpose level outputs in the context of achieving wider livelihoods impact, identify the issues with FFS members, raising awareness of the commonality of problems and attempting to link the groups to service providers and make alliances. While these projects may not work on a strategic basis, their work is contributing in significant ways in terms of engaging FFS members and their ‘buddies’ in joint analysis of the many social and political injustices that prevail in the Bangladeshi countryside. This is an important part of beginning the process of building a sense of community among an economically diversified group of people.

Part of CARE Bangladesh’s shift from a need-based approach to one that strengthens need-based activities through right-based initiatives is to slowly evolve its presently discrete project approach to regional programs. Thus some of the FFS projects are beginning to explore how advocacy efforts can be synthesized on a regional basis to have greater impact. Thus the shift away from discrete projects to a more integrated approach is allowing CARE staff to maximize their capacity, coordinate their activities, and share and learn from each others’ experiences.

C. The Network Facilitator ¹¹ (a pilot)

One of the FFS projects is now piloting ‘the Network Facilitator’ (NF). This is a service-based position, currently paid for through a grant awarded to the project’s PNGOs, with a set of defined responsibilities. These responsibilities emphasize, but are not limited to, building relationships *between* local FFS communities and resource holders / providers. In other words, the NF facilitates the networking between FFSs attempting to build a federated group that links to service providers. It is expected that the NF will work with FFS as well as community members to get continuous support from (on a need basis) and have access to local service providers, even after the FFS has graduated (i.e. phased out).

Thus the NFs are guiding the FFS, preferably the Community Organizers (COs), to improve the livelihood conditions of marginalized groups by building interactive relationships with formal and informal leaders, field and *upazilla* (sub-district level) based Government of Bangladesh (GoB) representatives and NGOs. Facilitating and initiating productive relationships between community, local leaders, service providers (GoB and NGOs, as well as private sector entrepreneurs) and responding to the key concerns of local communities is the primary function of the NF. The NFs have received basic training from CARE and work under the management of the project’s PNGOs.

Presently, an internal review of this pilot initiative is taking place. If the pilots turn out effective or is simply in need of ‘fine-tuning’, then the project plans to replicate this approach in other districts as well.

D. Agricultural Marketing (a pilot)

One of the major problems that has been identified by FFS members is the marketing of their agricultural produce. Thus the FFS projects have initiated agricultural marketing pilots to facilitate the sale of FFS members’ produce. FFS members and their ‘buddies’ are generally small-scale producers, always in need of ready cash, and thus compelled to sell their limited produce immediately after harvesting. In light of the small quantity to be sold, it is not profitable for FFS members to bear the opportunity costs and transport costs of transporting their goods to the market on an individual basis. Thus the vast majority of FFS members that sell produce are forced to sell at the farmgate where the prices are lower than in the *haat* or market. The marketing pilots then have several dimensions, the most important of which involve attempting to build groups, which a) allow FFS members to sell their produce collectively at the farm gate and gain greater bargaining power vis-à-vis *pikers* (traders) and b) enable them to minimize transport costs by pooling their resources.

E. Women’s Marketing Corners (a pilot)

A very innovative way of addressing the public / private sphere dichotomy between men and women in Bangladeshi society is the notion of establishing women’s marketing corners. In the context of Bangladesh’s *purdah* culture and male-dominated public spaces, it is difficult for women to engage in economic activities – particularly the selling of produce that requires

¹¹ This section relies heavily on Khan, N. 2002. *Network Facilitator Approach Review*. CARE Bangladesh – Go-Interfish.

many hours of standing in a single location, making women vulnerable to harassment. To facilitate women's access to markets as sellers (and buyers) the women's marketing corner ensures that they control the income from their labor.

Project staff and a few 'outspoken' women from the FFSs negotiate space, security arrangements and as well as clean latrine and water facilities with the *hat / bazaar* committee, a sub-committee of locally elected government. Interested female FFS members and women from female-headed households engaged in crop production from neighboring communities then set up shops in the women's marketing corners to sell their produce. In addition to providing a secure and comfortable environment, these women marketing corners also provide spaces for women from different communities to meet and share their common experiences.

F. Promoting Good Governance Practices to Build Sustainable CBOs (Pilot)

Projects where Logframe goals and purpose are concerned more with increases in production and food security rather than wider improvements in livelihood security are therefore limited in the extent to which they can invest in building staff capacity in the area of rights, social justice and governance. They are nevertheless piloting new approaches. For instance, two projects have initiated a pilot in the area of CBO good governance that will be replicated on a project basis.

The pilot is working with graduated (phased-out) FFS groups and additional members from the community to establish good governance guiding principles and best practices. The groups take on a structure that is not very different from other local governance structures. An executive committee is headed by an elected leader, who along with an additional member from the executive committee, receives training from CARE. In addition, there are several committees, each of which is charged with one activity, e.g. income-generation, networking with service providers, *salish* (village dispute arbitration), marketing, etc. These committees consist of members from the executive committee as well as representatives from the larger CBO (this is very similar to the union-level committees) who set the agenda, make a plan and execute the activities. The group also links to the GoB representatives and observes the numerous national days designed to create awareness of key issues (e.g. the need for immunization, education, maternal health, etc.)

The importance of this pilot is clear:- 1) it develops leadership capacity and promotes participatory decision-making among the poor, and 2) it has the potential of serving as a powerful forum through which the group can raise issues in the larger community and make demands on elected officials, and 3) it raises awareness of government programs, schemes, and initiatives. It is crucial to recognize that the organizational arrangements that this pilot is fostering mirror the organizational arrangement of the locally elected government. This initiative thus enables members from politically marginalized sectors of the community to gain experience in the various aspects that good governance entails (e.g. leadership qualities, financial management, participatory decision-making, etc.). Secondly, it increases individuals' bargaining power by 'joining the cause' with their fellow citizens and thus provides greater opportunity for successful lobbying. For example, such groups have been able to get drinking water tube-wells from the Union Parishad, and collectively take their surplus produce to the Local Supply Depot (LSD), a government procurement center, that is

generally ‘captured’ by wealthy farmers. And finally, public observances and rallies on key days such as World Food Day, Woman’s Day, National Immunization Day, Environment Day, etc. raise community awareness in the locality.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have emphasized the particular socio-economic conditions that characterize Bangladesh’s poor. The need for a FFS approach specific to the conditions in Bangladesh is clear. While the obstacles appear to be multifold, CARE Bangladesh is well positioned to take on the challenge. CARE’s agricultural projects have fostered relationships with local NGOs are building their capacity and are beginning to learn from their partners' approaches towards development. As we have shown, project staff have designed innovative approaches to begin the process of building sustainable Community-Based Organizations. This process has been facilitated through CARE Bangladesh’s shift to a rights-based approach in that it has not only created an enabling and supportive environment for new initiatives, but has encouraged forums for intra-project sharing and has made a tremendous contribution to build the staff’s capacity to work in the areas of Rights and Social Justice. CARE’s donors shift towards a livelihoods approach, reflected in the annual changes of projects’ logframes following the Output to Purpose Reviews, has institutionalized ‘the paradigm shift’. A commitment by donors to support longer term engagement in rural communities in recognition of the lengthier time scales necessary to bring about real social mobilization will be a final vital component which will allow field staff to run FFS which, as well as educating farmers in diversified agricultural practices, build civil society organizations at the grass roots and contribute to genuine farmer empowerment.