

Evaluation of Gender Equality and Dignity Programme



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Economic & Social Help**

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Foreword

This was a brief, yet quite an in-depth evaluation of the GED project supported by Diakonia Bangladesh at a time when the country was experiencing one of its worst political turmoil. Besides preparatory literature review, in-house planning meetings between the three member evaluation team, an extensive field visit was conducted during the days of general strike called by the opposition political parties. This evaluation report has been prepared on the basis of our study of field notes and assessment of many different reports, manuals and training modules. We greatly appreciate the unreserved and cheerful assistance the team has received from the staff of ADESH. We would like to convey our particular thanks to the Executive Director, Subrato Dey and Programme Coordinator, Yeakub Nabi for their excellent management support to implement such a long but tight schedule over a period of three full working days. This has required many different community groups, as well as civil society members, including members of ADESH's Executive Board, to be ready to meet us at short notice. We should therefore like to record our sincere gratitude to all these kind collaborators of ADESH for giving their time to share their frank views about their involvement with the GED project.

It should also be noted that the contents of this report (including the comments and recommendations given here) are those of the team of independent evaluators and not of ADESH or Diakonia Bangladesh. We are responsible for any error or omission. The undersigned will be grateful to receive any feedback on the report so that necessary correction and amendment can be incorporated for future record.

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Cover photo: Women group members in a village in Ashulia Union attending an orientation meeting on CRM (Citizen's Response Mechanism). Photo-credit: Evaluation Team.

List of Abbreviations

ADESH	Association of Development for Economic and Social Help
ASK	Ain O Salish Kendra (Legal Aid Organisation)
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust
BDT	Bangladesh Taka
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
CRM	Complaint and Response Mechanism
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GED	Gender Equality and Dignity
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HR	Human Rights or Human Resource
LFA	Logical Framework Analysis
LGI	Local Government Institutions
M & E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFI	Micro Financial Institution
MRA	Micro-credit Regulatory Authority
OWDEB	Organisation for Women's Development in Bangladesh
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicator
OIP	Open Information Policy
PMEL	Planning Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
RBA	Rights Based Approach
RMG	Readymade Garments
UP	Union <i>Parishad</i>
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
SWOT	Strength Weakness Opportunity Threats

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1. Introduction

Association of Development for Economic & Social Help (ADESH) is a national NGO by mandate but concentrates its work in the Savar *upazila* area situated at the outskirts of Dhaka city. Although within the city limits of greater Dhaka, the area has an interesting mix of urban and rural characteristics. Parts of it can be regarded as pure rural and agricultural society, while the rest is dotted with many industrial units with semi-urban lifestyles adopted by the majority low income population living there. As a result, the area offers a unique socio-economic context with many different challenges to address for a development NGO like ADESH. The organisation has been implementing a number of projects since its inception in 1988. It has now established itself as a small but well-respected local NGO; its constituency has spread across seven unions and many different people and stakeholders. One of ADESH's key interventions has been in the area of gender equality, democratic governance and human rights, and in this it has been supported by the Swedish organisation, Diakonia. The other major work is in micro-finance (MF), provided for the most of ADESH clientele except the participants in 'Gender Equality and Dignity' (GED) programme, supported by Diakonia. The other seven projects that the organisation implements are much smaller in size, if not in significance. This evaluation is mainly focused on the aforementioned GED programme, covering the period from January 2011 to December 2013. According to plan, ADESH engaged an independent team of consultants to conduct this evaluation towards the end of the phase and prior to a possible extension of Diakonia support of a new phase. Accordingly, the three-member team of evaluators began their work from late October 2013, by reviewing the relevant literature and making field visits to undertake consultation meetings and focus group discussions with members of the reference group and the key stakeholders of the project. This document presents the key draft findings of the evaluation.

1.1 About ADESH

The organisation was initiated in 1988 by a few enthusiastic young people committed to changing society, who then registered it with different government authorities. In 1991, ADESH received its registration from the Department of Social Service, from the NGO Affairs Bureau in 1992 enabling the organisation to directly receive foreign funding for its work and with the Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA) in 2007.

Vision: The organisation envisions building an "equitable society" through ensuring peoples' participation in working towards a just and gender balanced society (mission). As part of its strategy, ADESH currently implements a set of large and small projects in the following areas:

- Gender Equality and Human Rights
- Water & Sanitation
- Environment & Climate Change
- HIV/AIDS
- Primary Health & Hygiene
- Sexual & Reproductive Health Rights
- Bridging Education
- Institution Building & Micro Finance

1.2 The GED

The GED project has been planned for the socio-economic development of disadvantaged people, especially poor women in the community, with a view to reducing the prevailing gender discrimination. The project is financially and technically supported by Diakonia Bangladesh. The

partnership relationship between ADESH and Diakonia is quite well-established; it began in 1995. The GED project had already completed its previous phase which was evaluated in 2010. As mentioned about, while the current phase came to an end in December 2013, a new proposal is being developed.

The overall objective of the GED project is to “Improve quality of life of the downtrodden community in a sustainable way in the operational area of ADESH”, while the Purpose stands as “Decreasing discrimination among women & men groups with community people and conscious (sic) them for an equal social system and establish their legal rights, dignity and economic enhancement”. The project has specified four results to achieve during the three-year period. These are:

- Result: 1. Gender equality improved;
- Result: 2. Awareness and respect for human rights increased;
- Result: 3. Actors working with civil society for strengthening democracy; and
- Result: 4. Improve access to Disaster Management & Environment sustainability.

The project has been implementing in 90 villages of seven unions in Savar *upazila* of Dhaka district. Its target groups are socially and economically disadvantaged women and men, who are described as ‘disadvantaged, oppressed, neglected and living in backward rural settings’. A total of 6,630 women and men are the project’s direct beneficiaries (or target group).

1.3 Objective of evaluation

Broadly speaking, the key objective of the evaluation is to produce an independent assessment of the project’s performance. It is intended to present evidence in support of the project’s strengths and weakness with particular reference to effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability. Diakonia support to ADESH has continued for over 15 years now, and the particular intervention of GED with its current aims and approach for at least six years. Findings of an evaluation about three years ago were positive overall; similarly, this one has found no particular reason for major concern in terms of the project’s overall value generation. The evaluation thus attempts to highlight some of the good practices together with some critical analysis of both ADESH and the project.

1.4 Methodology

An intensive field investigation following a particular sampling method to visit several beneficiary groups formed the basis of this evaluation. As well as focus group discussions, several discussion meetings were held with a range of different stakeholders, including the executive board of ADESH, the Women’s Forum, and a civil society group organised by the project. An extensive literature review conducted before and after the fieldwork was also an important source of information and analysis for this work. A self-appraisal workshop with the senior staff of ADESH to record their key perceptions of the organisation and its work was another important evaluation method adopted for the purpose. In particular, we have tried to check if the interventions had been on track and were meeting the project objectives.

The evaluation generally followed an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach using participatory techniques. During the introductory meeting with staff, the purpose and approach was clarified and a self-appraisal (SWOT) was conducted. This particular approach was useful in allowing all concerned to open up and help the evaluation process achieve a greater depth. The literature review included annual reports of the project and the organisation, baseline study reports of 2007 and 2010, and the project proposal and ‘profile’ of the organisation. Over a dozen focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with organised community groups in their homes, comprising a mix of old, new, those in deep rural areas and a few in the Savar industrial area. We also spoke with some of the key informants, such as *union parishad* members, an *upazila* vice chair(woman), and heads of local government departments who were invited to the ADESH office to meet the evaluation team. During the visits to different field areas, the team

also spoke informally with a few local people to obtain their views of ADESH's work. The key management personnel including the Executive Director were interviewed separately to gain an insight into the organisational capacity and preparedness in relation to implementing the project. Before all of this however, the team made several 'virtual' visits to ADESH's impressive website at www.adeshbd.org for information.

1.5 Limitations

Because of country-wide political unrest and continuous calls for *hartal* (general strike) by the opposition political parties during the evaluation period, it was quite a challenge to keep to the planned visit schedule. However, with cooperation and flexibility of ADESH staff and the stakeholders, the evaluation team covered everything necessary. The report of the recent baseline survey (2010) was useful in informing us about ADESH beneficiary groups, but it was not used extensively for this evaluation to compare results as the periodical progress reports by ADESH had been covering that. Moreover, since this evaluation was meant primarily to be a qualitative assessment, scope and time for a statistical analysis of change based on the baseline survey was limited.



Discussion Meeting with Women's Groups in a Savar Village

2. Key changes achieved by project

2.1 Visible wind of change

It is commonly acknowledged that one of the most difficult challenges in development is breaking societal cultural barriers, built over many years of harbouring negative social values, superstition and prejudice. It requires a lot of hard work to motivate people to change their perceptions of those old ways of life which are detrimental to progress. GED has successfully engaged communities who are disadvantaged in many ways and have inspired them to adopt change towards establishing a gender-equal and democratic culture in their lives. In a hierarchical social structure where patriarchy is deep-rooted, this is a demanding aspiration. The evaluation team is happy to report that there has been evidence of change in gender relations and of reformed behaviour between women and men in the GED project area. The focus group interviews with community groups revealed familiarity with the ideas of equity and social justice with particular reference to women's emancipation. Women spoke confidently in the presence of men on how the latter have learned to change their attitude and behaviour towards women as a result of the programme enabling them to appreciate issues related to equal rights.

In many places visited by the evaluation team, it was clear that a process has been set in motion to creating sustainable impacts in the personal, family as well as community lives. What is less clear however is the quality of change. To what extent are the key concepts of the project concerning equity, democratic governance and social justice comprehended by the staff of the organisation as well as the community? Some groups did not appear very articulate about the rationale of change, although appreciated the need for it very well. The evaluation team has questions about the rigour of engagement and standard of inputs provided by field-level staff. Some of the changes noticed may partly be attributed to the changing overall socio-economic environment of the area, dominated by thousands of women engaged as labour in the RMG industry. Moreover, in some places the community environment was relatively open with semi-urban characteristics, where young, college-educated women volunteers and group members have enthusiastically joined the GED programme. According to one particular finding of the 2010 survey, over half of the women (on average) had decision-making power in their families regarding the education and marriage of their children, including the independence to buy goods and decide on family businesses.¹ In such a refreshingly different context, women looked vocal and self-confident. However, in the relatively remote rural areas (for example, Palthalia union) the situation with the relatively older and less educated women's group was still quite difficult, with relatively more incidences of violation of rights and relatively weaker existence of women in the family and community. Notwithstanding this, the wind of change in each of these areas can easily be traced in ADESH's programme area.

2.2 Rights orientation and Complementary actions

At the community level, where the work of ADESH is rooted, the issue of 'rights' in a rights-based programme (and organisation) somehow appeared less emphatic compared to micro-financial actions. Men and women are now increasingly aware of and recognise the value of gender equality; however their role as rights holders able to demand increased levels of responsive behaviour and accountability from the concerned institutions has been rather low-profile. During this evaluation, the team has observed how ADESH had organised a village level meeting under a Complain and Response Mechanism (CRM) programme to inform the community ("Citizens Charter") about its work, details about its legal mandate, names of responsible staff with their contact details, names of projects and budget. It appeared that ADESH was the first NGO in the area to have instituted this process. This is a very good

¹ Table 1, Decision-making ability of women in *Baseline Survey Report 2010*, NHD Foundation, p.8.

practice and a highly appreciated initiative to demonstrate the accountability and transparency of the organisation. It was expected that following the example of ADESH, other similar organisations in the area would come forward to disclose their information to the public. Under the GED programme, ADESH has received technical support from Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST) and established 'complaint boxes' at various public places/institutions to encourage people to report offences committed against women and girls (for example, sexual harassment in schools and the workplace). Although the result from this initiative is yet to be known, the initiative is commendable and it should start to create a difference in these rather under-developed areas of the country.

These small initiatives of ADESH complement the GED project very well, particularly in raising awareness of people's rights, which is closely linked with its democratic good governance strand. However, in ADESH/GED, the focus on rights appeared less emphatic than was expected. We would therefore advise ADESH to pay particular attention to orienting all its work towards a rights-based approach (RBA) model. For example, the rationale for its work on environmental and disaster risks can be explained by referring to the right to life, livelihood and security, as established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This cannot be fulfilled (or violated) when people become exposed to life-threatening environmental hazards such as toxic waste, similar pollutants or any hazardous effects on environment. Savar is perhaps the worst example in the country which is affected by multiple environmental hazards. The right to have access to a means of subsistence and be free from hunger is violated when land, water, and other natural resources become highly polluted or degraded.

In a well-functioning democratic culture where good governance prevails, any developmental action (or production process) that may have adverse environmental impact should be shared openly with citizens, public bodies and civil society and explaining how they proposed to mitigate those in the short and long terms. By allowing for transparency and participatory processes, citizens can voice their concerns and alternative solutions or remedial actions can be pursued to safeguard the environment and public interest. In the absence of such a mechanism, many environmental catastrophes have taken place. Participation of concerned citizens in decision-making processes is therefore very important to shun human rights violations, including suppression of information. From a disaster risk management perspective (e.g., avoid another Rana Plaza tragedy), programmes such as GED can mobilize the CSOs and relevant government bodies (e.g., the Department of Environment) to make open disclosure of information related to potential hazards and risks associated with all new and old factory establishments in Savar by using the recently enacted "right to information" law.

2.3 Context sensitivity of ADESH

Human rights are a precondition for sustainable development and proper environmental protection. Rights to life and security, as established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the right to health, as established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, cannot be fulfilled or are violated when people become exposed to life-threatening environmental hazards such as toxic wastes, pollutants or hazardous radiations. The rights to have access to a means of subsistence and be free from hunger are also violated when land, water, or other natural resources become highly polluted or degraded.

The GED project has clear strategic coherence with that of the Diakonia Bangladesh. As the implementation strategy of partners differ from one NGO to another depending on the organisational priority and specific physical and demographic context of the area, ADESH has also tried to reflect its context sensitivity as much as it could. A closer review of ADESH's work and the local context, however, reveals a huge potential for development intervention. As ADESH is operational in a semi-urban area close to the capital city, one would expect it to be somewhat different in its approach from other rural based NGOs and programmes of work. While the general problem of all disadvantaged population groups in the country in relation to gender, rights and governance is more or less same, there are specific issues of concerns in the urban industrial locations such as ADESH's which are distinctly different from the majority

rural and agricultural areas. For example, apart from facing violations of legal provisions related to physical safety of the work place, women and men working in the local factories often confront different disadvantages including violation of basic labour rights. The work area of ADESH is deep inside the main industrial belt of Dhaka dominated by textiles and ready-made garments (RMG) factories. However, the evaluation team spoke with some group members who have worked in some of these factories, but their work-related problems did not seem to constitute a particular concern for ADESH or Diakonia. Violation of labour rights including low pay, limited work space, limited wash room facilities, lack of fire safety including proper fire exits comprise some of the key concerns in these places which often make headlines of the national daily newspapers. ADESH is yet to undertake a programme of work to directly address some of these problems of the poor workers in the area.

ADESH's active participation (with assistance from Diakonia) in the search and rescue operation in the aftermath of the collapse of Rana Plaza in April 2013 is commendable, and there is now a contingency plan and agreement between the two organisations (although without specific agreement on finance). Poor RMG women workers are always the majority victims of such disasters. Doesn't ADESH have a role to play to address similar future risks and current vulnerabilities of hundreds of thousands of poor factory workers in the area².

This should thus seem natural ground for ADESH's interest, particularly given that the staff has close familiarity with the issues and positive rapport with the affected women workers. The evaluation team has discussed the issue with ADESH management who have expressed their guarded agreement to the idea that they should increasingly work with factory workers. However, as this area has recently seen a lot of labour unrest, ADESH has been somewhat wary of not wanting to be seen as adding fuel to this particular fire. When working against unauthorised effluent discharge in the local water bodies by the textile dyeing factories, the management of ADESH had reportedly received anonymous phone calls threatening their lives. While we understand the risk involved in such work, we also know that there are ways and areas of work that are at the same time productive and yet less confrontational. For example, OWDEB, a Diakonia partner NGO in Chittagong, has been working with RMG workers to achieve improved deals from the factory authorities for its workers through helping them with enhanced knowledge and awareness about their rights. This evaluation would recommend that ADESH finds some innovative ways to engage the RMG industry and its workers in Savar to both help the environment and the interests of the poor workers.

Similarly, another local context of Savar is that it is the largest brick manufacturing belt in the country producing millions of clay bricks in hundreds of kilns to feed the booming construction industry of Dhaka. While these are one of the prime sources of CO₂ emission polluting the air of Dhaka city, it is also very difficult to stop them as they meet the needs of the ever-expanding physical infrastructure building projects of the country that employs hundreds of thousands of unskilled poor workers. Violation of labour rights and safety rules in these kilns are a source of concern, and ADESH had attempted to address some of these problems, but stopped due to lack of cooperation from the kiln owners and labour contractors. This is unfortunate, and we believe a re-assessment leading to a more effective intervention strategy found to support poor workers and reduce the level of pollution by appropriate means. Action research is the first step to take, before designing a full-fledged project proposal.

There are many automobile workshops (known as *motor-garage*) in Savar, employing hundreds of young men as under-paid labourers. An ADESH volunteer group had suggested that these disadvantaged workers also needed attention from the human rights organisations like ADESH as people (children) are made to work here under harsh work conditions with extremely unfair wage arrangements, when these children badly needed education and health services, among

² There are an estimated 3.5 million RMG workers in the country, 80 per cent of whom are women; Savar has the biggest concentration of garments factories.

others. The organisation might look into this and plan a possible intervention programme with a thoughtful approach.

2.4 Tools and approaches of the project

ADESH facilitates formation of (more or less homogenous) *samities* (groups) with disadvantaged sections of the target people – mostly women in the community. Many activities are undertaken to develop a sense of togetherness and purpose among group members. These include group discussions to raise awareness of different social concerns, training in livelihood skills, as well as organising village meetings and workshop on subjects like gender equality, human rights, disaster management, HIV/AIDS, and agricultural adaptation. There are old and young groups, including a few which were formed way back in 1995. Many of those are also included in this phase of the GED project, which raises questions regarding how long it takes for a group to become fully aware and developed, and thus no longer require external assistance on a regular basis. Since the beginning of the last phase (2007) of Diakonia support, separate Gender groups have been formed with no connection with ADESH's micro-credit programme. However, family of the Gender group members continue to get credit support from ADESH.

2.5 Dilemma with Micro-Finance

Although micro-credit is an established area of ADESH's expertise, the organisation is more renowned for its mission in promoting gender equality and human rights, an area in which ADESH appears to be very passionate. However, as the organisation also appears somewhat insecure in financial terms, it has continued its work in micro-finance. This has a clientele size of 3,140 and a revolving fund of about BDT41 million, including ADESH's own fund of BDT16.6 million. If it wishes to be known mainly as a rights-based organisation, ADESH might have to consider relegating MF, if not completely withdraw from it, to a completely separate management or link the groups with other MFIs of the area.

Meanwhile, according to ADESH, the gender groups are separate from the micro-credit groups. On further probing, however, it was learned that although many 'completely new' gender groups have been formed in new working areas, some of the groups included members of the micro-credit client households who are not involved with any credit activities. This means that in some of the areas, instead of organising entry into new households, ADESH has found it convenient to simply open a new GED window in the same micro-finance client households. When we sought further clarity on this, we were assured that separate meetings for GED and micro-finance were held by different staff, and often on separate days. Hence, there has not been a significant reduction in the regular operational efforts. What might be of interest is to note the inevitable spill-over effect that the MF programme participants would receive in the form of increased awareness on GED issues.

2.6 Project inputs and change monitoring

The evaluation team feels that ADESH staff needs to create a strong learning culture within the organisation with regular studies, debates and reflections on core issues of the project. The front line staff who are responsible to spread the ideas and messages among the communities are to be commended for their enthusiasm though, if not highly accomplished. Each staff member has a number of different responsibilities and is required to cover a large number of groups within a given timeframe, and thus hardly gets an opportunity to pause, reflect and learn. A multipurpose worker often cannot concentrate on a single concept for long. This might have had an influence on some of the men and women group members who were less articulate about certain key values the project promotes. For example, most groups were unable to explain in clear terms why there was a need to positively discriminate women in our society. Similarly, people living in a community where there is a mix of different religious and cultural groups, the perception about respecting each other's beliefs seemed absent. Although

there was no report about any communal conflict, people's lack of interest about each other was also not a sign of healthy relationship. We believe staff needs to be trained on the value of fostering a pluralistic democratic culture, which involves mutual cooperation and equal rights to practice one's beliefs, rites and rituals. This is a prerequisite if the objectives of attaining gender equality and good governance are to be fulfilled. For this to happen, the project needs to put emphasis on fostering diversity, tolerance and mutual respect. That the concept of gender equality is closely linked with democratic culture and fundamental human rights - needs to be adequately highlighted at all levels.

Different tools and methods used for group discussions (information booklets, charts, and modules) looked quite well-developed, although it was difficult from the limited interaction with the target population and stakeholders to gather fully how skilfully these were used. To address this, the management of the programme needs to adopt a thorough monitoring practice. The current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system requires the recording of the number of outputs (e.g., group meetings or training) achieved, which is one task; monitoring the effects (or results) of these outputs is another. One method of quality assurance would be to check the resolution books that every group maintain, ensuring that they are properly maintained with details about the issues discussed, questions raised, answers given and most importantly, decisions adopted³. It may thus be a good idea to instruct each of the groups to end their meetings by adopting at least one or two decisions which reflect commitment to take some (even a small) 'actions', preferably in line with the topic discussed. The recorded decisions should then be reviewed in the following meeting and if needed further decisions for follow-up actions are taken. If no practical action is generated by the process, learning by the group members remains vague and uncertain. Needless to say, this will help to measure progress of work in more concrete terms.

It is also important that staff at all levels of the organisation received refresher training to periodically re-orient and update themselves on crucial issues and themes of their work through external input as well as through in-house discussion and debate as a part of their staff development programme. The culture of learning in the organisation should be systematically disseminated among staff and the community groups that ADESH works with. It is very important to ensure the ability of the organisation to adapt to the changing climate and concepts of development in the rapidly changing socio-economic and cultural context in which we work. Through our reviews of its monthly and annual staff meeting formats, we believe that ADESH has a deep interest in becoming a learning organisation and that the above recommendation is in line with that spirit.

2.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

ADESH expressed confidence in their ability to track the changes which occur as a result of the interventions of the project. The project's annual reports also presented many behavioural changes in percentage terms compared with the baseline information, for example, practice of dowry, knowledge on HIV and AIDS, freedom of movement, participation of women in cultural activities, and the participation of male family members in household activities. This indicates the hard work and sincerity of the implementing agency to remain aware of effectiveness of their work. However, the baseline survey of 2010 was conducted among only 33 per cent of *samity* members and 67 per cent of non-members in 71 villages. Comparison of the baseline information of 2007 and 2010 creates some confusion with regard to setting baseline indicators for social status. It gives the impression that compared to the situation in 2007, the situation of women in 2010 had deteriorated, which seems unlikely, given the national statistics which this result does not match. However, it is explained by ADESH that a very small sample of only 71 villages in Savar area might not always reflect the real situation in the country.

³ It was observed that the group Resolution Books mainly recorded the names of attendees and the topics discussed, but they hardly ever record any *resolution* or decisions to act thereupon.

Analysis of context, which sets the rationale for a particular intervention, is an important part of any planning process. Although this was duly done by ADESH in its project document, a review of the relevant statements shows that the analysis of the problem was far from adequate, deep or critical. Considering the particular semi-urban nature of the working area in Savar, with its concentration of many and varied industrial units, the issues (including environmental hazards and pollution, the struggle of the poor garment workers, their lack of safety, and extent of child labour engaged in hazardous jobs) would have been better reflected in the problem analysis and description of the context. It is expected that the organisation will improve on this in its application for support for the next phase of GED.

The organisation has given us a generally positive impression of a busy and active entity that is serious about achieving its work targets on time and maintaining external linkages fairly effectively and efficiently. Where it seemed somewhat weak and under-developed is in the area of Planning (as noted above). This might also result in weaker monitoring and evaluation capacity. Even if we do not question the process adopted to develop plans, the tools used for this purpose (for example, the logframe) do not give one a clear picture of their ability in this respect. The logical framework and its contents could have been simpler, much more logical and coherent, with a better structuring of purpose and results statements. The project logframe looked far from clear in its hierarchy of logic and quite different from the standard logframe. For example, the key results of the project are stated once under 'objectively verifiable indicators' (OVI) and the supposed indicators under each result also looked more like results than indicators. Elsewhere in the logframe, the results reappear in the first column of the intervention logic, but what is given under OVI now (on the right hand side) are numerical targets to achieve in different years as compared to the base year determined by a separate baseline study. What was noted under 'Main activities' in the project document were basically the target number of men and women to be reached by the programme. As a consequence, the periodical reports on the progress of the project looked very mechanistic and somewhat dull reading. Therefore, the evaluation team recommends that a) Diakonia make the model of logframe it requires its partners to use amply clear and b) work towards making it look closer to the standard logic model used by most NGOs and key donors in Bangladesh.



Community members intently follow a presentation on CRM given by ADESH staff

3. GED Programme: the Key Conclusions

This section gives an overall qualitative assessment of the project structured around the key Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (DAC)⁴ criteria.

3.1 Effectiveness

With a set of rather high objectives, the project has a simple yet effective design. The tools and approaches it adopts to achieve the four different results are appropriate to the needs of the particular disadvantaged population group the ADESH works with. Some parts of the project of course looked stronger than the others. For example, the effects of work on gender equality appear quite strong, with most household members the evaluation team has met looking excited about their newly-acquired knowledge and experience. However, their enthusiasm with regard to human rights, good governance, and disaster management was much less pronounced. When we met, separately, civil society representatives and the local government actors (women members of the *union parishad*), the latter seemed much more aware. The combined effects of the two together, if that was the strategy chosen by ADESH for achieving the project objectives, this is fine.

Much of the basic background problems were somehow linked with the general level of poverty and inequality, although the incidence of extreme poverty was possibly minimal in this part of the city. The project does not directly address the aspects of poverty which were linked with economic and livelihoods concerns. Instead, its focus has been on changing prejudice against women and stereotypes regarding the socially enforced dependent position of women. Achieving an impact on attitudes and behaviours is no mean task, and to achieve this, a major thrust has been put in the household level intervention mechanism. The male group we spoke with admitted they have realised that women have long been subjected to unjust treatment, disrespect, repression and discrimination. Both men and women are now aware of their rights, and how to claim them, and who the duty bearers are. They know the doors to knock at in order to access services when they need. In the process, the quality of life of the project participants and their respective households has improved, while their voice is now being heard at both household and community levels.

Although there is a broad thematic unity between gender equality, human rights and democratic good governance, in terms of general outcome the programme appeared to be more effective in achieving gender equality – fostering good governance and assertion of rights by weaker sections of the population have achieved relatively slower progress. There is no denying that correcting skewed gender balance in Bangladesh society has been a very formidable challenge given that it involves a century's old distorted perception of women's dependent position both in the family and the wider society. Change is needed to the negative beliefs, values and practices in relation to entrenched power relations based on the concept of male superiority.

It is not impossible that part of the change has been possible due to the changing external socio-economic environment of the country. Since the early 1990s, the large-scale participation of women in industrial work has caused a tremendous whirlwind which has deeply shaken entrenched misconceptions about the 'limited' ability of women. This has slowly but surely contributed to creating a favourable socio-economic and political environment in the country.

While gender is predominantly a matter of changing personal and social values, establishing democratic good governance is more dependent on changing institutional structures, systems, and the mind-set of the people managing them. Although access to and influence of common people are more on the local government institutions (LGIs) compared to regional or national level ones, the decision making powers of these LGIs are tied to a long, upward, vertical

⁴ DAC stands for Development Assistance Committee of OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

national hierarchy of organisations which are not so sensitive and responsive to the needs of the people at the bottom. From the point of view of a bottom-up reform approach of the democratic culture and practice of good governance at this level, the importance of this component of the project cannot be exaggerated. However, the particular implementation strategy that ADESH follows deserves a closer review. ADESH and Diakonia Bangladesh need to draw lessons from many different LG development projects undertaken by different organisations in the country so far.

ADESH has mobilised large numbers of women as their clients for a long time now in the Savar area; however, its work with mixed groups of men and women appeared comparably minimal. As a result, ADESH provides a comfort zone which the organisation believes is a demonstration of a fully gender-responsive organisation. On the contrary however: this level of comfort keeps the programmes at the level of addressing mainly the practical needs of women from a vulnerability perspective, an approach which may however limit innovation potentials to address structural gender challenges within the households and community.

3.2 Relevance

Although few NGOs in Bangladesh are focused on promoting gender equality, human rights and good governance through direct project interventions, these are certainly considered to be highly important 'cross-cutting' concerns for national development today. Referring to the constitutional provision of equality for all in Bangladesh⁵, people frequently raise their concerns regarding the declining standard of equity and social justice in the country. In this context, reference may be made to the recent historic decision by the government of Bangladesh to finally adopt a national policy on gender and development (2011), which was the result of a long process of debate and consultation. It not only highlights gender justice, but also basic human rights of all with particular focuses on the disadvantaged groups of people including women.

The particular social context in which ADESH works is dominated by half rural, half urban low income households in the periphery of Bangladesh's capital city, Dhaka. The area mainly supplies agricultural products (vegetable, rice grain, dairy, poultry and fish) alongside hundreds of thousands of members of the manufacturing industry labour force. The communities living here can be generally characterised as highly unequal and disadvantaged; there is a lack of access to education, health and other public services, while the prevalence of social prejudice, conflict, insecurity, injustice and many illegal social practices are very high indeed. Gender discrimination against women has been one of the most pervasive problems, as reflected in many disadvantages that they face at home, at work and in the community. Members of women's groups we met who gave poignant descriptions of how their lack of awareness about their rights had allowed men to treat them cruelly in the past. The incidence of violence against women, divorce and polygamy by men, and demand for dowry from the family of girls are widespread. Since the project has been operational in the area, women have begun to see the world differently as they acquired a sense of self-esteem and social power through increased levels of knowledge and awareness. In addition, women here have largely been financially poor. Although ADESH has carried out micro-financial interventions with similar (or possibly the same) groups of women, many other NGO-MFIs operating in the area have offered micro-financial services. However, ADESH is the only organisation focused on gender equality, human rights and women's empowerment through institutional linkage and awareness-raising training.

As is appropriate for a Diakonia partner, the project by ADESH looked very much aligned with the country strategy of Diakonia Bangladesh⁶. Different stakeholders that the evaluation team

⁵ Equality of all citizens before law (Article 27). No discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, sex or place of birth (Article 28). *The Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh*.

⁶ Thematic strategies 2.2.2.3.2, 3, & 4. *Civsam Asia 2012-2015*, Diakonia.

spoke with highlighted the relevance and high value of the interventions. For most rural women, including local community leaders, access to knowledge and information on gender equality and human rights was largely absent to them before their involvement with the project. ADESH has thus effectively filled an important knowledge gap, the impact of which can be seen among different population groups including political leaders, cultural activists, and members of youth and adolescent groups.

The project has huge potential for further expansion and replication in the area and beyond, which we discuss in detail in the next section. In brief, there are professional groups (in Savar) (such as garments workers, textile and dyeing factory workers, brick kiln labourers, young motor garage workers), all of whom are subjected to many kinds of unfair treatment (including gender discrimination, physical and sexual abuse, and lack of work-place safety and rights). It was heartening to note that ADESH is aware of these violations and wished to do something to address them; however, it is unable to muster enough confidence and resources to engage themselves in these challenging areas with appropriate adaptation of the (GED) approach.

3.3 Impact

As intended, the combined effects of ADESH's outputs and activities have left a community-wide influence in changing and shaping people's attitude and behaviour. This we learned from both formal and informal discussions held with people of the area. Lively focus group discussions held in the houses of ADESH's beneficiary women revealed that their enhanced level of awareness of gender equality and rights have led to a number of benefits which were not directly intended. For example, one said she used to wonder how their enhanced level of knowledge and experience gained through monthly meetings with ADESH staff could increase their decision-making power at home. They then realised that having control over resources (wealth and assets) gave women them additional power, and started to save money from their own income, gradually increasing their access to property and wealth. A number of women said that in the past ownership of all property effectively rested in the hands of the male members of the family. Now many women hold title deeds in their own names for property they inherited or gained through own income.

This is very unusual among poor women of the area. Moreover, women now seem able to think about how their children can also be empowered, despite the family asset size being not so significant. They said *all of them* now place definite emphasis on education for their children, particularly the girls. On cross-checking with the local school and elders, we learned that most children of the area are school-goers today although many of their parents had not been. There has also been a big change in women's ability to seek services from government health centres; they now know about government entitlements of monthly allowances for destitute women, widows and elderly people with no support. Although ADESH does not directly work to enhance political awareness of local people, it was observed that women have gained enough confidence through their participation in the GED programme that they do not only exercise their franchise (voting rights), but also contest elections for positions in the local government bodies – often against male contestants.

Challenges still remain however in tackling some of the structural gender barriers, especially with respect to the areas that challenge the status quo and power relations between men and women. While some of the younger and better-educated women have started to work outside the home, older and uneducated women are still tied to domestic chores, and change in traditional power-relations does not appear so pronounced. Control over income and expenditure, access to market places, entertainment facilities (no women seen drinking tea at local tea stalls), and restricted mobility of women might also indicate the denial of a voice for women at the household level. Although the initiatives studied show the potential of what can be achieved, men need to be brought more centrally into project design, so we have an increased buy-in of the ideas, and that they are thus made part of the decision-making process of finding solutions to barriers to gender equality. Although, men's tacit approval of women's

participation in the group activities was clear, the overall rate of their (men's) participation needed to be much higher to promote lasting gender equality.

3.4 Efficiency

We believe the process of open and transparent approach to selecting women beneficiaries with full knowledge (and possibly the consent) of the community is efficient. However, group participants, particularly women, need to be more articulate and able to explain in clear terms the reasons of structural imbalance in the society and how that must be corrected by positively discriminating women in the short to medium term.

The GED programme by ADESH has strong links with local government authorities, local elites, CSO groups, and young volunteer groups, all of which help in furthering the project activities and achieving its objectives very well. ADESH participates in different programme activities undertaken by different agencies (NGOs, CSOs, GoB) in the areas that promote gender equality and human rights.

ADESH's three-year GED project has a huge total of 49 different activities to execute in order to achieve the aforementioned four results. Besides this, there are many regular administrative and financial transaction activities including facilitation of external audits and an evaluation. The value generated by the project is certainly very high if we compare it with the financial allocation (BDT11,460,470) ADESH had for its implementation.

A review of the budget shows that more than half of it (about 51 per cent) was allocated against personnel and staff development costs. In addition, the administrative cost of the project was about 10.5%, and about 18.5% was for 'Other Costs' to implement the program. That means only about 20 per cent of the budget was allocated for direct program costs. Although the project is focused on awareness-raising and does not provide any material support, this allocation is still very low.

The team was very appreciative of ADESH's capacity to mobilise and enthuse civil society and functionaries of government departments in promoting the objectives of the project. This certainly has a strategic value for both ADESH and GED project. It was known that this has been achieved by a small financial cost. Not expressing specific concern about the extent of financial cost involved in it, the principle of giving a financial reward ('allowance') might raise question about true motivation of the concerned 'resource persons'. We recognise that this is a difficult issue for ADESH alone to handle in the particular context it operates, and we cannot clearly say this is completely unjustified. What we would advise though that as a rights based institution, it is important for ADESH to remain alert that it does not encourage the duty bearers to forget about their responsibilities and claim on their time by right holders.

3.5 Sustainability

The GED programme has clearly had some very positive influences on the beneficiaries, members of their households and the community in which they live. Sustainability of these benefits is indicated by the trend of change noticed in the attitude and behaviour of the community groups, government officials and civil society, in their efforts to mainstream gender equality and good governance. The project has been able to influence some of the structural gender and governance issues that will bear fruit in the long run. For example, the practice of registration of birth and marriage has now become almost an established phenomenon compared to some years ago when it was very rare. Most households now appear to know that one can access free legal assistance in the event of violation of rules against dowry, child marriage, and violence against women. An increased level of interest and participation of women in local political and local government institutions are indicative of positive institutional change. A discussion meeting with a group of about twelve women union *parishad* members revealed how in the past the male-dominated council of union *parishads* tried to marginalise them by hiding information from them and not giving them any role or authority in the

implementation of development projects. After their participation in the ADESH organised training programmes on leadership, the women UP members have learned about their official functions, roles, rights and responsibilities. As a result, they have now become more assertive and active in their role as leaders of local government institutions. Women members now know all necessary information of the UP related to both financial and non financial matters, while their male counterparts have learned to show appropriate respect to women members. We also have reasons to believe that small local initiatives like this (i.e., GED) has had a great influence in formulating and adopting the much valued national policy for women's development (2011).

Similarly, strong campaigns against pollution caused by the local industrial units have forced many packaging, printing and dyeing factories in the area to establish effluent treatment plants.

The GED project of ADESH has particular focus on bringing about qualitative change in the lives of people through raising awareness of the need of gender equality and respect for human rights. The chances of these non-material inputs to last is generally regarded as being higher than those of material inputs or physical assets. However, without practice the acquired knowledge and experience may gradually dissipate with time. In order to ensure sustainability of the benefits of the project, ADESH staff regularly monitor actions undertaken by different group members aimed at changing prejudices, stereotypes and negative practices. The evaluation team has learned that many concerned people have achieved change, which in areas has been rapid, in others, somewhat slow. For example, women are working fast to get away from their financial dependence on men by acquiring skills, education and assets, but it is taking time to remove some of the negative practices like dowry, early marriage of girl children and violence against women. One of the greatest achievements of these families is seeing change in the domestic roles of men and women, where men are known to be increasingly assuming responsibilities of managing household chores.

Increased activism by the project stakeholders towards establishing democratic norms and practices is creating an environment that encourages others to take part in the process of local governance. Thus people are increasingly becoming informed about and aware of their rights. Moreover, increased leadership capacity, particularly among women, in conflict resolution, practicing voting rights, mediating in various disputes and participation in commercial and financial activities have become an accepted way of life. Some of the institutional changes brought about by the project would be difficult to reverse in the future. For example, the practice of the *union parishad* organising open house events to announce its annual budget, and government officials attending NGO-organised programmes to give technical advice are considered positive and sustainable progress.



When the young housewives at the dooryards spoke of the change

4. Organisational Capacity

4.1 *Strength and Weakness*

The internal perception of the organisational strength and weaknesses by the staff was discussed and recorded during a self-appraisal exercise conducted by the evaluation team in October 2013. The key results of the SWOT analysis has been annexed to this report. The evaluation team was very appreciative of the free and frank attitude of the staff in discussing internal organisational issues related to their glory and concerns. The following discussion also has reference to sections 15 and 16 (page 45) of the published Annual Report of 2011-12 where they have listed down their strengths and weaknesses.

ADESH is indeed a well established organisation with all required organisational mandate, governance and management structure, systems and procedures. They have a good governance and accountability structure to meet both internal and external requirements. For example, apart from regularly holding the Board meetings, ADESH has been quite systematic and timely in meeting the reporting requirements of donors and government authorities. The evaluation team however, would like to point out some of the areas of the organisation that needs further improvement.

It does not yet have a strategy plan. An organisation without a proper strategic direction with appropriate long term and short term goals is like a rudderless boat. ADESH is a matured 22 years old organisation, yet it does not have a coherent work strategy with appropriate vision that can clearly explain why it is working with this particular combination of projects (there are nine different projects with different technical and thematic focus). It is time that ADESH identifies its true strengths and builds on them, rather than drifting into newer areas of work. The strongest asset the organisation has are its external linkages and its institutional (however imperfect) credibility in the outside world. The organisation has a very good rapport with the local government administration, civil society groups, women's leaders, and Bangladesh's political parties, as well as a host of national and international organisations. These are all listed (rightly so) as opportunities by the staff in a SWOT analysis; however, it must learn how to properly utilise these to alleviate some of its weakness and threats.

In order to sustain and capitalise on the above strength, ADESH needs to work on removing a number of crucial 'weaknesses', that is, beyond not having branch offices or inadequate staff training opportunities. We have emphasised the need of a strategy plan; however, closely linked to this is the need to enhance the capacity of staff to logically plan its projects and find out how the combined efforts of different projects contribute to achieving the organisational vision and goals. This refers to the need for an efficient PMEL (planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning) system that links the micro-level work at households with the macro (or broader) objectives stated in the project goals, purposes and results. This is not to say that the current set of projects are incoherent and not linked to the vision and mission statements, but rather to impress upon ADESH that the organisation needs to be led by its own conscious decision to focus on particular fields of work so that its institutional identity is clearer. Once that is achieved, it should give the organisation a stronger sense of purpose, increased level of effectiveness and impact, and improved sense of sustainability. The worry about "inadequate funds" that most non-profit organisations have stems from ADESH's lack of self-confidence. Once an organisation is absolutely clear about its true strengths and have learned how to build on them, it should not have that kind of worries at all.

4.2 *Management of ADESH and future of GED*

The general skills and ability of ADESH staff members appear positive, along with their commitment to the organisation. However, as noted above, a continuous process of staff development needs to be put in place, to ensure staff remain up-to-date with current issues and information related to their work, enabling them to gain an in-depths understanding of the

subjects they deal with. The Executive Director and the Programme Coordinator of ADESH are two of the three founding members of the organisation, while the third is the present Chairperson. This speaks of continued deep interest and involvement in the organisation. However, while this is commendable, the organisation also needs a befitting management structure with competent personnel from outside to match its current expansion mode. ADESH is now working in seven different unions of Savar *upazila* and has 42 regular staff. Understandably, the leadership has less time now for fieldwork than a few years ago. Although the expansion has been gradual and did not extend beyond one geographical area, the diverse nature of work ADESH is increasingly getting involved with, with a number of new projects/programmes, surely means a call for more staff with different skills and appropriate expertise will be required in the near future.

For a project like GED, it requires a very sensitive and competent management including a strong system of monitoring and evaluation in place. Otherwise, there is a risk of repeating the same awareness-raising messages year after year without its goals being attained. When visiting some of the older groups, it was realised that members were not aware of there being any vision within the group regarding their future goal, nor did ADESH have a particular plan of spinning those off as independent entities after a certain period of nursing. It is therefore imperative that the leadership of ADESH devises a plan to move on from the older groups and bringing about innovations in its method and approach of work in promoting gender equality, human rights and environmental safety.

Frequent staff turnover (owing, reportedly, to low levels of salary) has been identified by staff as a problem. Without analysing details related to qualification and experience of the present staff and the pay-package on offer by ADESH, it is difficult to make a judgement about this. However, the evaluation team would recommend initiating a process of rationalising the ADESH salary structure through comparison with equivalent organisations in the area. At the same time, there may also be a need to employ one or two senior level staff with capacity to independently conceive, develop, and effectively implement innovative programmes of work.

4.3 Institutional Linkages

The participation of a wide range of CSOs, government departments and representatives of local government bodies in ADESH activities represents an encouraging array of stakeholders. Mobilisation of this mid-upper crust of society in support of the project (and organisation) is very important, particularly because they uphold and promote key social values. Influencing this group regarding gender equality, good governance and human rights is essential for the creation of a wider and deeper social impact. It was indeed a very refreshing experience for the evaluation team to speak with people representing different key government departments and leaders of the civil society who were very supportive of ADESH especially because, as they said, the GED project was addressing some of the crucial social and political issues which most other NGO projects in the area do not do. It was indeed commendable for ADESH to have been able to earn the respect and confidence of the leading authorities and personalities of its constituency.

At another level, ADESH is closely linked with a group of specialised (national and international) organisations whose support it often needs and seeks to complement its work in rights and governance area. For example, its membership with the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), and its partnerships with NGO Forum for Drinking Water, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Credit & Development Forum (CDF), MIX Market, USA, Freshwater Action Network South Asia (FANSA), Bangladesh, Centre for Disability in Development (CDD), and Centre for Services & Information on Disability (CSID) have all been very rewarding for ADESH. Such network support allows the organisation to learn about the work of others who are in leading positions in their respective technical areas, and thus contribute to strengthening its own work. With such a wealth of wider contacts, ADESH should be able to demonstrate a much higher level of performance capacity than now. Its leadership needs to find appropriate strategies to employ this 'capital base' for building a stronger organisation.

4.4 Communication outputs and their value

ADESH has been very efficient in producing many different useful policy documents, study reports, training modules and procedure manuals (see Annex 3). A rapid assessment of the documents showed that some of them need improvement in the quality of language (both Bangla and English) and the analysis of information. Many are currently inadequate. For example, the HR policy document not only reflects the absence of important procedures like provision for lactating mothers, per diem rate for staff travelling out of station, transport for women staff, it also states that ADESH does not yet have a provident fund or a policy related to it.

The ADESH website was found to be quite informative, user-friendly and up-to-date with information on the most recent developments of the organisation, including images from its ongoing work. It also has useful links to policy documents and reports of the organisation. A glitch however was found in the 'Strategic Framework' link, which takes the user to unrelated material on Adaptation to Climate Change in Bangladesh. Yet it was concluded that compared to many Bangladeshi NGO websites, this one is very vibrant, active and useful.

4.5 Management Practice

As a relatively small organisation, the management practice of ADESH appears quite sound, transparent and effective. The work of ADESH is spread over seven unions of Savar *upazila* among 6,500 direct beneficiaries (members). The entire field operation is managed from ADESH's central office in Anandapur, Savar, with field locations up to ten kilometres away. Although it has about nine different projects, the major focus has been on GED, micro-credit and a housing project for the poor. To deal with all of this, the organisation has a simple management structure that seems to work well. The Executive Director and the (programme) Coordinator form the senior management team supported by the Accounts head (Accounts Officer). Day-to-day operations are managed from the main office at Savar directly with the help of a fleet of motorbikes and mobile phone communication. Some staff members expressed the wish for a couple of field offices, particularly at faraway locations, in order to save travel time and carry out their work more efficiently.

The key decision-making forum for field operations is the monthly staff meeting attended by almost all key staff (except support staff). Recent review meeting minutes show that the meeting shares activity reports, information on various organisational matters and decisions, reviews progress against plans, and adopts important management decisions. Good practice in these meetings includes the provision of field staff making demands on the time of senior managers when an important decision is to be made or a particular problem needs solving. As a good example of a learning organisation, in this forum staff also get to share his/her experience of attending meetings or training outside the organisation. The proceedings of the meetings are well-minuted, including a separate page listing all the decisions made so that they could be executed, followed up and monitored. In addition, an annual planning and review meeting held with the participation of the members of the Executive Board, besides the annual general meeting that adopts an annual plan and a budget. A discussion meeting with the members of the executive board indicated that they were fully aware of the strengths and limitations of the organisation, and helped the management with advice and support when needed.

Thus in terms of management and governance, the organisation is quite well-placed and has strong credibility among its stakeholders. However, in terms of 'content' management, it needs to have an increased level of conceptual clarity and concentration. Since the major focus of ADESH is on gender, governance, and rights of the disadvantaged people, it needs to further build its capacity in these areas. It currently has a range of projects and programmes which need to be rationalised under a strategic framework and plan (as discussed in more detail elsewhere).

4.6 Contingency Plan for Emergencies

As a voluntary development organisation, ADESH tries to respond to emergency situations with rescue, relief and rehabilitation activities. For example, in April 2013, it immediately swung into action when a disaster struck garment workers in the ill-fated Rana Plaza. Over eleven hundred people were killed and more than two thousand injured. ADESH joined the massive search and rescue operation with its own staff and volunteer corps, and later, with financial assistance from Diakonia, provided relief assistance. Following on from that experience, ADESH has developed a Contingency Plan for Emergency Management, relating to both natural and man-made disasters. This appears to have been prepared following guidelines of the international disaster management tools (standards) known as HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) and Sphere. Diakonia Bangladesh has agreed to provide similar assistance in case of future disasters. However, this plan does not indicate a particular financial limit. Allocating a budget to ADESH to be used in the immediate aftermath of a disaster on the decision of the chair of the organisation and verbal consent of the funding partner (CM, Diakonia) would be useful.



In the aftermath of the RMG factory disaster at Rana Plaza, Savar (April 24, 2013), staff and volunteers of ADESH were seen with rescue and relief support

Photo Source: ADESH Report on “Rana Plaza Collapse” to Diakonia, Bangladesh,

4.7 The Policy Instruments

ADESH has a number of policy and procedures documents to guide its work and staff behaviour. These include gender policy, staff procedures (HR Policy), open information policy (OIP), complaint response policy (CRP), and accountability framework. While this indicates a very good organisational preparation, it also gives the organisation with a lot of responsibility to watch for. A quick review of these instruments show that these contains the basic principles and procedures on particular policy themes and subjects which needs periodical review and adaptation based on practical experience. There should be interconnection between all different policies, for example, the provisions for women staff in the HR Policy should refer to the Gender Policy document where further details on the entitlements of a female staff are defined. Otherwise, HR policy document would appear almost like a gender blind document. The transport policy under 2c of the HR Policy (page 2), for instance, looks like a gender neutral subject, whereas the Gender Policy emphasises that women will be given priority over men (clause h, page 5) in allocating motorbikes. Similarly, under 5a of the HR Policy, it says that

those who (women) do not use motorbikes will be given “minimum travel costs” and food and accommodation costs (for overnight stay) as per discussion. This does not appear to reflect equal opportunities for men and women in real sense of the term, while in the social and security context of the country women deserve particular consideration. The policies do not also reflect considerations for some of the practical needs of pregnant or lactating mothers. Therefore, it is advisable to undertake reviews of these policies one after another – and update and revise them according to the need.

4.8 Phase-out Plan

The age of ADESH's groups varies from three to seventeen years, with older ones started with micro-finance. There did not seem to be a particular concern about how long support to a group should continue and with what specific aim. The staff admits the need of graduating groups and even phasing out from some of the older groups. However, there has not yet been a particular plan adopted for the purpose as recommended by the previous evaluation about three years ago (2010). When asked, it was learned that ‘non-availability’ of time was mainly responsible for that. A major finding of the 2010 evaluation was that the majority of ADESH's group members were financially well-off and needed to be replaced by people who were poorer. The baseline survey of 2010 also indicated that the average monthly income in the working area was BDT8,473 per household which was considered above the poverty threshold⁷. In a one-to-one interview, ADESH's executive director Subrata Dey said that the process of ‘moving on’ from the old areas had already started in an informal way. He explained that the informal indicators they used included observation of the changed situation of women who appeared well-established and empowered with dignity and a voice, and where children are all going to school regularly.



GED group members in a distant Savar village

⁷ This needs to be compared with the current poverty threshold determined by the national Household Expenditure and Income Survey (HEIS) by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

5. Recommendations

The GED Project

5.1. ADESH has popularly been known in its work area as an organisation dedicated to promoting human rights, gender equality and democratic governance. However, the rights-based approach to its work is still not very strong or adequately emphasised. It is therefore advised that ADESH pays particular attention to orienting all its work to an RBA model. For example, rationale for its work on environment and disaster risks can be explained by referring to 'right to life and security'. Savar is perhaps the worst example in the country, affected by multiple environmental hazards. This both restricts and violates the right of local agricultural producers to have access to a means of subsistence when land, water, and other natural resources become highly polluted or degraded by unscrupulous industrialists. ADESH needs to demonstrate its strong awareness, through its plans and actions, of the local physical and demographic realities.

5.2 Another locational characteristic of ADESH constituency is that the area is inhabited by a large group of RMG workers, the majority of whom are women. Unlike another of Diakonia's partners in Chittagong, ADESH has not yet included these workers in the project as a separate group, despite the fact that they constitute one of the area's key disadvantaged group. The main reason for this is the assumption that their needs would be different from other rural women's groups. With the Rana Plaza disaster in view, it is quite clear that men and women RMG workers lack, among others, workplace safety. In any case, before deciding a programme of action for/with these workers an assessment of their needs should be undertaken.

5.3 A past attempt to work with poor brickfield workers had been unsuccessful due to lack of cooperation on the part of the brickfield contractors and owners. If rights (wages, leave, safety) of these disadvantaged groups of people continue to be violated, ADESH has a moral duty to examine the problem again and devise a fresh approach to help them (under the new phase of GED), with a pilot intervention if possible. An all-stakeholder meeting/workshop comprising local government agencies, civil society groups, brick manufacturers' association and of course the workers could be organised to find possible ways to address issues the latter face.

5.4 In a gender equality programme, men's participation is as important as women's, as social customs, prejudices and values that are detrimental to progress and women's emancipation are mostly known to be upheld by men, particularly those holding leadership roles. Therefore, without their active cooperation it is very difficult to change gender-related structural inequality. The evaluation team recommends that efforts are undertaken to enhance the level of participation of men in the programme further.

5.5 The groups organised by ADESH are found to be generally weak in their articulation of the needs and ways of empowerment of disadvantaged women, their rights and responsibilities. It may be a reflection of inadequate orientation or training of staff in effectively motivating the group participants, if not a problem of giving enough time to them to fully comprehend the issues discussed in the meetings. It is therefore advised that the management of ADESH looks into the issue and try to improve the situation in this respect. One of the ways thought out by the evaluation team was to periodically invite external gender specialists to give talks on different gender issues to these groups.

5.6 The leadership training provided to women *union parishad* members has proved a useful tool to help women local government representatives act in a more assertive manner and thus help the LGIs function better, particularly in respect of demonstrating improved gender equality. However, when the LGIs in the context of governance in Bangladesh remain weak, measures taken by GED may have only limited effectiveness if at the same time, efforts are not made to undertake structural changes to this weak local government body. The *union parishads* are tied to a long-standing, upward and vertical national hierarchy of organisations which are relatively insensitive and responsive to the needs of the people at the bottom. From the point of

view of a bottom-up reform approach of the democratic culture and practice of good-governance, the importance of this unit cannot be exaggerated. The GED intervention in this respect is rather limited compared to its work on gender. In order to be at the forefront in its area of work, ADESH needs to make increased efforts to introduce more substantial and innovative approaches here. We recommend that ADESH puts increased efforts in this component of the programme, initially by studying other local governance development initiatives undertaken in Bangladesh by organisations like UNDP Bangladesh, SDC and Sida⁸ before introducing its own innovative one.

5.7 The Planning Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (PMEL) capacity of ADESH needs improvement. Monitoring and evaluation of any project is based on its planning, while a learning organisation must put adequate effort to ensure it has a strong system for that. The logical framework approach that ADESH has followed in preparing their project plan has much room for improvement. If we do not have a clear logframe, the task of monitoring and evaluation becomes that much more difficult. Considering the limitations of its PME tools and actions, ADESH is recommended to organise training for its staff on LFA under a PMEL capacity development initiative.

5.8 Among the groups visited by the evaluation team, some had been established for 17 years. On asking, the group members were unable to provide an idea on how long they would need to rely on ADESH's support before becoming independent. This is despite the groups being mobilised with the objective of developing them into independent bodies. The organisation now needs to find ways to reduce dependency of these groups on ADESH by adopting a plan of graduation. ADESH first needs to set phase-out criteria, and then undertake a plan of gradual phase out from the older groups.

Adesh the Organisation

5.9 The strongest asset the organisation is its external linkages and institutional credibility (whatever its imperfections) in the outside world. ADESH has a very good rapport with the local government administration, civil society groups, women leaders, the political parties as well as a host of national and international organisations. These are all listed (and rightly so) by ADESH staff as opportunities, but it must also know how to properly utilise these assets in support of its work and address the threats identified by the self-appraisal process (Annex 2).

5.10 The general skills and ability of the staff appeared positive and so was their commitment to work and to the organisation. However, there needs to be a continuous process of staff development so that staff remain up-to-date with current issues and information related to their work, and are thus able to analyse these in depth. It is therefore recommended that ADESH adopts a Staff Development Training initiative with long- and short-term objectives.

5.11 Staff turnover owing to low levels of salary has been pointed out by staff as a serious problem. Without taking a particular position on this, the evaluation team would support a process of 'rationalisation' of the salary structure by undertaking a comparative analysis with similar local NGOs in the area. At the same time, there may also be a need to recruit at least one senior level staff (preferably a woman) with the capacity to independently conceive and develop innovative projects.

5.12 ADESH has strong credibility among its stakeholders regarding its management and governance practice. However, in terms of 'content' management, the organisation needs to increase its capacity by improving its conceptual clarity and concentration. Since the major focus of ADESH is on gender, governance, and rights of the disadvantaged people, it needs to

⁸ One might check the LCG (Local Consultative Group) website on local governance:
<http://www.lcgbangladesh.org/Governance/>

further build its capacity here rather than getting lured away by any new project that comes along the way.

5.13 The organisation has a set of useful policy documents (although some are undated) which need periodical review and further development to reflect the changing needs. Moreover, there is a lack of inter-connection between the policies which might create confusion and conflict. It is therefore recommended that such anomalies are removed as much as possible by undertaking a fresh review of all the relevant documents and updating those soon.

5.14 The absence of a strategy plan of this experienced and old organisation is rather odd and unexpected. It may cause the organisation to lose its focus and drift from one project to another without making a substantial institutional gain. It is therefore timely and befitting for ADESH to start the process of developing a complete strategy plan, within a year if possible⁹.

5.15 Although, micro-credit is ADESH's old area of expertise, the organisation is better known for its role in promoting gender equality and human rights. According to some of the key informants of this evaluation, ADESH is different because of its human rights, Gender and environmental concerns and work. If ADESH wishes to become a predominantly rights based organisation, it may need to find ways to separate its work on microfinance (MF). Otherwise, there is a risk of the latter taking over the major share of its institutional energy and thus causing ADESH to lose its cutting edge¹.

5.16 The contingency plan for emergency response recently adopted by ADESH will not be a very effective or useful instrument unless its financial arrangement is ascertained. It is therefore advised that ADESH requests Diakonia (through exchange of letters) to commit to a sum of money that ADESH can spend soon after a disaster strikes, to be reimbursed later by Diakonia Bangladesh. This will enable the organisation to immediately and efficiently respond to a situation of humanitarian crisis.



Participants of Women's Groups in a Meeting in Genda, Savar.

⁹ In a separate note on an earlier version of this report, ADESH has explained how a sudden stoppage of the MF had been difficult with many clients having outstanding loans. Nevertheless, the organisation is in the process of developing a strategy plan and an exit plan to guide them out of the matured MF groups.

ANNEXURES

Annex 1: Field Visit Schedule

	Description	Method	Participants
23 October 2013			
AM	Introductory discussion	Review of the programme schedule	ED & Prog. Coordinator
	Visit to Vatpara, Savar to meet a group of men and women	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	About 20 women
	Meeting with group of women members at Genda, Savar	FGD with women of 3 different groups in Genda area	15 women from groups 2101, 53, 54, 55, 56 and 57
PM	Meeting with ADESH staff	Introduction by Evaluator; video presentation by ADESH	About 15 key staff including Programme Coordinator and ED were present.
PM	Self-appraisal of ADESH by staff	SWOT analysis: Questions and Answers	
3 November 2013			
AM	Visit to Gokulnagar High School to meet Sexual Harassment Protection Committee	Meeting with headmaster and teachers. Discussion meeting with students in a classroom	About 30 boys and girls of class IX
AM	Visit to a <i>samity</i> , Ghugudia village, Ashulia Union	Discussion meeting with members of different groups	Group numbers 103, 04, 433, 405, 434
PM	Meeting with civil society groups at ADESH Office	Discussion meeting	28 civil society members
PM	Meeting with project staff	On conceptual clarity of the project contents and ideas.	14 key staff
4 November 2013			
AM	Interview with ED at ADESH office	Focused on management and organisational issues	
AM	Visit to Ashulia Union: attended a meeting on CRM	Meeting to explain Citizen's Charter and Complain Box	About 15 leaders from diff. groups
AM	Meeting with members of a 'very good' Group.	Paragram, Ashulia	Group No. 303
AM	Interview with member of Gender group	Shadhupara	Zulekha, Group No. 221
AM	Meeting with Chair of a 'good group'	Paragram, Ashulia	Group No. 308 (Jamila)
Noon	A three-year old (new) 'average' group	Ashulia	318
Noon	Meeting with 6-8 month old groups	Two new groups close to garments factories.	12 members of gr. 2251 & 2253
PM	Meeting with women UP members	At ADESH office: discussion meeting	9 women UP members
PM	Meeting with Executive Committee	At ADESH office: concluded with preliminary feed-back.	Seven members of the Board.

Annex 2: SWOT analysis

Strength	Weakness
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ADESH is well known in its working area 2. Good management 3. Organisation is registered with all necessary registration authorities 4. Skilled workforce/personnel of ADESH 5. Necessary manuals and policies are in place 6. Work plan for every work done 7. An active Executive Committee 8. Financial audit completed on time 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ADESH has no branch office facility 2. Salary levels are low 3. Duration of projects is short (uncertainty of funding) 4. Dropout rate of staff is high (disruptive) 5. Staff have limited office space 6. Inadequate opportunities for formal training 7. Organisation has no strategic plan
Opportunity	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Well-accepted at the field-level 2. Good relations with local administration and non-government organisations 3. Trained volunteers on disaster management 4. Different programme activities are in place, in line with different donor priorities 5. Administrative and programme information is open to all 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Wrong interpretation of religion by religious fanatics 7. Inadequate funding 8. Political unrest in the country 9. Non-cooperation of a few local elites/influential persons 10. Frequent natural and social disasters 11. Corruption in different public sector organisations

Annex 3: List of People Met

3.1 Members of the ADESH Executive Board- met on the 4th October 2013

Name	Designation
1. Benoy Goswami	President
2. Ms. Hiyamoni Gain	Vice President
3. Md. Chowdhury Miah	Former General Secretary
4. Anna Bonik	Former Treasurer
5. Stanly Sitangshu Karmokar	Treasurer
6. Dola Gain Keya	Member, General Committee
7. Subrato Dey	Executive Director

3.2 Staff of ADESH participated in the meetings on 23rd October and 3rd Nov. 2013

Name	Designation
1. Subrato Dey	Executive Director
2. Yeakub Nabi	Coordinator
3. Anthony Sumon Gain	Programme Officer
4. Mina Afroz Mini	Accounts Officer
5. Israt Jahan	Asstt. Gender Officer
6. Sahed Ahmed Palash	Office Secretary
7. Rezaul Karim	Asstt. Programme Officer
8. Md. Kaikubad Hossain	Environment Dev. Officer
9. Shalina Akter	Development Worker
10. Nasrin Akter	Development Worker
11. Popy Yeasmin	Development Worker
12. Bulu Rani Roy	Development Worker
13. Kanchon Rani Das	Development Worker
14. Shilpi Lata Baroi	Development Worker (Gender)
15. Rina Akhter	Development Worker (Gender)
16. Parvin Akhter	Development Worker (Gender)

3.3 Members of Civil Society participated in the meeting on the 3rd October 2013

Name	Organisation
1. Masuma Samad	VASD
2. Sufia Begum	Polli Unnayan Samaj Kalyan Sangstha
3. Adv. Nazrul Islam	Manobadhikar Unnayan Kendra
4. Fuad E Azam	Dainik Janata (The Daily Janata)
5. Khandker Golam Sarwar	Dainik Amar Kagoz
6. Nasima Khanom	Swanirvar Bangladesh
7. Tayefur Rahman	The Daily Kaler Kantha
8. Javed Mostafa	The Daily Jugantor
9. Mirza Tarek Mamtazur Rahman	Retired Govt. Officer/Secretary VERC
10. Peter Halder	Bangladesh Youth First Concern
11. E. H. Sarker	SSUS
12. Nahid Akhter	SSUS
13. Sumona Samad	POOL
14. Shamim Hossain	The Daily Sangram
15. Shariful Islam	ATN
16. Md. Raisuddin Bhuiyan Shahin	Upazila Agricultural Officer
17. MD. Abdul Baten	Savar College (Social Work)
18. Anna Banik	YWCA, Savar
19. Parveen Islam	Bangladesh Mohila Parishad
20. Anwara Begum Lili	SUS
21. Khaleda Akhter Jahan	Upazila Women's Development Officer
22. Md. Monirul Islam	Swarup Sa. Pa.
23. Nargis Akhter	Savar Poursava (Municipality)
24. Joanna De Rozario	Savar, ADP, World Vision
25. Dr. Kazi Ayesha Siddiqua	Savar Poursava
26. Dufrin Akhter	Woman Councillor, Savar Poursava
27. Ms. Rokeya Haque	Vice Chair, Upazila Parishad
28. Nasrin Begum	Upazila Youth Development Officer, Savar.

3.4 Meeting with UP members concerned with the project on 04 Nov. 2013)

Name	Name of <i>Union Parishad</i>
1. Aleya Akhter	Tetuljhara Union Parishad
2. Ms. Maksuda	Bongaon Union Parishad
3. Ms. Nur Taj	Birulia Union Parishad
4. Rokhsana Khatun	Birulia Union Parishad
5. Hosne Ara	Yearpur Union Parishad
6. Mini Akhter	Yearpur Union Parishad
7. Ms. Rahima Khatun	Bongaon Union Parishad
8. Asma Begum	Tetuljhara Union Parishad
9. Ms. Rashida	Ashulia Union Parishad
