

## AID CO-ORDINATION IN NON-FORMAL PRIMARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN BANGLADESH FOCUSING ON BRAC AND PROSHIKA

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### Abstract

Aid co-ordination can be a powerful tool in addressing poverty. Its underlying objectives are to improve not only the performance of the project but also the capacity and human resource development of the recipients. To realise this outcome, this article introduces a model of aid co-ordination that embodies four principles: (1) local ownership and participation; (2) partnership between the donors and recipients; (3) institutional and capacity building; and (4) pooling of financial and technical resources among the donors. BRAC and Proshika can be considered success stories in terms of project performance and co-ordination procedures. An analysis of the co-ordination mechanisms currently employed in the aid programmes of BRAC and Proshika illustrate that each organisation has developed its own specific style of co-ordination mechanisms attuned to its own institutional framework. However, the general flows indicate that the essential principles for effective co-ordination are basically adhered to. Shortfalls stem from inefficiencies in pursuing the pertinent principles and thus, impair both NGOs in project performance and institutional and capacity building. It is evident that these weaknesses stem from limitations throughout various stages in the co-ordination cycle and pertain to both the donors and recipients. What lessons can be emulated from BRAC and Proshika to steer the future course of co-ordination for all stakeholders, such as, donors, recipient governments and NGOs?

### Introduction

The current understanding among the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors of sustainable development has evolved over the years to embody a long-term integrated vision of development, which comprises of local ownership, and partnership with government, civil society, aid agencies, NGOs and the private sector. The actualisation of this concept of sustainable development requires a departure from the conventional approaches to development co-operation. Aid co-ordination can be considered a key approach in promoting and implementing sustainable development as its basic principles and strategies are embedded in a genuine co-operative partnership between donor and recipient. Partnership in this context means that the recipients are responsible for their own

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development, and that the donors should seek to undertake supportive and advisory roles as opposed to their conventional approaches of intrusion and conditionality.<sup>1)</sup> The perceived advantages of aid co-ordination are eclectic ranging from a reduction of *duplication, waste and contradictions*<sup>2)</sup> on the donor side to increasing the capacity of the government and other institutions of developing countries at the levels of programme planning, delivery and implementation.<sup>3)</sup>

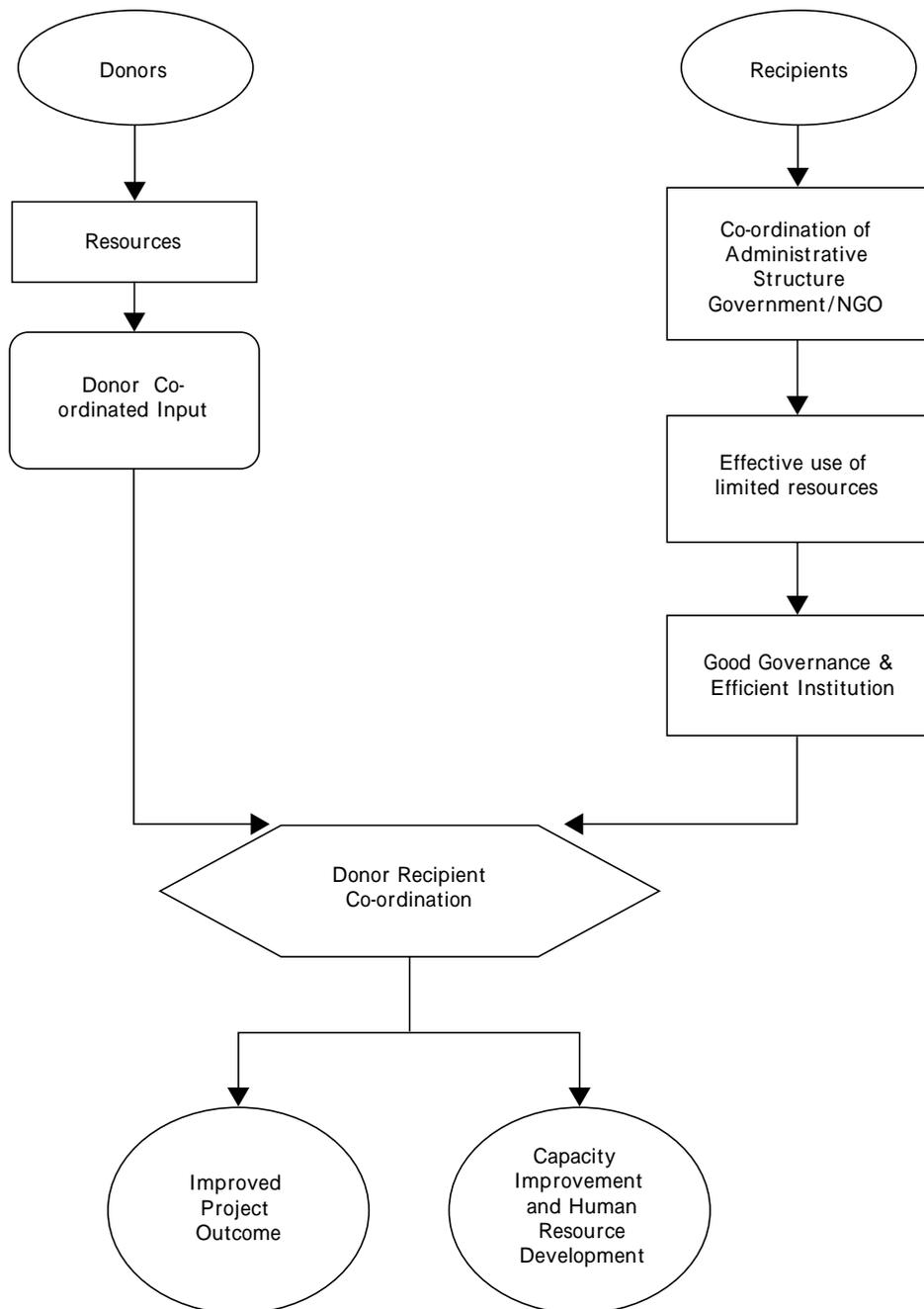
The main concern of this article is to analyse how the donors are conducting co-ordination efforts in the non-formal primary education ( NFPE ) sub-sector through two NGOs in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee ( BRAC ) and Proshika. The article begins by introducing a succinct concept of aid co-ordination because a definition will facilitate a better insight of the institutional arrangements and division of labour throughout each stage in the co-ordination process. This is followed by an exploration of the co-ordination processes of BRAC and Proshika throughout the three stages of the co-ordination model, co-ordination among the donors, co-ordination between the donors and the recipient, and co-ordination within the recipient organisation. These aid programmes will serve as a basis to select, augment and develop co-ordination strategies conducive to present day development principles. Finally, recommendations for making aid co-ordination more effective are derived from the findings of the case studies.

### 1. Definition of Aid Co-ordination

Aid co-ordination was not theoretically determined from the outset but advanced in an ad hoc manner as a strategy to overcome difficulties encountered by recipient governments in their administration of foreign aid. How these difficulties were interpreted, and what co-ordinating mechanisms were employed depended on the development era as well as the situation at hand. With no official definition of aid co-ordination, an attempt is made here to fill this lacuna as illustrated in Figure 1. This definition is based on explicit and implicit inferences from the modern day concept of aid, participatory development, ownership, and good governance.<sup>4)</sup> The DAC chairman states that local ownership and participation require channels and methods of co-operation from donors that do not undermine those values. Therefore, aid co-ordination must operate within the praxis of partnership between the donors and the recipients because the overall objective of aid co-ordination is to maximise the desired output of development assistance in terms of improved project performance, and the building of institutional and human resource capacity. In other words, the recipient government needs to plan and integrate the assistance from the donor agencies into national development goals and strategies. Common implementation arrangements of donor assistance reduce the burden on the recipient country's limited staff and financial resources.

In order to pursue a role of developing and sustaining proper use of domestic resources as well as international assistance, capacities need to be developed within the recipient country. Capacity

Figure 1: Definition of Aid Co-ordination



Source : the author.

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building is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to the ability of recipients to manage development on their own in a smooth, efficient and sustainable way<sup>5)</sup>. It is a process of self-reorganisation, where people undertake the reorganisation of their own system and can be considered both as a means and an end to sustainable development. Capacities in development administration, management and organisational structuring need to be strengthened along with human resources, and moulded to mirror attributes of good governance, such as, accountability, transparency, participatory development and democratisation. To ensure that all components are catered for, capacity building could be implemented from a sector-wide approach. The reformation of central administration can facilitate internal co-ordination among the various governmental departments and help redefine its relations with civil society and the international donor community to determine an effective use of limited resources. Good governance will enhance a sense of ownership by ensuring that the needs of the people and stakeholders are considered and that the inter-relationships between various organisations are accounted for. In turn, ownership can facilitate the mobilisation, co-ordination and management of government and donor efforts in a more efficient manner.

Based on the concept that the recipient is responsible for its own development, the mode of donor assistance must be vis-à-vis the 'donor driven' approach. The donor agencies' foremost input into the co-ordination process is to pool their financial and technical resources in a co-ordinated manner to ensure value for money, efficient management and evidence of impact. These co-ordinated resources have to be integrated with the recipient's domestic resources to maintain sectoral strategies that promote the building of human and institutional capacity.

It can be concluded from the aforementioned analysis that the model for effective aid co-ordination is based on the following principles: ( 1 ) aid co-ordination must ensure local ownership and participation in the programme; ( 2 ) aid co-ordination requires partnership between the donors and recipients; ( 3 ) aid co-ordination needs to build the capacity of the recipients to manage development on their own; and ( 4 ) aid co-ordination entails the donors to pool their financial and technical resources.

## 2. An Overview of the Primary Education Sub-sector in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's commitment to the goal of universal primary education requires the active participation of both the government and the NGO sector in fulfilling its vast educational needs. The government of Bangladesh ( GoB ) administers its formal primary education system through Primary and Mass Education Division ( PMED ) and owns 37,000 primary schools that cater for 12 million students.<sup>6)</sup> Non-formal education programmes for children deprived of formal schooling are managed by the GoB under Directorate of Non-formal Education but are implemented by NGOs. The NGOs also manage and run their own non-formal primary education catering for over 1.4 million students.<sup>7)</sup>

The Primary Education Development Programme ( PEDP ) is the GoB's overall programme for formal primary education ( 1998-2002 ) which is implemented through discrete, but co-ordinated projects.<sup>8)</sup> Although, the EC and two of its Member States, Sweden and the Netherlands participated in the project's preparation, planning and appraisal stages, they finally opted not to grant assistance. They agreed that a government-led sectoral approach would be more preferable than the adopted project approach considering that the primary education system is riddled with serious problems relating to poor quality, inequity and system inefficiencies. Hossain ( 1997 ) evaluates the administrative structure of primary education as follows: *Bangladesh school education system is left with an extremely centralised, non-participatory, non-transparent and bureaucratic educational administration, management and planning system. The system appears to be quite inadequate for the challenge of achieving the goal of education for all, including universal primary education in Bangladesh.*<sup>9)</sup> Recognising the taxing situation of the good governance problem within the GoB, assisting the formal primary education system under such conditions would fail to enhance institutional and capacity building. However, the EC has not relinquished on its commitment to education and has found its slot in supporting non-formal primary education ( NFPE ) through BRAC and Proshika alongside four of its Member States, Britain, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands and some European NGOs. The EC's attraction to these NGOs stemmed not only from their capacity to deliver high quality education programmes, but also from the ample opportunity they provided for the EC to carry out its mandate to co-ordinate with several of its Member States that were already partners in the Donor Consortia. The EC's decision to join the consortia resulted in increased access to aid from the EU for the recipients.

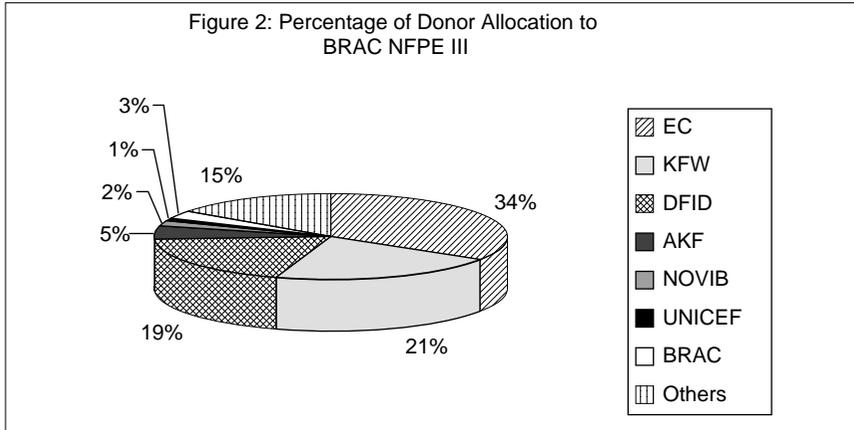
### 3.1 BRAC's NFPE

BRAC has made a name for itself within the international development community as the world's most successful indigenous NGO. NFPE programme is one of its four-pronged approach<sup>10)</sup> to development and is designed for the poorest children not catered for by the formal system. Favourable reviews and monitoring accompanied the completion of Phase II in March 1999. It was deemed as a *reliable and good quality education programme, well managed and achieving good outcomes for learners.*<sup>11)</sup> BRAC has entered Phase III of NFPE, which is expected to run until 2004. Phase III differs from Phase II in that it aims to improve the quality of education as opposed to the former quantitative expansion. Some of the measures to be undertaken will include the establishment of Education Development Unit ( EDU ) to improve curriculum development, teaching methods, and management and evaluation capacity, and to share resource developments and ideas with the government's formal system and other NGOs. Organisational changes will involve decentralisation of quality management from Headquarters to the field level and emphasis will be placed on establishing

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links with the formal education system.

### 3.2 BRAC Donors



Note: EC: European Commission, KfW: Kreditanstalt Fur Wiederaufban, DFID: Department for International Development, AKF: Aga Khan Foundation, NOVIB: Netherlands Organisation for International Development Co-operation, UNICEF: United Nations Children and Education Foundation, Others: CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency, DGIS: Directorate General of International Co-operation ( Netherlands ) and WFP: World Food Programme.

Source : Interview at DFID.

BRAC's NFPE III is estimated to cost approximately US\$122.7 million of which 97 per cent will be supported by a total of seven donors and 3 per cent from user fees.<sup>12)</sup> Like the previous phases, governmental funding will not be discharged for NFPE III. All funds are pooled so no component of the programme belongs to or is the responsibility of any one donor. Figure 2 depicts the expected percentage of donor allocation to NFPE III. The EC is the largest donor and its decision to finance Phase III is based on BRAC's proposals to establish stronger links between the formal and non-formal system, to increase the coverage of adolescents, and to focus on high quality education.<sup>13)</sup> The EU donors ( EC, KfW, NOVIB,<sup>14)</sup> and DFID ) will represent 76 per cent of total allocations. UNICEF is not a member of the Donor Consortium. Most of the funding is in grant form with BRAC signing a separate contract with each donor including specific rules for procurement procedures. As some of the rules contradict each other, problems arise for some donors, consequently causing delays in disbursements.<sup>15)</sup> While the finger may be pointed at the bureaucratic procedures of the EC's headquarters in Brussels, the EC claims that BRAC is also at fault. BRAC agreed to EC's procurement procedures even though it was incompatible with BRAC's own procedures. The EC

maintains that BRAC didn't pay enough attention to annexes.<sup>16)</sup> However, EC's tardiness in disbursing funds has resulted in BRAC resorting to taking loans from commercial banks, which is feasible for BRAC as a creditworthy institution. To make matters worse, interest payments are deducted from BRAC's budget with no indemnity from the donor. The interest charges for the bank loan that was needed to tie over BRAC until EC funds were released for NFPE II cost BRAC US\$308,286.<sup>17)</sup> As it is difficult for the EC to change its procurement procedures, all the other donors have to compromise with the EC. For example, if BRAC experiences any constraints due to significant delay of other partner's funding during the first year of NFPE III, DFID is willing to accelerate its budget input. Pool-funding through the Donor Consortium should allow for flexibility and mitigate the effects of delays due to some donors' financial deficit by ensuring that no component of the programme is deferred.

### 3.3 BRAC Donor Liaison Office ( DLO )

The Donor Liaison Office ( DLO ) is the focal point of co-ordination among the donors, and between the donors and BRAC. Its establishment in 1989 was a joint initiative induced by two underlying factors. First, at BRAC's request because its tenacity for a prompt escalation of activities necessitated a great deal of proposal writing to individual donors, and as a means for donors to combine their efforts to appraise and evaluate programmes.<sup>18)</sup> Second, at the solicitation of the donors in order to get a clearer picture of BRAC's activities and other donors' involvement in NFPE. The DLO was instituted to facilitate the streamlining of procedures between the recipient and donors and to serve as a vehicle for mediation between the donors and BRAC. NOVIB was selected on default as the co-ordinating agency of the DLO. The role of NOVIB in this respect entails little more than providing legal issuing of the DLO activities.

The liaison officer is neither a specialist nor an expert in education development, and is not given the task of micro-monitoring BRAC. The liaison officer deals with the Director of NFPE, a person specially employed by BRAC to liase with the DLO, and with the respective donor representatives engaged in the education sector. Duties involve flagging issues, setting agendas for meetings, providing donor teams with field reporting, logistical aid and office backup, and providing BRAC with proposal and report writing assistance, etc. The DLO has played a critical role in *gaining an overview and achieving integrated monitoring across programmes and activities*.<sup>19)</sup> It is not utilised by BRAC as an organisation as a whole and many of BRAC personnel are unaware of its existence. More usage could be made of the DLO and especially, by BRAC, who is inclined to approach the Liaison Officer only when it needs something. More frequent interaction could help rectify the miscommunication, misunderstanding, polarisation, and perceived expectations that occasionally flow between the two parties.<sup>20)</sup>

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Every year the Liaison Officer organises two formal style round-table meetings in May and December, in which all the donors are obliged to attend. These meetings are designed especially for those with no representative office in Bangladesh, giving all the donors and recipient opportunities to discuss and conclude pertinent NFPE issues. However, these discussions concentrate on on-going issues rather than overall policies and development plans. Ad hoc interim meetings are regular features, and either BRAC or the donors are free to approach the DLO to request a meeting. During the past two years the liaison officer has managed to persuade BRAC to meet its own deadlines and to submit its reports at least six weeks before a co-ordination meeting to give donors a chance to decipher the contents and to prepare appropriate points for discussion. Prior to this request from the donors, BRAC was submitting its documents on the morning of the meeting rendering the whole point of the meeting meaningless. BRAC is now managing to submit reports two or three weeks in advance as the liaison officer has made it a point not to distribute any literature to the donors within five days of the meetings.<sup>21)</sup>

The opportunity to speak in a unified voice that the Donor Consortium confers on the donors is seldom utilised and roles often remain blurred. This may be due to the internal procedures of the donor organisations and the lack of delegated authority. The EC tends to play the watchdog role and has a rather patronising attitude towards BRAC.<sup>22)</sup> If the EC staff were development experts or people rather than bureaucrats, their behaviour may be different. The liaison officer is frequently left to carry out donor demands without full donor support.<sup>23)</sup> Donors have stated the need to clarify the role and management responsibilities of the Liaison Officer because at times intrusive actions irk both the donors and the recipients.<sup>24)</sup> Albeit, the DLO is helping to keep the concept of partnership alive as opposed to that of a subordinate recipient.

### 3.4 BRAC Co-ordination Procedures

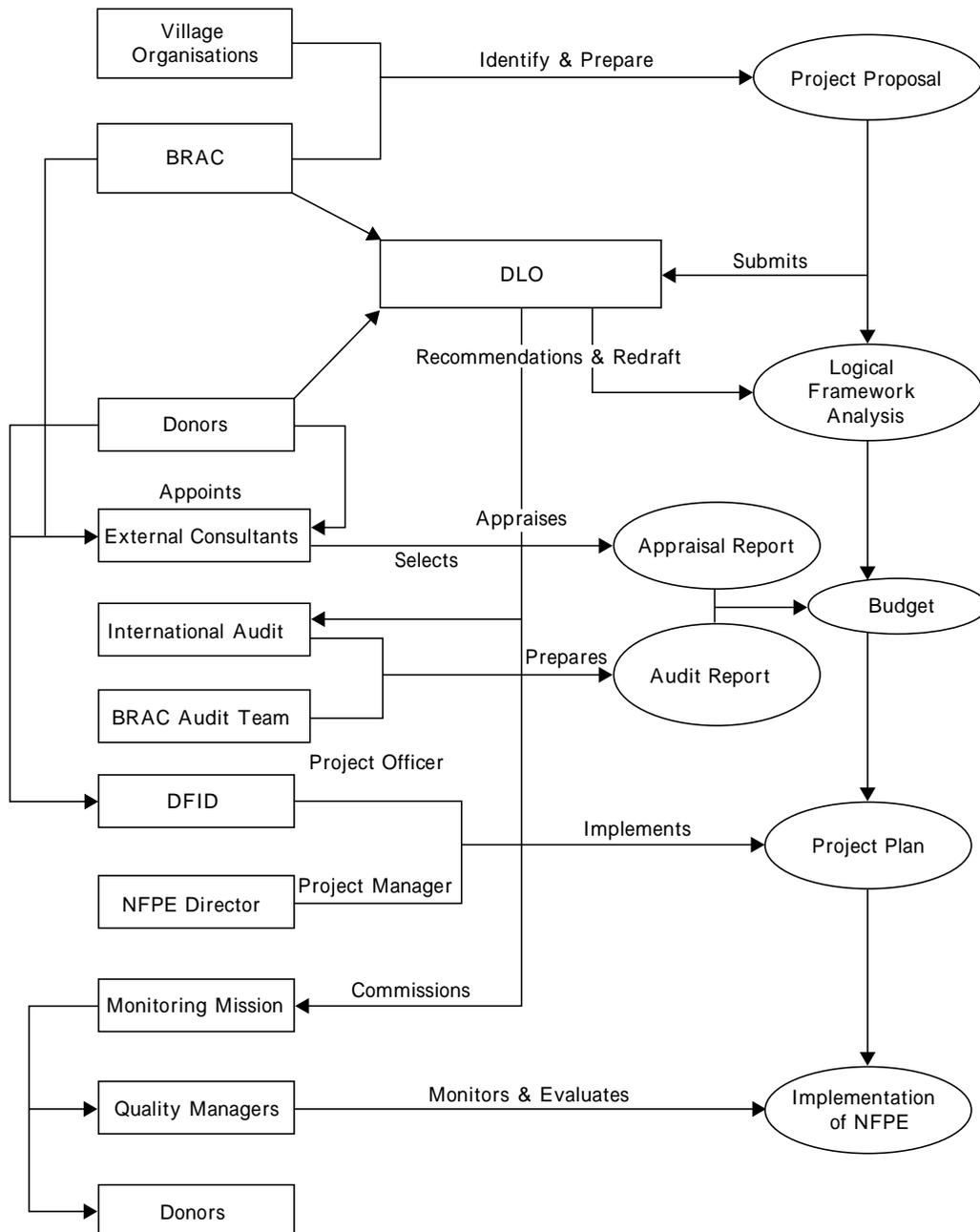
#### 3.4.1 *Project Preparation and Planning*

Terms of reference and co-ordination mechanisms are decided jointly by both BRAC and the donors through the Donor Liaison Office ( see Figure 3 ) Leadership of the Consortium is bestowed on BRAC, and with no lead donor, the chair revolves among the donors annually. In principle, the volume of individual procurement has little or no bearing on political weight as all donors have an equal say and decisions are made on a consensual agreement. At times this may be the case<sup>25)</sup> but some of the donors find themselves compromising with EC demands because it is the largest donor and things would be in a state of turmoil if the EC were to leave the donor consortium.<sup>26)</sup>

It is BRAC who drafts the project proposal based on its own strategies and development planning. It approaches new donors directly but uses the Donor Liaison Office for comments and commitment from its consortium partners. BRAC's proposal is not designed to comply with donor demands rather

it strives to reflect the needs and demands of the village community.<sup>27)</sup> As it is to be expected of an NGO with neither a Proposal nor Planning Cell, documentation drafting is not considered to be one of

Figure 3: Co-ordination between BRAC and Donors during the Project Cycle



Source: the author.

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its strengths. However, BRAC is reluctant to seek technical assistance or help with proposal writing, and will refuse if offered. Thus, the quality of the proposal is quite poor lacking a clear vision of the effects on other sub-components of the project or how other components need to be updated and expanded for new plans.<sup>28)</sup> Through the Donor Liaison Office donor advice and expertise is sought and the proposal redesigned. It is at this stage that the donors have the most impact on BRAC's policies, with each donor focusing on his own area of interest.<sup>29)</sup> Among the consortium partners, the EC and DFID attach the most importance on the work plan.<sup>30)</sup> BRAC itself does not place as much importance on work plans as the donors and is slow to make appropriate changes. It took the donors two years to persuade and to train BRAC on how to draft a Logical Framework Report.<sup>31)</sup>

### 3.4.2 *Appraisal and Auditing*

The Appraisal Team is selected by both donors and BRAC and is composed of external consultants. The Appraisal Report can be regarded as a kind of evaluation of the former phase, and is a joint venture between BRAC and the consultants. One of the specific tasks assigned to the Appraisal Team was to revise the Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) which was done in collaboration with BRAC personnel.<sup>32)</sup> The EC maintains that it is more difficult to find a common position with its partners than with BRAC.<sup>33)</sup> There are three sources of audit: one by an international auditor who conducts an annual audit of the BRAC organisation; quarterly audit of NFPE schools; and BRAC internal audit team activity. The Appraisal Team has commended BRAC for its high standards of financial control, which extends up from the field level to area office to the Head Office (HO) Each team and area office has accountants to support the field staff, and to keep financial records. The Receipts and Expenditure Statement is returned monthly by each team to the Head Office where six-monthly income and expenditure statements are prepared for the donor consortium partners. The data and information for all projects and programmes can be easily retrieved and reported on in accordance with donor's needs.<sup>34)</sup> The BRAC Chief Management Accountant and his team prepare the budget. Direct communication takes place between the NFPE management team and the management accounting section. The Director of Monitoring and Internal Audit has suggested the need for HO accountancy section to give additional training and support to the NFPE accountancy section.<sup>35)</sup>

### 3.4.3 *Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation*

Although, BRAC implements the project with the Director of NFPE acting as project manager, overall responsibility lies with the Executive Director. DFID's Senior Education Adviser will undertake the role of Project Officer while the Education Field Manager will assist with monitoring and reviews. DFID is an appropriate choice because its Dhaka Office is manned with experts and

skilled personnel who can produce specialised briefs. Other donors do not have such resources and in moments of doubt look to DFID's Education Adviser for advice and clarifications concerning policies, implementation, monitoring and evaluation procedures, etc. Thus, the Donor Consortium benefits from DFID's competencies and technical expertise.<sup>36)</sup> Due to its resourcefulness, accountability, transparency and a relatively long history of NFPE, BRAC is given tremendous freedom and flexibility. NFPE makes this flexibility difficult to abuse because of its comparably small size, and its focused and structured approach facilitates close monitoring and control.<sup>37)</sup> However, most of the donors are not so absorbed in micro monitoring, and BRAC is granted ample room to experiment through the Innovative Programme component.<sup>38)</sup> All parties conduct monitoring and evaluation based on monitoring indicators decided beforehand through consensual agreement in December. The Donor Consortium commissions the annual Monitoring Mission, which is conducted externally in March/April. Reports are submitted to the Donor Liaison Office three months later. Internal monitoring is co-ordinated by the NFPE Director and will be enhanced in Phases III by the newly established Quality Managers.<sup>39)</sup> The EC was proposing that BRAC should have a technical assistant in the HO to monitor BRAC on a full-time basis. BRAC rejected this proposal because it may have felt that the technical assistance was to meet donor needs by serving as 'ears' within local administrations. The other donors supported BRAC on the basis that three or four people would be required to monitor such a large organisation. This created a lot of tension within the Donor Consortium. As a result, BRAC is expected to submit relatively concise six-monthly reports using Logical Framework Analysis indicators to the Donor Consortium. Delays are not uncommon, as BRAC is unable to meet its own deadlines. The donors themselves go together on annual field visits for two to three days. During the day, they visit BRAC schools, centres and offices to conduct their monitoring tasks. Being together gives them the golden opportunity to spend the evenings discussing the days' observations, which they find very beneficial. On the other hand, the donors feel that they do not get an authentic picture of events as a lot is put on display and show just for the donors' visit.<sup>40)</sup>

### 3.5 BRAC Management: Internal Co-ordination

The key to BRAC's success is invariably effective management as the efficiency of programmes depends on the capacity of the organisation to make them work. BRAC places importance on institutional capacity and human resource development and as such, all programme grants from the donors must include a fixed percentage allocation for staff development. The majority of the BRAC staff is Bangladeshi with short-term expatriate consultants employed for special assignments. The criteria for selecting development workers are based on their ability to think for themselves, apply their own values, and act on their own. BRAC's ethics are that development management should be

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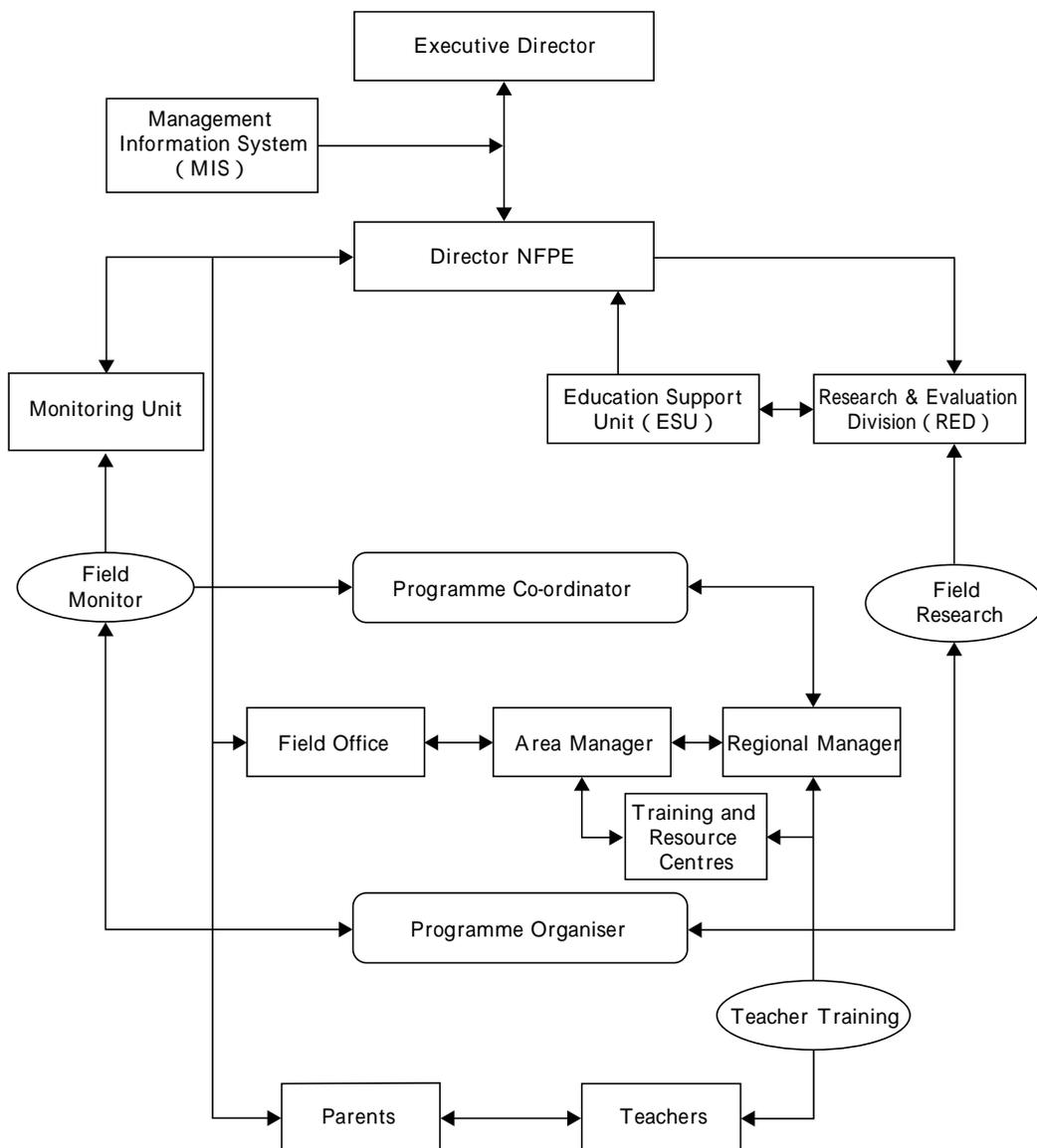
participatory and decentralised and embedded in certain values shared by managers and staff.<sup>41)</sup> Managers are selected from the field according to their experience and the values they have demonstrated. The structure is flat, with few intermediate levels between top management and field implementation. The small field management units enable every staff member to participate in operational decision making on a daily basis. Decentralisation of decision-making to these units minimises bureaucracy and enables BRAC to adapt to changing circumstances in the field to realise BRAC's vision of Village Organisations (VOs)<sup>42)</sup> playing a key role in the village, region, and national socio-political environment.

The top-down and bottom-up approaches through formal and informal mechanisms are utilised by the BRAC managers to co-ordinate internally. *There was and remains a closely co-ordinated link between what happens at the top of BRAC, and what happens in the village.*<sup>43)</sup> Figure 4 presents a simplified version of co-ordination within NFPE. Participatory approach at the grass-roots level through the VOs is ensured through regular monthly parent-teacher meetings whereby at least one parent of each student is compelled to attend. The Programme Organiser (PO) who supervises 14 schools on BRAC will attend these gatherings at random. However, teachers convene periodically with the Programme Organiser to give an up-to-date account of circumstances in their school, to exchange views with other teachers and to receive advice and instructions, etc. Occasionally regional managers and Head Office staff will participate at these meetings. The field office is the home, office and recreation centre for 10 to 11 Programme Organisers and one field officer. The Programme Organiser is a key figure in the co-ordination process because of sustaining links with BRAC, the members, and the beneficiaries. However, there is a feeling that the level of interaction between field officers and the members have steadily declined becoming more formal and less flexible, except in connection with credit. The POs indicated that their duties are so demanding that they have no time to deal with the specific needs voiced by its members or to respond to local perceptions. The pressure they are under to reach the set target for forming groups within a certain time frame has resulted in taking members of other NGOs as their clients. Group members feel that they have little 'ownership' of the BRAC programme and have little expectation of reaching some form of autonomy from BRAC. The little progress towards self-sustaining VOs stems from the confusion and a lack of understanding regarding the purposes of the VOs not only among the members but also among the BRAC staff and the preference of the members to leave leadership roles to BRAC staff.<sup>44)</sup>

The regional manager has meetings with the area managers every month. There are 9 NFPE regional managers who are assisted by area education managers, each responsible for 4 to 7 teams, the leader of which is responsible for around 70 schools.<sup>45)</sup> The managers of Training and Resource Centres (TARC) participate in the regional level meetings and give their views on issues discussed between the regional and area managers. The regional managers along with their programme co-

ordinator meet with the executive director once a month to review experience in the field, to problem-solve, to make decisions about programme changes, and to the forward quantitative data received from the area managers.<sup>46)</sup> The Monitoring Unit then checks the quality of the collected data. The NFPE programme Monitoring Unit is also responsible for collecting qualitative data at the school level in sample areas each month and subsequently shares the data with the Programme Organisers in those areas.<sup>47)</sup> There is a lack of formal co-ordination between NGOs and government administrators

Figure 4: Internal Co-ordination of BRAC's NFPE



Source: the author.

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at the local level which leads to an overlapping of services and schools. The Deputy Commissioner of the Tangail district in Bangladesh commented that he does not receive advance information on BRAC's intention to open non-formal schools, so he cannot co-ordinate Government-NGO resources in such a way to maximise student benefit. Some BRAC members have felt obliged to withdraw their children from government schools to enrol them in BRAC schools in order to gain access to credit through BRAC. In the Tangail district, children are more likely to attend the government schools when the 'food for education' programme is available.<sup>48)</sup>

The Research and Evaluation Division (RED) despatch researchers to the field on various research projects and to report back informally on other information they have picked up. It also conducts internal evaluations and ad hoc studies on NFPE programmes. The Management Information System (MIS) along with the Monitoring Unit and Research and Evaluation Division provide data for routine management and policy decision.<sup>49)</sup> The establishment of Education Development Unit during Phase III will entail a transfer of some of Research and Evaluation Division's duties to this new unit. These duties will include anticipating on-going education programme needs relating to innovation in the classroom and targeting those who have not participated in NFPE, and disseminating the knowledge and expertise acquired by BRAC to other NGOs.<sup>50)</sup>

It has been suggested that BRAC's administration is basically a two-parameter structure. The organisation is built around the strong and powerful personality of the Director who is well versed in dealing with donors. He is well aware of the inconsistencies among the donors and of their workload and knows how to take advantage of these factors. If the leader were to resign the future of BRAC would be debatable. Additionally, BRAC's management system does not reflect its principle of concentrating on women as the target group of its programmes because it only employs one woman in a high ranking managerial position, the Director of NFPE.<sup>51)</sup>

### 3.6 Synthesis of BRAC's Co-ordination Mechanisms

In terms of the first principle for effective co-ordination, which stipulates the need for local ownership and participation to bring about self-sustainability, the findings of the case study show that in principle NFPE III embraces both local ownership and the participatory approach in its development and implementation. BRAC's goal is to develop self-managed VOs and to enhance the capacity of the poor to participate in the national development process. Therefore, the internal co-ordination of BRAC and its participatory approach to development management is designed to enhance the active participation of its members at the grass-roots level at the preparation, planning, and implementation stages. Although, NFPE III is designed and implemented by BRAC and thus, can be regarded as 'owned' by BRAC, it does not necessarily reflect the needs of its members as the case

study shows. The dearth of communication between the members and BRAC staff prevent the beneficiaries' needs to be filtered to senior management, and the inertia of the members to undertake leadership hinder sustainability. In practice, BRAC's efforts of scaling-up its programmes is impairing self-sustainability of the VOs. Additionally, local ownership could be further enhanced if the recipients made more financial contributions to NFPE III as opposed to the current 3 per cent of the allocations. However, the nature of NFPE limits the prospects of achieving financial sustainability.

The second principle for effective co-ordination concerns partnership between the donors and the recipients whereby the donors undertake advisory and supportive roles and facilitate recipient leadership and ownership of their own development. On the whole NFPE III cannot be regarded as donor-driven because there are many indicators of the partnership approach between the donors and the recipients. Common implementation arrangements require a sense of partnership between the donors and between the donors and recipients. The DLO was established to fulfil both BRAC and donor needs and to cultivate the concept of partnership between them. BRAC's leadership role in the Consortium empowers BRAC's position in relation to the donors. The terms of reference and the co-ordination mechanisms are decided jointly by both BRAC and the donors through the DLO. Nevertheless, the EC's attitude towards BRAC infringes upon the concept of partnership. The donors' failure to speak in a unified 'voice' for BRAC's benefit can be regarded as a weak link in partnership among the donors and may undermine BRAC's long-term potential.

The third principle pertaining to institutional and capacity building is part-and-parcel of NFPE III. BRAC ensures that a percentage of all donor disbursements are allocated for staff development. Components of the NFPE III are designed to develop human resources within BRAC, i.e. the establishment of the Education Support Unit and the accounting section, to ensure the sustainability of the organisation. BRAC is given the freedom and flexibility to experiment and improve through the Innovative Programme Component. The common arrangements of implementation and the relatively 'hands-off' approach of the donors enhance BRAC's capacity to sustain the programme. Accountability and transparency are ensured through auditing, monitoring and evaluation. BRAC's participation at these stages as well as helping to select external auditors and consultants ameliorate capacity building of its organisation. Nevertheless, BRAC's neglect of capacity building at the grassroots level delays progress towards self-sustaining VOs and its two parameter management structure does not facilitate sustainability of either the organisation or of the VOs .

The fourth principle positing the need for the pooling of financial and technical resources among the donors is evident in NFPE III. Donor allocations are pool-funded and technical resources are streamlined through the DLO. The pooling of funds and technical assistance may not necessarily imply efficient use of disbursements. Failure to co-ordinate with other NGOs and local government results in overlapping of services and competition, which are detrimental for sustainability.

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Furthermore, delays in disbursements have financial repercussions for the recipient.

### 4.1 Proshika's Universal Education Programme: Phase VI

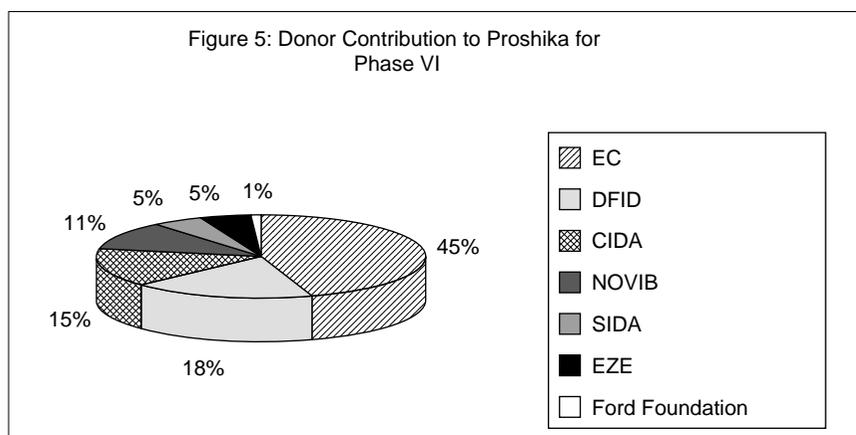
Proshika is the second largest NGO in Bangladesh. Unlike BRAC, it implements all of its activities under one umbrella programme entitled Participatory Sustainable Development for Poverty Alleviation, Environmental Protection and Regeneration, and plans five year comprehensive programmes. Training and education are the pivotal factors of all the programmes, which threads all the activities to make it an integrated whole. However, it is the credit programme that is recently receiving priority.<sup>52)</sup> As a stopgap measure to the shortcomings of the government in providing basic education for all, Proshika created a comprehensive education programme called Universal Education Programme (UEP) UEP provides functional adult literacy skills to group members and educational facilities to their children through formal and non-formal schools. It comprises of the following four components: (1) Adult Literacy, (2) Post-Literacy, (3) Enrolment into Formal Primary Schools, and (4) Non-formal Primary Education, which is the core of UEP. NFPE caters for those children between the ages of 8-11 years old who have dropped out of the formal system or who never enrolled, with the objective of advancing the innovative capacity of the children to the development process. Proshika's NFPE model is similar to the BRAC model except it is more compressed. The Appraisal Mission posits that Proshika's success to date in managing growth without loss of quality should enable its programme to become a financially self-sufficient core programme by the end of Phase VI.

### 4.2 Proshika Donors

For Phase VI Proshika has solicited US\$ 89 million or 20 per cent of its total appropriation from the donors.<sup>53)</sup> During Phase V, donor funding covered over 40 per cent of Proshika's programme costs.<sup>54)</sup> Thus, Proshika's long-term goal of becoming self-reliant and sustainable is gradually unfolding. Donors are required to fund the programme as a whole for five years and not just individual projects. This way of operating does not suit many donors but funding is accepted only if it conforms to Proshika's approach.<sup>55)</sup> The seven donors are in the order of disbursement volume: EC ( US\$39.69m ) DFID ( US\$16.29m ) CIDA ( US\$13.43m ) NOVIB ( US\$9.87m ) SIDA ( US\$4.71m ) Evangelische Zentralstelle fur Entwicklungshilfe ( EZE )( US\$4.09m ) and Ford Foundation ( US \$0.89m )<sup>56)</sup> Figure 5 illustrates the percentage each donor subscribes to the total donor contribution. The EC and DFID joined the consortium at the beginning of Phase V in 1994, and have remained the two largest donors since then. Five of the donors are from the EU and represent 84 per cent to total donor disbursement.

All donor disbursements are in grant form, and pool-funding makes it difficult to identify any particular donor with a specific part of the programme as the programme is funded as an entirety. The EC was initially indicating that Proshika was at fault for the EC's late disbursements because it

was not submitting its reports on time. However, when Proshika began to submit the reports on time or even earlier, funds did not come from the EC any sooner.<sup>57)</sup> The EC is trying to rectify the cash-flow problem encountered by Proshika due to its lengthy disbursement of funds. It will request Headquarters to ( 1 ) streamline the accounts required to support earlier preparation of the request and ( 2 ) obtain an 80 per cent advance on the year's requirements, to be adjusted 6 months into the year in question.<sup>58)</sup> Technical assistance is not included in the core funding. Proshika outlines its own technical assistance needs and approaches the donors for support. Occasionally, the donors raise their own concerns and Proshika responds when it sees the need for technical assistance. DFID is the most active of the donors in supplying technical assistance. The consortium came to the consensus that the EC should refrain from providing technical assistance because of the lengthy duration it takes to seek approval and then, for funds to be disbursed from Brussels. In lieu of technical assistance, the EC funds the co-ordination office.<sup>59)</sup>



Note : EC: European Commission, DFID: Department for International Development, CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency, NOVIB: The Netherlands Organisation for International Development Co-operation, SIDA: Swedish International Development Authority, EZE: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe.

Source : Data received from PCO, September 1999.

### 4.3 Proshika Co-ordination Office ( PCO )

Proshika Co-ordination Office ( PCO ) acts as the secretariat of the consortium, and is highly commended by the Appraisal Team because it enables the donors to have a more mature and equitable relationship with Proshika.<sup>60)</sup> The consortium was formed during Phase IV to stimulate harmony among the donors, and to enhance lines of communication with Proshika. At the beginning of Phase V it was decided by the consortium to establish a co-ordination office because three of the

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donors, EZE, Ford Foundation, and NOVIB had no representatives in Bangladesh. However, this plan took a year to actualise, and the finger may be pointed at the EC for its protracted bureaucratic procedures.<sup>61)</sup> Funding for the PCO does not come from the EC Proshika fund but from a separate fund. During Phase V, the EC committed 2 million ECUs for the PCO. However, the EC forgoes stamping its seal of authority on the PCO and its affairs. All members of the consortium have equal capacity to partake in the services of the PCO.<sup>62)</sup>

The fundamental objectives of the PCO are to bring out the best characteristics of both sides ( for donors to pay on time and for Proshika to submit its reports on time ) and to minimise the chances for disagreement.<sup>63)</sup> It is not meant to replace bilateral exchange but rather to facilitate co-ordination among the donors and between the donors and Proshika. The objectives and functions of the PCO are comparable to those of the DLO, which is not surprising considering that three of the major donors EC, DFID and NOVIB are also BRAC donors. DFID currently holds the chair of the consortium. Nonetheless, the style of operation between both organisations is dissimilar.

The main differences between the DLO and the PCO can be summarised as follows: Firstly, the DLO officer is recruited locally while the officer's position in the PCO is an expatriate post with expatriate privileges. Secondly, the DLO is not required to co-ordinate technical assistance as it is pool-funded whereas the Proshika relies on the PCO for orchestrating coherent technical assistance. Thirdly, BRAC has appointed an individual to liase with the DLO. Generally, this person is a Master's Degree graduate who is new to BRAC and thus, lacks the requisite skills. Once these skills are acquired and contacts established, this person usually moves on to brighter fields after two years. Needless to say, the quality of reporting is affected. On the other hand, Proshika as an organisation reports to PCO. Hence, the PCO has a limited role to play as a 'reporting' quality controller. Fourthly, BRAC uses the Logical Framework Analysis as its format to report to donors Although, the Logical Framework Analysis covers every single component, there is no need for in-depth analysis. Proshika has no designated formula for reporting and hence, reports and documents can be rather bulky. However, the Appraisal Mission recommended that Proshika also adopt the Logical Framework Analysis, to specify clearly and succinctly its qualitative and quantitative indicators. Fifthly, the DLO operates on a need-to-know basis and works with a 'hands-on' approach to reporting. The PCO tends to wait for Proshika to act in terms of reporting and responds to issues raised by consultants. Sixthly, the relationship between the donors and BRAC within the DLO is more formalised whereas the PCO is more personalised.

Two formal style Proshika round-table meetings are held in May and December for two to three days. All the donors are required to attend as well as sixteen staff members from Proshika. The dates of these meetings correspond with those of the DLO to enable those donor representatives travelling from abroad to kill two birds with the one stone. The agenda includes work plans, budget, cash-flow,

emerging problems and changes in direction. Prior to these meetings, the donors have their own meeting in the PCO to ensure commonality among them.<sup>64)</sup> From its inception, the consortium had given clear instruction that the PCO should not have any formal contact with the DLO.<sup>65)</sup> However, the past eighteen months have seen the PCO and DLO growing closer to one another. Proshika's adoption of BRAC's criteria for its Non-formal Primary Education programme and the increasing interest of the latter in the federation system have been catalytic factors. Recently, the DLO and PCO are co-ordinating the donors' field visits so they can compare the two programmes.

Both the donors and Proshika value PCO for various reasons. First, it enables the donors to adopt a core approach and deal with Proshika as a united group. Second, participation in the consortium capacitates the donors to bend internal policies and rules, in terms of auditing, procurement, etc. and everyone is forced to live with a common core report structure. Third, the PCO manages and facilitates consultants and co-ordinates technical assistance by drawing up the Terms of Reference. Fourth, the PCO keeps records of the minutes of all the meetings as well as all the documents and reports pertaining to Proshika. Thus, it acts as the institutional memory. Fifth, the PCO facilitates the field trips for the donors. Sixth, the PCO controls the amount of time spent in dealing with senior management within Proshika while key issues and ongoing management of the programme are adequately addressed. Seventh, each donor can contribute its comparative advantage, which allows the donors to apply in an informal way the division of labour by deferring the skills available.<sup>66)</sup> Eighth, the PCO enables the donors to monitor a programme. With their limited staff, donors like SIDA, EC, Ford Foundation, EZE and NOVIB would find it extremely difficult to keep pegs on all the programme's activities. Ninth, it helps foster equal partnership between the donors and Proshika.<sup>67)</sup>

Although, the PCO is highly appreciated by the consortium members, they also acknowledge its shortcomings. Firstly, the contact between the donor and Proshika is reduced. Therefore, the donors' knowledge of the organisation is not as complete as it should be. This not only reduces their level of influence, but could also have serious consequences considering that all the donors are in the same predicament. Secondly, donors tend to get roped into situations through the influence of the strongest voice. Thirdly, the PCO generates a lot of paperwork. Fourthly, it is only during Appraisal, at the Mid-term Review and End of Term Review that the donors really get to know about Proshika. These reviews take place only once every five years and occur at the end of the project cycle, which can be regarded as too late to get to know Proshika. Fifthly, the bi-annual Donor Consortium Meetings lasting two days each is too short to lead to meaningful discussion and bad decision-making may result.<sup>68)</sup>

## 4.4 Proshika Co-ordination Procedures

### 4.4.1 *Project Preparation and Planning*

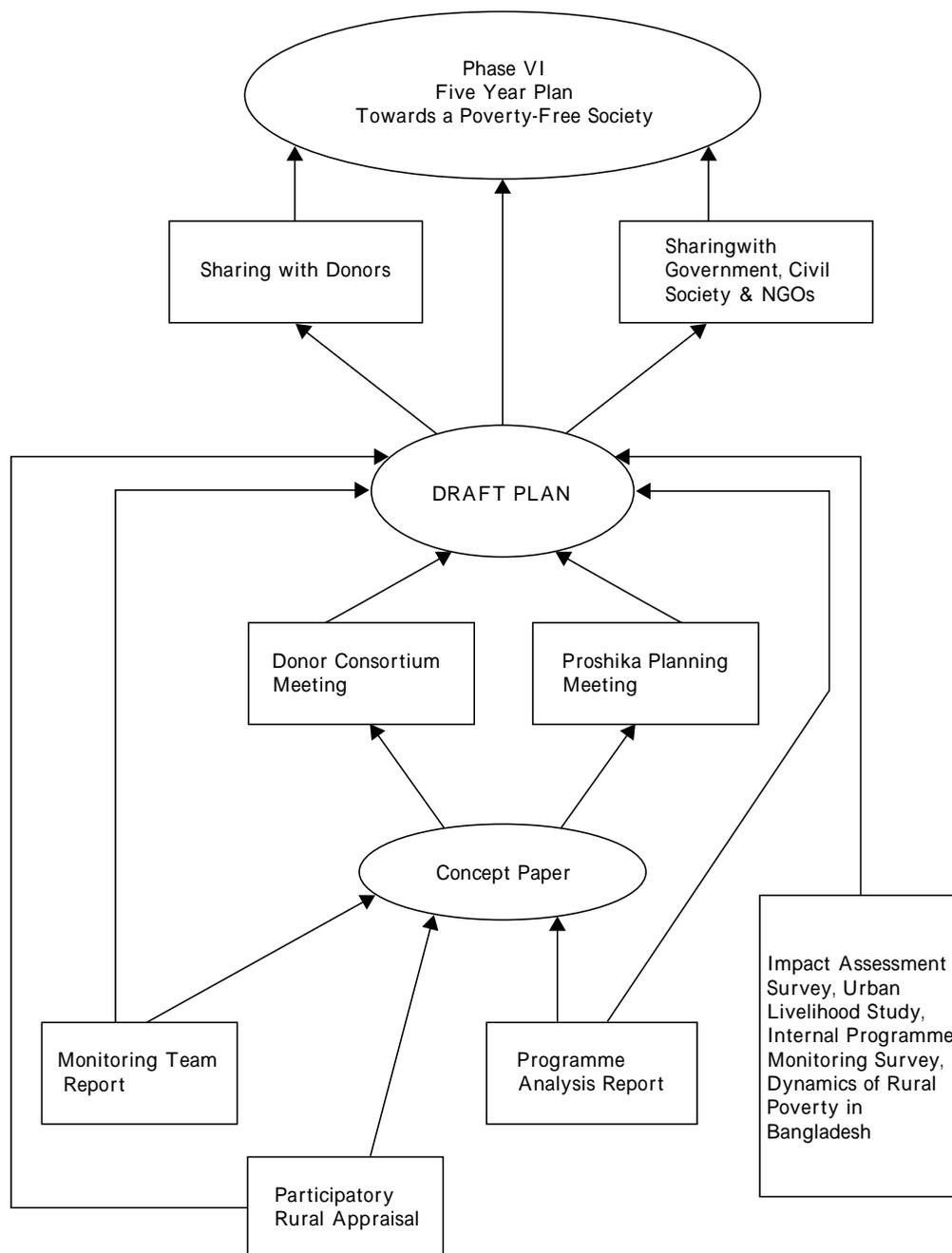
As shown in Figure 6, co-ordination between the donors and Proshika is at its most intense during the preparation and planning stage.<sup>69)</sup> The chair of the consortium currently lies with DFID. Officially, the chairperson should be elected annually but in reality the chairperson is asked to carry on this duty as long as he/she is willing to do so. The chairperson's obligations are to sign documents on behalf of the consortium and to meet with the PCO officer whenever necessary.<sup>70)</sup> The Terms of Reference and co-ordination procedures were outlined by consensus between Proshika and the donors.

Proshika, espousing the principles of self-reliance and sustainability through a process of participatory development, needs its beneficiaries to be actively engaged in planning and pursuing their own development. The needs of the villagers filter to senior management through a constructive bottom-up approach, who acts according to the perceived demands ( Figure 7 ) Hence, the donors have given Proshika considerable freedom to find the best response for its members. The priority setting remains with Proshika whose Five Year Plan is a product of a three month long Participatory Rural Appraisal exercise and an additional two month in-depth analysis by each programme head ( Figure 6 ) The concept paper along with budgetary requests is presented to the consortium for comments and donor input. The indicative Annual Work Plan and budget is prepared for the donors pursuant of contribution agreement with the EC. The donors list the technical assistance they can provide for the draft plan and Proshika selects its requirements. Technical assistance consists of formatting the English text. Hence, Proshika has become adept at proposal writing over the past few years. The donors also do their own independent analysis. The draft plan incorporates the suggestions delivered by the donors as well as those of the appraisal and monitoring team. Studies such as Human Development in South Asia, Dynamics of Rural Poverty in Bangladesh, Urban Livelihoods Study, and Impact Assessment Survey also serves as a basis for senior management to deduce conceptual inputs. The draft plan is shared with the donors and on-going dialogue substantiates the final version of the Five-Year Plan and the Annual Plan.<sup>71)</sup>

### 4.4.2 *Appraisal and Auditing*

Proshika and the donors co-select the consultants for appraisal. The Appraisal Mission recommended the need for a revised annual performance status report, which has been adapted and agreed upon accordingly by both Proshika and the donors. A definition for the Revolving Loan Fund sustainability has also been accepted in consultation with the donor consortium and has been set in the current project proposal. DFID and NOVIB provided technical assistance through capacity enhancement for the Participatory Rural Appraisal. A CIDA consultant along with two internal staff

Figure 6: Planning Process of Phase VI Programme:



Source : Proshika, Proshika, Towards a Poverty Free Society: Plan for Phase VI, ( Dhaka: Proshika, 1999 ) , p.352.

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of Proshika produced a report on Proshika, which made an invaluable contribution to the Five Year Plan. However, the EC feels that some basic questions remain unanswered such as, how to reach the poorest of the poor, and the place of micro-finance versus social services in the empowerment process.<sup>72)</sup> In response to the EC's concerns the Impact Monitoring and Evaluation Cell ( IMEC ) will look into the issue by undertaking a qualitative study on the issue and attempt to provide concrete recommendations. Additionally, Proshika will engage in participatory poverty monitoring every year. Technical assistance is being negotiated with the donor consortium to strengthen the IMEC in the qualitative analysis of the data. The technical assistance will be funded by DFID.<sup>73)</sup>

The End-of-Term Review described the financial management of Proshika as meeting international tests for probity, transparency and supervision of funds. Proshika is liable to be audited by any donor at any time. Certified public auditors are utilised and the consortium has a policy of changing auditors every two years. The EC also insists on hiring an international auditing company to examine the books. But the EC's policy on employing the cheapest bidder has not necessarily ensured quality. The consortium has circumvented this foible by combining the work of international and locally certified auditors. The multitude of reviews Proshika undergoes, embody the annual inspection of the accounts as well as the examination of the Credit Programme and Financial and Accounts Management System. Even the auditors themselves will be audited in the future. Proshika has its own Finance and Accounts Management System, which makes financial decision making more efficient and productive. The PCO has requested the Finance and Accounts unit to produce a common reporting framework to fulfil all donors' basic reporting needs for Phase VI. The EC is pushing for harmonised procurement procedures during Phase VI.<sup>74)</sup>

### *4.4.3 Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation*

Proshika's participatory approach to development involves the primary group members in the villages as the chief implementators of the programme and all its components. So far, Proshika has organised 81, 627 primary groups throughout Bangladesh.<sup>75)</sup> The formation of the primary group members is described in the following section under Proshika Management. The role of the primary group as regards education is sharing some of the cost as well as taking more responsibility in the management of the programme. The village co-ordination committee ( VCC ) representing ten primary groups at the village level, is responsible for selecting the teachers, the learners, the and accommodation for learning centres, for enrolling children in primary schools and assisting Proshika workers in follow-up and supervision. The duties of Proshika staff are to guide, assist, support, train, and monitor the primary group members. The donors do not engage in the implementation process but monitor from the sidelines. Up until Phase IV, the programme had been monitored by consultants. Since Phase V with the establishment of the PCO monitoring is conducted jointly. Monitoring and

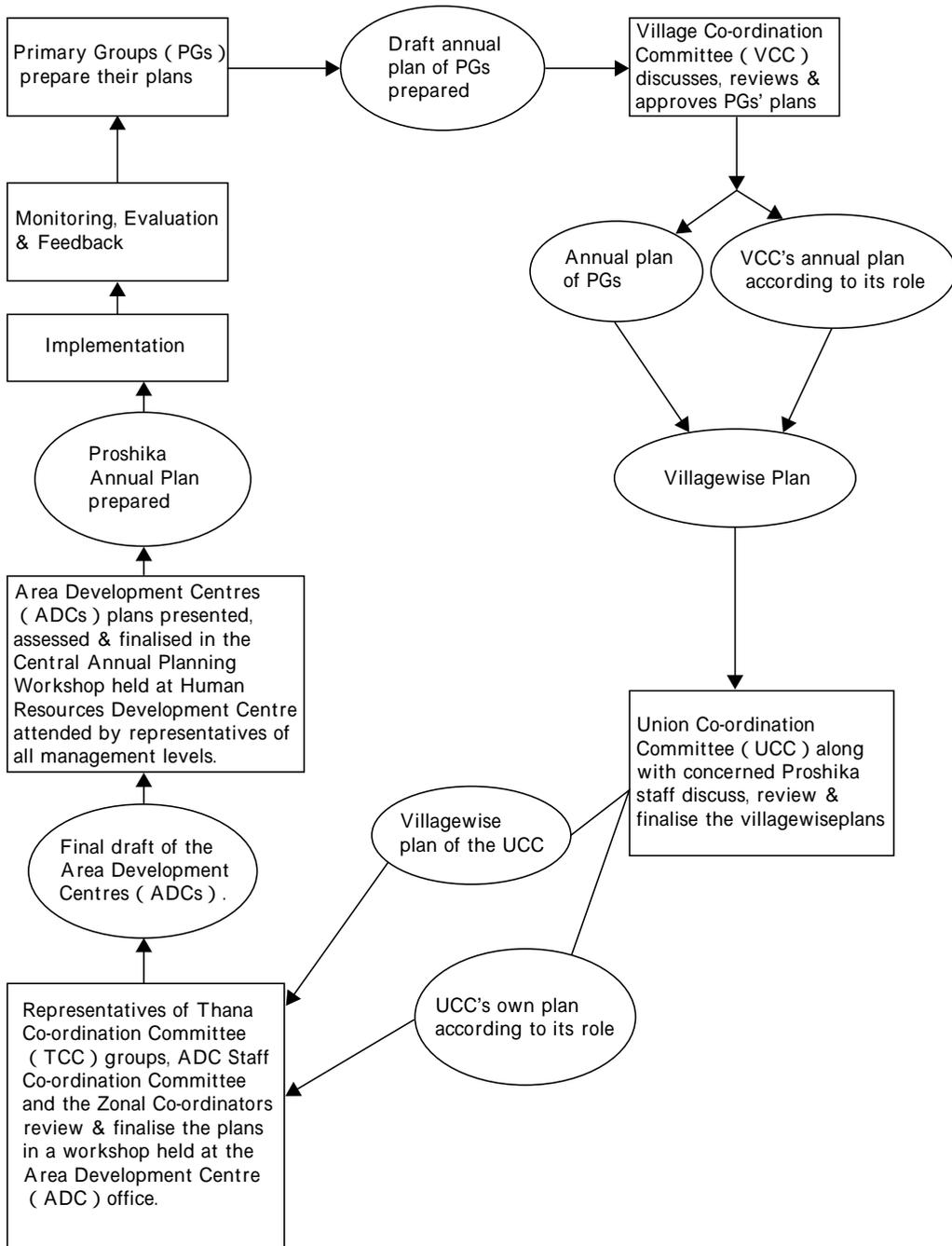
evaluation indicators are determined at the bi-annual meetings. Proshika produces six-monthly status reports on the progress of the programme and financial performance to targets and budget. A common format for these reports is decided jointly by donors and Proshika. The IMEC is developing a monitoring system called Impact Monitoring System. It is composed of three components: Impact Assessment System and Participatory Impact Assessment System, Internal Periodic Monitoring System, and Sectoral Evaluation System. The donors will benefit greatly from this additional monitoring. For the Mid-term Review, the donors fielded a six-member multi-disciplinary team of consultants to assess Proshika over a period of six weeks. They analysed the effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, sustainability, and soundness of the programme and management in realising poverty eradication. The issues of concern that were pointed out during Phase V are difficulties in reaching the poorest segments of society, overlapping between NGOs, necessary strengthening of management capacities, and the risk of over-emphasis on the micro-finance services to the detriment of the social services.<sup>76)</sup> The donors themselves also pay an annual visit to the field for two to three days. Recently, they are utilising this opportunity to simultaneously observe BRAC programmes. This experience provides a deeper insight of comparative strengths and weaknesses, which is shared with the recipients.<sup>77)</sup> Such particulars would otherwise be 'off-limits' to these two rival agencies. The dearth of funds within the evaluation budget limits the number of high-quality studies of the impacts of operations, or authoritative evaluations of specific programmes.

#### 4.5 Proshika Management: Internal Co-ordination

Proshika's management and administration system has been praised for its focus on the value and practice of participation, flexibility to accommodate a required change, autonomy of each level, decentralised and democratic decision-making mechanism and a bottom-up planning process.<sup>78)</sup> Federation is the main thrust of Proshika's strategy to enable the poor to breakaway from the poverty and repression they face. Within Proshika, federations have the real management power and represent a lot of people. Proshika fieldworkers identify areas that are poor and under-served, and invite potential group members for training at Proshika Rural Training Centre in human development, social analysis, leadership, and group formation. Fieldworkers assist the trained people to set up mono-sexed groups of around twenty people in their villages, by supervising and monitoring their activities. Members attend meetings regularly and contribute to the group's collective savings. The group savings fund becomes a source of interest free loan for group members in times of financial crises. The members talk about their problems, discuss ways of solving them, and try to resolve differences within the group. These meetings help them to understand their common situation and create awareness of the significance of organisation and unity. Once the group is able to manage its own affairs, group management falls on the group leaders with Proshika fieldworkers acting as advisers

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Figure 7: Participatory Annual Project Plan Formulation Process



Source : Proshika, *Proshika, Towards a Poverty Free Society: Plan for Phase VI*, ( Dhaka: Proshika, 1999 ) p.351.

and facilitators. The primary group undertakes its own annual plan for economic, social and cultural issues, and is forwarded to the village co-ordination committee ( VCC ) for review and approval as depicted in Figure 7. However, a study conducted by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs found that meetings are not conducted as often as they are supposed to, that only 60 to 70 per cent of all members attend and all the members do at the meetings are deposit savings and make loan repayments. Proshika's saving scheme is not effective because groups saving are not regular and some members in charge of the savings sometime misappropriate or personally use them. Furthermore, some of the groups interviewed claimed that they gained little from the training and would prefer more skill-centred courses.<sup>79)</sup>

Federations are formed on three levels, village ( VCC ) union ( UCC ) and thana ( TCC ) Each of these levels plays a central role in the annual project planning as illustrated in Figure 7. At each level, the formation of the committee and the process of decision-making are strictly participatory and democratic. Ten groups form a federation at the village level. The village co-ordination committee ( VCC ) comprises of two representatives from each primary group who meet monthly. An average of 70 percent of the representatives attends while those representing loan defaulter groups are usually absent. While each primary group remain autonomous and ensure maximum participation, unity at the village co-ordination committee level can assert a countervailing power against the oppressive vested interests.<sup>80)</sup> Its duties are to supervise the management of primary groups, process their credit applications, make recommendations to the union co-ordination committee, and provide arbitration on any problems that cannot be resolved by the primary groups. During the formulation of annual project planning, the VCC tasks include devising a Villagewise Plan based on the proposals made by the Primary Groups and the VCC itself.

A union co-ordination committee ( UCC ) represents five village co-ordination committees and comprises of elected representatives from the village co-ordination committee. Its tasks involve scrutinising credit proposals sent by the village co-ordination committees and passing them on to the Proshika office as well as undertaking various social programmes. The UCC meets regularly and has an average of 50 per cent attendance over the year. The village annual plans are assessed, reviewed and approved by Proshika staff and union co-ordination committee members. An annual union plan is formulated and village plans are finalised ( see Figure 7 ) Animators are front line field workers who represent Proshika at the village and union co-ordination levels and are recruited locally. They keep contact with the different groups for feedback and communication and attend the intergroup co-ordination meetings.

The thana co-ordination committee ( TCC ) is the key office and plays a crucial role in both the planning and implementation of programmes. With an office and training facility, this Area Development Centre ( ADC ) encompasses an average of 108 villages but will extend to 125 villages

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during Phase VI. This large and solid representation at the thana level has the strength to oppose local government policies. Although, relations between government and Proshika are good, the Thana Nirbahi Officer feels that Proshika is reluctant to share information on its work with the government and this reduces the opportunities for its members to benefit from government services.<sup>81)</sup> An Area Co-ordinator manages the Area Development Centre and has an average staff number of 26. The Area Development Centre provides a base for the animators to organise groups for conscientisation, training, credit and other development services. Meetings are held twice monthly between the Area Development Centre Staff and the co-ordination committee members to review the progress of programme implementation and to plan the monthly work schedule of each staff. The staff has considerable autonomy and can make financial and administrative decisions concerning programme implementation 90 per cent of the time.

As outlined in Figure 7, two to three day workshops are held to assess the annual plans and to draft the overall plan for the Area Development Centre. The draft plans are discussed during a week-long central planning workshop held at Proshika's Human Resources Development Centre. Management personnel from all levels of Proshika actively participate in this workshop. The drafts are finalised in this workshop taking into consideration Proshika's objectives, the availability of resources and the previous year's performance. Generally, the Area Development Centres get to attain 95 per cent of their plans. The integration and compilation of plans is done at Headquarters that forms the Proshika Annual Project Plan.<sup>82)</sup>

Two or three adjacent Area Development Centres form a zone that operates from one of the Area Development Centres. A zonal co-ordinator ( ZC ) is in charge of each zone and is the link between central administration and the Area Development Centres representing the grassroots level. The zonal co-ordinator also liaises with local and district level government authorities as well as other NGOs.

A central co-ordinator must have at least a total of twelve years of experience as fieldworker. Each sectoral programme component has a programme activity co-ordinator whose task is to provide support, guidance and monitoring to the Area Development Centres staff members. They spent a lot of their time co-ordinating with the government, donors and other NGOs.

Senior management constitutes the president, vice-president, directors, deputy directors and principal programme co-ordinators. Overall management, the execution of strategic directions to the 3,500 staff members, and the integration of all the components of Proshika's development process are the major concern of the senior management personnel. Substantial attention is given to establishing links with central government, donors, national and international NGOs. Government officials, members of civil society along with NGO representatives were invited to share their views on the Five Year Plan for Phase VI prior to the finalisation of the official report.

#### 4.6 Synthesis of Proshika's Co-ordination Mechanisms

Proshika's Five Year Programme Phase VI fulfils the local ownership and participatory criteria of the first principle for effective co-ordination. Proshika's attributes promote ownership. Proshika's belief in its principles entail that donors need to conform to Proshika's modus operandi and not vice versa. Additionally, Proshika is not easily swayed by financial gain. Ownership and programme sustainability is ameliorated because Proshika is only allocated 20 per cent of the total programme expenditure from donors.

Participation is instigated, as the beneficiaries of the programme have to be actively engaged in planning and pursuing their own development and are the chief executants of the programme. The Five Year Plan was compiled over a three month long Participatory Rural Appraisal and thus, reflect the needs of its members. Nevertheless, the VOs have expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of skill-centred training. Moreover, over emphasis on credit activities has led to the neglect of social issues at the grass-roots level.

The second principle stipulating the need for partnership involves facilitating recipient leadership and ownership of their own development is evident in the relationship between the donors and Proshika. The PCO acts as the interface between Proshika and the donors. The PCO, facilitates communication between all partners, promotes genuine policy dialogue, enhances transparency and accountability, and reinforces the concept of partnership between the donors and recipients. The investigation undertaken by the IMEC in response to donors' concerns and assistance furnishes a good example of partnership. The Terms of Reference and Co-ordination Mechanisms are decided jointly between the donors and recipients and the division of labour and roles throughout the project cycle are determined as a team. The main roles of the donors are to make recommendations on the draft plans, and to hire consultants, in collaboration with the recipients, for appraisal missions and auditing teams, and to monitor and evaluate the programmes. Donors tend to be rather flexible, accommodating one another when the need arises.

Due attention is paid to the third principle emphasising the need for institutional and capacity building to enhance sustainability. After all, Proshika's doctrine of poverty reduction is based upon the human and material capacity of the poor. The reduction of duplication of administrative and financial reporting due to the common approach adopted by the donors has helped Proshika to scale-up its operations. Components to enhance human resource development are incorporated in the programme such as, the strengthening of the IMEC through technical assistance and the development of a monitoring system, etc. Proshika's active participation through the appraisal, auditing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of the programme is an invaluable asset to capacity building. Yet, Proshika has not being completely successful in creating self-reliant organisations at the grass-roots

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level. Indeed, its policy of empowering members by refraining from micro-managing savings has had undesirable effects. Additionally, failure to strengthen links with other institutions at the grass-roots level can be disadvantageous to the beneficiaries.

Donor financial and technical assistance to Proshika is in line with the fourth principle of pool-funding. It is Proshika who proposes its technical assistance needs to the donors through the PCO. At times, the donors offer technical assistance but let Proshika decide whether to accept it or not. However, pool-funding has not helped to foster timely disbursements from the EC.

### 5 Conclusion

Aid co-ordination mechanisms have played an influential role in the ability of BRAC and Proshika to deliver successful projects on a large-scale basis throughout Bangladesh. The co-ordination procedures employed by both NGOs are different despite having some donors in common, which illustrates the difficulty of recommending one conclusive or ideal model for aid co-ordination. The model should be adapted according to the recipient's capacity and administrative development as well as the donors concerned. However, BRAC and Proshika's models strive to embrace the following four principles underlying effective co-ordination: ( 1 ) Local ownership and participation: The leadership role undertaken by BRAC and Proshika throughout the stages of aid co-ordination is conducive to local ownership and participation. The internal co-ordination mechanisms within BRAC and Proshika enable their beneficiaries to be actively engaged not only in the designing of the programmes but also in implementing them. These participatory conditions simultaneously strengthen local ownership and promote sustainability. The most discernible deficiencies in realising self-sustainability of the programmes at the grass-roots level pertinent to local ownership and participation are as follows: the scaling-up of programmes before the relevant capacity and institutional building are in place; the over-dependency of donor funding because of the dearth of financial input from the NGOs and their members; and over-emphasis on credit activities at the expense of social issues. ( 2 ) Partnership: The liaison offices, the DLO and the PCO are instrumental in promoting the concept of partnership between the donors and the recipients by facilitating communication, genuine policy dialogue and accountability. The donors undertake supportive and advisory roles that are crucial to sustainability in the form of making recommendations on draft plans, hiring consultants, and monitoring and evaluating the programmes in conjunction with the recipient NGO. A common set of arrangements for all donors ameliorates the sense of partnership. Weaknesses in the partnership principle stem from bureaucratic procedures of the donors along with lack of delegated authority at the field level, and the perception of some donors that financial allocations equal the level of political clout within the Donor Consortium. ( 3 ) Institutional and capacity building: Both BRAC and Proshika are grounded on the philosophy of empowering the poor to participate in the national development process through

capacity building and human resource development. Provisions to enhance institutional and capacity building are made through various components of BRAC's NFPE III and Proshika's Fifth Five Year Plan. Additionally, BRAC allocates a percentage of all donor disbursements to staff development. Due consideration needs to be placed on strengthening capacity building and human resources development at the grass-roots level to ensure self-sustainability of the VOs. (4) Pool-funding of financial and technical resources: No specific component of the programme belongs to or is the responsibility of any one donor because all allocations and technical assistance are pool-funded. The effects of pool-funding are diminished from late disbursements and from failure to strengthen links with other NGOs and the government involved in similar activities.

The insights gained from these case studies have the potential to ameliorate the effectiveness of co-ordination mechanisms since they can be adopted by those donors, recipient governments and NGOs who are committed to improving the sustainable development impact of aid. The lessons most conducive to fulfilling this objective are as follows:

- (1) Focusing on Sector Wide Approach: The sector-wide approach can be a more powerful instrument in addressing poverty than the project or programme approach because it incorporates many conditions that hinder project performance, such as, poor policy frameworks, weak institutional capacity, misapplication of resources, etc. Additionally, the sector-wide approach provides good platforms for aid dialogue, ownership, and aid co-ordination. The sector-wide approach should be based on a national development plan. BRAC's project approach limits the institutional and capacity building of the organisation to various sections and departments pertinent to the project on-hand and Proshika's programme approach also fails to co-ordinate with other major players involved in the same sector resulting in overlapping of services and misapplication of resources. It is the government who has the main responsibility to provide education to its citizens because the NGO service delivery is a mere drop in the ocean. However, both have major roles to play in alleviating poverty, and each can benefit from the experience and resources of the other. Thus, the sector-wide approach can strengthen the necessary links for these two major players to co-ordinate their activities at the local level for the benefit of the poor.
- (2) Pool-funding of Financial and Technical Resources: Pool-funding is the most effective mechanism for financing a sector programme because donors will focus on the entire programme rather than being preoccupied with maintaining responsibility for their own component and input. It also creates less administrative burden for the recipients. Dates for allocations should be agreed upon between the recipients and any costs incurred from late disbursements should be the donor's responsibility. Technical assistance should not be supply driven but based on real recipient demand.
- (3) Establishing a Liaison Office: For every project or programme, a Liaison Office similar to the DLO

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or the PCO should be set up to facilitate communication throughout the project cycle between the donors and the recipients. The success of BRAC and Proshika is largely due to the multi-dimensional functions of the liaison office, which range from donors adopting a core approach, bending donor internal policies and rules, enabling smaller donors to monitor the programme. Moreover, the DLO and the PCO are instrumental in nurturing the concept of partnership between the donors and the recipients as well as overseeing that requirements and co-ordination procedures are adhered to. The Liaison Officer should be selected on consensus between the recipient and the donors. The role and the duties of the Liaison Officer should be clearly specified from the onset to avoid confusion and intrusive behaviour as in the case of the DLO.

- (4) Recipient Leadership and Clarifying Roles: Like BRAC and Proshika, the recipient government or NGO should assume the position of leader in aid co-ordination and be responsible for strategic policy formulation and fiscal management. The role of each donor ought to be specified according to comparative advantages to utilise human and financial resources effectively. Unity among donors entails compromise, and options need be discussed and decided beforehand to avoid conflict in policy signalling during policy dialogue, etc. All partners must agree upon the rules embracing roles and responsibilities as well as sanctions for non-compliance to ensure that no one tries to change course halfway through the programme.
- (5) Institutional Reform and Capacity Building: To improve the efficiency of the recipient in delivering services, emphasis needs to shift more in the direction of long-term institutional and capacity building needs of recipient rather than just focusing on immediate programme needs. Before embarking on a project or sector-wide programme, the institutional capacity of the recipient should be carefully assessed and an institutional framework designed. Institutional reform should be closely monitored and regularly updated. Donors should pay more attention to performance of the recipient in the field rather than being overly concerned about the quality of documentation. In-depth evaluation studies on the impact of the programme are critical for future developments.
- (6) Financial and Management Restructuring of Donors: Multi-annual programming of budgets could be more effective for long-term planning within the recipient country than annual appropriations. Decentralisation of budget management at the country level would ensure that officials who are well versed in the recipient country affairs make the decisions concerning allocations, and disbursements would be on time. Decentralisation of management and authority to the country level is required to ensure autonomy in decision-making at the field level and to engage freely in co-operative ventures and on-the-spot co-ordination. To enhance the donor's role, the country level offices should be manned with committed professionals and experts who are well versed in policy making rather than generalists with little experience and special training in development

co-operation.

(7) Addressing Contentious Issues: The enforcement of the co-ordination process itself is not enough to ensure success. It requires commitment from all participants and must address sensitive and contentious issues in a timely manner.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Jean Bossuyt and Geert Laporte, *Partnership in the 1990's: How to Make it Work Better*, Policy Management Brief No.3 ( Maastricht: ECDPM ) 1994.
- <sup>2</sup>Ismail Serageldin, *Nurturing Development: Aid and Co-operation in Today's Changing World*, ( Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1995 ) p.11.
- <sup>3</sup>UNDP, *Aid Co-ordination and Management by Government: A Role for the UNDP*, ( UNDP Policy Division, 1994 )
- <sup>4</sup>In the 1996 annual Report of the DAC, 'development partnership' is described in terms of '*participation, good governance and accountability, the protection of human rights and the rule of law*' ( OECD, 1996 ) P.6.
- <sup>5</sup>Jean Bossuyt, *Capacity Development: How Donors do it Better?* Policy Management Brief No.5 ( Maastricht: ECDPM ) 1994.
- <sup>6</sup>Education Watch, *Hope not Complacency: State of Primary Education in Bangladesh 1999*, ( Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1999 ) p.2.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup>PEDP is funded by International Development Association ( IDA ) Asian Development Bank ( ADB ) United Nations Children's Fund ( UNICEF ) United Nations Development Programme ( UNDP ) United Nations Fund for Population Activities ( UNFPA ) Department for International Development ( DFID ) The Norwegian Official Aid Agency ( NORAD ) and German Technical Co-operation ( GTZ )
- <sup>9</sup>Muhammed H. Hossain, 'Decentralisation of Educational Management and Planning of Primary Education in Bangladesh'. in Jalaluddin AK and Chowdhury AMR ( editors ) *Getting Started: Universalising Quality Education in Bangladesh*, ( Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1997 ) p.98.
- <sup>10</sup>BRAC has four major programmes; ( 1 ) Rural Development Programme is the core programme, which focuses on income-generating activities facilitated by credit for the poorest of the poor; ( 2 ) Rural Credit Project which provides banking services for village groups that have graduated from four years under the Rural Development Programme; ( 3 ) Health programmes with emphasis on preventative health and assisting government rural health system; and ( 4 ) NFPE programme.
- <sup>11</sup>DFID, *Bangladesh: BRAC Non-formal Primary Education Programme Phase III*, Document ( 1999 ) pp. 7,3.
- <sup>12</sup>EC, *Working Papers: EC-Bangladesh Working Group, 28-29 September 1998*, ( Dhaka: EC, 1998 )P.141.
- <sup>13</sup>Interview at EC Delegation, Dhaka, September 1998.
- <sup>14</sup>The Netherlands Organisation for International Development Co-operation ( NOVIB ) is a Dutch NGO.

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- <sup>15</sup>) The Financial Control blocked BRAC's second request for disbursement ( 9mECU ) because of the cases of non-appliance of EC financial procedures in purchasing certain equipment. After receiving additional guarantees from BRAC, 80 per cent of the funds was transmitted to BRAC while 20 per cent was retained pending a satisfactory outcome of the international audit.
- <sup>16</sup>) Interview at EC Delegation, Dhaka, September 1998.
- <sup>17</sup>) Dr. Miriam Bailey et al. *An Appraisal of the Proposal for BRAC's Education Programme: Phase III*, ( Dhaka:22<sup>nd</sup> August-12<sup>th</sup> September 1998 ) p.54.
- <sup>18</sup>) Catherine H. Lovell, *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty: The BRAC Strategy*, ( USA: Kumarian Press ) 1992.
- <sup>19</sup>) DFID, ( 1999 ) pp. 7,16.
- <sup>20</sup>) Interview at DLO, Dhaka, March 1999.
- <sup>21</sup>) Interviews at EC Delegation, DLO & DFID, Dhaka, September 1998, March 1999.
- <sup>22</sup>) Interview at DLO, Dhaka, September 1998.
- <sup>23</sup>) The Logical Framework Analysis ( LFA ) is one such example. From Phase I, DFID was insisting on BRAC to incorporate the LFA in its reporting because of the difficulty in interpreting objectives, implementation procedures, institutional arrangements, etc. from its proposals. The other partners were not so concerned, making it very difficult for the liaison officer to persuade BRAC. Eventually after many attempts, BRAC finally gave in and incorporated the LFA in the last draft of its Proposal for Phase III. Had the donors taken a united stance, BRAC would have been quicker to conform, and would have saved a lot of trouble in the long run.
- <sup>24</sup>) Interview at DFID, Dhaka, August 1999.
- <sup>25</sup>) NFPE II furnishes a fine example of unanimity. In the middle of NFPE II, BRAC's proposal to extend its curriculum to Classes IV and V was rejected by one donor, KfW on the grounds that it did not comply with the project proposal set out prior to implementation. BRAC had to wait until NFPE III to implement the desired changes ( Interview at DLO, Dhaka, September 1998 )
- <sup>26</sup>) Interview at DLO, Dhaka, September 1998.
- <sup>27</sup>) Interview with the NFPE Director, BRAC Head Office, Dhaka, September 1999.
- <sup>28</sup>) Interview at DLO, Dhaka, March 1998. For example, BRAC initially failed to explain how teachers were to be trained, how textbooks were to be produced, and how monitoring was to be done for the programme expansion to Grades IV and V in NFPE III until challenged by the donors.
- <sup>29</sup>) DFID's emphasis is on gender issues, quality of education and transparency. NOVIB also focuses on education for females while EU looks to involving the disabled in BRAC programmes and accountability.
- <sup>30</sup>) Interviews at BRAC, DLO, EC Delegation, DFID, Dhaka, March & September 1999.
- <sup>31</sup>) Interview at DLO, Dhaka, September 1998.
- <sup>32</sup>) Interview at DFID, Dhaka, March 1999.
- <sup>33</sup>) Interview at EC, Dhaka, September 1999.

- <sup>34)</sup> Interview at BRAC, Dhaka, March 1999.
- <sup>35)</sup> BRAC Appraisal Report, 1998.
- <sup>36)</sup> Interview at DLO, Dhaka, September 1998.
- <sup>37)</sup> Interview at DLO, Dhaka, March 1999.
- <sup>38)</sup> Interview at DFID, Dhaka, March 1999.
- <sup>39)</sup> DFID, ( 1999 ) p. 7.
- <sup>40)</sup> Interviews at DFID, EC Delegation, DLO, Dhaka, September 1998 & March 1999.
- <sup>41)</sup> Lovell, ( 1992 )
- <sup>42)</sup> Village Organisations are formed with 20-55 members, with a management committee and comprising of smaller joint liability credit and loan groups.
- <sup>43)</sup> Ian Smillie, *Words and Deeds: BRAC at 25*, ( Dhaka: BRAC, 1997 ) p.32.
- <sup>44)</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Bangladesh: Evaluation of Netherlands-Funded NGOs, 1972-1996*, ( Amsterdam: Ridderprint BV, Ridderkerk ) 1998.
- <sup>45)</sup> DFID, ( 1999 ) p.7.
- <sup>46)</sup> Lovell, ( 1992 )
- <sup>47)</sup> ABEL, *Primary Education For All: Learning From the BRAC Experience: A Case Study*, ( Dhaka: BRAC Printers ) 1993.
- <sup>48)</sup> Interview at Deputy Commissioner's Office, Tangail, September 1999.
- <sup>49)</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50)</sup> Miriam Bailey, Barry Reeves, Anne Ryan & Brigid Smith, *An Appraisal of the Proposal for BRAC's Education Programme: Phase III*, ( Dhaka: BRAC ) 1998.
- <sup>51)</sup> Interview at EC, DLO, Dhaka, September 1998 & March 1999.
- <sup>52)</sup> Interview at PCO, Dhaka, September 1999.
- <sup>53)</sup> Proshika, *Proshika, Towards a Poverty-Free Society: Plan for Phase VI*, ( Dhaka: Proshika, 1999 ) p.358.
- <sup>54)</sup> For Phase V Programme Proshika requested US\$75.3m from the consortium while the rest of the total budget of US\$184m was met mainly from repayments into the Revolving Loan Fund ( RLF ) and associated service charge.
- <sup>55)</sup> A multilateral donors approached Proshika with a proposal to fund on a project basis, which would have covered 50 per cent of its programme financing needs. Proshika rejected the proposal on the grounds that all funding must be for its programme as a whole.
- <sup>56)</sup> Data received from PCO, September 1999.
- <sup>57)</sup> Interview at PCO, Dhaka, September 1999.
- <sup>58)</sup> EC, *Working Papers: EC-Bangladesh Working Group, 28-29 September 1998*, ( Dhaka: EC Delegation, 1998 ) p. 138.
- <sup>59)</sup> Interviews at DFID, PCO, EC Delegation, Dhaka, September 1999.

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<sup>60)</sup> Interview at PCO, Dhaka, March 1999.

<sup>61)</sup> Interview at Proshika, Dhaka, March 1999.

<sup>62)</sup> Interviews at EC Delegation, PCO, Dhaka, March & September 1999.

<sup>63)</sup> Interview at DFID, Dhaka, August 1998.

<sup>64)</sup> Interview at PCO, Dhaka March 1999.

<sup>65)</sup> The reasons for non-communication between the two liaison offices can be surmised as follows: ( 1 ) the PCO and the DLO were regarded as experiments, so there were many differences in the way things were conducted; ( 2 ) the donors were already taking a risk with such huge investment in NGOs, and consequently didn't want the co-ordination officers to juxtapose; and ( 3 ) the Bangladeshi characteristic of organisations not getting together, and the friction between the NGOs strained relationships.

<sup>66)</sup> For example, NOVIB draws on its world-wide experience of co-operation with local organisations to open up new ideas to Proshika ( Netherlands, 1998 ) and focuses on fieldtrips; CIDA is interested in operational matters and runs workshops on chain management; the EC is keen on NGO matters and impact assessment and analyses Proshika's data; and DFID, as a decentralised agency has many skills and services to offer.

<sup>67)</sup> Interviews at Proshika, DFID, EC Delegation, PCO, Dhaka, March & September 1999.

<sup>68)</sup> Interviews at DFID, EC Delegation, PCO, Dhaka, March, September 1999.

<sup>69)</sup> Interview at PCO, Dhaka, March 1999.

<sup>70)</sup> Interview at DFID, August 1999.

<sup>71)</sup> Interviews at Proshika, PCO, Dhaka, March & September 1999.

<sup>72)</sup> Interviews at EC Delegation and PCO, Dhaka, March & September 1999.

<sup>73)</sup> Interview at Proshika, September 1999.

<sup>74)</sup> Interviews at EC Delegation, PCO, September 1999.

<sup>75)</sup> Proshika ( 1998 ) p.1.

<sup>76)</sup> EC, ( 1998 )

<sup>77)</sup> Interviews at Proshika, PCO, DFID, EC Delegation, Dhaka, March & September 1999.

<sup>78)</sup> Proshika ( 1999 ) p.464.

<sup>79)</sup> See Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs ( 1998 ) p. 259.

<sup>80)</sup> Reza Shamsur Rahaman, *A Praxis in Participatory Rural Development: Proshika with the Prisoners of Poverty*, ( Dhaka: Moni Printers, 1986 ) p.25.

<sup>81)</sup> See Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs ( 1998 ) p. 265.

<sup>82)</sup> Interview at Proshika, Dhaka, March 1999.

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