



# **The Role of NGOs in Sustainable Socio-economic Development of Rural Poor: Evidence from Bangladesh**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author UJ created the idea, designed the study and constructed the framework. Author MSH wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author MAH collected the primary and secondary information. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present study aims to investigate the current initiative and practices of Non Government Organizations (NGOs) in sustainable socio-economic development of the rural poor people of Bangladesh. NGOs in Bangladesh have virtually grown in vast numbers since the independence. It has been observed that from the late seventies, NGOs have been playing an increasingly important role in the nation's development process. The study used both primary data and secondary information. Primary data have been collected for this study using random sampling from 10 villages of 2 districts of Bangladesh. A number of techniques have been utilized to collect data from the respondents such as household survey, focus group discussions, in depth interviews and observations. The final valid sample (Sample 1 and Sample 2) size of respondents stood to 819 (750+69) who are the beneficiaries and officials of different NGOs located on those 10 villages of 2 districts. Mostly descriptive statistics have been used to conduct data analysis in this

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study. The results reveal that the members of studied NGOs have been benefited from various programs undertaken. It has been observed that the food intake of the NGO beneficiaries has increased considerably in terms of income generation, nutrition value and health consciousness. The paper is expected to be one of the basic foundations for those who want to investigate further regarding NGO operation and policy making.

*Keywords: Non-government organization; society; socio-economic development; Bangladesh.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Non government Organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh have virtually grown in vast numbers since the independence of the country. It has been observed that from the late seventies, NGOs have been playing an increasingly important role in the nation's development process [1]. Moreover, their ability to make positive contributions in many spheres of national development is being increasingly recognized in current development process. Such recognition has been provided on the basis of the success of NGOs. To a great extent, changes are required at the grassroots level to facilitate implementation of need based development programs to improve the quality of life of the rural poor.

The conventional development approach with its prime focus on 'economic growth' has not contributed much to socio economic development of the rural poor who constitute the bulk of the population of the country. The process of centralized planning and the top down implementation approach through the rigid and non-responsive bureaucratic apparatus, has failed to a great extent to accommodate the needs and priorities of the poor and under privileged. In fact, most of the resources provided by the government were gravitated towards the richer section of the population which enjoyed power and political patronage [2].

On the other hand, certain characteristic advantages such as, rapid response, flexibility in financial and operational matters and close relationship with people need to be observed. It is worth mentioning that the NGO activities have been especially reported in the following areas: poverty alleviation through credit extension and income generating activities, literacy program, and health care, women development programs, population planning, legal education and various community development programs for socio- economic development of the rural poor.

Right now Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs have become an extensively discussed issue in Bangladesh. The NGOs have appeared as the savior of countless number of people without food, cloth, education and basic health facilities. With the record of being the most densely populated country on earth and feeble manpower competency, Bangladesh is facing massive challenge to meet up the demand of her ever-increasing population. Considering overall situations, the NGOs are working on poverty eradication by directly involving the poverty stricken population. Their target groups are basically the poor and vulnerable ones with hardly any possessions. Their main tasks are to organize these people, create awareness in them and make them development oriented. These organizations are working based on the assessed need and demand of the grass root level poor people. By involving the beneficiaries directly, they are working within the context of socio-economic development.

There are 30,050 large and small NGOs in Bangladesh [3]. These NGOs are working for the economic and social development of the poor people. Bangladesh in recent years has made some impressive progress on the social and economic fronts. The improvements that one notices in education, health, water and sanitation, and poverty alleviation can be explained as the result of more effective state action and the expansion of service delivery by NGOs [4].

However, one basic question that remains to be resolved is to what extent these successes and achievements will trickle down to the vast multitude of people who still live below the poverty line in rural areas. How much is their condition improving? Are these NGOs using the rural poor as a target group to assimilate their own interest? These questions usually arise because the rate of poverty in Bangladesh has not decreased dramatically. The answers to these questions will come out through this study. As a result of overleaping of NGOs programs rural poor people fall into a poverty cycle in the

name of Economic Development. Social development programs have lack of sustainability.

This research initiative will try to find out the gaps and constraints and suggest a way forward in the form of recommendations to enable BRAC to maximize the benefits of these programs for the betterment of those for whom these are being implemented. Following the discussion made above, the authors put forward the subsequent research questions:

1. Do the NGOs play any role in socio-economic development of rural grassroot level people?
2. To what extent the NGOs can change the socio-economic perspective of rural people?

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

### 2.1 Rural Poor

Those who are landless farmer and small or marginal farmer they are usually identified as the rural poor. Khan and Rahman [5] advocated for identifying rural poverty by the capability of earnings of the village population to satisfy their needs and wants. They also emphasized nutrition and safety. Younus [6] on the other hand, talked about usage of various socio-economic variables to identify the rural poor. [These are: family size, adult literacy rate, health and nutrition facility, cultivable land and elements, security; and family income & savings.

In one special seminar organized and broadcasted by "Voice of America" in September 1987 held in the USA, then the first lady of USA Nancy Regan said that people who live in the rural area, suffer from continuous starvation and malnutrition generally uneducated or insufficiently educated, lack basic housing and clothing facility and unable to maintain basic amenities due to very limited purchasing power to buy food and other daily essentials can be termed as the rural poor.

Rural poverty is a negative socio-economic-cultural state of affairs, which is exhibited in the form of lower standard of living; lower income, consumption, savings and social security; and low social welfare. In a simplified manner, it can be said that rural poverty is that level of living standard for rustic population where their inability to meet up basic necessities is exhibited. As for

Bangladesh, the basis and dimension of rural poverty is simply vast. Some aspects of rural poverty are:

- Lower income
- Rapid/easy fall in income
- Lack of coping crisis ability
- Limited access to the social resources
- Insufficiency or total deprivation from social and civic life
- Insufficient health and nutrition service

Therefore, in general, poor people living in rural areas share several characteristics including: low level of education, a relatively large number of children with relatively low accesses to material sources, social and physical infrastructure and higher susceptibility to community-wide exogenous.

### 2.2 Non Governmental Organization (NGO)

The diversity of NGOs strains any simple definition. They include many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives. NGOs are self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that aim to improve the quality of life for the disadvantaged people. It is a non-profit voluntary, service-oriented organization, either for the benefit of the members or of the members of the population (agency). In other words, a socio-economic development organization that assists empowerment of the disadvantaged people.

### 2.3 Emergence of NGOs in Bangladeshi Socio-economic Context

History of NGOs in Bangladesh can be traced back to the British colonial period. Since British era, NGOs in its traditional form have been working in Bangladesh as different trust based schools, hospitals, orphanages, and social reformist groups. Later, Bangladesh went through a great transformation and turned into agents of development in the post-liberation period.

After the independence, a large number of foreign voluntary agencies came to help the war affected country with the task of relief and rehabilitation. A number of national organizations and the personal initiatives of a few committed people also emerged during this period. There

are 30,050 NGOs in Bangladesh, of which about 95 percent are national. Most of these NGOs are directly involved in formulation and implementation of development programs specially geared towards the need of the rural poor and the disadvantaged. At present the program coverage of the NGOs has been geographically at 487 Upazilias (Sub-districts). Initially NGOs were mostly involved in the relief work. But later on, they also involved themselves in the construction of houses for the affected families, mobilization and construction of transport facilities, development of infrastructure, distribution of productive assets, etc. [2]. Eventually, the NGOs have become part of the institutional framework for rural development, poverty alleviation and disaster management in Bangladesh. In recent years, the NGOs have entered into an operational area which has traditionally been the 'exclusive domain' of the public sector. As a matter of fact, given their operational efficiency and experience, the NGOs are entering into the development scenario with increasing forces.

The NGOs throughout the world have evolved in the specific context of the society. The context of the developed countries and developing countries are definitely different. Since the independence of Bangladesh, the state has largely failed to assist the poor or reduce poverty, and NGOs have grown dramatically to fill this gap. Initially focused on relief and rehabilitation activities following the war of liberation and succeeding natural calamities, international and local NGOs turned their efforts to longer term development in the absence of state capacity to deliver welfare.

Bangladesh is a rural agro based country. Most of the people live in rural areas. The rural sector is basically the foundation of the country. No national development can be held without this foundation. Based on this view multidimensional economic program have been taken at different times by government to improve the socio-economic condition of the country. But the riddle is after the decades the rural sector and people still remain grossly under development. So the upliftment of rural population with the assistance of the government many NGO's like Care, BRAC, Proshika, Grameen Bank etc. have taken socio-economic programs for the development of the rural poor. NGOs in Bangladesh such as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Proshika, RDRS Swanirvar Bangladesh and Grameen are

working hard to develop the socio-economic condition of the rural poor.

To undertake the study, the few literature have been reviewed to enable us to oversee the role of NGO in socio-economic development of rural poor to some extent.

Despite the fact that the poor people have vast experience about life, still they are incapable of developing exact ways to scientifically analyze and fix their problems. In this case, efforts of the NGOs are worth mentioning to help these people analyze the society and problems in the backdrop of old, superstitious, anti life perspectives. For example, primary training, improved training, organizing exchange of views program among different groups or areas, regular adult education activities, weekly analytical discussion etc, have been introduced by NGOs. Different NGOs are playing essential role for humanitarian development through joint analysis and seeking solution through different seminars and workshop, joint social activities, and application of socio-economic projects. Besides, they have introduced certain essential concepts such as developing small groups, credit based cooperatives, mother welfare society and cooperatives etc. for homeless/ landless and thus have strengthened the root of organizational structure for rural poverty [7].

Some few studies have shown Micro-finance program and has shown how the Micro Credit program play role in the development of social capital of the of the target beneficiaries and suggested that social capital is a development target for the sustainability of the livelihood of the Poor. The focus is on how BRAC implemented education and health program creates opportunity to social networking and women empowerment [8].

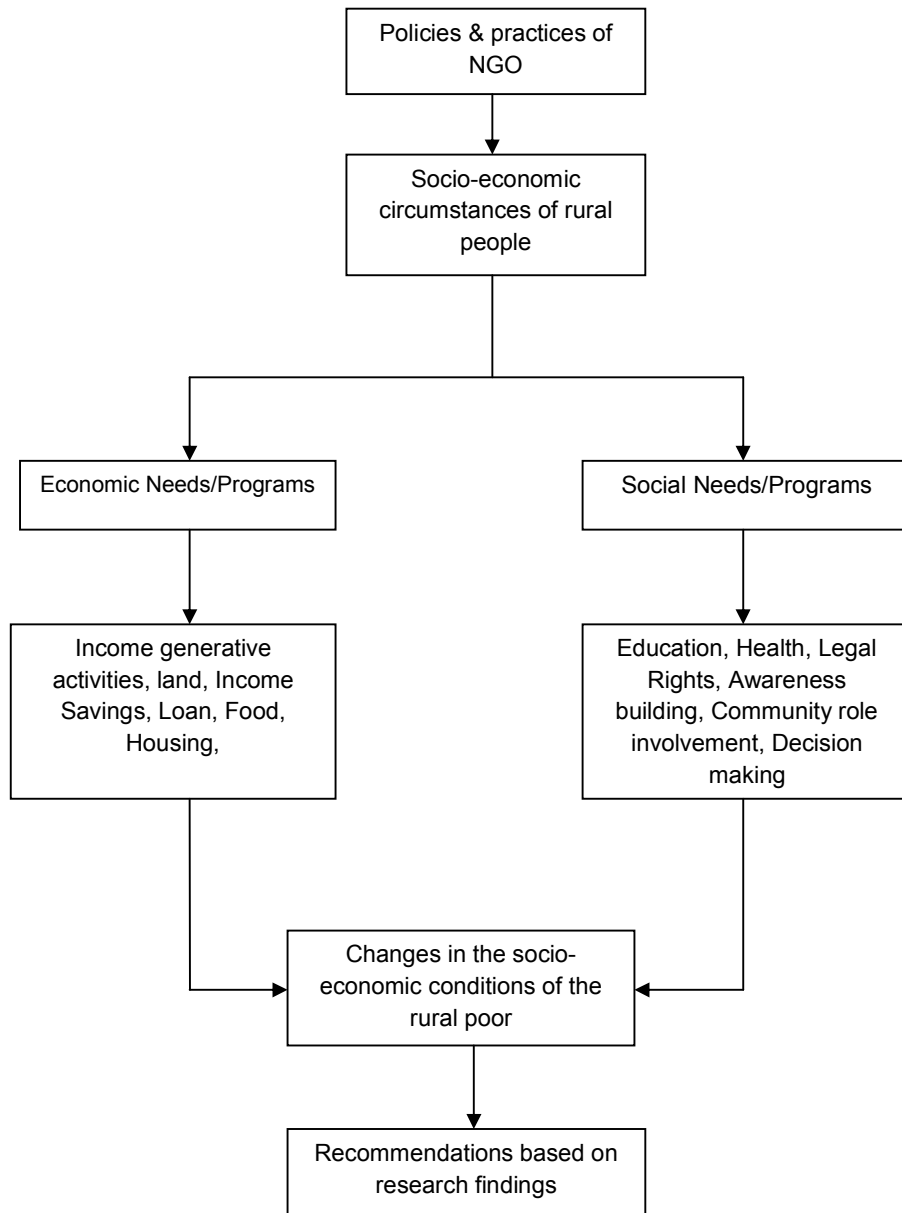
On the other hand some studies focused on BRAC launched health program, health practices and compared its impact on the extreme poor, moderate poor and the poor stated that for socio-economic development of the rural poor education health indicators are important. They suggested that The overall condition of the extreme and moderate poor warrants a special policy, strategy and pro-poor program with a more appropriate 'safety net' to address the pressing health needs of the different subgroups of the poor [9].

Very few studies focused on rural adolescents, who now able to change their outlook regarding

various social phenomena of rural societies in Bangladesh and stated that the impact of BRAC Adolescent Development Program concerning various social issues such as HIV/AIDS, early marriage, sexual violence, drug addiction perception level of Adolescent Development Program (ADP) member before and after join in BRAC-ADP. After conducting a comprehensive research on Adolescent Development Program, they emphasized that this program has been able to create a positive

impact on the rural poor adolescents of Bangladesh in terms of their awareness regarding social issues [10].

In some studies emphasis has given on economic development of poor people and they attempted to assess the social impact of microfinance operations of BRAC on the life cycle of the clients. In fact there is a correlation in socio-economic development of the clients/target group [11].



**Fig. 1. Research concepts and framework**

*Source: Authors' elaboration*

It is also reflected in some studies how BRAC Microfinance program empowered the rural women to enable them to influence decision making process. Due to their involvement in BRAC, women have begun to acquire positive self-perceptions of their own personal interests. These self-perceptions will allow them to assert themselves and make demands for their rights in their struggle towards socio-economic empowerment. On the other hand, they suggested that to sustain the women empowerment BRAC should play an effective role in bringing about changes in the mind set of society. In their studies they emphasized on economic empowerment in boarder aspect but social aspect was given partial prominence [12].

## 2.4 Research Concept and Hypotheses

Based on the literatures, the authors have developed the following research concept/framework and research hypotheses for this intended study presented in Fig. 1.

Based on the literature consistent with research concept/framework, the following hypotheses have been developed by the authors:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between the NGO activities and socio-economic development of the rural poor.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The NGO activities have a positive but insignificant influence over the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

### 3.1 Research Concept

The research was designed to be both quantitative and qualitative in way to analyze an understanding of issues and needs. The survey was carried out with semi-structured questionnaire using the quantitative method. The Qualitative method was used for in-depth interview of the NGO officials. For this pre-designed checklists were used. The qualitative method also helped to produce qualitative data by studying respondents' narration and observable behaviors. The research concept is presented in Fig. 1.

The development of rural poor has been studied by applying the socio-economic tools including income, savings, investment, food, housing,

education, health, awareness, participation and status in community and so on. The indicators indicating changes in socio-economic condition of rural poor are presented in the research framework of the study in Fig. 1.

### 3.2 Selection of NGOs

The study leads to comprehensive insight into various programs, planning and implementation of the activities in line with the objectives of the study. The program coverage, history, nature and focus of activities were the factors that have contributed in the selection of these NGOs and purpose of the study.

For this study, 5 largest NGOs were selected: BRAC, Proshika, Grameen Bank, PKSF and TMSS.

### 3.3 The Study Area

10 villages under two districts of Bangladesh were selected as the study areas. These villages also fall under the integrated program areas of the selected NGOs.

### 3.4 Sample Selection

Two types of samples were drawn for conducting the study, namely, NGO program beneficiaries and NGO officials. As the study was conducted in selected program areas of beneficiary sample units were drawn. The number of NGO program beneficiary (Sample-1) was 750. The program beneficiaries belong almost to the same socio-economic level. Random sampling method was used to select such program beneficiaries. The sample was drawn on the basis of the availability of the NGO beneficiaries during visits to the villages. On the other hand, the total number of sample-2, i.e., NGO officials was 69. Samples from this category were drawn to suit the purpose of the study.

### 3.5 Data Collection Techniques

Information were collected both from primary sources. The primary level information was collected through semi structured questionnaire, in depth interviews and observation.

#### 3.5.1 Collection of primary data

Primary data and information were collected through beneficiary household survey, focus group discussion, in depth interviews and observations. Prior to data collection, fact-finding,

visits to the selected villages were undertaken to collect basic information and to get introduced to local people and local NGO officials. During these visits, the purpose of the study was explained to them and basic information about the villages was collected.

The data were collected in two stages: first time without NGO involvement and second time with NGO involvement (after 1 year). After that, the information were compared to investigate if there were any significant changes occurred on the socio-economic status of the participants/beneficiaries. The data collection form sample-1 involved a variety of methods like household survey, Focus Group Discussion and observation. Secondary data collection method was mainly used to collect data such as NGO project reports, periodicals, published sources etc.

For sample-2, in depth informal interview method was used to obtain the pertinent information needed.

#### *3.5.1.1 Household survey*

Beneficiary household survey was carried out with semi-structured questionnaires. One questionnaire was designed to solicit information from the respondents of sampled households. Respondents were all women. The semi-structured questionnaire was pre-tested before the actual survey to check if there was any inconsistency in the questionnaire. Change and modifications in the questionnaire were made on the basis of feedback received from the pre-testing.

Household survey was conducted to gather to assess the impact of NGOs interventions in socio-economic development of rural poor. In total, 750 NGO beneficiaries from NGO households were selected for the survey. In conducting household survey, two students of Dhaka University assisted the researcher.

#### *3.5.1.2 In-depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews were conducted with 69 NGO officials belonging to 5 NGOs. In depth interviews were conducted with the help of pre-designed checklist, so as to make them informal and to keep the areas for questions open. The purpose of these interviews conducted to gather information from the NGO officials of various levels regarding the socio-economic concerns of

these NGOs and the changing socio-economic condition of the rural poor. The checklist included questions on socio-economic development policy framework, analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, constraints faced by the respective NGOs in addressing socio-economic issues at the beneficiary level as well as at the organization level.

#### *3.5.1.3 Focus group discussion*

Focus group discussion meetings with NGO beneficiaries, two in each study area, were conducted. In each meeting, on average, ten NGO beneficiaries, mostly women attended. The main purposes of these focus group discussion meetings were to solicit information from them about various aspects of NGO operations, the effects on their socio-economic and cultural life.

#### *3.5.1.4 Observation*

The authors have visited NGO offices, both headquarters and local, program/project areas i.e. villages in order to undertake the required first hand information. A detailed observation on socio-economic development related activities such as health, education, income generating activities, decision making was carried out. Local level meetings and NGO beneficiary group discussion meetings were attended to observe the participation of women and men.

### **3.5.2 Collection of secondary data**

To collect data and information from secondary sources, both published and unpublished materials were studied. These included books, journals and relevant literature on NGO activities in general policies, programs and project documents, annual reports etc. of the selected NGOs were also consulted.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Demographic Distribution of the Respondents**

To investigate the impact of NGO's role on the socio-economic status change of the beneficiaries, the study analyzed the socio-economic circumstances of the participants in two stages: before NGO involvement and the after effects (1 year) starting from Table 3. The first two tables have illustrated the demographic characteristics of the respondents while Table 3

to Table 5 have highlighted the change in socio-economic status of the participants before and after effective involvement have been summarized on tables:

The Table 1 presented projects the distribution of sampled respondents by age. It can be observed that majority of them are between the age group of 36-45 and 46-55.

Household family size was determined as small, medium and large consisting of 1 to 4, 5 to 10 and 10 to 15 members respectively. The collected data presented on the above table given suggested that majority of the total respondents had a medium family. The Second largest group is the small household consisting of one to four members. NGO wise

distribution projects more or less similar distribution pattern.

#### 4.2 Socio-economic Changes of Participants before and after NGO Involvement

Since the contents of first two tables are not significantly changeable within one year; the authors just identified them as the sources of demographic information. The authors have considered three factors as the indicators of socio-economic determinants of the participants in this study: land holdings, monthly cash income and school going children. Such changes have been indicated in the following Tables 3-5. The authors have highlighted the changes of the participants as the beneficiaries of five stated NGOs as the % of change.

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents (Sample-1) by age group**

Name of NGOs	Age range					Total
	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-60	
BRAC	22	49	33	41	17	162
Proshika	9	55	38	29	31	162
Grameen Bank	13	37	55	51	49	205
PKSF	7	12	23	31	28	101
TMSS	13	24	33	29	21	120
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>750</b>

Source: Filed interview

**Table 2. Distribution of respondents (Sample-1) by family size**

Name of NGOs	House hold family size			Total
	Small (1-4)	Medium (5-10)	Large (11-15)	
BRAC	89	73	49	211
Proshika	65	78	59	202
Grameen Bank	49	85	51	185
PKSF	12	23	31	66
TMSS	24	33	29	86
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>750</b>

Source: Filed interview

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents (Sample-1) by land holdings**

Name of NGOs	Household land holdings (in decimal)						Total
	1-10 (B)	1-10 (A)	11-20 (B)	11-20 (A)	21-30 (B)	21-30 (A)	
BRAC	64	69	48	57	44	31	209
Proshika	51	81	39	51	39	33	126
Grameen Bank	49	55	61	69	60	22	109
PKSF	41	48	44	52	49	27	187
TMSS	62	68	55	58	44	29	119
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>267(B)</b>	<b>321(A)</b>	<b>247(B)</b>	<b>287(A)</b>	<b>236(B)</b>	<b>142(A)</b>	<b>750</b>

Note: B=Before/A=After; Source: Field survey



To judge the economic situation of the beneficiary respondents, information were collected regarding their land holding before and after NGO involvement. Ownership of land property is an important socio-economic indicator in a developing society. It can be observed that majority of the beneficiary participants had the first group (35.6%) of landholding (1-10 decimal) before. Only 18.93% respondents had the highest decimals of landholdings.

After a year, there is a significant change of landholdings in the first (+7.2%) and second groups (+5.4%). However, the change is negative for the highest landholders. In this category, there is a significant negative (-12.53) change. The participants were asked regarding such changes and they reported that the marginal or lower order landholders invested their income to lands where the third category landholders sold the land and used the loans provided by the NGOs with some profitable businesses to increase income.

Data and information on the income level of the beneficiary respondents were also collected to assess their economic situation. The majority participants (42.4%) fell on the first group of monthly cash income earning indicating their poor economic circumstances before NGO effective involvement.

Similar to Table 3, the monthly income of first two groups have increases although the increase is not significant (+2% and +1.34% respectively). However, surprisingly, the monthly income in case of third group has declined (-3.33%).

We can observe an overwhelming increase in the percentage of school going children of the beneficiaries after involving with those five NGOs. The participants reported that with the suggestions and motivations made the NGO officials, they have understood the significance of education and hence decided to send their children to school who previously helped them in household and field works.

### 4.3 Results of Qualitative Analysis

This section covers summarized results of qualitative analysis of this study that was conducted with NGO officials (Sample-2) and also the beneficiaries (Sample-1). The authors talked about the NGO's policies and procedures with in-depth informal interviews. On the other hand, focus group discussion technique has been used to obtain the information required from the beneficiaries. The summarized results have been highlighted below:

**Table 4. Distribution of respondents (Sample-1) by monthly cash income**

Name of NGOs	Monthly cash income (in Bangladeshi Taka)						Total
	Less than 5000 (B)	Less than 5000 (A)	5000-10000 (B)	5000-10000 (A)	11000-15000 (B)	11000-15000 (A)	
BRAC	87	91	91	83	55	24	226
Proshika	71	75	63	75	41	22	172
Grameen Bank	75	78	51	61	37	27	152
PKSF	42	45	49	54	24	18	109
TMSS	43	44	47	38	21	15	91
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>750</b>

Note: B=Before/A=After; Source: Field survey

**Table 5. Distribution of respondents (Sample-1) by school going children**

Name of NGOs	Number of school going children		
	Before	After	Total
BRAC	21	201	-----
Proshika	31	113	-----
Grameen Bank	37	188	-----
PKSF	33	147	-----
TMSS	49	88	-----
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>750</b>

Source: Field survey

The NGO officials (Sample-2) reported that first the beneficiaries before proceeding with the assistance. They told us during the informal interview that they identified three basic areas: health, economy and education. Regarding health issue, the officials arranged one meeting each week with the female members where they were instructed about the cleanliness, nutrition and diet meals. Regular health checkups also been arranged. The members were instructed about the pregnancy issues, basic health care procedures and nutrition.

Regarding the economic issues, the members (Sample-1) were instructed on how to create earnings through agro-farming, small shops, household products, fishing and livestock. They were also given the advice regarding savings. After they were instructed, the officers gave them a small amount of loan that should be repaid in installments. The officers also reviewed the loan utilization process regularly. The repayment rate was 100% successful.

The NGO officers informed the members about the importance of child education and motivated them to send their children to schools. They also got success in this case and more than 90% members sent their children to schools.

During the field visits respondents (Sample-1) stated their economic condition was not so affluent before their NGOs membership. They do not know the proper way of farming. They could not have meal three times a day. They took money with high interest from local money lenders. After attending weekly and monthly meeting, their knowledge was enriched on how to make proper utilization of the loan. They bought cattle, tailoring machine, auto rickshaw, invest in fisheries and set up small shops. They also opined that they did not know about savings before NGO membership but through NGO membership, they realized the importance of savings. They made up their mind for savings and they could understand the advantages of savings for facing unavoidable situation. Their savings are increasing day by day as they deposit their money for savings regularly. They can understand that through savings, they can increase money and earn profit.

Most of them stated that they had thatched and soil made dwelling house. Now they have built tin roofed semi brick constructed and brick constructed dwelling house. Through NGO membership, their dwelling house condition has

of all, they identified the priority requirements of improved. They stated that before NGO membership they did not have their meal three times in a day with their children. They had no knowledge about nutrition of food and vegetable. After getting NGO membership, they were able to take meal three times in a day with their children and also know about the nutrition of food and vegetables. Now they can have fish, egg, milk, lentil and meat with their family member.

The participants (Sample-1) reported that they were not much concerned regarding the child education. They did not understand the importance of teaching their children. They did not buy the reading material of their children due to lack of money. Being the NGO member, they become conscious about the child education. The importance of child education is discussed in the issue meeting of their village organization. Alongside, by doing small business and farming they have become able to buy reading material and pay tuition fees of their offspring. They stated that as their money crises slow down, they get courage in mind concerning children education.

They stated that they had slight knowledge regarding health issue. They shared that if any of them were attacked by diarrhoea, they provided him/her juice of tree leaves and did not let him/her drinking water. They used latrine in bare foot. Their tube-well ground was not brick constructed. They did not know how to wash hands properly. After being NGO members, they become aware about their health, nutrition and food. They now know about neat and cleanliness, danger signs of pregnant mothers, tuberculosis, water born diseases and also the rules of using sanitary latrines. They have also stated regular pregnancy check-up. They can identify the red and green marks of Arsenic prone tube wells. They know that they have to boil water before drinking. They can wash their hands before and after cooking and having meal. They know that the vegetables are to be washed before cutting. They are conscious about the diet food of pregnant mother and immunization of pregnant mother as well as their child.

The respondents (Sample-1) expressed that before NGO membership they had no honor in the community. As they were poor, they were not aware of their rights as citizens and hence were ignored by the elite society. Their husbands did not evaluate their opinion in family matters. Through NGO membership their economic socio-

conditions improved. As they can collect loan from the village organization (cooperative), their status has increased to their husbands, children and in the society as well.

## 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of primary and secondary data and information from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives reveal that the rural poor beneficiaries of studied NGOs have benefited from various programs undertaken by these NGOs.

It has been observed that the food intake of the NGO beneficiaries has increased considerably. Now almost 100% of the beneficiary household members have three meals in a day. The nutritional status has also improved. Now the beneficiary household members more frequently have food contents like fish, egg, milk and meat in their meals. It can be referred that the increase in the house hold income through income generating activities has contributed to the increase of food intake and food content.

Condition of the dwelling houses of the beneficiary households has improved after NGO membership. Earlier, majority of the households had mud made houses. Now the majority of them possess tin roofed houses. Majority of the NGOs beneficiaries opined that as a result of using loan in income generating activities, their monthly incomes increased although the trend was very slow. Majority of the respondents invested loan money in their small business and cattle. It is noticeable that 30% beneficiaries invested loan in domestic animals, 25% percent in small business and 15% in buying rickshaw and leasing land. The second largest sector is small business which indicates microcredit entrepreneurship has started to rise slowly among the rural poor. However, 5% beneficiaries faced problems for managing loan installment money and they borrowed from others. 20% beneficiaries started to sell storage paddy for family food. The household land holding and farming land holding of some members are almost same as before NGO membership. In this area, the scenario of change is significant except one or two exceptional cases.

90% beneficiaries told that they had no savings practices before NGO membership. After NGO membership, 100% beneficiaries deposited savings regularly according to their ability and they used the savings for their family welfare

activities. It is mentionable that 20% respondents told that they could not withdraw savings whenever they needed. They had to depend on the wish of the NGOs staffs.

NGO beneficiaries now avail more health care services than before. As the government health care services have limited scope, the NGOs in this arena provide services in large scale especially on the raising awareness about pregnant mothers' risks and diet, child immunization, common diseases, family planning and so on. It is inferred that awareness programs of health care run by the NGOs stimulated the beneficiary households to take more health care. Sanitation practices of the NGO beneficiaries have improved than before. After NGO membership 50% of the NGO beneficiary households have constructed sanitary latrine. This positives change in the sanitation situation of the NGO households may be attributed to the increase in the awareness level about hygienic living and also to the rise in the income level.

Almost all the NGO beneficiary households drink safe water. The main source is tube well. Tube well, in most of the cases, was installed by the beneficiaries' won cost. Approximate 95% beneficiaries' become aware about neat and cleanness; and hygiene practices of latrine. 40% respondents told that they did not know clearly about common diseases and health tips before NGO membership. Rahima, a BRAC health beneficiary respondent shared that she had superstition about Diarrhea but right now, she knows what to do in such a case.

In case of education, the rural poor have more access to education than ever before. Educational advancement level of the NGO beneficiaries has also increased. All the beneficiaries are now literate. They can at least sign their names. Here it may be mentioned that being able to sign name is a precondition for NGO membership. Now the children of the beneficiary households are going to schools in a rapidly increasing numbers. It was found that 95% female children study in the NGOs school. Now parents are more conscious about better education for their children. The parents told that they admitted their children here for a number of reasons such as: flexible school timing, close to the students' houses, small class size managed by local female teachers, little or no homework, child-friendly environment and relevant curriculum that provides a basic education. To be more co-curriculums based, children are keen to

go to school. Majority of the Grameen Bank and BRAC beneficiaries of pre-primary school told that during winter their children find it difficult to study sitting on the cold floor.

The social status of the NGO beneficiaries has also improved now. They enjoy more respect in the household and in their community. Monowara Begum, a group leader of BRAC microfinance told that at first while she was admitted in the NGOs and worked with the members, the community people slanged them. But now the scenario has changed. But now she is an elected member of local union council. Majority of NGOs beneficiaries' respondents' community level participation and status have been increased as their economic condition improved than before. All the NGOs have endeavored to make beneficiaries aware of their legal rights in the context of inheritance property, marriage and divorce. In the study, it was found that most of the beneficiaries have become aware about their legal rights.

The majority of the respondents of this study had been participating in NGO activities for the last one year. It does appear from the respondents' views and the data and information that the NGO beneficiaries enjoy a relatively better life compared to many non-beneficiaries. However, it will therefore be improper to suggest any significant change is the non-availability of benchmark information for comparison. The study depends on recall method. Having realized these limitations in identifying change through this study, an attempt was made to know from the respondents what changes they experienced as a result of their participation in NGO activities in the last one year. The respondents told about the social and economic changes.

## **6. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted on the field level using information directly provided by the beneficiaries and officers. Therefore, the primary data and qualitative information are believed to be more trustworthy and consistent. Further, it was carried out on the base level of five largest NGOs operating in Bangladesh. Therefore, the authors believe that the results are more representative and guide the future investigations with consistent results.

The authors are hopeful that the results of this study using mix methods will be a guideline for

further investigations in a wider scope. The policymakers, as well, can get some important information and recommendations provided that would help them to formulate and implement root level decisions regarding the improvement of strategies and process.

## **7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Policy Recommendations**

The authors would like to provide some action recommendations. The recommendations have been made on the basis of the research findings discussed earlier. Such policy recommendations are expected to make the studied NGOs more focused on socio-economic development of the rural poor.

- Needs-based training programs should be developed and efforts should be taken to implement the training programs extensively.
- NGOs need to improve the knowledge and skills of rural poor in income generating activities as well as the legal rights issues. Training policy should be redefined giving more focuses on beneficiaries' training. Also, initiatives should be taken to monitor these training programs from time-to-time to improve effectiveness and to assess the impact.
- Policy should be developed by the NGOs so that particular program beneficiaries can know all the services provided by others programs.
- The saving policy should be redefined. Early marriage and dowry should be incorporated in parents meeting issues of NGOs pre-primary schools. Rational initiative should be taken to improve infrastructure of NGOs' pre- primary school.

### **7.2 Conclusion**

The rural poor of Bangladesh are extremely underprivileged in terms of standard measurements of development. Such a lower socio-economic standard is due to low literacy rate, low access to socio-economic resources and lack of knowledge of utilizing their human capabilities. In fact, majority of them are not aware of their socio-economic condition. The emergence of NGOs in Bangladesh can be traced back to history. In the beginning, they

were primarily involved in relief operations. But in the mid-1970's NGOs changed their operational emphasis to various sectors development. NGOs have started to launch various programs and projects through a continuous process enhancing socio-economic condition of the rural poor. NGOs believe that the increase in income is not enough for the emancipation of rural poor. So, the NGOs considered in this study emphasized an integrated approach for socio-economic development of the rural poor. Through this study an effort was made to investigate the NGOs' concerns for socio-economic development of the rural poor.

Presently NGO beneficiaries have more access to resources such as credit, marketing, training, production inputs etc. This has been made possible since the NGOs are making many of these resources available to them. In terms of long-term sustainability, the scenario is not positive. It is notable that some of BRAC microfinance beneficiaries told that they withdraw loan only to build their house and after that they will leave BRAC microfinance program because the loan is a burden for them. It is observed that 60% of the microfinance beneficiaries face multifarious problems to collect loan installment. It is also found that some microfinance beneficiaries of BRAC opined that they did not withdraw their savings when needed. Further, it has been observed that 35% of NGOs' beneficiaries of microfinance program did not receive any training.

Rural poor education and health status have improved due to NGO efforts. NGOs provided quality education for the rural poor children but there is an infrastructural problem in NGOs' schools. In winter season, the children suffer from cold, as they have to do schoolwork sitting on the floor. It is found that no respondents identify dowry and early marriage as parents' meeting issue. Early marriage is a rising issue in the rural poor family.

In the matter of legal rights awareness, there is a lack of coordination among the NGOs' operated programs. It was found that all programs' beneficiaries are not aware of their legal rights. Though the beneficiaries' status has increased in society after NGOs' membership, their participation in community-level decision making is still very low.

However, it can be concluded that NGOs have brought a tremendous change in the daily lives

and awareness concerns of the poor people. We can expect that in future, the progress will be further widening up although there are some limitations in their operations as of now.

## 8. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER SCOPE

The study has obviously a few limitations. First of all, this study is limited to one particular area thus confined to one particular culture. A cross-cultural study considering more substantive areas might provide some more representative outcomes to the readers. Second, the authors have considered only one year comparing the difference between the socio-economic status of the beneficiaries. It is logical to comment that such a gap could be three to four years to be more stabilized results. The authors expect that future researchers would consider such limitations in their investigations and carry out more and more studies in this important element of academia.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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