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**The PRIP Trust:
Becoming an Organization**

Prepared for Pact by
Babar Sobhan

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Dear development colleagues,

It is with great pleasure and pride that the PRIP Trust team shares with you this case study of the development of an NGO support organization in Bangladesh. Like all stories of living organizations, the PRIP Trust story is a "work in progress." It is not complete because it can only be a story of the past and not of the present or future. We hope as you read our story that you will learn from it and be better equipped to advance the mission of your own organization.

Private Rural Initiatives Project, PRIP, started in 1988 as a project funded by USAID Bangladesh and managed by Pact. The purpose of the project was to "improve the capacity of support organizations, networks, and forums" with the broader goal to "develop a sustainable NGO sector serving the development needs of the rural poor." NGO leaders, both within Bangladesh and outside, believed that Bangladesh needed interventions that would create a powerful role and identity for Bangladesh's NGO sector, build the capacity of NGOs to have a strong voice in setting the development agenda for the country and establish effective partnerships with the government and the private sector. PRIP and the PRIP Trust have addressed these important issues over the past decade and, in doing so, have established a rich web of relationships with networks, coalitions, and government and private sector stakeholders throughout the country and region.

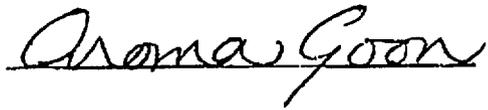
In 1995, after pursuing innovative and experimental initiatives during its early years as a Pact project, the PRIP Trust was registered as a legal entity and began its own course as a Bangladeshi governed and managed organization. The story that follows outlines our march forward as an organization, our efforts in human resource development, vision building, commitment to the sector and building partnerships, and the pangs and suffering of many. It is a story fundamentally about people and hard work. In a broad sense, organizations are a reflection of social desires, but when we come to the micro level, organizations are the sum of the individuals who are most responsible for developing them.

In the PRIP Trust story you will find how the different minds—the PRIP Trust team, the Pact team, the board of directors, and our valued partners—came together to build the PRIP Trust into what it is today. You will read in this case study how ideas form the shape of an organization and how the indigenization process can unfold. It is the study of organizational development and reveals an evolving process.

We will be happy if the experience of the formation of the PRIP Trust helps you in any way to go forward with your dreams. Through the growth and development of our organization we have learned we are not alone. We also encourage others to have this feeling. Throughout we had the steadfast support of many, but especially the board members of the PRIP Trust—Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, Dr. Qazi Faruque Ahmed, Father R. W. Timm, CSC, and Shafat Ahmed Chaudhuri—our NGO partners—Richard Brown, Mission Director, USAID Bangladesh; Lou Mitchell, President and CEO, Pact; and Sarah Newhall, Executive Vice President of Pact. We are deeply honored and grateful for their support.

Lastly, I would like to share with you the bold encouragement of our friend, Sarah Newhall, which she stated at the PRIP Trust's transition from Pact celebration in Dhaka, in August 1998: "Never give up."

Thanking you all,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aroma Goon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Aroma Goon
Executive Director, PRIP Trust

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This study was carried out on behalf of Pact with funding provided by USAID during August and September 1998. The aim of the study was to document the experiences of the PRIP Trust between 1995 and 1998 as it negotiated the difficult transition from an international project to a national organization.

This study could not have been completed were it not for the help of many individuals. The author is grateful to the staff (past and present) of the PRIP Trust and in particular the executive director, Aroma Goon, for making time in their busy schedules to meet with him. Similarly, thanks are due to the members of the board of trustees, Fazle Hasan Abed, Qazi Faruque Ahmed, Father Timm and Shafat Ahmed Chowdhury, for taking the time to discuss their association with the PRIP Trust. At Pact Inc. thanks go to Sarah Newhall for supervising the work and to Traer Sunley for editorial comments. Many thanks are due to Richard Holloway, Aroma Goon, Sarah Newhall, Aminul Islam Bhuiyan and Shaheen Anam for taking the time to read and comment on earlier drafts. Needless to say, final and sole responsibility for the contents of this paper (including any errors) remains with the author.

Babar Sobhan
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Acronyms

ADAB	Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BNPS	Bangladesh Nari Prograti Sangha
BPHC	Bangladesh Population and Health Consortium
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CBO	Community Based Organization
CDF	Credit Development Forum
CDS	Centre for Development Services
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CUP	Coalition for the Urban Poor
CUSO	Canadian University Services Overseas
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
FIS	Financial Information Systems
FIT	Foundation for International Training (Canada)
FIVDB	Friends in Village Development Bangladesh
GK	Gonoshystha Kendra
GNCC	Government-NGO Coordinating Council
GSS	Gonoshahajjo Sangstha
IDR	Institute for Development Research (Boston, USA)
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NGOAB	NGO Affairs Bureau (Government of Bangladesh)
ODA	Overseas Development Agency (UK)
PACT	Private Agencies Collaborating Together
PATC	Public Administration Training Centre
PRIA	Society for Participatory Research in Asia
PRIP	Private Rural Initiatives Program
PVDO	Private Voluntary Development Organization
PWBLF	Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDF	Social Development Fund
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. Introduction

Bangladesh has gained worldwide recognition for having a highly developed and sophisticated nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector.¹ Programs developed by NGOs, such as BRAC and the Grameen Bank,² are being replicated to great effect around the world. Over the last fifteen years a growing number of donors have begun to look to NGOs as an alternative to government(s), which are seen as unable to adequately meet the needs of the poor. As a result, an increasingly large proportion of official bilateral and multilateral aid to Bangladesh is now being channeled through NGOs, some of which operate on a scale more commonly associated with government.

In large part NGOs have concentrated their efforts on the implementation of projects in the fields of primary healthcare, education and microcredit, and these activities continue to attract the bulk of donor support going to the sector. However, the growing attention now being given to the issue of governance and the need to support a strong civil society has further increased the influence of NGOs in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Increasingly NGOs are adopting what David Korten terms "third generation NGO strategies" and have begun to assume a more prominent role in national-level policy making and advocacy as well as exploring links with both the state and the private sector.³ These changes form the context for the work of the PRIP Trust, which began ten years ago as a USAID-funded project under an cooperative agreement with Pact, an American NGO. The project was called the Private Rural Initiatives Project (PRIP) and aimed at "improving the capacity of support organizations, networks and forums to strengthen developmental NGOs." The goal of the project was to work towards a "sustainable NGO sector serving the developmental needs of the rural poor."

In 1993, following a series of reviews, a joint decision was made by USAID and PRIP⁴ to extend the duration of the project by an additional five years. The aim of the extension was to facilitate the transformation of PRIP from a donor-funded international project into a national organization with a mandate to support institutional capacity building among NGOs in Bangladesh. The aim of this paper is to document the transition process with particular attention being given to the key events of the years 1995 to 1998.

The paper is divided into three main parts. Section 1 will examine the history of PRIP as a USAID-funded project and its efforts to support the development of a strong NGO sector through organizational capacity-building and assistance in forming sector-specific networks and forums. Section 2 forms the heart of the paper and will examine the whole indigenization process. It will focus on the crucial roles played by the partners and the board of trustees of the newly indigenized organization, the PRIP Trust, Pact, the donors (both old and new) and most importantly, by the PRIP Trust itself. The final section will attempt to identify the key lessons from what at times was a long and tortuous struggle, but which ultimately resulted in the emergence of the PRIP Trust as a strong, dynamic national organization. The hope is that this paper will not only tell the story of the PRIP Trust, but will also provide important insights that will help guide similar attempts at indigenization.⁵

History of PRIP

It is the disparity in experiences and opportunities within the NGO sector in Bangladesh that sets the context for the work of PRIP. The project was funded by USAID through a five-year cooperative agreement with Pact and titled the Private Rural Initiatives Project (PRIP). It was launched under the leadership of Pact country representative Richard Holloway in November 1988 with two main purposes: (1) To build the technical and strategic capacity of private voluntary development organizations (PVDOs) in Bangladesh to more effectively use internal and external resources and (2) To support collaborative efforts between PVDOs, the government and the private sector. The original concept for the project was drawn up by David Korten and aimed to make strategic investments to support third generation NGO work (networking and advocacy) in Bangladesh.⁶ This focus on the needs of the sector as a whole (rather than on individual NGOs) was the major distinguishing feature of the PRIP project and was viewed as a relatively high-risk experiment for both USAID and Pact.

The capacity building OD/ID services focus: OD services to NGOs

Initially, the project concentrated on supporting the organizational development of NGOs and CBOs by helping them improve their technical, strategic and management capacity.⁷ The project provided support and leadership training to a range of NGOs.⁸ At the same time, the project attempted to address the gap between the effectiveness of NGO field operations and their relative lack of organizational and management capacity and systems. To do this, the project developed contacts with organizations such as the Institute for Development Research (IDR) in Boston and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), which had a proven track record and expertise in the field of organizational development.⁹ Experts were brought to Dhaka to lead workshops for NGOs, and leaders from the NGO community were given international exposure as part of an overall strategy aimed at raising awareness about the importance of organizational capacity building.

The cascade model

From the outset project staff realized it would not be possible for a single organization to meet all of the demands for OD services, especially in rural areas, given the size of the NGO sector in Bangladesh, nor would it be the most sustainable option. To counter the urban bias in donor funding that discriminated against most regional and local CBOs, PRIP developed the “cascade” model. The project identified a number of key NGOs and provided them with training, exposure and logistical back-up to enable them in turn to operate as support organizations to smaller NGOs and CBOs on a regional basis. PRIP operated as a supra-support organization and as an intermediary between the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in the North, Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB) in the Northeast, Uttaran in the Southwest and CODEC in Chittagong. These organizations provided support and OD training to 30–40 locals who collectively reached over a million people. This made it possible for the project to reach as large a group of people as possible with relatively limited financial resources. Over the last decade, PRIP has helped to create a critical mass of understanding around the topic of OD and, perhaps

more importantly, the partners were able to feedback their experiences in the field and to adapt this knowledge and learning to Bangladesh.

The NGO sector building focus: supporting ADAB and networks

The project provided critical support to a series of different sector-based networks and forums with the aim of improving mutual cooperation and learning in the sector. This strategy was complemented by efforts to strengthen the sector as a whole by providing support to ADAB (the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh)—the largest NGO umbrella organization. In the case of Bangladesh this represented an important challenge because, while the country is blessed with a large number of strong and influential NGOs, traditionally they have not worked together effectively as a sector.¹⁰ The project intended to draw on the development strength of NGOs to generate the external economies of scale that would greatly increase the overall impact of NGO interventions.

Without doubt the most important of these initiatives was the support provided to ADAB. Though ADAB has been in existence in one form or another since 1973, it had never really been able to establish itself as the genuine representative of the NGO community in its dealings with the government, private sector and civil society. Part of this stemmed from the fact that its precise role in relation to the broader NGO community had never been well worked out. At different points in time it has acted as a coordinating body, a funding body, the secretariat for sector-specific networks, and as a training body, none of which it performed with any great distinction. The effectiveness of ADAB was further undermined by the fact that the large NGOs had been able to establish independent contacts with government and the donor community, which meant they did not need the services of ADAB.¹¹

The need for a strong focal point for the sector was essential for several reasons. As Prem Chadha¹² pointed out, even the private sector works through bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce and has a range of auxiliary support bodies to meet the varying needs of its members. In the case of the NGO community in Bangladesh, however, while individual NGOs have always had bilateral relationships with the government, private sector and civil society, it was usually on the basis of a specific set of circumstances or personal contacts.¹³ These contacts rarely evolved into the institutionalized form of contact and cooperation needed to address broader issues, such as the legal status of NGOs, working with the government, and gaining access to decision-making bodies. The support to ADAB provided by was a crucial factor in revitalizing the umbrella organization. Father Timm, a member of the PRIP Trust's board,¹⁴ pointed out that during the time when ADAB threatened to collapse under the weight of the competing interests of its membership, PRIP played a vital role in sustaining efforts to build a strong and effective NGO sector. Over the years PRIP has also played an important role in helping ADAB to clarify its mission and role within the sector. Technical assistance was provided in the form of OD training and a clear delineation of responsibilities between the work of ADAB and PRIP was worked out. PRIP was particularly active at the chapter level and helped ADAB to better serve the needs of its members who did not have a high profile in the donor community. Finally PRIP provided support to the NGO sector in efforts to form closer contacts with the government, private sector and civil society.

Within the framework of providing support to ADAB, PRIP also took the lead in initiating and supporting the development of several key theme-based networks. Thus, PRIP

provided vital logistical support to the Campaign for Mass Popular Education (CAMPE), helped to coordinate the work of the disaster-preparedness network, and initiated dialogues aimed at getting NGOs to work together around common themes. These dialogues provided the impetus for the formation of the Credit Development Forum (CDF) and the Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), among others. These networks have played an important role in helping NGOs to learn how to work together and to interact more effectively with the government on a range of different policy issues. The CDF in particular has been able to reach out to a large number of smaller NGOs and CBOs running microenterprise projects to provide guidance and coordination. Ultimately, many of these networks were absorbed under ADAB, but would not have survived were it not for support from PRIP.

¹ The term NGO (nongovernmental organization) encompasses a wide range of different types of non-profit organizations. In this case study, the term NGO will refer to the sub-set of organizations involved in development work. PRIP also uses the term Private Voluntary Development Organization (PVDO) and the two terms will be used inter-changeably.

² Technically speaking, Grameen Bank is not an NGO but it possesses many of the traits commonly associated with NGOs and its model has been very influential in the sector.

³ *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*, David Korten, Kumarian Press, 1990.

⁴ During the course of this paper, the term PRIP will be used to refer to the organization in its incarnation as an USAID-funded, Pact supported project with an expatriate director. The PRIP Trust refers to the newly created national organization that grew out of the work of PRIP.

⁵ This paper should be read as a companion piece to *Exit Strategies: Transitioning from International to Local NGO Leadership*, Richard Holloway, Pact, 1997.

⁶ Much of Korten's work on his theory of generations grew out of the experiences of the NGO sectors in Bangladesh and the Philippines.

⁷ The project did not provide funding for operational work, that need being amply (and rather unimaginatively) met by other donors.

⁸ A number of NGOs who participated are among the leading NGOs in Bangladesh today. The assistance from PRIP enabled them to develop management systems to complement highly effective projects and to attract direct funding from official bilateral donors.

⁹ The project director started off favoring the use of the flexible funding tool to support organizations wishing to participate in international seminars, workshops and training programs. However, he was convinced by Bangladeshi partners that it was more important to establish long-term relationships with expert institutions such as IDR in Boston and PRIA in India that would help to develop a local base of expertise in OD and ID work.

¹⁰ This point was made by Prem Chadha, a management consultant with PRIA in India, who has worked closely with the PRIP Trust over the last five years. For a more general discussion, see Uphoff: *Why NGOs are not a Third Sector* in Hulme and Edwards, 1997.

¹¹ Not all NGOs are members of ADAB—the most prominent exception being Gonoshostaya Kendra (GK)—but it reflects very nearly all the foreign funded (and thus major) NGOs. There are those who argue that it does not have the mandate of the whole sector, but over the last four years, ADAB appears to have achieved a degree of recognition (especially by the government) as the representative of the sector. There are only a few holdouts, e.g. GK, Swarnivar Bangladesh, and fundamentalist Islamic NGOs.

¹² Prem Chadha is on the board of PRIA and IDR and has been working closely with the PRIP Trust on OD/ID matters during the transition process.

¹³ One of the most notable features about Bangladesh is the very small circle of people—connected by family, friendship or by virtue of having attended the same school or university—who are in positions of influence in government, the private sector and NGO community. These personal contacts have been very important in determining relationships. In the case of the PRIP Trust, Aroma Goon comes from a highly influential family and is of the generation that came of age during the 1971 War of Independence

and this has without doubt been a major factor in enabling the PRIP Trust to form linkages with important NGOs and government bodies.

- ¹⁴ Father Timm came to Bangladesh as a missionary over 35 years ago and has been involved with the NGO sector from the beginning and has seen the sector grow and change.

II. From international project to national organization

By the time of the 1993 mid-term review, both USAID and Pact had come to the conclusion that the project had exceeded the goals of the original project. PRIP had developed a profile within the NGO community for providing support for nonoperational work. NGOs knew they could look to PRIP for assistance with leadership training and organizational development. A study carried out in 1994 identified PRIP as a pioneer in promoting a sector-wide view. Its support to networks (especially ADAB) and forums, its work with support organizations to assist small NGOs and CBOs in capacity building, and its support of linkages with the government, private sector and civil society were seen as crucial contributions to the growth of the sector. The study also noted that Pact/ PRIP had developed a reputation as an “honest broker,” able to bridge the gap between the different groups within the community and to bring them together around common purposes and activities.¹ Lastly, the study recognized that the work with small NGOs and CBOs filled a major gap in the sector where virtually all the funds for NGO activities, including organizational strengthening, went to a few large organizations (Fox, 1994). This assistance was seen as an important means of bridging the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” in the NGO community.

The decision to indigenize

The decision to indigenize was by no means unique in Bangladesh. As early as 1974 the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO), a Canadian NGO, spun off part of their work and helped to create Proshika, which is the second largest NGO in Bangladesh. Similarly in 1978 the International Voluntary Services (IVS) ended the operational part of their project, which led to the creation of FIVDB. More recently, various European donors had begun to move away from direct operational work and to look at indigenization as a possible option (see Holloway, 1997:77). These donors have begun to concentrate their efforts on advocacy and networking, both locally and internationally, and to leave the day-to-day operation of projects to Bangladeshi organizations.²

Most donors are able to fund projects for a limited time only and face difficult decisions about how and when to end their support.³ By 1991, USAID, Pact and the project faced a major decision. On the one hand, the project had clearly fulfilled an unmet need for OD and ID services in Bangladesh. At the same time, the agreement between USAID and Pact was due to end in 1993. All the parties agreed that the project should continue and the issue was how this work would be funded. Initially, Pact and PRIP suggested that USAID create an endowment, similar to those created for USAID-funded environmental projects in other countries. However, USAID was reluctant to make such a commitment, and furthermore, as Richard Holloway acknowledged, this would have required at least two years of capacity building in investing and money management if this option were to be viable. USAID favored handing over the funding responsibilities for the project to a new set of donors. However, the staff of PRIP correctly pointed out that this would not resolve the problem unless efforts were made to make the organization a national organization. In the end USAID overcame whatever reluctance they may have had about transforming the project into a fully fledged Bangladeshi organization and agreed to extend funding to the project for an additional five years to prepare the ground.

Establishing a Trust

Once the decision to indigenize was made, several important steps needed to be taken. The first was on the kind of governance structure of the new organization. Despite 25 years of growth and development, and despite genuine efforts to institutionalize NGOs, most large NGOs still were under the dominance of the “charismatic leader,” who was usually the founder/executive director.⁴ Thus, BRAC is F.H. Abed, Proshika is Qazi Faruque Ahmed and GSS is still FRM Hasan. These organizations have governing boards, that are supposed to assist and guide the executive director in the running of the organization. In reality, however, most boards act as rubber stamps for the decisions taken by the executive director and exert very little influence on decision-making processes. Similarly, donors often can and do wield considerable behind-the-scenes influence over policy-making in their partner organizations because they are the principal source of funding.

Most NGOs are registered under the Societies and Welfare Act, which covers a very broad range of social organizations. When it came to registering PRIP as a Bangladeshi NGO, a decision was made to register it as a trust as opposed to an organization under the Societies Act. This represented a significant departure from the normal way in which NGOs are organized in Bangladesh. The main impetus for this decision came from the executive director of BRAC and the current chairperson of the board, who advised PRIP that this new form of governance would allow the organization greater flexibility and the space to evolve as the needs of the sector itself changed.⁵ Furthermore, in keeping with the project's tradition of being a pioneer in the sector, it was felt that registering as a trust could serve as a model for other organizations considering similar transformation in the future. Perhaps more importantly, as a trust, the board was required to assume both ownership and added responsibilities for the functioning of the organization than traditionally was the case in Bangladesh.

Selecting the board

From the start, it was important for the PRIP Trust to have a board that was strong and respected if the organization were to gain any form of legitimacy in the eyes of both the donors and the broader community. It is indicative of the general acceptance of the PRIP Trust that two of the most respected leaders in the NGO community, F.H. Abed and Qazi Faruque Ahmed, along with Father Timm, one of the oldest activists working in the NGO sector, all agreed to join the board. The last member of the board, Shafat Ahmed Chowdhury, came from the business sector. His willingness to join the board reflected his serious commitment to the linkage between the private sector and social development. Each of these board members provided consistent strategic support to the staff of the PRIP Trust during its first three years as a national organization.

When asked why they had agreed to become members of the board of an organization such as the PRIP Trust, the board members each gave essentially the same reasons. The first and most important was a shared belief that the PRIP Trust was in a position to play an important and strategic role within the sector. As F.H. Abed noted: “It would be difficult for an organization such as BRAC to play the role of broker because of its size and dominance in the sector,” but that did not preclude the need for someone to take up that challenge. In his view, the PRIP Trust was well equipped to meet that need. Similarly, Father Timm cited the long ties with the previous and current leadership of the PRIP

Trust and a belief in the work of the Trust in support of different networks. Board members cited the new executive director's excellent networking skills as another reason for believing in the viability of the PRIP Trust. As the chairman of the board pointed out: "Aroma has the unique ability to work with anyone and everyone and that will be important in helping the PRIP Trust to support the creation of strategically important relationships with different actors and institutions."

The composition and role of the board would prove to be one of the most important factors during the transition process. The concept of an active-working board was very new to the Bangladesh NGO sector and concerns did exist on the part of USAID and Richard Holloway regarding the amount of time the board would devote to the PRIP Trust.⁶ As we shall see, the fact that the board not only gave time to the PRIP Trust, but, more importantly, was willing to go the extra mile on behalf of the organization, was one of the most noteworthy aspects of the transition process.

Donor blues

For most donors working with NGOs was synonymous with the implementation of projects designed to improve the living conditions of the poor in Bangladesh. There were virtually no examples of NGOs receiving support for work that did not bring them directly into contact with grassroots communities. Capacity building for small NGOs had far less appeal and selling power than projects that would build schools or immunize children.⁷ In addition the donor community was used to working in three-year project cycles as opposed to more long-term commitments designed to strengthen the capacity of an organization or sector. As the project manager for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) acknowledged, this made supporting the PRIP Trust, with its long-term vision for the development of the sector, a high-risk venture for most donors, but one with the potential for tremendous gains.

The PRIP Trust also labored under the legacy of being a USAID-funded project with an international project director. Even though Bangladesh had a large donor community, cooperation between donors was not nearly as well developed as one would imagine. USAID in particular was known for working in isolation from the mainstream donor community, which meant that far less was known within the broader community about the projects it supported. The PRIP Trust thus faced educating prospective donors about its ability to move beyond its relationship with USAID.⁸ The close identification of the project with its expatriate executive director was also a major cause of concern for prospective donors, who were worried that the local staff did not possess the necessary understanding and vision to replace him. The fact that the director initiated preliminary discussions with prospective donors only served to confirm in their eyes that PRIP lacked depth in leadership. Much of the negotiation process between the PRIP Trust and donors ended up revolving around the organization having to demonstrate that they could do the work without the support of Pact or the expatriate executive director.

Added to the mix was a decision made to move from a single to a multiple-donor funding relationship. A proposal for funding for three years was prepared by Richard Holloway and shared with a potential consortium of donors that included CIDA, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and SDC. The expectation of all those already involved with the project—USAID, Pact and the staff of PRIP—was that funding would not be too problematic. PRIP had a solid record of working with the sector and was

recognized as a leader in the area of OD. The proposal represented a continuation of this work. However, when discussions with the prospective donor consortium began, it became clear that it was going to require more than a simple dialogue with the donors to gain support and funding.

The proposal shared with donors was less of a blueprint for the future and more a vision of what the sector could be and the role that the PRIP Trust could play in helping to achieve that vision. What the prospective consortium failed to appreciate initially was that one of the main characteristics that differentiated the PRIP Trust from other (donor) agencies was its ability to react quickly and flexibly to the needs of the sector. The proposal reflected this emphasis on responsiveness and flexibility, which unfortunately was interpreted as being over-ambitious and unfocused. The consortium members each had concerns that reflected the different priorities of their own aid programs. The UK Overseas Development Agency (now the Department for International Development), for example, paid particular attention to the log-frame developed by the PRIP Trust and repeatedly questioned whether or not the PRIP Trust would be able to meet the goals that were presented in it.⁹ Similarly, CIDA and the SDC were concerned about the role of the PRIP Trust as a funder and its capacity to meet its stated goals. At least some concerns arose from a misconception about the status of the PRIP Trust. USAID had always viewed the PRIP Trust as a fully functioning project that could easily make the transition to a national organization and reiterated this belief in its conversations with the new donors.¹⁰ In reality, the PRIP Trust was in the midst of a transition process that required both its staff and partners to rethink its role within the sector. This openness to rethinking its role unfortunately was interpreted as evidence that the organization, far from being fully functioning, lacked clarity and understanding of its mission. In order to satisfy these various concerns, the prospective donors conducted excruciatingly detailed examinations of the strategies and future plans of the organization.

The 1997 appraisal

Despite a lengthy donor negotiation process the PRIP Trust was unable to convince the donors to support the organization's work based on the original proposal that had been submitted. Eventually, at the end of 1996, a decision was made to commission a final independent appraisal of the PRIP Trust to be carried out by one of the leading authorities on NGO management.¹¹ The appraisal focused on seven key issues relating to the PRIP Trust's niche within the sector, as well as its competency to meet the goals laid out in the proposal. The appraisal took place in January 1997 and represented a crucial turning point in the transition process. The appraisal team met with a broad range of stakeholders, including partners, representatives of the NGO sector, donors and members of the board. The appraisal's conclusions were that the PRIP Trust fulfilled a highly important function within the sector in terms of the support it provided to ADAB and other networks. More significantly, in the words of Alan Fowler, one of the appraisers, "its work and expertise in OD/ID was of superior quality to that of similar organizations that [I have] evaluated around the world and the tools that it had developed could act as a model to other organizations." The assessment of the PRIP Trust's work with its regional partners was equally positive.¹² The appraisal did, however, suggest that the proposal was perhaps a little ambitious given the resources available to the organization and the needs of the sector as a whole. It went on to suggest that the PRIP Trust consider sharpening

the focus of its work, while retaining sight of the broader vision and goals set out in the original proposal.

The appraisal helped to clarify a major issue by pointing out that while there was the need for a PRIP Trust-like organization in the NGO sector, the organization itself was still undergoing a process of change and development and should be considered as a work in progress. The appraisal made a number of recommendations for how the PRIP Trust might handle this transition process and suggested that it receive donor support provided a number of milestones were met during the course of the three-year funding cycle.

The role of the board during negotiations with donors

In the wake of the appraisal, however, there continued to be hesitancy on the part of the donors. Despite this positive endorsement, the donors continued to raise questions about the organization, most of which had to do with the role of the executive director. Having initially been led to believe by the donors that the appraisal would be the final basis for an agreement, the PRIP Trust found itself having to respond to a new series of concerns. One of the things that became clear was that a communication gap existed between the PRIP Trust and its prospective funders. The project director for SDC went as far as to say that she felt that the actual negotiation on the form of the grant from SDC to the PRIP Trust only really began after the (positive) 1997 appraisal.¹³

The importance of the board became increasingly apparent during the negotiation process with the prospective donors. When donors commissioned the 1997 appraisal of the PRIP Trust proposal, the board of directors went out of their way to facilitate the work of the appraisal team and threw its weight behind the organization and the executive director in particular. The executive director repeatedly has cited the personal support she received from the individual members of the board as being an important factor in helping her to find the strength to push on during what was a very difficult time. Two important events highlighted the critical role played by the board.

The first of these took place during the period of uncertainty that followed the 1997 appraisal.¹⁴ Different members of the board were willing to take the time to play a direct role in helping to convince donors about the merits of the PRIP Trust. Qazi Faruque Ahmed had a three-hour discussion with the head of UK ODA about the crucial role played by the PRIP Trust and the need to support the organization as part of a broader commitment of support to the sector. As Aroma Goon pointed out, it was unprecedented for the chair of ADAB to take the time to meet with donors to convince them to support an organization other than his own. Similarly, when discussions with SDC appeared to be taking a turn for the worse, the chair of the board took the time to meet with representatives of SDC. He let them know that the integrity of the PRIP Trust was far more important than receiving SDC funding. He made it clear that if SDC were not prepared to fund the PRIP Trust on its terms, the PRIP Trust would look elsewhere for support. In discussions with representatives of the donor community, the degree of support from the board was cited as one of the most important factors in finally persuading them to go ahead and fund the PRIP Trust proposal.

The second point where the board demonstrated its commitment to the PRIP Trust occurred when it became clear that the organization would run out of funds before new funds were found. Rather than force the PRIP Trust to shut down (temporarily) or try to

negotiate a new bridging grant from the donors, the board member organizations, in this case BRAC and Proshika, stepped into the breach and effectively provided a loan to the PRIP Trust to enable it to continue operating. This loan served two purposes. The first was that it enabled the PRIP Trust to continue to work without having to be at the beck and call of the donors. It also demonstrated to the donors that the NGO community as a whole was committed to and valued the contribution of the PRIP Trust. This was an issue that had been raised during the 1997 appraisal. At that time, various donors had made the point that if the PRIP Trust's services were so valued by the broader community, then they expected to see some degree of support or buy-in by local organizations. The fact that BRAC and Proshika were willing to commit hard-earned resources to support an organization such as the PRIP Trust went a long way towards convincing the donors that it did have a role to play within the sector. Since then, the different members of the board have gone out of their way to show support for the organization by attending events organized by the PRIP Trust, using some of its services, and by including it in activities that concern the broader NGO community.

The discussion on the role of the board illustrates an important point about the relationship between donors and partners. The concerns about the competency of the staff of PRIP to implement the project throws up an interesting issue relating to theory on governance. As early as 1994 the Fox Report had questioned the wisdom of not allowing the board to appoint the new executive director. At the time Fox argued that this usurped one of the primary functions of the board, namely to take responsibility for identifying and hiring the new chief executive, who in turn would determine how the PRIP Trust would be run. But in the final analysis, both SDC and CIDA seemed to affirm the old conventional wisdom that an organization is a reflection of the chief executive. The fact that the PRIP Trust had a board comprising three of the most respected leaders of the NGO community did not carry as much weight with the donors as one would think and certainly did not satisfy donor concerns about the management capacity of the organization.

The role of the executive director

The choice of the executive director also emerged as a major stumbling block to securing funding. Questions were asked about whether or not Aroma Goon could fill the gap created by Richard Holloway's departure. What these objections failed to appreciate was the relationship between Richard Holloway and Aroma Goon, who had served as assistant project director under PRIP. From the outset, Richard Holloway had been grooming Aroma Goon to take over the responsibility for running the PRIP Trust. Father Timm, in particular, felt that the donor concerns about Aroma's executive ability were merely an excuse and thereby failed to recognize that Richard Holloway had always seen her as the logical person to run the new national organization and to provide the continuity during the transition process. The donors also chose to ignore the fact that many of the initiatives undertaken by PRIP were based on Aroma Goon's understanding of the sector and the excellent relationships that she had helped to foster with the NGO community.

These concerns were further exacerbated by questions regarding the alleged role of Aroma Goon in the movement that led to the resignation of the last government in Bangladesh.¹⁵ The role of the NGO movement in the run-up to the June elections in general remains an area of controversy and is beyond the scope of this paper. However,

the fact that Aroma Goon endorsed the call for a new election under a neutral caretaker administration in both a personal capacity and as a representative of ADAB (along with many other NGOs) became a major issue for the donors. The feeling was that those members who supported this call had crossed the line of impartiality or nonpartisanship and were supporting the opposition. Regardless of whether this was the case or not, the issue was used by the donors as a reason to question the PRIP Trust's prospective role as a funder and its ability to act as unifying force within the sector.¹⁶

Another issue relating to the executive director-elect revolved around the question of gender. The NGO revolution in Bangladesh had been notable for the fact that the vast majority of target group members were women and many NGO staff workers were also women. However, one of the many anomalies running through the sector was the fact that relatively few women held leadership positions in the NGO sector. Where women have made it to the top, it has been as the head of NGOs that were considered to be primarily concerned with women's issues, such as Saptagram or the Bangladesh Nari Prograti Sangha (BNPS). This phenomenon reflected partly on the fact that Bangladesh continues to be a very male-dominated society, despite the fact that the two leading political parties are led by women, where women are frequently viewed in relation to their fathers or husbands. It is also a reflection of the fact that the aid business is still dominated by men who are perhaps more comfortable working with and socializing with male Bangladeshi counterparts. Though this was never raised publicly by any of the donors, the fact that the executive director-elect was a woman was a factor that contributed to the scepticism of the donors about the managerial capacity of the PRIP Trust. The first secretary from SDC (herself a woman) did concede that Aroma Goon perhaps was held to a far higher standard than any male would have been in similar circumstances.

Relations between the board and executive director

At the beginning of the process of negotiations with prospective donors, the board chose to maintain a relatively low profile. As the chair noted "it was important to allow the leadership of the PRIP Trust to demonstrate its ability to sell its case to the donors." As a result, while all the members of the board at different times and in different ways, provided important moral support and advice to the leadership, it did so in a subtle, behind-the-scenes way. However, when it began to be clear that the negotiations were running into problems, especially with regard to the role of the executive director, the board did not hesitate to assert itself and play a much more active and visible role in supporting the leadership of the PRIP Trust. The first example was when the PRIP Trust was facing difficulties securing registration from the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) as a new, national organization. The fact that the board was made up of representatives of both factions of the NGO community went a long way towards assuaging the concerns of the NGOAB (and members of the donor community) about the alleged bias of the organization and its leader.

Father Timm was very clear that he did not agree with NGOs getting involved in political activities, which was something he felt went beyond the mandate of a development organization. However, he felt that the executive director was being discriminated against and pointed out that if Proshika was receiving donor funding despite the far more visible (political) role played by its executive director, then there was no reason why the PRIP Trust should not also be supported by the donors.

F.H. Abed argued that it was important to distinguish between the personal positions of members of staff of an NGO and the work of the NGO itself. He pointed out that if he had the slightest concern about the impartiality of the PRIP Trust he would not be supportive of its leadership and would consider leaving the board. He went on to say that nothing he had seen or heard suggested that this was a problem and that he had been more than prepared to reassure donors and partners alike about this issue. Similarly, Qazi Faruque Ahmed pointed out that the donor community has been pressuring NGOs to work more closely with civil society and to become more involved in advocacy. In his view, the call for a neutral caretaker government was not the property of the opposition political party but rather a belief endorsed by the private sector, civil service and a wide range of professional organizations. He therefore saw no reason why NGOs, and especially an organization such as the PRIP Trust, should be singled out for censure on this issue. This was a point that was echoed by the director general of the NGOAB, who asserted that there was a moral responsibility to speak out in favor of democracy and saw no reason why this should not also include NGOs.

Developing an identity

As was mentioned earlier, the Bangladesh NGO community suffered from the charismatic leader syndrome. Few examples exist where NGOs have been able to rise above this problem. The PRIP Trust was one of the few organizations that had made the successful transition to a second-generation leadership. One of the most heartening aspects of this story has been the way the PRIP Trust has grown and matured as an organization, enabling it to continue working long after the current leadership has moved on.

In the days of PRIP, the organization was very much identified with its expatriate director, Richard Holloway, who cast a long shadow over the organization and the NGO sector. He was a man with a vision of how an organization such as the PRIP Trust could support the development of the sector and one who was willing to make unorthodox decisions to support that view.¹⁷ As Father Timm noted, in many respects, as a USAID-funded project, the previous director was able to operate with far fewer constraints and was able to make decisions without worrying about how it all fit together.¹⁸ During the first four years of its existence, the organization consisted of just three people, the director, assistant director and the head of programs, and this was an area of concern for the new donors, who wanted to support an institution rather than a collection of individuals. As all those involved with the process of negotiation have said the most important part of what was often a long and painful process, was the organization taking genuine ownership over the future of the PRIP Trust.

Building a team

The original funding proposal was noteworthy for the breadth of its ambition, scope and scale—something that was beyond the capacity of the existing staff of the PRIP Trust. In order for the PRIP Trust to meet the goals laid out in the proposal, it would have had to significantly increase the number of staff. Therefore, the first task of the new director was to recruit a team to work with her in order to implement the new proposal, should it be funded. Five new professionals joined the PRIP Trust between 1995 and 1996.

The competencies of the new staff were evaluated during the 1997 appraisal, and it was clear that the director had attracted a diverse and talented group of people. New staff came from the UN system, the civil service, international agencies and large local NGOs. These were people who had the choice of working for whomever they wanted, yet all had opted to come to a fledgling organization, which was not even assured of funding. When this issue was explored with the new staff, the responses were revealing. All cited the influence of the executive director as one of the main reasons they chose to become part of the PRIP Trust family. Specifically, they talked about how the director was able to promote a vision of what the PRIP Trust wanted to do as well as offer opportunities for personal growth.

The PRIP Trust was the least well-paid option, but I was inspired by the potential of the organization and felt that the organization could play a major strategic role within the sector. Also the executive director was very supportive and helpful to me personally. All this made working for the PRIP Trust a challenging prospect.

After seven-eight years in the UN system, I wanted to see development from the other side. I was attracted by the space and opportunity to be creative and to be involved in innovative capacity building and to work on the women's leadership network. I felt that the transition from a project to a national Bangladeshi organization was a move in the right direction and that the PRIP Trust had the potential to play a leading role in the development of the sector.

I had some contacts with Pact/ PRIP while director of the Public Administration Training Centre and worked with Richard Holloway and Aroma Goon on the design of a course on GO-NGO relations. After 18 years in the civil service I was looking for a means of getting more direct hands-on experience and to work with small NGOs in the field. My background in training fitted in very well with the PRIP Trust's focus on capacity building.

All through the discussions and uncertainty, the executive director made sure that we were protected. She assumed all the burdens and worries and did her best to ensure that we could carry on working in a tension-free environment. When I saw the commitment of the executive director, it made it easy to us to believe in the value of what we were doing.

Taking ownership of the proposal

As mentioned earlier, Richard Holloway prepared the original proposal that was circulated among prospective members of the consortium. One of the most interesting parts of the transition process was the way in which the staff of the PRIP Trust was able to take ownership over the proposal over the course of the negotiations with the donors. If the initial perception was that the proposal was largely the vision of one man, by the time the agreement with the new donors was signed, it was apparent to all those concerned that the proposal was the product of the efforts of an entire team of people.

The 1997 appraisal, while broadly supportive of the work being carried out by the PRIP Trust, nonetheless suggested that the proposal needed to be reworked considerably. While highly appreciative of the efforts of the original executive director, most of the newer members of the staff admitted they were not very comfortable with this legacy. As one member of the staff commented: "The old proposal didn't mean anything to me... and did become something of a millstone in the negotiations with the donors." The donors also picked up on the recommendation of the 1997 appraisal for a more limited scope of activity. Initially, Pact and the PRIP Trust agreed that Richard Holloway would return to rework the proposal. However, it became clear that the problem was the continued lack of ownership of the proposal by members of the PRIP Trust staff and that no amount of external assistance would address this problem.¹⁹ As Holloway observed: "It was clear to me that the PRIP Trust was best served by my keeping away from Bangladesh. Not only did I not return to help the staff of the Trust to rework the proposal, I deliberately turned down other consultancies in Bangladesh to avoid confusing the situation." In early 1997 the PRIP Trust made a calculated decision to throw out the old proposal and begin the entire process anew. To many this was a high-risk strategy that could well have backfired. The decision to take control over the proposal-writing process was a key event in the long drawn-out process that ended with the PRIP Trust finally being able to convince the donors of the role that they could play in helping development of the NGO sector. It represented solid evidence that the PRIP Trust had the maturity to stand alone as a national organization and could make a major contribution to the NGO sector in Bangladesh.

Credit for the decision to rework the proposal should be shared by all those involved in the process. But perhaps most credit needs to be given to Aroma Goon for her willingness to defer to the other members of staff at the PRIP Trust—a team that she had largely recruited. The willingness to delegate and to include partners in discussions on the future of the PRIP Trust helped to build a strong team of people and organizations. The discussions with partners had made it clear to the team that while the range of activities that Pact/ PRIP had supported in the past were important contributions to the growth of the sector, the real value of the organization lay elsewhere. As the OD/ID team put it, the key questions that needed to be addressed by the members of the staff were: what have we done? what are we doing? what do we want to do?

Providing answers to these questions was by no means easy. It required people to question the most fundamental ideas about the nature of the work the PRIP Trust was doing, its relationships with its partners and the role it could play within the sector. Ultimately it meant the PRIP Trust would have to cut back on the work it was doing with its partners and with the sector.²⁰ Significantly, the partners stood by the PRIP Trust, even when it could no longer provide direct grant funding or the same level of support. As one partner put it: "The PRIP Trust was there when we most needed them and we were not prepared to abandon it in its time of need."

Ownership gives authenticity to indigenization

Even though the first version of the new proposal was far from adequate, what was more significant was the change in attitude and approach. Rather than simply making assumptions about its role and relationship to the broader community, the organization had begun a process of self-examination and looking at how it related to its partners. Very quickly, it became clear that while the PRIP Trust had an important role to play in terms

of its relationships with government, civil society and other sector bodies, the real core of its work was in OD/ID.

In terms of maximizing the return on an investment, working with partner organizations distinguished the PRIP Trust from other NGOs in Bangladesh. The major part of this involved helping partners to clarify their own vision, mission and goals. Work with organizations such as CODEC and Uttaran was where the PRIP Trust had been able to make its most important contribution. Tools such as POAP, Future Search and the training facilitated by experts from IDR and PRIA had helped to greatly strengthen the capacity of a large number of these support organizations, which in turn were beginning to play an even more significant role within the sector. While the PRIP Trust remained committed to helping organizations such as ADAB to play a role in national level debates, the challenge for the next three years was for the Trust to firmly establish itself in the minds of the NGO community as the foremost authority on capacity building. As one staff-person put it: "The PRIP Trust could no longer assume that it had something to offer to the sector, it needed to demonstrate and prove that it could do so. The PRIP Trust had to (re) establish its credibility within the sector."

At the end of the process, the staff produced a tightly focused document. There was a general consensus that the PRIP Trust had put together something that was of genuine high quality, a product that was the equal to anything produced by international experts. Rewriting the proposal was definitive evidence of the real meaning of indigenization. It proved once and for all that the PRIP Trust could survive as a national organization that was not tied to any external support or ideas. The proposal was no longer USAID or Pact or Richard Holloway's vision of how the NGO sector should look. It belonged to the staff of the PRIP Trust and provided the organization with an enormous collective boost of confidence. The PRIP Trust as an organization had a new identity and sense of self, one that was forward looking and grounded in the needs of the country. This feeling was best summed up by Phillip Chaudhury when he said that the proposal: "...was something that I was proud to be a part of and to be associated with..."

The work goes on

The fact that the proposal represented the work of the OD team appeared to prove finally to the donors that the PRIP Trust consisted of a team of professionals with both the expertise and experience to meet the challenges of working as a national organization. It also provided conclusive proof to the donors that the PRIP Trust was far more than its executive director.²¹ By this time, the ODA had withdrawn from negotiations leaving only SDC and CIDA expressing interest in providing funding. What had also become clear was that the donors were guilty of applying double standards. On the one hand, they had required the PRIP Trust to accommodate every demand for information, had submitted questions repeatedly that covered ground addressed by the various appraisals, and generally been highly aggressive in negotiations with the PRIP Trust staff. Most of this seemed to stem from some unsaid concerns about the role of the executive director. Whenever the PRIP Trust tried to point out that its work and relationships with its partners were being negatively effected by this long drawn out process, they were accused of being obstructionist.²²

Despite all the uncertainty and tension, the PRIP Trust was able to continue to play an important role within the sector and to continue with initiatives begun under PRIP. The

most significant of these was the support it provided to a World Bank-sponsored study aimed at creating an enabling environment for government-NGO cooperation. The study, titled *Pursuing Common Goals*, even went as far as nominating the PRIP Trust as a potential locus of information on the NGO sector. The PRIP Trust provided crucial support to the round-table discussions that resulted in the creation of the Government NGO Coordination Council (GNCC), to which the PRIP Trust was elected as a representative from the NGO community. Furthermore, in an endorsement of the work of the PRIP Trust, Aroma Goon was elected to the executive board of ADAB, which continues to play an important role in helping small NGOs maintain a profile within the community. The PRIP Trust also played an important role in promoting closer ties between NGOs and the business community through its work with the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum. The fact that the PRIP Trust survived owes much to the strength of its staff and the goodwill and support of an NGO sector that clearly values the efforts of the organization.

The role of Pact during the transition period

For Pact, and to a lesser extent USAID, the transition process was difficult. On the one hand, the aim was to withdraw and hand over responsibility to the staff of the PRIP Trust. On the other hand, when problems began to emerge in the negotiation process, there was a strong temptation to intervene on behalf of the PRIP Trust. For a parent organization, there is always a difficulty in knowing when exactly to provide assistance and when to step back and allow the staff of the partner organization to take charge of the process. In the initial discussions on indigenization, Pact played an important role in helping the staff make the case to donors by providing advice and financial assistance. However, it became apparent that the PRIP Trust would have to demonstrate its ability to function without the help of Pact, especially during 1997.

When it became clear that any new agreement with donors would not be concluded before the USAID-Pact funding ran out, Pact faced a particularly difficult choice. The easy option would have been to provide the PRIP Trust with a bridging grant in order to allow the organization to continue to operate. However, to do so ran the risk of making it appear that the PRIP Trust was still reliant on Pact. Thus, in the summer of 1997, Pact made the painful decision to stand back and to let the board of the PRIP Trust assume the responsibility for ensuring that the PRIP Trust had resources with which to work. Similarly, both Pact and the PRIP Trust came to the collective decision that reworking the proposal would have to be done by the Trust without any form of assistance from Pact. As Sarah Newhall stated: "Stepping back was an immensely difficult decision. Over the course of the project, I had come to view the PRIP Trust and its staff as part of the extended Pact family. It was very difficult to not get involved when the organization was facing so many difficulties. It felt like we were abandoning the PRIP Trust in its time of need. But if we were going to be committed to indigenizing, there was really no alternative. When we saw the new proposal, we felt that our faith and confidence in the organization's abilities were vindicated."

¹ Leslie Fox's observation is particularly interesting in light of donor concerns regarding the neutrality of the PRIP Trust.

² The PRIP Trust has been collaborating with the Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Development Services (RDRS), a project in Northern Bangladesh that was funded by the Lutheran World Federation, on a study that looks at the entire process of indigenization.

- ¹ Radda Barnen, for example, used to fund a clinic for poor women and children in Dhaka City for many years. When a decision was made to end all direct operational work in Bangladesh, the organization was faced with a difficult decision about how to withdraw and ended up setting a time limit for the clinic to attract new support or close its doors.
- ⁴ There are those who would argue that Bangladesh invented the notion of the charismatic leader. In the case of the PRIP Trust, its close identification with the original expatriate director was a major issue during the transition process. This point will be discussed in more detail later in the case study.
- ⁵ The decision to form a trust drew on the experiences of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), which is the leading policy think tank in Bangladesh. When CPD was founded, it was registered as a trust with a board comprised of representatives from the private sector, NGOs and civil society.
- ⁶ F.H. Abed and Qazi Faruque Ahmed are highly respected and influential in Bangladesh and within the international NGO movement and are constantly asked to participate in meetings with the government. Furthermore, Qazi Faruque is also Chair of ADAB, and in that regard has the added responsibility of representing the NGO community as a whole.
- ⁷ There have been major cutbacks in development aid in recent years as Northern governments dealt with their own budget constraints and the need to justify support being provided to Southern organizations.
- ⁸ There is no doubt that local NGOs continue to be highly suspicious of USAID funds for several reasons. The first has to do with the fact that USAID has traditionally been seen as a tool of the United States Government's foreign policy objectives (especially in Latin America). USAID funds are also normally associated with very rigorous reporting requirements and conditions that most NGOs find difficult to fulfil. At the same time, USAID rarely funds Southern NGOs directly and prefers to work through organizations such as Pact and Pathfinder International who have already demonstrated the ability to satisfy their reporting requirements.
- ⁹ Ironically, mid-way through the negotiations (i.e. July 1997), the ODA indicated that it would not be in a position to fund the PRIP Trust because it did not have the capacity to handle the paperwork. Unfortunately and somewhat disingenuously, the ODA did not make it clear to others that its problem with the PRIP Trust was a lack of its own administrative capacity. As a result, many others believed it had decided not to fund the PRIP Trust because of doubts about the value of the project.
- ¹⁰ The project director, while confident in his belief that the PRIP Trust had a role to play in the growth and development of the sector, was somewhat less sanguine about the ease with which new donors would be found. This stemmed largely from the fact that USAID was always viewed with considerable suspicion by other donors in part because of its stance on issues such as funding for abortion and family planning.
- ¹¹ The Team was made up of Dr. Alan Fowler (OD/ID expert and Team Leader) and Babar Sobhan (local NGO expert) with Ifttekar Hossain, ACNABIN (Finances).
- ¹² One interesting point that emerged was that the ODA was supporting another project, BPHC, which was also working on capacity building with smaller NGOs—though only in the field of health. An appraisal of that project indicated that the quality of services provided by PRIP was of a far superior quality (this was confirmed by one partner organization that worked with both PRIP and BPHC). The Fowler/Sobhan appraisal team was of the opinion that ODA could support PRIP on that basis alone but chose not to make this a central point in its conclusions believing that PRIP deserved to be supported on its own merits.
- ¹¹ The Social Development Advisor for DFID did admit that the PRIP Trust had acted in an exemplary fashion in its discussions with the prospective consortium and had initiated the discussion long in advance of when support was needed. He went on to concede that the delays had more to do with the donors than they did with the PRIP Trust.
- ¹¹ The appraisal conducted in 1997 by Alan Fowler and Babar Sobhan was generally favorably disposed to the work being carried out by the PRIP Trust and supported the recommendation that it receive donor support, provided certain changes (which were already under discussion) took place.
- ¹⁵ The opposition parties had called for the 1996 general elections to be held under a neutral caretaker government. When this was rejected, all the major opposition parties chose to boycott the February election. For reasons best known to them, the government proceeded to rig the elections which led to a movement for new elections in which NGOs played a role.

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- ¹⁶ Donors argued (though never publicly) that PRIP would only channel funds to those NGOs seen as being pro Awami League and would therefore polarize the sector. However, there has never been any evidence to support this claim and the donors eventually had to concede that the mere suggestion of bias was insufficient grounds to deny PRIP funding.
- ¹⁷ Despite the fact that many of the donors felt that Richard Holloway embodied PRIP, within the local NGO community, there was a strong feeling that PRIP was in some respects a marginal player on the NGO scene. By contrast, under the leadership of Aroma Goon, the PRIP Trust is at the heart of many important discussions about the future direction of the sector and has a far more relevant contribution to make today than it did as a USAID project.
- ¹⁸ At times this did result in the project director making decisions that USAID found troubling and led to a certain amount of conflict between the two.
- ¹⁹ Initially, Pact offered to provide funding for someone to help rewrite the proposal. But after discussions with the staff of the PRIP Trust, Pact quickly realized that this was something that the PRIP Trust would have to do all by itself if it was going to convince the donors of its vision and capacity.
- ²⁰ Despite all the uncertainty, one of the most notable things about the transition process was the fact that the organization continued to assist its partners as much as was possible. There were times when this meant making difficult choices, having to work extra hours but the staff were always determined to ensure that the burden was not felt by their partner organizations and the people with whom they worked.
- ²¹ This is not to downplay the role played by Aroma Goon, but more to demonstrate how donors are guilty of treating NGOs as solely a reflection of its leaders.
- ²² The author was subsequently involved in an appraisal of DFID in which members of staff reacted with far greater hostility to even the most basic of questions, yet feel able to demand total disclosure from prospective 'partners' as a condition for receiving funding.

III. Lessons learned

Donors have their own agendas and concerns that may not always coincide with the precise needs of a local organization. One of the most interesting aspects of the negotiations was the way the donors challenged the PRIP Trust and its partners to re-examine the way in which they wanted to work. At the same time, the PRIP Trust also challenged the donors to think about how best to meet the needs of the sector as a whole. It was a process of mutual learning and growth that ultimately resulted in a relationship that has tremendous potential and could and perhaps should act as a model for donor-NGO relations not just in Bangladesh, but elsewhere as well.

The importance of the board

The role of the board was crucial to the entire transition process. As mentioned previously, most NGOs in Bangladesh are associated with a charismatic founder-leader who, through a combination of vision and drive, is able to create a strong and effective organization. However, in the case of the PRIP Trust, we have perhaps the first example in which the board took upon itself to play an active role in guiding the organization and assuming responsibility for its work. The selection of a board of trustees who were respected within the community and who understood the PRIP Trust and its contribution to the sector was ultimately crucial in convincing the donors of the value of supporting the work of the PRIP Trust. The board gave the organization credibility with the donors, while at the same time, providing valuable advice and support to the leadership of the PRIP Trust.

Taking ownership

The turning point in the transition period occurred when the new staff of the PRIP Trust became involved in and took responsibility for rewriting the funding proposal. The decision to include the whole team in the negotiation process played an important role in demonstrating to donors that the PRIP Trust was more than a few individuals. It also provided an opportunity for the staff to take ownership over the process and the work of the organization. The clarity of mission grew out of the fact that the staff of the PRIP Trust was able to draw on their own experiences to make a powerful case in favor of supporting capacity building among small NGOs in Bangladesh. Credit must be given to the executive director for her willingness to entrust her colleagues with the important responsibility of reworking the proposal.

The need to have clarity of mission

Repeatedly through the process the donors tried to persuade and cajole the PRIP Trust into assuming a role that the consortium would be comfortable supporting. The PRIP Trust was under constant pressure to be more traditional in its approach and to concentrate on the direct implementation of capacity building projects. This stemmed from the fact that most donors did not fully understand the relationship between the PRIP Trust, a supra-support organization, and its partner support organizations. But by remaining firm in its convictions and assuming the burden of educating the donors about

the model, the PRIP Trust was able to win the respect of the donors for the work that it was doing in Bangladesh.

Educating donors

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the PRIP Trust was overly optimistic to think that the donor community would automatically understand its role in the NGO sector and share its long-term sector perspective. As a result, the entire negotiation process went on far longer than anyone anticipated. Added to the time needed to educate donors was the fact that most donors work in three-year cycles. This meant that the PRIP Trust had to repeatedly educate newcomers about its work, its relationship to the sector and to the needs of NGOs in Bangladesh. An excellent example of this is the fact that during the transition process, the social development advisor of the ODA was replaced and did not adequately brief his successor about the PRIP Trust.¹ Similarly, the CIDA representative, who had been highly sceptical in the beginning, ended up having to hand-over responsibility for the PRIP Trust just when he had come to understand and appreciate what the PRIP Trust had to offer. Similarly, SDC originally questioned the PRIP Trust's role as a funding agency, but changed its view when a new staff member with an OD/ID background took over responsibility for the PRIP Trust project.

Single donor relationships build a foundation

The decision to meet with donors collectively rather than on a one-to-one basis put the PRIP Trust leadership at a certain disadvantage. Even though the goal was to create a donor consortium, in retrospect it would possibly have been easier to establish individual relationships with the different donors before embarking on a consortium approach. The donors each had different concerns that individually were not major obstacles. However, when the donors sat together, they put forward a collection of concerns that made it difficult for the PRIP Trust to respond in a coherent manner. The leadership of the PRIP Trust found itself being pulled in several different directions at the same time. Responding to these concerns was seen as evidence that the organization did not have a clear idea of what it wanted to do. In reality, however, the uncertainty was in the minds of the donors and they were the ones who were succumbing to the temptation of trying to make the PRIP Trust something it was not.²

Clear hand-over

One of the key lessons to be learned is the need to have clear and visible hand-over of responsibility from the expatriate leadership to local staff well before the actual indigenization process takes place. Moving to local leadership of PRIP while it was still funded by USAID would have demonstrated to all concerned that the strength of the organization and its ability to function without expatriate leadership.³ The transition from a project to a national organization alone represented a major change. The fact that this took place at the same time as a perceived change of leadership created a degree of uncertainty that proved problematic to prospective donors. It is possible that fewer questions would have been raised about Aroma Goon's competency and capacity to replace Richard Holloway. This would have allowed more attention to be devoted to the broader implications of indigenization and how this would impact the PRIP Trust's

relationships with its partners and the sector as a whole. Too many changes at one time did cause concerns, especially for those unfamiliar with the PRIP Trust, and was one of the main reasons why the donors insisted on such a long drawn-out and rigorous evaluation process.

Lessons for donors

The lessons to be learned from this experience are not restricted to the PRIP Trust alone. There are important lessons for donors as well. With the exception of support to large well-established NGOs, such as Proshika or BRAC, donors tend to be reluctant to take over projects that they have not been involved with from the beginning. Both USAID and Pact did not give sufficient weight or effort to overcoming this problem nor to the idea of having built into the original project a plan for a future without AID funding. USAID in particular did not devote enough attention to explaining to other donors why it was that they were ending their funding to the PRIP Trust and assumed (incorrectly) that it would be easy for new donors to dovetail their systems with that of USAID. If USAID had been genuinely committed to helping a partner to indigenize it should have given consideration to setting up an endowment that would have enabled the partner organization to operate independently of donor funding. Alternatively, if setting up an endowment fund was not feasible, USAID should have been willing to devote time to educate donors fully about the work of the partner and the reasons why it could not continue to fund the organization. At the same time, former donors need to be open to questions or criticisms about the organization from other donors and should take time to address these concerns. As the experience with the PRIP Trust demonstrated, USAID had reservations but was flexible enough to allow both Pact and PRIP to explore the possibility of indigenization and deserve credit for having the courage to see the process through to the end.

Conclusion

The story of the PRIP Trust transition is highly complicated and should serve as a lesson to all those involved in attempting to indigenize. In the years ahead we will see many similar transitions as donors rethink how they wish to work in countries such as Bangladesh. Ultimately, all social development problems will have to be solved by local people using local knowledge and local initiatives. Donors may well help to underwrite some of the costs associated with getting initiatives off the ground, but it is important to understand that the final decision and choices must remain with those who are there to stay. Donors will come and go, but an organization such as the PRIP Trust will endure and will continue to persevere with its mission as best it can. The challenge for all involved is to keep sight of the bottom line, which is that we are trying to effect meaningful changes in the lives of those less fortunate than ourselves. Yes, we are all answerable and accountable to different actors, but if that gets in the way of the real work at hand, then we have lost sight of the reasons for doing what we do. For all those working in development, the challenge will be to stick to the path we believe in regardless of the obstacles that we encounter. In that respect, the story of the PRIP Trust is of an organization that had a mission and chose to work towards that goal despite all the difficulties that arose along the way. As Aroma Goon put it: "At the end of the day, I know who I am and I know what I want to do and why and nothing will change that and nothing can take that away from me. Donors can choose to support the PRIP Trust or not,

that is their choice, what they cannot do and I will not allow them to do is to make the PRIP Trust into something it is not.”

A quotation from a song by the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore captures the essence of the PRIP Trust story:

Even if your call is heard but no-one comes forward, proceed alone,
proceed alone, proceed alone!

¹ Ironically, the new SDA of DFID became involved in a World Bank project to channel funds to NGOs for social development. The project used the cascade principle developed by PRIP without having any idea that there was already a local body using this methodology to reach out to small NGOs and CBOs.

² This was a point that was alluded to several times during a ceremony to mark the end of the funding relationship with USAID and Pact. Several of the speakers from the local NGO community appealed to the new consortium to resist the urge to make the PRIP Trust something it was not.

³ In reality, Richard Holloway handed over primary responsibility for the running of PRIP to Aroma Goon a year before he left while remaining as the Country Representative of Pact Bangladesh. This allowed him to continue to be associated with the project in an advisory capacity and to act as a mentor to Aroma in the initial stages. The mistake was that handover was not publicized and most donors were unaware of the transition.

Timeline of events

August 1988	Five-year cooperative agreement signed between USAID Bangladesh and Pact for the Private Rural Initiatives Project (PRIP).
November 1988	Richard Holloway contracted for the position of executive director and sent to Bangladesh to start the project.
September 1992	First discussions surrounding the possibility of indigenization.
November 1992	New agreement with USAID to extend the duration of the project until 1998 with a view to indigenization. Possibility of setting up an endowment to ensure sustainability proposed by Pact but turned down by USAID.
December 1993	Mid-term appraisal by Glaser which endorsed the work of PRIP but held off on recommending indigenization.
July 1994	Fox report commissioned to look specifically at the question of indigenization.
October 1994	Partners' meeting on indigenization study. Covey/Chadha management study on staffing requirements for new organization.
May 1995	USAID agrees to fund a part of the ongoing work of PRIP until August 1996. Two new staff members recruited. Meeting of donors to present the proposal for the PRIP Trust 1996-1998.
June 1995	Richard Holloway departs.
July 1995	Two more staff members recruited.
May 1996	Richard Holloway returns for consultancy funded by USAID to help rewrite the proposal and negotiate with donors. This is his last visit to Bangladesh.
July 1996	PRIP Trust registers as a Bangladeshi organization with Aroma Goon at the head. Negotiations with donors continue.
August 1996	Pact requests and receives a no-cost extension to USAID funding of the PRIP Trust which will run into mid-1997.
January 1997	Fowler/Sobhan appraisal conducted and recommends support to the PRIP Trust provided certain changes are made.
April 1997	ODA finally withdraws from negotiations.
July 1997	PRIP Trust staff rewrites proposal.

Annex One

August 1997

Pact funding runs out. No agreement reached with donors. Three month bridging loan provided by Proshika and BRAC.

November 1997

Agreement reached with CIDA and SDC to fund PRIP Trust for three years. Foundation for international training identified as conduit for CIDA funding.

January 1998

Agreement signed retroactive to November 1997 for three year cycle.

August 1998

The beginning of a new era.

A brief history of NGOs in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has always had a strong tradition of community-based assistance and philanthropy. However, the modern NGO sector can trace its origins to two key events—the 1970 cyclone that devastated the coastal belt of the country and left over half a million people dead, and the 1971 War of Independence. With the government of the newly-independent Bangladesh struggling to overcome the legacy of twenty-five years of Pakistani misrule and a conflict that destroyed virtually the entire infrastructure of the country, much of the onus for rebuilding the country fell on local people and small community-based organizations. With assistance from international NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE, local organizations began by providing basic relief and welfare services to poor and marginal communities in rural Bangladesh. However, these same organizations quickly realized that the needs of the country ran beyond the provision of basic relief and began to reorient their efforts to have a more long-term developmental focus. Initially, under the influence of the work of Paulo Freire, local NGOs began to analyze poverty not simply in terms of a lack of access to resources, but more as a product of a system of unequal distribution and a lack of power. The focus of NGO interventions shifted to social mobilization and conscientization aimed at empowering the poor to effect genuine changes in their life circumstances.

Second generation strategies

However, this experiment quickly ran into problems as NGOs found themselves being drawn into conflicts between target group members and local elite groups over access to common property resources. As Sattar and Howes note with reference to the BRAC experience, while some significant gains were made during this time, they were rarely sustained.¹ Furthermore, BRAC found it increasingly difficult to maintain group cohesion at a time when members continued to find themselves economically marginalized.² As a result, by the beginning of the 1980s, most NGOs adopted a new approach to development that concentrated on individual economic empowerment as the first step on the road to poverty alleviation. NGOs began to concentrate on the provision of basic services to the poor, along with the use of microcredit as a means of supporting income-generating projects as part of a model of rural integrated development. This is not to say that the experiment with social mobilization was a total failure.³ Many of the lessons about working with and through local communities would prove to be very valuable when it came to developing the high quality, cost-effective delivery mechanisms for which the sector is now world famous.

This model of integrated rural development began to attract the attention of an international donor community that was becoming increasingly frustrated by what it perceived as the lack of interest on the part of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) in meeting the basic needs of the poor. In contrast, local NGOs with limited technical and financial support from Northern NGOs had demonstrated that it was possible to deliver high quality, cost-effective services to poor rural communities. For many of the more enlightened members of the donor community, the NGO model offered a potentially revolutionary means of reaching and working with the rural poor. Local NGOs were challenging the conventional wisdom that said the poor were somehow unable to learn or to effect meaningful changes in their lives, and with the assistance of Northern NGOs, were achieving results that most governments could only dream about.⁴ Thus, in 1982 the

first donors began to tentatively explore funding local NGOs directly in order to enable them to scale up micro-level projects.⁵

The impact of direct funding

The impact of direct funding on the sector has been nothing short of phenomenal. Between 1982 and 1998 there has been a six-fold increase in the number of NGOs registered with the government in order to receive foreign funding. Today, approximately 1200 local development NGOs operate in the country who receive around US\$400 million or roughly 24% of the total grant aid coming to Bangladesh annually.⁶ However, beyond a sheer increase in absolute terms of the number of NGOs in Bangladesh, direct funding has also had a profound impact on the shape and appearance of the sector and on the relations between NGOs. When direct funding first began, relatively few NGOs were in a position to enter into a relationship with official donor agencies. Most NGOs lacked the expertise and the organizational capacity deemed necessary to work on a national level, and, more importantly, to satisfy the reporting requirements of bilateral donors, who were increasingly under pressure from their governments to show greater financial accountability. As a result, most donors opted to concentrate their attention (and resources) on the handful of NGOs who had already developed highly successful and effective programs at the village level and were looking to scale-up these programs to work at a national level, and could satisfy their reporting procedures.⁷

As a result, between 1982 and 1990, the bulk of funding to the sector ended up in the hands of a small minority of NGOs. These organizations were able to use these resources not only to significantly increase the scale of their coverage, but also, as a means of strengthening themselves as institutions. NGOs suddenly had the resources to invest in staff training and development and to purchase equipment such as four-wheel drive vehicles and the latest computers all in the name of capacity building. It also sparked off a rivalry among NGOs to see who could expand the quickest. For donors interested in reaching as many people as possible, the rapid expansion in the size and coverage of NGO programs represented a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate that development assistance could have an impact. This was reinforced when it became clear that scaling up had not taken place at the expense of quality. As F.H. Abed, the Founder and executive director of BRAC, is fond of saying, "while small is beautiful, bigger can be better."

First among equals?

However, there was also a major downside associated with direct funding—namely the creation of a definite hierarchy within what is considered the NGO community. The growing gap between the handful of elite NGOs and the remainder of the community who continue to operate under very precarious circumstances is obvious even to the most casual observer. Bangladesh has an NGO sector in which the 25-30 largest NGOs receive upwards of 80% of all the resources channelled to the sector, with the remaining 20% shared by the 1100 or so other NGOs registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau.⁸ Organizations such as BRAC, Proshika and GSS operate budgets in excess of US\$100 million, employ thousands of staff and occupy highly modern office premises in the capital. The senior staff of these organizations are regularly consulted by government, donors and policy-makers and wield considerable influence in the international

development community.⁹ At the same time, the majority of the sector is made up of a plethora of small CBOs working on a shoestring budget in one or two villages or communities.

This tremendous disparity in access to resources and influence makes it impossible to talk in generalities about the NGO experience in Bangladesh. The disparity has many important consequences for NGOs both at the organizational level and in terms of relationships with the state, private sector and civil society. While the leading NGOs are increasingly able to participate in national policy making and to collaborate and work with the government, the vast majority of NGOs continue to work in relative obscurity, vulnerable to local officials and arbitrary changes in government policy and donor fashions. Similarly, the major NGOs appear to be able to tap into a seemingly bottomless reservoir of donor funding to support a range of different activities and projects, many aimed at helping them grow as institutions.¹⁰ For the majority of NGOs, however, existence continues to depend on the ability to attract project funding from an increasingly interventionist donor community. The reluctance of donors to make resources available to these organizations to develop their managerial and professional skills (because they are too small and/or have very limited coverage) has merely reinforced the gap within the sector. It should be noted, however, that there is evidence that many of the smaller NGOs are beginning to enter into partnerships with the big NGOs, which would enable them to continue to exist, while providing them with access to training and other capacity building opportunities. This has led to concerns that this homogenization will result in a loss of diversity, responsiveness and innovation that used to be an essential part of the NGO experience (Sobhan, 1997).

¹ For example, both BRAC and Proshika group members began to contest local level elections with some degree of success. However, all too often this did not result in the poor playing a more active role in decision-making processes at either the local or national level

² Mick Howes and M.G. Sattar: *Bigger and Better? Scaling Up Strategies Pursued by BRAC 1972-1991 in Making a Difference. NGOs and Development in a Changing World* Edwards and Hulme (eds.), Earthscan, London, 1992.

³ Most NGOs would strongly reject the notion that they have abandoned their commitment to social mobilization and would argue that the two approaches go hand in hand. It is worth noting that much of the NGO discourse still retains its Freirean origins.

⁴ The literature on NGOs is dominated with individual success stories. However, as Edwards and Hulme note NGOs have been far less successful when it comes to changing the systems and circumstances that keep people poor. Edwards and Hulme, 1992:1.

⁵ BRAC and Proshika were the first beneficiaries of direct funding from Sweden (SIDA) and Canada (CIDA) respectively. Similarly, the Grameen Bank had begun to receive funding from several multi-lateral agencies such as IFAD to expand the scale of its lending operations.

⁶ See *Partners or Contractors? The Relationship Between NGOs and Official Agencies in Bangladesh*, Sobhan, 1997, for a more detailed discussion of the impact of direct funding on the NGO sector.

⁷ The relationship with an influential Northern NGO played an important role in giving local NGOs a certain profile or visibility within the donor community and helped to determine who was able to access official bilateral aid. BRAC (Oxfam), Proshika (CUSO) and GSS (Diakonia) were all 'introduced' to official donors by partner NGOs.

⁸ In actual fact there is a three-tier NGO sector. The 8 leading NGOs in Bangladesh between them receive upwards of 60% of all the resources going to the sector, with a further 20% going to the next 22 NGOs, and the last 20% being shared by the remaining 1000 plus NGOs and CBOs, ADB, 1992.

⁹ Both the president of the United States and the president of the World Bank have very publicly supported the work of the Grameen Bank and regularly consult Prof. Md. Yunus, the managing director and founder of Grameen.

¹⁰ BRAC is currently in the process of trying to set up a private university in Bangladesh and have recently opened up a commercial milk-processing factory, both of which are only tangentially connected to the core goal of poverty alleviation.

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