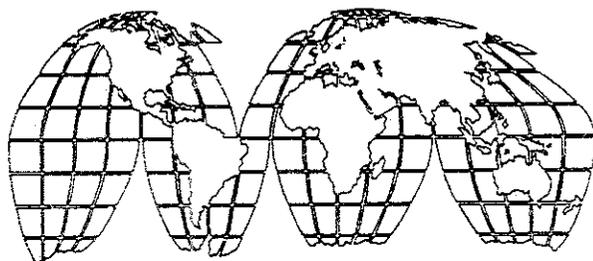


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Civil Society and Democratic
Development in Bangladesh:
A CDIE Assessment

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FINAL DRAFT

**CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT
IN BANGLADESH
A CDIE Assessment**

**Harry Blair, PPC/CDIE/POA (Team leader)
Joel Jutkowitz, Development Associates**

United States Agency for International Development
Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination
Center for Development Information and Evaluation
Program and Operations Assessment Division
Washington DC

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The views and interpretations expressed in this report are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Agency for International Development.

NOTE: Comment and criticism on this report are most welcome. Please address them to Harry Blair, Political Science Department, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837
Phone: 717-524-1300; FAX: 717-524-3760; Internet: hblair@bucknell.edu

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Preface

This report represents the findings and analysis from a CDIE case study field trip to Bangladesh, undertaken during March-April 1994. This study, along with one carried out simultaneously in Thailand, constitutes the first phase of a series of field studies being conducted as part of a CDIE assessment of civil society and democracy.

As with any enterprise of this type, there have been many people whose help has been critical in getting the task accomplished. In particular we would like to thank Tofail Ahmed for his help with the field work in Bangladesh, Saiful Karim for his assistance with field team logistics, and Karl Schwartz of the USAID Program Office in Dhaka for facilitating our visit.

On 13 June, a critique session was held in Rosslyn, at which three longtime observers and researchers of the Bangladesh scene participated: A. T. R. Rahman of the United Nations in New York; Syedur Rahman of Pennsylvania State University; and M. Rashiduz-zaman of Rowan College of New Jersey. We are most grateful for their comments and insights. Responsibility for the report, however, remains with the authors.

Executive summary

This report represents (along with a companion study of Thailand) the first of a series of field studies being conducted as part of USAID's assessment of civil society and democracy. As a CDIE assessment, the present inquiry is not a project or program evaluation of USAID activities in Bangladesh. Rather this civil society sectoral study has two basic purposes:

- to assess recent experience of USAID and other donors with efforts to promote democracy by supporting civil society; and
- to derive implications for future programming in the civil society sector that would be useful to USAID.

Definitions. Democracy can be defined as consisting of popular sovereignty (both regularly through elections and continually through citizen advocacy), political equality and political liberty. The key concepts in democracy are participation and accountability. Civil society is harder to pin down, for there is no firm consensus on its definition, but we have defined it here as consisting of those non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are:

- concerned with influencing state policy (whether as their main focus or as one agenda among others); and
- are autonomous from the state (and also from political parties).

This subset of NGOs can be called "civil society organizations" (CSOs), a concept that excludes those NGOs that are concerned only with service delivery, relief or productivity functions. Where civil society and democracy come together is that the former supports and strengthens the latter by widening participation and by increasing accountability. In political science terminology, this concept is embodied in the phrase "building pluralism." Pluralism has its dangers as well as its promises, for there can be "pluralist failures" in which stronger interest groups collude with each other to award themselves overlarge slices of the public pie, squeezing out the weaker groups that likely consist of minorities, women and the poor.

Political economy and civil society. The principal task of civil society in Bangladesh, insofar as democratization is concerned, is to widen the number of players enjoying significant roles in holding the state accountable. Thus far the groups having such roles has been very small indeed, as a political economy analysis indicates. Over its two decades and more of independence, there have been only three important elements at the upper tier of macro-level decision-making: the bureaucracy, the military and the political leadership. At any particular time, two of the three have acted in alliance to dominate the political scene; commonly the dominant duo have been the bureaucracy and the military, while much less frequently it has been the bureaucracy and the politicians (as it is at present under the current democratic dispensation).

Whichever alliance has been dominant, it has had a "silent partner" in the form of rural elites, who have basically supported the regime in power and maintained order in the countryside (generally through exercising control over the lower strata), in return for which they have been allowed to retain their positions of control and have been granted the de facto right to appropriate the greater share of government rural development spending to themselves. In very recent years, there is evidence that a new player has emerged on the scene, in the form of the business community, most especially the exporters, who have had an explosive growth in such industries as readymade garments, shellfish and leather goods.

What other players might make their voices heard? Many among what might be the expected pluralist candidates in Bangladesh have not surfaced as autonomous entities or in other cases not at all. Professional associations, labor unions and student groups tend to have been co-opted by the political parties, while market-oriented farmer groups, sharecroppers or landless laborers (which have become very powerful elements in many areas of India) have not really coalesced at all into effective civil society institutions.

Civil society strategies. Strategies may be grouped into two categories or "Basic strategies." Basic strategy 1 (BS 1) endeavors to improve and maintain the "enabling environment" for democracy, or the basic "rules of the game" for conducting the business of a democratic polity. Basic strategy (BS 2), focuses on supporting CSOs at work in particular sectors, such as women's issues, natural resource management, professional societies and the like. The CDIE team looked at eight strategies, of which three come under the BS 1 rubric, while the other four fall under BS 2.

Basic strategy 1. CSOs in the human rights field have been at work for some years, both during the Ershad regime and in the current democratic era. They have developed good systems of information gathering and have nurtured ties to the media and so can get their message out to the public. But they remain critically dependent on the international arena to be effective, for their power is the ability to point fingers at the state and embarrass it in the court of world opinion.

Under the democratic dispensation now in place in Bangladesh, the print media have blossomed in terms of what they can and do print. Accordingly, the media constitute the second BS 1 strategy taken up in this assessment. The range of topics has broadened significantly and the willingness to criticize the government has deepened considerably. But professional standards need serious upgrading in such areas as financial and environmental reporting, and investigative reporting is virtually non-existent in Bangladesh. A Government of Bangladesh (GOB) agency (the Press Institute of Bangladesh) has been working to improve things here, but there is a clear need for a non-governmental agency as well, particularly in the investigative journalism area. As a newly created NGO, the Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communications is hoping to make a serious contribution in this regard.

Umbrella NGOs acting as intermediaries between the NGOs community and the GOB have now become an integral part of the developmental landscape in Bangladesh, largely to mitigate and channel tensions between the two sides. Such tensions inevitably arise, given a countryside in which perhaps 15-20% of the population participates in some NGO activity and some of the larger NGOs have vast operations in place. Further contributing to these strains are the ample foreign funding supporting NGOs and their reputation for being more efficient than counterpart GOB agencies. Some of the tension can be smoothed over by the donor community, but clearly a strong in-country voice is needed. Fortunately, over the years the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) has emerged as an increasingly effective go-between.

Basic strategy 2. Although not a direct recipient of donor support, the business community provides good illustrations of CSOs mobilizing to press their interests with the GOB, particularly in the fast-growing garment export sector. Their emergence is, however, something of a mixed bag in pluralist terms, for while they do add to the number of serious players in an underpopulated political arena, their capacity to meet the rent-seeking appetites of the other major players already there may work more to dampen pluralist politics in Bangladesh than to open the arena further.

Over the years, family planning NGOs have had some impact on the GOB, helping to make it more amenable to birth control strategies at the policy level and contributing toward the training and professional orientation of GOB officials at the field level. But this influence has been almost exclusively a technocratic one, which has been operative regardless of whether the incumbent regime was democratic or authoritarian. In other words, family planning NGOs have had some civil society impact on government, but this has not been related to the presence or absence of democracy.

Advocacy NGOs constitute a third BS 2 approach. One logical outgrowth of the empowerment approaches taken by a number of the larger NGOs in the rural development area would surely have to be the launching of an explicit initiative to champion the cause of their constituency on the stage of public debate, building on their successes in promoting economic and social change to move into the political realm as well. And indeed this has begun to happen in Bangladesh. Some of the more activist NGOs have done this at the local level, encouraging their chapters to demand accountability of the state in providing services (e.g., public health) and guarantees (e.g., legal sharecropper rights).

Now three CSOs have begun taking an advocacy approach at the national level. For one of them - Proshika - the venture is more a think-tank enterprise, while for a second, the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the focus is on high-powered seminars dealing with major public issues. The third CSO, Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS), has started a much more wide-ranging effort at the national level, including such diverse elements as popular theater, legal aid cells, media relations and literature dissemination, all aimed at furthering the cause of its rural poor constituency. This third

enterprise raise hope for advocacy, as well as questions about it, not the least of which is the extent to which foreign donors will feel comfortable in supporting such an explicitly political agenda.

The environmental area was far and away the most exciting civil society activity the CDIE team was able to look at. Focusing on the GOB's very ambitious Flood Action Plan (FAP) to control flooding on the Ganges-Brahmaputra river system, several NGOs combined bottom-up citizen concern with CSO mobilization efforts at the macro level, investigative work and publicizing initiatives from research institutes, an interested press, and international networks drawing in European NGOs from the green movement there.

Together this informal alliance was able to greatly widen the public debate on the Flood Action Plan generally in Bangladesh and on people's participation in flood control efforts particularly. There is even some evidence that the CSOs working in this area have had some effect in inducing the GOB's flood control agencies to become more genuinely interested in real participation from affected citizens, a change that would imply a significant transformation in a bureaucracy heretofore rigidly opposed to public inputs.

Local level politics is the final sector in which the CDIE team looked at BS 2 strategies. A number of NGOs in Bangladesh, especially larger organizations have aimed at empowerment of their members or beneficiaries as part of their strategy, and in the 1992 union parishad (local government) elections, empowerment spilled over into electoral politics. In some cases, local NGO chapters ran their own candidates for local office, and in one instance - GSS - the national level organization provided direct support. Several hundred NGO members did get elected to the union parishads - perhaps as many as 1200 or more. This is a small fraction of the 43,000 UP members and chairmen returned to office in the country as a whole, but it is significant for what may be the beginning of a trend.

A second development at the local level is more ominous. In a number of pockets around the country, Muslim fundamentalists have vigorously opposed NGOs, particularly those pursuing women's programs. In the most prominent example, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC, which is generally considered the senior rural development NGO in the country) has reported that more than 1,400 of its primary schools have been vandalized, a good number of them burnt down.

At least three causes can be offered for this pattern of violence. First, there is the general resurgence of fundamentalism throughout the Islamic world, which must be expected to have some manifestations in Bangladesh. Second, the re-emergence of the Jama'at-i-Islam Party - long under a cloud because of its alleged collaboration with the Pakistan army during the 1971 war - has brought a rightist, religion-based political presence to the rural scene and a presence not especially amenable to female self-sufficiency. Third, and most important to this CDIE assessment, the reaction to

NGOs appears to be a response to their very success in providing opportunities to the rural poor - and especially to women - for income and empowerment. Such traditional power holders as landowners, moneylenders may well see in this upward mobilization a serious threat to their own positions.

Some major issues. Several larger issues emerge from this initial study of civil society in Bangladesh and raise questions at the more general strategic level about supporting civil society as a means to strengthen democracy. These issues should have relevance for the remaining case studies in this CDIE assessment as it moves forward. These issues are noted below.

Civil society in a defective polity. Political parties have not been effective in providing popular sovereignty, except in the crudest electoral sense of according a popular mandate to a particular party for leading the government, and even that has only been fairly tested on two occasions (the elections of 1970 and 1991). In such a defective polity, with political parties not serving as instruments for popular sovereignty except perhaps at election time, can civil society carry the load? If appropriately nurtured, civil society can surely make up some of the defects of the party system by directing a steady stream of policy demands to the state. It can also be effective in pressing the state to be accountable. But even the most vibrant civil society cannot substitute for political parties, for by their nature CSOs are particularistic, answering the needs of small, individual constituencies. There would appear, then, to be some real limits on what civil society can deliver in supporting democratization.

Civil society as a talent siphon. The argument can be made that NGOs in the longer (and maybe even the middle) run are detrimental to democracy in a country like Bangladesh, because they draw off talent that otherwise would have gone into the political parties and thereby helped building an enduring polity in a more direct and efficacious fashion. Thus foreign donors are actually playing a negative role in supporting NGOs, and should instead consider increased support to political parties. But if the idealistic young find their vocation in political parties, would they be able in time to change the opportunistic and rent-seeking behavior of these institutions? Such a metamorphosis seems dubious at best, at least in the Bangladesh case.

Consequences of empowerment. The participation of NGO members in the union parishad election of 1992 in many ways constitutes a logical follow-on to the empowerment agendas pursued by a number of NGOs. A second consequence of empowerment - whether it has been consciously pursued or is more a by-product of other NGO activities - is the religious reaction in some areas to NGOs. Both these developments should induce donors and NGOs to think through their strategies and objectives carefully.

Pluralist dangers. Some observers of the American political scene worry about excessive pluralism choking off the system's ability to respond, as in the current debate over health care. Similar

dangers may well lie in the future for Bangladesh, or perhaps problems with corporatism, in which apex organizations purport to represent the interests of large constituencies but in fact indulge in collusion to enrich their leadership echelons and defraud their memberships. Even so, it can be argued, one has to start somewhere in trying to support democracy, and if not with civil society, then where? A country like Bangladesh would seem to have few other candidates for strengthening democratization.

Acronyms

ADAB	Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh
BAMNA	Bangladesh Mukto Nirbachan Andolan
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BCAS	Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies
BELA	Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association
BCMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BNP	Bangladesh National Party
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CCHRB	Coordinating Council on Human Rights in Bangladesh
CNN	Cable News Network
CDIE	Center for Development Information and Evaluation, USAID
CEN	Coalition for Environmental NGOs
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CSO	Civil society organization
DC	Deputy Commissioner
FAP	Flood Action Plan
FAP 20	Tangail Compartmentalization Pilot Project
FPAB	Family Planning Association of Bangladesh
FPCO	Flood Plan Co-ordination Organization
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
GS	Gono Sangathon (the "people's organizations" that are autonomus within
	GSS)
GSS	Gonoshahajjo Sangstha
ICDDRB	International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh
IDPAA	Institute for Development Policy and Analysis (the advocacy agency
	within Proshika)
LCG	Local Consultative Group
NEMAP	National Environmental Management Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PACT	Private Agencies Working Together
PIB	Press Institute of Bangladesh
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
TAF	The Asia Foundation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	Union Parishad
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USIS	United States Information Service
UST	Unnayan Shahojogy Team
VHSS	Voluntary Health Services Society

I. Introduction and background to the study

This report represents one of the first two field studies being conducted as part of USAID's assessment of civil society and democracy. The assessment is being undertaken by the Agency's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) as the second in a series of inquiries in the democracy sector. As in the first such assessment on the rule of law (see Blair and Hansen 1994), the objectives are to examine and analyze the experience of USAID and other donors over the past decade or so with a view to distilling out lessons on what has worked, what has not, why this has been so, and what might be said to inform and guide future donor efforts in promoting democracy. In sum, the civil society sectoral study has two basic purposes:

- to assess recent experience of USAID and other donors with efforts to promote democracy by supporting civil society; and
- to derive implications for future programming in the civil society sector that would be useful to USAID.

The CDIE civil society assessment began with an "evaluation design" paper (Blair et al. 1994) that was criticized and vetted within CDIE (as well as by outside reviewers). In the second step, the present study on Bangladesh has proceeded in tandem with a similar study on Thailand (Hansen and Calavan 1994), and will be followed up by three or four more field studies focusing on Chile, El Salvador, Kenya and possibly one Eastern European country. The CDIE design is to conclude the work with by integrating the findings of the individual case studies into an "evaluation synthesis" that will be finished by the end of December 1994. The primary audience for the overall evaluation is intended to be senior USAID managers as well as program and project designers at the field mission and regional bureau levels, but it is hoped that the development community more generally will find it insightful and instructive.

The conceptual design for the study is laid out in considerable detail in the evaluation design paper mentioned in the previous paragraph, but it can be briefly summarized here as an introduction to the present report. This first chapter will provide such a summary and then offer an overview of the methodology pursued in the study and a capsule sketch of the CDIE team. Chapter II will provide the background context for Bangladesh with a short survey of its governing regimes since independence in 1971 and a quick sketch of its contemporary political economy. The third chapter will analyze civil society at the macro level, with a special focus on the areas that seem most active. Then the fourth chapter will take up civil society at the micro level. Chapter V will look at donor efforts in supporting civil society, and then a sixth chapter will endeavor to summarize the study and draw out issues to be dealt with as the overall CDIE assessment continues.

CDIE's civil society assessment

In a study of this nature, dealing with such traditionally indistinct and argumentative topics as "democracy" and "civil society," is it essential to pin down our definitions at the outset. **Democracy** has proven reasonably easy to delineate for this purpose, and we have adapted a typical political science textbook definition for it, holding that it consists of:

- Popular sovereignty - the state is accountable to its citizens and is accessible to them, both regularly (through elections) and continuously (through the rights of advocacy and petition);
- Political equality - all enjoy the full range of human rights and are permitted to participate on an equal basis in attaining access; and
- Political liberty - freedom of speech and assembly are guaranteed, especially for minorities.¹

The key concepts in this definition, it should be noted are participation and accountability. Each of the three parts of the description given just above contain or imply both these elements, and both must be not just present but vigorously so if democracy is to endure.

Civil society has been somewhat more difficult to define, for there is no firm consensus on the term within the political science discipline. Thus, in the end, any definition must be in some measure stipulative. For our CDIE assessment, we have defined civil society as consisting of those non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are:

- concerned with influencing state policy (whether as their main focus or as one agenda among others); and
- are autonomous from the state (and also from political parties).

This subset of NGOs can be called "civil society organizations" (CSOs), a concept that excludes those NGOs that are concerned only with service delivery, relief or productivity functions.²

One last term that should be delineated is the **state**, which we define as the whole set of governmental organizations from local to national level, including both bureaucracy and office-holding political leaders. The terms "government" (in its generic sense,

¹ This listing is adapted (with some additions) from Greenberg and Page (1993: 24-28 &ff).

² An NGO can become part of the CSO subset by taking on public policy concerns, or it could lose that status by dropping such interests. It may be noted here that political parties are excluded from our definition of CSO; the rationale is that parties have as their principal objective to take over the state, as opposed to CSOs, which only want to influence the state. For more on the definition of civil society and CSOs, see Blair et al. (1994: 4-10).

as opposed to, say, "local government") and "state," then, are essentially synonymous. To denote the political leadership currently in office at the national level, the term "ministry" will be employed. As with "civil society," these terms are ultimately at least somewhat arbitrary, but the definitions given here seem to meet the needs of the present study reasonably well.

Where civil society and democracy come together is that the former supports and strengthens the latter by increasing accountability by widening participation. In political science terminology, this concept is embodied in the phrase "building pluralism."

A cautionary note is in order here before proceeding further in this analysis. Pluralism holds dangers for democracy and the public weal just as it holds promise. Readers with social science backgrounds will note that pluralism in politics is quite similar to the classical (or neo-classical) marketplace in economics: Both assume that participants are behaving selfishly in their own interest, that the arena in which they act is highly competitive, and that these two characteristics working together will increase the public good, either by supplying quality goods and services at affordable prices or by producing public policies that a wide range of interests has had a hand in fashioning.

But just as there are common "market failures" in the economic realm through oligopoly, rent-seeking and the like, so too there are what might be called "pluralist failures" in the political arena. Instead of competing, the stronger interest groups can collude with each other to award themselves overlarge slices of the public pie, squeezing out the weaker groups. "Gridlock" and "demosclerosis" are two terms that have been used to describe this process in the contemporary United States.³

Moreover, public policy derived through a pluralist process carries no guarantee that it will serve the wider public interest. This is most demonstrably true when minorities are excluded from the process (e.g., the segregated American South of an earlier era), but it can also be true even when there are no structural obstacles to participation (as for example with the vast mountain of subsidies to American agriculture that have built up over the years). Pluralism, then, cannot be assumed to be an unalloyed benefit to a political system. In Bangladesh, given the political economy portrayed in the next chapter, it would appear that any increase in the number of players in the political arena would have to be an improvement – but how many more are needed? of what kind? These questions will be addressed in the last chapter of this report.

A second cautionary note concerns the scope of this CDIE assessment exercise. As with similar evaluations undertaken by the Program and Operations Assessment Division of CDIE in other areas, this

³ See Rausch (1994) for an insightful analysis of "demosclerosis" (the term is his own creation).

study does not constitute a review or evaluation of particular projects or programs implemented by the USAID mission in Bangladesh. Rather it is intended to review the overall experience of USAID as well as other donors in supporting civil society over the last several years. It should be added that this support may well not have been intended as such at the time. For example, donor assistance to the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) that was intended to help that organization help its members coordinate their service delivery activities (not a civil society function) may also have served to stimulate ADAB to develop a plan to represent those members' interests to the Government of Bangladesh (very much a civil society function). Thus it is important to emphasize that this report is not intended in any way to "grade" donor performance, but instead is designed to assess what donor support for such organizations has led to over time with respect to civil society.

Methodology and team composition

The original evaluation design for the CDIE civil society assessment had envisioned sending a four-person team from Washington for four weeks to the first country to be studied, with the idea that each of the team members would then become team leader for one or more subsequent field visits. The two primary candidates for the first visit were Bangladesh and Thailand. For a variety of reasons, it proved impossible to visit either when we had first planned (in February or early March 1994), and then we began to run into time constraints (related to our objective of finishing the complete assessment by fall 1994).

The best solution to these several dilemmas appeared to be sending two two-person teams, one each to Bangladesh and Thailand. This reduced presence was slightly ameliorated by having each team spend several days in the other team's country, but essentially each study was conducted and written up by only two people rather than the original four. For the Bangladesh study we were able to recruit a Bangladeshi social scientist on a part-time basis, who was most helpful, but one part-time person was of course not able to take the place of the two full-time people that had originally been planned for. The result of these changes, not surprisingly, has been two reports that are each less thorough than we had hoped, but we believe that taken together they will offer enough analysis and insight to inform and guide the remaining field studies.

The methodology pursued for this country study consisted largely of key informant interviews and document reviews. The team was able to conduct more than 50 interviews while in Bangladesh, meeting with a wide range of people. The largest category of respondents were full-time NGO officials, but we also talked with a number of foreign donor representatives, journalists and government officials. Documents relating to NGOs, civil society and democracy are both plentiful and accessible in Bangladesh, inasmuch as the country can boast a vigorous intelligentsia in its research institutes, journalistic profession and academic community,

virtually all of whom customarily write in English, which is the "developmental language" of the country.

In addition, the team was able to make several field visits away from Dhaka, to a thana (county) headquarters in Narayanganj district, an environmental planning workshop in Manikganj district, and a flood control project in Tangail district. It was also possible to test out our initial findings in several presentations, first at a political science department seminar at Dhaka University, then at a seminar sponsored by the economics section at the American Embassy in Dhaka, and finally at a session held at the Advocacy Institute in Washington, which was conducting a three-week training workshop for Bangladeshi NGO leaders.

One avenue that proved most helpful in a number of the country case studies undertaken for the rule of law assessment was public opinion polling. Opinion polling should prove of considerable value in some of the countries to be studied in the civil society assessment as well, but unfortunately Bangladesh is not among them. Survey sampling has become quite sophisticated in the public health sector, fueled largely by donor interest in family planning and the world-renowned International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDRDB).⁴ Political surveys, on the other hand, have yet even to approach the level of an infant art in Bangladesh and so were of no use in the present study.

The full-time CDIE team members were:

- Dr. Harry Blair (USAID), who served as team leader and is the assessment manager for the CDIE civil society assessment, is a political scientist specializing in South Asia, who has been visiting Bangladesh frequently since 1973 as consultant and researcher.
- Dr. Joel Jutkowitz (Development Associates) is also a political scientist and is a core member of the CDIE civil society assessment team. He has visited Bangladesh several times previously in connection with other projects.

Our part-time team member was:

- Dr. Tofail Ahmed, a faculty member at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development in Comilla, has been working for a number of years on rural development research.

In addition, the study team was complemented for brief visits by the two members of the CDIE Thailand team:

- Dr. Michael Calavan (USAID) is an anthropologist at CDIE in Washington and core member of the civil society assess-

⁴ See, for instance, Mitra et al. (1993), a study which would surely meet the most demanding statistical survey design standards.

ment team, who served in the USAID mission in Dhaka for four years in the mid-1980s.

- Dr. Gary Hansen (USAID), is a political scientist at CDIE in Washington and also a core member of the civil society assessment team, who served as assessment manager for the CDIE rule of law assessment.

II. The political context

Regime types over time

In the partition of British India in 1947, the province of Bengal was split into a larger, mostly Muslim eastern section that became East Pakistan and a smaller, mostly Hindu western section that became the Indian state of West Bengal. Despite several attempts at democracy over the ensuing 24 years, Pakistan spent most of that period under various authoritarian governors - most notably the 11-year regime (1958-1969) overseen by Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Democracy appeared briefly to resurface with a national parliamentary election in 1970, but the outcome of that poll almost immediately led to a civil war in East Pakistan, a struggle culminating in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country at the end of 1971.

The first two decades of the new nation's history were essentially more of the same, insofar as governance was concerned, with brief democratic windows opening but separated by much longer periods of authoritarian control. The principal regimes during this time were those headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972-75), Ziaur Rahman (1976-1981) and Mohammad Hussein Ershad (1982-1990). As in the Pakistan period, so too in Bangladesh succession has never been a smooth process; Sheikh Mujib and Zia were both assassinated, while Ershad was precipitously forced to resign by the military in December 1990.⁵

After Ershad, an interim government took over and within several months had superintended a parliamentary election widely perceived as the country's first free and fair national voting in a very long time (some would say the first such ever). The winner with a comfortable majority was the Bangladesh National Party (or BNP, founded by Ziaur Rahman), which triumphed over the Awami League (the party of Sheikh Mujib) and the Jatiyo Party (created by General Ershad, who contested several seats from his prison cell). Subsequently the BNP formed a government under the leadership of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia (the widow of Ziaur Rahman). As in most Commonwealth parliamentary systems, elections must be held within five years but may be called at any time before that if the ruling party chooses or loses a parliamentary vote of confidence.

Currently, the significant political parties number four, with the first three the legacies of founders now removed from the scene by death (Sheikh Mujib, Ziaur Rahman) or imprisonment (Ershad). There are some ideological distinctions to be made between them (the Awami League is more socialist, secular and Bengali-oriented, the BNP more capitalist and Bangladeshi-oriented, and the Jatiyo Party

⁵ For a good account of political successions in Bangladesh, see Ziring (1992).

more pro-Islamic), but the glue holding them together is arguably more one of individualistic opportunism than deeply held ideology. The fourth party is the Jama'at i-Islami - a largely fundamentalist religious party led by its charismatic and controversial leader Golam Azam and allegedly bankrolled by foreign funds from the Middle East.

The manner of the Ershad government's downfall is worth remarking, in that it brought to a head the agitational politics of the 1980s in Bangladesh and in several ways also set a possible tone for politics in the ensuing decade. During the 1980s, the two major opposition parties - the BNP and Awami League - had worked sometimes in alliance and sometimes at cross purposes in alternating between presenting lists of demands (e.g., that the Ershad government resign in favor of a caretaker government) and pursuing a "politics of the streets" to drive the Ershad government from office either by forcing it to call an election or by provoking the army to remove it through a coup.⁶

The parties mounted processions, *gheraos* (pickets around office buildings) and *hartals* (strikes) with varying degrees of success, finally culminating in what might be called a "Philippines scenario" in late 1990, which had two major components. First, not only the students, trade union members and party-funded demonstrators who had participated in earlier agitations, but also the major professional communities (lawyers, doctors, engineers, journalists, teachers, etc.), major segments of the business community and the country's leading development organizations joined in a rising crescendo of opposition to the regime. Second, when given an order by the president to impose martial law, the military refused and instead instructed the chief of state that it was time to leave office immediately. General Ershad did resign forthwith, and a neutral caretaker government took over with its major task being to carry out a fair election that would (and in the event did) legitimize an elected government.

The legacy of these events has had a profound impact on Bangladesh politics in the period since the end of the Ershad regime. In particular, there was no orderly *modus vivendi* developed between government and opposition, nor was there any lasting comity built between the major political parties themselves. The only ways to change governments the country has experienced so far are assassination, the military coup and the agitational "politics of the streets."⁷

⁶ The seemingly endless rounds of demands and agitation were chronicled once a year in *Asian Survey's* annual review (see e.g., Rahman 1989, 1990).

⁷ See Blair et al. (1992) for an exploration of this theme.

Political economy analysis: 1972-1990

The provenance of the present political economy of Bangladesh can be traced back at least several hundred years if not longer, to such dispensations as the Permanent Land Settlement of 1793 (setting up the patterns of land ownership) and the Indian Civil Service of administrators that manned the "steel frame" of British India during the 19th and early 20th centuries. But for our purposes, we may begin with post-liberation Bangladesh as it emerged from Pakistan rule and track developments from there.

The political economy as it existed during the 1972-1990 period is depicted in Figure 1. There were essentially three major urban-based strata involved, with an allied "silent partner" dominant in the countryside. The urban elements were the bureaucracy (principally the 30,000 or so officials that comprise its upper echelons; see Blair 1993 Esman paper), the military and the political leadership. During any particular period two of the three groups dominated politics at the macro level; sometimes these two consisted of the bureaucracy and the military (1975-79 and 1982-90), and sometimes they included the bureaucracy and the political leadership (1971-75 and 1979-81). It will be noted that the bureaucracy was the central player here, with the others alternating in alliance.⁸ This was simply because the bureaucracy was critical to managing the state; generals or politicians could claim the top leadership positions, but it was civil servants that had to keep things running.

[Figure 1 about here]

Whichever alliance dominated at the center, it could count on a "silent partner" in what might best be called a rural elite stratum in the countryside.⁹ This group consisted largely of those agriculturalists enjoying a sufficient production surplus that they hired in agricultural laborers, lent out money, let out land on sharecropping or tenancy arrangements, or in other words generally acted as patrons in the patron-client linkages that tend to

⁸ It could be argued that for a time in the late 1970s, as Zia's regime was endeavoring to transform itself from an authoritarian military government to a popularly elected one, both the military and the politicians governed in alliance with the bureaucracy. In the later 1980s, the Ershad government attempted a similar shift, but much less successfully.

⁹ As with the urban sector, the analysis that follows in the text is much oversimplified. The "rural elite" vs. "everybody else" account given here neglects a multitude of salient features of the rural socio-economic structure. Likewise, questions of the "mode of production" are ignored here. But the treatment does accord in a broad sense with the more widely held interpretations of rural political economy in Bangladesh (see, e.g., Wood 1981; de Vylder 1982; Hartmann and Boyce 1983; Westergaard 1985; Rahman 1986; Blair 1993).

characterize the rural sector in Bangladesh. Their relationships with the urban strata was largely one of mutual convenience: rural elites supported the central government (whatever it was at any given time) by keeping the countryside more or less quiet by means of their traditional patron-client methods of dominance, so that the urban groups did not have to worry about rural unrest or insurrection; and for their part the ruling urban groups tacitly agreed to keep the extant rural social structure in place.¹⁰

Foreign assistance significantly aided the relationships depicted in Figure 1 by providing much of the lubricant for these linkages. The bureaucracy, which was tasked with transforming the greater part of foreign aid into development activity, found itself with unique chances for rent seeking and, not surprisingly, took advantage of such opportunities. Thus foreign funds illicitly flowed through the bureaucracy to the military or the political leaders (whichever were the partners of the moment). The flow of foreign assistance to the rural elite community took a somewhat different path, in that the allocations from the central ministries in Dhaka were virtually all quite legitimate, in the form of various rural development project activities. What happened when the money got to the countryside, however, was rather otherwise, as rural elites siphoned off large shares to themselves from funds meant for infrastructure construction, rural credit, service provision, and the like.

In sum, the significant strata in Bangladesh's political economy for its first 18 years comprised only four major groups, which together amounted to a very small slice of the population.

Political economy today

The arena of political economy in Bangladesh today is somewhat wider than in earlier years, for it now includes an additional player: the business community. After the wave of nationalization that occurred during Sheikh Mujib's time (which turned the larger industries into parastatal concerns and transformed many businessmen - among those, that is, who did not decamp to Pakistan in 1971 - into bureaucrats), business had consisted largely of traders and a sprinkling of manufacturers, most of whom had a strong vested interest in maintaining the protectionist, regulatory

¹⁰ In recent years, there is much evidence (admittedly largely anecdotal, but the cumulated mass of anecdotes must be pointing to a significant reality) that a new stratum of landowners has come into being, with businessmen, bureaucrats, military people and ex-pat iate Bangladeshis buying up agricultural land. It would doubtless be too much a stretch to speak of a "gentleman farmer" class of the sort that can be encountered in parts of Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh in India, but there are clearly new elements emerging in the Bangladesh countryside. To this group must also be added the rural businessmen that have emerged in the last decade or so, centered largely on the construction trade (and battenning on public sector contracts) to become a force of their own in the local political equation, relating to lower levels of government much as businessmen in Dhaka relate to bureaucrats and politicians at that level.

state that Bangladesh had become (with the concomitant opportunities for rent seeking that such a state inevitably provided).

By the early 1990s, however, this equation had changed somewhat. Led by an explosive growth in finished garment exports¹¹ (but also including domestic economic expansion), the business community has by now emerged as a serious player in the political arena, concerned with the formulation of state policies on regulating exports and imports, as well as the administration of existing regulations through license granting, quota allocation, import duty collection and the like. The business community has become a player principally by contributing to the major political parties and through directing money to individual rent-seekers within the various state and political sectors.¹² The result of this expansion of the body politic is the depiction shown in Figure 2, wherein the business community is now a major element – not on the level of the bureaucracy, military and political leadership, to be sure, but a serious participant nonetheless.¹³

[Figure 2 about here]

Civil society and political economy in Bangladesh

If the fundamental purposes of civil society in a democracy are to inform the state what citizens want and to hold the state accountable for what it does on a continual basis, then it is fair to say that in its first 18 years Bangladesh saw very little of that purpose realized. Aside from the three state/government sectors themselves (bureaucracy, military, political leadership), at the beginning of the 1990s only the rural elite stratum and the business community could be counted as having serious influence with the state. But if democracy is to endure in Bangladesh, the effective body politic must expand beyond the very narrow slice of population represented by the groups now involved. More groups must come to have a voice in how public affairs are managed on a day-to-day basis (rather than only at election times) as well as a say in holding the state responsible for what it is supposed to be

¹¹ Exports in the garment area rose from virtually nothing in the early 1980s to almost Tk 40 billion in the early 1990s (BBS 1993: 208). To be sure, much of this total (80 to 90 percent by most estimates given to the CDIE team) represents the value of cloth imported for the finishers to make into garments, but even so the value added has been very large indeed for the entrepreneurs involved. Impressive export growth in the last decade has also occurred in such areas as leather goods, frozen shrimp and frog-legs.

¹² This system is explained in some detail by Kochanek (1993: 69-70, 195-96, 251 &ff, 259 &ff).

¹³ It should be added that there is little reason to think that the business community is united on most issues; sometimes this is the case with respect to major policy issues, but generally major businesses find it in their interest to seek particularistic solutions to their problems (see Kochanek 1993; 244 *et passim*).

doing. Put this way, the strategic task becomes a simple one, at least so far as its conceptualization is concerned: building pluralism.

Well, where are the other groups that might at least potentially have been civil society players? In the lower left-hand corner of Figure 2, a number of such groups are noted that customarily are included in political economy analyses of South Asian countries (see, e.g., Frankel 1989-90; Kohli 1990; Das 1992), whence their designation in the Figure as "traditional candidates." Of these, only the business community gets included in Bangladesh. What of the others? The answers to this question are critical to an understanding of civil society and the future of democracy in Bangladesh.

Three sets of candidates as political players are the professional communities (lawyers, doctors, journalists, academics, engineers, etc.), labor unions and students. And organized associations do in fact exist in Bangladesh, but they tend for the most part to be so strongly identified with various political parties that they can be said in effect to be co-opted by the parties. Indeed, for the most part, these groups are divided into organizational factions (often called "panels") that owe allegiance to one or another of the four major political parties in the country today.¹⁴ When they act on the public stage, they generally do so at the direction of political party leaders. In short, they have little if any autonomy from the parties.

To be sure, there are times when these three communities have played a serious role in determining sea changes in the region's history. In particular university students were key participants in such watersheds as the 1969 agitation against Pakistan dictator Ayub Khan, the 1971 civil war and the 1990 democracy movement against General Ershad. In the latter effort, labor unions and the professional classes also played a critical part. But for the most part, the three groups have been captive of political parties and so cannot be seen as autonomous actors playing important roles in civil society.¹⁵

The two agricultural strata noted at the bottom of the list of "traditional candidates" in Figure 2 are not co-opted, but instead are missing altogether. Market-oriented farmers, who can be

¹⁴ This was the unanimous view of those interviewed by the CDIE team. Regarding students, see also Blair et al. (1992). Just how and why these groups came to be co-opted is a profound question. The same does not appear to be true for the most part in Thailand, for example, as reported in the companion CDIE study to the present one (Hansen and Calavan 1994).

¹⁵ The autonomy issue raises some interesting questions here. At the outset of the CDIE civil society evaluation, it was decided in the study design stage that "civil society" would be defined as being composed of non-governmental organizations that both had public policy concerns and were autonomous from the state. Should such organizations also be defined as being autonomous from political parties? Evidence from Bangladesh would indicate that the CDIE definition should be amended in this fashion.

thought of as "middle peasants" utilizing mostly family labor and producing mainly foodgrains for the market do exist in Bangladesh, but they are not organized as a group, unlike the case in many parts of India, where "bullock capitalist" farmers have formed powerful political pressure groups pushing the state for higher crop support prices, greater subsidies to agricultural inputs, etc. (see, e.g., the Rudolphs' landmark 1987 study on this topic). Perhaps inspired by such examples, as well as fired by their own grievances, lower caste and lower class rural citizens in India have also formed organized groups to press their demands on the political system (cf. Omvedt 1993: 47-75; also Alexander 1980; 1989).

As democratic politics in Bangladesh hopefully expands in the coming years, perhaps similar organizations and lobbies will emerge among middle farmers and the less favored agricultural sectors, but thus far this has not happened. Like the professional communities, labor unions and students (at least in the absence of great crises like the transition from the Ershad regime), agriculturalists from the middle and lower strata are essentially unrepresented in the political dynamic by independent groups. Furthermore, the evolution of such organizations is at best a slow and gradual process, if the Indian experience is any guide. There middle farmer organizations trace their beginnings to the 1950s if not earlier (Rudolphs 1987; also Attwood 1992), while groups from the bottom of the social spectrum go back to the British colonial period as self-conscious movements (Omvedt 1994).

But these groups are not the only building blocks for civil society. Bangladesh offers many other possibilities as well for potential additional players, as indicated in the lower right-hand corner of Figure 2. These elements will be the subject of the next chapter.

III. Civil Society at Macro Level

The evaluation design paper for the CDIE civil society assessment (Blair 1994) posited two Basic Strategies for promoting democratic development through supporting civil society, which are illustrated with the figure and matrix table in Appendix A. These strategies are of course an artifact of this CDIE assessment; they do not exist (so far as we know) in any program or project supported by USAID or any other donor. But as analytical constructs they help to organize our thinking about civil society, and we would hope that in consequence of this democracy sectoral assessment, they will make some contribution to the Agency's thinking as well. In Basic Strategy 1 (BS 1) as depicted in Appendix A, donors focus on the **"enabling environment"** or what might be called "rules of the game" for civil society by supporting CSOs working to improve the political conditions within which it functions. An example here would be the human rights area, in which CSOs seek to better the political context for participation by assuring just and equal treatment from the state for all.

In Basic Strategy 2 (BS 2), donors operate within a given civil society environment by **supporting specific policy-oriented CSOs** to pursue the latter's own agendas. Under Basic Strategy 2 can be placed two categories of strategy. The first category is comprised of **participatory approaches**, in which the basic purpose is to widen the circle of those exercising a significant voice in the polity by mobilizing new segments of the population to take part in the political process. The second category can be labeled **policy accountability approaches**, whereby a CSO endeavors to hold the state to account for its performance in a particular sector of activity, as well as to suggest new policies to it. An example of the first category would be minority rights groups, while an illustration of the second would be environmental advocacy associations.

Within these two Basic Strategies, the evaluation design paper suggested some nine specific substrategy types, as shown in the Appendix A matrix table, which endeavors to lay out a number of dimensions for each of the nine.

In Bangladesh the CDIE team found international donors to be supporting both the Basic Strategies, and all but one of the nine substrategies shown in the Appendix A table to be actively in operation.¹⁶ This is perhaps not surprising, given the large

¹⁶ The one substrategy absent, it should be noted (No. 4 in the Appendix table - democratic transition) is actually an approach for non-democratic systems, intended to help move them along a path to democracy. Bangladesh is clearly past this point in the democratization process.

number of NGOs currently active in Bangladesh.¹⁷ The team was able to give some attention to seven of the substrategies (row 2 of the Appendix table), as indicated in Table 1. Because of time constraints, we were not able to devote time to pursuing "democratic culture" (as per the table in Appendix A), although it is in fact active in the area of election monitoring, which has been pursued by one of the CSOs we studied in another context (No. 2, human rights).¹⁸

Of the seven substrategies the team was able to explore, three belong to Basic Strategy 1 (human rights, democratic integrity and democratic pluralism), and four to Basic Strategy 2 (democratic capitalism, social mobilization, human resources and sustainable environment). This chapter contains an analysis of all seven approaches as they operated largely (though not necessarily exclusively) at the national or macro level, while the next chapter focuses in on the one strategy that pertained to the local level as well, i.e., social mobilization.

[Table 1 about here]

Human rights (BS 1)

The concern with human rights is a basic component of a democratic order, focussing on such issues as the inclusive or exclusive nature of participation, the degree to which dissenting voices can express their opinions and the ability of the individual to redress grievances committed by the state, often in the name of public order. The most recent report by the USG regarding the status of human rights in Bangladesh expresses some of these concerns. The report notes that the government of Bangladesh continues to use national security legislation to arbitrarily detain citizens, including political opponents. Detention may mean torture and even death. Violation of fundamental rights of women and children are also reported (abuse of women, child labor). There are also reports of forced repatriation of minorities and other violations of minority rights.¹⁹

¹⁷ There are presently over 600 registered NGOs that could be called developmental in Bangladesh, out of approximately 13,000 registered altogether (see Glaeser et al. 1993: 3-4).

¹⁸ This is the Coordinating Council on Human Rights in Bangladesh, which monitored the 1991 national parliamentary election, as well as local elections at the thana level in 1990 and at the union parishad level in 1992 (see Timm and Gain, 1991a and 1991b). There is as well another CSO that has reported on elections (see BAMNA 1991). As noted in the text, time limitations precluded the team's including election monitoring in its analysis, but an earlier USAID study did devote some attention to this topic (see Blair et al. 1992: 27-32).

¹⁹. See U.S. State Dept. (1993; 1994).

Similar concerns are expressed in the reports on the state of human rights prepared and published by the Bangladesh Manobadhikar Samonnoy Parishad (Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh or CCHRB). The CCHRB in their 1992 report (the 1993 report was not yet available) focus on such themes as the role of the so-called "black laws" (the Special Powers Act, the Vested Property Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act—introduced in 1992) in controlling dissent and limiting the rights of minorities, freedom of expression and the related right to information, conditions of prisons and prisoners, landlessness, the status of women and children and the status of minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. These human rights violations inhibit dissent as well as limiting the participation of women and minorities in the public arena.

CCHRB is an umbrella organization that has 39 member organizations that range from legal rights organizations (for example, Ain O Salish Kendra which focusses on the legal rights of women and children) to development NGOs (e.g., Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra). While some member organizations of CCHRB have human rights as their central focus, most of the organizations engage in a variety of concerns that affect social and economic participation, concerns that include economic development at the community level, enhancing health and promoting education.

The stated objectives of CCHRB are to:

- Investigate and analyze human rights situations in Bangladesh;
- Coordinate the activities of different organizations working on human rights and social justice;
- Generate support for protests and campaigns undertaken by member organizations;
- Promote the role of human rights in the integrated development of the poor;
- Promote legal education in order to generate legal aid for the disadvantaged sectors of the Bangladeshi people;
- Monitor elections as well as other events related to development and human rights, afforestation and deforestation, environment and ecology; and
- Hold seminars and workshops to build a common consensus on important national human rights issues.²⁰

To achieve these ends, CCHRB has tried to generate public awareness through a variety of activities: publication of newsletters and reports; conduct of seminars and workshops; contacts with the press; and lobbying politicians and bureaucrats. They are developing a documentation center that tracks human rights concerns through the newspapers and other sources they develop and investigate. They believe that the press responds well in getting out human rights stories. Large circulation dailies such as the *Daily Ittfaq*, the *Daily Observer*, the *Daily Star* and *Bhorrer Kagoj* cover

²⁰. As stated in the BMSP Newsletter, January 1994, pg. 1.

human rights stories. CCHRB has contacts with specific journalists who cover the human rights beat. These journalists are seen by CCHRB as part of their local network. In a sense, the newspapers and the journalists who cover human rights matters serve both as a source to identify human rights concerns and a means of communicating CCHRB's position on a given issue.

The organization sees itself as responsible for the full range of human rights concerns that comes to its attention. These could include in a given year women's rights, children's rights, tribal peoples' rights and prisoners' rights. They deal with broad issues and with single cases.²¹ They are concerned about the need to coordinate activities of the member organizations with those of CCHRB. They think that a great deal of duplication of effort takes place, limiting the effectiveness of the human rights movement.

The organization operates with limited resources (an annual budget of Tk 3.5 million, equivalent to around US\$ 87,000). Their support comes virtually entirely from foreign donors²². They also have access to HURIDOCs, the Human Rights Information and Documentation System, located in Switzerland, which provides them with information on human rights concerns throughout the world.

Member organizations follow similar methods of publicizing, lobbying, assisting and organizing their particular constituencies. For example, one organization concerned with the issue of child labor and women's labor, the Commission for Justice and Peace, has begun to investigate child labor abuses in garment factories and to publicize the results of those investigations.²³ Another organization, Ain O Salish Kendra, has developed a program of assisting children who come in off the street in addition to its efforts at legal assistance, particularly women.

These member organizations with few exceptions also have limited resources and therefore are likely to have limited impact. Their major avenues of impact in the future may well be in their ability to influence elite opinion through their public relations and lobbying efforts. Obviously that impact increases to the degree that the organizations expand their human and material resources as well as developing their skills at these activities. As they see their situations, they are dependent on the willingness of outside

²¹ One recent case involved securing legal rights of two sailors who were being tried on charges of smuggling heroin in Egypt, while other cases dealt with the military's treatment of minorities in the Chittagong Hill tracts and the role of child labor in the garment industry.

²² The Ford Foundation, the Asia Foundation and CIBEMO, the Dutch Catholic NGO Foundation are their current sources of support.

²³ That organization was able to participate in a US television investigation into Bangladeshi factories and their use of child labor which generated a great deal of publicity and a great deal of pressure on that organization's principal directors from both official and unofficial sources.

donors to provide the necessary resources for training, technical assistance and operations.

Skills enhancement is a prominent concern. As CCHRB pointed out in its 1991 human rights report:

Contemporary times are known as the "spring time" for human rights. The same is true for Bangladesh. But the main impediment is lack of sufficient number of committed personnel. There is also a lack of training in the techniques of investigation, legal aid and the resolution of conflicts (Timm and Gain, eds. 1991: 95).

The impact of these organizations also increases to the degree that the media remain an effective channel for communicating with the elite and the degree to which politicians and bureaucrats are responsive to public pressures as well as to direct influences by human rights groups. Currently the CCHRB reports the press as responding well in publicizing human rights stories, and certainly the present democratic dispensation at macro level makes it easier to cover human rights in the media. Efforts that strengthen the media (such as Asia Foundation support for the Centre for Responsible Journalism) and that strengthen the effectiveness of human rights legislation, in turn, augment the possibilities that human rights groups can get their message across.

NGOs can help human rights advance both directly and indirectly in Bangladesh. Groups such as CCHRB and its member organizations work directly to present human rights concerns to national elites and to the public at large. NGOs serve more indirectly to enhance human rights by working with groups such as women and the poor, whose human rights have traditionally been fragile. By fostering participation in the economy (as many NGOs do) or by empowering their constituencies to be more activist at local level (as a smaller number of NGOs do), they promote changes that enhance the human rights of women and the poor. These changes are not without risk, however, as can be seen in the recent reaction on the part of fundamentalists against some NGO activities in the countryside. This issue will be taken up in the next chapter of this report.

Democratic integrity: the media (BS 1)

In the long run, the integrity of a country's democracy must be determined by the citizenry, acting to hold the state accountable for its actions in the two ways noted earlier: regularly through elections; and continually through advocacy. But to exercise these responsibilities, the public must be able to discover what the state is doing, a function that (except in the very smallest of systems where direct democracy is possible) can only be fulfilled by the media.

In addition to this monitoring and informing function, the media also facilitate the articulation of interests directed at promoting state policy action, and they serve as a vehicle for expressing dissent and opposition to incumbent office holders, as well as to the political system itself. For many societies, where alternative

means for these second two functions - policy advocacy and dissent - are either rudimentary or absent, the media serve as virtually the only way to disseminate information and opinion on a large scale.²⁴ In sum, for a country like Bangladesh, the media have three roles to play in ensuring democratic integrity:

- monitoring the state's activities and reporting to the public;
- facilitating policy advocacy; and
- providing a major outlet for dissent and opposition to the state.

In fulfilling these functions, the media have faced two significant constraints, one from outside and the other from within. First, the government has throughout the history of Bangladesh (as well as in the Pakistan and before that the British periods) exercised some control over what news appears in the media. Secondly, the various organs of the media have not been able to achieve the levels of professionalism in news reporting and analysis or investigative journalism that are necessary to realize the three objectives listed above. These two problems of control and quality have been related, in that GOB restrictions on the media have inhibited improving journalistic standards, but even today with far fewer controls than in the past, there continues to be much room for professional growth in the journalism field. Such quality issues have been exacerbated by declining university standards, especially in English language. This trend has been particularly noticeable recently as the demand for journalists has gone up in the explosion of periodicals occasioned under the new democratic era with its greater freedom of expression.²⁵

For all practical purposes, "the media" in Bangladesh really means the print media, at least thus far. Broadcast media - both television and radio - are owned and operated by the state, and this control includes news coverage as well as other programming. Thus TV footage of government officials orating at conferences and smiling children greeting ministerial entourages are still the norm today, just as in the Ershad period,²⁶ though this fare is somewhat

²⁴ In a developed system like the American polity, alternative means abound - internal organizational communications systems, radio talkshows and subsidized bulk mailing are all examples. In Bangladesh, such modes do not exist to any real extent.

²⁵ One estimate indicates the number of newspapers in Bangladesh to have increased from less than 100 at the end of the Ershad period to somewhere between 500 and 1000 today. See Schoux and Choudhury (1994: 21).

²⁶ For example, the countrywide *hartal* organized and effected during the CDIE team's visit received virtually no coverage on the broadcast media.

ameliorated by the inclusion of BBC and CNN television newscasts during the day.²⁷

Government control

Fortunately, there are a large numbers of national and local newspapers. With the exception of those operated by the government (the *Danik Bangla* in Bangla language and the *Bangladesh Times* in English), newspapers are nominally independent. The largest circulation newspapers such as *Ittefaq* and *Inquilab* publish in Bangla, but there are several relatively high circulation newspapers that publish in English such as the *Bangladesh Observer* and the *Daily Star*.²⁸ Many newspapers are affiliated with or are considered as representing the viewpoints of political parties or ideological positions. The *Bangladesh Observer*, for instance, is considered more supportive of the government, while *Inquilab* is often characterized as favoring the Jama'at-i-Islam, and the *Daily Star* is generally seen as independent.

Historically, governments in South Asia have tried to control newspapers through a variety of mechanisms. First, the government allocates newsprint to all newspapers in accordance with circulation figures that the government itself determines. This has been an instrument for control in the past, but no one in the journalism field interviewed by the CDIE team allowed that it was being used to any serious extent today.

Second, the government allocates its own government advertising to newspapers, and for most of them such ads are a major source of revenue (indeed, a number of small-circulation papers exist whose sole apparent purpose is to collect fees for printing official notices). While the principle of allocation is supposed to be in accordance with circulation, it is widely believed that in practice the government favors those newspapers which are seen as most amenable to it. However, there is private advertising and in fact the leading Bangla newspaper, *Ittefaq*, claims to have reached a position where it turns back a good deal of lower-paying government

²⁷ Newscasts from BBC and CNN, of course, are almost exclusively devoted to non-Bangladeshi topics and so poses little risk to government control over domestic news dissemination. There has been some discussion of the possibilities of privatizing a second television channel, but that remains at the level of discussion. Satellite dishes have cropped up throughout the more affluent areas of Dhaka and elsewhere in the country, but they serve only a small segment of the citizenry and in any event do not provide any domestic news coverage. The only sources of non-government controlled news for the vast majority of Bangladeshis do not own television sets are the BBC and Voice of America radio broadcasts (in this regard, the USIS reports the existence of more than 550 VOA fan clubs in the country). It should also be pointed out that large numbers of Bangladeshis living within 40-50 miles of the national border also have access to line-of-sight TV transmission from India, and of course a much larger number of people can listen to Indian AM radio, but then these organs naturally focus on Indian affairs rather than matters of domestic interest to Bangladesh.

²⁸ *Ittefaq* has an estimated circulation of around 185,000, *Inquilab* of perhaps 125,000. The *Bangladesh Observer* has an estimated circulation of 70,000 and *Daily Star* of 30,000. (Based on information provided by USIS/BANGLADESH.)

advertising, filling its advertising space instead with private advertisements.

A third mechanism for control has been explicit government pressure to publish (or not publish) certain stories, including even direct censorship itself. Under the Ershad government, newspaper editors frequently experienced such pressures. Since then, however, this form of direct censorship appears to have ended.²⁹ Rather, newspaper editors are aware of the limits of what they can safely publish; topics such as matters relating to the armed forces or national security, for instance, are likely to cause them problems, so they defend themselves by practicing a degree of self-restraint, if not self-censorship. "I've never gotten a phone call from the [new democratic] government," reported one newspaper executive, "but I know there are some things that it would be unwise to publish."

Improving professional standards

The USG has made some investments in improving the status of print journalism in Bangladesh through USAID and USIS. USAID/Bangladesh through the Asia Foundation provides support to the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), a government agency, to strengthen the media's capacity to provide better reporting and promote civic education, policy debate and government accountability. The PIB was founded in 1976 and provides in-service training to print journalists in specialized issues such as the environment, health care, population, economic reporting, legislative reporting, women's issues, human rights issues, and the legal context of journalism. Courses are generally 15 days in length and are held in Dhaka, with attendees coming from the whole country to participate. PIB also provides courses on site to various provincial newspapers. Thus far TAF support has helped in training some 750 journalists.³⁰

TAF also provides support to a newly established NGO, the Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communication to promote investigative and interpretive reporting which initiated its activities on 1 April 1994. Hopefully this new center will contribute significantly to improving investigative reporting in Bangladesh, a field which has thus far remained notably underdeveloped.

An earlier CDIE review of judicial and legal reform found that investigative journalism was of great importance in helping to nourish public knowledge about legal matters, to build constituencies demanding reform, and to enhance a climate of opinion

²⁹ Although at least one newspaper editor and several journalists are reported to have been jailed under the current regime for "personal defamation" of a government official.

³⁰ Schoux and Choudhury (1994: 23). A recent evaluation of PIB training indicated that the training had increased journalists knowledge and skills in reporting (see Chowdhury and Samad 1994: 29).

favorable to it. CSOs working to improve investigative journalism in Argentina and the Philippines were most instrumental in all three respects for improving the rule of law (see Blair and Hansen 1994). It is to be hoped that the new center in Bangladesh will in time make a similar contribution.

USIS has also been active in the media field, providing support in the form of access to Worldnet programs dealing with the professionalization of the media and other related topics. It has provided Bangladeshi journalists opportunities to participate in International Visitor programs that deal with issues such as investigative reporting, US trade policy, print and TV journalism in the United States. In addition, it has brought one or two press-related speakers a year, either journalists or academics, to Bangladesh.

Roundtable dialogues

One journalistic activity that can be anticipated to have some effect on elite opinion is the newspaper publication of "roundtables" - extensive presentation of informed opinion on major public policy issues of the day. The CDIE team found two such initiatives, both being published by the *Daily Star*. In the first, the Centre for Policy Dialogue has begun sponsoring a series of seminars on policy issues in which political leaders, business people, professionals, donor representatives and NGO leaders discuss the assigned topic in detail. Transcripts of the discussions are then published essentially verbatim in the *Star*. The first of these dialogues was held in February 1994 and covered economic policy reform, while the second one, conducted in April, concentrated on implementing the GOB Annual Development Programme. In addition, the *Star* has conducted and published several of its own roundtable discussions. These roundtables generally run four full pages, so the represent a considerable investment for a newspaper that (like most of those in Bangladesh) rarely runs over 12 pages on an average day.³¹

How much impact can such efforts have? Newspaper reading in Bangladesh is largely an elite activity, as in inevitably the case in a low-income country with low income (US\$ 170 in the late 1980s) and a modest literacy rate (32 percent of adults). It is not surprising, then, that in the early 1980s, less than 5 percent of all households reported reading a daily newspaper,³² and there is no reason to think that this figure has increased greatly since

³¹ The first CPD transcript was published in April as "Policy Reform and Acceleration of Development: A Dialogue of Experts" (*Daily Star*, 11 April 1994). The second CPD dialogue took place on 12 April (*Daily Star*, 13 April 1994; see also *Holiday*, 22 April 1994), and the transcript publication will probably take a couple of months. Two examples of the *Daily Star's* own roundtable efforts have been on "Primary Education for All by the Year 2000" (12 January 1994) and "Pro-poor Planning" (20 March 1994).

³² Literacy and income data from UNDP (191: 123). Newspaper readership information from BBS (1993: 94).

then. But this 5 percent includes the active body politic of the country – the politicians, intelligentsia, professionals, etc., who concern themselves with political issues.³³ And those who will read the roundtable discussions are sure to be a greater number than those who have read the GOB Five-Year Plans or academic analyses of public policy planning like the ambitious task force report published in 1991.

This effort, initiated by the post-Ershad caretaker government, recruited an impressive group of academics, political leaders, government officials and professionals in an effort to lay out the problems and policy options facing the country across a whole sectoral gamut ranging from financial sector reform through agricultural production, corruption and environment to women in development. The report (Sobhan et al., 1991) emerged in four handsome volumes, priced at Tk 2000 (about US\$ 50) for the set, and – despite the high price – did achieve some circulation. But according to Rehman Sobhan, the director of the enterprise, it had virtually no impact on public policy. Sobhan, who now directs the Centre for Policy Dialogue, hopes that the new roundtable effort will find a wider audience over a more extended period of time and thereby enlarge the policy debate.

Summary

In any political system, the proportion of citizens seriously concerned with policy issues is small at best. In the United States, it has been found that the number of people who get involved in any real way in policy issues (except in rare instances such as the Vietnam war – the continuing debate over abortion may be another exception) is minuscule, confined for the most part to "inside the beltway types" and "policy wonks."³⁴ In Bangladesh, given the low income and literacy rates mentioned above, the proportion of seriously concerned citizens is surely much smaller. Accordingly, any effort like the roundtables to increase that rate is to be encouraged.

For the much wider numbers of people who are not serious students of policy, improvements in the print media are also to be welcomed and should be supported. Better reporting and investigative journalism will make for a more informed public and one that can make intelligent decisions both in choosing candidates at election time and in supporting public advocacy groups between elections.

³³ In the survey estimate cited in the previous footnote, more than 20 percent of households in Dhaka reported reading a daily newspaper, a figure unfortunately counterbalanced by a readership of only 1.7 percent in the rural areas (BBS, *ibid.*).

³⁴ See, for instance, the landmark study by Verba and Nie (1972) on political participation. Their study, of course, was published long before such terms as "policy wonks" became current, but there is no reason to expect their findings regarding participation would differ today.

But for the vast majority of citizens who are not newspaper readers (nor do they have access to satellite dishes or domestic television), radio is the news medium likely to have the widest impact. And so far, radio broadcasting continues to be tightly controlled by the government.³⁵ The opportunity for alternative voices to enter the airwaves remains only a topic of discussion. Accordingly, the potential for the media to facilitate the development of civil society is in significant measure unrealized.

Democratic pluralism: umbrella CSOs (BS 1)

Over the two decades and more since Bangladesh achieved independence, development-oriented NGOs have become very large, both in numbers (reputed to be over 13,000 when both local and national organizations are counted), in coverage (now believed to be perhaps half the villages in Bangladesh and around 15 percent of all rural households), and in foreign funding.³⁶

Given their size and prominent role in the development arena, it is only to be expected that NGOs have had a relationship with the GOB that is at times uneasy. Government officials have often tended to view NGOs as receiving favored treatment from donors, diverting foreign funds that should go to GOB development activities, paying excessively high salaries to their staffs, becoming ego projections of their founders, remaining unaccountable to anyone apart from their foreign donors, and engaging in glamorous, high-profile development work along narrow fronts while leaving the large, messy and intractable problems of rural development to the government. For their part, NGOs have tended to see the GOB as hopelessly inefficient, poorly motivated and corrupt in its efforts to promote rural development.³⁷

There is some truth to both images. NGOs are often favored by foreign donors, largely because they are seen as more efficient in designing and implementing project efforts. Their salaries are not high in relation to GOB remuneration, according to one study done several years ago (Siddiqui et al. 1987), in part perhaps because

³⁵ This may be loosening up a bit. BELA reported being allowed to do a radio show on environmental issues, which must be among the first such openings to anyone outside the government, if not the first such event.

³⁶ Data on total number of NGOs from S. Ahmed et al. (1991: 373), on villages covered from Proshika, and on total households included from the Prime Minister's Secretariat, as reported by ADAB. As for NGO funding, the aggregate amount is unclear and in any even depends on definition (e.g., NGOs receive grants as well as do work on contract with the GOB). One estimate given to the CDIE team asserted that as much as one-fourth of the Annual Development Programme was spent by NGOs, but this seems rather high. In any event, the aggregate budgets for all NGOs is a very large sum.

³⁷ The picture offered in this and the following paragraphs emerge not only from people interviewed on this CDIE trip, but from numerous conversations held and impressions acquired over many previous visits to Bangladesh by the team leader.

in many cases their charismatic founders can attract dedicated young people for relatively low wages (a factor lending some truth to the ego projection image). And while NGOs necessarily start out with a rather narrow focus, a number of the larger ones now carry portfolios of activities that cover as wide a range as those of the government. Proshika, for instance, now works with 35,000 groups in 5,000 villages, while BRAC's education enterprise has school programs going in more than 20,000 villages.

For the other side of the argument, government is often inefficient; GOB inability to utilize available foreign aid by translating it into development activities and the resultant constantly growing aid "pipeline" has been a constant topic of concern in the World Bank's annual reports on Bangladesh (e.g., World Bank 1992). And while government corruption has of course been difficult to research directly, owing to its inherently clandestine nature, it has certainly been a major and debilitating obstacle to development in Bangladesh, as the 1991 Task Force confirmed (B. Ahmed 1991; see also Kochanek 1993: *passim* but esp. 259 &ff; and Novak 1993: *passim*).

So there is both substance and myth to the images GOB officials and NGO staffers have of each other. The major point to be made, though, is that the persistence of the images had led the government side periodically want more control over the NGO community, while it has led the latter to defend its autonomy from the GOB. The issue is not an idle one, either for the two sides in Bangladesh or for the CDIE concept of a civil society that is concerned with state policy while maintaining autonomy from the state itself.

In the Bangladesh context, the autonomy problem has given the NGO community a powerful incentive to act in concert to fend off GOB efforts at direction and control. But the incentive is deeper and more abiding than the autonomy issue, for given the large presence of NGOs in Bangladesh, it makes practical sense to set up some kind of institutional interface between the NGO community and the state simply in order to routinize relationships between the two sides.

It is in this setting that the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh or ADAB has come into prominence as the primary intermediary between the NGOs and the GOB. The organization began in 1974 as the Agricultural Development Agencies in Bangladesh, then gradually enlarged its mandate and changed its name to the present appellation. Today ADAB has almost 700 member NGOs and 14 regional chapters. In recent years it has received funding from USAID through PACT, from Ford, NORAD and SIDA, among other donors. ADAB works mainly in three areas: service provision and capacity building (largely through training activities); representing the NGO community as their "bargaining agent" to the government; and building sectoral coalitions of NGOs (e.g., in environmental issues, the water-and-sanitation area). It is primarily the second area that is of interest to this CDIE report.

GCB policy and the NGO community

Toward the end of the Ershad period, an NGO Affairs Bureau was established, in significant measure at the behest of the NGO community, to serve as a "one-stop shop" for NGOs to get registered, file annual forms and the like, as well as to bring order to the somewhat chaotic relations between NGOs and the GOB, and to function as a focal point for NGO lobbying with the government. Despite the advantages of the single center, though, there were some who worried that a single portal through which NGOs would deal with the GOB could also prove to be a mechanism for the latter to control the NGO community. After the change to a democratic government, those fears in fact increased, as a new director general of the Bureau began to exercise a heavy hand on NGOs in 1992. Largely through ADAB, the NGO community resisted, pressed their international donors to oppose the threat, and matters eased with the transfer of the hostile official.

But then the next year, in March 1993, a new government order was issued that included the following requirements:

- NGOs were forbidden from any political activity (thus apparently extending an earlier prohibition on NGOs from forming alliances with political parties);
- NGO activities must not hurt religious sentiment;
- any GOB official was empowered to cancel an NGO's registration (i.e., its license to operate as an organization) on his personal finding of improper activity, without recourse to the courts for the offending NGO.

Again ADAB and the NGO community marshalled their forces, protested to the government and pressed their international supporters. The matter was reportedly raised at the Paris donor meeting, and the government backed down in July 1993, issuing a new set of procedures for foreign funded NGOs (a category that includes all the major organizations).³⁸

At the time of the CDIE team's visit, relations were going reasonably smoothly, though there continue to be occasional points of tension. It was reported, for instance, that at the January

³⁸ The annual Paris meeting is organized by the World Bank and includes the major foreign donors and the GOB. Its primary purposes are to coordinate development policy and to set a target for donor funding for the coming year. Needless to say, there is great interest in Bangladesh in the meeting, as reflected in the widespread journalistic coverage accorded to it (in the *Daily Star*, for instance, the 1994 Paris meeting was the subject of front page news stories for several successive days and a lead editorial; articles also appeared in the weekly magazines, e.g., *Kamaluddin* 1994; and *Mahamud* 1994). Accordingly, when donors raise an issue at the Paris meeting, the GOB listens. The new guidelines for NGOs were issued directly by the Prime Minister's office (GPRB 1993), an origin that likely reflects how seriously the government took the matter. The USAID mission in Dhaka did continue to have some reservations about the guidelines, however, for instance in the degree of independence the GOB appeared willing to accord to NGOs (letter from Acting Mission Director to Director General, NGO Bureau Affairs, Dhaka, 10 March 1994).

1994 meeting of the Local Consultative Group (LCG, composed of major donors with the objective of coordinating their assistance policies on the ground in Bangladesh in between the annual Paris meetings), a GOB representative declared that NGOs should not get involved in activities that go "against local culture." This comment occasioned considerable debate, for it could be interpreted to mean that efforts to increase female literacy should be abandoned, inasmuch as there had been some recent fundamentalist opposition to such efforts. In the event, the GOB official at the LCG meeting hastened to state strongly that violence against women would not be tolerated by the government.

But given the nature of the relationship between NGOs and the GOB, tensions must be expected to occur from time to time, even under the friendliest of governments. For both sides have as their major mission to promote development, both finance such efforts mainly through foreign assistance, and so some strains are bound to occur. On occasion donors may be able to set things aright, but their doing so tends to raise questions about how autonomous ADAB can really be. Clearly, over the longer term the NGO community needs a strong voice to represent its interests to the government, and ADAB appears to be rising to that challenge. In terms of the CDIE evaluation design, it works to maintain and improve the "enabling environment" within which NGOs and CSOs operate.

Other umbrella NGOs

ADAB is not the only umbrella NGO interacting with the government; there are a number of others as well, working in more specialized sectoral areas, with ADAB acting in effect as the "umbrella of umbrellas" in the words of its executive director, representing and coordinating the NGO community on generic issues and policy matters, while the sectoral umbrellas concentrate on narrower domains. In recent years, ADAB has been encouraging sectoral network groups to form umbrella organizations on their own.

The most prominent of the sectoral umbrellas is the Voluntary Health Services Society (VHSS), which has almost 200 full member organizations with over 100 non-voting member groups. VHSS concerns itself with major public health issues, such as the need to invest more in preventive medicine (e.g., immunizations) and rural, low-technology medicine, as opposed to the government's proclivity for stressing urban, high-technology, curative medicine. In some respects, VHSS's public advocacy efforts have succeeded, for instance in helping coordinate a combined NGO/GOB/private sector Extended Program of Immunization. The effort (which received some USAID assistance) drew in almost 100 private companies and made impressive headway in increasing the proportion of children covered by vaccinations from around 3 percent in 1985 to some 75 percent by 1990.³⁹

³⁹ Data from the executive director, VHSS.

Other examples of sectoral umbrella NGOs are the NGO Forum for Drinking Water and Sanitation and the Women's Development Forum, both of which are now organizations independent of ADAB. Another incipient umbrella is the Coalition for Environmental NGOs (CEN), which has recently organized itself under ADAB auspices and may soon be ready for an independent existence. CEN has focused its attention particularly on flood control issues, a topic that will be taken up later on in this chapter.

The NGO community and the media

As noted earlier in this section, the media are essential if advocacy groups are to get their message across to a public beyond their immediate memberships and contacts. Yet in Bangladesh until quite recently there was very little communication between the NGO community and the print media. The media covered the more directly political-administrative universe of political leaders, government programs, economic development and international affairs, while the NGOs were quite happy to keep a low media profile in a context where their principal audiences were their domestic beneficiaries and their foreign donors. NGOs might push and prod for certain policy changes here and there, but so long as the GOB allowed them to carry on their work unmolested, they were content to stay away from the glare of macro-politics and media publicity.

The fall of the Ershad government changed that equation, however. As the end of the dictatorship approached, with ever larger constituencies joining the opposition tide, a number of the larger NGOs realized that they were likely to be left stranded and friendless if a new government came to power which identified them with the *ancien régime*. Accordingly, they pressed for and were able to announce an ADAB declaration of support for the democracy movement in a press conference put on "at the eleventh hour," in the words of one prominent NGO leader.

This abrupt introduction to macro-politics also led some in the NGO community to realize that if they were to endure as important players in national development, they would have to build linkages to the press. Accordingly, ADAB has set up a public relations section, has begun to cultivate linkages with newspaper editors, and has organized field trips for journalists to acquaint them with NGO development work. Some of the larger NGOs have launched similar efforts. Such approaches have already produced some benefits in the form of largely sympathetic press coverage of the recent wave of fundamentalist-inspired attacks on NGO activities at a number of sites around the country (a topic that will be addressed in more detail in a later section of this report).

For their part the press professes a greater interest in the NGO community, a topic that had not much interested them in the past. The papers now devote more coverage to NGO activities, and the journalists interviewed by the CDIE team exhibited considerable understanding of and sympathy for the NGO schools and local chapters under attack from some fundamentalist elements in the countryside.

Democratic capitalism: business organizations (BS 2).

In a number of countries (e.g., Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Thailand, Eastern Europe), USAID has assisted chambers of commerce and business associations to organize themselves and begin their activities. In civil society terms, such assistance could be called a "democratic capitalism" strategy, in that it aims to help increase the number of pluralist voices in systems shackled by overregulated, "dirigiste" states. While USAID has in the past contributed to various deregulation and privatization efforts in Bangladesh,⁴⁰ neither it nor other international donors are (so far as the CDIE team could determine) currently supporting business organizations in advocacy efforts.⁴¹

This lack of support does not mean that the business community is languishing; far from it, business is doing very well in Bangladesh at present, and in fact appears to have become an important player in the macro-level political scene, as indicated in the previous chapter of this report. Indeed, the business community is the only significant new player in the political economy of Bangladesh in the last two decades. As such, it deserves some attention in a report like the present one.

The Bangladesh garment export industry

The garment industry presents a good candidate for brief examination, given its rapid growth and importance to the national economy. Along with that growth has come a number of problems that have impelled it to form associations in order to lobby for its interests, in particular the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The garment export industry was established in the late 1970s, taking advantage of international trade conditions, above all the free entry of Bangladeshi produced garments into the North American and European markets. The growth of the industry was fostered by the low capital investment required, the relatively quick return on that investment and the availability of a very cheap, trainable work force. Of particular importance was the availability of specific export quotas assigned to Bangladesh in the United States once a certain level of trade was attained.

The growth of the sector since the late seventies has been spectacular. There were around a dozen factories in the late

⁴⁰ Most notably its fertilizer privatization project in the early 1980s, which removed subsidies and privatized most of the trade. See Wennergren et al. (1984: esp 148-153), also Blair (1986).

⁴¹ USAID is currently supporting an industrial promotion project, which includes seminars involving chambers of commerce and the GOB, and it is also fostering dialogue between foreign investors and the GOB's Board of Investment, both of which are activities related to policy advocacy, but does not appear to be directly assisting the business groups taking part.

seventies, earning around US\$ 250,000. By the end of 1993, there were 1650 factories and total export earnings had risen to US\$ 1.6 billion, which represented 62 percent of the total export earnings of the country.⁴²

The garment export industry has had to overcome a series of legal and administrative constraints. For example, the cloth used to manufacture garments has to be imported from abroad. Until a few years ago, the Bangladesh Government taxed imported dyed cloth and prohibited the importation of undyed cloth. Both practices caused problems. The taxation reduced the competitive advantage of Bangladesh vis-à-vis other cheap labor markets like Sri Lanka, while the prohibition on importing undyed cloth limited the range of garments that could be manufactured.

A garment exporters association

It was problems such as these that led to the establishment of the BGMEA in 1982 to represent the interests of the garment export industry. It is made up of factories engaged in that industry and currently has 1790 members, which range from owners of multiple factories to jobbers who subcontract from large factories. BGMEA leaders tend to be influential members of society (the current BGMEA president is an MP for the BNP as well as an owner of several garment factories).

The BGMEA successfully lobbied the GOB to set up a bonding system to import dyed textiles to be processed into garments, thereby improving its international competitiveness, and it is presently working to extend the bonding system to include undyed fabrics (so-called "gray cloth") as well as dyes for them, which would permit more processing (and value-added revenue) for Bangladesh.

The most important single function that the BGMEA performs on behalf of its members concerns garment export quotas. BGMEA assists the government in its negotiations with the United States over the quota to be assigned to Bangladesh, as well as assisting government bureaucrats in assigning the allotted quota to its members. The President of BGMEA described the process of dividing the quota among the members as "a very open system", but the potential for rent-seeking behavior on the part of both government bureaucrats and BGMEA members is obvious.

⁴². Figures from BGMEA (1994: 3-4). It should be noted however, that this growth is much more modest in net terms than the export figures would suggest, for only a relatively small portion (some estimate as little as 10 percent) of total earnings remain in the country as wages, return on capital and tax payments. This is the case in large part because of low wages (estimated to be on the average between US\$10 and \$23 per month per worker), the need to import much of the machinery as well as virtually all the raw materials required, and the tax exempt status of much of the newer production facilities. Still, the garment industry is a vitally important one in a country as strapped for export commodities as Bangladesh.

A second important function BGMEA's role in labor relations both nationally and with respect to international issues such as child labor. Domestically, BGMEA as well as individual factory owners have developed close relationships with key officials in the Ministry of Labor, arrangements which have facilitated a strong management influence over potential labor problems. In some cases, it is reported that unions that are not considered favorably by factory owners have had difficulties registering with the Ministry of Labor or have been denied registration as a result of collusion between owners and bureaucrats.

On the international front, the garment industry in Bangladesh has recently been facing concerns from the United States and Europe regarding the use of child labor. The Harkins Bill now being considered in the U.S. Congress, for example, proposes to exclude garments from countries exploiting child labor. To head off such problems, the BGMEA has set up a tripartite commission - business, labor and government - to deal with working conditions. The organization claims to have reduced child labor in the garment industry, lowering it from around 5 percent to around 2 percent of the total work force.⁴³

Business associations and civil society

The BGMEA presents some interesting civil society issues to the forefront. On the one hand, the BGMEA has added an important voice to the political economy of Bangladesh. It has been able to help loosen restricting regulatory practices and to have a voice in implementing current rules (especially quota allocations). But on the other hand, it has through these very same efforts helped provide rent-seeking opportunities to the bureaucrats supervising the bonding system and allocating the quotas. In addition, it has likely used its connections with the Labor Ministry to curb organizing by potentially unfriendly unions and thus has helped preclude the expansion of pluralism in that direction.

On the issue of labor exploitation, the situation is especially murky, for the garment industry presents a serious developmental dilemma in that it tends to exploit its workforce through low wages, piecework systems and child labor (it is not for no reason, after all, that the term "sweatshop" derives from the American garment industry earlier in this century), but at the same time it offers incomes to large numbers of people who for the most part would not otherwise be employed or (for the children involved) in school.⁴⁴

⁴³ Child labor is defined as employment of those who are 14 years or younger. The reduction claim is disputed by local child rights organizations, which aver that their own surveys show around 27% of the garment industry workforce to be underage.

⁴⁴ The sweatshop issue creates dilemmas for American domestic policy as well, as evidenced by Reich's (1994) recent analysis.

Efforts on the part of civil society promoters to strengthening the business community, then, may well have mixed results. Such efforts can contribute significantly to political and economic development, but they can also lead to new problems for democratic growth by providing new opportunities for corruption, exploitation and denial of access to the political arena by other groups.

Human resources: family planning NGOs (BS 2)

Bangladesh with a total population of over 115,000,000 in 1991 and a population density of around 2000 people per square mile is the most densely populated country in the world with exception of the city states of Hong Kong and Singapore. That population is beset by problems of extreme poverty, widespread illiteracy, a limited resource base and a high rate of population growth. As early as 1953, with the founding of the Family Planning Association of Pakistan (whose East Pakistan branch would be transformed after independence into the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh) put a concern for population size and family planning as a mechanism for control on the national agenda. The organization contributed to the formulation of population policy from the outset of its creation. In 1957, family planning was first acknowledged by the Government of Pakistan as a means of dealing with the population question. The first relatively modest family planning programs began in both West and East Pakistan in 1960. By 1965, there was a full-fledged program designed to reach up to 15% of those eligible.

Currently, family planning coverage is provided by both public and private elements. There are three major components:

- The GOB through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which focusses largely on rural areas;
- The Social Marketing Company, which provides contraceptives through a national sales network; and
- The NGOs, which initially covered urban areas but have in recent years been providing rural coverage as well.

The Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (FPAB), as well as other NGO family planning providers such as Concerned Women for Family Planning are viewed by the donors as having played a critical role in the success of Bangladesh's family planning efforts. Bangladesh, in fact, is seen as unique among South Asian nations, in the prominence and significance of the role played by both the NGOs and the commercial sector from the earliest days of the family planning program. Over one-third of the current contraceptive prevalence rate is attributable to private sector initiatives (USAID 1992: 8).

More than as service delivery agencies, the NGOs in family planning have demonstrated over the years that they have the ability both informally and formally to lobby the national government. They have worked to maintain the interest over time of the government in the need for family planning and in the requirement to institute

changes in the forms of service delivery as the nature of the problem and the available remedies have shifted over time.

The formal mechanism for consultation between the public and private sectors is the Family Planning Council of Voluntary Organizations which brings together government officials, NGO officers and donor representatives together. All key decision makers in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are member of the council as well as all important donors, all national NGOs, all cooperating agencies (such as Pathfinder, the Asia Foundation, and the Association for Voluntary Sterilization) and one local NGO from each division for a total of five in representation of all local level NGOs. The council has two regular meetings a year, although in 1993 it met three times. Currently the council is undertaking a reorganization designed to make it more efficient. That reorganization will add two or three more donor representatives. It will also examine the possibility that the Council through its secretariat, the Family Planning and Services Training Centre, may engage in field monitoring and evaluation.

In addition to this formal channel, there is a stream of constant informal communication between the national family planning agencies, the cooperating agencies, donors and the respective government of Bangladesh officials. Most recently, this has included significant input into the redesign of the national family planning strategy by private sector and cooperating agencies. This linkage has been considerably strengthened in recent years through the practice of integrating family planning NGOs into the regular government program at the field level. Thus in many rural areas, the unions within a thana will be divided up such that the GOB family planning organization takes responsibility for some unions and NGOs do the same for others.

The largest and most influential NGO in family planning is the FPAB. That organization reported that it had been effective over time in lobbying the government on various aspects of family planning and related policy matters. For example, it had been active in lobbying the government to change the name of the Ministry of Health and Family Planning to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare so as to emphasize the concept of maternal/child health as well as family planning.

From its inception FPAB has seen itself as a compliment to the efforts of the national government, whatever that government has been. Initially, it sought to make family planning acceptable to the government and the society as a whole. It endeavored to overcome social resistance to family planning, using such approaches as careful interpretation of Quranic law on the family. Currently FPAB is lobbying to change inheritance laws - to give parents the right to give gifts of property to their daughters. In this effort it has formulated a proposal based on Muslim law and practice in such countries as Turkey, Algeria, Malaysia and Indonesia. And it is also moving at the local level, circulating letters to government fieldworkers in family planning to illustrate how this inheritance option might work.

FPAB is concerned with the problem of family decision-making, above all with enhancing the role of women in deciding family size, child spacing and use of contraceptives methods. As one mechanism to enhance the role of females, it is promoting field schools for both men and women at family welfare centers.⁴⁵

FPAB has prided itself on its apolitical character, noting that all political parties are represented within its governing board. In its own view, it has never had to be concerned with the political orientations of the board members since all board members see population control as a national need, regardless of their personal political orientation. FPAB has advised every government, whether democratic or authoritarian, on issues of family planning. To preserve its politically neutral posture, it has even stepped out of organizational arrangements such as membership in ADAB which might be construed as of a political nature.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the CSOs such as FPAB involved in family planning are highly effective in shaping policies that are related to their sector. But at the same time they seek to operate within a strictly *technocratic* framework - focussing on questions of designing and implementing policy, rather than on questions that might be considered to have political consequences. "Political" in this context can mean questions that revolve around the nature of the political process itself - the degree of democratic participation that may exist. In particular, FPAB and the other family planning NGOs interviewed were willing to work with the Ershad government to promote family planning, but were unwilling to become involved as did other NGOs aligned with ADAB in efforts to end that government.

It can be argued that it was not the intention of donors or of the family planning NGOs themselves to promote democracy through family planning; hence such involvement is not something that could or should be expected. The same argument, however, can be made of the ADAB NGOs that did join the anti-Ershad movement in 1990. But it can also be noted that FPAB and other family planning NGOs have made a contribution to democracy in their efforts to improve conditions of those at the greatest disadvantage in the society - women - and in that sense they have promoted broader participation of women in society.⁴⁶ At the same time, their approach has distinctly reflected a desire to get along with whatever government

⁴⁵ These efforts to promote women's role do not thus far extend to placing women in supervisory and managerial roles, a practice explained as stemming from traditional societal prejudices. This approach can be contrasted with that taken by Concerned Women for Family Planning, which has an all-female management as well as professional staff, and has demonstrated in its own work that there are no reasons why women cannot fulfill all levels of responsibility within an organization.

⁴⁶ Some family planning NGOs have provided assistance in areas often considered to be distinctly more "political" than family planning per se, such as legal literacy and election monitoring. But in general terms their major focus has been (as it should be) on service delivery.

might be in power. Therefore, it is unlikely that FPAB and other similar organizations can be counted on as allies in direct efforts at strengthening democracy.

Social mobilization: advocacy for the poor (BS 2a)

It should be clear by now that Bangladesh possesses a very rich universe of NGOs, covering a wide range of activities. Of the larger organizations, arguably the most self-consciously pro-active NGO on a significant scale in the country is Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS), which works at the village level to mobilize the rural poor into autonomous "village committees," first through "functional schools" pursuing a conscientization agenda, then through group efforts to hold local authorities accountable (e.g., a health committee to press the union parishad health system to deliver the medicines it should be dispensing) and to enhance equity in the local economy (e.g., by pressuring landowners to follow legal sharecropping rules).⁴⁷ These village committees then federate into ward and union committees as part of a "people's organization" or *Gono Sangathon* (GS), which is also treated as autonomous by the parent GSS organization in Dhaka. Empowerment and advocacy at local level, in other words, are very central to the GSS program. Thus far, the GS has begun organizing in more than 1300 villages and by mid-1994 had planned to have over 1100 village committees in operation, concentrated in several parts of the country but primarily in the southwest.⁴⁸

In the last couple of years, GSS has moved to make its advocacy role more explicit, not just at the village level of the GS, but up and down the chain between micro and macro level.⁴⁹ In part inspired by the ADAB contribution to the anti-Ershad movement in its final moments and its own part in arguing within ADAB councils for the organization to take a stand in the movement, GSS has put together an advocacy program, consisting of ten district-level units tied into a national center in Dhaka. The program has several facets:

- a lawyers' network with units at district level to offer legal aid (mostly *pro bono*), outreach activities and the like;

⁴⁷ In a field study undertaken several years ago of several NGOs pursuing conscientization agendas, Hashemi (1990) found only GSS to be solidly committed to following through with a social empowerment approach.

⁴⁸ See GSS (1993). The GSS is currently planning a rapid expansion, up from 134 unions to 259 over the next five years, and from 1103 village committees to almost 5200. This growth, however, is much more in terms of depth than areal expansion; the number of thanas covered is intended to grow from the present 31 to only 36 (see Wood et al. 1994: 9).

⁴⁹ Information in this paragraph is from the CDIE team's interview at GSS, Wood et al. (1994: ch. 4), and Polansky (1994).

- cultural advocacy, focusing on traditional folk art forms, in particular theatre in the Bengali tradition;
- popular communications -- mainly booklets in easy Bangla language, but also some audio-visual material as well; and
- media advocacy, both through submitting news items and commentaries to Bangla dailies and through trying to organize local journalists.

So far the advocacy effort has undergone what might be called a "convening" phase and has now entered its "organizing" phase where it is feeling its way (Polansky 1994: 17). How it fits in with the GS structure, how it chooses its agendas (a word purposely put into the plural here, inasmuch as the local units are intended to have considerable autonomy), and how much impact it has (along with what reactions it may bring) are all matters that lie ahead. The most important thing to note at this juncture is that GSS feels sufficiently confident and comfortable in the present political environment to launch such an enterprise, and feels that it has sufficient experience to guide it along. One American consultant with a background in advocacy efforts dating from the 1960s likened GSS's rural efforts to the civil rights movement of that time in the Southern United States, with such similarities as a shared ethos of uplift in the mass base, availability of assistance from more advantaged urban-based outsiders, and opposition from an entrenched dominant group (Polansky 1994: 13-14).

Two other advocacy efforts should also be noted. Proshika, one of the very largest NGOs in Bangladesh with roughly 35,000 groups active in some 5,000 villages and perhaps two million beneficiaries,⁵⁰ has also begun an advocacy initiative, the Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy (IDPAA). But the IDPAA approach is more one of macro-level advocacy, with a think-tank, policy papers and dissemination to decision-making elites aimed at influencing that constituency rather than one of work at the district level and below as with GSS (Polansky 1993, 1994: Wood 1994).

A third advocacy enterprise is the Centre for Policy Dialogue, which was discussed earlier in the section of this chapter dealing with media. These efforts on the part of CPD, IDPAA and GSS form a sort of advocacy spectrum, ranging from a small, centralized and self-consciously elite-directed enterprise on the part of CPD, through a slightly broader initiative from Proshika, to the much more decentralized and mass-oriented set of activities being put together by GSS. All three initiatives are quite new, and it is hard to predict where they will lead. But widening the forum for public debate has to be a central objective for a pluralistic democracy, and each of the three efforts noted here has potentially a significant contribution to make.

⁵⁰ Data from Proshika.

Sustainable environment: flood plan reactions (BS 2)

As recently as the later 1980s, there was relatively little concern for environmental issues in Bangladesh. Unlike neighboring India, where the Chipko movement had been in place for some years and such controversies as the Silent Valley or Narmada dam projects had generated much opposition from environmentally oriented CSOs (see e.g., CSE 1985; Herring 1991), environment did not seem a topic of much public interest in Bangladesh. It received little attention from the press, the intelligentsia, the GOB or the donor community.

By the time of the CDIE team's visit in March 1994, however, there was a vigorous environmental movement in place featuring several active (and even aggressive) NGOs, international network linkages to like-minded counterparts abroad, and considerable pressure on the GOB, at least some of which had a discernable policy impact. Indeed, the role of CSOs in this set of changes is sufficiently interesting to warrant a somewhat more extended treatment than has been accorded in this report to other sectors of CSO activity.

The Flood Action Plan

What had inspired the movement to emerge over these few years was the GOB's Flood Action Plan (FAP), a bold and ambitious program to control and manage floods in the major river systems of the country. FAP has its origins in the reactions of various foreign donors (especially the French) to the devastation caused by the extraordinary floods of 1987 and 1988 - "once in a century" floods that had in fact occurred back-to-back. Led by the World Bank (see World Bank 1990), the major donors put together the FAP, which consisted of some 26 component regional studies, sectoral analyses and pilot projects, most of which had commenced by 1991.⁵¹ Assuming that the studies and experiments went well, it was anticipated that the major flood control works would begin at some point later on in the 1990s.

The Flood Action Plan was a very large - even monumental - enterprise. Some idea of the scope of the initiative can be gained by considering the fact that the peak water flow of the combined Brahmaputra, Ganges and Meghna river systems into the Bay of Bengal is estimated to be more than twice that of the Missouri-Mississippi system in the United States (Brammer 1990; Dury 1990), and the total annual sediment load is thought to be seven times larger (Schumm, cited in Boyce 1990), although the South Asian system's drainage basin is only half as big as the American one. Early estimates of a price tag for controlling floods in Bangladesh ranged between US\$5 and \$10 billion;⁵² even the research analyses

⁵¹ See FPCO (1993b) for a brief description of the FAP components and a progress report on their activities.

⁵² See Boyce (1990), Custers (1992); Momen (1990). The figure US\$ 10 billion is the one heard most often, though it should be pointed out that the FPCO and the donors have not talked concretely of anything more than the \$150 million mentioned in the text, plus perhaps \$350-\$400 million for rehabilitating

and pilot projects taken up in FAP were projected to cost about US\$ 150 million (cf. World Bank 1990: 63).

Needless to say, there arose considerable apprehension about the viability of such a huge effort: whether it could in fact prevent floods of the 1987-88 scale, what would be its possible effects on agriculture (with its reliance on annual floodborne siltation), what might be the impact on such flood-dependent occupations as fishing, and so on. Much of this concern crystallized as a consequence of a national FAP conference held in early March 1992, at which all the FAP projects were presented.

The compartmentalization pilot project

In particular, a Dutch-German project in Tangail District served to galvanize environmental interest from the NGO community. A good part of the reason for this interest was that the project consciously began as a pioneering effort in including the local population as participants in the project itself, both in its design and its maintenance. In the course of things, Bangladeshi CSOs became involved, and eventually European CSOs as well, putting some pressure on the GOB to become more open to public inputs on environmental issues. Moreover, there is some indication that this pressure, combined with prodding from international donors, did have an effect in moving the GOB water management establishment toward a more participatory posture. Accordingly, this enterprise, the Compartmentalization Pilot Project FAP 20 (generally known simply as "FAP 20"), makes an excellent mini-case study in civil society and policy advocacy in Bangladesh.

The controversy over FAP 20 was itself helpful in the case study, in that it generated a good deal of writing and publication, which came in addition to the immense quantities of written material that the FAP itself has produced. In addition, the CDIE team interviewed a number of the principals in FAP 20 on both the project and the CSO side, and was able to essay a field trip to the project site in Tangail.

FAP 20 was intended to rehabilitate an earlier floodworks project which (like many similar efforts in Bangladesh) had fallen into disrepair over the years. The FAP 20 project would have three principal purposes, all of which aroused anxiety in various quarters:

- it would test approaches to "controlled flooding," as opposed to flood control, with the idea of managing the gradual influx and drainage of annual floodwater through a series of sub-compartments so as to maximize utiliza-

the infrastructure damaged by the 1987 and 1988 floods (see Wallace 1993). Still, none would deny that a serious effort at improving flood control measures beyond what they were in the late 1980s would cost a very large sum of money beyond the figures cited just above.

tion of the 13,000 ha command area for agriculture, fisheries and general use. That is, FAP 20 would **not prevent floods**, but rather would **manage them**.

- it would solicit **popular participation** in the successive phases of the project from the analysis and design through to implementation.
- both as a controlled flooding effort and as a participatory enterprise, FAP 20 was expected to **become a model** for future FAP projects. Accordingly, those involved in it, as well as those concerned about it from the outside, saw a good deal riding on its outcome, for it would likely serve as the exemplar for much future work in flood management in Bangladesh.

The basic engineering concept of the Tangail Compartmentalization Pilot Project, the official name for FAP 20, is to develop the original horseshoe-shaped "compartment" of earthworks and sluice gates surrounding an area of about 13,000 hectares by erecting a series of 17 "sub-compartments." Each sub-compartment would then be divided into smaller *chawks* or water management units, based mainly on existing roads (mainly of earthen construction, such that they serve to block water flow in addition to facilitating transportation), ranging in size from 20 to 200 hectares. This nested series of units would then endeavor to manage the annual flow of flood water into the area, so that the agricultural season within each unit would be predictable to the extent feasible and would manage the outflow so that the fish catch would be maximized.⁵³ Each of the three levels would have a management committee made up of local people, who would operate the various mechanisms in a coordinated fashion to control seasonal flooding.

As finally drawn up, the terms of reference ("scope of work") for FAP 20 included provisions for extensive local consultation with those to be affected by the project, a population defined to include not only landowners, but also landless people, fishermen and women. The consultant devised a process for assessing people's inputs, in which groups composed of these four elements would participate (see FAP 20, n.d.).

At the outset, then, FAP 20 had at least two qualities that distinguished it from virtually all infrastructural surface water management efforts in Bangladesh (or elsewhere, for that matter). First, in marked contrast to its traditional concern for design and

⁵³ The major agricultural season in this area is *rabi* + *boro*, in that farmers grow mustard seed or a similar dry season crop during the late fall and early winter, then transplant and raise a *boro* (paddy) rice crop in the winter and spring, which is later than normal for the latter. The photoin sensitivity of the "miracle rice" varieties used for *boro* lends flexibility to the growing season, but pushing off to later also puts it at risk from monsoon flooding. Thus if the *rabi* + *boro* schedule is to work, there must be some assurance that annual flooding will not come sooner than expected. The Tangail compartmentalization scheme is intended to provide such an assurance. This in brief is the concept of "controlled flooding," as opposed to "flood control" (absolute prevention of floods), which FAP 20 is not designed to accomplish.

construction and concomitant inattention to operations and maintenance, the water management agency involved would give concerted attention to operations matters. Second, whereas participation in water management projects typically has been either minimal or altogether absent, especially in the design phase, in FAP 20, the affected population was to be included right from the beginning.⁵⁴

The FAP 20 team began its survey and design activities, in the course of which it drew in a large swath of local opinion. By early 1994, it was claimed by the project that some 5,000 people had participated in the project consultation effort. There is some debate about what the consulted population in Tangail had to say about their priorities for water management or, conversely, about what they should have been able to say. Some in the community apparently wanted nothing more than improved drainage within the existing system, while others wanted improvements in the present structure. And while some in FAP 20 and the FPCO thought a "zero option" (i.e., doing nothing beyond rehabilitating the drainage system) should be a choice, others insisted that since there was already an compartment structure in place, the project had to start with the supposition that it would be improved. In the event, it was decided in June 1992 to exclude the drainage-only options from the choices offered to local people and to proceed on the assumption that a more ambitious water management project would be undertaken (IOV 1993: 38).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The focus on design and construction to the exclusion of operations and maintenance has been an abiding problem in the water management sector for decades. To the extent that it existed at all, "participation" tended to consist of informing the affected population of what was going to happen to them. See Chambers and Wade (1980).

Interestingly, William T. Smith, a water management engineer at the World Bank, mentions "the active participation of local communities" as "a new approach to project planning, implementation and management for the FAP" (as does the World Bank's [1990] Action Plan), but the only FAP project Smith specifically identifies as participatory in this fashion is FAP 20 (Smith 1994: 447-478). As Sklar and Dulu (1994: 403) put it in their technical review of the FAP, among all the FAP projects, "Only FAP 20 [misidentified in their essay as FAP 22, but clearly FAP 20 from the context], covering compartment pilot projects, has any explicit public participation." It would seem clear, then, that FAP 20 has been a pioneer in the participatory dimension.

⁵⁵ An example of the different needs of different areas within the Tangail compartment, see FAP 20 (1992); it should be noted that even within such a single, seemingly homogeneous agricultural area like this one, there existed quite a varied range of cropping patterns and regimes. Over the country as a whole (which also seems very uniform at first glance), this was even more so the case. In village surveys extending over the whole country, another FAP project found that whereas people in villages with yearly floods preferred flood-protecting embankments to improved drainage systems, in villages flooded less frequently the reverse was true (see Blair 1992; also FAP 14 1992).

On the controversy over participation in FAP 20, see Adnan (1992: 74-81); also Hanchett (1994). In addition, more than half a dozen of the key informants interviewed by the CDIE team had views on these topics, many of them strongly held and expressed. Within the FAP 20 enterprise itself and the FPCO, there was apparently considerable disagreement on how much community opinion should be heeded, with the consultant team urging more weight for participation in project design and the GOB side asserting that they had to get on with the design and

Several important things grew out of FAP 20's efforts to solicit popular inputs into the project. Before enumerating and analyzing them, however, it should first be noted that in a very real sense, they all emerged as a function of the project's intent to include community participation as an important component. If FAP 20 had been a more typical flood control effort, much of the controversy would never have arisen. In other words, the very innovative nature of the project precipitated some of the wider circles of controversy that came to surround it.⁵⁶

NGO reactions at home and abroad

An early source of discontent occurred in May 1992, when a group of women associated with the Unnayan Shahojogy Team (UST) NGO in Gala Union - one of those within the compartment area - launched a demonstration procession at the FAP 20 headquarters in Tangail town. UST is an NGO working almost exclusively with rural women, focusing on development education, conscientization and income generation, with self-reliance as the objective. The women's groups in Gala Union, energized by their involvement in an earlier controversy over local government land acquisition, became emboldened enough to organize a protest march when they felt their opinions, though solicited, were being ignored by the FAP 20 project. This at least is the story from the UST perspective. Noteworthy in the account are that the UST members' views were solicited by the FAP officials (even if not heeded) and that the members mounted a protest march at the thana headquarters, some distance away. It is difficult to imagine either the canvass or the procession occurring even a few years ago in rural Bangladesh.

In September 1993, a much bigger demonstration took place in Tangail, in which a number of NGOs participated, drawing in people from outside the area as well as local citizens. There were charges of stage managing from outside, as well as accusations of *mastans* (small-time thugs for hire) intimidating the protesters.⁵⁷ There was also a video-tape of the event, made by a Dhaka-based NGO, which subsequently achieved some circulation.

But well before the September 1993 demonstration, concern about the FAP in general and FAP 20 in particular had spread to European NGOs, especially environmental NGOs based in the Netherlands, which along with Germany was a co-sponsor of FAP 20. Dutch NGOs in particular put sufficient pressure on the Dutch parliament that a

construction, that "consulting with the people comes later, in connection with operation, maintenance and evaluation." This contention that came to a head at the June 1992 meeting mentioned in the text (IOV 1993: 38-42; quotation above from p. 42).

⁵⁶ But not all of it, as will be argued below, for some was generated by earlier NGO activity than by FAP 20's participatory component.

⁵⁷ As reported in an account appearing in *Bhorrer Kagoj*, a Bengali daily published in Dhaka, on 19 September 1993.

special investigation was launched into the FAP, with a special focus on FAP 20 (IOV 1993).

In May 1993 several European NGOs organized a conference on FAP in Strasbourg, France, which featured some heavy criticism of FAP 20 (see *Ecologist* 1993) and the following October, another European conference was held in Berlin, at which the Tangail demonstration videotape was screened.

In addition to the NGO pressure both in Bangladesh and Europe, the donor community also put some pressure on the FPCO after the March 1992 FAP conference to build more participation into the FAP process. One result of this pressure was a series of meetings from April through November 1992, involving FAP consultants, FPCO officials, donor representatives and others, intended to draw up a set of guidelines for popular participation in flood control efforts. The guidelines appeared in March 1993 (FPCO 1993), and called for community participation in all phases of flood control project activity, from pre-feasibility studies through to operations and maintenance.⁵⁸

A change of heart in flood control?

Well, has there been a change of heart on the part of FPCO? Some critics would deny it, but others discern a different approach from the water management establishment. The director of one environmental NGO said that participation was being taken seriously today, especially in FAP 20. In an overall sense, he said, "the FAP of 2 years ago and the FAP of today are totally different," including the chief engineer of FPCO, "who would be the first to say so," in the words of this observer. Suzanne Hanchett also cites this same chief engineer as being supportive of community participation, quoting him as saying, "Unless we know the problems, know what the people need, we're building up something on nothing" (Hanchett 1994: 27).

It could be, of course, that all this ostensible change is only rhetorical, essentially sops thrown to quiet NGO-based opposition, so that flood control construction could proceed on its traditional course, uncaring of what the local citizenry might think or want.⁵⁹ This will remain to be seen. But it can be said with certainty that even the public changes mentioned in the preceding paragraph would have been inconceivable at the beginning of the FAP in 1989. Things have come a considerable way since then, and the NGO community can justifiably claim a good share of the credit for inspiring the shift.

⁵⁸ For an insightful analysis of the creation of the guidelines, see Hanchett (1994).

⁵⁹ For example, the same chief engineer quoted just above has also been cited as denouncing the Council of Environmental NGOs as "barking dogs," in reaction to a CEN press conference put on in connection with the Third FAP Conference held in May 1993, as reported by a CEN leader to the CDIE team.

Environmental activism on the legal front

Helping to ensure that the BWDB and FPCO continue to feel pressure to be accountable is the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), which has involved itself in both class action and public interest suits against the GOB. In its class action efforts, BELA has represented land owners whose holdings have been acquired by the government for FAP activities and the Jamuna Bridge project.⁶⁰ On the public interest side, BELA has adopted a target-of-opportunity approach to hound the GOB on environmental issues.

With respect to FAP, the early months of 1994 saw two initiatives. In the first, it protested the apparent exclusion of several participation-focused paragraphs of the prime minister's speech at the March 1992 FAP conference from the official proceedings, demanding a recall and reprinting of all copies as well as an official apology. In the second public interest sortie, BELA threatened legal action against FAP 20 for carrying out infrastructural activities in violation of water sector statutes, "without jurisdiction and *mala fide*," in the words of the letter of complaint (Farooque 1994a and 1994b).

BELA has also proved adept at building relations with the press. It has sought out editors and reporters, trying to interest them in environmental matters. In the words of BELA's director, the main challenge was to make an initial splash. "Once you're a news-maker," he said, "they come running to you asking for stories." Evidently, this strategy has had some success, for BELA's actions have made the newspapers.⁶¹

Environment in the wider arena

Environmental concerns have recently achieved a higher public profile when the Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) and ADAB together with the GOB began sponsoring a series of 24 consultative 2-day "grass roots" workshops to be held around the country as part of the National Environmental Management Action Plan (NEMAP). A high-level GOB interest was assured in that one major supporter of the approach was the Minister of State for Planning, who was an original co-founder of BCAS, a leading environmental CSO. Participants in the workshops were to include a cross-section of

⁶⁰ There has been a considerable history of complaint against public infrastructure projects that their land acquisition activities have been arbitrary in selecting parcels to acquire, low in compensation to owners and tardy in making payment. For example, dirt roads built through Food for Work projects have long caused much distress from landowners whose plots are seized for right of way purposes.

⁶¹ The FAP 20 legal notice letter mentioned above in the text, for example, was the subject of a story in the *Daily Star*, "Lawyers serve notice on FAP in Tangail" (17 April 1994). It is worth pointing out that the FAP itself has been able to get its side of the story into the press as well, e.g., a story in the *Bangladesh Observer*, "FAP project in Tangail stressed" (9 October 1993), which covered an FPCO-sponsored a pro-FAP meeting of political and professional leaders held in Tangail.

farmers, housewives, artisans and the like, along with government officers posted at the local level; their objective was to identify, prioritize and suggest solutions to environmental problems in the local area (see BCAS 1994).

The CDIE team was able to visit one of the workshops, finding that the discussion groups were identifying and prioritizing such environmental problems as excessive chemical fertilizer, falling groundwater table, insufficient latrines, pest control and the like. Interestingly, the local officials were placed in their own discussion group, presumably so that the representative participants in the other groups would feel less inhibited about articulating their thoughts.

The NEMAP enterprise was scheduled to include several regional parleys as well as professional group meetings in Dhaka, with a final national workshop to be held in June 1994. Will this bring citizen participation to national environmental planning? As with the flood water management sector, government concern does not necessarily indicate government commitment, but the interest exhibited by the Minister of State for Planning is certainly a very hopeful sign.

Summary and issues

In the environmental sector, several things have stemmed from CSO activity over the last two or three years. First and most importantly, they have significantly widened the debate on environmental issues by placing the topic firmly on the public policy agenda. Second, CSO efforts appear to have had some effect (along with more direct donor pressure, and of course it would be impossible to say which had how much impact here) in changing the flood water management establishment's view of the role and importance of community participation. And third, however much the FPCO and BWDB may have had a change of heart, these institutions do now find themselves the subject of scrutiny by such CSOs as BELA, they know that CEN members monitor their activities, and they feel a pressure to justify and be accountable for their actions that they did not feel even a few years ago.

Whether the FAP officials or the environmental CSOs are more nearly correct on some of the details over which the two sides differ is hard to determine (at least from what the CDIE team was able to collect), but accuracy here is much less important from the civil society perspective than the fact that the controversy has widened the public debate and has put the environment on the public agenda as a sector deserving of serious debate. The environment has emerged as a sector in which today a number of disparate voices are heard, whereas only a few years ago it was a sector resounding only to a harmonious duet of bureaucrats and supportive donors.

Two further issues deserve brief mention here. To begin with, of the sectors looked into by the CDIE team, environment was clearly the most intriguing in terms of civil society activism and influence on state behavior. Why should this be the case? In

part, to be sure, because of the energy, dedication and perspicacity of the CSO leadership involved both in Bangladesh and in Europe, as well as because of the initial efforts of the UST membership group launching their demonstration in Tangail town. But could it also be that environment as a sector has a certain "motherhood" appeal around which it is considerably easier to build coalitions for action than would be the case, say, for women's rights, grain producers or investigative journalism CSOs? In other words, is environment in some sense a kind of special case that would tell us less about civil society than we might hope?

The second issue concerns possibly conflicting interests between local and national levels about exploiting the environment. In Tangail thana itself, there were some citizens clearly upset about FAP 20, but there were also many local individuals, groups and local officials supportive of the project [reference Tangail petition, also newspaper story]. At the national level, the lines were rather more clear cut, with the FAP and FPCO favoring the project and environmental NGOs opposed to it. There is a sort of line-up, then, which pits some locals plus national environmental groups against other locals plus the national bureaucracy. In this sense, the FAP 20 situation resembles development vs environment controversies elsewhere, with many (if not all) local people favoring the development initiative and national-level environmentalists opposed to it. The Silent Valley dam and Narmada River controversies in India are good examples in this regard. Deciding whose voice should prevail is not an easy matter. Implications for decentralization, participation and democracy are serious.⁶²



The present chapter has focused on civil society as a set of strategies focusing on policy at the macro level. But civil society also possesses salience at the micro level, where policy issues concerning local governments have just as much (and likely more relevance) for citizens as what is decided at the national level. It is to the local level that we move in the next chapter.

⁶² For more on these matters, see Herring (1991); also Blair (1991). Conflict between local interests ranking development over environment and national interests with the reverse priorities is a constantly recurring story, currently familiar to USAID/Washington readers as part of the controversy surrounding the Walt Disney effort to construct a large historical "theme park" in the Washington area. See, for instance, Hsu and Fehr (1994).

IV. Civil society at micro level

Thus far we have considered civil society and democracy largely at the macro level. True, much of the discussion of environmental CSOs in the previous chapter centered on Tangail district and the FAP 20 compartmentalization project there, which is certainly local. But in the Tangail case both pro-FAP and anti-FAP elements (or at least everyone apart from the Gala Union women who first demonstrated against FAP 20) realized that the project itself had implications far beyond the district's borders, for FAP 20 was widely considered to be a likely model for future flood control efforts throughout the country, and hence the stakes were high.

The task in the present chapter is to focus explicitly on the local level and to examine two critical aspects of civil society in which things are being played out for their own sake rather than as examples to be replicated elsewhere (though the micro-dramas being enacted do indeed have meaning for the world outside the confines of the local stage). Both aspects might well be labeled "spillover effects" from the empowerment agenda taken up by several of the larger NGOs in their rural development work over the last decade and more. The first concerns NGO participation in the local elections of 1992, and the second relates to a reaction at local level to NGOs, most notably what appears to be an Islamic fundamentalist backlash to several NGO programs.

The union parishad elections of 1992

There are presently some 4,451 unions in rural Bangladesh, having an average population of roughly 21,000 people each. The union has been the basic level of local self-governance in Bangladesh ever since the union boards were created in 1885. In subsequent iterations of local government structure, unions were (except in one instance) the bottom tier of whatever system was devised and were generally the primary level of representative governance. At the moment, they are in fact the only tier of representative local government, pending the decision of the Khaleda Zia ministry to set up other tiers.⁶³

The current arrangement is one of elected *union parishads* (UPs) or councils, each having three wards represented by three members elected at large within the ward. In addition, a union parishad chairman is elected at large within the whole union. For each union, then, ten officeholders are elected, and for the country as

⁶³ Continuity in local government has been elusive, for each of the regimes since liberation has scrapped the system it found in place and substituted its own scheme, and the current government is following the norm. The exception to this model of union as lowest representative tier was the Ziaur Rahman government, which set up a village level structure, the *gram sarkar* (see Blair 1985 for an analysis of recent local government history).

a whole, 44,510 (4,451 x 10) union parishad officials are returned. Elections must be held at least once every five years. Thus there was a poll in 1988 and again, after the overthrow of the Ershad regime and the parliamentary elections of 1991, in February 1992, when 3,903 UPs held elections.⁶⁴

Given the ambitious rural development programs of a number of NGOs in Bangladesh, it is not surprising that a good many of their members became involved in the 1992 union parishad elections. This is especially the case with GSS, which as noted earlier has been the most self-consciously empowerment-oriented NGO, at least among the larger organizations currently active.

When the 1992 union parishad election came along, the autonomous GS entities wanted to run candidates, and the parent GSS supported them in doing so. In the event, local GS units fielded some 400 candidates in the GS name, and 270 of these contestants got elected as UP members, with 9 more winning UP chairmanships. The GSS leadership maintains that it and the GS are quite separate organizations, and so GOB restrictions on NGOs contesting elections do not apply to it. The distinction is a subtle one to outsiders,⁶⁵ however, and the GOB threatened at one point to withdraw GSS's registration, though this danger now seems to have eased.

The NGO most like GSS in its program is *Nijera Kori*, which also pursues a strategy involving mobilization, functional schools and local advocacy. Unlike GSS, however, *Nijera Kori* decided not to give official support to members wishing to contest the UP elections. Some members did contest on their own, or with support from their village-level *Nijera Kori* associations, but there was no support from the Dhaka level or the organization as a whole.⁶⁶ The *Nijera Kori* leadership, in fact, thinks GSS is making a mistake in supporting its members so directly in the political arena.

Proshika, one of the largest NGOs in the country, also decided not to support members running for UP office, although it did not discourage them. After the election in 1992, it commissioned a study of Proshika members in the poll, finding that around 360 got elected as UP members and 6 as chairman in that year.

Grameen Bank is not, strictly speaking, an NGO but rather a quasi-governmental agency, but it operates with much the same autonomy as

⁶⁴ See Adnan's (1992) study, which found that in comparison with the 1988 UP poll - an occasion when "human rights and political freedom were literally trampled upon" and several hundred people were killed - the 1992 elections were well and honestly managed.

⁶⁵ As one careful observer put it in assessing GS participation in the 1992 elections, "It is not easy to accept the gloss that GS is independent of GSS sponsorship" (Wood et al. 1994: 42).

⁶⁶ See Westergaard (1992, 1994) for a comparative case study of GSS and *Nijera Kori* members' participation in the 1992 UP elections in southwestern Bangladesh.

if it were an NGO. Certainly it is the most well-known rural development agency in Bangladesh, having appeared on the CBS news program *60 Minutes* among other achievements.⁶⁷ It now operates throughout most of the country and has upwards of two million participants in its program, which centers around small loans, income generation and repayment discipline, primarily for women, who constitute more than 70 percent of its members. The Grameen Bank too opted not to support its members in the 1992 UP poll, though a number did contest and win office - more than 600 women were elected as UP members by one reckoning, though the CDIE team did not find any written evidence on an exact number.

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is the oldest and probably still the largest NGO in Bangladesh.⁶⁸ It did promote participation in UP elections back in the 1970s, before the Ershad regime, but it found to its dismay that BRAC UP members began to see their UP chairman as the appropriate role model rather than any BRAC ideal. Politics and personal advancement became the guiding principles for these BRAC members rather than public service for the poor. After a study of the phenomenon, the BRAC leadership decided to abandon the idea of contesting for public office, and in 1992 did not pick up the opportunity to try it again. Some BRAC members did get elected to UP offices, but they did so as individuals, and BRAC headquarters in Dhaka has no records on how many tried for or won office.⁶⁹

NGOs in the electoral arena: possible implications

When NGOs pursue grassroots empowerment strategies, do so over a good many years, and build very large organizations with memberships numbering well up into the hundreds of thousands, as has happened in Bangladesh over the past couple of decades, and when political democracy has emerged at local level, as has occurred there more recently, it is probably inevitable that there will be some electoral participation. Surely politically "conscientized" individuals will contest local elections, perhaps with the backing of their local NGO chapters. And it is likely that at least some one national NGO or other will be tempted to back its local chapters and/or members in such contests. It is scarcely surprising that these things have happened in Bangladesh.

⁶⁷ There are many studies of the Grameen Bank, virtually all of them laudatory. See Hossain (1988) and Rahman (1986b) for two good examples.

⁶⁸ See Lovell (1992) for a brief history and analysis of BRAC, which was founded in 1972, just after the Liberation War, as a relief agency, but soon moved into rural development activities. It is hard to compare rural development NGOs in terms of size, especially among the larger ones, because many of them are involved in a multiplicity of quite different activities. BRAC, for instance, now operates some 20,000 primary schools, as well as various employment generation and health efforts. Since people participate in many different ways, it is difficult to aggregate them all under any single rubric like "members." At any rate, however one tries to measure, BRAC is among the largest if not the largest NGO present in operation in Bangladesh.

⁶⁹ Information in this paragraph from interview at BRAC.

This process might be conceptualized as a "fifth generation" in NGO development strategies, adding to the four generations that have been proposed by David Korten - a "people's power" approach that is fueled not by revolution (which can now be regarded as a failed strategy) but by contesting elections.⁷⁰ The powerless thus take power not with the gun but with the ballot box.

But anything on this scale lies far in the future if ever. At most perhaps 1,200 or 1,500 NGO members might have gotten elected to union parishads in 1992, a very small fraction of the 43,000 UP members and chairpersons returned in the elections. Furthermore, given that the dominant classes are still very much there in the countryside and that NGOs by the most generous measure include not more than 15 or 20 percent of rural households in their fold, it would seem unlikely that many NGOs will be able to win power at the local level in their own electoral right anytime in the near future. A more realizable scenario would be alliances with other classes and parties in local elections, a development which Westergaard (1992) has found already emerging in her case studies of the 1992 poll. Indeed, a little reflection will show that, in the context of rural political economy sketched out briefly in Chapter II of this report, NGOs engaged in any serious work in the countryside over the near term will need at least the acquiescence of the dominant strata, if not their active support.

The question for this study, however, is not, "why do these things occur?" for the answer is reasonably clear: empowerment-focused NGOs (or their members) will get involved in electoral politics as a more or less logical extension of their other activities. Rather the questions for this assessment are, "what does NGO electoral involvement mean for civil society?" and "does such involvement - or should it - fit into a civil society strategy for supporting democracy?"

As we have seen above, most of the large, empowerment-oriented NGOs in Bangladesh have answered the last query in the negative, concluding that it is inappropriate for NGOs as such to involve themselves in electoral politics.⁷¹ Their reasoning has been both legal and practical. On the legal side, NGOs that wish to be registered as such (i.e., receive foreign funds) are forbidden from affiliating with a political party, a prohibition that by itself is enough to make most organizations shy away. And on the practical side, the NGOs realize that to enter the electoral lists is to become perceived as a political party and to run the risk of becoming treated as an opposition party by the winners, hence

⁷⁰ See Korten (1987; 1990: ch. 10). The first four strategies in Korten's scheme were relief and welfare; small-scale self-reliant development; sustainable system development; and people's movements.

⁷¹ In a strict sense, the GSS would answer this question similarly, holding that it is the autonomous GS structure that involves itself directly in electoral politics, not the macro-level GSS. But the distinction between the two is a hazy one at best, at least to outsiders.

ineligible for foreign funding or the special legal consideration that NGOs receive.

For this study, NGO involvement in electoral politics would imply at the minimum a significant change in how we have defined civil society. CSOs, we stipulated earlier, are organizations that are concerned with state policy but at the same time autonomous from the state. On that account, we rejected political parties, for their primary agenda is not to influence the state but instead to take it over and run it.⁷² Governance is not a function to be picked up when the state fails to do what it should, as with the BRAC primary education programs, for instance, but is rather a goal to be sought (on the good side) in order to implement a program or (on the bad side) for its own sake.

What the matter boils down to is the question, "is there a difference in kind between organizations that want *inter alia* to influence the state and organizations that want to win control of and manage the state?" So far in this CDIE assessment, the answer remains "yes." Parties may possess the *inter alia* characteristic in having other agendas beside political power (e.g., religion-based parties like the Jama'at in Bangladesh), but it would appear at this point in our evaluation that the urge to state power does mean a different kind of organization from the NGO or CSO that we are focusing on. However, we may well wish to revisit this issue after further country case studies have been conducted.⁷³

Religious opposition to NGOs

A second recent development at the micro level has been the emergence of a religious reaction to some NGO activities, most notably educational enterprises and income generation activities for females. In a wide number of pockets around the country, *mullahs* (Muslim village clerics) have issued *fatwas* (religious sanctions) against rural development NGOs, saying that female education is contrary to the *Qur'an*, that working with an NGO is an evil act for which a *touba* (penance) is required (or alternatively that divorce is mandatory), that only *kaffirs* (infidels) go to NGO medical facilities, that those who are employed by NGOs are Satans, etc. In many cases the anti-NGO impetus went further, damaging property. BRAC reported more than 1,400 of its 20,000 schools vandalized, with a good number of them burnt. Grameen Bank also came in for a good share of harassment from Islamic militants (see e.g., Hossain 1994).

⁷² See the discussion in Blair et al. (1994).

⁷³ This question of including or excluding political parties as part of civil society is a difficult one. In our discussions thus far both inside and outside USAID, it is the definitional issue that most frequently arises. Not the least of its dimensions is the question of what can be managed in a single CDIE assessment; including political parties would make the study much larger and more complex, possibly even crowding out attention to the organizations we have concentrated on so far.

This religious opposition to NGOs appeared to center on women's activities and had grown quite virulent in the months just before the CDIE team's visit to Bangladesh, and in consequence the topic was very much on the minds of the NGO and donor officials we interviewed. Explanations given for the hostility were varied but displayed several common themes:

- One political party, the fundamentalist-oriented Jama'at-i-Islami, saw political capital to be reaped in opposing these NGOs, and so motivated the *mullahs* to oppose them; one school of thought believed the Jama'at was building itself up in this way to become the "swing party" after the next parliamentary election (i.e., it would have the critical mass of MPs who could give a majority to one of the two major parties and thus form the government);
- Some newspapers, most especially the *Inquilab*, were inciting the hostility;
- The traditional power structure in many villages, which had long benefited from the patron-client relationships that had customarily kept the lower orders poor and illiterate, found itself perturbed at the spectacle of women earning their own incomes, and made common cause with disgruntled *mullahs* who were themselves unhappy with increasing numbers of women ignoring the dictates of *purdah* (the traditional Muslim seclusion of women);
- *Maliks* (landowners) and *mahajans* (money-lenders) in particular were distressed at so many of their former clients had begun to gain freedom from their clutches and so were inciting the *mullahs*;
- The whole thing was being bankrolled from the Middle East, most likely by fundamentalist Saudis.
- In the most bizarre explanation the CDIE team heard, Jama'ati businessmen thought they could move into the higher end of NGO income-generating activities like printing presses and cold storage warehouses by discrediting and intimidating the NGOs running them.

The most prominent themes voiced to the team were that the political hand of the Jama'at (which sought to build up its following in the countryside) was at work, along with the semi-feudal hand of village elites (who worried that their own followings were escaping from their customary control).

As for explanations, at least three factors seem to have been at work in promoting the religious reaction in the countryside. First there has been the general resurgence of devotion that has occurred in recent years throughout the Islamic world, a development that must be expected to have had some impact in a country that is more than 85 percent Muslim. Recent events next door in India have also played a role, particularly the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi crisis in Ayodhya, in which Hindu fundamentalist elements kept much of the country in political turmoil during the early 1990s. Chauvinism on the part of the majority Hindu community in India had its counterpart in the form of majority Muslim chauvinism in Bangladesh in 1992 and 1993, as for instance in the destruction of many Hindu

temples. It should not be surprising that some of this reaction may have manifested itself in harassment of women out of conformity with the traditions of *purdah*.⁷⁴

A second factor has been the resurgence of the Jama'at-i-Islam Party in Bangladesh in tandem with the re-emergence of its leader Golam Azam, who was elected party chairman in 1993 after having been exiled to Pakistan since the 1970s, under a cloud as an alleged collaborator during the Liberation War of 1971. Azam is still very much a controversial figure in Bangladesh politics, with some calling for his trial as a collaborator while others revere him as a charismatic leader. In any event, his resurfacing has helped make the Jama'at a political party that has to be taken seriously.⁷⁵

Third, and most significant in the context of this CDIE assessment, the reaction to NGOs appears to be a response to their very success in providing opportunities to the poor — and especially to women — for income and empowerment. Some response to these developments in a culture long characterized by hierarchy and control is only to be expected. This is especially the case in view of two recent developments. For one thing, BRAC has "scaled up" its education program to 20,000 primary-level schools (roughly one for every three villages in the country) and within them now has 80 percent female teachers and 70 percent female students.⁷⁶ The other contributing factor here is the GOB's abolition in 1991 of the *upazila* (county level, or about 200,000 inhabitants) governance system, which had been the centerpiece of the Ershad regime's rural development policy. The result of eliminating the *upazila* parishad has been that, although the *thana*⁷⁷ police and judicial systems are still in place, they are essentially directionless and consequently less effective than they might previously have been in maintaining order in the countryside.

⁷⁴ Pressure on the Hindu population is not a new story in Bangladesh. Each successive census since 1951 has seen a smaller proportion of Hindus in the population, down from 22.0 percent in that year to 10.5 percent in 1991. Even projecting lower birthrates for Hindus than for Muslims (as is the case in neighboring India), as many as 1.7 million Hindus "disappeared" from the Bangladesh population during the 1981-1991 period, presumably through surreptitious migration to India. See Ahmad (1994). But even though the theme is an old one, the recent high levels of religious fervor in Bangladesh are new. In an overall sense, the whole story is an exceedingly complex one and goes back in time well before the partition of British India in 1947 (see e.g., Rashiduzzaman 1994).

⁷⁵ For a brief account of the Jama'at and Golam Azam, see Khan (1992 and 1993).

⁷⁶ See Lovell (1992) for an analysis of BRAC's rapid expansion in education. Current data on schools are from BRAC itself.

⁷⁷ This is the older name for the county-level unit, now restored after the *upazila* abolition.

Response and significance

The events recounted above have been a source of much concern in Bangladesh, within the NGO and donor communities and in national politics in general. The NGOs affected, as well as ADAB on behalf of the whole NGO community have pressed the GOB to take a strong role in preventing violence, and the donors have raised similar concerns, for instance at LCG meetings. The press has also become concerned, and has published a number of analyses (e.g., Amin 1994; Hossain 1994; Moudud 1994) and editorials (e.g., *Daily Star* 1994; *Holiday* 1994) on the issue.

The government has been responsive. The GOB representative to the LCG was reported to have been very direct in saying that violence against women was "unacceptable." And the CDIE team heard that Deputy Commissioners (DCs)⁷⁸ in Bogra and Faridpur - two of the main trouble spots in this regard - had been directed to press charges against those responsible for attacking BRAC schools. But the GOB is no more monolithic on the subject of Islam in local politics than it is on any other issue. The representative to the LCG (a very high-level civil servant) was undoubtedly sincere, but he does not command the views of the entire bureaucracy, which as noted in the previous chapter has some anti-NGO elements (of whom at least a few might well not be averse to seeing the larger NGOs roughed up a bit). Moreover, while DCs can give orders to investigate, bring charges, and so on, the rural bureaucracy is often less than resolute in carrying out such instructions, particularly if it is not totally in sympathy with them. And given the current limbo of *thana*-level governance in Bangladesh, it is probably more difficult than usual to get effective directions transmitted down to that level, which is the base unit for police and judicial administration.

What then is to be done? In the shorter run, ADAB and the donors can press the GOB to be more assiduous in defending NGOs, the NGOs themselves can shore up their own security in the countryside. On the political scene, one can hope that the larger tides of politics will calm the urge to motivate village *mullahs* to incite their followers against NGOs.

But in the longer run, there are two serious issues to be addressed. The more practical challenge is that the development community must address the consequences of success for its empowerment agendas. When such approaches work and the rural poor gain some successes at achieving self-sufficiency and demanding accountability, those who see themselves adversely affected will react, sometimes violently. Rural power and status tend to be perceived as a "zero-sum game" in cultures like that of Bangladesh, and when one group advances its cause, others will see their own

⁷⁸ The Deputy Commissioner, whose office dates from the British period, is the GOB official at the district level (average 1.5 million population) in charge of all government activity within that area.

situation in danger of decline.⁷⁹ How to put across the message that rural life can be a "positive-sum game" in which all can advance should be accorded a high priority in future NGO and donor thinking.

There is also a more philosophical challenge to the development community in Bangladesh, which was very well put by one donor representative who said that the real problem is "how to find a way to be pro-Islam and at the same time not against female progress." It is of course not just Bangladesh but the wider Muslim world that must address this issue, but each Muslim country will have to answer in its own way. Moreover, it is an area where donors can be of only limited help. One hopes that no time will be lost in addressing it in Bangladesh.

Should donors (and/or NGOs) draw a line at support for organizations that sponsor candidates in local elections? If "empowerment" at local level is a strong plank in the rural development agenda, and if participation as candidates in Union Parishad elections is a logical outcome of successful empowerment, there is some serious thinking to be done. So far, most NGOs have decided against organizational backing for local members/beneficiaries as candidates for public office. Donors for the most part appear not yet to have considered this issue at all, apparently preferring to let the Bangladesh NGOs settle it. Possibly this approach will resolve matters, and it may well be that GSS heeds the cautionary warnings now being uttered by the other NGO heavyweights, but if GSS continues its support for GS members' candidacies, then the issue will have to be confronted and dealt with.

Whatever happens, though, the question of NGO involvement is not going to disappear, for successful empowerment of the poor in rural development will inevitably lead them to involvement in local politics, with or without NGO support. Political activity and mobility cannot simply be walled off from economic and social activity and mobility. This is the larger lesson to be drawn.

⁷⁹ There are many analyses of this phenomenon (e.g., Hartmann and Boyce 1983), but perhaps the best one remains Banfield (1953).

V. Donor roles

Bangladesh receives significant amounts of development assistance from both bilateral and multilateral donors, as is indicated in Table 2. Among these donors, the United States has ranked fourth or fifth in recent years -- clearly a major player in assisting Bangladesh, but by no means the dominant contributor. At least seven bilateral donors, the United States, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as well as at least two multi-laterals, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program are funding programs that support NGOs. Some of these donors have explicitly developed programs that deal with democratic issues which may also involve CSOs.

[Table 2 about here]

Donor activities supporting civil society

Two USG-funded organizations, the Asia Foundation (TAF) using USAID funding as well as some of its own and PACT, again using USAID funding are involved in issues related to the construction of civil society, TAF in a more direct fashion than PACT, although the work of both are relevant to building democracy. The most prominent private foundation working in the area of democracy is the Ford Foundation.

In the broadest sense, as we have noted earlier, donors have generously supported a set of development NGOs that have worked over the past several decades to alleviate poverty, promote participation by rural women, provide education and train the poorest sectors of the society in the necessary skills to be participant in society. They have also supported development and other NGOs in their efforts to organize themselves as a united lobbying force--as is the case with umbrella NGO organizations such as ADAB, CEN and VHSS, organizations discussed in Chapter III.

Donors such as Ford and TAF have also explored more direct support for democratic activities through NGOs. TAF has focussed on such areas as parliament, elections and the media as ways of strengthening democracy. It has supported NGOs working with Parliament (e.g. the Center for Analysis and Choice which is working to develop the skills of MPs as well as providing the necessary staff work to draft legislation), as well as the Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights. It is also supporting, as noted earlier, the Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communication, to build up professionalism in the media. They have provided support to CCHRB and Maonbik Shahajo Shangstha in the area of electoral

monitoring. Other TAF grantees include Ain o Shalish Kendra, BELA and the Madaripur Legal Aid Association.⁸⁰

Ford is working to strengthen the "interlocutor role" of the NGOs, supporting training in developing advocacy skills for key NGO leaders. It also has a focus on decentralization and local government. Currently Ford is supporting a study to examine the role that NGOs and other factors have on influencing the character of local development and governance in a sample of union parashads throughout the country. Altogether, Ford is arguably the most broad-gauged of the international donors in the democracy field; in recent years it has provided assistance *inter alia* to ADAB, Ain o Shalish Kendra, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, BELA, the Centre for Analysis and Choice, the Centre for Sustainable Development, CCHRB, the Madaripur Legal Aid Association, Nijera Kori, Oxfam (UK), and Proshika.

PACT, operating under a grant from USAID's Private Rural Initiatives Project, has also contributed to civil society in Bangladesh, but in a more indirect fashion than TAF or Ford. Its mandate has been institutional strengthening rather than civic participation, and in that dimension it has supported a wide range of organizations, including ADAB, BRAC, GSS and Proshika.⁸¹ This assistance has, it can be assumed, enabled the organizations supported to undertake civil society activities more effectively.

In addition to these American efforts, both public and private, a number of other donors have supported civil society activities, among them the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). Even the Asian Development Bank has begun to assist NGOs, though so far it has not ventured into the civil society realm (see O'Sullivan and Hickson 1992).

Most donors do not have a formal democracy or civil society component in their foreign aid plans for Bangladesh, though they have in many cases devoted considerable attention to this sector. TAF has for some time looked for areas where efforts directed at promoting and supporting democracy would be most effective. Ford is engaged in a similar process. They have made largely different choices with TAF focussing for example on the media, elections and parliament, Ford on local government and the necessary requisites to encourage advocacy. Other agencies are approaching the issue from other angles - the British ODA is concerned about corruption as an democratic distortion in the political process, UNDP and the Canadians on the issue of the environment. And it is worth pointing out that all of the agencies that support development NGOs

⁸⁰ Many of these activities are funded under a TAF project called Institutional Strengthening for Civic Participation. For a recent review of this project, see Schouzx and Choudhury (194).

⁸¹ For a recent evaluation of PACT, see Glaeser et al. (1993).

may well be indirectly supporting changes that may serve to promote democratic development, particularly regarding the ability of currently voiceless groups to express themselves more effectively.

Because of these factors, it would be very difficult to specify just how much each donor is contributing to civil society activities, just as it would also be hard to pinpoint how much each CSO is spending on civil society. To take just one example, GSS reported receiving support from DANIDA, ICCO (a Dutch group), NORAD, Oxfam (both the UK and USA branches), PACT and SIDA. Other CSOs have equally complex funding sources. Most of these grants are fairly small, less than US\$ 200,000, though some can range up beyond US\$ 1,000,000. Also, the pattern changes from year to year, as any given donor will support some particular NGO activity for a period of several years, then shift over to other NGOs and projects.

The multiplicity of donors and frequent changes in the NGOs and activities they support has some significant implications for an assessment of the kind being undertaken here. Insofar as donor impact on civil society is concerned, it does not make sense to speak of *w* donor assisting *x* CSO, to enable it to engage in *y* project, which has *z* effect on civil society. Instead, our analysis must be more along the lines of a group of donors supporting a number of NGOs, which are undertaking a bundle of activities that will have a series of effects on civil society.

Donor coordination

Regarding donor coordination, there are several levels of formal cooperation as well as efforts among the donor community in Bangladesh to maintain a dialogue among themselves. The "Paris Consortium" (officially known as the Bangladesh Aid Group) meeting, most recently held on 19-20 April, is an annual event that provides coordination among donors at the highest level, setting an annual agenda for giving that donors seek to meet as well as raising issues of conditionality and policy dialogue related to that assistance. The Local Consultative Group (LCG), which meets periodically in Bangladesh, provides another forum for discussion among the donors (mostly the major official donors along with several others like Ford and TAF), who gather to discuss mechanisms for coordinating their activities. The LCG has subgroups which cover areas of special concern, for example the environment sub-group led by the Canadians which has coordinated donor activity in this area.

At least one smaller sub-group, the Like-minded Group (consisting of Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden), has formed to coordinate the efforts of its members. It has cooperated on several studies (e.g., North-South Institute 1990) and has also acted in concert at the Paris meetings.

VI. Summary and issues

In this chapter, we will sum up the findings of our report on civil society strategies pursued in Bangladesh, try to assess the extent to which they have strengthened democracy, and raise a number of broader issues about the place of civil society in an embryonic democracy like Bangladesh.

A summary of findings

This report has endeavored to present a picture of civil society activity along several dimensions in Bangladesh, as indicated in Table 3. As outlined at the beginning of Chapter III, our CDIE evaluation design envisioned civil society strategies as falling into two basic types or "basic strategies." Basic strategy 1 (BS 1) deals with improving and maintaining the "enabling environment" for democracy, or the basic "rules of the game" for conducting the business of a democratic polity. Basic strategy (BS 2), focuses on supporting CSOs at work in particular sectors, such as women's issues, natural resource management, professional societies and the like.

[Table 3 about here]

The table in Appendix A charts the range of civil society strategies that were identified at the outset of this CDIE evaluation, and Tables 1 and 3 show the strategies that we were able to concentrate on during our field visit to Bangladesh. Of the eight strategies we looked at, three come under BS 1 and five under BS 2. Our findings are summarized briefly below.

Human rights. In Bangladesh, CSOs in the human rights field are the most obvious instance of an enabling environment strategy, and have been at work for some years, both during the Ershad regime and in the current democratic era. They have developed good systems of information gathering and have nurtured ties to the media and so can get their message out to the public. In other words, they are a going concern. But it should be noted that they are necessarily dependent on the international arena to be effective, not for funding (though they do receive foreign assistance) so much as for reactions that will pressure the GOB to maintain human rights standards. For the power of human rights agencies, after all, is the power to point fingers at the state and embarrass it before the court of world opinion. Only if the GOB knows that inattentiveness to human rights will result in unpleasant revelations from such sources as Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the State Department's annual report, and that this will lead to pressure from world opinion in general, and from donors responding in turn

to that pressure in particular, will it respond to and rectify human rights abuses.

The media. Under the democratic dispensation now in place in Bangladesh, the print media have blossomed in terms of what they can and do print. The range of topics has broadened significantly and the willingness to criticize the government has deepened considerably. There are still some restrictions, as for instance a widespread feeling within the media that criticism of the military would be unwise, and the GOB may still be showing some favoritism in placing government advertisements. But for the most part the media are essentially free to do what they wish.⁸²

As argued earlier in Chapter III, the media, like human rights, are absolutely essential to strengthen and maintain democracy in Bangladesh, as is the case universally. If the state is to be held accountable, the citizenry must know what it is doing and failing to do. It is in this area that Bangladesh needs significant improvement. Professional standards need serious upgrading in such areas as financial and environmental reporting, where as in many areas the press has essentially been dependent on publicity handouts in the absence of any real ability to develop stories and analyses on their own. And investigative reporting is virtually non-existent in Bangladesh, as is the case in most similar countries; there is much to be done here. The Press Institute of Bangladesh has improved things somewhat in raising the level of knowledge in a number of spheres, but, being a GOB agency, it cannot be reasonably expected to develop excellence in investigative reporting. It is to be hoped that the newly created NGO, the Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communications, will make a serious contribution in this latter sector.

Umbrella NGOs. In a country where perhaps 15-20 percent of the rural population participates in some NGO activity, and the larger NGOs have vast operations in place (e.g., 20,000 BRAC primary schools),⁸³ it must be expected that relations between government and the NGO community are not always going to be smooth. And in addition, two further factors contribute to tensions between the two sectors. First, most of the money spent by these NGOs, particularly the larger ones, comes from foreign assistance which in the minds of many GOB officials would otherwise be going to their own operations. Second, the NGOs are widely regarded as significantly more efficient (in using their money) and effective (in achieving development objectives) than their GOB counterparts.

⁸² These observations, of course, do not apply to the broadcast media, which continue to be a state monopoly, as in most nations in the region.

⁸³ These figures should be seen in the overwhelmingly rural context of the country. Even in 1991, Bangladesh was just over 80 percent rural, so that 20 percent of rural families would be roughly 16 percent (i.e., 80% x 20% = 16%) of overall population. The 20,000 BRAC schools would cover just about one-third of the country's 60,000 villages. (cf. BBS 1993: 75, 84).

Over the years, these strains have produced attempts on the part of the GOB to seek greater control over NGOs. The NGOs on their part have been able to resist these incursions, largely by supporting ADAB as their agent in dealing with the GOB and by convincing foreign donors to make representations with the GOB. While the NGO community might have weathered the vicissitudes of 1992 and 1993 (when the GOB's posture became for a time especially unfriendly) through the interventions of interested donors alone, the role of ADAB was certainly important, perhaps critical here. And certainly in the future, donors cannot be counted upon indefinitely to take up the NGO cause whenever it is threatened.

The business community. The growth of an entrepreneurial element within Bangladesh, combined with pressure from the donor community to deregulate and open the economy, has led to the rise of a business sector in Bangladesh with vital concerns regarding government policy. And if the country is to become part of the world economy, that element can only be expected to grow. Accordingly, it makes sense that the business community would sponsor its own CSOs to represent their own interests to the state. In sectors like the finished garment industry where growth has been explosive in the last decade or so and there are a large number of firms in business, the need to organize relationships with the state are even greater. Indeed, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association may well be a harbinger of many similar organizations to come, as the country moves into other sectors of activity like sports equipment, small appliances and electronic goods.

Such organizations do contribute potentially to pluralism by adding to the number of players in the political arena, and this appears to be happening already in Bangladesh, with the business community becoming the first significant addition to the political economy in a long time, as discussed in Chapter III. But there is a downside to this also, in that the ability of the business community to meet the rent-seeking appetites of the other major groups shown in Figure 2 may work more to close the political arena than to open it. That is, a combination of collusion and venality may make the political economy less open to other influences rather than more so.

Family planning. Over the years, family planning NGOs have had some impact on the GOB, helping to make it more amenable to birth control strategies at the policy level and contributing toward the training and professional orientation of GOB officials at the field level. But this influence has been almost exclusively a technocratic one, which has been operative regardless of whether the incumbent regime was democratic or authoritarian. In other words, family planning NGOs have had some civil society impact on government, but this has not been related to the presence or absence of democracy.

This analysis should not be taken as criticism of the family planning NGOs in Bangladesh, for neither the family planning organizations themselves nor the donors supporting them have had

any design of strengthening democracy. Nor is there any reason why they should do so. Perhaps in the future, family planning may become a politicized issue in Bangladesh, as it has in a number of Western systems. If so, the NGOs in this sector may well become deeply involved in the kinds of controversial policy issues that are the stuff of democracy in other countries. But thus far this has not happened in Bangladesh.

Advocacy NGOs. One logical outgrowth of the empowerment approaches taken by a number of the larger NGOs in the rural development area would have to be the launching of a an explicit initiative to champion the cause of their constituency on the stage of public debate. Thus far empowerment has become a reality mainly at the individual and household levels as program participants make their own way in the economic and social dimensions to become self-sufficient, but some of the more activist NGOs have pressed this onto the political scale at the local level, encouraging their chapters to demand accountability of the state in providing services (e.g., public health) and guaranties (e.g., legal sharecrop-per rights).

But this advocacy approach could be enlarged to the national level as well, as is currently being attempted by GSS in its efforts to assemble an advocacy program that will embrace both macro and micro level campaigns, and will include such diverse elements as popular theater, legal aid cells, media relations, and literature dissemination.

In addition, Proshika has also begun an advocacy effort, but its venture is more a think-tank enterprise narrowly aimed at decision-makers in Dhaka. Along somewhat similar lines the Centre for Policy Dialogue has opened a series of high-powered seminars organized to enlarge the public debate on critical issues.

Given the trajectory of the rural development NGOs in Bangladesh in the 1970s, one might have expected something like the GSS advocacy program to come along sooner or later. In the 1980s, however, there was some tendency to pull back a bit from the conscientization agendas of the previous decade in favor of a more modest approach. A sense of risk in the environment of the Ershad regime may have had something to do with this conservatism, but a larger factor was likely the attainment, after years of trial and error, of economic/social approaches to empowerment that seemed to work. Having developed a formula that looked successful within a context of grinding and endemic rural poverty, it must have made good sense to pursue it in place of the untested political adventurism that an explicit advocacy strategy offered. In any event, the approaches of the 1980s suggested less advocacy than earlier rhetoric had put forth.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This is the authors' interpretation of the argument put forth in two thoughtful studies of NGOs in the 1980s (Hasan 1985; Hashemi 1990). It is also the view of quite a number (though not all) of the NGO officials interviewed by the CDIE team.

In the 1990s, GSS seeks to reverse this trend and to focus explicitly on political advocacy along a broad front to press the agenda of its rural poor constituency. It is a bold approach. Will it work? To put things another way (and hopefully without too much violation to the integrity of either effort), can what succeeded in a modest way in widening the debate and making the GOB more accountable for its actions with respect to the FAP now work in a much larger context on behalf of the rural poor? It may be that the present democratic dispensation will provide the appropriate environment for such a strategy, or it may prove that GSS is pushing the advocacy envelope too far for the present political order to sustain. We cannot even say yet that the jury is out on this initiative, for it is just getting under way. But however things go, the experience will produce some valuable lessons for civil society and democracy, with implications for both Bangladesh and elsewhere.⁸⁵

A second question is a much ordinary one. Given that the GSS advocacy program will champion the causes of a wide number of constituencies -- women, landless laborers, sharecroppers, aspirants to settle on government land, etc. -- whose issues will float to the top of the agenda? All the constituencies have valid cases to be taken up, and to take them all up simultaneously would be to dissipate whatever organizational strength has been built. Will those groups whose causes have been put on hold keep up their support? Keeping everyone on board will surely be a challenge.

The Proshika and CPD enterprises should more easily fit into the present political universe in Bangladesh. The first will presumably offer well-grounded policy prescriptions, while the second will endeavor to provide a forum for debating policy alternatives. If the current polity endures, both should find a useful place.

Environment. The environmental area was far and away the most exciting civil society activity the CDIE team was able to look at. It combined bottom-up citizen concern with CSO mobilization efforts at the macro level, investigative work and publicizing initiatives from research institutes, an interested press, and international networks drawing in European NGOs from the green movement there. Together this informal alliance was able to greatly widen the public debate on the Flood Action Plan generally in Bangladesh and on people's participation in flood control efforts particularly.

How much genuine change of heart there may have been on the part of the state is hard to gauge, but it does seem fair to say that the water management sector now feels considerably more pressure to be accountable for what it does than was ever previously the case. A model is now available for assembling campaigns to increase public accountability from the state. The recent series of two-day workshops organized as the National Environmental Management Action Plan is evidence that the GOB is taking public participation in

⁸⁵ For a thoughtful critique of the GSS advocacy program, see Wood (1994: ch. 20) and Wood et al. (1994: ch. 4).

setting environmental policy much more seriously than it has in the past.

Local level politics. A number of NGOs in Bangladesh, especially larger organizations have aimed at empowerment of their members or beneficiaries as part of their strategy. The emphasis on empowering people to gain control over their own lives has changed over the years, ebbing and flowing within the programming of different NGOs. In recent years, with some organizations, empowerment has been seen more as an individual goal (whereby a person becomes capacitated to function economically and socially on an independent basis), while in others it is more group related (the local unit achieves an efficacy within its milieu).

This kind of empowerment certainly has political implications, as for instance a village-level unit (or group of such units) of an NGO might decide to insist that the local school teacher actually keep his required hours, taking its case to the union or thana level to pressure the government to enforce its regulations on providing education.

But in the 1992 union parishad elections, empowerment spilled over into electoral politics, as many local NGO members contested for office, seeking to spread their economic and social progress into to the field of local governance. In some cases, local NGO chapters ran their own candidates for local office. In the instance of one NGO - GSS - this was with the blessings and support of the national level organization, while with some other NGOs the local unit participated in the election without the support of the national organization, perhaps even without its knowledge. More commonly, national NGOs advised their members that they could run for office as individuals, but could not receive any organizational support at any level for their candidacies.

In the event, several hundred NGO members did get elected to the union parishads - perhaps as many as 1200 or more. This is a small fraction of the 43,000 UP members and chairmen returned to office in the country as a whole, but it is significant for what may be the beginning of a trend. Indeed, as NGOs have an ever greater cumulative impact on rural life over time, it should be anticipated that successively more of their members get elected to local office. And this in turn is sure to have some effects on the nature of local politics.

Some major issues

There are several larger issues that emerge from this initial study of civil society in Bangladesh and raise questions at the more general strategic level about supporting civil society as a means to strengthen democracy. These issues should have relevance for the remaining case studies in this CDIE assessment as it moves forward.

A defective polity. Political parties have not been effective in providing popular sovereignty, except in the crudest electoral sense of according a popular mandate to a particular party for leading the government, and even that has only been fairly tested on two occasions (the elections of 1970 and 1991). It very much remains to be seen whether there will be two free and fair elections in a row (the next one is constitutionally due within five years of the 1991 poll).

The problem is a longstanding one in Bangladesh and relates to the fact that historically there has been no sense of comity between political parties, in large part no doubt because there has never been until the present a period when politics existed in a "normal" atmosphere, with a party in power and a "loyal opposition." Thus there is no experience with parliament as a forum for debate. Rather the polity has been seen as winner-take-all system, with the parliament perceived as a piece of machinery to be dominated by the ruling party with little or no role for opposition or minority parties.⁸⁶ The parties out of power, accordingly, had no recourse except to demonstrate, protest and agitate in hopes of forcing the system into a crisis that would hopefully produce a new political dispensation in which they might gain a place.

Nor is the public to be consulted, at least not in between elections. The ruling party sees itself as having a five year mandate to govern however it wishes.

The result of all this is that interparty politics in the post-Ershad era have deteriorated, perhaps inevitably, to a "politics of the street" similar to that of the 1980s, with an opposition mounting demonstrations and disruption, and the regime countering with shows of resolution and force. The opposition hopes for an end game like that of the 1990 anti-Ershad movement (in which the regime abdicated on finding it no longer had military support), while the BNP ministry hopes for a scenario similar to earlier opposition efforts of the 1980s, in which the government prevailed through a combination of force, guile and fragmented opposition parties.

Events occurring around the time of the CDIE team visit in March-April 1994 did not bode well on this account. The year began smoothly enough in a constitutional sense with the opposition Awami League winning mayoral elections in the larger municipalities, the sort of wavelet that might be expected against the party in power after three years of office at national level. Unfortunately, both parties appear to have put far too much prestige and investment into a subsequent by-election for a parliamentary seat, with the result that its disputed result sent the political system into something of a frenzy. A *gherao* (picket around the central secretariat buildings) and two *hartals* (general strikes) followed

⁸⁶ For example, there is a committee system in the Parliament, with more than 40(?) committees appointed. But thus far they have not proven effective in providing fora for public debate on policy issues.

in quick order, with opposition demands for an immediate national election and an *ad interim* caretaker government, countered by the government showing force and resolve in the face of "irresponsible opposition elements."

In sum, political parties at this juncture appear to be neither institutionally nor constitutionally prepared to deal with each other as govt and opposition(s) in a system with rules that has accepted public roles for all. In consequence, such other institutions as the judiciary, the bureaucracy and civil society will have to play a stronger role to provide political stability and accountability to the constitutional order.

Civil society as filling the gap. The problems with the political parties are not easily soluble. In the words of one observer, they amount to "a manufacturer's defect" that is debilitating the mechanism's function, but for which there is no chance for a manufacturer's recall, at least in the foreseeable future.⁸⁷

In such a defective polity, with political parties not serving as instruments for popular sovereignty except perhaps at election time, can civil society carry the load? To attempt an answer, we must go back to the question posed in connection with Figures 1 and 2: "What is civil society in Bangladesh?" It can be argued that, in recent years, the business community has entered the scene as a significant player, but what is there beyond that? Given the problem raised in Chapter II with coopted constituencies (professional groups, labor, students) and "missing" elements (market-oriented farmers and agricultural underclasses), what else is there?

NGOs seem the only answer at present, insofar as they act as CSOs. Is this enough to flesh out a pluralist polity beyond the few entrenched groups now in the arena? The entrance of the business community will not do much in this regard, for their instinct will be toward cooperation and collusion with the groups already there. Can other groups enter the fray successfully? Is environment an entering wedge or vanguard, or is this a "motherhood" issue that has exceptionally widespread appeal itself but will be an impossibly hard act to follow by others? And even if several others do follow (say, human rights, women's groups), will their efforts be enough to begin introducing serious pluralism to the political system? We don't really know, but we do know that right now it's arguably the most promising game in town so far as strengthening democracy is concerned.

We should note in this context that foreign donors and even the CSOs themselves do not necessarily see their role to be one of functioning as civil society actors or as democracy supporters. But they can assist and perform that part nonetheless, simply by carrying on their present efforts as providing assistance and

⁸⁷ These ruminations were offered by Prof. M. Rashiduzzaman at the CDIE critique session in Rosslyn on 13 June 1994.

promoting agendas respectively. The players in democratic politics, in other words, do not have to self-consciously see themselves as working to better the overall public weal any more than do Adam Smith's participants in a market economy have to perceive themselves as serving the public good.⁸⁸

Civil society as a talent siphon. The argument can be made that NGOs in the longer (and maybe even the middle) run are detrimental to democracy in a country like Bangladesh, because they draw off talent that otherwise would have gone into the political parties and thereby helped building an enduring polity in a more direct and efficacious fashion. Thus foreign donors are actually playing a negative role in supporting NGOs.

There would appear to be at least two problems with this argument. First, it assumes a *ceteris paribus* condition with respect to socio-economic development, i.e., that things would proceed more or less as they are now in the absence of NGOs at work. In fact, NGOs have become such major engines of development that this can not be assumed. In their absence development, especially rural development, would undoubtedly be significantly less, for two reasons: their direct contribution would not be there (NGOs would not be reaching the 15-20% they are not estimated to be serving); and the GOB would not feel the pressure it now does to perform at least at some bare minimum level in the rural development field (it does little enough now in the rent-seeking state - it would do much less in the absence of an NGO community at work).

Secondly, the argument assumes that an influx of talent and dedication at the lower levels of the political parties would transform and build those opportunistic and rent-seeking organizations into champions of the public weal. Instead, it is probably more likely that the culture of the parties will mould the character and values of any young people entering their ranks than that a generation of neophytes will reshape the parties.⁸⁹

CSO limits. If appropriately nurtured, civil society can surely make up some of the defects of the party system by directing a steady stream of policy demands to the state. It can also be effective in pressing the state to be accountable. But even the most vibrant civil society cannot substitute for political parties, for by their nature CSOs are particularistic, answering the needs

⁸⁸ Provided, of course, that the assumptions (of competition, access, etc.), that are inherent to both models are in fact being met.

⁸⁹ The BRAC experience with Union Parishad participation some years ago could be cited once again here, in which NGO members getting elected to local government councils soon began to become local politicians concerned with patronage and pelf rather than stalwart tribunes for the rural poor.

It should be noted in connection with this discussion that political parties in Bangladesh have scarcely had any chance to develop as healthy institutions during the rapid downhill slide of the polity in the early 1970s or during the domination of the military over most of the period since then.

of small, individual constituencies. It is the political party that must aggregate the wide variety of demands into a program for managing state power (or offering an alternative program if it is in the opposition).⁹⁰ CSOs can help here, but they cannot carry the load of the political party unless they compromise and dilute the very focus and concentration that is required for them to become successful CSOs in the first place.

Overexpectations for democracy? Is the idea that a less developed country can push economic growth and democratic politics asking for too much? Could it be that perhaps some countries a bit further along the path of economic development like Thailand, CDIE's sister case study in this first phase of assessments and a place where per capita income is almost US\$ 1,600 and adult female literacy is reckoned to be around 90 percent, are better able to take on the challenges of democracy than nations like Bangladesh, where per capita income is estimated to be just over US\$ 200 and adult female literacy is thought to be a bit more than 20 percent?⁹¹ If such distinctions were to be made, Bangladesh would surely fall into some category of "too soon to attempt democracy."

Current thinking in USAID and most other donors, however, holds that economic and democratic rights should go in tandem, with each reinforcing the other.⁹² Further, it can be argued that if the people and the political leadership of Bangladesh have chosen to embark on a democratic course, then donors whose own political systems are democratic should assist them in the effort.

On a subordinate level, can a case be made for a division of civil society labor, such that whereas Thailand and other "advanced developing countries" possessing the appropriate enabling environment for democracy can fruitfully pursue BS 2 in providing support for CSOs pursuing their own particular agendas, the poorer LDCs should stick to BS 1 and work on what amount to pre-conditions for civil society by concentrating on human rights, corruption and the like? Possibly after several more country studies, the CDIE team will wish to entertain such suggestions, but for now it appears that both strategies can prosper in the LDCs, if Bangladesh is any guide.

Consequences of empowerment. The participation of NGO members in the union parishad election of 1992 in many ways constitutes a logical follow-on to the empowerment agendas pursued by a number of NGOs. Even those organizations not consciously taking up an empowerment approach nonetheless have capacitated their members by enhancing their capabilities to deal with the world around them.

⁹⁰ The political science-oriented reader of a certain age will recognize the hoary formulations of Gabriel Almond (1960), but in the judgment of the CDIE team, his interpretation is of enduring utility.

⁹¹ Data from World Bank (1993: 238).

⁹² See, e.g., the USAID strategy paper (USAID 1994) and the OECD summary of members' policies relating to democracy (DAC 1993).

It is not surprising, then, that such people have begun to run for local public office, for once empowerment has begun to take hold, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to separate political participation from economic and social participation in the wider world. Still, there are some decisions to be made on the part of NGOs involved, as well as donors, for the state is bound to become somewhat apprehensive at the prospect of direct NGO involvement in governmental bodies at any level. Should tendencies toward political participation be encouraged as part of a civil society strategy? Should it be discouraged? Ignored?

A second consequence of empowerment - whether it has been consciously pursued or is more a by-product of other NGO activities - is the religious reaction in some areas to NGOs. The violence perpetrated against NGOs in quite a few parts of the country has to be dealt with, and fairly soon at that.⁹³ But what does the reaction and the response to it imply for civil society strategies? Both the electoral and the backlash dimensions of civil society need much more exploratory analysis.

Pluralist dangers. How do we know the darker side of pluralism won't overpower its brighter aspects, that "demosclerosis" won't overcome competition, to the public detriment? Rausch (1994) finds this is happening in the American political system, while Mancur Olson (1993) would insist that it's been that way for a long time, in that particular interests will always be undermining the public interest. These dangers may well lie in the future for Bangladesh, or perhaps problems with corporatism, in which apex organizations purport to represent the interests of large constituencies (e.g., labor, small-scale industries, professionals, etc.) but in fact indulge in collusion to enrich their leadership echelons and defraud their memberships (see, e.g., Wiarda 1994).

Even so, it can be argued, one has to start somewhere in trying to support democracy, and if not with civil society, then where? Again, a country like Bangladesh would seem to have few other candidates for strengthening democratization.

The key role of the NGO umbrella. Given the periodic ebb and flow of relations between GOB and the NGO community, something like ADAB is essential for their survival. Donors can carry their water to some extent (e.g., at Paris meetings), but in the longer run they need their own intermediary agent to represent them with GOB.

The critical function of the press. If NGOs are to get their message out to the public, and if attempts to infringe on human rights (or suppress NGOs) are to be thwarted, there absolutely must be a press ready to report these things. This means basically

⁹³ Since the CDIE team's visit in March-April 1994, fundamentalist reaction against NGOs has increased significantly, becoming included as an element in macro-level politics in Dhaha, for instance as part of a series of demands that were a centerpiece in a *hartal* conducted in the summer of 1994. For more on this issue, see Blair (1994b).

networking and linkages between NGOs and the press. Investigative journalism lies some steps beyond that, but it must be expected to take some time in gestation and so should also be nurtured.

Advocacy from top down and bottom up. Generally, advocacy among CSOs has begun at the national level and worked down the organization. But the FAP 20 story shows from experience and the GSS approach wants to show by design that a bottom-up approach can work also. Proshika may well be following in the same direction. What lessons are there here for civil society strategies more generally?

Table 1. Civil society strategies currently under way in Bangladesh

	Civil society organization	Basic strategy type	Strategy category	Substrategy type
1	Human rights groups	BS 1. Enabling environment		2. Human rights
2	Print media organizations			3. Democratic integrity
3	Umbrella NGOs			4. Democratic pluralism
4	Business associations	BS 2. Organizational support	A. Participation	6. Democratic capitalism
5	Local participation			7. Social mobilization
6	Rural poor empowerment NGOs		B. Accountability	8. Human resources
7	Family planning			9. Sustainable environment
8	Environmental advocacy groups			

NOTE: To fit the strategies typologies in the last three columns into the CDIE civil society evaluation design schema, see Appendix A. The typology offered here follows the order of the table in Appendix A.

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**Table 2. Foreign aid disbursements to Bangladesh for major donors,
1986-87 to 1989-90
(figures in millions of US\$)**

Country or agency	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
Bilateral donors				
Canada	100	68	119	104
Denmark	35	71	17	51
France	42	20	6	37
Germany (Federal Rep)	63	42	57	50
Japan	332	315	340	335
Netherlands	37	63	52	43
Norway	44	34	25	35
Sweden	20	50	31	37
United Kingdom	46	37	44	52
United States	124	143	95	100
Multilateral donors				
Asian Development Bank	166	179	299	274
European Community	15	68	67	47
United Nations system	51	117	66	58
World Bank	251	330	297	463
All other donors (bilateral and multilateral)	269	103	153	123
Grand total	1595	1640	1668	1809

Source: BBS (1993: 407).

Table 3. Civil society strategies and democracy in Bangladesh

BS type	Civil society sector	Nature of activity	Relation to democracy	Problems
1	Human rights	Put pressure on regime to improve/maintain human rights	Needed to strengthen/maintain democracy	Dependent on international reaction to human rights abuses
1	Media	Publicize CSO activities; expose state wrongdoing	Needed to strengthen/maintain democracy	Need to upgrade professional standards; investigative journalism non-existent
1	Umbrella NGOs	Represent NGO community to state	Needed to protect NGOs against hostile state	Dependent upon NGO consensus and solidarity
2	Business community	Represent constituency to state	Adds to pluralist polity	Potential collusion; may serve more to squeeze out other voices than to widen pluralist arena
2	Family planning	Influence state policy and practice toward more effective family planning	Technocratic relationship with state	Effectiveness unrelated to democracy
2	Rural poor advocacy	Build broad-gauge advocacy coalitions to demand accountability	Adds a coordinated voice for the poor	Too explicitly political? Agenda setting—whose issues float to the top?
2	Environment	Press state to protect environment, widen participation in planning	Adds public interest constituency to policy debate	Dependent on foreign NGOs, donors for clout
2	Local level politics	CSO members participate in local elections with/without CSO support	CSO involvement in governance	A logical consequence of empowerment efforts?

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Figure 1

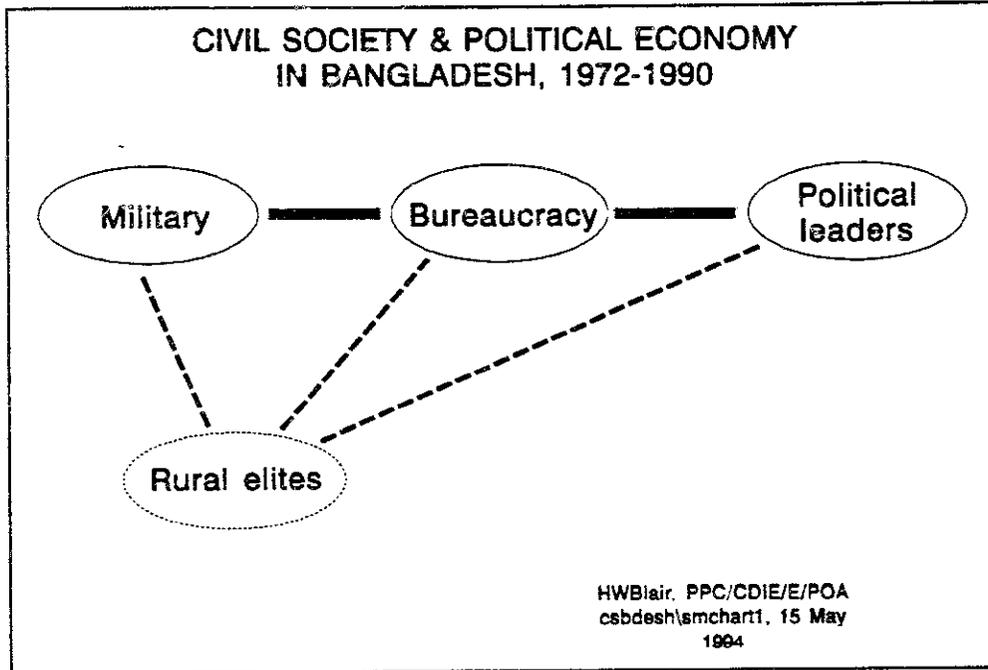
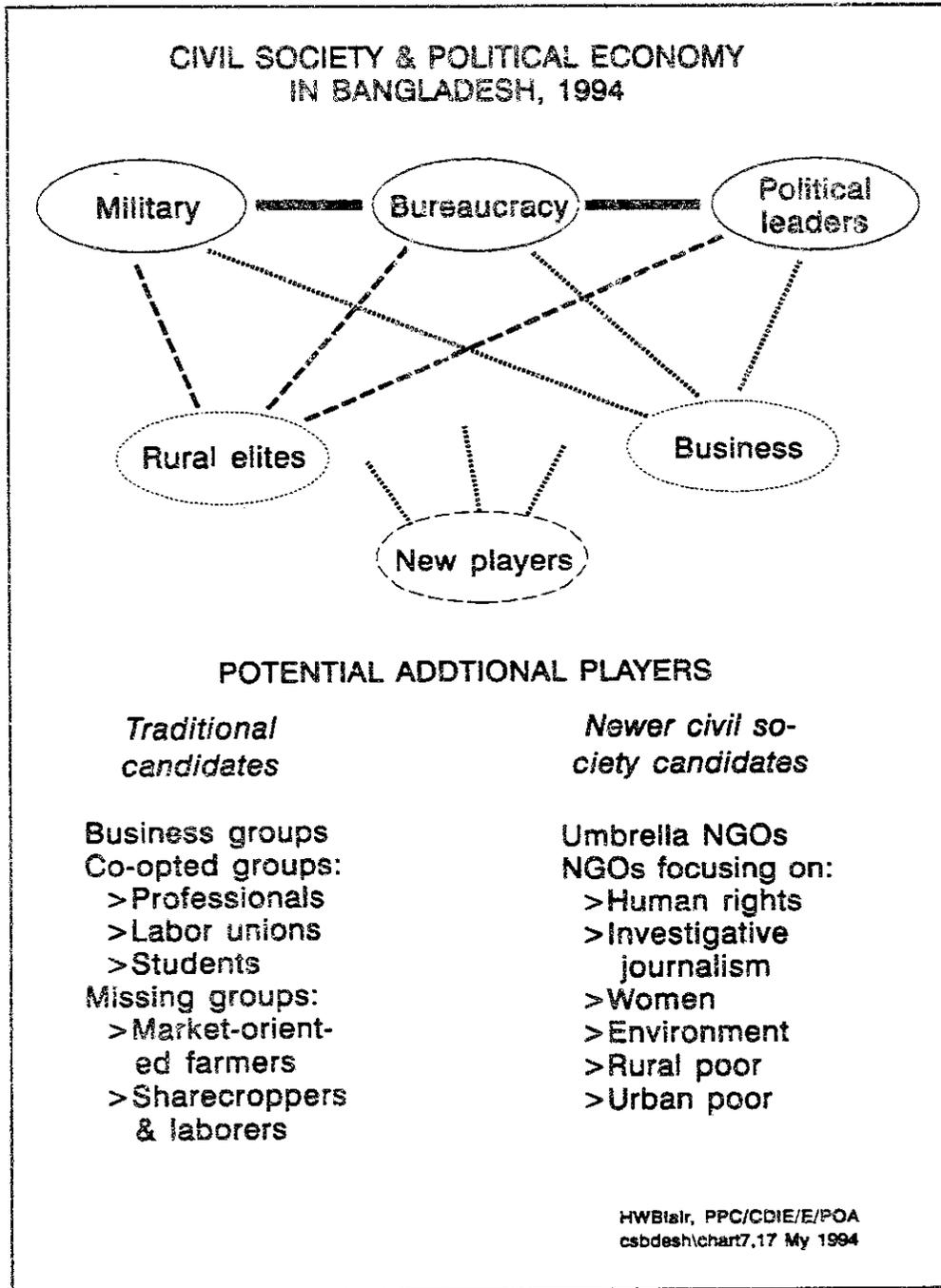
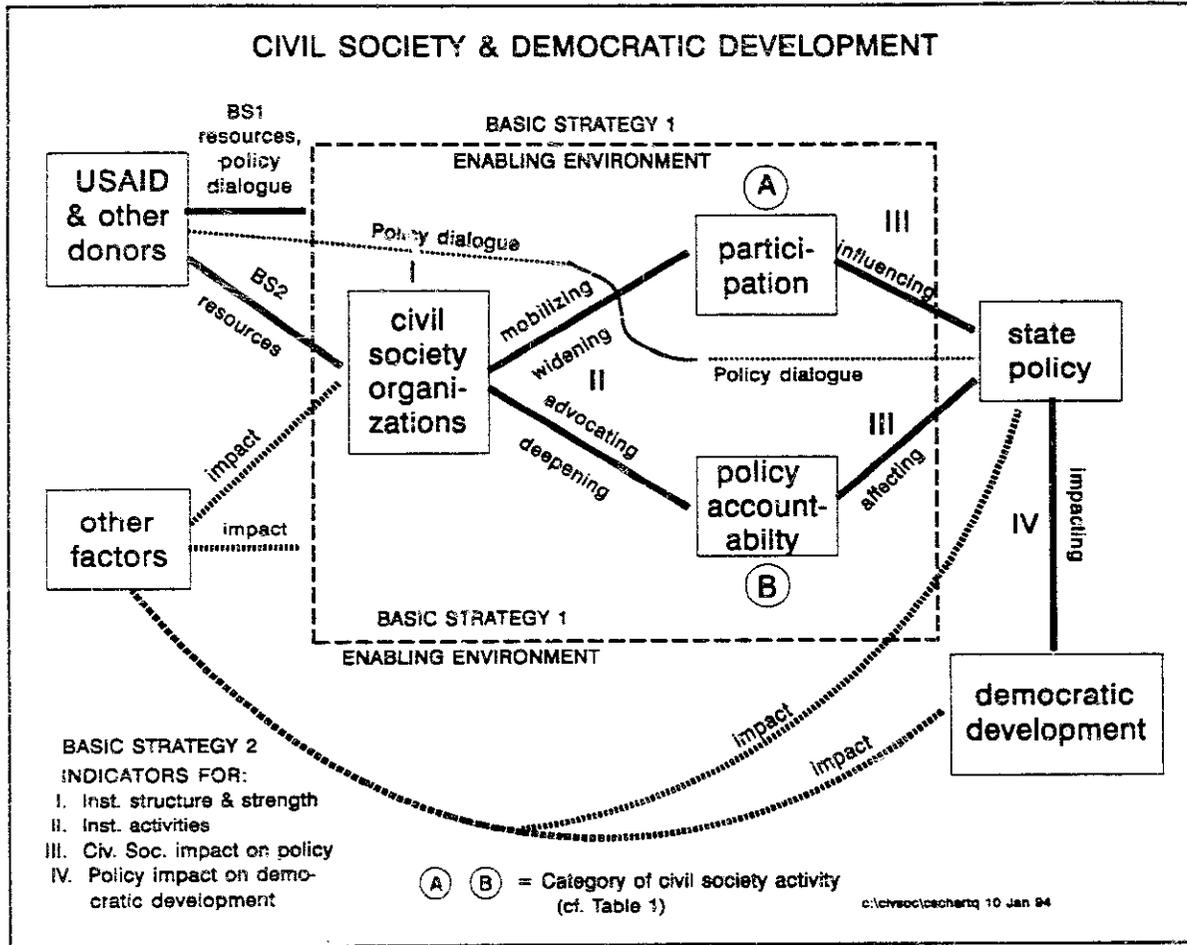


Figure 2



Appendix A



Source for Appendix A figure and table: Blair et al. (1994).

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Appendix A

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES INCORPORATING CIVIL SOCIETY

1	"Basic Strategy" & category (cf. Figure 2)	Basic Strategy 1: Enabling environment				Basic Strategy 2: Organizational support				
						Category A: Participation			Category B: Policy accountability	
2	TYPE OF STRATEGY	1 DEMOCRATIC CULTURE	2 HUMAN RIGHTS	3 DEMOCRATIC INTEGRITY	4 DEMOCRATIC PLURALISM	5 DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION	6 DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM	7 SOCIAL MOBILIZATION*	8 HUMAN RESOURCES	9 SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT
3	The development problem	Unsustainable democratic system	Human rights abuses	Unaccountable & corrupt government	Unrepresentative government	Autocratic state with minimal participation	State control of economy, "dirigiste" rigidity	Marginalized groups	Counterproductive state policy on PQLI NGOs	Natural resource mismanagement
4	Program purpose	Stable democratic polity	Decline in abuses	Corruption decline	Expanded body politic	Widening political voice	More inclusive market economy	Group empowerment	PQLI improvements	Natural resource decline reversed
5	Longer term goal	Sustainable democratic culture	Secure human rights	Integrity, predictability in government	Pluralist polity	Transition to democracy	Sustainable economic growth	Equal opportunity society	Healthy & productive society	Sustainable natural resource regime
6	Project elements	Civic education	HR monitoring HR reporting HR advocacy	Investigative journalism, political reporting	Organization building	Support all NGOs (some will become CSOs)	Market-oriented & producer organizations	Adult literacy & conscientization	Umbrella NGOs	NR monitoring NR reporting NR advocacy
7	NGO examples	LWV-groups, election watch groups	In-country HR advocacy groups	Investigative journalism NGOs	Professional associations, peasant groups	All NGOs	Chambers of commerce, water user associations	Women's rights, minority rights groups	Health sector umbrella NGOs	Environmental advocacy CSOs
8	Motivation for groups	Democratic norms	Human rights	Journalistic professionalism, whistle-blowing	Representing membership	All motivations	Self-seeking	Self-assertion	Service delivery	Public goods
9	EOP outputs	Adherence to democratic practices	Effective HR CSOs operating	Active media	New groups pressuring state	Some CSO influence on the state	Interest group lobbying	Micro- & macro-level advocacy	CSOs influencing state policy	User group & environmental group advocacy
10	Performance measures	Acceptance of democratic values (surveys)	HR improvement	Corruption exposed	Increased representation at all levels	Movement away from autocracy	More players in system, more state responsiveness	Increased minority representation	Spatial & class equity in PQLI	Decreasing environmental degradation
11	Issues & problems	Sustaining momentum	State opposition	Rent seekers' opposition	Continued elite domination of polity	Government hostility	Gridlock, "demoscclerosis"	Ethnic tension, majority backlash	Urban bias	Collective action issue
12	Possible responses to problems	Continual reinforcement	International publicity	Public pressure	Stronger non-elite advocacy CSOs	Lower CSO advocacy profile	Executive autonomy	Constitutional polity	Rural focus	User groups

Acronyms: CSO = civil society organization
NGO = Non-governmental organization

EOP = End of project
NIS = Newly Indep. States
HR = Human rights
NR = Natural resources

LWV = League of Women Voters
PQLI = Physical quality of life index

* This strategy should also be included under "B: Policy accountability"

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Appendix C. CDIE team interview schedule in Bangladesh

	DATE	TIME	INTERVIEWEES
We	30 Mar	08:30	Richard Halloway, Director & Aroma Goon, Assoc Director, PACT office
We	30 Mar	11:30	Nawshad Ahmad, Pgm Officer, Asia Foundation
We	30 Mar	3:30	Karl Schwartz, Pgm Director, Gary Robbins, Asst Pgm Officer, Jan Rockcliffe-King, USAID/Dhaka
Th	31 Mar	12:30	Gary Robbins, USAID/Dhaka & Andrew Haviland, 2d Secy, US Embassy
Fr	1 Apr	3:00	Nayeemul Islam Khan, Centre for Responsible Journalism
Sa	2 Apr	8:00	Fr Richard Timm & Ms Rosalyn DaCosta, Commission on Justice & Peace
Sa	2 Apr	10:00	Tawhidul Anwar, Director, Press Inst of Bdes
Su	3 Apr	11:00	Rahat Khan, editor, Ittefaq newspaper
Su	3 Apr	3:30	Allan Foose, Population Pgm Dir, USAID/Dhaka; carried over to next day @ 8:15 a.m., same venue.
Mo	4 Apr	10:00	David Chiel, Pgm Officer, Ford Foundation
Mo	4 Apr	2:00	Kim Hunter, Kim McQuay, Nick Langton, Resident Rep., Kim Hunter, Kim McQuay, both reps., Asia Foundation
Mo	4 Apr	4:00	Rashida Chowdhury, Director, Assoc Dev Agencies of Bdes
Tu	5 Apr	10:00	Atiur Rahman, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
Tu	5 Apr	2:00	Helen Gunther, Agricultural Development Officer; Zahir Sadeque and Peony Choudhury, Office of Food & Agriculture, USAID/Dhaka
We	6 Apr	10:00	Coordinating Council on Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB), Mahbub Hasan Siddique, Exec Dir, & Br Jarlath D'Souza, Pres
We	6 Apr	3:30	Mahfuz Anam, editor, Daily Star
Th	7 Apr	10:00	Mats Svensson, Director, SIDA
Sa	9 Apr	11:00	Rehman Sobhan, Executive Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue

Sa	9 Apr	1:00	Mohiuddin Ahmed, Managing Director, University Press Ltd.
Sa	9 Apr	4:30	Prof B. K. Jahangir, Political Science Dept, Arts Bldg., Dhaka University
Su	10 Apr	8:00	Eamoinn Taylor, Dy Head, Aid Mgt Office, ODA @ British High Commission
Su	10 Apr	10:00	Reidar Kvam, Asst Representative, NORAD
Su	10 Apr	12:00	Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, Barrister, ex-pres. Bar Assn of B'desh
Su	10 Apr	2:00	Bert Diphoorn, First Secy Devel (Water Sector), Dutch Embassy
Mo	11 Apr	8:30	Rokeya Sultana, Concerned Women for Family Planning
Mo	11 Apr	11:30	Shapan Adnan, Research & Advisory Services
Mo	11 Apr	2:30	Milan B. Paul, Family Planning Service & Training Institute of Bdes
Mo	11 Apr	6:00	Hans Visser, Team leader, FAP-20, C.P.P. Guest House
Tu	12 Apr	9:00	Salehuddin Ahmed, BRAC
Tu	12 Apr	11:30	Dr Nasir Uddin, VHSS (Voluntary Health Services Society)
Tu	12 Apr	2:00	Mizanur Rahman, Family Planning Assn of B'desh
Tu	12 Apr	3:30	Doris Capistrano, Ford Foundation
Tu	12 Apr	5:00	Redwan Ahmed, MP, President, & Md Nurul Haque Sikder, Bdes Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Assn
We	13 Apr	8:30	Salim Samad, Centre for Sustainable Development
We	13 Apr	1:00	Frank Young, Deputy Director, USAID Mission, Dhaka
We	13 Apr	3:00	Mohiuddin Farooq, Bdsh Environmental Lawyers Assn
We	13 Apr	11:00	Khushi Kabir, Coordinator, Nijera Kori, and Chairperson, ADAB board
We	13 Apr	7:00	Terry Collingsworth, AFLI representative

Th	14 Apr	1:30	Bengali New Year Holiday: trip to Sonargaon village. Interviews with Union Parishad politicians. Interview with FP and NGO officers.
Fr	15 Apr	10:00	F. R. Mahmud Hasan, GSS (Gono Shahajjo Sangstha)
Sa	16 Apr	8:00	Jorge Barenstein, Consultant
Sa	16 Apr	10:00	Atiq Rahman & Salimul Haque, Centre for Advanced Studies
Sa	16 Apr	12:00	Abu Abdullah, B'desh Inst of Devel Studies
Sa	16 Apr	12:00	Afternoon trip to NEMAP (Natl Env Mgt Action Plan) workshop at Manikganj
Sa	16 Apr	4:00	Prof. B. K. Jahangir seminar @ Arts Bldg, Dhaka University
Su	17 Apr	9:00	Nurul Huda, Project Officer, Asian Development Bank
Su	17 Apr	11:00	Qazi Faruque Ahmed, Executive Director, Proshika
Su	17 Apr	2:30	Ross Bigelow, USAID mission
Su	17 Apr	3:00	Sara Breault & Brian Proskurniak, First Secretaries, Canadian High Commision
Su	17 Apr	4:30	Rashid Mahmud Titumir, Environmental editor, Daily Star
Mo	18 Apr	8:00	Mike Constable, Deputy Resident Representative; Sophie de Caen & Jennifer Topping, Asst. Resident Representatives, UNDP Office
Mo	18 Apr	10:00	Dr. A. M. M. Shawkat Ali, Secretary, Telecommunications
Mo	18 Apr	12:30	Zarina Khan, David Chiel, et al., Ford Foundation
Tu	19 Apr	9:00	Hamidul Huq Majnu, Executive Director, Ummayan Shahojogy Team (UST)
Tu	19 Apr	11:30	Ms Salma Sobhan, Ain o Shalish Kendra
Tu	19 Apr	3:30	Donald Bishop, USIS
We	20 Apr	10:30	Trip to Tangail, to see FAP 20, Concerned Women for Family Planning, possibly also an FPAB Ctr in Gopalpur

Th 21 Apr 10:30 Briefing session with US embassy staff (per
Phil Carter)

Th 21 Apr 2:30 Dirk Frans, HEED office, Mirpur

Th 21 Apr 4:00 Richard Holloway, PRIP

Fr 22 Apr 12:30 Kim Hunter, TAF, lunch