



# BANGLADESH\*

## Introduction

Community learning centres (CLCs) are now drawing increasing attention in many developing countries as special institutions for adult and non-formal education. These are literacy and skills training centres that allow all those who are no longer or have never been in primary education to go through some learning process, be it literacy, livelihood trades/vocational skills training, training in primary health care, protection of civil rights, community welfare, environmental conservation, or leadership development. The present study of CLCs in Bangladesh aims to look at the activities of CLCs in the country, their management and linkage activities and their impact on the lives of their members. It has been conducted through both desk research and a field survey. The desk research comprised a review of the existing literature on CLCs in Bangladesh, followed by the processing and analysis of data generated from the field survey. This survey consisted of questionnaires distributed to a sample of CLC members, area studies, focus group discussions, case studies and interviews of a selected number of people at the grassroots level.

One of the major problems in the study was the lack of information about the number of different types of CLCs that actually operate in various locations of the country. The problem appeared more complicated when we discovered that the NGOs offering a huge range of socio-economic services, although not of the same scale and dimension in all areas and locations, experienced confusion in understanding about CLCs. CLCs in Bangladesh are almost invariably the creation of NGOs that also simultaneously carry out other activities. The local branches or field units of many NGOs in the country treat their programmes of literacy or training in income-generating activities as those of CLCs.

For the field survey work, the present study selected 25 CLCs located in different *upazilas* (literally, sub-districts that are local administrative units comprising a number of unions which are the lowest tier of local government formed with a number of villages) of the districts of Kurigram and Bogra (Rajshahi Division), Satkhira and Khulna (Khulna Division) Patuakhali (Barisal Division), Chittagong (Chittagong Division) and Dhaka, Netrokona and Jamalpur (Dhaka Division). These CLCs are sponsored by foreign NGOs such as ActionAid, national-level NGOs such as South Asia Partnership (SAP) and Nari Maitree, or local-level NGOs such as Concerned Women for Family Development (CWFD) and *Rupantar* (Transformation). The number of members at a CLC varies from 40 to 60. Ten members (distributed more or less evenly between men and women) from each selected sample CLC were randomly picked for interviews. In all sample locations, at least 10 persons representing members of the local public, such as social workers, schoolteachers, local government representatives, the business community, and workers of NGOs or voluntary organizations, were consulted. Although members of CLCs formed by the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) make up the major part of the CLC population in Bangladesh, the sample population described above did not include these members. This was because the principal investigator of the present study had recently conducted a special study on the CLCs of DAM and their impact on the lives of the rural people [Rahman, S. M. M, 2005]. The present report incorporates the findings of that study.

In the Bangladesh context, a CLC is a local institution of functional literacy outside the formal education system for disadvantaged people of rural and urban slum areas. Such centres are usually set up and managed by community people, with some funding and technical support from a local, national or international NGO. CLCs in Bangladesh usually do not use local facilities and buildings such as primary schools, mosques or temples. Instead, they operate in separate single-room structures with limited sanitation and other facilities. CLCs provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of the quality of life. Members of a CLC are usually homogenous in terms of their social and economic status. Within most CLCs, more than 60 percent of the members are women. CLCs are designed to function as the venue for education, information and services for improvement in the quality of life. The various CLC activities for development of the community people fall into the following areas:

- (a) **Functional literacy and continuing education:** diverse learning opportunities; remedial measures for children in difficulty; community library

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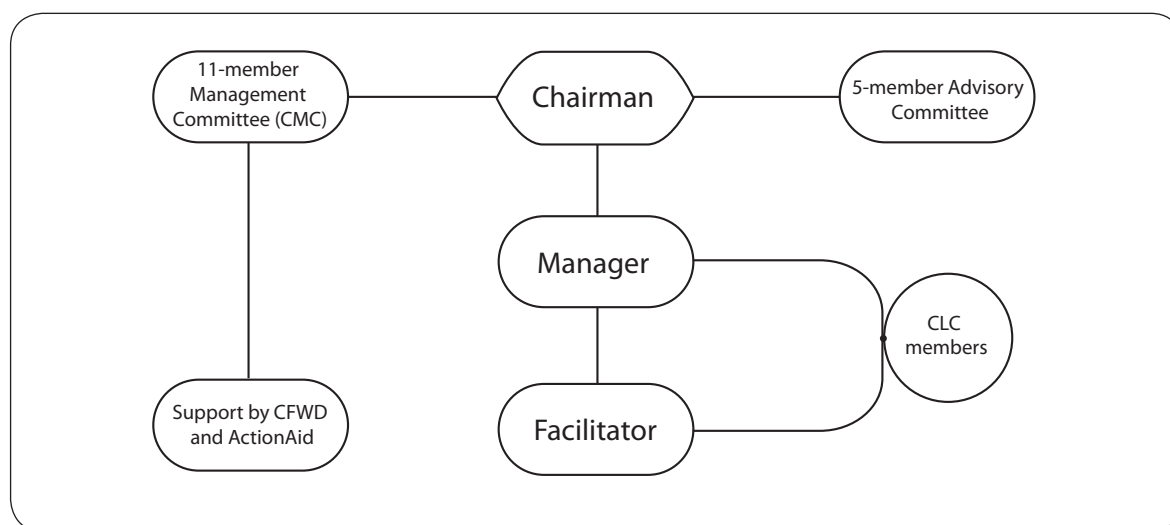
- (b) **Skill development and human resource development:** training in livelihood skills, income-generating activities (IGA) and leadership; savings and credit services; workshops; inoculation, early childhood care (ECC) and agriculture extension services
- (c) **Community development services:** exchange of ideas; activities for community development, resource mobilization; discussion of issues related to family and community; venue for extension and development service providers
- (d) **Awareness and cultural development:** raising awareness about education, health care, family planning, human rights, gender and environment; socializing and recreation

CLCs sponsored by different agencies and located at different places have some variations in programmes and mode of operation. They have a wide variety of functions, all leading to the creation of an overall environment for community development. CLCs vary in type and activities, but their main focus is more or less the same. For example, BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), a leading NGO in Bangladesh, has *Kishoree Kendra* (a CLC for adolescent girls attending regular schools and those who have never attended school or are dropouts). BRAC also has *ganokendras* (people’s centres), the target population of which comprises illiterates, semi-literates, neo-literates and literates. These CLCs provide non-formal education (NFE) and continuing education services, including reading facilities and textbook lending, skill training and socio-cultural activities. CLCs sponsored by Save the Children USA are called *lokakendra* (folk schools). They serve pre-primary, secondary-level and out-of-school children with limited literacy skills and provide services such as continuing education, social awareness development, library facilities, skills development, and information dissemination. Other NGOs such as Plan Bangladesh and ActionAid Bangladesh also have CLCs of their own names that have more or less similar programmes/activities for disadvantaged out-of-school children and youth. However, the NGO that operates the largest number of CLCs in Bangladesh is the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), which calls its CLCs *ganokendra* (or GK, people’s centres), that are based on village libraries and are usually established in an independent small house (almost invariably a one-room structure). GKs provide services such as literacy (adult and non-formal education), continuing education, training in life skills and IGA, awareness and leadership development, and access to information and resources. In 2004, DAM had about 1,050 CLCs in the country. DAM operated nearly 64 percent of them with local support and the remaining 36 percent in collaboration with other NGOs.

## Management and Operation of CLCs

The responsibility for overall management of a CLC lies with a CLC Management Committee (CMC), which is elected for a period of two years. Members of a CMC (including its chairman) are representatives of the local community. Before 2000, according to practice in Bangladesh, CMCs had from five to seven members. At present, the CMC of a DAM-organized CLC has from seven to thirteen members. The following is the management structure of a typical CLC in the country:

**Figure 1: CLC Management Structure (Monoharkhali Development Centre)**



The day-to-day CLC activities are managed by a community worker (facilitator or manager), who is usually a local young woman. She is overburdened with responsibilities such as registering members, keeping the CLCs open for the use of members, teaching literates and neo-literates, collecting fees and donations, carrying out training and other programmes, keeping records (minutes of meetings, daily attendance, membership fees, training registers, financial transactions, etc.), keeping the premises and its surroundings clean, reading out and explaining stories from books and newspapers, and making home visits to ensure that CLC members attend. A community worker, thus, has problems in managing time for providing continuing education services (which is sometimes treated as a secondary function), organizing vocational training, conducting issue-based discussions, carrying out social development and awareness campaigns, and developing linkages with government agencies and NGOs. CMC members could take these responsibilities, but in reality CMCs are merely titular bodies and are practically inactive. CMC meetings are not regularly held in many places, and CMC members (which include local primary school teachers, knowledgeable farmers, community leaders, doctors or businessmen) often remain absent from CMC meetings. There is little evidence about rapport between CLCs and these groups of local people for carrying out training, awareness and motivation activities.

The responsibility for supervision of CLCs, assistance to community workers, and arranging monthly meetings, training and other programmes lies with the supervisor of the sponsor NGO. The supervisor visits CLCs two or three times a month. During these visits, the supervisor usually checks registers and discusses problems with community workers and the CLC members, the performance of CLCs and ways to improve it. He/she also consults with local community members on all these issues.

## **CLC Linkages and Networking**

The linkage activities of CLCs are useful in many aspects, such as funding or manpower, equipment or technical support, training in income-generating activities and the registration of CLC members in enterprise development programmes. Also important are savings and/or loans/micro-credit programmes of other agencies/organizations, the marketing of products/services of CLC members, and the access of CLC members to the extension and social welfare services of various government departments.

CLC members are associated, as members or in other ways, with other local organizations. According to some estimates, more than half of the CLCs had links with micro-credit agencies such as ASA (Association for Social Advancement), BRAC or the Grameen Bank, and about 80 percent of CLCs receive support from other organizations. The support comes in the form of training, financial help and the supply of labour, construction materials, fixtures and books. Evaluation reports, however, say that the scale and magnitude of support from other organizations, especially from governmental organizations, is still very low. There is also scope for expanding the network functions with NGOs and government offices for meeting CLCs' needs.

## **Community Participation and Ownership**

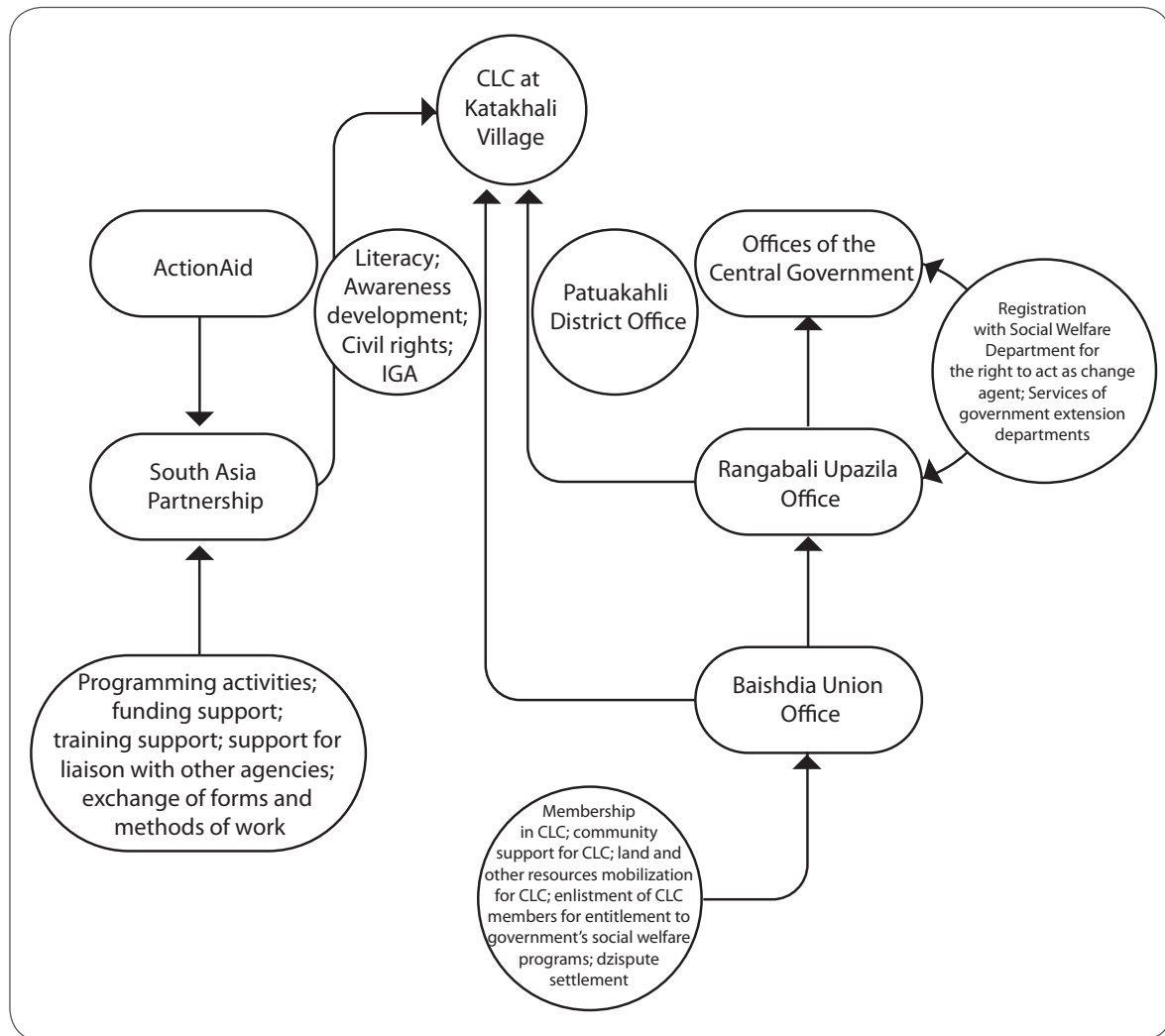
Experience suggests that the participation of community people in the process of CLC operations is not always voluntary. In addition, participation does not automatically create the feeling of ownership or the sense of belongingness to CLCs. One of the main reasons is the lack of ability and confidence of community people to take certain responsibilities in the management of CLCs. The CLC members, however, have a feeling of ownership, and they justify it in many ways. For example, they say that the CLC is a forum for getting together and working together, CLCs teach them how to live better, CLCs have been formed by the members themselves, the CLC is a useful forum for discussion of their problems, CLCs teach them to earn more, or that they can learn many new things through CLCs. At the same time, CLCs have yet to earn credibility in terms of their value as service providers. In many places, people strongly lack the feeling of ownership and feel that it is not worth paying for the services they offer.

## **Costs, Financing and Sustainability of CLCs**

The three main sources of CLC funding in Bangladesh are contributions from the headquarters of the sponsor NGO, donations by local people, organizations and institutions including local government bodies, and monthly fees paid by CLC members. However, the financial support provided by sponsor organizations



**Figure 2: CLC Operational Linkages (Katakhali Village Development Centre)**



is often not adequate for the proper functioning of CLCs. In addition, fees paid by members and donations by local community people are not sufficient to cover the deficits. Records relating to costs and financing of CLC programmes are not readily available in CLC offices or at the offices of their sponsor organizations. Findings from personal interviews with DAM CLC personnel suggest that DAM provides approximately one-fourth of the total cost of construction of a modest CLC house and the remaining part of the cost is met by contributions from local community people. It has been estimated that the total annual cost of operation of a CLC of the existing type in a rural location of Bangladesh is about Tk 30,000. If a CLC has about 100 members on average, the cost per member (per year) stands at Tk 300.00. This estimate is based on having a one-room CLC house on free land, with a token honorarium to a minimum number of CLC staff with minimum furniture and equipment.

The sustainability of CLCs in Bangladesh has become a major concern because of the lack of interest and commitment of the local communities in many places. People of the local community, including members of CLC management committees, are not very enthusiastic about contributing funds for CLC operations. Moreover, CLCs in the country can only expect (but not rely on) the availability of some allocations from the government budget, since CLCs have yet to get recognition from the government as useful literacy institutions. They, however, get some funding and technical assistance support from local NGOs, which are expected to continue providing this support so long as they themselves have prospects of getting funding assistance from the government or external donor agencies for their welfare activities.

One of many useful suggestions is to link the issue of CLC sustainability with improved income-generating activities for households. Better livelihood training for members and increased access to credit can create opportunities for additional income. This can motivate members to contribute more to financing CLCs. CLCs can generate resources through a system of sharing profits from trades and businesses promoted by them. For this purpose, the CLC may sign contracts with its programme beneficiaries. For the CLCs to be sustainable, they must have visible impact and be developed and treated by local communities as institutions for which they feel responsible.

## Benefits from CLC Activities

The following are the major observations on the nature and extent of benefits from CLC activities:

- Benefits are not equal for all; members who regularly take part in CLC activities are benefited more than those who do not.
- NFE provided by CLCs is quick and relatively effective; the literacy training makes about one-third of the CLC members literate at Level A (Grade Five) in three years, which in a regular primary school would take five to seven years.
- Functional literacy provided by CLCs enables members to orient themselves to practical situations and the practice of learning by doing at CLCs is their training in livelihood trades (income-generating activities), as well as in managing household accounts and even the accounts of small businesses.
- CLCs develop the capacity of their members to take better care of the family and children and increase their awareness about society and the environment.
- CLCs act as a forum where members can discuss their problems and try to find out ways to solve them.
- Active participation in CLC programmes/activities empowers members to be able to solve problems at personal, household or community levels and enhances their confidence, community consciousness and social integrity.

Evidence from the field suggests that CLCs have significant impacts on the lives of the target beneficiary people:

- (a) There is an increase in community awareness about the importance of education, primary health care, sanitation, environmental conservation, civic rights and participation in community activities.
- (b) There is a re-orientation of the mindset from seeking jobs in enterprises of other people or in government offices/departments to self-employment in income-generating activities.
- (c) Poor people, especially disadvantaged women, are empowered to acquire more confidence in decision-making.
- (d) There is an increase in incomes and improvement of the quality of life through newly acquired training and livelihood skills.
- (e) The status of CLC members in their families and communities is significantly enhanced.

Members of CLCs consider that the CLC is a useful organization for them. A field survey of 220 respondents revealed a number of reasons why they think so, and the findings are presented in Table 2. However, a significant number of CLC members are not satisfied with CLC services. More than three-fourths (about 77%) of the CLC members interviewed in the survey expressed their dissatisfaction, and the proportion of dissatisfied CLC members was higher among the male members than among the female ones. The reasons for dissatisfaction include the following: CLCs do not provide adequate services; they do not give money (credit); they cannot solve all the different problems of the members; they lack skilled/trained staff and because a CLC often has only one person to look after everything, she or he cannot perform all the tasks; they do not provide the training required; members undergoing training cannot use it effectively because of problems in funding and marketing; CLCs do not work well and do not take proper care and/or organize follow-ups.

**Table 2: CLC Usefulness by Skill-building and Activity**

Skill		Activity	
CLCs increased:		In CLCs the members can:	
Confidence	17	Read books	41
Income	32	Watch TV	27
Savings	33	Learn from useful discussions	13
Awareness	44	Get training	10
Literacy Skills	56	Discuss problems	44
		Develop mutual understanding	3
		Enjoy gossiping	18

Source: Field survey

Note: Not all responded to the question and some respondents indicated multiple reasons.

## CLCs Provide Literacy Services

CLC literacy programmes help in retaining and upgrading neo-literate literacy skills and in improving their lifestyles. However, members' irregular attendance in CLC literacy activities significantly scales down the effect and impact of programmes. Although achievements in reading, writing and accounting skills remain far from the intended results of an ideal CLC, the CLC achievements in these areas are better than those attained by learners under government-run NFE programmes. Evidence on this count from the field survey conducted for the present study is presented in Table 3. The table shows that a little more than one-fourth of the respondents did not attain any literacy skill after joining CLCs, but nearly one-third could demonstrate literacy equivalent to Grade One, about one-eighth equivalent to Grade Two and one-ninth to Grade Three. About one-tenth of the respondents reported that CLCs helped them in completing education at the secondary school certificate level or higher.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Acquired Level of Literacy/Education**

Attained literacy/education of equivalent grade /certificate)	Number		
	Male	Female	Total
None (did not attain literacy/education)	17	42	59
Grade one	28	40	68
Grade two	8	19	27
Grade three	7	4	11
Grade four	3	3	6
Grade five	4	7	11
Grade seven	3	4	7
Grade eight	2	7	9
Grade nine	2	1	3
Secondary School Certificate	6	9	15
Higher	2	2	4
Total	82	138	220

Source: Field survey

## CLCs Create Opportunities

Many CLCs provide training in income-generating activities, but only a few provide savings and credit services. CLC members, especially women, significantly benefit from the combination of training and loan services, which improve their livelihood. At present, the credit support by CLCs is very negligible, but CLC members can get credit from banks, cooperative societies or NGOs operating in the locality or its surrounding area. A special study on GKs belonging to DAM conducted in 2001 found that membership in CLCs could create a difference in the income of individuals: the income of CLC members at the personal level more than doubled – from Tk 319 to Tk 728. However, at the family level, the change is insignificant as Table 4 illustrates.

**Table 4: Average Monthly Income of CLC Members as Compared to Others**

	CLC members		Non-CLC Members	
	Current	Previous	Current	Previous
Personal level	728	319	1,066	821
Family level	3,634	2,970	3,690	2,816

Source: FREPD, 2001

## CLCs Develop Social Awareness and Empowerment

The information, counseling and resource services offered by a CLC include the dissemination of information related to community development, counseling for acute problems such as contamination of water by arsenic, the observance of nationally important days, and discussions of important news or about market prices or the environment. CLCs also conduct issue-based discussions and act as forums for socialization and the development of social awareness.

CLC members think that their participation in a number of CLC activities enhances their status in the community. Evidence suggests that CLCs have some contribution to the development of people's awareness about the need for conserving the environment and creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding in the community. However, the changes in various aspects of the lives of the rural people, including the CLC members, cannot be attributed exclusively to interventions by CLCs. CLC interventions only reinforce the process, in which many other parties, such as the government, mass media and NGOs, have a substantial contribution.

In 2001, the Foundation for Research on Educational Planning and Development (FREPD) conducted a survey of CLCs. The survey revealed that the social awareness and survival skills of neo-literate CLC members were higher compared to those of non-members (see Table 5). The survey for the present study also found that CLC training had an impact on members in terms of changing their occupation. CLCs had contributed to change in the occupational status of the women, especially those who had been housewives before. Self-employment was the predominant form of new occupation for these women (see Table 6). Also, it is interesting to observe that none of the 220 respondents had any business activity before they joined the CLC, but after they joined, 17 among them got involved in business as their new occupation.

**Table 5: Level of Awareness and Application of Skills by CLC Members**

		% neo-literates in CLC member households	% non-CLC member households
Capability to write letters	Male	61	51
	Female	43	35
Married couples adopting family planning		73	58
Households having access to sanitary latrine		85	69
Households using soap after defecation and before meals		65	51
Membership of any organization		35	15
Female respondents to which people come to seek advice		61	43

Source: FREPD, 2001



**Table 6: Incidence of Change of Profession by Gender**

Profession	Number of Respondents in the Given Profession			
	Before joining CLC		At present (after joining CLC)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Job in a govt./private office	1	6	4	16
Business	14	-	18	17
Agriculture	30	1	31	2
Wage labour	16	2	15	1
Housewife/housekeeping	4	101	1	62
Self-employment (IGA)	3	2	13	51
Unemployed	10	14	0	8

Source: Field survey

An earlier evaluation of DAM-operated CLCs [Rahman, S. M. M, 2005] shows that, thanks to participation in CLC training programmes on income-generating activities (and presumably loans taken from CLCs), 23 percent of the regular CLC members could increase their monthly income by amounts up to Tk 700, 40 percent by amounts between Tk 701 and 1,000, about 27 percent between Tk 1,001 and 1,500, and 10 percent between Tk 1,500 and 2,000. These observations about the impact of CLCs in terms of their contribution to members' increased incomes have been confirmed in the survey conducted during the present study. It found that about 70 percent of the CLC members could increase their household income by amounts up to Tk 1,000 (see Table 7). The corresponding figure was estimated at 67 percent in the previous study, which also recorded that literacy, development of social and community awareness, and increase in the monthly income of CLC women members contributed to the enhancement of their status in their families. Furthermore, 204 among the 220 respondents reported improvements in their housing conditions and 203 reported improvement in their food, clothes and health care. The improvement in living conditions as indicated by the respondents was of different degrees (see Table 8), although figures show that some improvement had taken place for nearly 85 percent of the CLC members.

**Table 7: Incidence of Increase in Monthly Household Income and Expenditure**

Range of increase in monthly average household income	Number of households in the range (N=190)	Range of increase in monthly average household expenditure	Number of households in the range (N=172)
Less than Tk 100	11	Less than Tk 100	51
Tk 100 – Tk 200	35	Tk 100 – Tk 200	29
Tk 201 – Tk 500	68	Tk 201 – Tk 500	49
Tk 501 – Tk 1,000	37	Tk 501 – Tk 1,000	26
Tk 1,001 – Tk 1,500	16	Tk 1,001 – Tk 1,500	10
Tk 1,501 – Tk 2,000	12	Tk 1,501 – Tk 2,000	4
Tk 2,001 and above	11	Tk 2,001 and above	3

Source: Field survey

**Table 8: Improvement in the Living Conditions of CLC Members**

Indicator	Number of Respondents Claiming Improvement of Different Degrees								
	Male			Female			All		
	high	moderate	low	high	mod	low	high	mod	low
Housing conditions	33	30	17	55	49	20	88	79	37
Food/clothing/health care	32	41	7	61	62	10	93	103	17

Source: Field survey

Table 9 shows that CLC members are better off in terms of their children studying in schools and receiving required vaccinations. The members are also more active in practicing family planning, participating in decision-making processes and attending public meetings. The table also presents some evidence of how disadvantaged people are being gradually empowered. CLCs enable members to change their attitudes through increasing their awareness, confidence and the ability to serve their own families, as well as their communities. They now aspire to live a life with human dignity. Thus, CLCs play an important role in empowerment of the poor and of women. Table 10 shows the position of the 220 field survey respondents in this regard.

**Table 9: Position of CLC Members by Awareness Indicators**

Indicator	In families with member of a CLC	In families that do not have a CLC member
% of school age children enrolled in primary schools	76	46
% of children aged <6 taking all vaccines	85	50
Contraceptive prevalence rate	78	43
% of households which consult qualified doctors	100	39
% of women participating in household decision process	63	39
% of women who attend public meetings	63	35

Source: FREPD, 2001

**Table 10: Empowerment of CLC Members through CLCs**

Area of achievement	Number of male/female respondents by the degree of achievement							
	Very High		Moderate		Low		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Increased social awareness	40	88	35	43	7	7	82	138
Enhanced status of the family	23	56	47	63	12	19	82	138
Increased self-confidence	48	99	32	35	2	4	82	138
Learning more about health care	56	96	23	39	3	3	82	138
Increased ability to participate in community development activities	22	55	52	56	8	27	82	138
Increased ability to provide assistance to wife and children	26	55	44	56	12	27	82	138

Source: Field survey

## Factors that Affect CLC Performance

Although the CLC design is theoretically impressive, its management and operation in Bangladesh need improvement in many aspects, including the mobilization of human, material and financial resources, the development of skills and efficiency of the CLC personnel and effective networking with other local and regional agents of development. CLCs have many limitations and constraints:

- Women members leave CLCs due to change of address after marriage; also, elderly people prohibit women from attending CLCs for religious reasons; and women members face problems in working together with their male counterparts.
- Finding time to attend CLCs becomes difficult for many members because of their workloads at home, in the fields or at other workplaces.
- Most CLCs provide training in limited types of skills; in many cases, skills training cannot be put to use because of the shortage of money for starting income-generating activities or a lack of access to markets for the products or services.
- CLCs are poor in their stock of materials for reading and equipment for learning, games and sports.

- CLC community workers are burdened with many tasks and they often lack efficiency.
- In many places, CLCs are not very successful in becoming institutions for which the general members have a feeling of ownership. Community members often have a feeling that paying for a CLC is not worth the services it offers.
- The flow of information materials at CLCs is irregular. Also, in many places, the CLC management committees are only titular bodies, rather than properly functioning authorities for planning, resource generation, supervision, networking, monitoring, and evaluation.

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

A major strength of the CLCs is the homogeneity and unity of their members. CLCs are common meeting places with equal access for all members of the community, who gain from discussions in a collective forum and addressing the problems of the community for a collective solution. The greatest weakness of CLCs is their poor resource base, i.e., poor infrastructure and lack of funds and technical and managerial staff with professional efficiency. The opportunities lie in the general recognition of CLCs as useful institutions of ANFE, functional literacy and continuing education, which has indeed resulted in a willingness among many national governments and both regional and international agencies to support the CLC movement. CLCs operate in an environment of gradually improving relationships among the members of a community and an expanding network with local government agencies and service providers of different kinds. The chance of CLCs becoming sustainable institutions is threatened by the fact that there are many NFE, adult education and continuing education programmes competing for resources from almost the same set of agencies and organizations. In addition, CLC staff have a slow learning curve, CLCs depend too much on outside funding support, conservative communities are resistant to change (particularly if the change empowers the helpless poor), and there is the possibility of funds leaking or draining away in transit.

CLCs perform multi-dimensional activities addressed to the needs and for the benefits of their members and the communities of which they are a part. They are most successful when recognized as a special type of institution for non-formal education and life skills training. CLCs are also generally recognized by neo-literate CLC members, as well as by interested members of the local public, as useful meeting places where they can read newspapers; discuss matters related to various issues of family and community life; develop their awareness about human rights, family planning, health care and the environment; get some training in skills required for income-generating activities; and receive inoculations and agricultural extension services.

The impact of CLC programmes on gender equity, poverty alleviation and environmental conservation are marginal; those on basic literacy, awareness development and sensitization are moderate; and those on awareness about primary health care and motivation of local people to send their children to school are fairly good. CLCs have contributed to enhancing participants' status within families and communities. In general, CLCs have a good impact on the lives of their members as well as on their communities, but the impact is often not as extensive as might be portrayed by the agencies that implement them.

Given regular participation in CLC literacy and NFE programmes, members attain literacy skills of different levels in a much shorter time than they would at a regular primary or high school. With the literacy level they attain, the members develop the ability to read, write and count, as well as to manage household accounts and even the accounts of the small businesses they start. Furthermore, with literacy and increased awareness about society and the environment, CLC programme participants take better care of their families and children, enjoy a better status in the family and in the community, and take a more meaningful role in the decision-making process at both levels.

That a large majority of CLC members do not regularly take part in CLC activities only demonstrates that the CLCs are not very successful in becoming institutions for which the general members have a feeling of ownership. Neither do residents of the local communities feel like owners, because both CLC members and the non-member local people are reluctant to contribute to funding CLC activities. In many places, CLC members, as well as local members of the public, have a feeling that CLCs do not provide adequate credit support for income-generating activities and entrepreneurship, and believe that the absence of an early childhood care and education programme is a problem. The flow of information materials at CLCs is irregular. In addition, in many places, members of CLC management committees do not regularly attend monthly meetings.

CLCs have little effect in terms of developing the management capacity of local people. In fact, CLC activities do not have this aspect in focus. So far, CLC members have not come up as an organized force that could take the initiative in social movements (for example, against drug addiction, child and women trafficking, terrorism or for the establishment of human rights), collectively facing natural calamities or organizing rehabilitation programmes. At the personal level, however, CLC members could develop some capacity in managing household affairs, making decisions and changing attitudes towards life.

CLCs have some linkages with local/district-level government agencies, local branches of some regional/national NGOs and a few local NGOs. However, the linkages are not institutionalized and none of the partners have any policy or plan of action to further cooperate. In view of some recent developments in the attitude of the government towards GOs and NGOs or public-private partnerships, and thanks to the personal initiatives of some CLC community workers or supervisors, CLCs can now arrange some training programmes with the help of extension service agencies and governmental departments and operate as venues for the delivery of agricultural extension, inoculation or family planning services.

CLCs in Bangladesh can claim some success in terms of their contribution to an increase in the social awareness of the poor and disadvantaged sections of the population, their empowerment through literacy, and their training in life skills and income generation. Yet CLCs also have failures, largely due to CLC members' lack of conscious participation in their programmes/activities, inadequate resource support and inefficient management. Although CLC programmes are low-cost, there is also the feeling that in their present form they are possibly not replicable nor sustainable.

Two major limitations of Bangladeshi CLCs are their poor physical set-up along with the shortage of reading/learning materials and equipment for games, sports and entertainment. Not all CLCs provide training in all types of life skills training that are locally useful, and in many cases CLCs suffer from poor management, supervision and monitoring. CLC community workers are burdened with many responsibilities, and they often find it difficult to allocate time and energy to effectively discharge all of them. CLCs do not have adequate funds for providing the micro-credit support to members who require it for income-generating activities. These constraints and limitations in CLC operations keep CLCs from having a broader and deeper impact in terms of their performance.

## Recommendations

The CLC programme in Bangladesh needs improvement in many aspects to create a substantial impact in terms of spreading literacy, widening the scope of self-employment and income-generating opportunities, and reducing poverty. The full-scale implementation of the programme would require new inputs in the form of reading materials, wider training facilities, and demonstration-based orientation of CLC members in life skills training. The following are a few suggestions based on the findings of the present study, as well as on the views of CLC evaluation teams and experts:

1. Equip CLCs with necessary facilities and materials.
2. Link literacy and community development activities with CLC interventions to address the socio-economic needs of the target population.
3. Arrange wider social mobilization through innovative forms and methods (e.g., flexible modes to suit the members' schedules, interventions to match their occupational needs, integration of learning materials and learning with recreational programmes).
4. Develop a systematic framework for monitoring CLC programmes/activities.
5. Link IGP activities with the market.
6. Formalize linkages with government agencies and other NGOs operating in the locality.
7. Design programmes in terms of core and non-core activities to concentrate more on the former.
8. Help the community to learn how to find the solutions to problems instead of giving community members the solutions.
9. Improve the management skills of CLC personnel.
10. Create a multipurpose professional/technical backstopping/support system for CLCs at the community level.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that CLCs in Bangladesh have many limitations, they have evolved as models for NGO-sponsored continuing non-formal education institutions, and do not appear to have been too costly. The uniqueness of the CLC concept lies in its philosophy of raising much of its resources from voluntary community contributions at the grassroots level. Thus, the costs incurred are shared by the sponsoring NGO, by participants/members/learners and by the people of the community where the CLC operates as a centre of continuing education. The benefits, though not as promising as were theoretically set, are significant. CLCs' most notable contribution seems to be their operation as centres of learning and training for the poor and disadvantaged in basic literacy, post-literacy and continuing education. One of the preconditions for benefiting from CLC programmes and activities is regular participation, and those who regularly take part in them benefit from CLCs in many ways.

CLCs can contribute to the comprehensive development of the nation within the overall framework of Education for All (EFA) if they are included in a national action plan. CLC experiences can be used in developing community-based infrastructure for EFA and mobilizing locally available resources. The government may arrange the necessary inputs for and provide systematic support to CLCs. Inclusion of CLCs in EFA national plans would call for close linkage with the formal system, equivalency programmes for school-age children, and a mechanism of resource sharing between formal schools and CLCs.

### Case Study: Yasmeen, Amtola CLC Member, Netrokona District, Bangladesh

Yasmeen is now known as the "mother of distressed women," not only in her native village Amtola, but also far beyond the borders of her own district. She is 29 and has a boy who is four years old. Her husband is a rickshaw puller. She started living in her husband's house in a different village after her marriage, but she had a difficult life. The family lived hand-to-mouth and sometimes had only one meal a day. Yasmeen started working as a part-time housemaid with a local well-to-do family. She cleaned floors and the yard, washed clothes and utensils, and prepared food for the labourers working on her master's farm. In return, she only got food and a very small amount of money that was not even enough to purchase food and clothes for her son.

Yasmeen did not have time to visit her father's house, but one day she did. Knowing about her worries, her father advised her to become a member of a local association for self-help named "The Swabalambi Unnayan Samiti" (SUS, Association for Development through Self-Help), which established a *lokakendra* (people's centre, a CLC) in Amtola village. Despite the fact that her husband and also many conservative senior people in the neighborhood did not like the idea of a 29-year-old woman joining the CLC, Yasmeen became a member of the centre. She quickly gained basic literacy skills from the training at the centre. In addition, she got ideas about poultry farming and rearing livestock. The centre helped her to get a loan from the SUS for the purchase of a cow and ten hens.

In about one year's time Yasmeen could feel that her life was changing. She started earning money from the sale of milk and eggs. The money was enough to repay her loan in weekly installments and to have some surplus for meeting her family expenses. She was happy to see that with a little skill in accounting, she could even save.

Towards the end of her second year with the centre, Yasmeen had become the owner of three cows, 33 hens and 27 ducks. She started earning more from the sale of milk, eggs and the chicks. She bought a new rickshaw for her husband, who used to pull one for rent that had been taking away a large part of his income. At present, the monthly income of the family is about Tk 5,000, which is sufficient for it to manage household expenditures and save. Yasmeen uses the savings for lending to the poor women on easy terms. She also purchased a piece of land for a new house. She takes special pride in providing some money to the centre that changed her life.

Yasmeen was helpless, but learnt how to survive. Only two years ago, she experienced negligence by her husband, who used to rebuke her on every silly ground and even beat her. But today, he is friendly, polite and, in a sense loyal to her. Yasmeen says that in her difficult days, she had wanted to commit suicide. Now she is a source of inspiration and also help for many other poor men and women. She is doing well and is serious about seeing that her centre continues to operate in the interest of her fellow community people.