

Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) is a research support agency established in 2002 with financial support from the Royal Dutch Government. The focus of its research support is on identifying strategies and programs that would ensure sustainable and progressive alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh.

Despite the efforts of successive Governments in Bangladesh and many Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) working over the years on poverty mitigation in the country, there are still serious and unresolved issues concerning the self-sustaining potential of these efforts. Lack of peoples' participation in problem identification and program design, imposition of donor goals and priorities, predetermined resource modalities, lack of local resource mobilization and ownership, and continuing donor funds and expertise dependency often lead to the withering away of these projects soon after the departure of external partners or their resources.

In this milieu, RIB's approach has been to involve participatory processes from the very design and conception of the research proposal, through the implementation phase to its final presentation, validation and follow up by the researchers and/or community being researched. In this effort we found that the Participatory Action Research (or *gonogobeshona* as it has come to be called in Bangla), promoting processes of collective self-enquiry, self-determination and capacity building, to be a useful method in reaching out to many marginalized communities. Often these communities are not found to be in the development agenda or mainstream Governmental or Non-governmental development agencies and are hence termed as the 'missing communities'.

Being an institution interested in creating a knowledge-based society, RIB encourages an approach where local knowledge is as valued as expert knowledge and in RIB's research findings it has been found that sustainability of a program lay in demand-led focus, participatory processes, a program designed to respond to needs and priorities as identified and owned by the people, and on local resource mobilization and self-reliance.

Furthermore, the most critical finding concerning hardcore poverty prevailing among the "missing communities" was that economic poverty is inextricably linked to social exclusion, deprivation of civic and land rights and denial of access to public services including health, education and credit and hence any strategy for their alleviation needs to take a holistic approach. This is evident in many of the follow-up activities which RIB's research communities have taken, e.g. social mobilization to spread lac cultivation among the landless and land-poor to prevent Monga, the inclusion of education as a basic strategic right along with the need for

diversifying livelihoods among the growing Dalit movement and perpetrating self-management skills through reflective thinking, such as, in the case of vegetable gardening in cyclone affected areas or establishing nurseries of indigenous fruit trees in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

However, because of resource constraints, RIB is now faced with the prospect of having to terminate its support to many of such projects at a time when they are just ready to go into the follow-up stage. Without RIB's support at this critical juncture, the organizations built up and local resources mobilized would likely be frittered away and the social capital thus generated lost, perhaps forever, in the aftermath of high expectations ending in helplessness.

Under these circumstances, RIB has decided to turn to interested donors and the local community of people for support to save these people's initiatives for self-development from premature extinction. An example of this approach will be found in the current website ( [www.rib-bangladesh.org](http://www.rib-bangladesh.org) )

). It is aimed at promoting and reviving peoples' initiatives in setting up and running pre-school centers for children from disadvantaged families based on the Kajoli model which emerged from a RIB-supported research project. Readers are also invited to visit the main website of RIB ( [www.rib-bangladesh.org](http://www.rib-bangladesh.org) )

), and its project areas to learn about the underlying premises of our studies to assess the value of the work that the disadvantaged people have already accomplished on their own. We look forward to their support to these ground-breaking and pioneering efforts of the hardcore poverty groups of Bangladesh.

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