

WHOLE PERSON DEVELOPMENT – KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION: BANGLADESH, MARCH 2009



Team members

By Lynn McIntyre

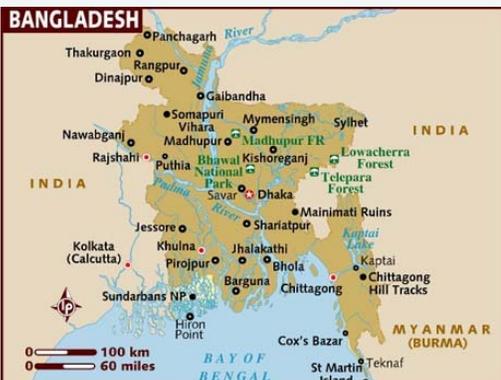
Apparently the weather was bad but the skiing was good while AHFMR Post-doctoral Fellow Sharon Kirkpatrick and I were in Bangladesh this past March. Our purpose was not to conduct traditional research, but to disseminate results to research participants and an array of stakeholders. And rather than an ‘evidence-based’ exercise, our findings were from a qualitative study with the unthinkable goal of having 43 ultra-poor Bangladeshi female heads of household not only give voice to millions of women like them, but also transmit insights and new learnings to persons who are educated, solvent and in positions of influence.

Our dissemination strategy was to maximize the knowledge transfer of research findings. Our two-year \$100,000 CIHR funded seed grant in gender, globalization and health was entitled, 'Understanding the Food Provisioning Experience of Food Insecure Bangladeshi Women Heads of Household'. Knowledge transfer efforts were aimed at Bangladesh policy makers and key stakeholders. We hoped to positively influence future policy making, program planning, and evaluation. The dissemination program was funded by a \$25,000 Meetings, Planning and Dissemination grant from CIHR Global Health and Knowledge Translation competitions.

Objectives included: 1) sharing the qualitative research findings for use by relevant bodies to improve Bangladeshi food security, health planning, programming and evaluation; 2) presenting the concept of ‘whole person development’ as a lens for policy making, planning, programming and evaluation; and 3) building capacity to use the study’s methodology and whole person development approach to promote policy making, programming and evaluation.



Ghorishal commissioners meeting



But before we did any stakeholder dissemination we had to check with the women who originally participated in the individual ethnographic interviews conducted between January and March 2008. The women represented five occupational/ethnocultural groups:

1. garment workers living in a Dhaka slum;
2. urban petty traders in a Dhaka slum area;
3. rural petty traders in the district of Ghorishal about two hours away from Dhaka;
4. subsistence agriculturalists also from Ghorishal;
5. Garo women, a matrilineal, Christian indigenous population in Haluaghat near the Indian border in the country’s north east.

Faculty Profile—Dr. Lynn McIntyre

Participants were all ultra-poor (lived on less than one US dollar per day), were the sole earners for their families, and had dependent children—otherwise they were purposively chosen to represent a variety of personal and household circumstances. Amazingly, 41 of 43 of the women were found after one year and 39 of 43 returned to focus group sessions where the results were presented to them for feedback. This was absolutely the highlight of the visit, with the women affirming the results and adding even more texture to the insights we shared with them. They enjoyed the session and were hopeful that their stories would help women like them.



BRAC presentation

Armed with the confidence of our controversial findings, we pursued an intense dissemination program consisting of two hour sessions each morning and afternoon except for Fridays (Saturday was used as a travel day) with different stakeholder groups—UN agencies, NGOs, major international donors, poverty alleviation programs, university faculty and staff, and several sessions with government (including the Minister of Food and Disaster Management and senior bureaucrats in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare). We did encore performances with BRAC (the largest NGO in the country), and for DFID (the UK's foreign aid organization). At our meeting in Ghorishal, the newly elected commissioners for the local district

and the head mistress of the local government school had a special session with us to hear about the results of the study.

We devoted considerable effort in support of the Garo people by presenting results to social and health leaders at the Joyramkura Mission Hospital, which serves the Garo. Once back in Dhaka, we also presented to an indigenous forum of leaders of tribal groups residing in Bangladesh.



Returning results to Garo women

Much of the success of the mission was in the pre-planning that is credited to Nicola Main-Thomson, project coordinator based in Calgary and project partners Dr. Syed Nazmul Huda (Institute for Nutrition and Food Sciences, Dhaka University) and Dr. Khaled Islam (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare), both of whom visited the Department of Community Health Sciences in the Fall of 2008. The support of Sanjeeb Drong of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum who hosted us at his family home in a remote corner of the Garo lands was also essential for our work.

The response: There is no doubt that stakeholders learned from the food narratives of ultra-poor Bangladeshi women heads of household, and that Whole Person Development as a conceptual framework for development processes that involve small whole person 'adjustments' intrigued and excited many participants. The ideas need to gel as well as be tested in practice—so the real work lies ahead.