

Background and Aim

There are major differences between men and women in Bangladesh, differences in family, religious, economic and social life. Most women live under great oppression. It's worse among the poorest. Due to an UN-report, 47 % of the men beat up their woman. Bangladeshi women don't have that many rights. In the countryside it's even usual with stoning to death if the woman doesn't live up to the Islamic code. Nowadays a new form of "punishment" has come up, pouring corrosive acid in (mostly) women's faces. The face becomes disfigured. Men use this to punish the woman for not wanting to marry a man, for example.

A new law demands women to go and get a medical certificate within 24 hours to even get the case to the legal system. This makes it very difficult to punish the rapist.

In cities the prostitution is widespread. There are government approved big brothels. Yet HIV is not widely spread but no one uses protection in the sex industry so there's a risk for an AIDS epidemic.

Many other countries know about the women situation in Bangladesh, unlike before. Thanks to the female author Taslima Nasrin who has written several books in which she criticizes Islam, writes about the discrimination of the minority group, the Hindus and writes about the Bangladeshi woman's liberation. She is threatened and persecuted by Islamic fundamentalists and lives now in exile in another country.

To help women to change their situation there are some organizations working in Bangladesh but we think more must be done. These organizations have strengthened women but started protests among conservatives. We have come up with an idea how to strengthen Bangladeshi women, help beaten up women, help women to get medical care if they need and try to make them more independent.

We will set up a women organization where women can get help with the things we have written above. Important for us is that those women can continue this work without our help, that they can be independent and that their status in society will rise.

We know the help is needed most in the countryside but it's impossible to start a project like this in the countryside so we will begin in the cities. We think it can spread out to the countryside and all over the country, even though we won't be working there.

At least half of the population will benefit from a more equal society and it will also be a more modern society if Bangladesh becomes equal between the sexes.

Project idea- *Women's Organization*

Our idea with this project is to create a support system for women. We want to establish an organization that will give women the opportunity to switch their environments, and to be able to talk about their problems and receive help and support. The organization will carry through three main activities:

- Severely oppressed women will be offered the opportunity of having a contact person. This person is there to listen to the woman, support her and if needed give her a different perspective.
- The organization will hold a few apartments in secret areas, which if there is an emergency women in need can fast and secretly be transported there. This will be a temporary solution when needed.
- The organization will also hold open meetings where women in similar situations can sit and freely discuss anything with each other, together with women in this organization.

All workers in this organization will of course be female. There will also be a mixture of influences within the staff. Our goal is to hire both Muslim Bangladeshi women and women here from west.

To understand the project idea better you need to understand the three main activities better.

Contact persons: The meaning of having a contact person can in some cases be essential. In Bangladesh there is an enormous need for this among oppressed women. A contact person in our organization will be carefully chosen to a woman depending on her situation and needs. This contact person will establish a relationship to the woman in question, they will meet a few hours a week or so, time they spend together depend totally on that specific woman's situation and need. They will meet wherever is suitable for the woman. Together they will be able to discuss anything, the contact person is of course under professional secrecy. The contact person shall of course be very familiar with their religion, Islam, which is an important factor of the society in Bangladesh. If the woman in question has grown up with a distorted view of women's role and the Koran, the contact person can give her another, better perspective to interpret the Koran on. The point is for the contact person to support and help the woman in question, to give her advice, support her and most importantly encourage her to grow on her on.

Many women are brought up in families where men are looked upon as superior to women, where women obey men and where women are believed to have no human rights. In these cases the contact person should remind them of equality, and show them that they do not have to accept this kind of treatment. Sometimes people need to talk to someone, and receive support in order to grow stronger. The contact person will adjust to the woman's situation. Most likely the women are in contact with this organization in secrecy and because of that have problems with the meetings. Therefore the contact person should be flexible in where and when to meet.

Emergency apartments: Women's situation at home due to for instance abusing husbands/fathers might be so serious that they fear for their lives. Various forms of abuse and oppression are preformed on daily bases in Bangladesh. To be murdered or severely injured by close relatives are not as unusual for these women. In these cases women need to escape immediately in order to survive. This is in many cases impossible; the women need a starting point away from the danger of their families. This is why our organization wants to provide women in these situations a starting point, a secret shelter they can escape to fast. We will have a few apartments located in different areas. The addresses will of course be secret and not mentioned outside of the organization. Women transported there will not be told exactly where they are headed and will have to swear not to tell anyone where they have been, in order for this to work.

When a woman needs to be immediately transported, any available worker at the organization, preferably her contact person if she have one, should secretly transport her to this apartment, of course the woman can bring her children with herself but no men are allowed. At the apartment she will have someone there to help and support her, a doctor and a psychiatrist is available if needed. This is of course only a temporary solution, to escape; it will give them security and time to plan where to go from there.

Open discussions: Our women's organization will also hold open discussions for any women to participate. Together with some influence of workers at the organization, the women will be able to discuss anything. They will see and be able to meet other women in similar situations. The point is for the women to understand that there is nothing wrong with them; they need to meet other women and learn to openly discuss their situations. Often women do not talk about these things openly; they believe that when a woman is punished she has done something wrong. Oppression among women is widespread and for no reason. The women understand each other better and might even identify themselves with other women in the meetings. The women are also able to create a network of help and support from each other. They can give each other advice and support in a way no one who has not been in a similar situation can. Of course the meeting will also be directed of trained women in the organization.

The meetings are open for any woman to participate, there is no compulsion to talk and share their lives with everyone. Actually we expect that it will take some time for the women to open up, dare to trust each other. However, we believe that theses discussions will develop into something extremely profitable for the women- to gain support and help.

Implementation

We will now describe how to go through with the whole project and all the different factors involving it in a more carefully and detailed way.

To be able to carry through this organization in long-term, we will seek help from SIDA's largest "ramorganisation", Forumsyd. Forumsyd who receives annual from SIDA, is a so called "umbrella organization" which supports many smaller organizations with projects. We will cooperate with one of these organizations that work with development programs for self-help/independence in Bangladesh. The organization is called SUS-Sabalamby Unnayan Sanity organization, and it supports projects for women's social and legal rights.

Cooperation with this organization will be helpful in many ways. They can help us with volunteer workers and to Bangladeshi contacts and to keep the organization going. However, the long-term goal is for Bangladesh to be able to take over this alone, which we believe will be possible.

This project will start to help women to create a starting point. However, the goal is for them to achieve self- supporting.

We will need a main staff leading this organization, a small management group. This group will be working full time organizing and planning for our *Women's organization*. They will also fill the function of being instructors to the contact persons. We have very high demands on these instructors. They must have skills and experience in this matter, because it is vital that nothing goes wrong when dealing with humans in this way. Because the instructors should be well educated and because it is an important full time job these instructors will have steady salaries.

We need six instructors with different backgrounds. Half of them will be from Bangladesh and the other half from Sweden. The workers from west must have a great insight in the religion and culture of Bangladesh. The cooperation will be many-sided if we have workers from different nations. They will gain different aspects and experiences to their work. The instructors will be divided into three groups, so they will be working in groups of two and two, one from Bangladesh and the other one from Sweden. The division is made like this to give each group different perspectives.

Concerning meetings within the organization, the management staff/instructors will have meetings, which will be held once a month. The meetings will give the staff the possibility to organize and plan the process, or to see if any problems have occurred or maybe if they need more resources. They will also plan how to develop the organizations future. If any of the "instructor pairs" is dealing with an extreme case or simply needs a second opinion here they have an opportunity to bring it up with the rest of the instructors, they will guide and advice each other.

The instructors can handle many contact persons. Each pair of instructors will, to begin with, have 7 contact persons they are guiding each. The pair of instructors will

have meetings with each of their contact person twice a month (more or less depending on need) to discuss how the woman in question is doing, and if there are any problems. The contact persons will be able to state if the women have made any progress or if their situations have become deteriorated. The instructors will then advice the contact persons what kind of efforts are required, and how to improve the women's development. Together they will put some sort of a plan with goals for continued contact with the woman.

Contact persons will be carefully chosen depending on the women's situation. The employee will have a big responsibility to the victim. Voluntary workers will be used for this task. Since being a contact person is only a part-time work the volunteers are able to work and support themselves at the same time. Voluntary workers are preferred not only because it's cheaper but also because they're often more engaged and committed to their jobs. This will form better work conditions.

The organization will hold five apartments, for emergencies, in different locations. The apartments will be in larger cities where the women can be anonymous easier than on the countryside. The apartments will be bought, not rented, which is the best long-term solution, expenses will of course also be taken into consideration when the apartments are chosen.

Every instructor and contact person will receive a key to one of the organization's apartments. If any woman needs help instantly she can contact the organization and any available worker, her contact person if she has one, will take her to one of the apartments, where she can be safe. During these circumstances the woman and her contact person have to be very careful, so that no one sees them. The addresses of the apartments will of course be in secret, so that nobody will know where the women are hiding. The doctor and the psychologist will always be available if there is an emergency. It depends on what has happened to the woman.

When any woman lives hidden in these apartments we will help her with everything to keep her identity secret. The women will be taken to the apartment furthest away from their own homes and they be offered to be escorted with when they need to go out.

Sometimes, there might be more women in need than apartments available. That will be a greater difficulty, the apartments will than simply be shared.

We will also need one doctor and one psychologist, in case of abused women or women with any mental disease. Most likely the women have been maltreated when they come to us. Therefore a doctor and a psychologist is important to have in a country with such a dysfunctional health care system as Bangladesh has, to have a private doctor is also for the best considering the women's secrecy. The women will also get the possibility to talk to the psychologist if they consider it as a helpful way to solve their problems.

The organization will also have an auditor to make sure that the money will be used in a useful way. If there is any lack of resources, the auditor will use the money to improve the organization's equipment.

Another dominating factor in this organization is the insurance of security to the women. The organization is not allowed to call its members at home. There is a great chance that the woman's husband would answer or maybe her children, which would cause her great problems. The women are allowed to call freely at any time they want. The organization's phone number will not be shown on the bill since it is a secret number. This organization also has an emergency duty, which means that the women are able to call 24 hours every day in the week in case of an emergency, or maybe just to talk to someone. The contact persons will all take turns in emergency-line-duty, the reception telephone will be connected to whom ever is on duty for the moment. However, women who have contact persons will naturally have private numbers to their contact persons so that they can always reach them.

Every contact person drives its own car, and the organization will contribute with the cost of the petrol. In other words, the contact person will not pay for the petrol every time she helps to escort a woman or her children. The instructors and the contact persons will register every woman in the computer and in different files to recognize their situations. This will at the same time, facilitate their work conditions. The files will of course be confidential.

The open discussion meetings will be held for all women about three times a week, and the main purpose is that we want as many women as possible to participate and share their opinions and thoughts with each other. They will be able to discuss their situation freely, without feeling alone or helpless. The discussions will be held in the same local as the organization work in, and two persons from the organizations will always be present at the discussions.

The government of Bangladesh is far of likely to support any project like this, neither is any local authority. However, depending on the local conditions the police might be helpful and supportive of this, which is a great benefit.

The organization would be most successful in any of the larger cities, in the countryside there are great ignorance and therefore greater resistance for these kinds of things. Similar organizations like this has shown to work very well in the cities but met great resistance out in the countryside.

Considering the resistance an open marketing of our organization would create, especially among men, we will spread information secretly. Any word is spread extremely fast on the streets in Bangladesh so the most efficient and safe way to market this through spreading it to for instance; local women groups, maternity care centrals, older teenage girls in school, to the police if they are cooperative in the specific area etc. This would be the fastest and most efficient way to market our organization and it has shown to be the most successful method used.

If this project will be successful and needed among the women in Bangladesh, the organization can easily be expanded spread among several different areas. Current similar organizations for women in Bangladesh have worked very well, and have fulfilled a great need. Therefore we strongly believe in this project, and truly believe that it will need to expand in the future.

The project will help women to build up their self-esteem, and help them to get away from unbearable conditions. However, this will not solve all of their problems. If they come through with this successfully, leave their homes and start over. From here the women have to in some way take care of themselves. They need a job and a new home to begin their new lives with. Although we will try our best to help them, clearly we cannot help them with everything. This projected is only a part of a process. We cannot tell the women exactly what to do or decide for them, from here and we cannot provide them everything they need. What we can and will do is to convey our contacts to these women, and give them information on where they can turn. The jobs, lawyers and other social contacts we have through our own organization, through Forumsyd and through SUS. For instance there are many other organizations in Bangladesh helping especially women to find jobs, what we can do is to help them contact this kind of organizations.

Expenses

We will need to **buy 5 apartments** in larger cities on a reasonable distance from each other.

We will also need to **buy a local** where the organization will be. These apartments will need **furniture including a computer, phone and administration.**

Salaries for following employees will be needed:

1 head chief

1 auditor

1 psychologist

1 doctor

6 instructors

Petrol expenses

The project is not an exclusively expensive one, but it is extremely efficient and needed in the country. The costs of the whole project will not exceed 10 million SEK.

Time planning

We need to find good workers, which will not be a greater problem considering the high unemployment in Bangladesh, especially among women

We also need time to find the apartments, and then we will take into account the abundance of apartments in the country.

Before moving in the organization we need to get all of the apartments, including the organization office, furnished and ready.

When every practical detail is ready we will start to market the organization, which will not take very long.

Not only is this project good in an economical and social point of view, the project will also be easy and fast to establish. We expect the project to be built up within approximately two months, considering every aspect of labor availability and abundance of apartments.

Summary

Most Bangladeshi women live under oppression or injustice whether they are Muslims or Hindus. We don't think their situation will be improved if nothing is done. It's not easy to help or criticize since the ones in power do not approve of that.

Our idea is to create a support system. Including three activities; open meetings, temporary living and the ability to have a contact person. These three things are how to help a vulnerable woman. The whole organization will be secret and be a place where women can come and feel safe, perhaps for the first time in many years.

List of sources

Länder I fickformat, Bangladesh, By: Lena Karlsson, updated 2002.

www.Landguiden.se

Cultures of the world Bangladesh, By: Mariam Whyte, 1999.

DN-articles

www.EBCSO.com- Asian Women Workers newsletter Published by committee for Asian women

www.SIDA.se

www.forumsyd.se

Kvinnojouren Liljan,

An organization working in Bangladesh called SUS-Sabalamby Unnayan Sanity

Web evaluation

To write the country description we have used only well known and what we consider reliable sources. We have mainly used *Cultures of the world*, *Länder I fickformat*, and *Landguiden*. These are all sources we have used several times before and found that they have very good, useful and reliable sources. The sources use only facts that can be proven, not anyone's opinions. The sources have shown to be objective and the information easy to understand and have had a good overview of the countries situation. Therefore, we decided to start with those sources, to get a good insight of the situation and culture of Bangladesh.

The information we have used for the background and aim are Landguiden, DN, and EBSCO. Landguiden has been a very good source when we needed a good background of every aspect of Bangladeshi life.

The information we used from DN has been used very critically, you should never trust what is in the newspaper since they always seems to get everything wrong. However, this specific article we used was an interview with women who have fled from Bangladesh. The women who have lived in Bangladesh for all of their lives know the culture and ways of Bangladesh better than any reporter from outside. This is mainly why we wanted to use information from this article. However, the women are probably very subjective when they talk about the culture of the Bangladeshi society, since they have been so abused and maltreated; this is a factor we have taken into consideration when we read the article.

The information from EBSCO, it is well known site, the layout and information is good and seems to be written objectively. The information we used was published by the committee for Asian women and they had an address where they could be contacted.

We have also called the Bangladesh union in Uppsala, and asked them questions about their culture and religion. The people at this union are all Bangladeshi who still go to Bangladesh often to visit, naturally they have a good insight in the ways of the country

and therefore we thought that this was a good source to use when we wanted to understand the culture better.

For the project idea and especially the implementation we visited SIDA's home page. This comes very naturally and seemed like a good source in this particular assignment. Here we looked more into the demand SIDA had on projects and more how to go through with different projects.

We also contacted SIDA to ask for advice, which was very helpful. They recommended us to visit www.forumsyd.se where we found very good and useful information. At Forumsyd they showed different projects that had worked very well in different continents. Here looked up the credibility of an organization for women really could work in Bangladesh. To our satisfaction we found that similar projects had worked very well, there has been no greater resistance for any other project that we would feel threatened by. We found that the information here was reliable since it showed different projects that Forumssyd and SIDA cooperate with. From here we also found the organization SUS.

We contacted SUS to ask about their projects in Bangladesh. They were very helpful they gave us advice on how to market the project in the best way and in what areas it was most needed and most appropriate to build up this kind of a project. The organizations gave good and useful advices on the matter, and we find this information very good since they know exactly what it takes to work for women in Bangladesh.

We have also contacted "kvinnojouren, Lilijan", in Sweden to understand how they work more in detail. The person we spoke to there was very kind and helpful. We thought that there would be great differences in forms of resources in Sweden, however we were wrong. Even in Sweden all of the workers were volunteers and the whole organization had no support from the government. The woman we spoke to helped and explained in detail how they work with abused women, what it takes and what the women needs. She shared methods they used which they found most successful. This organization had kept going without any greater difficulties for 10 years. Also here we found that this was a good source since this was a successful organization for women, which means that they know what it takes to help women in these situations. However, we do understand that there are great cultural differences between Bangladesh and Sweden and we have also taken that into consideration.

Fatme and Nazli have created the project idea, implementation, budget and time planning, and also this web evaluation. Therefore all sources used for these parts have been taken care of and criticized by them. Cecilia has created the background and aim and also the summary. Therefore all sources used for these parts have been taken care of and criticized by her.