

Caritas Bangladesh: Approaches and Methodologies to Serve Brothers and Sisters in Need in Bangladesh

1. Introduction:

Caritas is a Latin word. Literally it means "charity" or universal love. We prefer "LOVE" which includes all aspects of humanity. Caritas Bangladesh (CB) is a development organization, established by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh, to carry out activities of integrated social welfare and development. CB was founded in 1967 as the eastern branch of Caritas Pakistan. Following the cyclone of November 1970 it was re-organized and became known as CORR (Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation) and took on the character of a national organization on January 13, 1971. The name Caritas was re-introduced in 1976.

Caritas Bangladesh has now over 6000 staff in its 234 offices. Average annual budget for the last five years was Tk. 1775 million (Euro 19.55 million), about 40% of this budget is collected or arranged locally. About 70% of Caritas staff are non-Christians (e.g. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists) and over 90% of 'Program Participants' (beneficiaries) are non-Christians.

2. Principles:

The Mercy and Love of God manifested in Jesus is our guiding principle. We unite ourselves with the Mercy and Love manifested in all Religions and Cultures and in a spirit of Communion we wish to bear witness to that universal Mercy and Love with and for all peoples of Bangladesh. Other principles are:

- We aim at reaching the poorest strata of the population, irrespective of their colour, caste, religion, race, culture and gender.
- We emphasize that projects not merely address symptoms but reach the roots of the problems; therefore we aspire to eliminate in a sustainable way the roots of poverty.
- We contribute to enforce human rights and resist any form of social discrimination.

- We give utmost importance on strengthening self-help forces, self-responsibility and self-determination of our ‘Program Participants’.
- We carefully examine whether project activities are compatible with the environment as well as sustainable, i.e. the living conditions of future generations are being secured and strengthened.
- We respect the authentic cultural values of ‘Program Participants’ and support them in maintaining their precious traditions and way of life.
- We attach importance to an authentic dialogue on the basis of partnership and the goal to learn from each other.

3. **Vision, Inspiration and Mission**

Vision: In the light of the Social Teachings of the Church, Caritas Bangladesh envisions a society which embraces the values of freedom, justice, peace and forgiveness allowing all to live as a communion and community of mutual love and respect.

Inspiration: We are inspired by the Gospel of Jesus, who says, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, **you did it to me**” (Mt 25:34-36, 40).

Mission: Caritas Bangladesh tries to function in partnership with people - especially the poor and the marginalized, with **equal respect for all** - to attain integral development, to live **a truly human life in dignity** and to serve others responsibly and with love.

4. **Approaches:**

Following Cyclone in 1970 and Liberation War in 1971 Caritas started its massive relief and rehabilitation responses which continued until mid-1970s. This was followed by inputs oriented development approach by providing seeds, fertilizer, water pumps for irrigation and training of farmers on modern technology-based agriculture. Evaluation done on inputs oriented agriculture production project found

that production was increased but it did not bring expected benefits to the landless farmers. Because the project was taken up without any social analysis and study on power relations in the context of Bangladesh. Following this realization, Caritas decided to learn and follow empowerment process that begins in 1979 with social analysis and is progressed through animation for organization of the poor for social collective actions.

For poverty alleviation Caritas Bangladesh now follows holistic approach, especially entrenched in organizing and mobilizing the rural poor through building awareness, creating responsibility and solidarity, providing development education and empowering them. Caritas Bangladesh follows those development approaches, which are learned as best practices from its development endeavours. Together with the Vision, Inspiration and Mission, the approaches constitute the views of Caritas Bangladesh and help devise its Goals, Objectives, Outcomes and Strategies. Caritas Bangladesh follows different approaches as appropriate to the contest of a particular community. These are:

- **Social Groups**

Caritas facilitates in formation of social groups consisting of one adult member from each household of poor, marginalized and vulnerable communities. Social groups are formed of relatively homogenous living within the same village or locality. Group member is the point of entry for a household for development interventions.

- **Community Based Organizations**

The concept of facilitation of the Community Based Organizations (traditional organizations of different indigenous/marginalized /vulnerable communities) is to strengthen them as sustainable peoples' institution.

Community Based Organizations are self-managed people's organization serving as vehicles for carrying forward the development interventions of the poor by conducting advocacy, lobbying and networking; mobilization of resources; communication with local govt. officials; promotion of rights; practice and respect for own culture; retention and sustainable use of land; participatory monitoring and evaluation.

- **People's Led Development**

People's Led Development (PLD) is a process of development where community people organize themselves to achieve common goals through mobilizing private and public resources. With controlling power over every affair they make plans, implement activities, share experiences, monitor and evaluate results in a participatory way in order to promote sustainable up-gradation at community level.

5. Goals:

Through a participatory process and involving all stakeholders the following six goals have been identified and listed in the present Strategy Plan (2014-2019):

Goal 1: Social Welfare and Community Development

Improvement of the Quality of Life of the Extremely Poor and of the Vulnerable Communities.

Goal 2: Quality Education

Promote Education Rights and Inclusive Quality Education

Goal 3: Health Care and Education

Improve Health Education, Care and Public Health Services

Goal 4: Disaster Management

Strengthen Disaster Response and Community Resilience

Goal 5: Ecological Conservation and Development

Strengthen Ecological Sustainability

Goal 6: Development of Indigenous People

Improvement of the Living Standards of the Indigenous Peoples

6. Taking Up and Implementation of Projects:

The philosophy of development projects are stated as under:

1. Development is for the whole man within the framework of his whole social system;
2. True development occurs in response to shared desires;

3. In order to help people to help themselves, as process of education and practical training is essential;
4. Organization of small groups is a necessity in development; and
5. Projects should be based on success in small pilot undertakings.

Keeping in mind the above philosophy of development projects, Caritas Bangladesh tries to follow the learning and method from the famous book **The Pedagogy of the Oppressed** by Paulo Freire of Brazil. According to the Paulo Freire Method the social worker is only a participant-observer, not a teacher or lecturer. The people themselves are to identify their own problems and discuss them, guided by questioning when they are straying off the right track. Then they are to decide for themselves what they could do to solve the problem. This is basically what the Caritas Bangladesh's method consists of using its education materials.

The members of the groups are called 'Program Participants' and are made up of men or women or men and women together. They are homogeneous groups, made up of small or marginal farmers or landless labourers. The groups meet each week or on fortnightly basis and set aside weekly or fortnightly savings, at least the minimum amount decided on by the group. This is a way of giving them confidence by proving to themselves that they are not too poor to save. Together with matching loans from Caritas they are able to carry out small income-generating activities, either as a group or individually. They are also encouraged to identify the injustices in their lives and to do something about them. For examples, (1) if any of the teachers a Government school is absenting frequently they register a group complaint on behalf of their village; (2) following floods request for reconstruction of a damaged road is made to the local Government Office.

The main element of Paulo Freire is an animation process to raise consciousness of the oppressed people so that they may **think freely, articulate openly and demand for rights unitedly**. This animation process is explained as empowerment of the powerless to give back:

- power to think and analyze the root caused of poverty
- power to speak out and share their choices to satisfy their needs

- power to organize in order to change their socio-economic situation by establishing rights

What do people do in the process?

- they identify all the problems and needs and then prioritize one or two for steps
- they analyze the causes of problems and ways for meeting needs
- they mobilize local resources first and then look for remaining external resources
- they send an initial application for a project
- they participate in the pre-project writing workshop
- they become part of the project implementation committee
- they follow up all steps of project implementation
- they take part in the half-yearly monitoring and yearly review of the project
- they contribute time and experiences significantly for the project-end evaluation
- they also become participants in the impact study of the project

The process above can be summarized what was said by Lao-Tse, China in 700 B.C.:

Go to the people
Learn from them,
Love them.
Start with what they know,
Build with what they have.
But with the best leaders,
When the work is done, the task accomplished,
The people will say, "We have done this ourselves".

7. Challenges

Over the years, Caritas Bangladesh has overcome and is still facing a number of challenges. These include:

- suspicion about the objective of its activities/services;
- unfavorable country situation including political instability and natural disasters which comes one after another;
- rise of fundamentalism and intolerance following global events;
- erosion of values and morality because of greed and individualism;

- migration of educated and competent minorities including Christians;
- staff turn-over specially of women and of mid-level staff for better salary and benefits;
- imposition of ideas and approaches by the donors following their back donors conditions and priorities; and
- less freedom and flexibility to receive funds as it is done through open competition and tendering.

We have been able to overcome most of these challenges through our strict compliance to values, principles, guidelines, dialogue, openness to all and good governance.

8. Conclusion:

Caritas Bangladesh upholds the philosophy of partnership and participation, which are the concrete expression of communion of mind and heart with others. It operates in a spirit, not of competition, but of partnership with agencies which pursue goals akin to Caritas. Respect for the earth and its goods is a new concern. People are made aware of the fact that wasteful use of resources and pollution of the environment is our own loss. We have no moral right to destroy the environment. Caritas views the idea that people are to be friends of the earth by preserving its resources and environment.

No one is so poor that s/he cannot offer something to others and no one is so rich that s/he cannot accept something from others. For this, sharing of gifts received from God makes us all more humane, more dignified and more spiritual, and brings us together for making this World a better place for everyone of us!

(*Presentation of Dr Benedict Alo D’Rozario, Executive Director, Caritas Bangladesh for Public Conference organized by Secours Catholique-Caritas France at its office in Paris, France on Caritas Bangladesh Experience: how they involve beneficiaries at every stage of the project held on 10.09.2015)