

“If you knew what was going to happen in advance every day you could do amazing things. You could become insanely wealthy, influence the political process et cetera. Well, it turns out that most people don't even know what happened yesterday in their own business. So, a lot of businesses are discovering they can take tremendous competitive advantage simply by finding out what happened yesterday as soon as possible.”

(Steve Jobs, *Fortune*, 1994:23)

## **8.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Seven the focus was on organisational learning as it was taking place within the existing structures and systems of CCDB in the early 1990s. In this chapter the focus is on an intervention in the workings of CCDB. This took the form of the design and implementation of a participatory monitoring system (PMS) designed to aid the process of organisational learning. The overall purpose of the intervention was to test the value of an innovative design based on an evolutionary theory of learning. Unlike many conventional monitoring systems used in development projects it does not require the use of predefined indicators (Abbot and Guijt, 1997).

The chapter begins with an explanation of the background context in which the idea of a PMS was introduced and developed. These include developments amongst CCDB's donors and within CCDB itself. The next section describes the design of the PMS in detail, describing the core concepts and the structure of the system as it was implemented. Some initial expectations for the PMS are also spelled out. This is then followed by an extensive analysis of the performance of the PMS, once it was established. The qualitative content of the information finally selected at the Dhaka level is examined as a reflection of what has been learned by CCDB. A more quantitative analysis is then made of the behaviour and attributes of the PMS participants and how they have effected what was selected at the Dhaka level. This section is then followed by an

overall evaluation of the PMS, from within an evolutionary perspective. This begins with an analysis of the survival, replication and modification of the PMS. A more detailed analysis, focusing on the implications for CCDB's beneficiaries is then developed using the five attributes of learning developed in Chapters Three and Four. The chapter then concludes by identifying implications for donors to NGOs such as CCDB.

## **8.2 Background to the Development of the PMS**

### **8.2.1 Events at the Donor level**

In Chapter Seven reference was made to the role of the NGOAB and the CCDB Commission, and in particular the nature and effects of their demands for information from CCDB. In addition to these pressures, the attitudes of CCDB's donors, and developments affecting them in the early 1990's, were also an important part of the context in which the PMS was established. Their influence is visible in two sets of sources. One is the minutes of the CCDB RTMs in the early 1990's. The other is the documentation of a program of cooperative research initiated by four large Protestant donors in 1991 (EZE, ICCO, Christian Aid and Bread For the World), which initially focused on the subject of partnership (Riddell, 1993). All four donors involved funded CCDB.

The minutes of CCDB's RTMs show a continuing concern about impact issues but one which was moderated by expectations about the nature of the relationship between donors and funded NGO. Donors were clearly not meant to impose their needs and views on NGOs such as CCDB.

In the 1990 RTM, the Chairman and WCC representative "appealed to avoid the use of the word "donor" for its negative implication and anti-development connotation". Instead they became "resource sharing partners" (CCDB, 1991e). The expectation that no one should assert their status was expressed in its more extreme form in the 1991 RTM when before talking about participation in the PPRDP an adviser on PPP from EZE "made it clear he is not a 'resource person'. This terminology directly contradicts and conflicts with participation. He likes to see himself more in terms of a committed participant and in the role of a facilitator, among other co-

participants and co-facilitators” (CCDB, 1991e). This adviser (CT), had been instrumental in linking CCDB in the 1989-91 period with Indian NGOs who were already experimenting with forms of peoples’ participatory planning.

In the 1991 RTM CCDB presented its Indicative Program Plan (IPP) for the next three years, including its proposals for the new PPRDP. After being presented with the plan one of the five issues which CCDB asked sub-groups to focus on, was “How can monitoring and evaluation be carried out within PPP (especially when govt. funds are involved)?” (CCDB, 1992d). As a result of that discussion five proposals were agreed on: (a) “CCDB prepare instrument (evaluation tool) to study PPP process”, (b) “CCDB classify all materials available with regard to PPP level exercises, interpret these and prepare into a report”, (c) “The dynamics of what happen within CCDB, the struggles of the staff, their fears, their pleasures, their achievements need to be documented by CCDB and shared”, (d) “CCDB develop with the people the basic criteria of evaluation by the people to evaluate their own work. CCDB document and share this with partners” (CCDB, 1992d).

In the 1992 RTM there was no further reference to these agreements, or attempt to establish what had been achieved. Instead it was stated that “People should be the main actors of their own development in the field of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. As such the concerned agencies should allow CCDB three years time so she may come up with adequate information which may service the needs of every bodies. The issue will be further discussed in the next RTM” (CCDB, 1993c).

In the 1993 RTM a new representative from a smaller donor persisted in asking basic questions, focusing on outcome. “Let me ask in which areas of work and how it will be judged that the quality of life for people in that village will have changed for the better” (CCDB, 1994g). She was supported by another donor representative well known to CCDB who commented that “one needs indicators, therefore to me this process is no different from other development projects because all have certain goals and need indicators to judge their success” (CCDB, 1994g). CT and another EZE representative argued back that time needed to be given to the process, and pointed out that there is a baseline built into PPP, in the form of the module which involves a

review of the past. It was also the case that monitoring by the people was built into the PPP process, and that this involved the use of indicators. There the matter rested.

Looking back at the minutes of these RTMs the donors emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the impact of the PPRDP was haphazard and contradictory in its inclinations. Agreements were made and forgotten from one meeting to the next. Attitudes varied from the tolerant and open minded to the hard nosed and demanding (though less so). The Director was not under serious direct pressure to do something about monitoring the progress of the PPRDP, but the issue was clearly one that would remain of concern, and one which he may have felt he needed to respond to.

Despite the unimpressive performance of the donors, as suggested in the RTM minutes, there was evidence of a wider process of learning going on between CCDB's donors, which would impinge more directly on CCDB. In a report titled *Discerning the Way Together* Riddell (1993) analysed the state of partnerships between Protestant donor and the funded NGOs. As part of this exercise the four donors undertook a series of six sectoral assessments of the lessons learnt from a range of projects they have been funding. This included a file based review by Christian Aid of eight rural credit programs, including CCDB's MRDP in 1991/2. Riddell's report notes that "...the expectations of what these assessments would produce were far higher than the results achieved".

Referring to the achievement of objectives in CCDB's program, Christian Aid's own credit study noted that "The programme objectives in CCDB's three year plan are set forth in terms which make their evaluation difficult. Although each programme component has a quantified financial and "person" target, and these targets appear to being met in the annual reports, it is not always clear whether the broader goals of the programme are being met, as they are not objectively defined." (Christian Aid, 1992).

Looking into the future the DWT report noted that "...increasing understanding of the extent of poverty and the pitifully small amount of money available to the agencies, have fuelled support for the view that it is necessary to have a better idea of the impact of the work done, and of the effectiveness of the money that is spent" This was not just a view developed internally, and stimulated by the results of studies like that by Christian Aid. It was also noted that "Finally, and

especially for those agencies dependent largely on official funds, efforts to limit government expenditure have increased pressure on NGOs to provide evidence of impact” (Riddell, 1993). Both ICCO and EZE received a major portion of their annual income from their governments (APRODEV, 1997). They were also CCDB’s largest donors.

The Riddell study was followed by a second program of cooperation between the same Protestant donors in 1995 focusing planning, monitoring and evaluation. From 1995 onwards CCDB became involved, along with its major donors, in a planned series of workshops on this subject in Europe, Africa and Bangladesh (van Leeuwen, 1996, 1997; CCDB, 1996c).

### **8.2.2 Events within CCDB**

When CCDB first adopted the PPP process as the defining feature of the PPRDP in 1992 they adapted the original 11 module based planning process to include an additional module that would include monitoring and evaluation (CCDB, 1993b). Also built into the PPP process were three separate roles at the samiti level, those of Convenor, Animator and Recorder, collectively known as the CAR team (CCDB, 1993b). It was expected that this would have enabled samities to do their own documentation of both the planning process and its implementation. Within each of the Project Office there was also a designated staff member, known as a Functional Analyst, who was assigned to monitor and analyse the process taking place in the samities, using the CAR teams’ own records as important source of information.

In 1994 the Research team examined the role of the CAR team and found them to be effectively non-existent (CCDB, 1994c). Neither the samities nor Project Office staff had a clear idea of their particular role. Reports that were written tended to be carbon copies of the original module as it was introduced and there were few follow up reports. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, the documentation that was taking place during the annual PPP and budget preparation process later in 1994 was being undertaken largely by field staff, not samiti members. Although the Functional Analysts were supposed to specialist in monitoring developments in the samities, in practice, they were more actively involved in the roles of administrative assistants to the Project

Officers and de facto credit extension staff, helping recover overdue loans. The reasons for the failure of the original monitoring proposals built into the PPP were faulty assumptions about the literacy levels of samiti staff (CCDB, 1994c), and insufficient internal demand for the information that samities could have provided about the implementation of their plans. If there was significant demand their absence and poor quality would have already been self-evident to the Dhaka Office within a short space of time, without the need for a specific study. This demand may have been stronger had the ethos of the RTM required less self-effacement by the donor representatives when voicing their concerns about monitoring and evaluation.

In early 1993 there was no evidence of any system in place whereby CCDB could monitor the effects and longer term impact of the services it was providing to its beneficiaries. CCDB's Information unit had produced one report providing a qualitative description and analysis of the first year of the PPP process (1993b), meeting requirements (b) and (c) of the 1991 RTM (above). However, this report did not address what could be regarded as the most important requirements. These were to develop an evaluation tool to study the PPP process (a), and to identify criteria that the beneficiaries would themselves want to use to evaluate their own work (d). Over the next three years a number of initiatives were undertaken to develop CCDB's capacity in this area, one of which was the PMS. Two of these that were initiated before the beginning of the PMS are described briefly below.

In Chapter Seven it was mentioned that NC, a European medical anthropologist, joined CCDB in early 1993. The purpose of his attachment to CCDB was to assist the development of its research capacity. His first task was to help the then head of the Information unit (EC) to develop a means of "measuring the participation within the PPP exercises" (CCDB, 1994g). Their solution was to identify key aspects of participation, described rather confusingly as "indicators". These were "Physical Characteristics", "Participation (especially within the discussion)", "Samiti practising PPP exercises", "Facilitation" and "Reporting". Each was rated on a five point scale, ranging from 1 meaning "narrow, nothing" to 5 meaning "very wide, excellent". The rating scale was presumably to be used by CCDB staff, when observing samities participating in the annual PPP exercise. Although the rating scale approach was reported by EC and NC in a conference in Manchester later in 1993, and in the 1993 RTM in Dhaka, when I returned in 1994 there was no

evidence of it having been implemented by the PPRDP Project Offices. Some of the difficulties of using it became apparent to the staff of the Research Unit when they tried to apply it during their own research into the PPP process in 1994. They found qualitative comments on each of the 5 aspects of participation was easier and of more value, than giving them numerical values. The design of the rating scale shared the same weakness as the documentation produced by the Information Unit (CCDB, 1993b). This was a continuing preoccupation with participatory process, unlinked to the activities that resulted.

After the creation of separate Research and Information Units in late 1993 NC persuaded the Director that CCDB should become involved in a nation wide nutritional surveillance program, managed by the Helen Keller Foundation, and already involving 11 other NGOs. Two of the Rajshahi Project Offices were involved from 1993 onwards. In NC's view, expressed to me in early 1994, nutrition status could function as a "bottom line impact indicator".

Unlike the rating scale system CCDB's involvement in the nutritional status monitoring program did go ahead. A staff member from the Mohanpur and Manda Project Offices was seconded to work with HKI, gathering nutritional status information on a regular basis. Although implemented, the process seems to have had very little effect on CCDB's policies or practice since then. There has been no reference in the RTMs since then, only a one line reference in the 1994/5 annual report, and no mention in a workshop held in 1996 on CCDB's planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. More surprisingly, an evaluation carried out in 1996 of "Food security, health and nutrition" in the PPRDP made no mention or use of the nutrition survey data that had been collected (CCDB, 1996e). This is despite the fact that HKI has been capable enough to secure USAID funding for their nutrition surveillance program. When I spoke to the Mohanpur Project Officer in early 1994 he told me that he had no idea why CCDB was involved in the surveillance program. One explanation is that there was minimal sense of ownership of the process by CCDB, or involvement of middle or senior management in its operation.

### 8.2.3 Initial negotiations about a PMS

In early 1993 I spent the first two months of my field work time with CCDB, in Dhaka, getting to know their staff and developing ideas for how the fieldwork would progress. During this time, in mid February 1993 a CAA representative visited CCDB and spoke to the Director. The CAA representative later recounted to me his views of the quandary the Director was faced with, reporting on the PPRDP. On the one hand there was an inheritance within CCDB of target oriented reporting. Most of the reports from the Project Officers were still in the form of statements about targets and achievements, as were used in the MRDP. On the other hand there were some people, such as TB, a recently ex-senior staff member of CCDB, and CT, the EZE adviser, who were emphasising the process aspects of PPRDP. The extreme of this view was a reported statement by TB (during the meeting) that “We don’t have projects we have a process”. The Director was felt to be in a position of not having a report he could send to donors, and not knowing exactly what to send.

Two weeks prior to this meeting I had discussed some initial ideas with the head of the Information Unit and the Director. One suggestion was to do a participatory evaluation of the Project Officers’ six monthly reports or the PPP CAR data, treating them as similar to the content of the 1992 NGO survey questionnaires, discussed in Chapter Six. The Director’s response was that he felt the Project Offices’ reports would provide very little useful data, they were mainly figures. When talking about the PPP papers he mentioned that he would like to see more descriptive and story based material.

He gave as an example the case of one samiti which had used their new PPRDP fund to hire a local teacher to teach a literacy class for 150 taka per month, using the samities’ new collective fund, versus 300 taka that CCDB had previously paid. They were not using the collective fund to buy things that CCDB in the past would have bought. Instead they were asking those who would benefit from the particular training to buy the associated items themselves. In his view these events were showing that people had the capacity to be better managers of money than CCDB. In another case a samiti was planning to help people obtain water seal latrines. Although they were becoming a status issue amongst people, they were still expensive. The samiti had set up a three

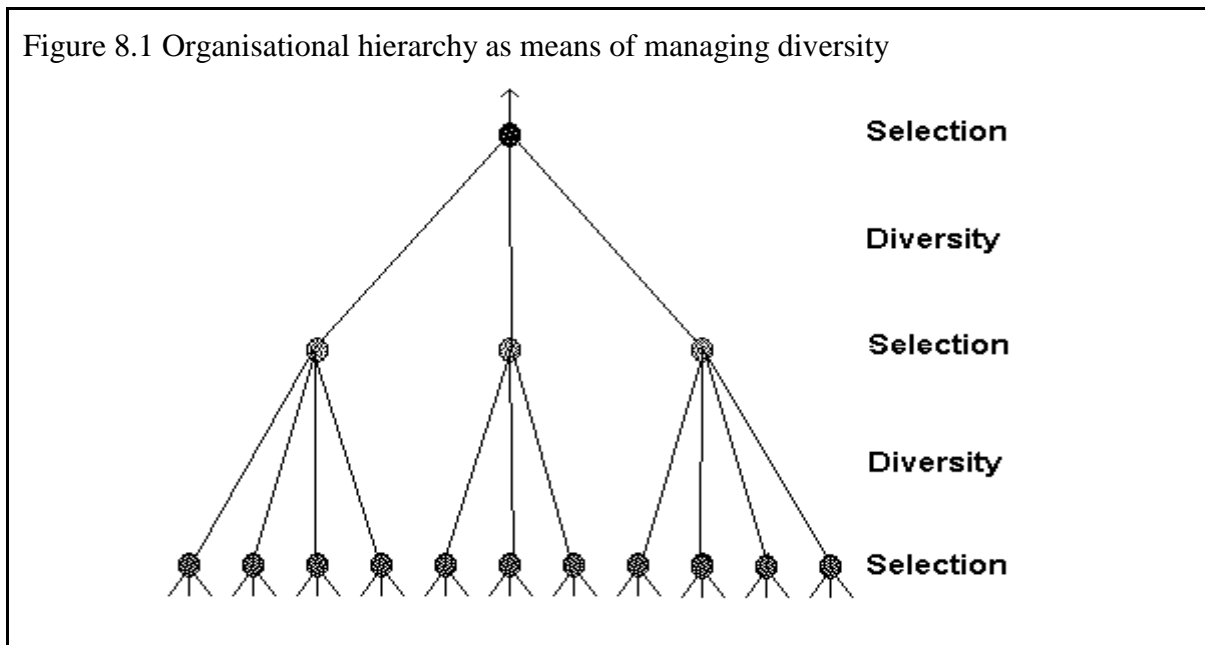


year program, whereby access to the latrines was organised on a queue basis, and payments for part of the production costs were charged, to extend the number of people who could get access. The Director's view was that this approach was a sign of maturity, of people being willing to wait their turn and look after other peoples' interests as well as their own. It was events such as these that were to become the focus of the PMS.

During this period in early 1993 I was also in contact with the staff of Concern Bangladesh in Dhaka. I used that opportunity to pre-test out the possibility of adapting the participatory evaluation process used to summarise some of the results of the 1992 NGO survey, described in Chapter Six. Two modifications were tested successfully. One was to focus in on changes over a much shorter duration of time, the last month rather than the last year. Interviews with Concern field staff in Mymensingh showed there was plenty of news, in the form of information about changes taking place at the field level, that were significant and which could make a difference to how Concern worked. The other was to use the organisation's own structure as the means for summarising information, rather than what was effectively the team based selection process used in the analysis of the 1992 survey results. An organisational hierarchy can provide a means of iterating the same process of choice and explanation; selection and re-creation of diversity. This process is summarised in a simplified form in Figure 8.1 below.

In November 1993 I was able to return briefly to Bangladesh and meet with both Concern and CCDB. Although not under my control, Concern's experimentation with the PMS process had been successful enough to warrant introducing it to the Director of CCDB as a method that could be used to monitor the effects of the PPRDP. I gave him a paper summarising the proposed process, explained the ideas behind it, and referred to the Concern experience to date. Concern wanted to continue it, and to use it in other program areas. His response was surprisingly positive, and plans were made for my return in January 1994 to begin a trial implementation of the PMS.

Figure 8.1 Organisational hierarchy as means of managing diversity



## 8.3 The Design of the PMS

### 8.3.1 The design process

The basic design of the PMS was established in a series of meetings in the Dhaka Office of CCDB in February 1994 and in four Project Offices in March 1994. Those in Dhaka included two meetings with the Director, one to initiate the process and another to work through the responses of senior staff, and to plan the next steps of the systems implementation. An introductory meeting was held with senior Dhaka Office staff to explain the concept behind the proposed PMS, to obtain some views on what types of changes should be monitored and to gauge their overall reactions. This was followed up by one to one meetings where their views on the types of changes that should be monitored were discussed in more detail. The meetings in Dhaka were followed by a visit to four Project Offices in the Rajshahi area in western Bangladesh. Meetings were held with the senior staff of each Project Office to explain the concept of the system, mainly by working through a practical example. Two weeks later a workshop was held in the Mohanpur Project Office where the staff of all four Project Offices were brought together to get more practical experience with the method and to identify how they would structure the

PMS within their own offices.

### **8.3.2 The trial area**

The Project Offices selected as the trial locations for the PMS were identified by the Director, on a purposive rather than a random basis. The Director's criteria focused on: (a) good project performance (high credit repayments, good savings levels, high literacy rates), (b) easier implementation of a pilot test of the PMS (cooperative local communities, helpful Project Officers, good project communications with Dhaka), and (c) the prospect of CCDB expanding its activities in that area in the future. These reasons related to CCDB's own needs as an organisation. They contrasted with those of TB, the ex-second in charge whose suggested sample of areas focused on differences between areas based on their natural resources and location, a set of criteria that was both more academic and disinterested, and more focused on the Reference People than CCDB. Other possible reasons for the choice of the Rajshahi area occurred to me later on. Many other major NGOs such as ASA, Grameen Bank, and BRAC were now working in this area. CCDB was under pressure to become more professional in its work.

The Director's plans for the scale of the trial PMS were more ambitious than mine. While I had planned to test the method in one project area only, and then maybe expand later, he immediately suggested a focus on at least two project areas, both in the same area of western Bangladesh. In practice, the trial was expanded to all four Project Offices in the Rajshahi area after my initial contacts with the Project Offices there in March suggested that its introduction would be easier than I expected.

### **8.3.3 Staffing**

By early 1994 there was a separate Information Unit and Research Unit in CCDB. The separation was made because of an inability of the respective heads to work together as one unit, in the previous year. In an attempt to avoid complications caused by this conflict I sought and

found a counterpart in the Training Unit, who was acceptable to the Director. Given the participatory nature of the proposed monitoring system it was in fact appropriate that a Training Unit staff member (KS) was associated with the development of the PMS. A year later when the system was extended to three new Project Offices, KS had both the training skills and technical knowledge of the PMS to ensure that it was successfully introduced.

While both the Research and Information Units were cooperative they were also mindful of their respective interests. When the Director had suggested that staff already working on an existing analysis of information on the PPP could be re-allocated to work on the PMS this was successfully resisted by EC, the head of the Information Unit in charge of that work. On the other hand he made the point that any reports on change kept by samities could be used as raw material for the CCDB annual report, a task he was responsible for. NC, the head of the Research Unit, expressed concern that the approach should not conflict with his Unit's research plans. Later in the same meeting with the Director and other senior staff he supported the choice of the Rajshahi area because of the potential of cross correlating data on impact from different sources.

#### **8.3.4 Key features of the PMS process**

The focus of the PMS was on *changes* taking place at the field level, especially in the lives of the beneficiaries of the PPRDP. Table 8.1 below summarises the structure of the PMS in terms of a two dimensional framework. The contents row below refers to what is produced by individuals, but the structure row refers to the organisational structure in which these contents are analysed. Each cell in this table is explained in detail below. The distinctions made at the organisational level parallel those made in Chapter Seven, between past knowledge accumulated in structures, and new knowledge being acquired via some of the major routines within CCDB.

Table 8.1 Key dimensions of the PMS as a designed learning process		
	Static differences	Temporal differences
Individual level ( PMS contents )	1. Domains of change that are focused on.	2. Time period which contents refer to (Reference period).
Organisation level (PMS structure)	3. How reports of changes are communicated within CCDB.	4. Frequency with which those reports are communicated.

### 1. *The domains of change.*

One purpose of the planning meeting with senior Dhaka Office staff was to canvass views on what types of change the PMS should focus on. The idea was raised of “domains” of change, such as changes in peoples’ participation, sustainability, etc. The term “domain” was borrowed from Spradley’s (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. These domains were not meant to be clearly defined, but just areas of change that were of concern to CCDB. The concept was captured by the mathematicians’ term “fuzzy sets”, though I did not use this term with CCDB. This is a categorisation of entities or events that has no precise boundary, but is defined by use. During the operation of the PMS, in the first instance it would be up to the field level staff to interpret what they felt was a change belonging to any one of these categories. Eight areas were mentioned in the meeting with senior staff : health and nutrition, income, literacy, gender, participation, peoples’ institutions, sustainability and leadership.

After the meeting I met each of the participants, identified their priorities and took these back to the Director for a final selection of three or four, as many as I thought the trial system could cope with. Staff members had specific and differing preferences for the type of changes they thought should be monitored. EC favoured participation, because of its central linkage with the PPP ideology which he was enthusiastic about. NC favoured nutrition because he saw it as a bottom line indicator of wellbeing, and this of evidence of CCDB’s impact (or absence of), and because of his involvement in HKI’s nationwide nutrition surveillance program. HT favoured institution building and sustainability.

The Director's choice was explained largely in terms of the CCDB Commission members' concerns, not the concerns of the senior staff proposing the various domains. Commission members were frequently asking what changes are happening in the lives of the beneficiaries. They were also concerned about sustainability. The interest in participation seemed to arise more from within CCDB, though staff would have been mindful of interest expressed in this area by CCDB's largest donor, EZE. The final decision, made by myself and the Director, was to have four domains of change:

- "Changes in peoples' lives"
- "Changes in peoples' participation"
- "Changes in the sustainability of peoples' institutions and their activities."
- "Any other changes"

The fourth domain was suggested by me as a window through which field staff could nominate important changes that did not fit any of the categories identified by the Dhaka Office. It allowed some bottom-up definition of what was important, at the level of categorisation of events. Although planned as part of the PMS from the beginning, this fourth domain was not built into the reporting process until May 1994 when it was felt that Project Offices could cope with the volume of reporting required.

CCDB staff did not specify whether these changes were to be negative or positive. I did raise the possibility of a domain that focused specifically on negative changes but this possibility was not acted upon. Although I could see a risk of only positive changes being reported I did not intervene, because I wanted to see how CCDB would manage this boundary of what would be acceptable public debate within CCDB.

## *2. The reference period.*

This is the period of time within which changes are expected to have taken place, and which

need to be identified by staff. I proposed from the beginning that the focus should be on changes that had taken place in the last month. This reference period was radically different to that which was implicit in much of the CCDB documentation that did describe changes at the level of beneficiaries. Case studies typically involved a contrast between the period before and after a person joined a CCDB samiti, a period that could cover 2 to 7 years. My proposed change in temporal focus was justified and explained in terms of a newspaper metaphor. Amongst the 16,500 beneficiaries in the Rajshahi area it would be hard to imagine that in the past month there would not be some newsworthy events that had taken place and which could be noticed by someone amongst the 165+ CCDB staff in the Rajshahi area. I also thought a focus on more recent changes would help keep reports which were produced more grounded in real events.

The basis to the monitoring system was a simple question combining a domain of change and a reference period in the following form:

*"During the last month, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in the lives of people participating in the PPRDP project?"*

The respondent in the first instance was the field level worker at the Project Offices (See below). They were asked to give an answer in two parts (written in Bangla). The first part was *descriptive*: what happened, who was involved, where did it happen, when did it happen. The intention was that there should be enough information written down so that an independent person could visit the area, find the people involved and verify that the event took place as described. The second part of the answer was expected to be *explanatory*. The respondent must explain why they thought the change was the most significant out of all the changes that took place in that month. In particular, *what difference did it make already?, or will it make in the future?* The combination of the description and explanation was meant to provide information in the broad form of an if-then statement, which was the equivalent of Bateson's "difference that makes a difference".

Significance was not expected in any absolute sense, but rather in a relative sense, evident when the various changes that were observed to have taken place in the same reference period were

compared to each other. The idea was emphasised that change is endemic in everyday life, not a special class of event. It was not expected that the explanation of significance would be objective. On the contrary, it would be a subjective expression of the respondents' values and concerns. The purpose of the explanation section was to help bring these values into the public realm where they could be examined, compared and selected in an accountable way.

The design of the questions to be answered involved a sampling process that was purposive rather than random. The aim of the PMS was not to report on the average state of the PPRDP, but rather on what was taking place on the edge's of the program's experience, i.e. the most significant events. If the reported change was a negative one, then it would be a type of change the PPRDP would want to move away from, to avoid in the future. If it was a positive one, then it would be a type of change that the PPRDP would want to see become more central to their program, more typical of their activities as a whole, in the future. The implicit but unintended metaphor was of the organisation as an amoeba.

### *3. The structure of participation in the PMS*

There were four main groups of participants in the PMS: (a) the samiti members in the Rajshahi area, as sources of information, (b) the project staff in the Rajshahi area, (c) the senior staff in the head office of Dhaka, and (d) CCDB's donors, particularly those participating in the annual Round Table Meeting (RTM). The structure of their participation determined how the large body of information available about reported changes was managed in a productive manner.

A significant amount of attention was given to the structure of participation in the design of the PMS. Both the Director and EC suggested that Project Office staff should have some say on the choice of which types of change would be monitored. In practice this did not take place, possibly as a result of my own concern to have these identified sooner rather than later so the system could be got up and running. BS raised the question of the samiti members, through their own forums (SRFs), doing their own analysis of change, as well as the CCDB staff. My initial response was that while this was feasible, and could be seen as very desirable, a trial development of the



system should not be too ambitious and that the participation of the samiti members could take place at a later stage when field staff were familiar with the system. The Director expressed concern that there should be more layers of staff involvement at the Project Office level than suggested in my initial outline. In practice both possibilities were left open for the individual Project Officers to decide, when I visited their offices and introduced the new system to them a week later.

In March 1994 a workshop was held with the senior staff of the four Rajshahi Project Offices to plan the implementation of the monitoring system. Each Project Office was told that at the end of each month thereafter they would be expected to report to the Dhaka Office one significant change within each of the four domains of change. Each Project Office was then asked to draw up a plan for how their field staff would, each month, identify a range of potentially important changes and how these would then be analysed in order to identify the most important. This change would then be sent by that Project Office to the Dhaka Office.

For research reasons no requirements or constraints were imposed on who could or could not be involved in the identification of significant changes within each of the Project Offices. There was no requirement that the same approach be used in each project area. They were also told they were free to copy from each others plans if they wished. After drawing up their own plans these were displayed in a plenary, and then each group was allowed the chance to question, and comment, and then make further changes to their plans. There was no requirement that the plan individual Project Offices made would have to be rigidly adhered to thereafter. However, it was insisted that if the plan was changed then the new plan should be made clear to the head office. The central requirement was that however the changes were identified and then selected to be sent to Dhaka, the process should be clearly visible to those reading the selected accounts. The selection process would be contextualised and accountable.

Although the intention of the experiment was to help improve the way in which CCDB learned from the beneficiaries no specific instructions were made concerning their participation. Project Offices were not told that they had to include beneficiaries, or that they could not include beneficiaries in this process. The diagrams that were produced by each group reflected

approaches that ranged from some beneficiary participation to none at all. The Chapai and Tanore proposals made no mention of beneficiaries, samities or SRFs. The Mohanpur proposal referred to samities, but as the source of news only. Only the Manda proposal described a role for the beneficiaries in the collection and analysis of news stories (in SRF meetings).

Some options concerning methods of selecting from an array of significant changes were outlined, specifically the possibility of using hierarchy (choice made by immediate bosses) or teams (choice made by agreement of peers) to make the selection of the most significant change out of all those identified and documented. The use of branching structure was already present as a model in that I had explained how Project Office selections would be managed by the Dhaka Office. What developed in practice at both the Project Office and Dhaka Office level was a hybrid system, a hierarchy of teams made up of locally senior staff. While field staff identified changes these changes were reviewed and selected by a small group of 4-5 senior staff in at the Project Office level. Then all these changes were sent by the Project Offices to Dhaka, where they were reviewed by a team of senior staff. In Dhaka the choice of these participants had been left to the Director, in the same way it had been left to the Project Officers at their level.

The review at the Dhaka Office involved a re-iteration of the same selection process as in the Project Offices. Four sets of four changes (one from each Project Office) were brought to the head office each month. The task of the head office staff was to select the 4 changes from the 16 which they thought were the most significant of all. In other words, the single most significant change in peoples' lives, in peoples, participation, in sustainability, and change of any other type.

The process whereby the choice was made by the Dhaka participants was left up to that group, though I participated in their first meeting. In practice they decided that each participant would rate each story out of 10, and the ratings would then be aggregated to produce the group response.

The rating process was preceded by an active group discussion of each account of change. The single requirement was that they must document and explain their choice, including who was involved in that process. In practice, the Dhaka Office selection process took about 3 hours of staff time per month.

It was expected that after each month's changes were evaluated and the choices documented that

brief report summarising these results would be fed back to the Project Offices concerned. In practice feedback from the Dhaka Office to the Project Offices took the form of minutes of the Dhaka Office meetings, which include tables showing the ratings on each news story by each participant, a summary column, and a list of reasons why the highest rating story was seen as most significant. The detailing of the ratings given by individual staff members was not something I had suggested or required.

The purpose of regular feedback was so that those identifying the changes in the first instance can take into account the views of CCDB senior staff when in the process of evaluating changes. They could either passively adapt their search for significant change according to the perceived concerns of the head office, or more actively seek better examples and provide better explanations for the significance of the types of changes that *they* think are most significant. It was intended that if feedback was provided as planned the monitoring system should take the form of a slow but extensive dialogue up and down the CCDB hierarchy each month. In more evolutionary terms it can be seen as a process of co-evolution of interpretative frameworks within the ecology of one organisation.

The third level in the process of analysis involved the donors who attended the 1994 Round Table Meeting (RTM) in Dhaka in November 1994. By the end of September the CCDB head office had selected 24 accounts of significant changes (4 domains x 6 months). Those changes were collated in the form of four chapters in a report. The introduction outlined the methodology behind their collection (as herein), and each chapter thereafter focused on one domain of change, with accounts of the most significant change ordered chronologically within that chapter (April to September selections). The appendices detailed an analysis of samiti and staff participation in the monitoring system. It was proposed that donors should read each chapter and select the one change in each chapter which they think was the most significant according to their own values and concerns. As with other participants, they should document the reasons for their choices. The intention was to develop a higher level of aggregation of information about the four most significant changes, in the lives of 16,500 people associated with CCDB, over a six month period.

#### *4. Frequency of reporting*

My initial plans had assumed there was fairly frequent contact between CCDB field staff and the Reference People, and therefore that weekly reporting of changes by field level staff would have been possible. However, at the planning meeting with senior staff BS, the Coordinator Programs, pointed out that “staff these days have less direct involvement with samities”, and that they meet only once a month. At the beginning of the systems operation in April 1994 an experiment was made with fortnightly reporting, on the grounds that since the monthly meetings of samities were staggered throughout the month and each Project Office had up to 100 samities to gather news from there should be news of changes available even on a fortnightly basis. Although field staff said they found it difficult to produce reports on a fortnightly basis, they did manage to produce reports. The main constraint was the inability of the Dhaka Office senior staff to meet quickly enough to review the changes that were sent to them, and get feedback to the Project Offices, before they next round of reports was due. The system of fortnightly reporting was changed in May 1994 to a monthly basis.

#### **8.3.5 Additional elements of the PMS**

##### *Verification*

The changes that were identified by the PMS as the most significant of all were precisely those events where the most effort needed to be invested in verifying the factual details of the event. Verification visits to the sites of the described events could perform a policing function, ensuring that field staff are kept honest in their report writing. They could also provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information about the event which was seen as specially significant, and if some time after the event, a chance to see what has happened since the event was first documented (another aspect of impact). Initially follow up visits were made by myself, with KS from the Training Unit. Later on, in my absence other CCDB staff were sent to Rajshahi to do follow up work (CCDB, 1996g).

### *Quantification*

Although the PMS appeared to be very much based on qualitative information, there was no reason why any account of a significant change could not include quantitative information as well as qualitative information. Furthermore, once a particular change was identified as the most significant in a particular period of time by the Dhaka Office there was also the possibility that Dhaka Office staff could seek information from all 10 PPRDP Offices on the incidence of that particular changes within a defined period of time, on a one off basis. However, there would be no need for this information to be sought every month thereafter, as in traditional monitoring systems.

### *Monitoring the PMS*

This potential component of the PMS was not explained in detail to CCDB staff, but it was mentioned to them briefly as a possibility. Using records generated by the process outlined above it would be possible to monitor changes over time in the proportion of samities and households that are referred to in reports of significant changes. Similarly it is possible to monitor the degree to which different types of staff (gender, age, position, education) were actively involved in the process of monitoring change, and of those actively involved, with what degree of success. Success in this case being defined as having an account of change being selected as most significant at the Project Office and Dhaka level. An analysis of the functioning of the PMS using this data could have enabled a second order learning process. Changes might have been made to the PMS structure, or how individuals participated in it, and these in turn effecting the information that was being processed by the PMS.

In February I had planned to run in parallel to the PMS the equivalent of a control group, whose performance could be compared against that of the PMS. The existing system of meetings, as well as the narrative and quantitative reporting by CCDB staff, had the potential to provide CCDB staff in Dhaka with a continuing flow of information about the situation of CCDB's beneficiaries. My intention was to ask senior staff in Dhaka responsible for field programs, a similar question to that asked of field staff: Based on the existing sources, what was the most

significant change that had taken place in each of the Project Offices in the preceding month?. The contents of the responses could then be compared to those provided by the PMS. The results would be analysed to see the extent that reports focused on beneficiaries at all, and where they did, how that focus differed, if at all, from the results generated by the PMS.

An informal pre-test for this method was carried out in February 1994 with three senior staff members without difficulty. However an attempt to repeat the exercise with BS, the Coordinator Programs responsible for the PPRDP, was not successful. BS expressed reservations about his ability to come with news at all citing the limited quality of the reports he received and the limited time he had even to read reports. Because of his defensiveness I did not think it would be productive to push this plan any further. I was left with a less precisely delineated “control”, that being all the information I could find about the normal processes by which information was processed up the hierarchy in CCDB. A selection of these have been described in Chapter Seven.

### **8.3.6 Expectations by CCDB staff**

In one of the initial planning meetings in February 1994 the Director indicated he was keen to see the system up and running and producing results as soon as possible, and asked me how soon I thought we could see a trend in what was happening in these areas. By a trend he meant a discernable impact of the PPP process. His plan was that this sort of information should be available before the Round Table meeting with CCDB’s donors in October 1994. Although I had suggested the idea of including the RTM participants in the PMS process this was after he had indicated he wanted some results to present at that meeting.

In a meeting a few days later two other staff members explained to me their view of the potential value of the PMS. The Program Coordinator said that the idea of monitoring change in the PPRDP project was “relevant to the matter of the organisations survival”. When I asked about what he meant, he mentioned that information about impact was important, because it was what donors would be interested in, and wanted to know about. HT pointed out that CCDB was coming up to the end of the current 3 year funding period, where another 3 years funding would have to be approved. The Indicative Program Plan for 1995-8 was to be presented at the 1994

RTM.

### **8.3.7 Implementation**

The implementation process went through four stages, defined after the event. The first was from February to April 1994. During this period the parameters of the PMS were defined, a trial run was organised in the Rajshahi area in March and then the system was left to operate independently of my presence while I was away in Australia in April. The second phase was from May to July 1994. During this time I made some changes to the design, monitored the system as it continued on, and did some facilitation at the Dhaka level. The third phase was from August 1994 to November 1994. During this period I did not exercise any control over the PMS at the Project Office or Dhaka level. My role was limited to preparing a report on the results for the RTM in November, organising a presentation and exercise at the RTM using the PMS results. The fourth stage was a follow-up evaluation of the PMS, through staff interviews in February 1995. A fifth period effectively continued from March 1995 onwards when I ceased to have any involvement in the PMS, but during which time I have been intermittently kept informed of its development.

### **8.4 Analysis of the Results of the PMS**

Learning has been defined as a process of selective retention of information. In the CCDB PMS there were four points at which information about the lives of beneficiaries faced a selection process. News (information about change) had to be noted by field staff, and seen as sufficiently valuable to be recorded and then submitted to the senior staff of their Project Office, on the PMS report form. In the face of competition from other reports from other local staff that news then needed to be selected as one of only four items of information that would be sent to the Dhaka Office. There it would face competition from four other items of news in the same domain, from the other Project Offices. If selected there as the most significant reported change it then (in 1994) had to face further selection by four different sub-groups at the annual RTM.

With the successful passage through each stage of selection a progressively limited number of

items of news were reaching a increasingly wider audience who, by their act of selection, were showing which news had significance and thus had a higher likelihood of being remembered and having some effect in the longer term. Each successive level of participants also had a wider span of authority, and thus the potential to promote and use that news on a wider scale than those below.

The following sections will examine: (a) the contents of the information selected at the RTM and Dhaka Office level, and (b) the factors affecting the selection process at the Dhaka Office and Project Office level.

#### **8.4.1 Reports selected at the Round Table Meeting**

Table 8.2 below summarises very briefly the subjects of the reports of significant change documented in a report to the donors attending the 1994 RTM, as well as the other significant changes subsequently selected by the Dhaka Office in the October 1994 to January 1995 period. The 37 items were selected from a total of 541 items reported by field staff during this ten month period. They reflect CCDB's selective perception of events in the lives of 16,500 beneficiaries and their families, the members of all the samities assisted by the four CCDB Project Offices in the Rajshahi District.

During the one hour RTM session devoted to the PMS there was only time for the analysis of changes in one of the four domains, that of changes in quality of life. Four sub-groups meet in separate rooms for about 30 minutes to make their selection of the most significant change out of the six different changes that had been selected by the Dhaka staff in the April to September period. There were two donor sub-groups, one for Dhaka Office senior staff, one for senior Project Office staff, and one for the "sample" of samiti members attending the meeting. When each sub-group had completed its task all four then reported back their conclusions to the plenary.

Three of the four sub-groups selected one change, that reported by Manda in June, and the fourth sub-group selected another change reported by Manda in May. The original text of these two



reports, as written by the field staff, is given in Tables 8.3 & 8.5 below. Following each account are the reasons given for the selection of this account by participants at each level in the selection process (Tables 8.4 & 8.6). The reasons already given by the three levels of CCDB staff were included in the text of the report on the PMS (mentioned above) which was made available to participants at the RTM.

Table 8.2: Reports of significant change selected by the Dhaka Office

Reference Period	Quality of Life	Participation	Sustainability	Other changes
April	Women buys cultivatable land in her own name, with money from prior investments assisted by CCDB loans and training ( <i>Chapai</i> )	44 male samiti members invest Taka 60,000 in a 5 year lease of a fish pond, using savings from CCDB aided investments( <i>Manda</i> )	SRF members erected a bamboo fence on a plot they used for meetings, to give privacy from passers by. ( <i>Chapai</i> )	No reports required this month
May	Widow buys land for homestead, which will enable her to leave her father's house ( <i>Manda</i> )	5 women make a successful first sale of fish from leased pond, their first joint venture ( <i>Manda</i> )	Women members trained in livestock care form their own samiti to ensure vaccine supply ( <i>Mohanpur</i> )	Women members pressure hospital staff and raise money for treatment of members' sons injured by train ( <i>Chapai</i> )
June	Women helps husband in establishment of bottling business, now employing 3 samiti members, and expanding ( <i>Manda</i> )	Women agrees for her daughter to be married without receiving dowry ( <i>Chapai</i> )	SRF assists one member samiti to get one member to repay loan, by seizing their property until re-payment is agreed to ( <i>Manda</i> )	Unmarried disabled women member gets employment with another local NGO ( <i>Tanore</i> )
July	Women sets up grocery shop, with accumulated profits and support of husband ( <i>Chapai</i> )	Two samities agree to establish a local secondary school, and have identified a location and teachers ( <i>Tanore</i> )	Women samiti members made profit from sale of fish in jointly leased pond, and re-invested some in new fingerlings ( <i>Manda</i> )	A day labourer became a tea shop owner and leader of samiti ( <i>Tanore</i> )
August	Women's successful poultry business enables purchase of goats, and plans for cows in future ( <i>Mohanpur</i> )	Women samiti members jointly agree to lend money to family of absent member not able to access samiti funds ( <i>Tanore</i> )	Women samiti members take joint action against loan default, seize property in lieu, involve local leaders and negotiate a	Widowed livestock cadre manages to secure vaccine supply from Govt. Offices and get their respect ( <i>Mohanpur</i> )

			settlement ( <i>Manda</i> )	
September	Women makes first income from newly established tree nursery ( <i>Chapai</i> )	Tribal women's samiti members help a member regain lost land, through court action ( <i>Tanore</i> )	SRF members negotiate with Grameen Bank about some samiti members joining GB and neglecting to repay CCDB loans ( <i>Manda</i> )	Disabled husband of member is helped to set up roadside stall, and attracts custom with music ( <i>Tanore</i> )
All the reports above were presented at the 1994 RTM				
October	Widowed member buys 500 bricks for a new house and secures her daughters marriage ( <i>Chapai</i> )	Landless labourer successfully accumulates land and develops fish pond as result of samiti membership ( <i>Manda</i> )	Women's samiti have established 3 rules to encourage own participation in literacy class funded with CCDB grant ( <i>Tanore</i> )	Women samiti member refuses to re-marry exploitative ex-husband, with support of other samiti members ( <i>Manda</i> )
November	Women begins construction of 3 room house, using assets accumulated via CCDB loans/training ( <i>Mohanpur</i> )	Women's samiti get support of village leaders to force 6 loan defaulters to repay loans ( <i>Manda</i> )	Six samities of one SRF jointly contribute funds to buy land for a SRF centre and fishpond ( <i>Manda</i> )	Because of illness women stops taking contraception and successfully pressures husband to do so instead, with support of samiti members ( <i>Mohanpur</i> )
December	Women is able to afford to buy a C.I. sheet roof for her house, without credit ( <i>Tanore</i> )	Women's samiti members resolve loan default by one member, by themselves by combining pressure, penalty payments and short term loan access ( <i>Manda</i> )	One SRF uses CCDB grant and samiti funds to sink tubewells for 6 groups of members, with some cost recovery to replenish funds ( <i>Mohanpur</i> )	No ratings given (but changes reported)
January	Women invest accumulated profits into a paddy threshing machine,	Members of a male samiti pool funds to buy small motor vehicle, which is	Members of one SRF start to build a house to meet in, on land donated by one	No ratings given (but changes reported)

	which should generate more income (Manda)	hired out to generate income (Manda)	member (Manda)	
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Table 8.3: The most significant change, as selected by majority of sub-groups at the RTM

Headline: *Ayjan Begum and her husband's factory*

Who: *Most. Ayjan Begum*

Where: *Modhumita Mohila Samiti, Banishor*

When: *June 15, 1994*

*"Most. Ayjan Begum is a member of Modhumita Mohila Samiti. Her family consists of her husband and a daughter. Her daughter is in a primary school. Financial condition of Most. Ayjan was very bad before her joining the samiti. Even she had no dwelling house of her own. She had to reside in the house of other person and her husband also had no work. Having remained unemployed for a long time her husband went to Dhaka and started to work in a bottle factory. On the other side his wife Ayjan was passing her days in the house in great difficulty. Having realised her condition and having seen the development of other female members of the samiti she became a member of the samiti. After a few months she took some loan from the samiti and started rearing cocks and ducks and also started a rice paddy business and thus somehow became able to manage their daily food. She also started making savings from the sale proceeds of eggs. After two years her husband returned home with a bottle manufacturing [bottling?] machine and begun to manufacture bottles from the money taken by his wife from the samiti. Thus rapid profit was yielding by them from the bottle manufacturing business and purchased 5 number of bottle manufacturing machines from the profits of one machine. Due to expansion of work area, they gave training to other female members of the samiti as a handicraftsman. Thus three members of the samiti are working in this bottle manufacturing at a monthly wage of Tk. 1500/- each. By dint of proper use of his wife's small rice business, they have been able to construct a small factory. They can now earn a profit of Tk. 4-5000/- per month after giving wages to their factory workers. At this moment they have no want in their family. After financial stability they have sent their daughter to school. They have again purchased another machine on June 15, 1994 from the profit of their business. Present intention is to purchase a separate plot of land and construct a house of their own along with a factory and thereby arrange employment of the unemployed people of the village. He now says without hesitation that their present development has a direct backing of the loan of his wife from CCDB."*

Table 8.4: Reasons given for the selection of *Ayjan Begum and Her Husband's Factory*

By the field staff member who reported the change	<i>"An empty handed family has gradually become a owner of a factory due to their sincere efforts. Where they had to work in the house of others now they have created opportunity of employment of others by virtue of the organisational assistance of CCDB. Thus in one side a major change has taken place in their personal life and a new venue for employment has opened to the members of the samiti on the other side. It is indirectly a great achievement of the samiti."</i>
By the senior Project Office staff who selected this change	<i>"Soundness of Ayjan's family has come with the help and assistance of the samiti; This has not only brought soundness to Ayjan but this has also taken the unemployed youth to the path of soundness and hence the event has become quite testy (sic) to us."</i>
By the Dhaka Office staff selecting the change in June	<i>"Real cooperation exists between husband and wife relation between men and women is improving; Job opportunity is being created of the husband who was jobless; Initiative in undertaking non-conventional trade; Has created job opportunity for other members of the samiti; Commitment exists; Proper use of loan; Future dreams; Well planned efforts exist; Need based efforts; Mutual respect between husband and wife exists; Sending daughters to school"</i>
By the RTM sub-groups selecting the change in November	<p><b>(Donor sub-group)</b> <i>"Economic benefit extended to others in the community; self-confidence was instilled; Ayjan Begum recognised her potential as a women; Value of education was recognised; Cooperation between husband and wife"</i></p> <p><b>(Dhaka Office staff)</b> <i>"A creative approach to the pursuit of alternative trade in the rural economy; Family harmony and mutual respect between husband and wife; Well planned and optimal use of credit for long term benefit; Developed consciousness about family size and education; Demonstration effect; Leadership capacity developed not only in family but in the samiti; (Added later) It created employment opportunities"</i></p> <p><b>(Project Office staff)</b> <i>"Job opportunity is being created for her husband and other society members; Real cooperation exists between husband and wife; He (?) is utilising local resources properly; He (?) loves society; Sending daughter to school; He transferred technology at grassroots level"</i></p> <p><b>(Samiti members)</b> <i>"They have got a source of income; Unemployment was ended in the samiti; The women in the samiti became self-dependent"</i></p>

Table 8.5: The most significant change, as selected by a minority sub-group at the RTM

Headline: *The name of model member is Hoshneara*

Who: *Most. Hoshneara Begum*

Where: *Kaligram Bahumukhi Mohila Samiti*

When: *1994 May 22*

*"Most. Hoshneara Begum is a widow member of the Kaligram Bahumukhi Mohila Samiti. After death of her husband she took shelter at her father's house along with her two sons and one daughter before joining the samiti. How long she will stay under the shelter of her poor father? Finding women's income progress she expressed her mentality to become a member of the samiti in order to get some hope of peace of her disappointed life. Though at first the samiti members showed unwillingness to take her in the samiti but later they accepted her as a member, seeing her strong interest and enthusiasm. Afterwards, the samiti members selected her as a health related cadre for her self quality [merit]. After having training from CCDB she gave health related advice to the members and neighbourhoods. In return, sometimes she would get some remuneration. Besides this, she took some training in this current month on bees cultivation and begun to cultivate bees. In fact CCDB'S loan returned her solvency. At present her youngest son helping in her business and he left his study and used van rickshaw for maintaining his family. Youngest daughter is in class 8. Once upon a time she was neglected to the society but at present women come to her for advice - due to her change. A few days ago she bought 5 katha of homestead land from the profit money she earned from her business. She is thinking to give up her father's house as soon as possible, and make a house on her purchased land where she will live with her children. While asking the question about the change of her personal life, she told that in past I was very disappointed. The solvency and peace came in my family through samiti. Now I am quite happy than many other employees. More over, the employees also borrow money from me."*

Table 8.6: Reason given for the selection of <i>The Name of Model Member is Hoshneara</i>	
By the field staff member who reported the change in May	<i>"1. Last of all she made a success only depending upon the samiti and struggling with the life. 2. The ideal of her life is a model for other members. Hence I think this change is important. Seeing her success other members are trying to be struggling like her and accept challenge of their life."</i>
By the senior Project Office staff who selected this change.	<i>"The change of a disappointed and struggling women is not only a model for the samiti members rather [also] a model to the disappointed employees and educated persons."</i>
By the Dhaka Office staff selecting the change in May	<i>"1. It is a constructive step towards self-reliance, it will help her overall situation, her movement to self-reliance in the future. 2. This type of change is always important because of its demonstration effect on other women. 3. There is economic improvement. This is a tangible benefit. People need to see this first. 4. There is education for the children 5. There is now self-confidence. She sees herself as better than job-holders. 6. She is getting recognition and honour, other people are coming to her for advice."</i>
By the donor sub-group selecting the change in November	<i>"The widow is a marginalised person in society. Due to her own persistence and membership in the samiti she was able to become re-integrated into the mainstream of the community. It is important for self-respect and dignity, as well as self-reliance."</i>

The June change described in Table 8.3 was selected by the samiti members, senior Project Office staff, senior Dhaka Office staff and one donor sub-group. The donor sub-group included representatives from EZE (Germany), HEKS (Switzerland), Dutch Church Aid, Norwegian Church Aid and the World Council of Churches. The senior CCDB staff sub-group included ten senior staff, all except one whom had participated in the Dhaka Office selection meetings during the year. The senior Project Office group included 11 members from different projects, four of which had participated in the selection process at the Project Office level.

The May change described in Table 8.5 was selected by the second donor sub-group only. This group included representatives of the World Council of Churches, Christian Aid (UK), EZE (Germany), the National Council of Churches in Australia, and ICCO (Netherlands).

Both the May and June reports which were selected share some common features. Both refer to a time period that covers not just the month prior to the report, but the whole period prior to and since their membership of the CCDB samiti. An important moment in both accounts was when the women concerned joined a CCDB samiti. Events that took place in the last month are in fact the culmination of a long chain of events dating from the period before they joined their samiti. They are not centre stage. A similar style of reporting was also found in the other eight changes in quality of life, selected as most significant by CCDB Dhaka Office. This focus on change over a large unit of time took place despite my attempt to build a bias into the PMS towards recent events (by using a one month reference period).

Given the context described in Chapter Seven the most plausible explanation for this focus on long periods of change is that it is CCDB's response to what it feels it is accountable for, to the CCDB Commission, to the NGOAB and to its donors. It is also what CCDB's donors feel they are also accountable for. There was no effective external demand for information about shorter term changes taking place during beneficiaries contact with CCDB. There situation is in dramatic contrast with the view of businesses described by Steve Jobs at the beginning of this chapter. There the focus is on the most recent of changes, because organisational survival is at stake. Other firms might be quicker at developing services which are more appropriate to the moment. Returning to CCDB the question can then be asked, which type of temporal focus is most in the interest of poor people receiving a service from an organisation? It could be argued that CCDB's current (1994) focus is likely to be least beneficial because: (a) it takes CCDB's attention away from current needs and services, and instead only provides: (b) very aggregated feedback about their relevance, (c) after a long duration of time.

A second common feature of both reports is the normative and moral character of the stories that are told. There is a strong sense of morality pervading the accounts. Judgements are clearly made about the worth of the key character and others they interact with. There are also some activities (promoted by CCDB) which are correctly recognised by the women concerned as being worthwhile, and they correctly recognise their diligent adoption will lead to success. The availability of public models of good behaviour is seen as an important part of this process of improvement. These reports, like many others not selected, have an epic structure, albeit on a



modest scale. People start out from humble beginnings, face great difficulties and obstacles, but by perseverance and correct behaviour, they overcome these and then find themselves rewarded, at peace, and with good prospects ahead of them.

To my surprise none of the donors at the RTM made any conspicuous comments about the lack of realism in the style of the reports they read. It may be that such a criticism would be more fundamental and threatening than questions about the accuracy of specific facts. A genre such as the epic is in effect a large scale categorisation of the nature of experience. In literature these have been categorised as epic, tragedy, lyric, comedy and satire (Cuddon, 1991). Even in animal societies there seems to be the ability to categorise contexts in basic terms such as play versus serious (Bateson, 1979). Such broad categorisations involve important assumptions about what should happen in that context. In the CCDB accounts it is that moral behaviour, and persistence and effort in the face of hardship, will bring its own reward. Criticism of such an assumption might have been particularly difficult given that CCDB's donors were expected to share the same Christian outlook on the world.

A third common feature of the two selected accounts of change was that within the adopted genre there was nevertheless a substantial diversity of interpretations. A striking feature of these two reports, and many other changes that came up through the PMS, was the ability of the accounts to embody multiple items of information (differences that have or will make a difference). This multiplicity was not simply a result of the requirement of having multiple observers agree on a choice. Reports by individual field staff often cited more than one reason, and the observation of the RTM sub-groups also showed individuals arguing for multiple reasons for selection of particular news items. For example, one senior Dhaka Office staff member argued about the importance of family harmony present in Ayjan Begum's story, as well as the fact that the bottle factory was a creative response to the problem of livelihood. This multiplicity of interpretations reinforces the relevance of seeing selection processes in terms of heterarchies of competing and co-existing criteria rather than simple hierarchies. The heterarchy model can be applied both to the structure of individual actors' preferences and also to how they were resolved when those actors' views encountered each other in the RTM meeting process. A schematic view of the relationship of both is given in Figure 8.2 below.

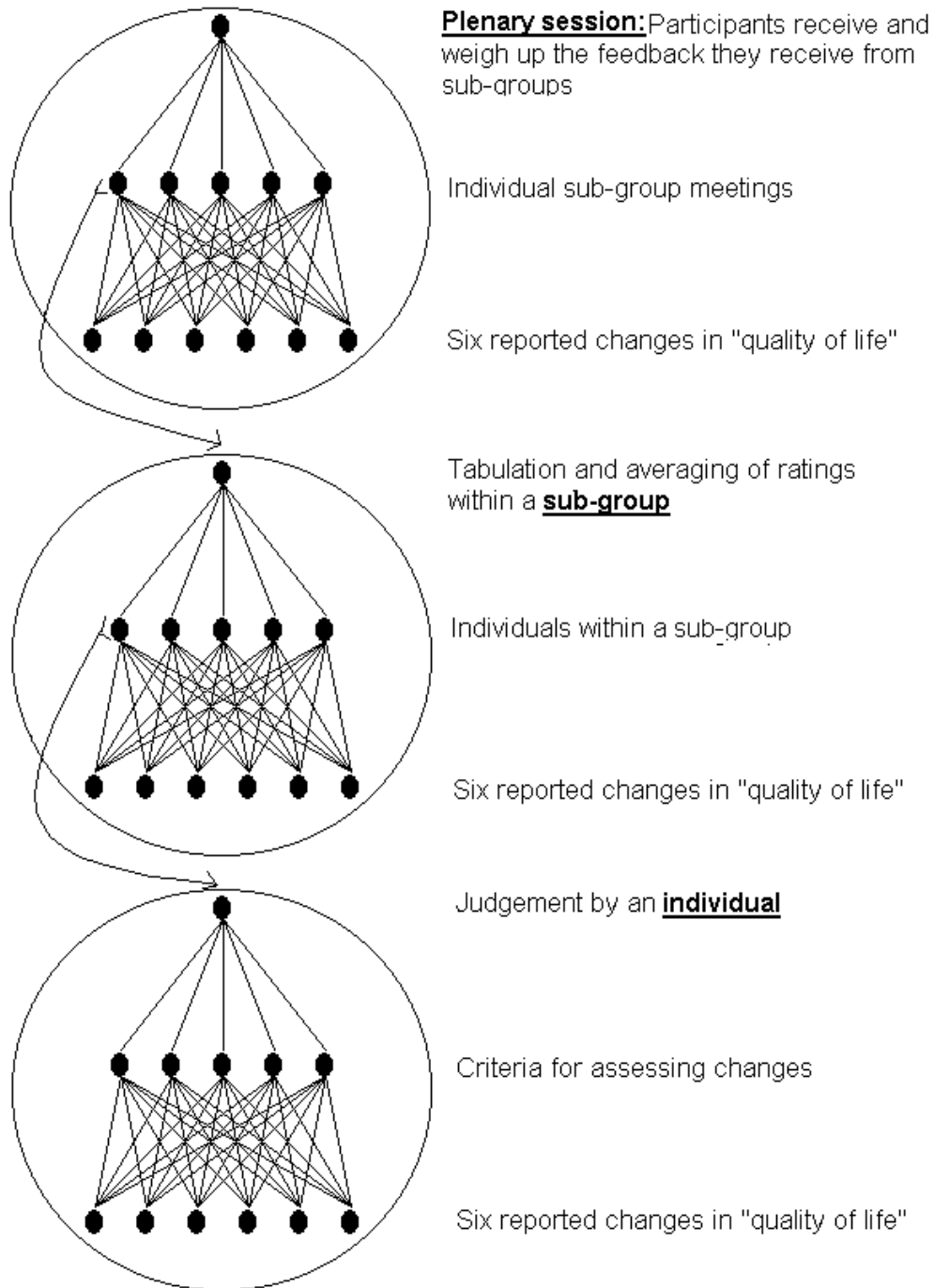
In the RTM session on the PMS the highest possible level of processing of information about changes in peoples' lives would have been in the plenary session, in which all the sub-groups reported their conclusions. A discussion of the reports in the plenary would have enabled everyone to assign their own weighting to the results produced by their sub-groups, in addition to the knowledge that three sub-groups had favoured one change and another had favoured another.

In practice the analysis of the PMS results was rigorously confined to its one hour slot within the program of events. Everyone in the plenary heard the feedback provided by each sub-group but no discussion was allowed.

Despite the commonalities discussed above, the second donor groups' choice of the May news story reflected the existence of significant differences at this level of aggregation. When the behaviour of each of the five sub-groups was examined in detail, looking at all their rankings of all the stories, not just the choice of the most significant change, the same split between sub-groups was still evident. The lowest correlation between the ratings produced by all the different sub-groups was between the second donor sub-group and all the others (a mean correlation of -0.12), particularly the samiti members sub-group (-0.33) .

Associated with the second donor sub-groups' preference for a different news story were differences in the criteria being used. In the explanations for their choices the focus was much more on the social rather than economic aspects of change. While socially oriented criteria were used by other sub-groups this sub-group specially emphasised gender oriented social criteria. In their documented criticisms of the bottle factory story they noted "It was unclear to what extent the women's initiative had been taken over by her husband. It was not clear to what extent she had control over the family expenses. It was not clear to what extent the women's credit had been a significant factor in the financing of the factory". Arguing for their own choice they gave prime importance to the fact that Hoshneara was a widowed women, "marginalised in society". The two highest ratings of this reported change were those given by two women donor representatives (Christian Aid and ICCO).

Figure 8.2 Heterarchies as a model of the selection process in the RTM



Amongst the three sub-groups selecting the bottle factory report the level of agreement over choices was greatest amongst the Dhaka and Project Office staff (0.75 correlation in ratings of the changes), and then amongst the Project Office staff and the samiti members (0.45 correlation). The high correlation between the Dhaka and Project Office staff of CCDB should be expected given they belong to the same organisation, with one group having authority over the other. Within the three sub-groups' choices of changes there were differences in the emphasis placed on social versus material changes. At one extreme, in the donor sub-group selecting the bottle factory report, four of the five reported selection criteria focused on the social consequences (self-confidence, women's potential being realised, girl's education being attended to and cooperation between husband and wife). Within the donor sub-group there were some members who wanted even greater emphasis on social criteria. Compared to all the others in the sub-group, one World Council of Churches representative gave a radically lower rating to the bottle factory report, on the grounds that economic and material gains were not what was most important when assessing the changes. At the other extreme, the members of the samiti sub-groups emphasised more economic changes: two of the three criteria used were much more concrete (the family has a source of income, and unemployment was ended in the samiti). The CCDB staff were mid-way between the samiti members and donors in their emphasis. Although the differences in criteria used by the two CCDB staff sub-groups were not dramatic, the Project Office staff sub-group did have greater focus on the economic dimensions of the change.

What was in dispute here were meta-criteria, significant differences between criteria of selection. Other types of meta-criteria were evident in the documented explanations for the sub-groups rankings, given above. Some changes were selected because they embodied evidence of the importance of various attitudes and behaviours as *requirements* for success in life. These included those of hard work, mutual support, planning, the proper use of loans, cooperation between husband and wife, limiting family size, as well as creativity and initiative. Other explanations for choices seem to be based on the *consequences* that had arisen from what had been done in the past. These included self-confidence, daughters being educated, employment being generated for others as well, and a model being made visible for others to imitate. Both of these were past oriented. Much less common were stories which focused on events of

consequence in the near future and which might require a response by CCDB.

A focus on criteria as objects of selection is characteristic of what Bateson (1979) has called second order learning. Within the sub-groups the arguments over the importance of social versus economic criteria suggest that this process of learning was taking place within the RTM. However the extent of this process was limited. While there was explicit argument over the importance of social versus economic criteria in the RTM there was no explicit evidence of this sort of learning taking place as those accounts worked their way up the CCDB hierarchy. None of the explanations documented questioned, directly commented on, or affirmed the explanations given by those at the level below. They were more in the nature of second guesses, independent judgements of reported changes made without giving much attention to the arguments made earlier. It is likely that discussions did take place in the CCDB selection meetings earlier in 1994, but that they were not documented and thus publicly retained. In the absence of that documentation what remains unclear is how many levels of abstraction might have developed during CCDB's ongoing analysis of significant changes.

#### **8.4.2 Follow-up after the RTM**

After the RTM the Director wrote (on my suggestion) to each of the donors who had participated in the RTM, requesting their selections of the most significant change in each of the other three domains not analysed in the RTM (participation, sustainability and other changes). Donors had already been given a report describing all the changes in the four domains for the six month period prior to the RTM. Two responses were received, from the two women who had represented ICCO and Christian Aid, mentioned above. No responses were received from the five other donors represented. Nor were there any requests from any of the donors represented for any reports on the results of the session. Unlike the situation within CCDB, there seemed to be little external demand for the information being generated by the PMS. The minutes of the 1994 RTM, which were produced some months later, may have reflected that nature the demand that was felt to exist. The minutes described the process in some detail, but summarised the results of the process in one sentence, simply naming the two reports of change selected as most

significant.

The two sets of responses subsequently received from the CA and ICCO representatives are summarised in Table 8.7-10 below. Both of the changes in participation which were selected as most significant emphasise collective organisation and activity (against dowry and against land expropriation). While these values are present in CCDB staffs' explanations for these and other changes they come across more persistently in the donors' explanations. In addition, in the donors' explanations given below, the emphasis on collective action also includes appreciation of opposition and resistance. Both donors' choices focused on the more socio-political dimensions of change. Amongst the other eight significant changes in participation selected by the Dhaka Office up to January 1995 seven had a more economic focus. Three concerned joint economic initiatives requiring some collective effort and four focused on management of differences between members over access to loan and grant resources. The bias away from economic benefits seen in the selection of quality of life changes during the RTM session seems to have been repeated by the CA and ICCO representatives when they focused on the domain of participation, albeit with a different type of emphasis within the social dimension.

This differences between NGOs and beneficiaries in their relative emphasis on the importance of economic versus social changes in peoples' lives has been noted in other experimental work on participatory monitoring carried out by ActionAid and its local partner NGO in India and Bangladesh (Davies, 1997a). It is a difference with consequences on more than a local level. The pre-occupation by some researchers and development organisations with the social dimensions of poverty has complicated the development of a politically useful consensus around more materialistic methods of defining poverty reduction targets, and assessing their achievement (Cox and Maxwell, 1997).

The explanation given by ICCO for the choice of the dowry story exemplifies a tendency that was also found in the explanations of given by the Dhaka Office staff for their own selections (e.g.. that of the bottle factory). Not only was there a surprising readiness to take the accounts at face value, but also a tendency to read into them features that were not explicitly present. The accounts almost seem to have become co-opted as vehicles for values which the donor

representatives wanted to see accepted and enacted. The justification given for ICCO's choice of a story about refusal of dowry payment (in Table 8.7 below) is one appreciating resistance to a dominating culture. The actual text (Table 8.8 below) suggests a more prosaic response by the parties concerned, of realism in the face of restricted opportunities, not a determined effort to expand the opportunities available.

In the sustainability domain differences between the two donor representatives and CCDB in terms of the selection criteria were less pronounced. Both emphasised collective activity, and there was less emphasis by CCDB on income generating activities (see Table 8.7 below). One noticeable difference was the emphasis by ICCO on samiti members doing things differently from the normal CCDB model for peoples' organisations. Diversity (variation from the norm) was seen as evidence of agency, and valued. As with the choice of the dowry, the interpretation of the events described seems to attribute more agency to the samiti members in their relationship with CCDB or the local government, than the text justifies (see below). While there are initial elements of opposition the account moves onto to the samiti members being given instructions on what they are to do and not to do.

There are other aspects of the reported changes which the two donors' selections have not focused on. Six of the 20 changes (participation and sustainability) involve micro-politics, conflicts within the samities themselves that is not always black and white in terms of the rights and wrongs involved. These typically involved problems of loan repayments by fellow samiti members. More than one of the reports selected by the Dhaka Office detailed how samiti members seized the property of those in default, holding in ransom. In some of these reports the role of local powers was cited not as oppressors but as potential mediators of disputes and sources of protection. Delay, patience and compromise were characteristics of the stories, as well as some agency. These news stories were evidently not in demand by donors, though judging by their number recognised as important by CCDB.

Table 8.7 Donors choices of the most significant changes (and associated criteria)

<b>In participation.</b>	
ICCO	CA
<p>(1st - <b>June</b>) The fact that women took common action against dowry is an important example that by cooperation (in their samiti) women were able to stand up against a social system and ideology, which by dowry, devalues women and turns them more and more into commodities (in a time of increasing conservatism)</p> <p>(2nd -<b>September</b>) Tribal people are the most deprived group in Bangladesh. It must take great courage to stand up against others (outsiders/dominant community). They were very persistent over a long period of time, had a sense of self-respect as a community and demanded their legal rights through the judicial system which is not in favour of the tribals and the poor</p>	<p>(1st - <b>September</b>) Excellent example of collective action in relation to fighting injustice and demanding rights; Particularly important in case of tribal people; Persistence despite initial setback.</p> <p>(2nd - <b>June</b>) Increased awareness leading to united action in relation to an important social issue. The fact that their samiti felt able to take such “unusual” action indicates its strengths and cohesiveness.</p> <p>(Equal 2nd - July) Samiti taking collective responsibility in identifying and tackling a particular need.</p> <p>(Equal 2nd - August) Indicative of the cohesiveness and solidarity of the group; joint decision making.</p> <p>(2nd - April) Working collectively; making use of local government services</p>
<b>In sustainability</b>	
<p>(1st - <b>May</b>) Livestock cadres took a new initiative cutting across the laid-out lines for organising (samities-SRF-PRF). It shows creativity and recognition of common goals and the need for professionalism for the sake of their communities.</p> <p>(2nd - <b>April</b>) Well planned, dedication, voluntary efforts, tangible sign of sustainability.</p> <p>(No further information provided)</p>	<p>(1st-<b>May</b>) Setting up a peoples’ group arising from a felt need / problem. Collective efforts. Planning for future functioning / sustainability of the samiti.</p> <p>(Equal 1st - June) Setting up of a Forum management committee sign of good planning towards sustainability. Collective decision making and action in the face of a problem threatening the stability of the samiti.</p> <p>(Equal 1st-August) Problem solving in a collective way trying different methods with varying degrees of success. At the end, the samiti felt confident enough on their own strength and unity to pardon the errant members.</p> <p>(Equal 2nd - <b>April</b>) Long term vision and planning for the samiti; Collective action and labour towards this goal.</p> <p>(Equal 2nd - July) Collective action towards self-reliance of the samiti. Joint use of profit.</p>

The demand for certain types of information produced by monitoring systems is one way in which a donor can influence an NGO. Particular demands can influence what was attended to



and not attended to, and thus what information was selected, retained, and possibly reacted to. The few examples of donor responses to information generated by the PMS suggest that the impact of donors' information demands is not likely to be straightforward. On the one hand donors might seek evidence of increased agency, a worthwhile development. On the other hand, it may be sought it may be in forms that neither the NGO or the samiti members themselves prioritise, or which fits in well with what is locally possible. Neglect of other forms of news which do not fit a particular model of the world, such as how samiti members manage loan defaults, may be just as detrimental as inappropriate demands, for example, leading to a excessively optimistic view of the benefits of micro-credit.

The alternative is for donors not to seek information about specific outcomes in beneficiaries lives, but information on when, where and how an NGO is learning from its beneficiaries. This can be done using the attributes of learning behaviour developed earlier in this thesis. Later in this chapter CCDB's own learning behaviour, as evident via the PMS, will be examined in these terms.

Table 8.8 Change in participation selected as the most significant by ICCO

**Marriage in the same samiti without dowry:** Most. Mafijja Begum, Chairperson of Champa Mohila Samiti earned a lot of awareness due to her long 8 years involvement and training in the said samiti. She is running her family well from a business by taking loan through the samiti. She has three children. Eldest daughter is 19 years old. At one stage of marriage conversation her marriage talks were finalised with one Md. Rohimuddin of nearby village. Bridegroom party claimed Tk 7000 as dowry. Most Mofeya Begum at last agreed to give the above dowry. She requested for three months time for Tk. 3000/- from the Bridegroom party but the bridegroom party left the house but not agreeing to the above request. All the members of the samiti heard this news and they gathered in the house of Mofeya. Most. Shefali Begum, a member of the same samiti proposed to give marriage her son with the daughter of Most Mofeya Begum without any dowry. Both parties agreed to the proposal in front of all members and on the following day. i.e. 30th June 1994 the marriage was held in a simple ceremony without any dowry. Now they are passing a happy and peaceful life.

(See next page for Table 8.9 & 8.10)

Table 8.9 Change in participation selected as most significant by Christian Aid

*Primitives are no longer lagging behind in gaining their rights; Chanduria Adibashi village is surrounded by forest and jungle. Malek, Moriom and Sarullah of Hemrom's family have been living in the village for a long time. Saotal tribes are living in a scattered way over the whole village. They feel proud to give their acquaintance as primitive family. In such a way Chanduria Adibashi Mohila Samiti has been formed with 26 members of 26 families. They are the companion of well and woe. It is an event of October 1990 Maleka Hemrom and Sarullah Hemrom consisting of three families were living together on a plot of land measuring 78 decimals. Suddenly a culprit named Kader Khan appeared with a forged document and threatened their eviction from the land claiming the ownership of the land. The matter was raised in their samiti meeting and took unanimous decision that they will put up the case in the local union parishad and file a case accordingly. But as ill luck would have it the verdict gone against them. They again decided to file a case in the court and in case of necessity they will collect subscription from amongst them to run the case. As they have thought they have acted accordingly and collected subscription from the primitives for maintaining their existence and all of them subscribed as per requirement. The court gave verdict on September 3, 1994 after running the case for a period of 4 years. Hemrom got back the land. They are now more conscious and established in the society.*

Table 8.10 Change in sustainability seen as most significant by Christian Aid and ICCO

*On August 30, 1994 working area and cadre card were distributed in uninstitutional [unconventional?] way among the regular cadre of CCDB, Mohanpur working area. Dissatisfaction created among the cadres of CCDB Mohanpur working area due to shortage of vaccine and irregularity of distribution and noncooperation and misbehaviour of the staff of the livestock office. As a result it created a movement against livestock staff. The cadres formed a convenor committee and created a fund unitedly. They were demanding to get vaccine from the livestock hospital through this committee. Regarding this, the cadres of CCDB met the Thana Livestock officer and discussed the issue. TLO and DLO advised the cadre to distribute the area and cadre card among themselves. Organisation will give the cards which will be attested by DLO to the cadres. DLO also gave some condition to the cadres to distribute the cards which are as follows: - One cadre should work in a definite area. - He/she has to send report regarding the progress to the DLO - Cadres have to bear the responsibility for success and failure. - Cadres have to assist for extension of the work - Cadres should distribute vaccine in the area regularly. Considering all the conditions mentioned above the concerned authority distributed cadre cards to 250 cadres among the 77 villages primarily. In that card distribution ceremony TLO was the president. He informed that vaccine will be distributed to the cadres on 2, 11, and 25th day of the month successively. To implement this method it is found that a large number of cadres received vaccine with cards on 2nd and 11th Sept. It seems that there is a close relation formed between the cadres and livestock staffs and it was proved that cadres are the assets of the Livestock Dept.*

### 8.4.3 Factors affecting the selection process at the Dhaka Office level

Identifying the influence of individuals on decision making processes involving multiple actors interacting with each other over a period of months is not likely to be easy. In the case of the PMS my analysis was focused on the effects of different staff members' participation in the selection meetings, on the types of changes selected by the meeting. The only difference attended to in the type of changes selected was the Project Office where the reported change came from,

one that could be categorised unambiguously. It was possible that some CCDB staff were selecting reports not on the basis of the contents of reports (the descriptions of events outside CCDB) but simply the source of that information within CCDB, regardless of content.

An analysis was made of the participation of the seven highest ranking staff, who also happened to have the highest levels of participation in the Dhaka Office selection meetings. The results showed no significant correlation between the presence or absence of any of the senior staff, and the rankings given to all the changes coming from particular Project Offices. At the most, there were two staff who did consistently favour changes in one domain coming from a particular Project Office.

A wider examination was made of the relationship between average grade status of meeting participants and the average ranks given to changes reported by each Project Office. Lower ranking staff might be more adventurous, or more cautious, in their judgements of significant changes. Over the 10 months to January 1995 (last data available in March 1995) there was no significant correlation between grade status and ranks given to reports from different Project Offices. In fact, analysis of the ratings given during meetings (from which ranks were calculated) showed a progress narrowing of the range of ratings given over the months, despite a substantial turnover of participants.

This limited analysis suggests that at the level of selection criteria which had an impact on overall rankings, knowledge within CCDB was widely distributed rather than specialised. This is consistent with the discourse found in CCDB publications, which stresses the need for all CCDB staff to internalise the values of PPP (CCDB 1990a, 1991c, 1993b). In early training reports the adoption of PPP by CCDB was reported to “...demand a transformation in outlook, analysis and perspective...The process is expected to lead to a new and alternative understanding of development...” (1990a) Such widely shared values can be seen as a less visible and intermediate level of structure that exists between the intra-CCDB differences, embodied in its formal organisational structure, and the differences which can be seen between CCDB and other NGOs. They are in competition with those concerned with status and rank differences described in Chapter Seven.

#### 8.4.4 Factors affecting the selection process at the Project Office level

In the design of the PMS it was assumed that Project Offices would view selection of their reports by the Dhaka Office as an achievement, a form of success. The initial workshop with Project Office staff in March, and later contacts with them supported this view. As Table 8.11 below shows, the changes selected each month by the Dhaka Office as the most significant were not drawn uniformly from all four Project Offices. The table shows one Project Office (Manda) performing especially well when compared to the other three. One limitation of this performance measure is that it can be biased by the effect of conspicuously good variations from normally poor performance, and neglect of consistent second best performance. Table 8.12 shows the average ranking achieved for all changes sent to Dhaka by each Project Office, for each domain. Manda Project Office was still the most successful in having its reported changes selected as most significant, but Chapai was less successful overall.

Table 8.11 Relative performance of the four Project Offices - 1st measure					
(Numbers of changes selected by the Dhaka Office as the most significant out of all those presented in any one month)					
Project Office	Quality of life	Participation	Sustainability	Other changes	All changes
Manda	3	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	1	<b>16</b>
Tanore	1	3	1	3	8
Mohanpur	2.5	0	2	2	6.5
Chapai	3.5	1	1	1	6.5
One change was selected each month, for each domain, over 6 months, except "other changes" which were selected over 5 months. "Quality of life" was the phrase that was used by Dhaka Office staff to refer to the domain of "changes in the lives of samiti members" In one case the changes reported by two Project Offices were seen as equal in importance, hence the 0.5 value.					

Table 8.12 Relative performance of the four Project Offices - 2nd measure					
(Average ranking for changes submitted: 1 = most, 4 = least significant)					
Project Office	Quality of life	Participation	Sustainability	Other changes	All changes
Manda	<b>2.15</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>1.65</b>	2.86	<b>2.10</b>
Tanore	2.55	2.35	2.45	<b>1.93</b>	2.32
Mohanpur	2.45	2.90	2.30	2.36	2.50
Chapai	2.65	3.00	3.40	2.86	2.98
N = 37 for each cell on the far right N = 10 for all other cells, except "Other Changes" column where N = 7 for each cell.					

There are various differences between the Project Offices which do not account for these differences in success. The least and most successful Project Offices (Manda and Chapai) had Project Officers who were both Christian, while those in Tanore and Mohanpur were Muslim. The newest appointees, and the only female Project Officer in the area, were all middle ranking , and not conspicuously successful or unsuccessful. Both the Manda and Chapai Project Officers had worked with CCDB for more than 10 years.

There was some evidence of an inverse relationship between performance within the PMS and the variations in the credit repayment rates achieved by the different Project Offices At the beginning of 1994 the Chapai Project Office had been identified as the most successful of all 10 Project Offices by the Director, especially for its achievement of 100% credit repayments. That achievement had been sustained throughout the April 1994 to January 1995 period analysed below. In contrast, the Manda Project Office had the worst repayment record during this period (an average of 9.47% of loans overdue). Mohanpur and Tanore were second and third worst respectively average (6.62% and 4.27%) overdue.

It was possible that the PMS was selecting a different kind of information associated with a different kind of achievement, to that involved with savings and credit operations. However, this view was not supported when the contents of the selected reports were examined. Almost one

third of the Manda reports selected by the Dhaka Office were in fact to do with problems of credit repayment, and how they were resolved (in all cases successfully). These were reported as significant changes relating to sustainability and peoples' participation, two domains of change where Manda was conspicuously successful. Chapai was more successful with stories of change in peoples' quality of life, all of which may have been helped by the proper functioning of CCDB's savings and credit scheme.

One other possible interpretation was that it was the Project Officers' personalities that mattered. The Chapai Project Officer was noticeably sycophantic in his relationships with the Director and other senior staff in Dhaka. This was not at all the case with the Manda Project Officer. Between both of them, in terms of success, was the new female Project Officer in Tanore, promoted from within CCDB, and the Mohanpur Project Officer, newly recruited from another NGO. A further contrast was that the Chapai Project Officer was a recent convert to Christianity, whereas the Manda Project Officer was part of a well established and well known Christian family in the Rajshahi area. A greater sense of security and independence of mind may have been a significant advantage in producing a continuing stream of changes which could be seen as significant by the Dhaka Office. Some risk taking would have been required. For example, when the Manda Project Officer took what might have otherwise been seen as failures (relating to credit) and repackaged them as achievements.

#### **8.4.5 Strategies used by Project Officers**

Each of the four Project Officers had two types of resources available which they could use to identify news that was of value for the Dhaka Office: their staff and their beneficiaries. While beneficiaries were the original source of news the Project Office staff were also essential resources, needed to identify and report any news that was of potential value. Table 8.13 summarises the resources available to each of the four Project Officers.

Table 8.13: Resources available to the four Project Offices.					
		Chapai	Manda	Mohanpur	Tanore
Staff		33	43	35	29
	% female	12%	9%	20%	24%
Beneficiaries					
PRFs		6	8	7	5
SRFs		18	30	21	16
Samities		98	192	122	101
	% female	98%	78%	76%	74%
Beneficiaries		3140	6074	4018	3225
	% female	98%	75%	70%	66%

There was a correlation between the scale of resources available to a Project Office, defined in terms of beneficiary and samiti numbers, and the number of that Project Offices' reported changes selected at the Dhaka Office level. However, it can be argued that even in the case of the Chapai Project Office there should not have been a shortage of potential news amongst the 98 samities and 3,140 beneficiaries. When added together their lives are the equivalent of 262 person years of experience which are available to the Chapai field staff, each month (3,140 people/12 months = 262 person-years).

In addition, the case of Tanore suggests that resources alone were not the key factor. Although Tanore only had marginally more beneficiaries (and actually had fewer staff) than Chapai the number of samities reported on and the number of reports submitted in total were the lowest of all Project Offices, yet they performed better than both Chapai and Mohanpur.

An alternate explanation for variations in performance was the different ways in which the Project Offices accessed the potential news that was available. As with NGOs analysed at the

sectoral level in Chapter Six, the Project Offices had a choice as to whether they would focus their attention and resources in specific areas, or use more generalist strategies. Organisation theorists who have been influenced by evolutionary theory such as Cyert and March (1963) have referred to these as “search strategies”. Project Offices could specialise by a focus on particular types of beneficiaries, and/or in the way that they used their staff.

### *Beneficiary focus*

One specialisation strategy would be for field staff to focus on certain samities that were known to be doing well, in development terms, and thus most likely to be sources of valued news. While these responses may be internally adaptive within CCDB there are two reasons for believing a generalist strategy would be more in the interests of beneficiaries. Firstly, it would enable a greater diversity of voices to be heard by CCDB, and potentially more sensitivity to that diversity. This would especially be the case if the Dhaka Office was favouring bad news as well as good news. On the other hand, if the Dhaka Office favoured the reporting of good news then the survival of a generalist strategy would suggest that the benefits of CCDB’s services were not restricted to a small sub-group within the beneficiary population. The scale of whatever that benefit would be evident in the contents of the reports.

When the behaviour of the four Project Offices was examined there was no evidence of Manda or Tanore using specialisation as a means of achieving success. There was no conspicuous specialisation of reporting on particular samities, or on samities with a particular gender. This is a positive finding, given the interpretation above.

In all four Project Offices there were other structures, in addition to the samities, which were potential sources of news about change. The SRFs and PRFs made up between 20% to 24% of all the structures that beneficiaries belonged to. However, across all four Project Offices these were the source of only 8.5% of all the reports. Given that much of the annual planning took place with the SRFs as CCDB’s main partners, and that during this period CCDB saw the development of the SRFs as a key part of its development strategy (CCDB, 1994d), the paucity of



reports concerning SRFs across all four project areas suggests that whatever had been achieved in that area to date was not seen as very newsworthy.

Another potential specialisation strategy was to focus on old and well established samities, or very new samities. If the impact of development aid inputs from CCDB was slowly cumulative in its impact, key events such as buying land, might not be visible in younger samities. On the other hand, the most dramatic impacts might take place soon after a family joins a samiti. When ActionAid examined in its Bhola Island savings and credit program in the early 1990's the evidence available from the SAMASARI monitoring system indicated that the most noticeable changes in nutritional status amongst children of members took place shortly after parents joined the samities (Salway et. al, 1994). In practice, an examination of Project Office records showed there was little opportunity for such specialisation in the Rajshahi area, because most samities had been formed within a narrow band of time, between 1989 and 1990.

A more basic response than that of choosing whether to specialise or diversify, is simply the amount of effort that Project Office staff decide to put into searching for news relating to beneficiaries. In practice, the overall amount of effort put into reporting significant changes was not related to performance at the Dhaka level. The field staff at Chapai and Mohanpur Project Offices both identified more changes than those at Manda.

#### *Use of Project Office staff*

Another potential strategy for Project Offices was to specialise in their use of Project Office staff to identify and report significant changes. Specialisation by staff in tasks such as reporting for the PMS may not be automatically contrary to the interests of the beneficiaries. Tradeoffs may be involved. On the one hand using a small number of staff will mean there will be fewer channels through which the views of beneficiaries, and views of their views, can reach the CCDB senior staff. On the other hand there may be some people who are, or who become, skilled in the form of observation skills required by the PMS, and making particular use of such people would make sense.

Chapai was conspicuously different from the other three Project Offices in that it used relatively few staff to identify and produce reports of changes. Although many reports were produced for selection at the Project Office level, a higher proportion of these were produced by a few staff members who focused on the task. Unlike the other Project Offices where senior staff were involved in identification of changes as well as field staff, in Chapai only the field staff were involved. Although Chapai had the highest percentage of female beneficiaries and samities, very few women staff provided reports. Overall, of the four Project Offices, the level of specialisation by staff in the tasks involved in the PMS was the greatest in Chapai.

In Manda there was no apparent specialisation in the use of staff. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant *inverse* correlation between numbers of reports submitted by individual staff members and the proportion of those selected by the senior Project Office staff (0.39, significant at  $p < 0.05$  level). This negative correlation could indicate that learning, in the sense of routinisation through repeated experience, was actually counter-productive in the context of what is required by the PMS.

This is understandable when it is recognised that the type of learning that was required by the PMS involved a significant jump in understanding, from being able to identify specific pre-identified events, to be able to identify new *differences* between events. Bateson (1979) has described this second order form of learning as it took place with a captured dolphin, being taught (by reward with fish) to display “new behaviour”.

“...each of the first fourteen sessions was characterised by many futile repetitions of whatever behaviour had been reinforced in the immediately proceeding session. Seemingly only by accident did the animal provide a piece of different behaviour. In the time out between the fourteenth and fifteenth session the dolphin appeared to be much excited, and when she came onstage for the fifteenth session, she put on an elaborate performance that included eight conspicuous pieces of behaviour of which four were new and never before observed in this species of animal. From the animal’s point of view, there is a jump, a discontinuity, between logical types.” (Bateson, 1979:123)

As Bateson would have been the first to point out, the learning process involved trainer *and* trained, and if there is not sufficient appropriate reinforcement from the trainer than this jump will not take place. One interpretation of the staff performance described above is that while senior staff (specially in Manda, which was the most successful in Dhaka terms), understood what was in demand, that understanding was not communicated sufficiently well to the field level staff. In these circumstances repeated production of reports by any individual ran the risk of routinising at the wrong level, standard accounts which were thought to be in demand, but not actually containing any *news*. If however news focused reports were not highly rated by Dhaka then routinised identification of desired accounts should have been easy, and success would have been positively associated with volumes of reports generated by individuals and their Project Offices.

Manda's generalist strategy prevented these limitations from becoming a source of disadvantage. Chapai's specialist strategy encouraged routinisation, in a way that was evidently not productive.

## **8.5 Evaluating the PMS**

In Chapter Four it was argued that the definition of what is "successful" learning is dependent on location, on whose interests the observer identifies with and prioritises. In this final section the PMS will be reviewed first of all from within my own evolutionary perspective, developed in Chapters Three and Four. In the process attention will be given to how the PMS has met the various interests of CCDB staff. The implications for the interests of their beneficiaries will then be identified in the context of a more detailed analysis of the systems use, in terms of the five attributes of learning behaviour.

### **8.5.1 The survival of the PMS**

In Chapter Three it was pointed that in evolutionary theory success is measured in minimalist

terms by survival, and proliferation. In the words of Belew, writing about Artificial Life studies, "The dumbest smart thing you can do is stay alive". (Belew, 1991). Proliferation is of value simply because it suggests fitness within a wider range of conditions, and thus better prospects for survival in the future. Applied within the context of CCDB, long term survival of the PMS would be indicative that it was providing at least a minimum level of value, even if it did not make a noticeable impact on CCDB's behaviour towards its beneficiaries. Extension or replication of the system would suggest a degree of wider value.

Although I withdrew from active involvement in the PMS at the end of the RTM in 1994 it has survived since then, more than four years after it was established. In January 1995 the PMS was adopted by three more PPRDP Project Offices in the Pabna area. By late 1995 it had been extended to cover the remaining three PPRDP Project Offices. In 1996 the system was taken up by the six Special Programs, all the other non-PPRDP programs. The system has survived and has proliferated within CCDB (CCDB, 1996g; 1997).

In the process of doing so changes have taken place in the PMS, it has been informed by experiences of its use within CCDB. The system has learned from experience. Two key changes were made but these did not contradict the underlying design principles. They do suggest some of the competing demands that such systems may have to manage as they are expanded in scale. When the PMS was extended to three additional Project Offices in early 1995 it increased the volume of changes that had to be analysed at the Dhaka Office level each reporting period, from 16 to 28 ( 4 domains x 4 Project Offices versus 4 domains x 7 Project Offices). CCDB adapted to this expansion by using two groups of staff at the Dhaka level to analyse the changes instead of one, one for each of the two zones. By the end of 1996 it was reported that three groups of Dhaka Office staff were being used, because by then the system had been extended to cover all the PPRDP Project Office (all three zones).

Associated with these changes was a change in the reference period and reporting frequency from monthly to three monthly. This would have enabled CCDB to aggregate information at a larger geographic scale than before, without a substantial increase in costs (in staff time). This choice suggests that temporal and geographical resolution were in competition with each other, and

geographical resolution was seen as the more important. This is consistent with the longer term temporal focus on beneficiaries lives, evident in the Annual Reflection (in Chapter Seven).

Although there are now three groups analysing changes at the Dhaka level CCDB has not added a further layer in the hierarchical selection process enabling comparison between the three zones and the aggregation of information about all PPRDP and other CCDB programs. Again, this would have involved extra cost. Two factors may have been influential. Firstly, while there were individual staff (Project Officers) who were responsible for performance at the Project Office level, no one was accountable for performance at the zonal level. Secondly, CCDB may have felt, with some justification based on RTM experience, that there was not enough external demand for information about the whole PPRDP (in this form).

The PMS has not only survived and proliferated, but steps have also been taken to institutionalise its maintenance. Following the end of my contact with CCDB in early 1995, KS was transferred from the Training Unit to the Research Unit in order to take on full time responsibility for the management and extension of the PMS. He has remained in that position since then. The initiative to institutionalise the role responsible for the PMS came from within CCDB, not myself, though my last week at CCDB I was actively lobbied by a number of senior staff to propose such a development.

Having been incorporated by the Research Unit in early 1995 the PMS, under KS's management, has managed to maintain support within that Unit in the face of other internal priorities (see below). In late 1996 the head of the Research Unit and KS published a report which argued for a strengthening of the PMS. In a report to the 1996 RTM (CCDB, 1996g) it was suggested that: (a) In each three-monthly Project Officer's Coordination meeting in Dhaka the most significant stories of that period should be discussed, (b) samiti members should be more involved in the process, both in the identification of significant changes, evaluating specific changes and during attempts to follow up previous reported changes, (c) The most significant changes of samiti members should be published in Roddur, a newspaper CCDB produces for the newly literate, (d) The senior staff of the Dhaka Office should be involved in field visits to follow up previously reported significant changes, (e) The reporters of the most significant changes should get

recognition from CCDB Dhaka Office, (f) More orientation sessions should be given to staff on how to collect accurate and unbiased information. The fate of these suggestions is unknown, but they suggest some continuing confidence in the value of the PMS, and its potential for further development.

The extension of the PMS took place in the face of other systems being maintained as well as proposal for their development. Their development showed evidence of the impact of the PMS, as well as evidence of absence of impact. In 1996 it was proposed by the Research Unit that the system by which Project Offices wrote monthly reports to the Coordinator Programs in Dhaka should be revised, to incorporate a much more systematic process of data collection about developments at the SRF and samiti level. The new design showed some influence by the PMS. Instead of reporting on all samities and SRFs each month, a large and daunting task, the system focused on one SRF per month, including its six constituent samities. This selective sampling would enable the Project Offices reports to go into much more detail about those samities. It was expected that on this basis complete coverage of all samities would be achieved once every 2 years at the most. In the PMS a selective sampling approach had lead to between 40% and 76% of the samities in the four Project Offices being represented within ten months.

The revised monthly reporting system also incorporated what was remembered about an earlier approach to monitoring, dating from 1991. This was a list of indicators based on a poster called *How To Live Well*. The poster contains a list of injunctions about what to do “to increase income”, “to be free from disease”, “to build a future” and “to be socially responsible”. While they are very similar, in their moral tenor, to the contents of the PMS reports there is a notable difference. All of the changes in quality of life identified as most significant by the Dhaka Office in 1994 involved the acquisition of physical assets. These included goats, extra land for farming, a tree nursery, land to build a house on, bricks, CI sheets, the building of rooms, establishment of a grocery shop, bottling machinery and a threshing machine. Some of these assets were traditionally valued, such as land, and others such as the bottling machine and machine thresher, reflected newer developments in the rural economy. With the exception of goats, none of these larger scale material changes were anticipated as indicators by the *How To Live Well* poster, or any of CCDB’s earlier monitoring systems. In choosing to use the *How To Live Well* list CCDB

seemed to be reverting to a more conservative view of change, one that was both less ambitious in outcome and more explicitly prescriptive.

There were also signs that the PMS has been influenced by inherited practices within the Research Unit. In late 1997 I was informed that changes had been made to the domains of change being monitored. Although participation and changes in peoples' lives were retained as domains, sustainability was not. Three new domains of "Peoples' economic changes", Gender issue" and "Health, Nutrition and Food" were added. These new domains were the same as the names of three streams of research initiated by NC, the head of the Research Unit in 1994. As before, Project Offices were responsible for reporting three significant changes each reporting period. However, they now had a choice as to which domains those changes will represent. This innovation seems constructive, a choice of domain enables the Project Offices to be more locally responsive to new developments than was previously possible.

### *The meanings of the PMS*

The PMS has survived, and evolved over time in terms of its objective features, such as its scale of operation, how frequently reports are made and analysed, and who was involved. Associated with these objective features are the subjective interpretations of various actors about the purpose and value of the PMS, which affect their willingness to participate in and promote the PMS. These exemplify the distinction made earlier in Chapter Three, about genotypal and phenotypal forms of information. Interpretations are the differences that can be made by differences in structure. Conversely, differences in interpretations can also inform differences in structure.

As with the news stories of significant change, the different interpretations of the purpose of a PMS do not have to be entirely consistent for the system to survive. In fact a diversity of meanings may help a particular practice survive within an organisation. In the report on the PMS produced for the 1996 RTM four different goals were listed for the PMS.

1. To improve CCDB's understanding of developments that are taking place in reference

peoples' lives

2. To improve the assistance that CCDB is providing to the reference people
3. To improve the understanding of CCDB's donors about how CCDB is working
4. To develop the analytic skills of CCDB staff

According to brief evaluation of the PMS in February 1995 the staff at the Project Office level saw the first goal as the most important. The second goal was less frequently mentioned as a positive feature of the PMS, but was a strong underlying concern of my own. The third goal was seen as important by both Dhaka Office and senior Project Office staff. The later also saw the PMS as a not so covert means of improving appreciation within CCDB about the work of their own Project Office. While field and Dhaka Office staff recognised the importance of skill development, the Director saw this as especially important, judging from his comments to myself, and CCDB staff, in meetings in 1994/5. Within this limited diversity there was clearly potential for conflict, especially between the goal of improving understanding about the lives of beneficiaries, and improving donors' understanding of CCDB's work.

Along with these goals which have achieved formal status there were many others, that may have survived informally since early 1995. In my 1995 review field staff mentioned many other values of the system, for example:

- "We have come to know about changes in other project areas as well as our own. These we can copy"
- "It will help evaluate staff and work performance...Before staff said they went regularly to the field but I am not so sure, but this process makes me sure"
- "There will be competitive attitude amongst the staff" (within the Project Office).

In Chapter Three it was pointed out that the minimalist nature of the definition of successful learning in terms of survival also made the definition enabling. Other forms of dependent structures could emerge. The diversity of interpretations of the purpose of the PMS, and the range of different needs that they meet, exemplifies the enabling nature of this definition.



### 8.5.2 Consequences for CCDB's beneficiaries

Within the same evolutionary framework there is a more specific way of evaluating the performance of the PMS. This involves the use of the attributes of learning behaviour identified in Chapters Three and Four. These were direction, frequency, openness, depth, and scale of learning. Two useful questions can be asked. Firstly, to what extent did the PMS enable variations of learning behaviour on each of these dimensions? Was it unduly constraining? This is of relevance to the interests of beneficiaries, in that it potentially effects the NGOs capacity to know their views and needs. Secondly, to what extent does the actual practice of learning, as evident when described in these five terms, signal to the CEO and to donors how CCDB's work to date may have effected the lives of beneficiaries? This capacity is also relevant to beneficiaries interests.

#### *Direction of learning*

The PMS used fuzzy categories to define where Project Office staff should look. This was supplemented by a completely open-ended domain, of any other changes. That facility was used by most Project Offices and in most months. In addition all the domains were open to redefinition at the Dhaka level, something which did happen after 1994. There were no structural features of the PMS that constrained where CCDB staff could learn.

While there was a wide range of events covered in the PMS reports areas of concentration and neglect can be identified. In 1995 KS pointed out to me (perhaps with some exaggeration) that "95% of the stories are credit related". His explanation was that "Credit is the only program running effectively, all the others going on not so actively". Some field staff made the same point, and explained "If no credit, there will be no stories, they will walk away to BRAC." In contrast, the absence of any significant changes focused on the vocational and awareness training programs suggests very limited or non-existent achievements in those areas. The under-reporting of events at the SRF and PRF level, noted earlier, suggests limited achievements at that level. As suggested above, in the outline of the design of the PMS, it would be quite feasible for senior

staff to analyse the proportions of different types of significant changes and relate these to where staff time and project funds are distributed. Donors could also do the same, at a relatively macro-level, without requiring substantial additional information.

### *Frequency*

The system was originally designed with the intention that frequency of learning could be tuned. In the actual implementation an attempt was made to set the frequency, firstly to fortnightly and later to monthly changes. This was only partially successful in practice. While in almost all cases there were events reported that happened in the last month, they were in many cases described as the culmination of a series of events, deemed important as a whole, that had started long before. Perceived demand for certain types of reports over-rode the intended settings. At the most, the requirement of a monthly reporting may have given more recent events a better chance of selection than if they had to compete with other events over a much longer period of time (e.g.. a year).

Despite this possibility, the behaviour of field staff was quite surprising. While there were sufficient reports produced by the Project Offices, for the monthly Dhaka meetings the field staff repeatedly complained to KS and myself that “We have not found any change” (CCDB, 1996g). Despite training and supervision by myself and KS in 1994, and by KS since then, staff had persisted in believing that stories of big changes in peoples’ lives, not small incremental changes, were what was in demand within CCDB. These were by definition more difficult to find than smaller changes. That learned behaviour was in effect limiting CCDB’s capacity to see and remember more immediate events right in front of it. The incapacity to learn from short term changes may have been reinforced by CCDB’s move in 1995 to a three month reporting period. As has been argued earlier in this chapter, the focus on long term events, is not in the interests of beneficiaries. It is a very slow way of enabling an organisation to respond to changes and differences in beneficiaries’ needs.

## *Scale*

In Chapters Three and Four it was explained that scale of learning can be increased by introducing different layers of learning. The hierarchical structure of CCDB provided a ready made series of layers within which complex qualitative information from the field could be processed and selectively retained. By late 1994 the PMS was covering the lives of 16,500 beneficiaries without apparent difficulty. The extension of the system to the other six PPRDP Project Offices involved a successful scaling up of the existing system. Even when covering all other CCDB project, CCDB still felt it could afford to use team based selection at the Dhaka level.

From the beginning of the PMS the coverage of samities mentioned in reports grew steadily, in all four Project Offices. After six months between 40% and 76% of all samities had been the subject of a report. This trend appeared to be continuing in early 1995. This coverage contrasted with the sample survey based approach to monitoring impact, being used by Proshika during the same period (Davies, 1995). Proshika's impact on more than 660,000 members was investigated through contact with 990 households. This was a sample of 1.5% (Shahabuddin, 1996).

While there were no major problems with scaling up the application of the PMS it should not be assumed there were no costs. More staff time was required at the Dhaka Office than before, with three groups involved in 1997 versus one in 1994. CCDB made strategic choices about how to manage these costs, which themselves signal where its learning priorities lay and which may vary in their effects on beneficiaries. A additional layer of aggregation across all projects was not seen as necessary, for reasons explained above. CCDB was prepared to compromise on the frequency of reporting in the process of achieving learning within large groupings of projects. This could have been avoided by switching, at the Dhaka level, from the use of teams to the use of decisions by individuals in charge of the projects or project groupings. The significance of lower frequency learning has been discussed above.

## *Openness*

The PMS is unusual (if not unique) as a monitoring system, in terms of its openness. It does not require the use of predefined indicators whose meaning must be widely agreed upon, or imposed by authority. A diversity of accounts and interpretations is not problematic, but encouraged and utilised. The focus is very wide, on *change*. The main constraint is that the reporting is about events which have already taken place. Modifiable constraints are imposed on direction and frequency of reporting, mentioned above.

Because of the open nature of the PMS, the way in which it is used by organisations such as CCDB can signal how open they are. There are at least two aspects of openness which can effect the interests of beneficiaries: novelty and negative judgements. The absence of either would suggest a very limited capacity to learn from experience, and a disadvantage to CCDB's beneficiaries.

There was evidence of novelty in the reports produced via the PMS. The bottling factory story, selected at the RTM, was exceptional because it was about employment generation at the samiti level, not just self-employment, which was far more common in the accounts processed by the PMS. The second most important account selected at the same meeting, by a minority, was about a women who was able to buy and register land in her own name. There was no suggestion in pre-PMS CCDB documentation that this sort of event might normally be expected to happen. However, more than one account relating to land purchase was subsequently reported by the PMS.

More unusual and significant events were also reported after the 1994 RTM. One focused on the uncompleted struggle of a women samiti member to get her husband to take responsibility for contraception, and the help she received from other samiti members, in arguing her case with her husband, and in an local shalish (village council) called to resolve this most unusually public dispute. Other more obscure events were reported to, but not selected, at the Dhaka level. One concerned the marriage of two trees, according to Hindu custom. The same two trees had previously been planted some years earlier by CCDB staff and samiti members, to celebrate the

start of the PPP process.

Perhaps the most important form of novelty is that in the form of uncontrolled outcomes. During the selection of the most significant changes in peoples' lives in the 1994 RTM a key area of difference that emerged between participants was over gender. None of the four domains of change focused specifically on gender, not did any other of CCDB's reporting systems. However the reports that were previously selected by the Dhaka Office staff, and their explanations, carried with them gendered views of the world. An examination of these reports shows CCDB staff placing a value on women behaving patiently, and being cooperative. Family peace and harmony were over-arching concerns. After reading the reports at the RTM, some CCDB donors raised questions in this area, others did not.

In more recent reports on the PMS (CCDB, 1996g, 1997), novelty has been evident but in a minority of cases, between two and three of the nine reported events selected at the Dhaka level. However this is a subjective judgement made by an outsider, who does not feel comfortable with the genre used in most of the reports. Further investigation would need to involve the participants themselves, such as by asking them to identify which reports contained the most novelty, and explain in what they were novel.

One constraint on the extent of novelty in the reports being selected by the Dhaka Office was the level of tolerance within CCDB for the public display of criticism and failure. In February 1995 I interviewed Project Office staff, and Dhaka Office staff about their views of the PMS. One key question was "What sort of stories of change have not been written, and why?" The single most common response by field staff was that negative changes were not being reported. This was consistent with an examination of the reports that were sent to Dhaka, less than 5% could be seen as negative changes. Examples of negative changes that field staff said were not reported included:

- Member took loans and then lost capital, in full or part (5)
- ...and then repays CCDB loan with money borrowed from mahajon (big man) (2)
- Drop outs from groups or samities...Due to (CCDB) resource limits samiti members leave and go to other organisations (2)

- Stories of members divorcing that do not end up in reconciliation (2)
- Stories of marriage where dowry is paid (2)
- Always we try to develop alternate leadership but then he (sic) goes under other leaders, joins a faction (1)
- The impact on our members due to BRAC's activities (1)

The first three changes, if ignored for too long, are potentially life threatening for CCDB as an organisation. As was noted in Chapter Seven, CCDB did find out about these developments from other sources. These included a survey of the savings and credit scheme in 1995, Research Unit studies, and more anecdotal information coming from Project Office staff in Coordination meetings. Sufficient information came in to prompt CCDB to react, but not with any of the speed suggested by Steve Jobs at the beginning of this chapter. CCDB's beneficiaries would have born the cost of this limited responsiveness.

When asked why this type of story was not reported a variety of reasons were given. The most common explanation, mentioned by at least five of the staff I interviewed in 1995, focused on the consequences for CCDB. "What will Dhaka think if we report negative changes after so many years of working with the people...We are a development organisation, but if we say after lots of work with people their condition is going down what will people say? ...We are doing a lot for people but they are not improving, we can't report this...After all we have done so far why we have got negative changes? They will say money is wasted" These comments relate to the problem identified earlier in Chapter Seven. CCDB's 20 year long engagement in some project areas does provoke some awkward questions. The comments above convey a sense of CCDB being trapped by its own history.

Other explanations were more focused on the consequences for individuals: "If people write negative stories, then get criticised for this, they will get dispirited....If negative stories are written our supervisors will be questioned...Negative stories will be to the discredit of the samities and discourage them...Negative stories will hamper the reputation of the Project Office and the Unit office". Underlying many of the staff responses, though not stated during these particular interviews, was a pervasive concern about job security and status, not doing anything

that would jeopardise one's position within CCDB. Negative stories were being filtered out of the intake of the PMS because they were seen as threatening both individual and organisational survival.

Some attempts were made by Project Offices to communicate negative developments via the PMS. Somewhat to my surprise, the Manda Project Office staff informed me in 1995 that their report on the marriage of two trees was sent to Dhaka as a negative change, intended to show the persistence of traditional beliefs, and by implication the difficulties CCDB faced when trying to educate people about opportunities for development. In the content of the report there was relatively little explicit negative judgement in the description of the event. Despite this, the Manda Project Office interpreted the fact that the change was not selected as a significant signal that reports of negative changes would not be valued in Dhaka. The boundaries of CCDB's tolerance had been tested, and identified. Other attempts to send negative reports may have been even more subtle. It is possible that many of the reports apparently dealing with resolved problems, such as those with credit repayments or the impact on CCDB samities of other NGOs, were packaged as resolved in order to obtain more risk-free awareness of this type of problem by the Dhaka Office. As with the identification of novelty, the most appropriate response of outside observers may be to ask participants themselves which of all the selected reports they felt reflected most critically on CCDB. Unless this is done, there is a risk that judgements by outsiders (such as myself) about the lack of critical awareness in such systems may simply reflect cultural ignorance.

### *Depth*

A common feature of a number of theories of organisational learning reviewed in Chapter Four was the idea of levels of learning. Second order learning, about appropriate criteria of selection for appropriate behaviour, was seen as something organisations find difficult. The idea of multiple levels of learning is present in Bateson's hierarchy of recursiveness and Nelson and Winter's hierarchies of routines. Within the PMS it would have been quite possible for senior Project Office staff to select reports by field staff on the basis of the selection criteria those field staff documented in their reports. In turn, it is possible that Dhaka Office staff could have

selected reports from the different Project Offices on the basis of criteria used and documented by senior Project Office staff. CCDB's organisational hierarchy could have been dealing with a hierarchy of logical types of information, and this process would have involved hierarchies of recursiveness (reports upwards, feedback on selection downwards).

In practice this did not happen. Initially this may have been because this possibility was not initially pointed out to senior staff, by myself. However, some innovation in this area would not be impossible. Even the documentation on the PMS produced in 1996 and 1997 still differentiated explanations made for choices by different participants at different selection levels, but there was no attempt to focus analysis and selection processes on those criteria. To do so would have required some decentralisation of authority by senior CCDB staff. This would have been consistent with CCDB's development ideology which focuses on participation, but it would have clashed with the very stratified view of status that CCDB shares with much of Bangladesh society. Decentralisation of criteria setting could have allowed more locally informed interpretations of what were significant changes. This would have been in the interests of CCDB's beneficiaries.

Despite this weakness there was plenty of awareness, outside the reports produced within the PMS, of the limits and weaknesses of the PMS system. Problems with lack of negative reports, and an excessive focus on credit activities, have been mentioned above,. Other problems noted were that "...some crucial information important for understanding the (success) stories has not been reported...some inaccurate information was identified during the follow-up...some stories should have been reported for another domain" (CCDB, 1996g). These problems were identified as a result of verification visits made by CCDB staff in November 1995 to locations of nine most significant changes selected by the Dhaka Office earlier that year (CCDB, 1996g). A subsequent report on the PMS produced for the RTM in 1997 showed that verification visits to the sites of the changes selected as most significant were still being carried out. In addition reported changes were being supported with further details, and the performance of different Project Offices and staff was also being documented, in terms of number and type of changes reported. There was some evidence of institutionalisation of the procedures needed for controlling error, and extracting value.



## 8.6 Conclusions

The continuation and extension of the PMS since 1995 is evidence of its value to CCDB. The structure of the system is not by design unduly constraining, and thus contrary the interests of CCDB's beneficiaries. The value of its actual use to beneficiaries depends on the user, and responses to that use. These are summarised below, in terms of the attributes of learning used above.

### *CCDB's learning behavior, as evident through the PMS*

1. *Direction of learning:* Given the contents of the PMS CCDB was clearly pre-occupied with credit activities. Given this pre-occupation, actual impact on beneficiaries' lives might be expected to be highest in this area. Neglect was clearly evident in respect to training activities, and to a lesser extent with SRF and PRF based activities. These problems were resolvable. In 1997 CCDB made a number of alterations to the domains of change that had to be reported on.

2. *Frequency of learning:* In terms of the interests of beneficiaries CCDB's behaviour poses serious problems. Despite efforts to skew the reporting of staff towards recent events, staff frequently focused on long term changes. This was probably reinforced when CCDB subsequently reduced the PMS reporting interval to three monthly. The main influence on the frequency of learning seems to be perceived donor demand for information about long term impact. However, beneficiaries are likely to prefer an organisation that is able to quickly identify and respond to their needs.

3. *Scale of learning:* CCDB has not had difficulty in learning, via the PMS, on a progressively larger scale over the last four years. As noted above, this expanded demographic scale has involved some reduction in temporal resolution. But alternatives, such as making less use of teams, were possible.

4. *Openness of learning:* From an outsiders' viewpoint novelty was present in the type of events reported. What appeared more limited, and was noted by CCDB staff themselves, were reports

which reflected negatively on CCDB. As discussed in Chapter Seven, in the case of the credit program, some CCDB beneficiaries have borne the cost of CCDB's inability to deal with negative outcomes on a reasonably open level.

*5. Depth of learning:* At the level of documented views, in contrast to meetings, there was a very noticeable absence of second order learning within the operation of the PMS. Although decentralisation of criteria setting about significant change is very consistent with CCDB's development ideology none of CCDB's donors have indicated any interest in any information that would suggest this has happened. In contrast, they have acknowledged and appreciated self-criticism within CCDB.

### *Implications*

A continuing theme through Chapters Seven and Eight has been the influence of external parties, outside CCDB. Some demands for information have had quite powerful effects on CCDB's behaviour, such as how it manages diversity during the annual planning process. Others, such as those that led to the establishment of the PMS, were less direct. In the analysis of the results of the PMS, it is clear that requesting information about specific types of outcomes, such as forms of political action, are risk laden from the point of view of beneficiaries. They may or may not fit their circumstances. On the other hand, using fuzzy categories provided some donors with unexpected bonuses in the form of contextualised information about complex issues, such as gender relations.

If donors want NGOs to be responsive to the needs of beneficiaries they should pay attention not to particular types of events in the lives of beneficiaries, but *how the NGO knows* what is happening. The five attributes of learning behaviour used above are one way of mapping the nature of that capacity, and identifying areas in need of development. These attributes also provide a means of planning the type of information demands that might improve learning. Donors could be asking CCDB for evidence that it is aware of shorter term changes, is able to differentiate beneficiaries' needs in considerable detail, and senior staff are monitoring and evaluating the criteria junior staff are using in their fieldwork. If donors feel the need for direct

field investigations, these should focus on validating CCDB's ability to know, not on trying to develop an objective picture of project impact.

This strategy is consistent with the responses noted in Chapter Two, to the problems of diversity in social science theorising. Marcus and Fischer have pointed out that in the absence of encompassing paradigms "...the most interesting theoretical debates in a number of fields have shifted to the level of method, to problems of epistemology, interpretation, and discursive forms of representation themselves employed by social thinkers. Elevated to a central concern of theoretical reflection, problems of description become problems of representation" (1986:9). Diversity is managed on a large scale by introducing a new level of analysis: differences in modes of representation.

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