SUSTAINABILITY FAILURE OF DONOR-SUPPORTED ORGANISATIONAL REFORMS IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

A Bangladesh Case Study

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Sustainability Failure of Donor-Supported Organisational Reforms in Agricultural Extension: A Bangladesh Case Study

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Abstract

For several decades, international donor agencies have provided considerable support for organisational reforms within the agricultural extension system in Bangladesh. This support has been provided through a series of short-term projects that have experimented with a variety of novel extension systems. These have ranged from the centralised training and visit model to decentralised sub-district based systems to an even more decentralised farmer-led extension system. They have also ranged from an extension system operated by a single government agency to systems run by a partnership between government and non-government organisations. The experimentation has also involved a country-wide or large-scale system to local or small-scale systems. Furthermore, the reforms have varied from a single organisation providing only advisory services to farmers to a constellation of organisations providing a combination of services. However, in virtually every case, when donor support was removed at the completion of a project, the extension reform was found to be unsustainable post-project. Despite the continued failure of donor sponsored extension reforms in Bangladesh, little is formally known as to why such reforms have been unsustainable. Such knowledge is critical if donor-assisted extension reforms in Bangladesh are to be effective and sustainable. Therefore, the overall aim of this study was to determine the reasons why a donor-supported extension reform becomes unsustainable in Bangladesh.

From a review of literature, a conceptual framework was developed outlining the conditions/factors under which organisational systems or innovations supported through donor projects do, or do not, become sustainable. Using a qualitative single case study approach, a poorly sustained extension reform supported through a donor project was investigated in depth in Bangladesh. From this investigation, a model that explains the non-sustainability of a donor supported extension reform in Bangladesh was developed.

Several theoretically important findings were identified in this study. The extension reform was poorly sustained because the principles underlying the reform lacked cultural legitimacy. This problem was compounded due to the presence of perverse institutional forces in the operational context, and because the extension agencies concerned lacked adequate human and financial resources. The sustainability of the extension reform was also compromised because of poor implementation performance, complex design, parallel modes of project implementation, a failure to develop recipient ownership, and poor capacity to learn and adapt the reform. The

mechanisms by which these factors influenced the non-sustainability of the reform are described in detail.

The results from this study suggest that the sustainability of donor-supported extension reforms cannot be achieved within the short time frame set out in most projects. Nor can such changes be sustainable unless they are aligned with the norms, values and traditions of extension agencies and rural people. In particular, sustainability will continue to be a serious challenge unless the perverse institutional incentives confronted by extension agencies and rural people are minimised. The donors concerned in Bangladesh should support a locally-owned and single reform idea rather than undertaking haphazard projects with varied ideas, improve inter-donor coordination and come up with a coordinated decision of not providing monetary incentives to extension agencies and rural people, support extension reforms according to the felt needs of recipients, and stop providing aid in the event of repeated failures.

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come in contact with students from almost all continents of the world. This association has been extremely useful.

Dedication

*This thesis is dedicated to my wife, **Dr Almas Ara Gheyas.** Without her sacrifice, constant encouragement and support, this work would not have been completed.*

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Boxes

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
AAO	Additional Agricultural Officer
ADAE	Additional Director of Agricultural Extension
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEO	Agricultural Extension Officer
ASA	Association for Social Advancement
ASSP	Agricultural Support Services Project
ASIRP	Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project
ATC	Agricultural Technical Committee
ATI	Agricultural Training Institute
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BADC	Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation
BARI	Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRDB	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
BRRI	Bangladesh Rice Research Institute
BS	Block Supervisor
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDB	Cotton Development Board
CF	Contact Farmer
CPR	Common Pool Resource
DAE	Department of Agricultural Extension
DAEPC	District Agricultural Extension Planning Committee
DDAE	Deputy Director of Agricultural Extension
DFID	Department For International Development
DG	Director General
DLS	Department of Livestock Services
DOF	Department Of Fisheries
DPIF	District Partnership Initiative Fund
ERP	Extension and Research Project
ESC	Extension Service Centre
ESP	Extension Service Provider
FD	Forest Department
FFS	Farmer Field School
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FINA	Farmer Information Needs Assessment

Acronym	Meaning
FLE	Farmer Led Extension
FP	Farmer Promoter
FSW	Field Services Wing
GB	Grameen Bank
GO	Government Organisation
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
HYV	High Yielding Variety
IAD	Institutional Analysis and Development
ICLARM	International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management
ICM	Integrated Coastal Management
IEA	Integrated Extension Approach
IGA	Income Generation Activities
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
LAFT	Local Area Facilitation Team
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAEP	New Agricultural Extension Policy
NCT	National Coordination Team
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NIA	National Irrigation Administration
NPICC	National Policy Implementation Coordination Committee
PC	Problem Census
PD	Project Director
PIF	Partnership Initiative Fund
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RT	Resource Team
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SCOPE	Systems, Contingency and Political Economy theories
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
TAECC	*Thana* Agricultural Extension Coordination Committee
T&V	Training and Visit
TK	Taka
UAECC	*Upazilla* Agricultural Extension Coordination Committee
UAO	*Upazilla* Agricultural Officer
UPIF	*Upazilla* Partnership Initiative Fund

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research background

Agricultural extension, a support service for farmers, is recognised by the Government of Bangladesh (MOA, 1999; NAEP, 1996; PRSP, 2003) and the international donor agencies (DFID, 2001; World Bank, 2005) as immensely important in developing the agriculture sector and alleviating rural poverty in Bangladesh. The reason for such importance is quite understandable considering the strategic importance of agriculture in Bangladesh's economy and rural development priorities. More than 84% of the population in Bangladesh live in rural areas and nearly half of them are poor (DFID, 2001; PRSP, 2003). Critical to rural poverty alleviation is the development of the agriculture sector because of its contribution to the national economy and its importance in the livelihood of rural people. For instance, about 32-35% of Bangladesh's GDP comes from the agriculture sector (MOA, 1999; DFID 2001) and agriculture employs about 62-63% of the country's labour force (MOA, 1999; DFID, 2001).

Agricultural extension has a long history in Bangladesh that dates back to 1820 when William Carry, a Christian missionary, established the Agro-Horticultural Society in the erstwhile Indian state of Bengal (Anonymous, 2003; Sarker et al., 1995). The society used to introduce new varieties of fruit and vegetables and organise training for the growers (Anonymous, 2003). A formal extension service, however, emerged only in 1914 with the establishment of demonstration farms in each District and the appointment of District Agricultural Officers to educate farmers about new crop varieties through on-farm demonstrations (Anonymous, 2003; Hassanullah, 2002). Since then, the extension system in Bangladesh has undergone profound changes in response to new challenges and opportunities resulting in the emergence of new policies, structures, processes, activities and methods. Today, the extension system in Bangladesh is far more developed and is

characterised by the presence of several large government agencies[1], more than 20,000 non-government organisations (NGOs) and numerous private sector actors such as farm input suppliers, traders and dealers (Anonymous, 2003; Chowdhury & Gilbert 1996; NAEP, 1996). These organisations and actors provide a variety of extension services (information, advice, training, input supply, etc.) in a wide range of agricultural sectors – crop, fisheries, livestock, and forestry (Anonymous, 2003; Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; NAEP, 1996).

International donor agencies have long been crucial partners in supporting the development of the agricultural extension system in Bangladesh. Such support, however, has been provided mainly through time-bound development assistance projects. For instance, since the late seventies through to the end of 2003, the donor agencies in Bangladesh had invested around US$ 88 million in three consecutive extension development projects (World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005; ASSP & ASIRP 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003).

The most notable initiative of donor-supported extension development in Bangladesh began during the late seventies through the introduction of the Training and Visit (T&V) model. At first, this organisational system was applied on a pilot basis in the North-West region of the country through the World Bank supported Extension and Research Project I (ERP I) (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Hassanullah, 2002; World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005). Based on the evaluation of this pilot project, the T&V model was scaled up in the 1980s to cover 46 out of the 64 Districts[2] in Bangladesh. This development was supported through a five-year credit from the World Bank under the Extension and Research Project II (ERP II) (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996).

There were several reasons for the introduction of the T&V system. First, in the 1970s there were six government agencies in Bangladesh with functions related to crop production. This resulted in duplication of efforts and confusion among extension staff about their responsibilities. Most often the same agencies met the

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[1] The key government extension agencies are the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Department of Livestock Services (DLS), Department of Fisheries (DOF), Forest Department (FD), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), Cotton Development Board (CDB), and Tea Development Board (TDB) (Anonymous, 2003; NAEP, 1996)

[2] Administratively, Bangladesh is divided into 6 Divisions, 64 Districts, 460 *Upazillas*, and 4,484 *Unions*.

same farmers, sometimes with contradictory messages (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996). Second, the extension organisations were impregnated with a heavy burden of input and credit functions which undermined the educational role of extension (Hassanullah, 2002). Third, prior to the T&V era, the extension worker-to-farmer ratio was very low to the extent that a field level extension worker was responsible for providing service to 2,000-3,000 farm families (Hassanullah, 2002).

The T&V model of agricultural extension was promoted by the World Bank in many developing countries along with Bangladesh. The basic features of the model are thus well known. These include centralised or top-down technology transfer, single line of command, strictly scheduled visits by extension workers to farmers, regular training of extension agents, and strong linkage between research and extension (Benor & Baxter, 1984; Benor & Harrison, 1977; ODI, 1994). In Bangladesh, the T&V design also followed similar principles (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Key organisational reforms promoted by the Extension and Research Projects (ERPs) in Bangladesh under the Training and Visit (T&V) system

Key reform features	Operationalisation of the reforms
Centralisation	Technologies generated by research institutes were passed on to farmers in a top-down manner: Research institutes to DAE to Contact Farmers (CFs) to other farmers.
Research-Extension Linkage	Creation of technical committees at National, Regional and District levels and discussion among the research and extension personnel to identify extension messages to be disseminated; monthly Research-Extension workshops; joint visits by research and extension workers to adaptive research sites and farmers' fields
Single line of command	Merger of six government agencies and creation of a new nationwide organisational structure called the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE)
Strictly scheduled visits by extension workers to farmers	Creation of 12,000 Blocks in the country, each consisting of around 1,000 farm families; appointment of one extension worker called Block Supervisor (BS) per Block[3], development of CFs in the Blocks and fortnightly fixed and rotational visits by BSs to CFs
Regular training for extension workers	Training of the BSs every fortnight by technical specialists

Source: Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Hassanullah, 2002

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[3] In order to assign one BS per Block new fieldworkers were recruited resulting in a three-fold increase in the staff number of the DAE (Hassanullah 2002)

In order to implement the T&V principles into practice, the ERPs supported the merger of six government extension agencies to establish a single line of command, created several new organisational structures and introduced a novel process of training and visit for the professional extension workers (Table 1.1). The T&V reform also provided a clear-cut role for extension workers – the transfer of extension messages only, thus separating agricultural extension from agricultural input and credit functions (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996). All these were clear attempts to overcome the weaknesses in the pre-T&V extension system as mentioned earlier.

The operation of the T&V model in Bangladesh supported through the ERPs continued until the early nineties. During this period, the World Bank, the key patron of the model, alone invested 28.08 million USD (World Bank, 2005). Following the completion of the ERPs, however, the World Bank and other donor agencies as well as the GOB became reluctant to continue supporting the T&V system (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Hassanullah, 2002). Although no empirical study was found that examined in detail the reasons for such reluctance, some publications (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; ODA, 1991; World Bank, 1992; World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005) have briefly highlighted a number of issues.

Firstly, the T&V model was regarded as being unsustainable in Bangladesh, although no empirical study was found that examined what exactly was unsustainable in the model and why. However, some publications (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996, ODA, 1991, Hassanullah, 2002, World Bank, 1992, 2003, 2005) have pointed out the issue of scale and the associated costs of running the system. According to these reports, the T&V model, by design, required a huge number of staff and funding for its operation. The problem was aggravated due to the country-wide expansion of the system during the ERP-II. Thus, due to these high operational costs, when the World Bank support was terminated, it was not possible for the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) to maintain the T&V system in the country (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005).

Secondly, the T&V was regarded as having failed to benefit the rural poor in Bangladesh, especially the small and marginal farmers and the landless who constituted more than 86% of the rural poor (Table 1.2). Chowdhury and Gilbert

(1996) noted that the Contact Farmer (CF) method was criticised as being dominated by elite male farmers who failed to communicate information to others, especially the poor and disadvantaged groups. However, the authors reported that there was no empirical evidence for such claim and argued that the problem might have arisen due to a failure of practice rather than a failure of T&V theory.

Table 1.2 Farm size structure and rural poverty in Bangladesh

Farm size (Acres)	Number (million) and percentage of households	Incidence of Rural Poverty (%)
Landless (0.00 to 0.49)	9.39 (52.65)	64
Marginal (0.50 to 1.49)	4.19 (23.53)	44
Small (1.50 to 2.49)	1.87 (10.50)	34
Medium (2.50 to 7.49)	2.08 (11.65)	25
Large (Over 7.50)	0.30 (1.67)	16
Total	**17.83 (100.00)**	**45**

Source: DAE Strategic Plan 2002-2006, http://www.daebd.org/Strategy/strategy.htm

Thirdly, the T&V model was criticised for its over-centralised planning and top-down development and dissemination of extension messages (ODA, 1991; World Bank, 1992). As a consequence, extension services became ill-adapted to variations in local farming conditions in the different geographic locations of Bangladesh and failed to correspond with farmers' needs (World Bank, 1992; World Bank, 2005).

Finally, the emergence of a large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector extension service providers weakened the rationale for funding a large-scale public-sector extension service such as the T&V (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Hassanullah, 2002).

Against this backdrop of increased criticism of the T&V model and its perceived non-sustainability, the World Bank and the DFID[4] proffered their support to reform the system. This began in the early nineties and continued until the end of 2003.

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[4] Department for International Development of the British Government; formerly ODA

During this period as well, these donor agencies provided support in the form of two time-bound projects. The first was the Agricultural Support Services Project (ASSP) and the second was the Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP) (Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Hassanullah, 2002; World Bank, 2003, 2005).

The ASSP had two four-year phases. The first phase ran from 1992 through to 1995 and the second phase from 1996 to 1999. The ASSP mainly intended to promote partnership between the DAE and NGOs. To this end, a process of contractual partnership was introduced during the first phase of the project (Table 1.3). During the second phase of ASSP, the GOB adopted a New Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) that stated inter-organisational partnership as a guiding principle in extension service delivery (NAEP, 1996).

During the eight year period of the ASSP, a total of 55 contracts were signed and implemented in selected Districts and *Thanas*[5] of Bangladesh (ASSP & ASIRP 2003b). These activities were mainly in the area of homestead agriculture (e.g. vegetable gardening, plant nurseries, etc.). Furthermore, in order to facilitate DAE-NGO partnership, a number of structural reforms were also undertaken. These included the formation of two new committees at the national level of the DAE and the restructuring of various planning and coordination committees at the District and *Thana* levels (Table 1.3).

In addition to the DAE-NGO partnership, the ASSP introduced a process of farmer consultation in extension planning using participatory methods and a process of decentralised or bottom-up planning (Table 1.3). These reforms were undertaken on a pilot scale in selected Districts and *Thanas* of Bangladesh (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b).

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[5] *Thana* is the lowest administrative unit of the Government of Bangladesh. A *Thana* consists of several *Unions*. A *Union* consists of one to several villages depending on the size of the village. *Thanas* were re-named as *Upazillas* in 1984. *Upazillas* were re-named again as *Thanas* in the 1990s. Again during the later part of the nineties *Thanas* were re-named *Upazillas*. The current administration retains the name *Upazilla*. During the first phase of ASSP the term *Thana* was used. The term *Upazilla* began appearing in ASSP documents during its second phase and continued to be found through to the end of ASIRP.

Table 1.3 Key organisational reforms introduced through the Agricultural Support Services Project (ASSP) in Bangladesh

Key reform principles	Operationalisation of the reforms
Contracted partnership	NGOs were contracted to work with the DAE in the planning and execution of extension programmes. The ASSP used to invite NGOs to submit proposals of extension activities and allocated funds on a competitive basis. The DAE and the contracted NGO then used to jointly implement the proposed extension activities.
	Establishment of a DAE-NGO liaison committee at the national level.
	Formation of National Policy Implementation Coordination Committee (NPICC)[6] and inclusion of NGOs as formal members of the committee.
	Restructuring of Agricultural Technical Committee (ATC), *Thana* Agricultural Extension Coordination Committee (TAECC), District Agricultural Extension Planning Committee (DAEPC) and inclusion of NGOs as formal members.
Decentralisation, farmer participation, demand-led extension	Introduction of Problem Census (PC) and Farmers' Information Needs Assessment (FINA) methods
	Upazilla and District-based bottom-up planning

Source: ASSP & ASIRP 2003a, 2003b; Hassanullah, 2002

The ASIRP ran for four years from 1999 through to 2003 and was mainly a follow-on of the ASSP (Hassanullah, 2002; World Bank, 2003). Hence, the reform principles were basically the same as those of the ASSP – partnership between the DAE and NGOs, farmer participation, decentralisation, and demand-led extension. In order to consolidate the ASSP-introduced contractual partnership between the DAE and NGOs, the project established a Partnership Initiative Fund (PIF) at the *Upazilla*, District and National levels of DAE administration (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003). The *Upazilla*-PIF (UPIF) was implemented in all *Upazillas* of Bangladesh while the District-PIF (DPIF) was implemented only in 12 Districts (ASSP & ASIRP 2003b). Similar to the ASSP, the ASIRP provided PIF funding to NGOs on a competitive basis. A total of 482 grants were sanctioned through which the DAE and the contracted NGOs jointly implemented a range of extension activities (Gill et al., 2003). Although the pre-existing UAECC (formerly TAECC)

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[6] The NPICC was formed mainly to implement the new extension policy adopted by the GOB in 1996.

structures were utilised to implement the PIF activities at *Upazilla* level, new sub-committees were formed for this purpose at District and National levels.

In addition to the PIFs, the ASIRP experimented with several innovative extension models in selected areas of Bangladesh. These small-scale systems were also based on the principles of inter-organisational partnership, decentralisation, farmer participation, and demand-led extension. Except for the Farmer-Led Extension (FLE) model, the existing UAECC structures and local government facilities were utilised to operate the systems. A key feature of these models was that they were intended to provide holistic or livelihood-based extension support to rural people by combining the various services offered by individual extension providers. Table 1.4 provides a summary description of the models.

During a period of around 12 years, the ASSP and the ASIRP projects invested 34 million and 18.76 million GBP respectively, in which more than 90% of the budget came from donor sources in the form of loans and grants (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003). However, several project implementation and evaluation documents (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003; World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005) reported that the organisational reforms introduced through the ASSP and the ASIRP projects eventually became unsustainable or demonstrated poor prospects of sustainability beyond the life of the projects.

The DAE-NGO liaison committee introduced through the ASSP stopped functioning in 1999 (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003b). Similarly, the continuation of the contractual partnership process between DAE and NGOs appeared to be unlikely beyond ASIRP grant completion (Gill et al., 2003). The sustainability prospect of the new extension models introduced through the ASIRP was also evaluated to be poor (Gill et al., 2003). For example, the sign of decline in interest among the actors involved with the IEAs was already evident in 2003 (Gill et al., 2003). The situation for the FLE model was similar (Gill et al., 2003; World Bank, 2005). The survival prospect of the village groups developed through the ASIRP to implement the FLE model was evaluated to be poor and so was the prospect for the DAE and the NGOs to continue supporting the operation of the model (Gill et al., 2003).

Table 1.4 Extension models introduced through the Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP) in Bangladesh

Extension models	Description
Integrated Extension Approaches (IEAs)	The purpose of IEAs was to provide integrated support based on holistic needs of farmers and through the coordination of all extension support providers at the *Upazilla* level. The IEAs were initially implemented in 12 *Upazillas* of Bangladesh. Later three new models were designed and implemented in 25 *Upazillas*.
• *UAECC Strengthening Model*	Various government and non-government member organisations within the UAECC (e.g. DAE, DLS, DOF, BRAC, BRDB, etc.) used to jointly analyse the services available for farmers in the respective *Upazillas*, assess and prioritise farmers' needs and then design and implement extension activities to address them. This model was implemented in 10 *Upazillas* under two Districts of Bangladesh.
• *Specialist Cooperation Model*	Field staff from various extension agencies used to record farmer problems that they could not solve immediately, and pass those to technical specialists of the various departments in the *Upazila*. The specialists used to provide fortnightly technical briefings on whole-farm agriculture to build field staff skills, and the staff would then return to farmers with solutions and advice. UAECC structures were utilised to implement the model in 10 *Upazillas* under two Districts.
• *Resource Centre or Local Government Model*	This model involved the establishment of Farmer Information and Advice Centres at the *Union* or *Upazilla* level. These were places where farmers, NGO workers, and other rural people could obtain information, advice and training materials. The centres were managed by a sub-committee under the UAECC and staffed on a part-time basis by BSs. The local government authorities allocated buildings or rooms for the centres and used the ADP (Annual Development Plan) budget to pay for renovations. This model was implemented in five *Upazillas* under one District.
Farmer-Led Extension (FLE) Model	The FLE model consisted of a group approach to extension, facilitated jointly by an NGO and the DAE. The model combined technology demonstration with savings and credit activities. Village groups were organised and Farmer Promoters were developed for the purpose of the FLE model. The FLE was implemented in six *Upazilla*s under three Districts of Bangladesh.

Source: ASIRP, 2002; ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003; Hassanullah, 2002

Some publications (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003; World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005), consisting mainly of project implementation and evaluation documents, have reported, although very briefly, a number of factors responsible for the poor sustainability of the organisational reforms introduced through the ASSP and the ASIRP. These include a lack of genuine commitment of the DAE top level officials, the project mode of donor-support in the DAE, the fund-

driven nature of the reforms in which the actual intention of actors was to capture funds, the creation of parallel structures to implement reforms, the high transaction costs of maintaining new structures, a lack of operational budgets, the difficulty of maintaining staff morale with low salaries, the uncertainty with financial decentralisation within GOB ministries, an unwillingness or inability of the GOB to re-finance the reforms through revenue budgets, and limited staff incentives.

1.2 Statement of the research problem and aim and objectives of the research

As the background suggests, three major donor-supported projects invested millions of dollars over a period of 20 years in reforming the agricultural extension system in Bangladesh. These projects have included experiments with a variety of organisational innovations ranging from the centralised T&V model to the decentralised *Upazilla*-based systems[7] to an even more decentralised farmer-led system. They have also included experiments with extension models operated by a single agency (DAE) and those operated through partnership between or among the various government organisations (GOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs) in Bangladesh. The experimentation has also involved a large-scale T&V system as well as systems implemented on a small scale. Also, the reforms have ranged from an extension organisation (DAE) providing services in a single sector (only crop) to those providing services in a wide range of sectors. Furthermore, the reforms have varied from a single organisation (DAE) providing only advisory services to farmers (T&V) to a constellation of organisations providing a combination of support services (e.g. combination of information, financial credit, etc.) to rural people. However, in virtually every case, soon after donor assistance had ended, the organisational innovations appeared to be unsustainable beyond the life of the projects. In other words, the structures, processes and associated activities embodying the new organisational systems or models failed to continue operating or demonstrated uncertain prospects of survival or lost support from the extension agencies concerned and/or the GOB.

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[7] The terms "extension model" and "extension system" are interchangeably used in this thesis. This is cconsistent with agricultural extension literature (see Hoffmann, 2003; Roling, 1995). For example, the T&V is described both as a system and as a model.

In spite of Bangladesh's history of such poorly sustained organisational reforms in agricultural extension, little is known as to why an extension reform or innovation eventually becomes unsustainable in the country. While some negative factors are reported in the available publications (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Gill et al., 2003; Hassanulah, 2002; World Bank, 2003, 2005); none of these reports provides an in-depth and detailed explanation of the sustainability problem. Moreover, most of these reports are project implementation and evaluation documents. At the time this study was undertaken, no research article was found in journals or any other form of peer reviewed publications that reported any investigation into the factors/conditions that make an agricultural extension reform unsustainable in Bangladesh following the termination of project aid. An in-depth investigation of the sustainability problem and drawing lessons from failures would be crucial for developing sustainable extension systems in Bangladesh through successive cases of donor assistance.

As such, this study was intended to develop an in-depth explanation of the reasons why an organisational reform promoted through a donor-assisted project eventually becomes unsustainable in Bangladesh following the termination of project aid. In order to achieve the research aim, the researcher pursued the following objectives.

➢ Develop a theoretical framework from the literature that enables researchers to identify and document the factors/conditions under which organisational systems or innovations promoted through development projects do, or do not, become sustainable.

➢ Use the framework to identify and describe the factors that negatively impacted on the sustainability of the Farmer-Led Extension (FLE) system promoted through the Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP) in Bangladesh.

➢ Compare the results of the FLE case study with the literature to establish whether or not the framework stands up to close scrutiny.

➢ As necessary, develop and propose a refined framework that may have wider applicability but will specifically explain the reasons why a donor-supported organisational reform in agricultural extension fails to become self-sustainable in the Bangladesh context.

1.3 Identity of the researcher

The way an individual explains a social phenomenon is influenced by what Wilson and Morren (1990) called his/her "worldview". Institutionalist scholars (North, 1990; Scott, 1995, 2001) refer to a similar term "mental model" that provides a framework for individuals to make meaning of the universe around them. The development of a worldview or mental model, although a continuous process, is related to the cultural background or setting and the real life experiences of an individual (Bawden, 1998; Kolb, 1984; Wilson and Morren, 1990). The following paragraphs provide a brief autobiography of the investigator and his relationship with the subjects of this study and their settings.

The investigator completed a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree and a Master of Science in Agricultural Extension Education degree from Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh. After completing his Masters degree in December 1996, the investigator joined Bangladesh Agricultural University as a Lecturer in 1997. In 2000, the investigator was elevated to the position of Assistant Professor – a position that he retains to date.

In addition to teaching, the investigator was involved with a number of research projects prior to undertaking this study. Apart from his own Masters degree research project, the investigator worked as a Research Assistant in several internationally funded projects. These projects were concerned with the identification and analysis of farmers' indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) and the analysis of environmental and sustainability issues for the organisation and practice of agricultural extension. While working in these projects the researcher spent a considerable time in rural areas and used various ethnographic techniques in data collection. Based on his research work, the investigator has published a number of papers in Bangladeshi and international journals and in conference proceedings.

Although by virtue of his profession the researcher resides in a city in Bangladesh, he has spent a considerable part of his life in rural areas. The investigator was born in a Bangladesh village and lived there before moving to a nearby town at the age of 12. Even while living in the local town the investigator and his family were in close contact with the village by virtue of farming and family relations. The

investigator and his family members used to frequently visit the village and interact with the relatives and friends, many of whom were full-time farmers.

After completing his high school education in the local town the researcher moved to Mymensingh city for his university education. However, moving to a more urban setting did not detach him from rural people. Instead, this created more opportunities for interacting with them and learning about their livelihood. This was possible because the investigator used to teach Agricultural Extension Education courses at Bangladesh Agricultural University. As part of the course, he had to regularly participate in various outreach activities, sometimes taking students to villages located in remote areas of Bangladesh and living there for weeks.

The investigator believes that his boyhood experience coupled with professional experiences enabled him to learn a great deal about the rural people and their way of living. The investigator does not, however, dare to claim that he is an "insider" since he never farmed by himself. Neither did he ever experience for himself the agony of the rural poor in Bangladesh. The investigator is thus unable to explain what it means to be a poor rural father who cannot manage to provide the day's meals for his starving children, or what it feels to be a poor rural woman who cannot even afford to buy proper clothing. While this is generally the scenario of rural Bangladesh, which neither the investigator nor any of his family members have ever experienced, he is quite confident to claim that he has a high level of empathy for rural people. This empathy is partly emotional and partly due to a sense of social and moral obligation, neither of which is easily explainable.

The researcher has considerable familiarity with the organisational context of agricultural education, research and extension services in Bangladesh. He has worked for more than six years at a public sector university in Bangladesh before undertaking this study. Thus, there is little doubt that he realises what it means to be a public sector employee in Bangladesh. During his six years' tenure he has gathered many real-life experiences concerning the way a public sector organisation operates. Moreover, as a life member of the Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Society (BAES) and several other professional forums, and the voluntary Joint Editor of the *Bangladesh Journal of Extension Education* (BJEE), the researcher has participated in a number of seminar, symposium, workshop and

discussion meetings. These allowed him to interact with the personnel from various government organisations, NGOs, and even several key donor agencies operating in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, as part of the Agricultural Extension Education course, the researcher used to take his students for visits to various research and development organisations in Bangladesh, including the DAE. These visits provided valuable experiences regarding the operational procedures, culture, and policies of the government organisations and NGOs involved with agricultural and rural development activities in Bangladesh.

In terms of personality, the researcher identifies himself as an outgoing and sociable person having a cosmopolitan outlook. The investigator is confident in socialising with individuals from any ethnic, national, and religious background. He holds a very high regard for the farmers of Bangladesh and a passion for serving their interests. He takes a keen interest in the past and contemporary historical, political, and ecological conditions affecting the development of Bangladesh agriculture and the livelihood of farmers in the country.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The research work reported in this thesis has been, for the convenience of presentation, structured into eight chapters as follows:

- ➢ In Chapter 1 the background to the research is provided, the research problem is stated, the aim and objectives of the study are introduced, and a brief autobiography of the investigator is provided.

- ➢ In Chapter 2 the relevant literature dealing with the sustainability of development organisations, especially those promoted and supported through donor projects, are reviewed. Also in this Chapter a theoretical framework that explains the reasons why development organisations become sustainable or not is provided.

➢ Chapter 3 contains a description of the research methodology. This includes a description of the research design, the selected case and its operational context, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the techniques used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

➢ According to the structure of the theoretical framework developed from the literature review the results of the case study are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Chapter 4 is focused on the contextual factors associated with the sustainability of the case study organisational reform; Chapter 5 contains a description of the relationships between project implementation performance and sustainability; in Chapter 6 the design and management-related features of the case study reform that affected its sustainability are highlighted.

➢ In Chapter 7 the results obtained from this study are compared and discussed vis-à-vis those reported in the literature.

➢ The conclusions of the study are presented in Chapter 8. Also in this Chapter the contribution and implications of the results are highlighted, the research methodology is evaluated, and directions for further research are provided.

Chapter 2

Sustainability of development organisations:
A literature review

2.1 Introduction

Although donor-supported extension reforms have nearly three decades of history in Bangladesh, the investigator did not find any theoretical framework in the literature that could be used to analyse the success or failure of such reforms. The purpose in this chapter is to review of the extant literature and develop a framework to analyse the reasons why an extension reform promoted through a donor-supported project becomes unsustainable in Bangladesh. At first, the existing theories and frameworks dealing with the sustainability of development organisations[1] including those promoted through donor-assisted projects and programmes are reviewed. This is followed by a review of the descriptive literature from the broader discipline of development studies as well as from agricultural extension and rural development. Finally, based on the synthesis of the literature, a conceptual framework is developed.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks: A review

Frameworks are meta-theoretical schema which outline a set of variables that can be applied to diagnose and analyse a phenomenon of interest as well as prescribe solutions (Ostrom et al., 2002). Frameworks are usually informed by theories, which are applied to explain the variables identified through the application of frameworks (Ostrom et al., 2002).

Several theoretical frameworks are available that provide useful guidelines to analyse and explain the sustainability of development organisations. Instead of relying on any one of them, in this study several major theoretical frameworks are

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[1] Definition of organisation includes systems that involve groups of individuals intending to achieve some common goal or purpose (North, 1990).

reviewed for a number of reasons. First, the available frameworks have a limited history of application in agricultural extension. Second, the assumptions underlying each framework are different. Third, it is difficult to argue that any one is superior to the others since each framework has its own strengths and weaknesses. Fourth, none of these frameworks is beyond criticism. Finally, it is always advantageous to use multiple theoretical lenses, to develop a robust view of a social phenomenon (Ostrom et al., 2002; Yin, 2003).

Three theoretical frameworks are reviewed in this chapter. These include the two frameworks developed and informed by the "institutionalism" school and the one developed in the "institutional development" literature, known as the SCOPE framework. In the following sections, these frameworks are, at first, described and then compared.

2.2.1 Institutionalism

One of the theoretical traditions that provide important analytical concepts in the study of organisational sustainability comes from the institutionalism school. Institutionalism is concerned with the study of institutions – their origin, changes and roles (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lowdens, 1996). However, institutionalism has its root in several disciplines, the most important of which are economics, political science, and organisational sociology. According to these various disciplinary origins, institutionalist scholars differ in their relative emphasis on institutions and the assumptions about the roles of institutions in individual and collective behaviour (see Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lowdens, 1996; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004 for comprehensive reviews).

Two important sub-schools can be identified in institutionalism (see e.g. Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lowdens, 1996) – the rational choice institutionalism and the cultural institutionalism. Therefore, in the following sections two theoretical frameworks – one from each of these two schools – are reviewed: (i) The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework informed by rational choice institutionalism, and (ii) The "three pillars of institutions" framework informed by the cultural institutionalism school.

2.2.1.1   Rational choice institutionalism and the IAD framework

Rational choice institutionalism has its roots in economics and political science and is mainly found in the writings of prominent business historians and political economists (North, 1990; North and Thomas, 1973; Ostrom, 2000; Williamson, 1985). The rational choice institutionalists are generally (but not exclusively) interested in what Scott (1995, 2001) has classified as the "regulative" dimensions of institutions such as laws, property rights, governance rules and their enforcement mechanisms.

With regard to the role of institutions, the rational choice instituitonalists argue that institutions "structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic" (North, 1990: 3). Organisations, on the other hand, are groups of individuals bounded by some common purpose to achieve some common objectives. According to this perspective, individuals and organisations are actors or players operating in an institutional environment consisting of formal and informal rules of the game (North, 1990).

Rational choice institutionalism has received interest in international development assistance as early as the late 1980s (Goldsmith, 1992). Since then, important work in this tradition has been done by people associated with Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues from Indiana University (e.g. see Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom et al., 2002). Their works involved the application of a framework known as the "Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD)" framework. These works have demonstrated the importance of focusing on institutions to analyse the performance and sustainability of development initiatives. The key constructs of the IAD framework are summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Key analytical constructs in the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework

Key concepts	Definitions
Institutional Context	The context is the initial conditions or "the environment" that structure the efforts to achieve outcomes. The context consists of three sets of variables – rules-in-use, nature of goods and services, and culture of communities.
Rules	Prescriptions that forbid or permit some action in a particular setting, and the sanctions associated with failing to follow a rule. Rules can be formal (e.g. laws, policies, regulations, etc.) and informal (e.g. behavioural norms). Unlike formal rules, informal rules or norms are not enforced by designated agents in a regular way. Norms are culturally sanctioned such as feeling of shame or guilt or disapproval by other members in the community. Rules-in-use refer to the rules as they are understood, generally followed by participants, and enforced in a collective action situation. These rules are nested at three different levels – the operational level, the collective choice level and the constitutional level.
Physical and material conditions	It is the problem around which a collective action is organised. Refers to the nature of the goods and services being exchanged or acted upon. These are public goods, private goods and Common Pool Resources (CPR). Public goods are jointly consumed and non-excludable, i.e., it is difficult to exclude an individual from the consumption of the good, regardless of the person's contribution in the production of the good. Private goods are individually consumed and can be readily excluded from potential beneficiaries. CPR goods are non-excludable and at the same time subtractable i.e. a person's use of the resource subtracts its availability to the other users.
Culture of communities	A set of variables that include the generally accepted norms of behaviour in the community, level of common understanding about the action arena, extent of homogeneity of preferences among those living in a community, history, the distribution of resources among the members, etc.
Action arena	A complex conceptual unit consisting of an *action situation* and a set of *actors*. It is within this system that actors exchange resources and make decisions. An actor is either a single individual or a group of individuals who have a regularised way of making decisions, such as a firm or a government.
Incentives	Rewards and punishments that are perceived by individuals to be related to their actions and those of others.
Interactions, outcome and evaluative criteria	Interactions are the processes applied to produce outcomes. An institutional analyst can evaluate both the processes and the outcome using a range of criteria e.g. economic efficiency, equity, accountability, conformance to general morality, adaptability, **and sustainability**.

Source: Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom et al., 2002; Hees & Ostrom, 2004

The primary analytical unit in the IAD framework is called the "action arena" that consists of a set of "actors" and their decisions or "action situations". In using the framework, it is important to identify these actors and the incentives that they face in making their decisions about an action or outcome. According to the rational choice tradition, the IAD assumes that the "actors" are strategic and selfish decision makers. However, at the same time, the IAD takes the premise that although the actors are selfish, they are "boundedly rational". This means that while individuals pursue their selfish goals, their actions are also constrained by ignorance or informational problems. Therefore, in order to be able to explain why a system of collective action fails to survive, it is necessary to identify the incentives that impinge upon the actors who collectively comprise the system, as well as the informational problems that the actors confront.

The institutional context within which the action arena is located constitutes an important analytical construct in the IAD. According to the IAD, this consists of three conditions – the "nature of the goods and services" around which the collective action is organised, the "cultural attributes" of the concerned communities, and the "rules" that govern the collective action situation (Table 2.1). These conditions affect the incentives for actors to undertake, or not to undertake, an action. By specifying this, the IAD draws attention to the importance of analysing the contextual conditions to explain the development and survival of a system.

According to the political economic tradition, the IAD classifies the goods and services into three types – private, public and common pool resources (CPR) and suggests that organising collective action in the production of public goods and services, and the CPR is difficult (Table 2.1). Because of the characteristic of non-excludability associated with public goods and services, actors face incentives to free ride or shirk from the production of such goods (or services). Similar is the case with the CPR. In addition to the problem of non-excludability, a CPR is characterised by subtractability. Due to these two unique features, governance of CPR regimes is a challenge because each actor faces incentives to defect or harvest more from the resource; resulting in its depletion, degradation or even destruction.

The concept of "rules" is one of the key facets of the IAD framework. However, the IAD is interested in the "rules-in-use" rather than the existence of rules written in legislation, contracts, court decisions, and so on, that may not be known to participants. These rules can be formal or informal and nested at several levels: operational, collective-choice (policy making) and constitutional. Operational rules are the day-to-day working rules, while the rules at the collective choice level concern the formulation or adjustment of the day-to-day rules. The constitutional rules determine who is eligible to be involved in making rules and how those rules are to be formulated. According to the IAD, these rules-in-use in a given setting set the boundary by specifying or prescribing what action is required, permitted or allowed to be taken.

A third set of contextual variables that affect the action arena relate to the cultural attributes of the community. These include the norms of behaviour that are generally accepted in a community, the level of common understanding among participants about the structure of an action arena, the extent of homogeneity among the participants in terms of preferences, and the distribution of resources among those affected. The IAD uses the term "culture" to refer to this bundle of variables. These cultural attributes affect the extent to which it would be possible to develop adequate rules and norms among different actors over time. Furthermore, the cultural attributes of a community may also affect the cost of developing monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms. For example, if the users of a good or service come from many different communities who are distrustful of each other, the task of devising and sustaining effective rules is substantially increased (Ostrom et al., 2002).

The IAD framework suggests that the institutional context within which the action arena is located affects the patterns of interactions that take place within the system. These, on the other hand, lead to a particular outcome. An institutional analyst can use one criterion or a set of criteria to evaluate this outcome. The framework further suggests that the evaluation of the processes and the outcomes would further affect the action arena and the actors through feedback loops (Figure 2.1). For example, if a donor-funded project or programme is evaluated to be economically inefficient, it may result in a lack of support from the actors, leading to non-sustainability of the project or the programme (Ostrom et al., 2002). In addition

to economic efficiency, a number of other evaluative criteria are suggested in the IAD literature. These include equity, accountability, and conformance to general morality, adaptability, and sustainability (Table 2.1). Sometimes, however, these criteria may be in conflict with one another. For example, a donor-project may not be economically efficient but it may have a high level of conformity to the moral standards and thus be able to attract support from the actors (Ostrom et al., 2002).
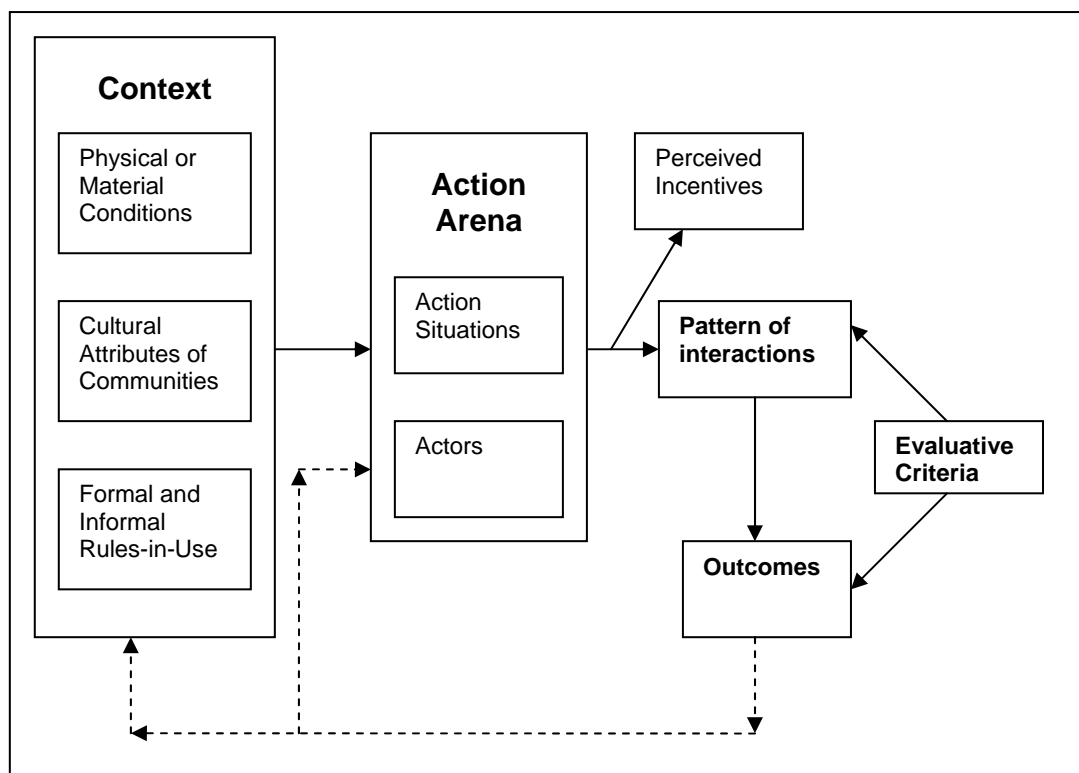
Figure 2.1 The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework
(Source: Ostrom *et al.*, 1994: 37)

The works of Ostrom and the associated IAD researchers are concerned mainly with the governance of Common Pool Resource (CPR) systems such as community managed irrigation systems, open water fisheries, and forestry regimes. However, recently, Ostrom and her colleagues used the IAD framework and the associated theories of collective action[2] to analyse the sustainability[3] of the development benefits or improvements promoted through donor-supported projects or programmes. The study entitled "Aid, Incentives, and Sustainability: An

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[2] The important theories used in the analysis are **game theory** and the **principal agent theory**
[3] The study defined **sustainability** as the longevity of development cooperation's benefits or outcomes, rather than the concerned projects or programmes themselves. This definition is consistent with that of other authors (e.g. AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Catterson & Lindahl, 1999) and the current study.

Institutional Analysis of Development Cooperation" is quite relevant for this research. This is because in the current study the researcher also intends to analyse the reasons why the outcome of a development assistance project, which in this case is an organisational innovation in extension service delivery, fails to become sustainable.

In their incentive study, Ostrom and her colleagues argued based on empirical evidence that development problems in countries where donors operate are caused by so-called "perverse incentives". Under the influence of these incentives, actors in these countries are generally reluctant to engage in mutually beneficial collective actions. The authors further argued that unless development assistance is able to alter these conditions and create positive incentives for concerned actors, sustainability of the outcome of development assistance projects or programmes would be unlikely.

In line with the IAD framework, Ostrom and her colleagues pointed out that perverse incentives in development assistance arise from various sources. First, they emerge from some of the "inherent" problems such as the nature of the goods and services that development assistance deals with. In most cases, this involves assisting developing countries in the production of public goods and services (for example, strengthening provisions of public service delivery, improvement of natural resources, etc.). In addition to this, the very concept of aid creates negative incentives in developing countries by encouraging recipients not to actively search for solutions to resolve their own collective action problems by themselves.

Second, the governance rules in developing countries are either weak or dysfunctional. For example, in many countries, the government employees are generally not accountable to the public for their actions. Public servants are underpaid and resort to obtaining additional funds from various informal transactions such as rent-seeking and corruption (Ostrom et al., 2002: 49). In many cases, they devote their working time to a wide diversity of private activities including running their own businesses. Despite evidence of such unlawful activities, it is generally very difficult to fire a government employee because of a weak law enforcement mechanism. Development aid, under such weak institutional contexts, tends to exacerbate the already existing incentive problems by encouraging corruption and rent-seeking (Goldsmith, 1992).

Third, perverse or negative incentives occur when development assistance is used in attempts to alter the *status quo* or asymmetrical power relationships in a recipient country. If the elites feel threatened due to a change that is collectively beneficial but does not place them in an advantageous condition, they tend to resist such a change. In other words, they would prefer a less productive *status quo* that distributes assets to them in a disproportionate manner compared to a more equitable and productive change (Ostrom et al., 2002: 32-33).

Fourth, the asymmetric power or relationships, that often characterise the development and negotiation of aid projects between the donors and the recipients, are important sources of perverse incentives. In the event that the donor is powerful and unilaterally decides how the recipients should utilise the aid, this undermines the incentives for the latter to own and sustain the project when the donor withdraws. Sometimes, however, the situation might be quite the opposite and a donor, for example, may be in competition with other donors to provide aid to a country because of its own economic or political interests. This is one reason which may seriously affect the incentives of recipients to sustain the project.

Finally, the development assistance process itself is a complex system involving actions and interactions among multiple actors such as the donor government, the donor agency, the recipient government, the civil society organisations in donor and recipient countries (e.g. NGOs), the contractors (e.g. consultants), other donors operating in the recipient country, sectoral ministry or agency in the recipient country, and finally, the beneficiaries. This complexity and the resultant broken feedback loops make it difficult to monitor the activities of these diverse actors, and thus make it difficult to undertake corrective actions. There is generally no direct link between the donors and the beneficiaries of aid. In most cases, donors have to work through contractors, who act as intermediaries between the beneficiaries and the donors. Being far away from beneficiaries who are located in developing countries, it becomes difficult for donors to monitor what their appointed contractors are doing in the field.

Based on their empirical works, Ostrom et al., (2002) argued that the poor outcome from donor-supported projects (e.g. lack of sustainability) is due to the inability to adequately address the underlying incentive problems. However, the authors

recognised that since it is very difficult to change the nature of the goods and services, and the established norms (culture) of actors, the way towards resolving this problem is to change the "rules system" governing the design and implementation of aid projects or programmes (Ostrom et al., 2002: 25). To this end, donors need to encourage a locally owned process of development by placing the beneficiaries at the centre. In order for this ownership to occur, aid projects and programmes need to be based on four important design principles. First, donors should provide aid only when beneficiaries enunciate a request for such assistance. Second, beneficiaries need to exercise some control over the resources made available through aid. Third, beneficiaries need to allocate at least some of their own assets to the project or programme so that they have a real stake in the way their own and other actors' assets are used. Finally, beneficiaries need to have clear assignments of responsibility and be able to participate in decisions regarding continuance or non-continuance of a project.

2.2.1.2 Sociological institutionalism and the "three pillars of institutions" framework

Sociological institutionalism has its roots mainly in organisational sociology and anthropology. This tradition views organisations as "open systems" operating in relation to their institutional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004). This theory explains why or why not individual organisations (or actors/groups within an organisation) adopt certain practices, structures and routines, and hence, is important for analysing organisational reforms in agricultural extension.

The basic difference between sociological and rational choice institutionalism rests on the underlying assumptions regarding human actions and the roles that institutions play in shaping such actions. While rational choice institutionalism assumes that actors are strategic or rational (profit maximisers), cultural institutionalists assume that what an actor perceives as a "rational action" is itself "socially constituted" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 949). In this case, institutions provide cognitive and normative templates for interpretation and actions (Hall & Taylor, 1996), that is, meaning for actions (Scott, 1995, 2001).

The sociological institutionalism school is based on a central tenet of "legitimacy", which refers to a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially (culturally) constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995: 574). This cultural legitimacy, as the theory posits, is necessary for an organisation to receive support from its stakeholders and thereby survive (Brinkerhoff, 2005; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004; Suchman, 1995). Since cultural forces provide templates for meaning-making (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Scott, 1995, 2001), an organisation (or an organisational system, structure, practice, and so on) must culturally "make sense" in order to be able to receive support from its stakeholders (Brinkerhoff, 2005). These cultural forces may operate at the individual organisation level[4], at the inter-organisational or sectoral level[5] or even at international levels[6] (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004). Therefore, cultural institutionalism is argued to be applicable in the study of micro-level organisational interactions to international regimes (Scott, 2004).

Due to its origin in organisational sociology and anthropology, sociological institutionalism has predominantly placed greater emphasis on the role of cultural institutions such as norms and cognitions (Scott, 2004). Accordingly, the key sources of legitimacy for an organisation or system are identified to be cultural. However, attempts to integrate the various institutional forces into the analysis of organisational legitimacy are also noteworthy. This is evident in the "three pillars of institutions" framework developed by the prominent organisational sociologist, Richard Scott (Table 2.2). This framework provides an integrated view of the disparate schools within institutionalism.

Scott's framework, similar to the IAD framework discussed earlier, draws attention to the importance of laws, rules and sanctions[7] (e.g. rewards and punishments), that is, the "regulative pillar of institutions". However, regulative institutions are viewed as sources of coercion. Such coercion may originate from other organisations on which a particular organisation depends. Examples may include organisations that have the power to establish rules, inspect or review an organisation's conformity with these rules, and as necessary, manipulate sanctions

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[4] Influencing the individuals and groups within the organisation
[5] Influencing individual organisations and their actors; also called *organisational fields*
[6] Influencing countries and international regimes
[7] This is the point where Scott's ideas converge with those of other rational choice institutionalists, for example, North (1990) and Ostrom *et al.* (2002).

in an attempt to influence behaviour (Scott, 1995:35). An organisation may acquire legitimacy by conforming to these coercive requirements (Scott, 1995).

Table 2.2 Three pillars of institutions

Dimensions	**Regulative**	**Normative**	**Cognitive**
Basis of compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken for granted
Mechanisms	Coercive	Social obligation	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules, laws, sanctions	Certification, accreditation	Prevalence, isomorphism
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Culturally supported, conceptually correct

Source: Scott, 1995, 2001

The second pillar in Scott's framework concerns the normative systems of prescriptions, obligations and moral values that influence organisational life. These norms may include the values that are shared in a particular profession, or expectations that have gained acceptance within organisations. These may be unspoken or implicit but still they may act as powerful pressures. They specify how things should be done, and define values, goals, means, and behaviours that an organisation needs to pursue. While regulative institutions prescribe "what my interest is", the normative institutions prescribe "what is expected of me". Normative institutions, similar to the regulative institutions, may be formal or informal. They prescribe what is right and wrong and thus constrain actions. At the same time, however, normative institutions may empower actors and enable organisational action. Under this influence, "actors conform not because such conformance serves their individual interest but because it is expected of them, they are obliged to do so" (Scott, 1995: 39).

Finally, the cognitive institutions refer to the symbol systems (words, signs, and gestures), taken-for-granted beliefs or myths that exist in the organisation's environment. While normative institutions specify "how things *should be* done", the cognitive institutions specify "how things *are* done". In contrast to the normative pillar in which the basis of compliance is social or moral obligation, the cognitive pillar stresses the way situations are framed and social identities defined. According to Scott, social identities frame "our perception of who we are and what

actions make sense to us in given situations" (Scott, 1995: 44). For example, when a manager says, "This is how we do things around here", the person refers to a culturally established definition of an organisational practice (Oliver, 1997). In this case, the manager pursues the practice not necessarily because the behaviour is efficient but because this is what is culturally defined (Oliver, 1997).

According to Scott (2004), in contrast to the old institutionalism in which the focus was on normative institutions, the new institutionalism in organisational sociology focuses primarily on the cognitive institutions. When an organisation deviates from these forces, it becomes difficult for the new organisation to be legitimated. On the other hand, by adopting widely shared "myths", for example, an organisation can garner legitimacy from its stakeholders (Scott, 2004: 6). In such situations, compliance with the taken-for-granted beliefs about how best to organise, and towards what ends, become more important than the actual efficacy of particular organisational structures and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

While Scott's framework and its associated theories have placed utmost importance on the various institutional forces in the environment of an organisation – such as laws, norms and beliefs – the author has also drawn attention to the technical environment, for example, material resources. According to Scott (2004), all organisations confront both technical and institutional pressures although the strength of these forces varies across organisational sectors. Thus, educational organisations are typically subject to stronger institutional than technical pressures, whereas the reverse is true for many industrial concerns. Some other organisations, such as banks and nuclear power plants, confront strong pressures of both types (Scott, 2004).

2.2.2 The SCOPE framework

Alongside institutionalism, another body of literature developed in the 1990s (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 1990, 1992; Brinkerhoff, 1991, 1992; Goldsmith, 1992) out of a growing concern among major aid agencies that a considerable proportion of their institutional development projects in the "Third World" countries were failing to generate lasting impacts (Goldsmith, 1992: 585). In order to improve the situation,

the USAID funded research at the University of Maryland, which resulted in the development of a framework, called the SCOPE or the "institutional sustainability" framework (Goldsmith, 1992).

The SCOPE is an attempt to explain why institutions do, or do not, sustain themselves over time. However, unlike in institutionalism, the term "institution" in this framework is used to mean an "organisation" such as a government body, rural clinic, agricultural university, and so on, that has attained special status or legitimacy (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Goldsmith, 1992).

The proponents of the SCOPE define "institutional sustainability" as "the ability of an organisation to produce outputs of sufficient value so that it acquires enough inputs from its stakeholders in order to be able to continue production at a steady or growing rate (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992)." This definition indicates two things. First, it takes a simple or broad approach in defining the institutional sustainability of organisations. Instead of defining sustainability as the continuous survival of organisational structures, activities, availability of funding, and so on, the SCOPE proponents consider sustainability as the ability of an organisation to receive inputs or supports from its stakeholders (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1992). Second, the definition suggests that in order to maintain such supports (and thereby retain its legitimate status) an organisation must continuously and efficiently produce valued outputs. By adopting such a view, the SCOPE proponents have drawn attention to the "pragmatic" aspects of an organisation's legitimacy (Brinkerhoff, 2005). In other words, what the organisation actually produces for its stakeholders and how it performs in relation to expectations is the key to the organisation's legitimacy (Brinkerhoff, 2005). In the context of development projects, it draws attention to the implementation performance of the projects during their lifetime (Brinkerhoff, 2005; Ingle et al., 1990).

In explaining the institutional sustainability of development organisations, the SCOPE proponents have combined insights from systems theory (S), contingency theory (CO), and political economy (PE). Hence, they named their framework "SCOPE". From Systems theory the SCOPE authors take the idea that an organisation is like a system consisting of a set of interrelated units that interact with one another to convert some types of inputs (tangible and intangible resources) into outputs (products, services, ideas, etc.). In this input-output

production process, the system operates in relation to some broader systems that constitute its environment. The environment acts as the source of inputs for the system and at the same time the system produces outputs that influence the environment.

From contingency theory, the SCOPE authors take the idea that the optimal structure and management style of an organisation is contingent upon uncertain, exogenous conditions (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990). Therefore, they reject the traditional Weberian (1947) view that there exists a single, universal way to constitute organisations. Instead, the authors hold the premise that the success of an organisation depends on its having an adequate fit with the environment. In order to achieve this fit, an organisation must possess structures, strategies, and procedures as appropriate in a given context.

Finally, from political economy, the SCOPE proponents adopt the premise that an organisation is dependent on various political and economic relationships with its environment. These relationships affect the incentives for the organisation's stakeholders to support or not support the organisation, or in other words, affect the resource renewal process between the system and its environment (Gustafson, 1994).

Accordingly, the SCOPE framework is based on two hypotheses (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992). First, it assumes that the long-term survival of an organisation is affected by its external environment and internal system features. Second, in order to remain viable in a changing world, the organisation must develop and stick to a strategy or game plan with a strong fit among its own internal strengths and weaknesses and the external threats and opportunities. If there is a mismatch, institutional decline or demise is likely.

As regards the internal system, two sets of factors are proposed in the SCOPE framework as important for the institutional sustainability of an organisation. They are the technology and the structure. *Technology* refers to the organisation's production and decision-making processes and *structure* refers to the distribution of jobs among the people (or groups) within the organisation. The important point about technology and structure is their degree of complexity. Other things being

equal, the framework postulates that the complexity of an organisation is inversely related to its sustainability.

The SCOPE authors also propose that an organisation's technology tends to become complex when the processes are variable and irregular; involve issues of power asymmetry or principal agent relationships and deal with multiple units and complex tasks requiring coordination and integration. The structure, on the other hand, tends to be complex if it is informal, non-hierarchical, decentralised, contains relatively more units, and the units are independent and perform different tasks. One central point in system complexity is the requirement for coordination and integration (Israel, 1987). Organisations requiring greater coordination among multiple units are more complex, and vice versa (Israel, 1987). An integrated rural development project involving multiple organisations from a range of sectors, for example, would be a complex organisation (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 1990, 1992; Israel, 1987).

The complexity of the technology can put pressure on system resources through its scale of operation, cost of coordination, supervision and staff motivation. Structural complexity can affect incentives for organisational actors, and thus encourage some forms of behaviour while discouraging others. In addition, complexity may influence the transaction costs and flow of information within the system, which may affect system sustainability. For example, structures that generate excessive transaction costs are often non-viable (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990: 35). Similarly, formal structures, as opposed to informal ones, are difficult to maintain in developing countries as formalisation tends to increase transaction costs because it requires specialised training, familiarisation with new roles, and so forth. Therefore, organisations that use intricate technologies or have elaborate structures are apt to be difficult to sustain (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 1992:372).

In the operating environment of an organisation, the SCOPE identifies both direct and indirect influences. According to the prevalence of these influences, the environment may be hostile or helpful. Environmental hostility, like complexity, is inversely related to sustainability. The most critical external sustainability variable proposed in the framework is the demands of the stakeholders – both resource providers (patrons) and resource users (clients). According to the political economy

view, the SCOPE proposes that these demands may be economic or political in nature (e.g. a desire to retain control over power). In either case, an organisation, in order to be able to sustain itself, must fulfil its stakeholders' demands through the production of outputs that will be valued by them.

In addition to direct environmental influences, some other factors – such as a change in government commitment, bureaucratic opposition, the relative visibility or clout of the organisation's clients or major changes in the environment – are also proposed in the SCOPE as having indirect influences on an organisation's institutional sustainability (Gustafson 1994; Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 1990, 1992).

In addition to the internal and environmental conditions, the SCOPE authors propose "strategic management" as an important sustainability variable. Strategy is important because of the political, social and economic uncertainties in the operating environment of an organisation. These may affect both internal operations and the way that stakeholders judge the value of the organisation's products. Therefore, sustainability would require a strategy to match the organisation's internal strengths and weaknesses and the environmental contexts (demands) in which it operates (Gustafson, 1994: 123-124).

Four types of managerial strategies are proposed in the SCOPE (Figure 2.2). The strategy can have an internal versus an external focus. An internal strategy takes the environment for granted, while an external strategy involves an active engagement with the environment, surveying it and perhaps even trying to affect it, for example, by making attempts to involve the stakeholders and thus increase their commitment to the organisation. The strategy can also emphasise either an active dimension (doing things right), or a reflective dimension (doing the right things). Based on these active versus reflective, and internal versus external distinctions, managerial strategies may take four forms: mechanical, adaptive, reactive, and interactive (Fig 2.2).

According to the SCOPE, the mix of strategy that would be important for sustainability is a contingent decision. No organisation can belong to a single type of strategy. Although the SCOPE emphasises learning, it takes a neutral stance and suggests that how much learning is appropriate depends partly on the internal

complexity of the system and the level of hostility in the environment. If the system is complex and the environment is hostile, a mechanical strategy is not likely to work. However, in most developing countries, despite well-recognised environmental hostility, donor funded projects often tend to have a mechanical strategy. The reason is the financial oversight and accountability demanded by donors' own stakeholders (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992).

	Orientation	
	Internal	**External**
Active	Mechanical	Adaptive
Reflective	Reactive	Interactive

Dimension of capacity emphasised
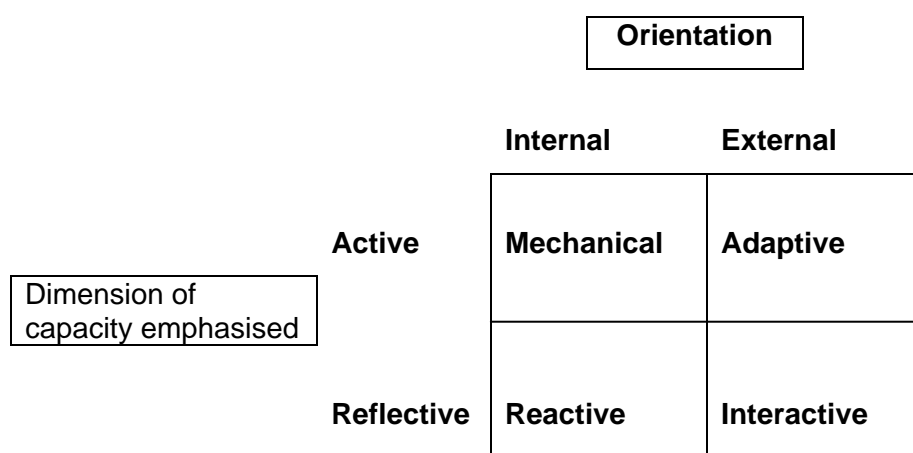
Figure 2.2 System strategies for translating capacity into performance (Source: Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 1992: 41)

Despite the origin of the SCOPE in the context of a developed country (USA) and private profit-making firms (Goldsmith, 1992), the framework was applied in the nineties to evaluate the sustainability of various donor-supported projects in health, agriculture and rural development. The lessons learned are summarised by Finsterbusch (1990).

The relationship between organisational performance (project implementation performance) and sustainability was affirmed (Finsterbusch, 1990; Ingle et al., 1990). A good (implementation) performance in terms of demonstrated success influenced the decision makers and beneficiaries to sustain the organisation. However, quite opposite to the speculations in the SCOPE, the studies also revealed that some institutions that produced low quality outputs were better sustained compared to those that produced high quality outputs. Thus, the results were inconclusive, and Finsterbusch (1990) argued that more research was necessary in this regard. Two important explanations were provided by

Finsterbusch (1990) as to why some organisations were sustained despite their poor performance. First, vested interests within bureaucracies tended to protect incompetence and thus maintain their *status quo*. The second explanation was a lack of significant inter-institutional competition in the environment. Despite poor performance, incompetent institutions continued receiving budget allocations from their patrons.

As regards organisational strategy, considerable involvement of staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders and sharing power with them were all important for developing ownership. This, in turn, resulted in improved performance. However, although stakeholder involvement was found to be important for sustainability, the findings reported by Finsterbusch (1990) do not provide adequate guidelines as to what nature and degree of involvement and power sharing were associated with organisational sustainability.

The SCOPE framework was also applied in academic research to study the relationship between learning and institutional (the term is used in an organisation sense) sustainability of donor-supported programmes in the Caribbean (Brown, 1996). The study did not reveal any strong relationship between learning and sustainability, and concluded that some forms of learning always take place in organisations, but they are not necessarily adequate to ensure sustainability. The author (Brown, 1996), however, supported the claim made by the SCOPE proponents that the framework is "generic" in the sense that it is applicable in the analysis of all forms of institutions.

The SCOPE framework was also applied to study the institutional sustainability of the T&V projects in agricultural extension (Gustafson, 1994). For the sake of comparison, the findings are discussed along with the other descriptive-empirical literature in section 2.3 of this chapter.

2.2.3 Comparison among the frameworks

A review of the three frameworks suggests that while some concepts are similar across the frameworks, there are certain contrasting features as well (Table 2.3). One point of contrast is between the assumptions underpinning the IAD and the

three-pillar framework. The IAD assumes that social actors are strategic and driven by the motivation of seeking incentives. While this assumption is also acknowledged in Scott's framework, its major emphasis is on the cultural nature of organisational action in which organisational actors are portrayed as conforming to social norms and traditions, rather than rationally or strategically seeking incentives.

As regards the key explanatory variables, the IAD draws attention to a number of variables. These include the vested or perverse incentives arising from the nature of the goods and services, the culture of the communities, the rules governing stakeholder interactions in the system and the outcome of the system. The framework also indicates the importance of learning that takes place within the system over time. In contrast to the IAD, Scott's framework (mainly) points to the cultural legitimacy of the organisation's goals, structures and practices. Thus, as mentioned earlier, Scott's framework does not take into account the outputs and outcome of the organisation. This is an area where cultural institutionalism differs from the SCOPE framework as well.

Table 2.3 Comparison among the IAD, the three pillars of institutions, and the SCOPE frameworks

Points of comparison	IAD framework	Three pillars framework	SCOPE framework
Philosophical assumptions	Mainly rational-instrumental	Mainly socio-cultural	Mainly rational-instrumental
Key explanatory variables	Vested interests or incentives arising from culture, rules governing interactions among actors (e.g. negotiation and ownership), outcome, and constraints of learning (informational problems)	Institutional legitimacy – coercive, normative and cognitive; material resources	Degree of environmental hostility, system complexity, organisational strategy, and quality of organisational outputs, i.e. project implementation performance
Primary unit of analysis	Action arena – action situation and actors	Organisation, groups within an organisation	System and its stakeholders (resource providers, users)
Origin	Developed country but has history of application in developing countries	Mainly developed country; no known application in developing countries	Developed country but has history of application in developing countries
History of application in agric. extension	Not known	Not known	One known study

While there is considerable agreement of the SCOPE framework with both schools of institutionalism in that it draws attention to the environment-system interactions, its most obvious distinction is due to an emphasis on strategic management. Unlike the IAD and the three-pillar framework, in which the role of management is largely implicit, the SCOPE framework explicitly recognises that not only can the environment influence an organisation's survival but also the organisation can influence the environment by adopting appropriate strategies such as through continuous learning and adaptation.

The biggest contrast of the SCOPE is, however, with the three-pillar framework. The SCOPE puts little emphasis on the cultural context as a source of legitimacy for an organisation. On the contrary, the framework is more closely aligned with the rational choice school underpinning the IAD framework due to its strong emphasis on the political and economic contexts. Moreover, like the IAD, the SCOPE also takes into account the outputs and outcomes that are produced by an organisation as important for its sustainability. It also supports the assumption underpinning the IAD that system sustainability is jeopardised when one party unilaterally decides the rules for the weaker parties, that is, the role of asymmetric power.

The unit of analysis in the IAD framework is the action arena in which the actors operate and make decisions or choices. Therefore, the IAD draws attention to the incentives that the key actors within the system face in making decisions and taking actions. Similar to the IAD, the primary unit of analysis in the three-pillar framework is the whole organisation or the group(s) within an organisation. The SCOPE framework considers the whole system or organisation as the unit of analysis, although implicitly, recognising the importance of the stakeholders.

Both the IAD and the SCOPE have a history of application in empirical studies concerning the sustainability of donor-supported projects in developing countries. However, since the SCOPE has been applied in agricultural extension reform projects, it provides a documented empirical ground as an analytical framework for this study. Compared to the IAD and the SCOPE, the framework of Scott has no known history of application in the study of donor-supported extension or rural development projects in developing countries. On the contrary, as Scott (2004) points out, the theoretical foundation of sociological institutionalism is largely

grounded on experiences from organisations in developed countries (particularly USA).

Despite their plausibility, the institutionalism school has received criticism among development writers as being abstract and lacking empirical guidelines for action (see Goldsmith, 1992). Similar is written about the SCOPE (Brown, 1996; Goldsmith, 1992). Brown (1996: 294), for example, noticed that the major weakness of the SCOPE framework is its operational difficulty. The internal, external and strategic variables, as listed in the framework, are difficult to apply mechanically. Although the SCOPE proponents, albeit implicitly, emphasise that learning is important for system sustainability, they do not clearly indicate how such learning would take place and by whom (Brown, 1996). In addition, the model does not clearly articulate how the learning of individual actors (e.g. managers) would translate into the learning of the system as a whole (Brown, 1996). Of particular concern is the problem of measuring 'outputs' as articulated in the SCOPE.

2.3   Descriptive literature

The review of the three important theoretical frameworks, as presented above, has shown that although they provide useful guidelines, none is beyond criticism. The most important point of criticism is their abstractness. Moreover, the literature was developed largely from experience with non-extension organisations. Thus, in order to be able to develop a framework that is empirical-friendly and more relevant for extension, it is necessary to identify more specific and relevant concepts. Considering these, a further review of the literature was carried out. This review included the prescriptive and empirical literature in the broader discipline of development studies and particularly those of agricultural extension and rural development. These are presented below in line with the concepts reviewed in the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier. The review also includes some new concepts that were identified in the descriptive literature. Furthermore, based on ideas found in the descriptive literature the review elaborates the concepts of "stakeholder participation" and "organisational learning".

2.3.1 Institutional contexts

The influence of formal and informal institutions in the sustainability and performance of development organisations/projects/programmes has received considerable interest in the discipline of development studies (AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Brinkerhoff, 2005; Gow & Morss, 1988; Israel, 1987; White et al., 2005). Many development writers and practitioners (AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Gow & Morss, 1988; White et al., 2005) have recognised that donor-supported programmes or projects that fit well with recipient government policies have much better prospects of sustainability[8] as they are more likely to generate high-level political support. For instance, White et al. (2005) reported that adequate legal and policy framework was important for the sustainability of the Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) project activities in the Philippines and in Indonesia. These two countries in recent decades have passed legislation (e.g. The Philippines' Local Government Code of 1991 and Fisheries Code of 1998) to devolve development functions to local government. One crucial reason for the rapid spread of the ICM approach in the Philippines and Indonesia was that its activities were carefully aligned with the local government planning, and legal and revenue generating systems of municipalities, cities and provinces. Also, the ICM project indicators were aligned with the national government's development indicators, so that objectives of both were the same.

The essence of government policy support for the survival, spread and institutionalisation of novel agricultural extension systems and approaches is well-emphasised in the descriptive literature (Fakih et al., 2003; Garforth, 2004; Hoffmann, 2003; Roling, 1995; Scarborough et al., 1997; Thapa & Ojha, 2004). For example, compatibility between government policy goals and farmer demand was found to be an important requisite in the design of demand-led extension systems as government policy goals may sometimes be in conflict with farmer demands (Garforth, 2004). As governments provide funds for public extension, they may

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[8] The term **project/programme sustainability** is defined by these authors as the longevity of the development benefits/outcome of the concerned project/programme, not the project/programme itself. Such benefits/outcome may be of various types depending on the nature of the project/programme and may include physical infrastructures, organisational structures, activities, approaches, etc. promoted through the project/programme. This definition is consistent with Ostrom *et al.*, (2002). Since the organisational innovations were promoted in Bangladesh through time-bound projects, the literature dealing with project/programme sustainability is quite relevant for this study. This is because the new organisational systems are the benefits/outcome of the projects concerned. Therefore, in the context of this research, the terms "project sustainability" and "organisational sustainability" mean the same thing.

want to fulfil their own policy goal rather than supporting farmers' demands (Garforth, 2004). A change in government policy in Nepal, Vietnam and Zimbabwe in favour of farmer participation played an important role in the adoption and spread of farmer-led and demand-driven extension approaches in those countries (Scarborough et al., 1997). Similarly, Fakih et al., (2003) found that government decentralisation policies, which opened up space for farmer groups to carry out advocacy and to organise at the district level, facilitated the institutionalisation of the community-based Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach in Indonesia. On the contrary, the trade liberalisation and agricultural commercialisation policies of the government negatively affected the programme because these laws discouraged ecologically sound IPM practices among the farmers (Fakih et al., 2003).

Despite several examples, the descriptive extension literature does not explicitly differentiate between the existence of formal rules and the actual rules-in-use as envisaged in the IAD framework (Ostrom et al., 2002). Therefore, it is unclear as to whether it was merely the formal policy statements or the policy-in-practice that influenced the decisions or actions of the actors concerned to support the novel extension approaches or systems.

Several empirical studies in the development studies discipline have shown that the political-administrative context in developing countries was important for the performance and sustainability of donor-supported projects and programmes (Bossert, 1990; Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Manning, 2001; White et al., 2005). Bossert (1990) reported that institutionalised corruption negatively affected the sustainability of donor-supported health projects in some African countries. The author reported that in those countries, the state was a predator rather than the servant of the people. Manning (2001) observed that due to corruption and undesired political influences, the so-called "new" public management reforms, promoted in African countries through donor assistance, failed like the "old" ones. On the other hand, the transparency of the legal system and the capacity of law enforcement provided favourable conditions for the sustainability of ICM project activities in the Philippines and in Indonesia (White et al., 2005). Although the broader development discipline has identified and reported the importance of

dysfunctional political-institutional contexts, no such example was found in the agricultural extension literature.

The flow of excessive aid in government organisations through donor projects has been identified as an important constraint on successful reforms. This negative impact is reported in the World Bank's (1995) country assistance review in Ghana. The review reported that too high levels of external assistance and a donor-driven development agenda in the country were encouraging government officials to postpone the adoption of the desired political reforms, fostering dependency mentality such as "let the donor do it", and creating perverse or distorted incentives (World Bank, 1995: 15).

The descriptive literature (Cayota, 2004; Garforth, 2004; Kidd, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Lightfoot, 2003; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004) in agricultural extension and rural development has identified several normative institutions characterising the relationships between the government organisations (GOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs) in developing countries. These features affected the success and sustainability of extension and rural development projects and programmes. For example, the hostile relationships between the GOs and the NGOs characterised by a lack of trust, and confrontation, have been reported by several authors (Farrington et al., 1993; Lewis, 1993; Scarborough et al., 1997). According to these authors, these features have constrained attempts to promote GO-NGO partnership in developing countries. Based on project implementation experiences, Scarborough et al., (1997) concluded that although GO-NGO partnership can be realised for definite, short-term activities, such arrangements may be difficult to sustain in the longer term.

Lewis (1993) found that the relationship between the GOs and the NGOs in Bangladesh was "polarised" and characterised by "mutual distrust". The author reports that the political leadership in Bangladesh is hostile towards the NGOs. The government circle is critical about the accountability of the NGOs in terms of financial matters and the latter's close relationships with the donors (Lewis, 1993). These norms featuring GO-NGO relations are important given that the post-T&V donor-supported extension reforms in Bangladesh have involved the principle of GO-NGO partnership in extension service delivery. No empirical study in

Bangladesh, however, has identified their role in the sustainability of donor-supported extension reforms.

Some other authors (Ison & Russel, 2000; Lewis, 1998) reported that culture was important for the spread and sustainability of agricultural extension reforms. For example, Ison and Russel (2000:15-18) reported that past extension traditions of Technology Transfer affected the cultural legitimacy of farmer-centred or participatory extension approaches in Australia. The tradition of Technology Transfer influenced what constituted acceptable and valid extension practice for the government extension providers in Australia. Similarly, Lewis (1998) reported that the top-down vision of Technology Transfer among the government extension agencies in Bangladesh adversely affected the sustainability prospects of the ICLARM[9] aquaculture extension project in Bangladesh. The author also reported that the extension agencies in Bangladesh operate in a resource-dependent context where the government agencies and the NGOs compete with each other for donor resources. These norms were manifested in the ICLARM project and negatively affected the prospects for sustaining the project's organisational arrangement beyond donor involvement.

In addition to the broader government-NGO relations, some authors (Cayota, 2004; Garforth, 2004; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004) have reported that the culture of the government extension agencies was an important barrier to the success of donor-supported extension reforms. For example, Sulaiman and Hall (2004) reported that despite some examples, GO-NGO partnership is still a missing norm in the public sector institutions in India. The authors argued that a change in the "institutional culture" of public sector organisations would be required for successful government-NGO partnership approaches in agricultural extension.

Quite opposite to that of the government organisations, the culture of the NGOs is generally admired among the donor circle, as observed by several authors (Chambers, 1993; Scarborough et al., 1997; Gow & Morss, 1988). The general image of NGO culture is that these agencies have a more participatory decision-making style and that they are more flexible towards partnership with other

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[9] International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management

agencies (Gow & Morss 1988). The NGOs are also considered to be more capable of working in a process mode, using participatory tools (e.g. PRA) and developing grassroots organisations of the rural poor (Chambers, 1993).

At the same time, however, some adverse cultural images of NGOs are also recognised in the development literature (see Chambers, 1996; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Farrington et al., 1993). For example, quite opposite to the image that NGOs are more flexible in their approach to partnership, Farrington et al. (1993: 173) observed that the NGOs have sustained a "confrontational rhetoric" about the state. Most NGOs in their study were found to be critical of the state while highlighting their own strengths against government inefficiency, corruption and bias. However, no empirical study was found reporting the role of NGO culture in the sustainability of donor-supported projects and programmes.

Some authors (Hulme, 1994; Lewis, 1997) reported that in Bangladesh, the NGOs, in general, have two cultural images: the traditions of social welfare and helping the poor on one hand, and the radical language of political transformation on the other, for example, reducing social inequality and empowering the poor. However, Devine (2003: 227-242) found that the NGOs in Bangladesh have undergone a profound transformation in recent decades (since the 1990s onwards) in which their original objectives of mobilising and empowering the poor have been replaced by a much narrower concern with securing funds that enable their own organisational growth. One reason for this is the struggle of the Bangladesh NGOs (mainly due to pressure from the donors) to reduce dependency on donor funding. Owing to this pressure, the NGOs have become more "inward looking" and "anxious" about their own survival than the long-term security of their beneficiaries (Devine, 2003: 231). In order to secure this survival, the NGOs have resorted to service charges and profits from their micro-credit programmes with the rural poor, sometimes to the detriment of the poor (Devine, 2003).

Several cultural attributes of rural communities – such as their traditions, history, norms of cooperation, and conflicts – are also documented in the agricultural extension and rural development literature (Datta, 2005; Hagmann et al., 1998; Lewis, 1993, 2003; Lyon, 2003; Scarborough et al., 1997; Uphoff, 2001). These cultural attributes are reported as important for the success and sustainability of

extension and rural development projects and programmes. For example, the Nicaraguan Farmers' Association and the resultant norms of solidarity that existed among the farmers facilitated the spread of farmer-led extension approaches in the country. Similarly, traditional self-help norms such as *alayon/bayanihan* in the Philippines and Ngua, Kuwadana, and *weni mwana* in Kenya are also reported to be important cultural factors influencing extension projects (Scarborough et al., 1997).

Unfortunately, however, in most developing countries the communities are fragmented and unorganised (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990). Uphoff (2001) reported that the popular community development approach of the 1950s and 1960s became dismantled due to the underlying assumption that communities are homogenous units. The author maintained that quite contradictory to the conventional wisdom, communities are often not cohesive, harmonious social entities but are divided by religious, familial, clan or other separations, making for a considerable level of conflict. Therefore, they are not "happy or united places". Instead, there can be feuds and even fights. However, at the same time, communities usually have traditional mechanisms of resolving or containing conflicts (Uphoff 2001:11). Any approach of rural "institution building"[10] should, therefore, be based on a proper understanding of the term "community" (Uphoff, 2001).

Long-standing dependency relationships between the rural people and outside agencies are also reported to be important cultural features of communities (Datta, 2005; Lewis, 2003, 1993; Scarborough et al., 1997). Several authors (Datta, 2005; Lewis, 2003) have reported that due to these patron-client or paternalistic relationships, it became difficult to develop sustainable rural organisations through external assistance. For example, Lewis (2003) noticed that due to a high level of continuing dependency of the rural groups on the NGOs, the rural people involved in the Silk Development Project in Bangladesh failed to see an independent future for their groups. According to Wood (1994, 1997), such vertical patron-client relationship is a dominant social norm in rural Bangladesh. Owens and Simpson (2004) also reported a similar dependency relationship among farmers involved with the Farmer Field School (FFS) programme in Mali. The farmers involved with

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[10] Similar to Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1992), the author considered legitimate organisations as institutions.

the FFS programme expected extension agents to make repeated visits to reinforce and consolidate their teachings of the FFS training programme. The authors recognised that such dependency was due to the past T&V programmes in which farmers were always taught by the extension agents.

The literature in agricultural extension and rural development also contains reports of 'aid syndrome' as an important cultural trait of rural communities, having important implications for the sustainability of community-based organisations developed through project assistance (Bagadion, 1997; Hagmann et al., 1998; Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002; Scarborough et al., 1997; Uphoff et al., 1998). This refers to a mentality or habit of rural people to seek free goods and grants (from donors and other external agencies) in order to participate in development projects. Due to this, rural people, on many occasions, become reluctant to put up their resources for their own development (Uphoff et al., 1998: 36). Instead, they hope or expect that if they "decline self-help" they "can get something for free" (Uphoff et al., 1998: 36). Several empirical instances of aid syndrome are documented based on case study experiences from Zimbabwe (Hagmann et al., 1998; Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002), India (Scarborough et al., 1997), Sri Lanka, and the Philippines (Bagadion, 1997; Uphoff et al., 1998).

One key reason for such an aid dependency mentality of rural people is the history of the provision of free gifts and grants to these communities by external agencies (e.g. GOs, NGOs, donors) for participating in the latter's development projects (Bagadion, 1997; Scarborough et al., 1997; Uphoff et al., 1998). Uphoff et al., (1998) have described it as a "legacy". For example, the history of dole-out from politicians in the form of free food and cigarettes undermined the self-reliance ethos in some village extension groups in the uplands of the Philippines (Scarborough et al., 1997). In addition to the legacy of paternalistic interventions, such mentality has its roots in the poverty and history of exploitation of farmers by outsiders, as observed in the Rajasthan state of India (see Scarborough et al., 1997).

2.3.2 Material resources

There are few guidelines in the literature as to what specific material resources are important for the sustainability of development organisations. The most frequently cited constraint is the scarcity of funding and human resources within which

developing country organisations operate. Some authors (Anderson et al*., 2006; Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002), for example, reported that budgetary constraints of developing country governments were important reasons for the non-sustainability of donor-supported projects. According to Anderson et al., (2006), this crisis in developing countries manifests when donor budgets terminate and is a common phenomenon in poor, donor-dependent countries. Because of poor revenue generating mechanisms, host governments often fail to finance the project activities once donor support is terminated. According to Hanyani-Mlambo (2002), governments in developing countries have always struggled to allocate scarce resources among competing choices. Given collapsing economies and even tighter budgets, governments have been forced to cut spending on, sometimes essential, services. In most cases, this has led to supposedly collaborating partners fighting for scarce resources.

In agricultural extension literature the scarcity of financial resources has been extensively discussed and is considered to be the most important reason behind the non-sustainability of the large-scale T&V extension projects (Anderson et al., 2006). A comprehensive study by Purcell and Anderson (1997) showed that 70% of the T&V projects in developing countries had an "unlikely" sustainability rating because of the poor financial standing of the governments. Anderson et al., (2006) argued that fiscal inadequacy of host countries was more important for the non-sustainability of the T&V system than some other factors such as the design weaknesses of the model and its inability to demonstrate impacts. Several recent experiences from Venezuela, Hodurus, Nepal and Uruguay have indicated that due to financial constraints the sustainability of the post-T&V extension approaches introduced in these countries was negatively affected (Saviroff & Londarte, 2004; Rivera & Alex, 2005; Kidd, 2004; Cayota, 2004)

2.3.3 Project implementation performance

Although the relationship between organisational outputs and sustainability is one of the key concerns in the SCOPE framework, the concept of "output" lacks a precise definition (Brown, 1996). Although several authors (Gustafson, 1994; Finsterbusch, 1990; Ingle et al., 1990) who applied the SCOPE framework have used the term "implementation performance" under the broader concept of

"programme success" in establishing a relationship between organisational outputs and sustainability, the term *performance* was not defined. Compared to this, the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 2002) used the concept of "outcome". Furthermore, in the descriptive literature, concepts like project effectiveness, project benefits, project impacts, and so on, are used.

Several empirical studies (Bossart, 1990; White et al*., 2005*) have shown that the sustainability of donor-supported projects was related to their ability to produce convincing evidence of impacts to the stakeholders concerned. These observations suggest the importance of an organisation's pragmatic exchange relationship with its stakeholders, as suggested in the SCOPE literature. For example, in a study of the donor-supported health projects in Central America and Africa Bossert (1990) found that poorly sustained projects were characterised by an inability to achieve the targeted objectives and goals. In addition, in such projects the goals were vague, which made it difficult to demonstrate achievement of the objectives. Similarly, an empirical study on the sustainability of Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) projects in the Philippines and Indonesia revealed a relationship between visible improvements in the local ecosystem and sustainability of the ICM project activities beyond project life (White et al., 2005).

In some other instances (Bossert, 1990; Ingle et al., 1990), however, evidence contradictory to the above, was observed. This evidence suggests that projects may sometimes be sustained even without real evidence of positive impact. In such cases, the "reputation" of the projects' performance was found to be important. The study on the sustainability of donor-supported health projects in Central America and Africa carried out by Bossert (1990: 1019) showed that it was the projects' "reputation for being successful" that positively affected their sustainability despite the fact that there was no objective means of determining their effectiveness. The reputation of the projects influenced the decisions of the health officials and beneficiaries concerned to support the projects regardless of whether or not the reputation was backed by 'scientifically designed evaluation studies'.

According to AusAID (2000), the ability of a donor-supported project or programme to generate financial gains for the stakeholders is important for its sustainability. The agency argues that if a programme or project does not deliver clear and

equitable financial or economic benefits, which are apparent to the stakeholders, it is most unlikely to be sustained after donor funding finishes (AusAID, 2000). Similarly, the study by White et al., (2005) found that perceived increase in economic gains and improved economic returns for stakeholders and their income generation were important for sustaining ICM project activities in the Philippines and Indonesia.

In addition to financial gain, an organisation's economic efficiency is also argued to be important for its sustainability. In other words, the benefit must be equal to or more than the perceived cost that stakeholders have to invest in terms of time, money and labour (AusAID, 2000). Therefore, AusAID suggests that benefits are not conducive for sustainability if the net benefit arising from a project or programme is negative or very small when all the costs are considered (AusAID, 2000:5). The study by Steckler and Goodman (1989) of 10 health promotion programmes revealed that when benefits associated with the programmes outweighed the costs, individuals became predisposed to supporting the programme's continuance. These observations also point to the importance of pragmatic legitimacy of an organisation for its sustainability, as articulated in the SCOPE literature.

At the same time, empirical evidence produced in the development literature (Steckler & Goodman, 1989; Ingle et al., 1990; White et al., 2005), showed that organisational performance in generating visible impacts was a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of sustainability. For example, White et al., (2005) found that although measurable gains were important for the sustainability of the Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) projects in Indonesia and the Philippines, they were not sufficient conditions for sustainability.

The literature in extension and rural development also produced evidence that an organisation's ability to demonstrate impacts is important for its sustainability (Gustafson, 1994; Anderson & Feder, 2003; Anderson et al., 2006). For example, Gustafson (1994) found that programme success in generating visible impacts was important in building demand and prestige, which helped achieve greater sustainability of the T&V projects. However, demonstration of impacts has always been a challenge in the case of agricultural extension projects, a problem that is considered to be generic (Feder et al., 1999). This is because of the nature of

goods and services that extension organisations deal with, which in most cases are characterised by attributes of "public goods" (Anderson & Feder, 2003). Traditionally, mainly under the T&V system, extension organisations have been associated with the transfer of information and advice to farmers in order to increase agricultural production (Anderson & Feder, 2003). The impacts or values of these services are, however, very difficult to prove or quantify (Feder et al., 1999).

In descriptive case studies on recent donor-supported extension projects embodying the principles of privatization, GO-NGO collaboration and demand-led extension, it has also been recognised that demonstration of benefits to the stakeholders was important for the sustainability of these new extension approaches (Nahdy, 2004; Lightfoot, 2004; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004). At the same time, it is observed that there has been little improvement in resolving this issue because of the nature of the current reforms. For example, some of the rationales underpinning demand-led extension reforms include enhancing farmer participation, empowerment and capacity building. Pursuing these goals has made it more difficult to prove extension's contribution (Fleischer, 2004). This is because participatory extension impacts are mainly relating to increased human resource capacity, which is not usually manifested over a short period (Fleischer, 2004). Based on experiences with two participatory extension projects in Egypt, Fleischer (2004) has recognised that participatory extension poses new challenges for methodologically sound assessment, as there is no longer a primary focus on the diffusion of externally supplied technologies, but on the creation of human and social capital, which is "difficult to measure and value" (Fleischer, 2004: 47).

Considering the shortcomings of extension organisations in producing visible impacts, some authors (Sulaiman & Hall 2004) recommend that extension should involve a wide range of activities beyond the single goal of information transfer and involve some provision of private goods. In order to support their arguments, Sulaiman and Hall (2004) have reported the cases of two privatised and partnership-based extension projects in India, which were sustained and expanded beyond the period of donor involvement over a short period. One of these projects offered extension services to clients in a wide range of areas such as development of self-help groups and master farmers, group marketing, a unique credit package, funding and facilitating technology development, and fruit and seed processing.

Reportedly, due to this wide focus, the project resulted in an increase in crop yields in the cultivated areas, improved marketing and credit facilities for farmers, and reduced production costs – all of which contributed to an increase in farmers' income. The other project improved the access of farmers to quality inputs such as farm machinery, agricultural credit, advisory and field supervision services including buy-back, and better prices. Interviews carried out by the authors showed that the farmers were satisfied with the services offered by the project, although no quantitative evidence of impact was reported.

The importance of net benefits or economic efficiency, based on cost-benefit comparison, is also reported by extension and rural development authors (Lightfoot, 2004, Datta, 2005). Evidence for this came from the experience of a demand-driven extension reform initiative in East Africa (Lightfoot's 2004) and from the integrated rural development projects supported by Concern Bangladesh (an NGO) that attempted to develop community-based organisations of the poor rural people in Bangladesh. The benefits of playing leadership roles in the groups was perceived by some group leaders as insufficient compared to the amount of time they needed to invest to ensure the smooth operation of the groups (Datta, 2005:5). Owing to this, the group leaders demanded 'incentive payments' (compensation) and when the general group members refused to provide the payments, some leaders left the groups resulting in a collapse of the community-based organisations (CBOs) (Datta, 2005).

The study by Datta (2005) also showed that *fairness* of the group leaders involved with the community development projects in Bangladesh was important for the sustainability of the groups. The author reported that, despite a strong perception among the group members that the community organisations were beneficial, the members of the groups that did not survive were not interested in reviving their activities. The reason was that the members lost trust in their leaders owing to the latter's malpractices such as the mismanagement of group funds, and favouritism (Datta, 2005).

2.3.4 Organisational design and strategy

The important concepts discussed in this section include organisational complexity, parallel versus integrated mode of project implementation, stakeholder participation and ownership, and the learning process approach in project management. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the concept of stakeholder participation and ownership, and organisational learning are discussed in detail in this section, based on ideas and observations drawn from the descriptive literature.

2.3.4.1   Organisational complexity

In the agricultural extension literature, the concept of organisational complexity has been applied to analyse the sustainability of the T&V projects (Gustafson, 1990, 1994). Some authors (Gustafson, 1990, 1994; Israel, 1987; Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1992) have argued that lowering organisational complexity was at the heart of the T&V system's original design. Accordingly, T&V is characterised as a highly structured and disciplined organisation (Gustafson, 1994). Features like a simple and clear-cut role of extension (e.g. message transfer only), single and hierarchical line of command, clear-cut job description of extension workers and their repetitive tasks through a routine of fortnightly training and visits were meant to keep the level of complexity down.

In practice, however, the T&V system was found to manifest different dimensions and levels of complexity in different countries (Gustafson, 1994). Gustafson (1994) found that this variable *complexity* had important implications for the sustainability of the system. For example, the adoption of multiple tasks such as transferring technology, developing farmer organisations, training the youth, and providing credit to farmers, added complexity to the T&V system in the Philippines. This required the system to generate additional resources to carry out those complex tasks, thus jeopardising its sustainability. At the same time, however, the study showed that increased complexity played positive roles in the sustainability of the T&V system in Thailand and India. In those countries, the extension workers were found to perform non-extension tasks, which were beyond their assigned role of message transfer. According to Gustafson (1994), although these additional tasks increased the complexity of the T&V organisation in those countries, it was vital to

satisfy the vested interests of the politicians and garner farmer support for the system.

Some authors (Datta, 2005; Lyon, 2003) in the rural development literature have also reported that design features were important in organisational sustainability, although these authors have not used the concept of complexity in reporting their findings. For example, simple and flexible processes of decision making and management appropriate for the situation of rural people were found to be important for the sustainability of community-based groups, created through donor-supported projects in Ghana (Lyon, 2003). The author reported that seasonal and need-based cooperation (i.e. informal processes, as opposed to routine) was conducive for group sustainability.

Another study by Datta (2005) in Bangladesh revealed contradictory evidence to those found by Lyon (2003). This study showed that the formalisation of rules was important for the performance and viability of Community-based Organisations (CBOs). According to the author, the successful CBOs involved with the integrated rural development projects of Concern Bangladesh (an NGO) had formal systems of loan realisation based on strict repayment schedules. Datta (2005) found that successful groups and village organisations reduced the risks of financial mismanagement by opening bank accounts, maintaining daily accounts, setting rules, and introducing written policies.

2.3.4.2   Integrated versus parallel mode of project implementation

Lack of integration with the existing organisational structures in recipient countries (also called *vertical* or *parallel* structure) is considered to be a reason for the non-sustainability of donor-supported development projects. A number of authors have argued (AusAID, 2000; Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998) and several others have provided empirical evidence (Bossert, 1990; Uphoff et al., 1998) that projects and programmes that are built on local structures have better prospects of sustainability compared to projects for which vertical or parallel structures are created.

According to Bossert (1990), a project's structure is vertical if its administrative hierarchy is separate from the usual national implementing agency, or if the structure is formed as an autonomous unit within the existing structure, and if that administrative structure has its own narrowly defined goals and objectives. A second aspect of verticality is if the personnel involved with the project receive more privileges, for example, salary, subsidies and more materials than equivalent services in the national agencies (Bossert, 1990). An integrated programme, on the other hand, is characterised by compatibility or fit between the programme and the mission and activities of the implementing agencies (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

Bossert (1990) reported that donor-supported health projects in African and Latin American countries that were designed and implemented as vertically-run separate hierarchies were less sustained compared to those that were integrated into the existing organisational hierarchies. Uphoff et al., (1998) reported that in the successful (sustainability was one criterion of success) rural development programmes in Asian countries the existing local organisations, often the traditional ones, were utilised rather than creating new structures.

There are several reasons why vertical structures are counterproductive for sustainability. According to Bossert (1990), vertically organised projects are vulnerable because they often rely heavily on foreign funding during the life of the project, making it harder to gain national funding when the foreign funding ceases. They also tend to generate jealousy, particularly if their staff are perceived as having gained extra resources and salaries in relation to providers of similar services that are not receiving donor funds. This further reduces the prospect of attracting national resources when their external source cease. Integrated structures, on the other hand, create many organisational actors who have developed routines with the project activities. These actors may continue project activities with their own resources or may help lobby for additional national resources to cover the loss of donor funding (Bossert, 1990).

According to Conyers and Mellors (2005), the impact of parallel structures created through donor projects are damaging for the existing institutions in aid-recipient countries. These structures not only divert time and effort from strengthening the

existing structures but also undermine them. The higher salaries and better working conditions, compared to those of the existing organisations, "poach" the latter's most capable staff, thereby reducing organisational calibre and the morale of the remaining staff. In this way, parallel structures result in further weakening of the existing institutions, increase aid dependency and thus perpetuate a vicious cycle of institutional degradation.

Despite the negative consequences, vertical or parallel structures continue to be a common practice in donor-funded projects, as observed by several authors (Conyers et al., 1988; Conyers & Mellors, 2005). Conyers & Mellors observed that such structures are most common in countries where government institutions are the weakest. In such an environment, parallel structures are justified (by donors) as the only way to deliver complex and/or much needed public services in a weak government institutional environment. Some other important reasons are an intention to ensure strict control over funds, accounting needs of donor agencies to their own government, and a lack of trust in the aid recipient stakeholders (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Conyers & Mellors, 2005). According to Bossert (1990), projects that are organised as vertical implementing units are often considered to be more likely to be effective (but not necessarily sustainable) because they can focus resources and activities on the goals of the project and do not require compromises with other interests in the bureaucracy.

2.3.4.3   Stakeholder participation and ownership

As discussed in section 2.2.1.1 and section 2.2.2 respectively, both the IAD and the SCOPE literature have emphasised the importance of stakeholder participation and ownership for the sustainability of aid-supported projects and programmes. Application of the frameworks in empirical studies also revealed the importance of these practices. However, the precise form and degree of stakeholder participation and ownership that would ensure sustainability are not provided in either the IAD or the SCOPE literature. This problem is also recognised by Ostrom and her colleagues (Ostrom et al., 2002). It is also not known in which phase of the project or programme such practices should occur.

The essence of stakeholder participation and ownership for the sustainability of donor-supported development projects and programmes is widely recognised in the descriptive literature (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Moore et al., 1996; van de Walle & Johnston, 1996). However, compared to the IAD and the SCOPE, some more specific and new concepts regarding the issue of stakeholder participation and ownership are reported in the literature. Some of the concepts are, however, consistent with the IAD literature. The central concern of this literature is the degree of power or control exercised by the target stakeholders in the project or programme. These disparate ideas can be organised under the following headings.

Initiation of the project or innovation

As mentioned in section 2.2.1.1, Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues identified "demand enunciation" by the aid recipients as an important condition for the latter's ownership of an aid-supported project or programme (Ostrom et al., 2002). This view is also supported by several other authors (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Weeks et al., 2002). For example, Weeks et al., reported that recipient ownership is undermined when donors undertake a development initiative without consulting the recipients and assume that the recipients would, over time, learn and adopt the idea through their involvement. Similarly, Conyers and Mellors reported that reform programmes in some African countries were successful when the recipient organisation identified the need for the intervention. In those cases, external aid just assisted the organisation to achieve its objectives. Compared to this, when donors played proactive roles, it resulted in a lack of ownership (Conyers & Mellors, 2005). Edgren (2003) expressed a similar view. According the author, when all initiatives emanate from the donors' side and the donors determine which values and objectives are good for the aid recipients, recipient ownership is undermined.

The above views are supported by observations from several developing countries, as reported by a number of authors (Bossert, 1990; Catterson & Lindahl, 1999; Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Moore et al., 1996; Ostrom et al., 2002). For example, Bossert reported that donor-supported health projects that were viewed by the national officials in African and Latin American countries as being imposed by the donors were poorly sustained. Such projects had to overcome serious constraints throughout their lifecycle such as resistance or initial lack of interest. Similarly,

Catterson and Lindahl (1999) observed that a Sida-supported project in Tanzania was not owned because the adult education approach that the project attempted to promote reflected a Swedish perspective. Using the IAD framework, Ostrom et al., (2002) also found similar evidence from African countries and from India.

Some of the highly successful (sustainability was one criterion of success) cases of rural development programmes in Asian countries documented by Uphoff et al., (1998) are characterised by self-mobilised initiatives undertaken by dedicated local leaders. Some examples of these were the Grameen Bank project in Bangladesh initiated by Professor Eunus and the Aurangi Pilot Project in Pakistan initiated by Akhter Hamid Khan. Although both cases eventually received donor support, the origin of these projects and their organisational innovations (e.g. the Grameen model) were local.

The relationship between the initiation of the idea of undertaking a project or programme and its sustainability is also reported in agricultural extension literature (Anderson et al., 2006). According to Anderson et al., an important reason for the fall of the T&V system was related to its history of initiation in developing countries. The model was rapidly implanted by the World Bank based on distorted feedback from small-scale pilot experiments in India. The reason for such quick spread was that the project served the vested interests of some groups within the World Bank, leading to perverse incentives among the aid recipients.

Cost and/or resource sharing

Similar to the proposition of Ostrom et al., (2002), sharing resources with recipients is considered to be an important strategy to develop their ownership and thereby enhance project or programme sustainability (AusAID, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988). This contribution could be in terms of cash or kind such as user fees or membership fees from beneficiaries, sharing of office space, staff, with implementing agencies, and so on (AusAID, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988).

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) has clearly articulated the benefits of resource-sharing (AusAID, 2000). The agency stated that counterpart contributions, either in cash or in kind, from the partner government or communities, are a sign of commitment to the programme or project objectives supported by the AusAID. The organisation also stated that such contribution demonstrates, in a tangible way, that partners place value on the expected benefits of AusAID assistance because payment is an expression of value. The agency further states that if people are willing to pay for a good or service, it means they really want it. According to AusAID (2000), a demonstrated demand is a strong indicator of likely sustainability, both for the agency's economic and social sector programmes and projects.

User-pays is also prescribed as a means to generate revenues that can be used to continue the service after the withdrawal of donor support (AusAID 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988). For example, AusAID argues that even in very poor communities, user-pays approaches can work, and may be the only sustainable solution to service delivery if the government is unable or unwilling to provide adequate operating funds (AusAID 2000).

Bossert (1990) reported that donor-supported health projects in which a cost-sharing strategy with communities was adopted were better sustained than those that relied on government funding sources. Resource sharing with beneficiaries is also reported to be important in the extension and rural development literature (Garforth, 2004; Uphoff et al., 1998). For example, Uphoff et al., reported that the successful rural development programmes in Asia were characterised by a unique approach of assisted self-reliance in which the villagers contributed labour and finances that allowed them to have a voice in the operation of the programmes. Some extension authors (Anderson & Feder, 2003; Katz, 2002), however, have expressed concerns that the strategy of cost sharing may exclude poor clients from the benefits of extension programmes.

Power and/or control over project design and implementation processes

The extent of power or control exercised by the aid recipients in the design and implementation of development projects is considered to be an important factor affecting their ownership of an aid project or programme (AusAID, 2000; Edgren, 2003; Gow & Morss, 1988; Pretty, 1994; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; World Bank, 1996). This is in fact the central tenet underpinning the concept of stakeholder participation and ownership. Such power-sharing or delegation of control is not only for the beneficiaries but also for the recipient organisations who receive support from the donors.

Consistent with the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 2002), several other authors (AusAID, 2000; Edgren, 2003; World Bank, 1996) stated that recipient ownership and hence, sustainability of donor-supported projects are jeopardised when the donors determine the rules of the games for the recipient country organisations and officials, that is, what the recipients should do, how they should behave, what is beneficial for them, and so on. Edgren (2003) has characterised such practices as "donorship", which is an antonym of the concept of "ownership". Regarding the ownership of recipient agencies, Edgren reported that successful strategies in this regard should include the control and authority of recipient country managers over budgets, procurement of inputs and even hiring of consultants. The authors reported that given such practices, the recipient country managers become willing to take personal initiatives to sustain a project. In addition, the hiring of consultants by host country managers makes the consultants more accountable to the recipients rather than to the donors.

In addition to the prescriptive literature, a number of empirical studies (Bossert, 1990; Ostrom et al., 2002) have revealed the negative impacts of donor control on the *ownership* by recipient country officials and organisations. For example, Bossert found that donor-supported health projects that were poorly sustained in African and Latin American countries were characterised by the lack of a mutually respectful project negotiation process. In such cases, national institutional contexts were not taken into account in project designs and bureaucratic interests were not negotiated. This resulted in opposition and resistance among the officials or their lack of interest in the projects. Compared to this, when the projects were initiated,

designed and implemented according to the interests and plans of the implementing agencies, through national participation, the projects were more likely to be sustained.

As regards the issue of beneficiary[11] involvement and control, the participation scale developed by Pretty (1994, 1995) suggests that this may occur in various "degrees" (Table 2.4) ranging from beneficiaries having no control at all (manipulative participation) to the maximum possible control (self-mobilisation). Similarly, in the context of urban planning, Arnstein (1969) proposed a participation ladder that describes the various degrees to which citizens could exercise their power and control.

In the eight-rung ladder of Arnstein (1969), the bottom two rungs consist of "manipulation", and "therapy". According to the author, these are "non-participation" as the citizens do not really have any say in planning or conducting programmes. The middle three rungs in the ladder are "informing", "consultation", and "placation". Arnstein labelled these as "tokenism" that allows citizens to listen to the information provided by experts or programme initiators. The citizens might also be allowed to give their opinion, but it is the experts or the powerful actors who control resources and decisions. The highest level of participation in Arnstein's ladder is called "citizen power", which consists of three forms of participation – "partnership", "delegated power", and "citizen control". In a partnership, the citizen negotiates and engages in bargaining with the power holders. At the topmost two rungs, delegated power and citizen control, the citizens exercise maximum levels of power and control most of the decisions.

The degree or level of control is an issue about which the SCOPE literature does not provide any specific guidelines. Compared to this, Ostrom et al., (2002) have been a bit more specific. The authors have advocated that for ownership to occur beneficiaries need to be placed at the "centre" and they should be allowed to have "some degree of control" over project resources (section 2.2.1.1). As regards the extension and rural development literature, although several authors (Pretty, 1994, 1995; Rivera et al., 2001; Uphoff, 2001) have advocated for beneficiary

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[11] Although every actor on the recipient side, e.g., government organisations, NGOs, rural people, etc., could be the beneficiaries of a donor-supported project or programme, the term is used to mean rural people only (see Ostrom *et al.*, 2002). Uphoff *et al.*, (1998) used the phrase "intended beneficiary" to mean the same.

participation, there is no agreement as to how much control would make an optimal strategy of ownership.

Table 2.4: A typology of beneficiary participation in rural development projects and programmes

Typology of participation	Characteristics
Manipulative participation	Participation is simply pretence, with people's representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no power.
Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without any listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs to external professionals only.
Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes, and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources; for example, labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and labour, but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduction in costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still be co-opted only to serve external goals.
Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
Self-mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilisation can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilisation may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.

Source: Pretty, 1994, 1995

Four streams of arguments are noteworthy in the literature. The first contention is that the higher the level of power-sharing, the better it is for ownership (Chambers, 1983; Pretty, 1994, 1995). The second contention challenges the underlying assumptions of participation and is critical about the usefulness of the concept (Cook & Kothari, 2001; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004). In between these two

extremes, the third contention takes a moderate stance and calls for a catalytic or mixed approach (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 1990, 1992; Uphoff et al., 1998; Uphoff, 2001). The fourth argument suggests that there is no recipe of participation, that is, the successful strategy would be contingent on the contextual conditions (Okali et al., 1994) – a view also consistent with that of the authors of the SCOPE framework (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 1990, 1992).

Uphoff (2001: 18) criticised the purer version of participation[12] as the "populist fallacy" that does not take into account the limitations of the rural people. A number of empirical studies (Datta, 2005; Lightfoot, 2004; Uphoff et al., 1998) in agricultural extension and rural development have also claimed that in successful projects a catalytic or mixed approach to beneficiary participation was applied. In such an approach, neither the rural people nor the outsiders were in full control. Instead, the process was two-way in which rural people took certain initiatives and the outsiders just played the role of facilitators.

Based on experiences from the rural development projects of a Bangladesh NGO, Datta (2005) reported that providing rural people with control over project processes resulted in successful CBOs. This involved villagers selecting their own leaders through election and allowing the CBOs to take full control of their own savings fund, an approach very uncommon in Bangladesh. In most cases, the NGOs in Bangladesh tend to control the funds of the CBOs they work with because of the formers' own micro-finance policies (Datta, 2005:4). Due to their having control over savings funds, the villagers identified the CBOs as their own and not those of the NGO that supported the development of the CBOs.

From field-based experiences, numerous authors (Cernea, 1987; Datta, 2005; Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002; Lyon, 2003; Scarborough et al., 1997; Uphoff et al., 1998; White et al., 2005) have produced evidence of the importance of stakeholder participation for sustainability in extension and rural development initiatives. In a study of 25 agricultural and rural development projects funded by the World Bank (Cernea, 1987), it was found that 12 of the 25 projects that achieved long-term sustainability were characterised by a major contribution from local organisations.

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[12] The author's description of a purer form of participation corresponds with the top-most rung (self-mobilisation) in the participation ladder of Pretty.

Among those features were participation of local organisations in project decision making, a high degree of their autonomy and self-reliance, and continuing identification of project activities based on local needs (Cernea, 1987).

Recent worldwide experiences gathered from extension reform projects have also shown the need for stakeholder ownership and control (Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002; Kidd, 2004; Lightfoot, 2004; Rivera & Alex, 2005). For example, Rivera and Alex recognised the need for a participatory consensus building approach and allowing local change agents to lead the process of reform. In Hanyani-Mlambo's (2002) case study of the Coordinated Agricultural and Rural Development Programme (CARD) in Zimbabwe, the author identified that a top-down approach in project identification, preparation and implementation that took little account of community involvement was an important reason for the failure of the programme. The approach was characterised by a process where planning was carried out inside offices on the assumption that expatriate "experts" understood local people's problems. A similar observation in Uruguay is reported by Kidd (2004). Insufficient farmer involvement during the design process resulted in unsustainable producer groups (Kidd, 2004).

Ironically, although the need to involve multiple stakeholders and delegating greater control over project processes have been focal points in the last couple of decades' development assistance, there is a growing realisation that such practices are more difficult to implement than often stated in project documents (Garforth, 2004; van de Walle & Johnston, 1996). For example, van de Walle and Johnston (1996: 54-55) observed, and concluded from their study, that although the donors widely acknowledge the importance of participation and ownership, in reality, they 'still tend to dominate the project cycle and pay inadequate attention to the preferences of the government or project beneficiaries'. Observing such gaps and the resulting frustrations has led some authors to describe participation as a new 'development tyranny' (Cook & Kothari, 2001).

Several constraints have been reported in the literature that limit ownership-friendly participatory practices (Gow & Morss, 1988; Schmitz, 2004; Uphoff et al., 1998). The difficulty of negotiating multiple stakeholder interests and resolving power struggles among multiple stakeholders are two of such constraints. Schmitz (2004)

reported that two partnership-based extension projects in the 'para' state of Brazil involving researchers, farmers and extensionists collapsed because of power struggles between the two organisations concerned. One source of this struggle was the control over financial, material and human resources, for example, vehicles, computers, physical space, contracting of collaborators, and definition of research themes. One organisation perceived that the other one was getting more benefits and suspected that their own autonomy would be disrupted due to partnership. Even within one organisation, there was grouping. Other manifestations of this power struggle were competition for control over farmer organisations by the research and extension agencies. Besides, there was competition for prestige between the organisations. For example, an official visit by the project evaluation team without extension agency representatives was considered as an offence or insult. This and several other empirical studies (Mosse, 1995; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004) suggest that the management of conflicts and negotiation of varied interests are very important in a multi-stakeholder participatory process.

Observing the difficulty of negotiating stakeholder conflicts in multi-stakeholder situations, Leeuwis and van den Ban (2004) have refuted the assumptions underlying the normative expectations in the participation theory that participation will almost automatically lead to *consensus* and cooperation (emphasis original). The authors have argued that it is not the maximum possible level of participation that can bring development success; rather multi-stakeholder processes may sometimes require 'top-down intervention and stakeholder exclusion' to manage conflicts (Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004). The authors, therefore, have called for a better understanding of the sources of conflicts and the development of appropriate methods to negotiate the interests of multiple stakeholders as pre-conditions of successful development interventions.

In addition, participation is recognised as a costly process requiring special skills, time and funding (Farrington et al., 1993; Rivera & Alex, 2005). Gow and Morss (1988) identified several constraints of participatory practice such as lack of political commitment, bureaucratic resistance, inadequate resources, improper attitude and behaviour of field personnel. The authors recognised that for participation to be successful there should be a supportive government policy and appropriate

incentives, both material and non-material, for the participants (Gow & Morss, 1988). According to Uphoff et al., (1998) beneficiary participation requires the right environment. The authors have recognised a "complex of factors" in developing countries that vary from country to country and even from community to community. These include poverty, prejudice, despair, paternalism, local power structures, legal and regulatory restrictions, adverse past experiences, and other forces (Uphoff et al., 1998:83).

Several shortcomings even within the donor agencies are also identified in the literature that limit the strategic importance of stakeholder participation (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Uphoff et al., 1998). Hanyani-Mlambo (2002) reported that beneficiary participation in a donor-supported extension project in Zimbabwe was constrained due to a pressure to fulfil targets set by donors, produce outputs within specific periods and urgency to meet a deadline. These factors militated against a participatory strategy in the project. In the context of local institution building for integrated rural development, Uphoff et al*., (1998: 66) noticed a tendency to implant organisations, which the author called the "Xerox approach". One important reason for this is the concept and goal of 'replication' that has become 'pervasive' in donor agencies (Uphoff et al., 1998:66).

Furthermore, local ownership is difficult to achieve because of several other constraints, some of which prevail within the donor agencies. Some of these constraints include lack of a clear-cut definition of ownership responsibilities and accountabilities; conflicting goals among stakeholders (Ostrom et al., 2002); lack of clear-cut or uncertain exit strategy (Ostrom et al., 2002; Weeks et al., 2002); multiple donors competing against each other for the same recipients (Ostrom et al., 2002); insufficient understanding (by donors) of the policy environment in the recipient country and the pressure on donor agencies to disburse budgeted funds (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Ostrom et al., 2002). This pressure stems from a combination of factors such as spending targets set by the donor government (often for political rather than "developmental" reasons), competition between donors and the need for individual agency staff to justify their own existence (Conyers & Mellors, 2005: 84).

2.3.4.4   Learning process

The idea of a learning-based and adaptive management approach in rural development is an old one, developed as early as the 1980s through the highly-referred work of David Korten. In addition to Korten (1980), several other contemporary development authors of the 80s and 90s (Cusworth & Franks, 1993; Gow & Morss, 1988; Honadle & Van Sant, 1985; Rondinelli, 1983) expressed the need for a learning process approach to achieve successful outcomes from development projects. Uphoff (2001:17) claimed that the past 20 years of rural development theory suggested that a learning process approach was the key to successful development outcomes.

Several rationales are also found in the literature in favour of adopting a learning process approach in institution building or people-centred projects. These are very similar to those articulated in the SCOPE literature. According to Korten (1980), a learning process approach enables an organisation to achieve a fit among the key internal and external variables of a programme, which is central to its performance. This idea of achieving "fit" is very similar to the management strategies underpinning the SCOPE literature (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Goldsmith, 1992).

In addition to the above, a learning process approach is argued to be necessary for various other reasons. One important reason is the difficulty of detecting the interests, perspectives, reactions and power of various stakeholders such as project agents and beneficiaries (Cusworth & Franks, 1993; Dale, 2000). In most cases, these are difficult to apprehend beforehand and thus are highly uncertain (Cusworth & Franks, 1993: 8-9). In addition, the organisational environment in most developing countries is highly uncertain and complex, which makes it difficult to predict outcomes from development investments (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Dale, 2000; Mosse et al., 1998). Uncertainly also arises when development interventions involve the application of new ideas and approaches that are exploratory, politically sensitive and have not been fully tested in the present environment of a country (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Mosse, 1998).

A number of characteristics of a learning process approach are reported in the literature (Table 2.5). In most cases, these features demonstrate sharp contradiction with the traditional "blueprint" approach. These concepts indicate striking similarities with the various organisational management strategies described in the SCOPE literature (section 2.2.2). For example, a learning process approach can be compared with the adaptive/interactive strategy and a blueprint approach with the mechanical strategy. However, in contrast with the SCOPE literature, the learning process literature provides more specific guidelines of activities. Among these, the salient features of a learning process approach are flexibility and evolving design, based continuous learning and adaptation. In contrast, the traditional blueprint mode of project management is characterised by rigidity and a target-focused monitoring and evaluation with few adjustment mechanisms. In an organisation with a learning process orientation, errors are embraced rather than concealed.

David Korten (1980) is one of the earliest researchers who have reported the importance of the learning process approach in rural development projects and programmes. Based on his analysis of five successful (institutionalised) cases of community organisation programmes in Asia, the author concluded that a learning process approach was the key to the success of those programmes.

One of the cases reported by Korten (1980) was the introduction of the community-based irrigation system within the Philippines National Irrigation Administration (NIA). In sum, the Philippines case was characterised by a design and implementation process in which learning laboratories were set up in the form of small-scale projects in which NIA teams, rather than outside consultants, worked with the farmers to develop and test new methods and procedures. These laboratories enabled identification of the compatibility or conflict of the new approach with the broader policies and procedures of the NIA. Process-oriented research was undertaken in which trained social scientists collected and analysed a massive volume of socio-institutional data (institutional profiles), documented implementation processes using participant observation methods that included non-evaluative narratives and rapid feedback about the NIA personnel and the farmers. Accordingly, corrective actions targeted capacity building of not only the farmers but also the implementing agencies including the NIA. Such capacity building

initiatives included change in the operational procedures of these agencies to match with the community-based approach, introduction of a new reward system for the employees, and so on.

Table 2.5 Salient contrasting features between a blueprint and a learning process approach in the management of development organisations*

Points of comparison	Blueprint approach	Learning process approach
Objectives and goals	Definite, in specific details	General outline of the problem, context, and tenable solutions;
Timeframe	Well-defined, finite	Open-ended
Planning mode	Systematic, advanced planning, planning by experts who are far away from field reality, planning for certainties	Carried out with rural people, planning by those who are involved with implementation, open-ended, planning for contingencies
Implementation	According to rigidly defined plan of action, e.g. specification of tasks according to time-schedule	Open ended, annual and phased implementation, flexible
Design process	Usually short, rigid	Extended time-frame, collaborative, tentative, slow start, flexible, evolving based on learning from implementation experience
Management structure and style	Rigid	Flexible structure, participatory decision making
Monitoring and evaluation	Target based, production oriented, calculation of budgets and resources, usually at the end of project time-frame, measures changes based on pre-set targets, evaluation carried out by experts through short visits, information serves administrative/accountability requirements	Continuous, evaluation to identify capacity weaknesses and strengths, open-ended, inductive, action-oriented, strategic - oriented to analysing and reflecting environmental threats and opportunities, focus on process rather than product, identify norms, culture, conflicts, reactions, etc.
Re-design orientation	Rigid design	Strong re-design orientation such as periodic revision of project organisation, objectives, and job descriptions of project personnel
Mechanism of error correction	Short-term, *ad hoc* training or replacement of personnel	Errors are embraced, self-critical reflection

*Synthesized from Conyers & Mellors (2005); Cusworth & Franks (1993); Dale (2000); Gow & Morss (1988); Mosse et al. (1998); Mosse (1998); Korten (1980); Uphoff et al., (1998)

In addition to Korten (1980), a number of development writers and practitioners have reported that successful cases of institution building projects and programmes are characterised by a learning process approach (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Datta, 2005; Fakih et al., 2003; Lyon, 2003; Mosse et al., 1998; Uphoff et al., 1998). For example, recent experiences from donor-supported projects in Ghana (Lyon, 2003)

and Bangladesh (Datta, 2005) suggest that it was important to take a trial and error approach in order to develop sustainable rural organisations. This is because an organisational model that works in one place does not work in other places because of variations in contextual features such as local culture, institutions and the characteristics of the people involved.

The relationship between a learning process approach and organisational sustainability has also been reported in extension literature (Gustafson, 1994; Hagmann et al., 1998). Gustafson (1994) found that the most successful and most sustainable T&V extension programmes were those that had moved beyond the mechanical stage of systematically delivering messages to incorporate some degree of learning from farmers and from extensionist experiences. The author further reported that there was a strong connection between the "degree" of adaptation of the basic T&V structure and "sustainability", where the adaptation reflected learning from experience and a conscious response to local characteristics (Gustafson, 1994:131). For example, the structures and functions of the T&V projects in Malaysia and in the Indian state of Kerala were adapted over time to meet changing needs of farmers. On the other hand, the mechanical mode of operation of the T&V system in the Sind province of Pakistan that repetitively supplied the same old extension messages lost the support of the farmers. This, in turn, lowered the system's sustainability prospects.

Gustafson's (1994) study also showed that there was a relationship between learning and participation of farmers in the T&V projects. Successful adaptation over time to varied local characteristics or changing circumstances was possible only when participation of farmers was systematically incorporated into the institutions' (T&V) operations. The author also reported that participation was necessary for a variety of reasons, but was especially important in the 'institutional learning and adaptation processes' required of extension organisations.

One of the most important evidence of the learning process approach and project sustainability comes from the experiences with an extension project in Zimbabwe. What started as a pilot project was gradually able to attract the attention of a good number of national and international donors within a period of six years. According to Hagmann et al., (1998) the reason behind this sustainability of the project was

due to the adoption of a learning process approach in community capacity building. This involved a four-step interactive process in which social mobilisation, community level action planning, implementation and experimentation with new ideas, and continuous feedback and self-evaluation were the important features.

More recent worldwide experiences with donor-supported extension reforms have also confirmed the need for learning and adaptation to develop stakeholder ownership and sustainability for the new approaches (Conolly, 2004; Lightfoot, 2004; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004). These experiences also supported the fact that there are no models or external prescriptions that are entirely appropriate or applicable to the particular needs of individual countries (Conolly, 2004). For example, the successful cases of new extension projects reported by Sulaiman and Hall (2004) suggest the importance of continuous experimentation, reflection and learning. These authors have reported that the various activities in those projects such as development of farmer leaders, group activities, management styles, size, source of obtaining financial loans for the groups, choice of enterprise, and so on, were all developed over time based on trial and error.

Despite widespread recognition and several examples of success, taking a learning process approach has been extremely difficult in donor-supported projects, a problem recognised in some of the earliest rural development literature (Chambers, 1993; Korten, 1980). More recent literature (Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Lyon, 2003) suggests that the trend of a blueprint, rather than a learning process approach, is still dominant in most donor-assisted projects. As Conyers and Mellors (2005: 87) observed, learning process-oriented projects 'are the exception rather than the rule'.

One reason for the difficulty of adopting a process approach is the tendency in most projects to achieve targets which are pre-set by donors (Chambers, 1993; Korten, 1980; Lyon, 2003). Some other constraints include the asymmetric power relationships between donors and recipients of aid (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000: 11-12) and several important limitations within the donor agencies themselves such as pressures to meet spending targets, and the needs to demonstrate tangible outputs to home governments or funding agencies, and justify the continued existence of the sections and individuals involved (Conyers & Mellors, 2005;

Korten, 1980). Conyers and Mellors (2005: 87) also pointed to the 'quality of the technical expertise' as an important constraint to 'organisational learning' in aid projects. In the past 25 years, observations by the authors revealed that the quality of the foreign consultants has deteriorated. This, in turn, results from frequent staff turnover within donor agencies.

In addition to the above, learning in donor-supported projects become constrained due to the political nature of the monitoring and evaluation process (Lewis, 1998; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004; Mosse, 1998). Mosse recognised that few management systems encourage and reward critical observation. On the contrary, in most development agencies there are strong organisational imperatives to conceal errors and report success. This is especially so in externally supported and evaluated programmes where 'critical feedback may be seen as having resource implications' (Mosse, 1998:48). In addition, the information may concern sensitive issues such as information on informal transactions such as rent-seeking, revealing conflicts rather than consensus. According to the author, this type of information is usually unwelcome and viewed as 'threatening interferences' (Mosse, 1998:49). The author recognised the need for a conducive policy environment and a change in learning culture for process approaches to be successful. Lewis's (1998) institutional ethnography of the ICLARM extension project in Bangladesh encountered this problem. The negative information generated through the process was rejected by the government stakeholders concerned (Lewis, 1998).

2.4 Outcome of the literature review: The conceptual framework

The review of the three theoretical frameworks as well as the descriptive-empirical literature as presented above provides two important guidelines for this study. First, none of the theoretical frameworks is better or worse than the others. Instead, all of them provide complementary insights that can be useful in the analysis of organisational sustainability. Second, the descriptive-empirical literature provided important concepts to improve the empirical applicability of some of the explanatory variables articulated in the theoretical frameworks. These include concepts relating to the nature and level of stakeholder participation and ownership, and the learning process approach in organisational management. The descriptive-empirical

literature has also emphasised the negative aspects of parallel projects that are designed and implemented through donor support. Based on this review, the following tentative propositions are provided to explain why an organisational system or innovation promoted through a donor-supported project either survives or becomes less likely to be sustainable.

Proposition 1: The sustainability of a development organisation depends heavily on its operational context, which includes both institutional forces and financial and human resources. Institutional forces include the rules such as policies and legislation as well as the cultural aspects such as the established norms, beliefs or traditions. These forces exert two kinds of influences – they provide meaning for actions/decisions, that is, legitimacy, and create incentives (perceived rewards and punishments) for actors. Thus, the proposition concerning the relationships between the operational context of an organisation and its sustainability can be further subdivided into three propositions.

Proposition 1a: A development organisation's sustainability is dependent on its institutional legitimacy. Organisations that do not conform to the cultural and policy context are perceived by the actors concerned as illegitimate and hence, such organisations fail to receive their support.

Proposition 1b: A development organisation's sustainability is dependent on the incentives embedded in its institutional environment. In developing countries where donors operate, the institutional framework guiding the actions and interactions of development actors is generally dysfunctional or weak. These dysfunctional conditions create negative or perverse incentives for actors to engage in collective actions for a common goal and propagate undesirable behaviour such as rent-seeking, corruption, shirking, and so on. An organisational innovation promoted through a donor-aided project or programme may lose support from the actors concerned due to the influence of perverse incentives arising from the weak institutional context.

Proposition 1c. If an organisational system is to be sustainable, an adequate level of funding and human resources (staff) must be made available to those involved. Such resources are generally scarce in developing countries. Due to this scarcity,

actors in developing countries cannot continue supporting an organisation that was financed and staffed through time-bound project aids.

Proposition 2: The quality of the outputs (goods and services) produced by an organisation affects its sustainability. A development organisation that fails to produce quality outputs loses support from its stakeholders. In the context of a development project, this statement refers to the implementation performance of the project and includes the project's ability to achieve the expected goals, and provide benefits (impacts) for its stakeholders.

Proposition 3: The complexity of the structure and technology, that is, the internal system features of an organisation affects its sustainability. A complex structure and technology that involves high transaction costs is unlikely to be sustainable.

Proposition 4: Donor supported projects that are designed and implemented in a parallel (or vertical) mode, rather than being integrated into an existing system, are unlikely to be sustainable.

Proposition 5: The performance and sustainability of a donor-supported project are influenced by the nature and level of participation and ownership of aid-recipients – government officials, development agencies, beneficiaries, and so on. Recipient ownership, and hence sustainability, are undermined when the donor initiates the project, does not share resources/costs with recipients, and controls the design and implementation decisions/actions of the project. Compared to this, when a donor provides assistance according to the expressed needs of the recipients, shares project costs/resources with recipients, and allows recipients to exercise a reasonable degree of power and control over decisions and actions, prospects for recipient ownership and sustainability are improved.

Proposition 6: A development organisation's performance, its adaptability with the contextual conditions, and hence, sustainability are improved when the organisation is able to operate in a learning process mode. Such learning organisations are characterised by a number of factors: (i) a flexible design and implementation orientation (ii) a monitoring and evaluation system oriented to learning about the processes and the contextual challenges rather than simply measuring targets, and (iii) an ability to critically reflect, embrace errors and make

corresponding readjustments. A development organisation lacking these features is likely to perform poorly, become incompatible with the contextual conditions, and thus become unsustainable.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher has reviewed the existing theoretical frameworks in relation to the sustainability of development organisations, including the descriptive-empirical literature in agricultural extension and rural development. Three theoretical frameworks have been reviewed. They are the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD), the "three pillars of institutions" framework, and the SCOPE framework. A comparison among these frameworks was also made and their complementarities were identified. According to these frameworks, three sets of factors/conditions appeared to be important in explaining the sustainability or non-sustainability of a donor-supported organisational innovation: the contextual factors, the performance of the innovation during the project implementation period, and the organisational design and management-related factors. Some of these explanatory variables were further elaborated based on the descriptive-empirical literature. Based on the review of the three theoretical frameworks and the descriptive literature, a conceptual framework and tentative propositions were developed to guide the study of the non-sustainability of a donor-supported organisational reform in agricultural extension in Bangladesh. In the next chapter the research methods used in the study will be described.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

At the time this study was initiated (late 2004), few empirical studies on the sustainability of donor-supported organisational reforms in agricultural extension were reported in the literature. Moreover, there was little guidance available in the agricultural extension literature about the most appropriate method for carrying out such research. Therefore, literature from a range of other disciplines was used to develop a research method for this study. In this chapter the research strategy, research design, the selected case and its operational context, along with methods of data collection and data analysis, and the techniques used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study are described.

3.2 Research strategy

Prominent case study author, Robert Yin (2003), has identified five basic strategies used in social scientific research: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history, and case study. The author has also suggested three criteria based on which an appropriate research strategy can be chosen. These include the type of research question, degree of control over behavioural events, and the temporal focus of the research (Table 3.1). These criteria suggest that a case study is an appropriate strategy for this research. This is because the researcher intends to answer the question – "why" an extension organisational reform supported by a donor project becomes unsustainable when aid is terminated. Investigation of this type of phenomenon does not allow for control over behavioural events as it unfolds naturally over time. Moreover, the focus of this research is on a contemporary development phenomenon as opposed to a historical event.

Table 3.1 Criteria to choose research strategy in social sciences

Strategy	Form of Research Question	Requires Control of Behavioural Events	Focuses on Contemporary Events
Experiment	How, why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who, what[1], where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
Archival analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
History	How, why?	No	No
Case study	How, why?	No	Yes

Source: Yin (2003:5)

3.3 Characteristics of a case study

Yin (2003: 13) has defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". It requires collection of data on both the context and the phenomenon. This makes a case study different from an experiment in which the context is excluded so that a few important variables can be examined (Yin, 2003). Similarly, a survey researcher's intention to limit the number of variables under investigation means that the context is studied to a limited extent (Yin, 2003). Such an approach is considered to be unsuitable for rural development studies in which an understanding of the context is an important requisite (Chambers, 1983). Thus, a case study is suitable for a research question that involves a large number of variables and few data points or units of analysis (Yin, 2003). A case study is especially suitable to study complex systems (Yin, 1994, 2003). This recommendation also suggested that a case study approach was the best choice as a research method for this study since this research involved the study of a complex organisational system involving three different organisations (section 3.4.1).

A general feature of case studies is the use of qualitative evidence. Therefore, the terms "*qualitative*" and "*case study*" are often "interchangeably" used (Eisenhardt, 1989: 538). There is, however, no universal rule and with a case study method the data can be either qualitative or quantitative or even both (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999;

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[1] "What" questions, when asked as part of an exploratory study, pertain to all strategies.

Stake, 1994; Yin, 1984, 1989, 1994, 2003). The case study method used in this study was predominantly qualitative involving very few quantitative data. There were two reasons for this. First, most of the variables/concepts proposed in the conceptual framework (Chapter 2), especially those related to institutional conditions, are not easily amenable to quantitative methods. Neither was their quantitative measurement deemed very essential for the purpose of this study. Second, several authors (Chambers, 1983; Marsden & Oakley, 1990; Moris & Copestake, 1993; Pound, 2000) have recommended that qualitative rather than quantitative methods are suitable for rural development studies.

Case study approaches can be used for the purpose of theory building and/or theory testing (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994, 2003). For the purpose of this research, it was decided that a theory building or theory elaboration approach would be suitable since there was no prior theory on the current research topic in Bangladesh.

3.4 Study design: An overview

A research design "is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (Yin, 2003: 20). The important aspects that a research design includes are: the questions of the study, the propositions (if any), the relevant data, and the unit(s) of analysis including the logic of linking the data to the research questions (Yin, 1994, 2003).

Yin (2003) has identified four basic designs in case study research. Accordingly, a case study design can be single versus multiple and holistic versus embedded (Figure 3.1). A holistic design involves a single unit of analysis, while an embedded case has multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2003). In this research a single and embedded case design was used.

	Single case designs	**Multiple case designs**
Holistic (single unit of analysis)	Type 1	Type 3
Embedded (multiple units of analysis)	Type 2	Type 4

 Figure 3.1: Basic types of designs for case studies (Yin, 2003: 40)

Both multiple and single case designs have advantages and disadvantages (Yin, 2003:39-53). These relate to the time and resource requirements versus the robustness of the data. The advantage of a multiple case design is that it facilitates comparison and improves robustness of the data and thus enhances the generalisability of the findings (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Multiple-case designs, however, require "extensive resources and time", which can go beyond the means of a single student or independent research investigator (Yin, 2003: 47). Single case designs are, therefore, more suitable for student research (Patton, 2002). For this study, a single case design was adopted because it was carried out by a single student having limited budget and time. Moreover, the in-depth study of different organisations and groups within a complex organisational system (section 3.4.1) required extensive time and resources. Following the investigation of one case, the researcher found that he did not have enough funding and time to study more cases.

During the initial design phase of this research, a review of the extant literature was carried out. The review resulted in the identification of key concepts and relationships that provided the basis for developing a conceptual framework (presented in Chapter 2). This was crucial because there was no prior theory developed on the current research topic in Bangladesh. However, the initial framework was tentative and was refined over time. This meant that while the research used the extant literature, it also allowed for new concepts to emerge from the data. This was necessary because there was no existing analytical framework that was developed on the basis of a case study in Bangladesh. This practice is very common in theory-building research as recommended by several authors (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The preliminary conceptual framework was used to design a case study protocol, which was refined over time. Data were collected by employing a number of techniques, as suggested by qualitative case study authors (Eisenhardt, 1999; Patton, 2002; Yin, 1994, 2003). These included interviews, focus group discussions, document analyses, and personal observations. During fieldwork in Bangladesh, some preliminary analysis of the data was also carried out. Based on results from these analyses, the protocol and the framework were continuously reshuffled during the entire course of the fieldwork. This meant that the process of data collection and analysis was overlapping, a technique recommended by a

number of authors (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Silverman, 2005; Yin, 1994, 2003). However, more in-depth analyses of the data were performed only after the completion of the data collection. After completion of the fieldwork in Bangladesh, more literature reviews were carried out. This continued until the analysis was completed. This was necessary because new concepts were emerging from the data, which had not been included in the earlier framework. At the end of the analysis, the results obtained from the case study were compared with the extant literature and a theoretical model of the factors explaining the non-sustainability of a donor-supported organisational reform in agricultural extension is provided. In the following sections, the research design is more elaborately discussed.

3.4.1 The case and the units of analysis

In any case study design, a fundamental problem that researchers face is to define what the case and the unit of analysis are (Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003). A case may be an individual, an organisational change, decisions, programmes or projects, and even an implementation process (Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003). As a general rule, the definition of the unit of analysis is related to the way the researcher has formulated the primary research question Yin (1989, 1994, 2003).

This researcher attempted to answer the question "Why does a novel (reformed) organisational system of agricultural extension promoted through a donor-assisted project become unsustainable in Bangladesh following the completion of project aid?" In order to answer this question, this researcher selected the Farmer-led Extension (FLE) system or model promoted through a donor project in Bangladesh called the "Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project" (ASIRP). The FLE is an example of a novel organisational system of agricultural extension service delivery that was evaluated to be unsustainable following the completion of the ASIRP (section 3.4.2). The unit of analysis in this study was the FLE system. However, since the FLE system was developed and implemented in Bangladesh in a project mode, the terms "FLE system" and "FLE project" are interchangeably used in this thesis. Also, consistent with the definitions in the literature (section 2.3), the phrases "project sustainability" and "FLE sustainability" are used as synonyms.

While the investigator considered the whole FLE system or project as the primary unit of analysis, he also identified some embedded units within the system. The FLE system or model consisted of three different entities: (i) a government extension agency (DAE) (ii) an NGO, and (iii) rural communities (described in the following section). Therefore, these three entities were considered as the embedded units within the FLE system who were to maintain the system following the completion of project aid. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provided guidelines in this regard (Table 2.3). For example, all three theoretical frameworks that were reviewed indicated the importance of focusing on the individual actors within a system to explain the reasons why an organisational system/innovation promoted through a development project becomes sustainable or not.

3.4.1.1 The FLE model: the reform principles[2]

The FLE model or system was designed and implemented in Bangladesh to test its suitability as an alternative to the traditional T&V model used by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) – the largest extension agency of the Government of Bangladesh. The designing and implementation of the FLE were supported by the Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP). The ASIRP was funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) of the British Government (ASIRP, 2002; ASIRP, 2003; ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b).

Four key features best describe the organisational reform underpinning the FLE model (ASIRP, 2002; ASIRP, 2003; ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003). First, the FLE was an initiative to apply the principle of farmer demand-led extension. This principle was in contrast with the traditional T&V model, in which agricultural technologies are supplied to the farmers regardless of whether the farmers actually need these or not. The FLE was based on the rationale that the impact of extension services would be limited unless the technologies were demand-driven and adapted to the local contexts of the farmers.

Secondly, the FLE project was based on the philosophy/principle of "empowerment" of the rural people. In practice, it meant organising and developing self-sustainable village groups and farmer extensionists or promoters (FP). It was

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[2] This section is written based on the analysis of several ASIRP documents (ASIRP 2002; ASIRP 2003; ASIRP & ASIRP 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003) along with conversations with key informants in Bangladesh.

expected in FLE that after the capacity building inputs (e.g. training and facilitation) provided through the project, the village groups would be able to analyse their livelihood problems, develop village-specific extension plans and then contact appropriate extension support providers (ESPs) located at the *Union* and *Upazilla* levels[3] to solve their problems. The ESPs, in turn, would then respond with appropriate support as demanded by the farmers. In practice, this contact was expected to take place through the FPs in each FLE group. The role of the FPs was to establish and maintain contact with the various ESPs at the *Union* and *Upazilla* levels, make group members aware of new technologies and opportunities, facilitate analysis of group members' needs and problems, and seek ways to solve those problems. The promoters were also expected to conduct group extension activities such as demonstrations and field days on their own farms. These activities were meant to provide opportunities for the other group members and community people to learn about new farming technologies.

As regards farmers' empowerment, a special emphasis in the FLE was to develop the capacity of the small-holder farmers (small and marginal farmers), the landless, and the rural women and thereby improve their access to extension services offered by the various government and non-government ESPs. This was different from the T&V model used by the government extension agency in Bangladesh (DAE) in which the beneficiaries of extension services are mainly the male and the relatively well-off farmers (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a).

Third, group-based savings-credit (also known as micro-credit) was an important element of the FLE model. This was different from the T&V model in which the DAE used to disseminate technologies relating only to the production of crops. By design, each FLE group member was required to deposit a small amount of savings into the group fund at particular intervals (usually per week). When they had accumulated a certain amount of savings, the members could then obtain loans from the group fund at an interest rate set by the members themselves and utilise the money for various income-generating activities.

Fourth, although the concept of FP, empowerment of rural people, and rural groups were the key elements of the FLE model, it also involved the principle of

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[3] *Unions* and *Upazillas* are the local government units of the Government of Bangladesh. A *Union* consists of several villages and an *Upazilla* consists of several *Unions*.

partnership between the government and the non-government organisations (NGOs) in the delivery of extension services. The reason for this was to combine the relative strengths of each type of organisation and thus make a better impact on the livelihood of farmers as well as achieve cost-effectiveness in service delivery. This was fundamentally different from the traditional T&V model, which was implemented only through the DAE. In the FLE project, the DAE worked with a local NGO[4]. The NGO was responsible for organising farmer groups and developing their capacity to undertake savings-credit activities. The DAE, on the other hand, was responsible for developing farmers' capacity to undertake extension-related activities, for example, extension demonstrations. Both organisations also played important roles in linking farmer groups to other ESPs working at village and *Upazilla* levels.

3.4.1.2 Organisational framework

As mentioned earlier, the FLE was designed and implemented through the ASIRP involving the donor, the DAE, the NGO, and the rural communities. In order to design and implement the model, various committees were created at different levels. At the topmost level, there were two committees: a project steering committee and a project management committee. The *project steering committee* included selected top level officials from the ministries of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and donor agencies including the Director General (DG) of the DAE. The committee was chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) of the GoB. The ASIRP *management committee* consisted of the DAE high officials and was chaired by a Project Director (PD) who was an Additional Director of the DAE. A simplified organisational framework of the ASIRP-FLE project is presented in Figure 3.2.

For implementation of FLE, the highest body was the National Coordination Team (NCT) consisting of the Additional Directors (AD) of the DAE who were Heads of the two regions in which the FLE project was implemented (Figure 3.2). The committee also included the Deputy Directors (DD) of the DAE – the Heads of the Districts of the two FLE regions. In addition, the consultants (Technical Assistants) hired by the ASIRP project, designated as the Change Management Advisers, and

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[4] The name of the NGO is omitted to maintain anonymity.

Extension Advisers were also members of the NCT. One of the consultants was a DAE officer (Deputy Director, stationed in the Head Office of the DAE in Dhaka[5]) and the rest were of British origin. The NCT also had members from the partner NGO – the Director and the Assistant Coordinator. The purpose of the NCT was to coordinate the overall planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring functions of the FLE project, mainly through periodic meetings and workshops.

Implementation committees	Key tasks and functions
ASIRP steering committee and management committees (Secretary MoA, DG-DAE, and other GoB high officials, Donor representatives, PD)	Project negotiation, planning, implementation and monitoring
National Coordination Team (Senior officers of DAE and NGO including donor representatives, advisors or consultants)	Coordinating FLE activities at national level, allocating resources, supervision and monitoring, arranging workshop and coordination meetings
Resource Team (District and *Upazilla* level staff of DAE and NGO)	Monitoring and supervision of Local Area Facilitation Team (LAFT), providing technical advice and training to the LAFTs
Local Area Facilitation Team (DAE and NGO field workers)	Organising and facilitating FLE groups, maintaining liaison with FPs, providing training to FLE group leaders, establishing linkage between FPs and ESPs, disseminating demand-based technologies, monitoring and supervising FLE group activities
Village Groups	Performing savings and credit tasks, undertaking situation analysis and developing plans, establishing contacts with ESPs, conducting technology demonstrations, monitoring and evaluation of group activities

Figure 3.2 Simplified organisational framework of the FLE project

In each of the two FLE regions there was one 6-8 member Resource Team (RT) headed by a Regional Coordinator, a District level officer of DAE. The other members in the RT included the *Upazilla* and District level managers of the NGOs, the Additional Agricultural Officers (AAOs) of the DAE, and the Instructors of the Agricultural Training Institutes (ATIs) of DAE located in the FLE District towns. The

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[5] The capital city of Bangladesh

RT members were responsible for monitoring and supervising the activities of the Local Area Facilitation Team (LAFT) members, providing them with technical assistance and training and preparing quarterly progress reports and sending those to the NCT.

The LAFT consisted of a Block Supervisor (BS) from the DAE and a field worker from the NGO concerned. There were three LAFTs in each FLE *Upazilla*. The total number of LAFTs involved with the project was 18 (nine in each region), each responsible for four farmer groups. The LAFTs were responsible for organising and facilitating the village groups; monitoring their progress as well as providing the necessary information, advice and support services to the groups. The facilitation role of the LAFTs included (i) attending the weekly meeting of the FLE groups and assisting group leaders in the organisation and conducting group meetings (ii) assisting group leaders in the collection of members' savings dues, including distribution and loan recovery from the group funds (iii) assisting farmer promoters in the establishment, monitoring and evaluation of model demonstrations on various income-generating activities.

At the village level, there were the village groups formed through the project. Each group had a five-member group management committee consisting of a President, a Secretary, a Cashier and two FPs. On an average, each group included around 15-25 members. In addition, there was a committee for the Extension Service Centre (ESC) composed of the leaders from the four FLE groups located in each village and consisting of a President and a Secretary. The purpose of this committee was to look after the ESC located in each *Union* and coordinate the meetings, training and other extension functions that used to take place at the centre.

3.4.1.3 Key events in the FLE project cycle and timeline

The design and implementation of the FLE began in mid-1999, soon after the inception of the ASIRP project and continued until June 2003, when a formal evaluation of the FLE model was carried out. In October-November 2003, the donor withdrew its support following the completion of the ASIRP project. The key events and timeline of the project are presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Key implementation events and timeline in the ASIRP-FLE project

Timeline	Events
June/July 1999 to July-Aug 2000	ASIRP inception, FLE project identification, selection of partner agencies, formulation of project implementation committees, preparatory workshops, project site selection, and action plan development
August 2000 to May 2001	Strategy formulation to implement the project at the community level and training of trainers (TOT). Training involved both in-country and overseas training given to the DAE and the NGO staff within the NCT, RT and the LAFT
Early 2001 to mid-2003	Community level implementation – farmer group organisation, training of farmer promoters and group leaders, establishment of model demonstration on income-generation activities together with farmer promoters, construction of the Extension Service Centres (ESCs) in target communities
June 2003	Evaluation of the ASIRP-FLE project
July-Sept 2003	Post-evaluation workshops among the DAE, the NGO and the donor agency representatives
Nov-Dec 2003	Formal closure of ASIRP-FLE project

3.4.1.4 General profiles of the project implementation sites, rural communities[6] and implementing agencies

The FLE project was implemented in six *Upazillas* of the West and North-Western regions of Bangladesh. Three *Unions* in each *Upazilla* were brought under the project and four farmer groups (two male groups and two female groups) in each of these three selected *Unions* were involved with the project. Thus, there were 12 groups in each *Upazilla*, 36 groups in each region and 72 groups in the two regions of Bangladesh. In all, about 1,100 farm families participated in the project (ASIRP, 2003). However, for practical reasons, the data for this study were collected from only three *Upazillas*[7] in one region.

The *Upazillas* are located around 300 Kms away from the capital city of Bangladesh (Dhaka) where the ASIRP head office was located. The areas of the *Upazillas* range from 237 to 330 square km having a population of 210,000 to 588,000. The *Upazillas* have different degrees of urbanisation based on the percentage of agricultural households (45% to 97%), communication infrastructure,

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[6] In this study the term "community" has been used to mean a "village".
[7] The names of the *Upazillas* and the region are omitted to maintain anonymity.

higher educational institutions, markets, healthcare facilities, and so on. One *Upazilla*, for example, is a major city in Bangladesh. The city has highway links with all other major cities in the country including the capital city. It also has railway communication and airport facilities in a nearby town. Moreover, this *Upazilla* has a medical college, a university college, a cadet college, an engineering college, several supermarkets as well as most of the important government organisations.

The FLE villages were located within the 3-5 km radius of the *Upazilla* towns. Most of these communities have good (by Bangladesh standards) road links with the *Upazilla* towns and some of these are located beside major highways connecting with the capital city, Dhaka. The FLE communities in one *Upazilla*, for example, are located near a military cantonment that provides employment and livelihood opportunities for many villagers.

As regards the nature of agriculture, rice and wheat dominate among the crops grown in the communities, covering more than 95% of the cultivated areas. Minor crops include seasonal vegetables and occasionally jute and pulse crops. A very common feature, however, is that most of the cultivated crops are irrigated High Yielding Varieties (HYVs). There are very few local varieties that the farmers of these areas cultivate nowadays. As a result, there is a high demand for agricultural inputs in the farming communities. Some important problems the farmers in these areas face include the increasing price of agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, irrigation, pesticides, good quality seeds, and financial capital.

The FLE project sites are located in some of the most poverty-stricken regions in Bangladesh marked by frequent incidences of floods, droughts and famines. Further, due to their remoteness from the capital city, these areas are politically underprivileged with a high incidence of rural poverty. According to the World Bank (2005), this region has the highest incidence of rural poverty (63.2%) in Bangladesh. The baseline survey statistics gathered in the FLE project during April 2001 also reveals this poverty situation. According to the project classification, a vast proportion of the people in the project sites were "poor" to "ultra poor" (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 Socioeconomic profiles of the FLE communities: Some highlights
(Source: FLE project implementation documents)

- **Literacy rate:** 42.50% to 55.60%; male 49%, female 33%
- **Farming population:** 45% to 97%
- **Farmer type:**
  - *Large (>3 ha):* 0.29% to 0.51%;
  - *Medium (1-3 ha):* 11.9% to 15.91%,
  - *Small (0.02-1.0 ha):* 23.84% to 23.86%;
  - *Marginal (<0.02 ha):* 26.36% to 27.89%
  - *Landless (no land, only household):* 33.58% to 35.84%
- **Household/village:** 25000 to 4000, area 200-300 ha (2-3 sq. km)
- **Population density:** 800-1150/sq.km, average family size 5-6
- **Poverty statistics** (ASIRP-FLE project classification, April 2001)**:**
  - *Rich family:* (0.82% to 13%),
  - *Medium family:* (13.85 to 27.39%),
  - *Poor family:* (13.70 to 53.97%),
  - *Ultra poor family:* (33% to 47%)

The agricultural extension and rural development service providers in the selected *Upazillas* and communities include government organisations (GOs), NGOs, and private agencies. Among the GOs, the DAE is the largest in terms of manpower and resources. The other major GOs include the Department of Fisheries (DoF) and the Department of Livestock Services (DLS). In addition, there are several other government agencies such as the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and the regional stations of the agricultural research institutes – Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), and banks. The activities of some of these agencies are provided in Table 3.3.

Apart from the FLE-NGO, the other important NGOs working in the project sites are the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Grameen Bank (GB), CARE Bangladesh, PROSHIKA and the Association for Social Advancement (ASA). These NGOs are primarily engaged in micro-credit programmes involving the resource-poor villagers, mainly the women. Besides these agencies, there are numerous private sector agencies involved with agricultural and rural development activities in the *Upazillas* such as seed dealers, farm machinery suppliers and dealers, pesticide and fertiliser dealers, and so on.

Table 3.3 List of the major government extension and rural development service providers in the FLE project sites

Name of service providers	Services provided
Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE)	Information, advice and training on crop production and management
Department of Livestock Services (DLS)	Information, advice and training relating to livestock production, disease control
Department of Fisheries (DOF)	Information, advice and training relating to fisheries production, disease control
Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI)	Development of improved rice varieties and management practices; dissemination of these technologies through training, information and advice
Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI)	Development of improved crop varieties (except rice) and management practices; dissemination of these technologies through training, information and advice
Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC)	Production and distribution of seeds through contact growers and government dealers

As mentioned earlier, the FLE model involved partnership between the DAE and a local NGO. **The DAE** is the largest organisation under the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and also the largest extension support provider in Bangladesh. Organisationally, the DAE has a network from national level up to the village level. The organisation has 8 divisions (called "wings") of which the Field Services Wing (FSW) is the largest one and responsible for all field-related extension activities. The other wings are responsible mainly for supporting the activities of the FSW. The DAE employs around 24,000 staff all over Bangladesh.

The lowest administrative unit of DAE functions at the *Upazilla* level and is managed by an *Upazilla* Agricultural Officer (UAO). The UAO is supported by an Additional Agricultural Officer (AAO), 2-3 Agricultural Extension Officers (AEO) and 20-40 Block Supervisors (BS) and a variable number of other non-technical office staff (such as Clark, accountant, cleaner, typist, and so on). There are 468 *Upazilla* units of the DAE stationed all over Bangladesh. The BSs are the front line extension workers in the DAE. They form the interface between the farmers and the rest of the agency. There are approximately 12,000 BSs stationed in 468 *Upazillas* of Bangladesh.

The *Upazilla* offices of the DAE are managed and coordinated from the Districts. There are 64 District offices, each of which is directed by a Deputy Director (DD). The work of the District offices is coordinated and overseen by nine regional offices, each headed by an Additional Director (AD). The ADs report directly to the Director, Field Services Wing in the Head Office located in Dhaka.

The main functions of the DAE are (a) to plan, implement and evaluate agricultural extension services (b) to transfer the latest technologies (available through formal research) to the farmers. The extension activities of the DAE are mainly in the area of crop production practices such as improved methods of planting, new crop varieties and environmentally friendly soil fertility and pest management practices. As an important government agency, the DAE is also involved in the implementation of various other government programmes, which are not necessarily extension in nature. These include emergency relief distribution, rehabilitation programmes during floods, quarantine of agricultural inputs such as pesticides, fertilisers, and so on. In addition to these regular activities, the DAE implements various projects supported through donor assistance.

The DAE carries out its extension function in several ways. The BSs undertake demonstration activities in farmers' fields to motivate farmers to adopt new production practices. These demonstrations are usually on improved crop varieties including their various management techniques. In addition, the BSs provide information, printed extension publications, and oral advice to the farmers while visiting their respective Blocks. The DAE also arranges and provides training to the farmers. Usually the training sessions take place at the training centres under the respective *Upazillas*. In addition, the DAE undertakes various media campaigns through the central and local radio stations of the GoB.

The NGO involved with the FLE project (labelled in this study as FLE-NGO) came into being during the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971. It was established through the grant of a Swedish donor agency. Currently the NGO provides services in the broad areas of rural development including agricultural development, community-based health and sanitation programmes, microfinance, environmental health, and social empowerment.

The FLE-NGO is a medium-size organisation in terms of area coverage and number of people served. According to NGO publications, it has a working area covering 10 districts in Bangladesh targeting a total population of 10.40 million, of which 1.9 million are rural poor. As of the latest statistics, the organisation has 1.5 million direct beneficiaries of which 80% are women.

Hierarchically, the NGO is structured at different levels: national, regional, District, *Upazilla*, and village levels. At the national level, the NGO has an eight-member Board of Trustees (BoT). At the regional or programme level, there are four Divisions, each headed by a Director. Under the Director, there is a Senior Programme Manager who is responsible for coordinating all programme activities in the region. At the District level, there is a Senior Manager who is responsible for coordinating the activities in all *Upazillas* in a District. At the *Upazilla* level, there are 2-3 Managers and a variable number of Assistant Managers. The Assistant Managers work directly with farmers at the village level. At the village level, there are farmers' federations involved with the NGO programmes. These federations mainly consist of small farmers, the landless, and women.

3.4.2 Logic for selecting the FLE case

Case selection involves two considerations: (i) the criteria to be used to select the case and, (ii) for multiple case designs, the number of cases to be studied (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stake, 1994; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005; Yin, 1994, 2003). In a qualitative case study approach, the most commonly suggested criteria for selecting a case are the theoretical relevance of the case, accessibility to the data, and costs of studying the case (Eisenhardt, 1999; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994, 2003). The key focus of sampling should be to identify a case that is information-rich and provides maximum opportunities for learning about the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994, 2003).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, three consecutive donor-supported projects involved experimentation with a range of extension models in Bangladesh since the late seventies (T&V model) through to the end of 2003 (ASSP & ASIRP-promoted models) and none of the organisational innovations appeared to be sustainable

post-project. Although each of these novel systems could be investigated to fulfil the aim of this study, the FLE case was selected for three important reasons: (i) the theoretical relevance of the case, (ii) opportunity for learning, and (iii) accessibility of the data.

In terms of theoretical relevance, the FLE was an illustrative example of a poorly sustained donor-supported organisational reform in agricultural extension. The implementation phase of the project was completed during October-November 2003 and an end-of-project evaluation was conducted (Gill et al., 2003). The evaluators reported that the FLE had a poor prospect of sustainability beyond the period of donor support (Gill et al., 2003). There were three important manifestations of this problem. First, the key actor in the project – the DAE – did not demonstrate any desire to adopt the FLE model in its regular activities or replicate the same. A similar problem was observed in the case of the FLE-NGOs that appeared to be unlikely to continue supporting the village groups following the completion of the project. The evaluation report of Gill et al., (2003) also recorded their conclusion that the village groups formed through the project had a poor survival prospect, beyond the life of the project.

At the beginning of the research fieldwork in Bangladesh, however, the reports of Gill et al. (2003) concerning the sustainability of the FLE model were verified through interviews with key project actors and through personal observations. Those interviews and observations confirmed that the FLE was indeed poorly sustained. In addition, a World Bank publication (World Bank, 2005) reported that FLE activities stopped following the withdrawal of donor assistance.

All of the foregoing features made the FLE a theoretically relevant case for this study. Since the innovation was unlikely or unable to receive continuous support from the target stakeholders – the DAE, the NGOs, and the communities – it exhibited features of non-sustainability which were in complete agreement with the definition of sustainability as articulated in the SCOPE theoretical framework (see section 2.2.2). The features manifesting the poor sustainability of the FLE case were also consistent with the definition of project/programme sustainability as found in the development literature (see section 2.2.1.1 and section 2.3.1). In other

words, the FLE, as an outcome of the ASIRP, demonstrated a poor survival prospect following the completion of donor aid.

In addition to the above, the FLE was selected as a case study because it provided the best opportunity to learn. The investigator was born and brought up in one of the regions where the FLE project was implemented, and hence was familiar with the local language, culture, socioeconomic, physical and agro-ecological features of the project sites. Most importantly, the rural people in this region speak a dialect which is different from the official *Bangla* language. The investigator was quite proficient in the language and very familiar with the people's way of living. This was considered to be an advantage to learn about the project because language is an important conduit of learning.

Thirdly, the FLE case provided the best prospects for accessing the necessary data. The investigator had personal and professional acquaintances with some high-ranking executives of the FLE-NGO and some DAE officers involved with the FLE project. This was deemed important for the investigator to be able to access the project documents and convince the relevant people to participate in this study. It is also due to the feasibility of accessing data that the investigator decided not to select the extension innovations promoted through the ERPs and the ASSP. Since the ERPs were completed in the early nineties and the ASSP in the late nineties, it would have been difficult to find and access the project documents as well as to locate and interview the relevant people.

3.4.3 Data collection

Case study research typically combines different data collection methods (Yin, 2003). Yin has identified six sources of evidence in case study research. These include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts. In this study, four different methods were used in data collection. These were: interviews, focus group discussion, personal observations, and document analyses. Although interviewing and focus group discussions were the primary methods, the other methods were employed for two reasons. First, they provided opportunities for triangulation and thereby improving the validity of the research (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Second, project documents

provided important evidence regarding the implementation processes that occurred during the lifetime of the project. Since the data collection began after the project implementation period was over, it was difficult to collect this information through interviews.

Before the onset of data collection, a detailed data collection protocol was developed based on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. The protocol included a list of the information required to analyse the case (Appendix A). Accordingly, appropriate methods were used to fulfil these information requirements. These are described in detail in the following sections.

3.4.3.1 Interviews

A case such as a project or programme involves certain "mini cases" within it (Patton, 2002). Even though the case is usually decided in advance, there are subsequent choices to make about persons, places, and events to observe because it is not possible to study everything in a case (Stake 1994). Therefore, "within-case sampling" is an important feature of case study research (Stake 1994). Making such choices involves the same process as case selection (Stake 1994), that is, selecting those samples that can maximize opportunities for learning and theory development.

Four important criteria were considered in the selection of interviewees. As described in section 3.4.1, the FLE model involved three different organisations – a government agency (DAE), an NGO, and village groups. Logically, therefore, the first criterion was to select interviewees from all these three organisations. The second criterion was to select interviewees based on their position or role in the project. For example, within the DAE and the NGO, people from several hierarchical levels (e.g. top level executives, fieldworkers, etc.) were involved with the case study project (section 3.4.1). These people had different designations and roles in the project such as project coordinators, line managers, and fieldworkers. Similarly, within the village groups, there were different positions such as farmer promoters, group leaders, and common members (section 3.4.1). Therefore, the interviewees from the three organisations were chosen based on their position and role in the project. However, in the case of the village groups, interviews were

carried out only with some selected farmer promoters. Third, the project was implemented at multiple sites in Bangladesh, known as the *Upazillas* and the *Unions* (section 3.4.1). Therefore, the interviewees were chosen from the multiple sites where the project was implemented. Finally, alongside interviewing the people involved with the project, some non-project people were also interviewed to triangulate the data sources. A total of 42 interviews were carried out in this study. Table 3.4 summarises the profiles and the number of people interviewed[8].

To identify the interviewees, at first, a list of the people involved with the project was obtained from the project implementation documents. This list provided a basis for identifying the preliminary contact persons from the DAE, the NGO, and the communities. After completing a couple of interviews with these initial contacts, the rest of the interviewees were selected using a snowball sampling technique (Patton, 2002). This technique involved identifying successive interviewees based on the information provided by an interviewee. This was necessary because some interviewees told that they did not know about certain issues and/or were unable to comment on those. In such instances, the interviewees were requested to refer to the appropriate person who could provide the information. In this way, successive interviewees were identified. This process continued until the investigator was satisfied that no new concepts were emerging from the data.

A semi-structured or interview guide method was used to conduct the interviews. The guide included a list of the information required from the interviewees. Despite having the list, however, the investigator did not attempt to restrict the interviewees' responses within the concept (s) guiding the interviews. This was deliberately done to let new concepts emerge from the data. During an interview, the sequence in which the questions were asked varied according to the situation.

In interviewing a person, at first the person was contacted by telephone and/or through a face-to-face visit. During this contact, the objectives and purpose of the study, including the identity of the researcher, were briefly introduced to the interviewee and his or her consent was obtained. Obtaining consent involved both formal such as written consents as well as informal or oral consents. The time and

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[8] People who had been the ASIRP steering committee members (section 3.4.1) could not be interviewed, although attempts were made. This deficiency was complemented through document analyses (section 3.4.3.3).

place of interview were chosen according to the preference of the interviewees. As the investigator resided in the study area during the entire period of data collection, it was possible to adapt to the requirements of the interviewees.

Table 3.4 Distribution of the interviewees according to their position in the case study project

Designation or position in FLE	Identity of the interviewees	Total number of people involved	Number of people interviewed
Project-staff			
Project Directors and Coordinators	High-ranking officials and executives from the DAE and the NGO	12 (8 from DAE and 4from the NGOs)	**4** (2 from DAE, 2 from NGO)
Resource Team members	District and *Upazilla* level managers from the DAE and the NGO	14 (8 from DAE and 6 from NGO)	**4** (2 from DAE, 2 from NGO)
Local Area Facilitation Team Members	Field level workers from the DAE and the NGO who directly interacted with the farmers in the project	18 (9 from DAE, 9 from NGO)	**8** (6 from DAE, 2 from NGO)
Farmer promoters	Community members involved with the project	144 promoters in 72 farmer groups	**8** (3 females and 5 males)
Non-project interviewees			
DAE and NGO employees	Top-level and mid-level officials	N/A	**6** (4 from DAE and 2 from NGO)
Employees from other government agencies	Mid-level officers	N/A	**4**
Farmers from the FLE villages	Key informants from the villages	N/A	**8**
Total interviews			**42**

The first interview was undertaken on 3 November 2004. At the beginning of each interview, simple non-threatening questions were asked to relax the interviewee, as suggested by Patton (2002). Then, the broad questions as outlined in the interview guide were asked and in this way the interview was carried on in a conversational style. Thus, although the broad questions remained the same, the specific questions that were asked varied in different interviews. The interviewees were given complete freedom to answer or decline to answer the questions according to their choice. They were given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. This was especially important because of the sensitivity of the topic of sustainability.

Each interview took one to two hours depending on the time that the respondents could spare at one time. Because of other commitments, many interviewees could not complete the interview at one time. This required interviewing the same person

several times to cover all of the questions. The investigator did not pressurise any interviewee to complete the interview at one time because that might have meant that information lacked sufficient depth.

The interview data were audio-recorded in most cases. However, some of the interviewees declined to provide audio-taped interviews or became hesitant in expressing their views when confronted by the tape recorder. Some interviewees also became suspicious about the investigator's role. This happened with most of the top-level and mid-level officers in the DAE. However, in some instances when the audio-recorder was removed, the interviewees felt free to express their opinions. In those instances, the interviewees' answers were recorded in the personal diaries of the investigator.

It was realised during the interviewing that formal interviews, particularly in the instances where the responses were recorded, created certain limitations. Observing those limitations, it was necessary to apply informal interview techniques as well. The informal interview took place during the evening hours and out-of-office hours in the forms of socialisation in local shops and tea stalls. This was not difficult as the investigator was born in the area and is proficient in the local language and dialect. Moreover, many of the interviewees in the sample were the alumni of Bangladesh Agricultural University where the investigator was employed. This facilitated the development of rapport with the interviewees. This acquaintance enabled the investigator to locate knowledgeable people who were involved with the FLE project, and facilitated his access to the project documents. Informal interviews were also carried out with the rural people to complement the information obtained though focus group discussions (description follows). The information obtained from the informal conversations was recorded in personal diaries.

3.4.3.2 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

A focus group is a form of unstructured interview but with more than one subject (Bryman, 1988; Patton, 2002). Focus group discussions provide important advantages in qualitative research by making data collection cost-effective (e.g. interviewing a large number of people within a short period of time), improving data quality through checks and balances among the different views of participants,

assessing consistency of views among subjects, and making data collection enjoyable for subjects (Patton, 2002: 386). Moris and Copestake (1993) suggested that community-level focus group discussions can be an effective method of data collection, especially within the context of rural development projects or programmes that have worked with, or through, community groups. Killough (2003) used this method in a case study of farmer-led extension programmes in Latin America.

Focus group discussion was crucial for this study for a number of reasons. First, there were around 3,500 rural people organised in 72 village groups, each having 10-25 members. These groups were located in different communities. Given the time and budget, it was not possible to travel to these different communities and individually interview a comprehensive number of the farmers involved with the project. Second, although key informant interviews were undertaken with the farmer promoters and group leaders, it was necessary to cross-check the views of other group members. Third, since in the project a group approach had been used, an understanding of the group dynamics was necessary. Focus group discussion was not necessary in the case of the other stakeholders, that is, the field-level extension workers, managers, and project coordinators, as they were limited in number. Therefore, in-depth individual interviews were found to be more suitable for them.

Morgan (1988) recommended undertaking more than one focus group discussion since one FGD may simply result in the researcher's observing the dynamics of a single group. In this study, a total of seven FGDs were carried out with the rural people who participated in the FLE project. The number of FGDs was limited to seven for three major reasons. First, it was extremely difficult for the investigator to convince a good number of the rural people to participate in the research (explanation follows). Second, interviews with eight farmer promoters from different FLE groups (Table 3.4) had already generated some information about those groups. Thirdly, after completing seven FGDs, the investigator realised that no new concepts were emerging from the process.

The participants in the FGDs included the farmer promoters, the group leaders, and the common farmers or community members. However, it was not possible to organise separate FGDs for each of these categories of people. The number of

participants in each FGD ranged from 6 to 8. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the communities and the groups (Killough, 2003; Patton, 2002). Three important criteria were considered in the selection: (i) gender of the farmers as the project involved groups of both men and women farmers (ii) extent of urbanisation of the *Upazillas* and communities where the groups were located, and (iii) groups that survived during the post-project period versus those that did not; since a few groups in some communities survived during the post-project period (source: personal observation). These criteria were developed after the data collection process began. However, although there were considerable variations among the rural people in terms of socioeconomic profiles (see Box 3.1, section 3.4.1.4) such as income, farm size, education, and so on, it was not possible to organise separate FGDs based on these criteria. Table 3.5 summarises the number of the FLE groups involved in FGDs, including the criteria used in their selection.

Table 3.5 Criteria used in selecting village groups for FGDs

Total groups involved in project	Total groups interviewed	Criteria used in group selection		
		Gender	Urbanisation of project sites	Active vs. inactive
72	7	Male – 3 Female – 4	High – 4 Moderate – 2 Low – 1	Active – 3 Inactive – 4

To organise a FGD, an advance contact was made with the respective group leaders or promoters in the communities. The names and locations of these people were obtained from the project documents, with further assistance from the relevant fieldworkers of the DAE and the FLE-NGO. However, convincing people to participate in the FGDs was very difficult and time-consuming. Initially, the rural people assumed that the investigator was an employee of the FLE project or was working for the donor/extension agencies. Many of them thought that the purpose of the investigator was to evaluate the project and based on this evaluation, they would receive further assistance. When the identity of the investigator and his purpose were explained to the rural people, many of them became reluctant to participate in the research. It was because of this problem that the investigator was unable to employ more participatory methods of data collection such as various

PRA methods[9] and resorted only to FGDs. To convince the rural people to participate in the FGDs, assistance from some local acquaintances (community members) and the relevant DAE and FLE-NGO personnel was obtained. In spite of taking assistance from the DAE and the NGO personnel, however, the investigator attempted to ensure that they were not present during the discussions.

The FGDs were held as per the preferred date and time given by the initial contact persons in the FLE communities. In most cases, the discussions took place in the house premises of those contact persons. In some communities, the Extension Service Centres (ESCs) developed through the project were used to hold the discussions.

At the beginning of each discussion, the participants were given a detailed description of the purpose of the discussion including the identity of the investigator. This was important to avoid misconceptions, as discussed earlier. After a detailed description of the purpose of the study and the identity of the investigator, it was expected that the misconceptions held by the rural people were minimised.

To carry out the discussion, a set of questions was developed based on guidelines from the conceptual framework as outlined in Chapter 2 (see Appendix A). The questions were gradually introduced to the group and their opinions were sought. The investigator did not seek consensus (Patton, 2002) but encouraged the participants to freely express their opinions. Although questioning and counter-questioning of ideas and opinions were encouraged, attempts were made to avoid sensitive issues that were likely to lead to conflicts among participants and hence a deadlock situation.

The outcome of each focus group discussion was recorded in detail by the investigator. However, since he had no assistant, each of the focus group discussions was also tape recorded. It took around one and a half to two hours to complete one group discussion. At the end of each discussion, the outcome of the discussion was presented to the group to check if there were any mistakes, any suggestions or amendments to make.

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[9] For example, transact walk, seasonal maps, Venn diagram, etc.

During the course of the discussion, it was noticed that some of the members were too shy to talk or were hesitant to talk. A list of those people was prepared by the investigator and later they were informally interviewed to seek their opinion on the outcome of the discussion. For this purpose, the investigator had to return to the community after a couple of days.

3.4.3.3 Document analysis

Analysis of the FLE project documents comprised an important method of the data collection process. The key documents and their purpose are presented in Table 3.6. The documents fulfilled two important data requirements: (i) a profile of the FLE case and its operational context, and (ii) project implementation processes such as the nature and extent of control of different stakeholders over decisions, evidence of organisational leaning[10], and so on. The documents also served the purpose of triangulating the data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 3.6 Documents analysed in the case study and information sought

Documents	Purpose or information sought
Summaries of workshops and meetings that were held from time to time among the different stakeholders during the design and implementation of the project	Control of various stakeholders over decisions; evidence for organisational or project level learning
Official correspondence and MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) letters among key stakeholders such as the donor, DAE and NGO officials	Control of various stakeholders over decisions; project negotiation; evidence for organisational learning
Monitoring and evaluation reports including annual progress reports (up to September 2003)	Evidence for organisational learning; project outputs, outcome and performance
Community development planning documents that were prepared on the basis of baseline survey and PRA during the implementation of the FLE project	Context of the communities where the project was implemented
DAE annual reports and Block Supervisors' diaries containing the basic statistics of the villages and sub-districts where the project was implemented	Operational context of the DAE stakeholders and the communities where the project was implemented
Annual report of the NGO that includes its history, manpower, mission and vision, structure, programmes, etc.	Operational context of the NGO involved with the project

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[10] Review and evaluation documents, minutes of meetings, MOU letters, manuals, contracts, etc. comprise "codified" expressions of organisational or collective learning. Brown (1996) measured organisational learning in development programmes by analysing such documents.

3.4.3.4 Personal observations

Personal observations comprised an important component of the research fieldwork. For this purpose, the investigator stayed for over seven months in the field during the research fieldwork. The observations were mainly casual (Yin, 1994, 2003) and focused on the characteristics of both the implementing agencies and the communities. Personal observations were recorded in the form of field diaries.

Observations of the DAE and the NGO included the day-to-day activities of these agencies, the inter-personal relationships among different groups within the organisations, their interactions with the farmers, and the other extension agencies operating in the project sites. These observations were made at different levels (e.g. *Upazilla*, District and National) of the organisations which assisted in developing an understanding of the rules-in-use within which the actors from these organisational operated.

Observation of the community characteristics were made through day-long visits to the communities and included the nature of farming, socioeconomic and political relationships among the farmers, relationships between the farmers and the extension professionals operating in the communities, performance of the farmer promoters, and the impacts of the technologies disseminated through the FLE project.

3.4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of qualitative case study research since there are few standardized procedures available to analyse case study data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994, 2003). However, a number of analytical methods and techniques are suggested in the literature (Dey, 1993; Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003). These strategies and techniques can be applied in within-case analysis and, in a multiple-case design, in cross-case analysis (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, the analysis may take place at several stages in the research

process and at several levels[11] (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003).

In this study a modified version of the qualitative data analysis procedure suggested by Dey[12] (1993) was used, with additional insights from the other qualitative research authors (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003). Dey has advocated three iterative processes in the analysis of qualitative data – describing, classifying, and connecting. According to this framework, these three processes are circular, that is, one informs the other and the whole process repeats until the entire analysis is completed (Figure 3.3).

The data analysis process in this study was commenced from the very beginning of the research fieldwork in Bangladesh, a technique recommended by a number of authors (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2005). After each day's fieldwork, the investigator used to listen to the audio-tapes, take personal notes and read through the field diaries, make meaning from the interviews and observations, and attempt to identify important theoretical concepts. The formal process of analysis began only after the investigator had returned to New Zealand following the completion of the research fieldwork in Bangladesh. In the following sections the data analysis process used in this study is described.
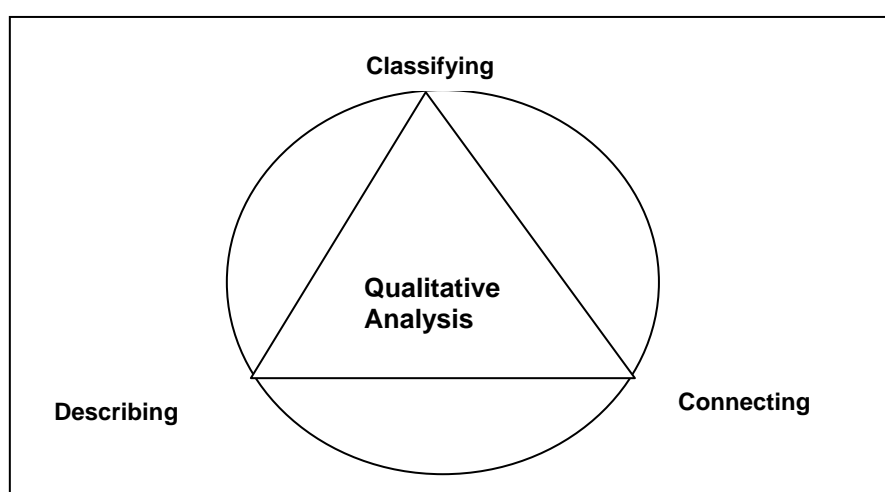
Figure 3.3 Qualitative data analysis as a circular process (Dey, 1993: 31)

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[11] For example, the lowest level may involve presenting the data without interpretation and abstraction. A higher level may involve the development of descriptive narratives, which are rich and believable. The highest level involves building theories based on high levels of interpretation and abstractions (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
[12] The investigator undertook training in qualitative research methodology at Massey University. The training involved practical exercise with Dey's (1993) analytical procedure.

3.4.4.1 Describing

Describing is the most preliminary process of data analysis (Dey, 1993). This involves a thorough and comprehensive description of the phenomenon – a "thick description" (Denzin, 1978; Geerz, 1973), including the context within which the phenomenon occurred (Dey, 1993; Patton, 2002). To describe the data of this study, at first, one set of transcripts from each stakeholder group (e.g. the DAE, the FLE-NGO, and the rural people) involved with the FLE organisation were summarised. According to the conceptual framework (Chapter 2), these summaries were arranged under three major headings: (i) contextual factors, (iii) project implementation performance, and (ii) organisational design and strategies. Within these three headings, important concepts and instances from the data were further organised under subheadings. For example, under the heading of "contextual factors", there were two subheadings – institutional context and material resources. Important points were identified and arranged under these sub-headings. In the description process, tables and diagrams were used to elaborate the data. The summaries also facilitated the identification of important categories and their relationships. As suggested by Dey, several versions of the same transcripts were prepared and iterated. The number of iterations, however, gradually declined over time and stopped when the investigator was satisfied that no new categories were emerging from the data.

3.4.4.2 Classifying

According to Dey (1993), classification is the process of segregating the data into well-defined categories, subcategories, and supracategories. The process is also called *coding* (Dey, 1993) or open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the data analysis process of this study, coding the data was the most difficult, extremely complex and time-consuming part. This was mainly because of a large volume of unstructured textual data. To code this bulk of the data, a computer software programme called NVivo (Richards, 1999) was used. The NVivo facilitates rapid coding of the data, compiling them into nodes, and development of conceptual models.

In the coding process, the transcribed data were converted into rich-text word files (.rtf) and imported into the Nvivo system. Each file was given a code name according to the identity/origin of the transcript, stakeholder, and area/location (document attributes). Following this, each document was meticulously browsed, read line-by-line and relevant text units were coded using the Nvivo *coder*, and compiled under *nodes*[13]. The nodes were given names and definitions. At first, the coded texts were stored under "free nodes", which were then arranged into "tree nodes" or hierarchically structured nodes. This structuring was done on the basis of logic.

In the classification process, most coding categories were drawn from the existing literature (Chapter 2). However, a limited number of categories were developed inductively by the investigator during the analysis, and a few others were taken directly from the conceptual structure of the people studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Most of these new categories were related to the "cultural features of the communities" involved with the case study organisational system. A form of comparative analysis (Dey, 1993; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was also used in the classification process in which a unit of text was compared across categories to examine if it was similar to them or different from them (Dey, 1993). Appropriate subcategories were developed if there were theoretically important distinctions between the data within a category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moreover, the categories were structured into supra-categories if this provided a useful theoretical concept (Dey, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The structure of a category hierarchy was decided based on logic (Dey, 1993). The entire classification process was dialectical and involved several iterations. Thus, as the analysis progressed, the categories were renamed, redefined, repositioned in the structure hierarchy, merged, and/or segregated into subcategories (Dey, 1993).

3.4.4.3 Connecting

The final step in the analysis process was connecting (Dey, 1993) or axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While classification involves

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[13] A node is like a container where ideas and concepts are stored.

fragmenting the data into categories, axial coding enables pulling the data back together again in new ways, making connections between categories and sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The connection process results in the development of conceptual frameworks or theories, which can be presented diagrammatically.

During the connection process, relationships between categories and sub-categories were identified and defined. Such relationships were identified through linking words or conjunctions (Dey, 1993) such as "and then", "because", "therefore", "as a result", "and after that", "as a consequence", "that's why", and so on. The connection process resulted in the identification of important causal relationships between concepts, for example, the influence of a particular "contextual condition" on the "choice of the DAE" or on the "ability of the FLE-NGO" to support or not to support the FLE system post-project. Like the two other processes described earlier, the connection process was also carried out in an iterative way using tables and diagrams (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.4.4.4 Subsequent analysis

After the analysis of a couple of key transcripts and documents through the process of describing, classifying and connecting, the entire process was re-iterated. During this phase, a second summary was prepared by using the previous summary, category hierarchy, and the same sets of data. This summary was much more elaborate than the previous one and was structured according to the category hierarchy developed through the first iteration. The data, categories and their inter-relationships were re-analysed. During this process, frequent consultations with the investigator's supervisors were made. The supervisors examined the outcome of the first iteration and passed on their critical comments. Accordingly, the categories, their definitions and arrangements were readjusted to avoid investigator bias. This process continued until a certain level of satisfaction was achieved. Then, the process was applied in analysing the rest of the data. These successive analyses required much less time compared to the first and second iterations since they mainly involved matching the data with the existing category hierarchies.

3.4.4.5 Comparison with the existing literature

After the general model explaining the non-sustainability of the FLE system had been developed through the analytical process, the model was compared with the existing literature (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999). Such comparison was very crucial since this study was based on a single-case design (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003). Thus, generalisability of the findings was sought to the existing theoretical propositions (Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003). The comparison was intended to identify the areas in which the findings were similar to or different from those found in other empirical studies, the areas in which the results provided empirical support or refuted the prescriptive literature. If there were differences between the results and those in the literature, explanations for such differences were sought. Furthermore, an attempt was made to identify the areas in the literature where this study provided new or additional insights as well as the factors which were mentioned in earlier studies but were not found in this study.

3.5 Ensuring quality of the research

According to Eisenhardt (1989: 548), the quality of a theory-building case study research depends ultimately on whether the concepts, framework, or propositions that emerge from the process generate a "good theory". The author stated that a good theory is parsimonious, testable, and logically coherent. It depends on the strength of the method, the evidence provided to ground the theory, and the ability of the research to generate new insights (Eisenhardt, 1989: 548). In case study research the concerns for research quality are addressed through the traditional tests of validity and reliability (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Yin, 1994, 2003). The investigator also used these techniques as described in the following sections.

3.5.1 Validity

According to Hammersley (1987: 69), an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise. In order to be considered as valid, a study needs to demonstrate that the propositions generated, refined, or tested "match the causal conditions" which

obtained in human life (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982: 43). The test of validity is further divided into four types: face validity, construct validity, internal validity and external validity (Dey, 1993; Lecompte & Goetz, 1982; Yin, 1994, 2003).

According to Dey (1993), *face validity* refers to the degree to which there is a fit between the observations of a researcher and the concepts used by the person. *Construct validity*, on the other hand, is the degree of fit between the definitions of the concepts used by a researcher and the "previously established" and "authoritative" definitions of the concepts in the literature (Dey, 1993: 255). Table 3.7 summarises the techniques advocated in the literature (Dey, 1993; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003) to ensure face and construct validity of qualitative research, including those that were applied in this study.

Table 3.7 Techniques advocated in the literature to ensure face and construct validity of qualitative research and those applied in this case study

Techniques in the literature	Applied in this study?
Use multiple sources of evidence	**Yes;** interviews, focus group discussions; document analyses and personal observation were used during data collection but the main sources were interviews and focus group discussions.
Use concepts from the literature	**Yes;** presented in Chapter 2
Maintain a chain of evidence	**Yes;** NVivo software was used to document the chain of evidence
Demonstrate the criteria by which the data were categorised and exhibit how the connections between the concepts were identified and made explicit	**Yes;** discussed in this Chapter
Exhibit several anecdotes and illustrations of a concept	**Yes;** several stories and instances of a concept are presented in the results chapters
Provide both typical as well as negative or extreme instances	**Yes;** typical as well as negative or extreme examples, wherever available, are provided
Have the key informants review draft case study reports	**No** but interview summaries were discussed with some of the key informants of the DAE and the NGO involved with the study as well as with some farmers.

In addition to the above, the internal and external validities are two other important types of validities. Internal validity is important if the intention in the case study is to

explain a phenomenon (Yin, 1994, 2003). Internal validity concerns whether the scientific researchers actually observe or measure what they think they are observing or measuring (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982). It means whether conceptual categories, understood to have mutual meanings between the participants and the observer, actually are shared (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982: 44). Qualitative researchers (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1999; Lecompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003) have identified a number of threats to the internal validity of research and advocated possible remedies to circumvent the threats. The key threats and their suggested remedies, including those that were applied in this research are summarised in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Important threats to internal validity of qualitative research, tactics advocated in the literature to minimise threats, and tactics applied in this study

Threats	Tactics to minimize threats	Applied in this research?
History and maturation effects	➢ Long term residence in the field ➢ Retrospective tracing of phenomena ➢ Time-sampling procedure ➢ Revisit sites at subsequent intervals to verify time-dependent phenomena	Yes Yes No Yes

Threats relating to observer effects or misinterpre-tation	➢ Triangulate –
	  Data source
	  Method
	  Theory
	  Investigator
	➢ Gradually disengage from informal relationships, periodically withdraw from field (i.e. don't go native)
	➢ Extended fieldwork to understand people and setting
	➢ Code participant responses according to situations expected to elicit contrived responses
	➢ Be reflective, that is, engage in self-critical reflection, monitor own bias and try to control
	➢ Have case summaries checked by participants
	➢ Use verbatim when writing research reports to let readers understand subjects' viewpoints and emotions
	➢ Perform pattern matching
	➢ Select and study negative cases
	➢ Peer review (e.g. discussion with colleagues)
	➢ Be a sceptic and look for rival explanations; enlist as many rival explanations as possible
		
		Yes
		Yes
		Yes
		No
		Yes
		
		Yes
		Yes
		
		Yes
		
		Yes
		Yes
		
		Yes
		No
		Yes
		Yes

Mortality	Identify and record loss or gain in group membership; collect baseline data to compare activities and events over time	No
Reactive effects	➢ Compare with already documented cases ➢ Record reactive effects on respondents ➢ Interview subjects on reactive effects	Yes Yes No

To minimise history and maturation effects the investigator resided in the field throughout the seven-month duration of the fieldwork. The study sites were also re-

visited at the end of the fieldwork to monitor whether or not there were notable variations during the seven-month duration of the fieldwork. In addition, tracing the events that had occurred in the lifecycle of the FLE organisation was part of the data collection strategy. It was performed through retrospective interviews and focus group discussions with the community groups. Moreover, important past events were retrieved from the analysis of the ASIRP project implementation documents. However, time sampling was not performed.

A number of tactics were used to minimise possible threats to internal validity due to observer effects and the misinterpretation of data. Triangulation of the data source such as interviewing several individuals on the same issue, using multiple methods in data collection (e.g. interviews and focus groups), and using multiple theories in explanation building were some crucial tactics used in this study. However, investigator triangulation was not possible because of resource limitations. Utmost care was taken to avoid the problem of "going native". While familiarity with local culture and the investigator's domicile in the region facilitated communication with the respondents, the investigator was aware from the very beginning that such familiarity could also jeopardise the internal validity of the data. The investigator also periodically withdrew from the study sites and stayed in distant locations. Moreover, continuous self-reflection and exploring possible investigator-bias was an integral part of the study. There were some real threats of contrived responses noticed in this study. These threats were minimized through interviewee triangulation and coding the responses accordingly.

To reflect subjects' viewpoints and emotions, important quotations from the interview transcripts are presented in this thesis. The quotations are, however, not verbatim but translations from the *Bangla* language to the English language. During the fieldwork in Bangladesh, the interviews and focus group discussions were periodically summarised and were shared with the interviewees. However, it was not possible to share the results with all individuals and groups who participated in this study. Instead, only some of the high-ranking officials and fieldworkers involved with the FLE and some selected farmer interviewees were consulted. Although it was not possible to share the case summaries with colleagues in Bangladesh, frequent discussions were conducted with the investigator's supervisors. Selecting both positive and negative cases was not part of the design, since it was a single

case study. However, deliberate attempts were made to develop rival explanations of an incident. Although some reactive effects on interviewees were noted and recorded in the field notes, it was not possible to explicitly discuss the effects with the subjects. No threat due to change in group membership arose during the seven-month duration of the fieldwork.

The external validity of research concerns the issue of generalisability (Denzin 1978), that is, whether the results are likely to apply outside the immediate context, population and settings of the study (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982). For research to be externally valid, a researcher needs to establish the domain in space and time to which the results can be generalised (Yin 1994, 2003). Table 3.9 summarises the key threats to external validity and the tactics used by qualitative researchers to minimise those threats (Denzin, 1982; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lecompte & Goetz, 1982; Yin, 1994, 2003).

Table 3.9 Important threats to external validity, tactics advocated in the literature to minimize those threats, and tactics used in this study

Threats	Tactics to minimise threats	Applied in this research?
General threats: *Comparability and translatability*	➢ Provide a detailed description of the context, characteristics of the people and groups and other necessary information needed to demonstrate typicality or atypicality ➢ Use theoretical sampling ➢ In a multiple-case design, use replication logic ➢ In a single-case design, use rival theories	Yes Yes N/A Yes
Selection effects	Collect evidence from different perspectives (e.g. participants versus non-participants)	Yes
Setting effects	Beware of over-saturation[14] of settings and avoid subjects that have been under repeated investigation	Yes
Historical effects	Describe influence of historical factors on target groups	Yes
Construct effects	➢ Explicitly define constructs ➢ Avoid use of idiosyncratic constructs that are difficult to compare across groups	Yes Yes

The general threats to external validity of this research are addressed by providing a detailed description of the case study context, people, and organisations. Moreover, a description of the basic features of the FLE organisational model and

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[14] This refers to the settings where the groups and cultures have attracted continual and intermittent investigation by social scientists.

the meaning of sustainability in the context of the organisation are also provided in order for other researchers to be able to compare their work with the findings of this study (Section 3.4.1, this Chapter). The researcher also employed multiple theories such as the explanations of organisational sustainability from the viewpoint of sociological institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, and those originated in the field of development management (Chapter 2).

In addition, the specific threats such as selection effects, setting effects, historical effects and construct effects, as suggested by LeCompte and Goetz (1982), were addressed. To minimise selection effects, data were collected both from those who were directly involved with the FLE project and those who were not. The setting effect was clearly evident in some of the farmer communities investigated in this study. The farmers in those communities were found to have been exposed to several development projects and thus possessed a distorted attitude that the investigator was there to collect data about the feasibility of another development project. This threat was minimised by carefully monitoring and reflecting on the experiences of individual subjects, avoiding those who have been subjected to other researchers and cross-checking the findings with a number of subjects. The historical influences on the participant organisations and the communities were also recorded. These are made explicit in the results. The construct effects were minimised by explicitly defining the constructs and indicating their disparities with those reported in the literature.

3.5.2 Reliability

The test of reliability refers to the degree to which a study can be replicated (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982: 35). It requires that the research produces the same results if carried out by the same researcher at a different point in time or by another researcher using the same methods as those of a prior study (Dey, 1993; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Yin, 1994, 2003). Unlike quantitative research, establishing reliability in qualitative research poses a "Herculean problem" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982: 35). This is because of the unique nature of each case and their settings as well as the unique personalities, epistemological and ontological assumptions of the individual researchers and their training, knowledge and experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Moreover, the

research process, the nature of the data and the conventions followed in the presentation of results is unique in each qualitative study which further complicates the problem of reliability (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Despite all of these difficulties, qualitative researchers (Bryman, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Kirk & Miller, 1986; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Yin, 1994, 2003) have recommended a number of tactics to minimise the threats to the reliability of qualitative research. Table 3.10 summarises these tactics along with those used in this study.

Table 3.10 Tactics advocated in the literature to minimize threats to reliability in qualitative research and tactics applied in this study

Dimensions of reliability	Tactics to maximise reliability	Used in this study?
Internal reliability	➢ Provide low-inference descriptors (verbatim accounts, narratives, etc.)	Yes
	➢ Use multiple investigators	No
	➢ Have results reviewed by subjects	No
	➢ Have the research peer examined	Yes
	➢ Mechanically record data (video and audio tape recorders, camera, etc.)	Yes
	➢ Develop a detailed case study database	Yes
	➢ Perform triangulation	Yes
	➢ Provide explicit description of data collection and analysis procedures	Yes
	➢ Provide explicit definition of constructs	Yes
	➢ Overlap methods	No
External reliability	➢ Describe characteristics of researcher and subjects	Yes
	➢ Describe social relationships between the researcher and the subjects	Yes
	➢ Delineate the physical, social and inter-personal contexts within which data were collected	Yes
	➢ Provide detailed description of analytic constructs and theoretical assumptions including methods of data collection and analysis.	Yes

There are two types of reliability concerns in qualitative studies – internal and external (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). *Internal reliability* refers to the degree to which, within a single study, the meanings held by multiple observers about the phenomena would be congruent so that they would describe the phenomena in the same way and arrive at the same conclusions about them (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982: 41).

A number of tactics have been applied in this study to minimise the threats to internal reliability (Table 3.10). Verbatim or exact quotations are used in the presentation of results. Moreover, the raw data including a detailed database of the case study have been preserved and could be provided upon request. A considerable proportion of the data were recoded in the form of audio-tapes and a good number of photographs of the research fieldwork in Bangladesh were taken. In addition, the constructs were explicitly defined and the data sources and theories were triangulated, as described earlier. A detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures is also provided in this chapter. However, as described previously, it was not possible to employ multiple investigators. Neither was it possible to have the results examined by the subjects in Bangladesh. The summary of each interview and focus group discussion, however, was shared with some selected key informants in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the entire research process was reviewed by the investigator's supervisors. The researcher also did not use overlap methods.

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), the external reliability of research refers to the extent to which independent researchers would obtain the same results if the same research were to be carried out in the same, or similar, contexts. The author has identified several threats to external reliability and the tactics used by qualitative researchers to minimise the threats to external reliability. These include five areas: researcher status position, informant choices, social situations and conditions, analytic constructs and premises, and methods of data collection and analysis (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982: 37-40). In this research, a number of tactics were employed to address the concern of external reliability. Some of these are mentioned under the tactics of internal reliability. In addition to these, the professional identity of the investigator and his relationships with the subjects are provided in this chapter. A detailed description of the physical context and the important profiles of the subjects are provided in this Chapter. Moreover, in Chapter 2, the theoretical assumptions are described and the constructs used in this study are defined.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter a description of the research strategy used to investigate the reasons why a donor-supported organisational reform in agricultural extension became unsustainable in Bangladesh is provided. A case study approach was used to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. A qualitative and theory-building or theory elaboration approach was adopted for the research because there was no prior theory developed in Bangladesh on the topic.

A single and embedded case design was used in this research. The case or the unit of analysis was the FLE system and the embedded units were the extension agencies and the rural groups involved with the system. The case was selected based on its documented record of poor sustainability following the termination of project aid. The other selection criteria included an opportunity to access the data, and the familiarity of the investigator with the cultural context. In studying the case, multiple data collection methods namely, interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and personal observation, were used. The data were analysed through an iterative process of "describing", "classifying", and "connecting". The computer software NVivo was used in the analysis.

According to the structure of the conceptual framework (Chapter 2), the results of this case study are presented in the next three consecutive chapters – Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Chapter 4

Contextual factors

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter the contextual factors that influenced the non-sustainability of the FLE system are presented. Contextual factors, as proposed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, included two dimensions – the institutional context and the material resources. Institutions were defined as the rules, norms, shared beliefs or traditions within which the FLE operated. Institutions were considered as sources of legitimacy of the FLE and as sources of incentives for the stakeholders to sustain the system. The analysis of material resources included the availability of financial and human resources.

As described in Chapter 3, the FLE was a complex organisational system consisting of three different organisations – the DAE, the NGO, and community-based groups of the rural people. Each of these individual entities has its own unique operational context. Therefore, the results in this Chapter are organised in three sections. In the first two sections the contextual factors influencing the non-sustainability of the FLE are presented from the perspective of the DAE and the NGO. These include the institutional as well as the material resources of these two agencies. In the third section, the institutional forces within the community environment are presented.

The results in this and the other chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) are presented mainly in the form of narratives and quotations. Important causal links between concepts are also demonstrated. It is to be noted that only some of the important quotations from the interview transcripts and the field notes are provided. The quotations are used mainly to enrich the narratives.

4.2 Contextual factors and FLE non-sustainability: the DAE perspective

In this section the results concerning the contextual factors influencing the non-sustainability of the FLE system are presented from the perspective of the DAE, which was one of the key stakeholders of the project. According to the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, three contextual conditions were examined in this study: (i) the institutional legitimacy of the FLE system to the DAE actors, (ii) the institutional incentives for the agency to sustain the system, and (iii) the material resources available at the disposal of the agency.

4.2.1 Institutional legitimacy of the FLE reforms

As described in Chapter 3, the FLE extension model was based on a number of novel ideas or principles: empowering the rural people or developing their capacity to undertake their own extension and development activities, service delivery through GO-NGO partnership, and farmers' demand-led technology transfer. The findings of this study suggest that these reform principles or the logic of organising the FLE system were lacking institutional legitimacy to the DAE. These were manifested while the DAE interviewees at different levels were explaining the reasons why it was not possible for the agency to support the FLE project, especially following the withdrawal of the donor (Figure 4.1).

The goal of **empowerment or capacity building** of the rural people was expected to be achieved by developing capable farmer extensionists or promoters and village groups who would be able to undertake their own extension activities without the assistance of professional extension workers. The results of this study suggest that this reform principle of the FLE project did not have legitimacy to the DAE. This lack of legitimacy was identified through an examination of the policies and mission statements of the DAE and also during conversations with a cross-section of the DAE interviewees at different levels in the agency.
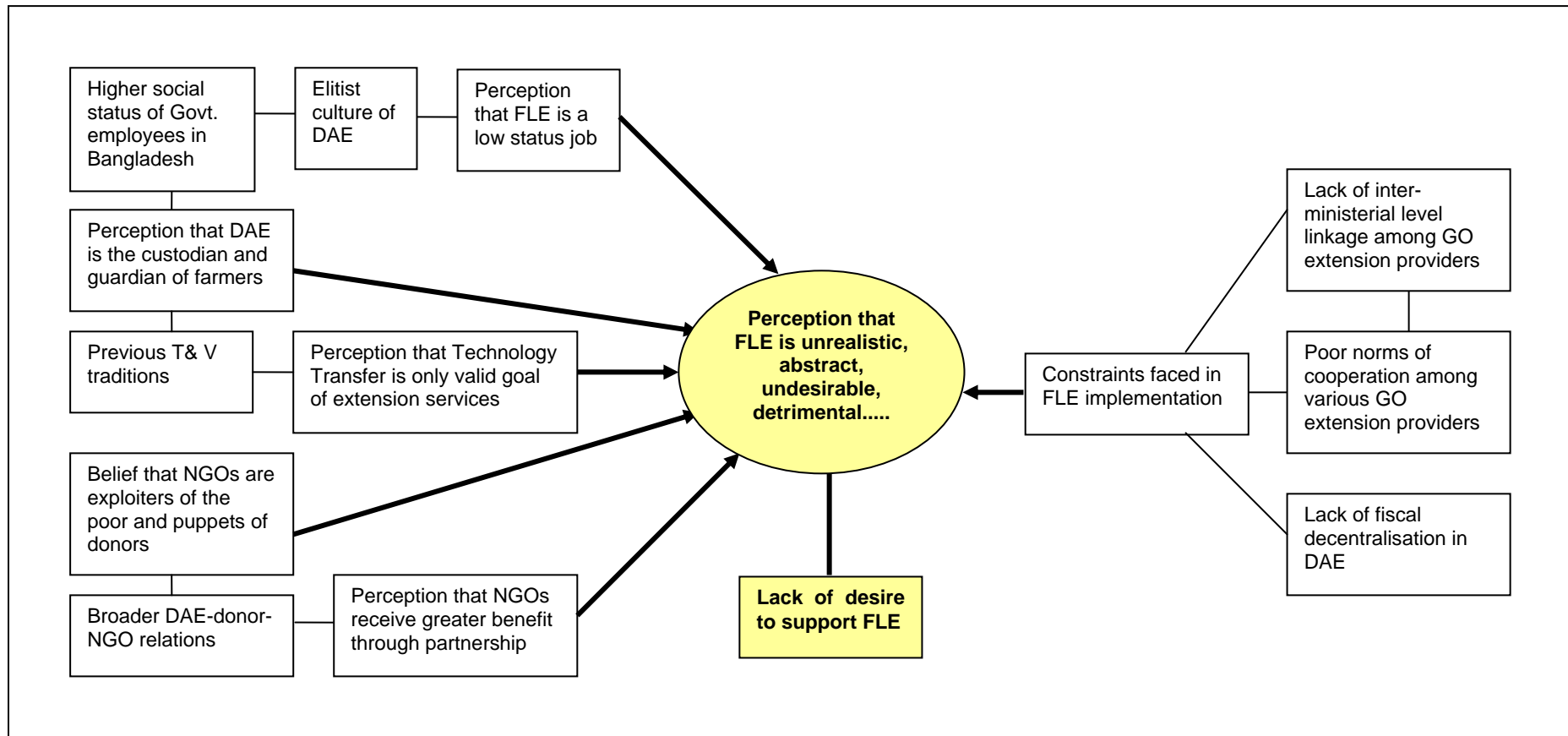
Figure 4.1: Lack of institutional legitimacy of the FLE from DAE perspective and its sources

The DAE was established in the 1980s to transfer improved farming technologies to the farmers in order to increase agricultural production in Bangladesh. In this Technology Transfer process, the DAE has acted as a carrier of new agricultural technologies such as improved crop varieties and management practices generated by various research institutes in Bangladesh. Until the inception of the ASSP and the ASIRP reform projects, Technology Transfer has been the formal mandate of the DAE. Although the FLE project was implemented through the DAE, neither the policies nor the mission statements of the agency explicitly recognises farmer capacity building or empowerment as its mandate[1].

In addition to the mission or policy statements, a cross-section of interviewees at different levels in the DAE hierarchy stated that the FLE project was abstract and a waste of time and resources. Instead, the resources could be invested for more productive purposes such as increasing agricultural production, which could help the rural people. For example, while discussing the reasons why it was not possible for the DAE to eventually sustain its support for the FLE system following the period of donor withdrawal, a high-ranking DAE officer who served as one of the Coordinators of the FLE project stated that,

> The ASIRP reforms [including FLE] are so *theoretical*[2]. These are just wastage of time and money. Instead, if they [donors] had given us funding to undertake more technology transfer activities, we could grow gold (meaning increase crop production) in this region. This could help our people.

A number of the senior-mid level DAE officers interviewed in this study also stated that the logic of developing independent rural groups in the FLE project was impractical because it was not compatible with the cultural context of the rural communities in Bangladesh. Many of them were opposed to the idea that farmers could play the role of extension workers without the help of professional extension advisers. These officers maintained that the farmers in Bangladesh are not mentally independent and that they need outside "guardians" like the DAE employees in order to be able to undertake development work. Such views are clearly reflected in the following statements.

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[1] Despite the fact that the DAE was found to have been working in several donor-supported projects having such goals
[2] Italicized words used throughout the results are the exact words used by interviewees. The others are translations from *Bangla* to English.

> These [projects like FLE] are impractical (*obastob*). If farmers are capable of doing extension work, what we are here for? No matter how smart they are, they need professional extension workers...... (DAE officer1)

> The idea of developing independent farmer groups is impractical. The reason is they need a big brother as a guardian….. This is our habit; this is what we inherit. We are an exploited or repressed nation. We still haven't received the mental independence. This mentality would not change in a day. ……….Because we have ruled FLE for 3 years, it worked [during the project phase]. This mentality will not change so soon...... (DAE officer2)

Interviews and observations also revealed that the concept of **working with poor villagers' groups** to help them develop their capacities to manage savings-credit, as was one of the key principles of the FLE, also lacked institutional legitimacy to the DAE. For example, while explaining the reasons for a lack of interest of the DAE towards the FLE project, some officers and fieldworkers stated that assisting poor villagers in their savings-credit activities was not compatible with the professional status of DAE employees. Instead, those "menial tasks" were suitable for the NGOs. According to an interviewee, many employees in the DAE find it difficult to interact with the poor villagers because of their elitist mentality. The interviewee further stated that the DAE employees have strongly retained their hierarchical norms acquired during the T&V era. As a DAE officer and a BS stated,

> It is an *established norm* in our department that if there is something relating to savings-credit of the poor, we believe it is NGO work. It is not possible to accomplish this type of work through us. Managing *Fakir-Miskin*[3] better suits NGOs. They are good in it. Giving loan and recovering loan by visiting door-to-door is not possible for government employees. …..(DAE *Upazilla* level officer)

> It is difficult for the DAE to support FLE because many of us have the *bossing tendency*. We haven't given up the old habits [of dominance, referring to the T&V era]. You see, we have to change our habits. Otherwise, it is not possible to work through groups. Most of us still have the *imposing habit*. We do not have respect for farmers. This is why we don't like to work with poor farmers' groups. Projects like FLE are very hard for the DAE to sustain because you have to bring yourself down to farmers' level …. (BS, DAE)

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[3] A derogatory term used to mean beggars; in this case referring to the concept of working with poor villagers; closest meaning 'menial tasks'.

The investigator found that the statements challenging the legitimacy of the FLE reforms such as those presented above are deeply embedded within the elitist culture of the DAE. These are visible in the day-to-day interactions of the employees within the agency as well as in their interaction with the rural people. In such interactions, the DAE employees present themselves as "officers", which symbolises a superior class relationship in Bangladesh society. Being "officers", the DAE employees expect to be addressed as "Sir" while interacting with their subordinate workers and the farmers. Similar to the word "officer", the word "Sir" also symbolises a hierarchical class relationship in Bangladesh.

In addition to these cultural features characterising the day-to-day life of the DAE; several other incidences were found that manifested the elitist culture within the organisation. One notable example of this was the long political struggle of the DAE fieldworkers to change their designation from Block Supervisor to Assistant Agricultural "Officer", which came into effect in 2003-2004. Interviews with the BSs suggested that this struggle was more driven by their aspiration for higher status (to have the term "officer" in their designation), rather than for higher wages or other material gains.

Interviews and observations further revealed that the fieldworkers (BSs) are generally reluctant to visit their respective Blocks in the villages. Instead, they prefer spending most of their time at the DAE office buildings in the *Upazilla* towns, despite the fact that there are village-level office buildings for the BSs located within the *Union Parishad*[4] complexes (source: personal observation). The BSs and officers also generally dislike living in the villages and remote *Upazilla* towns. Instead, they prefer living in the nearby cities. Although there are several practical reasons for this reluctance, such as a lack of children's educational facilities, poor housing and poor infrastructure facilities in remote areas, a desire to maintain the elitist status is an important one.

Due to this elitist culture, it becomes difficult for DAE employees to work with poor farmers, although by organisational mission statement and according to government extension policy, the agency promises to serve all categories of farmers – rich, medium, small, marginal, the landless, and the women (NAEP

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[4] Local government administrative structure at village level

1996)[5]. On the contrary, in practice, the contact of the DAE employees is usually with a few elite and mainly male farmers in the villages (ASSP and ASIRP 2003a; World Bank 2005; personal observation from FLE project sites).

The **GO-NGO partnership** concept underpinning the FLE model was also found to have no legitimacy to the DAE. Although in recent years, the DAE has been working with NGOs (including the FLE-NGO) in many donor-supported projects, the general perception within the DAE is that such partnership is "donor driven" and detrimental for the agency. One important reason is the belief among the DAE employees that the NGOs are earning a huge amount of money from the donors and the Government of Bangladesh for their roles in farmer group formation[6] but when the donor funding terminates, the NGOs concerned do not take any responsibility to sustain the projects' activities.

This mistrust and sense of rivalry of the DAE officers towards the NGOs was also manifested in the FLE case and was found to be one of the important reasons for their lack of ownership of the project. The DAE officers perceived the project as an activity of the FLE-NGO and a ploy of the donor agencies to help establish the NGOs in Bangladesh. While discussing the reasons for DAE's lack of interest in the FLE project, some DAE officers expressed these feelings in the following ways,

> Financially, the NGOs are getting benefited. There is nothing for us, the DAE people, except some training allowances. Interestingly, the total money is coming from the government but it is coming via the NGOs. The NGOs are told to form groups, give and recover credits….. They get TK 15000 for group formation. This is how NGOs are capturing huge amount of money through DAE! So much money! Earlier, they probably used to get TK 5000-6000 for each group formation but now they are getting more …… (DAE officer1)

> FLE is the project of the FLE-NGO. It is virtually their work. We are just nominally involved. These types of projects are a kind of burden on us. When project support continues, funds come, NGOs take the *financial lead*. We are just in pen and paper. Actually we have nothing here. The interesting thing is when a project becomes successful; the credit goes to the NGOs. When funds discontinue, we have to take the burden. These projects [projects that involve GO-NGO partnership] are actually to help establish or nurture the NGOs (*NGO-posha project*) in Bangladesh ….. (DAE officer2)

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[5] Policy and mission statement recognises working with poor but does not use terms like *empowerment* and *capacity building*.
[6] Farmer group formation is a common practice in most contemporary donor-supported projects in Bangladesh that have farmer empowerment as a goal.

At the fieldworker level, however, several interviewees expressed a somewhat friendly attitude towards their fellow NGO fieldworkers. Some examples of good interpersonal assistance while working in various donor-supported projects were also found. One reason for this is the feeling among the BSs that, being fieldworkers, they belong to the same class regardless of whether they are government or NGO workers.

Despite good interpersonal relationships between the DAE and the NGO fieldworkers, the perception of the DAE fieldworkers towards the "NGO sector" was based on several myths, which revealed a lack of cultural support for the concept of "DAE-NGO partnership". Interviews with several DAE fieldworkers revealed examples of these myths. For example, a fieldworker believed that the micro-finance programmes of the NGOs are means to "exploit the rural people" and that these interventions are intended to destroy the "family structure" of the rural people. As the fieldworker stated,

> The NGO loans [provided through micro-finance programmes] do not help in any kind of agricultural improvement. It is seen that due to NGO involvement, the family structure is breaking down. There is conflict between husband and wife. There is a local song in X [name of an NGO] that teaches….. don't listen to your husband.

Based on these criteria, a number of the DAE fieldworkers argued that the impacts or benefits of the FLE project would have been better if it had not involved the NGOs. Some of the fieldworkers also believed that if the FLE project had been implemented only through the involvement of the DAE, the DAE would have been more inclined to support the project.

Apart from the principles of empowerment of the rural people and GO-NGO partnership, the principle of farmers' **demand-based extension** also failed to receive approval and therefore legitimacy from DAE. An important reason for this was a gap between the stated policies and their actual practice within the DAE. Even though the concept of farmer demand-based extension is present in the mission statement of the DAE and also in the extension policy of the GoB (NAEP, 1996), several interviewees mentioned that this is barely implemented in practice.

Two important examples of this gap between the existence of policies and their actual practice were identified. First, in contrast to the government policy of decentralisation, the DAE employees at the local[7] levels have to rely on central sources of funding, which in most cases, is scarce (details in section 4.2.3) and often comes too late to provide extension services according to local demands. The authorities at the national level of the DAE and at the ministerial levels in Dhaka decide which technologies are to be disseminated in a particular area, the targets to be achieved, and the amount of budget to be allocated. Even for the agricultural inputs (such as seeds, fertilisers, money) that are needed to undertake extension demonstrations in farmers' fields, the local staff have to wait for the central sources because these are purchased centrally and supplied to the local staff.

Second, the local planning as espoused in the decentralisation policy of the DAE and its actual practice in the field were found to be different. Although a process of local *Upazilla* based planning was in practice for some period, this soon stopped for several reasons. One important reason was that the plans developed by local staff had often been ignored in the past by the top administration. In addition, due to delayed release of funding from the head office, bottom-up planning used to delay programme implementation.

Given these centralised fiscal and planning policies-in-practice, several DAE interviewees at the local level stated that the FLE was an unsuitable extension model for the DAE. They further stated that for the DAE to be able to implement demand-led extension approaches, it would require restructuring the entire ministerial system of the GoB, which is unrealistic in Bangladesh. Thus, some of them questioned, how would it be possible rather than why it was not possible for the DAE to sustain the FLE.

A number of the DAE interviewees at the local level further reported that due to the centralisation policies-in-practice, the FLE project suffered even during its implementation phase. For example, some DAE fieldworkers (BSs) said that it was not possible for them to provide demand-led extension support to the FLE group members in their respective areas because they had no control over the decisions

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[7] Local means *Upazilla* or sub-district level and the Block or village levels of the DAE

of the top management. On the other hand, they had to undertake extension activities as instructed from the top administration, regardless of whether or not the farmers' actually wanted those services. The BSs believed that if they could have undertaken demand-led extension activities, it would have been possible to keep up the interest of the rural people towards the FLE project. As one of the BSs stated,

> I could not support the FLE groups in my area. What they wanted and what my authority told me to do was different. Our target came from the top. For example, we were instructed to conduct special programmes such as granular urea, new varieties, crop museum, ideal seedbed, preservation of cow dung for composting, budding, etc. Even if the farmers' do not want these, we have to transfer these to them. This is how things happen. We are just fieldworkers; we have nothing to do ….. (BS, FLE site)

A lack of support from the broader policy environment was also identified by a number of interviewees as a key constraint that negatively affected the prospects for providing farmer demand-led extension services in FLE. The interviewees reported that providing farmer demand-led services in the FLE project required the cooperation of other government and non-government extension support providers. Although the existing government extension policy (NAEP 1996) provides a legal basis for such cooperation in the sense that it recommends that all extension support providers should work in partnership and provide demand-led services to the farmers, this did not occur in the FLE project. Although in a few instances, cooperation from other government organisations was given because of friendly interpersonal relationships, in most cases such initiatives failed.

Numerous examples of the lack of cooperation from various other government agencies were provided by the DAE interviewees. For instance, in an *Upazilla*, the farmer promoter (FP) from an FLE group requested the DAE officer concerned to assist them in securing rice seeds. The farmers in that area could not store enough seed to produce rice seedlings for the next cropping season as most fields were destroyed by severe floods. The DAE officer concerned requested the BADC to assist the FP. However, there was no formal linkage between the DAE and the BADC, although both are GoB agencies. Thus, the DAE officer informally requested the BADC officer to support the FP. Despite this request, it was not possible for the BADC to cooperate. By referring to such examples of policy

constraints, the DAE interviewees argued that the idea of demand-led extension in the FLE was too abstract in the Bangladesh context. Several DAE interviewees maintained that unless there are changes at the inter-ministerial level of the GOB and formal linkages are developed, it would not be possible to sustain extension models like the FLE.

4.2.2 Institutional conditions, perverse incentives and support for FLE

In this section the dysfunctional or weak institutional elements that negatively affected the incentives of the DAE actors to support the FLE project, both during and after the project implementation period are presented. The sources of these perverse incentives were both within and outside the DAE (Figure 4.2). Within the DAE, six inter-related sources of perverse incentives were identified. They are the unrealistically low salary and wages of the employees, lack of promotion and career development opportunities for the fieldworkers and the lower to middle level officers, lack of formal reward for good performance, weak enforcement of administrative rules, norm of rent-seeking and corruption, and project or donor syndrome. Due to these factors, the employees are generally reluctant to perform even their officially assigned duties, let alone support new roles introduced through donor-supported projects, as was the case of the FLE.

As regards the issue of **salary and wages**, the employees of the DAE, except a few officers at the top-level, are generally low-paid. The salary of a senior mid-level officer, for example, is around US$ 200 per month. With this salary, it becomes difficult for the employees to live a decent life and maintain their families. Reportedly, many lower level employees are engaged in what they call "side businesses" despite this being illegal for a government employee. For example, a mid-level officer in an FLE *Upazilla* was found to own a private business of pesticides and agro-chemicals (source: personal observation).

The **promotion and career development opportunities for** the mid to junior level officers are severely limited. For example, in some *Upazillas*, the UAOs have been in the same position for more than 20 years, while many of their colleagues working in other government organisations have got several promotions. This is because of

two important reasons. One is the discriminatory government policy where 'agriculturists' are the 'neglected civil servants', compared to the other government cadres such as the magistracy and police services. The other reason is that there are many more employees at the mid to lower levels, compared to the very few vacant positions at the top. A mid-level officer of the DAE who was involved with the FLE project stated,

> The stomach of this department has become fatter (meaning there are a huge number of officers to be promoted at the middle level). It has become deformed, like a child suffering from malnutrition.

Similar is the promotion situation of the fieldworkers (BSs). Reportedly, most BSs began their career as BSs and retired while still in the same position. Many BSs, however, have received the "selection grade" that resulted in an increase in their salary. Despite this, there is a desire among the BSs to be promoted to the "officer" position as it is related to higher social status. As a BS stated,

> Our promotion was held up for a long time. Recently it has been changed a bit. Now we are getting the *selection grade*. We are not hampered economically… The salary scale is no longer a problem, but we haven't got the second-class status[8] … (BS, DAE)

The DAE interviewees also reported that due to a limited scope for promotion, there is fierce competition among the lower level employees to climb up in the hierarchy and the winners are those who have informal political lobbies and are capable of paying rents. In Bangladesh society where promotion to higher positions is usually seen as a determinant of prestige and social status, lack of this opportunity has generated enormous frustration among the middle to junior officers and field staff. Reportedly, many junior officers expend considerable effort in securing employment in other government departments such as magistracy, police service, and the like, where promotion and income opportunities are better compared to the agricultural institutions.

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[8] According to government civil service rule, BSs are third class while officers are the first and second class employees.

In addition to lack of promotion opportunities, there is barely any system of **formal reward** for well-performing officers and field staff[9]. The only formal reward that exists in the DAE is the "President Award" given to a few (usually 2-3 in an *Upazilla* in one year) of the best performing field staff. This award, comprising a medal and a certificate, however, is generally perceived to be unattractive. Instead, as the interviews suggested, the employees perceive salary increase and promotion as more attractive. Reportedly, even in the distribution of the President Award, there are often unjust political interventions and nepotism (favouring relatives, friends, acquaintances, kin, etc.). For example, in a certain year (exact year is omitted to maintain anonymity), fake documents were prepared to reward a field agent for the 'tree plantation programme' in an *Upazilla* bypassing the BS who actually made the programme a success. This happens mainly due to a lack of an appropriate performance assessment mechanism within the DAE and the centralisation of power at the top level that makes it difficult to identify and reward well-performing workers from the field level.

Given this situation, the incentives provided through various donor-supported projects play an important role in motivating the DAE employees. Of these incentives, overseas training is often considered to be one of the most attractive ones. However, some of those interviewed reported that often, due to unfair political interference from the top, the wrong people are chosen. Many such stories of unjust distribution of project-based incentives were told by the DAE interviewees.

Under such an uncongenial working environment within the DAE, the employees are generally reluctant to perform even their regular duties. Thus, the BSs most often remain absent from their Blocks and the officers attempt to evade their supervisory roles. In one *Upazilla*, for example, out of 48 BSs, only two were identified by the interviewees as good performers and sincere. Reportedly, this tendency of shirking official responsibilities is increasingly becoming prominent even among the employees who are known to be some of the best workers within the DAE. A BS stated this grim situation within the DAE in the following ways.

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[9] During the ASIRP reform, however, some rewards (certificates, radios, medals) were introduced within DAE for the best performing BSs. Although these rewards were not perceived by the lower level staff as useful (for example, 'certificate' was perceived as just a 'piece of paper'), even these stopped soon after the ASIRP project was closed.
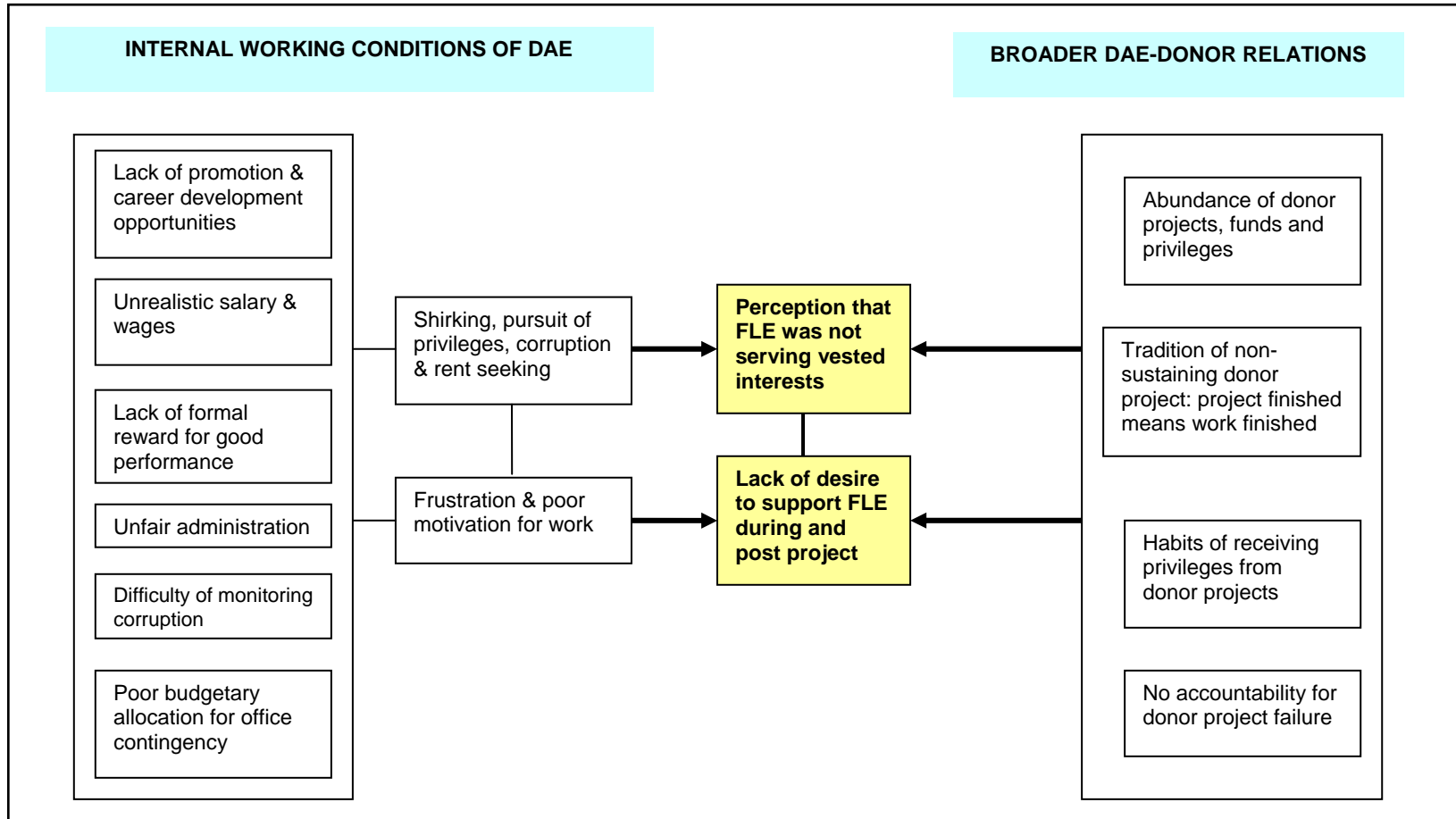
Figure 4.2: Dysfunctional institutional conditions, perverse incentives and their effect on DAE's support for FLE

> Now nobody in this department wants to work. Why should they? Everybody is getting the same salary in this department but what about good performance? ...... You will know more about this if you visit Mr X (name of BS) today. He is one of the best workers in this *Upazilla* and a *President Award* holder. Nowadays, if he is given any work, he tries to avoid that…. (BS, FLE site)

The above dysfunctional situations affect a donor-supported project in three major ways. First, it requires the use of privileges such as remunerations to motivate the employees to participate in the project. Second, those who do not receive such incentives are generally not interested in the project's activities. Third, when the vital donor incentives (such as overseas training as it was in case of the FLE) is over, there is little incentive from within the DAE to motivate the employees to continue supporting the activities introduced through a donor-supported project.

This study revealed that the above situations negatively affected the FLE project both during and after the project implementation period. A number of sources confirmed that during the FLE implementation period, many lower level employees rarely visited the rural groups formed through the project. An important reason for this was that the employees were not provided with adequate privileges as demanded. Many lower level officers and fieldworkers thus perceived that the FLE was a project that did not provide opportunities for overseas training, budget for staff remuneration, money for the purchase of office accessories, and private vehicles for the DAE staff. For example, one of the interviewees called the FLE a "beggars' project". Due to the absence of these privileges, many DAE employees at all levels were highly dissatisfied and reluctant to participate in the FLE project, even during the implementation period. Despite remaining absent from their duties, however, many of the lower level employees regularly submitted their monitoring reports to their higher authorities. Due to this, the performance of the project in developing the capacity of the rural groups was seriously hampered. After the project implementation period, absence of privileges was found to be one important reason why the DAE became reluctant to continue supporting the FLE.

The problem of poor work motivation within the DAE originates also due to the **weak enforcement of administrative rules**. In theory, the DAE has a quite elaborate mechanism of supervision and control. For example, there are ACR (Annual Confidential Report) systems written by immediate supervisors. In the case

of breach of administrative rules there are provisions for warning, show-cause notices, transfer to remote areas and in extreme cases, suspension. The incidence of firing staff is, however, very rare and the process is extremely lengthy requiring complicated judicial steps.

Despite the existence of formal rules, however, most often it becomes difficult to enforce administrative rules. One DAE officer stated that "the chain-of-command in DAE has virtually collapsed". The reasons for this are very complex and arise from numerous factors such as corruption (e.g. taking a bribe from the accused), nepotism (favouring friends, relatives and acquaintances), political affiliation (e.g. local and national political leaders intervene to save the accused, sometimes threaten or even physically assault the administrator), unionism of employees (e.g. sometimes unions call strikes to save the accused regardless of whether the accused was guilty or not) and also due to an ineffective system of monitoring. Reportedly, the supervision of the *Upazilla* level staff is very weak. The management team from the DAE head office in Dhaka visits the *Upazillas* once in "one and half to two years".

Under this dysfunctional administrative rules-in-use, the lower level employees enjoy, and often exercise, personal discretion in performing their assigned roles. A number of the DAE employees stated that this general context of weak administrative control affects DAE's ability to implement and sustain any donor-supported interventions and FLE was just one of those many. Although the supervision in the FLE project, in theory, was "very frequent", in most cases, the lower level employees failed to perform their assigned roles. For example, a widely known and dedicated DAE fieldworker who was supporting the FLE groups in one of the villages[10] following the period of donor withdrawal stated,

> They [other DAE fieldworkers and officers] do not care about FLE [post-project period] because they do not have to answer to anybody for what they do…..The same happened during project implementation…. We do not need new rules in this department to sustain [donor-supported] projects. Whatever existing rules we have are enough. The problem is the enforcement of rules….. (BS, FLE site)

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[10] This fieldworker was one of the two persons found to be working with the village groups in their respective Blocks during the post-donor period. This person was one of the highly respected and widely known fieldworkers in the DAE who has a good performance record.

Interviews with the DAE employees also revealed that **rent-seeking and corruption** are some perverse norms that prevail within the agency. Some forms of corrupt practices include abuse of project funds that are allocated to carry out extension activities such as establishing demonstrations (mainly new crop varieties, and management practices) in farmers' fields and adjusting the allocated budget in illegal or immoral ways. The funds are misused in a chain of rent-seeking and corruption involving employees at various levels. Some DAE interviewees informed that whenever a donor-supported project is implemented through the agency, there are people at various levels who want their illegal share from the project budget and that there is no "transparency" in the way the funds are spent. As a DAE employee stated,

> When a project comes, everybody wants [illegal] share of the budget –
> from top to bottom. There is no transparency. If share is not given, the
> ACR[11] becomes bad…

Three important reasons for such practices within the DAE were reported by the interviewees. First, it is due to the unrealistic wages and lack of supplementary income for employees, which has already been discussed (section 5.2.2). Second, it becomes difficult to monitor corruption because of the motivational nature of extension work, which makes it difficult to objectively verify extension activities. Thirdly, the government budget for the *Upazilla* level units of the DAE is very limited. Within this limited budget, it becomes difficult for the respective officers to maintain the office contingencies. Worse is the fact that sometimes the *Upazilla* staff have to bribe (the personnel in the government treasury department) to release the budget.

In this institutional context, donor-supported projects are viewed as sources of extra income and maintenance of contingency costs. This affects the sustainability of development projects in two ways. First, projects that do not offer such opportunities, as was the case of FLE, usually do not attract DAE staff. It means projects without considerable budgets provide little opportunities for rent-seeking and corruption. Secondly, when donor funding for a project terminates, there is nothing much left that could be attractive to the employees.

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[11] Annual Confidential Report

Interviews revealed that the FLE project was also perceived as a source of rent-seeking and financial corruption. Instances were found that the DAE employees, in collaboration with the NGO fieldworkers and some elite farmers, misused the allocated project funds. This seriously affected the ability of the project to develop capable farmer groups and promoters. After the project period, the absence of project funding appeared to be an important reason why the DAE failed to take initiatives to sustain the project. For example, when asked why the DAE high-ranking officers failed to take initiatives to sustain the FLE, some interviewees stated,

> Except a few of us [fieldworkers], none of the *high officials* is interested [in FLE] because there is no *project* money left…..(BS, DAE)

> Why should they [top-ranking officers] care about FLE? Those at the upper level just understand one thing – money. Now they are after the X project[12] because it has an ADB (Asian Development Bank) budget of several *crore Taka*[13]…..(DAE *Upazilla* level officer)

Furthermore, according to several interviewees, an important reason why donor-supported projects are not sustained by the DAE is because of the shared understanding that "project finished means work finished". This informal understanding prevails at all levels in the hierarchy. According to some DAE interviewees, there is "no trace" of the numerous projects that have been implemented in the past through the DAE and nobody has any accountability for the success or failure of a project. Therefore, the wisdom in the department goes "projects come and projects go" and then "they disappear". A number of BSs informed that even though they were interested in continuing their support for the FLE, the higher authorities discouraged them by arguing that "the project was finished" and that the BSs did not need to think about FLE any more. As two of the BSs stated,

> ….The agricultural officer does not let me go and visit the FLE groups. He tells, "The project is finished" (BS, FLE site1)

> …Yes, we could include the FLE groups into our regular work schedule but we do not have support from the UAO[14]. I tried to do that a couple of times but my UAO tells, "The project is finished, why you are creating unnecessary troubles?" (DAE-BS, FLE site2)

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[12] Name of the project omitted to maintain anonymity

[13] 1 crore=10 million Taka; International conversion, 1 US$ = around 70 Taka

[14] UAO stands for *Upazilla* Agriculture Officer, Head of the *Upazilla* level unit of the DAE

Two important reasons were found for the existence of such a syndrome. First, this is due to the availability of too many donor-supported projects within the DAE and corresponding flow of funding resources within the agency[15]. In most cases these projects have offered (in the past) and are offering[16] (at present) various kinds of incentives to the DAE staff, the most important of which is extra pay in the form of remuneration, opportunities for overseas training, and logistics. According to the analysis of some employees, this is now a norm in the DAE that the employees are, in general, not interested in any work unless there are extra incentives for them.

Second, there is no established rule for which the DAE could be held accountable for the failure of a donor-supported project. After project completion, the funding agencies rarely monitor what happened to a project after they had phased out. Instead, they come back with new projects and new money. For example, quite contradictory to the donors' concern for the financial sustainability of DAE's extension service[17], the proportion of donor funding in the agency has increased over the years rather than decreased (World Bank, 2005; presented in detail in Section 4.2.3). According to some DAE interviewees, this creates perverse incentives that discourage DAE from taking efforts to sustain a donor-supported project. Therefore, monitoring and follow-up by donor agency personnel were perceived to be important requirements for the DAE to be able to sustain a donor-supported intervention. While explaining the reasons why the DAE discontinued its support for the FLE approach following the withdrawal of the donor, a DAE mid-level officer who was involved with the FLE project stated,

> There are no personnel from the project. If any project personnel would have come, for example, the *consultant* or the *foreigner* [foreign consultant who worked for the donor agency], then our *office* [high officials] would have thought, *hei* the people of FLE have come, let's do it [FLE] now. This *monitoring* [by donors] must be in place because people in our country forget everything quickly.

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[15] During data collection, DAE was found to implement 8-12 projects in different FLE sites, the names of those projects are omitted to maintain anonymity of the sites
[16] Referring to the period during the post-project period when the data for this study were collected
[17] This was one important rationale for reforming the T&V through the ASSP and the ASIRP.

4.2.3 Material resources

Analysis within the DAE revealed a very high level of donor dependency in terms of critical resources, especially funding, which is an important input for the agency's extension activities. The funding of the agency comes from two sources – government sources and bilateral donor sources. The government funding comes through the annual revenue and development budgets. However, a recent World Bank (2005) study shows that more than 50% of the budget of DAE comes from donor sources (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Sources and trend of funding in the DAE (World Bank 2005)

Year	Total expenditure (Million Taka)	Government source (%)	Project-aid through donor sources (%)
1992/93	217.42	43.38	56.62
1993/94	738.88	45.74	54.26
1994/95	569.80	39.89	60.11
1995/96	533.26	29.55	70.45
1996/97	689.79	29.36	70.64
1997/98	630.99	39.60	60.40
1998/99	736.57	45.92	54.08
1999/2000	735.41	40.55	59.45
2000/2001	949.26	60.90	39.10
2001/2002	788.79	49.96	50.04
2002/2003	799.02	41.28	58.72
2003/2004	1242.12	41.46	58.54
2004/2005	1377.00	38.85	61.15

Of the government share, more than 90% is spent in staff salary and allowances meaning that nothing much is left for developmental work. The data presented in Table 5.4 also suggest that this trend has been consistent from the 1990s up to the most recent time, indicating a high level of donor dependency. Consequently, the DAE depends greatly on donors to finance its extension activities. It means when there is no donor-supported project; there is almost no extension work, except some routine demonstrations (usually on new crop varieties and management practices). The severity of this funding scarcity was evident during conversation with the DAE employees. For example, some BSs interviewed in this study reported that the number of extension demonstrations conducted by the DAE is extremely limited, usually 3-4 per season per *Upazilla*. For this reason, the BSs are

generally reluctant to visit the farmers. This grave situation can be understood in the following statement of a DAE officer.

> When there is (donor-supported) project, there is some *narachara* (movement). Otherwise the same schedule work. The BS goes to the field. We follow them occasionally; do a couple of demos (extension demonstrations). That's all. That's what is going on since 1987 - gave (to the farmers) two kilos of rice seeds of the BR-11 variety, also did some demonstrations of 0897 (rice variety). That's all. In my first service life, I got 7 demonstrations and some rice seeds. The situation hasn't improved [till today].…. This is where the problem is. Government money is spent mainly for the purpose of unproductive works. There is no money to do development related works……... Our job in this department is nothing but selling one's mouth (*mukh bikkri kora*) ….. (DAE officer, FLE site)

The findings of this study suggest that the resource scarcity within the DAE was an important factor that negatively affected the agency's ability to support the FLE project, both during and after the withdrawal of the donor. During the project period, this constraint negatively affected the performance of the FLE project in terms of providing demand-led services to the farmers involved with the FLE project. Resource scarcity emerged as an issue because of the nature of farmer demands for extension services in Bangladesh. In most cases, the farmers do not just want oral advice (which DAE mainly provides alongside some demonstrations) they also demand farming inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and financial loans. In particular, the demand for financial loans is very high because of the poor financial condition of farmers. A number of the DAE interviewees stated that owing to this reason, the farmers are more interested in the NGOs rather than in the DAE. As a DAE officer stated,

> Nobody [farmers] nowadays wants to listen to just talking [oral advice]. They say, "You don't give demo, don't give money, don't give seed, just tell us to do this and that – use that fertiliser, that pesticide, grow that crop" These types of comments they make…Yes, still some farmers want advice but very few. They are not the poor farmers … (DAE officer, FLE site)

Interviews revealed that during the project implementation period, the FLE farmers were demanding support, which was not possible for the DAE employees to provide as they did not have the necessary resources to fulfil those demands. This failure discouraged many rural people from remaining with FLE groups. This issue

is further discussed in Chapter 5. Given this resources scarcity, some DAE interviewees stated that the principle of providing demand-led services to the farmers in the FLE project was a "ridiculous idea". For example, an officer and a fieldworker stated,

> It is a ridiculous idea that we will provide services according to the demand of the farmers. How can we do this, what resources do we have? Donors talk about too many things – demand-led, this and that – but never look into our abilities……….. (DAE *Upazilla* level officer)

> I tried so hard to keep these groups [FLE groups] alive but I failed. They want seed and fertiliser from me. From where can I get seed for them? …. (BS, FLE site)

4.3 Contextual factors and FLE non-sustainability: the NGO perspective

In this section the results with regard to the contextual factors influencing the non-sustainability of the FLE are presented from the perspective of the NGO, which was one of the key stakeholders of the project. The results are organised in the same way as has been done for the DAE. Therefore, at first, the institutional legitimacy of the various reform principles or practices of the FLE model to the NGO is described. Second, the institutional incentives for the agency to support the system are shown. Finally, the material resource capabilities of the NGO and its influence on the ability of the agency to support the FLE are demonstrated.

4.3.1 Institutional legitimacy of the FLE reforms

Unlike the technocratic values characterising the operation of the DAE (section 4.2.1), the NGO involved with the FLE project, by policy and mission statement, claims that its organisational mandate is to ensure people's participation in development, empowerment of the poor (especially of women), and strengthening of civil society. Through these means, the NGO intends to contribute to rural poverty alleviation and sustainable development in 10 Districts of Bangladesh.

Interviews with the NGO employees at various levels and observations from their day-to-day interactions with the rural people also indicated that the organisation

has a culture in which rural people and their empowerment are respected and valued. For example, while interacting with the rural poor, the employees respectfully address them as "brothers" and "sisters". The rural people were also found to be very comfortable in addressing the NGO employees in the same way. According to several NGO interviewees, this value system in the organisation has developed due to its long involvement in development projects having goals of empowering the poor rural men and women. Through these involvements, their employees have been able to learn how to show respect to the poor, although many of them have a formal educational background in technical dimensions of agriculture (same as the DAE employees).

Alongside the empowerment of the rural poor, however, a dominant value that co-exists in the NGO is "market orientation". This means that while the organisation believes in the empowerment of the poor, it also emphasises that the interventions intended towards this end should be economically profitable. This market-based value of the NGO was reflected during conversations with the top executives in the organisation. One of them stated,

> NGO means market, private sector. Only government is subsidy. ….We have a long term commitment in poverty alleviation… [But] our development model is integrated. We have combined both social and economic aspects. So, we undertake commercial or profit-oriented works that serve the poor. For example, we are [now] producing quality seeds, livestock feed, hatchery; these all are for the poor people…… (Director, NGO)

According to the NGO interviewees, a major reason for the commercial orientation of the agency is a reduction of funding from the parent donor, a Swedish aid agency. This led to a realisation in the NGO that if the organisation has to survive, it must be able to generate its own funding. The interviewees informed that while some of the large NGOs in Bangladesh such as BRAC have already been able to do so; their organisation was still not in such a position. As practical steps towards this, the NGO has recently introduced a management strategy known as the 'self-financing scheme'. Under this scheme, the NGO field workers enter into partnership with farmers for income generation activities (e.g. beef rearing, goat rearing, etc.). The funding and major inputs for such activities are supplied by the NGO. The profit generated through this joint business enterprise is then shared between the participant farmers and the NGO. The scheme is called 'self-financing'

because a portion of the salary of the field staff concerned comes from the profit of the joint business.

The findings of this study suggest that the market-oriented values of the NGO and the associated pressures were important reasons why it became difficult for the agency to maintain its support for the FLE, despite its commitment to the empowerment agenda (Figure 4.3). Interviews revealed that the NGO's plan was to continue supporting the FLE groups through its self-financing scheme, following the withdrawal of the donor. In return, after the completion of a partnership scheme, the NGO would take 40% of the profit as a service charge. However, after the donor had phased out, it became difficult for the NGO to sustain this partnership scheme with the FLE groups because the NGO did not perceive it as financially profitable. As a mid-level NGO manager stated,

> Our organisation has stopped visiting the [FLE] groups…. Since our organisation (name) has no financial benefit here it has no headache in FLE. It's true that according to the earlier plan there should have been headache….Our fieldworkers are visiting only those groups where they are getting return of their money.

Three important reasons for this phenomenon were identified. First, since most of the FLE group members were resource-poor, the NGO workers perceived it risky to undertake partnership businesses with them because the poor could use the loan money to finance their more pressing needs such as buying food, rather than using the money for an income-generating activity. Second, it would be difficult to recover the money as the poor have few physical assets that could be used as collateral. Third, in the event the partnership failed to generate profit, the fieldworkers would risk losing their jobs, since, as the fieldworkers reported, loss is hardly tolerated by the top management. Reportedly, some of the self-financing staff have been fired because they failed to make a profit. All these indicated that the idea of serving and empowering the rural people, as was envisaged in the FLE, appeared in the longer term to be an illegitimate idea to the NGO.

As regards **GO-NGO partnership**, an important concept of the FLE innovation, the NGO interviewees informed that their organisation has long been working in partnership with a range of government agencies in Bangladesh. The management

claimed that partnership was a dominant "norm" in the NGO. The interviewees mentioned several examples of partnership activities; some of those included collaborative programmes with the DAE (names omitted to maintain anonymity). In addition, in recent years, the NGO has taken initiatives to strengthen linkages with various extension, research and educational organisations in Bangladesh. To this end, the organisation has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with several public universities and research institutes in Bangladesh. By referring to these examples, the NGO interviewees claimed that all these were indications of the goodwill and commitment of their organisation towards 'partnership'.

Despite mentioning a number of examples of partnerships-in-practice, however, several interviewees, particularly the high-ranking executives in the NGO, were found to hold a belief that working in partnership with government organisations (GOs) was very difficult. Several reasons were given by the interviewees, which manifested a confrontational relationship of the organisation with the GOs. First, the interviewees believed that the GOs consider themselves as "elites" and the NGOs as "commons". Although, as they believed, this value system is gradually changing in Bangladesh, still the government employees demonstrate a policing attitude while working with the NGOs and attempt to control the NGO workers.

In addition to the above, the NGO management was also found to have a belief that the GOs, including the DAE, were inefficient by the standard of cost-reduction in service delivery. The NGO management criticised the traditional idea of social welfare underpinning the operation of the public sector agencies in Bangladesh and believed that financial cost-recovering, privatising and downsizing the government sector in Bangladesh was necessary. The management also believed that there was no need of so many BSs in the DAE and that the efficiency of the DAE would have improved if the number of BSs could have been reduced. As the NGO Director stated,
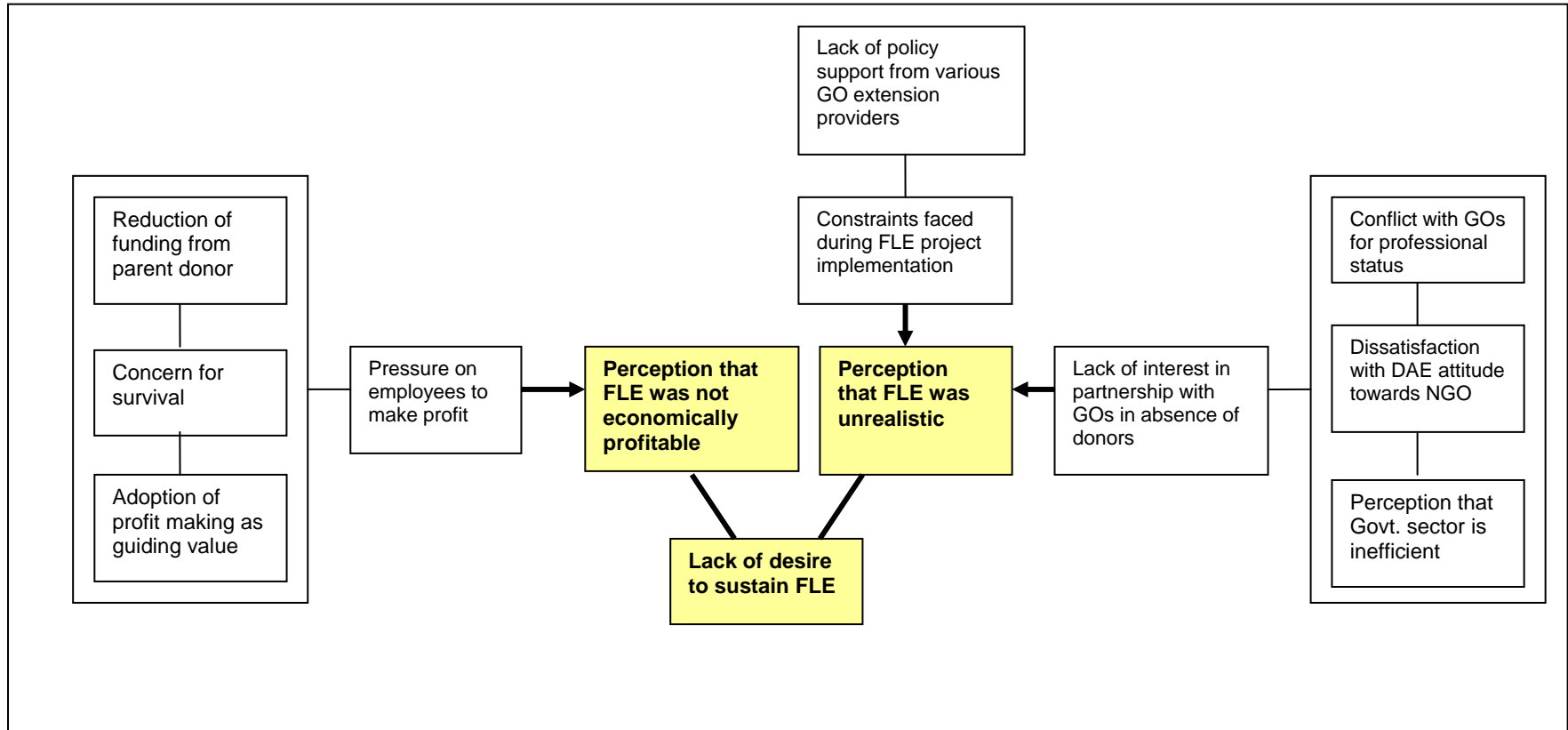
Figure 4.3: Lack of institutional legitimacy of the FLE to the NGO and its sources

> All developed countries are market oriented. There should be market attitude. We have to make everything cost-effective…. This is why the government sector in Bangladesh is so inefficient. Lots of employees need to be downsized. Why do we need so many BSs? The work could have been accomplished with far less number of BSs. But all these are political. These are being done in the name of people's welfare. If government expenditure could be reduced, the cost would have been much lower. Today, you will see there are countless staff (*kilbil korche*) in the government offices. If it could be privatised, only a few people could be kept, the efficiency would have been much higher.

These deeply held confrontational values of the NGO towards the GOs in general and also towards the DAE were reflected in the statement of a high-ranking manager in the organisation. The person stated,

> Well, at many places, the people of Government Organisations do not like to work with the NGOs. Sometimes, they express their bad reactions openly….. [But] the attitude that NGO is a lower class agency *Nomoshudro*[18] and you, DAE, you are an upper class agency *Brahmin*[19] – gone are those old days. The NGOs now also have a high status, which is no way less than yours [directed to DAE]…. The donors bring partnership programmes and we [GO and NGO] have to work together.

Despite the confrontational values held by the NGO towards the DAE and the "government sector" in Bangladesh, the interviewees did not provide this as an explanation for their agency's inability to sustain the FLE project following the period of donor withdrawal. However, a number of interviewees informed that the partnerships between their organisation and the GOs were usually donor-driven. As long as there are donor funds, the partnership continues, but this is not what they would like to do in the absence of donors. According to an interviewee, the GO-NGO partnership was a "marriage of incentives", rather than of "intentions".

Concerning the issue of **demand-led technology transfer**, the management of the NGO informed that their organisation had vested in "100% freedom" to the local staff to undertake development activities as per local demand. Through the self-financing partnership scheme (as described earlier), the local staff are allowed to get involved in any profit-making activities as per rural people's demands. In FLE, this was the mechanism through which the NGO intended to continue supporting

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[18] Name of a caste in *Hindu* religion, usually refers to the "untouchables"; in this context it refers to low social status.
[19] The elite caste in *Hindu* religion

the FLE groups following the withdrawal of the donor. Although this policy was quite at odds with the centralisation rules-in-use in the DAE, interviews with the local NGO staff revealed that they were quite reluctant to use this discretion. This reluctance had direct bearing on the NGO's ability to maintain its support for the FLE. As an NGO manager stated,

> ….If I tell the management now that there is a good group in that village and I want to do something with them….they will approve that instantly …but the entire liability is mine. It means I have the power to make independent decisions but the risk is very high. So, I will not do that. For example, there are 12 FLE groups in this *Upazilla*. I could do business with them but I will not do that….In FLE project, however, this was the agreement. We were told that after forming the groups, you should undertake seed production project, this and that. This is okay but there is another condition – you have to recover the money. Otherwise, it will be recovered from your salary. Now, this is the risk for which I do not want to undertake any programme with the FLE groups in my *Upazilla*. …… (NGO manager, FLE site)

Similar to the DAE interviewees, several NGO interviewees recognised the poor policy support for the FLE project, particularly with regard to the idea of providing demand-led services through coordination among various agencies. The interviewees provided several examples where the other government service providers failed to cooperate and extend demand-led services to the farmers. In one instance, for example, the FLE farmers asked the NGO workers for some services concerning livestock husbandry. Despite attempts made by the NGO workers concerned, the relevant government department (DLS) failed to cooperate. An important reason was that the DLS employees were asking the farmers to provide rents or *bhata* for their services, although according to GoB policy, the DLS services are supposed to be provided free. Due to such corrupt practices by the government officials, the NGO believed that the concept of demand-led service in the FLE project was an unrealistic idea. Such instances manifested a lack of legitimacy of the FLE project to the NGO. A senior mid-level NGO manager, while discussing the reasons for the poor performance and sustainability of the FLE project, stated:

> The idea of providing demand-led service [in FLE] is unrealistic. It seems as if everybody [ESPs] is eagerly waiting when the farmers would go to them and they would provide demand-led services. This is a stupid idea…..for example the farmers needed semen to inseminate their

cattle. When they asked us where to get this, we told them about the livestock department. When farmers went there they said "we have run out of semen reserve". Instances were also found that they gave them dead semen.

4.3.2 Institutional conditions, perverse incentives and support for FLE

Similar to the DAE employees, the NGO employees are also poorly paid. On an average, a fieldworker (with a diploma-level degree) receives US$ 50-60 per month and a manager-level employee (with a 4-year University degree in agriculture) draws around US$ 100 per month. The salary of the temporary, project-based staff is even lower, as they depend on the amount of funds provided by a donor. Like the DAE staff, many NGO employees are also engaged in "side businesses". The salary and allowances (as well as privileges) enjoyed by the top level officials and executives, however, are considerably high by Bangladesh standards. For example, one of the Directors draws a salary of US$ 1000-1500 per month. This indicated a very high income gap between the executives and the fieldworkers within the NGO.

Similar to the DAE, the reward for good performance was unsatisfactory in the NGO. Nepotism and political lobbying, rather than objective performance assessment, often play an important role in rewarding employees. Furthermore, the opportunities for promotion to a higher position are extremely limited. Interviews revealed that the lower level employees are highly dissatisfied with their salaries. A number of them told that they would prefer to join another organisation, if they had the opportunity.

Despite these grievances, in general, most of the NGO employees are hard working and sincere. An important reason for this is that the NGO's governance mechanism is very strict and administrative rules are enforced religiously. For example, an NGO top-level manager can fire a fieldworker instantly, which is even unthinkable in the DAE. There is no room for a fieldworker to challenge this decision of the top management. Since there are extremely limited opportunities for employment in Bangladesh, the NGO employees are very cautious about how they conduct themselves. Moreover, compared to the public sector agencies, for

example the DAE, financial corruption is not so pervasive in the NGO. The audit system in the agency is very strict and transparent, leaving little room for corruption. Moreover, being small in size, there is frequent monitoring of the employees' activities.

Despite the strength of the NGO's administrative system, there were instances of nepotism and financial corruption that negatively affected the FLE project. The NGO failed to act against some fieldworkers involved with the project who had disturbing records of corruption, shirking and forgery. These fieldworkers shirked or remained absent from their assigned role of nurturing the rural groups formed by the NGO in the FLE project. Further, they misused the allocated project funds in a corrupt way in collaboration with the DAE fieldworkers and some elite farmers. Such incidences had serious negative consequences for the viability of some FLE groups. The members of these groups became discouraged and did not want to participate in the project due to the corrupt practices of the NGO fieldworkers. A number of the field-level NGO employees informed that despite evidence of such corrupt practices, it was not possible to remove or take punitive actions against those employees because of their familial relationship with a high-ranking Director in the NGO.

In addition to the internal work culture, two important institutional factors were identified in this study that constrained the ability of the NGO to sustain its support for the FLE. Concerning the first issue, the NGO demonstrated a similar culture to that of the DAE (section 4.2.2) that was also based on the shared understanding that "project finished means work finished". For example, when asked why the NGO failed to sustain its support for the FLE project following the withdrawal of the donor, a mid-level NGO manager who was involved with the FLE project stated,

> Why can't we continue it [FLE] now? ...... It has become a *norm* in Bangladesh that project finished, everything finished. It is a problem of our mindset, a mental problem……Previously, I used to work in a different NGO (name of NGO); my experience was similar.

Interviews further revealed that such a project syndrome is in fact a pervasive culture in the NGO sector in Bangladesh. According to some interviewees, the actual motive of the NGOs in Bangladesh is to agree to whatever ideas the donors bring to them and obviously, the interest is not in the new ideas but in the new

resources of the projects. Reportedly, there are many "fake NGOs" in Bangladesh whose purpose is just to trap donor and government money. This syndrome that prevails in the NGO sector in Bangladesh was found to affect the FLE-NGO as well.

Several FLE-NGO interviewees mentioned that donor projects (recognised by the interviewees as 'bilateral projects') serve several crucial purposes of their organisation. They act as sources of salary of the existing staff (discussed in detail in next section), provide opportunities for re-employing the redundant staff from earlier projects[20], bring salary for the highly-paid top-level executives, and occasionally, provide opportunities for financial corruption. This means after the completion of donor-funding, there is generally little incentive for the agency to remain committed to that project. A number of the interviewees also stated that a lack of pressure and follow-up monitoring by donor agencies after the completion of a project discourages NGOs from undertaking initiatives to sustain the project. As a mid-level manager of the FLE-NGO stated,

> For this [sustainability] failure [of FLE], the donors are also responsible. If they could put pressure, then it would be possible to sustain projects. I think either their [donors'] *monitoring* system is weak or they pretend not to see. Not only FLE but also numerous projects [in Bangladesh] are becoming crippled due to this.

4.3.3 Material resources

Similar to DAE, the FLE-NGO also revealed a high level of donor dependency for critical resources. This study shows that the NGO, from this point of view, stands in a far weaker position compared to the DAE. From funding, staff salary to even the development agenda of the NGO is highly influenced by, and dependent on, donor resources. The data presented in Table 4.2 suggest that the major source of funding (> 90%) of the NGO is the overseas donors. There are two kinds of donors that provide funding for the NGO: the core donors and the bi-lateral donors. These donors are the agencies from Europe, North America and Asia. A very small proportion (7.47%) of the agency's funding comes through internal sources. Before

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[20] Many of the NGO staff involved with the ASIRP-FLE project were redundant staff from earlier DFID-supported projects

1980s, almost 100% of the salary and allowances and other establishment costs of the NGO used to come through the grants of the parent donor, a Swedish aid agency. However, since the 1980s, the parent donor has been gradually reducing its financial support (@ 10% each year). Currently only 30% of the funding comes from the parent donor. Therefore, increasingly the NGO is under pressure to manage staff salary and allowances to ensure its own survival.

Given the huge reliance of the NGO on donor funding and the reduced support from the parent donor, the NGO does not, in the complete absence of donors, have the capacity to pay staff wages. According to a manager, the NGO is able to provide only 10% of the staff (core staff) salaries in complete absence of donors. Therefore, the great majority of the employees in the NGO are project-based and temporary. After the completion of a project and with the termination of donor funding, these bi-lateral staff usually become redundant (a very few are absorbed into the core structure). This situation indicates that after the termination of donor funding, the NGO is largely incapable of carrying on the activities initiated through donor aid.

Table 4.2 Sources of funding of the FLE-NGO

Sources	Contribution to annual budget	Proportion
Core partners	USD 2,713,900	40.54%
Bilateral Project Partners	USD 3,480,000	51.98%
Other Sources (cost-sharing and recovery, self-financing, income generating activities)	USD 500,000	7.47%
Total	**USD 6,693,900**	**100.00%**

Source: NGO publications

This study revealed that this staff and funding shortage was a reason why it became difficult for the agency to maintain support for the FLE. During the FLE project period, the NGO received financial support from the donor to implement the project. The funds were utilised to establish model demonstrations in FLE farmers' fields. There was also budget support for staff salaries. Following the withdrawal of donor funding, it became difficult for the NGO to manage the salaries and allowances of the FLE staff. As a consequence, the NGO had to remove its workers from the FLE areas and move them to other donor projects. This situation is reflected in the following statements.

> Well, this is difficult [to maintain] after the end of project as our organisation depends on project fund. There was mechanism during the project phase but now as the project has ended many problems have arisen such as from where the salary of the field staff would come. As a consequence, two of the three field staff have been given work outside the FLE areas …. (NGO manager, FLE site)

> Now our staff cannot visit the FLE groups because they are busy with other projects. Previously, it was their job and they were paid from the project. Now they have to look after those projects where the money is coming from …… (NGO manager, District level)

Not only during the post-donor period but also during the FLE project implementation period, the scarcity of human and financial resources negatively affected the ability of the NGO to perform its expected role of facilitating the FLE groups. In several project sites, for example, the same NGO employee was involved in multiple donor projects. Thus, it became difficult for them to invest the time required to properly facilitate the FLE groups. Although in several instances, the NGO management realised that it was necessary for them to employ more staff to properly nurture the groups; they failed to do so because of a serious shortage of staff. It was also found that in many areas, the NGO employed some fieldworkers from another donor project to facilitate the FLE groups. These fieldworkers did not have the requisite training to be able to perform the type of activities that were required in the FLE project. A number of the NGO employees at the mid and lower level informed that due to this manpower shortage, the FLE project suffered tremendously and is one of the reasons why the FLE groups performed poorly.

4.4 Contextual factors and FLE non-sustainability: the rural community perspective

In this section the cultural context of the farming communities is analysed in terms of their history, norms and traditions and an attempt is made to understand whether or not the FLE principles were legitimate to the rural people and if the rural context created any incentives that prevented them from continuing with FLE activities.

4.4.1 Community culture and FLE legitimacy

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the FLE was based on the philosophy/principle of farmers' empowerment. This was intended to be achieved by developing village groups that would be able to operate independently (without the help of outsiders) on the basis of mutual co-operation among the rural people. To this end, assistance was provided through the ASIRP project to develop the capacity of the rural people to manage their savings-credit operations by themselves, develop group funds, prepare village-specific extension plans, and demand services from the extension organisations. The analysis of the rural context, however, revealed a number of cultural features which created a lack of legitimacy of these principles and practices among the rural people and negatively affected their willingness to continue with the FLE post-project (Figure 4.4). These institutional forces are: (i) the patron-client or dependency relationship between the communities and outside agencies, (ii) weak traditions of cooperation, and (iii) indifference to development.

The culture of **dependency** of the villagers on outside professionals was identified as an important reason for the poor sustainability prospect of the FLE project. In all village groups interviewed, the group members expressed the view that a lack of continued presence of the DAE or the NGO staff was an important reason why the groups failed to remain viable. The members informed that without their presence or pressure, most group members generally exhibit reluctance to perform group activities such as organising weekly meetings and conducting group savings-credit operations. This attitude of dependency was prominent even in some of the few female groups that were able to survive after the formal closure of the FLE project. Those women believed that the major reason why their groups survived was the continued presence of the BSs and the NGO staff during the post-project period.
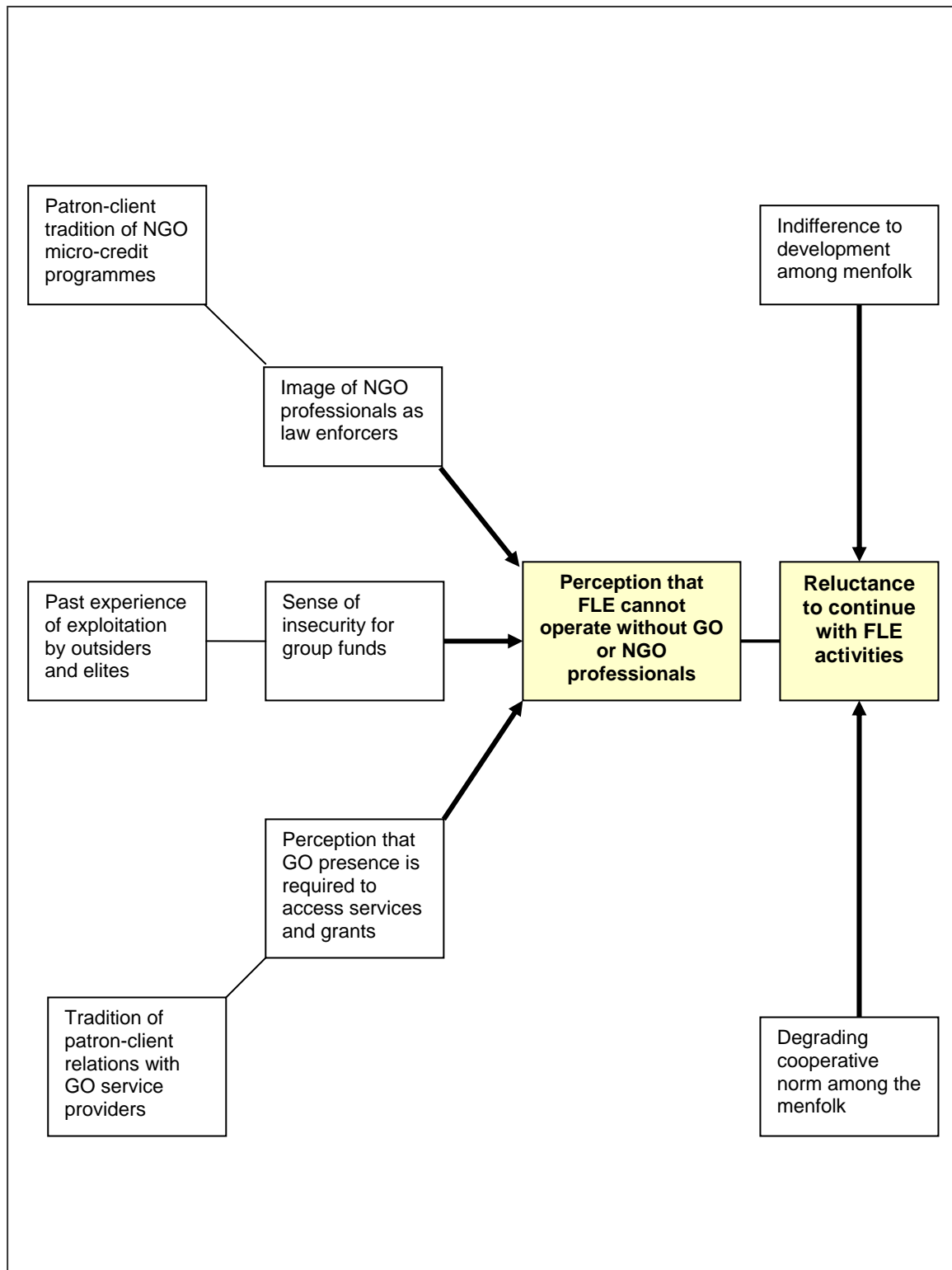
Figure 4.4 Community institutions affecting the legitimacy of the FLE to the rural people

They informed that when the staff remains present, the group members become sincere in paying their savings-credit dues. Otherwise, they tend to procrastinate or dilly-dally. The dependency mentality of the rural people becomes evident through the following statements made by the FLE group members.

> Q. Why are meetings not going on in your area? Aren't the leaders doing anything about it?
> Response of farmer leader: The people do not listen to us. If the DAE or NGO workers are present they feel encouraged. Otherwise, they don't come ….. (Conversation, FLE group leader, FLE site 1)
> ---
> Q. Why aren't the activities of FLE going on in your village?
> Response of farmer leader: There is no contact from the *office* (meaning the implementing agencies). They used to come before but now do not come. They do not tell us that there is meeting and you have to go.
>
> Q. Why do you need outside people? Why can't you do it by yourself?
> Response of group members: For example, today you have come [Indicating the interviewer]. We feel encouraged if people like you come. We think FLE will no longer continue since no *office* people come…If BS or NGO worker would come, we would also come…… We already have the office (ESC). Now if the government people come then the meeting will resume. Everybody will come again ….. (Focus Group, FLE site 2)

This study revealed that this attitude of dependency is embedded in the tradition of patron-client relationships between the villagers and the outside professionals. Several manifestations of this relationship were identified. First, traditionally the rural people in the communities are not used to the concept that group-based micro-credit activities could operate without professional workers. In most of the villages where the FLE project was implemented, there were numerous other micro-credit groups operated by various NGOs. These micro-credit programmes have been operating for a long period of time, in some cases, for several decades. The common practice in such groups is that the professionals strictly control the savings-credit tasks such as providing and recovering the loans. The control is so intense that sometimes the defaulters who fail to return NGO loans are even taken to court. Over time, this has formed a culture in which the image of the outside professionals is that they are the rulers or law enforcers. No example was found in any community that the micro-credit groups were being run and managed by the villagers themselves.

Given this, the micro-credit procedures in the FLE project failed to conform to the already institutionalised tradition of organising micro-credit groups in which application of coercive forces by outside professionals is a norm. All groups interviewed in this study believed that their groups failed to survive because there was no coercion or control by professional staff. In making this argument, the rural people, in most instances, tended to compare their groups with the existing micro-credit traditions of the various NGOs. Such comparisons manifested a lack of institutional legitimacy of the micro-credit element of the FLE model. During focus group discussion, a FLE group leader explained this in the following way,

> If outsiders come, recovering loan becomes easier. Everybody becomes alert or agile when outside people are present. Now [post-project], many members often skip instalments; sometimes gives one instalment and then takes a long pause…..This is because there is no *tagada* (pressure). We see that those who take loan from BRAC, ASA (name of NGOs) are very sincere in paying their instalments. This is because there is always outside pressure.

In addition, the rural people viewed the continuous presence of the government staff as an essential requisite to keep up confidence among the villagers about the future prospect of the FLE project. For example, many groups perceived that the presence of BSs was necessary to build confidence that the FLE was a "government programme" and thus it has a future prospect of receiving support from the various service providers. The reason for such belief was based on their past experiences that if government people are involved it becomes easier for them to access the grants or subsidies provided during the period of crisis, which otherwise are difficult to access. For example, some women members informed that on several occasions, they received relief materials (e.g. rice or money) from the BSs during the period of seasonal floods. Several incidents of such informal patron-client linkage were found in this study.

Furthermore, the people in some communities had been cheated in the past by external agencies, particularly by some NGOs and immoral rural elites. For example, some NGOs organised savings-credit groups with the villagers in the past but eventually ran away with the group funds. Being mostly illiterate and poor, the group members could not do anything and thus never got their money back. The presence of outside professionals, particularly of government employees, was

perceived to be necessary to provide confidence and a sense of security among the villagers about the FLE activities. The following conversations with a farmer promoter (FP) and a BS reflect these feelings.

> Q. Do you think it is possible for the rural people to run this project (FLE) without the help of the field agents?
> FP: Well, we might…but I think their [field agents'] role is very important. If they retreat from the scene, the common members will lose enthusiasm.
>
> Q. Why should they feel so? The promoters and group leaders can give leadership. Can't they?
> FP: It is a very difficult thing to explain. People are not used to this. Without the presence of field agents, the whole thing might lose importance. We are here. We play our roles but we are not enough.
>
> Q. Why do people think that they need outside people? What is your observation about it?
> BS: There is a trend among the villagers of dishonest and opportunistic behaviour…that's why there is need for continuous monitoring [by professional staff]…..many NGOs in the past formed group here [in this village], developed funds and then ran away with farmers' money. For this reason, farmers' do not want to form groups. When we remain present, they get a faith that government people are here. So, there won't be any problem.

In addition to the culture of dependency, the **weakening tradition of cooperation** among the villagers was found to be a reason why the village groups were unable to sustain themselves. The rural people informed that the people in their villages are increasingly losing the traditional norms of cooperation that used to prevail in the past. Instead, the villagers have become more hostile towards each other and conflict and jealousy have become common phenomena. This was also noticed by the fieldworkers. For example, one of the BS stated that

> The farmers do not want to get organised by themselves because they have lack of self-confidence, they have hostile attitude towards each other. Today this is a common scenario in all spheres of rural life.

The extent of traditional norms of cooperation, however, varies according to gender. The rural people and the fieldworkers informed that the norm of cooperation is still quite prominent among women, compared to men. One important reason for this is the informal exchange among the rural women

(particularly among those who are from resource-poor households) in the villages. As the villages are densely populated[21], women from one household often are acquainted with the women from the neighbouring household. On many occasions, these women exchange various kinds of household commodities such as rice, kerosene, and even small financial loans. This helps the families to overcome many seasonal crises. Furthermore, the mobility of women is very low, compared to the men. This is because of the traditional norms of division of labour. According to this norm, men generally take care of activities outside the household, for example, farming. Women, on the contrary, take care of activities inside the house, for example, cooking and taking care of children. Some interviewees, however, told that women are breaking out of the traditional *purdah* system (Muslim religious norm) and increasingly appearing to be involved in activities outside their households. According to a member of the project staff,

> Those days are gone, as it seems. Now our women are involved in many activities outside their households. Now it seems like we have left those traditions long before. They are the stories of the past … (FLE project staff)

Despite this cultural shift, however, still the mobility of the women is limited within the villages, not to urban areas. Reportedly, few women in the villages have visited the nearby *Upazilla* towns, located within a 2-3 km radius. This limited mobility allows the women to have more frequent interaction with each other. Most often, whenever they have some free time, women from neighbouring households gather together, gossip and pass their leisure time.

This study found that this traditional norm of cooperation among rural women appeared to be an important reason why it was possible for some of the female groups to survive in the longer term. The women group members interviewed in this study believed that due to this, they found it relatively easier to manage their groups, compared to the men. Particularly, the past habit of financial exchange was argued to be an important reason for the smooth operation of the savings-credit activities within the female groups. Some data-bits from a cross-section of interviews are presented below to describe this in the interviewees' own words.

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[21] For example, 50-60 households living contiguously where one house is physically connected to the neighbouring one (personal observation)

Q. Why are the female groups still active while the males have vanished?
Female member: Actually, these are nothing new to us. We have been always doing these. All our group members know each other. We have always exchanged this and that. So this is not a problem for us. We also have conflicts among us but we are more cooperative to each other compared to our males (laughing, sarcasm)…… (Female group member, FLE site)

Q. Why are the male groups not doing as well as you?
Group Leader (female): …… We are not so sure why they are not doing well but we can understand that they do not have unity. This is always a problem. They (males) cannot work together like us.

Q. Why are your groups not working? What's wrong?
Group leader (male): Can you tell me, who the poorest are in Bangladesh? They are the farmers. We are always being exploited by the elites. The reason is we have no power. But we are also responsible for this. We are not united. It is a *cultural* thing. If I am in danger, nobody (referring to fellow villagers) will come forward to help me out. Instead, they will try to put me into more danger.

In addition to the above, a number of interviewees informed that the viability of the FLE groups was negatively affected by the day-to-day lifestyle of the menfolk. The men in the villages are usually **indifferent towards development activities**. Quite often they are seen spending time chatting with their neighbour, gossiping in local tea stalls, smoking *bidis*[22], and chewing *paans*[23] or just sitting around; rather than utilising the time for some income-generation activities. According to some NGO and DAE workers who have long been working in those communities, the reason for such indifference was their low demand for material well-being. Despite poverty, they are content with whatever little resources they have. In an interviewee's account, their demand is limited to "earning the day's meal". In contrast to the men, however, the women are generally more hard working and have a higher propensity to participate in development activities. This is because of their changing attitude that has been occurring during the last couple of decades (also discussed in earlier paragraphs). The women now want to be financially independent and emulate the men. This is a reason why it was possible for some of the female groups to sustain the FLE activities, compared to the males.

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[22] Iindigenous cigarette
[23] Betel leaf, found to be widely used by people in the study area

4.4.2 Community culture, perverse incentives, and FLE non-sustainability

Two important factors were identified in the history and traditions of the communities that created perverse incentives for them to continue with FLE activities. These are: (i) the legacy of dole-out, and (ii) the legacy of perverse loan culture.

4.4.2.1   The legacy of dole-out

This study revealed that one important reason why many FLE groups failed to become sustainable was related to the long-existing dole-out culture in the communities. Traditionally, rural people in these areas have received incentives from external agencies to participate in their projects/programmes. For example, to participate in a training session organised by a development agency, farmers get incentives like umbrellas, dining allowances, bags, and sometimes direct cash. Similarly, to participate in an extension demonstration organised by DAE, the farmer concerned receives free inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, and sometimes even money. Over time, this has grown as a habit of the people to actively seek for these opportunities whenever any development project is undertaken. Therefore, in most FLE groups, the attention of members was directed more towards the free goods attached to the project.

The dole-out culture was also observed in the few FLE female groups that sustained their activities during the post-project period. For example, some female group leaders expressed a desire to receive some grants in order to be able to continue with their group. Interviews revealed that this was related to their past experiences with various donor-supported projects. The women have learned that most development projects in Bangladesh are supported through donor aid and that development agencies need their participation to make the projects successful. They also believe that external agencies use rural people to achieve their own agenda, rather than a genuine commitment to help the poor. As a woman FLE group leader stated,

> …………We know this project money comes from the Philippines government………we understand that after discussing with us you (researcher) will have meeting with the foreigners. Give us a project. If you

> do not give, how do we survive? Everybody searches for the poor (to implement project) but nobody looks after them. Give us TK 20000 "we will run your group" ….. (Female group leader in Focus Group Discussion)

Interviews also revealed that the villagers have learned from their past experiences that once the funding of a development project is completed, the external agencies do not come back to monitor what is left in the community. Therefore, the villagers have also developed an understanding, similar to those of the DAE and the NGO, that "project finished means work finished". In the case of the FLE, an NGO interviewee recalled the manifestation of this habit of the villagers in the following way.

> …..we did a closing ceremony [of ASIRP-FLE project] in … (name of town). It was a huge programme. The PD (Project Director) came, others also came. There was a huge arrangement of food and drinks. The FPs also came. When it was declared there (in town) that the project is closed, it became closed here (villages) as well. Nobody told [in the closing ceremony] that the activities will stop but it was observed that as soon as the closing declaration was given, the groups also slowly started dying. ….Not only us but also our farmers have become habituated in this way….. The farmers' also know now that as long as the project continues, works will continue…. (NGO manager)

4.4.2.2   The legacy of perverse loan culture

Among the cultural features identified in this study that were associated with the poor sustainability of the FLE practices within the communities, the perverse loan culture or borrowing habit was found to be an important one. It is defined as a dysfunctional habit of rural people to take out repeated loans, use the money for an unintended purpose and not repaying the loan.

The researcher found that it is a custom or habit of the rural people not to return loan money and this habit manifests even in the case of informal exchange of loans among villagers. The lenders often find it difficult to recover the loan from the borrowers. Due to this, savings-credit groups formed by villagers themselves (not by outside agencies) also collapsed in the past.

> …..We formed a similar group (similar to an FLE group) in our *haat*
> (village market). We continued for some time with the weekly savings-
> credit. It was going on fine until the conflict began. Some members did not
> return the loan money. The *samitee* broke down…this is the *habit* of poor
> people. When they need money they will come to you and say sweet
> words, brother, please help me I will honestly return your money but when
> the time of repayment comes the sweet face turns ugly. If you put
> pressure, the person would say, "I will not return your money, do whatever
> you can do". Now you see this is what you get in return for your kindness
> ….. (Conversation, FLE group Secretary).

Interviews revealed that one important root of the perverse borrowing habit of
community people was associated with their involvement in the past and
contemporary micro-credit programmes of various NGOs, which are numerous in
the FLE communities. Reportedly, due to prolonged interventions by NGO micro-
credit programmes, a perverse "loan culture" has developed among the villagers.
Out of poor economic conditions, often the poor villagers take loans from various
NGOs and spend the money for unintended purposes such as buying food,
shopping or recreation. On some occasions, despite intentions to invest the money
for income generation, they fail to do so because of unfavourable investment
opportunities. In most cases, therefore, the borrowers fail to return the loan money
taken from the NGO programmes. Finding no alternative, the poor villagers then
begin selling household assets and property to repay the NGO loan. Thus, the poor
become even poorer, take one loan after another and thus, enter into a vicious
cycle of loans (Figure 4.5).

According to some farmer interviewees, this dysfunctional borrowing-culture was
also manifested in the FLE groups. Many of the poor members who failed to return
the loan money were also involved with other NGO micro-credit groups or were
previously involved with such programmes. Many of them took loans from the FLE
group funds for income-generation activities but eventually used the money for
repaying their previous loans taken from other NGOs. Being unable to repay their
FLE group loans, many members stopped attending group activities, thus leading
to a collapse of the groups. The following statement by a group leader during a
focus group discussion captures this norm.

> ……People always want loans because they are very needy. Sometimes
> when they take loan they go to the market and do some shopping or go to
> the cinema. It has become a habit of the poor. They take loans after loans

and use the money from one source to repay the money taken from another source. There is a rule in NGO that if a member pays back a certain amount of the dues he/she can take more loans. There is a tendency among the people who think if they can somehow manage to pay back 5-7 instalments then they can again take TK 10000 loan. So, the person keeps on taking loans and ultimately enters into a vicious cycle of loan. The end result is he/she loses everything and turns out to be a beggar or a day labourer. Many of the FLE members also possessed this kind of mentality. They thought FLE would work the same way as NGO groups ….. (Focus Group, site 1)
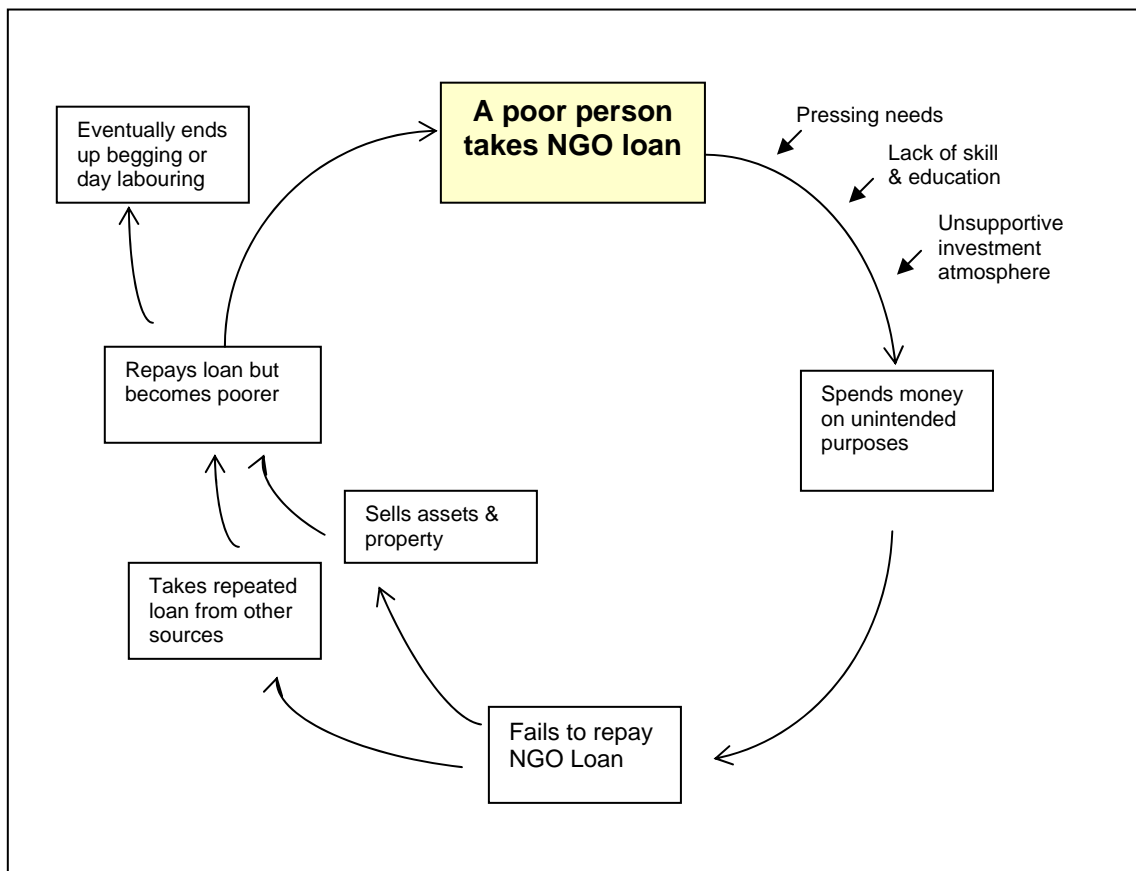
Figure 4.5: Vicious cycle of perverse borrowing habits or loan culture among the poor villagers (source: focus group discussion, this study)

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the contextual factors/conditions that influenced the non-sustainability of the FLE system are presented. Based on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, the analysis involved the institutional as well as the material resources in the operational context of the project. Institutions were analysed as sources of legitimacy of the FLE model and as sources of incentives for the DAE, the NGO, and the rural people who were to sustain the FLE project, following the period of donor withdrawal.

The results suggest that the key reform principles underlying the FLE model lacked institutional legitimacy to the extension agencies and the rural people. The manifestations of such legitimacy, however, differed among the three groups of actors. This lack of legitimacy negatively affected the performance and sustainability prospects of the system.

From the perspective of the DAE, the FLE lacked legitimacy for four major reasons: (i) the rationale or purpose of the project was undesirable according to the technocratic definitions of extension practiced by the DAE (ii) the concept of working with the poor rural people in FLE did not match with the elitist norms of the DAE employees, (iii) the concept of partnering with the NGOs was perceived as detrimental by the DAE, and (iv) the demand-led principle of the FLE was not compatible with the unfavourable context of policy-in-practice both within and outside the DAE. From the perspective of the NGO, the FLE project lacked legitimacy for two major reasons: (i) The logic of empowering the rural poor in the FLE did not conform to the market-orientation or profit-making values of the NGO and (ii) the concept of demand-led extension did not match with the context of policy-in-practice. At the community level, the FLE lacked cultural legitimacy due to the traditions of patron-client relationships between the rural people and the outside agencies, the weakening of traditional cooperation, and the indifference among the rural people towards development.

The performance and sustainability prospect of the FLE project was also negatively affected by the dysfunctional institutional elements in its operating

context. These dysfunctional elements created perverse incentives for the DAE, the NGO, and the rural people who were to implement and sustain the project. The perverse incentives for the DAE and the NGO originated from their internal working climates as well as from the broader context of donor-recipient relationships. At the village level, the legacy of dole-out and the perverse loan culture were found to create negative incentives for the rural people.

In addition to the institutional context, the scarcity of financial and human resources of the DAE and the NGO negatively affected their ability to support the FLE project both during and after the project implementation period. In the next Chapter, the findings relating to the implementation performance of the case study project are presented.

Chapter 5

Project implementation performance

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the results concerning the relationships between the implementation performance of the FLE project and its sustainability are presented. Implementation performance entailed analysis of the ability of the FLE project to produce the outputs and outcomes as expected by the stakeholders, which in this study were the DAE, the NGO, and the rural people involved with the project. The results in this Chapter are organised into three sections. The first section describes the expected outputs and outcomes of the FLE project from the project implementers' point of view. The second section describes the performance of the FLE project and its role in garnering support from the extension agencies. The third section describes the performance of the project and its role in generating support from the rural people.

5.2 Expected outputs and outcomes of the FLE project

As described in Chapter 3, the FLE was an organised initiative to develop the capacity of the rural people to undertake their own development activities. To this end, the project aimed to develop men and women farmer extensionists called the *farmer promoters*. In addition, an attempt was made in the project to develop village groups capable of resolving their own development problems by undertaking appropriate initiatives without assistance from the professional extension workers. Therefore, the farmer extensionists and their groups were the "finished products" or "outputs" of the investments made in the FLE project. Interviews with the project staff concerned suggested that through the production of these outputs, the FLE expected to achieve a number of outcomes. These are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Outputs and outcomes of FLE project as expected by stakeholders

Expected outputs	Expected outcomes or impact from outputs
Development of male and female farmer extensionists who would be: • Able to contact various ESPs (especially those outside the LAFT) according to the need or problem of the farmer groups they belong to. • Able to demand extension services from the DAE, the NGO and the other ESPs and bring appropriate extension services back to the group and share the extension support with the fellow farmer members • Able to provide various advisory supports to the group members • Able to undertake and carry out technology demonstration activities in own field	***For the ESPs***: Opportunity for DAE and other ESPs to provide demand-based extension service as enunciated by the farmers; reduction in service load of DAE extension workers ***For farmers:*** Improvement in farmers' access to extension services, which suit their needs and conditions leading to improvement in their livelihood
Development of community groups that would be: • Able to operate on their own; the group leaders would be able to manage their groups in the absence of BSs and NGO workers • Able to organise group meetings, develop extension plans and undertake their extension and development activities without assistance from the professional extension workers • Able to accumulate a savings fund and recycle the fund among members for income generation activities	***For the ESPs***: Reduction in workload of DAE; greater area coverage by having contact with more farmers at one time by the DAE field agents; technology transfer at a faster rate ***For farmers:*** Improvement of farmers' livelihood through improved extension services that suit farmers' needs and conditions; easy access to credit for undertaking income generation activities (IGA); increase in farmers' income by undertaking IGA using group fund as loan

In regard to the development of the farmer promoters, it was expected that the promoters, after having received their formal training and facilitation by the project staff, would be able to contact the various ESPs including the DAE and the NGO as per the needs of the group members, collect advice or other kinds of extension support from the ESPs, and then share the advice or support among the other members of their groups. In addition, in the event that there was a new agricultural technology available, the promoters would at first adopt the technology, try the technology in their own farms, demonstrate the technology to other farmers, and share experiences with fellow farmers so that the technology spreads in the community.

Concerning the development of village groups, it was expected that after the formal training and facilitation inputs provided through the project, the leaders within the groups would be able to manage their group activities without the assistance of the DAE and the NGO facilitators. For example, they would be able to organise meetings, develop extension plans, and accordingly undertake their own extension and development activities. In addition, the groups would be able to accumulate financial capital through their own savings. Once the savings grew into a large fund, the groups would be able to utilise this fund to provide financial loans to its members to undertake various income-generation activities.

Interviews with the project staff revealed that through the production of capable farmer promoters and community groups, it was expected that the project would achieve a number of outcomes or benefits both for the implementing agencies and the rural people (Table 5.1). For the implementing agencies, the outputs were expected to create an opportunity to provide demand-led extension services to the farmers. According to the interviewees, traditionally, it is the professional extension workers who have been providing extension support to the rural people, regardless of whether such support is actually required by the latter. The FLE was organised with the logic that the impact of extension would continue to be limited if the services did not match with the needs and conditions of the farmers. This was a problem in the previous Training and Visit (T&V) system where the technologies were supply-driven rather than demand-driven.

The interviewees further informed that due to its supply-driven nature, the T&V failed to make impacts on farmers' livelihood. Therefore, FLE was expected to break out of the traditional mode of supply-driven technology transfer. From the DAE's perspective, it was expected that if the FPs and the groups could operate as desired, it would result in a reduction in the workload of the DAE Block Supervisors and enable the DAE to cover a larger area at one time. For example, if there were some active groups in the villages, the DAE fieldworkers would just visit those groups and spread the technologies through the groups, instead of contacting the individual farmers.

In addition to these expected outcomes for the implementing agencies, the FLE project was organised with an expectation to make better impacts on the livelihood

of rural people. The most important expectations were that through the capacity development of village groups and promoters, it would be possible to enhance the access of rural people to extension services provided by the various ESPs, including those of the DAE and the NGO. Availability of demand-based support and the adoption of the technologies provided by the various ESPs would improve the livelihood of the rural people. Moreover, it was expected that the group-based savings-credit would enable the rural people to undertake various income generation activities and thereby enhance their income.

5.3 Project implementation performance: perspectives of the implementing agencies

Interviews with the DAE and the NGO stakeholders at different levels and at different project sites revealed that the FLE project performed poorly in terms of the development of farmer promoters and village groups capable of undertaking extension activities (Figure 5.1). All interviewees mentioned that while in some villages, there was some significant demonstration of successes by the farmer promoters; in most villages the promoters failed to play their expected roles. In most cases, they failed to contact the various ESPs on their own initiative and draw on support services for their fellow group members. Some DAE interviewees complained that the FPs never even contacted them for any advice or assistance, although they were willing to provide support. One of them stated that,

> The FPs themselves did not have any desire or interest (*agroho*). So, I had given up. Even now [post-project period], I tell them (FPs) "if you want, I can introduce you to the ESPs and request them to give you training" but it is the farmers who are not interested.
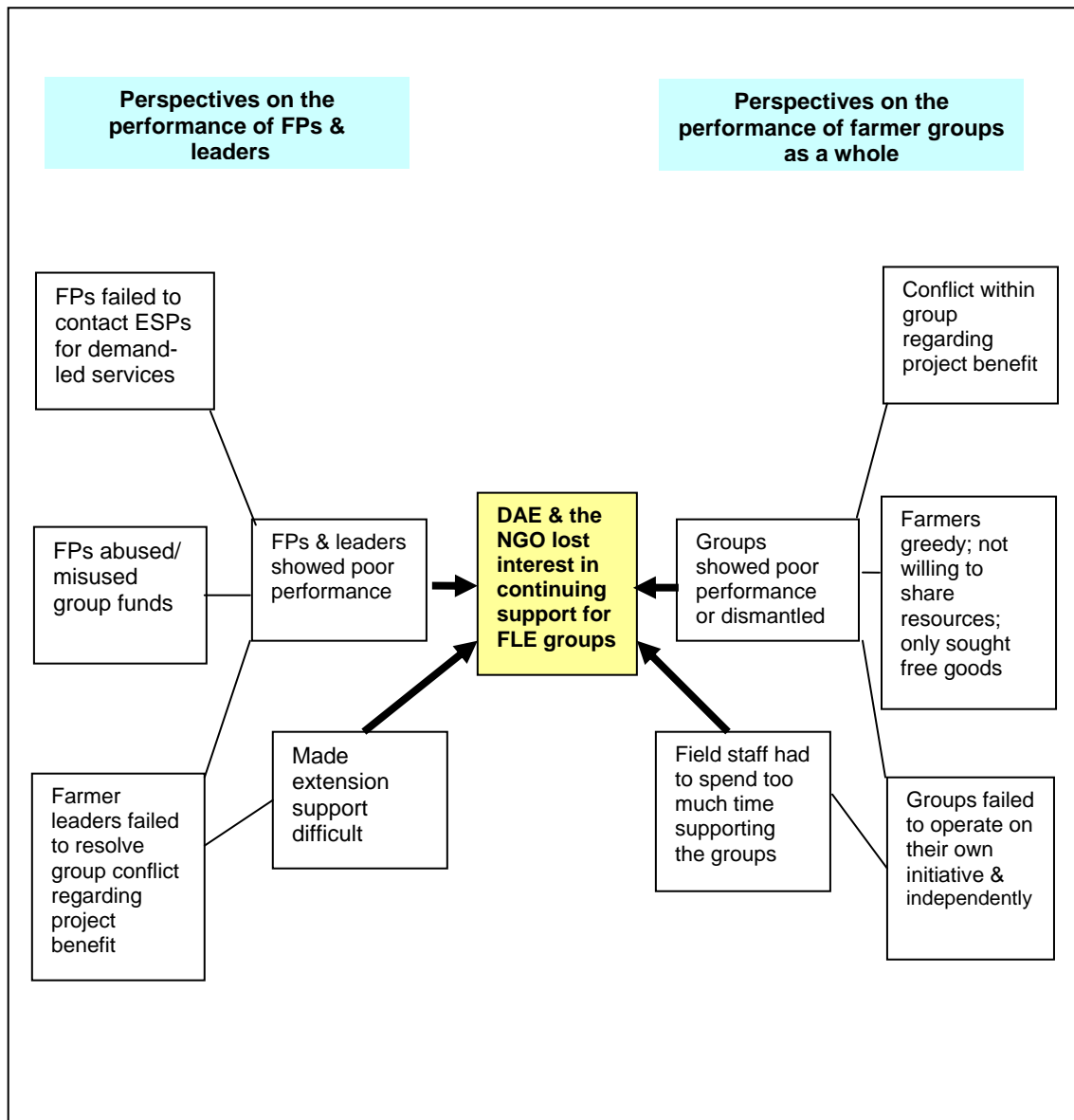
Figure 5.1 Perspectives of the implementing agencies about the performance of the FLE groups, FPs and leaders and its impact on their willingness to continue supporting the groups

Although no quantitative evidence was provided by the DAE and the NGO interviewees, some of the key informants from these agencies advised that on an average "two to three" promoters out of a total of 24 promoters in 12 groups per *Upazilla* were able to perform as expected.

Both the DAE and the NGO interviewees also mentioned some malpractice committed by the FPs. These indicated that while the FPs were trained to serve their fellow group members, they actually played just the opposite role. For example, the FPs were given some start-up loans from the project sources to undertake income-generation activities in their villages so that the other farmers could learn from these practices. However, after having received the start-up loans, most of them had "disappeared" or were at least never seen in their groups again. In most instances, it was not possible to recover the loans. Similarly, many of the FPs took loans from the FLE group funds but failed to return the money, despite repeated requests by the project staff. As a BS stated,

> Some leaders, after taking loan [from the group funds] are staying away…...Some FPs of the male groups have vanished (laughing, sarcasm). It is actually a big failure (laughing, sarcasm). It is like the "mustard that you will use to drive the ghosts away, has the ghost in itself"[1] …… (BS FLE site)

The DAE and the NGO interviewees informed that the village groups failed to operate on their own initiative and most of the time the DAE or NGO staff had to remain present to enable the groups to carry out their group meetings and savings-credit tasks. This was quite opposed to what was expected from the village groups. As a DAE interviewee informed,

> If the FLE groups could have operated [as expected] it would have been very beneficial for us. Actually it is not possible for the BSs to work without groups. If there are some groups in each village, we could just go to the groups. And if the ESC[2] was active, we could just go there to transfer the technology. It could facilitate rapid transfer of technologies but we have seen [in FLE] that the farmers cannot operate on their own …. (BS, FLE site)

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[1] Local proverb, meaning the solution of a problem itself causes a problem.
[2] Extension Service Centre – a house-like structure created in each village through the FLE project.

In addition, the DAE interviewees stated that the farmer leaders were unable to manage conflicts within their groups on their own initiative. Most frequently, they engaged in conflicts and there were "groups within groups". Such conflicts made it difficult for the DAE workers to undertake extension activities with the groups. The DAE interviewees mentioned that many villagers who participated in the FLE project did not realise at the beginning that it was the FPs who would be getting extension support from the ESPs. As the project progressed over time and the other farmers recognised that it was the FPs who were receiving benefits, they became upset. Some participant villagers began criticising and opposing the FP selected from another locality and demanded that a FP from their own locality be selected. These aspects of the groups were also considered as a significant failure of the FLE project and hence, there was a belief among the DAE stakeholders that the "FLE approach did not work". As one of the DAE interviewees stated,

> ….It was seen that when the FPs who are getting training repeatedly, getting demonstrations on new technologies…..then the jealousy started. Some started telling [us] "why did you make that person a FP, he does not know anything, our … (name of person)…...could be better" ….. (BS, FLE site)

Some DAE interviewees also criticised the farmer promoters and the villagers involved with the FLE project as "greedy". Quite contrary to their expectation that, after the training and facilitation provided through the project, the rural people would be able to mobilise their resources and undertake development activities, the rural people always expected the DAE employees to provide some free inputs or grants. A DAE interviewee expressed this gap between the expected performance of the FLE groups and their actual behaviour as follows.

> They are greedy and always want something. They do not pay attention to the utilisation of their own resources whatever they have and improve their own situation. Instead they always want something from us….We expected [in FLE] that they will make a plan by discussing with each other, say for example, 10 farmers want to cultivate a rice variety BR-11. We expected that they would discuss among themselves about how to cultivate the variety or how to find a good source of the seed and then ask us about it. But such types of initiatives did not come from them. They wanted that we give them the seeds for free. They expected the same thing from the NGO as well.

A number of the DAE interviewees also said that whenever they visited the groups and wanted to undertake any extension demonstration or training activity together with the groups, the group members used to gather quickly to show that their group was active. Through this kind of behaviour, the villagers expected to receive some grants from the BSs. However, soon after the BSs had left the village, all activities of the group would stop. The DAE interviewees perceived such deceptive behaviour of the rural people as a failure of the FLE project. As one of them stated,

> It was seen that when we did some demonstration then the group would become active; they used to gather in the hope that they would get something. All the time they expected to get something. When we could not give them something, they used to disappear ……. (BS, FLE site)

In terms of the accumulation of group funds and income generation through savings-credit, several DAE employees mentioned that it was a beneficial aspect of the FLE organisation. In the groups where the savings process worked, the rural people benefited, for they could use the savings for various income-generation activities and make a profit. However, most interviewees informed that such instances were found only among a few female groups and the male groups failed to demonstrate this ability. Since 50% of the groups formed through the project consisted solely of males, it served as an index of considerable failure in performance.

The DAE and the NGO interviewees also reported that the village groups were not able to manage their savings-credit operations and group meetings without their assistance. Therefore, they had to spend considerable time and efforts to keep the groups operational. Sometimes, they had to visit the groups during out-of-office hours such as early in the morning and sometimes in the evening. During the daytime, the farmers were out of their houses such as working in the crop fields. Therefore, in order to be able to organise a meeting with the farmers, they had to go to the villages either very early in the morning or at night. Moreover, they had to frequently supervise the farmers and remain present in their meetings.

This study revealed that a failure of the FLE project in developing quality FPs and village groups negatively affected the willingness of the DAE and the NGO to sustain the project. In addition to interviews, this was reinforced by the observation that in some communities where a few female FPs and groups demonstrated good performance (Box 5.1 and 5.2), the DAE workers were interacting with those groups even after the FLE project had formally ended. These observations indicated that had the FLE project produced quality FPs and village groups in most communities, it could have been able to garner support from the DAE.

Similarly, the performance of the FPs and the groups was also found to influence the behaviour of the FLE-NGO. In the communities where the few FLE groups performed well, the NGO workers were engaged in self-financing partnership activities with those groups. On the other hand, in the communities where the FLE groups failed to perform as expected, the NGO workers were unwilling to work with those groups. It has already been discussed in Chapter 4 that the NGO's plan was to undertake self-financing income-generation schemes with the FLE groups in order to sustain its support for FLE activities. In this partnership, the NGO would provide financial loans and other forms of agricultural inputs for the FLE members to undertake various income-generation activities. However, due to the poor performance of the FPs and the groups, the NGO workers perceived such interactions as risky and feared that if they had provided loans to those groups, it would have been difficult to recover the loans. As an NGO manager stated,

> In my area, the FLE was a total flop. I could undertake some self-financing activities with the FLE groups but I won't do that. It's very risky…..They did not even return the loan that was given to them during project implementation. Will they return my [organisation's] money? It would be difficult for me to recover loans from them.

Not only the DAE but also the other government agencies in the *Upazillas* also continued their interaction with the few female groups that performed well. One key reason for this was the performance of the groups in terms of development of larger group funds and their ability to demonstrate self-mobilised initiative undertaken by the FPs concerned. As a BS reported,

We contacted the Department of Youth Development and requested them to provide training to this group. Then they selected members and provided the training here. After the end of the course, they took a test examination of the participants. A total of 28 members qualified in the examination. The Department of Youth Development then provided the trainees with certificates. With the qualified members, the group themselves initiated a tailoring programme, without the help of outsiders. The group has approached the Social Welfare department for formal registration. As part of this registration procedure, one representative from the group had to go to Dhaka. This group has already got approval although there are some other formalities yet to be done. The Social Welfare department invited one representative from the group that is working well, has good savings fund. The department will hold a workshop with these participants and then give approval. We are very hopeful about the future of this group. Hope they will make more progress.

Box 5.1 Story of an FLE group, widely perceived as "successful" by the DAE and the NGO stakeholders

This is the story of a female group that was formed on the 4th of March 2002 through the FLE support. They started with only 15 members that increased eventually to 25 in 2004. More and more women from the neighbouring area are expressing their willingness to join the group. The group holds regular meetings. In January 2005, they held their 162nd meeting. The savings and credit function is also going on very smoothly. The group has been able to develop a fund of over TK. 100,000, a reasonably big amount for the women coming from poor families in the Bangladesh context[3]. Furthermore, many members in the group have taken loan from the group fund and undertaken various income-generating activities. The savings of individual members in the group range from TK. 1200-8000. They have also participated in a number of training programmes organised by various external agencies. The women are regularly participating in the weekly meetings and discussing not only savings and credit but also a wide variety of issues relating to agriculture. The group members informed that they have been involved with a number of projects with the FLE-NGO such as goat rearing and beef fattening. Through FLE project assistance they also undertook poultry rearing and pigeon rearing projects with local ESPs and participated in the health and sanitation programmes offered by the various government agencies. The group has developed their own annual plan of action and thereby taken attempts to establish contacts with the local ESPs. The FPs in the female groups are very active and enthusiastic as well. They have taken initiatives to link the groups with the local ESPs (Box 5.2).

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[3] For example, a day labourer earns at the best TK 50-80 for a whole day's labour; international conversion is 1USD = 75 to 80 TK.

BOX 5.2 Story of a FP widely perceived as "successful" by the DAE and the NGO stakeholders

Nurunnahar (pseudonym), a woman in her 30s, is the FP of an FLE female group. She has 10 years of schooling and worked in the NFP (Non-formal Education Programme) of BRAC (an NGO) from 86 to 95 i.e. for nine years. She comes from a family that has less than 2 acres of land. Her husband is a small businessman. The total number of family member is 7 that include two children. Her eldest son is a service man. Nurunnahar informed that she got involved with the FLE project by herself i.e. due to her own interest. She contacted the BS of her area and expressed her willingness to serve as a FP.

In 2003-04 i.e. during the last year of the FLE project, Nurunnahar adopted the production of African Catfish in homestead ponds. She got the technology by contacting the Department of Fisheries (DOF). She cultured the fish in a small pond in her own land and made profit. She used the fish for household consumption as well. However, she later found that the technology was not suitable for this area, as it gets flooded during the monsoon. She informed that during the last monsoon the ponds got flooded and many of the catfish got out of the ponds into the open water body. She decided neither to do it again nor to suggest other members to do that. Nurunnahar also participated in the plantation of fruit trees on the homestead. She believes that this is very useful. Some other members also adopted the same technology. Nurunnahar mentioned that the members of the groups took beef-fattening project through partnership with the FLE-NGO. However, her and other members' observation was that the project was not much help to them as the duration of the project was only six months. In six months, they made some profit but it was very minimal compared to the time and labour they had to invest. During interview, Nurunnahar informed she was now trying to convince the NGO fieldworker concerned about a cow-rearing project, instead of a beef-fattening project. She told the NGO staff that they were not interested in beef fattening any more. She discussed it in a group meeting and found that the members also had the same opinion. They told the fieldworkers that a cow-rearing project would be more beneficial for them. The BS was trying to contact the local livestock department to explore how the demand of the group could be fulfilled.

Nurunnahar, however, was not relying solely on the DAE and the NGO workers. Instead, to help the group, she herself contacted a local privately owned dairy farm in a nearby area. She submitted an application to the farm and got positive commitment from the authority. The firm authority told her they would supply an improved variety of cows to the groups on condition that they would sell the milk to the farm instead of selling on the open market. They also told Nurunnahar that the profit of the project would be shared into three parts. The two parts would be given to the farmer for feeding the cow and providing labour and the third portion would go to the farm. In one year's time, however, the farmer would be the owner of the cow. Nurunnahar discussed this among the group members and found that many of them were interested. She also contacted the Department of Youth Development in the *Upazilla* town. The Department authorities told her they would consider her appeal. However, she found that the cooperation was not so encouraging but she was not ready to give up. Nurunnahar also went to the capital city in Dhaka to attend a training course on behalf of her group on handicrafts and tailoring. She also contacted the Department of Family Affairs to learn about how to improve the health and nutrition of children in the family. She reported that she also requested some credit from the department, as the interest rate was low compared to other sources.

5.4 Project implementation performance: perspective of rural people

Like the implementing agencies, people of the rural communities also considered that the FLE performed poorly in producing the expected outputs and outcomes (Figure 5.2). However, while the DAE and the NGO interviewees reported that the promoters, in most cases, failed to perform their expected roles, interviews with the promoters revealed a slightly different perspective. A number of the promoters said that although they made need-based extension plans and contacted various extension service providers (ESPs) as per the plans, the ESPs failed to provide the requisite support. This was manifested in several project areas and both male and female promoters considered this as a serious failure of the project. The promoters informed that during the various workshops and training sessions of the FLE project, different ESPs assured the promoters that they would be given all kinds of cooperation whenever they asked for such assistance. In reality, however, the service providers repeatedly failed to keep their promises.

The FPs interviewees in this study expressed their discontent on this issue and viewed such incidences as "harassment" and "waste of their time and efforts". Worse still, on several occasions, the government ESPs concerned asked for bribes from the FPs in order to be able to provide services. Many examples of such instances were provided by the farmer promoters, which indicated that the FLE project failed to achieve the goal of providing demand-led services to the farmers. All FPs and group leaders interviewed in this study reported that this was an important reason for the disbanding of their groups. A number of them argued that participation in the FLE project did not provide the benefits which the stakeholders had promised them. A promoter stated his bitter experiences as follows.

> There was 2-day training in X training centre [name]. The Sir's [external facilitators] told us "if you face any problem you could contact the various departments at *Upazilla* and District levels. They told you could go to BADC[4], livestock department, fisheries department, and you would

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[4] BADC (Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation) is a state-run corporation responsible for the production, multiplication and distribution of crop seeds, fertilisers, etc.

get assistance". We went to the departments and introduced ourselves by saying "we are the FPs of FLE group of the DAE, we need seeds". They told us "there is no seed". When we repeatedly insisted, they asked "What seed do you want?" We told "we need BR 29[5]". Then they replied "we don't have BR 29, we have BR 28". We told, "OK, give us 28 then". Then they told "You are late, BR 28 is finished, we have *Jagoron* 1[6]"…This is how they used to harass us. Sometimes, they asked for bribes too. Now, if we don't get any benefit by participating in a group then what is the meaning of doing all these?

Interviews also revealed that the promoters and the group leaders perceived the benefits as minimal compared to the effort they needed to invest in FLE activities such as the organisation of group meetings and maintaining contacts with the ESPs in the *Upazilla* towns, and managing the group-based savings-credit. Within the savings-credit process, loan recovery was perceived to be a very difficult, time-consuming and risky job (Box 5.3) since the group members were generally unwilling to repay loans without the application of force. A number of farmer leaders argued that since they were not receiving any salary for their services, it was not worth investing their time and risking conflicts with their fellow farmers in recovering loans. Instead, most male group leaders believed that they could better use their time for more productive activities such as farming. In several communities, therefore, the promoters and the leaders finally declined to provide their time for FLE activities. As a farmer commented,

> Our (group's) main problem is our leaders do not want to give time. They say "I do not take any salary; so why should I spend two hours here leaving my family responsibilities". It is true that the leaders have to pay more time, sometimes they have to go to the Bank. The common members just come and pay their instalments. It is because of the lack of willingness of our leaders to give time that our group is in a bad condition now ……. (FLE male group members)

In addition to the above, the findings of this study suggest that while the FLE was expected to enhance the access of farmers to DAE extension services, the farmers' had a different evaluation of the need for DAE services. A number of the interviewees said that the services (BS advice, information, and training) provided by the DAE were not attractive for farmers, particularly among the resource-poor farmers within the groups. The reason is that these farmers work as either

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[5] Name of high-yielding rice variety released by Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI)
[6] Name of another high-yielding rice variety
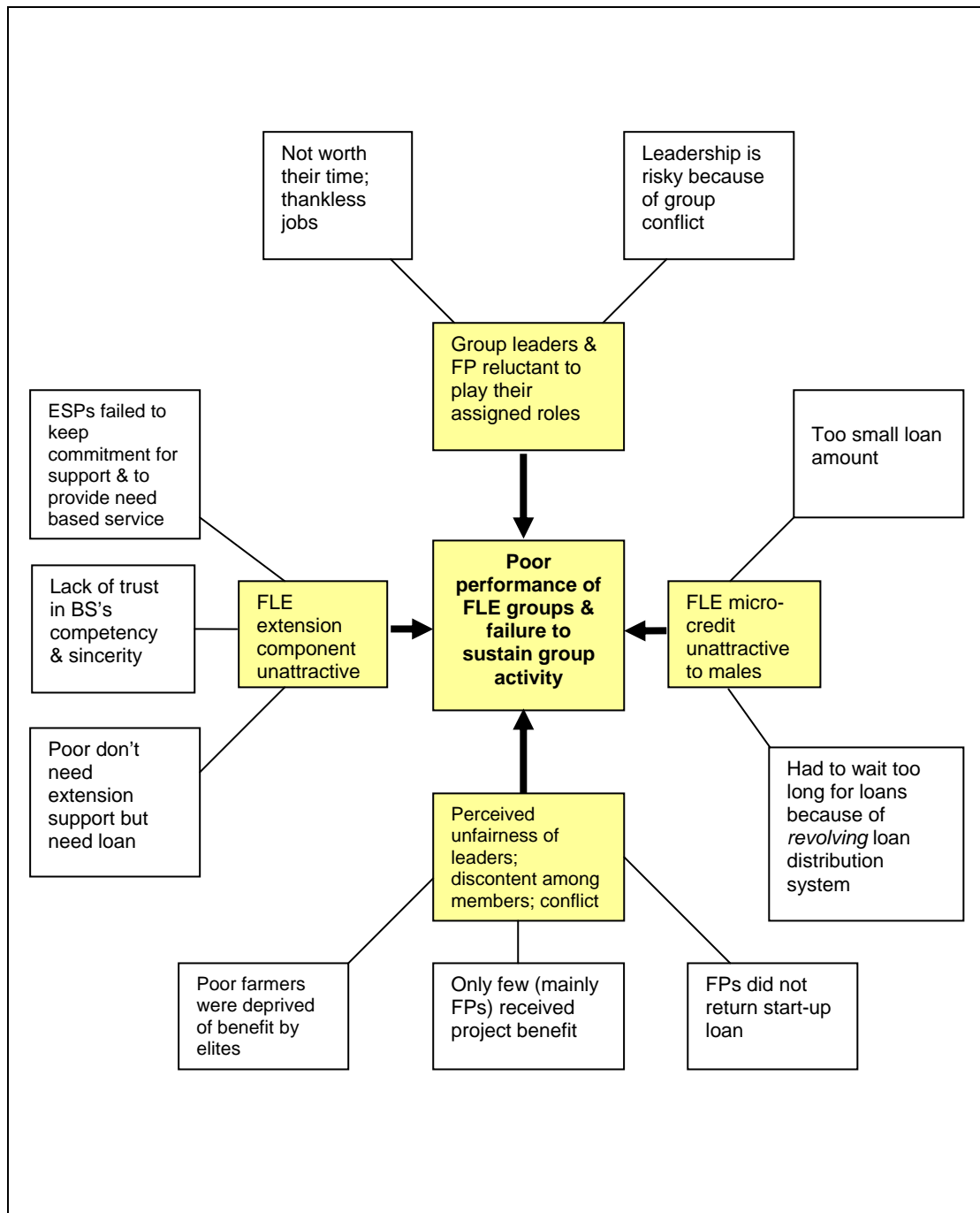
Figure 5.2 Perspective of group members about the outputs and/or outcome of FLE project and its effect on group performance and sustainability

day labourers in other farmers' fields or cultivate very small pieces of land and therefore agriculture plays a very minor role in their livelihood. Being financially insolvent, these farmers require ready cash to meet their pressing needs such as purchasing foods. Hence, in most cases, the poor members looked for financial loans.

The farmers also informed that the BSs involved in the FLE project had failed to play their assigned roles in contravention of their commitments during the group formation that they (BSs) would be available as and when needed by the farmers. The interviewees reported that many of the BSs were not even seen in the communities after one or two visits at the beginning of the project. On several occasions, despite repeated requests from the FPs, the BSs failed to show up and provide assistance to the groups. This lack of commitment of the BSs was perceived by the farmers as an important weakness of the FLE project. Such incidents indicate that farmer participation in FLE groups did not make access to DAE services any easier. Thus, it failed to generate any feeling among the farmers that "groups" were better a means to achieve BS advice and assistance.

Furthermore, the competency of the BSs in the respective FLE communities was perceived by the farmers to be "questionable". For example, some members of the failed FLE groups informed that the BSs sometimes come to them to learn about agricultural practices and that they (the farmers) have very little to learn from the BSs. They also stated that the only utility that the farmers expect from the BS is the free demonstration inputs and training remunerations. Furthermore, the FLE group members complained that the BSs were unfair in selecting farmers for extension demonstrations and training that were provided during the FLE project period. Instead, as the farmers informed, the BSs had preferred their personal acquaintances, most of whom were the rural elites, and in some instances misused the project fund. A common complaint from all the failed FLE groups was that most of the time the BSs remained absent during the project period. Contrary to this, the members of the few surviving female groups considered the respective BS as highly competent, sincere, trustworthy, and his advice and assistance as beneficial. This finding clearly established a relationship between the role that the individual DAE fieldworkers played during the project period and the success of the village groups.

In addition to the above, the number of rural people (within a group) receiving support services from the ESPs was important for the survival of the groups. The group members reported that while there were 15-25 members within a group, only a couple of members were able to receive benefits from the ESPs. For example, the support given through the project to undertake extension demonstrations in the villages went only to the FPs. Since the rest of the members within the groups did not receive any support, they became reluctant to participate in the group. Similarly, the "partnership loans" provided by the FLE-NGO, although considered by the farmers as important, were limited to only a couple of members. For example, in one case, the members of an FLE group made a list of 15 farmers who were interested in getting a loan from the NGO to undertake potato seed production activities. The NGO failed to provide loans to all of the enlisted members. Instead, only four members were given the potato loan. This caused resentment among the other members. Such examples were found in all communities and were important reasons for a lack of interest among the farmers to continue with the FLE activities.

The FLE group members also said that the failure to distribute external support on an equitable basis negatively affected the willingness of the rural people to remain in the FLE groups. For example, during the selection of farmers to participate in training or demonstration activities, the same farmers were repeatedly given opportunities and the others excluded. The interviewees also mentioned that this problem of unequal or unfair distribution of external support was observed not just within a group but also between groups. Among the four groups in a village, for example, one or two received more benefits than the rest. Some groups with more resource-poor farmers, for example, complained that while they had larger group funds, the external agencies favoured the other groups where the members and the leaders were relatively rich farmers.

As shown in Table 5.1, development of group funds for income generation of the rural people was an important expected output of the FLE project. The findings of this study suggest that this output was poorly produced by the FLE project. Out of 36 groups in one region, for example, only four female groups were able to demonstrate good performance in group fund development and revolving the fund among the members. According to the rural people, none of the male groups was able to equal this performance. On the contrary, in most male groups, the start-up

loan provided to the farmer promoters could not be recovered, leading to serious discontent and conflict within the groups (Box 5.3). In addition, there were serious irregularities in the payment of savings deposits by the farmers. Some very poor members could not even afford to pay TK 5 per week. Moreover, in a majority of the groups, it became difficult to recover loans from the borrower members.

Box 5.3 Poor implementation performance of the FLE project: Conflicts in the male groups

Story: The FP in the male group took the start up loan from the FLE project fund (which was later supposed to be a group fund) to establish an IGA (Income Generation Activity) on beef fattening. Reportedly, the person reared the beef, sold it in the local market and made some profit. As per conditions of the loan, the FP was supposed to return the base capital to the group fund to provide opportunities for the other members to rotationally get the same privilege. However, months passed by but the FP did not show any sign of returning the loan. The LAFT members (DAE and NGO fieldworkers) also requested the FP but he did not listen. Finding no other alternative, some of the group management committee members together went to the defaulter's residence, forcibly captured two of his bullocks and sold them on the local market. Although this mechanism resolved the immediate crisis, this incident eventually sparked a bitter reaction in the area. During the time of data collection, the interviewees reported that they were afraid of revenge because the FP was a powerful person. They were expecting intervention by the DAE and the NGO staff to resolve this issue.

This study revealed that the poor performance of the FLE project in terms of its expected goal of developing group funds had direct consequences for the survival of the village groups. In a few communities where the groups were able to accumulate bigger funds, revolve the funds among members for income-generation activities, the groups were able to continue operating even after the formal ending of the FLE project (Box 5.1). Interviewees from these few surviving groups showed that one major attraction to the members was the group loan and the associated financial benefits for the members.

The financial gains obtained through group savings-credit, although important, were not adequate to sustain the FLE groups. The valuation of the expected and the actual outputs from savings-credit was variable according to the gender of the participant farmers. While the females were very enthusiastic about this benefit, the males did not consider group savings-credit and the opportunity of obtaining

financial loans from FLE group funds as attractive. Given that most male groups failed to survive, this distinction appeared to be important.

Two reasons were given by the male members that made the group savings-credit unattractive to them. First, compared to the micro-credit programmes operated by various NGOs, it required a longer time to obtain a loan from an FLE group fund. According to some interviewees, this was because of the "rotational" system of loan distribution in the FLE groups. Since the size of the group fund was not large enough to provide loans to a large number of group members at a time, a member willing to borrow from the group fund had to wait until some of the earlier borrowers had repaid their loans. Sometimes, this delay was a couple of months. Compared to this, obtaining a loan from an NGO micro-credit programme was quicker. The second reason was that the amount of loan that an FLE group member could obtain was very small since the savings deposited per week were very low (hence, the group fund was small). Some interviewees reported that if a farmer who is a member of an NGO micro-credit group had a savings deposit of TK 200, the person could borrow TK 2000 against the deposit. It means the amount of loan was 10 times higher than the savings deposit.

In contrast to the men, the women FLE group members valued savings-credit for two important reasons. First, the women members had limited income-generation opportunities compared to the men. Moreover, unlike the men they have less mobility and hence fewer opportunities for getting involved in income-generating activities. Therefore, the group savings-credit provided opportunities for them to make some income, which did not require them to move outside their villages. Second, amid their preoccupations with household chores, they have some free time to invest. For example, although many of the women assist their husbands in various farming activities, they informed that such work is mainly seasonal and lasts for only a short period of time. Therefore, according to a woman group leader, the women generally spend their free time "just hanging around". The group savings-credit scheme thus provided an important opportunity for the women to use their free time and earn some money, which contributed to family income and children's education. A woman group leader stated,

> Most of our members come from medium to poor families who have 2-4 *done*[7] land. If we are in the group we get some benefits. Even if it is TK 5 or TK 10, it is useful for us. We can multiply the money. We are doing the group with this consideration. If, through our savings, the group fund increases, we can take loan…we need money for the education of our children. We do not have much scope of work. We think this can be a source of income for us. Our husbands are making separate income. Our income can help overcome the occasional family crisis such as children's' form-fill-up (for sitting in exam or enrolling in school)….. (Focus Group Discussion with FLE female group)

One important reason for the reluctance of many FLE members to continue participating in group saving-credit functions was that they considered the loan distribution system in FLE as unfair. Former members of some FLE groups that failed to survive mentioned that during the loan distribution process, their group leaders unfairly distributed loans to their friends and relatives in the group.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the implementation performance of the FLE project, as perceived by the stakeholders concerned, is analysed. Performance of the project was defined in terms of its ability to produce the outputs and outcomes that the stakeholders expected the project to produce.

In terms of the production of farmer promoters and village groups capable of operating on their own, the performance of the project was found to be poor by the DAE and the NGO stakeholders. Contrary to their expectations, the promoters demonstrated selfish behaviour, abused project funds for personal gains, and failed to bring extension services for their fellow members. The village groups also performed poorly in terms of their ability to develop financial capital, undertake extension and development activities, and manage conflicts without outside assistance. This failure was an important reason why the DAE and the NGO lost interest in supporting the FLE project.

The farmers also evaluated the outputs and outcomes of the FLE project as poor. The farmers perceived that the commitment given by the extension agencies that

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[7] Local unit of land measurement; 1 *Done* = 25 to 27 decimal; 100 decimal = 1 acre

the participation of the farmers in the FLE project would enhance their access to extension services was not fulfilled. Interestingly, although the FLE was organised with the expectation to improve farmers' access to DAE extension services, the farmers had little interest in the agency's services. The outcome from the group savings-credit was found to be of great attraction to the rural people. However, the valuation of savings-credit outputs was influenced by the gender of the group members, the comparative advantage of FLE savings-credit over the other NGO-supported micro-credit programmes, and the fairness of the loan distribution process. In addition, the costs of managing group savings-credit and the conflicts within groups were perceived by farmers as high compared to the returns. Because of this, many farmers preferred investing their time in otherwise more beneficial activities and thus negatively influenced the sustainability of the FLE model at the village level.

In the next chapter the design and management-related features of the FLE project that affected its sustainability are described.

Chapter 6

Organisational design and strategies

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results concerning the organisational design and management strategies of the case study project are presented. According to the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, this analysis involved four dimensions: (i) complexity of the FLE organisational structure and technology, (ii) mode of project implementation – whether integrated or parallel, (iii) stakeholder participation and ownership, and (iv) the learning process approach applied in the project.

6.2 Organisational complexity

Complexity was identified as an important feature of the FLE system, which had important implications for the performance and sustainability of the system. This complexity was manifested in a number of design principles of the FLE. First, the savings and credit tasks associated with the project were too complex for the rural people to operate. Second, the intention to combine technology transfer with group-based micro-credit resulted in the formation of heterogeneous village groups and involvement of multiple agencies leading to increased complexity. Third, the intention to provide demand-based services to the rural people required coordination among multiple extension agencies. These factors associated with complexity, the resulting problems, and their effects on system performance and sustainability are shown in Figure 6.1.

Factors creating complexity in FLE design	Problems due to complexity	Effect on performance & sustainability
Variable & irregular savings-credit; complex system of drawing & disbursing money	Computational problem; Monitoring & control difficult; High requirement of time	Reluctance of rural people to continue
Heterogeneity of group members		Collapse of groups
Combination of technology transfer with savings credit	Dissonant claims; Difficulty of reaching consensus; conflict	
Involvement of multiple agencies		Reluctance of extension agencies to continue
Demand-led extension services	High cost of coordination	

Figure 6.1 Sources of complexity in FLE design and its effect on system performance and sustainability

6.2.1 Savings-credit tasks

The investigator identified that the processes associated with the group-based savings and credit scheme in the FLE design was too complex. This was highlighted by a number of the respondents as a major reason for the non-viability of the community groups. A number of factors made the savings credit tasks highly complex for the rural people to manage.

First, there was no fixed amount of money that each member was required to pay. Thus, in most cases, the group members used to pay variable amounts of money. For example, while some members used to pay TK 10 per week, some other members in the same group used to pay TK 50 per week. This became even more complex because most members were extremely irregular in paying their dues. While some members used to pay their dues every week, some other relatively poor members could not afford to be so regular. A number of female group leaders commented that this made the calculation of profits for each member very difficult since they did not have the requisite level of education to be able to solve those computational problems. They suggested that it was one reason why the groups required the assistance of external agency professionals.

Second, many of the members who took out loans from the group fund would frequently fail to repay them, despite repeated requests. It required the leaders to spend considerable time and energy to recover the money, sometimes by visiting door to door.

Third, there was competition among the members to get a loan from the group fund. The same person, who took a loan, insisted that he/she be given another loan before repaying the previous loan. According to several group leaders, it became difficult for them to handle this chaos, especially in the absence of outside assistance.

Fourth, several female group leaders mentioned that they did not have the requisite skills to perform banking tasks[1] associated with the deposit and withdrawal of group

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[1] The project opened bank accounts in the nearby *Upazilla* towns for FLE groups to deposit and withdraw their savings.

savings. A number of both male and female group leaders informed that the process of depositing and withdrawing money from the bank was extremely time-taking and cumbersome. This was largely because the withdrawal of money, by group resolution, required the signature of the President, the Secretary and the Cashier. Quite often, when an urgent transaction had to be arranged, it was difficult to find all these three officials. As an FLE group leader stated:

> It is very difficult to play the role of leader. Depositing money and recovering it takes lot of time. On one occasion, I had to spend the whole day. One member suddenly rushed to my house and told he needs some loan. Now you see I could not help instantly. Withdrawing money required signature of the Secretary and the Cashier. So I had to run to the Secretary and the Cashier's houses. They were busy people, went to the field. I had to then go to the field to collect their signatures. After that when I went to the Bank there was a long queue. I had to wait a couple of hours there to withdraw the money. What is the meaning of taking so much trouble; these are thankless jobs ……. (FLE group leader in focus group discussion)

6.2.2 Combination of technology transfer and micro-credit

Unlike the traditional T&V model, the FLE design involved a combination of technology transfer and group-based micro-credit functions (see section 3.4.1.1). This combination, however, increased the level of complexity of the system. The technology transfer component required inclusion of some farmers (to serve as FPs) having reasonably large farm size so that their farms could be used for setting up extension demonstrations. The FPs also required having at least a basic level of education to read, write and perform basic arithmetic. The project also included other wealthier farmers in the groups, especially those prepared to donate lands on which to build the Extension Service Centres (ESCs). To operationalise the micro-credit component, on the other hand, the FLE included small and marginal farmers and the landless[2], most of whom were poor and illiterate. The heterogeneity resulting from the mix of a few wealthier, educated farmers along with the poor, illiterate farmers in the same group created a number of problems that undermined the viability of the groups.

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[2] Traditionally micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh are run by NGOs that involve community groups of landless and women. The micro-credit programmes of the FLE-NGO were the same. Therefore, the inclusion of micro-credit and an NGO in FLE design required inclusion of landless and women. Some of the micro-credit groups of the FLE-NGO were also re-designed to implement FLE.

First, because of the heterogeneity of the groups, it became difficult for members to reach consensus on an issue. For example, the relatively poor members were more interested in the loan process and had no interest in participating in other discussions. However, the group leaders, consisting mainly of the wealthier farmers, were reluctant to provide loans to the poor because they believed that the poorer members were incapable of repaying loans. This distributional problem resulted in serious discontent among the poorer members. During the project phase, outside facilitators helped the groups come to a consensus on issues but as the project was phased out and their inputs withdrawn, the group leaders found it increasingly difficult to reach consensus and manage conflict. Second, the inclusion of elite members within these groups provided the opportunity for these individuals to capture the bulk of project benefits. The poorer members in the groups did not have the power to challenge this misplaced exercise of privilege. This behaviour in turn led to the demise of the groups, as individuals who failed to benefit abandoned the groups.

6.2.3 Involvement of multiple agencies

The FLE model, by design, required coordination among multiple government and non-government agencies. This coordination was necessary not only between the partner organisations, that is, the DAE and the FLE-NGO but also between these two agencies and various other ESPs in the *Upazillas*. This was because the FLE model was based on the concept of providing demand-led services to the rural people. For example, in some communities, the FLE group members identified the need for irrigation water. Since neither the DAE nor the FLE-NGO had provision of such support, they had to coordinate with the Department of Irrigation and Water Resources to provide this service. According to several interviewees, such coordination was extremely difficult and time-consuming since there was no formal linkage between the DAE or the FLE-NGO and other departments. Therefore, the staff had to take personal initiatives to convince other stakeholders.

During the project period, this coordination used to take place through periodic workshops to which the various ESPs were invited by the DAE and NGO project staff. Those activities were being funded through the project sources. Sometimes, however, the DAE and the NGO project staff used to personally request various

government departments to provide support to the FLE groups. On the other hand, coordination between the DAE and the NGO staff used to take place mainly through two mechanisms. First, there was the formal coordination meeting every four months. Second, sometimes a DAE member would ask another member to make a joint visit to the village. On many occasions, DAE and NGO staff would visit each other's offices and discuss various tasks undertaken in the project.

After the termination of donor funding, it became difficult to keep the coordination committees active. The reasons were the perceived difficulty of coordination and the cost involved. Cost emerged as a serious problem because no stakeholders were interested in participating in coordination meetings without remuneration, a norm that has developed over time due to past donor-supported interventions (described in Chapter 4). Both DAE and NGO interviewees argued that since their organisation did not have enough money to cover the costs, it became difficult for them to continue arranging coordination meetings. Moreover, a number of interviewees argued that it was 'extremely difficult' and 'time consuming' to coordinate the other GO and NGO stakeholders. As a DAE officer commented,

> This is an enormous task to bring stakeholders to meeting. Nobody wants to come to meeting without any remuneration. It is a norm here. …we do not have resources to maintain such forums. Previously, there were some supports given through ASIRP to maintain the coordination meeting. Now there is no government budget for this… Some of us from DAE and the NGO have personally taken some initiatives but it is difficult for us to continue it in this way. We have other works to do …. (DAE *Upazilla* Officer, FLE).

6.3   Integrated versus parallel project implementation

The FLE demonstrated several features of a vertically[3] organised project, as opposed to a well-integrated one. These features were manifested in three major dimensions: (i) the creation of new project implementation committees, (ii) the use of remuneration and incentives in project implementation, and (iii) the introduction of parallel tasks or procedures. These features negatively affected the prospects of sustainability of the FLE system.

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[3] In this thesis the terms "parallel" and "vertical" are used synonymously.

6.3.1 Creation of new project implementation committees

In order to implement the FLE project, an autonomous hierarchy was created including officers and staff from the DAE and the NGO (see section 3.4.1.2 of Chapter 3). This hierarchy ran parallel to the existing hierarchy of the DAE. For instance, an Additional Director of DAE was assigned as the Project Director (PD) of FLE. In terms of administrative authority, this person was neither the head of the DAE nor the head of the Field Services Wing (FSW) of the DAE that was responsible for the implementation of the project. While creation of such parallel authority facilitated timely implementation of the project, it eventually affected the prospect for sustaining the FLE model within DAE. Not being in the top ladder of the DAE's hierarchy, the PD after the end of the project failed to provide requisite support towards the continuation of the FLE activities. During an interview one PD expressed the opinion that it was not within his authority to integrate the FLE model into the core activities of the DAE.

In addition to high level committees, the FLE implementation committees at the *Upazilla* level also demonstrated characteristics of parallel authority structure. For example, instead of selecting the *Upazilla* Agriculture Officers (UAOs) as the heads of these committees, the project opted for Additional Agricultural Officers (AAOs). Since by authority, the UAOs are the Heads of the DAE *Upazilla* level units, assigning authority of project implementation to AAOs manifested features of parallel structure in the FLE. Moreover, the project also created several new coordination committees only for FLE implementation, despite the pre-existence of a multi-stakeholder coordination committee in each *Upazilla* known as the *Upazilla* Agricultural Extension Coordination Committee (UAECC). The UAECCs were headed by the UAOs and located within the DAE office complexes through which the various government and NGO stakeholders in the respective *Upazillas* used to coordinate their extension activities.

There were several negative consequences of these parallel structures, some of which were manifested even during the lifetime of the project. First, bypassing the UAOs in the operation of the project created discontent and resistance in some cases. In some *Upazillas*, for example, the UAOs discouraged the BSs from participating in FLE activities and assigned other duties to them. It also resulted in a

breakdown of communication between the UAOs and the FLE project staff from the DAE and the NGO. Lack of support from the UAOs also made it difficult for the AAOs and the BSs to coordinate with other stakeholders in the *Upazillas* while attempting to provide demand-led services to the farmers. Also, not being integrated with the coordination system of the UAECC, the DAE officers took no interest in FLE coordination post-project.

6.3.2 Use of privileges in project implementation

Although the FLE project took a deliberate strategy of not providing monetary incentives to the stakeholders for their participation, some DAE and NGO staff did eventually receive remuneration (a lump-sum grant) for providing and attending in-country training programmes of the FLE. Moreover, some of the DAE officers and high ranking NGO executives were also sent to the Philippines for training on FLE. Although in-country and overseas training was part of the capacity building process, those who did not receive the remuneration or the opportunity to visit the Philippines became envious and showed reluctance to support the project, both during and after the implementation phase. As a BS reported,

> My UAO used to say, "You will stay in the office whole day and not go anywhere". I could understand he was angry. His argument was "I am the agriculture officer, the boss of the *Upazilla*, but I do not know about such a big thing [FLE activities] that is going on here, for which some people went to the Philippines!"

The FLE project also provided financial support to the DAE to purchase office accessories for the implementation of the project and to the NGO for hiring staff. This, however, created resentment because the DAE employees considered that the NGO was receiving more privileges from the donor agency compared to them. This was found to be one of the reasons why DAE failed to take ownership of the FLE. This issue is further elaborated in section 6.4.1.3 under "project negotiation".

6.3.3 Novel tasks or procedures

Creation of novel tasks or procedures that were parallel to the regular programmes of the extension agencies was a detrimental feature of the FLE design. This was manifested in the design of the savings-credit tasks. Although some of the previous

micro-credit groups of the FLE-NGO were integrated into the project, the savings-credit tasks of these groups were re-designed by introducing new procedures such as the concept of 'revolving fund'. According to this concept, the FLE groups were allowed to take control over their own group funds and revolve the money among their members for undertaking income-generation activities.

Interviews with the NGO employees at different levels revealed that these newly introduced micro-credit procedures of the FLE groups were parallel to the other micro-credit groups supported by the FLE-NGO as well as the other NGOs operating in the *Upazillas*. According to the interviewees, in the case of NGO micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh, it is the NGOs that handle financial matters for village groups. There are two major reasons why the NGOs prefer to do this. First, it gives greater security to the NGOs since it reduces the potential risk of borrowing members going bankrupt. Second, the group funds are used as collateral based on which the NGO provides further loans to the group members. Compared to this, the rural people involved with the FLE project were given full control over their group funds, according to the "farmer-led" principle of the project.

These new FLE micro-credit procedures made it difficult for the NGO to sustain its support for the FLE groups. Interviews further revealed that the newly introduced micro-credit procedures ran parallel not only to the NGO's regular programmes but also to the existing procedures of other financial institutions such as the banks. This made it difficult for the FLE groups to obtain financial loans from the banks. While explaining the reasons for his agency's inability to incorporate the FLE village groups into its regular micro-credit programmes, a top-level executive from the NGO stated,

> We cannot accept the revolving fund concept of the FLE groups because it is not financially viable for us. It is not just a problem for our organisation; any NGO in Bangladesh won't accept it, let alone the DAE who does not have credit programmes. If the farmers want to do that by themselves, they can do that. It is their business but whenever they would ask loan from any NGO or Bank, the agencies will ask for collateral. The groups have to hand over their savings. This is the system of NGO that this money will act as collateral so that we have some control…. (NGO Director)

6.4 Stakeholder participation and ownership

In this section the nature of stakeholder participation and local ownership as observed in the FLE project is described. Stakeholder participation and its effect on ownership of the project, was examined in three areas: (i) initiation of the project or expression of request, (ii) cost and/or resource-sharing, and (iii) negotiation between the donor and the recipients as well as their power/control over project implementation decisions and actions. For the sake of convenience, the findings are presented in two sections – the participation and ownership of the implementing agencies, and the participation and ownership of the rural people or beneficiaries.

6.4.1 Participation and ownership of implementing agencies

The participation and ownership of the implementing agencies was examined according to the phases and events in the lifecycle of the FLE project. The phases were divided into project initiation, implementation, and evaluation. This study revealed that the idea to undertake the FLE project was proposed by the implementing agencies. However, the parent ASIRP that supported the implementation of the FLE project originated from the donors. The FLE also involved a strategy of cost-sharing with the Government of Bangladesh. However, the implementing agencies had limited control over the project resources and the key implementation decisions. Further, many of the project implementation decisions were top-down in nature and poorly negotiated. These practices had several negative consequences for the performance and sustainability of the FLE project. In the following sections, these findings are elaborated.

6.4.1.1 Initiation of the project or reform

Regarding the question of the enunciation of request for the FLE project, the interviewees in this study informed that it was the high-level NGO executives and some of the top-level DAE officers who proposed to the donor agency to undertake the project. As some of the interviewees recalled, the idea of the project came when some of the DAE officers were visiting the IIRR (International Institute of Rural Reconstruction) in the Philippines as part of a training programme

commissioned through the ASIRP. It needs to be mentioned here that the IIRR is a global leader in the promotion of farmer-led concepts and practices in agricultural extension. Based on this, the FLE was incorporated into the ASIRP design as one of the outputs of the project.

Interviews revealed that the initial decision to undertake the project was finalised without consulting the various interest groups within the DAE, especially the Block Supervisors whose vested interests were potentially in conflict with the goals of the FLE. According to a DAE Head office source, the decision was finalised by a couple of high officials "during a coffee break" at an ASIRP workshop. Initially, therefore, there were enormous suspicion and resistance among the BSs who thought that they were going to be replaced by the farmer promoters. An important reason for this suspicion was the long-standing World Bank pressure on the DAE to downsize the number of BSs, who had been recruited in great numbers during the previous T&V era.

However, even though the idea of an FLE intervention was proposed by the top-level officials of the DAE and the NGO, the parent ASIRP project that supported implementation of the model, was a brainchild of the donors. Not only the ASIRP but also the predecessor ASSP, that is, the entire concept of reforming the T&V system in Bangladesh was highly donor-driven and there was little internal motivation within the DAE to reform its extension services (Pasteur, 2002).

It was unclear as to whether there was a direct causal link between the origin of the FLE project and the subsequent reluctance of the DAE and the NGO stakeholders to maintain their support for the project, especially following the period of donor involvement. This was because of the sensitivity of the issue about which very few of the interviewees were willing to talk. However, instances were found during the project implementation period that the BSs, in many places, remained absent from their assigned role of facilitating the village groups formed through the project. In some other communities, the BSs were seen in just "one or two" initial visits (during group formation and establishment of model demonstrations) and were subsequently never seen again during the entire three-year implementation period of the FLE project. These instances had serious negative consequences for the

willingness of the rural people to continue with the project as well as for the performance of the rural groups.

Further, the pursuit of vested interests or economic gains by the DAE and the NGO stakeholders was clearly evident during the lifecycle of the FLE project. For example, the DAE and the NGO officials repeatedly requested remunerations, logistics and incentives during the FLE project implementation. The conflicts which emerged between the various groups in pursuit of project privileges also illustrate the problem (also discussed in Chapter 4). When the FLE project was first proposed donor funding through the ASIRP had already been sanctioned. Given these circumstances, serious doubts can be raised as to whether the actual interest of the DAE and the NGO was in the FLE reform or in the project's privileges. A few of the interviewees from both the DAE and the NGO, however, stated that there was a direct link between the donor-driven nature of the FLE project's origin and its subsequent inability to garner support from the Heads of these two implementing agencies. For example, a mid-level NGO manager explained why the agency's top executives, who served in the leadership position of the FLE project, failed to continue their support following the donor's withdrawal by stating that,

> The donors often come with agenda which are their priority, not ours. We are needy, we need money. If a donor comes and offers money we [NGO] will agree to undertake that project. This is because we [referring to the NGO top management] need to develop our own livelihood, not the farmers'. The donors know all these, don't they? But do they really care?

6.4.1.2   Resource and cost-sharing

Cost and resource-sharing was a crucial strategy in the FLE project intended towards developing ownership in the DAE and the NGO for the project. Although the ASRIP (including the FLE sub-project) was mainly initiated by the donors, the project was not a 100% grant from the donor. Instead, it was based on a strategy to share the implementation costs with the Government of Bangladesh (GOB). The government share of the implementation cost was met from the development budget of the DAE and took place during several phases of the project. For example, the costs of developing human resources for the project through formal

training and exchange visits were shared between the donor agency and the DAE. Out of TK 166,880.00 for the total training cost, the donor agency contributed TK 128000.00 (76.70%) and the rest TK 38,880.00 (23.30%) came from the GOB's DAE budget. Again, both donors and the DAE contributed to the cost of constructing the Extension Service Centres (ESCs). Compared to the DAE, the NGO, however, did not have to make a direct financial contribution in the implementation of the FLE project. However, the agency provided its staff and shared office spaces to accommodate the coordination meetings that took place from time to time during the implementation period. The researcher did not find any positive effect of the strategy of cost-sharing on the performance of the FLE project or the willingness of the implementing agencies to maintain their support for the FLE approach following the withdrawal of the donor agency.

6.4.1.3   Project negotiation, power and control

In order to improve the level of ownership and commitment of the DAE and the NGO for the FLE project, attempts were made to foster participation of the employees from these agencies in the decision-making processes at different levels. To this end, multi-stakeholder committees were formed at various levels of the FLE organisation (Chapter 3). Iinterviews also revealed that there was a collective decision-making process in FLE implementation that used to take place through quarterly workshops and review meetings among the various stakeholders of the project. In those workshops, not only did staff from the DAE and the NGO participate but also Heads of various other government departments were invited from time to time.

Despite the above, the findings of this study suggest that while a range of parties were involved in the decision making, they failed to reach consensus on several key decisions and actions in the project implementation process. Some of the key areas where the negotiation failures were manifested included strategies for securing beneficiary participation in the project, control over the project resources, decisions regarding support for training and hiring staff, and the use of incentives for the *Upazilla* level stakeholders of DAE. These are described below. In these

instances, it was the ASIRP consultants[4], rather than the DAE and the NGO stakeholders, who were in the driving seat. Particularly, there was a serious lack of ownership of the decisions and actions among the *Upazilla*-level employees of the DAE and the NGO. In addition, a lack of mutual respect and trust among the three key stakeholders – the donor, the DAE and the NGO – was clearly evident.

Decisions regarding beneficiary participation

Being an initiative to organise a farmer-led extension approach, it was vital to ensure participation of rural people in the FLE project. However, an examination of the decisions and actions regarding the nature and level of beneficiary participation revealed a remarkable lack of negotiation among the stakeholders. Two major instances suggested that the DAE and the NGO stakeholders had little ownership over the strategies.

The first was the strategy to share resources with the beneficiaries in the implementation of the FLE. Interviews revealed that this decision came entirely from the ASIRP consultants hired by the donor agency. According to a number of interviewees, the consultants had a rigid and preconceived idea that the rural people should contribute land and other resources to the construction of the Extension Service Centre (ESCs) in the FLE villages. The interviewees believed that such a strategy was unrealistic in the Bangladesh context and had a negative impact on the FLE project. Because of this strategy, the DAE and the NGO stakeholders were compelled to include the relatively rich farmers in the community groups. Inclusion of these elite farmers in the groups of resource-poor farmers deprived the poor of project benefits. The decision to include rich farmers in the project was contrary to the goal of developing the capacity of resource-poor farmers, as was envisaged in the initial project plan. An NGO mid-level manager expressed disagreement with the resource-sharing strategy as follows.

> The land for ESC was donated by the farmers. It was not that the farmers were willing to do that. We had to struggle to convince them. It was a high-level decision taken by ASIRP authorities in Dhaka……The

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[4] It became difficult to distinguish the actions of the consultants from those of the donor because the interviewees tended to identify the consultants as donors. Moreover, the donor agency personnel were not directly involved with the project but worked through the consultants. In this study, therefore, the consultants' actions are taken as those of the donors.

> consultant [name] wanted that the materials for building ESC should also be donated by the farmers. The consultant [name] told them [the farmers] that "it is going to be your asset and you will get benefit from this. Different service providers will come here and give you service. So, all of you should donate materials for building this and you will build it". ….. But our farmers are neither used to doing so; nor can they afford giving things…….. (FLE project staff)

The second issue was related to the level of farmer control in project processes. The ASIRP consultants insisted that the farmers should be allowed to exercise maximum possible control over group processes such as the savings-credit operations, organisation and conduct of group meetings, conflict resolution, and the like. However, interviews revealed that the *Upazilla*-level employees of both the DAE and the NGO who were in charge of working directly with the village groups had little ownership of this strategy. Instead, a number of interviewees believed that it was because of this strategy that the FLE groups failed to perform as per expectations.

In addition to the above, an important example of the donor-driven nature of the project was manifested in the way the foreign consultants perceived the process of introducing new behaviour among the local FLE stakeholders. On several occasions, for example, the consultants urged the local DAE and NGO staff and even the top-ranking DAE officials to sit with farmers on the ground, which, according to the DAE and NGO interviewees, is culturally unacceptable in Bangladesh. As a consequence, many of the DAE officers were very annoyed with the consultants. Some interviewees reported that even the farmers felt uncomfortable in such circumstances. As one of the project staff informed,

> One consultant [name] would want that we would conduct the meeting by sitting under tree; we would not sit on the chairs. Now, we no longer live in that age. Maybe sometimes in the past the situation was like that when people would sit under tree….. Not only to the project staff, but he would also insist to do so to people who were visiting from Dhaka including the DG. Now is it possible to tell them to sit under tree? ... We tried to explain to the consultant that the service provider would not take this normally as they are not working with the farmers directly, because they are bureaucrats. He refused to understand this… He would also say that we cannot order the farmers…. Some people were annoyed. There were some problems with the DAE people, because they would not accept it so easily.

Control over project resources

As regards the issue of control over project resources, a number of interviewees said that the ASIRP consultants, and not the DAE and NGO implementers, were in charge of controlling project funds. Most decisions regarding the use of resources were also top down in which the local level stakeholders had little control. These observations also illustrated the donor-dominated nature of the FLE project. An important example of this top-down control was the "pre-financing" mechanism through which the project funding was channelled to the NGO in the implementation of project tasks. According to this mechanism, the NGO had to finance the operation of the project through its own fund and then request the donor (consultant) to reimburse the money along with proof of expenditure. Reportedly, even for the release of small contingency costs such as purchase of papers and files, the ASIRP asked for proof in the form of vouchers filled in by the NGO staff involved with the project.

In addition to control over resources, the consultants decided that the NGO, rather than DAE, should handle the financial matters of the project. For example, in the construction of the Extension Service Centres (ESCs) in FLE villages, the consultants insisted that the DAE and the NGO staff would together purchase materials for the ESC but it would 'exclusively' be the NGO that would handle the money. One important reason for this was a lack of trust of the ASIRP consultants in the DAE stakeholders and hence, they wanted to ensure that there was no mismanagement of the funding. As an FLE staff member reported,

> The person [name of consultant] gave us TK. 17000 for building the ESC……. He said that DAE and NGO will together buy the things for ESC while exclusively NGO will handle the money. The consultant was very adamant about that and wanted to ensure that there was no scope for mismanaging the fund.

There were several negative consequences of this top-down control over project resources by the donor (consultants) and their strategy to opt for the NGO in the utilisation of resources. First, due to a top-down approach to the release of funds, it became difficult to implement the project activities as per schedule. In several instances, for example, it became difficult to organise stakeholder coordination meetings and workshops in the FLE *Upazillas* because the money arrived very late.

Some FLE project staff stated that such experiences negatively affected the motivation of various ESPs to provide extension support to the village groups.

Second, the strategy to vest the responsibility for financial management in the NGO resulted in mistrust and conflict between the NGO and the DAE employees. On several occasions, the DAE officers and fieldworkers expressed their opinion that the NGO employees were misusing donor funds. This suspicion was so intense in some areas that the DAE fieldworker concerned threatened his NGO colleague that he would seek revenge. Due to this suspicion on one hand and lack of control over project funding on the other, many DAE employees took little interest in FLE activities. These tensions are illustrated in the quotations presented below.

> I took the DAE officers to … [name of *Upazilla*]… in order to hold a workshop. The DAE officers were pressurising me "where is our honorarium?" They suspected it was our conspiracy since our organisation handled the money …. (NGO manager)

> We had no role here. We just participated in one or two workshops in the NGO building. They [consultants] used to come there and directly go to the field with them (NGO staff). Then they (NGO staff) would inform us. Sometimes they would call us, hei, we are going to the field, send your BS there….It was the NGO Coordinator [name] and the consultants who were all in all. FLE is none of our business. It is the project of the NGO. Our department is not interested in any project where there is no financial involvement of us ……. (DAE *Upazilla* officer)

Third, a number of interviewees from the NGO and the DAE believed that the consultants did not trust them. Some interviewees were of the opinion that the consultants failed to utilise the resources as needed by the project and that they (consultants) utilised the resources at their own discretion, for their own comfort. Such statements indicated a serious lack of mutual respect and trust between the donor and the implementing agency staff. This study showed that the resultant mistrust negatively affected ownership of the FLE project by the local stakeholders. Reportedly, due to the dominance of the consultants, the DAE *Upazilla* level officers did not participate in FLE willingly but 'by compulsion', that is, by order of their top level officers. As a mid-level FLE manager stated,

> They [donor and consultants] appeared to be very miserly but there was no shortage of their own luxury! We went to region-2 for a cross-visit.

> There was jeep hired for them but they went by aeroplane and the jeep
> went empty! The argument was that the road was bad so they won't be
> able to tolerate journey. What about us? The road was also bad for us.
> We lived in cheap accommodation but they were in luxury suites! My
> question is where this money for luxurious expenditure coming from?
> There is no accountability for this, but when we wanted to hire staff we
> did not get it. Although we got some eventually, it was at the end of the
> project. This is why the DAE officers were so unhappy. They did not
> participate by heart but by compulsion ….. (RT member, FLE)

Decision on funding supports for training and hiring staff

A lack of negotiation was also found between the donor and the implementing
agencies (DAE and FLE-NGO) with regard to the resources required to implement
FLE activities. For example, a request made by the DAE and the NGO local
stakeholders to allocate more funding for the inter-region exchange visits for the
Local Area Facilitation Team (LAFT) members was turned down by the consultants.
Instead, only a few high-level officers from the DAE and the NGO were given
opportunities for such visits, causing enormous discontent among the lower-level
staff. Similarly, despite repeated requests by the NGO to allocate funding for hiring
more staff to facilitate the farmer groups, no such funding was made available. The
interviewees said that due to staff shortages, it was not possible for their
organisation to properly nurture the FLE groups. Inadequate facilitation by
fieldworkers, on the other hand, negatively influenced the performance of the FLE
groups. As an NGO manager reported,

> I would blame the donors [for the failure of the project]. British
> government wants to help us because they have money but why there
> was so much dilly-dally? We requested for staff from the very beginning.
> I mean I am talking about the LAFT staff. If they [donors] had the
> willingness that we would like to develop an extension model, then why
> they showed so much dilly-dally? Our Director Sir repeatedly requested
> [to the donors] for staff because we do not have sufficient staff in our
> organisation. Despite repeated requests, there was no positive response
> from the donors.

The issue of logistical support for the DAE employees in the implementation of FLE
activities was also found to be poorly negotiated. Reportedly, during the
implementation phase, the *Upazilla* level DAE employees informed ASIRP that they
did not have the capacity even to bear the small contingencies needed to

implement the FLE project. Therefore, they demanded resource support from the donor agency in order to be able to implement FLE activities. Although finally, the ASIRP provided a lump-sum grant of TK 8000 per *Upazilla*, interviewees found that the DAE employees at the *Upazilla* level were very unhappy about it and demanded more from the donor.

In addition, the BSs demanded transport facilities for them to be able to perform FLE activities. They argued that since their working area was very large and that they had to visit nearly 1200 to 1500 farm families in their Blocks, they needed transport to visit the village groups. A number of DAE officers interviewed in this study also believed that the demand of the BSs was quite justified. However, ultimately this demand was not accepted and the BSs felt too discouraged to participate in FLE activities.

On the other hand, although no transport support was given to the BSs, the ASIRP provided transport to the NGO employees. The ASIRP also provided staff salaries for the NGO employees. In the case of DAE employees, the assumption was that since they received salary from the government, there was no need for additional funding support for them. The findings of this study indicate that such a strategy to provide more resources to one organisation compared to the other adversely affected local ownership. Some DAE interviewees considered this as 'discrimination' against their employees and expressed anger over the issue.

The failure to negotiate the interests of the DAE and the NGO regarding the issue of logistical support also led to a counterproductive struggle between the DAE and the NGO. For example, as per the project partnership contract, group development was the role of the NGO. The NGO received funding and logistic support from the donor for this purpose. The logic was that the NGO did not have adequate staff to invest in the FLE group formation and facilitation and therefore, needed funding support from the donor. The DAE, however, failed to accept this and wanted to prove to the donor that their BSs were also capable of developing groups. Therefore, they wanted to prove repeatedly that without their assistance it was not possible for the NGO to develop village groups. This is illustrated in a letter written to the ASIRP leadership by the then Director of the Field Service Wing (FSW) of DAE. The Director was the National Coordinator of FLE. There was an expression

of annoyance in the letter that the BSs were developing most of the groups while the NGO failed to perform its desired role. The consequence was that the DAE and NGO ended up developing 'separate groups' which was against the norm of 'partnership' upon which the project was conceived on the first place.

Negotiation failure regarding project privileges and remunerations

In addition to the above findings, this study showed that the issue of project privileges such as remuneration for the stakeholders was poorly negotiated. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the FLE project operated in an institutional environment where the development agencies have received various kinds of incentives from the donors for implementing development projects. These incentives included paying financial remuneration and allowances to implement donor projects and opportunities for overseas training. The FLE project also confronted these challenges as the DAE and the NGO stakeholders demanded incentive payments from the donor agency to support implementation of the project.

Despite being fully aware of the situation, the ASIRP attempted to break out of this tradition because past projects had shown that paid reforms did not result in local ownership. While the donor believed that there should not be any allowances or remuneration for local stakeholders to participate in project events such as in workshops and field days, the DAE and the FLE-NGO had an altogether different idea. A number of the DAE and the NGO interviewees stated that such a strategy was unrealistic in the Bangladesh context. On several occasions, they took up the issue with the donor without success. This unrealistic strategy and the failure to negotiate the issue negatively affected the ownership of FLE activities by local stakeholders. As an interviewee reported,

> Even when the service providers were invited at workshops or the consultant told us to arrange "field day", he [foreign consultant] would not give us any allowance for that. The consultant said that no money can be spent for field days. He said that people would come and see. Now, is that really possible in Bangladesh context? Can you imagine that in Bangladesh? We have tried to explain this so many times to the consultant [name] but the person just would not understand. Our Coordinator wrote so many letters regarding this but he [foreign consultant] was adamant that no money would be given for field days. We argued that there should be at least some arrangements for "tea and

> biscuit" for the guests but he would not give money even for that… The
> DAE staff were very unhappy about it…… (RT member, NGO)

Another important negotiation failure was also manifested regarding the opportunity for stakeholders to go for overseas training in the Philippines. Although a couple of DAE officers and some NGO high-ranking managers were given the opportunity, very few of the lower-level employees from these organisations agreed with the arrangement. There was a firm belief among the DAE fieldworkers that their superior officers within the National Coordination Team (NCT) failed to properly negotiate this matter with the donor. Reportedly, the BSs protested during the quarterly workshops by arguing that it was they who would implement FLE activities directly in the field. Therefore, they deserved incentives and remuneration similar to those given to the NCT members. For example, the BSs desired that, similar to their high officials, they should also be sent to the Philippines to receive training on FLE. This demand, however, was ignored. As a consequence, many of the BSs refused to perform their duties in the FLE.

This study also showed that the resentment of the BSs with regard to remuneration and opportunities for overseas training was grounded within the cultural context of the DAE. The conflict and suspicion of the BSs towards their top-ranking officers, as manifested in the FLE project, was simply a continuation of the historical relationship between these two factions.

6.4.2 Participation and ownership of rural people

In examining beneficiary participation, the main focus was on the nature and level of farmer control over the project processes and resources and these were measured against the "participation scale or ladder" presented in section 2.3.4.3 of Chapter 2.

This study revealed that farmer participation was sought only during the project implementation and evaluation phases of the FLE project. The beneficiaries did not have any involvement during the project initiation phase; neither did they enunciate any demand for the FLE intervention. During the project implementation phase, beneficiary participation was sought in six key events in various degrees and forms.

However, a number of examples indicate that in most cases, the project failed to either achieve the "intended level" of beneficiary participation or produce the intended benefit from such participation (Table 6.1). The findings also indicate that some practices intended to secure beneficiary participation were counterproductive (Table 6.1). In the following sections, these findings are elaborated.

Table 6.1 Beneficiary participation in the FLE project and its consequences

Project phases and tasks	Beneficiary participation – level and form	Consequences
Project initiation or formulation	No participation; initiated by outsiders	Joining project for wrong reason; disbanding of groups
Project implementation		
Assessment of farmers' needs and dissemination of technology	Consultative; tokenistic	Not clear
Group formation	Consultative; manipulative; tokenistic; passive participation of poorer beneficiaries	Poor project performance; elite inclusion; group heterogeneity; low ownership by poorer members; disbanding of groups
Development of operational rules and distribution of roles	Consultative, operation rules developed by outside professionals	Not obvious; effectiveness was influenced by FW quality
Construction of ESC	Functional in the form of cost-sharing; consultative, no control of beneficiaries over choice	Inclusion of elites; elite domination; conflict; collapse of groups; reluctance to use ESC
Establishment of model demonstrations in farmers' fields	Tokenistic; corrupt, manipulative	Discontent among farmers, especially the poorer members and the women; lack of interest in FLE;
Operation of group tasks and management of funds	Functional	Conflict among members for loan; disbanding of groups; effectiveness of participation was influenced by fieldworker quality;
Project evaluation	Discussed separately in section 6.5	

6.4.2.1   Project initiation or enunciation of request

During the project formulation or initiation stage, the rural people involved with the FLE project did not have any involvement in the related activities such as formulation of the project proposal, development of various project implementation committees (e.g. the Local Area Facilitation Team, Resource Team), design of the

course-curricula for providing training to the farmers, choice of project area, selection of project implementation staff, and so on. These decisions were made in a top-down way and there was no evidence that the rural people were consulted during these processes.

As regards the enunciation of request by the rural people, several interviewees from the DAE and the NGO said that the beneficiaries did not have any interest in participating in the project. They further informed that they had to seriously struggle to convince the rural people to participate. When the project staff approached them to participate in the FLE, the farmers in many communities said that they would be willing to participate if there were some grants or loans for them. As a project staff member from the DAE reported,

> The farmers did not agree at the beginning to form the groups. [In my Block] when I approached them, they told me "we are not interested in forming groups or anything". Actually, it has become a habit of the farmers. If we contact them for a development project, at first they would ask what benefit or incentive they are going to get. They expect that they will be given loans, free seeds, fertilisers, and so on.

Reportedly, the fieldworkers had to persuade the rural people by providing commitments for such incentives. Consequently, many villagers joined the FLE with the expectation that they would receive loans and grants. This had severe adverse effects on the goal of developing farmer promoters and village groups for agricultural extension work. Many rural people, when realised in the long run that the FLE was not about giving free gifts or loans, abandoned their groups.

6.4.2.2   Power and control over project implementation processes and resources

As mentioned earlier, during the FLE project implementation phase, beneficiary participation in the project was sought in six key events. They were: (i) assessment of farmer needs and demands, (ii) selection of members and leaders in the formation of community groups, (iii) development of operational rules and distribution of roles and responsibilities among selected farmers, (iv) construction of the ESCs, (v) extension demonstration and income generation activities, and (vi)

operation of the group tasks such as savings-credit. In these events, beneficiary participation occurred in various forms and at different levels/degrees.

During the beginning of the implementation phase, the intention of beneficiary participation was manifested in the use of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) tools to consult with the rural people. The purpose of this consultation was to collect information regarding the needs and demands of the beneficiaries. The rural people, in several communities, however, informed that they did not receive the technologies as identified through the PRA process. Instead, in several communities the project authorities attempted to promote various crops and animal varieties, which, according to the rural people concerned, were based on the choices of the implementing agencies rather than those of the beneficiaries. For example, although the rural people did not ask, pigeon rearing was chosen for demonstration in some villages. Several examples like this one revealed that the technology choice of the rural people was turned down by a top-down process. However, the consequence of such tokenistic or consultative level of beneficiary participation was not clear.

Selection of group members and leaders was an important process during the implementation phase of the FLE project. The management wanted the rural people to choose their own group members and leaders. To this end, the fieldworkers were instructed to organise meetings in the target communities, brief the farmers about the purpose of the project and the tentative criteria for group membership. After this initial briefing, the management wanted the rural people to select their own members and leaders. The management also instructed the fieldworkers that under no circumstances should they exercise their choices.

Even though it was intended that the rural people would have full control over member selection, in practice there were serious anomalies. In many of the communities such selection was carried out mainly by the field staff, particularly when it came to the question of selecting group leaders or farmer promoters. In some communities the project staff concerned selected group leaders even without asking them if they were interested. It was also found that in some other communities, the fieldworkers selected their friends, elite acquaintances, former accomplices and even relatives – regardless of whether or not those people met

the criteria laid down by the project. Moreover, in some cases, it became difficult to prevent elites from being selected because the resource-poor farmers abstained from giving their opinion during the selection meetings. The reason was that the poor in the village are dependent for many reasons on the rich. For example, many of them work as day labourers in the fields of rich farmers. Moreover, during the periods of emergency (e.g. flood, famine) rich farmers provide them with critical support such as financial loans or even sometimes food. It was, therefore, difficult for them to give any opinion against the landowners on whom their livelihood depended.

The harmful consequences of such a low level and quality of beneficiary participation were quite obvious. Because of the inclusion of elites and relatives and friends of fieldworkers, it was these people who captured most of the benefits of the project, sometimes in a corrupt way. Owing to this distributional problem many groups collapsed as the members who failed to receive benefits abandoned the groups. However, the findings of this study also indicate that it is not the lack of high level control of beneficiaries over the group formation process but the personality/quality of the fieldworkers concerned that affected the outcome from beneficiary participation. For example, in the few surviving female groups, it is the fieldworkers who selected group members, promoters and leaders. Also, these fieldworkers strictly controlled the member selection process and resisted the inclusion of certain community members whom they knew as "trouble makers". These fieldworkers were found to be well-known as "good performers" in their respective organisations and also to the rural people.

Following member and leader selection came the task of structuring the village groups such as developing operational rules and distributing roles and responsibilities among the members. This study revealed that even these processes were pre-designed by the project consultants. For example, the size of the farmer groups, the composition of the group management committees, roles and responsibilities of farmer promoters and leaders, the number of groups in a village, composition of management committees for the ESCs, and the like, were designed by project personnel. However, a process of consultation was conducted with selected farmers. This illustrated a consultative type of participation in which beneficiaries acted as passive information providers. According to some

interviewees, one reason for adopting such a consultative approach, rather than an elaborate process of participation, was due to the short duration of the project. It was not possible to invest much time in the process. However, the negative consequences of such consultative level of beneficiary participation were not obvious since the few surviving female groups were also subjected to such a level of participation.

Construction of the ESCs in the FLE villages was another important event during the implementation phase of the FLE project. The FLE project management adopted a deliberate strategy of cost and resource sharing with the beneficiaries. According to some project staff, this was an attempt to improve beneficiary ownership. The project staff persuaded rural people to donate lands for the construction of the ESCs. More importantly, the project made this a permanent donation by legally registering the land in favour of the Director General (DG) of the DAE.

In some communities, the rural people were encouraged also to donate some material resources such as tins, rope, bamboo, chairs, and tables to the ESC. Although there was a donation of TK 17000 from ASIRP sources to construct the ESCs, the beneficiaries were persuaded to make some financial contribution as well. For example, in some communities FLE group members paid TK 50 each to share the cost of the ESC construction. The resource-poor farmers who could not contribute in cash provided labour. This was merely a functional type of participation and the farmers did not have any control over the decisions. The cost and resource-sharing took place only after the major decisions were taken by the ASIRP management. Even the decision that an ESC was needed was taken by the DAE and the NGO leaders in the National Coordination Team (NCT). The fieldworkers were instructed to 'strictly follow' the directions given to them in the construction of the ESCs. Moreover, the allocated ASIRP budget of TK 17000 for ESC construction was used according to the choice of the NCT members. Neither the farmers nor the fieldworkers concerned were given any control over the fund.

This study showed that the strategy of cost and resource sharing had various unexpected negative consequences for the project. For example, in a number of communities, the farmers who donated lands had their own vested interests. They

did that more to gain advantage from the project, rather than to serve their poor fellow farmers. As a consequence, eventually the bulk of the project benefits went to these elite farmers. Some of these stories are presented in Box 6.1.

Box 6.1 Consequences of cost and resource-sharing in the FLE project

Story 1: This is the story of a farmer leader in a community. The farmer in the area donated land to construct the ESC. Apparently this donation was altruistic. However, in the course of the project, the actual motive of this altruism was clearly evident. Reportedly, the donor became the president of the group and he included his own son (a local rich businessman) as the Farmer Promoter. Ultimately, they captured all benefits provided to the group by the external agencies. When the other members realised this, they decided to leave the group.

Story 2: The person is a reasonably rich farmer in the community and is a defence person working in the local military cantonment. The house and land area of the person also demonstrate his physical wealth in a community crowded with a huge number of landless farmers. The person himself, his wife and several close kin were found to be the leaders and members of the FLE groups in the area. The person donated land for the construction of the ESC. During an interview, he claimed that he has done it for the welfare of the people in the area. However, other FLE members in the area informed that the altruism was in fact a disguise to capture the project benefits. As soon as the project had ended and the project staff left the area, his wife stopped giving loans to the poor members in the group. Reportedly, the family is utilising the money for personal purposes without informing the other members. Moreover, most extension demonstrations given to the group went to her husband, which caused jealousy and lack of interest among the rest of the members.

Story 3: The project staff tried to persuade a local village doctor to donate some land for the construction of the ESC. The person had some fallow land in his house premises, which was unutilised. The project staff considered the location of his premises very suitable for ESC. However, despite repeated requests, the project staff failed to convince the person to donate land. Finding no other way, they approached another farmer in the neighbourhood and were able to convince him. As usual, the donor became one of the FPs of the group. However, as soon as the FP started receiving the training and demonstrations, the village doctor became jealous and pressurised the project staff to relocate the ESC site in his premises. When the project staff declined to do that, the doctor forbade the members from his area to attend FLE activities. Serious hostility and conflict broke out between the two factions that eventually led to the break up of the group. During fieldwork the ESC was found abandoned, nobody was using it.

Establishing model demonstrations and income-generation activities by farmer promoters was another important aspect of the FLE project. For this purpose, the project allocated TK 5000-8000 per promoter. The management wanted the promoters, together with the BS and the NGO fieldworkers, to purchase agricultural inputs such as goats for the goat rearing project, calves for beef fattening project and the like. This was a clear attempt to give the beneficiaries control over project funds. This study, however, showed that despite this good intention, it became difficult to put the resolution into practice. Several gaps were identified. First, in some communities, the project staff exercised their choice and purchased low

quality inputs without securing consent from the respective promoters. They concealed the information and kept the larger part of the budget in their own pockets. This was observed mainly in female groups. Second, in some other cases, the promoters, together with the respective fieldworkers, purchased poor quality inputs spending less money than the allocated budget and shared the rest of the money between them. Such corrupt practices resulted in disbanding of FLE groups in several communities.

During the operational phase of the project, the management instructed the fieldworkers not to influence the farmer promoters and leaders after their formal training and let them run their groups by themselves. According to a fieldworker, the management instructed the field staff not even to assist farmer promoters in writing group registers or the savings-credit books. The beneficiaries were also given full control over their own group funds (accumulated through members' savings, not project fund). This, according to some NGO interviewees, was unusual (in positive sense) and did not follow the procedure of the NGO's own micro-credit groups. All these were clear manifestations of the managerial intention to establish farmer control over group processes.

This study revealed that such a relatively high level of beneficiary control negatively affected FLE project performance. According to several DAE and NGO interviewees, when the fieldworkers did not visit, group members became engaged in conflicts over the distribution of credit, setting up demonstrations, and so on. The interviewees stated that because of this, in most cases, the groups performed poorly and failed to survive. On the other hand, a low-level beneficiary control was found to be effective in some instances. For example, one of the reasons why some of the female groups were able to survive was because the DAE and NGO fieldworkers concerned strictly controlled the savings-credit processes of those groups.

Participation of beneficiaries was also sought during the project monitoring and evaluation phase. The purpose was to identify the problems and errors within the village groups so that they could be sorted out through appropriate actions. Since all these activities constitute part of the organisational learning process, they are discussed in the next section under the heading – Learning process.

6.5 Learning process[5]

In this section the results concerning the nature of managerial strategy applied in the FLE project – learning process versus blueprint approach – are presented. The analysis was focused on the planning and implementation modes, error detection and the re-adjustment or error correction mechanisms. Analysis of the FLE case suggested that there were three important mechanisms in place for error detection and correction. These included a system of monitoring, periodic workshops, and mid-term and end-of-project evaluations. The findings of this study, however, indicate that these mechanisms were largely unable to generate high quality information; neither were they able to unveil the important errors of the FLE organisation that were necessary for learning to take place. In addition, even when some errors were detected, the management team struggled to correct those errors. These findings are elaborated in the following sections.

6.5.1 Monitoring

Learning through monitoring of ongoing implementation tasks and adjusting the system accordingly, was an explicit managerial strategy of the FLE. Two key process characteristics reflected this strategy. First, at the beginning of its implementation phase, the project developed a broad outline of objectives and goals rather than setting clear-cut targets. Hence, as an interviewee stated, there were no specific written guidelines in the FLE project about "what exactly to do and what to achieve". Instead, the management intended to change the implementation tasks according to the situation in the field. Second, in order to foster learning, the project implementation tasks were separated into quarterly (three-monthly) plans. At the end of each quarter, the implementation performances were reviewed.

In order to monitor the quarterly implementation activities, the ASIRP technical assistance team developed a monitoring form. This form was supplied to the DAE and the NGO field workers within the Local Area Facilitation Team (LAFT). The form was used for a couple of months but was later abandoned because the NCT members found it difficult to compile the data collected through the initial monitoring

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[5] In this study learning is considered as a "process" consisting of both "error-detection" and "error correction" or "adjustments". As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the term "learning" in this study refers to "organisational learning", not "individual learning".

format. Later, the staff concerned from the NGO developed a new format, which was used for the rest of the project duration.

The monitoring system was designed to collect information regarding the activities and performance of the FLE groups involved with the project. By design, the leaders (President and Secretary) and farmer promoters in each group were required to maintain records of their group and individual activities respectively. The LAFT members collected these data on a monthly basis and sent them to the resource team (RT) members of their respective organisation. Each LAFT member was responsible for compiling the information into a quarterly reporting format for each FLE group that he was facilitating. In each quarter, every RT member was to summarise the LAFT reports (within 5 pages, in Bengali) and forward them to the NCT.

Despite the existence of a formal monitoring system, interviews with the project staff concerned indicated that the mechanism served the purpose of reporting and control rather than of learning. The reporting purpose, as represented by the monitoring documents used in the project, indicate that they were simply used for the collection of "numerical digits". For example, the monthly reporting of farmer promoter activities contained information about the amount of credit received by them, name of the Income Generation Activities (IGA) established, number of stakeholders contacted, number of farmers with whom an idea was shared, and the number of training sessions conducted. Similarly, the monitoring of group activities included data on the number of group members, amount of group savings, amount of credit received, and the like. The quarterly reports contained information about detailed expenditure on IGA demonstrations, amount of the group fund recycled, interest rate of group loan, physical assets in the ESCs, name of ESPs providing services to the FLE groups and number of participants.

This information, coupled with an interview with the FLE monitoring officer, suggested that the information was collected mainly to justify expenditure of the funds given by the donor for implementing FLE activities. There was no mention of any obstacles or problems encountered in implementing the project activities; neither was there any explanation of why certain groups were lagging behind in

achieving the pre-set targets such as loan recovery or fund accumulation (few were reported, most groups were shown to be doing very well).

In addition, the NGO used the monitoring information to assess the performance of its fieldworkers involved with the FLE project. For example, if the groups facilitated by a fieldworker failed to accumulate a good amount of funds or if a farmer promoter in the group was not repaying his or her loan, it would mean that the fieldworker was performing poorly. As a consequence, the NGO field staff were reluctant to report any poor performance of the groups. As an NGO interviewee stated,

> We had a time frame in which these tasks were to be completed….So, if a field worker failed to develop a good farmer promoter who repays the (loan) money on time; then we would consider that field worker was lagging behind in his work. This is how we used to judge the LAFT performance …. (NGO manager, RT)

Furthermore, other evidence suggested that the monitoring system failed to generate authentic information for learning to take place. First, many of the LAFT staff responsible for collecting information from the FLE groups did not have the skill to fill in the monitoring forms. Second, many of the FLE groups failed to keep detailed records of the events and activities. This made it difficult for the LAFT members concerned to collect detailed information. Third, many of the LAFT members filled in the monitoring forms without even visiting the farmer groups. There were two main reasons for this. For the DAE staff, it was poor motivation. Many BSs within the LAFTs perceived their tasks as 'non-rewarding' (as they generally do; discussed under the concept of 'culture' in Chapter 4). In addition, since there was little financial remuneration in the project, many BSs in the LAFTs perceived their work as an 'extra-burden', which was further constrained by poor supervision of the LAFTs by the respective RT members from the DAE. In fact, many RTs themselves were also not motivated towards supporting FLE activities because of a lack of opportunities for overseas training and the like. This information suggests that the perverse institutional incentives within the DAE (Chapter 4) influenced the learning system of the FLE project as well.

In the case of the NGO workers, the problem was slightly different from that of the DAE employees. Many fieldworkers involved in the FLE were newly recruited NGO

staff (project-based or temporary staff) and their likelihood of being recruited in another project depended on their performance in the FLE project. Since the FLE monitoring was used to measure their performance, they naturally had a tendency to avoid reporting negative aspects of the FLE groups. In addition, a number of NGO interviewees reported that they were overworked. This was because they were involved in multiple projects due to a shortage of manpower in the NGO. Some of the newly recruited staff in the FLE were also not paid their salary on time and hence, were working only in pen and paper, not in the field. Moreover, in some *Upazillas*, some of the NGO workers were among the worst-performing staff of the organisation that had past records of forgery, insincerity and absenteeism. Despite their poor record, they were employed in FLE because they were relatives of a powerful Director of the NGO. As to be expected, these workers were extremely irregular in performing their assigned roles of facilitating the FLE groups. Nevertheless, they filled in the monitoring forms and sent them in to the RTs.

Although sometimes the NGO managers in the RTs were able to identify the problems, they failed to take any action against the poorly performing LAFT members because some of them were the relatives of a powerful Director in the NGO. These findings suggest that like the DAE, the NGO failed to provide a favourable institutional environment for learning to take place in the FLE project. A manager from the NGO, who served in the RT, mentioned these problems in the following way.

> The reports given by the LAFT members seemed to me *Bhua* (fabricated, false). I knew they submitted *false reports*. For example, I have proof that the LAFTs did not attend the group meetings properly. I think they barely did even one meeting in a month [which they were supposed to do weekly] but in pen and paper they showed that they have done the meetings regularly. Even if I was able to realise it, I had nothing to do. …..…. (RT member, NGO)

In addition to the institutional constraints within the DAE and the NGO, the pressure to satisfy the donor was also found to be an important barrier against learning. This is a culture where aid-recipient organisations report only favourable information about the project they implement and conceal negative information. This is because of a fear that negative feedback would result in donor funding being withdrawn. An interviewee told that this culture is more prominent among NGOs because their

survival depends on donors' satisfaction. The findings of this study suggest that this informal rules-of-the-game in donor-recipient relationships also negatively affected the FLE organisation's ability to learn. Therefore, although the monitoring in FLE was "quite frequent", both the DAE and the NGO employees were deliberately concealing the problems encountered by the farmers groups and were reporting that "everything was just fine". The concern among them that failure might result in a termination of donor funding was further aggravated by the expectation that the ASIRP project funding would extend further (which of course, did not happen).

6.5.2 Implementation reviews and evaluation

Besides regular monitoring, the performance and advantages of the FLE approach were evaluated through two implementation reviews and an end-of-project evaluation. The implementation reviews were prepared by the NGO, which provided a basis for the evaluation carried out by the ASIRP technical assistance consultants. As regards the usefulness of the implementation reviews produced by the NGO, there is no evidence to suggest that they served any purpose of learning. Similar to those of the quarterly monitoring reports, as discussed earlier, the yearly implementation review reports were nothing more than number games. They contained information about the various quantitative targets such as the number of groups formed, the number of model demonstrations completed, the number of group members, amount of group savings, and the like.

In addition, the evaluation processes were affected by several other factors. First, due to a lack of clear-cut statement of project goals, it was difficult to evaluate what was achieved (Gill et al., 2003). Second, the culture of error concealment constrained the ability of the evaluators to generate authentic information about the FLE model that could have been used to detect mistakes and undertake appropriate corrective actions.

As is common in Bangladesh, FLE was evaluated by the ASIRP consultants hired by the donor agency. These consultants used to visit the FLE project sites from Dhaka (200-350 kms, a reasonably long distance in Bangladesh) and spend 1-2 days in the project *Upazillas* to evaluate the project. It is generally very difficult for such people to directly enter a village, locate the appropriate people and talk to

them in order to be able to gather useful information. The problem becomes more serious if the consultants include foreigners who cannot speak the local language. Therefore, in most cases, the consultants have to rely on the field staff concerned in order to visit villages and collect information.

This study revealed that the evaluations carried out in the FLE were affected by the above problems. Although some of the members in the consultancy team were among the DAE high officials, there was a general understanding among the field-level staff that it would be difficult for the "honourable foreign consultants and the accompanying DAE sirs" to travel to "remote villages". They were, therefore, "taken" to the "nearest ones" with good road communication and to the favourable places where the FLE groups were relatively successful. For example, out of 36 groups in one region, only two groups were "repeatedly demonstrated" to the evaluation team. Interviews revealed that some of those group leaders who were subjected to evaluators' interviews were the farmers who were "adept at talking to foreigners" (in a negative sense). On few occasions, however, some consultants themselves preferred to stay inside their suites at the NGO guest house and talked to the field staff there, instead of travelling to the villages.

Analysis of the project documents, however, suggested that the ASIRP evaluation team was aware of the culture of error concealment. For example, before the start of the evaluation study, the foreign consultant in the ASIRP team wrote a letter to the DAE and the NGO field-level offices that the fieldworkers from these agencies should not be present when village groups were evaluated. This indicated the evaluation team's desire to collect authentic information. However, this deliberate attempt to isolate the DAE and NGO field staff from the evaluation process generated a feeling among the local staff that the evaluation team did not "trust them enough". This indicated a lack of local ownership of the evaluation process itself.

Such an attempt to generate true information, however, is generally futile. There is generally a long-established personal relationship between the field staff and the rural communities. In this relationship, the fieldworkers play the role of patrons who create opportunities for the villagers to access outside resources, for example, recruiting a farmer in a donor project (also discussed in Chapter 4). Therefore, the

villagers obviously have a tendency to be loyal to the fieldworkers rather than to the short-term outside visitors. This patron-client relationship, which is generally difficult for outsiders to penetrate, acts as an important barrier in the learning process. Thus, fieldworkers do not have to remain present in the community to constrain the ability of outsiders to access information. Rather, they are able to regulate the process even in their absence. As an interviewee stated,

> The donors come to monitor and evaluate ….. Is it possible for them to understand our *chaal* (surreptitious behaviour)? …..We have our farmers fixed. It is not possible to achieve success in any project in Bangladesh through monitoring and evaluation. Yes, I agree that monitoring and evaluation is necessary to keep the staff encouraged but it is nothing if there is not the right motivation. Most often the donors pressurise [for M&E]. The assessment team comes but they are not taken to the field …….. (RT member)

Despite all the above adverse influences on the feedback system, the evaluation processes did identify some negative aspects of the FLE model (Table 6.2). Although the evaluators concluded that the performance of the FLE project was impressive, they expressed concern about the post-project sustainability of the model, particularly the survival of the FLE groups. However, the central barrier to sustainability, as identified in the evaluation, was the unavailability of "money". Two major financial constraints were identified. First, the farmer promoters did not have any paid compensation for their service and hence, it would be necessary to find appropriate ways of funding their activities. Second, neither the DAE nor the NGOs have the requisite financial capability to continue supporting the FLE. Hence, unless these agencies receive funding support from another donor project, it would be difficult for them to sustain their support for the FLE.

This evidence suggests that the evaluation identified sustainability more as a financial problem. There was no analysis of the institutional constraints that have been presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis; neither was there any analysis of why the problems occurred in the first place. For example, although the lack of cooperation from the various GO and NGO stakeholders was identified as a constraint on the performance of the FLE groups, there was no in-depth explanation of the problem. Similarly, although poor managerial capacity of the FLE group leadership was identified as a problem, there was no attempt to explore why such problems occurred. This superficiality of the evaluation process was

ostensibly intended to observing and correct symptoms rather than identify causes. This also indicated that the purpose of evaluation was mainly to improve production of the targeted outputs set by the management, rather than to learn.

Table 6.2 Learning through the evaluation processes in the case study project

What problem?	Were causes of problem identified?	Was any action taken? If no, why?	Was problem solved or situation improved?	Was action followed up? If no, why?
The FPs were not receiving supports from the other agencies except the DAE and the FLE-NGO	Yes Lack of clear guidance and instructions from the respective department Heads	Several meetings and workshops were organised to bring together FLE representatives, staff from different ESPs (GO and NGO) and also some members of *Union Parishads[6]*. Department heads of all GOB ESPs were involved in the process.	Responses from other GO and NGOs improved temporarily during project period; discontinued during post-project	No Project ended
FLE model had poor sustainability prospects, particularly the services of the FPs	Mechanism for compensating FP services during the post-project period was missing; neither DAE nor NGO had financial ability to pay compensation	No	No	N/A
FLE group management committees did not effectively manage their groups	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
FLE had poor sustainability prospects; non-replicable on a large scale	DAE didn't have financial capacity; needed financial support from another donor project to be able to sustain and scale up	No	N/A	N/A
Little or no spread of benefits from group members to the rest of the community	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mechanisms for scaling up within DAE were missing	No	Dialogue with DAE senior staff during the project period; dissemination of evaluation lessons through publications; meeting with DAE senior management; workshops	No	No Project ended

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[6] Local government administration at the village level in Bangladesh

Certain actions taken to correct the problems identified through evaluation resulted in a temporary improvement in the situation. Such actions also manifested an attempt to influence the operational environment of the FLE project. For example, the engagement in dialogue with the various non-project ESPs and inviting their Heads to meetings and workshops indicated that the management was attempting to influence the broader policy constraints. At the same time, a lack of in-depth analysis of such problems indicated an attempt to find an *ad hoc* solution. Moreover, many of the issues such as the funding constraint identified through evaluation remained unresolved. The investigator did not find any evidence that either the Donor agency or the DAE or the FLE-NGO leadership took any initiatives to resolve those issues. This inertia manifested a tendency to externalise the errors rather than correct them through appropriate action.

In addition to the above, this study showed that there was no initiative evident on the part of the DAE to use the evaluation information. As usual, the reports were found to be locked up inside the file cabinets at the DAE head office in Dhaka along with the other ASIRP subproject reports (source: personal observation). The same situation was found to prevail at the *Upazilla* level units of the DAE. Interviews revealed that the FLE evaluation reports were never used or even read by DAE officers.

6.5.3 Workshops and review meetings

Frequent workshops and review meetings were an important feature of the FLE managerial approach. The major purpose was to analyse activities carried out over a specific period, identify the opportunities, constraints and threats through SWOT analysis and formulate appropriate strategies to cope with implementation constraints. A total of 17 workshops and review meetings were held during the tenure of the project. These were attended by the NCT, RT, and LAFT members along with the ASIRP representatives (e.g. project director, donor representatives). Therefore, at the organisational or project level, these workshops and review meetings could provide important opportunities for learning through the exchange and sharing of ideas among various parties.

Analysis of the relevant project documents and interviews with project staff suggested that the management team was able to detect a number of problems through these processes (Table 6.3). These included identification of several constraints within the FLE groups as well as in the implementing agencies and the operational context of the project. The management also took actions to overcome those barriers. For example, after having identified that many families were preventing women from participating in the project, the management team discussed the issue in a workshop. They identified two sources of the problem – resistance from both the traditional leaders in the communities and the husbands of the women. Therefore, they invited the religious leaders from the communities as well as the husbands of the women members to a number of workshops organised by the ASIRP. These actions ultimately resolved the problem.

Despite some examples of problem detection and correction, the results (Table 6.3) suggest that the purpose of these efforts was to identify and resolve the immediate constraints so that project implementation targets could be fulfilled. None of the problems identified or discussed in the workshops and review meetings was analysed in depth. On the contrary, attempts were made to resolve the problems through *ad hoc* actions. For example, sometimes when the FLE groups or farmer promoters were performing poorly in some communities, the management attempted to resolve the problems through superficial actions such as transferring the fieldworker concerned from one area to another or replacing the poorly performing farmer promoter, and the like. No example was found that the management team attempted to analyse in depth the reasons why the groups or the concerned fieldworkers failed to perform up to expectation. Consequently, the crucial cultural and motivational problems influencing the DAE and the FLE-NGO project staff were never identified.

The results also suggest that some of the error-correcting actions had negative consequences, which were never followed up – not even in successive cases. For example, frequent changes of farmer promoters resulted in loss of trained farmers. As a consequence, new promoters had to be recruited. However, the new recruits were not given any training. A number of individuals told that the project lacked a strategy of adaptive action. One interviewee used the analogy that although "buildings" were constructed, they were never "repaired", meaning that although

rural groups were developed, the project lacked a strategy to correct the problems that emerged over time within the groups.

Table 6.3 Problems identified through workshops and review meetings and actions taken to correct errors

What problems or errors were detected?	Were the problems analysed in-depth?	What actions were taken? If not, why?	Were problems solved or situation improved?	Were actions followed up? If not, why?
Jealousy and conflict within farmer groups for demonstration inputs and start-up loans provided to FPs through project grant; Conflicts among members to secure loans from group fund	No	Introduction of yearly rotational leadership; recycling of group funds; change of the concerned NGO fieldworker	No	No; Perceived to be beyond correction i.e. externalized as a cultural issue
The criteria for FP selection was problematic, resource poor farmers could not establish demonstrations	No	Change in criteria, inclusion of relatively rich farmers	Yes but resulted negative consequences as it allowed for inclusion of elites	No Project ended
Farmer promoters were performing poorly in some communities	No	Change farmer promoter	No	No; project funding period terminated.
The criteria for group member selection was problematic – one member per household made it difficult to find enough people	No	Change in criteria and inclusion of multiple members from one household	Yes	No Project ended
Uncertainty of post-project funding for NGO	No	Introduction of fee-for-service	No; aggravated as it excluded the poor farmers	No Project ended
Resistance to women's participation in group activities	No	Workshops with local leaders e.g. religious leaders	Yes	---
Conflict between DAE and NGO fieldworkers in FLE group formation	No	Only information shared through official letters, no corrective measures taken	No	No Sensitive issue
Corruption of fieldworkers in the procurement of inputs	No	Only information shared through official letters, no punitive action taken	Not known	No Sensitive issue
Lack of high level support from DAE	No	Inclusion of Director, FSW as National Coordinator	No	No Not known
Turnover of the overseas-trained DAE staff	No	Formal request to DG, DAE by NCT leaders and donor representatives	No; lack of administrative power of FLE project leadership	No Project ended
Inadequate TA/DA for project staff to participate in FLE activities	No	No Donor did not agree	----	-----
NGO staff shortages hampered FLE implementation	No	Yes ASIRP provided funds to hire new staff	No Required more staff; support came very late	No Problem concealed by NGO due to asymmetric power between NGO and donor
DAE staff were dissatisfied with incentives and logistics supports	No	No Asymmetric power between DAE lower and higher level staff	No Aggravated	No Not known

In addition to the above, many of the constraints identified through the workshops and review meetings could not be corrected (Table 6.3). This resulted in broken or incomplete learning cycles. There were several instances and reasons for this.

First, some of the problems were perceived to be too difficult to correct and hence, were externalised in the long run. For example, the management team identified that the FLE groups were disbanding because the general members were jealous of the training and incentives received by the farmer promoters. To overcome this problem, the project management team decided to annually rotate the farmer promoter position so that each group member would have the opportunity to receive training and other incentives provided to the person in this position. The management also decided to recycle the credit-support that was given to the farmer promoters (through the ASIRP grants) to undertake income-generation activities. According to this system, after a farmer promoter returned the loan to the group fund, another member would receive the loan and then the money would rotate among the rest of the members in a cyclic order. However, none of these solutions worked. No attempt, however, was made to further analyse the problems in more detail. On the contrary, the management believed that it was a "cultural" problem – "one faction just cannot tolerate another faction". Hence, as the interviewees believed, it was not possible to correct such types of problems within the period of a short duration project.

Second, the resolution of some problems required administrative authority, which the FLE project leaders lacked. One such example was the failure to prevent the turnover, from FLE to non-FLE regions, of the DAE officers who received FLE training from the Philippines. This problem occurred quite early in the implementation phase and the issue was discussed in several NCT meetings. In addition, attempts were made by the project leaders and even by the donor agency to retain the trained officers within the FLE regions. Ultimately, however, their actions did not succeed because none of the project leaders had the requisite administrative authority to influence the DAE staff turnover policy. Although as per the policy, an officer is allowed to stay in a place for up to three years, some interviewees believed that this could be manipulated if there were high ranking administrators within the management team. As one of the FLE Coordinators reported,

> …. we discussed this issue and requested the DAE top administration to retain the staff in the FLE *Upazillas.* Even the donors also requested but ultimately it was not possible …… (FLE Coordinator)

Third, adaptive corrections were also constrained because of the rigidity in the duration and mode of donor funding for the project. For example, although the DAE and the NGO stakeholders recognised that to consolidate its achievements the project needed to be extended beyond its scheduled closing date, the donor refused to accept the request. Several interviewees believed that if the time had been extended and some aspects of the FLE model modified, it would have been possible to make the model sustainable. An informant pointed out,

> I think the FLE model itself was faulty. It could have been better if we could modify (*ghosha-maja*) and adapt it but the question is why we failed to do that. I think one important reason was the short duration of the project. You know, when a project finishes, it becomes difficult. If there were more time, we could adapt the model. It could improve chances of sustainability …… (FLE line manager)

Similarly, quite early in the implementation period, DAE asked the donor to provide monetary incentives for its employees. The issue was raised several times in review meetings, but the donor could not agree with the demand as the issue of incentive payments was not included in the initial project proposal (PP). These examples suggested that the project was implemented rigidly according to the PP and there was little scope or flexibility to adapt to the evolving needs of the stakeholders.

This study also revealed the existence of obstacles to the flow of information between the donor and the field-level workers of both the DAE and the NGO. This was perceived by some interviewees as an important reason why learning did not occur in the project. There was a perception among the lower-level DAE employees that their "voices were not heard" or their feedback was not "presented to the appropriate fora". As one of the interviewees stated,

> The thing is we told our opinions but we have doubts if our voices were heard – i.e. whether our feedback was presented to the appropriate forum. …. (DAE *Upazilla* level officer)

A similar example of communication breakdown was found between the donor and the NGO. In this case, the problem was even worse because of an asymmetric power relationship between these two agencies which constrained the dialogue and generation of feedback that was crucial for adaptive learning. For example, although the problem of shortage of staff was seriously affecting the agency's ability to facilitate the FLE groups, the NGO top management was reluctant to give this feedback to the donor. However, ultimately the issue was raised by the NGO Director in a workshop and some additional funding support was given to the NGO. But it came too late.

According to the NGO interviewees, there were several reasons for the breakdown in the feedback system. First, there was no direct communication between the NGO fieldworkers and the donor, with the result that the fieldworkers could not apprise the donor of the problems in the field; and therefore the donor remained in the dark about the situation. Second, higher management was reluctant to engage in too much negotiation with the donor. This was because of a perception in the organisation that too much bargaining with the donor might result in a cancellation of contract for the FLE project. Additionally they were apprehensive that it might also harm the organisation's future prospects for getting donor projects. Given the resource constraints and the pressure for survival, the NGO had to be soft with the donor and "talk less".

The negative influence of asymmetric power relationships between the donor agency and the NGO on the FLE learning process was also manifested on several other occasions. For example, while the NGO fieldworkers, like the DAE fieldworkers, also resented lack of incentive payments from the donor agency, they abstained from giving feedback on the issue. Apart from the perceived risk of losing donor support, the NGO top management was not used to tolerating what it perceived as negative comments from its lower level employees. This culture did not promote learning in FLE. The NGO employees also did not like the way project consultants acted to bring about change in their interaction with rural people, but preferred to accept it in silence.

> It [lack of incentives] created some resentment among the LAFTs. Our staff, however, did not express it but I heard that BSs showed quite strong reaction against it……There were some problems of the

consultants with the DAE people [regarding instructions on the way DAE staff should behave with farmers], because they would not accept it so easily…. I think some problem [of DAE ownership] arose due to this. Since we are NGO we could accept this, but DAE had problem with this ….. (NGO manager)

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the results concerning the organisational design and management strategies applied in the FLE project and their influence on the sustainability of the project have been presented. Analysis of the organisational design and management strategies involved three aspects. The first was the level of complexity and integration of the FLE organisational system. The second aspect was the level of stakeholder involvement and ownership over the project processes. The third aspect dealt with the learning process of the FLE project.

The results suggest that the FLE organisational system involved several dimensions of complexity that negatively affected the sustainability of the system in the longer term. Among these were the variability and irregularity of the savings-credit tasks and the high cost managing the processes. The cost of coordinating FLE activities among various extension support providers involved with the project was also high. The FLE also demonstrated several features of a poorly integrated project. First, the project created new structures for coordinating project tasks, which were in parallel to the existing structures of the DAE. Second, several key aspects of the village organisations were novel and did not match with other organisations performing similar operations. Third, the project provided privileges to extension personnel and rural people concerned during project implementation. These features undermined the sustainability prospects of the FLE system.

As regards the issue of stakeholder ownership, the FLE project showed several features of a donor-driven, top-down approach. First, the project was initiated by the donor agency as a grant. The local stakeholders, particularly the farmer beneficiaries, did not express any desire for such intervention. Second, although the donor provided funding and technical assistance, it was the consultants, rather than the DAE and the NGO stakeholders, who dominated by directing the allocation and use of resources. More importantly, most of these decisions were poorly

negotiated with the lower level employees from the DAE and the NGO. It has been shown in this chapter that these features of the FLE project fostered perverse incentives, resulted in discontent and insincerity among the stakeholders concerned, and created lack of interest among them to maintain the system.

In the FLE project beneficiary participation was sought in six key events during the implementation phase. However, the findings indicated that in most cases, the project failed to achieve the intended level of beneficiary participation or the expected benefits from participation. A failure to implement high quality and level participation resulted in negative outcome in some instances. However, some of the practices intended to achieve high level participation had also unwanted negative consequences for the implementation performance of the project. These included: (i) allowing beneficiaries to select group leaders and members (ii) allowing beneficiaries to have full control over group funds, and (iii) sharing cost and resources with beneficiaries during project implementation. It is also shown in this chapter that the quality of the fieldworkers concerned, the community power structure and patron-client relationships among project actors appeared to be important for beneficiary participation to play positive roles.

As regards the issue of learning versus a blueprint approach, an analysis of the FLE case suggested that the project had several mechanisms in place that could foster adaptive learning. These included a system of ongoing monitoring, periodic workshops, and mid-term and end-of-project evaluations. Despite the existence of these mechanisms, they were largely unable to generate high quality information; neither were they able to unveil the important errors of the FLE organisational model that were necessary for learning to take place. The project was also characterised by a failure to learn about the critical institutional conditions in the operating environment. However, even when some errors were detected, the management team struggled to correct those errors. These results indicated that the FLE project was characterised by the features of a blueprint or limited learning system.

In the following chapter, the results presented in this chapter and the previous two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) are compared with the literature.

Chapter 7

Comparison of the results with the literature, and discussion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results obtained from the case study are compared with the literature presented in Chapter 2. In doing so, at first, a classification of the case is made. Then, the explanatory model obtained from the case study is compared with the literature. This comparison includes the results relating to the contextual factors, the project implementation performance, and the organisational design and strategies of the FLE case.

7.2 Classification of the case

In order to interpret and compare the results of case studies with those from other studies it is crucial to specify the theoretically important characteristics of the cases (Orum et al., 1991; Ragin, 1992; Vaughan, 1992; Walton, 1992). The theoretically important characteristics of the FLE case are provided in Table 7.1. In this study, the case is a novel organisational model/system of agricultural extension that was promoted through a donor-supported project (Gustafson, 1994; Rivera & Alex, 2004a-e). The new model involved four important reform principles: (i) farmer demand-led extension (Lightfoot, 2003, 2004; Rivera & Alex, 2004c), (ii) capacity building or empowerment of small and marginal farmers, the landless rural people, and the rural women, (iii) partnership between government and non-government organisations (NGOs) in extension service delivery (Rivera & Alex, 2004d), and integration of advisory and technology transfer activities with group-based micro-credits.

The case is an example of a poorly sustained donor-supported organisational reform within the agricultural extension system. Consistent with the literature (AusAID 2000; Bossert 1990; Ingle et al., 1990), the term *sustainability* in this study is defined as the sustainability of the outcome of the investments of a donor project,

which in this case is the novel extension model or system. The sustainability of project outcome is used synonymously with the term *project sustainability*, in the same way as used in the development literature (AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Ostrom et al., 2002). The term *sustainability* is also used to mean the ability of the new extension system to receive support from its stakeholders, as defined by Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1990, 1992). In this study, the outcome or the novel system promoted through the donor project failed to become sustainable, that is, the system lost support from the extension agencies and the rural people who were to keep it going following the withdrawal of the donor.

Table 7.1 Theoretically important characteristics of the case study

Characteristic	Case study classification
Sustainability	
The case	An organisational innovation or system promoted through a donor project. The reforms included the principles of demand-led extension, empowerment of rural poor, partnership between government and non-government organisation (NGO), and integration of technology transfer services and micro-credit.
Type of case	Negative – poorly sustained; the structures/activities that were expected to be sustainable were not sustained; the new system lost support from the key stakeholders
Nature of sustainability	Post-project – following the formal closure of the project and withdrawal of donor assistance; project return-on-investment phase
Project	
Sector	Agriculture or Natural Resource Management
Area	Agricultural extension and rural development
Project type	Extension organisational reform
Project duration	Short term (from mid 1999 through to the end of 2003)
Project funding	Donor funded with share from the aid recipient government
Scale of operation	Limited scale – regional, implemented in six sub-districts involving about 1100 farm families
Organisations and beneficiaries	
Number of organisations involved	Multi-organisational – Government Organisation, NGO, Community-based Groups of rural people
Beneficiaries	Mainly small and marginal farmers, landless, and women; low income group; low level of education
Implementation context	
Country status	Developing – poor development indicators
Poverty levels	High

The nature of donor assistance was time-bound project aid as opposed to programme aid, and the duration of assistance was short term, that is, a little less than four years. As opposed to a country-wide reform (Gustafson, 1994), the case

project was applied in a limited scale involving around 1,100 farm families located in six sub-districts of Bangladesh. The broad sectoral location of the project is Natural Resource Management with particular focus on agricultural extension service delivery. The case project was implemented in a developing country context with a high incidence of poverty and poor socioeconomic development indicators.

7.3   Factors explaining FLE non-sustainability

The reasons for the poor sustainability of the case study project can be explained according to the concepts articulated in the explanatory model in Chapter 2 that has drawn on the theory of institutional (cultural) legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Scott, 1995, 2004) as proposed in the "three pillars of institutions" (Scott, 1995, 2004), the IAD (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom et al., 2002), the SCOPE framework (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992) coupled with some of the concepts in the descriptive-empirical literature (see section 2.3 of Chapter 2).

As proposed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, all three dimensions of the case – its contexts, implementation performance, and design features and management strategies – were found to be important in explaining why the case was poorly sustained. These are further discussed in the following sections.

7.4   Contextual factors

The results obtained in this study support the propositions in the three theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter 2 (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Ostrom et al., 1994; Scott, 1995, 2004) as well the descriptive literature (section 2.3.1 and 2.3.2) that favourable contextual conditions are important prerequisites for the survival of an organisational system. Among the various contextual conditions, the institutions – that is, the rules, cultural norms and traditions within which the FLE system was located – acted as powerful forces influencing the system's performance and survival prospects. This was consistent with the relevant theories in the literature (Ostrom et al., 1994; Scott, 1995, 2004).

As envisaged in the sociological institutionalism school (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004), the cultural forces in the context reduced the perceived legitimacy of the reform principles of the FLE system and thus resulted in a lack of support from the extension agencies and the rural people. In addition, the political institutional forces in the context encouraged the pursuit of vested interests among the actors, thus undermining their interest to maintain the FLE system following the period of donor withdrawal. This was similar to those reported in the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 2002).

Furthermore, in line with the propositions of Scott (1995, 2001, 2004) and the descriptive literature (section 2.3.2, Chapter 2), institutions were not the only contextual forces; rather, the paucity of material resources of the implementing agencies also reduced their ability to sustain the FLE system following the period of donor withdrawal. The model of the contextual conditions identified in this study provides a more comprehensive framework than those proposed in the individual frameworks reviewed in section 2.2 of Chapter 2.

7.4.1 Institutional legitimacy of the FLE reforms

A lack of institutional legitimacy was identified as an important reason for the poor sustainability of the FLE project. This was manifested in the perceptions of the extension agencies and the rural people that the FLE system was based on some reform principles that did not match with the traditions, norms, and the policy context and hence the FLE was an abstract, undesirable or improper organisation. These findings are similar to the sociological institutional premise (Brinkerhoff, 2005; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004; Suchman, 1995) that institutional legitimacy is an important prerequisite for an organisation to be able to receive support from the stakeholders and thereby survive. An organisation is legitimated when the actors perceive that the actions of the entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially or culturally constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995).

While the lack of institutional legitimacy of the FLE affected both the DAE and the NGO, the specific manifestations of these influences differed between these two

agencies. Four important perceptions held by the DAE actors revealed a lack of institutional legitimacy of the FLE: (i) The rationale or purpose of the FLE was undesirable according to the conventional technocratic definition of desirable extension practice, (ii) The goal of developing empowered rural groups in FLE was unrealistic in the cultural context of Bangladesh, (iii) Working with the rural poor and assisting them in their savings-credit was a low status job for government extension employees, and (iv) The NGOs are rivals rather than partners. As the results in Chapter 4 have shown, the sources of such perception were embedded within the norms and belief systems or, in other words, the culture of the DAE. These deeply held institutions shaped what constituted the acceptable and desirable extension practices for the DAE employees, which were in clear mismatch with the reforms underpinning the FLE project.

Recent descriptive case studies in agricultural extension carried out in other countries around the world (Cayota, 2004; Garforth, 2004; Thapa & Ojha, 2004) also revealed the influence of culture on the sustainability of new extension projects and programmes that are based on the principles of demand-led extension, participation, partnership, and privatisation. Being mainly descriptive in nature, these studies, however, did not clarify the specific manifestations of the cultural factors and explain their role in sustainability.

To the DAE actors, one of the important reasons for the institutional illegitimacy of the FLE was its goal of empowering the rural people. This was in clear contradiction to the technocratic values upon which the DAE is founded and the elitist norms that characterise the behaviour of its employees. The technocratic value is driven by a deeply held belief that transferring improved crop technologies to the farmers is what extension professionals should do and this is what the farmers in Bangladesh would require for their development. Similarly, the concept of working with poor villagers on an egalitarian way did not conform to what DAE employees believe is expected of them as extension workers. Thus, working with poor rural people became analogous to working with '*fakir miskins*' or beggars, which is a low status job and does not conform to the societal image and the "officer status" of a government extension employee in Bangladesh. The influence of these values and beliefs made it difficult for the DAE employees to continue their support for the FLE.

These findings conform to the propositions in the theory of institutional legitimacy (Brinkerhoff, 2005; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2004; Suchman, 1995). As shown in the "three pillars of institutions" framework in Chapter 2 (Scott, 1995), cognitions and norms are important institutional elements that exert influences on the actors. The cognitive institutions refer to the belief systems and specify "how things should be done". The concept of norms includes the values that are shared in a particular profession or the expectations that have gained acceptance within organisations. These normative pressures specify "what is expected of someone" in a given context and prescribe what is right and wrong. Accordingly, when an organisation conforms to these socially or professionally sanctioned norms and beliefs, it is accorded cognitive and normative legitimacy by the organisation's actors. Such cognitive and normative legitimacy is important for an organisation to be valued and supported by its stakeholders.

The influence of the technology transfer culture in the legitimization of farmer-centred or participatory extension practices, as was identified in the case of the FLE, corresponds with the observation of Ison and Russel (2000). The authors reported that the dominant extension tradition of Technology Transfer has developed into a kind of culture in Australia. These past extension traditions shape the perception of what is acceptable and valid or legitimate extension practice in the country. According to Ison and Russel (2000:15-18), the technology transfer culture was in "collision" with the newly introduced farmer-centred approaches in Australia. Lewis (1998) also noticed the existence of the top-down technology transfer vision among the government extension agencies involved with the ICLARM[1] aquaculture extension project in Bangladesh that influenced the prospects for sustaining the project following the period of donor involvement.

This study revealed that an important reason for the FLE model's lack of legitimacy was the concept of partnership between the government and the non-government organisations (NGOs). In this study, this lack of legitimacy was manifested in the form of a deeply held suspicion between the DAE and the NGO, a confrontational rhetoric of the NGO towards the DAE, and a perception among the DAE that the NGOs were being patronised by the donors to the detriment of the government organisations. The results, however, indicated that the government extension

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[1] International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management

agency (DAE) was more reluctant towards partnership compared to the NGO. These findings are somewhat similar to the observations of several extension and rural development authors on Bangladesh (Farrington et al., 1993a; Lewis, 1993, 1998) and other developing countries (Farrington et al., 1993a; Scarborough et al., 1997), although the authors did not use the concept of institutional legitimacy in reporting their observations.

Lewis (1993: 56) found that the relationship between the government and the non-government organisations in Bangladesh are "polarised'" and characterised by "mutual distrust". The author also noticed that the financial accountability of the NGOs and their relationships with the donors are questioned in the government circles in Bangladesh. Based on observations from the ICLARM aquaculture extension project in Bangladesh, Lewis (1998: 99-115) reported that the development agencies in Bangladesh operate in a resource-dependent context where the government agencies and NGOs "compete" with each other for donor resources. The author identified this competition as a major constraint to sustaining the organisational framework of the ICLARM project beyond donor involvement.

This study provides empirical support for the statements made by Sulaiman and Hall (2004). Based on lessons from new extension projects in India, Sulaiman and Hall reported that although there are some examples of GO-NGO partnership in India, partnership is still a missing norm within the government organisations in the country. The authors maintained that a change in the institutional culture of public sector extension organisations would be required for successful application of extension approaches that are based on partnership between the government and non-government organisations.

The findings regarding the institutional legitimacy of the FLE model to the NGO were somewhat different from the DAE results. As shown in Chapter 4, although the key reform principles underlying the FLE project matched with the policies, mission statements and the operational norms of the NGO, it became difficult for the agency to sustain its support for the FLE project because of its market-oriented values. By the standard of this value, the FLE was perceived by the NGO as a non-profitable entity. The NGO thus encountered two kinds of pressure from its institutional environment – the need to pursue its foundational values of

empowering the poor and at the same time, achieving financial solvency for its own survival. Given that the organisation finally failed to sustain its support for the FLE system, it indicated an overpowering role of the financial exigencies over the normative ones. This result provides empirical support for the premise that the type of institutional pressures confronted by organisations varies according to the nature of the sector in which the organisations operate (Scott, 2004). In the FLE case, the pressure on the FLE-NGO was in fact emerging from a condition that prevails in the "NGO sector" in Bangladesh.

As has been explained in Chapter 4, an important reason for the commercial value orientation of the FLE-NGO is its struggle to achieve financial sustainability in the event of dwindling support from the parent donors. This observation supports the research of Devine (2003) on the NGOs in Bangladesh. According to the author, the NGOs in Bangladesh have undergone a profound transformation in recent decades (since the 1990s onwards) in which their original objectives of mobilising and empowering the poor have been replaced by a much narrower concern with securing funds that enable their own organisational growth. One reason for this is the struggle of the Bangladesh NGOs (mainly due to pressure from the donors) to reduce dependency on donor funding. Owing to this pressure, NGOs have become more "anxious" about their own survival than the long-term security of their beneficiaries (Devine, 2003: 231). In order to ensure survival, the NGOs have resorted to service charges and profits from their micro-credit programmes with the rural poor, sometimes to the detriment of the poor (Devine, 2003).

This study also revealed that the FLE model lacked legitimacy due to its demand-led principle that required appropriate government policies of decentralisation. The FLE did not conform to the centralised planning and resource allocation procedures of the DAE. Policy constraints were also found at inter-organisational or ministerial levels that discouraged other government agencies from supporting the rural groups formed through the FLE project. This lack of support negatively affected the performance of the project. However, this poor policy support was due more to the way the actors generally apply the existing written policies. As shown in Chapter 4, in the case of the DAE, despite having formal policies of decentralisation which matched with FLE principles, the DAE's policy-in-practice was highly centralised. Similarly, despite the government policy to provide free services to farmers, the

culture of seeking rents or *bhata* by government extension personnel indicated that policies are not necessarily applied in the way they are written or stated.

Several authors (AusAID, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988) have argued that appropriate government policies are important requirements for the sustainability of development projects and programmes. For example, AusAID (2000) stated that when a donor-supported project fits well with the existing policies of the recipient government, it is more likely to receive high level administrative support. However, the results of this study are difficult to compare with such simplistic statements. The results of this study suggest that the existence of written policies and their actual application are not necessarily the same thing. In the FLE project a lack of policy support emerged not because there were no written policies but because the policies were applied by the actors in a different way. These results indicate the usefulness of the concept of "rules-in-use" as proposed in the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 2002).

A number of empirical studies in the broader development field (Bossert, 1990; White et al., 2005) and in agricultural extension and rural development (Fakih et al., 2003; Garforth, 2004; Scarborough et al., 1997; Thapa & Ojha, 2004) have reported that development projects and programmes performed well and were better sustained or institutionalised when they matched the legal and regulatory frameworks as well as the existing policies of the government. These authors, however, did not distinguish between the "existence of policies as statements in papers/manuals" and the "actual practice of written policies".

The FLE model also encountered a lack of cultural support or legitimacy among the rural people. The specific manifestations of the cultural forces were, however, different from those confronted by the implementing agencies – the DAE and the NGO. One of these manifestations was the belief among the rural people that it would not be possible for them to operate the village groups without the continuing presence of outside professionals. As shown in Chapter 4, this dependency characterised the tradition of the patron-client relationship between the villagers and the government and NGO service providers. In this relationship, the outside agencies act as the relief providers, money lenders, law enforcers or rulers, grant providers, and the like. Due to these deeply rooted traditions and the resultant

dependency mindset, the rural people involved with the FLE groups failed to perceive that they could operate independently of their patrons. This was in clear contrast with the goal of developing independent farmer groups in the FLE project.

This result corresponds with those reported by a number of authors (Devine, 2003; Lewis, 1993; Lewis, 2003; Wood, 1994, 1997) who also noted the existence of patron-client relationships between the villagers and the outside agencies in Bangladesh. For example, Devine (2003: 234-235) reported that relationships, alliances, and networks are the most common (and often the only) mechanisms through which poor people in Bangladesh can stake a credible claim on resources. This is because the poor people with weak, dysfunctional, or ineffective relationships find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. The author further reported that such relationships are historically forged in Bangladesh across class lines between elite patrons and clients. Normally, this takes the form of patrons offering material aid, protection, and advice in return for political allegiance, support, and loyalty. Devine (2003) reported that the patron-client relationship was very resistant to change.

The negative influence of the patron-client relationship on the sustainability of the Silk Development Pilot Project in Bangladesh is reported by Lewis (2003: 217). The author noticed a high level of continuing dependency of the rural groups on the NGOs who formed the groups. The author reported that due to this dependency, the villagers failed to perceive an independent future for their groups, thus reducing prospects for sustaining the project. Lewis (2003) referred this dependency to the tradition of patron-client relationships that characterise rural societies in Bangladesh.

This research also showed that traditional cooperative norms among community people are important for the sustainability of a donor-supported extension reform. As shown in Chapter 4, due to the weakening of traditional cooperative norms among men, it became difficult for the male FLE groups to sustain their activities. Compared to this, the prevalence of stronger norms of cooperation among women such as exchange of household items during seasonal and family crises facilitated the survival of a few female FLE groups. This cooperation was found to be

supported by the tradition of family-based division of labour and the limited mobility of women.

In addition to the proposition in the SCOPE (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992) and the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 2002), this result supports Uphoff (2001) who maintained that the existing norms of cooperation in the rural communities are important for the success of rural development projects. According to the author, the popular community development approach of the 1950s and 60s was dismantled because of the assumption that communities are homogenous social units. Uphoff comes to a view that contradicts conventional wisdom. Communities are often not cohesive and harmonious social entities but divided by religious, familial, clan or other issues which lead to a considerable level of conflict. Uphoff also reported that communities have traditional mechanisms of resolving or containing conflicts. In this study, such mechanisms were found to prevail only among women, not men.

The degree of existing norms of cooperation among the rural people and the successful implementation and spread of farmer-led agricultural extension projects in developing countries are also reported by Scarborough et al., (1997). For example, the traditional cooperative norms of *alayon* or *bayanihan* in the Philippines and the *Ngua*, *Kuwandana*, and *weni mwana* in Kenya facilitated the spread of farmer-led extension approaches.

In addition to weak traditions of cooperation, the researcher identified two other cultural attributes of rural people that negatively influenced the sustainability of FLE. They are the "poor development propensity among rural men", and the "perverse loan culture". No study was found to report the influence of these cultural forces on agricultural extension and rural development projects and programmes.

7.4.2 Institutional conditions, perverse incentives, and FLE

While the concept of cultural legitimacy provided an important theoretical construct to explain the poor sustainability prospect of the FLE project, some of the institutional factors identified in this case study, were difficult to explain with reference to the concept. It was noticed that these institutional factors/conditions

acted as sources of distorted or perverse incentives which encouraged actors to withhold support for the FLE system. In such instances, the actors concerned appeared to be strategic and their actions or decisions were deliberate and intended towards maximising vested self-interests. Therefore, the rational choice perspective of the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom et al., 2002) appeared to be important in explaining these findings. In the following sections, these results are discussed and compared with those in the literature.

The findings of this study support the proposition and empirical evidence provided by Ostrom et al., (2002) that the benefit/outcome of donor-assisted projects or programmes becomes unsustainable due to the influence of perverse incentives in developing countries. The ASSP and ASIRP literature (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003) also reported a similar condition that negatively affected the sustainability of donor-supported extension reforms in Bangladesh. For example, the "DAE-NGO contracted partnership" model was unsustainable in Bangladesh because the actors lacked a real commitment towards such a reform. Rather, they participated in the reform to access donor funds (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003b).

A number of dysfunctional institutional conditions were found to create perverse incentives for the DAE and the NGO actors as well as the rural communities to maintain their support for the FLE system following the period of donor withdrawal. Bossert (1990) and Ostrom et al., (2002) also reported that dysfunctional institutional conditions were important sources of perverse incentives for actors involved with donor-supported development projects and programmes in India and some African countries.

This study also showed that while some of the institutional sources of perverse incentives were different for each of the actors – the DAE, the FLE-NGO, and the rural communities – the other forces were similar. For the DAE, the dysfunctional institutional conditions included the norms of rent-seeking and corruption, absence of employee rewards for good performance and lack of promotion opportunities, poor enforcement of administrative rules, lack of accountability for the failure of a donor-supported project, and donor or project syndrome. Corruption and rent-seeking as norms of government agencies and their negative impacts on the success and sustainability of development projects are reported in empirical

literature in development studies (Bossert, 1990; Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Manning, 2001; Ostrom et al., 2002). Bossrt (1990: 1018) identified "institutionalised corruption" among the government agencies as an important factor that negatively affected the sustainability prospects of donor-supported health projects in African and Latin American countries. In Zaire, for example, the author noticed that the state was a "predator" that undermined the sustainability prospects of the health projects in the country. Although these perverse institutional incentives are reported in the broader development literature, no study in agricultural extension was found to have reported these factors.

Bossert (1990) and Ostrom et al., (2002) also reported several other dysfunctional institutional incentives that negatively affected the sustainability of donor-supported projects in African and Asian countries. These factors are very similar to those identified in this study such as absence of appropriate rewards for government employees, low salary and wages, weak application of administrative rules, and absence of cooperative norms within the public sector agencies. The World Bank (2005) country study in Bangladesh also reported that the lack of appropriate incentives for government employees is an important reason for the poor sustainability prospects of the donor-funded extension and research projects in Bangladesh.

The dysfunctional institutional conditions creating perverse incentives for government extension actors and the negative impacts of these conditions on extension reforms have received little attention in the extension literature. Although a lack of "commitment" and vested interests of government extension actors are reported to be key threats to successful extension reform both in Bangladesh (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Gill et al., 2003; World Bank, 2005) and other developing countries (Lightfoot 2003, 2004), little is written as to why government actors fail to remain committed. The results of this study suggest that the concept of commitment does not itself provide an adequate explanation for unsuccessful extension reforms. Rather, a lack of commitment is the creation of the dysfunctional or weak institutional contexts within which government employees operate.

A comparison between the internal work culture of the DAE and the NGO revealed that the NGO's internal work culture also negatively affected the performance and

sustainability prospects of the FLE system. An important factor identified in this study was the nepotism of the NGO in the enforcement of its administrative rules. Although the negative influences of the work culture of government agencies have received attention in the development literature (Bossert, 1990; Ostrom et al., 2002), no empirical study was found reporting the negative work culture of NGOs involved in extension projects.

The norm of project or donor syndrome was evident both within the DAE and the NGO. The rural people were also caught in a similar syndrome where they did not perceive any incentive to participate in FLE activities without free goods and grants. This study revealed that the reasons for this syndrome are related to the ongoing and past traditions of donor-supported projects and excessive inflow of foreign aid into Bangladesh. The norm of paying monetary and other forms of material incentives for project implementation has developed a habit of seeking remuneration and doles.

These results support the observations of the World Bank (1995) country assistance review in Ghana. The World Bank review identified the flow of excessive aid projects as a reason for reluctance of Ghanaian government officials to own development projects. Similarly, the ASSP and ASIRP extension reform literature in Bangladesh (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, Gill et al., 2003) highlighted that over-projectisation (too many donor projects) of donor assistance in DAE was a key reason for the agency's lack of ownership of donor-supported extension reforms.

While the influence of excessive aid on government officials is reported in the literature, such an impact is not documented for NGOs. The tradition of dole-out in the form of free goods and grants provided to rural people and their harmful impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of development projects is well documented in the descriptive-empirical literature in agricultural extension and rural development (Bagadion, 1997; Hagmann et al., 1998; Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002; Scarborough et al., 1997; Uphoff et al., 1998). For example, Uphoff et al., (1998: 36) argued that the legacy of dole-out creates a dependency mentality among rural people that discourages self-sustained rural development. This is because it results in the reluctance of rural people to put up their own resources. Instead, they hope or expect that if they decline self-help they can get something for free.

7.4.3 Material resources

The findings of this study suggest that the paucity of material resources available to the extension agencies negatively influenced their ability to sustain their support for the FLE project. This is consistent with the empirical literature on agricultural extension that the scarcity of financial and human resources of implementing agencies in developing countries is a major reason for the poor sustainability of extension projects supported through donor-assistance (Anderson et al 2006; Cayota, 2004; Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002; Kidd, 2004; Purcell & Anderson, 1997; Saviroff & Londarte, 2004; Rivera & Alex, 2005).

A good number of publications (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a, 2003b; Chowdhury & Gilbert, 1996; Gill et al., 2003; World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2005) concerning donor-supported extension reforms in Bangladesh have also highlighted the poor financial condition of government agencies and lack of operational funds as important reasons for the non-sustainability of various donor-supported extension reforms in Bangladesh. With specific reference to the FLE model, the results of this study are consistent with the ASIRP project completion report (Gill et al., 2003). The report stated that the FLE model was unlikely to be sustainable beyond donor involvement because the DAE and the NGOs did not have the amount of resources required to keep the model operational.

In addition to the extension literature, several empirical studies in the broader development field (Bossert, 1990; Finsterbusch, 1990) also reported a relationship between the poor economic condition of government agencies and the sustainability of donor-supported projects in developing countries.

The results from this study, however, suggest that resource scarcity affected not only the prospects for sustainability of the FLE innovation but also its prospects for performance during the project implementation period.

7.5 Project implementation performance

The results (Chapter 5) from this study indicate that the FLE innovation failed to demonstrate the expected level of performance during its lifetime, that is, the project implementation period. The project largely failed to produce the expected outputs and create beneficial impacts as expected by its stakeholders. This failure was a key reason why FLE lost the support of stakeholders. The relationship between "performance failure" and "sustainability failure" of organisations, projects, and programmes is well documented in the extension and development literature reviewed in Chapter 2. However, no study or publication concerning agricultural extension reform in Bangladesh was found that has reported a similar relationship.

The FLE project set out to develop independent village groups and farmer promoters who would be capable of operating on their own. The performance of the project in this regard was perceived to be poor by the implementing agencies – the DAE and the NGO. Quite opposite to their expectations, most of the farmers that were trained to be "farmer promoters" demonstrated selfish behaviour, abused project funds for personal gain, and failed to bring extension services to their fellow group members. According to the perception of the implementing agencies, the great majority of the village groups also performed poorly in terms of their ability to accumulate group funds, undertake extension and development activities, and manage conflicts without continued assistance from the DAE and the NGO workers. These implementation failures resulted in a lack of interest among the DAE and the NGO in the FLE approach.

The relationship between the perceived poor performance of the FLE project and the willingness of the stakeholders to support the project was also proven by the observation that a number of government (including the DAE) and non-government extension support providers (including the FLE-NGO) took a considerable interest in supporting a few of the successful promoters and their groups that the project was able to produce. This means that had the FLE project produced quality farmer promoters and groups in most instances, it would have been possible to garner support from the extension service providers.

The above results of this study tend to support the general proposition in the SCOPE framework that a system's ability to produce high quality outputs is important for its sustainability (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992). These results also support the concept of exchange or pragmatic legitimacy as coined by Brinkerhoff (2005). According to this concept, as the author has maintained, an organisation's legitimacy depends not only on the institutional forces but also on its ability to fulfil the performance expectations of its stakeholders.

The findings of this study, however, contradict the results obtained from some of the earlier empirical studies reported by Finsterbusch (1990) in which organisations were sustained despite their poor performance. In the FLE case, poor performance resulted in poor prospects for sustainability. Fisterbusch (1990) explained that the reason why the poor performing cases were sustained was because they were able to serve the vested interests of the bureaucrats. This explanation perfectly matches with the FLE case. As the system failed to satisfy the vested interests of the DAE bureaucrats, it lost their support.

In addition to the SCOPE literature, the relationship between project performance and sustainability is also reported in the health intervention literature (Bossert, 1990; Shediac Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). For example, Bossert's (1990) case study of the sustainability of donor-supported health projects in Central America and Africa found that the projects that were not sustained were characterised by an inability to achieve the expected objectives and goals during their lifetime. On the other hand, health projects that were sustained had a good reputation for being successful. Such reputations influenced the decisions of the health officials and beneficiaries concerned to support the project following the withdrawal of the donor, regardless of the fact that there was no objective or quantitative evidence for such success.

As regards the expectations of the rural people, this study also revealed that the ability of the FLE project to generate material and financial benefits was important in order to keep up the interest of the rural people in the project. There was great competition among the rural people for the demonstration inputs and training provided by the service providers. However, the demands were not for the new knowledge or agricultural technologies but for the free inputs and remuneration

associated with these extension activities. The results further revealed that there was little interest among the farmers in the information and advice provided by the DAE service providers. As shown in Chapter 5, the farmers sought seed, fertiliser, financial credit, and so on, from the service providers.

A failure of the FLE project to fulfil these needs or to be able to enhance farmers' access to these agricultural inputs resulted in their lack of interest in the project. Furthermore, the financial gain from the group-based savings-credit was very important to maintain the interest of the rural people in the FLE project. In most of the FLE groups, a failure to meet the members' demand for financial loans was a key reason for the disbanding of the groups. A few of the female groups that maintained FLE activities post-project pointed out that even though they encountered the same unfavourable contextual conditions as the others, the incentive of continuing financial profits kept their groups going.

These results support several extension authors (Anderson & Feder, 2003; Feder et al., 1999) who maintain that the inability to generate visible or material benefits is a key reason why extension organisations providing only advisory services lose the support of stakeholders. Anderson et al., (2006) explained that one of the important reasons for the demise of the T&V system was its inability to produce visible impacts. On the other hand, Sulaiman and Hall (2004) reported that donor-supported extension projects in India were sustained because the projects were able to generate visible benefits on a number of fronts such as increased crop yields and income, improved access of the farmers to agricultural inputs such as farm machinery, agricultural credit, advisory and field supervision services including buy-back and better prices. Similarly, using the SCOPE framework, Gustafson (1994) revealed that the success of the T&V projects was related to their ability to demonstrate visible impacts to the farmers.

The results of this study also indicate that at the village level financial gain was the most important factor for the sustainability of the FLE project. This was proven by the observation that in some of the communities, where a few of the female groups were able to accumulate bigger group funds through the group-based savings-credit and the members were able to make some financial gains, the groups were able to survive. This result provides empirical support for AusAID (2000) which

maintained that financial gain would be the most important factor for the sustainability of a development project and programme. Several empirical studies (Datta, 2005; White et al., 2005) also reported that financial gain was the most important factor for the sustainability of development projects.

This case study, however, also revealed that the perception of financial benefit generated through group-based micro-credit was related to the socioeconomic characteristics of the rural people. In the FLE case, such characteristics included the gender of the rural people, their economic conditions, mobility, availability of time to invest in savings-credit activities, and opportunity for supplementary income. Furthermore, the ability of FLE group-based savings-credit to provide more advantages compared to other contemporary organisations providing micro-credit services was found to be important. As the results in Chapter 5 have shown, these were the reasons why the women were more interested in the group-based savings-credit compared to the men. While financial gain is identified in the literature as a key factor influencing the sustainability of extension and development projects, the factors under which such benefits would be valued is not reported in the literature.

This study also revealed that although financial and material gains were quite important to keep up the interest of the rural people, an inequality in the distribution of these benefits created negative consequences for the survival of the project activities at the village level. Capture of project benefits by the elite and powerful farmers to the deprivation of the relatively poor members created negative impacts. This finding supports the experiences with area development projects in developing countries as reported by Edgren (2000). The author points out that the benefits of a development investment may not always go to the poor. Elites may capture the benefits and thus threaten the survival of the organisation (Edgren 2000). Edgren (2000:63) argued that one reason for this is that in most projects the target groups are not well defined, often with the assumption that "everyone in the area is poor". As the earlier discussions in this chapter have shown, the FLE project's design was characterised by this problem.

The above result also provides empirical support for the propositions forwarded by AusAID (2000) that in order for a project or programme to be sustainable, there

should be clear and equitable distribution of the benefits. From Bangladesh, Datta (2005) reported a similar finding. The author found that Community-Based Groups (CBOs) involved with rural development projects failed to survive because of a perception among the rural people that their group leaders did not distribute project benefits fairly.

This study also showed that the number of rural people receiving benefits was important for the sustainability of the FLE project at the village level. Since the project was able to generate benefits for only a small number of farmers, the majority who missed out decided to leave. No empirical study was found to report similar findings.

In the FLE case, the benefits of the project were perceived to be low compared to the time that rural people were required to invest. This finding supports the AusAID (2000) statements that suggested that when project costs outweigh benefits or the benefits are very small compared to the costs, it negatively affects sustainability. Several empirical studies have also reported that development projects were sustained when the benefits were perceived to be greater than the costs (Steckler & Goodman, 1989). Lightfoot (2004) maintained that for extension reform projects to be sustainable it would be necessary for the reform to produce more benefits compared to the costs. A number of extension and rural development authors (Anderson et al., 2006; Datta, 2005) also reported that for extension organisations to be sustainable, the benefits must be greater than the costs. For example, Anderson et al., (2006) explain that one of the important reasons why the T&V system failed to survive was because the costs of operating the system were very high while the ability of the system to demonstrate visible impacts was very low.

7.6 Organisational design and strategies

The results of this study suggest that the sustainability prospect of the FLE system was undermined because of its use of complex technology and structures and a parallel mode of project organisation. These findings are consistent with those in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and also with those in some of the extension reform literature in Bangladesh (Chapter 1). This study also showed that the FLE

project lacked an effective strategy to develop ownership of the FLE innovation by the DAE, the NGO, and the rural people. This observation supports the proposition developed from the review of the literature (Chapter 2). Concerning the role of beneficiary participation, the results of this study were somewhat different from those reported in the literature. As regards the issue of organisational learning, the FLE project was characterised by a considerable failure to detect and correct errors that resulted in the poor performance of the project. This finding was difficult to compare with the proposition in the SCOPE literature since the framework does not clarify the nature and level of learning. The relationships between "organisational learning" and "sustainability" as observed in this study, however, were more closely aligned with those reported in the descriptive literature.

7.6.1 Organisational complexity

The results presented in Chapter 6 have shown that the FLE project's sustainability prospect was negatively affected by the complexity of its internal system processes. This observation provides empirical support to the concept of internal complexity articulated in the SCOPE framework (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992). This is an important contribution because few of the previous studies that applied the SCOPE (Finsterbusch, 1990; Ingle et al., 1990) included examination of the concept of complexity in detail. Furthermore, except one project evaluation document (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003b), no study or publication was found in Bangladesh that highlighted the role of organisational complexity in the sustainability of donor-supported extension reforms.

The complexity of the technology and structure in FLE design was manifested in several dimensions. One of the important manifestations was found in the group-based savings-credit processes (technology) that the rural people were required to undertake. The process became complex mainly because of its variability and irregularity in application – such as the amount of savings to be deposited by a member, the amount of loan that a member could obtain from the group fund, the recovery of the loan, and so on, were highly variable and irregular. The results in Chapter 6 have shown that such irregular frequency in the savings-credit process became unmanageable for the rural people and required the group leaders concerned to invest a considerable amount of time and effort to keep it going. As

was found in this study, this was an important reason why many of the rural people who were selected as group leaders for the FLE project declined to continue with the project's activities in the longer term.

This observation supports the SCOPE that irregularity and variability in the frequency of application contributes to high complexity in the technology (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992). Complexity, on the other hand, is inversely related to organisational sustainability (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992). A similar observation comes from an ASSP and ASIRP project evaluation document in Bangladesh (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003b). According to the report, the "contractual partnership model between DAE and NGOs" became unsustainable because the process was "lengthy" and hence, involved high transaction costs.

The FLE model was intended to combine the traditional task of technology transfer (under the T&V system) with group-based savings-credit so that a combined service would have a bigger and better impact on the livelihood of rural people. However, combining these two functions increased the level of complexity in FLE group processes. As shown in Chapter 6, while a few of the relatively well-off farmers within a village group who had agricultural lands were interested in the technology transfer activities, the majority of the poor group members (e.g. the landless) had obviously no interest in such activities. Instead, they were more interested in group loans and other monetary matters. This conflict of interest was an important source of tension in most of the village groups which seriously hampered FLE project's goal to develop farmer promoters. This result supports the argument put forward by Israel (1987) that an organisational system becomes complex when it is intended to address multifaceted tasks.

In addition to the above, the inclusion of rural people from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds substantially increased the level of complexity in the FLE design. For example, within the same village group, the farmer promoters and group leaders were relatively well-off farmers while the majority of the group members were smallholders, marginal farmers and the landless. Due to this admixture, the project suffered from several harmful consequences. As presented in Chapter 6, the farmer leaders, by virtue of their power and relationships with the outside professionals were able to capture the bulk of project benefits while unfairly

depriving the relatively poor group members. Being relatively powerless, the poorer members were unable to challenge such malpractice committed by their leaders. Such incidences were major reasons for the collapse of many village groups. This result supports the concept of "asymmetrical power" as a source of system complexity as articulated in the SCOPE framework. As Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1990:34) stated, "whenever the parties to transactions have dissonant claims, and they lack full knowledge of and ability to control each others actions, sustainability is at risk".

This study has also shown that the FLE project's intention to provide demand-led services was an ambitious plan that was unrealistic in the context where the project was implemented. To implement this ambitious plan, the DAE and NGO stakeholders concerned were required to coordinate their work with a range of other government departments with whom these two agencies did not have any formal linkage. Such coordination on the other hand required the project personnel concerned from the DAE and the NGO to invest considerable time and effort. This design feature was especially unrealistic because of the lack of devotion of the DAE employees to their duties and an institutional context where various stakeholders seek remuneration to participate in the activities of donor-supported projects. Thus, although it was possible to achieve inter-stakeholder coordination with funding support from the donor, it became impossible to maintain such coordination following the termination of donor funding. This result provides empirical support for the propositions of Israel (1987) and Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1990, 1992) that integrated rural development projects or programmes which involve multiple organisations from a range of sectors tend to be complex and that such complex structures are difficult to maintain because of their high transaction costs.

Lastly, the involvement of both GO and NGO in project implementation also demonstrated features of complexity. As articulated in the SCOPE literature (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992), this complexity was manifested in the form of asymmetrical power relationships between the two organisations – the DAE and the NGO. For example, the domination of the DAE employees in the selection of rural people to form community groups, the difficulty of reconciling the interests of these two agencies in deciding on the criteria of farmer selection, and so on,

negatively affected the FLE project. As shown in Chapter 6, this was an important reason why the village groups developed through the project resulted in an admixture of rural people coming from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Since each organisation was pursuing their own interest to form groups that would be compatible with their own organisation, it became difficult to come up with a coordinated decision. Therefore, the asymmetric relationships between the DAE and the NGO turned out to be irreconcilable that adversely affected FLE project's ability to achieve its goal. This supports the propositions in the SCOPE framework that a system involving asymmetric power relationships and conflicting interests tends to be complex.

Very little attention is given in the agricultural extension literature to the design features of the extension organisations that are promoted in developing countries through donor-assisted projects. The only study that examined this aspect was that of Gustafson (1994). It is, however, difficult to compare the findings of this study with those of Gustafson because his study involved the T&V model that was applied at a national scale while the FLE system was a small-scale initiative. Further, the T&V was a top-down and government-run system while the FLE was [intended to be] a bottom-up and farmer-led system. Despite all these dissimilarities between the two cases, the results of this study support Gustafson's (1994) observations that incorporation of multiple functions increases system complexity, which in turn negatively affects its sustainability. In the case of FLE, the complexity was created by a combination of technology transfer and micro-credit activities and also the intention to address the broader livelihood issues of rural people. These features made it difficult to sustain the system due to their high requirements for coordination and the associated costs. Gustafson's study, however, did not mention the other complexity factors identified in this study, such as the involvement of multiple organisations with disparate policies, mission-visions, and asymmetrical powers.

Gustafson (1994) also found that the relationships between the sustainability of a system and its complexity varied in different countries where the T&V system was implemented. For example, while complexity played a positive role in India and Thailand, it played a negative role in the Philippines. As Gustafson reported, the adoption of multiple tasks negatively affected the sustainability of the T&V system

in the Philippines because this required too many resources to maintain the system. On the other hand, in India and Thailand, multiple functions (e.g. non-extension functions) performed by the extension employees under the T&V approach satisfied the bureaucrats and the politicians. Such political support was conducive to the sustainability of the T&V system in those countries. Gustafson (1994), therefore, concluded that there is no technically correct formula of system design. The author, however, did not provide an adequate explanation for such variations in different countries. This study has shown that one important reason why the cost of coordination in the FLE system became very high could be traced back to the lack of formal linkages between the various government extension departments and their norm of seeking remuneration for participating in development activities involving foreign donors. The present study, therefore, shows a contingency relationship between system complexity and the institutional context within which the system is located.

7.6.2 Integrated versus parallel mode of implementation

The FLE was an example of a poorly integrated project. This poor integration was manifested in three ways: (i) the project created new or parallel structures, (ii) used remuneration and incentives in project implementation, and (iii) introduced parallel tasks or procedures. This study shows that these factors negatively affected the performance and the sustainability prospect of the FLE system. These observations support the propositions and empirical findings in the development literature but they have received very little attention in agricultural extension literature in Bangladesh and other countries.

7.6.2.1   New or parallel implementation structures

New or parallel implementation structures in donor-supported projects and programmes are recognised as important features of poor integration (AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Parallel structures are characterised by several features: (i) they have separate hierarchies in relation to the existing hierarchies of the implementing agencies, (ii) they operate as autonomous administrative units lacking coordination and communication with the

existing administrative structures, and (iii) they have narrowly defined goals and objectives.

The current study suggests that the FLE matched with all these features of parallel structures mentioned in the literature (AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). The project developed new implementation committees named the NCT, RT, and LAFT in parallel to the pre-existing committees in the project sites. The authority relationships in these committees were different from those of the administrative hierarchy of the DAE. These structural features of the FLE project decreased administrative support from the DAE officers, both during and after the withdrawal of the donor. Further, the operation of the new FLE committees during the project phase was supported through donor resources. As a consequence, it became difficult to maintain these committees at the completion of the FLE project when donor funding was removed.

Except for two project evaluation documents in Bangladesh (ASSP & ASIRP, 2003a; Gill et al., 2003), no empirical study was found in agricultural extension that has reported the negative consequences of parallel structures in donor-supported projects. According to the Bangladesh documents, some of the organisational innovations promoted through the ASSP and the ASIRP were unsustainable because they involved parallel structures. These documents, however, did not clarify the meaning of "parallel structures" and demonstrate how they affected sustainability.

The empirical study by Bossert (1990) on the sustainability of donor-supported health projects in African and Latin American countries reported that health projects that were designed and implemented as vertically-run separate hierarchies were less sustained compared to the projects that were integrated into the existing organisational hierarchies of the implementing agencies. The explanations for such results, as provided by Bossert (1990), also matched with those found in this study. According to Bossert, parallel structures affected project sustainability because they resulted in reduced support from the administrators who could provide resources for the continuation of the project following the withdrawal of donor support. Parallel structures were also vulnerable because they depended heavily on foreign funding during the life of the project, which made it difficult to gain

national funding after the cessation of foreign funding (Bossert, 1990). The descriptive study by Uphoff et al., (1998) also reported that rural development projects in Asian countries were successful (sustainability was a criterion of success) when they built on the already existing structures rather than creating new structures. The findings of this study also corroborate the prescriptive literature (AusAID, 2000; Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998) that parallel or new structures are less likely to be sustained in the longer term.

7.6.2.2   Use of privileges in project implementation

According to Bossert (1990), an important feature of poorly integrated or vertically-run projects is that they tend to be privileged, that is, they involve provisions of extra allowances, subsidies and more materials compared to other organisations providing equivalent services in the national agencies. By this criterion as well, the FLE case demonstrated characteristics of a vertically-run project. This is because the project involved provisions of incentives such as overseas training, remuneration, funding for hiring staff, and transport allowances. Although such privileges were minimal in the case of FLE compared to other contemporary donor-supported projects in Bangladesh, they resulted in jealousy, competition and rivalry among the FLE stakeholders.

These results corroborate the findings from Bossert's (1990) study that donor-supported health projects that were more privileged tended to generate jealousy, particularly if they were perceived as having gained extra resources and salaries in relation to similar services that were not receiving donor funds. Bossert (1990) found that such vertically implemented health projects were poorly sustained in African and Latin American countries. The findings from this study also support the observations of Conyers and Mellors (2005) that the provision of higher salaries and better working conditions in donor projects, compared to the existing organisations, negatively affects the morale of the remaining staff and thus results in institutional degradation. No empirical study or publication was found in Bangladesh or other countries that reported the negative consequences of paying remuneration in the implementation of donor-supported extension reforms.

While results from this study support the observation of Bossert (1990) and that of Conyers and Mellors (2005), they provide some additional insights with regard to the consequences of using extra privileges in donor projects. The results presented in Chapter 6 have shown that the jealousy and tension arose not just "between those who received the privileges versus those who did not receive the privileges". Rather, such tensions occurred even among the various interest groups that received project privileges, and an important reason for such tension was an unequal distribution of the privileges. For instance, the funding and transport allowances provided to the NGO while not providing such privileges to the DAE, sending some officers for overseas training while not sending the fieldworkers for such training, resulted in jealousy among these interest groups. Such incidences negatively affected the interest of the various stakeholders in proffering their support for the FLE project.

The results from this study further suggest that the use of privileges in FLE project implementation was a reluctant decision. Despite a desire to avoid the use of privileges, it was not possible to maintain such intentions. As this study has shown, had the FLE used no privileges, it would not have been possible to implement the project, let alone sustain it.

7.6.2.3   Parallel tasks

In addition to the criteria of parallel implementation structures and use of privileges that are mentioned in the literature (AusAID, 2000; Bossert, 1990; Conyers & Mellors, 2005), the investigator has identified "parallel tasks" as an important factor resulting in poor integration of a donor-supported project. In case of the FLE project, parallel tasks were manifested in the group-based savings credit and demand-led technology transfer functions that were the two key elements in the FLE model. Results presented in Chapter 6 have shown that the approaches applied for these tasks ran in parallel to the regular approaches used by the two implementing agencies (the NGO and the DAE). The FLE saving-credit activity, for instance, differed from the regular micro-credit function of the NGO. This is because the FLE micro-credit process involved novel procedures such as "revolving funds" and giving farmers control over the savings fund. Such novel procedures were different from the micro-credit procedures applied in the NGO's

regular programmes. Again, the DAE was capable of supplying only a limited number of technologies that are centrally planned whereas FLE required that technologies be transferred according to farmers' demand. Due to this poor integration of the FLE tasks, neither the NGO nor the DAE was interested in continuing their support for the FLE groups.

Although the parallel tasks were found to be an important factor in non-sustainability in the current study, no empirical study in the literature was found reporting similar results.

7.6.3 Stakeholder participation and ownership

This study showed that the FLE project was unable to employ an appropriate nature or level of participation of the extension agencies in terms of (i) project initiation (ii) cost-or resource sharing and (iii) power and control of implementing agencies. The FLE was also unable to develop ownership of the innovation by the extension agencies. These failures encouraged perverse incentives among the actors and negatively affected the performance and sustainability of FLE. This observation is consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Concerning the issue of beneficiary participation and ownership, the results of this study show that although the FLE project was intended to involve rural people during several phases, it failed to achieve the intended levels of participation and the expected benefits from such processes. On the contrary, several strategies intended to achieve beneficiary participation had negative consequences for the performance and sustainability of the FLE system. Some of these results were found to be different from those in the extant literature (Chapter 2). No publication was found in Bangladesh that highlighted these issues.

7.6.3.1   Participation and ownership of the implementing agencies

Project initiation

As shown in Chapter 6, the idea of undertaking the FLE project was formulated by a couple of senior DAE and NGO officials with almost no consultation with the

different interest groups within the DAE, particularly the Block Supervisors. Initially, there was a widespread perception among the BSs that they were going to be replaced by the farmer promoters. However, even if the top executives of the DAE and the NGO jointly had proposed the project to the donor, the parent ASIRP intervention, which supported implementation of the FLE extension model as a sub-project, was a brainchild of the donors. The DAE as the key government agency in charge of implementing the ASIRP had little interest in undertaking the reform (Pasteur, 2002). The DAE in particular did not want to replace the established T&V extension system in Bangladesh with a farmer-led, demand-driven and partnership-based system which the ASIRP intended to promote. From this point of view, the FLE could be seen as part of a broader project that was driven and owned by the donors, rather than by the recipient agencies. Moreover, the boundary principles of the ASIRP reform – farmer-led, GO-NGO partnership, decentralisation, demand-driven – within which the FLE project was formulated, were also pre-set by the donors.

The negative consequences of a donor-originated project were apparent in this study. The pursuit of vested interests by both of the implementing agencies, the DAE and the NGO, was quite remarkable. The repeated requests made by the DAE and the NGO officials for overseas training, remuneration, and logistics during FLE project implementation clearly indicated this. Also, the conflicts among the various stakeholder groups for these privileges illustrated their desperation for material gain. Such behaviours raised doubts as to whether the DAE and the NGO were actually interested in the FLE innovation. Thus, as this study identified, when the privileges provided by the donor were no longer available, there was little incentive for the DAE and the NGO actors to maintain FLE.

The above findings correspond with the arguments of a number of authors (Edgren, 2003; Ostrom et al., 2002) as well as the observations made in a number of empirical studies (Bossert, 1990; Catterson & Lindahl, 1999; Conyers & Mellors, 2005; Moore et al., 1996; Ostrom et al., 2002; Weeks et al., 2002). For example, Bossert (1990) reported that donor-supported health projects that were viewed by national officials in African and Latin American countries as being imposed by donors were poorly sustained. Such projects had to overcome serious constraints throughout their lifecycle such as outright resistance or an initial lack of interest.

Catterson and Lindahl (1999) reported that a Sida-supported project in Tanzania was not sustained because the new adult education approach that the project promoted reflected a Swedish perspective and hence was not owned by the Tanzanians. In the context of Sida-supported development projects, Moore et al., (1996) found that one of the key reasons why the projects failed to survive was because of the perverse incentives resulting from a lack of recipient ownership over the interventions. Weeks et al., (2002) also reported that when the donor agencies supported development interventions with the assumption that the recipients would learn and adopt the idea through their involvement over time, it undermined recipient ownership. Compared to this, when the recipient agencies identified the need for an intervention, ownership and sustainability of the reform were enhanced (Conyers & Mellors, 2005). Using the IAD framework, Ostrom et al., (2002) also found similar evidence from African countries and from India and argued that in order to ensure sustainability and recipient ownership, a donor should support a project only when the recipients express a need for the intervention.

Some of the highly successful (sustainability was one criterion of success) cases of rural development organisations in Asian countries documented by Uphoff et al., (1998) are characterised by self-mobilised initiatives undertaken by local leaders. An example of this is the renowned Grameen Bank model in Bangladesh. The project began its journey as a pilot initiative undertaken by an individual university teacher (Nobel Laureate Professor Eunus) with only a few villagers. Within a few years, this grew rapidly. While the Grameen Bank project eventually received foreign assistance, the original idea or the Grameen model was a locally developed technology that emerged out of the felt needs of a Bangladeshi entrepreneur. Foreign assistance was provided only after such assistance was requested. A similar case is the renowned Comilla Model in Bangladesh and the Aurangi Pilot project in Pakistan, which were initiated by a dedicated leader Akhtar Hamid Khan. Compared to these examples, the FLE model was an idea imported from the Philippines and aid was provided regardless of whether or not the recipients actually wanted such an innovation. This partly explains the pursuit of vested interests by the implementing agencies in the FLE project while taking little interest in the model itself.

The FLE case, however, suggests that the issue of donor-recipient negotiation at the outset of an aid project is far more complex. While the development literature recognises the downside of imposing a development idea on aid recipients, the literature barely takes into account the hidden motivational and informational problems that often characterise interactions between a donor and a recipient. The FLE case suggests that the recipients may enunciate a request or propose a project to the donor with a hidden political motive, which is difficult for a donor to know *ex ante*. Given this, it is difficult to argue that a lack of recipient ownership results only when the idea originates from outside, as is presented in the literature. From this point of view, the political economy perspective of the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 2002) appears to be important because it suggests that donor-recipient relationship is a political game in which each party plays a part they hope will maximise their own interest.

The results of this study support Anderson et al., (2006) who analysed the reasons for the demise of the T&V model of agricultural extension. According to the authors' analysis, an important reason for the fall of the T&V system was related to its history of initiation in developing countries. The model was rapidly implanted by the World Bank based on distorted feedback from small-scale pilot experiments in India. The reason for such a quick spread was that the project served the vested interests of some groups within the World Bank, leading to perverse incentives among aid recipients. Although the investigator did not analyse the incentives within the donor agency, the results of this study are comparable in the sense that the ASIRP-FLE project was also an example of a reform based on incomplete analysis of the recipient stakeholders' needs or preferences. Due to this, the project faltered not only in its initial phase of implementation but also right up to the completion.

Cost and/or resource sharing with implementing agencies

This results of this study do not support the prescriptions in the development literature (AusAID, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988) that resource-sharing with implementing agencies automatically result in sustainable projects. As shown in Chapter 6, the FLE project, including the parent ASIRP, involved a strategy of cost-sharing with the Government of Bangladesh in project implementation. The NGO

also shared its own resources in project implementation, although not financial. Despite this, the FLE project was not sustained beyond withdrawal of donor support.

The ineffectiveness of the resource-sharing strategy as found in this study can be explained by two probable factors. First, the prevalence of dysfunctional institutional conditions discouraged the DAE and the NGO actors from valuing government resources. As has been shown in Chapter 4, under various dysfunctional institutional influences, the DAE employees, the agents of the state, act as predators of state resources. Given this, the resource-sharing strategy in the FLE project did not make any difference to the perverse incentives. Instead, the resources were seen as sources of rent-seeking and other forms of illegal transactions. Second, resource-sharing is only one of the many different forms of participation or ownership that are reported in the literature. Therefore, the benefits of one form of ownership-building strategy may be overshadowed by the failure to employ other strategies. As the following discussion will demonstrate, this was indeed the case in the FLE project.

Power and control of implementing agencies

Although the idea of undertaking the FLE project was recognised by the DAE and the NGO officials, a number of practices during the design and implementation phases of the FLE project clearly illustrated the donor-driven nature of the project. These practices included (i) control over crucial project decisions by the consultants hired by the donor agency (ii) control over project resources by the consultants, and (iii) failure to negotiate the interests of DAE and NGO stakeholders. The results presented in Chapter 6 have shown that these practices seriously hampered the ability of the FLE project to achieve its stated goals (performance), and the willingness of DAE and NGO stakeholders to own the innovation.

The control over crucial project decisions by the consultants was evident with regard to the nature and level of beneficiary participation. For instance, it was the consultants who decided how the idea of "farmer-led extension" should be implemented and what level of farmer control would be necessary. Being an attempt to initiate and sustain a farmer-led extension system, these decisions were

crucial. The consultants also tended to specify how the DAE and the NGO officials needed to behave in order to successfully implement a farmer-led approach. Moreover, it was the consultants who set the boundary of partnership between the DAE and the NGO, for instance, by specifying that the project funds should be channelled and spent through the NGO, instead of the DAE. This study revealed that the DAE and the NGO stakeholders widely disagreed with these decisions. This meant that although the idea of the FLE originated locally, despite the fact that it was within the boundary principles set by donors through the ASIRP (see section 7.6.3.1), the design and implementation processes of the project reflected the values and preferences of the donors, rather than those of the recipients.

These results support the propositions in the literature (Edgren, 2003; Ostrom et al., 2002) that recipient ownership (and hence, sustainability) of donor-supported projects is jeopardised when the donors determine the rules of the game for the recipients, that is, what the recipients should do, how they should behave, and what is beneficial for them. Edgren has characterised such practices as "donorship", which is an antonym to the concept "ownership". The harmful consequences of these donorship-enhancing practices are also recognised by several other authors (AusAID, 2000; World Bank, 1996) who have advocated for greater control over project design and implementation decisions by the recipients rather than by the donors.

In addition to the prescriptive literature, a number of empirical studies (Bossert, 1990; Ostrom et al., 2002) have revealed the negative consequences of donorship over development projects. For example, Bossert (1990) found that donor-supported health projects that were poorly sustained in African and Latin American countries were characterised by a lack of "mutually respectful" project negotiation process. The design and implementation of such projects did not reflect the preferences of the bureaucrats resulting in their opposition, resistance or lack of interest. Compared to this, when health projects were initiated, designed and implemented according to the interests and plans of the implementing agencies, through national participation, the projects were more likely to be sustained.

The control over project resources by the consultants or the donor agency and the harmful consequences of such control on the ownership of the FLE case were

clearly manifested in this study. This result corresponds with findings reported in the development literature (Apthorpe et al., 2002; Ostrom et al., 2002; Weeks et al., 2002) which demonstrates that when the rules or conditions for accessing the resources are set by the donors, the ownership of aid recipients is reduced (Ostrom et al., 2002; Weeks et al., 2002).

Failure to reconcile the demands/interests of the implementing agencies (the DAE and the NGO) and the various groups within these agencies was an important feature of the FLE project implementation process, even though the project was intended to achieve consensus through multi-stakeholder decision-making processes. As shown in Chapter 6, these failures were manifested in the form of conflicts, resentment, anger and mistrust surrounding the issues of funding, logistics, staff requirements, capacity-building training, and privileges for the implementers such as remuneration and overseas training. The negative consequences of these negotiation failures on the motivation of the personnel who were in charge of implementing the FLE project were clearly evident in this study. A number of examples presented in Chapter 6 suggest that these aspects of the FLE project negatively affected its ability to achieve the intended goals.

In addition to the empirical study of the donor-supported health projects (Bossert, 1990), this finding corresponds with the empirical (Mosse, 1995; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004; Schmitz, 2004; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004) and prescriptive literature (Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004) in agricultural extension and rural development. All these authors have drawn attention to the importance of stakeholder negotiation as an important requisite for successful projects and programmes. For example, Schmitz (2004) reported that two partnership-based extension projects in the *Para* state of Brazil involving researchers, farmers and extensionists collapsed because of the power struggle or conflict between the implementing agencies concerned, which was not possible to resolve. One source of the struggle was the control over financial, material and human resources, for example, vehicles, computers, physical space, contracting of collaborators, and definition of research themes. One organisation believed that the other one was getting more benefits and suspected that its own autonomy would be diminished if it was engaged in a partnership. Even within this one organisation, there were different groups. Another manifestation of this power struggle was a competition for control over farmer organisations by the

research and extension agencies. Further, there was competition for prestige between the implementing agencies. For example, official visits by evaluation teams that did not include representatives of the extension agency were considered by the latter as an offence or insult.

Identification of the failure to negotiate power struggle or stakeholder interests/demands as a reason for poor performance and sustainability adds a new insight to some empirical literature of the nineties (Bossert, 1990; Finsterbusch, 1990). While these studies also identified the need for stakeholder participation or power sharing, the results tended to simplify the complexity of the issue. For example, a synthesis by Finsterbusch (1990) of the empirical studies that used the SCOPE framework suggests that stakeholder involvement played a positive role in the sustainability of organisational reforms supported through donor projects. The author commented that,

> The best projects in the sample showed considerable involvement of staff, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. As power was shared with them they took ownership of the project and helped design it to make it relevant to their needs. As a result performance improved (Finsterbusch, 1990: 227).

Statements such as the above do not adequately explain which of the stakeholder groups (staff, beneficiaries, or other stakeholders) enjoyed what degree of power and ownership in the successful cases. Such simplifications limit the empirical usefulness of the concepts. The findings from this study suggest that the issue is far more complex than stated in the literature. A strategy to promote ownership of one stakeholder may in fact undermine the ownership of another group. For example, in the FLE case, the strategy to vest financial control in the NGO undermined the ownership of the DAE. Similarly, the donor strategy to negotiate with top-ranking officials of the DAE and the NGO, while paying inadequate attention to the interests of the fieldworkers, undermined the ownership among the latter. Ostrom et al., (2002) also noticed a similar problem in Sida-supported projects in India and some African countries.

The results of this study also contradict earlier findings based on the use of the SCOPE framework (Finsterbusch, 1990) with regard to the locus of power sharing. These studies claim that successful cases of organisational reform originated at the

top, that is, through the patronage of top-raking officials such as the Directors of the implementing agencies. The FLE case suggests that a reform that originates at the top, or that is intended to appease only the top-ranking officials, fails to achieve its goal when the vested interests at the bottom are not properly negotiated. As the results in Chapter 6 have shown, this was observed in the inability of the FLE project to satisfy the interests of the DAE Block Supervisors.

The results from this study support the arguments made by some rural development authors (Cook & Kothari, 2001; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004) regarding the limited usefulness of the concepts of participation or power-sharing as strategies to improve ownership and sustainability of development interventions. In the real world of organisations, it is very difficult to ensure that participation or power-sharing has occurred (Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004; van de Walle & Johnston, 1996). Apart from the issue of power asymmetry that inherently tend to characterise aid-supported projects (Ostrom et al., 2002), an important reason for such difficulty is the contingency relationship between the organisation and its [institutional] environment (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Ostrom et al., 2002; Scott, 1995, 2001). In the case of the FLE, the institutional grounding of mistrust, competition, and conflict between the various interest groups in the project made it difficult to negotiate power sharing and harmonisation of interests through deliberate strategies.

7.6.3.2   Participation and ownership of rural people

The results suggested that the FLE project employed a deliberate strategy to ensure beneficiary participation. However, such participation occurred only during the implementation and evaluation phases of the project. The beneficiaries did not have any role in FLE project formulation. Neither did they express any wish for the intervention. In terms of the degree of power vested on the beneficiaries and their level of control over project resources and decisions, the FLE was able to practise a low to moderate level of beneficiary participation according to the "participation scale/ladder" reviewed in section 2.3.4.3 of Chapter 2. Even in such instances, the project failed to achieve the intended level of beneficiary participation and also the expected benefits of participation. Moreover, some practices of beneficiary participation resulted in unintended negative consequences.

With regard to project initiation, there is clear evidence in this study to support the observation that the rural people had little interest in participating in the FLE project. Despite their initial lack of interest, involving them in the FLE intervention encouraged perverse incentives that eventually affected the viability of the community-based groups. This finding is in complete agreement with Ostrom et al., (2002) who argued that in order to improve recipient ownership a donor should proffer support only if the recipient beneficiaries express a need for the intervention.

As regards beneficiary participation, some of the earlier studies that applied the SCOPE framework (Finsterbusch, 1990) found that beneficiary participation in the form of power sharing positively contributed to the sustainability of organisational reform projects. However, these studies did not report any failed cases. Neither did they provide enough detail about the precise form and level of beneficiary participation that occurred in the successful cases. The FLE was a failed, rather than a successful, case and the degree of participation was low. Thus, the results are difficult to compare with those reported by Finsterbusch (1990). For the same reason, the results of this study are difficult to compare with some recent descriptive-empirical literature on agricultural extension reform (Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002; Kidd, 2004). Although these authors reported that a failure to involve the beneficiaries in the design, preparation and implementation of extension projects negatively affected sustainability, a precise definition of the form and degree of beneficiary participation was lacking. Thus, it was unclear as to what form and degree of beneficiary participation were sought in those projects.

Bossert (1990) reported that there was no clear direct relationship between the sustainability of donor-supported health projects and community or beneficiary participation. According to the author, projects which had community participation were no more likely to be sustained than those which did not have community participation. In his study as well, the degree of community participation was not clearly defined, which made it difficult to compare the results with those of the present study.

In contrast to the optimism expressed in the literature (AusAID, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988; Rivera et al., 2001; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998) regarding the potential benefits of beneficiary participation, this study revealed that some

strategies intended to secure beneficiary participation proved to be counterproductive. Three major instances were identified in this study where beneficiary participation failed to produce the expected benefits and proved to be counterproductive: (i) allowing beneficiaries to control their group savings-credit by themselves, (ii) allowing villagers to select their own members and leaders, and (iii) cost or resource-sharing with the villagers.

Allowing villagers to control their group savings-credit funds by themselves resulted in unmanageable conflicts within the groups and a lack of access of the poor members to the group funds. Similarly, allowing villagers to select their own leaders and members resulted in the inclusion of rural elites into the groups. Ironically, on the other hand, in some communities where a couple of the dedicated BSs and NGO workers strictly controlled these tasks, the groups performed well and survived even after the project was formally closed.

The most obvious negative consequence of beneficiary participation was observed in the strategy of resource or cost-sharing with the rural people. This finding was quite opposite to the prescriptions forwarded in the development literature (AusAID, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988; Ostrom et al., 2002) as well as in agricultural extension literature (Rivera & Alex, 2001) that support cost-sharing as a strategy to achieve project sustainability. In addition to this prescriptive literature, the benefits of resource sharing with beneficiaries are also reported in the descriptive-empirical literature on agricultural extension and rural development (Cernea, 1987; Datta, 2005; Garforth, 2004; Uphoff et al., 1998). Quite contrary to this prescriptive and empirical literature, the cost-sharing strategy in the FLE project resulted in inclusion of the rich and the powerful farmers into the project who ultimately captured project benefits and in this way excluded the majority of poorer members – the smallholder farmers and the landless. Further, in some instances, these powerful farmers, in collaboration with the fieldworkers concerned, misused project funds. These results, however, provide empirical support for some of the authors (Anderson & Feder, 2003; Katz, 2002) who are wary of the potential danger of poor farmers being excluded from financial participation in extension projects.

Two major explanations may help answer the question, why did participation of the beneficiaries fail to generate the expected benefits? First, the FLE project design

lacked a clear-cut specification of who the target beneficiaries were to be and who would require participating. As has been discussed in earlier sections, the project involved different categories of rural people coming from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This meant that the project designers considered the rural people as a homogenous social unit, and failed to take into account the differences in power, socioeconomic status, and preferences. These findings support the prescriptive literature (Edgren, 2000; Uphoff, 2001) that for participation to be useful, it is necessary to precisely define the target group. Not all the people living in a village are poor and communities are not homogenous social units but are divided along social, economic, and political lines (Edgren, 2000; Uphoff, 2001). The study by White et al., (2005) found similar results in the context of the sustainability of ICM project sustainability in the Philippines and in Indonesia.

The second explanation draws attention to the role of contextual conditions within which beneficiary participation was expected to occur. In the FLE case, an important reason why it became difficult to put participation into practice was the local power structure and the past relationships between the rural elites and the outside professionals. As has been shown in Chapter 6, the rural poor in the communities are traditionally dependent on the rural elites and this dependency relationship enables the poor to survive during times of crisis. Therefore, the poor involved in the project did not risk losing this safety net for the sake of an outsiders' project. Similarly, the past relationship between the rural elites and the outside professionals serve the vested interests of both parties. These constraints of beneficiary participation are well documented in the descriptive-empirical literature on agricultural extension and rural development (Uphoff et al., 1998; Scarborough et al., 1997). Third, the usefulness of participation depends on the facilitators – their dedication, honesty and sincerity – as was demonstrated by some of the fieldworkers.

As regards the level/degree of control or power-sharing, very little agreement exists in the literature as to the appropriate level of participation that would be useful to achieve a successful outcome. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, four streams of argument are noteworthy in the literature. The first assumption holds that the higher the level of power-sharing, the better it is for ownership and sustainability (Chambers, 1983; Pretty, 1994, 1995). The second premise challenges the

underlying assumptions of participation and is critical about the usefulness of the concept (Cook & Kothari, 2001; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004). In between these two extremes, the third premise takes a moderate stance and calls for a catalytic or mixed approach (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Uphoff, 2001; Uphoff et al., 1998). The fourth argument suggests that there is no recipe of participation, that is, the successful strategy would be contingent on the contextual conditions (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Okali et al., 1994).

As mentioned earlier, the FLE case was found at the bottom to middle rungs in the participation scale/ladder proposed by development authors (Arnstein 1969; Pretty 1994, 1995). This means that while power and control were shared with the beneficiaries, all project decisions and actions were not left up to villagers' control. For instance, while the rural people were allowed, by design, to manage their groups by themselves, the rules for such interactions were developed by the outside professionals.

Such practices of participation in the FLE project matches with the premise which advocates a combination of both the top-down and bottom-up approach of beneficiary participation (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Uphoff, 2001). For example, Uphoff (2001: 18) criticised the purer version of participation as a "populist fallacy" that does not take into account the limitations of the rural people. A number of empirical studies (Datta, 2005; Lightfoot, 2004; Uphoff et al., 1998) in agricultural extension and rural development have also claimed that the successful cases applied a catalytic or mixed approach to beneficiary participation. In such an approach, neither the rural people nor the outsiders had full control. Instead, the process was two-way in which rural people took certain initiatives and the outsiders just played the role of facilitators. Despite the adoption of a moderate degree of participation, the sustainability failure of the FLE project, therefore, does not relate very closely to this literature (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Datta, 2005; Lightfoot, 2004; Uphoff, 2001; Uphoff et al., 1998).

While in some instances a low-level and poor quality of beneficiary participation resulted in poor project performance (see Chapter 6), the results of this study do not indicate that a higher degree of power-sharing would have been useful. As this study has shown, even when external professionals intended to hand over control

(for example, self-selection of farmer promoters and group members, financial management of savings-credit) the villagers, particularly the poor, were either unwilling to assume the power or were unable to handle it. Furthermore, in a few communities where some honest and dedicated fieldworkers strictly controlled the member selection and savings-credit tasks, the groups performed well and survived during the post-project period.

These results tend to support the premise that participation is not a panacea and that the theory of power-sharing is fraught with unrealistic assumptions (Cook & Kothari, 2001; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004). As this study suggests, the equation is not so simple that the powerful would hand over control to the powerless and the powerless would be willing or able to handle the power assigned to them. Rather, the situation is far messier in which each actor acts from his/her own rational perspective. In the FLE project the poor demonstrated reluctance to assume power because it was not in their own long-term interests. The results also tend to support the argument put forward by some authors (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992; Okali et al., 1994) that there is no recipe of beneficiary participation and that the successful strategy would be contingent on contextual conditions.

7.6.4 Learning process

The results presented in Chapter 6 suggest that the FLE project set out with an intention to operate in a learning process mode. Although over time, it became difficult for the organisation to be a learning organisation and most of its plans to learn were shattered, the initial good intentions were quite visible. Quite opposite to the traditional blueprint approach, the case study project began its journey with a broad guideline of operation rather than formulating specific project tasks from the outset. Further, various activities in the project were planned and implemented on a quarterly phase-to-phase basis. In the literature (Cusworth & Franks, 1993; Dale, 2000; Uphoff et al., 1998), these open-ended planning and phased implementation orientations are portrayed as the characteristics of a learning process approach. In addition to this, the FLE undertook activities such as scanning the project and community environment, and reviewing and monitoring the project outputs from time to time. Examples of these activities included reviewing the implementation progress, SWOT analysis, continuous monitoring and feedback on FLE group

performance through monthly and quarterly progress reports, and an end-of-project evaluation. In the literature, these are also mentioned as the features of a learning process approach (Cusworth & Franks, 1993; Dale, 2000; Uphoff et al., 1998).

The above features of the FLE project might give an impression that it operated in a learning process mode. However, as the results in Chapter 6 have shown, despite having undertaken all these activities, the project was constrained in its ability to learn. This result suggests that having learning systems or activities in place and the capacity to foster organisational learning are not the same thing. As discussed in Chapter 2, the SCOPE (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992) and the descriptive-empirical literature are poorly developed in this regard and assume that having learning systems or intentions would automatically foster learning.

A number of features demonstrated that despite having an intention to learn and putting learning mechanisms in place, learning in the FLE project was severely constrained. The system was also characterised by an ability to learn the things which should have been learned for improving the performance and sustainability prospects of the FLE model. These failures explain to a large extent why the project failed to achieve its goal, which severely affected its ability to garner support from the implementing agencies and the rural people.

In any organisational system, monitoring is an important mechanism through which feedback information is collected and acted upon. In the case of FLE, the learning disability of the monitoring system was quite obvious in the way it was used and functioned. As has been shown in Chapter 6, the monitoring was mainly target-focused, that is, it was directed towards examining the achievement of implementation targets. Further, the monitoring reports were nothing more than number games with almost no negative feedback or explanations about why targets were not fulfilled. In addition, the monitoring mainly served the purpose of controlling the actions of the fieldworkers and to fulfil the information (accountability) need of the donor agency. Quite troubling was that the monitoring or the feedback system barely generated authentic information even about the targets that the FLE wanted to monitor due to concealment of error or poor performance by the respective fieldworkers.

The purpose and functioning of the annual reviews and the end-of-project evaluation were not much different from the monitoring system of the FLE. These systems also demonstrated debilitating capacities to promote learning in the FLE project. Similar to the monitoring reports, the reviews were simply number games, neither having any focus on the institutional threats and constraints in the context nor on the failures of implementation performances. Further, they were carried out by consultants hired by the donor agency who had little connection with field realities. The evaluations were carried out mainly (but not exclusively) to report to the donor agency about the various expenditures rather than for critical reflection on implementation performances. In addition, quite similar to the monitoring system, the evaluations were also subjected to false reporting or distorted feedback.

These monitoring and evaluation features of the FLE project are quite different from the ideal monitoring and evaluation procedures of a learning process approach recommended in the development literature (Cusworth & Franks, 1993; Dale, 2000; Gow & Morss, 1988; Korten, 1980; Lewis, 1998; Mosse et al., 1998; Mosse, 1998). These authors have recommended that to ensure a successful outcome of development projects, the monitoring and evaluation procedures should focus on project "processes" rather than on "products" or targets and attempt to identify norms, motives, reactions and conflicts among stakeholders, and the like. The non-conformity of the monitoring and evaluation procedures of the FLE project with these recommendations and the failure of the project, therefore, provides, if only by default, empirical support for these recommendations. In addition to the purpose and focus of monitoring and evaluation, the incidence of error concealing also matches with Korten's (1980) characterisation of a blueprint project in which errors are concealed rather than embraced. Authors (Scarborough et al., 1997) writing on agricultural extension have also stated that embracing errors is a necessary condition for the success of agricultural extension projects. Therefore, the FLE case provides empirical support for the recommendations made by the extension authors.

Despite all the weaknesses of the feedback system, the FLE project did identify some of the weaknesses and attempted to correct them. The key sources through which most of the problems were detected and discussed were the periodic review meetings and workshops. However, even after the identification of some errors or

threats, the project management team failed to take corrective or adaptive action. Even in some instances where corrective action was taken, it was mainly ad-hoc or superficial in nature. In some instances such actions temporarily improved the situation but they failed to provide lasting solutions. Despite this, there was no critical analysis of significant problems. Furthermore, some of the constraints were externalised by the management with the belief that they were impossible to correct. In certain instances, some corrective actions produced counterproductive results but were never reviewed.

These observations also indicate that the FLE project was characterised more by features of a blueprint or constrained learning system according to the criteria mentioned in the literature (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000; Korten, 1980). According to Korten (1980), for example, blueprint projects tend to resolve problems through *ad hoc* solutions, rather than attempt to critically analyse or research the problems. Such organisations also attempt to externalise or surrender to the problems. Korten (1980) has characterised such an organisation as a defeated organisation rather than a learning organisation. Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000: 9) also believe that it is not enough to identify a problem and propose a solution but the solution must be put into practice before learning can occur. Learning organisations, continuously experiment with their ideas and actions through trial and error (Korten, 1980).

Numerous empirical studies (Datta, 2005; Fakih et al., 2003; Gustafson, 1994; Hagmann et al., 1998; Korten, 1980; Lightfoot, 2004; Lyon, 2003; Sulaiman & Hall, 2004; Uphoff et al., 1998; Mosse, 1998) have claimed that a learning process was one of the key reasons for good performance and sustainability of agricultural extension and rural development projects and programmes. Very few of these studies are, however, directly comparable with this study. One of the reasons is that most of the case studies are success stories. Since the FLE was a failed case, the results obtained from this study are difficult to compare with those of successful cases. In addition, many of those cases are large-scale or countrywide projects and programmes while the FLE was a small-scale initiative. Some of those cases, however, provide important insights that draw attention to the limitations of the learning process that occurred in the FLE project.

David Korten (1980) is one of the earliest researchers who have identified and reported the importance of the learning process approach. The five successful (institutionalised) rural development projects and programmes studied by the author demonstrate striking contrast with the FLE case in terms of the nature and degree of learning. One of the cases reported by Korten was the introduction of the community-based irrigation system within the Philippines National Irrigation Administration (NIA). This NIA case shares some characteristics in common with the FLE because both include the idea of involving rural communities in government programmes. The NIA, however, had a national level coverage.

In sum, the Philippines case was characterised by a design and implementation process in which learning laboratories were set up in which the NIA team, rather than outside consultants, worked with farmers to develop and test new methods and procedures. These laboratories enabled participants to identify which features were compatible or likely to lead to conflict and how the new approach would fit into the policies and procedures of the NIA. Process-oriented research was undertaken in which trained social scientists collected and analysed a massive volume of socio-institutional data (institutional profiles), documented implementation processes using participant observation methods that included non-evaluative narratives and rapid feedback about NIA personnel and farmers. Accordingly, corrective actions targeted capacity building of not only the farmers but also the implementing agencies, including the NIA. Such capacity building initiatives included changes in the operational procedures of these agencies to match the community-based approach, introduction of new reward systems for employees, and so on.

Compared to the NIA case, the degree of learning in the FLE case was at a very low level. The key difference was evident in the focus and purpose of project monitoring and evaluation. As discussed earlier, these activities were target focused, were carried out mainly for and by the donor agency representatives, and the corrective actions were not intended to develop the capacity of the implementing agencies. When compared with the process-documentation and institutional profiling of the NIA case, the FLE was nothing more than a blueprint organisation.

Using the SCOPE framework, Gustafson (1994: 131) found a strong connection between the "degree of learning and adaptation" and the "sustainability of the T&V projects" in different Asian countries. The author reported that the most successful and most sustainable T&V projects were those that adapted the basic T&V structures over time to varied local characteristics or changing circumstances. In those projects, adaptation reflected learning from experiences. For example, the T&V projects in Malaysia and in the Indian state of Kerala adapted their structures and functions over time to changing farmer needs. On the other hand, the mechanical mode of operation of the T&V system in the Sind province of Pakistan that repetitively supplied the same old extension messages, lost the support of farmers. This, in turn, lowered the system's sustainability prospects.

The result concerning the relationship between the "degree of learning and adaptation" and "sustainability" as found in the FLE case study clearly conforms to the observation of Gustafson (1994). As discussed earlier, the FLE project demonstrated a very low degree of error detection and adaptation capacity. However, the FLE provides some additional insights into the study by Gustafson (1994). While Gustafson reports that the degree of adaptation of the T&V systems to farmers' contexts was related to the sustainability of the systems, the author does not mention if there was a relationship between the sustainability of the systems and their degree of adaptation to the operational contexts of extension agencies. The FLE example suggests that the sustainability of an extension system is related not just to its degree of adaptation to farmers' contexts but also to the circumstances in which extension service providers operate.

While the essence of a learning process approach in rural development organisations received attention in the literature as early as the 80s (Korten, 1980), very little has been done to identify, through empirical studies, as to why employing such approaches has been so difficult (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000). For example, while Gustafson (1994) identified that the T&V project in different Asian countries demonstrated variable degrees of learning and adaptation, the study does not adequately explain why such variations occurred.

A contribution of this study is that it has identified several constraints that limited the ability of the FLE project to detect errors and make the necessary adjustments. First, learning was constrained due to the short duration of donor assistance in the

project. A project of about four years was found to be an insufficient time to learn about complex institutional issues as many of these constraints were not obvious at the beginning of the project. By the time management began to realise the weaknesses in the design features of the project and the scope of external threats and opportunities, donor assistance was about to be terminated. Despite requests made by the project leadership it was not possible to extend the time frame of donor assistance. This non-flexible exit strategy of the donor prevented management from making adaptive changes that could have contributed to FLE sustainability.

This result provides empirical support for the statements made by the proponents of the SCOPE framework (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990: 44) that in most developing countries, donor-supported projects tend to emphasise a mechanical rather than a learning-based strategy dictated by the financial oversight and accountability demanded by the donors' own stakeholders. This finding also supports the observation of Conyers and Mellors (2005:87) who state that learning process oriented projects "are the exception rather than the rule" because of the targets set by donors. Other authors (Chambers, 1993; Lyon, 2003) have also reported that in most donor-supported projects fulfilling targets is placed before learning. The weak or non-existent exit strategy in donor-supported projects was also identified as a threat to learning and sustainability by several development authors (Catterson & Lindahl, 1999; Edgren, 2000; Ostrom et al., 2002).

The second constraint in the FLE case was the vested political motives that characterised the relationships between the donor and the recipient agencies, particularly the NGO. Due to this, the latter preferred not to criticise the actions of the former or provide negative feedback on project implementation failures. As shown in Chapter 6, such behaviour of the DAE and the NGO was guided by a culture of donor satisfying that currently prevails in Bangladesh. An important reason why these agencies wanted to satisfy the donor was to ensure that the flow of aid remained undisturbed. This hidden political motive stifled self-critical reflection, dialogue and negative feedback that were essential for learning to take place.

These observations provide empirical support for the concerns expressed by several development authors (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000; Edgren, 2000) including those in agricultural extension and rural development (Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004; Mosse, 1998; Mosse et al., 1998) regarding the incentive problems as a threat to learning in development organisations. As Mosse (1998:48) stated, critical feedback in externally supported and evaluated programmes may be seen as having "resource implications". Thus, there are strong organisational imperatives "to report success" rather than problems or failures (Mosse, 1998:48).

Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000) have lucidly articulated this problem by stating that too often the recipient country stakeholders are more or less totally dependent on the resources provided by donor countries. Such dependence entails important consequences for the nature of the relationship, for learning, and for the effectiveness of aid. The dependence makes it difficult for the recipient party to challenge the views and be critical of the donor. As an analogy, the authors have mentioned that nobody intends to "bite the hand that feeds" someone. This means that the critical dialogue, which is so important for learning, rarely takes place in aid-supported projects (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000: 11-12). Using the IAD framework, Ostrom et al., (2002) also identified the problem of asymmetrical power relationships in Sida-supported projects in India and African countries that affected the prospects for ownership and sustainability of the projects.

Third, learning and adaptations in the FLE project were also hampered by constraints in the operational context of the implementing agencies and the rural people. The poor motivational incentives arising from the working context of the DAE and the NGO employees drastically affected the feedback system. Some of these adverse conditions included the absence of rewards for good performance, low salary and wages of lower level employees and shortage of staff (in the NGO). The negative influence of these factors was manifested in the tendency of the fieldworkers to provide false reports, not going to work but still submitting monitoring reports, and the reluctance of the DAE officials to use project reports. In these error-concealing processes, rural people acted as accomplices of DAE and NGO employees in order to protect their own vested interests. These behaviours weakened the capacity of the FLE to identify what was going wrong and make corresponding adaptations.

This result provides empirical support for arguments made by several authors (Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004; Mosse, 1998) who point out that learning is a political process and that it requires a supportive organisational culture and access to authentic information (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000). These were clearly lacking in the operating context of the case study project. Lewis (1998) also reported similar incidences from a multi-agency aquaculture extension project in Bangladesh in which learning was constrained owing to the vested political interests of government agency officials.

Identification of the political dimension of learning and its contextual grounding provides additional insights into the strategic management underpinning the SCOPE literature. While the SCOPE emphasises the importance of contextual influences on the organisation or system, it largely ignores the influence of these contingency factors on the strategic choice of the actors within the system. Thus, the SCOPE assumes that the managers whose strategic choice would enable the organisation to adapt to its context are themselves not affected by the contextual conditions. The FLE case suggests that the extent to which an organisation's actors can be strategic or adaptive in their approach, which could benefit the organisation, are themselves influenced by the context. From this point of view, the institutional theories underpinning the IAD and the "three pillars of institutions" framework provide more plausible explanations showing the prime importance of the institutional environment. This institutional grounding of learning explains to a great extent why, despite having identified the necessity of the learning process approach in the 80s, it has been so difficult for development organisations to put these strategies into practice (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000; Conyers & Mellors, 2005).

Fourth, this case study also revealed that the power or the horizon of control of management is also an important determinant of adaptive change. As the results in Chapter 6 have shown, some of the contextual factors were too difficult for the project leaders to handle. The fact that an individual project manager or a project management team often lacks such power is frequently ignored in the literature that prescribes a learning process approach. In the case of the ASIRP-FLE project it was clear that although the project management was able to locate some of the critical problems for which the FLE approach struggled, they lacked the requisite power to correct those constraints. This corroborates the speculation of Brinkerhoff

and Goldsmith (1990: 45) that in most developing countries few managers are able to influence changes in the context, mainly because there are too many factors that are beyond their control. This also sheds lights on the limitations of the strategic management underpinning the SCOPE framework.

Fifth, learning in the FLE project was also constrained due to the missing or broken feedback loop between the decision makers, and the rural people. Although the FLE intended to develop a farmer-led system, there was no direct link between the beneficiaries and the decision makers in the national coordination team including the donor or consultants. Since the system relied on an intermediary, that is, the fieldworkers who themselves were not dedicated enough, the system suffered from a lack of credible information. In the context of Sida-supported projects, Ostrom et al., (2002) also identified broken feedback loops among the different interest groups that made it difficult for the systems as a whole to undertake corrective actions.

Finally, a failure of the coordination team members to listen to the lower level employees (power sharing) was an important constraint to organisational learning in the FLE project. An effective linkage between the top-level and the field-level was important because it was the field-level employees who encountered the problems of FLE implementation. As discussed in the earlier section, despite having provision for collective decision-making processes in the FLE project, the opinions or reactions of the lower level officials and fieldworkers were heard neither by the donors (consultants) nor the top management. This suggests that the success of learning is inherently linked with the degree to which power and control are shared among the different interest groups, that is, the degree of stakeholder participation. Ostrom et al., (2002) also reported that the asymmetrical power (control) among actors influenced learning in Sida-supported development projects. The proponents of the SCOPE framework (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992) also postulated that asymmetrical power relationships affect the flow of information within a system.

Not only the degree of sharing of power and control among the implementing agency staff affected the FLE system but such constraints of learning also occurred at the beneficiary level. As discussed earlier, although the FLE design reflected a conscious attempt to incorporate farmers' participation in the project, the degree to

which participation could be put into practice was low. This was reflected in the monitoring and evaluation processes in which rural people acted just as information providers, having no control over the implementation decisions made by the national coordination team members, especially the consultants. The study by Gustafson (1994) also revealed that the degree of learning and adaptation in the T&V projects was related to the participation of farmers in the operation of the organisations. However, the author did not indicate the "degree" of farmer participation that was necessary for such learning and adaptation. To this end, the FLE case provides some additional insight.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the theoretically important attributes of the case have been characterised and the results concerning the factors/conditions that explained the non-sustainability of the case study reform have been compared and contrasted with the extant literature. Although most of the results obtained from this case study were similar to those reported in the literature, some variations were identified. The role of institutional legitimacy was affirmed in the same way as proposed in Chapter 2. The specific institutional conditions that resulted in a lack of legitimacy of the FLE reform were reported. The negative influence of dysfunctional institutional conditions on the sustainability of a donor-supported extension reform was strongly supported by the extant literature. Similar support were found for the other conditions – the paucity of financial and human resources of extension agencies, poor project performance, design complexity, and the parallel mode of project implementation. However, the findings concerning the role of "stakeholder participation" and "learning process" were found to be somewhat different from those reported in the literature. Appropriate explanations were developed for such variations, wherever they appeared. In addition, the areas where the findings of this case study contributed to the literature were highlighted. The contributions were mainly with regard to the role of "stakeholder participation and ownership" and the "learning process approach". In the next chapter the conclusions of this study are drawn, the implications of the findings are outlined, the research methodology is evaluated, and directions for further research are provided.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

For a number of decades, international donor agencies have provided considerable support through a series of short-term projects in order to bring about organisational reforms within the agricultural extension system in Bangladesh. These projects have involved experimentation with various novel organisational systems: (i) from the centralised Training and Visit (T&V) model to decentralised farmer-led models, (ii) implemented by a single government agency to a partnership between the government organisations (GOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs), (iii) countrywide or large-scale systems to local or small-scale systems, (iv) a single organisation providing only advisor services to farmers to a constellation of GOs and NGOs providing a combination of support services, and so on. However, at the completion of the projects when the donors withdrew their support, the novel organisational systems introduced or promoted through the projects appeared to be unsustainable. Despite Bangladesh's history of such poorly sustained organisational reforms supported through donor projects, little was known about the reasons for such failures. Given that international donors are crucial development partners of a poor country like Bangladesh, an in-depth investigation of the non-sustainability problem and drawing lessons from failures would be useful for developing sustainable extension systems through successive cases of donor assistance. Therefore, the overall aim of this study was to develop an in-depth explanation of the reasons why a donor-supported organisational reform or innovation in agricultural extension eventually becomes unsustainable in Bangladesh following the completion of project aid. To this end, a poorly sustained novel organisational system promoted through a donor-assisted project in Bangladesh was studied using a qualitative case study approach. The research aim was achieved by fulfilling the following objectives:

- ➢ Develop a theoretical framework from the literature that enables researchers to identify and document the factors/conditions under which organisational

innovations or systems promoted through development projects do, or do not, become sustainable.

➢ Use the framework to identify and describe the factors that negatively impacted on the sustainability of the Farmer-Led Extension (FLE) system promoted through the Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP) in Bangladesh.

➢ Compare the results of the FLE case study with the literature to establish whether or not the framework stands up to close scrutiny.

➢ As necessary, develop and propose a refined framework that may have wider applicability but will specifically explain the reasons why a donor-supported organisational reform in agricultural extension fails to become self-sustainable in the Bangladesh context.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw important conclusions, discuss the implications of the research findings for relevant stakeholders and the discipline of agricultural extension. In addition, in this chapter the research methodology is evaluated and future areas of research based on the lessons from this study are identified.

8.2   Research conclusions

The results obtained from the application of the theoretical framework developed from the literature (Chapter 2) demonstrated that a novel organisational system promoted through a donor project becomes unsustainable due to factors/conditions relating to the operational context of the system, the performance of the system during the project implementation period, and the design and managerial aspects of the project. Based on the results and in the light of comparative observations drawn from the literature, the following major conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions are formulated in line with the propositions in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2.

The role of the **operational context** on the sustainability failure of an extension organisational system was affirmed. As proposed in the conceptual framework in

Chapter 2, both institutional and material dimensions of the context were important in explaining the reasons why the novel extension system became unsustainable in Bangladesh.

The concept of **institutional legitimacy** was found to be important in explaining the non-sustainability of the case in Bangladesh, which was in agreement with the propositions of the sociological institutionalism school (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2001, 2004). The novel organisational system analysed in this study became unsustainable because the rationale of undertaking the organisation and its underlying reform principles – decentralisation, farmer demand-led extension, empowerment of the poor, and GO-NGO partnership – did not conform to the existing norms, beliefs, and traditions of the extension agencies and rural people. Such nonconformity resulted in a lack of interest among the stakeholders to maintain the system following donor withdrawal.

This study, however, demonstrates that the institutional conditions that created a lack of legitimacy of the case study reform differed between the government organisation, the NGO, and the rural people. These were identified and made explicit. Based on these results and in the light of their comparison with the literature, the researcher concludes that the type of institutional conditions that create lack of legitimacy of a donor-supported reform differ according to the sectoral orientation of the extension agencies concerned. A government organisation becomes reluctant to support a donor-promoted reform when the reform does not conform to its technocratic values and elitist norms. It is also concluded that given the context of an institutionalised hostility towards NGOs, a GO becomes unwilling to maintain a donor-supported reform when it perceives that the reform is intended to benefit NGOs. As regards NGOs, this study leads to the conclusion that even if a donor-supported reform matches with the organisational norms and mission-vision of an NGO, the agency becomes unwilling to continue maintaining the reform unless the reform also matches with its market or profit-making values. However, both a GO and an NGO tend to be reluctant to maintain a reform because of policy constraints emerging from a culture of poor implementation of government policies. In the case of rural people, an organisational reform becomes illegitimate when it fails to conform to their traditions, especially the patron-client relationship with extension providers.

The negative influence of **dysfunctional institutional forces** on the sustainability of a donor-supported extension reform was affirmed in the same way as postulated in the IAD literature (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom et al., 2002). The case system lost support from extension agencies and rural people because of perverse incentives arising from dysfunctional institutional conditions in Bangladesh. The specific dimensions of these institutional forces were identified and made explicit.

In the Bangladesh context the dysfunctional institutional conditions include the unrealistic salary and wages for employees, absence of employee rewards for good performance, rent-seeking and corruption, and weak enforcement of administrative rules. Given such influences, extension organisations and their employees tend to view donor-supported projects as sources of extra income, sources of privileges such as remuneration and overseas training, sources of illegal rents, and means of livelihood. Added to this pervasive aid-dependency culture are the abundance of projects, abundance of donors, abundance of monetary or material privileges for participation in different projects, and absence of accountability for the failure of donor projects. As this study shows, these conditions adversely affected the willingness of the extension agencies and the beneficiaries to maintain the case study system in Bangladesh.

In addition to the IAD study (Ostrom et al., 2002) these results were well supported by those reported in the descriptive-empirical literature. The discussion in Chapter 7 has shown that a key reason why the T&V system failed to survive in developing countries was also related to the vested interests of the actors involved with the projects. Although the reform ideas of the T&V system are different from those of the FLE system in Bangladesh, the priority given to vested interests was the same. It is, therefore, concluded that given weak/dysfunctional institutional conditions, it is the very concept of "project" and "donor" that militate against sustainability rather than the type of extension reform pursued through a donor project.

Although both institutional legitimacy and institutional incentives were important in explaining the non-sustainability of the case study extension reform, the problem of perverse institutional incentives that characterises the development environment in Bangladesh, deserves more attention. This means the issue of institutional incentive stands out to be a stronger explanation compared to the issue of

institutional legitimacy. If the FLE reform principles were illegitimate then the implementing agencies should not have agreed to undertake the project in the first place. The explanation provided by the implementing agencies that the FLE did not fit into their belief systems, norms and policies, after almost four years' of involvement with the FLE project, is itself an indication of perverse incentives.

The role of **financial and human resources** in the non-sustainability of an extension system was affirmed in the same way as proposed in Chapter 2. The case study system became unsustainable because the extension agencies did not have adequate financial and human resources at their disposal to maintain the system following the termination of project aid.

In line with the proposition of the SCOPE framework (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992), an important conclusion that emerges from this study is that a donor-supported extension reform, that fails to **perform** as expected during the project implementation period, loses support from the stakeholders. It means sustainability is jeopardised not only because of an unfriendly institutional context but also because of the failure of a reform/innovation to demonstrate its actual worth. In the Bangladesh context, the inability of an extension system to generate sufficient material benefits such as increased income, results in a reluctance among the beneficiaries to maintain the system. The degree or amount of material gain that would satisfy beneficiaries would depend on their socioeconomic characteristics and the comparative advantages provided by the system over the other systems providing similar services. In addition, the interest of beneficiaries to maintain a system is reduced when the system fails to distribute the benefits on a fair and equitable basis. When a couple of elite beneficiaries unfairly capture the bulk of the benefits, the system's survival is at great risk. Furthermore, when a system fails to provide benefits for a good proportion of the beneficiaries and/or the benefits are minimal compared to the costs, the system is unlikely to be sustained.

The results of this study also support the proposition that the **level of complexity** of an organisational system must be realistic and well-thought-out in order for it to become sustainable. A system that requires a costly mechanism of coordination and conflict resolution is difficult to maintain. Such costs become high when the system attempts to include multiple extension agencies having diverse

organisational missions, policies, and demands. In addition, a system that fails to clearly define who are the target beneficiaries and includes beneficiaries from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds is apt to pay a high cost for coordination. An integration of technology transfer or advisory services with group-based micro-credit certainly increases the chance of creating visible benefits for rural people but at the same time, as this study has shown, such arrangements tend to increase system complexity. Being monetary in nature, group-based savings-credit poses the risk of enhanced conflicts among the members and thus making it is a costly technology.

Another important conclusion which emerged from this study is that an organisational reform in agricultural extension supported through a donor project becomes unsustainable when the project creates **parallel authority structures** or new committees, introduces **new procedures**, and provides **privileges** to the extension agencies and beneficiaries during implementation of the reform.

This research confirms the relationship between the **origin of a donor-supported extension reform** and the "ownership" of the reform by extension agencies/officials. A reform that originates from donors, which the aid-recipient officials/extension agencies did not request, encourages the pursuit of vested interests, creates resistance and generates a lack of interest to support the reform. This case study further leads to the conclusion that cost and resource sharing with aid-recipient officials/extension agencies does not automatically lead to their ownership of a reform. Moreover, when consultants or donors control the resources and/or key decisions of an extension reform project, the extension agencies/officials tend not to own and support the reform.

As regards the issue of **power and control** of extension agencies/officials and their ownership and support for a donor-supported reform, the results of this case study demonstrate that the relationship is very complex. This is because the problem of power and control occurs not only between the donor (consultants) and the aid recipient agencies/officials but also between the different interest groups on the recipient side. As this case study shows, when a reform project pays attention to the interests of the high-ranking officials at the neglect of the lower level employees, it undermines the ownership of the latter and risks losing their support.

Similarly, when financial control is vested in the NGO it results in a lack of ownership and support from the GO. Therefore, it may be concluded that the performance and sustainability of an extension reform promoted through a donor project is negatively affected when the project fails to negotiate the interests, needs and preferences of various groups within and between extension agencies.

This study confirms that the **initiation of an extension project** without consulting beneficiaries encourages perverse incentives and thus adversely affects the performance and sustainability of the project. This case study further leads to the conclusion that some forms of beneficiary participation such as resource-sharing actually threatens the performance and sustainability of a donor-supported extension reform.

Any clear-cut relationship between the **level/degree of beneficiary participation** and the "performance and sustainability" of a donor project could not be established in this study. The case project demonstrated a low to medium level of beneficiary participation but the consequences of such practices were either not very clear or variable according to the type of project tasks and the quality of the external facilitators. In some instances, a failure to ensure a reasonable level and quality of beneficiary participation played negative roles. In some other instances, an attempt to employ a reasonably high level of beneficiary control also played negative roles. Yet in some other instances, a lower level of beneficiary participation and a higher level of control by outside professionals were found to be useful. The case study also showed that in instances where the practice of participation generated negative outcomes, the external facilitators were of poor quality. On the other hand, in the instances where a low level of beneficiary participation played a positive role, the facilitators concerned were found to have an established record of good performance, honesty, and dedication. Given all these, the researcher concludes that beneficiary participation affects project performance and sustainability depending on the quality of the facilitators concerned, rather than the level of participation.

As regards beneficiary participation, this case study also leads to the conclusion that the usefulness of beneficiary participation and its quality of practice are highly influenced by the design features of a project organisation, the quality of the

fieldworkers/facilitators concerned and the institutional contexts. An extension reform project that involves diverse groups of beneficiaries, fails to employ quality facilitators, and operates in an unfavourable institutional context characterised by patron-client relationships may fail to achieve the intended level and benefits of beneficiary participation.

This study confirms that a failure to employ an effective **process of organisational learning** in the project cycle leads to a poor implementation performance and non-sustainability of an extension reform promoted through a donor project. However, the relationships between organisational learning and sustainability, as observed in this case study, was aligned more with those reported in the descriptive-empirical literature (for example, Hagmann et al., 1998; Korten, 1980; Mosse, 1998; Mosse et al., 1998) than those proposed in the SCOPE framework. As this case study shows, the case project, although it became unsustainable, was not completely devoid of learning. However, the learning was at a low level and the project was characterised by features of a blueprint system (Korten 1980) – such as a narrowly-focused and target-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems, a tendency to conceal errors and undertake superficial actions to resolve problems, rather than research the root causes of problems. The case project was unable to learn about important process events such as the conflicts, motivations and reactions of various actors. In addition, the project was characterised by an inability to learn about institutional conditions and their impacts on actors. Based on these results and also comparative insights drawn from the literature, the investigator concludes that an extension reform promoted through a donor project performs poorly and eventually becomes unsustainable when in the project cycle the critical process events and the institutional conditions are not detected and acted upon.

Quite opposite to the postulations in the SCOPE literature (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1990, 1992), this study indicates that the ability to learn in a project context is a complex and challenging issue, which is barely amenable to conscious managerial control. In the Bangladesh context, the reasons why organisational learning in a donor-supported extension project may be difficult were identified and made explicit. These include a short and non-flexible mode of donor assistance, vested political interests of the recipient actors aimed at satisfying the donor, poor working conditions within the implementing agencies resulting in poor staff motivation,

absence of a culture within the implementing agencies that encourages fieldworkers to provide negative feedback, failure to negotiate the interests of the lower level employees who are close to the field, patron-client relationships between the rural elites and the fieldworkers, a low degree of farmer participation in the learning process, and absence of direct communication between the beneficiaries and the decision makers.

8.3 Contribution of the study and implications

This study was carried out with the intention to develop an in-depth explanation of the reasons why an organisational reform promoted through a donor project fails to become sustainable in Bangladesh. The expectation was that such an analysis would provide guidelines to improve the return-on-investment from donor supported extension reform projects. Therefore, one of the primary groups of beneficiaries of this research is the international donor agencies who are interested in assisting the development of the agricultural extension sector. At the same time this study has important implications for Governments, government and non-government extension organisations, and agricultural universities and colleges in Bangladesh and other developing countries. Furthermore, this study contributes to the discipline of agricultural extension and the broader discipline of development studies.

The most important contribution of this study is the explanatory framework proposed in section 8.2 of this Chapter. The strength of this framework is the ability it provides to apply multiple lenses to the analysis of an extension system taking into account concepts from: (i) the IAD framework informed by political economy school (ii) the "three pillars of institutions" framework that originated in the discipline of organisational sociology, (iii) the SCOPE framework that originated in international development management, coupled with the descriptive-empirical literature. Although the SCOPE framework was applied in a previous study (Gustafson 1994), the investigator did not find any empirical study in the agricultural extension literature that has used such a comprehensive framework as the one proposed in this study. Particularly, no example of the application of the IAD and the sociological institutional frameworks was found in agricultural extension,

although these frameworks have been widely applied in the broader discipline of development studies.

The detailed description of the research method provided in this case study is another important contribution to the discipline of agricultural extension. Since there is no guideline in the extant literature, the students of extension discipline can apply this research method in successive case studies.

This study has demonstrated the importance of the operational context in the performance and sustainability of a newly introduced extension system. It is difficult for donors who come from developed countries and from different cultures to know *ex ante* about these unique contextual conditions in Bangladesh. The framework proposed in this study can be used by donors in conducting feasibility studies before undertaking an extension reform project. Such analysis would save wastage of funds and other resources of both donors and recipients in Bangladesh. It would be useful to assess the norms, beliefs, and traditions of the stakeholders concerned. Side by side, an assessment of the financial and human resource capacity of the extension agencies would enable an estimate of the potential costs that would be required to achieve a sustainable outcome.

As regards examination of the institutional context, this study indicates that the nature and sources of institutional influences vary among government extension agencies, NGOs, and rural people. Therefore, in order to have a comprehensive picture, it would be necessary to undertake separate institutional analyses for each of the extension agencies and the rural people. From this standpoint, the combination of both sociological and political economy views of institutions, as articulated in the framework, provides a comprehensive analytical lens.

When analysed from a sociological institutional perspective, the case study showed that the mismatch between cultural institutions and intended practices and principles of the reform/innovation was a major threat to sustainability. Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable outcomes from project-based investments, it may be useful for donors to avoid bringing ideas into Bangladesh that are far distant from what constitutes culturally "acceptable and valid extension practices". In other words, it might be useful to think about a slow and incremental change rather than

opting for an abrupt transformation. To this end, donors may decide to fund an extension model that has previously been implemented or tested, rather than introducing novel systems every time. For example, donors may decide to continue funding the FLE system. Since the failure of the system has generated important insights through this study and other publications, it would be easier to deal with the cultural constraints. Such actions might include, for example, adapting the FLE model according to the existing village norms/traditions or taking pre-emptive actions to minimise the negative influences of culture.

This study shows the role of dysfunctional institutional conditions in Bangladesh, the perverse incentives they create for extension employees and rural people, and their negative effects on the sustainability of an extension reform. This study further demonstrates that excessive inflows of foreign aid projects and the culture of paying remuneration, providing funds for logistics, sending government employees overseas for training, and providing doles to villagers, tend to aggravate the already existing institutional weaknesses. To improve the situation and the effectiveness of foreign aid, donor agencies in Bangladesh could undertake a number of steps. They could try to improve inter-donor coordination, avoid haphazard undertaking of projects with multiple ideas and goals, come up with a coordinated decision of not paying material incentives to extension agencies and beneficiaries for participating in development projects, and stop providing aid in events of repeated failure. It would also be useful to make public, through publications and other forms of mass media, the agreements that take place at higher government levels during the initiation of a project. Donor agencies could undertake "incentive studies"[1] before funding a project, commission in-depth case studies on failed projects and publish the results on the mass media[2]. This may help check the pursuit of vested interests.

This study clearly shows the magnitude to which the extension agencies in Bangladesh, particularly NGOs, are dependent on donor funding. This observation has two important implications. First, donors need to reconsider whether sustainability should at all be a target of their assistance to a poor economy like Bangladesh. The second implication relates to the concern raised in literature (see

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[1] An example of such study is the study of Ostrom et al. (2002) commissioned by SIDA

[2] Some donor agencies seem to have already begun the process. For example, the ASSP and ASIRP evaluation reports commissioned by the World Bank and the DFID are available online.

Chapter 2) that donors have traditionally or overwhelmingly been very supportive of NGOs. While NGOs may have certain advantages in working with poor, donors need to bear in mind that an NGO can be more financially vulnerable compared to a GO. Therefore, when NGOs are involved in extension projects, it is unlikely that they would be able to maintain the projects without continuous donor funding.

The findings of this study can be used by extension and development managers in the design of extension systems. The identification of the factors contributing to system complexity can be used as a guide in this regard. It is important to bear in mind that GO-NGO partnerships, combination of technology transfer with micro-credit, inclusion of heterogeneous groups of rural people into projects can be costly. Therefore, if these designs are to be used, extension managers need to figure out how best such designs can be made cost effective. Furthermore, if sustainability is a goal, avoidance of parallel structures, tasks, and procedures in donor projects would be required.

This study has demonstrated the importance of recipient ownership in the performance and sustainability of a development assistance project. In this study identification of the factors that negatively affect ownership have important implications for donor agencies. They show the negative consequences of providing assistance when there is no demand for it among recipient agencies and rural people, the hazard of channelling funding and other resources through NGOs bypassing government actors, the harmful consequence of controlling project funds and decisions, and the failure to negotiate stakeholder demands. The donors may use this finding in deciding when aid needs to be provided and in the event aid is provided, what donors should do to ensure that the recipients own the project.

This study shows the importance of bearing in mind the power of fieldworkers. Although they remain at the bottom rung in the organisational ladder, they can make or break a project. This provides an important lesson for extension and development managers. This suggests that management is not about imposing decisions and ideas on those lower in the hierarchy but about the ability to negotiate. The negative consequences of appointing inappropriate consultants, as shown in this study, provide lessons for donor agencies. Donors may need to appoint consultants who have higher social relations skills, proficiency in local

language, sensitivity to local culture and a high-level familiarity with the context of the country. It is quite dangerous to appoint a consultant just on the basis of his/her "technical expertise".

This study shows that beneficiary participation can be useful provided it is possible to carefully manage the power asymmetry, and clearly define who needs to participate, in what form, in which activities, and to what extent. Since beneficiary participation is a highly desired strategy in most contemporary rural development projects, extension and development managers may use the findings of this study as guides to decide on the appropriate strategies of participation. This study also shows that for participation to work, the quality of the facilitators is important. This has important implications for extension managers. While appointing professional facilitators, it is not enough just to consider their "technical expertise" on participatory methodologies but also their other traits such as past records of good performance, honesty in dealing with financial matters, and dedication to profession.

It is important for extension and development managers to bear in mind that learning is very crucial for good performance, both during the design and the implementation phases of a project or programme. If sustainability is a goal, it would be essential to invest sufficient time and resources for detailed exploratory studies, rather than superficially documenting and reporting "numbers". In this regard, appointing anthropologists or trained social scientists and allowing them to work with the communities and the existing organisations for a prolonged period of time, might assist in improving outcomes from project investment. It would also be useful to develop systems for learning about the institutional constraints rather than learning about targets. This study has also shown the sort of barriers that might adversely affect the intention to learn. Extension and development managers may use these as guidelines during project implementation. Particularly, the constraints on learning as identified in this study can be used in training and raising awareness among project implementation staff in Bangladesh. The donors should try to encourage honest feedback including negative findings from stakeholders. This could be promoted by setting examples of funding some failed projects since the worry of cancellation of donor funding is a reason why stakeholders refrain from reporting failures.

Finally, this study has highlighted the strength of cultural and political-institutional contexts in the performance and sustainability of development initiatives. It is unlikely that any donor would be willing to resolve those issues just for the sake of its projects. Neither is it within the realm of the donors to handle many of these issues. This suggests that organisational sustainability may not be possible to achieve within a short duration project time frame. This has two key implications for the donor agencies. First, the donors may need to reconsider whether sustainability is at all a valid goal when the development assistance provided is in the form of "projects". Second, if the donors are really serious about the sustainability of their development assistance in the agricultural extension sector in Bangladesh, they may need to abandon the project mode and take a more comprehensive and long term intervention approach.

As regards the project mode of international assistance, this study provides some important insights for the Government of Bangladesh. Lessons from this study can be used by the Government to avoid accepting projects that are unrealistic in the Bangladesh context or difficult to materialize within a short-duration project time frame. The government may also request assistance from the donor agencies in strengthening the already existing organisational systems rather than introducing new ideas and practices that are developed in different countries and are not well tested in Bangladesh. If sustainability is a goal demanded by the donor, it would be important for the Government to negotiate and identify future sources of funding to be able to continue operating the system after donors withdraw their support. It would be useful for the Government of Bangladesh to develop, from the outset, a mutually negotiated exit strategy for the donor.

The findings of this study can be equally useful to the Governments of other developing countries having socioeconomic, cultural and political contexts similar to those reported in this study. The framework proposed in this study would be useful in analysing any type of rural development projects and programmes in Bangladesh and other developing countries, where sustainability is a goal. A caution, however, should be exercised that sustainability is a huge challenge; events leading to sustainability or a lack thereof are sometimes highly unpredictable and may be evolutionary features of a system. There is no infallible recipe or blueprint for

success. The framework offered here needs to be altered to fit local contexts, especially if it is to be used in another developing country or sector.

The framework developed in this study can be used by the agricultural Universities in Bangladesh as a basis for upgrading their extension course-curricula. Being a teacher of the largest public sector university in Bangladesh, the investigator is aware of the need for such initiatives. Currently, the course-curricula in extension education mainly include the study of technology adoption and diffusion processes, especially the methods of communication between farmers and extension professionals. This is because until recently, the term "extension" meant advisory or technology transfer functions. This study has demonstrated that it is important to understand the political and cultural contexts within which extension systems operate and the role of international development assistance in the performance and survival of the systems. Therefore, it would be necessary to include courses on political economy, cultural anthropology and international development in the discipline of agricultural extension.

This study has also contributed to the literature in the broader discipline of development studies. This study provides empirical evidence of the usefulness of the three theoretical frameworks, namely, the IAD, the three pillars of institutions, and the SCOPE. In addition, this study has refined, annexed, and refuted some of the concepts reported in the descriptive-empirical literature, particularly with regard to "stakeholder participation and ownership" and "organisational learning". These are already reported in Chapter 7.

8.4   Evaluation of the methodology

The application of a qualitative case study approach has proved to be very useful for an in-depth investigation of an extremely complex organisational system, comprising multiple agencies and rural communities. The adoption of a flexible design, data collection methods, and use of multiple sources of evidence provided great advantages in developing a rich picture of the system and its context.

Although Eisenhardt (1989) recommended that four to ten samples be included in a case design, the experience of this study suggests that it would be more useful for student researchers to undertake a single rather than a multiple design in studies involving complex multi-organisational systems. This is because of the time and resource limitations on student researchers. In this research, the amount of time and effort required to study just a single case was enormous. Had the researcher used multiple-case designs, it would have been extremely difficult to provide an in-depth explanation of the phenomenon. Neither would it have been possible to handle the large volume of qualitative data. This recommendation, of course, is consistent with Patton (2002) and Yin (2003) who recognised the difficulty of using multiple case designs in student research.

Defining the case and its units of analysis are the most challenging aspects of case study research. These issues are barely clarified in the descriptive-empirical literature reviewed in this study. Although the FLE was defined as a case or example of a poorly sustained extension organisational reform, it was necessary to identify the appropriate units of analysis. While the FLE project or the system as a whole was identified as the primary unit of analysis, a focus on the government agency, the NGO, and the rural communities as embedded units of analysis proved to be useful. This particularly enabled the identification of diverse institutional pressures confronted by each actor. It would be useful in successive studies to focus on the individual organisational entities within a multi-organisational system alongside examining the system as a whole. The IAD framework that draws attention to "the actors in the action arena" provided useful guidelines in this regard.

As recommended by case study authors, a review of the extant theories and the literature before undertaking the study proved to be extremely useful in defining the case, identifying the units of analysis, developing the case study protocol and guiding the data analysis process. It is very important that students undertaking similar studies conduct a comprehensive review of the extant literature and develop a "tentative" analytical framework before going to the field. At the same time, it is important that the literature review be considered as an ongoing rather than a one-off exercise. This should continue until the final draft of the thesis is completed. It would also be useful to review diverse theories rather than just one.

Semi-structured interviews using interview guides proved to be a useful method of data collection. Taking notes during conversations assisted in capturing the expressions and influence of the contextual conditions on interviewees. The method of identifying successive interviewees based on some initial interviews, that is, the snowball sampling provided important assistance in building the full picture. It was also important to interview multiple actors about the same issue to improve validity of the data. Use of an audio recorder in interviews was very useful because it was not possible to write down all the details in a lengthy conversation. Many interviewees, however, declined audio-recorded interviews or became hesitant to answer certain questions. An important lesson of this study is that a case study investigator should not rely only on formal interviews (e.g. by making appointments). Ability to socialise with the subjects and casual conversations are extremely important in data collection.

Personal observations of the operational context of the extension agencies and the rural people and recording such observations in diaries were immensely important. Such methods enabled identification of the working culture of the actors, which is otherwise difficult to define or describe.

The focus group method used in this study was very helpful in capturing the viewpoints of people in rural communities. It also allowed for cross-checking views on different subjects at a time. In this study three criteria were used in conducting focus groups: (i) men versus women groups i.e. gender (ii) survived versus disintegrated groups, and (iii) groups located in highly urbanised versus less urbanised areas. However, it was realised that the method could have yielded more information if separate focus groups had been organised for farmer promoters, group leaders, and common group members as well as well-off farmers and the relatively poor farmers.

A problem encountered in this study was that high-level administrators in the Government of Bangladesh could not be interviewed, despite repeated attempts. The investigator realised that this was largely because the case was negative. This shows why there is very little information provided in the descriptive literature on unsuccessful or negative cases. The explanations provided in this study could have been more comprehensive if the high-level or ministerial level interactions between

the Government and the donor could have been analysed. Although the investigator attempted to fill in this gap by analysing project documents and by interviewing the senior mid-level officials, the investigator was not completely satisfied. It is recommended that while interpreting the results of this study, the reader takes this limitation into account. At the same time, an important lesson is that project documents are extremely useful sources of data in a qualitative case study.

Residence in the field for an extended period and socialisation with the target stakeholders were immensely important to capture the "unspeakable". The lesson from this study is that it is immensely difficult to have people speak about the vested political interests that affect the outcome of a development project. In such situations, socialisation and prior relations assist in establishing trust. It is preferable that students carefully consider the accessibility to the data prior to choosing a case that requires investigating the political behaviours of actors.

The ability of the researcher to speak the local dialect was found to be extremely important. This enabled him to understand the cultural meaning attached to certain words and phrases and thus reduced for the likelihood of distortions in the data. A familiarity with the local culture or way of life of the rural people and extension agencies was also very useful in this regard. It is important that student researchers undertake empirical studies in their own country, preferably in their own locality. Donor agencies interested in undertaking empirical research should also take this into consideration and avoid appointing foreign residents.

The application of Dey's (1993) qualitative data analysis process proved to be suitable for analysing the data collected in this study. The technique was found to be very simple, straightforward and practical. To this end, the NVivo software was extremely important to reduce and code the data. Without the software, it would not have been possible to analyse the data within the timeframe of this study. However, it would be useful to remember that the software is useful only if the researcher is familiar with the concepts and categories raised in the literature. The software does not automatically identify the concepts.

An ability to properly define a concept was extremely important during data analysis. The literature provided important guidelines in this regard. However, a

difficulty encountered in this study occurred in the translation of the data from *Bangla* to English. It was important for the investigator to have a high level of proficiency in both languages. Despite having such proficiency, it appeared that in many cases, the cultural meaning attached to particular words, phrases and sentences, was difficult to express or convey in English. It is anticipated that some meaning of the data might have been lost in this way. As an example, it proved to be difficult to code the habit of asking for *bhata* by the government officials to provide services to the farmers. The word *Bhata* has multiple meanings from the cultural understanding of *Bangla* language and is extremely context-dependent. In the literature, the closest concept for this was found to be "rent seeking". While rent-seeking bears a negative connotation, "*bhata* seeking" is not necessarily always a bad practice in Bangladesh. Although it may be regarded as a negative practice in some instances, in many other events, it may denote an informal social transaction, which is accepted and even sometimes respected in Bangladesh society.

Given the above, as has been done in this study, it would be useful if the researchers could provide a verbatim record of such concepts along with their English translation. It would also be necessary for qualitative researchers to be able to think carefully and identify the cultural meaning of the various words used in a given context. Such instances also suggest that it is better for qualitative researchers to undertake research in their own culture in order to improve the validity of the data and be able to develop good theories.

An important area where the research methodology could be improved is through the use of a longitudinal case design. Since the data collection was *ex post*, identification of the factors relating to FLE project implementation processes required the interviewees to recall events, which was difficult for some. The investigator attempted to resolve this problem through the analysis of the project documents. However, it was realised that if the day-to-day interactions and events were elaborately recoded, it would have been extremely useful to develop a rich picture of the events that occurred in the life of the FLE project. However, for this to happen, the researcher would have to be a member of the FLE project implementation team. It suggests that an investigator who is part of the organisation under investigation might be in a better position to analyse a case in-depth compared to an outsider.

8.5   Directions for further research

The results of this study direct attention to a number of areas for further research regarding the sustainability of donor-supported reform initiatives.

The relationship between vested political motives and the sustainability of donor-supported reforms has been established in this study. However, this study has been focused only on the actors on the recipient side – the extension agencies and rural people. In order to develop a comprehensive picture of the problem, it is necessary to extend the analysis to higher level actors. In future studies it would be useful to include an investigation of the relationship between the political interest of donor agencies and the sustainability of aid-supported extension projects.

Two questions are particularly worthy of investigation. First, why do donor agencies come up with new ideas/innovations every time they fund a project? In other words, why cannot they fund an already existing innovation/system? Second, why do donor agencies continue providing assistance to a context that has proven records of misuse of foreign aid? The first question arises because there is little empirical evidence that the T&V was ineffective/ unsustainable in Bangladesh (see Chapter 1). In spite of this, the reasons for undertaking two successive projects to reform the T&V system were unclear. The second question is especially important for Bangladesh because the country is well known for its institutional weaknesses[3]. For the same reason, it is important to study the reasons why the Government of Bangladesh continues to accept short-term organisational reform projects despite evidence that such changes are difficult to maintain.

This study has identified a lack of cultural legitimacy as a major factor affecting the sustainability of a newly introduced extension system. This suggests that it is immensely difficult for a new idea or innovation developed in one cultural context to be institutionalised in a different cultural context. As the institutionalism school suggests, institutions or cultures are very resistant to change. However, development of the extension sector in Bangladesh might require exploitation of innovations or examples of best practices from other countries. Therefore, an

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[3] See for example, the contemporary reports of the Transparency International. Readers might also be interested in the recent political developments in Bangladesh. There has been a massive anti-corruption campaign run by the interim caretaker government of Bangladesh. A good number of high profile political leaders are currently under trial for corruption charges.

interesting area of further study would be to identify, investigate and take lessons from cases where innovations originating in one culture were successfully institutionalised in a different culture.

The findings of this study are based on the analysis of a single case. It would be useful to carry out similar studies on more cases of extension reform projects in Bangladesh using the maximum variation sampling according to the case attributes provided in this study. This would allow identifying a pattern of the factors negatively affecting the sustainability of agricultural extension reforms.

The complexity of a system was identified to be a negative factor in this study. An important source of this was the idea of integrating technology transfer and micro-credit functions in the design. Such integration was beneficial because it is the return from the group-based savings-credit that enabled survival of a few of the rural groups. The results, however, indicate that such integration increased the cost of coordination and thereby reduced prospects for sustainability in most of the groups. In successive studies, it would be useful to investigate how sustained systems that use complex designs, tackle the problem of high transactions costs and/or what are the most cost-effective designs for agricultural extension systems. There is currently no guideline in the extension literature in this regard.

The researcher has identified a lack of ownership of the reform by the recipients as one of the negative factors. However, this study also revealed that in a multi-stakeholder system, it is extremely difficult to ensure that all stakeholders have equal ownership. Future studies may investigate how successful cases negotiate this problem.

As regards ownership, this study shows that donor control over financial resources is a key threat to recipient ownership. However, it is also risky to hand over to recipient actors a total control of financial matters in a corrupt institutional context. This study also shows that handing over financial control to NGOs negatively affects ownership by government actors and is, therefore, not a useful option. Successive investigators may attempt to answer the question: how can donor agencies overcome this dilemma?

Concerning recipient ownership, this study indicates that ownership is threatened when donors initiate a project or provide aid which recipients did not request. However, this is not a new finding and the problem is well documented in literature.

Therefore, a question requiring further investigation is, why do donor agencies provide aid even when recipients do not ask for such assistance?

The degree of beneficiary participation in the case study was found to be at a low level, according to the scale/ladder proposed by development authors (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1994, 1995). However, the relationship between sustainability and level of participation could not be established. Furthermore, certain practices of beneficiary participation negatively affected the outcome of the case study project. In successive cases, it would be useful to study the precise form and degree of beneficiary participation that positively affect sustainability.

This study showed that financial participation of beneficiaries played a negative role in sustainability. However, in order to develop self-sustaining systems and reduce financial dependency on donors, such practices might be indispensable. Therefore, further investigations would be necessary to identify the contexts or conditions under which financial participation plays a positive role.

A failure to employ an effective process of organisational learning in the project cycle was an important factor negatively affecting the performance and sustainability of the case study reform. Although the project was not completely devoid of learning, the focus of learning was narrow and target-oriented. However, it was difficult to conclude whether sustainability would have been improved if there had been a much broader focus of learning covering institutional contexts and project processes. Although some authors (for example, Korten, 1980; Mosse et al., 1998) have claimed that such an approach to learning plays positive role, the empirical basis for such claim is extremely limited. Therefore, more studies are required to find out whether or not a process-focused and institutional-level learning improves system sustainability and how such learning occurs.

This study showed that vested political motives of actors acted as important barriers against learning in the case study project. A huge literature (Carlsson & Wohlgemuth, 2000; Edgren, 2000; Mosse et al., 1998; Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004) suggests that this is a very common problem in aid-supported development interventions because actors confront strong incentives to report success rather than failures. Although the reasons for such vested interests are reported, little guidelines exist in the literature as to how such constraints could be overcome.

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Appendix A

Data Collection Guide

A-1: Data Collection Gide for the Extension Agencies

1. **Project background**

   - ➢ The goal and objectives of the project
   - ➢ The reform principles and rationale
   - ➢ The key actors
   - ➢ Funding sources
   - ➢ Implementation events
   - ➢ The implementation setting

2. **Contextual influences**

Why did the extension agencies think it was not possible for them to maintain the reform?

How do the key stakeholders perceive the reform principles based on which the project was undertaken? Do they perceive that the reforms were appropriate for their organisation? If yes, why do they perceive so? If not, why?

Do the reforms conform to the existing policies of the extension agencies? Do the reforms conform to the day-to-day interactions of the extension agencies with the rural people? If not, how do the reforms differ from their existing working norms?

What incentives are there for the extension agencies to sustain a donor project? Do the internal working conditions of the extension agencies generate enough positive incentives for the employees? Do the people perceive their jobs as rewarding? If not, why? What effects did it have on the motivation of the concerned actors to sustain their support for the reform?

What were the terms of conditions or agreements between the donor and the extension agencies? Are there appropriate rules and/or sanctioning mechanisms in place for the extension agencies to be able to continue supporting the reform? What other donor projects are implemented by the agencies? How did the broader aid environment affect the incentives for the extension agencies to sustain their support for the reform?

What is the material and financial strength of the extension agencies? What are the sources through which the extension agencies receive funding? Do the extension agencies have the requisite resources to continue operating the reform after a donor withdraws its funding and other forms of material support? How cost-effective was the reform when compared with the resource capacity of the extension agencies? How did it affect the ability of the extension agencies to sustain their support for the new extension approach?

3. Project implementation performance

What were the expectations of the extension agencies from the reform?

Was the project able to achieve what it wanted to achieve? How do the extension agencies perceive that the new model was beneficial for their organisation? If yes, why? If no, why do they perceive so? Did it play any role in their decision to sustain the reform?

4. Complexity

How the project organised the jobs among the various stakeholder groups? Which stakeholder played what role? How were decisions and actions coordinated? How do the extension agencies perceive about the coordination mechanism?

Did the coordination continue after the withdrawal of the donor agency? If no, why was it not possible?

5. Mode of project implementation

Where was the project located within the hierarchy of the implementing agencies? How were the various project tasks and coordination activities different from the existing procedures of the extension agencies? Was there any negative effect on the sustainability of the reform due to the way the reform project was organised? If yes, how?

Did the donor use privileges for the extension agencies to participate in the project? If yes, what privileges were provided? How did the privilege differ from the privileges enjoyed by the other employees in the agencies? Was there any negative consequence in the reform project due to the use of privileges?

6. Stakeholder participation and ownership

Where did the reform idea come from? Did the extension agencies enunciate any demand for the reform from the donor? Is there any relationship between the demand enunciation and the willingness of the extension agencies to sustain the reform?

What contributions or resources did the extension agencies provide in the implementation of the reform project? How were decisions regarding the design and implementation of the project made? Who used to take part in those decisions? Who ultimately made the final decisions? What was the reaction among the extension agencies about the decisions?

Who used to control the resources of the project? Were there agreements among the stakeholders? Was there any negative consequence in the reform project due to control over resources?

7. Learning process

How were goals or objectives formulated during the project? Were there attempts to collect information about the operational context of the project? What information was collected, how and by whom? Were the goals and objectives refined over time?

What were the mechanisms through which the project used to assess the implementation events? What was the focus and purpose of the assessments? How were the monitoring information fed back to the different members of the organisation? How were the feedback information used by the stakeholders? What information was generated through the monitoring process and what actions were undertaken? Did the actions improve the situation? If no, why? Were the actions followed up?

Was there any mechanism to reflect on the implementation events in the project? If yes, how often? Who used to participate in the discussions? What were discussed? Was there any actions taken based on the discussions? Did it improve the situation? If not, were follow up actions taken?

How many evaluations were undertaken during the project? What was the focus of the evaluations? What mechanism was used in the evaluations? How were the evaluations carried out and by whom? What constraints were identified through the evaluations and what actions were undertaken? Did the actions improve the situation? Were the actions followed up? If no, why? How did it affect the project?

A-2: Data Collection Guide for Rural People

1 Community setting
   - Location
   - Population
   - Occupation
   - Agriculture
   - Extension and rural development agencies working in the communities
   - Interactions between the extension agencies and the rural people
   - Key historical events or trends in the communities
   - General norms of cooperation among the people
   - Past history and experiences with donor projects

2 Why did the groups disintegrate during the post-project period? How do the rural people explain the phenomenon?

3 What did the rural people do in the project? What was their role? How difficult did they perceive their jobs were? If the tasks and procedures were difficult, why? How did the rural people perceive about the savings-credit activities, group meetings, and extension activities? Did they consider those very difficult? If so, why?

4 Why did the rural people participate in the project at all? What did they expect from the project? What is the evaluation of the rural people about the project? What are the positive and negative aspects of the project are according to their evaluation? Did they perceive that the project was able to fulfil their expectations?

5 What contributions were sought from the rural people in the initiation and implementation of the project? How were the people selected, by whom? What are characteristics and background of the people? How were the groups designed? What inputs were provided by the rural people in the design process?

6 What role the rural people played in the implementation of the project? What were their specific contributions? How much freedom did they have in deciding the operation of the groups?