

6

Women prefer lunchtime

Claus Euler

• Introduction

During a recent training for Project Village Committee (PVC) members in the Rural Family and Child Welfare Project (RFCWP)¹, an exercise was conducted among 27 participants (23 women and 6 men) from three villages of Charghat Subdistrict to find out the best time of day for visits by project supervisors. This note is an account of the method used.

• Method

The participants were divided into three groups according to gender. Two women's groups were formed, to allow a comparison between two different villages and because there were more women than men present. The groups were asked to divide a normal day into nine equal sections of two hours each, from 5 am to 11 pm. They drew the day's nine sections on the floor using chalk. They were then asked to rank (from first to fifth choice) the best time of day for visits, which they did using pieces of broken bricks. After that exercise, the office hours of the government supervisors were added to the floor diagrams, to see how their duty time fits in with the requirements of the villagers.

• Results

The results showed that different gender groups preferred different times. The two women's groups both preferred 1-3 pm, while the men ranked 11 am - 1 pm as being most suitable. For both women's groups their preferred time coincided with the staff's lunch break, which is officially from 1-1.30 pm, but is usually extended to at least a full hour. Women start to prepare the food for lunch at 9 am, and would prefer the supervisors to come after cooking time, when they just have to serve the meal. Considering that travelling to and from the villages takes some time, the women's first choice would hardly ever be met.

During the discussion about the results of this exercise, the men heavily opposed the women's preference, saying that they should be free to serve the food. The men do not want to be visited during this time of the day (1-3 pm), because this is their resting time after heavy work in the morning. The women argued that those men whose wives are engaged in this type of development activity, which is for the betterment of the entire family, should sacrifice a bit as well.

After further similar exercises, a proposal could be put to the government to adapt the visiting hours of project staff to be more convenient for villagers, just as many NGOs are doing. This is one reason why some NGOs can claim that they are more embedded in the villages and are better accepted by the people.

¹ Implemented by Enfants du Monde (a Swiss NGO), in collaboration with the Department of Social Services and the Ministry of Social Welfare under a bilateral agreement between the governments of Switzerland and Bangladesh.

• **Claus Euler**, Enfants du Monde, GPO Box 986, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.