

**Evolving strategy- ethical guideline and driving mechanism of a local Farmers
Research Institution towards Holistic Rural Development**

OR

**Paradigm Shift from Project Approach to *Krisok* Approach for Holistic Rural
Development- a local initiative**

By: Zakir Hossain & Shaila Shahid



Central Research: East Sujonkathi, Goila, Agailjhara, Barisal, Bangladesh.
Dhaka Center : Ka 212/14, Khilkhet Namapara, Dhaka-1229. Bangladesh
Fone: ++88-02-8912536, Cell: ++88-01815002251
Email: farmers.voice@gmail.com

Background:

Apparently the mission was nearly impossible.

To inspire a *Krisok Samaj* (Farming Community) to be kept ourselves on the dreamy track for establishing a Farmers' Research Institute, to enjoy the ocean of pain and drops of joy, to motivate ourselves towards Organic Philosophy, to build some tiny boats with our own efforts and available resources - instead of boarding on big ships, to not to be greedy for glittering life style and "Project Culture"were really an impossible mission.

Not even those, in the arena of "chemical business" in a country like Bangladesh-where still there is no initiative for "Organic Agricultural Policy" and rarely the voice of *Notun Krisok* (Organic Farmer) is heard....there working for Rural Development through Organic Policy is a risky business.

It was even easier to become a researcher or policy maker of a national/ international organization with the return to Bangladesh after completing the graduation in "Ecological Agriculture" from Wageningen, The Netherlands. But it was really tough and very odd looking to have the desire then to be a *Krisok*. It is quite a non-conventional approach for an agricultural graduate to the context of Bangladesh, especially where *krisoks* themselves are ashamed of their low social profile. We felt the necessity to organize the farmers for identifying their problems and prospects and create a common platform. It was definitely interesting that the farmers themselves opposed the most at the very beginning! Social attitude towards *Krisoks* was another main barrier to reach and to be acquainted with them. The wish to start with a very little existing available resource was a knot like. Thus we had to proceed inch by inch by fulfilling the expectations of different groups like small or landless farmers, local elite, curious women folk, primary school teachers and above all through a vast network coverage with the children of the *Samaj*.

However, the desire and idea had been taking shape gradually. When a *Krisok* does put some seedlings/seeds here and there of their home garden- it does may appear nonsense and a fool's work to the conventional researcher or policy maker. As the *krisoks'* initiative does not follow any conventional rules although he/she has the foresighted pictorial view of seven years next- at least. And he/she has acquired the wisdom through the experience and experiment of hundreds of years back. In fact, the aim was only to be a *krisok*. The objective is to form an organic community. The goal is to bridging the gap among farmers, policy makers and researcher.

Krisoker Saar (Farmers' Voice) is a tiny Farmers' Research Institute evolved from the local community itself through a non-conventional way of institutional formation and development. Since started dreaming and conceptualising the Institution; we have been working to developing a holistic way of living by using research to foster local development. The Institution focuses on ethical - production, research, conservation, marketing, policy analysis and advocacy.

Elaborating non-conventional *Krisok* approach:

Although conventional research discourse is sustainable to some extent but it seems evident that the main constraint of development through conventional way of research is often "fixed objective oriented research" or "imposed research". For example, researches demanded by the external or alien policies that often do not match with the local priority. However, we feel that the nature of the society is constantly changing. In this course of continuous change, every phenomenon had to be studied in its particular concrete existence at a particular space, time, and demand and from the correct scientific angle. Hence *Krisok* approach was looking for existing wisdom and knowledge based transformative style of research and local development.

With all the existing resources, *Krisok* approach looks into the farmers' actions to nature, life and development. Following the way of the farmers' ancestors' experiential wisdom and researches, we have been performing the actions consciously- considering the continuous changes of policies, technological commodities and human perceptions. Thus our effort aimed to closer the linkage between our wisdom and existing knowledge. The incisive and in-depth idea and evaluation gave the farmers struggle a totally new and innovative profile and prestige that it did not have before in the locality. And that is the non-conventional approach to find fresh spaces for farmers to create their own dialect- from where they can generate new imaginations, innovations, invent their own patterns for move forward to enjoying their rights and happiness.

Evolving Strategy:

On the way of searching 'happiness' and to generate peasant farmers' consciousness pertinent to their rights, the desire leads coming back to the very locality of village *Sujonkathi* after completing higher study on agriculture. That determination to be tied up with other fellow farmers was the first crucial factor for success and failure of the initiative. Social expectations especially of the local elites for a project with huge foreign money involvement were the first obstacle on the way of reaching the small farmers. The tea stalls in the locality are the places where farmers gather in morning and evening, from where information are gathered, processed and exchanged. So tea stall were the first places of putting forward our idea of "Organic Agriculture". Initially any one hardly believed that it is still possible to produce without chemical fertilizer and pesticides. On the contrary while visiting their field, it was observed that traditionally some of them are already producing in organic manner. So it was the food for thought why they are ignoring their own practice. Probably: a) lack of self confidence; b) considering it backdated and forgotten practice; c) technological commodity based knowledge covered up the experiential wisdom; d) Fear of expressions against the conventional flow are some basic factors. While discussing the findings of the observations – there gloomy eyes started to blinking. Although they still then could not come out from the vicious cycle of thinking "Not possible without chemical inputs".

So we decided to start cultivation of our own. Initially we took rent 2 acres of land in 2000. We worked hard throughout the winter season. It became the centre of attraction for all the people of the *Samaj* "what will be the result?" The vegetables grew well. We invited them to visit the field occasionally and they observed curiously the growing stages of the crops throughout the season. Finally, they certified that "It is possible". Even then, no one was coming forward but only one to start practicing following organic principles. In the mean time, we started to work with the school going children of the *Samaj*.

One turning point for group formation happened at the very moment while saving a pond's life which is an example of compact diversity. Although local people were not involved directly but supported with all their spirituality, wisdom, necessary information and information networks to the effort. The auto reflex of the community later was rationalized as a research. It was the year 2001.

A news board was placed within the community which is still serving as a communicating tool with the people. Simultaneously, formal and informal discussions were going on in various places like fields, in tea stalls or in leisure time among the farmers regarding the way of practicing agriculture and surrounding environment. *Krisoker Saar* (Farmers' Voice) relentlessly were giving input to raise discussions and shared information on laws, policies, international agreements, rights of the farmers, the causes of deprivations etc. Thus valuable opinion were building up and farmers were becoming conscious about individual and community responsibilities for producing safe food, conservation and better use of natural resources for their own existence. Finally after two years of the initiative, farmers seemed to be organized around one point that it is possible to produce vegetables organically, necessary scientific knowledge is reachable and they themselves holds the answer to bring changes in their life.

In the mean time, our works were presented at the IFOAM Organic Congress in Canada. This recognition influenced the people in a very constructive way and they perceived the

international dimension of organic agriculture.

Krisoker Saar (Farmers' Voice) started to functioning formally in 2001. Our desire extended from only agricultural issues to holistic rural development. a) Why we – the local people will develop the locality? b) Is there any development theory within the perceptions of the local people of their own? – were two fundamental questions while the institute started working.

Naturally various socio-economic-political groups exist within the *Samaj*. But to the question of the Institute's view, all are in a single group. Within the group, regrouping occurs according to research interest, experience, expertness and stress tolerance. We have learnt from experience that most of the conventional research initiatives do often try to keep the local community merely as a recipient of the research output only. Due to systemic and ego-centric constraints, they are not included into the research process and the voices are rarely heard in any fora. In our case, while ensuring the ownership and participations of the local people, the group members have access from policy formulation to research topic selection, structuring and designing, implementation, documentation, result dissemination etc. and these are some reasons for effectively functioning of a group. Even some of our serious research idea was initiated and structured by school going children (e.g., saving local trees as a contribution to Global Climate Change). There are certain techniques and strategies are followed to launch a research program and integrate the total *Samaj* with the research process.

Some of the *krisoks*' initiatives to create a difference in the locality:

- ***Saving, restoring and better use of local water resources in the community:***

Due to different practices within the locality, most of the surface water sources, like ponds are being used for intensive fish farming. Open water sources are shrinking at a rapid speed and also contaminated with agricultural inputs residues. Major open water sources in the local community, the historical canal '*Shimul Bhanga*' was born around the year 1893 and is going to be vanished because of failed sluice gate construction in one end and thus by siltation. Although thousands of acres of lands are being irrigated yet with the water of shrinking *Shimul Bhanga*' and it still is serving the local people unconditionally with various aspects including play grounds of the teen aged and youths of the community. But the people were so much habituated to see the development of a common property under project regime, which they couldn't even think to renovate a yard themselves. They simply did loose the connection with it. The history of the canal was becoming a vanishing memory even to the few most seniors. Most in the community didn't even know the name of it.

Since undertaking the research initiative pertinent to water issues in the *Samaj*, the institute did provide the community with a good bulk of information gathered through different scientific sources, networks and newsletters. Made aware the local people with the present situation and integrating them to find out the possible solutions and strategy of struggles with water issues etc.

With the goal of making it possible the renovation of *Shimul Bhanga*, the initiative was lunched in 2000. While acting as a water voice messenger (by Mr. Zakir, ID# 00854) to the World Water Conference, Japan, the issue of the canal was brought to light ranging the level of International to Local. The *East Sujankathi Governmental free primary*

School community is located at Agailjhara Upazilla in Barisal District of Bangladesh. Although initially, the regional Water development authorities were reluctant of providing necessary information of the canal but later it was collected from the community through interviewing, discussion, competition, local field study and survey etc. A continuous knocking with both level of research and action towards the forgotten mind of the local people mainly made it possible to think beyond project discourse. In the wetland day of 2005, the tiny community marked the portion (500 feet) of *Shimul Bhanga* in a magnificent way and festive mood. The colourful flags from the children (who were also guided by *Krisoks*) put the question marks with different colorful placards on both sides of the canal. The total community and even the passers by did attract with some question. The news boards, non stop discussion, traditional information sharing mechanisms were being used properly for communication. During evening period, the activities of noon were displayed audio visually. Mass of the local people was touched with the enthusiasm of their children. They instantly promised to provide 200 people with spades on the renovation day. The issue of the initiative was raised in different national seminars, workshops of water issues. Beginning of 2006, government did include *Shimul Bhanga* in the list of “to be renovated”. But the total project is not started yet “due to lack of fund”. Now the initiative of KSFV with the canal is to renovate 5000 feet during a festival day of coming dry season. So that the local people (including the elites) will be more enthusiastic to be involved with their own development by themselves. In the mean time, some of them are connecting their ponds with *Shimul Bhanga* to restore the synchronized water ecosystem with abound local fishes.

Thus the total *Samaj* integrated already to renovate their own canal by themselves.

- ***Learning from Nature- a way of motivating children towards social development/ Integrating Nature to the children’s subject curriculum:***

The institutions sees children, the most surprising and innocent creation of nature. Their family, friends, relatives, teachers and the *Samaj* collectively act as educator. Although the arena of social, familial, individual conflict and confrontation are the key elements of changing a child’s thinking level and behavioral pattern in a conventional way. Apparently KSFV also felt that in a low income developing country like Bangladesh, the current formal education and development discourse do not leave any room for the nature to participate itself in the learning process as an educator. And thus rural children are also becoming apart from the nature. Based on these experience and findings Krisoker Saar (Farmers’ Voice) has explored the approach of ‘Learning from nature’.

Thus the Farmers’ Research Institute has been performing the research since 2001 with around 500 children including 3rd, 4th and 5th grade school children, pre-school and drop-out children of the *Samaj* with the aim to developing an intrinsic relationship with nature and environment around them. In this way the program aims to develop a child’s personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to grow with their fullest potentiality. Consequently the institute KSFV has been enormously motivating children towards locality development from the very beginning of their childhood.

Thus integrate conservation and sustainable use into education program (formal and non-formal) through the provisions of learning from nature or environmental education opportunities that particularly targets the children and locality development. The Research Institute also felt and realized that the local conservation ethics and practices are thereby dictated by the practical necessities of immediate survival of a *Samaj*. Hence by introducing children with natural, social and moral- values of a *Samaj* child are becoming conscious, caregiver, respectful and responsible towards natural environment and development process around them. While working with the children KSFV

spontaneously trying to enter their wonderful wisdom and leads them to the entrance of their own mind, thus sow the seeds of humanitarian nature. Furthermore this is the approach on the basis of a wholesome and healthy desire to understand and to benefit from the spiritual, aesthetic and intellectual capacities of children with diverse background towards social development.

The initiative started with a request made to the Headmaster of East Sujonkathi Free Govt. Primary School to send some students to the fields for a magic show. He did arrange to send some from the orphanage adjacent to the school. Later on when our view was clear to the teacher they do started to send the children during break. Initially we did not have any clear idea where to start to reach the students. We observed that, children learn by constructing their own knowledge about world, not by memorizing facts. It was the basic theme for us that children should feel the place and surroundings secure, lively and interesting. However not all the children were vocal at initial stage but when they felt that this is not a classroom, discussing topics are not from their books rather the topics related to their easy-knowing world, then they gradually become vocal as they know the topics well and liked it. However, they initially tried their best to match the topics with their books. But the discussion, style, observation, new findings lead them to discover the facts and thus they could construct easily a platform to start. For example, when they were asked "Tell the harms birds do to us". They thought a lot and expressed one or two with confusion and with laughing. Then again when we asked "Tell the good things birds do". Instantly they expressed altogether a lot those answers were mixed of theoretical and experiential feelings. Also they themselves went into the deeper of their thinking level. Till then the question of killing birds for fun was not raised by the researchers. But the children instantly marked a boy who was carrying a *Gulti* (weapon, made of wood and rubber, favorite to children to hitting any bird). He surrendered the *Gulti* that is usually a tough task through advises only. At this point also a small lyrics and rhymes were pushed to their brain praising the birds and a promise not to kill them anymore. And interestingly the lyrics and rhymes spread all over the village from the next day as the children started reciting those with joy.

For all the exercises, the institute never tries to teach them but to facilitate them the way of discovering their insight by themselves. They now are experienced to see and feel the sunrise and sunset in a new way of discovery. They could hear the birds' song; they could feel the feelings of plants in a new way, they could identify any man made social barriers that hampering locality development. For each child the way of learning process is different as each child is a unique individual. While the children apply manure in the research plots with lyrics and rhymes, sow the seeds, observe the development of the seedlings, share them among themselves, plant them and nurture with great care- in each step they learn the shared responsibilities.

Discovering the nature such as local trees, birds, natural resources, practical agriculture, negative consequences of chemical agriculture, seed saving, home garden re-establishment, drop-out children, rural development, feeling the lights and sounds of nature, conflict resolving with others and self-are some basic activities of the initiatives. The initiative already created an enabling environment for a dialogue and interaction among the children, parents, educators and the *Samaj*. Also Parents are feeling secured as the leisure time of their children is being utilized in developing their physical, and mental health which directly affecting the familial development in a *Samaj*.

Other on going researches of the Institute:

- Soil health improvement by using available resources.
- Local fish conservation, their habitat improvement and natural breeding.
- Assessing the contribution of local fruit trees to the society for nutrition and agriculture, their conservation and multiplication.
- Low cost bio-gas plant innovation.
- Salt accumulation problem on irrigated rice field - causes, short term and long term solution.
- Saving local trees, as a contribution to Global Climate Change.
- Home garden re-establishment by school children.
- Eco housing-justification from social attitude, economy, feasibility and importance.
- Conservation, improvement and promotion of biodiversity.
- Localisation and Socialisation of Environmental Policies, Laws and Agreements.

Voices of *Notun Krisok* in different national and international forum:

Although *Krisoker Saar* (Farmers' Voice) begins its small steps to make inroads into this vast realm of national and international forum but already in various events the *Notun Krisok* has played significant role for ensuring his/her voices to be heard.

Nationally the Institute is always active in any kind of pro-people movement, especially on the issues of environment, ecology, agriculture and human rights etc. The farmers gave significant inputs in the Asia Pacific People's Convention on Food Sovereignty, organized by Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) and People's Food Sovereignty Network, Asia Pacific (PFSNAP) from November 24-27 in Dhaka, Bangladesh and also worked as rapporteur for documentation of the whole convention, which address to bring an end to poverty and hunger. The fellow farmers of the Institute also actively took part in the month long mobilization of the peasants, farmers and fisher folk in September 2004, under the banner of "The People's Caravan for Food Sovereignty", which was organized by PAN Asia and the Pacific (PANAP) and Pesticide Action Network, Malaysia. Moreover, one of the *Krisok* contributed in the research process for preparing the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (NBCSAP) of Bangladesh which is being implemented by Ministry of Forest and Environment (MoEF) in collaboration with IUCN (World Conservation Union). Also participated in the South Asia People's Summit for People's SAARC (PSPS), held from 5,6 February 2005, jointly organized by South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and South Asia Partnership (SAP). The main focus of the programmed was to promote the process of development, peace and regional cooperation in South Asia.

One important achievement is that one of the research study titled "Integrating Nature as an educator for Children's curriculum", of *Krisoker Saar* (Farmers' Voice) was accepted and presented at the Sixth Bangladesh Educational Development Conference, jointly organized by UNESCO and BAFED (Bangladesh Forum for Educational Development) on 12th July 2005.

Internationally *Krisoker Saar* (Farmers' Voice) is always active in contributing in various forum and conferences. Some of the significant contributions are: The Research paper "Environment related Research and Development, experience of local communities in a developing country." was accepted for the conference of the European Association for

the Study of Science and Technology, held in Lausanne (Switzerland) from 23rd to 26th August, 2006. Following Research papers were selected for oral and poster presentation at the 15th IFOAM World Organic Congress, which was held at Adelaide, Australia from 20-23rd September 2005

- “Localizing and Socializing of Environmental Agendas as a tool for holistic rural development: *Krisoks’* Perspectives.”
- “Acknowledging the role of gender in organic farming, particularly informal seed sector and *Krisoks’* Perspectives.”
- Traditional wisdom and Medicinal Plants: Reviewing the ancient heritage for life support systems of *Krisok Samaj*.”
- “Evolving strategy, philosophy, ethical guideline and driving mechanism of local farmers’ research institute ”

Research Paper titled “Acknowledging the Role of Gender in farming, particularly informal seed sector and *krisoks’* perspectives” was selected and accepted as Key-Note paper on The 6th IFOAM-Asia Scientific Conference and General Assembly in South Korea from September 7-11, 2004. Abstract titled “Experiential Wisdom of Nature-Humanity Relationship; Learning from *Krisok Samaj*” was accepted for the International Conference “NATURE, SCIENCE, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS”, Organized by University of the Aegean, Greece, 25-28 June, 2004. Abstract titled “An auto reflex of *Notun Krisok* to life, rationalizing the action as a research” was accepted for oral presentation at the International Conference “Reconciling Holism and Reductionism, the new Science and Practice of Health care, Organic Agriculture and Nutrition”, organized by Louis Bolk Institute, The Netherlands, 14-17 May, 2003. And “Pain and Joy on the way of a *Notun Krisok* (Organic Farmer)” - paper presented at 14th IFOAM Organic World Congress, organised by Canadian Organic Growers & International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, 21-24 August 2002, Victoria, Canada.

One of the *Krisok* also nominated in the Hearings of the General Assembly (23-24 June 2005) at UN Head Quarter in New York as speakers and active participants and placed the Institute’s message and recommendations in the events.

Beside those the Institute participated in different dialogues, debates on different policy issues nationally and internationally and also active member of different networks. Unfortunately *Krisoker Saar* (Farmers’ Voice) did not able to physically participate all those above mentioned international conferences for want of adequate money except the IFOAM, Canada. However, the Institute did not leave any space for applying sponsorships to different funding organizations and organizing body of those conferences but did not get positive response although on some conferences their paper was accepted as Key-note paper (!!!).

Constraints face at different stages:

In 1999-2001 during exploration phase, the initiative was highly non structured. Research issues prioritization was tough to sorting out.

During 2002-2003, savings was running out and funds were being collected from within the *Samaj*. It brings new problem pertinent to expectation. However, the issue of experimental fields was solved by acquiring on rent basis.

From 2004 to till date, it was a crucial question whether the organization will be converted to a NGO from its current status of “Not for profit company” to comply with outsource funding criteria. For international cooperation the institution may be too small. As the funding sources squeezed already, so everyone has to do some off farm works. So, members can provide less time to the initiatives. Infrastructure in the field is needed now. Documents of the works in audio, video, soft and hard copy format must be organized in proper methods and process immediately. Expansion in both working area and places is expected. Need to place news boards for local government, National and international organization working in Bangladesh. A website is necessary (now we have that freely hosted, so slow and lots of pop ups). Communicating tools should be updated. A national workshop on our initiatives will stimulate the local *Samaj*. An international dialogue on “Supporting local initiatives beyond project culture” might be helpful.

Motivating farmers towards *Notun Jibon*:

Within four years of formal evolvement in 2001, it has been able to attract the attention and involvement of National and International farmers, researchers, policy makers and activists; mainly because of its non-conventional approach to nurturing the change. *Krisoker Saar* (Farmers’ Voice) is a research based Institute, funded by the *samaj* (Society) itself and registered under license of the Local Government. We undertake research initiatives based on our ongoing and forthcoming needs, crisis, benefits etc. under one life long program “*Notun Jibon* (New Life)” for the journey towards happiness.

The present stands starts with the various stages of metamorphosis that we had to go through to reach at this stage of achievement and acceptance by the *Samaj* itself. In spite of all the odds, social and technical drawbacks and the overwhelming costs of the farmers’ efforts, the organization at least has been able to create a platform to explore the views of *Krisoks* at local, national and international levels. The struggle is made possible because it has been continuously blessed with the incredible team work of the whole *Samaj* that has converged into a collective strength. In spite of all the formidable obstacles and the regular crisis situation, it is the worth that become a part of the magic of creating something different and innovative that reaches the local people and touches their souls, no matter how brief the moment.

ⁱ *Krisok* is the Bangla tem of Farmers to the context of Bangladesh.

ⁱⁱ *Samaj* is the traditional and strong organization in a village.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Notun* is new, but here *Notun Krisok* is Organic Farmer.

^{iv} *Notun Jibon* means New Life



The Historically worst cyclone 'Sidr' of 15 Nov.2007 did caused severe damaged to our Institutions as well.

More information on Sidr:

http://www.horizonmapping.net/projects/farmers_voice/fv_gallery/fv_gallery.html

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