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Exploring Cause, Taxonomies, Mechanisms and Barriers Influencing Knowledge Transfer: Empirical Studies in NGOs
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Exploring Causes, Taxonomies, Mechanisms and Barriers Influencing Knowledge Transfer:
Empirical Studies in NGOs

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge transfer is one of the significant elements in the knowledge management process. Knowledge transferors share different types of knowledge with the recipients with a view to fulfilling the latter's knowledge needs. The importance of identifying the appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms and the barriers to knowledge transfer are paramount. However, neither the knowledge management literature nor the NGO-sector literature has adequately addressed the issues of causes of knowledge transfer, taxonomies of knowledge, mechanisms and barriers of knowledge transfer in comprehensive way in the context of the Bangladeshi NGO sector. The highest number of NGOs in the world is deployed in Bangladesh. Little is known about such transfer within the NGO context based in Bangladesh. This paper makes an endeavour to bridge these grey areas of knowledge management and NGO-sector. Having collected the qualitative data from Bangladeshi NGOs and using the content analysis technique, the study identified the causes of knowledge transfer, taxonomies of knowledge, mechanisms of knowledge transfer and the barriers to knowledge transfer in the context of Bangladesh. By understanding the mechanisms and the determinants of knowledge transfer, company and NGO managers and public policy makers can influence knowledge transfer more effectively. Future researchers may extend this study by carrying out similar research in a different context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge transfer, being one of the vital ingredients in the knowledge management process (Argote *et al*., 2000; Jasimuddin et al., 2012; Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2012), is receiving extensive attention (Hasnain et al., 2013). Knowledge transfer is essential for an organisation's survival (Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2013 Jasimuddin et al., 2011). Learning and implementations of others' experiences for social and organisational benefit necessitate the relevance of the concept of knowledge transfer. Successful transfer between different parties strengthens trust and ties (Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2008). Such trust ensures future knowledge transfer from the recipients of the knowledge. Knowledge transfer may occur between independent organisations (inter-organisational) or between the sub-units of a single organisation (intra-organisational) (Darr *et al.,* 1995; Jasimuddin et al., 2005; Islam et al., 2015). Transfer of knowledge across and within firms also appears to be a fundamental element of

strategy formulation and research (Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2015; van Wijk*et al.,* 2008; Jasimuddin, 2008; Jasimuddin. & Zhang, 2009).

Presently NGOs in Bangladesh are at the top in contributing to the country's development (Devine, 2003). Winning the trust and confidence of the illiterate and ill-informed people of remote and inaccessible areas is the prime responsibility of the NGOs (Panda, 2007) for successful operations. The knowledge provider seeks and analyses whether the conditions of transfer are conducive to its strategic intents. The following questions are emphasized when making the decision; to whom knowledge to be transferred? What type and content of knowledge is to be transferred (Hass and Hansen, 2007), and what are the mechanisms to be used to transfer knowledge? What is the requirement of transferring knowledge? What are the barriers to the transfer process encounters?

This study revolves around the aforementioned questions in the NGO-context of Bangladesh. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 introduces the data used in the qualitative analysis. Section 4 presents and discusses the results. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic concept of knowledge transfer may be compared to the well-known communication process model of Shannon and Weaver (1949), where two actors remainengaged in transferring a message, both of them educating each other. There may be noise between communications, and one should understand the other's message, otherwise the entire communication process fails. A significant number of authors have defined knowledge transfer in different ways. For example, Davenport and Prusak (1998) have a holistic and wide-ranging view of knowledge transfer emphasising the important issues like 'absorption' and 'actions' on the basis of transferred knowledge are taken into account. They showed that knowledge transfer consists of transmission (sending or presenting knowledge to a potential recipient) and absorption by that person and group i.e. *Transfer= Transmission +Absorption (and use).* Motivation is one of the reasons of knowledge transfer (Jasimuddin et al., 2006; Stenmark, 2001). At the NGO-level, knowledge transfer helps in empowering the beneficiaries (Sultana and Islam, 2009; Afrin et al., 2008). The contribution of NGOs in socio-economic development is also acknowledged by many authors (Begum, 2008; Nawaz, 2011; Gauri and Galef, 2005).

The NGOs mainly transfer knowledge as per the functional coverage. At present NGOs have a wide range of functional coverage, including microcredit (ADB, 1999; Mahmud, 1998; Gauri and Galef, 2005; Lovell, 2005, Nawaz, 2011), empowerment/income generation (Begum, 2008) education (Ahmad, 1999; Begum, 2008), health and nutrition (Mahmud, 1998; Gauri and Galef, 2005), and environment (Begum 2008), natural calamities/disaster management (Rahman, 2000).

Several researchers, most notably, Hansen et al. (1999) and Zhang and Jasimuddin (2008) focuson the mechanisms of knowledge transfer. Generally speaking, knowledge transfer in organisations can take place in many diverse ways (Hansen et al., 1999; Jasimuddin 2007). Several authors (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Jasimuddin, 2007; Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000) have emphasised the roles of mechanisms for smooth and effective knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer mechanism is a vehicle by which knowledge is transmitted between the parties concerned (Jasimuddin *et al*., 2014).

Bangladesh is a country where approximately 22,000 NGOs (Devine, 2003) operate with different objectives and activities. The NGOs mainly transfer knowledge to the beneficiaries. Knowledge transfer may occur between similar minded NGOs/organisations/SBUs with similar missions, for example, BRAC [Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee] Bank and BRAC University. However, knowledge transfer may also occur between NGOs and other 'for profit' organisations, such as the Grameen bank (not an NGO) transferring its microcredit knowledge to other organisations (Grameen phone, mobile phone provider). Extensive knowledge transfer also occurs between the NGO headquarters and different projects.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Bangladesh is geographically divided into seven administrative divisions in which 2445 NGOs are working. 14 NGOs were purposefully selected for the study. A total of 54 respondents were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. Content analysis technique is currently popular to academics, commercial researchers and communication practioners (Neuendrof, 2002). For this research all interviews (recorded and interview notes) were transcribed. This research makes an endeavor to extract final emerged themes from the study. This study used the procedural guidelines to tabulate and present the content analyzed data from Jankowicz (2005, p. 272-73).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Bangladesh is inundated with poverty, hunger, unemployment, malnutrition, illiteracy, diseases, environmental degradation (Ahmed, 2004), political disturbances (Karim, 2002) and natural calamities. At present, thousands of NGOs are working across the country with a view to changing huge disadvantage, and the lives of the poor people. In doing that, NGOs are greatly involved in knowledge sharing in Bangladesh. The following paragraphs present the knowledge transfer activities of NGOs operating in Bangladesh.

4.1. The Nature of Knowledge Transfer

Many researchers (eg.,, 2001; Jasimuddin et al., 2006; Klein et al., 2007; Mu et al., 2008; Darr *et al.,* 1995; van Wijk, Jansen and Lyles, 2008; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2008; King, 2006) highlight the reasons for knowledge transfer.

NGOs' activities on capacity building and empowerment is well documented (e.g., Afrin *et al.,* 2008; Buckland, 1998; Haque, 2002; Begum, 2008) and that corresponds with the findings of this research. Sultana and Islam's (2009) investigation finds that the living standards of the women improve after joining the NGOs. They further claim "they [women] have become aware of child rights, women's rights and, above all, human rights (p. 98)".

A number of reasons for knowledge transfer are unveiled in the Bangladeshi NGO context. The reasons for knowledge transfer of the NGOs include empowerment of the clients, social development, economic development, filling up the knowledge gaps of the clients thereby strengthening the capacity of the clients etc. Figure 1 depicts the causes for which NGOs transfer knowledge to the beneficiaries.

4.1.1. Social and Economic Development of the Clients

Socio-economic conditions include the improvement of income, food, clothing, healthcare, housing, furniture, electronics, tuve-well toilet, children's education, and social status of population. Nawaz's (2011) empirical findings on microcredit NGOs reveal the advancements of the socio-economic conditions of NGO members (beneficiaries). A number of NGO officials emphasized these points.

A respondent states:

We need to transfer knowledge.... for their [clients] financial stability and to develop their social status...

An NGO-employee highlights the similar causes:

… NGOs transfer knowledge for social development, some of the NGOs transfer knowledge for economic development of the people...

Figure 1. Reasons for knowledge transfer. Note: 1 = To empower the clients, 2 = For the clients' social development, 3 = For the clients' economic development, 4 = To bridge the knowledge gaps between the NGOs and the clients, 5 = To strengthen the capacity of the clients, 6 = Others (miscellaneous), and 7 = No answer.
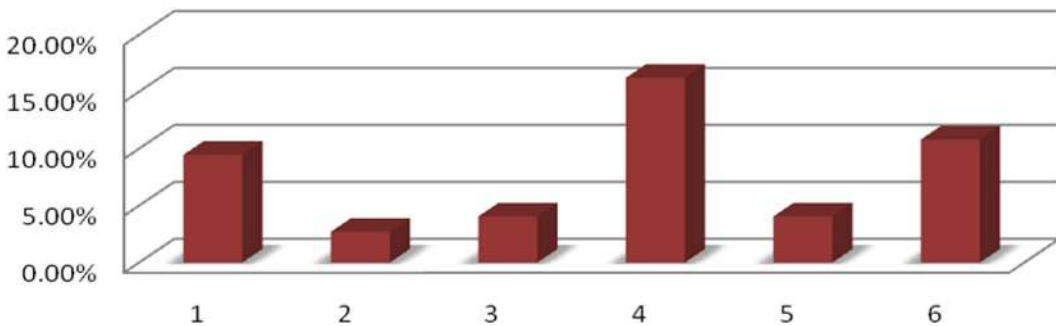
4.1.2. The Empowerment of the Clients

Interviewees (16.67%) have claimed that they transfer knowledge to empower the clients. An NGO employee informs:

The goal or objective of our organisation is to empower the target people specially women... to avail this goal knowledge transfer is very important...

4.1.3. Bridging the Knowledge Gaps between the NGOs and the Beneficiaries

NGO-employees (15.38%) inform that they transfer knowledge to bridge the knowledge gaps between them and the beneficiaries. Several NGO employees made the following statements:

....When there are deficiencies [of knowledge], at that time there is a need to transfer knowledge. It may happen that somebody may not have the specific knowledge, or somebody may possess knowledge in the community and we should coordinate that knowledge.

4.1.4. Strengthening the Capacity of the Beneficiaries

Several interviewees (12.82%) say that they transfer knowledge to strengthen the capacity of the clients. In this regard an interviewee states:

They [clients] are almost illiterate people. They do not know anything... We build awareness among them...so that they become self-sufficient and they can earn their own bread and butter.

4.1.5. Other (Miscellaneous) Reasons

There are several miscellaneous reasons for which the NGO-employees transfer knowledge. As the citizen of the state some interviewees think that it is their social responsibility to pass on their knowledge so that others could go their assigned job to accomplish the objectives of the organisation. An Executive Director of an NGO states:

So far, I have understood that these [knowledge transfer] are the social responsibility and commitment…

4.2. Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms

Appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms are indispensible for the purpose of successful knowledge transfer (Jasimuddin, 2014; Jasimuddin, 2007; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Pan and Scarbrough 1999; Hansen *et al.,* 1999; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2005; Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2008; Appleyard, 1996). A number of knowledge transfer mechanisms are identified by the interviewees. Figure 2 shows the content-analysed data. It shows the mechanisms, number of respondents and percentages. This research finds that face-to-face conversation, workshops/seminars, rally, day observation, books, leaflets and reading materials, posters, signboards and banners, staging dramas, mike, telephones etc. are the mechanisms used for knowledge transfer between the NGOs and the beneficiaries.

4.2.1. Face-to-Face Conversation

Davenport and Prusak (2000) find that face–to-face conversation is often the best way of knowledge transfer. Hence they continue by stating "we strongly advocate knowledge transfer through face-to-face meetings and through narratives in addition to more structured form." (p. 94). Parallel to this, Jasimuddin's (2007) empirical findings on the knowledge transfer mechanisms also clearly report that face-to-face conversation is commonly used mechanism of knowledge transfer. The findings of this investigation on knowledge transfer between the NGOs and the clients also reveal that face-to-face conversation is the most frequently used mechanism of knowledge transfer (56.94% respondents opined). The majority of the beneficiaries in Bangladesh are illiterate. Face-to-face conversation allows the beneficiaries to clarify and acquire complex knowledge from the NGOs employees. Further, it allows both the knowledge contributors (e.g. NGO-employees and the beneficiaries) to exchange views, opinions and ideas openly and freely. The majority of the interviewees inform that they use face-to-face conversation as a mechanism of knowledge transfer. A Branch Manager of an NGO informs:

Our fieldworkers go to the clients' houses. They suggest to them various projects and also see the progress of the works. They also listen to their words. Our field workers are regularly doing these. Our field workers remain in touch with the clients and continuously communicate with them.

4.2.2. Books, Leaflets and Reading Materials

Books, leaflets and reading materials are also the media of knowledge transfer. In this regard, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explain "documentation helps individuals internalize what they experienced, thus enriching their tacit knowledge. In addition, documents or manuals facilitate the transfer of explicit knowledge to other people, their by helping them experience the experiences of others indirectly (i.e., "re- experienced" them)" (p. 69). This is also reflected by the views of interviewees (Figure 2). This empirical research finds that NGOs supply various types of books, leaflets, pamphlets, papers and other reading materials free of cost to educate the beneficiaries. These materials are written in a simple, readable and understandable manner so that the beneficiaries can easily absorb knowledge. NGOs supply books and other reading materials to educate the beneficiaries. Several interviewees mentioned about books, leaflets and other reading materials as the mechanisms of knowledge transfer. For example, an interviewee informed:

...we have pamphlets on different topics which we distribute without any cost...

In this regard an Executive Director of an NGO also states:

...We make leaflets on anti-dowry [when we talk on dowry with the clients]. It is seen that they receive the message quickly through the leaflets than words of mouth...

Figure 2. Mechanisms of knowledge transfer. Note: 1 = Face-to-face conversation, 2 = Workshops/seminars, 3 = Rally, 4 = Day observation, 5 = Books, leaflets and reading materials, 6 = Posters, signboards and banners, 7 = Staging dramas, 8 = Mike, 9 = Telephone, 10 = Others (miscellaneous), and 11 = No answer.

4.2.3. Workshops/Seminars

A number of theorists and researchers (Marquardt, 1996; Appleyard, 1996; Davenport and Prusak, 2000) have identified conferences, workshops and seminars as the mechanisms of knowledge transfer. This researchfound that some of the interviewees have the opinions that their NGOs use conferences/seminars as a mechanism of knowledge transfer. The interviewees notify that the NGOs regularly arrange conferences, workshops and seminars to educate and train the beneficiaries on the relevant subject areas and contemporary social issues. An NGO employee informs:

…. Not only through books, but [also]...to grow the awareness we arrange seminars...

In support to the above statement an interviewee informs:

... We have [also] seminars, conferences, meetings, sessions etc. with the clients where knowledge transfer activities take place. We have also workshops... for the children and community people...

4.2.4. Staging Dramas

Interestingly this empirical research could find that staging drama is one of the mechanisms of knowledge transfer. Knowledge management literature (Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Pan and Scarbrough 998; Hansen *et al.,* 1999; Jasimuddin, 2007; Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2008; Appleyard, 1996, Chowdhury, 2009) have not so far addressed this issue. However, this mechanism of transferring knowledge is not new (Garaventa, 1998). This empirical research could also gather that some of the NGOs in Bangladesh stage dramas on contemporary social issues adopting low and high impact training strategies. An interviewee states:

We have one sort of training system for the owners of the factories and we have different sort of training systems for the workers. ...Our cultural facilitator makes dramas on various laws and arranges to display those before the workers. These dramas highlight about the maternity leaves,

holiday entitlements, wages, minimum wage rates, appointment letters, service books, compensation packages, complaint and grievance procedures etc... Many of them are not educated hence the dramas make the thing easy for them to grab the ideas quickly.

4.2.5. Posters, Signboards and Banners

Posters, signboards and banners are the media for knowledge transfer. NGOs occasionally use posters, signboards and banners to transfer knowledge to their beneficiaries. The empirical findings also reveal that 'posters' is a mechanism of knowledge transfer. NGO-employees inform about the posters, signboards and banners as the mechanisms of knowledge transfer.

An interviewee narrates:

...We have many communication materials like handbills, leaflets, posters, sign boards, banners etc. We use these materials to transfer knowledge...

4.2.6. Day Observation, Rally, Mike Telephone, etc.

A couple of interviewees identified day observation on a particular issue, rally, mikes and telephones etc. as the mechanisms of knowledge transfer. In this regard some quotations are cited below:

...We have ……… day observation etc...in the environment-day, we highlight the causes of environment pollution etc.
...We have trained staff in both areas [cyclone prone and flood prone areas] who transfer knowledge to the people... The Government of Bangladesh has formed union disaster management committee in every union. ...to activate these committees we go to the lower level i.e. wards. ...We train this committee. We also have formed some task forces...We have bought mega phones for these task committees to pass the message. If there is a cyclone, they will hoist the flags, we've already trained them. Moreover, we bring experts to train them.

Several authors (e.g., Appleyard, 1996; Jasimuddin, 2007) recognise that telephone is one of the channels of knowledge transfer. Appleyard (1996), for example, identifies telephone as a private and unrestricted mechanism in respect of access to knowledge and use of knowledge respectively. 95% of the geographical area of Bangladesh (including Chittagong Hill Tract) is under the cellular telephone coverage (e.g., Mousumi and Jamil, 2010).

4.3. NGOs' Knowledge Taxonomies

Different types of knowledge are transferred by the NGOs to the beneficiaries, the analyzed data reveal. The interviewees inform that they transfer knowledge on health and nutrition, knowledge on credit, knowledge on human and legal rights, knowledge on disaster management, knowledge on awareness building, knowledge on environmental issues, agricultural knowledge, knowledge on income generating skills and other miscellaneous knowledge. The content analysis data are shown in Figure 3. It is clear that knowledge on awareness building occupies the first position (20.28%), health and nutritional knowledge second and knowledge on credit is holding the third position.

4.3.1. Knowledge on Awareness Building

The investigations of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1998) cited by Khan (2000) reveals that social awareness is one of the major coverage of the NGOs operations in Bangladesh. Similarly, many interviewees also give their opinions in favour of the above authors and researchers (see Figure 3 Content- analysed data: Type of knowledge transferred by the NGOs). The majority

Figure 3. Types of knowledge transferred by the NGOs. Note: 1 = Health and nutrition knowledge, 2 = Knowledge on credit, 3 = Knowledge on human and legal rights, 4 = knowledge on disaster management, 5 = Knowledge on awareness building, 6 = Knowledge on environmental issues, 7 = Agricultural knowledge, 8 = Knowledge on income gerating skills, 9 = Other miscellaneous knowledge, and 10 = No answers.
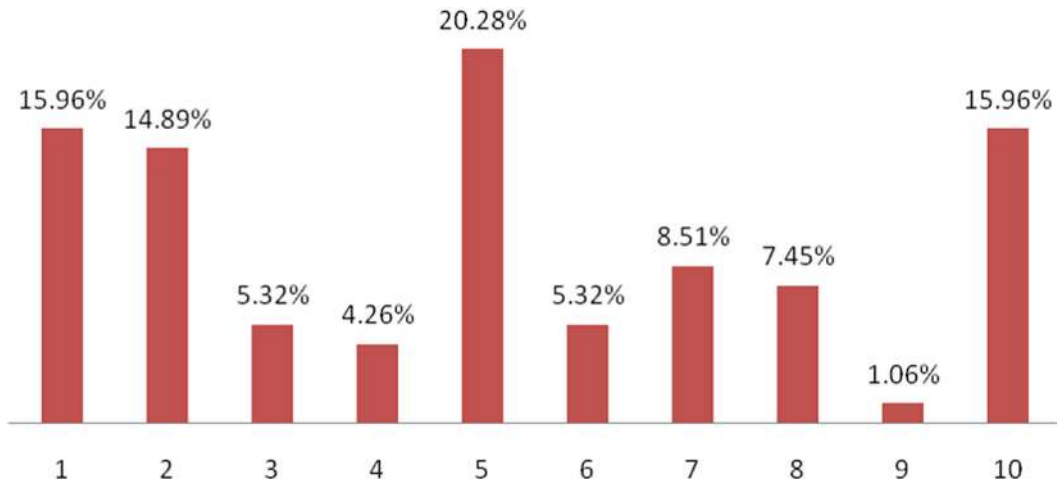
(e.g. 20.28%) of the NGO employees informed about transferring knowledge to the beneficiaries on awareness building.

In this regard, a Community Service Facilitator of an NGO informs:

I have told about awareness. ...We teach them [clients] how to grow self awareness, how to develop themselves...

4.3.2. Health and Nutritional Knowledge

The NGOs in Bangladesh have made a significant progress in transferring health and nutritional knowledge to the beneficiaries (Mahmud, 1998). NGOs have already made remarkable contributions in nationwide immunization programmes and also on the means of treating diarrhoea through homemade ORS (Begum (2008). The literature is consistent with the opinions of the interviewees. 15.96% of the interviewees inform that their respective NGOs transfer knowledge on health and nutrition. A Programme Coordinator of an NGO informs:

We work on health programmes. We advise the pregnant mothers on related issues. We advise them to eat adequate food, drink plenty of water, avoid heavy works, take rest in the afternoons after lunch etc. We also advise the newly born child...We work in the villages. Their ideas and knowledge are full of superstitions. We cannot accept superstitions. They try to give us knowledge about some wrong old system and procedures of treatments...

4.3.3. Knowledge on Credit

Microcredit is a meticulous and heavily supervised credit programme which teaches the financial management skills and also helps the beneficiaries to become self supporting and self sufficient (Afrin *et al.,* 2008). The opinions of the interviewees also reveal that the NGOs transfer knowledge on the nitty-gritty of the credit procedures and the maintenance of the financial accounting to the beneficiaries. Many interviewees claim that microcredit help to develop the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiaries. 14.89% of the NGO employees give views about the knowledge about credit.

On the subject of the transfer of accounting knowledge to the beneficiaries through microcredit, an NGO official informs:

She [a beneficiary] gives instalments [of microcredit] every week. Every week after the payment when she goes back home, she makes a knot in a rope for each instalment. She had to pay total 45 instalments. Before the second last instalment she came and asked me how many instalments she has paid. I told her that 43 have been paid and two left. She went home and counted the knots in her rope. When she found 43 knots in her rope then she came back to me.

4.3.4. Agricultural Knowledge

Bangladesh is mainly dependent on the agriculture. It is essential for the beneficiaries to know about the modern techniques and technologies of cultivation. Lewis (1997) and Begum (2008) describe the agricultural knowledge. Begum (2008) specifically informs about the development of irrigation technologies by the NGOs and transferring that knowledge for the economic benefits of the beneficiaries 8.51% of the employees informed about the agricultural knowledge. A Director (Development) of an NGO talks on the knowledge of modern method of cultivation. He explains:

…In the south of Bangladesh because the salt increased in the water, the original types of plants or crops are not growing any more. So what are we doing? We are bringing the information about the saline tolerant crops, fishes or species etc from abroad. Instead of breeding Ruhi fishes we can breed crabs...Instead of having to cut cultivation we are promoting crab cultivation because it is much more saline tolerant crop or aqua species...coastal resource management...What we are adding to that is how to do it scientifically, the management of it and the governance of it...We are giving this knowledge ... to the villagers...

4.3.5. Knowledge on Income Generating Skills

Income generation programmes include various vocational programmes. Theses vocational programmes help the people to acquire various income generating skills. 7.45% of the interviewees notify that they transfer knowledge on income generating skills. In this regard a Project Officer informs:

We try to include them [the clients] in the handwork activities. We have many trades here. If I mention here: embroidery, dye, block, batik, karchopi [designing on clothes] etc. We also do some traditional works like nakshikata [a special design on clothes in Bangladesh]…Our objective is to expedite their existing income. We do not give them money. We are transferring knowledge to them. We transfer the skills to the clients so that they can sale it and earn some money...

4.3.6. Knowledge on Human and Legal Rights

The rural people of Bangladesh do not know about their legal rights hence fail to preserve and defend their rights and become the victims of exploitation of others (Rafi & Chowdhury, 2000). 5.32% respondents report that their NGOs are working with human and legal rights. A Director Human Resource of an NGO informs:

We…provide training on … gender, women's right, human rights, etc...

A Cultural Facilitator of an NGO states:

We transfer knowledge on different issues like child marriages, drug, human rights, fundamentalisms etc...

4.3.7. Knowledge on Environmental Issues

There are several NGOs who transfer knowledge on environmental issues. They undertake many programmes and make people aware of issues such as deforestation, desertification etc. They also raise awareness about sealed (cemented) confined latrines. 5.32% of the interviewees inform that their NGOs are performing the activities of environmental issues.

In this regard an interviewee states:

We have almost 64-projects in whole Bangladesh ... We have subjects like education, social value, environment, technical etc...

4.3.8. Knowledge on Disaster Management

Bangladesh faces natural calamities and disasters every year. Many NGOs transfer knowledge about disaster management to the beneficiaries (Rahman, 2000). In Bangladesh disaster preparedness knowledge is provided through formal and non-formal means by the NGOs (e.g., Khan, 2008). 4.26% of the respondents inform about knowledge on disaster management. For example, a Director Disaster Management of an NGO states:

...We transfer knowledge on flood management preparation. Our work is to transfer knowledge on how to save life and belongings from disaster…

A Research and Evaluation Coordinator of an NGO specifically mention about the transfer of knowledge on disaster management:

…we transfer knowledge on river erosion, cyclone, what to do and how to get rescued or cope with natural disasters, etc….

4.4. Barriers to Knowledge Transfer

Many authors (e.g. Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Szulanski, 1996; Dyer & Hatch, 2006; Sun & Scott, 2005; Atkinson, 2010; Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2008) address the issue of barriers to knowledge transfer. In respect of knowledge transfer this sector (NGO-sector) in Bangladesh encounters number of barriers (Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2012). The barriers to knowledge transfer are described below.

Interviewees inform that a lack of trust, pressures from the political leaders and local elites, ambiguity in knowledge, superstitions, religious conservatism, duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities, lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy, lack of knowledge and training in the NGOs, stubbornness, language barrier and difficulties with implementation of knowledge are the main barriers to knowledge transfer. (Content-analysed data of the barriers to knowledge transfer are appended in Figure 4).

4.4.1. Religious Conservatism

The literature (e.g., Edwards & Hulme, 2002; Rahman, 2006a; Rafi & Chowdhury, 2000; Shehabuddin, 1999; Hashemi, 2002) reports that the NGOs encounter interference from religious conservationists, rural elites and political leaders to the NGO activities in Bangladesh. Rafi and Chowdhury (2000) report "as part of the human rights education campaign, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) fixed 700, 000 posters throughout Bangladesh. This met with opposition from the religious organisations"(p.19). The majority of the respondents (e.g. 16.22%) are of the opinion that religious conservatism is one of the barriers to knowledge transfer.

A field worker of an NGO reports:

Figure 4. Barriers to knowledge transfer. Note: 1 = Lack of trust, 2 = Pressures from political leaders and local elites, 3 = Ambiguity in knowledge, 4 = Superstitions, 5 = Religious conservatism, 6 = Duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities, 7 = Lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy, 8 = Lack of training and knowledge in the NGOs, 9 = Stubbornness, 10 = Language barrier, 11 = Others, and 12 = No answer.
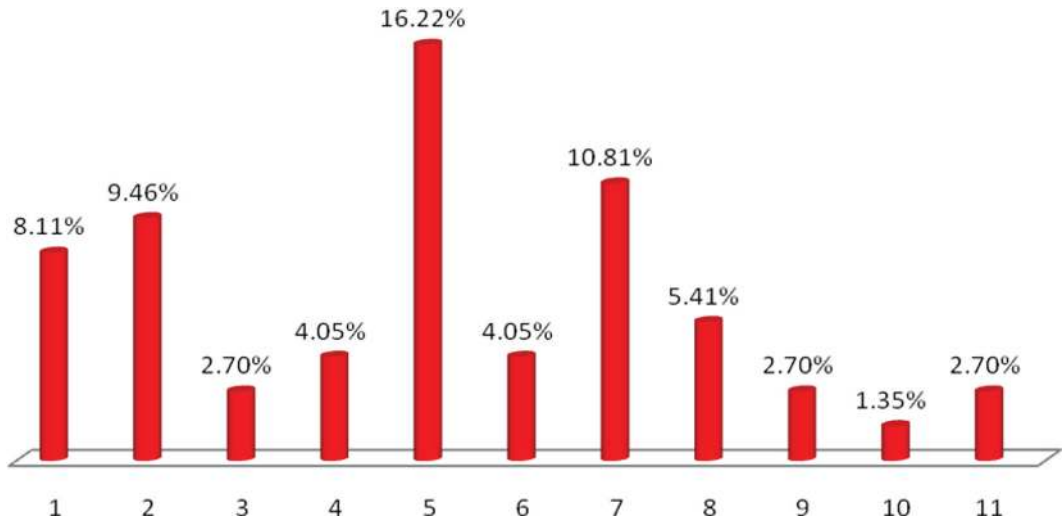
...barriers come from the religion conservatives ... from my service experiences I can inform you that I have encountered them. There are some area-based leaders who are called "Shamprodhan". ..I spoke about some awareness issues like taking pills and using stuff for family planning. I faced one of the Shamprodhans. He asked me to stop. He said that whatever I was saying is against religious beliefs. He said that birth and death is in the hand of the God and men have got nothing to do with it...In...[an] office[of an NGO]...most of the staff were female. So people...cordoned the office to attack the women staff. They were against their [women's] bicycle-riding ...So in knowledge transfer religious fundamentalism is a great barrier....

4.4.2. Lack of Absorptive Capacity in Clients Due to Education and Literacy

Several scholars (e.g. van Wijk *et al*., 2008; Grant, 1996; Szulanski, 1996; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Marquardt, 1996) discovered that a lack of absorptive capacity in the recipient of knowledge is a barrier to knowledge transfer. In the Bangladeshi NGO context, beneficiaries are the ultimate recipients of the knowledge which is transferred to them by the NGOs. There is no point in transferring any knowledge if they cannot understand and apply it to their daily life. In support of the literature the interviewees (e.g., 10.81%) also have similar opinions. The clients are the recipients of knowledge. In Bangladesh the majority of clients are illiterate. Therefore, it may be difficult for them to absorb and act as per the directions provided in the transferred knowledge of the NGOs. The lack of absorptive capacity in the clients is due to education and literacy and this is the barrier to knowledge transfer as identified by 10.81% interviewees.

In this regard an NGO coordinator observes:

...Sometimes we design projects and plan without the consultation with the [clients].We do not consider the level of the clients who will be receiving our knowledge. So when we go for transferring knowledge and technology to them we face difficulties...

4.4.3. Pressures from the Political Leaders and Local Elites

Local political leaders and elites create pressure on the NGOs' activities to take undue advantages. 9.46% of the interviewees say that pressures from political leaders and elites are the barriers to knowledge transfer. In this connection, a Project Coordinator states about the barriers to knowledge transfer:

...We have some... projects which are community based. [We] give some support to them [poor clients]. ...There is always an influence of somebody in the society. It may be a politician, or a social leader, or local elite [who] tries to include his/her relatives in the [clients'] selection process...

4.4.4. Lack of Trust

Lack of trust is one of the main barriers to knowledge transfer and this is acknowledged by many researchers (Mayer et al., 1995). Corresponding to the literature, this research also found that a lack of trust is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Trust is one of the crucial factors influencing knowledge transfer. 8.11% interviewees identified lack of trust as one of the barriers to knowledge transfer. An interviewee states:

There are many examples where knowledge transfer activities are expedited for .... trust and... knowledge transfer activities are impeded for... trust...

4.4.5. Lack of Training in the NGOs-Employees

It is reported that many NGOs are not well trained to impart lessons to the beneficiaries. NGO-employees are the knowledge contributors to the beneficiaries. It is imperative for the NGO-employees to be well equipped with knowledge and resources. In this regard, Ahmad (2002) found that the NGOs and their employees were not adequately trained and resourced to deliver the services to the beneficiaries. This study also found that a lack of knowledge and training in NGO employees is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Some interviewees (e.g. 5.41%) informed about the lack of training in the NGO-employees as the barrier of knowledge transfer. In this regard an interviewee points out:

...there are barriers. I think that there should be more training for the NGOs. If the NGOs are trained, they will be able to transfer that knowledge to the beneficiaries...

4.4.6. Duplication or Overlapping in the NGO Activities

Duplication or overlapping denotes 'performing similar activities by the different NGOs in the same place for the same beneficiaries'. NGOs are duplicating or overlapping their services in respect of operational areas, families and beneficiaries, which is wastage of resources (Sarkar and Ahmed, 2000). Ahmad (1999) finds that 78% of the villages in Bangladesh are covered by the NGOs, which means one person receives the same service from one to three NGOs simultaneously. Citing the example he shows how one person receives microcredit from three NGOs simultaneously and repays the loan by borrowing from the other. Thus a beneficiary may fail to repay the credit which causes a difficult relationship or the termination of his/her membership with the NGO. A difficult relationship between the knowledge actors is a barrier to knowledge transfer (e.g., Szulanski, 1996). Acknowledging the literature, this research finds that duplication or overlapping of NGO operations is a barrier to knowledge transfer between the NGO and the beneficiaries in Bangladesh. 4.05% of the interviewees have the opinion that duplication or overlapping in the NGOs' activities is a barrier to knowledge transfer. An interviewee states:

...Moreover different NGOs are working at the same place so there is duplication of work...

An NGO-worker remarks:

… [In] overlapping one client is ...receiving knowledge from [2/3 NGOs]. After receiving the knowledge, he thinks that he can do everything. But when he is applying the knowledge ... of 3/4 NGOs [,] he cannot tackle [those]…

4.4.7. Superstition, Stubbornness and Language Barriers

Davenport and Prusak (2000) unearth that pride (e.g., pleasure taken out of knowledge achievement), stubbornness (e.g. inflexibility, obduracy, dogmatism and rigidity), fear of taking risk (the possibility of knowledge misuse/ the trustworthiness of the source) and self-esteem (e.g. what we know and how we have done things in the past) attitudes are barriers to knowledge transfer. This empirical research finds that in case of Bangladeshi NGOs, language is not a major a barrier to knowledge transfer. It may be noted that Bangladeshi people speak the same language (e.g., Bengali). Superstitions are the beliefs, which are not based not facts and those cannot be proven. 4.05% of interviewees identified the superstition as a barrier to knowledge transfer:

…Superstition works as a great barrier... [to knowledge transfer]

A programme coordinator informs:

...there are superstitions. Sometimes the old grandmothers try to highlight superstitions.

Obduracy, dogmatism and rigidity in knowledge source and recipient are barriers to knowledge transfer. 2.70% of the interviewees identify stubbornness as an obstacle to knowledge transfer. Some of their quotations are cited below: A Director of an NGO informs:

They [clients] have a preconceived idea that NGO workers are service holders and that is why they are telling all these. They are telling all these for their service. This sort of attitude problem is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Similar attitude problem is also there in the NGO side. NGO workers think, 'why should we tell more?'

4.4.8. Ambiguity in Knowledge

Szulanski (1996) found that the features of the knowledge and difficulties of interpretation capability by the receiver of knowledge hinders knowledge transfer. This empirical examination also revealed that beneficiaries cannot absorb the ambiguous and complex knowledge and the interviewees identify it as a barrier to knowledge transfer. Vagueness and indistinctness in knowledge creates a barrier to knowledge transfer. 2.7% of interviewee informed about ambiguity in knowledge as the barrier to knowledge transfer. An NGO high official narrates:

...in some cases, the NGOs face various barriers [to knowledge transfer]. There is lack of clarity in knowledge and information.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In the NGO-level knowledge transfer mainly occurs between the NGOs and the beneficiaries. The NGOs in Bangladesh transfer knowledge to their beneficiaries with a view to developing their socio-economic conditions. The NGOs have different functional coverages, which are linked to the knowledge they (NGOs) transfer to the beneficiaries.

This study revealed numerous reasons (empowering the beneficiaries, for socio-economic development, bridging the knowledge gaps, for strengthening the capacity of the beneficiaries etc.) for which the NGOs transfer various types of knowledge to the beneficiaries. The NGOs use various mechanisms of knowledge transfer. The study also reveals that the NGOs encounter many barriers to knowledge transfer. These findings are consistent with the literature. From the findings, it may be argued, knowledge transfer is highly dependent on the variables, such as the type of knowledge to be transferred, the génesis of knowledge transfer, the mechanisms of knowledge transfer and the barriers of knowledge transfer. Future researchers, practitioners and executives may extend this study in different contexts.

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