

## Traidcraft Exchange

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If your only potential source of increased income was a coconut tree, could you make a living?... That has been one of the challenges I've set to several groups of 14- and 15-year-olds over recent months. Although the work I have been doing has been developed in the classroom by someone who is not a Technology teacher, I believe there are aspects of income generation in the 'third world' that can and should contribute to mainstream technology education.

### ■ Where are we coming from...?

The work of Traidcraft Exchange's Schools Department is to develop relevant and interesting curriculum-based materials.

We have tried to identify areas of the curriculum where we feel we can make a distinctive input. We have then worked with teachers, tutors and students in the classroom to develop and trial new materials.

### ■ Where are we going...?

It is in the realm of value-related issues that the approach of Traidcraft Exchange's schools' work is significant. We have direct personal contact with 'third world' craft producers. This means developing an awareness not only of raw materials, processes and skills, but also

different social contexts for work. Craft production reflects the values and culture of the society in which it is developed. It is about self-determination and empowerment. Its growth and development are influenced by its social, economic and environmental context.

A schoolchild will probably encounter technology in a primarily 'Western' context. There may be more global input, particularly in terms of food technology, but it is important whatever the context to look at an artefact in terms of a range of value issues, which affect how and why it is made. To a great extent these are cultural and social. They are essential to developing creative responses in Technology.

### ■ How are we getting there...?

There have been two strands in developing ideas for the classroom. The relative freedom of local 'Industry' days has given the opportunity to work on Technology modules....which is where the coconuts come in! At the same time we have been looking into linking Technology and Business Studies directly, through a 'third world' craft business. The former is described in more detail below — the latter is at an earlier stage.

### ■ Coconut Industry

I wanted to give students the opportunity to see the context and value of craft production in Bangladesh. To do this I needed to 'introduce' the country, and be quite sure that they understood the environment in which their craft work was to be carried out.

With a range of written and visual material, including selected video snippets, they worked in groups to draw image webs around the word 'Bangladesh'. I was careful to include positive images — I did not want to start from a totally negative stereotype. We spent time developing the ideas on their image webs. I wanted to be sure that they were going to be able to work as if in a different social and cultural environment and to develop crafts that grew from that context (see Fig. 1).

Groups then went on to investigate village life — for that is where their activity was to be set — and to draw a second web. At this stage they used more personal accounts relating to individual roles within the community. In these ways they built up an idea of the constraints and opportunities of village life (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 1.

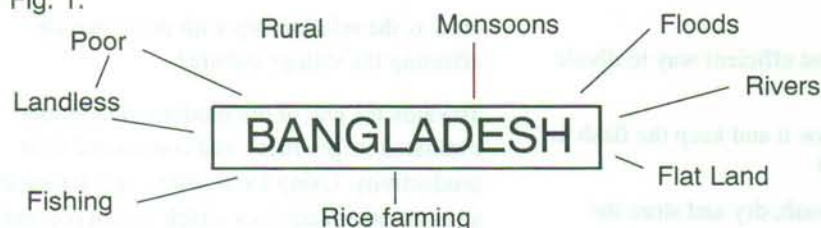
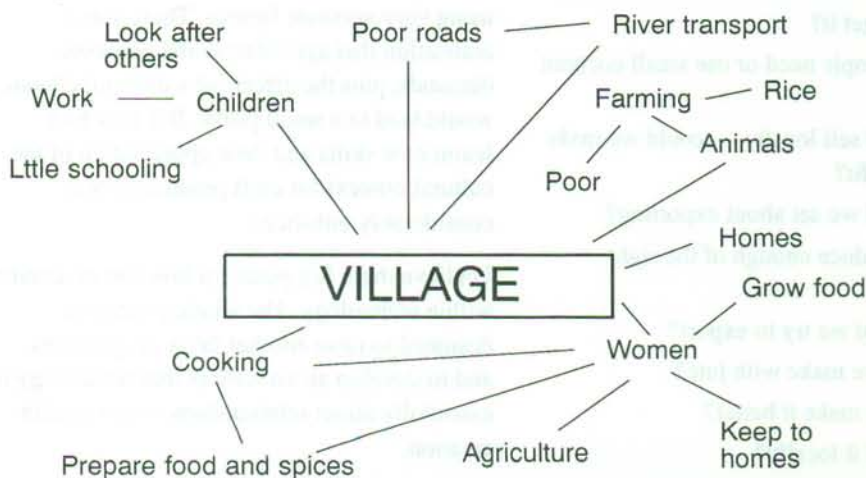


Fig. 2.







At this point the groups were allocated information packs; one relating to coconuts, one to jute. The packs contained coconuts and jute, samples of local tools, and a selection of slides showing production processes. Also included was a price list of basic foods and household necessities, and costs for raw jute and whole coconuts. (We did have a problem here, as of course coconuts in the UK do not have the outer coir casing.)

Each group's task was to work with the raw materials to develop products to sell — we made no suggestions as to where. They were to assume that they were members of a village community. Their aim was to generate an income. The constraints were that electricity was not available — we did allow them to use hand tools.

We asked them to take note of how long it took to produce something, from idea to final product. This information would be required later. At this point there was considerable group discussion, followed by experimentation. Groups very quickly settled down to production, and ideas evolved as they considered potential markets. There was frequent consideration of the context of their craft — would this be of use in the village... who would buy it?

The design—make—evaluate process raised numerous issues'

- What is the most efficient way to divide up a coconut?
- How can we saw it and keep the flesh in an edible state?
- How will we wash, dry and store the coconut flesh?
- Should we process it further?
- Coconut spoons need bamboo for handles — can we get it?
- Do local people need or use small coconut spoons?
- What could sell locally — could we make enough profit?
- How would we set about exporting?
- Can we produce enough of the right quality?
- What should we try to export?
- What can we make with jute?
- How do we make it better?
- Can we sell it locally?

- Should we export — how do we do it?
- 'What do we export?

There is opportunity within this sort of activity to uncover and discuss related value issues.

- What is the value of craft production — what are the social spin-offs?
- If you made a profit how would you use it?
- Why do people want to be involved in craft production? Do they benefit in ways that are not strictly economic?
- Is that the same in the UK?
- To what extent do we undervalue traditional skills? How do they relate to their context — jute hanging baskets are used for food storage in the home — every girl in Bangladesh will be able to work with jute. Yet when a group of girls in the class tried to make a table mat they had real problems in getting it to lie flat. They were intrigued by the notion that a table mat is not used in Bangladesh... so would a Bangladeshi woman have thought of that product?

These activities are sustainable and environmentally friendly, using locally available raw materials, but are they economic?

If they developed a low-profit but fairly secure local market, would that be better than a less reliable but more profitable export market?

How is the relationship with those outside affecting the village culture?

Towards the end of the module each group evaluated its products, and considered their productivity. Using local prices, and taking into account other activities which would prevent continuous production, they assessed their profitability. Predictions were fairly gloomy, although we all accepted that we were not using very accurate figures. There was a realisation that agricultural and domestic demands, plus the effects of a difficult climate, would lead to a small profit. But they had learnt new skills and their appreciation of the cultural context for craft production was considerably enhanced.

I believe there is a place for this sort of activity within technology. The whole process is designed to raise another layer of questions, and to develop an awareness that technology is essentially about relationships — not wealth creation.

