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Learning Document Series

15

Sharing development practices to create space for critical learning and discussion

December 2009



Learning Document Series

1-5

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to create space for critical learning
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Impact Assessment & Shared Learning (IASL)
ActionAid Bangladesh

Learning Document Series

1-5

Dhaka, December 2009

Edited by:

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Prologue

'*Learning Documents Series*' is the culmination of an effort that took almost two years to materialize. The idea started when we were conducting 'writeshops' for documenting our best practices and studies to understand processes that change poor people's lives. We were looking for ways to harness and disseminate the knowledge which would also assist others. As this would be a continuous process we were thinking of a continuum. Thus the idea of '*Learning Document Series*' was developed.

Though we would have liked to publish each of the series separately, for a beginning we have brought together the first five (*Learning Document Series 1- 5*). Most of these documents were initially written in *Bangla* and later translated in English. You would probably notice that most of writers are from the grassroots, reflecting a conscious effort from our side to have their perspectives and thoughts weaved into the documents.

We wanted these documents not only reflect the sunnyside of the processes but also to present the constraints, giving holistic view. You would be a better judge of this and we welcome constructive comments for future development.

Wishing you a happy reading and hoping the following pages give you a different perspective which is useful to you professionally and in personal life.

Partha Hefaz Shaikh
Head
Impact Assessment & Shared Learning
ActionAid Bangladesh



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1 Putting the Poorest First

Experience of Addressing Hardcore Poverty in the River Basin Areas of Jamalpur

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Preamble

This document is prepared on the basis of the findings of a field study on *Empowerment of Hardcore Poor in the River Basin Areas of Jamalpur* conducted in August 2008 by Shared Learning Unit of Impact Assessment & Shared Learning Department in cooperation with Livelihood Promotion Theme of ActionAid Bangladesh. Therefore, it acknowledges the study report and its contributors who made the study possible through providing support in data collection from the field as well as providing necessary information. In this respect, gratitude goes to Mr. Shamsul Huda, Executive Director of Unnayan Sangha (US), Ms. Laily Akter, Manager, DA-3 (US), Mr. Rezaul Karim Chanchal, Monitoring Officer, DA-3, Mr. Rafiqul Islam, Mr. Abdur Razzaque, Mr. Anisur Rahman and Mr. Nazrul Islam, Project Officer, DA-3. They made a great effort in organizing the field and taking the study team to the respondents. It is also acknowledged that the respondents of the study i.e. the participants of the hardcore poor, general microfinance group and self-help groups, local elites and field organizers of the Project were key performers of the study.

This document has narrated socio-economic and geo-physical situation of the Jamuna river basin areas in Jamalpur, the interventions made by AAB and US in the areas, situation of the hardcore poor, process of addressing them, its impacts, sustainability, shortcomings, challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt. Moreover, it tries to expose the process of addressing the hardcore poor as well as the areas that need further attention to addressing the hardcore poor.

Introduction

Jamalpur, a district located in the north-western part of Bangladesh, is one of the worst survivors of riverbank erosion and floods. It is located in the lap of two mighty rivers- the Jamuna and the Brahmaputra. Everyday a number of localities, houses, infrastructures, crop lands are swallowed by the rivers through riverbank erosion. This area also faces severe floods almost every year. These natural phenomena result in increased landlessness, pauperization, unemployment, food insecurity and forced migration. Dewanganj and Islampur are the most vulnerable upazilas within Jamalpur district to riverbank erosion and floods.

Considering the situation, ActionAid Bangladesh started working in Dewanganj and Islampur upazilas in 1992 with a view to promoting the livelihood situation of the distressed and vulnerable people in the areas initiating the Project of Socio-economic Development Programme for the *Char-dwellers* (SEDP-CD). The objective of the Project was poverty alleviation through *shomiti* programme, education programme, health and immunization programme, water and sanitation programme, etc. The Project worked in 5 unions of the selected upazilas for the people, who were the worst survivors of riverbank erosion, displaced from their houses due to the erosion, vulnerable to floods and other natural calamities and lived in *charlands* or in an isolated, unemployed and nearly unserved situation.

In 2000, AAB took up a shift from service-delivery to rights and from direct intervention to partnership approaches in the areas. To the end, AAB made partnership with 3 local NGOs- Unnayan Sangha (US), Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE) and Varsha in 2000. Among the partners, US had been placed to work with a focus on livelihood promotion of the poor and marginalized people in the areas. In cooperation with AAB, US has been working in 5 unions of Dewanganj and Islampur upazilas targeting the poor and

marginalized people especially the women. They divided the target people into three groups self-help groups, general group and hardcore poor. Apart from other groups, US undertook a programme to address the poorest of the poor i.e. the hardcore poor, who are not usually included in any income generating activities, micro-credit supports and any other development interventions by the development organizations.

US started the Programme for the hardcore poor in 2002. It aimed at creating sustainable livelihood options for the hardcore poor and making them self-help through small trade-based training and capacity building activities. Following the capacity and confidence, they were provided with interest-free loans.

Over the years, the Programme has been able to bring about changes in the lives and livelihoods of the target people and has created a sort of impacts on their families, society and economy. It also has set an example of addressing hardcore poverty for other development agencies and actors. The study on *Empowering the Hardcore Poor of River Basin Areas in Jamalpur* tried to glimpse the changes and impacts of the Programme. The broad objective of the study was to distinguish and document the best practices, learnings, agents and drives of changing the lives of the hardcore poor in the Project areas throughout the intervention with a view to leading the process towards greater dissemination and replication. The specific objectives of the Study were:

- to look into the previous situation in the areas and causes of vulnerability, impoverishment and lack of employment opportunities and services;
- to review the entire process of changing the situation in the lives and livelihoods of the hardcore poor families in the areas;
- to measure the level of social and economic empowerment of the target hardcore poor in their families and communities as well as its effectiveness and sustainability; and
- to recognize the opportunities, threats

and lessons of empowering the hardcore poor of the hard-to-reach and disadvantaged areas, and disseminate those in the development arena for further intervention and replication.

Methodology

The Programme on hardcore poor selected a total of 400 hardcore poor people from 4 unions through a baseline survey. Of them, 279 had been addressed throughout the years. Among them, 2 hardcore poor have improved their situation remarkably and thereby they have been taken to the self-help groups. A total of 24 hardcore poor have been taken to the general (microfinance and savings) groups. As many as 15 have been found dropped out.

The hardcore poor participants were selected in a scattered form, therefore, the Study had to cover 10 villages of 4 unions under Dewanganj and Islampur upazilas of Jamalpur district. Interview, observation, focus group discussion (FGD) and case study were applied to gather data from the field. Interviews were undertaken with 20 hardcore poor participants, 8 participants who were taken in general groups, 2 participants who were taken in self-help groups, 4 community leaders and 2 UP members. 7 FGDs were conducted, of which, 1 was carried out with watch committee, 2 with hardcore poor participants, 1 with micro-finance group, 1 with self-help group and 2 with US and Project staff. A total of 10 case studies were conducted. Furthermore, the activities of the hardcore poor participants, their lives, trades, homestead, assets, children and their different practices were observed under the Study.

Prior to that, a meeting was held with the Project staff to prepare an operational plan to collect data from the field. The data was collected during 2-7 June and 13-19 June 2008. Before going to collect primary data from the field, relevant documents and books were reviewed.

Understanding poverty

Poverty: Both the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* refer to the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services. In 2001, the *UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* reached the agreement on the definition of poverty as a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (*The Daily Star*, 23 October 2005).

From sociological perspectives, poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently in terms of the concept of relative deprivation. Individuals' families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities, which are customary or are at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies they belong to. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend, 1979). Sen (1987) demarcates the poor, who are those people whose consumption standards fall short of the norms (consumption norms), or whose incomes lay below the poverty line.

Rowntree (1902) distinguished the poverty into primary and secondary types, which later came to be known as absolute poverty and relative poverty respectively (Townsend, 1979). To him, families whose total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency are falling under this head may be described as primary poverty. Minimum necessary expenditure for the maintenance of merely physical health

includes food, house rent and household sundries. Townsend (1979), Mack and Lansley (1985) emphasize upon relative deprivation, and standard of living in determining poverty lines.

Long-term Poverty: The income shortfall of a person whose income is less than the poverty-line income can be called his 'income gap' (Sen, 1987). When the 'income gap' becomes permanent or the meager income cannot cope with the necessities or is not likely to take the family over the poverty line is called long-term poverty. It may remain over the entire life cycle of a person.

Hardcore Poverty: Poverty in Bangladesh is basically defined and measured by four indicators, food intake, income, capability and consumption. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimates poverty based on calorie intake method. It demarcates poverty line-1 (overall poverty) on recommended intake of 2,122 kilocalories per day per person. On the other hand, poverty line 2 (hardcore poverty) is demarcated on 1,805 kilo calories per day per person (BBS, 2008).

Causes of Poverty: To ActionAid, poverty is the consequence of the denial or violation of human rights. People living in poverty are often treated as less than human, which results in a deepening cycle of poverty. Day to day, from the cradle to the grave, they are cheated and exploited and are denied the very material and philosophical basis that allows them to flourish as human beings. This is perpetrated by family members, neighbours, employers, traders, and most shamefully, the state, the very body that is ultimately entrusted with the duty to protect and promote people's human rights, dignity and well-being (ActionAid 2008).

Rowntree (1902) attributes six causes for primary poverty: (1) death of chief wage earner; (2) incapacity of chief wage-earner through accident, illness, or old age; (3) chief wage-earner out of work, (4) chronic irregularity of work; (5) largeness of family and (6) lowness of wage. Lewis (1965)

identifies a few cultural traits that are related to poverty: (a) unemployment and underemployment, (b) low wages, (c) unskilled labour, (d) child labour, (e) absence of savings, (f) chronic shortage of cash, (g) absence of food reserve, (h) the pawning of personal goods and (i) borrowing from local money lenders at usurious rates of interest, etc. Other major correlates of poverty in the western literature include gender (Millar and Glendinnings, 1989; Graham, 1987; Dex, 1985; Beechey, 1987; Lewis and Piachaud, 1992), race and ethnicity (Moore and Wallace, 1975; Cohen and Tarpey, 1986; Brown, 1984; Amin and Oppenheim, 1992), old age (Walker, 1986; Baldwin and Cooke, 1984; Falkingham and Victor, 1991) and disability (Oliver, 1991; Dalley, 1991; Groves, 1988; Topliss, 1979) (Cited in Ahmed, 2004).

Using household data from five successive national surveys, Wodon (1999) analyzes the micro-determinants of poverty in Bangladesh from 1983 to 1996 and finds education, household size, land ownership, occupation, and geographic location affecting poverty. The official survey on household income and expenditure in 2002 finds several factors related to poverty- household size, structure of dwelling unit, land ownership, age, gender, marital status, religion, education, occupation and geographic location (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2002) (Cited in Ahmed, 2004).

Poverty in Bangladesh: Bangladesh is described as one of the poorest countries in the world with a GDP per capita of US\$1,602 per annum; and a Human Development Index (HDI) rank of 145th out of 173 countries in 2002 (UNDP, 2002). Based on poverty line constructed as less than US\$1 per day per person, 29 per cent of the population are found as income-poor, whereas the percentage increases to 78, if the poverty line is raised to less than US\$2 per day per person (UNDP, 2003). Based on poverty line measured by direct calorie intake (DCI) method as less than 2,122 kcal per person per day, it is found that that 44.3 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh or 55.9 million

are “absolute” poor in 2002; the corresponding figure for rural areas is 42.3 per cent or 42.6 million (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Similarly, cost of basic needs (CBN) method constructs “upper poverty line” (a generous allowance for non-food items), and “lower poverty line” (a minimal allowance for non-food good for those who could just afford the food requirement). More than half of the rural population in Bangladesh is consumption poor (Ahmed, 2004).

Addressing Hardcore Poor in Bangladesh:

The donors, national and international NGOs have been working in Bangladesh to eradicate poverty. But almost all of them have avoided the hardcore poor people in addressing poverty. A major reason for this is the preoccupation of most NGOs with savings mobilization and credit in large measure due to the imperative of attaining financial sustainability (Murshid & Mostafa, 2003). Some organizations like World Food Programme (WFP), BRAC, Unnayan Sangha (US), Jagarani Chakra Foundation, Swabalambi Unnayan Sangha and POPI have piloted to address the hardcore poor but to a limited extent. They tried to include the hardcore poor in their micro-credit programme but they are finally excluded assuming the risk of recovering the loan. The staffs at the fields feel the risk as they are pressurized to recover the loan. If they fail in some cases, they have to compensate from their monthly salary. On the other hand, the micro-credit providers think to sustain their programme. A study conducted by ASA refers that all policies and directives of the central office are said to have been framed with the objective of maintaining sustainability of the micro-credit programme. Sustainability of the programme depends on daily income opportunities that the hardcore poor people lack, therefore, the staff pay attention to giving micro-credit to the poor rather than reaching hardcore poor (ASA, 1997).

Situation of the river basin areas in Jamalpur

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. The geographical location and topographical features of the country have exposed her to almost all kinds of natural and human induced disasters. The major natural disasters are flood, cyclone, tornado, riverbank erosion and drought. Jamalpur is one of the most disaster-prone areas in Bangladesh. Flood, riverbank erosion and tornado are the common phenomena in the area. The monsoon weather brings in tornados in the area during March-June. Due to heavy rainfall in the country as well as in the northern Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya, floods occur almost every year in

Jamalpur district consists of 7 upazilas, 6 municipalities, 68 union parishads, 57 wards, 224 mahallas and 1532 villages. Total population is 2089366. Of them, male 50.58%, female 49.42%; Muslim 97.74%, Hindu 1.98%, Christian 0.10%, Buddhist 0.04% and others 0.14%. There are some ethnic nationals: Garo, Hodi, Kurmi and Mal. Average literacy rate is 21.5%. Of them, males are 26.6% and female 16% (Banglapedia, 2006).

the area during the months of July-October, which result in heavy damage to properties, crops and lives. This district is in the lap of the Jamuna and the Brahmaputra rivers. Tide of the mighty rivers erodes their banks, which takes away localities, crop lands, market places, etc into rivers. This is the most derogatory phenomenon in the area. Within Jamalpur district, Dewanganj and Islampur upazilas are most vulnerable to river erosion and floods caused by heavy rainfall and flow of water of the mighty river the Jamuna and the Brahmaputra come from upstream during rainy season and monsoon.

Due to the riverbank erosion, the people of the river basin areas are frequently displaced of their houses. They loose their lands to the rivers. It leads to landlessness. The displaced people take shelter on roads, railways,

embankments and *khaslands*. Many of them migrate to cities, towns and many other places. The people who take shelter on roads, railways, embankments and *khaslands* go to cities, towns or other places to seek works in different times.

Like many areas in Bangladesh, the rate of age at marriage is very low in the areas. People tend to get their daughters married at early stage as thought it would cost a minimum dowry. Boys are also got married early to get dowry from the in-laws. Population growth rate is high in the areas. People have less scope of income generating opportunities. Dependency ratio is very high among the families. In the displaced families, there are a lot of examples of leaving families by the husbands, who go to other places to seek for works but do not come back to their families. The rate of divorce is also high, which mostly happens due to dowry claiming. These trends increase female-headed households, which mostly run into food insecurity, malnutrition and vicious

poverty circle.

The economy of the area mainly depends on agriculture. In Jamalpur district, 44% households occupy agricultural lands. On an average 24.6% households depend on agricultural labours. Only 10.62% occupations are based on commerce, 4.84% on service. There are 186058.87 hectares

cultivable lands in Jamalpur district. Of those, only 29% lands have been taken under irrigation system. As many as 19.57% lands produce single crop whereas 70.29% double and 10.14% triple. Paddy, jute, sugarcane, corn, mustard seed, peanut, wheat, sweet potato, tobacco, betel leaf, chilly, pulse and vegetables are the main crops (Banglapedia, 2006).

Table-1: Main Occupations of the People in Jamalpur

Occupations	Percentage
Agriculture	44.01%
Transport	1.39%
Fishing	1.26%
Agricultural labourer	24.6%
Wage labourer	2.86%
Commerce	10.62%
Service	4.84%
Others	10.42%

Source: Banglapedia, 2006

Like other areas in Bangladesh, the people of river basin areas in Jamalpur live in an agrarian society. Ownership of land is the key to power, prestige, status and class in society. Land owners and the large farmers are the key figures in the rural power



River erosion, a common phenomenon of Jamalpur area

structure in the areas. But the trend of social mobility is huge in the river basin areas, which is induced by riverbank erosion. Large farmers or land owners become powerless due to erosion of their lands by rivers. The families which are rich and educated are powerful in rural society. Alongside, the service-holders, teachers, village doctors, religious leaders, chairmen and members of union parishads and so on are the dominating figures in rural power structure. Of course, they represent those families, which are land-owners and large farmers and of the dominant families. The people of the families, who are educated and get involved in business and services play lead role in the urban areas of Jamalpur.

The landless poor families depend on working in the land of others as labourer. Traditionally they sell their labours in agricultural fields of others. During crisis situation in October-November, they sell their labours in advance. But currently this trend has been changed to a great extent. They have learned to bargain now. They tend now to fix up the wages. Many of the labourers go to other places to seek for works. They manage works in brick field or roads in other areas and pull rickshaw in towns or cities. Sometimes the land-owners face crisis of labourers during harvesting of crops. Women of the poor families now can work in the field, though they are not still paid equally. But it was out of imagination for the women to work in the field in the previous times.

The type of family and society in the area is patriarchal. Males are treated as the earners, producers and growers. They play dominating role in family and society in making and implementing

decisions. Females in the rich or middle class families get the opportunities of education along with males but not in the same approach. Although the women work hard at home the whole day, their works are not considered as productive since their incomes are not seen in cash. Males take decisions in family and society. The rich families and professional elites like teachers, doctors, religious leaders, UP chairmen and members dominate the decision-making process in the society. The poor and marginal people do not have access to the decision-making process at the greater community level.

As of the vulnerability of the area to floods and riverbank erosion, the areas have been getting tremendous supports from the donors over the years. Many national and international organizations have been working in the areas since the independence of Bangladesh. Different NGOs like BRAC, ASA, POSHIKA, Caritas Bangladesh, World Vision, Ganosahajyo Sangstha, Unnayan Sangha and so on have been working in the areas. They have been working mainly on health, education, agriculture and livelihood

promotion through micro-credit. This is to mention that there were a lot of fallow lands in the areas. The NGOs sensitized the people towards using the lands through production of different agricultural products. New types of crops like maize are being produced now-a-days in the areas. People especially the poor have been made sensitized towards cow and goat rearing. Concerned government agencies are also helping the process to some extent. With supports from the donor agencies, government also has been implementing several Projects in the areas, though most of the Projects are basically addressing the

Table-2: Occupation of the hardcore poor (baseline)

Occupation	f	%
Agriculture		2.87
Begging	19	6.81
Cattle rearing	20	7.17
Daily labour	63	22.58
Hair cutting	4	1.43
Handicraft	9	3.23
Maid servant	88	31.54
Net making	9	3.23
Pottery	26	9.32
Rice husking	5	1.8
Rickshaw pulling	8	2.87
Sewing	3	1.08
Small trade	17	6.1
Total	279	100.00

Source: Baseline Survey Report, 2001

people in *charlands* of Jamalpur.

Situation of the hardcore poor

The programme on hardcore poor undertaken by US conducted a baseline survey in 2001. The findings of the survey depict the situation of the hardcore poor. Following the situation, the programme selected the target households. It was evident that in a nutshell, the following situations were endowed with the hardcore poor in the areas:

- Unlikely to manage two meals a day
- Survivors of riverbank erosion
- Having no land for living and living on land of others, roads, embankments and railways
- Having insufficient daily income opportunity
- Having no cultivable land
- Widowed or divorced or separated women and
- Person with disability.

The baseline survey report 2001 states that 84% among the surveyed households were female-headed. Of them, 6% were divorced, 9% were deserted, 46% were widowed and 39% were having disable or very old aged husband. Average age of the female household heads was 39. Before the intervention, 31.54% of them were engaged working as maid servant, 22.58% as daily labourer and 6.81% in begging.

In the river basin areas of Jamalpur, the major cause of hardcore or extreme poverty is riverbank erosion. The Jamuna and the Brahmaputra are the key agents of extreme poverty in the areas. The river-eroded people lose their land both cultivable and dwelling places, and, in turn become hardcore poor. They thereafter take shelter on roads, embankments and railways. They hardly can come out of the extreme poverty situation. One of the major causes behind it is single cropping in the areas due to floods and other natural phenomena. Most of the lands in the

area can produce crops only one time a year since this area faces severe and devastating floods almost every year. Again floods make thick sandy layer over the agricultural land, which makes the land uneven and unlikely to produce crops. It takes much preparation, time and costs to make the land productive. The farmers do not very often want to cultivate the land more than one time. Agriculture is the main productive sector in the area. But it cannot sufficiently absorb all people round the year due to lack of opportunities and diversification. The poor and marginal ones do not have alternative income opportunities other than becoming engaged in agricultural activities as day labourers, though, it can give them the works only for a few months.

Due to the displacement and lack of income opportunity i.e. lack of scope of works, many people among the hardcore poor households are compelled to migrate to other places. Many of the husbands or sons, who become seasonal migrant for works, do not come back to their wives or aged parents. The neglected-wives or mothers have to struggle along with the neglected-kids. Feroza Begum (35) of Char Dakatia village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur informs, "My husband went away to town to seek for work 10 years ago. He did not come back." Achhia Begum (40) of Balugram village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur repents, "My youngest son is now 18 years old. My husband kept us away before he was born. I do not know yet where he lives now." Begum (45) of Gilabari village, Islampur, Jamalpur informs, "My eldest son went away to Dhaka for works 9 years ago. He did not come back to us for even a moment. I am still looking after his wife and children. What a pity!"

Denial of human rights by the duty-bearers are the basic causes of making the people in the areas poor and leading them towards having in hardcore poverty situation. The hardcore poor are denied of rights and dignity in different ways. Either they or the duty-bearers do not have the ideas that they have rights to natural resources and services

and government is the key agent to ensure these.

The hardcore poor women do not have scope of working outside. They fail to pay attention to the external sources. Rich relatives or neighbors do not extend any kind of cooperation to them. Banekhha Khatun (45) of Takimari village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur recalls, "Nobody of my relatives helped me when I was hungry and crying for medicine. I was a serious appendicitis patient." The NGOs that operate micro-finance activities do not include them to their supports as they seemed unlikely to repay the loan. Suryabhan (25) of Uttar Gilabari village, Islampur, Jamalpur says, "I was so helpless after getting divorced. I wanted to get loan to start a small business. But nobody trusted me, even any NGO."

Most of the hardcore poor are also deprived of getting VGD or VGF cards and other government supports. They cannot also take the opportunities from the programme of Food for Work. Chairmen and members of union parishads give the cards to their poor relatives or others in exchange of money. Jamila (55) of Kazlapara village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur repents, "I was begging. My husband had died 15 years ago. My sons do not look after me. Even then, I am not given any support from union parishad." Shelly Akter Shanti (35), an UP member of Kulkandi union, Islampur, Jamalpur informs, "We get very minimum VGD or VGF cards. But there are huge number of poor people in this area. We cannot give the cards to all." On the other hand, the VGD or VGF supports are not given to the deserved poor round the year. Rafiqul Islam, an UP member of Belgachha union, Islampur, Jamalpur informs, "Maximum supports from the union

ActionAid began operating in Bangladesh in 1983, and now works with 120 partner organizations and over half a million people to address poverty and injustice together. AAB is dedicated to ensure quality, citizenship and justice by means of ending poverty through humane, practical, politically intelligent and open strategy.

parishad are given only in crisis period. Only the widow allowances are given for long term. Others are seasonal."

All these factors keep the hardcore poor into extreme poverty situation. They let alone cannot manage one meal for whole day. Having one meal a day, wearing one piece of cloth everyday, living in houses of others, or in houses built on place of others, malnutrition, bearing sickness and so on are the common picture of the hardcore poor in the areas. It goes beyond their imagination to think over health, water and sanitation, education and other needs.

The male hardcore poor people tend to migrate to other places, where scope of works might be available. But if the hardcore poor people are women, who are divorced, separated, neglected, aged and with disability, their distress knows no bound. Many of them beg from door to door or work in other houses. But they are not well paid, if they work for others. Sabistry (40) of Barkhal village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur informs, "I sometimes work in a family as maid servant in Dewanganj. I work there whole day. They feed me two times and pay 10 taka only. I have a son. I cannot feed him well with the money." All of the respondents reply that during rainy season or flood situation, they cannot go outside for work. They cannot store any food for the crisis situation. They, therefore, have to get starvation for many days. If fallen sick, they cannot even think for medicines.

Socio-Economic Development Programme for the Char-Dwellers

ActionAid has been working in Jamalpur district since 1992. It has started partnership with three organizations- Unnayan Sangha (US), BACE and Varsha in 2000 following the shift from direct intervention to partnership and service-based approach to rights-based approach. Among them, US has been implementing the Project on Socio-Economic

Development Programme for the *Char-Dwellers* (SEDP-CD) in Dewanganj and Islampur upazilas of Jamalpur district. The goal of the Project is to ensure poor people's rights and especially to enhance the socio-economic development of the *char*-dwellers. The Project has been addressing the issues of group savings and credit management, access to public services and natural resources, risk reduction, livelihood promotion and ensuring local governance. Under the group savings and credit management, US deals with the poor and marginalized people in three dimensions- (i) self-help group formation, (ii) micro-finance group formation and (iii) addressing the hardcore poor. This is to mention that the self-help and micro-finance groups are capacitated and advanced forward through *Reflect* approach.

Addressing the hardcore poor

US undertook the programme on the hardcore poor in 2002 adopting the objectives- (i) reviving the lost mentality of hardcore poor households towards positive changes; (ii) forming village watch committee and making them responsible for reducing hardcore poverty and its intervening factors; and (iii) ensuring utilization of local resources in the process of hardcore poverty reduction. US has been implementing the programme without engaging extra staff. Along with other two components, it looks after the hardcore poor within existing procedure and opportunities. The Project has been being implemented in 4 unions of Dewanganj and Islampur upazilas under Jamalpur district. US mobilized the money for the programme in two ways- from the DA

Unnayan Sangha (US) is a long-term partner of AAB in Jamalpur district. Since 1980, US has been working for improving the socio-economic status of the disadvantaged group of people in Jamalpur and Sherpur district. The vision of the organization is to have a just society where there will be no injustice, discrimination and insecurity.

Steps of addressing the hardcore poor:

Step-1: Developing self-confidence of the hardcore poor

Step-2: Forming village organization

Step-3: Identifying local resources and making those easier to use

Step-4: Selecting specific tasks

Step-5: Training

Step-6: Cooperation

Step-7: Ensuring the support

Step-8: Evaluation of the on-going activities

Step-9: Identifying the future of the Project

budget of AAB (Taka 2 lakhs) and from the interest came from microfinance programme (Taka 1 lakh). This is to mention that US receives 12.5% interest from the participants of micro-finance group, of which, 10% are kept in the savings of the participants and the rest 2.5% are kept in a separate bank account that is engaged for continuing the programme for the hardcore poor as well as other activities on the basis of mutual understanding between US and AAB.

Based on a baseline survey conducted in 2001, a total of 656 hardcore poor were found out. Of them, 400 were targeted to address under the Project. The selected hardcore poor were prioritized as they were found taking meals less than two times a day, survivors of river erosion, landless, living on places owned by others, very low income people, widowed, divorced and separated women and person with disability. Among 400 selected hardcore poor, US has been able to address 279. Of 279, 24 have been taken in general savings and micro-finance groups and 2 in self-help groups. As many as 15 are dropped out, who have migrated to other places. Among 238 hardcore poor, 148 run their trades round the year. The trades of the rests are seasonal. Most of the participants are women.

The selected participants were imparted training on initiating small trades. Through the trainings, their capacity, potentials and experiences were assessed. Then they were given the ideas on how to start a trade, how

to keep record, how to market the products, how to make profit and how to sustain in trade. Thereafter they were given interest-free loans, which ranged 300-1000 taka in order to advance them towards utilizing the money in income generating activities. They were made using the borrowed money in generating income through *muri* and *chira* frying, rice husking, *vapapitha*, pickle, *chanachur*, *shutki* preparing, cow-dung fuel making, etc and selling those in localities and markets. If they were found attaining success and repaying the loan in installments, they were given more money to continue or enlarge their trade or business. Later on they have been capacitated to utilize the loan of more than 2,000-3,000 Taka.

Beside the trainings and interest-free loans, the participants are helped in marketing the products. The successful traders among the selected hardcore poor have been gradually taken into general savings and micro-finance groups and self-help groups when they are seen capacitated to utilize more capital in their trades.

The hardcore poor needed immediate supports for their existence. Making available of hardware supports by US itself was not the goal of the Programme. The Programme aimed at kindling the potentials of the hardcore poor so that they could make their hands open to earn or achieve by their own; not through begging or depending on others. Apart from making small loan available, the programme also focused on making awareness on their rights to coming out from hardcore poverty, indignity and injustice situation through engaging themselves in utilizing their own potentials and capacities as well as claiming their entitlements from duty-bearers at local level.

The impacts

Throughout the Programme for the hardcore poor, some changes have been brought about in the lives and livelihoods of the target participants. This is to mention that the

hardcore poor in the Project area are poorest of the poor and they are always endowed with adverse situation. Nothing helps them to get out of the situation. They are always in trap or vicious circle of extreme poverty. There are a lot of intervening factors to keep them in extreme poverty situation. However, this would be obviously exaggerative, if it is claimed that a reverse situation has been created in the lives and livelihoods of the target participants over the years. Through a small supports and motivation, it is indeed hard-hitting to make positive and more successful change happens, where everything is adverse. The selected hardcore poor had all kinds of attributes to be endowed with extreme poverty. They could not manage their meals even more than once a day. They were the survivors of riverbank erosion. They face flood almost every year. They are either separated or neglected or divorced or widowed or old aged or with disability. They were out of any external support. They were not believed by the loan givers even by the NGOs, who claim themselves work for the poor.

Within the situation, US targeted the hardcore poor and have made some changes in the lives and livelihoods of the target groups.

Potentials and self-confidence renovated

The hardcore poor people are more than passive in nature. They never think that they are worthy or they have knowledge, ideas on anything, or their ideas or works are worthy or have economic value. Since they were frequently neglected, separated, disappointed and dishonored, they lost their self-confidence. The Programme has revived their confidence and made them learnt that they also have potentials. They can do something worthy and make lives easier. They now know how they can earn money. They are well aware of the way of trading, initiating new trades and way of profit-making. Most of them have made many things by their own through business. Now they know that they can also do something that makes their lives easier.



From Begging to Business

Twenty years back her husband lost his legs in an accident. She failed, trying a lot to make him cured. Her husband passed away leaving 3 kids on her shoulder. The Jamuna displaced her family for 13 times. Finding no other way she took shelter on a land of others, and started begging for feeding her kids. She sent one of her children to an orphanage.

She is Majiran Bewa (42) of Belgachha village, Islampur, Jamalpur. Not feeling easy in begging, she wanted to do something to earn. In 2003, she was given an interest-free loan of 300 taka from US. She bought paddy and husked rice with the money. She started selling the rice making a good profit. After repaying, she made another loan of 500 taka. She ran same business and made a good profit. Repaying the money, she made a loan of 1,000 taka and initiated zilapi making and selling by her son. It gave her much profit.

One year back, Majiran was taken to the micro-finance group since she needed more money for investment. She received 5000 taka from the group which she invested in rice and zilapi business. She can now make 4,000 taka profit every month. With the profit she maintains her family. She can now feed her kids well. The eldest son has got married. Sometimes, Majiran helps him when he needs. She bought a bull and made a tin-shed house. She sends her daughter to school. As she knows that it becomes impossible to run business during flood, she stocks rice but never loses her capital.

Majiran recalls, "Nobody sees the distress that I faced. Polay tin din na khaya kandichhe. Khabar dibar pari nai. Vater moddhye pani diya diya khaichhi. (My son cried for food for 3 days. I could not feed him. We fed ourselves giving water in rice.)" She can now feed them well. "Once I could not manage food for one time a day. We can feed easily now for two times. Alla koichhe kormo kori khao. Ar poisa holi bagher chokh mele (Allah has said, do work. It is possible to manage everything, if I have money). Want is decreasing gradually. I will help myself through the business up to death," expresses Majiran with happiness of winning over distress through business.

Feeling of self-help and self-dependence created

Before the intervention, the target hardcore poor had dependency feeling. They expected that their sons, riches, chairmen-members of UPs or any other external sources would help them in managing their bread. They tried a lot to attain the supports but failed. Finally many of them earned their bread through begging. The initiative of US motivated them to be self-helped and self-dependent. All of them made loan from US and utilized that in small trades. They learned the techniques of trading through training. They can now feed them as well as their dependants. The women, who once begged, have been earning their bread through trading or business. They now do not urge help of others even of their sons or daughters. During floods, they cannot carry on their business. They try to save their savings and capital of their business. Somebody fails to save the money if they lack external supports i.e. relief and rehabilitation.

Expertise and scope of works regenerated

The target hardcore poor had experiences on *muri* frying, *chira* making, *shutki* preparing, pickle making, *vapapitha* making, rice husking, etc. But they did not know whether they can use the expertise and knowledge in small business. On the other hand, they did not have

capital to initiate something by their own. Before giving supports to them, they were given ideas that they can start an initiative through utilizing their existing expertise. They were then trained on how they can trade the rice, *vapapitha*, *chira*, *muri*, *shutki*, pickle, cow-dung fuel and many other products and make profit. Assessing their capacity and interest in what type of trades, they were given the training and necessary ideas and tips.

Based on the assessment, they were supported with interest-free loans ranged from 300-1,000 taka. With the money, they produced products and sold in villages. What the expertise the hardcore poor had earlier, they started utilizing being a part of the process. They now believe that the works they know are indeed productive and income generating ones.

Women in small trade

Traditionally the women in Bangladesh work at home. The males consider their works having no economic value. The women also believe that. This social stigma makes the women feeling dependents, vulnerable, unprotected, etc. Along with household works, rural women in Bangladesh rear hens, ducks, goats, cows, etc. But their involvement in small trade is not old. The target hardcore poor women are now involved in small trading of rice, *muri*, *chira*, ghee, oil, pickle, *chanachur*, cow-dung fuel, etc.



Standing on Own Foot

“My father had died 8 years ago leaving no property. I was then only 12. My mother alone could not manage our bread with her work as maid servant. She got my elder sister married promising a dowry of 10,000 taka. But she failed to keep her promise. My sister was sent to our home. I started working in a brick field. The brick field had works for 6 months. Rest of the time I had to leave myself to watch the distress of my mother and sister,” recalls Krishnachandra Sarker (20), a young boy in Beer Bhaboshur Das Para, Dewanganj, Jamalpur.

A Village Watch Committee sent Krishna to US. In 2005, US gave him a loan of 1000 taka. He started vending nuts. After repaying the loan, he took 2000 taka for two times and started vending zilapi, pickles, oil, soap, biscuits, chanachur in the nearby villages. He has been now a matured trader. He says, “I know what worklessness is. I have discovered three types of places for my vending- village, school and bazaar. I sell nuts at bazaar, pickle at school premises and other things in the villages. Whole the year round, I always try to keep my business run,” Krishna articulates.

This year Krishna has taken a loan of 3,000 taka. He has made a good profit. With the profits he has bought a plot of land. On a part of the land, he has made a house for living and cultivates vegetables on the rest. He has bought two bulls. He has installed tube-well and sanitary latrine. He has also paid 10,000 taka to his brother-in-law to make his sister received by her husband. He has now 5,000 taka cash, which he utilizes in business. Krishna states, “Nobody had lent me money to let me do something. US gave me the loans without interest. Now I can lend money to others. The people in my village invite me at their occasions. Every young boy used to make great merriment during Durgapooja. I had no way but staring at. Now I can cheer up. I can give subscriptions to the temple during worship.” He dreams for making a big shop at the upazila bazaar where he would sell many goods and yield a lot of profit. “Then I will marry; not before then,” expresses Krishna, a boy who is stick to his dream to stand on his own foot.

Achhia: a Case of Change

"My husband left me 20 years ago with 2 daughters and a son. We lived in Char Dakatia village. The whole village is now in the Jamuna. 3 years back I made my shelter on the road," states Achhia Begum (40), a strong combatant against poverty living in Balugram village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur. She worked hard as maid servant but that could not support her family to even exist simply. "I could not manage food for even one time a day. My children had to starve maximum times. Nobody helped me. My husband just threw me to a hell," repents Achhia.

In 2003, Achhia took a loan of 1,000 taka from US. She received training on how to utilize the money to make profitable business. She started selling nuts, betel leaves, shutki (dried fish), oil, biscuit, lozenge, etc from her house in Char Dakatia. She started making good profit. Repaying the loan in installments as well as saving a little, she started maintaining minimum necessities of her family.

Like other survivors of river erosion, Achhia got shelter on a road in Balugram village. When everybody was thinking what they would do, Achhia made a tin-shed house for living with the money that she saved from the profit she made. At a corner of the house she shaped a shop and started selling rice, potato, dal, oil, salt, onion, chilly and many other necessary commodities. With the profit she was able to make a savings with which she got her two daughters married spending 14,000 taka.

Achhia can maintain the demands and entertainment of her sons-in laws. Along with the business, she rears ducks and hens. Although she has small space around the house, she tries to grow vegetables. She can give vaccine to ducks and hens and she does it commercially as she received training on it.

Now she needs not to borrow money from others. Sometimes she sells goods without instant payment with a view to helping others. She can keep records through writing the dues of the customers, purchase and selling rate of the goods. She has educated her children upto class VI. She says, "Age ek belao khabar pachhila na, ekhon tin bela khabar pai, onek jinis korchhi (Once I could not manage food for one time a day. Now I can manage food for 3 times a day. I have made many things)." US treats her a successful small trader.



They themselves prepare the products and sell from their houses or in villages or in local bazaars.

Alternative livelihood options created

Due to riverbank erosion, floods and sedimentation on lands after floods, the farmers in the areas can produce crops for one time a year. Scope of working is less than that of other areas in Bangladesh. The hardcore poor find options to seek for work in other areas. But the poor helpless and deserted women fall in trouble. They tend to work as maid servant in other houses but fail to manage their daily foods. Many of them are bound to beg. Throughout the programme, some alternative livelihood options have been explored like trading of rice, *muri*, *chira*, ghee, oil, pickle, *chanachur*, cow-dung fuel, etc, which are traded in shops, bazaars or villages. The target hardcore poor have accepted these options and have been earning their bread easily. Observing their successes, other hardcore poor also find interest in it. They also seek for loans to initiate such kind of trades to earn their bread.

Small entrepreneurship developed

Beside the women under initiative, the hardcore poor men were trained on entrepreneurship development. They have initiated shops at local bazaar either of grocery shop or sweets and bakery shops. All of them have been

successfully running their business. They are gradually enlarging their initiative through making better profits. Some women have bought sewing machines with loans taken from US. They sew clothes of others of their neighbors. They have planned to take orders from the cloth shoppers at bazaars through whom they will try to sell their products. They also keep pieces of cloths for sale. Customers buy the pieces of cloths from them as well as order them for making their garments. Some women vend cloths in villages, which they buy from Dhaka. All enterprises give them sizeable profits through which they have changed their past and have been earning their bread easily.

Capacity enhanced

The hardcore poor, especially the women were not aware of their capacity. They could not think they can do or think something worthy that could be transformed into earning initiative. All of them had hidden and unused potentials, which the programme explored and made the hardcore poor thought and done something different to earn their bread. They were trained in initiating and running trade and techniques of making profits. Although they are not literate, they have been learnt how to keep record.

A Win over Woe

“Now I have the capacity to lend money to others. I can feed others. I can buy medicine by my own. Everybody among my neighbors respects me as I can help them,” expresses at a stretch Banechha Khatun (45), a shopkeeper at Takimari village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur. Once her husband got her divorced when he detected her wife having problems at her stomach that would cost a lot and she would never be able to give birth of a child. 9-10 years back she took shelter at her parents' house. Since her parents were not well off to take care of her, Banechha started seeking for help of others but failed to draw attention to anybody. After two years, both of her parents left her forever. She became the burden of her poor brother. However, her younger sister took her to a doctor and borne the treatment cost. After an operation, she got cured.



Banechha started working as maid servant. *“I was so weak to work everyday after the operation. I could not earn everyday's bread. I sought for help of others. I wanted to do something through which I could earn my bread. I wanted to get a loan to initiate small business. But nobody helped me as they thought that I would never be able to repay,”* says Banechha. She then made contact with US and made an interest-free loan of 1000 taka in 2005 with the flexibility of repaying the loan after she had started making profit. She got training on running business, keeping record, making profit, etc. With the money she started vending shutki (dried fish), onion and green chilly in a shop made of sugarcane leaves on a road nearby her house. She started making profit of 80 taka everyday. Then she started repaying the loan in installments along with saving 10 taka every week.

“Thereafter I did not look back. I started making profit. After repaying the loan I made loans of 2,000 taka for 3 times. I made a tin-shed shop and started selling rice, dal, potato, soap, sugar, salt, oil, biscuit, chanachur, beetle leaves, nuts, etc,” informs Banechha. She has adopted a son of his brother. He is now able to earn. As his father demanded to take him back, Banechha got agreed considering his brother's helplessness and impoverishment. *“I have no need to take help of others. I was staying in my father's house. Now I stay at my own house which is made of tin and wood. I can help my brother even with money. I lend money to others if they need. I help others in delivering new born babies. Everybody in my village invites me at any occasion. I give subscriptions to the mosque. I sometimes feed poor people. I have a cash of 16,000 taka which I use as capital. Ehon Allar doai onek valo achhi (I am very fine now by the mercy of Allah),”* expresses Banechha with a happy smile.



Charubala: a Change-maker

"We could not manage food for even one time a day. I had to wear same cloth after bathing," recalls Charubala (45), a change-maker woman of Belgachha village, Islampur, Jamalpur. She is now a member of a self-help group named Prochesta for one year. She has got her one daughter married and is seeking a groom for the youngest one. She has leased out 3 ponds and is doing fish cultivation, which may yield 70,000 taka profit after a year. She has taken a piece of land in contract where she cultivates paddy. She has bought a piece of land where she produces jute. She made a big house for her and two sons. She has a bull. She has bought net with which her husband catches fish from the Jamuna. In a word, Charubala now has many things to talk about her change.

"Once I had nothing. My husband was a TB patient. He could not work. My sons were very younger. I tried to do something. I sought for loan. But nobody gave me any type of support except US. 6 years ago (in 2002), US gave me 300 taka as interest-free loan," informs Charubala. She bought rice and fried muri with the money, and then sold in the shops in the local bazaar. She had been making good profit. After repaying the loan, she took 1000 taka. She took a pond owned by other for share-fisheries. "I was able to make 5000 taka profit in first year. With 2,000 taka, I bought a net, with that my husband started fishing in river. Thereafter, I started doing many things and winning over my miseries," expresses Charubala.

Charubala is now a member of self-help group where she saves money, takes loan and utilizes the money in different way. She can now easily make profit. "Once nobody wanted to lend me money. The NGOs even the groups of US did not take me in their groups. 5 years later, a group of US took me in their group. Nobody knows them, if they do not have money. Now everybody knows me. Everybody invites me in their occasion. All honour me. But once I did not have food-clothes. My daughter did not have cloth to face her groom. Now I have everything," she throws the words with pride.

They keep record in their own way. Nobody can cheat them.

They are now confident enough. All of them now dream for extension of their trade and making much profit to help themselves and their dependants. Once they had been the burden of others. Now they can take care of themselves through earning. Many of them have been able to create helping hands to others. They are now savior of themselves and their dependants; no more burden.

Income generating opportunities created

The hardcore poor find now the options for generating income. They know it very well that if they have money they can invest it in different ways. To run and extend their trade they make loans after repaying the old ones. They find the interest-free loan a great opportunity. Since the installment was flexible enough and allowed them taking time till making profit, they treated it as a great opportunity and blessings to them. Attaining the flexibility, they utilized the money in small trades and made profit. They now try to utilize all of their belongings in income generation. Charubala (45) of Belgachha village, Islampur, Jamalpur had a *doba* (tiny pond). She did not imagine that it could give her money. After getting loan, she prepared the pond for fisheries. Now she makes good income from the pond. Halimon (80) of Mollapara village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur had small plot of land. She with her aged husband did not use it. Being trained on vegetable gardening, she started cultivating vegetables in the plot

with the small loan from US. She has now no tension on bread earning. The staff of the Project inform that there is no record that the target hardcore poor have failed to repay the loan. In crisis situation they took time but did not fail to pay back the loan.

Necessary assets comprised

Most of the hardcore poor lived on the places of others even in the houses of others. Most of them still live on the place of others but all of them in the houses made by their own. And all the houses are made of tin, especially the shed of the houses. Some of them have bought small plot of land to live on. Most of them did not have sleeping bed i.e. cot or like that. All of them now have the bed and necessary things. Some have installed tube-wells by their own accord. Many of them installed sanitary latrines. The women who were trained or had experience on sewing have bought sewing machine. Some of the women who have husband or son have bought them rickshaw or van. Some have bought their husband or sons net for fishing. Many of them have bought cows, goats, hens and ducks.

Food, cloths and other necessities more accessible

The target hardcore poor could not earn bread sometimes for even one time a day. All of them can now feed themselves and their dependants for minimum two times a day. They have the capacity now to buy minimum cloths and other necessities. Most of them have the capacity to cope with the natural disasters like floods. But many of them do not have yet the capacity to cope with the situation. If they cannot run their business during flood or other unfavorable situations, they have to spend the capital or seek for external supports. Apart from the natural calamities, they can continue their earnings and can earn their daily bread easily. Some of them store foods for the flood situation but do not misuse or spend the capital. They did not have the capacity to visit doctor or purchase medicines. Many of them now have the capacity.

Rabeya: a Role-model of Retailers



Rabeya (45) of Kulkandi village, Islampur, Jamalpur is now a successful shopkeeper. She sells rice, potato, ata, onion, chilly, salt, sugar, oil, pickle, biscuit, betel leaf, nuts, muri, chira, soap and many other daily necessary commodities from her shop. She has made the shop by her own spending of 4,500 taka. She always keeps a capital of 10,000 taka. She has made a tin-shed house. She has 8 ducks, 5 hens, 4 goats etc.

5 years back Rabeya was a maid servant. She worked hard in others' houses but could not manage her daily foods well. She is alone. Her husband divorced her many years ago. She had no kids. She took shelter at her parent's home who lived on an embankment.

Rabeya started her business taking loan from US. She took 1,000 taka as an interest-free loan. From the very beginning, she made a very good profit. Initially she used to sell chanachur, nuts, betel leaf, chilly, onion, etc. She sells many commodities now. Everyday she sells 300-500 taka and makes a profit of 50-80 taka daily. She recalls her agony, "I had nothing. Nobody helped me. I worked in others' houses. Onek dukkhito achhilaam (I had much distress). I can now help others. Many of my neighbours buy commodities with due. I let them do it considering their distress. Nobody cheats me. I cannot write. The literate customers help me keep record. Everybody honours me." Now Rabeya is a role model of the hardcore poor who can help themselves through business.



Cow-dung Fuel Fuels Azifa

Azifa Begum (25) of Char Dakatia village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur buys cow-dung fuel from the villages and sells in hotel and restaurants. She can make profit of 50-60 taka daily. With the money, she can save her two kids. The kids are very minor. The last one is 1 and the first is 2-year old. Her husband does not look after her and the kids. He has another wife and Azifa is his second wife. Poor Azifa lost her parents at her very boyhood. She was brought up in a family as a maid servant. They got her married with the married person. Her husband sometimes visits her but takes no responsibility. He takes responsibility to another wife and her kids since she gave him dowry that Azifa could not.

Neglected by her husband, Azifa worked as maid servant in others' houses but due to her very little children, she found it tough to manage works. Taking this into account, people did not want to take her in works. Poor Azifa wanted to do something that might not disturb others. She started buying cow-dung fuel in due and sold in the hotel and restaurants at the local bazaar. She could make some profit with that she managed her bread and repaid the due. It seemed hard to continue the business without capital. She contacted US and made a loan of 1,000 taka in 2006. She invested the money in her business and started making more profit. She now lives in a house of her own, though on a khasland. "I have no tension and grief now thinking that my husband does not look after me. I can now earn and feed my children well," expresses Azifa. She has a plan to make more loans and enlarge her business through which she dreams for making her life easier.

Trend to educate the children created

This is the normal situation in the poor households to avoid sending the children to school. This is more than true for the female children. They rather get their children engaged in works to help them earning money. Most of the selected hardcore poor women have children. They send their children to school. Of course, maximum of the children are sent to the Anand Schools which are governed by some NGOs. Mahiran (45), a widowed woman of Gilabari village, Islampur, Jamalpur got all her children married. She could not send them to school. Now she has the capacity. She keeps a granddaughter with her whom she sends to school and bears all expenditures.

Preparedness and coping with natural phenomena enhanced

Flood is the regular phenomena in the areas. It appears almost every year. Hardcore poor are the most vulnerable to it since they lack preparedness and coping strategies. Most of the target hardcore poor now have the capacity to cope with the floods. They stock food and fuel for the emergency situation. Most of them cannot continue their trade or business during the situation. They try their best to save their capital. But some of them cannot do it. They spend their capital, if the situation lingers and no external supports are given to them. Some take alternative steps. Achhia Begum of Balugram village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur, a shopkeeper, takes her products to sell at the schools during floods. Like Mahiran (45) of Gilabari village, Islampur, Jamalpur, most of the target hardcore poor women sew *kanthas* of others during the situation. Majiran (42) of Belgachha village, Islampur, Jamalpur stocks one *mand* rice for the flood situation but she never thinks to spend her savings or capital.

Women are empowered

Most of the target hardcore poor women

head their families. Now they know well how to take effective decision. By their own decision, they initiate trades, extend their business, select their purchasing and selling place. They take decision in getting their sons and daughters married. In their vulnerable situation, they could have been the burden to their sons or daughters or any other relatives. But they are alone enough to maintain daily necessities by their own. Adversely, they try to contribute to their sons' or daughters' families, if needed. Some of the participants, who live alone, have taken responsibility of their nephews or grandsons or daughters. They maintain all responsibilities of the children by their own cost. These contributions result in obeying their opinion and decision in the families of their sons or respective ones.

Some of the participants even can contribute to their society. They subscribe in mosque or temple and any other social events. They are invited there. When they had nothing, everybody avoided them. To Banechha's (a participant of Takimari village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur) word, "Once everybody got afraid of me as if I had sought for help. Now all of my villagers invite me to any occasion."

Helping Herself

"When I was reading in class V, my father got me married. I went to my husband's house. He claimed dowry. But my father failed since he did not have capacity. My husband along with his mother and sisters tortured me and did not give foods. I became sick. I was then sent to my parent's home. Finally I was made divorced after six months of my marriage," recalls Suryavan Akter (20), a victim of early marriage and divorce at her early boyhood. She now lives her parents' home in Uttar Gilabari, Islampur, Jamalpur.

With sickness, Suryavan could not work. Her father was old and a TB patient. Her mother worked in others' houses. She had a younger brother and a sister. Her parents did not feed them well. "But now I rear up my parents, brother and sister. I am no more a burden of anybody rather I have to take care of my dependants," expresses Suryavan.

To overcome the situation, Suryavan tried to do something. She went to US for loan. US assessed her distress as well as capacity and interest of Suryavan and gave her a loan of 1,000 taka. She started buying paddy and husking rice to sell. She made a good



profit. After one year she made another loan of 2,000 taka, then 3,000 for 5 times. Last year she drew a loan of 3,000 taka. She invested the money in rice business. In a week, she processes 4-5 mands rice and yields 800-900 taka. Now she has a capital of 12,000 taka. With the profit she maintains her parent's family. She has mended her parent's house, bought furniture and clothes for her parents and siblings. She sends her siblings to school and bears all cost.

Two months back, she has been taken in general microfinance group of US observing her capacity. She dreams for making a plot of land, where she would make a house. She wants to make a shop at bazaar. She also dreams for buying a rice husking machine.

Suryavan has got married again 4 months back. Her new husband is also a businessman. He lives in Islampur. Suryavan does not want to go to her husband's house. She doubts she would lose her capital, if gone. She rather wants to run her business at her parent's home.

"Amar babsa chhaira ami kothao jamu na. swamir bario na. (I will go nowhere leaving my business, even to my husband's home). Now everybody honours me," says Suryavan. Suryavan can now decide upon her everything with confidence.

The participants who have husbands are greatly helping them in maintaining minimum necessities. Haliman (80), a participant of Mollapara village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur has her husband of around 100 years old who cannot even move. They have two sons, who do not look after them. Haliman cultivates vegetables with the loan taken from US. With the productions at her plot, she can easily maintain her family without being dependent on others. Rahela Begum (52), another participant of Gilabari village, Islampur, Jamalpur makes different types of pickles and sells in villages. She has also husband but is not likely to earn. She runs the family in her own way.

All the participants are self-dependent. They need not to seek help of others. But this is a long way to go to see them empowered in society i.e. they will be included in the decision-making process. The hardcore poor participants are dealt with individually, rather than in groups. It is, therefore, not possible to even find them taking collective decision, which could have been the alternative source of empowerment in society.

Gender role promoted

This was out of imagination to the people that a woman sits at her shop, or sells commodities in villages, or supplies cow-dung fuels and other things to the restaurants or shops at bazaars. But these have been the common scenario in the areas. With the loan taken from US, the hardcore poor women initiated business. They easily can run their shops, trades, businesses, buying and supplies of products. It has been easily taken by the community that the women can also initiate and run the income generating activities. The males at the families of the participants help the women in doing their activities.

Power relations impacted

The complex patron-client type of power relation is not found today in the working villages. The dependence on agricultural

labour by the poor and marginal people has decreased due to the single-seasoned cropping systems. Due to the riverbank erosion, landlessness increases to a great



Watch Committee for Worst-ignored Communities

“We do advocacy for the poorest of the poor people of our village. We give advice to the unemployed people. We take serious patients to hospital. We do mediation to resolve disputes. We do work to stop early marriage, dowry, violence against women, etc. We give advice to people to get birth registration, marriage registration, voter registration, etc,” states at a stretch Samiul Haque, an UP member and the president of the Takimari Watch Committee in Chikajani union, Dewanganj, Jamalpur. The Committee was formed in 2003 as a part of the project implementation strategy of US.

The Committee helps US find out the hardcore poor people, who face a lot of distress and become unlikely to manage their daily bread at any means. The Committee performs different duties. It does advocacy for the distressed men and women so that they can get VGF, VGD cards from the Union Parishad. “We cannot help the distressed men and women directly since we have less financial capacity, rather we suggest them how to get opportunities and supports from the UP, NGOs and other sources. We make linkages with respective service-providers. We negotiate with the UP, NGOs and others so that they can find out the most vulnerable and hardcore poor people and include them in their list of supports,” expresses Shamsul Haque, a member of the Committee.

extent. The trend of losing huge lands by the big owners and becoming landless is the common scenario in the area. The land owners or single-seasoned farmers fail to carry on giving works to the labourers, therefore, the labourers seek for works in other areas. Many of them tend to migrate to other places. The members of self-help groups under the entire Project are empowered to a remarkable extent since they have the capacity to bargain collectively. They also have capacity to take huge loans from the group funds and can invest or utilize in their own way.

The hardcore poor's dependence on the riches and elites also has lessened, although many of them need to seek help of others during their crisis moments. The participants who could not do well in their trades due to different causes like floods, load of dependency, etc, have to seek relief during floods. UP chairmen and members, village elites take the opportunities then. They practice their power in selecting the hardcore poor for distributing VGD and VGF cards, food for work and other opportunities from the government. This is to mention that the community elites have been sensitized towards assisting the hardcore poor in different ways. Under the Programme, the working unions have several watch committees consisting of the elites. The committees help US selecting the hardcore poor. They give advice to the participants, help in market promotion of their products and also try to extract the opportunities for UPs and other organizations for the hardcore poor.

Village market promoted

The small traders among the participants take goods at the doorsteps of the villagers. People can purchase their daily necessities at their home. The shopkeepers among the participants, who are running shops, are helping the villagers through availing all necessities at their vicinity. The women and children in communities are getting sewing services at their nearest home from the participants, who have sewing machines.

Some participants are helping the restaurants at local bazaars through supplying cow-dung fuels. The consumers at villages are getting local products, which are made by the hardcore poor participants at their homes. The home-made products like *chira*, *muri*, pickle, cake, rice, etc that the participants make are more valued in terms of quality than those of made in small factories or mills. The local consumers have accepted the products. It has been helping the process of making balances between demands and supplies, which has been being created and met as well in village markets.

Establishing social stability helped

The income generating options have given the hardcore poor stability and security to foods to some extent. They are now self-dependent. They are no more burden to their family or society. They are engaged in their own affairs. They are helping others through making availability of the daily necessities at the vicinity of the villagers. Following them, other hardcore poor are encouraged. They also seek for loan to initiate such trades. In a word, they are setting examples for others.

Claiming rights started

The hardcore poor participants now know to some extent that they have entitlements on government services. The participants informed that they were the most vulnerable people in the areas. They deserved VGF, VGD cards and other supports from government. But they were deprived. Now most of them have been able to help themselves fully. Nevertheless, many of them fall in trouble during disasters. They understand that disasters can make them destitute and compelled to spend the money that they use in small trade. Most of them, who have not yet been capacitated enough, have understood that external support is needed to cope with the disasters, because it can save their capital. Most of them, who fall in trouble mostly during the situation, inform the Watch Committee and members of UPs earlier to find their attention.

Moreover, they have learned to go to the

hospitals for free treatment, animal husbandry offices for treatment of their cattle, hens and ducks. Most of them live on place of others or roads, railways, embankments, khaslands etc. If they find disturbance and threat, they go to the UP chairmen and members and even to the UNOs to save their dwellings.

Sustainability of the impacts

Sustainability of impacts of anything depends on the intensity and effectiveness of the initiative. A long-term initiative and intensive follow-up can create enormous impacts. The impacts of the initiative can be expected sustainable, if there are given effective inputs according to the lessons learnt during the intervention. If the intervention period fails to create massive changes at the level of knowledge, attitudes and practices of the target people, sustainability will not come in the long run. Although it has been claimed above that a lot of changes have been made in the lives and livelihoods of the target hardcore poor, this is yet long way to reach the claim that the impacts will sustain in the long run.

Above all, it can be stated that the changes in the lives and livelihoods may face disruption due to the trend of frequent floods in the areas, old age, lack of dynamism, continuous supports, etc. The old aged widowed participants may pass their lives based on the business until they are able to carry on their earning initiatives. But their position is not yet supportive to feed them up to their death. Furthermore, many of them can run their business for some months as they run seasonal business like *vapapitha*, *chira*, *muri*, etc. *Vapapitha* business is run only in winter season. *Chira* and *muri* businesses can be run in rice harvesting period. They cannot switch over other businesses due to lack of expertise and sometimes money. Most of the participants cannot continue their business during rainy season. Flood situation is the great hindrance to it, when they are

compelled to stay at home. Moreover, many of them need to spend the capital during this situation. They have risk and vulnerability to disasters but could not yet make the capacity to take strong coping strategies and make proper preparation.

On the other hand, the participants, who have made a good capital can invest in different ways and have energy and dynamism, have been capable to carry on their initiatives. Of them, who have set up shops and/or have different types of efforts considering the seasonality will sustain for a long term. Some of them have learned the necessity of preparedness. They take preparation to cope with floods. Many of the participants yet believe that they will be given external supports during disasters. So they do not still think to have preparedness before disasters. If they find no external supports during disasters, they are compelled to spend the money that they use as capital. So, sustainability is yet far reaching to them. Moreover, this area is flood-prone. Every year the survivors of floods get relief and rehabilitation supports from different agencies. The poor people have the way of thinking to get supports during all disaster situations. This attitude is also a great hindrance to the sustainability of the impacts.

But what the participants achieved in their mind-set throughout the Programme is remarkable. They were in a vulnerable situation. Many of them had nobody to depend on even in their old age. Or they were seriously neglected. Many of them started begging. Being supported by the Programme, begging among the participants has stopped. Many of the women participants worked in others' houses as maid servant with a very low wage. They started doing small trades instead of that. This change has greatly impacted others along with the participants. They tried to have loans to initiate small trades. The trends of depending on self, doing something instead of depending on others, making small trades based on own expertise, the small



Bowling out Begging

“Allar kachhe chai ami jan ar thoila hatot na nei (May Allah help me to avoid begging forever),” prays Jamila Bewa (55), a widowed woman of Kazlapara village, Dewanganj, Jamalpur recalling her past. Her husband passed away 15 years ago. She has four sons. All are married and no one looks after her. She repents, “I reared up my children working as maid servant after their father had passed away. They all are now grown up men. They earn but do not take care of me. Finding no other way I started begging.”

Jamila lives in a cluster village made on khaslands. Government made the village allocating lands to the landless people, who were the survivors of river erosion. Like other landless people, her husband got a plot of land in the village. Being neglected by her sons, Jamila started begging. But it went against her personality. She felt ashamed and guilty in begging. She found a micro-credit group in her village. She wanted to be a member of the group. But no member agreed to include her thinking of her incapability to repay the loan. One of her relatives sent her to US. She expressed her will. In 2006, US gave her a loan of 1,000 taka and training on how to start and run a small business, how to maintain accounts, how to make profit, etc. She started vending shutki (dried fish) along with onion, chilly, nuts, betel leaves, etc in the nearby villages.

“I started making profit. I bought a goat, some chicks and hens. I could easily give the installment as well as money for savings. With the profit I started feeding myself for three times a day that was out of imagination in the previous days,” Jamila states. But during the last two floods in 2007, Jamila could not go for buying or vending goods in the villages. All villages went under flood water. Finding no other coping strategies she spent total money that she had. She fell in a crisis that required much effort to overcome. In 2007, she made a loan of 2,000 taka from US and started her business again. She can make a profit of 50-60 taka a day. “I am very well now. I can earn and eat 3 times a day. I have no problems now. Ami ar bhikkhar thoila hatot niba nai (I will not take the bag of begging again at my hand),” expresses Jamila.

trades in villages, etc will sustain in the long run, because people have found those make lives easier.

Challenges and threats

The programme has viewed some challenges and threats throughout the intervention period. These can be viewed also as the challenges and threats to addressing hardcore poverty in Bangladesh. Those are as follows:

- The hardcore poor are mostly dependent on others. They usually work for others as wage labourers. As most of them are women, old aged or persons with disability, the work-providers find them working hard but with low wages. If they are disengaged from works of others through making supports for initiating small trades, the land-owners or work-providers may retard the initiative. Most of the hardcore poor live on the land of others. They might face the threat of eviction from their houses. If they fail in their business and seek for works again, they might be refused.
- The selected hardcore poor, who could not be covered under the Programme, had migrated to other places. The participants, who had been dropped out, most of them, had also migrated to other places. Out migration is the normal trend in the areas, where riverbank erosion is the common phenomena. There is a great challenge for the people to make them stable, if they find difficult to make good profit to earn their bread through the small trades or anything made on the small supports.
- The hardcore poor especially the widowed women, old aged, do not have much skills or long-term vision for their development. They just tend to manage their daily food. They do not try to upscale their situation.
- The poor people especially the hardcore ones, who frequently get

Lessons Learnt

The Study has extracted some lessons that can be utilized for further intervention in addressing the hardcore poor:

- *Training and motivation are the keys to forwarding the participants towards success. A single type of training is not sufficient to bring about changes in their knowledge, attitude and practices.*
- *Trainings facilitated by the successful participants can easily give clear insights to others as well as ways out of overcoming obstacles and making the initiative successful. It shows them an instance of success and influences to a great extent.*
- *Some small trades require more capital. The hardcore poor, who can create clear vision and capacities, can make good use of the capital. If they are provided with more loans when they need, they would put together more success.*
- *The hardcore poor lack self-confidence that should be aroused first. Then they would make quality products. At the initial stage, they are not confident enough to face hazards in marketing their products.*
- *Since the hardcore poor lack many necessary things, they need more attention. Staff from other programmes who feel it of their extra duty cannot make difference in addressing the hardcore poor properly.*
- *In the flood-prone Jamalpur area, preparedness is necessary to cope with disasters. In flood situation and rainy season, the participants cannot run their trades. They are very often compelled to spend the capital.*
- *Lack of diversification of the products or businesses on the basis of seasonality analysis leads to getting a business or trade unsustainable.*
- *Dealing with the hardcore poor from different scattered areas kills a lot of time. It hampers close monitoring, exchange of ideas, views and experiences of other participants.*
- *The hardcore poor can make good use of interest-free loan. They do not get defaulted, if they are let enjoy flexibility in giving installment.*
- *Community leaders like UP chairmen-members, teacher, religious leaders, village doctor and so on can help the process, if they are sensitized and involved in selecting the hardcore poor of their community, monitoring their activities and making the participants active in their initiatives. Framing village committee like Watch Committee is helpful in this regard.*

survivors of natural disasters, learn to think that they might be given supports from external sources. Yet most of the participants, who have been even able to manage their regular bread, have expectations of free external supports.

- The areas, where the intervening factors of poverty are more, people lack purchase capacity. The trades that are likely to meet up the daily necessities of the people can only be run. It is difficult to create markets of new products in the areas.
- At the very outset, the trades run by the women were not taken simply by the local elites. They also tried to oppose the new trend of going to bazaar by the women to trade or purchase their products.
- Marketing of products by the hardcore poor faces difficulties. If they want to sell their products at local bazaar, they will encounter competitiveness. If their products are not much quality to other existing ones, they will fail to compete in the market. On the other hand, if they sell in cheaper price, they may face threats of the big and powerful shopkeepers in the market. Within the situation, they are compelled to sell their products in villages or from their homes.
- Based on the capacity, the hardcore poor are normally provided with small supports. With the supports, a few of them can make good profit to change their situation remarkably. Since they do not have previous support, they need to fill up all necessities like houses, beds, tube-wells etc and they need to spend all the profits that they can make. This trend makes it difficult to change their situation to a remarkable degree.
- If the hardcore poor especially of the female-headed families, who have dependants also face difficulties. Giving dowry to the groom at marriage is still prevailing in the villages. Other than bearing the cost at marriage ceremony, a mother is made compelled to give thousands of money to the grooms as

dowry. It makes the female-headed hardcore participants losing their capitals.

- If the hardcore poor participants do not have the capacity to store foods to cope with natural calamities like floods, there is a great possibility to lose the capital.
- With the small supports, the participants cannot diversify their products, therefore, they cannot run their initiative in all seasons. It leads them towards depending on the capital for the rest of the year and finally towards losing their capital.

Recommendations

According to the findings of the study, there is a need to look into the issue of addressing hardcore poverty with serious attention. Since they face the most vulnerable situation in their lives and find no assistance from others even from their relatives, they should be taken to the forth and their vulnerable situation should be prioritized in addressing human rights and triggering development process. In accelerating the process, the following recommendations can guide the planners and implementers to a great extent:

- Several trainings need to be imparted to build up their capacities in trading and profit-making. They can be encouraged enough, if they are introduced with the challenges, obstacles as well as opportunities and potentials during training. Regular motivation can help them to be in the right track.
- Some small trades require more capital. The hardcore poor, who can create clear vision and capacities, can make good use of the capital. The Programme does not give loan again unless the previous one is repaid. Some participants need capital between the times but face crisis. If they are provided with more loans, they would put together more success.
- The hardcore poor lack self-confidence that should be aroused first. Then they would make quality products. At the initial stage, they are not confident enough to face hazards in marketing their products. They should be helped in this

regard. They can be linked with the wholesalers so that they can purchase goods with more reasonable price and also supply their products with good profit.

- Since the hardcore poor lack many necessary things, they need more attention. They should be nourished intensively engaging separate staff.
- In the flood-prone Jamalpur area, preparedness is necessary to cope with disasters. In flood situation and rainy season, the participants cannot run their trades. They are very often compelled to spend the capital. In order to sustain the capital, their awareness on preparedness and coping mechanism must be increased.
- To address the problem of seasonality, a business or trade can be initiated that is likely to be run round the year. Diversification of products or businesses can be another solution to it.
- The small traders should be made closely oriented to the techniques of profit-making and extension of trades and markets through exchange visit, experimentation, field-based training, etc.
- The hardcore poor participants can be dealt with in groups. If they have spaces to sit together weekly, they would have scope of exchanging views, experiences, problems, obstacles, successes, potential trades, etc. This might help them think over anything collectively. It would certainly help them empower themselves in society.
- If the hardcore poor are selected and made a group within a particular cluster, the dealing would be easier and effective as well. If the issue is addressed in small scale, it would make more positive and concrete results.
- LGIs play key role in rural areas. Hardcore poor people can get different services and supports from LGIs. If they are supported with VGD, VGF cards and other supports, they could utilize the loan more effectively. But they are not empowered enough in community to get attention of LGIs. A linkage between

hardcore poor and LGIs should be created. The Programme should facilitate it.

- The hardcore poor lack awareness on their rights, way of making services available, safe water, sanitation, hygiene, health, education and other social issues. They should be made aware through awareness programme. Awareness messages can easily be imparted, if they are made sit together in groups.
- Since they run trades or businesses, they have to keep record, count prices and make the customers clear about their purchase and dues. To enhance their capacity, they can be made literate through *Reflect*.
- The hardcore poor do not have own places to live. Sometimes they are compelled to migrate. Some of them live on the government allocated *khasland*. If all of them are provided with *khasland* at least for living, forced migration would not happen. It might help continue their trades and addressing hardcore poverty.
- Regular monitoring, supervision and evaluation need to be carried out to evaluate the status of trades as well as accelerate the participants.
- Advocacy programme can be initiated to sensitize government and NGOs to include hardcore poor in their programme and address hardcore poverty through flexible and interest-free loan; not aid or relief.
- Interest-free loan can help them get rid of extreme poverty. Traditional micro-credit programme that the large NGOs follow is not applicable to address the section of population. Because it is not possible for them to make savings first to show their capacity. If they are not given time until they make profit, it is not possible for them to give installment. Furthermore, if the loans are not found interest-free and the installment flexible, no positive result will come out.
- The hardcore poor are not aware of their own potentials. These should be explored and utilized accordingly. Their existing potentials, expertise and experience can

be utilized in the early hours and with effectiveness.

- It should be the first duty of the NGOs to address the poorest of the poor i.e. the hardcore poor. But they are avoided absolutely. The approach of providing interest-free loan to the hardcore poor with flexibility and trade promotion through them has been a good example to address hardcore poverty in an alternative way.

Conclusion

Most of the micro-credit providing NGOs find it difficult to address extreme poverty i.e. the hardcore poor. Many of them tried but had been taken away finding the hardcore poor unlikely to repay the installment. This is indeed a great challenge to address the poorest. But they deserve the supports more since they find nobody to get help. The NGOs or any other development agencies claim to be dedicated to development of the poor and marginal people. If the hardcore poor are excluded taking into account their lack of capacity to repay the loan promptly, the meaning of being beside the poor and marginal people goes obviously to great deviation.

The endeavor of US in addressing the hardcore poor can rightly place an alternative model for others. It designed some steps to follow in the implementation process. The study reveals that the steps were not followed accordingly. It was a separate component but dealt without engaging any particular staff. The staff of other components dealt the participants. The participants were not dealt in groups or motivated up to the mark. Given the condition, this is not yet enough to claim that the Programme has created huge impacts on society, economy, power relations, gender relation, employment, empowerment and many other spheres of development.

Prior to the limitations seen in the implementation process, it should be greatly

considered that the target people were the poorest of the poor. They were at the bottom of the poverty line. The areas where riverbank erosion, frequent floods, lack of agricultural production and scope of works, etc are the common phenomena, it is tough to change the lives and livelihoods of the people, especially who have to encounter the phenomena frequently. There are a lot of intervening factors that engulf them and take into a vicious circle of extreme poverty.

Considering all these obstacles and challenges, the Programme can be treated as the starting point of addressing the hardcore poverty. The Programme has yielded some results, which can be, of course, encouraging and influencing to others. This can draw attention towards the hardcore poor, who are basically deprived of all development initiatives taken by the government and NGOs. But it would be a great challenge for the micro-credit providing agencies, if they want to address the hardcore poor as like as they do for their regular participants. US has been successful on some cases as it deals the participants within an option of giving the loan without interest and allowing them the flexibility in repayment. This should be followed in addressing the hardcore poor.

In Bangladesh, hardcore poverty is increasing. Natural calamities like floods, cyclone, riverbank erosion and tornado are the old regular phenomena. Sea level rise, salinity intrusion, water-logging due to the climate change have been started to induce in the environment of Bangladesh. It is predicted that Bangladesh will face more severity and intensity of natural calamities in future. The poor and marginal people, especially of the disaster-prone areas will be the severe victims. If they are not endowed with coping capacities and preparedness, it will be a great challenge to them to survive.

It is impossible to come out of hardcore poverty situation unless external supports are made available. This is also true that external supports in an unplanned way will not help people sustain the results. Self-dependence

and coping capacity of the hardcore poor must be strengthened. Interest-free loans, flexible repayment, training, motivation, small trade and local market promotion can be appropriate solution to it. In a nutshell, hardcore poor must be included in all development programmes. Otherwise, the drive against poverty will never be able to

achieve its lofty goals. Government, NGOs, donors and other development actors must prepare well-timed strategies to address the hardcore poverty in different manners. A commitment must be made from all corners to include them in the entire development process.

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2 *Polli Mela*

An effective extension methodology for disseminating messages on prevention of domestic violence

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Preamble

A *Polli Mela* (village fair) is an effective and interactive extension methodology for disseminating information and sharing experiences on prevention of domestic violence. *Polli Mela* on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which has been organized three times in Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district since 2006, has proved it. It has proved its acceptance to the community people of that area. Effectiveness of this fair in creating mass awareness and sensitization of stakeholders has encouraged us to articulate it as a learning document to share with wider audience for its extension.

This learning document is produced through a writeshop, which was organized by Shared Learning Unit of Impact Assessment & Shared Learning Department in cooperation with Stop Violence against Women (SVAW) Theme of ActionAid Bangladesh during 18-19 February 2009 at Nasreen Milonayatan of ActionAid Bangladesh. The writeshop was participated by a team who were the part of organizing *Polli Mela*. A table of content indicating some questions was set before the participants. They answered the questions. Following the answers, this document is prepared. The questions were answered in *Bangla*. This document is presented here as a translated, compiled and edited form.

Introduction

Women of Utholi union in Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district eagerly wait for the days that come with their great event of *Paribarik Nirjatanbirodhi Polli Mela* (Village Fair on Prevention of Domestic Violence). They sense of it and make plan how they would participate, what they would speak about and which urge they would place for establishing a violence-free society. They count down the days for the fair. If truth be told *Polli Mela* has made them wait since they have found for the last three years that every year it comes to them as a special festival. Moreover, it seems to them a breathing space where they can speak out their joys and sorrows as well as place their ideas and dreams.

In rural Bangladesh, women do not have space for gathering with so many people. Village fair as a traditional part of our culture comes to the people in different forms. But it hardly waves the women. It clearly excludes them from any kind of participation. In rural areas, fairs are mostly organized for and by the men, where women hardly get allowed to participate. Women are traditionally kept within a visible or invisible boundary. They hardly get the opportunity to cross it. Existing social structure does not permit them. But the *Polli Mela* appears to them as a spacious space, which is absolutely a fair of them, for them and tremendously by them. Women are expected to participate in it as a mainstream part. They discover themselves one of the organizers of the fair. They install stalls by their own to exhibit their ideas and products, show their creativity and speak about their domain that they dream for.

Fairs are inseparable part of the traditional culture of the people of Bangladesh. Some fairs are organized because of their traditional values and social importance whereas others are simply for fun and amusement. The customary fairs in Bangladesh are usually organized annually for periods of three to five days and sometimes for up to an entire month. Different social values, religious spirit and other ideological factors are involved with some particular fairs.

Domestic violence in Chuadanga

It is said that Chuadanga is one of the zones in Bangladesh where violence against women is a common phenomenon. Domestic violence like assault and battery is widespread in every family of the areas. But people do not treat those as violence. Even the survivors of domestic violence especially the women forbear these without any complaint. The women even thought that it is husbands' right to beat their wives when the wives make mistakes. It states that violence against women is an in-built or acceptable phenomenon in the social structure of the areas. Moreover, there are a lot of intervening factors found in the areas which trigger the violence against women. In Chuadanga, prevalence of domestic violence comes out in different temperaments.

Wife battering is a very common phenomenon of domestic violence against

Chuadanga, a district of Khulna division situated in the north-western part of Bangladesh with an area of 1157.42 sq km, is bounded by Kushtia district on the north-east, Meherpur district on the north-west, Jhenaidah district on the south and south-east, Nadia district of West Bengal of India on the south-west. Chuadanga region is within the Gangetic delta. Chuadanga was turned into a district in 1984. The district consists of 4 municipalities, 36 wards, 93 mahallas, 4 upazilas, 31 union parishads, 421 mouzas and 514 villages. The upazilas are Chuadanga sadar, Alamdanga, Damurhuda, Darshana and Jibannagar.

women in the areas. But irony is that wife beating or repression on women is not yet recognized as a violence or offence. In the areas, it happens mostly on dowry claiming. If bride's father fails to pay dowry, tortures take place on wives. It even leads to killing. Husbands also commit violence against their wives if wives' appearance is not seen well, if foods are not prepared in time or cooked badly that makes less taste. Moreover, wives are got blamed if they are found talking with

neighbors. Husbands sometimes get biased by others and beat wives consequently. In Chuadanga, husbands commit violence against their wives watching cheesy movies or having drugs.

Repression on old father and mother-in-law by daughter-in-law also takes place in this area. It occurs when fathers and mothers-in-law lose their contributive capacity and thereby lose their authority at their very old age. At this stage, daughters-in-law in this area tend to show negligence on them in different ways.

Domination towards daughter-in-law is another form of violence against women. It happens from complexity and conflicts, which take place in the families after the new brides come as a part of the family. The brides are expected that they would perform all out duties placed on them according to the directions of mother-in-law, husband, father-in-law and other superiors. If it is violated, mothers-in-law start treating in a way that turns into violence. It also happens, if dowry is kept unpaid. It leads to severe harassment on the brides. They are also scolded if they are found gossiping with neighbours. It is accused that talking with neighbours is a violation of *pardah*.⁸

Repression on bride by sister-in-law also takes place in this area. Husbands' sisters commit this violence towards their sister-in-law. To them, brides are treated as outsiders. The sisters-in-law unmindfully think that their brothers' love and attention is snatched after appearance of their *vabis* (sister-in-law). They also behave badly with *vabis* paying heed to neighbours or laying mere excuse.

These types of violence sometimes turn into severe injury and cause negative impacts on women and children and eventually result in breaking peace and harmony in family and society. But the people of this area are not

A Helpless Hasina

Hasina (28), a housewife of Monoharpur village of Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district was got married 12 years ago. After 1 year of her marriage, her husband Munsur Ali started claiming dowry from her father. To get her father's attention, he used to beat her. She has brought up 3 children. Before them, Munsur frequently scolded and beat her if found any fault and excuse. Community leaders and their neighbours sometimes tried to consult with him. He straight refused them and noticed that this is a matter of their family. Others should not interfere into it. The neighbours were annoyed to see the oppressions against Hasina but did not talk about anything more. Hasina used to forbear all oppressions expressing no complaints with others. On 21 October 2005, Hasina was cooking. A goat was damaging their vegetables. Noticing it, Munsur got raged with Hasina and started beating her severely. He said, "Opoya, Olokshmi, toke diye songsar hobe na (Unlucky, destroyer, you are not eligible to be in my family." Then she was sent to her parents' home. The neighbours observed all these but could not do anything thinking it a matter of their personal life. Her father and mothers-in-law also loved her. But they could not even do anything for her.

still aware that these are undoubtedly violence against women. Therefore, great silence prevails in the society of this area, even if there occurs severe attack and assault and thereby severe injury. Silence sometimes breaks in case of death of survivors happens as a result of violence.

How Polli Mela came

It first came from BRAVE circles. Circle participants first gave an idea on it. They raised a demand for a gathering for the participants of 4 circles, which they proposed to be organized after every 3 months. Their plan was to share the activities of circles

⁸ Literally it is the veil that the Muslim women wear for protecting themselves from the sights of males outside of their families. By the fundamentalists, it is also suggested to the Muslim women to be inside of home for the same.

among all circles of their areas. Following their ideas, a gathering was made in 2006 where 80 participants of 4 circles gathered together and exchanged their experiences. They got encouragement from the gathering and thought for its enlargement. They then discussed with *Lokomorcha*,⁹ *Lokokendra*¹⁰ and other influential persons about their ideas. Through discussion, they found the concept of *Polli Mela*. They envisioned that they would organize such a fair, from where the messages on domestic violence would be disseminated through discussion, debate, drama, folk-song and other possible mediums. They shared their ideas with BRAVE Programme. The Programme felt it interesting and innovative and agreed on supporting it. A discussion was held with *Lokomorcha* and Utholi UP¹¹ on the feasibility and way of implementation of the fair. *Lokomorcha* and the UP expressed their interest and assured their cooperation to be extended to the fair. Later on, it became a joint initiative of BRAVE circles, Utholi UP and *Lokomorcha*. These three institutions started organizing the fair from 2006 with support from BRAVE Programme. Through a consensus, the organizers gave the name of fair- *Paribarik Nirjatanbirodhi Polli Mela* (Village Fair on Prevention of Domestic Violence).

Goal & objectives of *Polli Mela*

The goal of the fair was to create mass awareness on domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. The objectives of the fair were:

- Making people aware on the forms and causes of domestic violence;
- Making people aware that domestic violence is also a criminal offence;
- Encouraging women in protesting domestic violence breaking their silence;
- Sensitizing relevant institutions and stakeholders towards protesting domestic violence and providing supports to the survivors through proper judgment.

Process of organizing *Polli Mela*

In the last three years i.e. in 2006, 2007 and 2008, SVAW Network (*Lokomorcha*), Utholi Union Parishad and BRAVE Circles jointly organized the fair. ActionAid Bangladesh supported to organizing this fair through DA 26 (ActionAid Bangladesh innovated the BRAVE model, which has been being implemented in this area). Before organizing the fair, a meeting was held with the local

BRAVE (Breaking the Silence of Violence) is a long-term (DA) programme of WAVE Foundation implemented in Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district with support from ActionAid Bangladesh since 2006. It aims at addressing the domestic violence through creating mass awareness, standing beside the survivors through providing psycho-social, legal and rehabilitation support and sensitizing the stakeholders towards protesting domestic violence against women. Currently it is implemented in Utholi union at its 8 villages with 32 circles, 6 self-help groups and 3 Lokokendras. A total of 640 participants have been working in the community groups with a target to stop violence against women. Alongside, there are Nari Nirjatan Protirodh Committee (Committee for Prevention of Violence against Women) at UP and SVAW Networks (Lokomorcha) at upazila and district levels, where the civil society groups are involved in eliminating all forms of violence against women. In general BRAVE carries out its activities through three types of people's organizations- BRAVE Circle, SVAW Network (Lokomorcha) and Lokokendra.

⁹ This is a network based at upazila and district level. Influential persons at upazila and district levels are the members of the network. It has strong linkages with the BRAVE circles members. They help the survivors of violence against women get fair judgment and compensation.

¹⁰ This is formed comprised with a number of Reflect circles after phasing out of two years of activities in circles. These circles are basically group of community people operated through Reflect approach.

¹¹ UP i.e. the Union Parishad is the lowest tier of local government system in Bangladesh. It comprises with a chairman, 9 members and 3 women members.

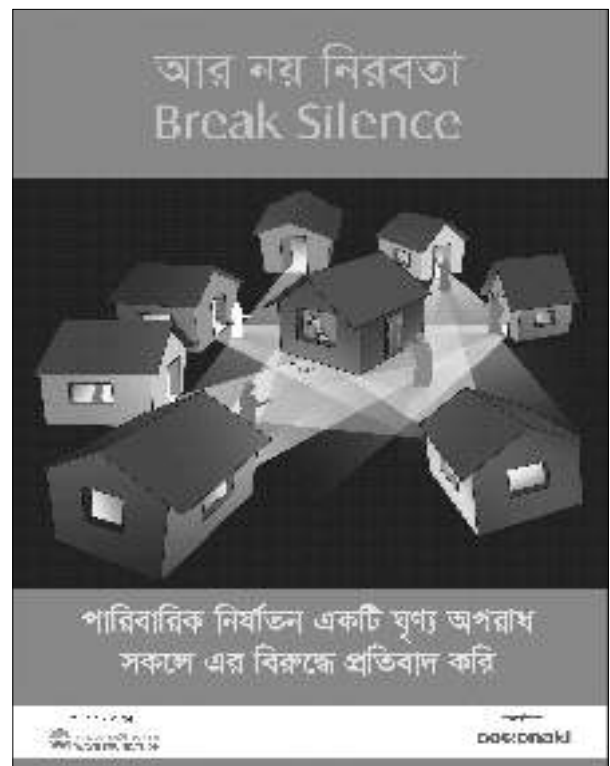


A display in the inauguration session of Polli Mela

elites, member and chairmen of UPs, members of *Lokomorcha* and BRAVE circle members. A 51-member committee was formed, which was termed as fair implementation committee. Chairman of Utholi UP convened the committee. He also convened the 7-member executive committee. A 33-member volunteers and field operation committee was also formed, which was convened by a member of *Lokomorcha*. The committees involved Utholi UP, *Lokomorcha*, BRAVE Circle Champions, WAVE Foundation, *Imam*,¹² *Kazi*,¹³ political leaders, teachers, retired government officials and other volunteers in the entire implementation process of the fair.

As a co-organizer, Utholi UP performed special role in organizing and implementing the fair. The chairman looked after everything in the fair from beginning to last through the members of his UP and *Lokomorcha*. He also ensured the attendance of guests of the fair. He also ensured security supports to the fair through the village police (*chowkider* and *dafader*).

Polli Mela normally continues for 4 days. Everyday it starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 10:00 p.m. Before starting the fair, a massive announcement is carried out for its publicity,



A poster of Polli Mela

¹² Religious leaders of Muslims, who perform religious customs of marriage. One's marriage is accepted to society if it is done properly by them.

¹³ Marriage registrar appointed by the government.

which is done in diverse ways like-discussion in BRAVE circles, communication with stakeholders, letter, postering, miking, leaflet distribution, communication with school and college teachers and media.

The stakeholders involved

Alongside the community people, *Polli Mela* always targets the stakeholders who are in place to implement government policies at different tiers of government. It also targets the influential persons in community and the areas who are playing their motivating role through their works. It aims at sensitizing the stakeholders and influential persons towards taking side against domestic or all forms of violence against women in the areas. In the last three *Polli Melas*, different stakeholders were invited to the programmes of the fair, which included government officials,



Deputy Commissioner of Chuadanga inaugurates Polli Mela

people's representatives, political leaders, teachers and journalists. Among them, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Chuadanga, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO¹⁴) of Jibannagar upazila, Officer-in-charge (OC) of Jibannagar police station, Jibannagar Upazila Chairman and Vice-chairman were invited to the fair as chief and special guests. Providing information on the activities of BRAVE as well as its goal, objectives and implementation process was the main objective of inviting them to the fair. Seeking

their cooperation in implementing the activities and uncovering them as messengers of stopping violence against women was another purpose of it.

Polli Mela also tries to ensure the participation of some other stakeholders who can directly or indirectly contribute to the process of stopping domestic or all forms of violence against women in their areas. They are BRAVE circle champions, school and college teachers, local journalists, *Imam, Kazi*, match-makers, community leaders like *Morol/Matbar*, youths, government officials, NGO/development activists, cultural activists and so on.

Polli Mela also ensures the participation of the audience from the community. The audience include the women of different ages (adult, adolescents and children), men of all ages including farmers to businessmen. It also involves the students in its different programmes. They are encouraged to participate in the discussion and debate. They are expected that they are more likely to pick the messages and can rightly disseminate those in their families and peer groups. They are also thought that they would take leadership in communities and be placed in decision making positions when they would utilize the knowledge and attitudes attained from the fair.

In the last three years, participation of women, adolescents and children in the fair was remarkable. There were separate programmes for the adolescents. They participated in the programmes very spontaneously. Women also participated in the discussions and shared their experiences and opinions. In the last fairs, there was also a separate space for children, where a variety of toys and sports materials were kept for their amusement. Many couples also came to the fair together and some couples participated in some discussion sessions.

¹⁴ They perform as the chief executive officer of government to look after the administration at upazila level.

The stalls and exhibitions

Like other village fairs, *Polli Mela* on Prevention of Domestic Violence gives people the options of participation through installing stalls. But before the outset, it sets some conditions for the participants who want to install stalls in the fair. Some of those are as follows:

- BRAVE circles must sell those products which are made by their own
- Prohibited products cannot be sold
- Gossiping inside the stall is strongly prohibited
- Significance of the fair as well as the messages must be discussed with the customer or audiences and their reactions also be gathered
- One stall is compulsory from every village
- Food selling stalls must maintain cleanliness and hygiene

Getting agreed on the principles, the interested people in the areas furnish stalls in the fair. In 2008, a total of 57 stalls were set up in the fair. Of them, BRAVE circles set 16 stalls. They exhibited their activities of their circles while selling their products made by their own like cake (*pitha*) and other hand-made food items and handicrafts. There were other stalls, of which 11 stalls sold cosmetics, 2 balloons, 2 toys, 13 food items, 3 tea, 2 coffee, 4 furniture, 1 *chatpoti*, 1 *nagordola* and 1 fast food. A BRAVE information centre and a child corner were also installed in the fair. The stalls from the BRAVE circles exhibited the following products:

- Documents of BRAVE circles
- Publications of *Lokomorcha* and WAVE Foundation on violence against women
- Documents on the fair
- Poster on domestic violence

Polli Mela also tried to give a flavor of the traditional village fairs through installing the stalls where other customary items like food, toys, cosmetics, furniture, bangles, etc were sold.

Messages given through *Polli Mela*

A series of sessions are designed for the fair. Open discussion, debate, drama, folk-song, story-telling, experience sharing, etc are some programmes of *Polli Mela*, through which messages on domestic violence are given. The programmes tend to narrate the following issues:

- Domestic violence and social attitude towards it
- Patriarchal society and domestic violence
- Role of Utholi UP to stop different types of violence against women
- Role of police and local administration to stop violence against women
- Poverty and domestic violence against women
- Role of *Lokomorcha* to stop violence against women.

Through the programmes, *Polli Mela* imparts different messages on domestic violence. Stalls given by BRAVE circles and the



A sticker distributed in *Polli Mela*

programmes like open discussions, debate, folk-songs, drama, story telling and experience sharing depict necessary messages. The messages given through the programmes are on the following issues:

- Forms of domestic violence and causes of it
- Drawbacks of dowry, early marriage and polygamy
- Necessity of addressing women's opinion, liking and disliking
- Necessity of education for women

Polli Mela also sets some slogans alongside the messages. It places an urge before the audience- "NO MORE SILENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE". It also demands- "WE WANT EFFECTIVE LAW TO PROTEST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE". It urges to the audience to practice it in life- "NO MORE COMPROMISE OR CONCILIATION; WE WANT DIGNIFIED RELATIONSHIP". Through all, it tries to impart the following message:

"DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A PUNISHABLE OFFENCE."

Views of the visitors

Polli Mela attracts people significantly. People come to the fair and absorb the messages while they visit the stalls, listen to the slogans and enjoy the programmes. Md. Abdul Hannan, a member of Utholi UP opines, "*Polli Mela* attracts people like cinema. But people together with husband, wife and kids do not go to cinema. But everybody can come to *Polli Mela*. People come to see what happens in the fair. Some of them come to join from their curiosity. But the messages are given in a way that they are bound to receive those." Md. Sharif Uddin, chairman of Utholi UP informs, "We did not get agreed at first when we were given proposal to organize the fair. But now we are very happy to be a part of organizing it. We must continue it in future even by our own fund."

A participant of Khoyerhuda Self-help Group in Utholi union participated in the fair for the

last 3 years. She is asked, "Isn't it a sin to go to the fair?" She replies, "*Bhirer moddhe garit uthli pap hoy na, melat geli pap hoy!* (If it is not a sin to ride on bus in crowd, how it is sin to go to the fair!" She further adds, "This is a very different type of fair. There is much discipline in it."

Md. Mokhlesur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner of Chuadanga attended *Polli Mela* in 2008 as chief guest. In his speech, he opines, "I have seen different types of fair,

The programmes focus on:

- Domestic violence and social attitude towards it
- Patriarchal society and domestic violence
- Role of Utholi UP to stop different types of violence against women
- Role of police and local administration to stop violence against women
- Poverty and domestic violence against women
- Role of Lokomorcha to stop violence against women

but I have never seen such a fair that can be organized on the theme of domestic violence. I am open now to extend my hand of cooperation to address domestic violence, if you require. I must share the experience of it with the people wherever I go."

Abdul Awal, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Jibannagar attended *Polli Mela* in 2008 as special guest. He states, "There is an advertisement of the national daily *Prothom Alo*, which states that *Prothom Alo* stands beside that is good. I must say, in Chuadanga WAVE Foundation stands beside that are good."

Akbar Ali, Chuadanga district correspondent

The messages focus on:

- Forms of domestic violence and causes of it
- Drawbacks of dowry, early marriage and polygamy
- Necessity of addressing women's opinion, liking and disliking
- Necessity of education for women.

of *Dainik Samakal* and *Channel 1* also attended *Polli Mela* in 2008. In his covering news published in the *Dainik Samakal*, he gave title of his reporting- "*Dekhlam, shunlam, bujhlam bouer gale char mara jabe na* (I SAW, HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD- NO SLAP ON WIFE'S CHEEK)."

An adolescent audience opines, "I came to the fair because the environment of it is very nice." A women audience says, "This fair is a nice initiative to stop violence against women. This should be continued."

Outcomes of *Polli Mela*

Polli Mela creates tremendous reactions among the people. People enjoy the fair along with receiving the messages given through the programmes. However, it has marked remarkable changes in communities regarding awareness on domestic violence. There are some outcomes of *Polli Mela*:

Understanding on domestic violence as offence created: Through *Polli Mela*, the audience come to know that the violence occurs at home is also a criminal offence. They also have received ideas on the drawbacks of domestic violence as well as the importance of stopping domestic violence. People both male and female come to understand about the type and nature of domestic violence, which they always tend to ignore.

Awareness on domestic violence among wider audience created: *Polli Mela* has successfully reached wider audience of Chuadanga district. It has clearly crossed the boundary of Utholi union, the working area of BRAVE Programme. Thus, *Polli Mela* has been able to disseminate the messages on domestic violence with wider audience consisting of all age and sex.

Breaking the silence of domestic violence among women started: Women also came to understand that what their husbands did with them including beating, torturing

physically and mentally are domestic violence. They also understood how these are harmful for their health and peace in family and society. They also knew that this should be stopped. Participating women got encouraged to protesting domestic violence as they saw that DC, UNO, Upazila Chairman spoke and took stand against domestic violence.

Institutional sensitization on domestic violence created: Government officials, political leaders and people's representatives who attended *Polli Mela* as guests and participants expressed their solidarity with people who take side against domestic violence. They also assured that they would extend their cooperation in prevention of domestic violence. This has greatly inspired the community groups including BRAVE circles in protesting domestic violence in their communities.

Adolescents and students got sensitized: Adolescents both boys and girls were acquainted with the domestic violence. They pledged to contribute to stopping domestic violence through making awareness in their families. The teachers also gave commitment that they would teach their students about it in classes. These groups are future leaders in communities and institutions. They are expected that they will create a society where domestic violence will never happen.

Responsiveness among people and institution created: *Polli Mela* has created massive responsiveness among the participants and audience. Responsibility to take part in prevention of domestic violence has thereby created among the participants.

UP appeared as partner: Utholi UP has been supporting to *Polli Mela* as co-organizer. It has shaped a new image of the UP. It has taken some initiatives to prevent domestic violence. Before partnership, Utholi UP executed all *salish* according to the will of chairman. The situation has changed. Now-a-days women are given due respect in *salish*. It has introduced open budget where allocation

for women is clearly marked. It has also taken initiative to provide financial supports to the survivors of violence. It has also established sales centre for women.

Missed opportunities

In the last *Polli Mela*, there were some opportunities but were missed. These can be included in *Polli Mela* to be organized in future:

- The couples in the areas could be actively participated through designing separate programme for them. They could have been made aware on domestic violence through a programme where the couples together participate and get messages at the same time.
- The fair could have been organized in different places. But last years, all fairs were organized at the same venue.
- Popular artists including singers and actors or actresses could have been invited for performance. Their presence

Lessons Learnt

- *Information on prevention of domestic violence can be disseminated through Polli Mela so interactively that the audiences take the messages very positively.*
- *Through Polli Mela, information on prevention of domestic violence can be disseminated to wider audience within very short time.*
- *Women can actively participate in this kind of fair, where their ideas on domestic violence can be sharpened and they can be given more ideas on it.*
- *Through this fair, people of all ages, classes and sex can be gathered at a place and make a consensus on prevention of violence against women.*
- *Through this kind of fair, local government institutions as well as administration can be effectively sensitized towards prevention of domestic violence and their cooperation can be successfully bagged.*

and performance could have attracted more audiences as well as given more messages on domestic violence effectively.

- The survivors of violence who got judgment could be presented in some programmes of *Polli Mela*. If they were spoken on their experiences, the audience would get more inspiration, ideas as well as the messages.

Conclusion

Polli Mela on Prevention of Domestic Violence is proved an effective tool to disseminate information among wider audiences within very short time. It helps people be aware of domestic violence and its drawbacks. This is a space where all kinds of people can gather together. This also appears as a place for women where they can gather every year and ventilate their angers and agonies. They can also express their opinions, ideas, and feelings.

Domestic violence and silence to it is a part of our social structure and culture. Demolition of it and breaking silence of it, therefore, requires institutional or societal recognition. Society must recognize that domestic violence is one kind of offence and the perpetrators must be punished. It should be established in society. *Polli Mela* can play here a supportive role. It can effectively create a collective voice or consensus among so many people within very short time that domestic violence is an offence and it is an evil part of our social structure. The voice supported by all creates massive responsiveness among others. This is an event that can gather together all stakeholders- community people to duty bearers. Community leaders and government institutions are sensitized by it. It can also create responsiveness among them.

But there requires intensive journey to address domestic violence. More intensive programmes are also needed. *Polli Mela* can be a supportive initiative to make a ground on it.

3 Partnership with Union Parishad

Making a difference in stopping violence against women

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Preamble

With support from ActionAid, WAVE Foundation has been implementing a Programme on Breaking the Silence of Violence (BRAVE) in two unions of Jibannagr upazila in Chuadanga district since 2006. It works for the prevention of domestic violence as well as other violence against women in partnership with local stakeholders. As a local alliance Utholi Union Parishad (UP) is playing a vital role in the endeavor of preventing domestic violence in its areas. Its pro-activeness proves that partnership with Union Parishad makes a difference in stopping violence against women.

This learning document is produced through a writeshop, which was organized by Shared Learning Unit of Impact Assessment & Shared Learning Department in cooperation with Stop Violence against Women (SVAW) Theme of ActionAid Bangladesh during 18-19 February 2009 at Nasreen Milonayatan of ActionAid Bangladesh. The writeshop was participated by a team who are the integral part and agent of establishing and keeping up the partnership with Utholi Union Parishad. During the writeshop, a table of content indicating some questions was set before the participants. They wrote about the entire process of partnership and its result while answering the questions. This document is prepared following their write-up according to the questions. The questions were answered in Bangla. This document is presented here in a translated, compiled and edited form.

Background of the partnership

Chairman of Utholi⁸ UP⁹ used to mediate people's cases by his own way. He used to punish the people, whom he found guilty by his own judgment. In a nutshell, chairman of Utholi UP was all in all in the mediation conducted through *salish*¹⁰ or village court. All verdicts depended on his personal judgment. Nobody could participate in it or talk against his verdicts. People, therefore, seldom placed their complaints before the UP.

Given the situation, partnership with Utholi Union Parishad was a crying need for implementation of the Programme on Breaking the Silence of Violence (BRAVE) successfully. In fact, the necessity of partnership came into action for different reasons. As a part of community mobilization, BRAVE Programme started working on sensitizing different stakeholders on gender issues. At some stage in working with Utholi UP, it was felt that it needed capacity and skill in addressing violence against women and girls in order that protecting women rights. Generally in Bangladesh it is viewed that the UPs are mostly interested in infrastructure development through different government's allocations and relief and rehabilitation related activities. As the front line agency of local government, they implement the action plan of government at grassroots level. But development initiatives particularly for the women or in particular the pro-women development approaches are quite missing. However, there was a need to involve them in the process of establishing women's rights and triggering greater development as well as creating their stake in prevention of

violence against women.

The BRAVE Programme planned an activity for activating the *Nari Nirjatan Nirodh Committee*¹¹ (Committee for Prevention of

***BRAVE (Breaking the Silence of Violence)** is a long-term (DA) project of WAVE Foundation implemented in Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district with support from ActionAid since 2006. It aims at addressing the domestic violence through creating mass awareness, standing beside the survivors through providing psycho-social, legal and rehabilitation support and sensitizing the stakeholders towards protesting domestic violence against women. Currently it is implemented in Utholi union at its 19 villages with 64 circles, 8 self-help groups and 3 Lokokendras.*

Violence against Women) in the working areas. Apparently it was not an easy task to shape and activate the Committee for creating an enabling environment for women development and prevention of violence against women. To this end, it was strongly felt that active involvement of Utholi UP in prevention of domestic violence or any kind of violence against women or violation of women's rights is the timely decision.

In Bangladesh, women are ignored from the participation in development plan and budgets. BRAVE Programme felt that women's participation in UP budget formulation can make a difference in raising grassroots women's voices and thereby accelerating their empowerment. It was viewed that active participation of women in formulation of UP budget must insist UP towards making continuous allocation for women alongside prevention of violence against women.

⁸ Utholi Union Parishad is situated in Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga district under Khulna division.

⁹ UP is the lowest tier of local government system in Bangladesh. It comprises with a chairman, 9 members and 3 women members.

¹⁰ *Salish* is a kind of mediation takes place to take the complaints verified through witnesses, probes and opinions. In Bangladesh village leaders usually hold it.

¹¹ This committee is formed at UP level to prevent violence against women. It comprises UP chairman and members, Imam (religious leader of Muslims who finally makes the marriage through Muslims rules and law), Kazi (marriage registrar), Ghotok (match maker) and members of community.

It was also felt that UP's initiative for creating mass awareness on violence against women or domestic violence would effectively create changes since it is the powerful and thereby accepted institution at local level. If UP is involved in the process, more value is added and the initiative goes strengthened to a great extent. Moreover, an example of preventing domestic violence through UP intervention was considered necessary to show people the effectiveness of UP against violence against women, because UP's intervention is more acceptable to the people. People obey the verdicts of UP considering its position, power and importance. The instance of Utholi UP's intervention on domestic violence was also looked-for to create an example to be followed by other UPs in the country.

It was also believed that involvement of UP can help the poor women survivors of violence access to justice. Helping the distressed and oppressed people of the country is the government's *responsibility*. As a local government institution, UP has the responsibility to take care of the oppressed people living in their respective unions. It was thought that partnership might be the way of making the UPs responsive to this issue.

In reality it is observed that the UPs in Bangladesh conduct the mediation by their own ways, though there are laws and regulations regarding the issues for mediation in the village court. However, sometimes they do not obey the legal procedure or avoid the spirit of rule of law. Due to lack of proper orientation, they very often forget that some issues go beyond their authority and must not be mediated through village court. Considering the circumstances, BRAVE Programme thought to activate the village court that would follow the legal procedures and rule of law. In brief, the UP needed proper understanding along with capacity for proper functioning of the village court.

Traditional UP dealing

Before partnership with BRAVE, Utholi UP used to deal with the issues related to violence against women by its own way. In fact, personal opinion of the chairman and members of UP was the basis of their own judgment. It did not take into account the complaints related to domestic violence against women issues rather they considered it a concern to be dealt within persons or families. They along with the community people in the union believed that any other persons or institution outside of their families should not interfere into it.

Moreover, this is quite interesting that they were not well informed to which complaints on violence against women they could have the authority to mediate and which are not. They used to mediate all complaints by their own way, if even found the issues beyond their authoritative capacity. They gave verdicts by their own way. Those sometimes even went against the survivors. Alongside they released the offenders from guilty.

It was always the chairman of the UP who always fixed the date for mediation of the complaints on violence against women. The problems of others even of the survivors, witnesses or offenders in making sure of their presence were not taken into consideration. Again the mediation did not consider the opinions of others rather than the chairman. Chairman's verdicts always were meant as final decision and all were compelled to obey those. Moreover, the mediations always considered the opinion and participation of males. It never allowed participation of women with their opinions.

This is alleged that chairman of the UP punished the offenders before the people gathered in the *salish* by his own way. He beat the offenders and even the survivors irrespective of male or female if he found them guilty.

Utholi UP today in practice

The partnership between Utholi UP and BRAVE has resulted in remarkable changes in dealing with violence against women issues. Now the chairman of Utholi UP verifies the complaints to see which ones are entitled to be mediated by UP and which should be referred to proper places for legal action. After scrutiny, the complaints that are appropriate to be mediated by UP are recorded in the register book. Utholi UP now takes into account only the cases falling under the authoritative power of an UP. They refer the complicated and inappropriate cases for the UPs to the legal authorities as well as suggesting the survivors to file case against the perpetrators.

In order to address the complaints found to be mediated after scrutiny, Utholi UP sends official notice to the survivors and their families for submitting written complain. After verifying the petition, a date is fixed for open hearing where both parties are made present and expressed their complain. UP now sends written notice to both parties for their presence. They are noticed to have presence in the village court with their witnesses and one nominee from the influential persons and one UP member for each party.

When two parties i.e. accused and survivors or complainer come to the village court in response to the notice along with their nominated representatives and witnesses, chairman forms a 5-member jury board to administer the mediation. The board hears opinions and witnesses of both parties and witnesses. Based on the opinions and probes of 3/2 or 4/1, the chairman of Utholi UP openly declares the verdicts. If the verdicts are declared based on 4/1 opinions, no opportunity is given to appeal for further judgment. On the other hand, if it is done based on 3/2 opinions, it is mentioned that the appellant can go for action through legal authorities and of course, if the appellant

cannot be satisfied on the verdict. In addition, Utholi UP now makes sure the verdicts of village court are kept recorded in the register book.

For *salish* or mediation, Utholi UP forms *salish* board following the rules and regulations and considering its authoritative capacity. In *salish* all opinions of both parties are heard with due importance. Then the board facilitates the mediation of disputes through discussion with accuser, offenders, witnesses and nominees from influential persons. Now Utholi UP organizes village court and *salish* maintaining a particular time in every week. Moreover, it keeps all decision recorded. In brief, Utholi UP now considers the issues of domestic violence with due importance and is committed to removing it from the union and be a model for other UPs in the country.

Bridging BRAVE with Utholi UP

In 2005, WAVE Foundation and Utholi UP signed an agreement on implementing the BRAVE Programme activities jointly in a partnership manner. Based on it, BRAVE and Utholi UP are jointly implementing different initiatives. In the agreement, both parties agreed to stop violence against women from their union by preventing all forms of violence against women. To implement their joint commitment, they have taken and implemented the following initiatives:

- Formation of *Nari Nirjatan Nirodh Committee* (Committee for Prevention of Violence against Women) at UP level and activating it through providing capacity building supports.
- Strengthening capacity of Utholi UP on *salish* or mediation and functioning the village court following the rules and regulations and ensuring the rule of law.
- Organizing *Polli Mela*¹² (village fair) on prevention of domestic violence to create mass awareness and mobilization against domestic violence.

¹² This fair is organized every year in the areas to create mass awareness on domestic violence. It has been being organized since 2006.

- Formulation of UP budget, development plan and implementation ensuring active participation of people from different levels including the women.
- Enlisting the poor, widow, divorced and other hardcore poor women jointly.
- Observance of the national and international days¹³.
- Tree plantation on roadsides in partnership with BRAVE circles and Lokokendras.
- Monitoring of the government's services through UP standing committees especially the committees on health, education and agriculture.



Participants in a training on sewing

the entire union with a view to stopping early marriage.

Initiatives of Utholi UP

After the partnership, Utholi UP started taking different initiatives for preventing violence against women. Some of those are as follows:

- It organized ward-based mass gathering for creating awareness on different types of violence against women including eve teasing and domestic violence.
- It has provided support to the authorities of different school under the union to file cases against 12 eve teasers of Khayerhuda and Singnagar villages.
- It has helped form and activate UP *Nari Nirjatan Nirodh* Committee for prevention of violence against women.
- It accomplishes *salish* and village court through maintaining regularly a particular time in every week.
- It has made possible to sign on a memorandum by the persons associated with match-making and marriage registration like *Imam* (religious leaders of Muslims), *Kazi* (marriage registrar) and *ghotok* (matchmakers). They pledged that they will not process marriage without verifying the age of the brides based on birth registration certificate.
- It has ensured 100% birth registration in

Being beside the survivors

Partnership with Utholi UP has made the scope of creating strong space for the survivors. Utholi UP's initiative and its stand beside them have given them the strength to stand and speak out boldly. Utholi UP is now perfectly beside the women survivors of violence. It has noticed that violence is mostly committed on the women in poor families. By social category they are helpless. Furthermore, violence makes them more vulnerable. It becomes sometimes difficult for them to maintain normal lives and continue livelihood options. Basically they need supports- both mental and financial. Considering the need, Utholi UP has started taking different initiatives for the women and

Table: Addressing violence by Utholi UP

Type of cases	Number of complaints	Solutions took place
Family conflict	25	18
Divorce	15	10
Dowry	13	9
Land ownership	12	7
Debt	09	5
Total	74	49

Source: BRAVE

¹³ They have jointly observed the International Women's Day, Asia Reflect Day, National Sanitation Week, International Child Rights Day, National Day for Prevention of Violence against Women and so on.

children who had been the worst survivors of violence. Amongst the initiatives, some are stated below:

- It has investigated on spot into the cases of violence against women in cooperation with Lokomorcha¹⁴ and BRAVE circles.¹⁵
- After investigation, it has supported to the survivors for medical treatment and filing cases against the perpetrators.
- It has created mass awareness on making sense and sympathy for the survivors and on contrary hatred on the perpetrators through people's gathering at community level.
- It has also organized press conference in cooperation with Lokomorcha and BRAVE circles to influence the local administration for fair judgment.
- It has made sure of attaining mohr and khorposh¹⁶ for the survivors from the offenders through salish or mediation.
- It has also rehabilitated the survivors through providing different income generating trainings.
- It gives priority to the survivors in incorporating them in the social safety net

programmes like VGD, VGF, road construction and maintenance, tree plantation and nursing of the trees etc.

- It has provided sewing machine and cows especially to the survivors following relevant trainings.

Empowering the women

Utholi UP now believes in women

Papri pushed it forward

Papri (18), a housewife of Dehati Shahpara in Utholi UP got married when she was only 13. After 10 days of her marriage, her husband started scolding and beating her for mere excuse. He continued it being a drunk. By 4th year of her marriage, she became mothers of two children. Her father was very poor. Finding no other ways, she forbore all repressions of her husband. One day she got late to serve food to him. He burst with anger and started beating her severely. One of her legs got broken as beaten. She was screaming and seeking help but her husband locked her up in room instead of taking to hospital. The members of a BRAVE circle learned it and decided to help Papri. They immediately informed it to Utholi UP and UP Nari Nirjatan Nirodh Committee. They went to see Papri and make a quick investigation. Noticing them, Papri's husband Boga got angered and denied to take her to hospital. He also started to scold all for interfering it. Considering the situation, chairman of the UP and members informed it to police station. Police rescued her and sent for treatment, and arrested Boga.

After the occurrence, UP organized a mass gathering to aware people on violence against women. There all people had been oriented that domestic violence is also a punishable offence.

empowerment in family and society. In order to perceive women enjoy social and economic empowerment, it has taken different initiatives. Few of those can be cited below:

- It has started providing stipend to the meritorious female students of poor families from UP budget to encourage them in continuing their education.
- It has ensured active membership of women (BRAVE circle champions, women members of Lokomorcha) in the UP standing committees, School Management Committees at UP level, smuggling prevention committee, law and order committee and so on.

¹⁴ This is a network based at upazila and district level. Influential persons at upazila and district levels are the members of the network. It has strong linkages with the BRAVE circles members. They help the survivors of violence against women get fair judgment and compensation.

¹⁵ These circles are basically group of community people operated through Reflect approach.

¹⁶ According to Muslim Law, wives are entitled to get the amount of money or property which the husbands made commitment to pay during marriage.



- It has established a sales centre for the women at Shialmari *haat* to lead the poor women entrepreneurs towards selling their products along with buying their daily necessities without any hassle and helps of males.
- It has also initiated to make sure of women participation in formulation of budget and development plan for UP. As a part of it, it has organized meeting with the women at ward level to assess the needs of women for their development.
- It has also helped the poor women entrepreneurs in getting loans from banks.
- It also gives space for the women from BRAVE circles and *Lokomorchas* in speaking and placing their opinions on the occasion of observing different national and international days and discussion meetings.

Budget allocation for women development

Before the partnership, Utholi UP prepared its budget by their own ways. They did not share the budget with people. Women's participation in budget formulation was beyond their imagination. But this has been possible. Utholi UP now formulates participatory open budget. This is quite remarkable that it started preparing gender sensitive budget from 2008. This is to mention that in the budget of 2008-9 fiscal year, it allocated a remarkable amount for the women.

Table: Allocation for women in Utholi UP Budget 2008-9

Budget Head	Allocation (Taka)
Road maintenance by 9 destitute women	194,000
School infrastructure development and stipend for the meritorious female students	450,000
Prevention of violence against and women development	100,000
Providing sewing machine and helps for animal husbandry for the destitute women	90,000
Emergency response	100,000
Total	934,400

Source: Utholi UP

Being positive towards women

As dominated by patriarchal social construct, male members of UPs did not have liberal attitude towards the women members. Although the women were directly elected, they were not allowed to enjoy their right to perform their duties as an active people's representative. After the partnership with Utholi UP, the chairman and members of the Parishad have been orientated on it. It has resulted in huge change in the attitude of male chairman and members towards the women members.

Now the male members consider the female ones as colleagues. They now understand that the women members have power and rights as much they can possess and practice. They also consider them as integral and cooperative part of administering of the UP. In the previous days, female members were marginalized in giving responsibilities in distributing and determining government allocation for the people. Now it has changed greatly. Female members are given proper responsibilities and allocation as such as their male counterparts. Male members now have

the outlook to extend cooperation in implementing their assignment and performing their duties.

Previously women's participation in village court or any kind of *salish* was totally denied. Their presence as audience was also discouraged. Only the males were the part of the *salish* or mediation. Males' opinion always dominated the mediation. Verdict often went against the survivors if they were found less powerful. The female UP members were also passed up. The members of Utholi UP are now well orientated on it. They now know the importance of the participation of female members in mediation.

Utholi UP now ensures active participation of female members in the *salish* or mediation. For any mediation, it forms *Salishi Board*¹⁷ where 1/2 female members are compulsorily included. If it is a case of violence against women and to be dealt at village court or through *salish*, women members are given first priority. They are made members of the board to ensure fair judgment. Moreover, female members are closely engaged in investigating into the cases of violence against women. They are given priority in it. During mediation or *salish* in the village court, female members are particularly nominated to ask questions to the survivors, offenders and witnesses.

Stopping dowry and early marriage

After the partnership, Utholi UP started intervening the issues of dowry and early marriage as they found these the key intervening factors for violence against women. To the end, they have taken the following initiatives:

- Ensuring 100% birth registration
- Orientation with *Imam, Kazi*, matchmaker and local administration on dowry and early marriage
- Organizing school-based discussion with

Process of response to violence

- *Investigation on spot into the cases of violence against women*
- *Supports to the survivors for medical treatment and filing cases*
- *Creating mass awareness on making sense and sympathy for the survivors and on contrary hatred on the perpetrators*
- *Organizing press conference to influence local administration for fair judgment*
- *Attaining mohr and khorposh for the survivors from the offenders*
- *Rehabilitation of the survivors through income generating training*
- *Giving priority to the survivors for the social safety net programmes*
- *Providing sewing machine and cows to the survivors following relevant training*

students

- Organizing debate on early marriage at schools
- Organizing ward-wise discussion on dowry and early marriage.

Dealing beyond institutional capacity

Before the partnership and orientation on violence against women as well as institutional role and capacity, Utholi UP mediated all complaints submitted by the people. Today it is highly empowered with proper knowledge on the rules and regulations i.e. the legal procedures of dealing with violence against women. They now practice it in mediation through village court. If the cases go beyond the institutional capacity of UP, Utholi UP refers those to police station suggesting to file case against the offenders.

Sometimes the UP faces the case of rape. It first takes the issue in consideration and sends the complainer to the police station for filing cases. At this stage, it plays facilitating role in filing cases and providing mental support to the survivors. It also follows up the cases for fair investigation and proper

¹⁷ This is a board formed for mediation where women members are also included. This is practiced now.

punishment of the perpetrators. It also helps the police in investigating the cases. Simultaneously, it mobilizes people towards taking sides of the survivors and fair judgment. Lokomorchas at upazila and district levels are also mobilized towards attaining medical and legal support from the respective authorities. It also makes sure to protect the survivors from further harassment by the perpetrators since it is suspected that they might give mental pressure to the accuser for withdrawal of the case.

Results of the partnership

Partnership with Utholi UP has placed remarkable results in the communities of Utholi union. It has proved that making partnership with the UP was a timely decision. Partnership with UP really makes a difference in the endeavor of stopping violence against women. However, the partnership has created the following results in Utholi union:

Awareness on domestic violence:

People of all levels have been aware that domestic violence is a criminal offence. They are now informed that they have place to complain against domestic violence.

Protesting domestic violence: Women members of a family have learned how to protest domestic violence or any violence against women. They have also been aware of family law.

UP Nari Nirjatan Nirodh Committee activated: UP Nari Nirjatan Nirodh

Committee has been formed following the manual and it has been playing effective role in stopping violence against women.

Following proper procedures: Every salish or mediation and the village court are functioned properly according to the procedure and considering the rule of law.

Ensuring women participation: It has been made possible to formulate people's participatory UP budget and development plan of action where women's participation is ensured.

Accessibility to UP increased:

Accessibility of different stakeholders of the Programme to Utholi UP has been increased to a great extent.

Eve teasing

decreased: As a result of filing cases against 12 eve teasers, the intensity of eve teasing has decreased significantly.

Early marriage

lessened: The rate of early marriage and other sorts of domestic violence have reduced remarkably.

Monitoring of government services strengthened:

Different stakeholders of BRAVE Programme have been included in the UP standing committees. It has resulted in diversified and active committees. As a result of the activities of the committees, some remarkable successes have been achieved. It has made possible to expose the medicine kits box of UP family planning centre before the UP health standing committee. A list of medicine is also stuck on the notice board at the centre. Moreover, it has ensured agriculture block supervisors to submit their field visit plan to the UP agriculture standing committee. That

Securing guardianship

Niharan (11) with her younger sister of 6 years was abandoned from her family by her step mother. His father denied their upbringing being suggested by his second wife. She was a student of class V. This situation compelled her to stop her education rather she tried to earn their bread through begging. Her neighbours informed it to a BRAVE circle. The circle along with community leaders placed a petition to Utholi UP. Immediately after getting the petition, the chairman of the UP held a meeting with the members and decided to mediate it immediately by the UP Nari Nirjatan Nirodh Committee. They called upon a salish where her father Kalom Shah was called in. He had been made clear about his duty on his daughters. Based on the decision of the salish, he got agreed to take all responsibilities of his daughters of first wife.

plan also is stuck on the notice board of UP. It also has made sure of identifying problems at primary schools and taking actions based on the field visits of education standing committee to different schools.

Access to government services increased:

It has been easier to access to the government services by the people as a result of regular monitoring of government offices by the people.

Domestic violence acknowledged as social problem:

At community level, it has also marked remarkable impact on society. Community people now are aware that violence against women is a problem of their society. Furthermore, they have learned that they can collectively address it for the sake of peace and progress in the society. They have, therefore, taken it as their own problem and have been trying to move against it collectively.

Future plan of the UP

Utholi UP now owns the issue of violence against women. They are now committed to address it. The chairman and members of the UP have expressed that they must continue this endeavor. They have also expressed about some future plans. Some of those are as follows:

- Disseminating the message- 'DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE' to every family.
- Providing sewing machine and cows to all trained up poor women to make them self-sustained.
- Providing stipend to the meritorious female students of poor families.
- Increasing the number of poor women in the UP implemented social safety net programmes.
- Making the poor women self-help through training to be available from Women Affairs Department and Social Welfare Department.
- Continuing the organization of *Polli Mela* on prevention of domestic violence in different places.

- Establishing sales centre for the women entrepreneurs at different *haats*.

Challenges of partnership

It was not an easy task to make partnership with Utholi UP. At the very outset, the UP thought it as a great interference to their works. It assumed the stakeholders of the Programme as their opponent. They thought that it would gradually lead them to great trouble in the long run and that is why they did not get agreed to make partnership. They also tried to avoid it pretending that stepping to be accountable and transparent with all works and budget might drop them in a great danger. Moreover, when they were requested to give space to the women members, they tried to oppose it showing narrow and patriarchal attitude. They also claimed that their capacity to establish rule of law is inbuilt in their UP, therefore, they found no need to make partnership on the issue.

They also stated that UP's budget should be prepared by UP; outsiders should not interfere into it. There were also political hindrances. They started considering it a political game and way of defeating them in the next election. Moreover, they tried to keep away from it finding there no possibility of financial gain.

Lessons Learnt

- A collective initiative incorporating all concerned irrespective of political and religious affiliation can create an acceptable result.
- If the problems come out from very grassroots are considered with due concern and addressed through greater participation of people, people's participation in addressing violence against women issues gets more attention.
- When a recognized or established institution takes initiative, more result is created and the issue gets due emphasis and more importance or value is added eventually.
- If the women are made participated in formulation of UP budget, it is possible to formulate a real gender sensitive budget.

Conclusion

Union Parishad is the powerful and acceptable institution at grassroots level. Government implements different programmes through UPs. People in a union are closely associated to UP. They are the grassroots level duty bearers. They hold services and possess power. People, especially the poor, need to go to them for government provided services. Chairmen and members of the UPs can greatly utilize

their position, power and influence, if they are motivated towards working for the wellbeing of society. Partnership with UP in implementing local level initiative can greatly honor them. As return what they can impart is huge. Their involvement makes works easy and result-oriented. Partnership with Utholi UP has proved it. It might have some downbeat sides also. But achievement might be huge if it is dealt with considering the connectors and dividers in it.

4 Social Change Agents

Investing in adolescents – the future leaders

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Preamble

Building the adolescents as social change agent has been the proven strategy for building future leaders of society for women and girls-friendly environment and development. Creating Adolescents Opportunities (CAO) Theme of ActionAid Bangladesh has successfully demonstrated it. This is widely practiced by its partners working on adolescents issues. BITA and CWFD in Chittagong and Nari Maitree in Dhaka have been making the most of it since 2000. PRDS, a strategic partner of AAB, has also started working through this strategy in Dhaka city. However, it has shaped a remarkable result in the communities particularly in regard to the issues on adolescents. We have found it very creative and effective in creating future leaders for the society where the people and institutions would be proactive towards building enabling space for adolescents and women at all levels. It has directed us to document it for disseminating this idea widely.

This document is a rewritten and compiled form of a write-up on Social Change Agent prepared through a 2-day writeshop organized at Nasreen Milonayatan of ActionAid Bangladesh jointly by Shared Learning Unit and Creating Adolescents Opportunities Theme of ActionAid Bangladesh during 28-29 July 2009. A number of 9 participants from communities and concerned partner organizations prepared the write-up based on a content of discussion. They, following the content, discussed in groups and prepared the write-up. They were divided into two groups - each group presented their write-up and following the feedback they finalized their piece from their part.

Background

In urban areas of Bangladesh especially in Dhaka and Chittagong, adolescents are always at risk of drug, sexual and political abuses. Lack of proper education, enabling environment and sufficient growing opportunity often leads them to the wrong way of life where the meaning of life gets changed and turns into great deviation, hazards and insecurity. It results them in a situation where they are treated as 'burden' of society instead of an important part or strength of the nation.

ActionAid Bangladesh has been working with the adolescents for many years to create a space for them where they could be growing up as an important part of society, their attitudes of exploration be treated positively, their issues be heard and addressed, their needs be supported and fulfilled. From its long experiences, it has learned that adolescents can make positive changes to the society through utilization of their constructive ideas and work, if they are given proper guidelines and space for growing up in a creative and enabling environment.

This is beyond debate that adolescents are the future leaders of the nation. They are supposed to play active role in family, society, economy, politics and government in future. But how much they would do it or what would be their ways of working i.e. attitude and behavior towards adolescents and women of their time is a question. From our experience, it is evident that if they are made as change agents during their

Social Change Agents: Who they are
Adolescent boys and girls who are working as the agents of changes in society as the adolescents forum members are termed as social change agents. They are envisioned to change their society through identifying and solving the problems. They will also be continuing their efforts and playing creative role in society when they would be grown up members of their society.

adolescence through capacity building initiatives, they might utilize the lessons in future when they would be able to lead their family, society, country and beyond. Bearing it in mind, Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Art (BITA) and Concerned Women for Family Development (CWFD) of Chittagong, Nari Maitree and PRDS of Dhaka have been working closely with the adolescents through shaping adolescents forum with a view to leading them towards preparing themselves to uphold their issues and create positive changes in society through identifying and solving problems of their society along with of their own.

Objectives of creating the social change agents

Creating the adolescents as responsible future citizen of the country is the main objective of creating adolescents as social change agent. They are supposed to be built with knowledge and attitude towards creating adolescents opportunities and girls and women-friendly environment. There are also some specific objectives as the adolescents perceived through the journey:

- Building consciousness among the adolescents about their rights, tracking them towards right direction and involving them in development initiatives of society; and
- Building leadership quality among the adolescents so that they can lead the society towards building it free from superstition and impediments for the adolescents.

Forming the groups

Social change agents or adolescents forums are formed with 10 or more members from 10-19 years old adolescents, who have self-enthusiasm to work for others to find out problems and solve those collectively. They are basically selected from poor, marginalized and disadvantaged families. Of course, there are options to include more members in group, if the forums feel the need to strengthen their togetherness.

Capacity building

Orientation on different issues and training are the major ways of capacity building of the social change agents. They are orientated on adolescents' family life education, reproductive health, early marriage, HIV/AIDS, dowry, population growth, gender, environment, eve teasing, violence against women, social development, trafficking, child rights, etc.

There are some other activities for the adolescents like study circle, library, art competition, debate, wall magazine, etc, which also sharpen their capacity. Some leadership trainings are also imparted.

The issues they work on

The adolescents of the forum working as social change agents tend to work on different issues, which are thought as necessary to change their society. They classify the issues as:

Social development: They work on some social issues like repairing of roads, dustbin installation, sewerage line installation, etc in their communities.

Violence against girls and women: They also work on violence issues like dowry, violence against women, domestic violence, eve teasing, early marriage etc.

Motto of working as social change agents:

Some slogans motivate the adolescents to work as social change agent. Some are as follows:

- We demand for adolescent-friendly society, rights of all to prove us the best citizen of the country.
- SAFE ADOLESCENCE, ENLIGHTENED FUTURE.
- SAFE ADOLESCENCE, JOYFUL ENVIRONMENT.
- Local development through participation of adolescents leads to sustainable development.

Quality education: They work on the education for the drop out children and others who have enrolled in primary school.

Adolescents' issues: They identify the problems of the adolescents and build awareness on puberty and other problems among the adolescents.

Economic development: They also work for their economic and group development.

Planning and implementation

The adolescent forum or social change agents first identify the problems of their society sitting in forum and prepare plan for monthly, quarterly and yearly with the opinions of all members. They also ascribe works and responsibilities to the members. In the process of implementation, they make sure of the involvement of the community people especially the influential persons like ward commissioner, guardians, teachers and other persons who are closely involved in the institution they work with like school, family, club where problems and solutions both can take place. In planning and implementation process, the adolescents' forum or social change agents go through the following steps:

1. Identification of issues through discussion
2. Discussion on the issues to make sense of



A planning meeting of an adolescents forum

the issue, its dimension, people involved in it and so on

3. Solving the problem through discussion, if it seems to be very simple
4. Planning for solving difficult problems through different initiatives
5. Organizing guardians meeting, rally, postering, leaflet distribution, etc.
6. Discussion on the issue with guardians, local leaders, ward commissioner and other influential persons
7. Communication with service-providing authority, especially the local government organizations through their concerned organization, if needed.

Social change agent: How it is established

The adolescents prove themselves the social change agents through achieving recognition of others that comes through their works. They claim that they identify and solve different problems and thus the community people enjoy the results of those. Community people recognize it and value their works. Concerned facilitating organizations and ActionAid Bangladesh also reward them for their achievements. They consider it a kind of acknowledgement of their works, which indeed supports that they are really social change agents since they are working and achieving rewards for their works as social change agent. But are their societies changed? In answer they claim that it has started.



Adolescent Forum members preparing poster



Participation by the adolescents in a national convention

Attitudes towards adolescents have changed to a great extent in their societies. They argue that they must be able to change their society when they will be the grown up people. They further add that they have orientation on different issues. Their knowledge is sharpened and attitude changed that will certainly contribute to changing their society towards positive transformation that will give girls and women friendly environment at every sphere of society.

Who helps them work

Peoples from different professions help the adolescents implement their activities. Guardians from concerned families, club, library, local organizations, teachers and ward commissioner of City Corporation help them in their activities. Moreover, doctor, local youth club, religious leaders, lawyers and other professionals also help them, if they ask for. They usually make many other people including the influential persons of their communities involved in implementing their works. In a nutshell, the adolescents' forum members involve others in the following ways:

- Building relationship
- Inviting others to visit their activities
- Sharing their activities
- Sharing the problems of communities
- Sharing their ideas of solving the problems.

Creating collective efforts

In Ward-33 (Firingibazar) of Chittagong City Corporation, adolescent forum found out a problem in pond management. They noticed that most of the ponds did not have boundary wall to protect water, therefore, people were compelled to use dirty water of the pond. There was also no bathing point. The forum organized a meeting with guardians. They expressed the need of building and repairing the ghat and boundary of the pond and keeping water usable through cleaning. They also discussed how dirty pond water induces water-borne diseases and why their children fall into the ponds. Understanding the necessity, the guardians discussed with the community leaders. All they collectively took initiative to clean the pond. All members of the forum participated in cleaning. Moreover, they ensured the involvement of other adolescents of their communities in it.

They then placed application to the City Corporation so that they could remove the dust regularly from the pond area. Commissioner of the concerned ward visited the place and took necessary step. Then they started building the ghat with the money they collected as subscription from the users. The forum members and the local influential persons then communicated with the Ward Commissioner for a dustbin. Ward Commissioner responded to it very quickly and installed a dustbin. Now everyday a person from City Corporation collects dust from the bin.

Situation of the society: How it was

Before working in communities on adolescents' issues, adolescents of those communities did not have opportunities or space for even talking about any issue of their own or society. For example, adolescent girls suffered from different difficulties during puberty. They did not have ideas on parity between boys and girls. People also did not have practice to see parity between men and women. They had reluctance to get their children especially the girls admitted to school.

There were also problems like drop out of children from school, lack of ideas about primary healthcare, early marriage, negative attitudes towards adolescents, violence against women, lack of initiative for the development of adolescents, lack of ideas about government services etc. People basically lacked positive attitude towards change even if it was positive. Furthermore, the adolescents of the communities did not think of involving themselves in income generating activities.

Changes taken place

Shaping the adolescents as social change agents has created remarkable changes in communities of the working areas:

- There has been created space for the adolescents where they can now express their opinions and it has clearly spaced for development of their talents.
- Adolescents have been made with the sense that they can also contribute to their society and country from very early of their lives. They can also be an active citizen of the country by ensuring involvement in community development.
- Adolescent girls have learned to solve their problems that they face in their lives.
- Discrimination among the boys and girls in their behaviors and activities has decreased to a great extent.
- Enrolment of children to school has increased as well as drop-out of adolescents has decreased.
- Adolescents are now enriched with skills for income generating activities and they have started earning through it. They can make jacket, *nokshi kantha*, and have skills on block-boutiques, computer, bag making, etc. They can sell their own products in local markets. Many of them

who make bags have a mechanism to spend some money from selling the bags in education for the children of underprivileged families.

- Adolescents now have opportunities to take legal supports from relevant organizations and different services from local government authorities.
- They also have the capacity to claim and ensure their rights like birth registration, national identity card, vaccine, primary healthcare, etc.
- It has impacted on other people's attitudes and they have been changed positively.
- No school had first-aid box for the students who sometimes get ill or injured. Adolescents forum advocated it with the school authorities. Many schools around their communities have been convinced to arrange first-aid box.
- Early marriage has decreased to a great extent as they protest it very instantly. When they find any case beyond their capacity, they seek help of others and get those solved thereby.
- Adolescents are enriched with knowledge on different issues and they have capacity to make people understand what they tend to talk about.
- Adolescents have established adolescents library, adolescents debate club, and adolescents computer club. They are running those by their own initiative.

Claiming rights from duty bearers

In Chittagong City Corporation, adolescent forum members repaired the Bazaar road of Ward-27. That road was not in good condition. People of the ward did not know how to solve the problem. Adolescent forum of the ward organized a meeting with community people and discussed about potential solutions. Then they prepared a work-plan and found out who can help them implement that. They went to the Ward Commissioner and placed their demand. In response to their application, the Ward Commissioner took necessary step on it. The road is now repaired.

Adolescents in communities have now space for learning within their localities.

- Sexual harassment has reduced to a great extent as they protested some cases and

Doctors come before death

Adolescents from 47 ward's forum in Dhaka City Corporation felt that most of the slum dwellers suffer from general health related problems like cold, fever, diarrhea, etc. And that is why very often they cannot go for work. The forum members communicated to two MBBS doctors. They made the doctors feel the need and convinced them to provide free treatment support to the slum dwellers. The doctors are now available in their slum twice a month. In addition, the adolescents had been able to convince a high executive of a renowned medicine company to provide sample medicines to the slum people.

took some initiatives with helps from their guardians, community leaders and City Corporation.

- Adolescents have been involved in different development activities. Hence their leadership capacity has been enhanced.
- Adolescents are writing news, stories, features, etc in newspaper. They also publish wall magazine.
- Adolescents have formed cooperatives. They are mobilizing savings regularly.
- Adolescents have been capacitated to mobilize people towards awareness on development issues.
- These achievements and changes in society has resulted in achieving adolescents rights to a great extent. The changes are helping the adolescents express their opinions in different forums of their communities.
- They have got space for sharpening their talent. They are getting right to education.
- Adolescents are participating in different social events like marriage ceremony, mediation, day observance, etc.
- Attitudes of the adolescents have changed; thereby they are now more

First-aid box at school

After shaping the forum with students of Pahartali Girls' High School in Chittagong, a session on adolescents' reproductive health was organized for the peer educator forum members. The session helped them feel that they need to share some problems with teachers and school authority. Thereafter, they shared their necessity and demanded for first-aid box from school authority. School authority understood the need and set for 20 first-aid boxes for the students.

rationalistic to judge over the superstitious beliefs.

- The trend of acceptance of their ideas and activities is increasing in their family and society.

Challenges they faced

There are different challenges faced by the adolescents while working as social change agents in their communities:

- Deterrence by family members i.e. their guardians who tend to deter them working for their society instead of working for the family.
- Adolescence is not defined or recognized by law. It sometimes stops them in claiming their rights as the separate portion of citizens in terms of age.
- When they started working in communities claiming that boys and girls are equal and there should not be any discrimination, people used to tease them saying 'rascal'.
- Female members of the forum faced repression especially eve teasing by other people in community while working.
- Community leaders had a tendency to ignore the adolescents when they tried to include them in the development process of their communities as well as addressing the social issues. Moreover, the activities and words undertaken by adolescents were paid less importance by the grown up people.
- At the very outset, there was shyness and

lack of confidence among the adolescents in working and talking with grown up people and community leaders.

- Teachers at schools did not want to cooperate to the adolescents in working on their issues. They presupposed their activities to be harmful to their education.
- Most of the community people had negative ideas about NGOs. People thought about getting support from the adolescents group as they thought that there might be some monetary assistance to be channeled through the adolescent group and people would be benefited through it. Actually some unexpected desires grew among the community people when they started working.
- They also faced economic crisis while implementing the plan of the forum. Sometimes they needed money to implement some particular activities where they faced difficulties to mobilize that.

Future plan

Adolescents of the forum, the future leaders have their own plan to sustain their forums. They have planned to include new members from the younger ones and train up them so that they could take the role of social change agent. They will also involve and train them in identifying and solving the problems. They will also make contact with the influential persons in community so that they can also help their fellow travelers sustain the forum and work as well in cooperation with their advices and assistance. They also want to get their forums registered from relevant authority. They also envision creating income generating activities to help continue their works as they have experienced that it sometimes requires money to implement some kinds of activities. They also intend to create linkages with some other organizations and mobilize money to work and thus sustain their forums. They also express how they will continue their endeavor as social change agent:

- They will be continuing their effort to

identify and solve the problems of their own and of community.

- They will include more adolescents to their forum in order to hand over their duties. Once they would include more members, they would orient them about and train up how to work. They will also help their fellows be capacitated in the efforts of social development.
- They will be working for right tracking of the adolescents who are about to be deviated.
- They will also get all adolescents involved in the working on their community issues for social development.
- They will learn to work for building a violence and crime-free society.
- They will be working for ensuring education of the children of disadvantaged families.
- They will establish education club in every locality.
- Through their works, they will establish their recognition as social change agent.
- They will offer themselves for the youth clubs after completing their works as adolescents and help the forum work from stronger position.
- Being grown up and established in society, they will also help the adolescents materialize their dreams and create more space for the adolescents.

Contributions dreamt as grown up citizen

When the adolescents of the forum will be the grown up people, they have envisioned creating friendly relationship with the adolescents of their families. They will also discuss with them about the problems, wills, dreams, works, etc of the adolescents and give necessary suggestions as well as cooperate in performing their works or solving problems. They will also do same for other adolescents in their communities and help them solve their problems.

They will also write on adolescence issues in newspaper to create consciousness among

the adolescents as well as to sensitize other people. They basically want to work for creating adolescents-friendly environment in their communities. Building area-wise adolescents clubs will be a part of it that they dream to shape in future. They will also work for sensitizing government towards preparing a separate policy for the adolescents.

Areas need more attention

The adolescents have identified some areas that require more attention for establishing enabling environment for the adolescents. They have put some recommendations as follows:

- Government should establish and patronize clubs for the adolescents.
- Adolescents' issues should be addressed through establishing a ministry for the adolescents.
- A national daily can be published on the issues of adolescents where the adolescents will have space for writing and expressing their views and ideas.
- Hospitals can establish separate health corners for the adolescents.
- Particular curriculum for the adolescents should be developed with the issues on adolescence. NCTB should mainstream the adolescents issues in curriculum.
- Adolescents who work for their communities and themselves should be widely recognized and awarded.
- Adolescents should be given scope of participation in national events, different competitions and spaces so that they can utilize and sharpen their talents. Separate events for the adolescents can also be organized. Television, radio and newspapers should have space for the adolescents for learning and participating in different creative items.
- Development organizations can also involve them in their activities. National conference can be organized for the adolescents for their greater understanding and acquaintance with development issues.

- Exchange visits and study tours can be organized for the adolescents.
- Greater adolescents forum can be formed where representatives from different areas can be elected and larger space for learning and gathering experiences can be patronized.

Lessons learnt

- If a plan is implemented through group approach, there will be strong possibility to be done it successfully and rapidly.
- Throughout engagement and cooperation of people at different levels, any kind of problems can be solved.
- Ensuring participation of the adolescents in community activities can enhance self-confidence among them.
- If problems are correctly identified as problems and those are analyzed, drawing solution of those is highly achievable.
- Equal participation of boys and girls in different activities can create sensitization among them on equal rights of all. It helps ensure cooperation among them and finally they find works easy to do.
- Case study and analysis of different issues of society can give a picture of a society on its nature, problems and it helps draw probable solution.
- Communication with wider audience at different level can give the adolescents sense of opportunities and entitlements.
- Skill training can enhance leadership quality among the adolescents. It also helps them create income generating opportunities for the adolescents who need supports.
- Building capacity on working together in community during adolescence can help the adolescents adapt to any situation.
- Study circle can create creative capacity among the adolescents.
- This is possible to create gender sensitive and active citizen of the country through shaping the adolescents as social change agent. Moreover, it helps the adolescents refrain from derailing into ill ways of lives and livelihood options.

5 Hanging Garden

Helping people survive and creating voice against anti-people's interventions

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Preamble

Hanging Garden has appeared as the saviour of the people in the south-west areas of Bangladesh, where water-logging has been the most terrible hazards of people due to different humanmade interventions. Community people, who once totally depended on agriculture, have lost all ways of agricultural production due to water-logging. People's lives and livelihoods have turned in at stake. Five years have passed but people's voices are still unheard. It has been as if the fate of people to face the miseries every year for 5-6 months. For surviving, people still look into the alternatives until the solution takes place. Hanging Garden has emerged as an alternative mechanism for agricultural production, though in a limited scale in the areas to help people survive.

This document is a rewritten and compiled form of a write-up on Hanging Garden prepared through a 2-day workshop organized at Nasreen Milonayatan of ActionAid Bangladesh jointly by Shared Learning Unit and Economic Justice Theme of ActionAid Bangladesh during 4-5 August 2009. A number of 5 participants from communities and concerned partner organizations prepared the write-up as helped by their experiences. They, following a content of discussion, discussed in groups and wrote up their ideas, experiences and future thoughts on Hanging Garden.

Background

South-west areas in Bangladesh, especially Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts, were once full of resources - diversified crops and vegetables were produced, different species of fishes were cultivated, cattle had open lands and foddors to graze over and multiple trees and forests were surrounded. People were blissful to produce local varieties of crops. People had riches and happiness. They had houses full of cattle, ponds full of fishes and store full of rice. People were completely self-dependent on their own indigenous knowledge, traditional agricultural system that never turned into harmful to environment.

Today it may seem to be a tale seeing what the present situation of the areas is. In reality, situation has been drastically distorted. And this is the some anti-peoples' interventions that made it a history that tells people of that area formerly had riches and happiness. In our days people cannot produce paddy, cattle cannot graze over the lands, trees cannot grow well and fishes cannot survive. This is only because of water-logging that has been induced over the decades by different interventions of government being prescribed by the donors. They built up embankments in the name of flood management and crops protection from disasters. Alongside they tried to introduce different varieties of agricultural products from outsides in the name of creating green revolution.

In the long run the embankments retarded the natural flow of tide and siltation and created water-logging in the coastal areas. The people in Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira are the major survivors of this human-made calamity. People of the areas ceaselessly have been raising their voice against the interventions to get rid of it. But their voices are still unheard. Now it has been beyond the capacity of the water-logged people to survive. They are passing through an inhuman struggle to earn their bread in a dome where everything related to livelihoods is out of function.

People are striving their best to survive their lives by the way of innovation. Hanging Garden is one of those innovations that the community and local organizations have innovated to cultivate some vegetables in an alternative way.

Geophysics and environment of the areas

South-west area of Bangladesh is a part of the great Ganges delta. The land of the areas is made of the Ganges sediments. This is a plain land as formatted and shaped by tide. Once natural tides were found in the coastal rivers for two times a day. Furthermore, this area was well-known for fisheries. Many species of local fishes were found. Many medicinal and fruit trees also grew. Agricultural lands turned into alluvial being blessed by tide and sedimentation that helped different varieties of crops be produced. Local productions could totally meet local needs alongside it could be possible to send the surpluses to other areas of the country. Poor people could gather vegetables from forests, fallow lands and roadsides, fishes from open water bodies and thus they could easily earn their bread. The farmers had their own way of protecting their crops from saline and flood water. They collected subscription of one taka from each family and utilized those in building temporary embankment. After utilizing the embankment, they cut that in rainy season to let the natural flow of tide be usual.

In 1960s, government started building embankments in coastal areas in the name of implementing green revolution. This embankment immediately resulted in triggering green revolution through huge production of paddy and other crops. But it lasted very temporarily. In the long run, it turned into a curse to the entire areas and resulted in enormous crisis in the lives and livelihoods. It created water-logging and pulled in different calamities that made the lives and livelihoods to be at stake. It has been appeared as if a permanent problem to the people of the areas that might never be



moved out. It induced another problem. A vested interest group of the areas have been trying to utilize the water-logging. They captured into saline water and started shrimp cultivation in it. Shrimp cultivation all over the areas entering into saline water caused different problems. Poor people are blocked to access to open water bodies for fishing. Furthermore, sweet-water fishes started getting diminished due to lack of sweet water. In short, saline water everywhere gradually very harmfully impacted on all kinds of agriculture, forests, animal husbandry, poultry and all their lives and livelihood options.

Causes of water-logging

In 1960s, coastal embankment Programme was implemented. It built up some polders and sluice gates to impede overflow of tide. It reduced the intensity and natural flow of tide seriously. Sluice gates were not maintained regularly that gradually caused heaping silts over the river instead of blowing to the downstream and discharging to the sea. Basically the gates impeded to washing away the silts. As the river got filled with silts, it lost the capacity to restrain and flow water. On the other hand, it helped the banks of the sea rise up as the natural flow of tide was limited up to the bank instead of reaching to the rivers. As a result, the land areas away from the banks turned lowered. If water sometimes enters into cannot get out from the lower areas. Gradually it resulted in water-logging in the *beels* round the year. In essence, coastal embankment Project did not consider the local knowledge, environment,

Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in 1995-96 came up with the Khulna Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project (KJDRP) with ADB's \$62 million loan. The drainage problem was a result of a series of earlier donor interventions (including ADB) on the river systems of the region with constructions of polders/enclosures that de-linked the floodplain wetlands from rivers. KJDRP was officially completed in 2004. The objective of KJDRP was to upgrade existing flood control embankments. KJDRP met people's resistance in its initial stage. Local communities demanded for indigenous water management practices developed over generations. Local communities demanded environmental and social impact assessment (EIA and SIA). The EIA recommended the people's concept of Tidal River Management (TRM).

In 1997, ADB sent a fact-finding team and endorsed the viability of TRM. ADB advised the BWDB to redesign the project and incorporate the concept of TRM. However, the TRM was not implemented in accordance with people's suggestions. The failed-project has now left a legacy of environmental disaster exemplified by silted-up, dead rivers, permanent inundation of thousands of hectares of land and the loss of indigenous varieties of fish and crop bio-diversity. The embankments disconnected the rivers from floodplain/wetlands, cutting fish migration routes and disturbing the spawning areas of indigenous fish varieties. A number of local fish varieties have almost become extinct.

Source: PEOPLES FORUM AGAINST ADB, www.asianpeoplesforum.net

river systems, natural flow of tide and ecology of the areas. Moreover, illegal river encroachment by the land grabbers and different constructions also contributed to the situation.

People of the areas raised their voices against the intervention in different ways. In response to their movement, government started implementing Khulna-Jessore



Drainage Rehabilitation Project (KJDRP) to remove water-logging from the *beels* in 1995. After completion of the Project in 2004, it was found that it could not resolve the problem but create new one. The Project was implemented in such a way that the previous problem got sustained permanently. Actually that Project paid heed neither to people's voice nor to their participation in its planning and implementation process. Local people demanded for ensuring uninterrupted tidal flow over the rivers. But the Project ignored the suggestion. Eventually it created a huge inundation along a vast area of the region.

Impacts of water-logging

There are huge impacts of water-logging on agriculture and lives and livelihoods of the people in the coastal districts where water-logging has appeared as curse to the people. It has even impacted on society and culture of the areas along with the economy. Once people of the areas totally depended on agriculture. Means of production and entire economy of the area was based on agriculture. People's livelihoods were also totally dependent on agriculture. In a word, agriculture was the only way of lives and livelihoods. All families could rear ducks, hens and cattle and throughout the means they themselves could meet their nutritional requirements. They could even sell the surpluses of the products that they could easily produce.

People joined the festivals with enthusiastic manner. Social and religious festivals also

were observed with great joyfulness. Mutual cooperation and kinship ties among the villagers and relatives were very strong.

But the water-logging has changed the situation. It has greatly changed the livelihood pattern of the people. People now greatly lack their traditional livelihood options. They have lands but are unable to use for production of any crop due to water-logging. All farmers are now totally unemployed as there is no way to use their lands for cultivation. They are now compelled to go for seeking works in other areas. It has been the push factor for out migration. Women are getting more vulnerable. They cannot now support their families through kitchen gardening, goat and cow rearing, duck and hen rearing, etc. They have become now unable to send their children to school. Water-logging has even lessened the value of the land. Some of vested interest groups appeared there and started shrimp cultivation, which has created inaccessibility of people to the open water bodies for fishing.

Women can now sew clothes and *nokshi kantha* at home. But they cannot take order from outside or sell their products in other places due to dreadful condition of communication as the roads remain under water most of the year. People of the areas now lack purchasing capacity. But they are sometimes compelled to buy products with higher prices. The vendors who come to their localities with their products practice it greatly. People very often get exploited this way. On the other hand, they find no way but sell their products with lower prices since very often they themselves cannot go to the market places due to the communication disruption. There are some specific problems induced by water-logging, which are as follows:

- Today all agriculture lands remain under water for 5-6 months a year. Once those could produce crops for three times, but today this is even tough to produce crops for even once a year.
- Options for grazing cattle are reduced to

a great extent. Fodders for the cattle cannot now grow in the areas except hyacinth. But hyacinth is not always suitable fodder for cattle.

- Cock or hen cannot be reared since there lacks sufficient dried space. Ducks only can be reared. But those get affected to different diseases due to water pollution since the water is always logged within the area and cannot get altered.



- The value of land is lessened to a great extent as it has lost its eligibility to produce anything.
- At the very outset, people could catch fish in the open water bodies. Today some people have started shrimp cultivation acquiring and encroaching lands and entering saline water into the water-logged areas. It has curtailed the options of the poor people for catching fish from open water bodies. Moreover, all natural foods and vegetables, which are naturally grown in common properties like forests, roadsides, river banks, etc, are now extinct. Water-logging has drastically diminished their existence. People of poor families who had the opportunity to depend partially on those vegetables for their regular foods are severely impacted.
- This is a serious concern that all kinds of livelihood options have been severely impacted. It has seriously lessened the employment opportunities. In a word, people are now completely unemployed.
- People of other areas are now totally disinclined to get their sons or daughters married with the brides or grooms of water-logged areas. They argue that it

would be difficult to communicate with their relatives. They also assume that they would be in poverty due to lack of income opportunities. They are also afraid of the odds of snake biting.

- People face serious problems in communication since the roads and all ways remain under water for maximum times of a year. Children cannot go to school, therefore, drop out rate from school is increasing. If anybody gets ill, their families cannot take the patient to hospital easily.
- Scarcity of safe drinking water is acute. Surface water surrounded by the entire areas is contaminated with saline and dust and unlikely to be used for even household chores. Tubewells also go under water during the acute water-logging situation especially in the rainy season. It creates severe scarcity of safe drinking water. Old latrines are drown and devastated when the water-logging started. Now they do not have enough high land to install new latrines.
- Water borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, itching etc have been the common diseases in the areas due to the lack of safe drinking water. Sometimes those appear as epidemic.
- Livelihood patterns i.e. people's occupations have been changed greatly. Water-logging has made the farmers roll into fishermen or boatmen.
- Push factors of migration have appeared to the highest degree, which leads even the women to migrating somewhere for works. It has created social and economic insecurity among the people of the areas.



This is strongly experienced by the women. The people of the areas are migrating to town and cities with their families or alone.

- Out migration has been creating another problem - families are experiencing breaking - husbands go to towns to seek works and do not get back to their wives who are left in villages. Women also have been the survivors of different violence and repressions.
- Local festivals, rites and cultures are also at risk. The people of Hindu community can no more perform their *Durga Pooja* in *Ashwin*, *Kali Pooja* in *Kartik*, *Janmastami* in *Vadra* months of Bangla year due to water-logging. Moreover, people now cannot organize *Kirtan*, *Palagan*, *Jari*, *Sari*, *Kobigan* due to lack of open spaces. Children even cannot now play due to lack of playground.
- It has seriously impacted on women and children. As the people of this area have lost livelihood opportunities to a great extent, they have lost thereby the purchasing capacity. Due to lack of proper foods, mother and children are getting malnourished.

Making a Hanging Garden

Initiative for Rights View (IRV) and Panjia Samaj Kallyan Sangstha (PSKS) followed some steps in implementing Hanging Garden. First they selected the potential farmers for it. Then they selected suitable place for Hanging Garden together with the farmers. The place where the shadow of trees



What is Hanging Garden

Hanging Garden is a garden which is made as an earthen platform set over a bamboo frame. The platform is made on an earthen basin, which is filled in mud, cow dung and fertilizers. Some particular types of crops and vegetables are grown on the platform. The platform is placed in the areas where water-logging takes place and endures for 5-6 months and most of the places go under 4-5 feet water. This platform is made 5-6 feet high. Basically herbs and shrubs types of crops and vegetables are possible to be grown over the platform.



is less i.e. sunlight is available and open is suitable for Hanging Garden. There are some procedures in preparing the soils for the garden. First fertile soil is heaped at a place which is thereafter mixed with organic fertilizer or compost of cow dung, hyacinth, dusts, duck and hen's faeces, kitchen dusts etc. The fertilizer or compost should be one-third of the total mixture. The soil is prepared during dry season in March or April. The mixed soil and fertilizers are put into the earthen basin placed over the bamboo frame. Then the seeds of herb and shrubs are sewed. Local seeds are good for Hanging Garden. The platform of Hanging Garden is locally called as *Nada*, which is made of clay by the potters. Generally five seeds are sewed in a platform. When saplings grow, bad ones are removed from the platform leaving the best two. Saplings require water for two times a day. If the insects attack, cow's urine can be sprayed as insecticides. In that case, urine should be preserved in a jar. After 10 days,

Initiative for Right View (IRV) is a non-profit right based research and campaign organization. It was established in 2008, through a group of young development activists who are committed to social change, transformation and confident for raising peoples' voices on different burning issues, which caused sufferings of the people, especially the poor, marginal and oppressed people. The special focus of IRV is to address economic justice, biodiversity, climate change, disaster response and risk mitigation, community, women's knowledge systems and human rights. IRV is committed to uphold the women's right and equitable distribution of social wealth.

that can be sprayed to the shrubs mixing with 10 times water. The herbs and shrubs require proper nursing. When the shrubs grow up and spread heavily, a scaffold is needed to be constructed for widening the areas of the garden as well as spacing for good growing of the shrubs. This is also possible to place the shrubs over the rooftop of the houses. When the herbs grow flowers, male flowers should be plucked and touched with female flowers for cross pollination.

Hanging Garden - Its innovation

The people of water-logged areas were visibly at stake and restless how to recover their livelihood options and survive within the water-logging situation. They tried their best to create some alternatives. They thought it differently and in a scattered way but could not implement anything due to lack of confidence and supports. IRV and PSKS, the implementing organization discussed the issue with community people in their working areas. They discussed with the people of Panjia union of Keshabpur upazila of Jessore district on how to create an alternative way to survive their lives. People gathered their ideas in various ways. They tried to relate how flower trees are grown in tabs or how trees are grown on rooftops. They also thought about creating a stand over

the water to be made of the pieces of date or coconut trees and over there they would have created a platform for growing crops. They also thought of making a concrete platform, which might cost high. Considering the availability and affordability of the people, they finally thought that earthen basin could be a cost effective way of materializing the Hanging Garden. Thereafter it came into action and the Project started piloting the Hanging Garden in Panjia union.

Piloting Hanging Garden

Sufferings of the people of the water-logged areas know no bound. Producing crops that was a regular task of the farmers turned into a difficult job. Even living in houses got difficult due to the water-logging. People were at inhumane difficulties to even manage their daily foods and other minimum necessities. They could not even think for any alternative solution. PSKS and IRV discussed the issues with communities and gradually made the thinking of their own. Community people were made aware of the issues, the causes and consequences of water-logging as well as the ways out of surviving. They together with the community people thought for the solution for surviving their lives. People were motivated that Hanging Garden could give them an alternative way of producing vegetables that they could meet their needs. They could understand that huge production might be possible by it and even surpluses could be sold after meeting their

IRV undertook an initiative to strengthen people's movement on IFIs (ADB) Project through building strong coordination with local community, system development on peoples' alternative livelihood in the waterlogged areas. It was designed to create a safety net and to demand accountability of ADB for the protection of community. Social mobilization, discussion, experience sharing, advocacy and awareness raising strategies have been implemented. It has been implemented in 4 villages of Panjia Union of Keshabpur Upazila in Jessore district.

own consumption. Alongside, they were motivated that Hanging Garden could be made successful with the use of local seeds and organic fertilizers to be made at home. They finally understood that very minimum investment in Hanging Garden could help them survive in the water-logging situation. Considering its necessity people were motivated to pilot Hanging Garden at their home.

The materials and cost for Hanging Garden

Making a Hanging Garden costs only 350 taka. Some materials are required for making a Hanging Garden. A *Nada*, the earthen basin is a must. To set it over the water, there needs three pieces of bamboo, which are framed in such a way that it can act as a stand for hanging the platform. A mixture of mud, cow dung and compost is needed to make the platform or bed. To help the herbs hang on, a gallows is needed to be constructed over the platform. Bamboo sticks can be used in this regard. This is to mention that most of the materials required for Hanging Garden can be found available at home and its surroundings.

The gardeners

Women are the key initiator of Hanging Garden. They initiate, make sure, nurture and create the results and make support to their families. Women of 200 families in



The crops

Chilly, tomato, gourd, pumpkin, cucurbitaceous (Jhinge), bean, spinach and some edible herbs are grown in Hanging Garden. Of those, cucurbitaceous, edible herbs and chilly are produced well.

Panjia union of Keshabpur upazila of Jessore district initiated the Hanging Garden at their home. Afterwards, 40/50 families from the working villages other than the participants replicated it at their home.

Some instructions for Hanging Garden

Hanging Garden needs regular watering for two times a day, otherwise the plants would be lean or stagnant. In summer, plants might be dried and died, if those are not watered timely and properly. It might be seen that local seeds produce less. But local seeds are



What it adds

Hanging Garden appears as true savior of the people of Panjia union. It yields much profit compared to the investment. It has already illustrated some benefits, which are as follows:

- *It can meet vegetable and nutritional needs of a family.*
- *Good production can help them sell the surpluses for buying other necessities. For example, chilies can be easily sold through huge production.*



more cost effective as those can be preserved and used by the farmers by their own knowledge and capacities. This is to keep in mind that saline water is inappropriate to using it in the platform of Hanging Garden.

Acceptability of Hanging Garden

In the water-logged area, people had no way to produce even a single crop. They did not have capacity to buy vegetables as much as they required. The Project initially included 30 families to the Project for Hanging Garden. Then other 51 families expressed their interest in it. And the Project supported those families in the 1st year. Many families out of the participants started Hanging Garden being learned and followed by the process. Moreover, many families outside of the Project areas are making Hanging Gardens as an alternative way of producing vegetables.

This is also possible to replicate Hanging Garden in other low lying areas, where water remains for 4-5 months on the lands. In other areas, where water-logging is a problem, Hanging Garden can be a true alternative. It can also be a tool for demonstration for drawing attention of government and donor communities on the shortcomings of their interventions as well as the urge of the people.

Hanging Garden can also be the most effective way of cultivation of crops in the wetlands and waterlogged area that might no

way disturb the ecology and ecosystem. It could also be an effective coping mechanism for small farmers. Besides, this method can provide more productions by less expenditure than the traditional agricultural system. It can also be an effective alternative option for fisher folk community. As the fishermen are sometimes restricted from fishing for few months to protect reproduction, Hanging Gardening can be very supportive to their livelihoods.

Results of Hanging Garden

Hanging Garden has greatly contributed to the lives and livelihoods of water-logged people in Jessore in the following ways:

- The farmers who are growing vegetables through Hanging Garden are now greatly able to meet their nutritional needs.
- Some families who can grow more through Hanging Garden can earn money by it through selling the surpluses.
- By Hanging Garden, local agriculture has received a little fuel to survive.
- It has also created people's togetherness and mass awareness on the causes of water-logging.
- Women are now the recognized earning members of their families by virtue of Hanging Garden.
- Women are now capacitated to raise their voice on their problems, which are induced by water-logging. They are now



well known to whom are the culprits of water-logging. They are now organized on their issues.

- Women now can lead their groups. They are now raising their issues in the regional and national levels' spaces. They have created an involvement with local government representatives, civil society, journalists and are working with them on the issue.
 - At the very outset, males did not take the initiative positively. They are now impressed seeing the success of Hanging Garden.
 - Hanging Garden has created an opportunity to mobilize farmers towards creating their voices against water-logging and the culprits who created the hazards in the name of development.
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