



BUILDING RESILIENCE OF DISASTER VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY FROM BANGLADESH

Chars are the small islands in the river delta of Bangladesh. The char communities in Bangladesh are extremely vulnerable to extreme climate events such as cyclones, floods, erosion and saline water intrusion, which has reduced agricultural production and employment opportunities and increased loss of assets and poverty. The Capacity Building of Ultra Poor (CUP) project built the capacity of poor farmers on climate-adaptive agriculture technologies to increase production, diversify income options and raise awareness on disaster risk reduction and climate change.

This Case Study was a background briefing for Oxfam Novib's 2013 Annual Review, prepared in partnership with the Shariatpur Development Society (SDS), and describes the programme in Bangladesh. Although it is not a formal evaluation it does consider lessons learned by both Oxfam Novib and its partner organisations.

These Case Studies are shared in the form in which they were submitted, often written by partners whose first language is not English, and have not been edited since submission. We believe that the meaning is clear enough, and the authenticity of the reporting and the availability of Southern Voices on development makes their inclusion in the Oxfam iLibrary worthwhile for sharing with external readers.

Programme Partner: Shariatpur Development Society (SDS)

AIM OF THE PROJECT

to build resilience and increase food security of ultra poor peoples in vulnerable Char communities in River Padma.

CONTEXT

Bangladesh is a low-lying deltaic country in South Asia formed by the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna rivers. More than 310 rivers and tributaries have made this country a land of rivers. Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to its geography and climate patterns due to natural hazards. Bangladesh suffers cyclones, storm surges, floods, tornadoes, river erosion, earthquakes, epidemics, salinity, arsenic and droughts and resulting loss of life, livelihood etc. About 85% of its people living in rural areas mainly depend on agriculture for livelihood. Estimates of rural poverty rates now stand 32% and of which about 11% lives under extreme poverty. Climate change adds a new dimension to community risk and vulnerability. The location of the district made people vulnerable to floods and cyclones. The riverine structure of the district has made it more prone to flooding and river bank erosion and there are areas where people have to rebuild their houses several times. The Shariatpur district is densely populated.¹

A large portion of Shariatpur district is covered by char land and many people of the district are living in those char areas. The riverine sand and silt landmasses known as char in Bengali are home to over 5 million people in Bangladesh. These areas are highly vulnerable to sudden and forceful flooding as well as erosion and loss of land, which makes living in the chars both hazardous and insecure. The Island (char) in Padma basin mostly concentrated in Shariatpur and part of Chandpur District. The victims of erosion lose their settlements, agricultural land and employment, and are forced to move elsewhere, sometimes on an annual basis. Land is the most important resource in the chars, but poor households lack the support they need to utilize it fully, including technical advice and training, agricultural supplies and market access. There is great potential to improve household food security, nutritional status and livelihoods in the chars through household food production.

Government, NGO and private sector intervention is absent in the char areas due to remoteness and difficult transportation to and from the char. Lack of service and opportunity for private sector initiatives reduced the potentiality of peoples livelihood. Considering the situation and miseries of the char peoples, Oxfam Novib provide support to SDS for working in the chars areas to build resilience of the communities.

METHODOLOGY

The project worked with 40 women groups consist of 1200 direct women beneficiaries from 1200 ultra poor HHS in 4 Unions (lowest tire of local government) under Shariatpur and Chandpur district. The CP implemented all the planned activities with the target Right Holders (RHs) through the groups as a cost effective manner. SDS facilitated a process to form Union level federation of new and old groups of previous phases. This approach strengthened the position and voice of char peoples to the different government levels for ensuring the services and resources allocation for char communities. A number of activities were undertaken with the RHs' groups in 2013 to improve adaptive capacity and diversification of income of RHs.

Activities to build adaptive capacity of farmers and increase production:

- Conducted training on improve adaptive agricultural technologies, cultivation of new improve varieties, quality seed production and preservation at farmers level.
- Provided technical support to the advance farmers and established demonstration plots of new technologies, varieties of vegetables and field crops for transfer of new technologies among the greater farmers community.
- Provided support to the farmers for installation of shallow tube-wells for low cost irrigation facilities.
- Provided technical and inputs support to the RHs for fruit trees plantation and vegetable cultivation in the homestead area.

Activities for livelihoods diversification and increase income:

- Conducted skills development training on different income options for the RHs mainly non-crop income options such as Cow, goat & poultry rearing, tailoring, small business etc. based on feasibility.
- Asset/inputs support to the RHs to start diversified livelihood options.
- Supported the groups for rising beneficiary savings and group fund as source of loan for the RHs for running IGA options.
- Conducted workshop and visit for developing linkages with market players and government line departments.

Activities for awareness raising:

- Conducted training for RHs, community leaders and school teachers on climate change issues, disaster preparedness measures, early warning system.
- Setup bill board with early warning messages, raised water point above flood level, installation of safe latrine and equipped the community with megaphone.

Inputs/services delivered to the RHs:

- Knowledge and skills on new/improve and suitable adaptive agricultural technologies for increasing agricultural production.
- Improve seeds, irrigation equipment and fruit trees saplings.
- Knowledge and skills on diversified livelihood options, asset/inputs for IGA, linkage development.
- Awareness/skills on DRR, climate change, bill board, water point, safe latrine, megaphone.

Oxfam Novib assessed and approved the counterpart's proposal, transfer of funds and monitored progress of the project. The CP organized the RHs, implemented the interventions and delivered the service & inputs to the RHs. The management staff of the counterpart ensured the logistics, delivery of services, collected data and monitored implementation of plan.

RESULTS

Outputs achieved

Capacity of ultra poor farmers improved on climate adaptive agricultural technologies.

Income option of ultra poor families diversified and increased.

Awareness and capacity of disaster vulnerable char communities increased on DRR and climate change.

Outcomes

Production and income of 1200 ultra poor RHs increased of vulnerable char communities in river Padma.

Impact

To build resilience and increase food security of ultra poor communities in the riverine char of Shariatpur district.

Policy and practice changes

SDS has been implementing same type of livelihoods project with separate groups in other areas. The CP can use this experiences and learning in these project for building resilience of vulnerable communities. Secondly, create linkages between char communities and government service providers. Govt. officials visited project areas. The linkages make the RHs empowered to visit different govt. offices like agriculture, livestock, health and local government to claim their right to services and safety nets programs. The situation will create pro-poor service delivery provision gradually by the providers.

Successes & failures

- RHs successfully implemented the knowledge and skills on new adaptive technologies and produced new crops/varieties in the char such as watermelon, maize, cucumber, early vegetables cultivation etc.
- 696 RHs diversified their livelihoods and increased their income.
- Target communities have access to safe water during normal and flood time.
- Most of the community peoples able to understand early warning messages and disaster preparedness measures.
- Char farmers not able to attract the buyers and private sectors in the chars to buy directly from the farmer groups and undertake intervention for economic growth of chars.

HUMAN INTEREST

Individual success story # 1

Ajufa has find out the way of exit from extreme poverty through IGA

Mrs. Ajufa, wife of Mr. Sunu Miah of Rashid Gazir kandi of Gariberchar union under Gosairhat upzila. They are five members in family including two sons

and one daughter. She has no lands of her own and she was living with very uncertainty to family operation.

Consequences of SDS CUP project interventions Ajufa also received various helps like; training, materials and technical supports. Though the CUP project provided the same supports for other beneficiaries but Ajuafa has taken it raptly than others. She was waiting to catch a chance for change her life.

Once upon a time the chance has come. The CUP arranged three days training on food processing (Chanachur making). All though 25 no's of participants were attended in the training; Ajufa has proven her an exceptional.

After training, SDS also provided a lam-some initial capital of BDT 1000.00 and equipments for each participant.

After receiving the training Ajufa has taken initiative to apply her knowledge and capacity immediately. She shared her husband and others family member about chanachur (processed food) making. Mr. Sunu miah also appreciated her initiatives. Ajufa's husband Sunu Miah helped to collect required materials from market like flour, pulse and other spices.

Ajufa started small-scale production and sample supply in local small shops. Ajufa's chanachur attracts the local consumers and creates higher demand. Within a month Ajufa scaled up her production and started wholesale in local markets.

Now a day, Ajufa's Chanachur named 'Shanti Chanachur' has become a well-known local brand. She earns BDT 16000 to 24000 per month. She is now owner of 22 decimals of lands and a home. Within a year she improved herself from landless to small holder and set as a milestone of women leadership. **SDS invested only BDT 10000/- against the achievement.**



Individual success story # 2

CUP lighten to poorest Panna

Mrs. Panna Begum (45) is wife of Mr. Sadeque Bhuan of Gazikandi village under Alaolpur union of Gosairhat upazila. They are seven members in her family including three daughters and two sons. They have no cultivable land at all. Panna's husband was day laborer. Once upon a time Panna and her husband could not manage two times food for their child in a day. Due to extreme poverty all their children deprived from opportunity of education. On the other hand morbidity was abiding with her family members due to mal nutrition. Panna had become very demoralized about her life.

When the SDS started the CUP project in community many poorest was being involved as project beneficiaries. Mrs. Panna also becomes the same. Consequence of asset transfer activity in 2008 SDS CUP project provided a cattle to Panna. Simultaneously she also received necessary training on cow rearing from CUP. Moreover Panna received homestead level early vegetable cultivation. Panna starts early vegetable cultivation in organic way. She used their cow dung in vegetable garden. In 2010 Panna's cattle was developed as a cow and she calves a calf. The cow starts giving five to 6 liter milk per day. Every day Panna earned 150 to 180 BDT by selling milk. According to Panna's statement her income from milks are; first year tk.30000/= and second year tk.48000/= . On the other hand approximately money value of her cattle is tk.80,000. Panna also earns from vegetable garden. Average annual income from vegetables garden is approximately tk.24000/= . She is enjoying now a peaceful family life. They are able to arranged three meals for family members. Their two children are now going to school.

Panna is now grateful to SDS and CUP project. She said, " CUP project is a blessing for poorest community. If we were missing to involve with CUP, we had to migrate very in that time". It is mentionable that, moreover 38 poorest women those are now become self dependent like Mrs. Panna Begume and simultaneously many others improved their living status from the assistance of CUP project.

NOTES

¹ Shariatpur is one of the districts, which is located in the central region of Bangladesh.

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First published as an internal document in Oxfam Novib March 2014.

Loaded to the Oxfam iLibrary and first published online November 2015.

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This case study was written by Khan Alamgir and prepared with the support of the Oxfam Novib partner Shariatpur Development Society (SDS).

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail info@oxfamnovib.nl

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published through the Oxfam iLibrary by Oxfam GB for Oxfam Novib in November 2015.

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