



CLP Impact Series

Empowering Women in the Chars

The CLP's Contribution



Chars Livelihoods Programme

Reducing Extreme Poverty on the Riverine Islands of North West Bangladesh

Empowering Women

The CLP's Contribution



How Does the CLP Measure Women's Empowerment?

The package of support that the CLP provides to its participants is designed to empower women. The activities of the CLP centre largely on females: women receive an asset, collect the stipend and receive livelihoods training. The Programme also provides comprehensive social development training, the purpose of which is to change attitudes towards women.

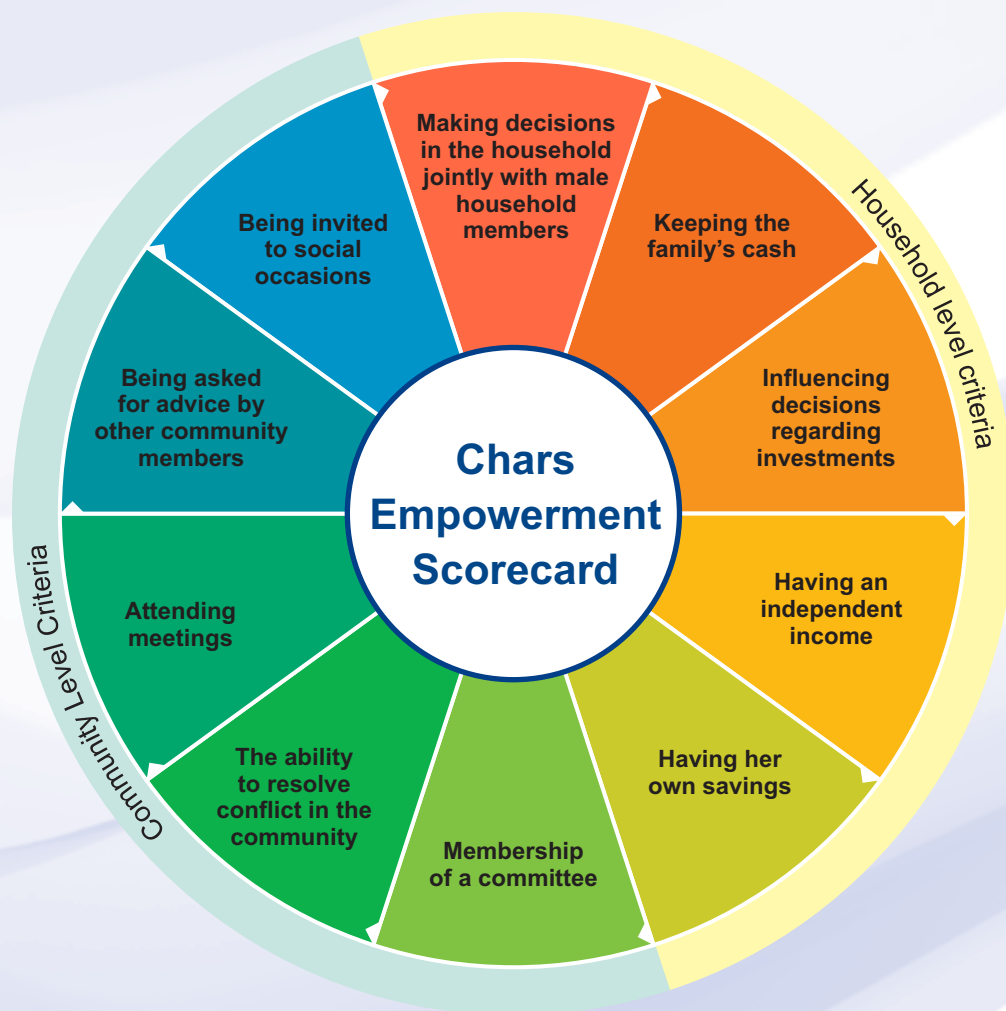
The CLP needs to understand its impact on women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is difficult to measure. The behaviours which tell us that somebody is empowered are very specific to the social context in which they live.

During May and June 2012, the CLP conducted detailed research with people living on the chars to understand which behaviours show them that a woman in this context is empowered. The result of this research is the Chars Empowerment Scorecard – ten criteria that the community has identified as most important for determining whether a woman is empowered.



The Chars Empowerment Scorecard

This scorecard shows the behaviour which people on the chars have identified as representing empowerment. The CLP uses these ten criteria for monitoring its impact on women's empowerment.





The CLP's Impact on Women's Empowerment

The CLP has a substantial impact on women's empowerment – and it has this impact very quickly.

Participating in the CLP has a substantial impact on a woman's level of empowerment. The average empowerment score for women who have completed the CLP is 5.4. The average score for extreme poor women who have not yet taken part in the CLP is 2.4. Participants who are currently receiving support from the programme have a similar score to women who have completed the CLP; showing that the programme has an impact on women's empowerment in the space of months, rather than years.

This impact is driven by two key factors: increased knowledge and increased wealth.

Research findings show that improvements in female empowerment are a result of their increased knowledge and their increased income. Participants attribute these changes directly to elements of the CLP package. Increased knowledge is provided by the wide range of training CLP participants receive, from cow rearing to hand-washing practice. Increased wealth is a consequence of the CLP's livelihoods work, most importantly the provision of an asset.

Reduced financial dependence on men provides women with a higher value in the household.

Prior to entering the CLP, women are generally not involved in bringing income into their household. Participation in the CLP can provide women with income through various sources. Research has shown that this raises their status in the household, and gives them far more influence over important decisions.

Improved knowledge changes a woman's status.

The most telling moment of the CLP's research came outside of a formal setting. As the researchers were waiting to interview a participant, a conversation within one of the households was overheard, with the husband telling his wife that the women participating in the CLP had 'become clever'. This illustrates what CLP participants tell us; that the knowledge provided through training sessions makes male household members value their opinion.

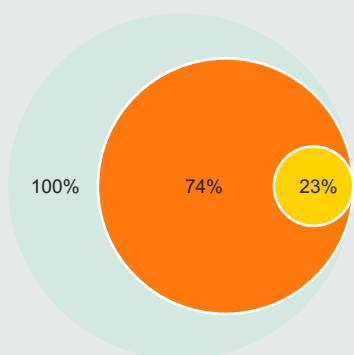
Group meetings establish links between women, which provide an infrastructure for collective action.

The CLP's research tells us group meetings run by the CLP reduce the isolation of women, and increase their social capital. Women participating in the CLP have better links with one another, and create networks of mutual support. This is especially relevant to domestic violence, where groups of women mobilise to pressure male household members into stopping.

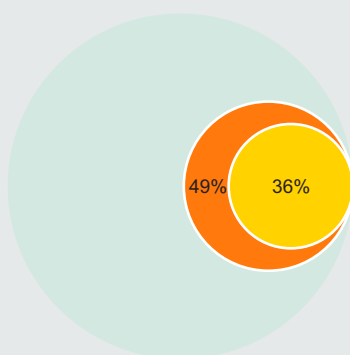
Impact upon Empowerment in the Household

Through administering the Chars Empowerment Scorecard prior to a woman's entry into the programme, to former and current participants, and to a control group who have not yet joined the CLP, it is possible to understand the CLP's impact across the different dimensions of empowerment on the chars.

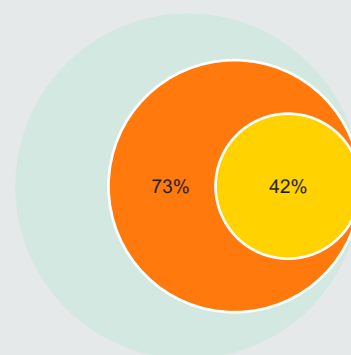
- Women who have participated in the CLP
- Women in a control group



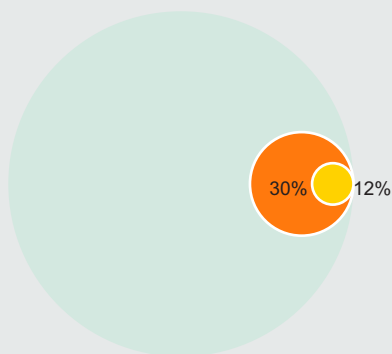
Making decisions in the household jointly with male household members



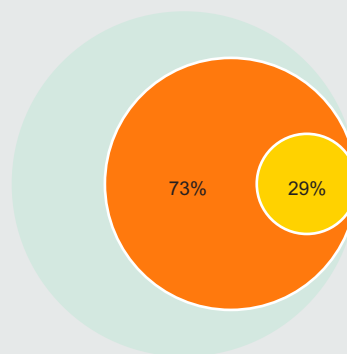
Having an independent income



Keeping the family's cash

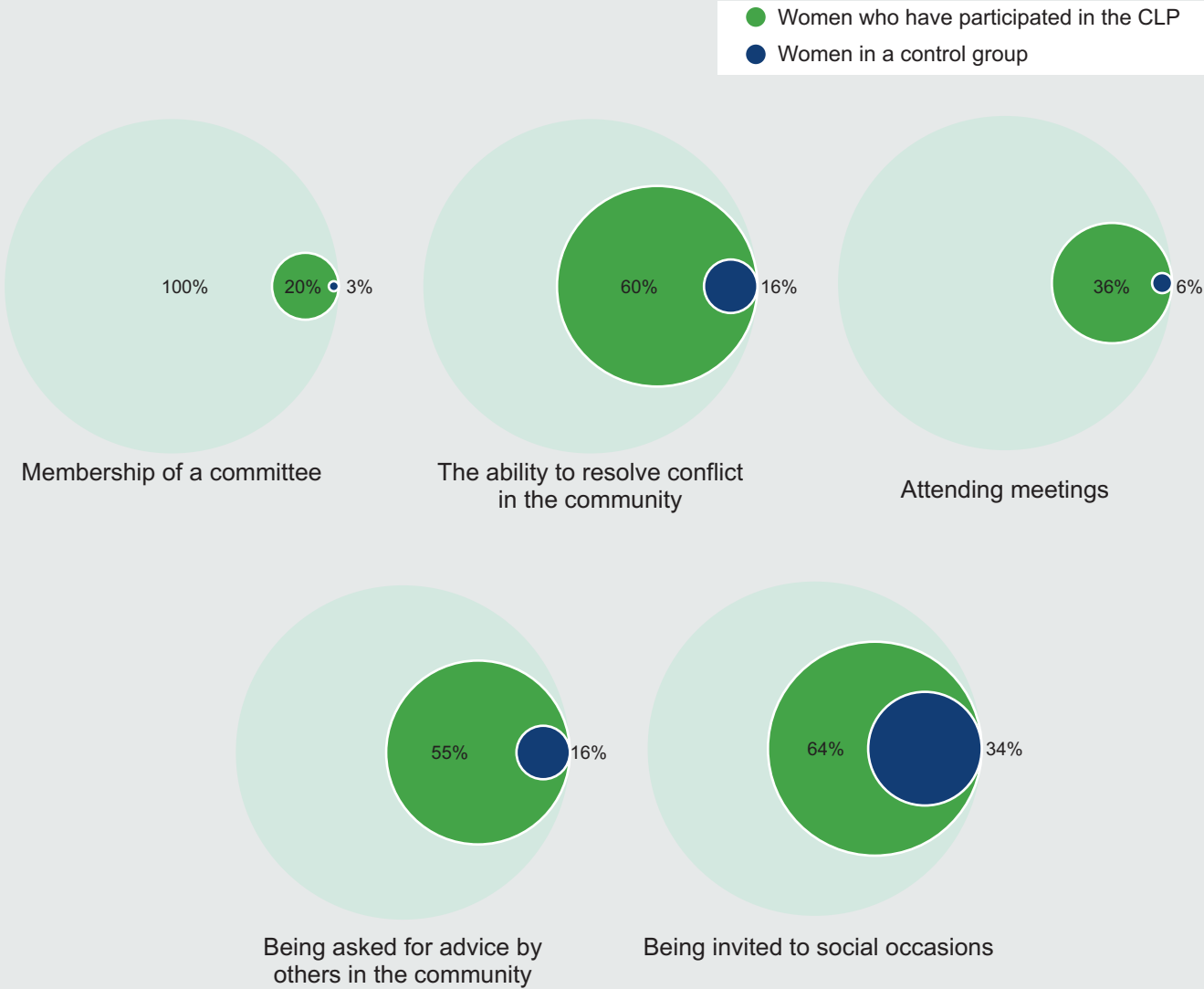


Having her own savings



Influencing decisions regarding investments

Impact upon Empowerment in the Community



Case Study **Moiful**

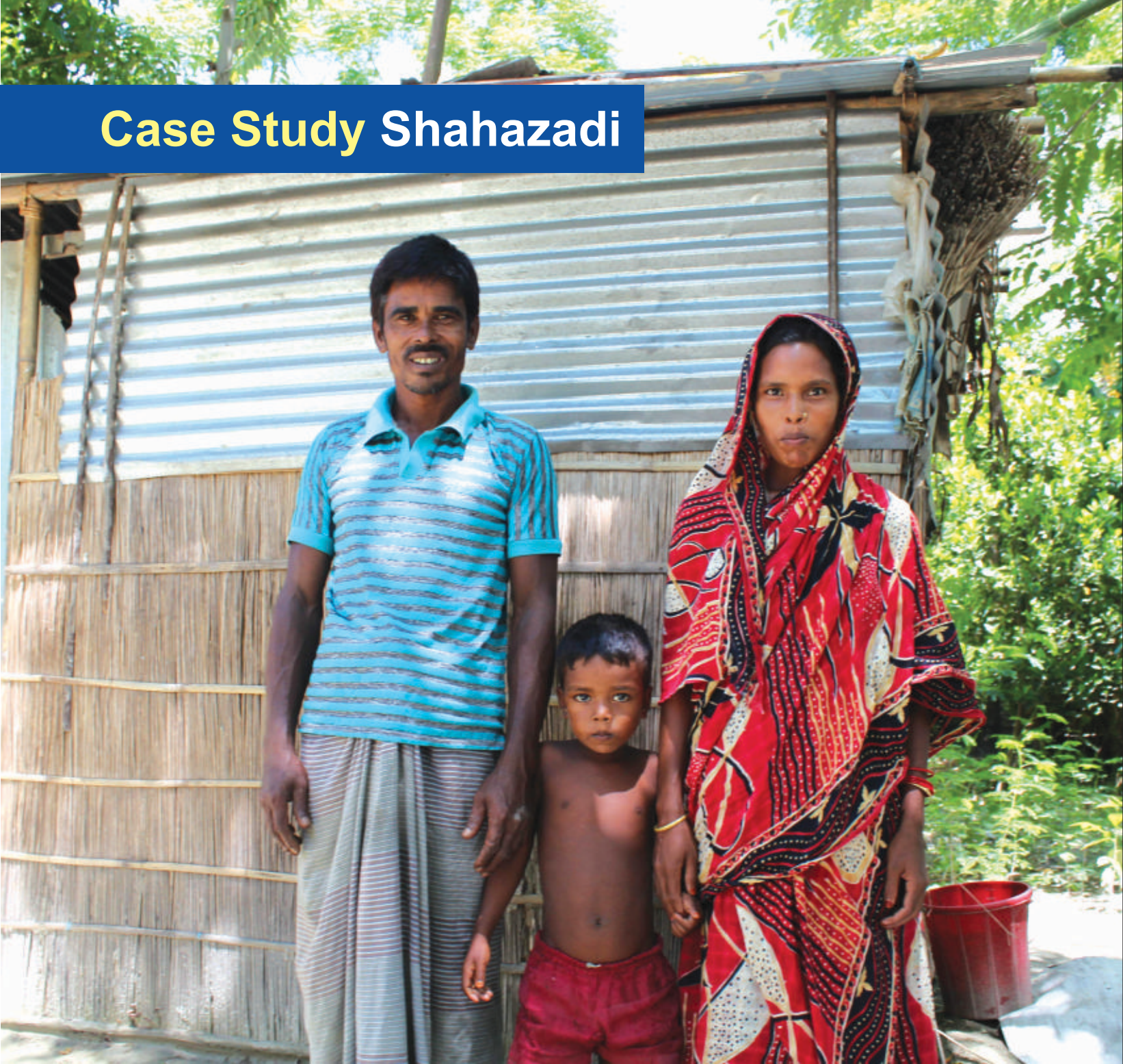


Prior to joining the CLP, Moiful felt that she had a low status in her community. Her confidence was low, and she did not feel that she could speak to many community members, especially men. If she tried to give advice people would ignore her; she says that she didn't know how to speak to people. Regardless of her confidence, conditions were against her. As she was poor she was not invited to social occasions such as weddings, because she wore old clothes and she could not afford to provide the customary wedding gift.

Empowerment is a long-term process, but research shows that the CLP can have a fairly quick impact. Through a combination of an asset transfer and training, Moiful's position in the community completely changed. She is now invited to social occasions and local meetings. As a result of the CLP's social development training, she says she is now confident speaking in public, and the knowledge learnt has increased the respect other community members have for her. If there is conflict in the community, her opinion is valued. She says people in the community come to her for advice, and she speaks at local meetings. She is now a member of the local school committee - unlikely to have happened without this newfound social confidence.



Case Study Shahazadi



Shahazadi does not have fond memories of family life before joining the CLP. She was very dependent on her husband. He wouldn't allow her to go outside the house to work. She had very little influence upon the decisions made in the household that affected her life. Her husband beat her, so she was concerned about the repercussions of sharing her opinions.

After joining the CLP, Shahazadi slowly felt confident enough to make changes. In training sessions she learnt about her rights and the laws which exist to protect her. Whereas before she was isolated, she now has support from other women in the community. Shahazadi was a member of a CLP Social Development group. When her husband continued to beat her, 23 members of the group went to him and persuaded him to stop.

Shahazadi's status in the household has increased as a result of the skills she has learnt in CLP livelihoods training. She has practical knowledge of cattle rearing and other ways of generating income. According to her, her husband is impressed by this knowledge, and he now values her opinions. CLP training has also provided Shahazadi the idea of the 'development of the household'. Her husband has bought into this concept. Now, two and a half years after the end of the CLP package, its effects sustain. Shahazadi has significantly more control over her life.



The Chars Livelihoods Programme works with extreme poor households living on island chars in North West Bangladesh. The Programme aims to improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of at least one million extremely poor and vulnerable women children and men living on chars. The CLP provides a package of interventions with the aim of improving social and economic assets, reducing environmental and economic risks, and increasing access to markets and services.

For further information on the CLP's impact on women's empowerment, please visit the Publication page of our website. The most relevant documents are:

McIntosh, R.A. (2012) *Reviewing the CLP's Approach to Measuring Women's Empowerment*.
McIntosh, R.A., Kenward, S., Islam, R., Alam, Z. (2012) *The CLP's Impact on Women's Empowerment*.

This brief is part of the CLP's Impact Series, which outline the CLP's impact across key thematic areas. Forthcoming briefs in this series will address Food Security, Livelihoods, Nutrition and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).



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Learn more at:
www.clp-bangladesh.org

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