



CLP'S EXPERIENCE IN SELECTING CORE PARTICIPANTS

SUMMARY

After operating from 2004 – 2016, the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) accumulated vast experience working with the extreme-poor and in remote areas.

During its final year CLP developed a series of Lessons Learnt briefs with donors and development practitioners in mind.

CLP can share many lessons on establishing who to target and how to develop selection criteria for poverty reduction programmes.

LESSONS INCLUDE:



A set of selection criteria that considers the wider context results in a better selection of participants and greater acceptance in the communities.



Adopting a broader definition of “char” helped GoB and DFID reconcile their understandings of the targeted working area and allowed CLP to add more households in need to the programme.



CLP2 broadened inclusion to reduce possible social division arising from the supply of high value inputs to a targeted group within a population in which there is an undoubted, pervasive general need for support.



A range of interventions like sanitation, behavioural change and disease control are best tackled with a community-wide approach.



Targeting women increased women's empowerment as well as providing an additional income to the household.

BACKGROUND

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) was a poverty reduction programme implemented in Bangladesh and co-financed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It was managed by Maxwell Stamp PLC and sponsored by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C) and executed by the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division (RDCD) of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

People on the riverine islands ("chars") of north-west Bangladesh had precarious livelihoods. They were often heavily reliant on low-paid and unpredictable agricultural day labour, and there were few other stable livelihoods options open to them. They were vulnerable to environmental shocks that could have devastating effects on their livelihoods, with flooding a particular risk. Most chars-dwellers moved home several times in the last few years due to floods or char erosion. Many reported that they had lost all their possessions and assets at least once in the past.

The precariousness of their livelihoods meant that many chars households faced food insecurity and suffered from the effects of under-nutrition. Limited access to improved water sources and sanitation and low levels of services such as health, education and livelihoods support were further challenges, resulting in chars-dwellers being amongst the poorest people in Bangladesh. CLP aimed to work with these people to help them lift themselves out of poverty.

CLP operated in two phases – CLP1, from 2004 to 2010, and CLP2, from April 2010 to March 2016. Over that time, CLP accumulated substantial experience from working with the extreme-poor in remote areas.

CLP is widely recognised as having been a very successful programme. By the end of its tenure, CLP directly (and in many cases dramatically) transformed the lives of over 78,000 core participant households, and it improved the livelihoods of one million poor and vulnerable people. Moreover, it achieved this while operating in one of the most challenging environments in the world: the riverine island chars in the Jamuna, Teesta, and Padma rivers of north-western Bangladesh.

During the course of its implementation, CLP needed to undergo a number of major changes, to respond to a range of new challenges, and to test out a variety of approaches. It involved itself in many different activities, spanning everything from livelihood improvement to market development, from social protection to land reform, from education to nutrition, and from health to veterinary services. Over the years it operated, CLP learnt a number of very important lessons. These lessons are now documented in a series of Lessons Learnt briefs which are intended to share CLP's experience with donors and practitioners, both in Bangladesh and further afield.

This particular brief focuses on lessons learnt from developing selection criteria and targeting extreme-poor households.

CLP SELECTION CRITERIA

From the beginning, CLP used a set of rigorous criteria: every participant needed to be land-less, asset-less, income-less, credit-less. Each of these criteria had specific indicators. A potential participant also had to be able to meet certain residency and participation requirements. Together, these criteria were considered good proxies for the identification of extreme poverty in the context of the chars.





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Land-less

- Absolutely zero decimals of land ownership, including homestead land
- No access to agricultural land, including share cropped land
- No land to be inherited under Bangladesh law
- Households renting homestead land are still eligible



Asset-less

- Ownership of no more than 2 goats / sheep, 10 fowl & 1 shared cattle
- Must have productive assets valued at less than 5,000 taka



Income-less

- Not receiving cash or asset grants from any other asset transfer programme
- Irregular Income



Credit-less

- No loan outstanding from any microfinance or credit programme



Residency

- Must be a resident for at least 6 months in a village which has been classified by CLP as an island char



Participation

- Must be able and willing to participate in weekly meetings

LESSONS LEARNT

Selecting the right participants is one of the core challenges for any poverty reduction programme because it determines how efficiently the investment reaches the targeted population. The credibility and effectiveness of development efforts is challenged when resources fail to reach those most in need.

To address this, poverty reduction programmes should identify specific criteria with very limited potential for inclusion and exclusion errors to help identify the extreme-poor more precisely. These criteria need to be clearly defined and agreed upon between the programme and the various stakeholders so as to avoid any ambiguity. Targeting women in the selection process can have wide-ranging positive impacts. Also, including mechanisms that allow for engaging with the broader community is sometimes not only necessary for effectiveness but more productive.

SELECTION CRITERIA MUST ANTICIPATE INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION ERRORS

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) defines extreme poverty as income below Tk 19 pp/pd. However, unlike GoB, CLP chose not to simply emphasise income as the single most important measure of extreme poverty. At the poorest levels of the chars community, the main driver of income is labour – not land and assets. As assets and land are not driving income, it is possible to have no assets and/or no land but still have an income above the Tk 19 pp/pd threshold (resulting in inclusion error). Similarly, it is possible to have high levels of productive assets and/or land but an income below Tk 19 pp/pd (resulting in exclusion error).

Although income was taken into consideration in the criteria, CLP believed the indicators needed to be expanded beyond simply pp/pd data and be put into the context of living on the chars. For instance, the composition of a typical char-dweller's income is largely homogenous: CLP's baseline data showed that between 67-91% of participants relied on irregular day labour as their main (and sometimes sole) source of income. In addition to the unpredictability of income, char-dwellers also face *monga*, an annual season of underemployment for many rural day labourers that occurs from September to November and from March to April after crop harvesting.

Baseline data also showed that an overwhelming majority of CPHHs did not have access to land. It has been noted that "the lack of ownership of and/or access to land and poverty are synonymous in rural Bangladesh." Thus, so as not to exclude this population, landless-ness was made a criterion.

CLP continued to use the original set of criteria until March 2011 when the second phase of the Programme underwent its first annual review. The review team concluded that, based on CLP's selection criteria at the time, the Programme may have been excluding extreme-poor households. They suggested that the Programme undertake a poverty assessment (PA). This PA would determine whether or not the then-current criteria were the most effective, and, if not, what new selection approach could be taken to ensure that it captured as many extreme-poor households as possible and ensured the lowest possible inclusion and exclusion errors.

The exercise considered four possible options to reduce the exclusion and inclusion error:



The PA exercise found that options 1-3 were not preferred because they either exacerbated the problem, or failed to address it adequately. Option 4, however, drove down both exclusion and inclusion error. Thus it was suggested that CLP incorporate a combination of asset levels and types, as well as various social criteria, into its existing selection criteria. Based on these suggestions, CLP adapted its selection criteria to include one proxy indicator in the asset-less criterion, i.e. ownership of no more than 2 goats/sheep, 10 fowl & 1 shared cattle.

Any targeting system is likely to face difficulties with borderline cases that may result in the exclusion of similarly extreme-poor households. Overall, however, CLP's criteria proved to be clearly understood, easy to apply in practice and transparent.

At the scale CLP conducted its work, combined with sufficient oversight and verification, this final set of selection criteria proved to have relatively low inclusion and exclusion errors. The criteria, therefore, gained acceptance in the char communities and facilitated a relatively rapid and cost-effective selection process for CLP.

SELECTION CRITERIA DEFINITIONS CANNOT BE AMBIGUOUS

After the first year of operations, in June 2005, DFID began to emphasise that the Programme's funding was primarily intended for residents of the unattached chars who, by definition, were the most remote from mainland because they had been "cut off by a major river". These areas, by virtue of their remoteness, were also the least likely to be served by the GoB or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, it seems the GoB had a different, broader interpretation of the meaning of the word "char". The definition of a char according to GoB is any "low lying, flood-prone area".

In the working areas of CLP1, there were a sufficient amount of households that were deemed as eligible under DFID's original definition. However, with the shift in geographical focus under CLP2, the number of people located in the new working areas that qualified as living on chars was much lower than anticipated by the Programme designers. In fact, if the original DFID definition of chars was used, CLP2 would not have been able to achieve its target of providing 67,000 households with comprehensive support. Thus it was necessary prior to the start of CLP2 to expand the Programme's definition of chars to consider attached chars, as per GoB's conceptualisation of char areas.



TARGETING WOMEN SERVES TO INCREASE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

While all members of a core participant household benefitted from the CLP package, the core participants selected into the Programme were all female. This was a decision made in the design process.

The fundamental aim of targeting women was to improve the status of women and ensure gender equality in char communities. The economic benefit behind targeting women in an extremely patriarchal society like Bangladesh is that when the woman is empowered, and the two adult household members can both contribute to the household income, then that family is much more likely to weather financial shocks, and ultimately more likely to climb out of extreme poverty.

CLP's range of interventions were designed to build women's confidence, increase their ability to take control over their livelihoods and to make decisions that impacted their life and the lives of those around them. Interventions also aimed to address negative social attitudes and behaviours and increase respect from women's family members and the wider community.

To achieve this, CLP enrolled women in Social Development Groups, comprising between 15-25 women (all core participants). The members attended weekly sessions where they followed a social development curriculum. Sessions consisted of role play, exercises and discussions aimed at making participants aware of their rights, improving their understanding of them, and strengthening their confidence in exercising them.

INCLUDING THE WIDER COMMUNITY IS BENEFICIAL

CLP2 sought to broaden inclusion of those not selected as direct participant households. This was done for a few reasons.

Firstly, this was done to reduce possible social division arising from the supply of high-value inputs to a targeted group within a population in which there is an undoubted, pervasive general need for support. Including the wider community in certain projects helped to mitigate these potential conflicts.

Secondly, involving the community in activities which sought to have broad results, such as sanitation, could greatly improve the success and impact of the project. The inclusion of more non-core participants in CLP-provided services was desirable for long-term sustainability, as well as for ensuring equity.

There were instances where interventions, initially only offered to core participants, yielded stifled results. CLP therefore adjusted policies to be more inclusive of the wider community, recognising that certain aspects of development, for example behavioural change and disease control, were best tackled through a community-wide approach.

Building sanitary latrines is a notable example where the community-wide approach was more productive. CLP changed its policy in 2011. Instead of supplying well-constructed, relatively high-cost latrines only to CPHHs, CLP shifted to a community-wide participatory approach, involving sanitation awareness raising and self-built, low cost latrines with only a small grant and the slab and water seal supplied by CLP. The goal of this was to reduce or eliminate open defecation in the community. The result was creating a public good at no extra cost to the programme.

Other mechanisms through which CLP was able to benefit the wider community included:

- Providing access to health and nutrition activities, including public satellite health clinics.
- Establishing Village Savings & Loans (VSL) groups, which provided core as well as non-core participants with access to microfinance.
- Offering sustainable employment opportunities for char-dwellers in jobs such as CSKs (char health workers), paramedics, livestock service providers and poultry vaccinators, as well as temporary employment building plinths through the Infrastructure Employment Programme (IEP).
- Initiating market development projects, such as the Char Business Centres (CBCs), which connected local char businessmen with mainland markets and purchasers.
- Supporting Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), such as Village Development Committees (VDCs), which spearheaded local social development campaigns and steered community development activities.

The design of any new programme should place a major emphasis on ensuring that it has elements that will benefit, as much as possible, the wider community. This should be viewed not as a dilution of programme resources, but rather as a mechanism for ensuring support for the programme and for better integration of the core beneficiaries into the community. Overall, this can serve as a guarantor of greater programme sustainability.

If you wish to learn more about CLP or the lessons learnt series of briefs please visit the CLP website www.clp-bangladesh.org.

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Chars Livelihoods Programme

Reducing Extreme Poverty on the Riverine Islands of North West Bangladesh

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