

Notes for 'CLP Overview'

Slide 1 – CLP Objective

The overall objective of the CLP: “Improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of at least one million extremely poor and vulnerable women, children and men living on remote isolated riverine char islands of north-western Bangladesh.”

What are riverine 'char' islands? As the picture shows, they are essentially banks of sediment that are deposited (and eroded) by the rivers along which CLP works: the Jamuna, Teesta and Padma. Although some have existed for as long as 30 years, many last only a few. Erosion can be staggeringly swift. One family told us that they had lived 300m from the edge of their char. They noticed the bank beginning to erode. One hour later, they were in a boat, watching their house and livelihood be swept away downriver, right in front of their eyes. They saved what they could, but their crops, fruit trees, house and other possessions that couldn't fit in the boat were lost.

Important point to note: CLP's core assistance package (of which more later) was delivered to 78,026 households, or around 304,000 people (using the household average size of 3.89). However, some assistance areas were aimed at the community, rather than specifically at Core Participant Households (CPHHs). These included: improved water; sanitation through sanitary latrines; plinths; cash-for-work programmes; emergency responses; markets components; amongst others.

Slide 2 – Why the Chars?

Essentially, this revolves around the fact that the chars are hotspots or pockets of extreme poverty. The other reasons given mainly explain the presence of extreme poverty. For example, CLP's research indicates that flooding and erosion are two of the main causes of char-dwelling families falling into poverty, or falling back into poverty after they'd escaped it. Because chars are essentially temporary sediment islands in the river, or in areas that the river regularly floods, the vulnerability means that it is much easier for poor people to get trapped in a cycle: building up a livelihood; having it damaged or destroyed by a flood or erosion event; and ending up in extreme poverty again.

At the height of the rainy season, the main channel of the Jamuna river can swell to up to 15km wide – although it's more usually between 8 and 10. This means that in the dry season, there are large swathes of land that were once river bottom, but are now dry. However, the sandiness of the river bottom means it is still difficult for wheeled vehicles to drive over; it's also hard for people to walk on! So the chars are often hard to reach, being kilometres from the mainland and cut off by difficult, sandy conditions.

Although many people have, over the decades, moved to the chars in order to find livelihoods opportunities, nevertheless regular jobs are almost non-existent. Most families rely on seasonal agricultural day labour. CLP research shows that this has distinct seasonal highs and lows; during the 'good income' season, households may not be considered poor, at least by income standards. However, once the lean or 'monga' season comes in (usually between October and January), incomes can fall drastically. And although agricultural labour wages have generally tracked inflation over CLP's six years (2010 – 2016), possibly even exceeding it slightly, nevertheless the wages of between Tk 250 and 400 per day cannot be considered enormous (between £2.30 and £3.65 per day at an XR of 110 from March 2016).

There are few services available on the chars. Although there are NGOs and government services in some areas, for the vast majority of CPHHs with whom we worked, CLP was the only organisation providing any kind of assistance.

Government is reluctant to invest in things like infrastructure, schools and so on, for the obvious reason that permanent structures get washed away by river erosion. During the 2015 flooding year, one concrete multi-purpose school / gov't building in CLP's working area was first cut off by the river; then entirely swept away.

Even where schools are built by gov't using disaster-resilient materials such as corrugated iron and bamboo (disaster-resilient because they are light enough to be swiftly packed onto boats if erosion threatens), often teachers don't turn up. Getting out to the chars is long, tiresome and involves extra costs that they are not reimbursed for. Sometimes they pay someone else, an unqualified person, to turn up and do their lessons for them. Either way, kids get either no education, or not much of one. It's a similar story with roads (there are none); electricity (almost nowhere has mains electricity; the richer families buy solar panels when they can afford them); market places, and so on.

All of this generally means that the extreme poor living on the chars have worse health, food security, nutrition and literacy than comparable people living on the mainland.

Slide 3 – Who does CLP work with?

In simple terms, it's the poorest of the poor – the extreme poor. The selection criteria that CLP uses are based around three major indicators:

- Landless
- Assetless
- Jobless

They should have no land or access to land; not even owning the land their homestead is on. Even if someone is a sharecropper (i.e. works land belonging to someone else, but retains a share of the produce) they would be considered non-eligible for CLP. Even if they are still poor, nevertheless they would generally be less poor than CLP's targeted participants.

They should have productive assets worth less than Tk5000 – about £43.50. Owning a cow outright would disqualify them; a part-ownership share would be OK. They can own two sheep / goats and up to 10 chickens or ducks, but more than that would disqualify them. They should also have no other asset such as a sewing machine or agricultural equipment that they could use to generate a steady income.

The household should have no immediate family member (wife, husband, child) that has a steady job paying Tk5,000 or more per month. Most women either don't work or do very low-pay work; and most of the men are migrant agricultural day labourers.

CLP's identification process has generally been successful. Most of our statistics reveal that the potential for inclusion errors (people we receive assistance but actually are better off than they should be) is very low. Exclusion errors (those who should get assistance, but are mistakenly excluded) are also thought to be low.

Slide 4 – Where are they?

- CLP's working areas are in the north-west of Bangladesh.
- CLP2's core assistance was delivered in:
 1. Nilphamari
 2. Lalmonirhat
 3. Kurigram
 4. Rangpur
 5. Jamalpur
 6. Gaibandha
 7. Tangail
 8. Pabna
- CLP2 also worked in Bogra and Sirajganj, but only through its markets components. The 'core package' of assistance was not delivered in these Districts, because they had been included in CLP1 and it was judged that there were no longer enough HHs that would be considered 'extreme poor'.
- The map on the left shows CLP1 and CLP2 core working areas. The map on the right is just the CLP2 core working areas.
- The green areas show working Upazilas; while the yellow areas show the Unions in which CLP villages were located.

Slide 5 – CLP's Approach – The Core Package

Paragraphs below are numbered according to the pictures, starting in the top left, then working across and down to the bottom right.

1. CLP's approach is based on the Asset Transfer Project, where HHs are given a sum of money to invest in an income-generating asset. The household is not given the cash directly; the asset is provided to them. They must spend it on an income-generating asset; it cannot be used for consumption or non-productive assets. Nearly 98% of participants chose cattle as their asset. Stipends (unconditional cash grants) are also provided for the full period of assistance.
2. The second picture from the left in the top row shows a CLP plinth, being used to dry jute as well as keep the household 60cm (2 ft) above the highest-known flood level in the area. In most areas, the 2007 floods were used as the baseline. However, the 2014 flood exceeded these levels in some places, so plinths were built to the 2014 level in those affected areas.
3. Water, sanitation and hygiene are vital for general good health, but also for nutrition. CLP provided improved water supplies, sanitary latrines and extensive education / capacity-building in health-related matters.
4. Health was supported by the implementation of 'satellite clinics' in active working areas. These clinics occurred every two weeks and were staff by paramedics. In addition, a network of Char Shasthya Karmis (Char Health Workers), who were recruited from the chars, provided very basic health advice, referral services and over-the-counter medicines. Similarly, a network of Chars Pushti Karmis (Char Nutrition Workers) provided nutrition counselling as well as distributing Iron and Folic Acid tablets and multi-nutrient powders.
5. Influencing social norms – through CLP's Human Development Unit, a comprehensive social development curriculum was delivered. Covering 47 modules, it included topics such as gender empowerment and the laws against dowry and child marriages, among many other topics.

6. While the markets components were not part of the 'core package' as such, they were an innovative addition to CLP's activities. Using the M4P approach (making markets work for the poor), they aimed to make market systems work better for char producers in the meat and milk markets.
7. Many aspects of CLP's assistance benefitted the wider community. The picture shows several families and their assets sheltering on a CLP plinth during a flood. This was a very common occurrence in all CLP areas. As well as being good for livelihoods and resilience, CLP was also often told, informally, that the ability to help their neighbours in these difficult times led to them having greater standing in the community.
8. Partnerships were sought by CLP to bring additional stakeholders, goods, services and resources to the chars. CLP's highly successful Partnerships Division saw a total of 76 unique organisations contacted, with 74 'real' activities begun. CLP counted an activity as 'real' if it went beyond discussions; i.e. if a Memorandum of Understanding began to be documented; or if work began on a project proposal. As of March 2016, 61 of these 74 had reached implementation or completion status. Around 42% were in health, with agriculture (11%), education (11%), markets (9%) and access to water / WASH (9%) making up much of the remainder.

Slide 6 – CLP's sub-projects, 1 of 2

Showing how the Programme's various technical sub-projects (18 in total) were sub-divided into the technical units of Infrastructure, Markets and Livelihoods and Human Development.

Slide 7 – CLP's sub-projects, 2 of 2

Showing the various Partnerships projects, as well as CLP components under Management, such as M&E, finance, Gov. of Bangladesh capacity-building, etc.

Slide 8 – Cohorts and HH Numbers

CLP2 worked through several 'intakes' which it called Cohorts. Each was, on average, 13,000 households in size. A two-year period was usually allocated to each cohort, with the first 2-3 months taken up with identification, verification, then other admin such as contracting.

The length of assistance each individual HH received varied among and within cohorts, due to the reasons given in the slide.

A total of 78,026 HHs were assisted. This is 16.5% higher than the original design target of 67,000. No additional budget was needed due to VFM and efficient operations, as well as a significant exchange rate gain for at least part of the overall six years. The Taka was budgeted at 100 to the £ in budgets made during 2010. By 2014 it had slid to Tk133 to the £, meaning CLP had over 30% more taka to spend. However, the Taka began to recover by 2015, ending the programme closer to Tk110 per £; but by that point, savings had been 'locked in' by inclusion of an extra 11,026 HHs.

Slide 9 – Summary Activity Schedule

CLP was like a 'layer cake' in its operations. Although key activities were phased in once the Cohort began technical assistance, nevertheless it quickly reached a point where all activities were ongoing all at the same time.

The 'plinths' activities shows breaks for the small and large rainy seasons, to avoid having to transport water-logged earth for building the plinths.

Slide 10 – CLP in Numbers

Fairly self-explanatory; but presenters sometimes highlighted the points below.

- Sanitary latrines were a community-wide benefit; the village was blanketed with them. Village Development Committees were also actively involved in promoting the 'anti-open-defecation' message, to ensure all members of the community stopped defecating out in the open.
- VSLs formed – large sums of money ended up being handled through these groups. The amount of savings as of Dec 2015 was BDT 188 million (£1,709,091 – or £1.712m; US\$2,446,961), saved by 54,408 members altogether. The total amount of interest earned on savings was BDT 67 million (£582,609).
- Clinics – many provided. However, clinics ended once CLP assistance ends. BRAC agreed to implement their basic health services in 2/3rds of our villages – approx 423 villages of 640 (66.1%). Still a couple of hundred villages that do not have basic medical assistance anymore, although CSKs continue to work.

Slide 11 – CLP Partner IMOs

- IMO stands for Implementing Organisation.
- CLP contracted 17 IMOs during the last Cohort (2014-2016). These IMOs are all national non-government organisations (NGOs), most of which were headquartered in CLP areas and had deep development roots in the local communities.
- These IMOs delivered CLP's 'core package', while some of them also delivered milk market development project services.
- The two SSPs – Special Service Providers – were iDE and PHD. iDE provided market component services only for the meat project; while PHD provided health-based services. These SSPs did not deliver any other aspect of the CLP's core package.
- Generally speaking, the contracting approach was a success. IMOs were generally reliable partners, although CLP did keep a very close management, technical and financial watch on all aspects of implementation.