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THE CHANGING ROLE OF CHT WOMEN IN LOCAL PEACE BUILDING PROCESS THROUGH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING & DECISION MAKING

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Abstract: CHTDF (Chitagong Hill tracts Development Facilities) UNDP has been working in Chitagong Hill Tracts since 2004 to promote development opportunity as well as to build confidence in the underprivileged community across three hill district of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari; the distinct part of Bangladesh. Considering gender equality and women empowerment CHTDF played a very significant role to create opportunity of women involvement in development activities, managing resource, community planning as well as decision making process in this region. In all aspects of program operation, policy making and partnership, woman involvement is measured as a prior area for building trust and confidence as a peace building process in this area. On the other hand special grants and skill development initiatives are taken particularly for women besides the combined fund and opportunities for the community. All of these CHTDF initiatives made a positive consequence which significantly impacted in the lives of backward CHT community particularly in women empowerment process; enhanced opportunity for women's individual income, political participation and controlling over the resource as well. The CHT people have been deprived of many socio-economic and political rights and an armed insurgency was waged against the government until the signing of a Peace Accord in 1997. The CHT Accord of 1997 is the milestone for development in CHT but CHTDF has paved the way of community people including women to participate in the development process which could be considered as a cornerstone; successful local peace building initiative as well as women empowerment in CHT.

Figure 1: CHT map ^[3]

Introduction and Background

The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh comprises an area of 13,295 km² in south-eastern Bangladesh, and borders India and Myanmar (Burma). It is home to 11 distinctive indigenous groups and Bengalis. According to the census 2010, the population was 974,447, of which 501,114 were tribal peoples and the rest were from different communities. The tribal people are collectively known as the Jumma which includes 11 recognized tribes such as the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Pankhou, Mro, Bom, Lushai, Khyang, and Khumi.

According to 1900 regulation three districts of CHT has been divided into three Circle of Chakma Circle (Rangamati), Mong Circle (Khagrachari) and Bomang Circle (Bandarban). Considering indigenous structure a parallel governing structure of Chieftainship with Democracy has been established in CHT ³.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bengali: পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম Parbotto Chottogram) possesses a special characters with very hilly topography and presence of diversified ethnic communities residing in this region. It is a distinct region in terms of its strong ethnic cultural, cropping pattern of Jum Cultivation and a long political history of communal conflict. Before 1997 there was completely an unrest situation across CHT, after signing of peace accord with the government of Bangladesh, international donors, different development organization and agencies with national organization initiated for sustained peace and confidence building in the area. ^[4]

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Figure 2: As traditional practice Man -Woman is going to market together for selling agro product



Inheritably CHT women are directly involved in entire production system and they work side by side with the man in every steps of agro based production, sowing seedlings to marketing of the agro product; they play a very significant role in family income which gives the speciality of the women in the region than the women in others part of Bangladesh. After a decade long conflict the situation seems to be turned into a positive manner particularly in the participation of women in decision making process; contributing role in community planning, implementing and monitoring. By this time the social views has been started to be changed, women mobility has been increased with different structure of the society; a good reflection of these changes has been found in women's capacity building and empowerment process.

Objectives

- To comprehend the CHT context considering women's role and in rights exercises
- Analyze and share effectiveness of women engaged development program initiatives
- Identification of bottlenecks for women empowerment in CHT
- Look for future opportunities towards women empowerment

Methods: Review of literature, Collection of secondary information, field experiences through visit, interview, Focus Group Discussion and large group discussion, consultation with the representatives of Working NGO, Nation Building Department, Hill District Council, indigenous governing structure of headman and karbari.

Inception of development in CHT: After a long of 25 years of protracted conflict the CHT Peace Accord was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbottya Chattogram Jana Shanhati Samity (PCJSS)

in December 1997 which considered as the cornerstone of development in the region; paved the way of community people including women to participate in the development process and it creates scope to emphasizing on gender mainstreaming as well as women empowerment through different collaborative development initiative by the government of Bangladesh, International donor agencies and the NGOs working in the region as well. In 2003 a comprehensive development program was signed between UNDP, Bangladesh and the Government of Bangladesh as development cooperation and a process of peace building named "Promotion of Development and Confidence Building in the CHT" CHTDF has been working since 2004 for empowering the CHT people through Community Empowerment and Economic Development project across three districts of CHT which created the opportunity for the women and vulnerable groups to participate in development process. In 2004 a peace building initiative also taken through building local capacity by some donor agencies including DANIADA, SIDA, UNHCR, OCHA, German EZE EED and AG/KED, foreign Ministry of NORWAY, OFDA of USAID along with the help of more than 50 national development organization ^[1]

Major objectives of the project (CHTDF): It was to create opportunity of international Aid in CHT, empowering root level Community and coordination among different stake holders to established political stability and peace in the region as a means of opening up new opportunities of development through empowering CHT people. (Example of good development activities in CHT) ^[1].

CHTDF UNDP works with holistic approach prior to the vulnerability of service from different service providers, remotest and poverty. By this time it covers maximum area:

Table-1: Area Coverage In three Districts:

District	Upazila	Union	House Holds	Population		
				Male	Female	Total
Rangamati	8	40	39213	97938	93923	191861
Khagrachari	6	29	43235	103965	100790	204755
Banderban	6	25	39213	79576	78716	158292
Total	20	94	113110	281479	273429	554908

Empowerment strategies: CHTDF UNDP works with a range of different implementing partners including Government agencies, NGOs and private companies and community based Organizations. Local governance institutions at regional, district, Upazila and Union levels ensure transparency and accountability in decision making ^[2]. The main implementing strategies of the project was to form local level development organization named PDC, also different groups of PNDG (village level women development group) and

weaver groups has been formed aiming for women empowerment. All these platforms work as a center of development activities in the concern community. As a program strategy CHTDF UNDP initiated and ensured 30 to 50% of women position in every committee of community organization. They also represent in different coordination committee at union Upazila and district level which works as bridge between community and the Nation Building departments; they together for effective implementation monitoring and evaluation of different community initiated projects.

The women members of PDC hold dwell membership both in PDC and at the same time in PNDG. PNDG members get the opportunities of bias and pressure free environment for planning and implementing different women friendly but income generating projects. The PDC/ PNDG identified the own community problems, analyze those and formulate community development planning. They implement the planning in collaboration with PDC according to the priority of the community. For technical assistance The PDC/ PNDG members maintain regular communication with different supporting departments of GO/NGO and private sectors. The PDC also monitor their ongoing projects and evaluate for further improvements. In PDC, PNDG and all supporting committees there have unique opportunities of equal participation both of women and vulnerable groups. Women membership has been recognized at all steps of the program for better representation as well as a great forum to raise the voice of deprived and minorities.

Input supports: CHTDF provided non refundable grants to all community organization and groups including PNDG, Weaver group and PDC. CHTDF provided grant to all community organization and groups to initiate community demanded project, facilitate technical assistance and monitoring supports through implementing partners of local NGO and zilaparisad, implementing agencies are continuously providing different training supports for proper project management and community capacity development. CHTDF facilitates gender sensitization activities to the PDC members at union level where a total of 1341 participant female-644, male 697 in 2011 with the objective of increasing awareness on woman participation as well as to learn about the role of man and woman in their society in addition to importance of women participation community development activities^[2]. On the other hand a large number of community representatives received skill development training and develop as community health worker, Community poultry worker, livestock worker, farmers field school facilitator, Nursery initiator and they are playing role in the community besides they are influencing the different part of the society; making decision or contribute to take decision. Moreover opportunity of women participation in different meeting, training workshop exchange visit added another values of more knowledge, and experience to the women.

Table-2: Number of Community Organization and Woman Group in three Districts:

District	PDC	PNDG	Waiver group
Rangamati	1243	629	5
Khagrachari	917	480	5
Banderban	1044	629	6
	3258	1686	16

The Concept of PDC-(P=Para D=development C=committee) is a village level Community Development organization, it consist of 1 male and one female member from each households of the concern village. It has two tiers of executive body and a general body. It is mandatory to engage 50% of female members in all tiers of the committee and activities including decision making, planning, execution of community initiated projects and different dealing both financial and organizational with different stakeholders of implementing NGO, GOB line departments, private sectors and different finance institutes as well. The PDC represents and coordinates all development and social activities in a community through its regular meeting; a good forum of sharing and gathering of diversified knowledge and experiences among all walks of community people and to build cohesion among them. It is a great opportunity of female to work with male in a same platform as well as influence to establish women rights in the society.

Figure 3: A Women Development Group is in Meeting



The concept of PNDG- (P=Para, N=Nari (women) D=Development G=group) is a village level women Development group, it comprises 1 female member from each House Holds of a village to work particularly for women development emphasizing on taking decision of women chose which make easier of their life along with creation of direct income source. The PNDG member works independently beside PDC activity; the forum gives opportunity of gathering together of all women members.

They share their different challenges and barriers of women movement in the society as well as taking decision for their welfare.

Cases study-1:

Eguijyachari PNDG; the role model in CHT Women Advancement

Figure 4: Working Women at Paddy Field as Traditional Duty.



Previous scenario of the community: Eguijyachari the name of a small remote village at the Union Balukhali, Rangamati Sadar Upazila, Rangamati. There are 55 Households. Total population is 253 comprises of 117 Female and male 136. It is far away of 20 kilometers from District town and used only boat for communication. It is very hard to communicate in dry season; needs to go on foot and boat, it takes total of 3 hours which is a hindrance of their development. Being a remote village they avail very poor public services even from NGO and private sectors. They are deprived of basic services like health, water and sanitation; maternal health care, even education for their children. They were engaged with inherited and traditional livelihoods. The women in this village used to pass time dawn to dusk hard work particularly on cooking, fetching, care giving, cleaning of cookeries, rearing of cattle and agricultural labor; they could never thought of anything apart from these routine work! In some cases they were deprived of basic health, education and food; for lack of consciousness the male never considered the women for taking part in social and political participation like social arbitration or representation in decision making for the community betterment; in a sense women were totally ignored, they had no choice but to comply with the decisions taken by male, women never thought of independent economic activity with their own management. They were with poor technical knowledge and unity. It was out of dream to cost family income for their choice lack of poor household income and women right's consciousness. They knew how to work hard but use never enjoyed freedom of using their earning. At present the situation has been entirely changed; such discrimination towards women has been brought near about to an end through CHTDF activity; particularly the PNDG formation and implementation of different projects with PDCs particularly because of PNDG formation and utilizing QIF grants; taking women friendly decision in the community and working together with man with more confidence.

Input supports: In 2004 CHTDF UNDP started to work through Community Empowerment and Economic development project through partnership with implementing partner CIPD (Center for Integrated Program and Development). The activity starts with PDC first and the community turned in to an organized form with commitment of their own development. They analyzed their common problems and set out plan and act collectively. They received required training both from GoB line departments and PNGO particularly on organizational development and skill development to implement their initiated activities. In fact the participatory approach to every step of the PDC management and project implementation open the door of women participation at the community. Different project interventions like awareness session, Regular meeting, training on leadership, gender, project management, organizational development, participation in different extension and promotional activities including day observation, information dissemination workshops, and exchange visit contributed effectively which made them encouraged. They started community savings both for male and female. All of these activities and its outcome encourage them to move ahead according to the community planning.

Figure 5: Women Leaders are Facilitating Decision Making Process in PDC Meeting



In 2008 basis of their success they formed PNDG (Women Development group). At the starting they received QIF grant of BDT 200000 from CHTDF UNDP; starts with goat rearing project. Initially they utilized BDT 100000 and purchased 40 goats per female members. Through the goat rearing project according to their project principle; they gathered experience of modern cattle rearing process rather than the traditional one. As a result they make profit of BDT 65000 within a short period of 13 months. They distribute the profit among the female members which gives a first time opportunity of using earned money with the women chose; like clothing, beautification or use of technologies or communication facilities with their earning. Some of them utilized the money for mitigating their hobby like mobile phone, nose pin, house making, purchasing of CD player and clothing. Some of them

utilized it for child education and food. On the other hand some are reutilized for income generating activities like goat, pig or cow rearing. They are more organized now, sit in a scheduled day through meeting and take decision for their improvement as well as to implement their planning. The attitude of male members slowly changed and started appreciating and extending their hand in PNDG activities. The women members are managing well, implementing cow rearing with the test of QIF grant of BDT 100000 and planned to set solar panel at every house. The ability of women participation in decision makes process has been enhanced, they are taking part in regular PDC meeting and other social activities, keeping regular records and communication with concern Government Line Departments, Union Parishad and other services providers regarding their project activities and playing a very good role to influence decision making process of their own development. The women in this village are more aware, more sensitized and more influential on claiming their rights and role of woman in society; it could be considered the model of women empowerment in the remote and deprived area.

Learning: The neighboring PDCs/ community perceive that Egojyachari PNDG is a successful women group and with ability of doing many things like man if given the opportunity, women are able to contribute both in social and economic development equally with man even in a remote area. So it is very important to enhance aware of the male members to gear up women in the society for broader development.

Case study - 2:

Asam Bosti Weaver group is on the way to secure livelihood!

Figure 7: Proud Group President and Treasurer With Their Products



Waist loom is a long and significant tradition in CHT; CHT women make their traditional dress with waist loom and sometimes they take it as small business with very limited design and products rather than the broader marketing in outside of CHT. Weaver group is one of the initiatives of CHTDF particularly to enhance income of group members and marketing opportunities through diversification of traditional weaving practice and

products. Asambosti is to the south-west corner of Rangamati town. It is a very communally diversified area of Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tangchangya, Ahomiya, Lushai and Bengali. People from different parts of the country settled here. Daily labor, small business and weaving are the main source of income. Particularly the women in the area work at different weaving factory. Considering these Asam Bosti Weaver group is formed under the economic development component of CHTDF UNDP in 2010. Different community peoples both tribal and non tribal are engaged in the group; total of 13 members comprising 11 female and 2 male. Before establishing weaver groups they worked in local factory with poor wage rate and there were irregular working opportunities even they did not get their wage duly because of monopolies of the factory owner. Asambosti Weaver Group received BDT 200000 as non refundable grant from CHTDF and received required management trainings like Organizational management, Entrepreneurship development, accounts keeping and liaison linkage with finance institute. On the other hand they received required skill development like product designing, pit loom management, Use of silk and cotton, handicraft, Chamicak dying, costing, pricing & branding of products. By this time they have established 5 pit looms and one waist loom with grant and self contribution. Currently the group member are working with their own factory in homely environment and with own management.

Figure 6: Happy Group Members at their Own Factory in a Homely Environment



They take decision in every step of production by their self with full ownership of the factory. Initially they start with small size weaving. Currently they make different types of handicraft items besides weaving which include pen Box, tissue Box, photo-stand, flower box and other showpiece like doll and key ring. Group members' skill is being increased; they get the opportunity of work according to their preference of time and items which is really an opportunity to adapt with household activities as well as to continue business for income. Day by day they are being engaged with different marketing channel. By this time they have created working opportunity for their group members. Currently they have limited scope; can't work all (13 members) together with 6 looms. On the other hand due to shortage of

capital they can't run 6 looms at a time, they are running with a tiny hired room as a result some of their members are to work with other factories in rest of the time. They desire to work together under a roof with a pressure and bias free environment including equal and justified wage rate, child keeping in work place, time of preference as well as to contribute to family income.

Learning: Ownership and stability of work environment enhance confidence which is a crying need for developing woman work force as well as women empowerment in every sector of our society.

Recommendation

- Still to date women's rights are hard to reach in reality. So emphasis should be given to the ensuring women's strategic needs including special recruitment quota both Government, Non Government and autonomous institution beside fundamental needs of maternal health and Education for women to establish women rights in the society.
 - Up gradation of technical skills and product diversification can provide women entrepreneurs and opportunity to increase amount of income.
 - Still a huge portion of women are far from being mainstreamed in the development process as well as decision making process in CHT especially those residing in the remotest parts. So, some special initiatives such as, adult literacy program for these women, coaching and mentoring on rights issues can be introduced.
 - According to customary laws of most ethnic groups women are not considered as successors and do not have property or land endowment rights: these discriminatory customary laws further create the scope to look women down in family and society. Advocacy through civil society networks and collaborative voice rising on this can only change the situation.
 - Marriage is not registered under the customary laws followed by most of the ethnic groups residing in the CHT. However the society has been changed so changed the social norms, values and the people in the society. Lack of proof of marriage often makes many destitute women to suffer with claim of maintenance cost for her and the custody of her children after divorce/ separation. Hence, mass sensitization on registration of customary marriage through traditional leaders i.e. karbari among adolescent girls and proper education on values and gender of adolescent boys can stop repetition of these unwanted incidences.
- Life in CHT is very challenging especially for women, they have to manage household and out of household activities together; still now they have to spend a huge time to carry or collect water and wild resource or agricultural products manually. Project on electricity and water supply and sanitation should be considered to make women life

easy in this area. Women in remote area are dead in dark about pre and post natal care, importance of women's education and political participation so family level awareness on women's rights should be emphasized for any development activity.

Abbreviations

- CHT= Chitagong Hill Tracts
- CHTDF=Chitagong Hill Tracts Development Facilities
- PDC= Para Development Committee
- PNDG=Para Nari Development Group

Notes & References

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