

## Village Development Committees

### Summary

Many of CLP's activities require deep-rooted social change which relies on participation and commitment from the community at all levels. VDCs were introduced to CLP to be an anchor for this change.

The objective of the research was to investigate the effectiveness and sustainability of VDCs and understand the factors that contribute to their sustainability.

The research used a cross-sectional mixed methods approach including Questionnaires, FGDs, KIIs and a sharing workshop. Respondents were committee members, CLP core participants and non-core community members.

Key strengths and successes of the VDCs were identified. These included: VDC achievements and objectives; the commitment of members; and community relationships. Barriers and weaknesses to VDC sustainability were also identified. These included: attendance at meetings; levels of ownership; financial concerns; and the *char* context.

Key differences were noted between active and non-active VDCs. This allowed for 'Predictors of Sustainability' to be identified. Recommendations were made aimed at strengthening the capacity of the VDCs.

### Summary of recommendations:

- Establish a structured phase-out plan;
- Ensure priority is given to create linkages;
- Formulate a disaster response strategy;
- Ensure VDC is village-led and therefore inclusive;
- Increase independence and ownership of members during CLP support;
- Ensure training is more tailored to capacity building;
- Monitor attendance and usefulness of CLP trainings;
- Formulate a long-term vision and identify key indicators for inactivity within the VDC.



*A focus group discussion with VDC committee members*

### Background

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) works to alleviate poverty at the household and community level. Participants are enrolled in the Programme for 18 months, at which point they 'graduate'. A key objective of the CLP is to ensure participants graduate in a sustainable way and do not slip back into extreme-poverty once CLP phases out.

### Village Development Committees

Many of CLP's activities require deep-rooted social change which relies on participation and commitment from the community at all levels. Village Development Committees (VDCs) were introduced to CLP in 2010 as one of the three Community Based Organisations aimed at being an anchor for this change, by acting as an authority and form of governance within the community.

The sustainability of VDCs is important to ensure that there is an institution in *char* areas that is committed to working towards the development of the community; that it can access resources and services for the *char* residents; and to uphold the good attitudes and practices CLP core and non-core participants learnt during their time with CLP.

With just over two years left of the Programme, CLP decided to investigate the VDCs and

understand the factors that contribute to their sustainability and effectiveness.

This research will enable CLP to have a clearer understanding of the success of the intervention thus far and work out what CLP should change or improve to help VDCs remain sustainable after CLP-2.

### CLP's concept of VDC sustainability

VDCs will be sustainable when they continue to contribute to village development following the phase-out of CLP-2 programmes.

## Methodology

VDCs across all CLP-2 cohorts (2.1 to 2.4) in 42 communities were identified as 'active' or 'non-active' VDCs. The research used a cross-sectional mixed methods approach. Data was triangulated using a quantitative Questionnaire, qualitative Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Respondents were: committee members, CLP core participants

and non-core community members. A sharing workshop with CLP's implementing organisations was also conducted to understand the institutional capacity of the VDCs.

## Strengths and successes

**Objectives:** The majority of VDCs had clear, multiple objectives which were matched closely with CLP's overall objectives for the VDCs. Objectives were also very similar for active and non-active committees, showing a good understanding of the members as to the overall purpose of the committees. Areas such as: preventing early marriage; conflict management; and improving health, hygiene and sanitation were the top three reported objectives.

**Achievements:** There were similarities in the reported achievements from active and non-active VDCs. The prevention of early marriage; health hygiene and sanitation; and obtaining funds from government were often-reported achievements, demonstrating

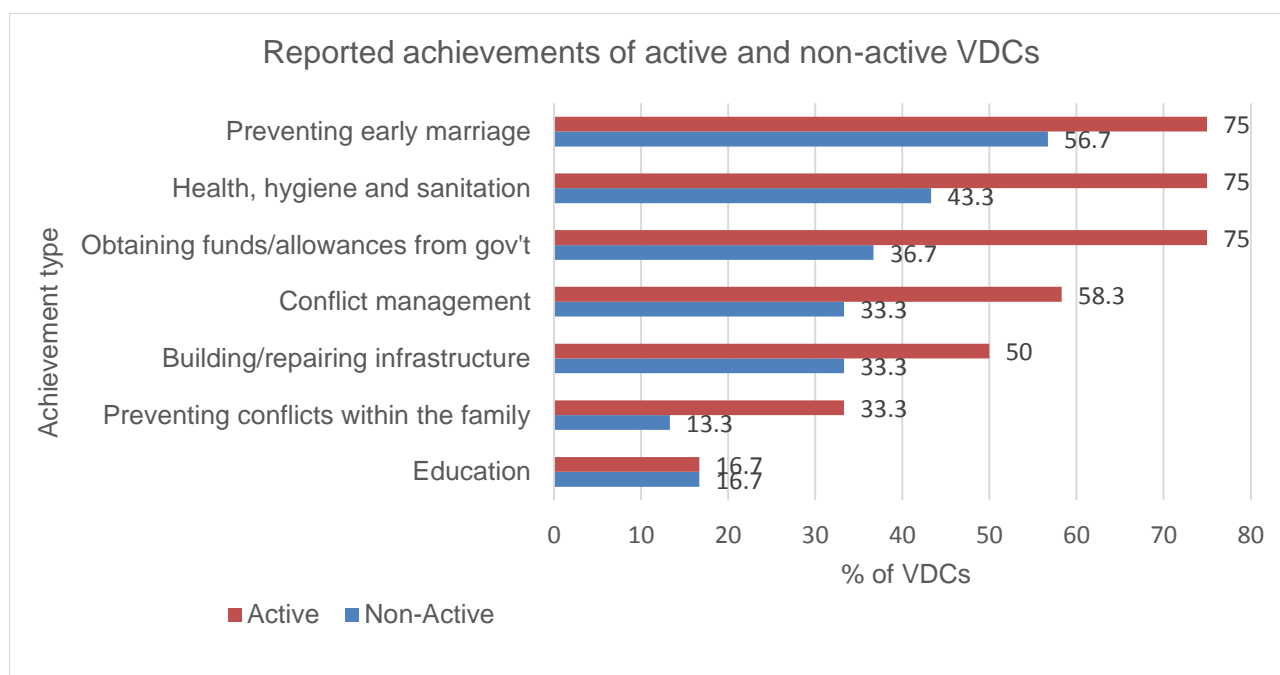


Figure 1: The overall reported achievements of active and non-active VDCs

success among the VDCs and progress towards achieving their objectives.

**Commitment of members:** Only 16 out of 42 VDCs had some of their original members leave, demonstrating strong commitment from members. Reasons members gave for leaving included members moving away from the village and an election being held within the VDC. Of the 16 VDCs, 15 replaced their members. A key point to note were the ways new members were chosen. In two-thirds of non-active VDCs, committee members decided among themselves, compared to two-thirds of active VDCs who involved both committee members and members of the community. Inclusivity of community members during this process was seen as a predictor of VDC sustainability.

**Community relationships:** All community members from active villages and 83.3% of members in non-active villages said they felt comfortable approaching VDC members personally to raise problems or concerns. This is essential as it increases opportunities for problems in the community to be identified. All respondents, (active and non-active) expressed the need for a VDC in their community. In non-active villages, individuals would still carry out activities initiated by the VDC. Therefore although the VDCs may not sustain, some of the attitudes and behaviours continue.

**Institutional strengths:** These included: having a fixed meeting place (present since cohort 2.4); having CLP monthly meetings; and the ability of VDCs to make links with local government, increasing their ability to obtain funds and allowances for their committee.

### **Barriers and weaknesses**

Results estimated that between 12.5% and 20.2% of VDCs sustain and the average lifespan of a VDC is 17 months. This is almost the same length of time as CLP's intervention

period. Thus, the removal of CLP support was noted as a key contributing factor to why VDCs do not sustain.

**Meetings:** During CLP support VDCs meet monthly. After CLP, only 66.4% of active VDCs met regularly and 11.1% on a needs basis. For non-active VDCs, 13.3% met regularly and 6.7% on a needs basis. 80% of non-active VDCs did not meet at all. For 92% of non-active and 44% of active VDCs the reason reported for not meeting was the removal of CLP support. For active committees the main reason (66.7%) was the declining interest of members. Although the frequency of meetings decreased, continuing to meet was recognised as an essential component to the functioning of VDCs by active and non-active members.

**Removal of CLP support:** The absence of someone who was willing, or able, to take on the responsibility to organise and facilitate meetings had a large impact on the VDCs. Financial incentive was another reason. During CLP support there was a provision of snacks during meetings. Once CLP left, there was no incentive to bring the members together. No member wanted to take on the responsibility of holding a meeting as they would be expected to provide snacks.

**Finance:** In addition to the lack of financial incentive to attend, financial disincentives were a concern. When VDC members were called to a meeting, they risked losing a day's wage. The majority of VDC members are extreme-poor or poor members of the community. The benefit of ensuring the VDC continues in the long-term may not override the short-term need to earn money. Further, the lack of an income-generating activity was a concern. VDCs felt disheartened when they could not solve a problem in their community due to financial constraints.

**Ownership:** A lack of independence of members during CLP support led to the VDC being seen as a CLP initiative. This meant that no-one took responsibility for the VDC once CLP phased out and members were unsure what their roles should be. Further, non-core community members were not always aware of the VDC and its purpose.

**Char context:** The *char* context was reported by 16% of non-active VDCs as a reason for discontinuation. Flooding during the monsoon and a lack of structured roads during the dry season made travelling to meetings difficult.

**Institutional weaknesses** included: lack of a post-CLP phase-out plan; absence of a financial source for VDCs; the VDC and committee members not always being equally accepted by the community; and the VDC's composition becoming less representative.

### Differences between active and non-active VDCs

**External linkages:** Linkages are important to ensure VDCs are aware of assistance available to them, and how to obtain it. This supports VDCs in meeting their objectives. The main type of support active and non-

active VDCs received from links was financial support, advice and information, and material resources. The average number of links made by active VDCs was 2.4 compared with non-active VDCs who made, on average, 1.3 links. Active VDCs also made more useful links (91%) compared with non-active VDCs (64%).

**Disaster Response Strategy:** This is important to help communities recover and for the VDCs to sustain. Of the active VDCs, 75% had a disaster response strategy, compared with 33.3% of non-active VDCs.

**Attendance and usefulness of training:** Training is essential for VDC capacity building. Attendance at training was between 75-100% for active VDC members compared with 33.3-66.7% of non-active VDC members. Of those who attended trainings, active VDCs, over all, found the trainings more useful to their committee's functions.

**Long term vision:** All active VDCs had a long term vision for their committee and 66.7% included the continuation of the VDC in this. For non-active VDCs, 23.3% had no long term vision and only 16.7% included the continuation of the VDC.

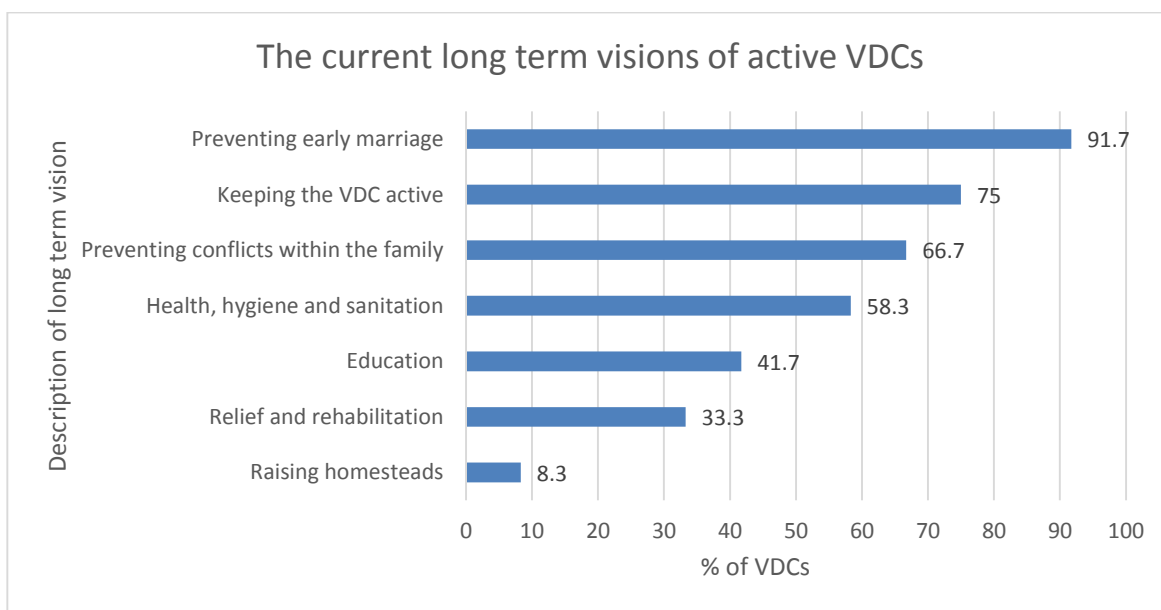


Figure 2: The current long term visions of active VDCs