

# A study into the effectiveness and sustainability of Village Development Committees

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## Acronyms

AG	Adolescent Group
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ATP	Asset Transfer Project of CLP-2
BRAC	formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, an NGO
CB	Capacity-building
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDO	Community Development Officer
CLP-2 (or CLP)	Chars Livelihoods Programme, Phase 2
CP	Core participant
CPHH	Core participant household
DEMOs	Data Entry and Monitoring Officers
DFID	UK Department for International Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBP	Great Britain Pound Sterling
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HDU	Human Development Unit
IML	Innovation Monitoring and Learning unit
IMO	Implementing organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSC	Most Significant Change Technique
NGO	Non-government organisation
NCP	Non-core participant
NCPHH	Non-core participant household
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RDRS	Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service
SD	Social Development
SDU	Social Development Unit
Tk	Bangladesh Takka
UP	Union Parishad
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
VDC	Village Development Committee
VSLG	Village Savings and Loans Group
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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## Executive Summary

In a 2010 review of CLP's Social Development component, it was recommended that CLP support community based organisations (CBOs) in their working areas and facilitate the introduction of new CBOs in areas where they do not already exist. Many of the CLP activities require deep-rooted social change which relies on participation and commitment from the community at all levels. The CBOs were to be an anchor for this change by acting as an authority and form of governance within the community.

A key objective of the CLP is to work towards lifting our participants out of extreme poverty in a sustainable way. This research aimed to investigate the effectiveness and sustainability of the VDCs after CLP phased out of their working area and to understand the factors which contribute to VDC sustainability. 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; to access resources and services for the *char* residents; and to uphold the good attitudes and practices core participants (CPs) and non-core participants (NCPs) learnt during their time with CLP.

VDCs across all CLP-2 cohorts were identified and split into either 'active' or 'non-active' committees. Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were the main data collection methods used to gather the experiences of VDCs and their respective communities. An IMO sharing workshop was also conducted to gain the perspectives of our partners and to understand the institutional capacity of the VDCs.

There were some positive results regarding the effectiveness of the VDCs. The commitment of members and the strategies in place to recruit new members, ensuring the stability of a 'group' was one strength of the VDCs. VDCs also had clear objectives when they formed and were successful in working towards achieving these objectives. Areas such as: preventing early marriage; building and repairing infrastructure; improving health, hygiene and sanitation; and preventing conflicts in the family were all highly-reported achievements. Another strength was the communities' relationship with the VDCs, with the majority of community members feeling comfortable approaching committee members with their problems. In addition, all respondents, both from active and non-active villages, expressed the importance of their VDC and the need for one to be present in their village.

Findings also highlighted some negative factors that reduced the effectiveness and sustainability of the VDCs. Participants expressed the view that CLP support was necessary for the VDC to continue its operations; i.e. without CLP support, they were not likely to sustain. This was linked to members' attendance at meetings, the expectation of financial incentives and low feelings of VDC ownership from the committee members. The lack of a strategic phase-out plan was also raised as an issue, as was the VDCs' lack of an income-generating source, which was important for them to continue and carry out their activities. The unstable nature of the *chars* was also a commonly articulated concern, with VDCs sometimes failing to continue due to erosion of the *chars*.

Analyses of VDCs across CLP-2 cohorts allowed us to conclude that between 12.5% and 20.23% of VDCs are sustainable. Differences were found between active committees and non-active committees in areas such as: having a disaster response strategy; creating links with government and non-government organisations; attending trainings; having a long term vision; and ensuring the VDC is village-led rather than CLP-led. These differences allowed us to identify predictors of sustainability which, if followed, should increase the sustainability of a VDC.

The following recommendations were made:

- i) Ensure that a structured phase-out plan is developed with the VDC during the CLP support period to transition them from CLP support. This should not be done at the last minute; there should be time for the VDC to integrate the phase-out plan into their regular activities.
- ii) Ensure that during the period of CLP support, priority is given to creating linkages with government and non-governmental agencies. During VDC training CLP should include skills training on planning and on how the VDCs will access support and follow up with links created. Identify, with the VDC, a list agencies and services that are available to them.
- iii) Focus attention on formulating a disaster response strategy with the VDCs and ensure that the community, both CP's and NCP's, are aware of the strategy.
- iv) Ensure the VDC is led by the village and as such is inclusive of all members, during and after the period of CLP support. VDCs should be encouraged to hold a three-monthly update meeting where members of the community gather to talk about the VDC's objectives, current plans and any achievements they have made in the period.
- v) Increase the independence of members during CLP's support phase to promote levels of ownership within the committee. Two specific areas should be addressed: 1) Ensure members take more control over writing meeting minutes and recording achievements in the record book; and 2) the VDC should work to cover its own costs. The monthly meeting costs around Tk. 300 to Tk. 500. The CLP should support the VDC to generate this themselves. During training, a list of ideas of how to generate funds should be drawn up with the VDC members. This should reduce the financial barriers many committees face following phase-out.
- vi) The three-day residential training should be more tailored to the capacity building of the VDCs e.g. management, community-based advocacy and network-building. During these trainings identify responsible members of the VDC who could take on the leadership roles after phase-out, thus assigning the role to one or two individuals. Included in this, should be training on the selection process of new members to ensure the committee structure remains and the committee continues to be an influential body. This should help eliminate the current trend of CLP's CP's (extreme poor women) being elected when members leave the VDC. Training on the selection process should teach the benefit of including committee and community members within the process and encourage this as best practice.
- vii) Attendance at the CLP trainings should be monitored, as should the usefulness of the training to ensure members are actively involved in the establishment of the VDCs and find the messages given in the trainings helpful.
- viii) Ensure that each committee formulates a long term vision for their VDC at formation and that this vision is revisited towards the end of CLP support. Within this, members should be aware of common practices that CLP knows can contribute to VDC inactivity. Members should be able to identify these in their own committee and resolve them in the early stages.

# 1 Background

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) works on the *chars* of the rivers Jamuna and Padma in north-west Bangladesh. The second phase of the programme, CLP-2, began in 2010 and will run until 2016. It aims to improve the livelihoods of over one million extreme poor and vulnerable people by 2016. Participants, who are all female, join the programme for 18 months. On joining the programme each participant receives an income-generating asset of her choice, up to the value of Tk. 16,500. During the 18 months, CLP works with its core participant households (CPHHs) on a number of livelihood interventions aimed at: increasing their social and economic assets; increasing food security; improving health and hygiene; increasing access to markets and services; and reducing environmental and economic risk.

## 2 Introduction to CLP's Village Development Committees

### 2.1 The beginning of VDCs in CLP

In a 2010 review of CLP's Social Development component, it was recommended that CLP support community based organisations (CBOs) in their working areas and facilitate the introduction of new CBOs in areas where they do not already exist.<sup>1</sup> Many of the CLP activities require deep rooted social change which relies on participation and commitment from the community at all levels, not only the co-operation of CLP's core participants (CPs). It was therefore acknowledged that to reduce vulnerability amongst *char* residents and achieve lasting success from CLP's programmes, requires a whole community approach whereby lasting relationships can create sustainable solutions. CBO's would act as an anchor for this social change by acting as an authority within the *char* community. Three CBOs were suggested; Youth Groups, Village Savings and Loans Groups (VSLGs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs). This research will focus on the latter.

### 2.2 Main objectives of the VDCs

One of the key objectives of the VDCs is to assist and monitor CLP's activities to ensure their long term success. One aspect of this is to support the Asset Transfer Project (ATP), a central component of the CLP programme. VDCs should ensure that participants who receive assets realise their value and protect them. Another key objective is to reinforce the trainings CLP provides to its core and non-core participants: to ensure the community remains aware of the teachings and can identify negative practices in the village. Examples of these practices include: open defecation; dowry; polygamy; early marriage; divorce; and violence against women (VAW). VDCs are responsible not only for being able to identify problems in the village, but also to create an environment where the community feels confident raising problems or concerns with committee members. Following this, the VDC should have the capacity to help solve these problems. VDCs are responsible for working to create social unity in the community by resolving conflicts between community members or groups and by facilitating the introduction of social safety net programmes. VDCs' other responsibilities include encouraging and assisting with birth registrations, vaccinations and helping the community at times of natural disasters and during disease outbreaks.

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<sup>1</sup> Premchander, S. Review of the Social Development component of the Chars Livelihoods Programme, October 2010.



## 2.3 Composition of a VDC

CLP establishes VDCs in villages that have greater than 50 CPHHs. Each VDC comprises between 11 and 13 members; 40% of which are members from Social Development groups and Village Savings and Loans Groups (VSLGs) and 60% are village residents. A meeting is held with the whole village present, during which committee members are democratically elected. These selected members then vote amongst themselves to establish who will take on the roles of the executive committee, which comprises: a President; General Secretary; and Cashier. Members that represent a typical composition of a VDC are shown in Box 1.

It is recognised that group composition will differ slightly from village to village, however a balance is maintained as much as possible between community members and elite as well as ensuring youth representatives are included and women as well as men.

## 2.4 Key features of a VDC

### 2.4.1 Regular meetings

Regular meetings are a key component of the VDC structure. During their intervention stage, CLP's Community Development Officers (CDOs), responsible for facilitating the VDC, will initiate a monthly meeting with committee members. Meetings usually last between two and three hours and at least ten of the total number of members must be present. During the meetings, members will share activities, discuss issues within the village, decide on a plan for the coming month and draw up an agenda for these activities. Since cohort 2.4, Annual General Meetings (AGMs) have been introduced. AGMs take place after 18 months, in which VDCs will sit with the village and discuss their achievements and the challenges they faced. This also provides an opportunity to plan for the year ahead. Meetings offer the opportunity for committees to stay connected and make decisions together. In addition, the process of recording meeting minutes and developing monthly and annual plans ensures that achievements are recognised and any related problems can be reflected on.

### Box 1

#### VDC member Composition

- Social Development Group (SD) representative x 3/4
- *Char Shasthay Kormi* (community health worker) x 1
- Adolescent group representative – girl x 1
- Adolescent group representative – boy x 1
- Livestock Service Provider (LSP) x 1
- Non-core VSLG representatives x 2/3
- Person with a Disability (PWD) x 1
- *Char Pusti Kormi* (community nutrition worker) x 1
- Union Parishad (UP) member x 1
- Teacher x 1
- *Imam* x 1

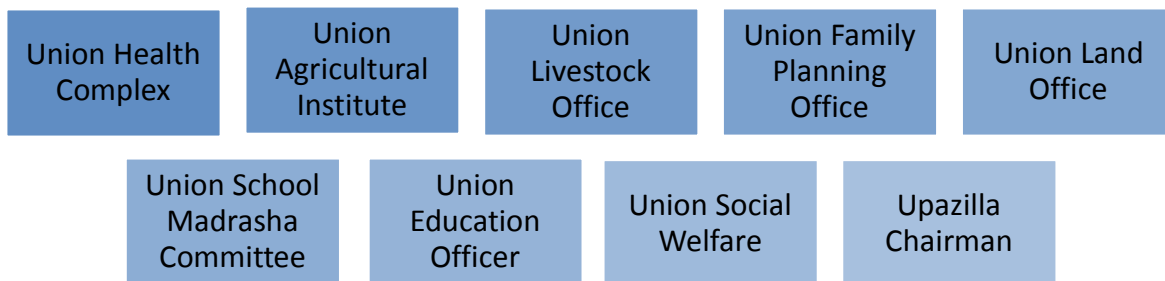
#### Executive Committee

- President
- General Secretary
- Cashier

## 2.4.2 Creating Links

In a review of CLP's social development component in 2012, Smita Premchander states that "The sustainability of a new CBO beyond the project period during which it has been initiated, is dependent on how well it is linked with mainstream organisations and leaders who carry the same agenda as the new CBOs do."<sup>2</sup>

Establishing links are crucial for the VDC in order for them to fulfil their objectives. It also increases the chances of the committees being sustainable following CLP's involvement. Links allow the VDC members to access vital services, resources and support systems to help members of their community. Most of these links will take place at the Union Parishad (UP) level, the most local level of governance with administrative power. Examples of UP level links the VDC can make are listed below:



## 2.4.3 Training

Once the VDC has formed, CLP provides the committee with a three-day residential training session. During this training, members are taught about the CLP and the roles of CLP's implementing organisations (IMOs). There are sessions which focus on raising awareness of negative social practices such as dowry and early marriage. Members are also taught the ability to identify problems in the village. One session informs VDCs how to claim services from the UP and members are taught the basics of leadership, how to hold meetings and keep records. They also prepare an implementation plan and a one-year action plan. Following this training, a refresher course is held after six months as well as an exchange visit to another village, to build the capacity of the VDCs.

## 2.5 Rationale for the study

The CLP works to alleviate poverty at the household and community levels. 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 poverty once the CLP interventions phase out.

The same ideal applies to VDCs. VDCs have been part of the CLP programme since CLP-2 and as such, with just over two years left of the programme, it is appropriate to investigate their sustainability. 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 CP and NCPs learnt during their time with CLP.

<sup>2</sup> Premchander, S. Chars Livelihoods Programme. Social Development Review, May to August 2012, p.21.

## 2.6 Objectives and research questions

The objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of Village Development Committees as a means of self-governance and anchor for developmental change on the *chars*. This research will enable CLP to have a clearer understanding of the success of the intervention thus far and what is required of CLP to support the VDCs in order that they remain sustainable following the end of CLP-2.

There are six key research questions:

- 1) Are the VDCs able to work towards their objectives and contribute to the development of their village?
- 2) What factors reduce the effectiveness of the VDCs?
- 3) Have VDC's remained active after the CLP's 18 month intervention period?
- 4) What are the contributing factors to VDCs sustaining and not sustaining?
- 5) Where are the gaps/problems with the VDCs?
- 6) What can CLP do, in the future, to fill these gaps and build capacity, to improve sustainability?

## 2.7 Structure of the report

Section three of the report presents previous research from CLP and discusses available literature on the sustainability of CBOs, with some examples from Bangladesh. The methodology used to conduct this research is then outlined in Section four. Sections five to seven present the results of the research, looking at: the strengths and successes of the VDC; the barriers and obstacles to the sustainability of VDCs; and the reasons why some remain active when others do not. Included in these sections are highlighted stories from key informant interviews and information gathered from an IMO sharing workshop which was held to assess the institutional sustainability of the VDCs from the opinions of our partner organisations in the field. Section eight revisits how we define sustainability in the context of VDCs and what it means to people living on the *chars*. The concluding section, nine, provides an overall evaluation with key findings and presents recommendations to CLP.

## 3 Background research

### 3.1 Previous research from CLP

VDCs were introduced in 2010 towards the start of CLP-2. To date, one piece of research has been carried out by CLP regarding VDCs. In 2012, Smita Premchander conducted a review of the whole Social Development component of the CLP.<sup>3</sup> Within this review she reported on the status and perceived sustainability of all three CBOs in the CLP programme: VDCs; VSLGs; and Adolescent Groups (AGs).

Premchander identified four features of the CBOs that would be essential to review in order to assess their sustainability. These four features were: group composition; vision and objectives; leadership and capacity building; and linkages to mainstream organisations (their leaders) and services, in particular at the UP level.

Premchander's review found positive evidence for the role of CBOs and she concluded that after two years, the VDCs had "...potential, and are poised to be shaped as community-based organisations (CBOs) that survive sustainably after CLP leaves a *chars* village."<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 Community-Based Organisations: their strengths and weaknesses

Community-Based Organisations are grassroots organisations intended to build social capital and serve as a form of governance within the community. Social capital is largely achieved through meetings and collective activities that benefit the community.<sup>5</sup> The concept of a CBO works on the premise that development within the community can be driven by community members rather than external agencies, thus removing the idea of dependency and as a result, making people agents of their own change. Good governance is now widely recognised as being one of the most important factors contributing to the reduction of poverty. Good governance has the effect of reducing corruption, empowering communities and ensuring the poor are able to exercise their rights in order to access services and resources available to them.<sup>6</sup> CBOs can be formed either through community initiatives or as a result of outside agencies who establish CBOs with or on behalf of communities.

Even when CBOs are established by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or development organisations, the goal is that they continue to remain active once the programme phases out. Research by Adhikari and Risal, based in Nepal, found that 95% of the external agencies, taking part in their research, thought it was a necessary part of their programme that the CBOs continued after the programme phased out. Similarly, members of the CBOs shared the same view: with all participating members stating that they joined the group with the intention to stay for a 'long time' or for 'some years'.<sup>7</sup> Even with these aspirations, various factors contribute to the sustainability of CBOs after programmes stop working directly with them. Narayan states that the process whereby an outside agency establishes CBOs often bring with it difficulties in the sustainability of such

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<sup>3</sup> Premchander, S. Chars Livelihoods Programme. Social Development Review, May to August 2012

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Adhikari, K. P. and Goldey, P. (2010) Social Capital and its "Downside": The Impact on Sustainability of Induced Community-Based Organizations in Nepal. World Development. Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 184–194.

<sup>6</sup> Chowdhury, A. M. and Sattar, M. G., (no date) BRAC. Building governance for fighting poverty. Role of NGOs in Bangladesh.

<sup>7</sup> Adhikari, K. P. and Risal, R. (no date) Securing the Future? An Exploration of Prevalence and Sustainability of Community Based Organisations in Nepal. pp 1-22, p. 4

organisations.<sup>8</sup> Similarly Adhikari and Goldey express the view that although social capital can be generated, it is difficult to sustain, once projects phase out.<sup>9</sup>

In 2005, research by Datta, based on Concern International's rural development projects, identified strengths that contributed to CBOs remaining active after the project phased out. Ownership of the CBO was one such factor. In research by Baroi and Rabbani it is discussed that the sense of ownership for rural CBOs exceed that of CBOs in urban slum communities. The reason for this comes from the urban slum dweller feeling that they are temporary residents and will eventually have to move.<sup>10</sup> Another factor that effects ownership of a CBO comes from development organisations planning and establishing CBOs without the input or inclusion of local knowledge from the community, in which the project is being implemented.<sup>11</sup>

Thompson describes external linkages with other agencies and local government and the ability to access and demand public services, as being good practice that sustainable CBOs should follow.<sup>12</sup> This supports Premchander's inclusion of linkages in her four aspects of sustainability. Trust within CBOs was another factor mentioned by Lyon that would have an effect on the sustainability of CBOs.<sup>13</sup>

Weaknesses of CBOs that act as barriers to sustainability once organisations have phased out, have also been noted. A key weakness relates to financial capital. Expectation from the communities in terms of financial incentive is always high. Eminence found that when an outside agency, such as an NGO is involved, it is expected that some form of financial benefit will be provided.<sup>14</sup> Datta found that the expectation of financial incentives also came from leaders of the groups who expected 'incentive payments' from other members to keep the groups running. Another weakness, highlighted by Datta, was the lack of secondary leadership. If a group member died, there was no-one to take over the responsibility. Without the presence of an outside agency taking responsibility of the continued functioning of the group, there must be someone within the group who can take over. Another contributing factor is the idea of a 'phase-out plan' to guide committees in how to operate independently of the organisation that established them. An example in Datta found that there was not much done by Concern to prepare the CBOs for independence once Concern phased out.

### 3.3 Capacity building

Premchander identified capacity building as one of her four features of sustainable CBOs. One of the key elements of creating a sustainable VDC model is to build capacity amongst the committee. It is important for the committee to understand the specific context they are operating in and create objectives accordingly.

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<sup>8</sup> Narayan (1999) in Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern's rural development projects. *Community Development Journal*. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Adhikari, K. P. and Goldey, P. (2010) Social Capital and its "Downside": The Impact on Sustainability of Induced Community-Based Organizations in Nepal. *World Development*. Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 184–194.

<sup>10</sup> Eminence (2007) in Baroi, H. S. and Rabbani, G. (2011). *Community Driven Development in Bangladesh: Factors Behind the Reality*. *Canadian Social Science*. Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 74-81.

<sup>11</sup> Baroi, H. S. and Rabbani, G. (2011). *Community Driven Development in Bangladesh: Factors Behind the Reality*. *Canadian Social Science*. Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 74-81.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, P.M. (2013) Sustainability of Community-Based Organisations in Bangladesh, *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal*, Vol 26, No. 7, 778-794.

<sup>13</sup> Lyon (2003) in Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern's rural development projects. *Community Development Journal*. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Eminence (2009) in Baroi, H. S. and Rabbani, G. (2011). *Community Driven Development in Bangladesh: Factors Behind the Reality*. *Canadian Social Science*. Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 74-81.

Capacity can be defined in a number of ways:

“An organisation with capacity has the ability to function as a resilient, strategic and autonomous entity.” (Kaplan, 1999)<sup>15</sup>

“The ability of people, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives.” (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2002)

Capacity building is seen as an important factor to ensure a CBO is able to function over time. Uphoff describes what he termed a ‘catalytic approach’ where capacities of an organisation, along with their purpose and structure, come from within the group and is not imposed from the outside. This way communities are more able to identify and solve their own problems.<sup>16</sup>

Capacity can be built by: members deciding on a vision for the group; writing a constitution; understanding members’ roles and responsibilities; and choosing executive members. It can also be built through training, workshops and exposure visits.<sup>17</sup> CLP initiates these processes during the formation of the VDCs where: a full constitution is produced; election of executive members occurs; objectives and long term visions of the committees are decided; and training is provided to all members.

### 3.4 Different models of community based organisations

CBOs are not homogenous and their objectives can range from being broad based to being more focused in their activities. Ostrom noted that the sustainability of collective action and the institutions created to facilitate this, cannot be based on a ‘blueprint’: each context must be taken into consideration.<sup>18</sup> The context of CLP’s VDCs on the *chars* is a unique environment and one that will have unique impacts on the sustainability of our VDCs.

One factor that differs between CBO models is the existence of a micro-credit or savings fund. Some CBOs tie this into their activities allowing the groups to generate funds in order to keep committee activities running. Generating funds is also an incentive for community members to keep groups active. Adhikari and Risal found that, after phase-out of the NGOs “CBOs largely tend to reduce their activities to savings and credit”, independent of the original group activities. They noted that having a savings and credit component to the CBOs “helps people to work together for a sustained period of time in groups which, otherwise, would already have been fragmented soon after the project is phased-out.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly Datta noted one of the main reasons for ownership remaining strong in some groups was the presence of a savings fund.<sup>20</sup>

Another factor that differs between CBO models is the existence of federation structures. Concern works in the Haor areas of Bangladesh, which are similar to the *chars* in being disaster prone and lacking in transport infrastructure. Concern set up a structure with primary and secondary level

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<sup>15</sup> Ed. Ubels, J. Acquaye-Baddoo, N. A. and Fowler A. (2010) Capacity Development in Practice. pp 1-361.

<sup>16</sup> Uphoff in Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern’s rural development projects. Community Development Journal. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern’s rural development projects. Community Development Journal. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Omstrom (1994) in Thompson, P.M. (2013) Sustainability of Community-Based Organisations in Bangladesh, Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal, Vol 26, No. 7, 778-794.

<sup>19</sup> Adhikari, K. P. and Risal, R. (no date) Securing the Future? An Exploration of Prevalence and Sustainability of Community Based Organisations in Nepal. pp. 1-22, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern’s rural development projects. Community Development Journal. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.

organisations with the aim of strengthening members' capacity to gain access to services and resources and also to assist the primary groups in running their activities. A total of 226 primary groups were established with 29 secondary level organisations.

An assessment was conducted two years after Concern phased out of the area, at which point it was discovered that only 30% of the secondary organisations and their primary groups were active. One of the strengths of those groups that remained active was that they ensured a specific quota for the number of women present in the groups. Levels of ownership were increased in groups that had a self-run savings fund, as this meant groups identified the fund with themselves and not a product of Concern. After this evaluation, Concern decided to work with those active groups to build up their capacity. Over time the model was replicated in different communities, in different regions. During the following four years, 28 federations were formed. At this time, only 5 (around 18%) were seen to have the capacity to be independent of Concern's support. One reason for this goes back to the idea of the *catalytic approach* which was somewhat lost when Concern replicated the model of successful VDCs onto new federations in new communities. In addition, factors such as finding time to attend meetings (particularly for female members), corruption, and funding shortages all contributed to the lack of sustainability of the federations.

As part of the background research to this current study, CLP visited the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) in Kurigram District, to understand their federation structure. RDRS federations have lasted for 15 years. Key factors that could be seen as contributing to their sustainability were access to finance through savings and microcredit that operates through the federation and also the continued presence and support from RDRS. Interestingly in Datta, both malfunctioning and active groups "**emphasised the importance of Concern's presence** in the area for an indefinite period of time, even in a limited form" to ensure sustainability. One reason for this was the need for the organisation to resolve conflicts within the groups and help the groups during times where funds were lacking. This highlights the importance of outside support being available to CBOs. The removal or absence of such support can have a negative and probably detrimental impact on the committees' ability to sustain themselves. This finding has also been reported in other papers that have researched CBO sustainability. Research by Walsh et al also highlighted the need for donor support in the medium to long term for CBOs to remain sustainable.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.5 VDC objectives and defining sustainability

Sustainability can be defined in a number of ways and will be dependent on: the context; the needs of the community; and the objectives of a particular programme. The U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) highlights four key dimensions to sustainability. These are Environmental, Economic, Social and Institutional.<sup>22</sup> CLP's interventions work across all these areas at the household and community level. The broad objective of the VDCs was to work toward the overall development of the community with a particular emphasis on social developmental change. Specific objectives are outlined below:

- Assisting the implementation of CLP activities;
- Ensuring proper implementation of CLP programmes, and proper distribution and use of the assets through continuous monitoring;
- Helping the committee members to protect their assets;

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<sup>21</sup> Walsh, A., Mulambia, C, Brugha, R & Hanefeld, J. (2012) "The problem is ours, it is not CRAIDS". Evaluating sustainability of Community Based Organisations for HIV/AIDS in a rural district in Zambia. *Globalization and Health*, 8 (40) Pp. 1-16 (p.13).

<sup>22</sup> Carney, D. *DFID. Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches: Progress and Possibilities for Change*. Pp1-64 (p.15). Accessed on 29.07.13. <[http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0812/sla\\_progress.pdf](http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0812/sla_progress.pdf)>

- Formulating plans for village development;
- Ensuring proper use of group assets on the basis of discussion between members;
- Helping members in distress (e.g. natural disasters, epidemics, illness and healthcare);
- Making people aware of the negative impact of divorce, dowry, polygamy, early marriage, and violence against women and resisting these;
- Encouraging and assisting birth registrations, vaccinations and other social development work;
- Coordinating with government organisations, NGOs and Union Parishads to get services and assistance for the villagers;
- Assisting in the implementation of social safety net programmes;
- Removing conflicts between factions, maintaining social solidarity/unity.

Research has defined sustainability in various ways. In the evaluation of Concern Bangladesh's CBOs, Datta defines sustainability to be "where members are capable of planning and implementing their development initiatives independently."<sup>23</sup> Similarly in research by Adhikari and Goldey, which looked at the role of social capital in relation to group sustainability, their respondents defined sustainability to be "the continuity and regularity of group activities, such as meetings, savings (if any), investment, repayment (if any), or other sector related activities."<sup>24</sup> Abdullah and Ali take the view that:

*"The fundamental requirement for a CBO to be sustainable depends upon the power that lies within it."*<sup>25</sup>

### 3.6 How CLP defines sustainability

CLP's Human Development unit and the Innovation, Monitoring and Learning (IML) unit conceptualised what sustainability meant in the context of the VDCs on the *chars*. The overall definition was that:

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

This definition was expanded to include some key concepts, listed in Box 2.

#### Box 2: CLP's concept of VDC sustainability

- A group of some form remains in the village
- Meetings of group members occur on at least a 'needs' basis
- Continue with the Annual Plan formulated during the VDCs time with CLP, review progress in accordance to the plan and prepare new documentations once the current plan ends
- Continue to identify and solve problems in the village
- Maintain links and co-ordination with levels of government and service providers
- Maintain good communication with the community allowing feedback and whole community ownership of the group.

<sup>23</sup> Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern's rural development projects. Community Development Journal. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Adhikari, K. P. and Goldey, P. (2010) Social Capital and its "Downside": The Impact on Sustainability of Induced Community-Based Organizations in Nepal. World Development. Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 184–194, p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Abdullah and Ali (1998) in Datta, D. (2007) Sustainability of community based organizations of the rural poor: Learning from Concern's rural development projects. Community Development Journal. Vol 42, No. 1, pp. 47–62. Bangladesh & Oxford University Press.



Sustainability was further defined from the collective opinions of our IMO's during a sharing workshop. They defined sustainability as:

**The continuation of VDC activities as a result of their own initiatives after CLP phase-out.<sup>26</sup>  
It is not important whether the membership and extent of their activities has increased or decreased, only the functionality of the committee matters.**

Definitions for active and non-active VDCs were also discussed. Due to the importance of a group structure being present and the attendance of meetings, highlighted in CLP's sustainability concept, **Active VDCs** are considered to be committees which are currently operating. Active VDCs were identified as:

- Having an existing committee;
- The committee should include one person with a designated responsibility e.g. a member of the executive committee;
- Actively meeting on, at least, a needs basis and working together to identify and solve problems in the community.

**Non-active VDCs** were identified as those that did not meet this criteria.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Approach

This study was an exploratory research project with the aim of understanding the sustainability and effectiveness of CLP's VDC initiative. The research used a cross sectional mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design. Data was collected from different sources to ensure triangulation of the information. Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used to collect data. These were all carried out concurrently. A quantitative questionnaire survey was carried out on 82 individuals. Questionnaire data was used to establish the key findings and areas of interest. It was used to explore the positive and negative contributing factors to each of the research questions regarding effectiveness and sustainability of the VDCs. Information from the questionnaire was then compared and contrasted with the FGDs and KIIs. It was predicted that results from both qualitative and quantitative sources would validate one another. In addition, it would allow us to explore the factors involved in greater depth and come to conclusions with greater confidence, than if only one form of data collection was used. After data collection was completed, data from the three sources were analysed independently.



<sup>26</sup> This relates to regular meetings, participatory decision making, detection of problems, identification of solutions and self-evaluation. It also includes the innovation of new ideas and their materialisation.

## 4.2 Determination of sample and data collection

For the quantitative questionnaire survey a multistage sampling design was used to establish a representative sample. The first stage involved stratifying all VDCs based on two criteria – CLP cohorts (CLP 2.1, 2.2., 2.3 and 2.4) and the sustainability of the committees – active and non-active VDCs. Data allowing us to identify these criteria came from information provided by our IMOs. The second stage used a cluster sampling procedure where each village was treated as a cluster. A total of 42 villages were selected where 21 were active VDCs and 21 were non-active VDCs. There were no reasons to suggest that VDC activity would differ between districts and as such data was collected from five of CLP’s working areas: Jamalpur, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Gaibandha and Kurigram. These districts were chosen due to CLP having worked with a greater number of cohorts in these areas, compared to our other working districts, therefore making it easier, logistically, to sample across cohorts.

For the qualitative data collection, 24 FGDs were conducted in 11 *chars*. FGDs were divided into three groups: VDC members, CPHHs and NCPHHs. Questions for each were tailored to the different respondents. 30 KIIs were carried out with members of the executive committees and questions were based on the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique. Stories collected as part of the KIIs and FGDs provided opportunities to develop case studies for the final report.<sup>27</sup>

An IMO sharing workshop was also organised during data collection. The objective was to assess the capacity of the VDCs to be sustainable institutions; to understand the strengths and weaknesses; and to identify the gaps that exist.

Seven Data Entry and Monitoring Officers (DEMOs) were recruited for this study. A one-day training session was held followed by a two-day field pre-test, culminating in an open feedback session. An assessment field visit was carried out during the data collection period to ensure the quality of data collection and to collect case studies. During visits to the field, a few constraints were noted and efforts were taken to minimise those effecting the final data that was collected.<sup>28</sup>

After data collection was completed, all qualitative data was translated and, where necessary, coded. SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative questionnaire data and Nvivo software was used to organise and support the coding of qualitative data collected from the FGDs. Results of these analyses were then merged for the evaluation stage.

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<sup>27</sup> See Annex 6 for a compilation of MSC stories and case studies from the field. These will be fed back to active VDCs as examples of other committees’ work.

<sup>28</sup> See Annex 4.

## 5 Strengths and successes of CLP's village development committees

The next three sections will outline the results from the study, focusing on the VDCs' strengths, weaknesses and the differences highlighted between active and non-active VDCs.

### 5.1 VDC developed objectives

Formulating objectives is key to a committee sustaining. CLP works with the VDCs to explain the Programme's overall objectives for the VDCs. After VDCs have been established, they form their own set of objectives based on their own expectations for their committee. If VDCs have specific goals then they are more likely to stay together in order to reach these goals. Results from the research found that the majority of VDCs had very clear, multiple objectives for their committee and these were matched with CLP's overall objectives for the VDCs. The types of objectives formed were very similar for active and non-active committees showing a good understanding from both types of committee as to the types of objectives they should form. The top seven objectives VDCs chose for themselves can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: The objectives chosen by active and non-active VDCs at formation

VDC objectives	Active %	Non-active %
Preventing early marriage	91.7	76.7
Conflict management	83.3	76.7
Improve health, hygiene and sanitation	83.3	66.7
Prevention of conflicts within the family	66.7	70.0
Helping CLP carry out their activities	41.7	56.7
Building and repairing infrastructure	25.0	40.0
Relief and rehabilitation	16.7	26.7

*The improvement of health, hygiene and sanitation* included the establishment of sanitary latrines and use of them and general health care, with a specific focus on pregnant women and children. *Prevention of conflicts within the family* included cases of raising awareness and the prevention of dowry, divorce, violence against women and polygamy. *Relief and rehabilitation* included the protection of houses during river erosion. *Conflict management* refers to general incidences of conflict in the household (HH) or in the community e.g. conflict over land and quarrels between people in the village. We can observe from Table 1 that non-active committees were more likely to place *building and repairing infrastructure* and *relief and rehabilitation* as their objectives, than active groups. There were, however, no significant differences found in the data analysis in the types of objectives outlined by active and non-active VDCs.

## 5.2 VDC achievements

VDCs were asked to list all their achievements, as a result of being part of the VDC. The results of this are shown in Figure 1.

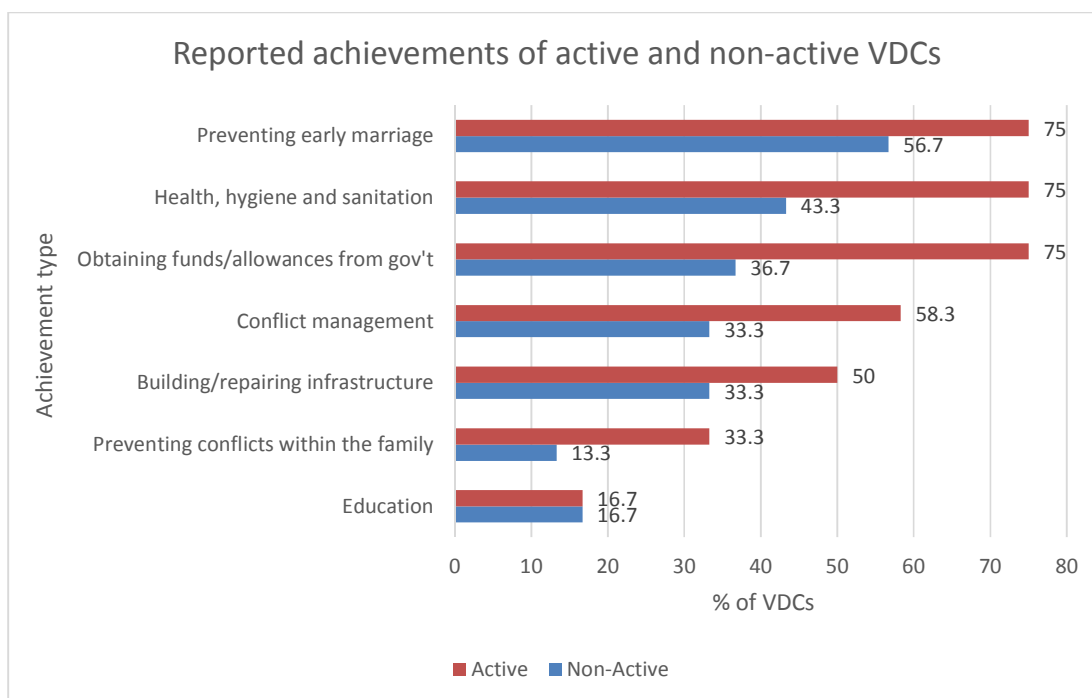


Figure 1: The overall reported achievements of active and non-active VDCs

Overall, the prevention of early marriage could be considered one of the VDC's greatest successes. It was the highest rated objective: with 91.7% of active committees and 76.7% of non-active committees presenting it as a key objective of their VDC. Their long-term visions (discussed in section 7.6) also included the prevention of early marriage. Of the VDCs' achievements, as shown in Figure 1, prevention of early marriage was one of the highest occurring for both active and non-active committees: 75% and 56.7% respectively. Further, it appeared most consistently in responses relating to: people's overall opinion of the VDCs; what benefits VDCs bring to the community; and the importance of the VDCs continuing. In KIIs, the prevention of early marriage was frequently mentioned as a most significant change in the village.

“Early marriage stopped. Be it poor or rich, nobody allows marriage before 18. Before, girls used to be burdened when they are 10. They got married. Now we have learnt from the training. When any marriage is arranged, the committee enquires about the age of both bride and groom. Now everyone is conscious. They do not allow early marriage.”

– CP in an active 2.2 village, Dowabari *char*

VDCs have even been able to influence the prevention of early marriage at the UP level. A committee member from cohort 2.4 in Kaziari *char* explained that the UP used to provide birth certificates where they would increase girls' ages so that their marriage could be arranged. The VDC was able to contact the UP and explain the negative impact this procedure has. As a result they believe the UP has become more cautious and now visits the village to identify girls' age before the certificate is produced.

Achievements related to *health, hygiene and sanitation* was another highly reported success of VDCs, both in active and non-active committees: 75% and 43.3% respectively. Activities under this category included: providing medicine to people in the community; the arrangement of vaccines for children; preventing open defecation; raising awareness of health and hygiene practices; family planning and birth control; and providing health care to expectant mothers. An example was provided by a now non-active VDC, whereby the VDC was able to provide 200 persons with family planning products as a result of linkages with the Union Family Planning Office. Preventing open defecation through the use of sanitary latrines was the achievement most frequently noted in the area of *health, hygiene and sanitation* and changes in health practices were seen to impact the whole community: committee members; CPs; and NCPs. NCPs from Bonober *char* gave the example that the VDC in their village established latrines for non-core households and as a result open defecation has reduced in their community. The high levels of reported achievements relating to open defecation demonstrate that the VDCs are working to complement the activities of CLP. Further it shows that the VDCs were able to work towards their priority objectives, with the improvement of health, hygiene and sanitation being the third highest reported objective for active VDCs (83.3%) and the fourth important for non-active VDCs (66.7%).

“Open defecation was a major problem in the village. The VDC members went door-to-door to prevent it. We checked whether people had sanitary latrines, whether they use it and how they use it. We taught them not to defecate openly. We made them aware that open defecation spreads diseases. Insects bring germs to our food and we got sick eating them. Now it has stopped. Open defecation caused bad smells. People could not walk on the roads. The VDC stopped this.”

- Active VDC member from cohort 2.2 in Dowabari *char*

*Obtaining funds/allowances from governments* was the third highest scoring achievement among active (75%) and non-active (36.7%) VDCs. This is an important finding as it indicates the VDCs are linking with governments and are aware of and can access services and resources from them. One VDC from cohort 2.4 has already been able to arrange for people in the village to receive an elderly allowance from the chairman of their village. Having funds is key to the VDC being able to achieve its objectives.

*Prevention of conflicts within the family* was reported by 33.3% of active VDCs and 13.3% of non-active VDCs. These achievements included raising awareness and the prevention of divorce, dowry, physical abuse and polygamy. An example can be seen in a 2.3 village, where the groom's family were asking for Tk. 20,000 in dowry payments. When the VDC heard about this the committee went to the family to talk to them. This resulted in the marriage going ahead without dowry. Bangladesh is a patriarchal society and social and cultural norms such as dowry and polygamy are widespread. Particularly in rural areas, values and belief remain very traditional and as such these norms are even more prevalent. CLP teaches the negative effects of these practices and as such it is important that the VDC supports these teachings and works to identify and solve problems in the community.

“We solved some familial problems like divorce and polygamy. We made them understand not to do these. We told them, ‘see, you are already struggling. If you get married again, you will get into more trouble. We presented the example of the drowning statue of a Hindu goddess. It was done by putting the statue on two boats with help of a bamboo. When it is time to drown it, the boats were moved away. Similarly marrying twice is like putting feet on two boats at the same time. You will drown if you do that. But if you try to continue only with your current wife, you will be happy.”

- Non-active 2.3 VDC member, Bonober *char*

*Building and repairing infrastructure* is a key group of achievements that should be noted, with 50% of active committees and 33.3% of non-active committees reporting achievements in this area. Building and repairing of infrastructure related to helping to repair broken roads and helping people in the village find soil so that they could raise their homesteads. Another case involved building a foot-bridge that aided movement during the raining season. This can be seen in a quote from a non-active VDC member from cohort 2.3:

“It was troublesome to move during the rainy season so we made a foot-bridge. We have been doing it for 2-3 years now. We did this year too.”

### 5.3 Relationship, trust and communication

VDCs' relationship with the community can have a strong impact on: how successful it is; how aware it is of problems within the community; and how great an impact it makes. Results showed that all community members from active villages would approach VDC members personally to raise problems or concerns and 83.3% of members in non-active villages would feel comfortable doing so.<sup>29</sup> Many villagers said they would approach committee members in the street to raise concerns they may have. This indicates that community members feel confident speaking to the committee and as such this increases the opportunities for problems in the communities to be identified.

“If there is any problem, VDC members stand beside us. If we have any problem, they solve it for us. If we call them, they come to help.”

- CPs from cohort 2.2, non-active village

### 5.4 Perceived importance of the VDCs by committee members and the *char* community

One of the greatest strengths of the VDCs comes from the unanimous opinion that they are important and should be present in the communities we visited. Mannan, a VDC member from a cohort 2.1 non-active VDC on Parul *char*, said the “continuation of the VDC is very important. We progressed when the VDC worked. Now we lag behind.” This shows that members think the VDC is a key contributor to their development and thus a main reason as to why they *should* continue. Many committees recognise the importance of the VDC in giving voice to people of the community who may otherwise not have one: “(women) can talk with others after they joined the VDC. Earlier, they remained behind the veil and did not talk to others.” Active committees we spoke to similarly expressed the need for the VDC to remain in the village:

“Everyone said that they want the VDC. They want it for the betterment of the village. We want our sons to continue it. We benefit from the committee. We can live in peace if we have the committee. We can solve problems. The VDC plays an important role to solve these problems.”

- VDC member, 2.2 village, Dowabari *char*

Even for non-active VDCs that were no longer meeting, individuals still carried out activities in the village that were previously associated with the VDCs. Many still appreciated the importance of the values that their VDCs espoused when it was operational. It is clear that, although the VDCs themselves may not always sustain, the attitudes and behaviours learnt through the VDCs and CLP support remains.

<sup>29</sup> See Annex 5 for raw data table.

This is important because VDCs are set up largely by CLP. It is important that people report wanting the VDCs to sustain, as well as both members and the wider community reporting that: they feel VDCs are effective in what they do; and they agree with the teachings and principles of the VDC. It shows that there is the potential for VDCs to break away from being seen as a programme implemented by an outside agency with which the community has no attachment. We can infer from this that if the VDCs did have increased capacity and could overcome some of the barriers to their sustainability, described in detail in chapter 6, there would be support from the committees to sustain.

“To everyone, continuation of the VDC is important, we have learned many things after joining VDC. We can learn further working as the VDC. It is very important for us, activities of the VDC is our responsibility. We have to do these even if the committee does not sustain.”

– Hossain Ali, VDC member from non-active 2.1 village, Parul *char*.

## 5.5 Commitment of members

Drop-out of members was predicted to be a cause of VDCs becoming non-active, particularly because conditions on the *chars* often cause members to migrate. The assumption was made that, once membership started to decrease, the VDCs would slowly dissipate and become non-active.

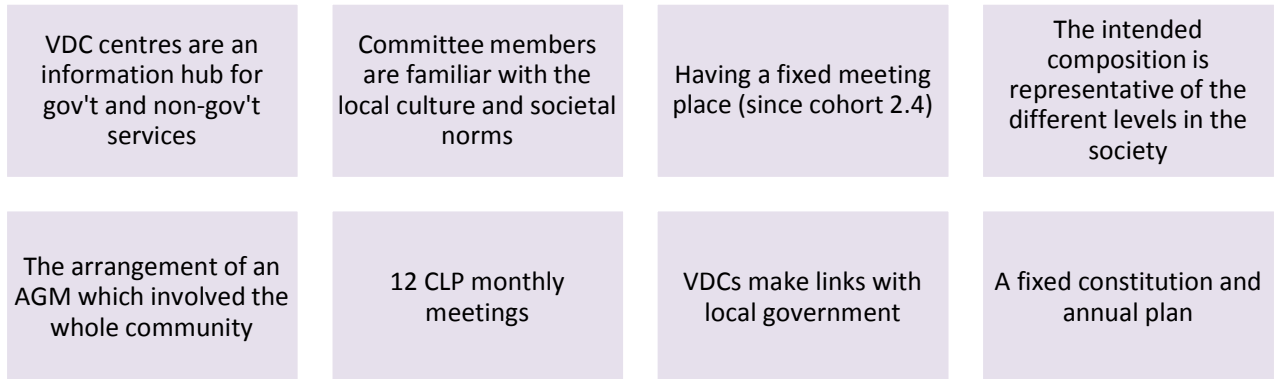
Results from the research, however, did not support this expectation. Of the 42 committees, only 16 had some of their original members leave. The main reasons given for this were *members moving away from the village* and *an election being held within the VDC*, with *insincerity of the members* and *members having too many commitments* being the third and fourth most frequently stated reasons.

In 15 of the 16 cases of members leaving, new members were re-elected. This shows good strategy among both active and non-active committees and indicates that there is a commitment of members to stay with the VDC and also a commitment of members to replace those who leave in order to ensure the VDC sustains. It was observed that there was a difference in the way new members were chosen between active and non-active committees. In two-thirds (66.7%) of non-active VDCs, **committee members** decided on the replacement member. This was compared to two thirds (66.7%) of active VDCs who involved **both committee members and members of the community** in the decision.<sup>30</sup> In one case, with a non-active committee, CLP staff chose the new member. This is a crucial point to note, as the inclusivity of members of the community in the re-election of new members can be seen as a possible predictor of VDC sustainability. That said, member drop-out and replacement of members did not have a negative effect on the committee, with 77% saying it made members more encouraged than before, with the remaining 33% not noticing any significant change.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See Annex 5 for raw data table

<sup>31</sup> See Annex 5 for raw data table

## 5.6 Institutional strengths of the VDCs



*Diagram 1: Feedback from the IMO sharing workshop regarding institutional strengths of the VDCs*

Diagram 1 shows the perceived institutional strengths of the VDCs from the perspectives of our IMOs. Results of our data collection from committee members, as well as members of the community, gave views that corroborated with this feedback. One area in particular that was expressed by cohorts prior to 2.4 was the need for a fixed meeting place. The IMOs described having a fixed meeting place in the current cohort a definite strength of the VDCs. This will hopefully continue to strengthen VDCs in future cohorts. The monthly meetings have also been expressed by our sample as being important to the sustainability of the VDC in their village. Links were also viewed as important, with one of the most frequently stated achievements from committee members being the ability of the VDC to obtain funds and allowances from government.



## 5.7 Most significant positive change

### MSC in the last three months...

In the last three months, we have done following things for disaster preparedness:

- Arranging safe drinking water and keeping it covered;
- Not bathing in dirty water, to avoid diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery;
- We have spread burned chilli and bleaching powder around the house and nearby jungle to prevent insects;
- We have stored dry food like flattened and puffed rice and have taught others to do so to;
- We advised people to bring saline and medicine from a community clinic beside Keramot member's place whenever someone suffers from diarrhoea. For those who cannot bring medicine we provide it from our surplus supply;
- We go door to door and raise awareness about extra care for children during floods to ensure no child drowns. Moreover, whenever we see any child getting closer to water, we move them away to safer places.

By doing this and by the grace of Almighty, we avoided loss during this flood and this is the most significant change.

If we had not done this, people would have become sick and they would have lost money getting treatment. Since they have no money, they would have borrowed it with interest, which would have been difficult to repay. Since we took this preparation and kept cautious, our loss has been minimised and we saved on additional treatment costs. This meant we could spend more money on Eid and bought new clothes for our children. No children drowned and people were happy.

We have been successful in avoiding loss as a result of natural disasters by preparing ourselves in these ways. From this, we have learned that if we do this in future, we can avoid losses from fires during Chaitra (last month of Bengali calendar), from storms during Baishakh (first month of Bengali calendar) and from cold waves during winter. We can all be safe if we are prepared like we were this time.

- Afroza Begum, Secretary, Sitaijhar Munshipara *char* (active VDC)

### Overall MSC...

Nobody defecates openly anymore. Every house has a sanitary latrine and they use it. This is the most positive change to me.

When people used to defecate openly, insects would bring germs to our food. We used to get sick eating that food and thus, we would suffer from diarrhoea, cholera and other diseases. It used to spread a bad smell. When we defecated on other people's land, the land owner used to behave badly. Female members used to face the most difficulty. It is difficult for them to defecate outside the house: day or night. All these problems have been solved by using sanitary latrines. That is why it is the most significant positive change for me.

We have learned that it was very good. Preventing open defecation and using sanitary latrines ensured people remained healthy and did not suffer from diseases. Before, people used to suffer from worms, which is very rare now.

The change is still noticeable in the village. We all consider it good work and it has been proved. So we sustained it together.

- Anowar Hossain, Secretary, Bongshir *char* (non-active VDC)

## 6 Barriers and obstacles to achieving sustainability

### 6.1 Proportion of VDCs that remain active after CLP phase out

We were able to gain an initial understanding of the sustainability of VDCs during the sampling stage of the research. We had planned to generate data from an equal number of respondents from active and non-active committees. A mapping exercise that involved collecting data from CLP's implementing organisations (IMOs), indicated that 25% of VDCs from Cohort 2.1 remained active after CLP phased out. Cohort 2.1 is the most removed cohort from CLP support and thus gives the most accurate representation of sustainability. Results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Results from a mapping exercise to determine the proportion of active and non-active VDCs

Cohort	Active %	Non-Active %
2.4 (current)	100.0	0.0
2.3	51.0	49.0
2.2	30.0	70.0
2.1	25.0	75.0

During data collection, however, half of our active sample were found to be non-active. The main reason for the discrepancy between data provided by the IMOs and the information we found at field level was that IMOs have limited to no contact with VDCs once CLP phases out. Their information was therefore based on estimates of how many VDCs they believed were still operating. Taking this 50% margin of error into account, we halved our initial 25% finding, leading us to our estimation for the proportion of VDCs that sustain after CLP support to be **12.5%**. Realising that the error may not be as clear cut as halving the 25% figure, we subsequently worked out the exact proportion of error for each cohort, in order to ascertain an accurate representation of the committees that are currently active. From this the data we can predict that approximately **20.23%** from all the cohorts are active.

Due to the length of time VDCs have been removed from CLP support being an important indicator in assessing sustainability, we can use both figures to say that the average number of VDCs that sustain is in the **range of 12.5% to 20.23%**.

### 6.2 Average length of non-active VDCs

Data collected from our sample of non-active committees revealed that the average lifespan of a VDC that becomes non-active, in our sample, was **17 months**. VDCs are not always formed immediately after participants join the CLP and therefore we can estimate that the average lifespan of a VDC is almost the same length of CLP's intervention and thus, the removal of CLP support is a key contributing factor to why these committees do not continue. Other contributing factors are discussed further in this chapter.

### 6.3 Organisation and attendance at meetings

During the period of CLP support, committees are meant to meet once a month, and this was confirmed by the data. After CLP support however, the frequency of meetings decreased. The study found a difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the frequency of meetings held between active and non-active VDCs once CLP phased out. A total of 22.2% of active committees continued to meet on a monthly basis with the majority (44.4%) still meeting regularly (once a quarter) and 11.1% meeting on a needs basis. For the non-active committees, however, only 13.3% met regularly (once a month or once a quarter); 6.7% met on a needs basis; and **80% did not meet at all** after CLP phased out.<sup>32</sup> Reasons for the decrease in meetings are outlined in Table 3.

“Now there is no committee. They do not work anymore. Meetings took place for 18 months since formation. It only sustained as long as CLP was here. The CDO does not come any more, so meetings do not take place.”

- CPHHs in a non-active 2.1, village

Table 3: Reasons given for the reduction of meetings after CLP phased out.

Reason for not meeting	Active %	Non-active %
Removal of CLP support	44.4	92.0
Declining interest or laziness of members	66.7	32.0
Members moved due to river erosion	0.0	16.0
Belief that all VDC targets had been achieved	33.3	16.0

For non-active committees the removal of CLP presence had a large effect on their regularity of meetings. Interestingly, active committees reported that regularity of meetings was more affected by the disinterest or laziness of the members.

“There is no branch since there is no tree.”

(If CLP’s activities continued, the VDC would continue).

Although frequency of meetings decreased among both active and non-active committees, continuing to meet was recognised as an essential component to the functioning of VDCs by respondents. Meetings are the main way in which members can come together and discuss problems and respondents did express the view that meetings are a key

factor in helping to solve problems in their villages. Meetings ensure that decisions are made with a group consensus and the whole committee is aware of future objectives and plans of the VDC. During the IMO sharing workshop a similar opinion was aired, with one of the key features of VDC sustainability being *contact*. It was seen as very important that members were able to contact each other and it was acknowledged that this can be particularly difficult during the flood season, a barrier described further in section 7.5.

“There was no meeting after phasing out of CLP. It is a strong barrier to running the VDC.”

- NCPHH, non-active 2.1 village, Parul char.

<sup>32</sup> For raw data table see Annex 5. The question was asked ‘How often did the committee meet after the period of CLP support.’ Although some non-active VDCs reported meeting this is due to this selection of non-active VDCs continuing to meet for a period after CLP support, however were not meeting or active now.

It was also noted by VDC members that being a part of a group enables them to have authority in solving problems in the village. One member gave the example that if one person attempted to advise a family against the early marriage of their daughter, no one would listen. If the committee approached the family together, however, villagers are more likely to take them seriously and listen to their advice.

#### 6.4 The effects of CLP phase out and the expectations of financial incentives

The average VDC lasts only until CLP phases out and support is removed. As such it is important to understand what happens once CLP leaves and what the communities believed could have been done to prevent committees becoming non-active.

As noted in Table 3, the lack of CLP support after phase out was a main contributing factor in the frequency of meetings reducing, with 92% of non-active VDCs and 44.4% of active VDCs giving this as a reason for not meeting anymore. One reason was that the committees lacked someone who was willing or able to take on the responsibility previously held by the CDO, to organise and facilitate meetings. VDCs expressed the view that “now the CDO is not available to call meetings, meetings have stopped.”

There was a large emphasis put on financial incentives as a reason the committees stopped meeting. Although this was not explicitly stated in the responses shown in Table 3, from the FGDs we observed that financial incentives were linked very strongly to CLP’s presence, therefore it is safe to assume that these reasons were included in the category of *removal of CLP support*. During CLP’s intervention, snacks were provided at meetings which was an incentive for members to attend. Once CLP stopped holding the meetings there was no incentive to bring the members together. One committee member mentioned that the removal of a budget for snacks meant that no member wanted to take on the responsibility of holding the meeting.

“There would be a budget for snacks in the meetings. That is not there now and that’s why nobody wants to take the responsibility of calling a meeting. There is no problem of leadership and there is no problem with the training either. The reality is that there is no gain from here.”

- VDC member, non-active 2.3 village, Balur *char*

One explanation that can be inferred from this is that the other members may continue to expect the provision of snacks from the inviting member and this was not a responsibility anyone was willing or, indeed, able to take on. It could be said that during CLP support, snacks should not be provided, in order to eliminate the expectation for it to continue either by CLP or another member following CLP support. An interesting point was raised, however, by our IMOs. Although the arrangement of snacks by CLP has been questioned at times, it particularly encourages non-core members of the VDCs to participate in meetings. Without this, they may feel discouraged if they see only CLP’s CPHHs receiving benefits. It is important, therefore, to find a different way of providing incentive to NCPs e.g. highlighting the positive impact being part of a village with a VDC can have.

Financial concerns from the community also related to the welfare of members’ families. Core participants in an active village explained that VDC members “need to be called regularly, they cannot work for free. They have a family to maintain. They cannot maintain it if they keep working for the committee. So financial assistance should be put in place.” This means that as well as losing money they could get from working there was no compensation once they arrived at the meetings, adding another disincentive for members to attend.

A CP from a non-active 2.1 VDC in Parul said “They are poor people. They can earn 300 taka if they go for work instead of coming to meetings.” 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 for their family on the day a meeting is held.

Lack of meetings after CLP phase-out was also linked to the lack of a set meeting place. The idea that someone would have to host meetings was seen as an inconvenience and would place a lot of responsibility onto that person. Since cohort 2.4 however, CLP introduced a meeting hut and this hopes to solve such a problem once CLP phase out from the current cohort. For previous cohorts, however, this remains an issue for their sustainability. The lack of a fixed meeting place impacted particularly on female members as described here by an ex-VDC member:

“We do not have a meeting place. When we meet members on our way, we inform them about the problem and call them to meetings. But we cannot meet everyone that way. For instance, we do not meet women as we meet men on the way. We cannot sit for meetings to discuss a problem and solve it unless we have a meeting place.”

- VDC member from non-active 2.3 village, Bondober *char*

Financial resources also prevented committees from carrying out activities, as in the case described in Box 3. Even members of committees that are currently active felt disheartened when they could not solve a problem due to financial constraints and expressed that they were eager to solve problems in the village but they did not see the point if they could not follow through, after coming up with a solution.

CLP establishes the VDCs and supports members throughout the 18 months. During this time the amount of ownership felt by the committee members and by the community should have an effect on the committee’s sustainability. The greater the feeling of ownership, the less negative an impact CLP phase out should have.

**Box 3**

Minara said, “my sister-in-law Shahinur got married three years ago. She is three months pregnant. Her husband used to beat her. One day her husband beat her and then ran away. Shahinur was admitted to hospital. The chairman was informed after she was returned to her father’s house. The chairman and the VDC were told to file a case against the husband. But they could not file it due to lack of money.”

– NCP active 2.4 VDC, Nischintopur *char*

One contributing factor to strengthening ownership within the committee is the members’ independence from CLP during their period of support. CDO’s usually call meetings, document achievements and record meeting minutes. Some committees reported that during this time VDC members also took responsibility for these activities. Table 4 shows that during CLP support almost all active VDCs had committee members, together with CDOs, record achievements compared with just over half of non-active committees. This could help ensure that fewer changes occur in the functioning of the committees after CLP phases out, increasing the chance of the committee sustaining. The level of CLP support provided was reiterated during the IMO sharing workshop as one of the key factors relating to sustainability. IMOs said that VDCs are supported entirely by CLP staff who organise meetings and write resolutions. The IMOs stated that, as a result, this leads to many VDCs only remaining active during CLP.

Table 4: The percentage of VDC members and CDOs that actively recorded VDC achievements in active and non-active committees

During CLP	Active %	Non-active %
CDO	72.7	75.0
VDC member	90.1	53.6
Do not know	0.0	3.6

During one of the field visits, an IMO at Pochim Isli *char* also expressed the view that they perceived a reason for non-continuation to be ownership. They said “the participants do not see it as being their committee; more the committee of CLP. After phase out, therefore, no-one takes responsibility for it continuation.” Both active and non-active VDCs identified sustainability as being a CLPs role, rather than a responsibility of the VDC or participants. The quotes in Box’s 4 and 5 indicate that the communities and VDC members believe the VDC belongs to CLP and as a result, after phase out continue to expect to receive support and benefits from CLP. When CLP stops visiting the village, this can make the VDC think that the committee is over, with a CP from Bondober *char* saying “The VDC thought that they were done after CLP left.” It also may cause disinterest with members feeling that if CLP isn’t involved any more than why should they?

**Box 4:**

“We want the VDC to sustain. Now it is your responsibility (CLP’s) to sustain it. We will help as much as we can.”

- NCP from non-active 2.3 village, Bondober *char*

**Box 5:**

“If CLP provides some help, the committee will run. They can provide labour and brain, but cannot provide money. It will not work without CLP. If CLP monitors it, it will keep working. The committee will run in expectation of getting benefit from CLP.”

- VDC member, active 2.4 village, from Nischintopur *char*

Results from the IMO sharing workshop highlighted similar opinions. IMO’s suggested that VDCs who had ownership over their committee were more likely to initiate activities independently and use local resources to achieve their activities. They observed this in older cohorts, where activities are seen to be the success of the committee’s initiatives rather than a success resulting from CLP.

IMO staff expressed the view that for the VDC to continue, the introduction of an income-generating activity (IGA) was necessary. This was supported by data from the field. Moslema, an NCP from a 2.2 non-active village said, “There is a box meeting (VSL group) in the village which is still running. It is running because there is an income. Everyone works for income. There is no money in VDCs, so they do not conduct meetings.” CLP helps to establish VSLGs in villages, some of which also have a VDC. Linking these two groups would have some implications however. CLP’s VSLGs provide a ‘safe place to save’ for the extreme poor women we work with. Once village members with more influence, who would likely be male, become involved this could affect the operations of the VSLGs. It is important that VDCs find a source from which they can generate their own income.

Another point frequently raised was that some VDCs did not understand their role once CLP left. “We learned many things from training. We share them with the villagers, but CLP did not instruct us how to run it after they have gone.” This is very much linked to the feelings of ownership in the committee. If ownership was higher during the CLP support period the committees would be more

likely to continue, due to the VDCs believing it was *their* committee to continue. This finding highlights the need for a phase-out plan to be created to give the VDCs guidance once CLP leaves.

## 6.5 The unstable nature of the chars

Table 3 shows that 16% of non-active committees moved due to river erosion. Although this may seem quite low, during field visits and discussions with our respondents it was observed that the context of the *chars* was an important factor contributing to why some committees do not stay active.

The issue of distance was raised in Pochim Isli *char* by the ex-Secretary of a non-active VDC. On the *char* six members live relatively close to one another and the other five members live 3-4 km away. During the monsoon season this 3-4km area becomes flooded and during the dry season there are no structured roads for the community members to travel on. Therefore, meetings between the two halves of the committee is extremely difficult – almost impossible. Further, when asked active VDCs what they perceive to be potential reasons that could cause their VDC to discontinue, erosion and environmental hazards were frequently described.

“If they have to move outside the village due to river erosion or cannot attend meetings due to floods, the committee will stop.”

– NCP, 2.4 active VDC, Kazier *char*

## 6.6 Institutional weaknesses of the VDCs

The IMO sharing workshop highlighted some institutional weaknesses perceived in the VDCs.

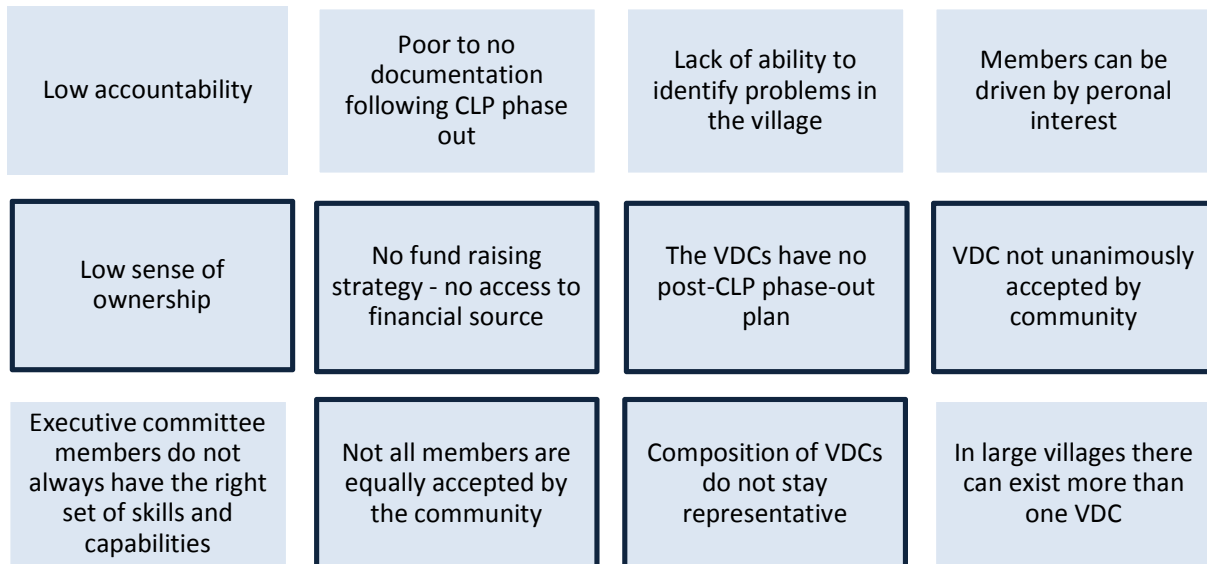


Diagram 2: Feedback from the IMO sharing workshop regarding institutional weaknesses of the VDCs

Of these, there are some key areas that were also highlighted from our results. Ownership, as discussed earlier in this chapter was a key factor. The lack of a fund-raising strategy/no access to a financial source can be linked with VDC members feeling they had no avenue to generate an income which had an impact on whether they were able to carry out activities and solve problems. A final point, supported by the field data, was the lack of a phase-out plan. Although a ‘plan’ was not explicitly stated by VDC members and the community, it was expressed by VDCs that they did not know what to do once CLP had left. They either did not know how to run the VDC, they felt the VDC

had come to a natural end, or no one took responsibility for its continuation. The weakness highlighted in Diagram 2 that, the VDC may not always be unanimously accepted by the community can be related to the non-inclusive nature of NCPs in some of the villages. This may lead to the VDC not being accepted or utilised in the right way. With regards to the view that not all members are equally accepted by the community, this can be linked to the fact that, in some VDCs, the composition of VDCs do not stay representative. This should be addressed in the strategies put in place for the re-election of members to ensure that a) all of the community is happy with the re-elected members and b) the composition remains the same.

## 6.7 Most significant negative change

### MSC in the past three months...

The only problem in the last three months has been our bad roads. We had to suffer to attend the meetings of the committee. There are seven members in the surrounding neighbourhoods but the meeting place has been built in Teghoria which is far from here. During the rainy season, we could not attend the meetings on time due to bad roads and could not do the VDC work properly. It did not, however, affect the group as a whole.

Villagers also suffered in the rainy season due to bad roads. The only thing that could be done to solve it was if our MP or Chairman could make the roads for the village. We have learned that we could not make this happen, we could not create enough pressure. It is not within our jurisdiction. The population of the village is small so the MP or Chairman does not take us seriously.

- Md. Somej Uddin, President, Teghoria char (active VDC)

### MSC overall...

Female members were barred from attending the meetings by their husband and community people, that's why it was difficult to conduct meetings properly. From my viewpoint, this was the most significant problem.

Because of this problem, attendance rates dropped significantly. Participants missed different development and educative topics discussed in the meeting. This hampered the expected development of our village.

Consulting the members' husbands and their community members could solve this problem. Moreover, if they could engage with female members in different social activities undertaken by the VDC and if they also attend the meetings; they could even help contribute to the development of the village. I have learned that it is easier to gain support from others in our good initiatives if I can gently persuade and consult them about the matter.

- Mst. Shaheda Begum, Secretary, Pardiara (non-active VDC)



## 7 Differences between active and non-active VDCs

As discussed in the previous sections, there are common strengths that exist for both active and non-active VDCs as well as some common weaknesses. We established in this research that approximately 12.5% to 20.23% of VDCs remain sustainable after CLP phase out and as such it is important to understand specific factors that separates this group from those that do not sustain.

### 7.1 Linkage Building

Building up a network of links is important to ensure VDCs are aware of assistance available to their community and that they understand the channels they must go through to obtain this assistance. During their time with CLP, VDCs establish links with various Union Parishad offices and their Upazila Chairman. It is hoped that they continue to use these connections after CLP phase out and also continue to create new links.

The average number of links made by VDCs during the time of CLP support by active VDCs was **2.4**, compared to non-active VDCs who formed, on average, **1.3** links. This supports the notion that having a larger network of links would help VDCs sustain. Not only is it important to have links, it is necessary that these links are useful. Results revealed the type of support VDCs were able to receive from the links they made.

The main type of support active and non-active VDCs received from links was mainly financial support (61.8%), followed by advice and information (47.1%), and closely followed by material resources (44.1%).<sup>33</sup> There were no differences between the type of committees and the types of support they received. This support then led VDCs to certain achievements.

The main types of achievements, as a result of the linkages, VDCs made are shown in Figure 2.

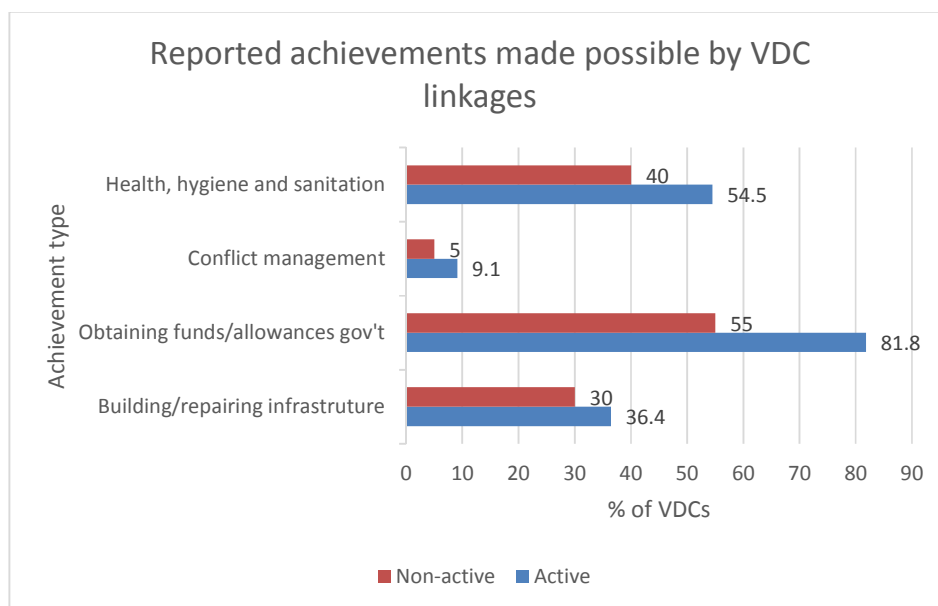


Figure 2: Reported achievements of active and non-active VDCs as a result of linkages

<sup>33</sup> See raw data table in Annex 5

Demonstrating the usefulness of links to VDCs, results showed that 91% of active committees and 64% non-active committees described the links they made as being 'crucial to their achievement'. The remaining links made by both non-active and active committees were described as 'helping a significant amount to their achievement'.

Three key points came from this data. The first is that active VDCs are able to make more links during CLP. The second, active VDCs are able to make links that are more productive, i.e. they led the VDC to a specific achievement. The third important point is that active VDCs found the help they obtained from their links to have had a crucial impact on them succeeding in their achievements more often than non-active VDCs.

## 7.2 VDC's resilience to shocks and stressors

Due to the unique context of the *chars* and their susceptibility to natural disasters such as flooding, it is important that VDC have strategies in place for when a disaster occurs. This is important for them to, firstly, help the community recover and, secondly, to sustain themselves as a committee. Our IMOs listed the threat of natural disasters and the communities' need to migrate as a result of river erosion, as one of the main threats to VDC's sustainability.

There was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between active and non-active committees and whether they had a disaster response strategy to enable their community to recover: 75% of active committees had such a strategy, compared to 33.3% of non-active committees.<sup>34</sup>

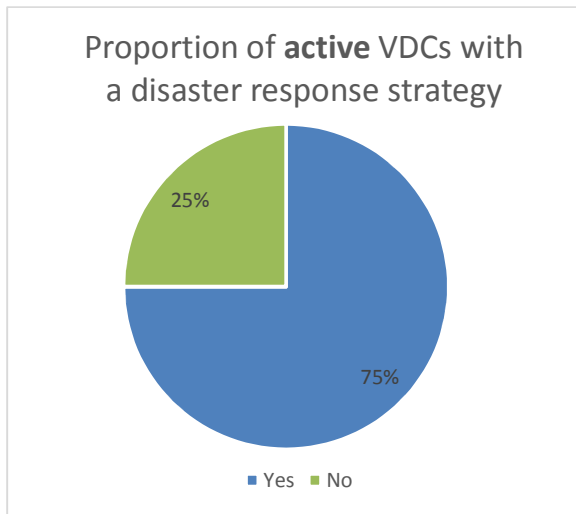


Figure 3: The proportion of active VDCs with a disaster response strategy

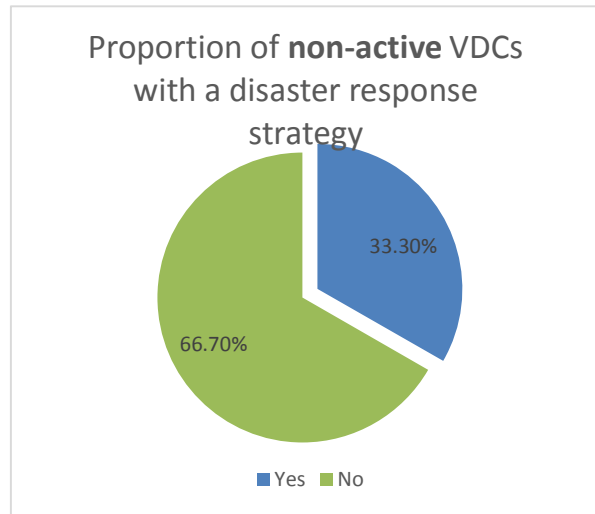


Figure 4: The proportion of non-active VDCs with a disaster response strategy

Both active and non-active committees described times when they implemented disaster response strategies as a result of being part of the VDC. VDC members from a committee formed in cohort 2.1 who are still operating today gave the example in Box 6.

<sup>34</sup> See raw data table in Annex 5

**Box 6:**

“We have a disaster procedure in place to transport flood-affected people to a shelter. We provide them with water and purifying tablets and other relief.”

- VDC members, active 2.1 village. Jhunkar *char*

Some VDCs gave examples of using the loud speaker from the mosque to alert the villagers if a house was on fire and they needed help. In another case, a *char* resident spoke of having a good relationship with the UP chairman. The VDC went to the UP member to get relief after a flood in 2012. They were able to get clothes and 150 blankets. Other forms of help provided by VDCs to minimise the effects of disasters, include flood prevention, early warning systems, repairing roads and raising a disaster relief fund.

### 7.3 Training

Training is an important part of the capacity building of the VDC members. Training is in place to help ensure the VDC is able to fulfil its objectives during its time with CLP and carry these on after CLP phase-out. We asked active and non-active VDCs which training they attended and to what extent the training led to an improvement in the operations of the committee. Regarding attendance of training, differences ( $p < .1$ ) were found between active and non-active VDCs for the three-day residential training, the exchange visit, one day linkage workshop/refresher training and the AGM. These results are shown in the Figure 5.

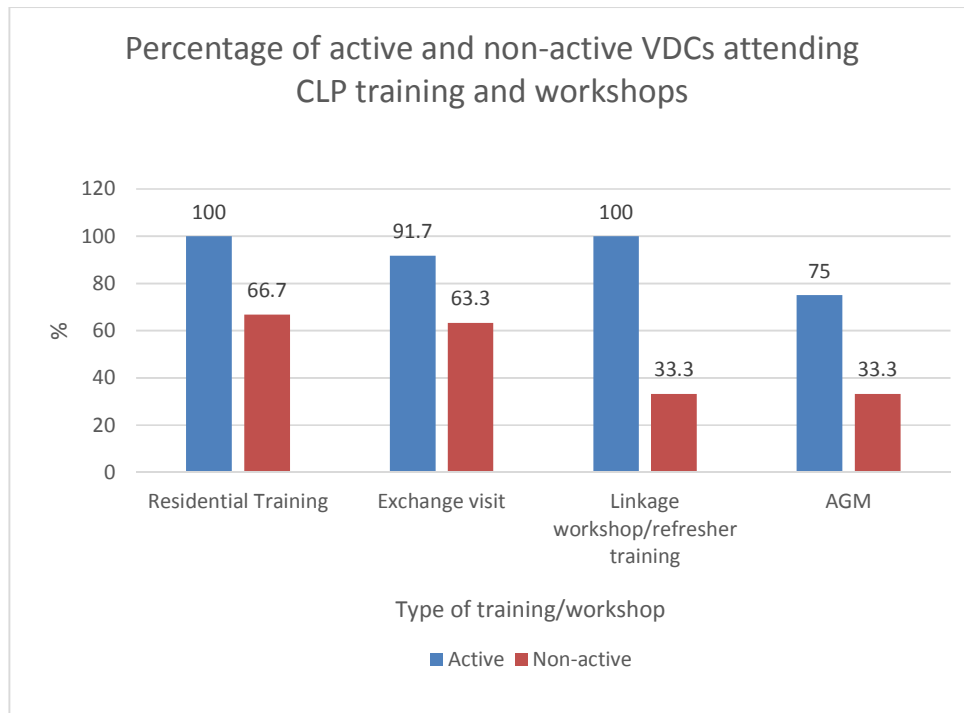


Figure 5: Percentage of VDCs that attended CLP training and workshops

Residential training consists of a number of different sessions. The usefulness of the training and workshop sessions produced significant differences (p. <1) between active and non-active VDCs. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the trainings impacted their operations using the following four options: *to a very large extent; somewhat; not much; and not at all.*<sup>35</sup> For all the trainings, between 83.3% - 100% of active VDCs rated training sessions as helping to a very large extent compared with only 41.2% - 57.9% of non-active VDCs rating training in this way. Exceptions to this, for non-active VDCs, were for the sessions on open defecation: where 80% found the training helped to a very large extent; and the session on early marriage where 70% chose this option.

“We received training for three days after the committee had formed. Then we received training on the policy of the committee. These trainings were good. We then started working on conflict mitigation, prevention of early marriage, open defecation, adolescent health, sanitation, health and family planning.”

- Active VDC member from 2.3 Makhoner char

## 7.4 Difficulties changing attitudes and behaviours

One of the sessions within the three day residential training focused on dowry and the prevention of violence against women. Interestingly 8.3% respondents from active VDCs and 20% of respondents from non-active VDCs said the training had ‘not much’ of an impact on VDC operations. A follow-up open-ended question revealed that 22.2% of those respondents said that preventing early marriage or dowry was not possible and as such CLP’s training would not have an impact. The examples below support this idea:

“We cannot help the poor financially to arrange the marriage of her daughter, so there is no point of stopping it. We do still try to make them understand. We went to someone’s house to prevent the marriage of her daughter. They said, ‘Are you going to take care of my daughter? Are you going to pay for her expenses? Are you going to help us with money?’ If we say that UNO is instructed by the government to prevent marriage under 18. They say, “are UNO and the government going to maintain my daughter’s expenses till she is 18?” Later he arranged his daughter’s marriage.”

- VDC member, active 2.3 village, Makhoner char

“Sabina Begum said, Ayub Ali arranged an early marriage for his daughter. I told them, she is young. She may suffer if she is married early. She may get sick or die giving birth at early age. The family may be unhappy. She will become less attractive. Then, the husband will marry again. Later the parents understood what I said and stopped the marriage. The committee was there too. The girl was only 12 years old and she read in class five. A week later, we heard that the parents married their daughter during the night.”

- VDC member, non-active 2.3 village, Bonober char

## 7.5 Inclusion and support of the wider community

As discussed in section 4.3, VDC members stated that community members personally approached them with problems or concerns. During the pre-test of this study, however, we became aware of some differences between CPHHs and NCPHHs and their awareness of the VDC in their community. In some cases NCP’s heard of the VDC for the first time when we spoke to them, others mentioned seeing the VDC meetings from a distance but they were not aware of the purpose of the VDCs or

<sup>35</sup> The three-day residential training includes: introduction session; social dispute and social problem identification; dowry and prevention of VAW; Birth and death registration; Union Parishad and its services; VDC meeting and register maintaining; Communication; Leadership training; Disaster management training. See raw data table in Annex 5.

what work they were involved in. Results from FGDs with NCPHHs highlighted some interesting points. In the non-active villages, non-core community members were less likely to know about the VDC or be involved in activities carried out by the committee. Due to the VDC being an authority for the whole village, inclusion of the *whole* community is important. Further, it appears from this finding that it is also significant for VDC sustainability.

An interesting point was raised by the IMO's during the sharing workshop. They suggested that, when members left the committees, it was usual for them to be replaced by CPs. As a result, the composition of the VDCs have a large proportion of members from CPHHs. The initial composition of the committees is organised to ensure the VDCs are representative of the community. This is important so that the views and problems of all members of the community can be addressed. Another problem that may arise from CP's replacing members is that they are extreme poor women and thus do not have as much of a voice in the community as more elite members. The VDC needs to be a respected and influential figure within the community and this may not be as possible if it consists mainly of CLP CPs. An additional point raised by the IMO's was that adolescent group members are not very well represented. Often they get married and, as a result, have to leave the VDC.

It was expressed that the lack of awareness between the VDC members and the NCPHHs was mutual. It was not only that the committee did not help the NCPs but also that NCPs did not alert the committee to problems they were experiencing: either they did not feel they needed the committee or they did not take the committee seriously. Some NCP's expressed the view that if they did not inform the VDC of their problem then they could not expect the committee to know about it or solve it. Nur Islam, a NCP from Parul *char* said:

"I had a problem regarding my sister Amena. We arranged her marriage, she was 18 years old. Her in-law is a local doctor and does not stay at home. Five or six months ago, news came that he got married again. My sister is suffering now. I did not come to the VDC because I did not take the committee seriously. Now I feel that we have made a mistake not informing the VDC."

Although some NCPs from active VDCs also raised concerns about approaching the committee they also provided some positive responses indicating feelings of inclusion with one NCP saying "We know that the committee had been formed. We understood that we are part of it."

## 7.6 Long term vision

Having a long-term vision for the committee is also necessary for its sustainability. Many of the same objectives committees had at formation (Table 1) fed into their long-term vision, e.g. prevention of early marriage and prevention of conflicts within the family. These areas were similar for active and non-active VDCs however there were some interesting differences. All active VDCs reported having a long-term plan when they formed whereas 23.3% of non-active VDCs reported not having established a long term plan at formation. Although not asked directly, two-thirds of active VDCs' long-term vision included to 'ensure the continuation of the VDC.' Only 16.7% of non-active VDCs stated this (see Figure 6). The IMO's expressed the need to concentrate more on establishing a long term plan with the VDCs and making plans accordingly, to help the VDCs achieve their goals. From this, it is evident that having a long term plan means that a VDC has long term aspirations for the committee. Having this in place can be seen as a predictor of VDC sustainability as they are more likely to stay together to achieve these long term goals. Including the continuation of the VDC as a specific long term goal should be encouraged as this could also help sustain the VDC by affirming the commitment of the members.

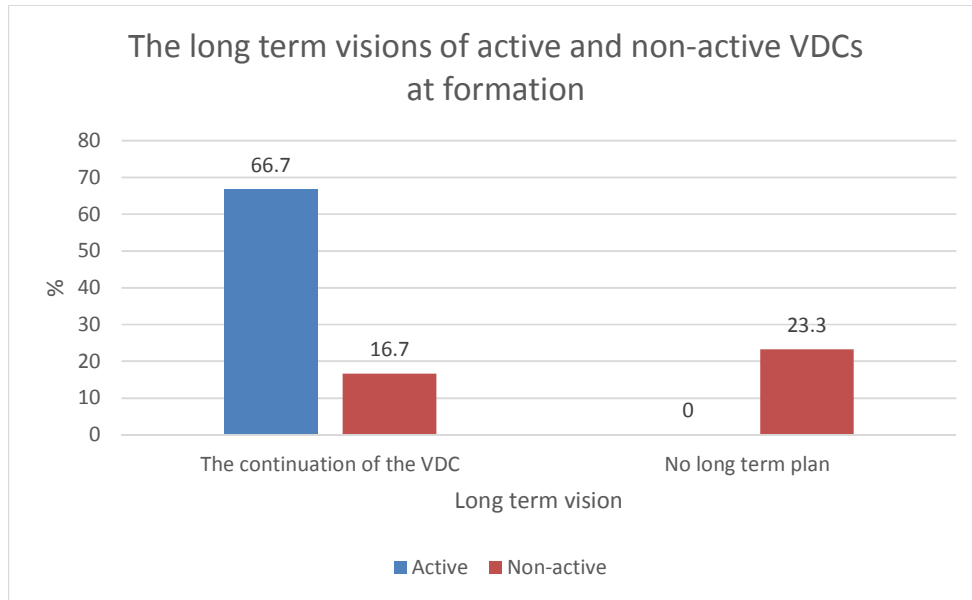


Figure 6: The long-term visions of active and non-active VDCs at formation

In addition to understanding VDC's long term visions at formation, we asked current *active* committees what their long-term vision for the VDC was today, to see if this had changed and to observe whether they still had long-term goals for the committee. This yielded very encouraging results, shown in Figure 7. Again without it being a direct question, 75% of active VDCs responded saying that they wanted to keep the VDC active. This meant for them: to spread the teachings of CLP; continue CLP activities; and continue solving problems in the community. *Improve health, hygiene and sanitation* included encouraging and ensuring the use of sanitary latrines and raising awareness of good hygiene practices. *Prevention of conflicts within the family* mainly referred to the prevention of dowry and *Education* referred to ensuring children attended school. Raising awareness of dowry and its prevention was commonly expressed as an area where VDC members understood its importance but also found it to be one of the more difficult attitudes to change among people in the village. Including it as part of their long term visions indicates that the VDCs are aware that for this practice to change, it will require time and should therefore remain a long term goal.

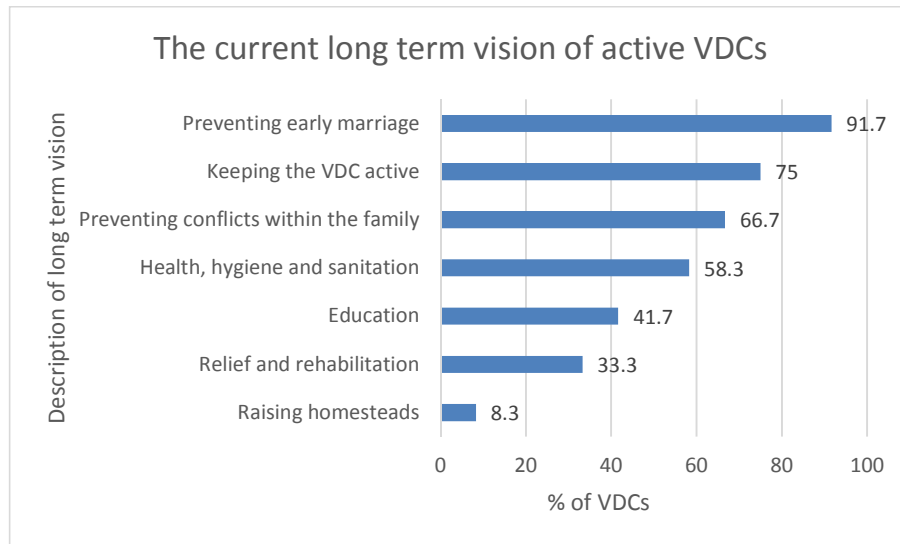


Figure 7: The current long term visions of active VDCs

## 8 Evaluation of the effectiveness and sustainability of VDCs

### 8.1 Summary of key findings

Regarding the effectiveness of the VDCs, our findings generated some very positive results. VDCs formulated clear, objectives and carried out activities that allowed them to achieve in these areas. Achievements that were particularly highlighted related to the prevention of early marriage and improving health, hygiene and sanitation in the communities, with a particular emphasis on open defecation. Further noted were the VDCs' achievements in obtaining funds from the government to help their community and building and repairing infrastructure. The perceived importance of the VDCs and the lessons learnt as a result being a part of a VDC was also a key success, as was the commitment of members and strategies to ensure re-election of members.

Findings also highlighted some negative factors that reduced the effectiveness and thus the sustainability of the VDCs. One of the main factors was the emphasis placed on CLP support as being necessary for the VDCs to sustain. This was linked to members' attendance at meetings, the expectation of financial incentives and low feelings of VDC ownership from the committees. The lack of a strategic phase-out plan was also raised as an issue, as was the VDCs lack of an income generating source: which was important for them to continue and carry out their activities. The unstable nature of the *chars* was also a commonly articulated concern.

Analyses made on VDCs across CLP-2 cohorts allowed us to predict that between 12.5% and 20.23% of VDCs are sustainable. Although we found some overall common strengths and weaknesses of the VDCs there was some variation between active and non-active committees. Further to this, the research allowed us to identify characteristics that separated committees that sustain from those that did not. These are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: The characteristics of an active VDC compared with a non-active VDC

Active	Non-active
All community members feel comfortable personally approaching committee members with a problem or concern	83.3% of community members feel comfortable personally approaching committee members with a problem or concern
Two thirds decide on the re-election of a new member consulting both community and committee members	Two thirds decide on the re-election of a new member consulting only committee members
After CLP support: 66.4% met monthly or regularly	After CLP support: 13.3% met monthly or regularly
Removal of CLP support was the contributory cause of 44.4% of VDCs not meeting	Removal of CLP support was the contributory cause of 92% of VDCs not meeting
Almost all involved committee members in the recording of minutes and achievements in meetings during CLP support	Just over half involved committee members in the recording of minutes and achievements in meetings during CLP support
Average number of links made during CLP support = 2.4	Average number of links made during CLP support = 1.3
91% of links were thought of as crucial to VDCs ability to reach their achievement	64% of links were thought of as crucial to VDCs ability to reach their achievement
75% had a disaster response strategy	33.3% had a disaster response strategy
75-100% attended CLP trainings	33.3-66.7% attended CLP trainings
83.3%-100% found trainings to have a positive impact on their operations to a 'very large extent'	41-57% found trainings to have a positive impact on their operations to a 'very large extent'
All had a long term plan at formation. 66.7% included the continuation of the VDC as part of this plan	23.3% had no long term plan at formation. 16.7% included the continuation of the VDC as part of this plan

From the differences outlined in Table 5 it was possible to establish predictors of sustainability which, if followed, should increase the sustainability of a VDC. These are listed below:

- Formulating clear objectives
- Having a strategy in place to elect new members after members drop out. Included in this the VDC should:
  - Ensure both committee and community members are consulted
  - Ensure the original committee composition is adhered to during the selection process
- Having regular meetings
- Having a person responsible to lead the VDC after CLP phases out
- Having income generating sources available to the committee



- Members having a sense of ownership
- Knowing how to continue the VDC after CLP phases out e.g. in the form of a phase-out plan
- Creating links and ensuring these links are productive and beneficial
- Having a disaster response strategy in place
- Attending trainings and finding the training helpful to VDC operations
- Having a long term plan/vision. One that includes ensuring the continuation of the VDC
- Having a VDC which is village-led, rather than CLP-led

The original objectives of the VDCs were aimed at supporting CLP's activities and focusing on the development of the village, particularly in relation to social development activities. This study showed that VDCs were very effective in achieving these objectives and in supporting our participants at a household level. We know that the VDCs that do not sustain, remain active for an average of 17 months. As such, CLP must ensure that during this time the VDC's capacities are strengthened, particularly in the areas noted as predictors of sustainability. CLP should also ensure that the VDCs are equipped to address all areas of sustainability: institutional; environmental and social. This will ensure that they become sustainable and self-governing institutions that can support the activities of CLP after phase out and ensure the households and communities we work with continue to improve their livelihoods, and avoid slipping back into extreme poverty.

## 8.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to strengthen the capacity of VDCs during CLP support, particularly in the areas highlighted as being contributory to successful, sustainable VDCs.

- i) Ensure that a structured phase-out plan is developed with the VDC during the CLP support period to transition them from CLP support. This should not be done at the last minute; there should be time for the VDC to integrate the phase-out plan into their regular activities.
- ii) Ensure that during the period of CLP support, priority is given to creating linkages with government and non-governmental agencies. During VDC training CLP should include skills training on planning and on how the VDCs will access support and follow up with links created. Identify, with the VDC, a list of agencies and services that are available to them.
- iii) Focus attention on formulating a disaster response strategy with the VDCs and ensure that the community, both CP's and NCP's, are aware of the strategy.
- iv) Ensure the VDC is led by the village and as such is inclusive of all members, during and after the period of CLP support. VDCs should be encouraged to hold a three-monthly update meeting where members of the community gather to talk about the VDC's objectives, current plans and any achievements they have made in the period.
- v) Increase the independence of members during CLP's support phase to promote levels of ownership within the committee. Two specific areas should be addressed: 1) Ensure members take more control over writing meeting minutes and recording achievements in the record book; and 2) the VDC should work to cover its own costs. The monthly meeting costs around Tk. 300 to Tk. 500. The CLP should support the VDC to generate this themselves. During training, a list of ideas of how to generate funds should be drawn up with the VDC members. This should reduce the financial barriers many committees face following phase-out.
- vi) The three-day residential training should be more tailored to the capacity building of the VDCs e.g. management, community-based advocacy and network-building. During these trainings, identify responsible members of the VDC who could take on the leadership roles after phase-out, thus assigning the role to one or two individuals. Included in this, should be training on the selection process of new members to ensure the committee structure remains and the committee continues to be an influential body. This should help eliminate the current trend of

- CLP's CP's (extreme poor women) being elected when members leave the VDC. Training on the selection process should teach the benefit of including committee and community members within the process and encourage this as best practice.
- vii) Attendance at the CLP trainings should be monitored, as should the usefulness of the training to ensure members are actively involved in the establishment of the VDCs and find the messages given in the trainings helpful.
  - viii) Ensure that each committee formulates a long term vision for their VDC at formation and that this vision is revisited towards the end of CLP support. Within this, members should be aware of common practices that CLP knows can contribute to VDC inactivity. Members should be able to identify these in their own committee and resolve them in the early stages.

*“We respond at any moment to anyone who seeks help, be it day or night...CLP came here and formed the VDC. It revolutionised us. We have become conscious. We want to develop our village.”*

- *Active 2.1 village VDC members from Jhunkar char.*

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10 Annex 1

**Questionnaire: VDC Sustainability Study**

DATE: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
 DD MM YYYY

CLP Phase		1=CLP1 2=CLP2 3= Control
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ATP Phase:		1, 2, 3, 4
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	NAME	CODE
DISTRICT:		
UNION:		
IMO:		

	NAME	CODE
UPAZILA:		
VILLAGE:		
VDC NAME:		

COMMITTEE MEMBER NAME:	
Position in Committee:	

Gender		(1 = Male 2 = Female)	Religion		(1=Islam, 2=Hindu, 3=Buddhist, 4=Christian, 5=Others)
Type of Committee		(1 = Active 2 = Non-active)			

**PLEASE ASK THE PERMISSION OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBER TO ASK A SERIES OF QUESTIONS. INFORM THAT AT ANY TIME THEY CAN REFUSE TO ANSWER A QUESTION IF THEY WISH.**

It is the responsibility of the Enumerator to treat all respondents with respect and to complete this questionnaire faithfully and accurately. Permission should be sought from the respondents to ask the following questions and to enter the household (if appropriate). If deemed necessary, the Enumerator must revisit any household if the data collected is considered incomplete. At no time should the Enumerator accept anything from any household. Non-compliance with these conditions will be considered gross mis-conduct.

It is the responsibility of the Field Supervisor to ensure the quality of the Enumerators work and conduct. This should be achieved by both spot check visits during interviews and by thoroughly checking every questionnaire submitted by the Enumerators they are responsible for. At no time should the Field Supervisor accept anything from any household. Non-compliance with these conditions will be considered gross mis-conduct.

It is the responsibility of the Data Entry Clerk to ensure accurate and high quality data entry.

Enumerator	Field Supervision Check	Data Entry Check
Name:	Name:	Name:
Date:	Date:	Date:

1	What date did the VDC form? (can be approximate to month and year)	
2	How many members were in the committee when it formed?	
<b>Question 3 is only applicable for ACTIVE VDCs</b>		
3	How many members currently form the committee?	
<b>Question 4 and 5 are only applicable to NON-ACTIVE VDCs</b>		
4	What date did the VDC stop operating? (can be approximate to month and year)	
5	How many members were in the committee when it stopped operating?	

		<b>Code</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Yes, 2 = No
6a	During the life span of the committee have (did) any of the original members left (leave) the group?		

If the answer to question 6a is 'yes' then ask question 6b.

If the answer to question 6a is 'no' then go to question 7.

<b>6b.</b>	<b>Which of the following members left the committee?</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Yes 2 = No 3 = N/A (if there was no such member to begin with)
i			
ii	Non-core VSLG member		
iii	<i>Imam</i>		
iv	Union Parishad member		
v	Local Elite		
vi	Char Shasthay Kormi (CSK)		
vii	Adolescent group representative		
viii	Teacher/member of school committee		
ix	Livestock Service Provider (LSP)		
x	Person with a Disability (PWD)		

<b>6c.</b>	<b>Were the members, indicated in 6b, one of the following executive committee members?</b>	<b>Code:</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Yes 2 = No
I	President		
ii	General Secretary		
iii	Cashier		
iv	Executive member		
		<b>Code</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Lack of financial incentive, 2 = Conflict between committee members, 3 = Member had too many other commitments, 4 = Member had to move away from the village 5 = Other (please specify)
<b>6d.</b>	<b>What was the main reason for committee members leaving?</b>		
		<b>Code</b>	
<b>6e.</b>	<b>Once a committee member left the VDC, were new members from the community re-elected to take their place?</b>		<b>Code:</b> 1 = Yes 2 = No
<b>If answer to 6e is 'yes' answer question 6f: If answer to 6e is 'no', go to question 6g</b>		<b>Code</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Committee members decide, 2 = Community members decide, 3 = Both committee and community members decide, 4 = New member was chosen by CLP staff, 5 = Other (please specify)
<b>6f.</b>	<b>What is (was) the VDC's procedure to re-elect new members?</b>		

6g.	What effect (if any) have these changes of committee members had on the way the group operates (did operate)?
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		<b>Code:</b>	<b>Code:</b>
7a	How often did the committee meet during the period of CLP support?		1 = Once a week 2 = Once every two weeks 3 = Once a month 4 = Once a quarter
7b.	How often did the committee meet after the period of CLP support?		5 = Twice a year 6 = Once a year 7 = On a needs basis 8 = Not at all
7c.	If there is a difference between answers 7a and 7b, please give the reason for this difference.		
7d.	Who organises (organised) VDC meetings?		<b>Code:</b>  1 = CDO 2 = Group President 3 = Another member of the Executive Committee 4 = Another member of the committee 5 = Other, please specify  9 (new code) no fixed person

7e.	On average, how many members attend (attended) committee meetings?	
8a	What were the committee's objectives at formation?	
8b	What was the committee's long term vision for the group at formation?	
Question 8c is only applicable for ACTIVE VDCs		
8c	What is the committee's long term vision for the group now?	
9a	How are (were) the VDC's achievements recorded?	
9b	Who recorded achievements during the period of CLP support?	
9c	Who records (recorded) achievements after the period of CLP support?  Code: 1 = CDO, 2 = Committee member, 3 = Other	



<b>10a. Since the formation of the committee, what links have the VDC made (did the VDC make) with other organisations or leaders in the public, private or NGO sector? Please indicate in the table which links were established and when.</b>			
	Institution/Organisation	Established (enter code)	Time established (enter code)
I	Union Health Complex		
ii	Union Agricultural Institute		
iii	Union Livestock Office		
iv	Union Family Planning Office		
V	Union Land Office		
Vi	Union School Madrasha Committee		
Vii	Union Education Officer		
Vii	Union Social Welfare		
ix	Upazilla Chairman		
X	Union Parishad Chairman		
Xi	Other Government or Public sector link (please specify)		
Xii	Private sector links (please specify)		
Xiii	NGO links (please specify)		
		<b>Code:</b> 1= Yes 2 = No	<b>Code:</b> 1 = During CLP's support period 2 = After CLP's support period

10b. What support did these institutions/organisations provide the VDC to help them provide essential services to the community? Please give specific examples, in the table below, of support the VDC has received, achievements the committee has had as a result of these institutions/organisations and how important they were in achieving this.			
Institution/Organisation	Support received from Institution/Organisation	Achievement of VDC	Importance of support from Institution/Organisation
	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Financial support, 2 = Human resources, 3 = Material resources, 4 = Advice/information, 5 = Other (please specify)		<b>Code:</b> 1 = Link was crucial to the achievement, 2 = Link helped a significant amount, 3 = Link was somewhat helpful, 4 = Link was helpful but not necessary, 5 = Link was not helpful

11. What other achievements has the VDC had since formation (while it was operational)? (please refer to register book if necessary) Please fill in the table to describe the achievement, how it was achieved (e.g. how the group get the necessary finance and resources), how the achievement was recorded and whether it occurred during CLP's support period or after?			
Achievement	How did you achieve it? (please specify how the committee was able to get the necessary finances and resources e.g human capacity, materials, advice/information for the achievement)	How was achievement recorded (enter code)	Time of achievement (enter code)
		<b>Code:</b> 1 = Fully recorded in register book 2 = Partially recorded 3 = Not formally written/no record book found	<b>Code:</b> 1 = During CLP's support period 2 = After CLP's support period

12.	How do (did) problems in the village become known to the VDC?	<b>Code</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Always raised by a VDC member, 2 = Always raised by a member of the community, 3 = Both community members and VDC committee members raise problems 4 = Other (please specify)
12b.	How do (did) community members approach VDC members with an issue or concern?		
12c.	What procedure does (did) the VDC follow to ensure problems in the community are (were) addressed?		
13	How are (were) decisions made amongst committee members, to solve problems in the community?		
14a.	In times of crisis e.g. a disaster such as a flood, river erosion, tornado or cold wave does (did) the VDC have a specific strategy to help the community adjust?	<b>Code</b>	<b>Code:</b> 1 = Yes 2 = No
If answer to question 14a is 'yes' answer question 14b. If answer to question 14a is 'no' answer question 15			
14b.	Describe the strategy and give an example of a time (if any) this has been used.		

<b>15b. What training and types of activities did the VDC participate in during their time with CLP?</b>			
<b>Type of training/activity</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Which components of the training did you participate in?</b>	<b>To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations? (enter code)</b>
Residential training (at formation, 3 days)			
Opening session, objectives, getting to know each other and group formation			
Introduction to the roles of CLP and IMOs			
Social dispute and social problem identification			
Open defecation			
Early marriage			
Dowry and VAW			
Birth and death registration			
Alternative dispute resolution			
Union Parishad and its services			
VDC meeting and register maintaining			
Social safety net programme			
Communication			
Planning			
Leadership training			
Gender training			
Disaster Management training			
Exchange visit			
Linkage workshop/Refresher training (1 day)			
AGM			
Other (please specify)			
<b>Code</b>	<b>1 = Yes 2 = No</b>	<b>1 = Yes 2 = No</b>	<b>1 = Very large extent, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Not much, 4 = Not at all</b>

15c.	If answer to question 15a was '2 = Somewhat', '3 = Not much' or '4 = Not at all', please explain why?
15d.	Please give examples of extra training or support you would have liked to receive from CLP and why this would have been helpful to your committee?
16.	What are the committee's plans for the community in the next 3 years?
<b>Question 17 is only applicable to NON-ACTIVE VDCs</b>	
17	Are there any other committees that have independently formed in the village to fill the role of the VDC? Please provide details about these committees.

11 Annex 2

**Key Informant Interview: VDC Sustainability Study**

DATE: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
 DD MM YYYY

CLP Phase		1=CLP1 2=CLP2 3= Control
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ATP Phase:		1, 2, 3, 4
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	NAME	CODE
DISTRICT:		
UNION:		
IMO:		

	NAME	CODE
UPAZILA:		
VILLAGE:		
VDC NAME:		

COMMITTEE MEMBER NAME:	
Position in Committee:	

Gender		(1 = Male 2 = Female)	Religion		1=Islam, 2=Hindu, 3=Buddhist, 4=Christian, 5=Others
Type of Committee		(1 = Active 2 = Non-active)			

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**It is the responsibility of the Data Entry Clerk** to ensure accurate and high quality data entry.

Enumerator	Field Supervision Check	Data Entry Check
Name:	Name:	Name:
Date:	Date:	Date:

1	What date did the VDC form (can be approximate to month and year)?	
2	How long have you been (were you) active in the VDC? (in years and months)	
3	What is (was) your position in the VDC?	
<b>Question 4 is only applicable to NON-ACTIVE VDCs</b>		
4	What date did the VDC stop operating? (can be approximate to month and year)	

<b>Questions 5 and 6 are only applicable to ACTIVE VDCs</b>	
5.	<b>In the last 3 months, what has been the most significant positive change you have seen within the community as a result of the VDC?</b> <i>From your point of view, why do you think this was so significant?</i> <i>What have you learnt from this?</i>
6	<b>In the last 3 months, what has been the most significant problem faced by the committee?</b> <i>What effect did this have on the committee?</i> <i>What effect did this have on the community?</i> <i>What could have been done differently to avoid this problem happening?</i> <i>What have you learnt from this?</i>
7.	<b>What do you think has been the overall most positive significant change within the community as a result of the VDC?</b> <i>From your point of view, why do you think this was so significant?</i> <i>What have you learnt from this?</i> <i>Is this change still noticeable in the community today?</i>

<b>8.</b>	<b>What do you think has been the overall most significant problem faced by the committee?</b>
<i>What effect did this have on the committee?          What effect did this have on the community?          What could have been done differently to avoid this problem happening?          What did you learn from this?</i>	
<b>9.</b>	<b>During CLP's involvement, what was the most significant form of support CLP provided to the VDC?</b>
<i>What are the reasons that you perceive this as being significant?</i>	
<b>Question 10 and 11 are only applicable to ACTIVE VDCs</b>	
<b>10.</b>	<b>What strength does the committee have that you think will be most significant in ensuring the sustainability of the committee?</b>
<i>Please describe why you think this?</i>	
<b>11.</b>	<b>What aspect of the committee do you think will be the most significant problem regarding the committee's sustainability?</b>
<i>Please describe why you think this?          How will you work to overcome this problem?          What could CLP do to help you overcome this problem?</i>	
<b>Question 12 is only applicable to NON-ACTIVE VDCs</b>	
<b>12.</b>	<b>What do you perceive to be the most significant reason the committee did not continue to operate?</b>
<i>In your opinion, why do you think this was significant?          What could the committee have done to prevent this from happening?          What could CLP have done to prevent this from happening?</i>	



## 12 Annex 3

### Focus Group Discussion with active villages

- 1) What has your overall experience been with having the VDC in your village?  
*If a positive/negative experience, why was this?*
  
- 2) How beneficial has the VDC been in addressing the needs and concerns of the village?  
*Please give specific examples of how and when this has happened*  
*Please give examples of when this did not happen*
  
- 3) In your opinion, what motivates the committee to continue?
  
- 4) Have you noticed a difference in how the VDC functioned after the period of CLP support?  
**(Do not ask for cohort 2.4)**  
*Please give examples of specific changes*
  
- 5) How would you describe the committee's relationship with the community?  
*How well does the VDC communicates its activities with the community?*  
*How accessible are the VDC members if you need to raise an issue or concern?*  
*If possible, please give an example*
  
- 6) Would you like the VDC to remain in the village?  
*If not, why?*  
*If yes, why?*  
*Are there any changes you would like to see in the VDC?*
  
- 7) What do you perceive to be the main challenges for the VDC?  
*Can the VDC overcome these?*  
*If yes, how? If no, why?*
  
- 8) Can you foresee any reasons for the VDC not continuing one day?  
*What are these reasons?*  
*Could CLP do more to build their capacity? If so, how?*  
*Could the committee do more to ensure the VDC continues?*

Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experience with this VDC?

## Focus Group Discussion with non-active villages

- 1) What was your overall experience when the VDC in your village?  
*If a positive/negative experience, why was this?*
- 2) How beneficial was the VDC in addressing the needs and concerns of the village?  
*Please give specific examples of how and when this happened*  
*Please give examples of when this did not happen*
- 3) What were the main challenges faced by the committee following the period of CLP's support?  
*How did it affect the community?*
- 4) How would you have described the committee's relationship with the community?  
*How did the VDC communicate its activities with the community?*  
*How accessible were the VDC members if you needed to raise an issue or concern?*  
*If possible, please give an example*
- 5) Does the community need a committee structure such as the VDC's?  
*Why is this seen as important/not important for the community?*
- 6) What do you think the reasons were for the VDC not continuing?  
*Was it a lack of commitment from members?*  
*Was it a lack of capacity built up during the period of CLP's support?*  
*Were their financial reasons?*  
*Was there a lack of leadership?*
- 7) What could have been done to prevent the committee from finishing?  
*Could CLP have done more to build their capacity? If so, how?*  
*Could the committee members have operated differently after the CLP support period?*
- 8) Are there any other comments you would like to make about the VDC?

## **Focus Group Discussion with non-core community members**

1. What do you know about the VDC in your village?
2. After formation of the VDC did you feel that you were part of their activities?
3. How beneficial was the VDC in addressing the needs and concerns of the village?
4. Do you think you could talk to VDC regarding any problems or issues you are facing?
5. Do you think there is any conflict between CPHHs and non-core HHs?
6. Would you like the VDC to remain in the village?
7. What do you perceive to be the main challenges for the VDC?
8. Can you foresee any reasons for the VDC not continuing one day?

## 13 Annex 4: Study Methodology

### 13.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires comprised qualitative and quantitative data. A sample of 42 villages were chosen with two committee member respondents from each VDC, totalling 82 respondents. The sample was initially divided equally to ensure respondents came from 21 active VDCs and 21 non-active VDCs. It was also planned that the sample be representative across the cohorts: 14 from 2.1; 16 from 2.2; and 10 from 2.3. Although it was not expected that differences would be seen between the cohorts, distribution across cohorts ensured the sample covered groups that had been around longer than others, allowing us to assess different stages of sustainability. We aimed to sample seven VDCs from cohort 2.1, seven from cohort 2.2 and six from cohort 2.3 for both active and non-active villages. In addition two VDCs would be sampled from cohort 2.4, with one respondent per VDC. This would allow us to gain an understanding of views from VDCs currently being supported by CLP. It was ensured that the two respondents to the questionnaire from each *char* were not involved in the KIs of FGDs.

Table 5: The sample distribution of questionnaire respondents

	Committee member	
	Active	Non-active
2.1	2	14
2.2	4	10
2.3	4	6
2.4	2	

### 13.2 Focus Group Discussions

FGDs were planned to support the quantitative data we would get from the questionnaires. A total of 18 FGDs were planned with 12 to be conducted with VDC members and 6 with community members. Again, the sample was divided equally with 12 (6 member FGDs and 6 community FGDs) from active villages and 12 (6 member FGDs and 6 community FGDs) from non-active villages. The sample was further divided equally by cohort. Each FGD would have 6-8 participants, although it was realised in the planning stages that this may not be possible, especially in villages where the committees were non-active.

VDC member FGDs and community member FGDs would be carried out in the same *chars* to increase reliability of the results. During our pre-test we came to understand that there was a difference between CPHHs and NCPHH in their understanding of what a VDC was, their involvement with the VDC and their opinions about the VDC. As a result, in communities that we had planned community based FGDs we added an extra NCPHH FGD. We also added 6 FGDs to be carried out in 2.4 villages: 2 with committee members; 2 with CPHHs; and 2 with NCPHHs. This made a total of 30 FGDs overall.

Problems in sampling respondents, discussed in section 13.6, meant that our final number of FGDs as well as the distribution of our respondents differed slightly from our aim. To reach our proposed number we could have conducted further data collection however, after reviewing the FGDs we had reached an information saturation point and as such it was decided to stop data collection.

Table 6: The sample distribution of FGD respondents

	Active			Non-active		
	Committee member	CPHH	NCPHH	Committee member	CPHH	NCPHH
2.1	1	0	0	2	1	1
2.2	1	1	1	2	1	1
2.3	1	1	0	2	1	1
2.4	2	2	2			

### 13.3 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were used in the study based on the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique. MSC generally works on hierarchical selection of MSC stories: passing MSC stories up to the next level until the most significant story/stories are selected. During this study we followed an adapted version of the technique. We aimed to collect 30 KIIs from executive committee members in 30 VDCs. We aimed to collect 15 from active groups and 15 from non-active groups and cohort wise: 11 from 2.1; 13 from 2.2; and 6 from 2.3. The quality of the data collected meant that only a few stories really encompassed the nature of most significant change. As a result these were extracted and the best of these were chosen through discussions with Christina Haneef, Young Professional and Maksud Hannan, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit Manager. Christina Haneef then chose the most significant of these. The chosen stories will be fed back to the VDCs.

Table 7: The sample distribution of KII respondents

	Committee member	
	Active	Non-active
2.1	2	4
2.2	3	11
2.3	3	5
2.4	3	

### 13.4 IMO sharing workshop

A half day IMO sharing workshop was carried out on the 10 October 2013. A total of 20 CLP IMO staff attended the workshop including 5 DSDMs, 5 PM, 5 TD, 5 CDS.

The objective of the workshop was to assess the institutional capacity of the VDCs. We obtained the views our IMOs on the effectiveness of the VDC as a sustainable institution to govern and promote developmental change in the community. We also aimed to address any gaps and problems with how the VDC's operate and in the type and level of CLP support they received.

Presentations were given describing aims and objectives of researching the sustainability of VDCs as well as the current status of the study. An introduction into S.W.O.T analyses was also presented.

An open discussion on the definition of sustainability in relation to VDC's was facilitated to act as a warm up session.

A SWOT analysis was then conducted, focuses on three key areas:

- IMO's perception of the benefits of the VDCs to the IMOs
- IMO's perception of the benefits of the VDCs to the village
- IMO's perception of the potential for VDC sustainability

A feedback and discussion session concluded the workshop.

### 13.5 Data collection schedule

One day training	22 September
Pre-test	23-24 September
Feedback session	24 September
Data collection commenced	30 September
Field assessment visit	23-24 October
Data collection completed	14 November

### 13.6 Constraints to data collection and learnings from the field (pre-test)

There were several constraints to carrying out this research which were noted during the pre-test and early data collection stages.

- i) In villages where we planned to carry out FGDs, particularly where three different FGDs were planned, the study was designed to ensure we sampled *chars* that IMOs had estimated greater numbers of committee members, CPHHs and NCPHH remained. Despite this, there were difficulties in finding respondents to fulfil the sampling requirements.
  - i. One reason, especially true for non-active villages, was due to members having moved away.
  - ii. We collected data during the day and as the majority of VDC members were men, they were engaged in other commitments or at work. Particularly for the KIIs, respondents were high-up members of the community and had multiple appointments to attend to.
  - iii. This problem was made more prominent due to our data collection continuing in the week prior to Eid-Al-Adha, when men were often at the market purchasing their cattle.
  - iv. Some of the *chars* were quite large and informing and collecting members was very time consuming for both the DMOs and for the respondents
- ii) Prior to data collection, we gathered data from our IMOs regarding the status of the VDC: whether they were active or non-active. However, IMOs only work with VDCs while CLP is working in the area and therefore it may have been hard to accurately identify committees as active and non-active. As a result, during data collection it was found that committees that were listed as active were in fact non-active.

## 14 Annex 5: Raw data tables

		Type of Committee			
		Active		Non-active	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
q12bN	Community members make personal contact to VDC	12	100.0%	25	83.3%
	VDC member raises issue with committee	0	.0%	4	13.3%
	CDO informs VDC	0	.0%	1	3.3%

		Type of Committee			
		Active		Non-active	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
What was the main reason for committee members leaving?	Lack of financial incentive	1	16.7%	0	.0%
	Conflict between committee members	0	.0%	1	10.0%
	Member had too many other commitments	2	33.3%	1	10.0%
	Member had to move away from the village	1	16.7%	3	30.0%
	Due to an election	1	16.7%	3	30.0%
	Insincerity of member	1	16.7%	2	20.0%

		Type of Committee			
		Active		Non-active	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
What is (was) the VDC's procedure to re-elect new members?	Committee members decide	2	33.3%	6	66.7%
	Community members decide	0	.0%	0	.0%
	Both committee and community members decide	4	66.7%	2	22.2%
	New member was chosen by CLP staff	0	.0%	1	11.1%
	Other	0	.0%	0	.0%

### What effect (if any) have these changes of committee members had on the way the group operates (did operate)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Participants more encouraged than before	10	23.8	76.9	76.9
	No change noticed	3	7.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	13	31.0	100.0	
Missing	NA	26	61.9		
	no response	3	7.1		
	Total	29	69.0		
Total		42	100.0		

		Type of Committee			
		Active		Non-active	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
q7bN	Once a month	2	22.2%	3	10.0%
	Once a quarter	4	44.4%	1	3.3%
	On a needs basis	1	11.1%	2	6.7%
	Not at all	2	22.2%	24	80.0%

**Pearson Chi-Square Tests**

		Type of Committee
q7bN	Chi-square	13.578
	df	3
	Sig.	.004 <sup>*,a,b</sup>

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

\*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.

a. More than 20% of cells in this subtable have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.

b. The minimum expected cell count in this subtable is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.

		Count	Column N %
\$q10bbM	Financial support	21	61.8%
	Human resources	1	2.9%
	Material resources	15	44.1%
	Advice/information	16	47.1%
	Other	8	23.5%
	No support	0	.0%

**Pearson Chi-Square Tests**

		Type of Committee
In times of crisis does (did) the VDC have a specific strategy to help the community adjust?	Chi-square	6.007
	df	1
	Sig.	.014 <sup>*</sup>

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

\*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.



		Type of Committee			
		Active		Non-active	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Opening session: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	10	83.3%	10	50.0%
	Somewhat	2	16.7%	9	45.0%
	Not much	0	.0%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Introduction: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	10	50.0%
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	9	45.0%
	Not much	0	.0%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Social dispute and social problem identification: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	12	100.0%	11	55.0%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	8	40.0%
	Not much	0	.0%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Open defecation: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	12	100.0%	16	80.0%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	3	15.0%
	Not much	0	.0%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Early marriage: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	12	100.0%	14	70.0%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	4	20.0%
	Not much	0	.0%	2	10.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Dowry and VAW: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	11	55.0%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	5	25.0%
	Not much	1	8.3%	4	20.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Birth and death registration: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	12	100.0%	10	52.6%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	8	42.1%
	Not much	0	.0%	1	5.3%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Alternative dispute resolution: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	10	55.6%
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	6	33.3%
	Not much	0	.0%	2	11.1%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Union Parishad and its services: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	10	50.0%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	9	45.0%
	Not much	1	8.3%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
VDC meeting and register maintaining: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	10	50.0%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	9	45.0%
	Not much	1	8.3%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Social safety net programme: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	10	83.3%	10	50.0%
	Somewhat	2	16.7%	9	45.0%
	Not much	0	.0%	1	5.0%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Communication: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	8	42.1%
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	8	42.1%
	Not much	0	.0%	2	10.5%
	Not at all	0	.0%	1	5.3%
Planning: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	10	83.3%	8	44.4%
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	7	38.9%
	Not much	1	8.3%	2	11.1%
	Not at all	0	.0%	1	5.6%
Leadership training: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	7	41.2%
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	8	47.1%
	Not much	0	.0%	2	11.8%
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%
Gender training: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	10	83.3%	10	52.6%
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	7	36.8%
	Not much	0	.0%	2	10.5%
	Not at all	1	8.3%	0	.0%
Disaster management training: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	11	57.9%
	Somewhat	0	.0%	6	31.6%
	Not much	0	.0%	2	10.5%
	Not at all	1	8.3%	0	.0%

			Type of Committee			
			Active		Non-active	
			Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Exchange visit: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	11	57.9%	
	Somewhat	0	.0%	8	42.1%	
	Not much	1	8.3%	0	.0%	
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%	
Linkage workshop/refresher training (1day): To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	11	91.7%	5	50.0%	
	Somewhat	1	8.3%	5	50.0%	
	Not much	0	.0%	0	.0%	
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%	
AGM: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Very large extent	9	100.0%	5	50.0%	
	Somewhat	0	.0%	3	30.0%	
	Not much	0	.0%	2	20.0%	
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%	
Other	Very large extent	0	.0%	0	.0%	
	Somewhat	0	.0%	0	.0%	
	Not much	0	.0%	0	.0%	
	Not at all	0	.0%	0	.0%	

### Pearson Chi-Square Tests

		Type of Committee
Opening session: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	3.685
	df	2
	Sig.	.158 <sup>a,b</sup>
Introduction: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	5.811
	df	2
	Sig.	.055 <sup>a,b</sup>
Social dispute and social problem identification: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	7.513
	df	2
	Sig.	.023 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Open defecation: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	2.743
	df	2
	Sig.	.254 <sup>a,b</sup>
Early marriage: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	4.431
	df	2
	Sig.	.109 <sup>a,b</sup>
Dowry and VAW: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	5.120
	df	2
	Sig.	.077 <sup>a</sup>
Birth and death registration: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	8.010
	df	2
	Sig.	.018 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Alternative dispute resolution: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	4.603
	df	2
	Sig.	.100 <sup>a,b</sup>
Union Parishad and its services: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	7.517
	df	2
	Sig.	.023 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
VDC meeting and register maintaining: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square	7.517
	df	2
	Sig.	.023 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Social safety net programme: To what extent did this lead	Chi-square	3.685
	df	2

**Pearson Chi-Square Tests**

	Type of Committee
to the improvement of committee operations?	Sig. .158 <sup>a,b</sup>
Communication: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 7.732 df 3 Sig. .052 <sup>a,b</sup>
Planning: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 5.058 df 3 Sig. .168 <sup>a,b</sup>
Leadership training: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 7.700 df 2 Sig. .021 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Gender training: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 6.237 df 3 Sig. .101 <sup>a,b</sup>
Disaster management training: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 7.818 df 3 Sig. .050 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Exchange visit: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 7.818 df 2 Sig. .020 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Linkage workshop/refresher training (1day): To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 4.774 df 1 Sig. .029 <sup>a,*</sup>
AGM: To what extent did this lead to the improvement of committee operations?	Chi-square 6.107 df 2 Sig. .047 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
Other	Chi-square . df . Sig. .

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

a. More than 20% of cells in this subtable have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.

b. The minimum expected cell count in this subtable is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.

\*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.

## **15. Annex 6: Most Significant Change stories and case studies of VDC achievements**

One VDC committee member told us:

“Exposure visits outside the village are the most significant. One can learn what development works have been done in other places and know about possible income generating activities. We can learn about their culture and by implementing others learnings they can develop their own village”.

This collection of stories is aimed at providing VDCs with the knowledge and ideas of what other committees are involved in and what is possible.

### **MSC infrastructure**

We have built a foot-bridge. It has improved connection with the nearby village. Students can go to school using this foot-bridge. Improvement in road-communication facilitates movement, helps students and develops markets.

Previously tube wells did not have concrete platforms. Now people have become aware of having concrete platform for their tube wells so they can have safe water. IMOs and the VDC played the vital role in this. Even when a platform has not been built by the IMO, the VDC will build it by themselves. If the tube well platform remains muddy, it exposes the tube well water source to dirty surface water and it can become contaminated with bacteria and diseases. Knowing this the VDC have built platforms themselves. Villagers are now using arsenic free water as the IMO and Gov't have tested for arsenic. When a family cannot afford to install a tube well, the VDC will corresponds to different committees for them. Drinking clear and arsenic free water from a tube well with a concrete platform; nowadays they are not getting sick. The change is still visible today. All the tube wells in village now have concrete platforms except one which has just been installed.

### **MSC in health, hygiene and sanitation practice**

Using a sanitary latrine. In the past, people used to defecate here and there. Because of its odour and physical presence it became agony to walk through the streets and roads. The environment got polluted. Flies and insects spread diseases to our food and as a result people used to get sick from different diseases, mostly diarrhoea. Spreading of disease is less severe now as people are using sanitary latrine and soap/ashes to wash their hands. VDC members are raising awareness of hygiene and sanitation among the local people everywhere they get a chance to do so. Most of the households are now using sanitary latrine and those who cannot afford one are building a low cost one with bamboo thatch.

Prevention of open defecation. Nobody defecates openly anymore and every house has sanitary latrine and they use it. It is the most positive change to me. When people used to defecate openly, insects would bring the germs to our food. We used to get sick eating those food and thus, suffer from diarrhoea, cholera and other diseases. It also used to spread a bad smell. When we defecated on other people's land, the land owner used to behave badly. Female members used to face the most difficulty. It is difficult for them to defecate outside the house, be it day or night. All these problems have been solved by using sanitary latrine. That is why it is the most significant positive change to me. By preventing open defecation and using sanitary latrines, people remain healthy and do not suffer from diseases. Before, people used to suffer from worms, which is very

rare now. The change is still noticeable in the village. We all consider it as a good work and it has been proved. So we sustained the practice together.

Among our works, preventing open defecation in the village is the most significant change to me. We have made people understand that it looks bad and causes disease by insects bringing germs which spread to our food. Now open defecation has reduced in the village. Open defecation is bad. That is why I emphasised it. Before, they did not care and were not ashamed and they suffered from many diseases. This has reduced now and people have become civilised. So I have learned that good work can bring good change. People are building sanitary latrines in every house and nobody defecates openly. The change is still noticeable today and they will never do it again

We have done many things for the village after formulating the VDC. We helped to buy cows for the participants, we have repaired roads through the UP, built a foot-bridge by collecting bamboo from everyone, we worked towards 100% sanitation, stopped early marriage, polygamy, divorce and dowry, sent the children to school, raised awareness on hygiene and worked for flood prevention by planting trees in 2-4 acres of land. **But to me, of these, sanitation is the most positive change that VDC made.** Open defecation spreads diseases and people used to be unhealthy. They used to suffer from diarrhoea, dysentery and worms. When we go for open defecation, sometimes we are seen nude by others which is very shameful. In fact, open defecation itself is a bad thing. In the rainy seasons, wastes are mixed with water. When cattle drink from that they get sick. When we bathe in that water, we suffer from itching and other skin diseases. Seeing these, we have come to think that we have to stop it. That is why, ensuring 100% sanitation in the village is the most significant to me. I have learnt that we can always benefit from good work. CLP staff used to describe the benefits of sanitary latrines in various meetings. Besides, many governmental offices also advised for this. But CLP's contribution is the largest. They came to our *char* and made us understand and provided its participants with sanitary latrines for free. Not only this, they also supplied elements for sanitary latrines at low cost to the non-participants. We have learnt hygiene practices like wearing slippers to go to latrine, and to wash our hands with ash or soap. The change was noticeable for a while but then it started to get worse in the last year. We experienced problems with the pans of the latrines breaking causing a bad smell. As a result, those houses were defecating openly again. In some cases, tin-shades were not used in latrines. As a result, those were drained during rainy season and stopped working. Those houses are also not using the latrines anymore and they are again defecating openly and polluting the environment. There used to spread bad smell due to open defecation and people used to suffer from many diseases. After formulating VDC, we discussed with people from all levels within the village and stopped open defecation within a year. Our village is 100% sanitised now. As a result, the problems caused by open defecation are no more in our village. Due to our good work, people respect us, they say salaam and we get encouraged by this. I learned that good work brings with it, respect. This change through VDC activities is the most significant to me. We are now conscious and people are living a healthy and happy life because we are no more affected by problems caused by open defecation. I walk around the village and I know that everyone has sanitary latrine now. Passers-by would also feel that it is noticeable when you will walk down the roads.

The most important change the VDC has made is in the prevention of open defecation and use of sanitary latrines. Due to open defecation, people in the village used to suffer from diarrhoea, dysentery and other diseases. As a result, they have to spend extra money on treatment. Now people use sanitary latrine instead of open latrines and they are suffering less from diseases and avoiding economic loss. **No matter how hard the job is, it can be done if the VDC works with unity and the villagers cooperate with them.** At first, many people were not interested to use

sanitary latrines, but when the committee spoke with the villager and made them understand together, they listened to them. The change is still noticeable today.

Among the works we have done I liked the establishment of sanitary latrine the most. Previously *char* people used to defecate here and there. Ducks, chickens as well as insects used to bring these waste to our house. Mosquitos and flies would sit on the food which spreads diseases. People would die from these diseases. Previously, there had been diseases in every house during September and October but now, we do not suffer from these diseases any more. Only those who lost their home due to river erosion have no latrine. Everyone else has and uses a sanitary latrine. Child mortality has decreased. Income has also increased due to reduction in morbidity. That is why I think that this is the most significant change that we have achieved.

We learnt from CLP that we have to wash our hands and tools before we cut vegetables. They told us that vitamins in the food remain even if we do that. We also walked without slippers which lead to worms getting into us. We have been relieved from that now that we wear slippers. The VDC told us that if we maintain these rules we will be healthy. We can earn by working because we will be healthy and as such improve our family condition.

### **MSC for the prevention of early marriage**

VDCs have been able to influence the prevention of early marriage at the Union Parishad level with a committee from cohort 2.4 explaining that the UP used to provide birth certificates where they would increase girls' ages so that their marriage could be arranged. The VDC was able to contact the UP and explain the negative impact this procedure has. As a result they believe the UP has become more cautious and now visits the village to identify the girls' age before the certificate is produced".

Our village is a disconnected village. We do not have many roads and especially in the rainy season, we face difficulties travelling. We decided to build a mosque and have appointed an imam for the mosque with a salary of Tk. 800 per month. Due to bad roads in rainy season, the imam cannot come here regularly. Since we do not pay much, he is not very interested either. So we, the VDC, along with the villagers have talked to another person who teaches in a madrasah. We will pay him a little more. And he agreed to come five times for prayer. Our children can have some religious education beside their regular education. They will learn how to pray and the imam will teach the children in *maktab*. The adult people also face difficulty to pray five times due to lack of imam and we cannot perform the prayers appropriately. Some people do not *takbir*, some do not know how to perform *azan*. So we thought that we can also learn something from the imam. That is why I thought this is important. If we have an imam we can pray all together and perform our prayer appropriately. Moreover, our unity increasing from praying together. Everyone keeps contact and interpersonal relation improves. We have learned that doing good work and religious work gives peace of mind. This is the most significant change within last 3 months.

Creating awareness on the importance of education is the most significant. VDC members have raised awareness about the importance of education among the parents. Education will improve standard of living and the social environment in the village will be good. Young children will respect their elders and siblings can help each other in their education. If they are educated, they can do business, work in the garments industry and become representative of the community. Now parents have become aware and they send their children to school. At present children are going to school and their drop-out rate has reduced. However, due to lack of a high school in the village, many must stop after primary education. However, about 95% of the villagers can sign their names. The change is still noticeable and every children in the villages goes to school now.

## Preventing of the CLP provided asset

Prevention of selling/destroying the CLP provided asset is the most significant change to me. Due to VDC's activities, nobody decided to sell or destroy their asset. Poor people of the village have improved their condition by keeping and making productive the CLP provided asset. **Those who had nothing earlier have now become self-reliant.** They do not have to starve any more. This is why I think this is the most significant positive change. We, on behalf of VDC, could make people understand that people become self-reliant by using resources rather than selling/destroying them. A CLP member's husband Afurulla (Father- Shaheb Ali) got a cow from CLP. He reared the cow and bought 2 other cows by selling it. Few days ago, he sold it at 15000 taka which has set an example to the people of the village. I think the VDC does good work and good work gives inner peace as well as encourages people's respect. People now call us in social meetings and for conflict mitigation. Since we work for the welfare of poor, they pray for us. The change prevails in the community and we hope that it would prevail in the future too.

In the last three months, we have done following things to increase the disaster preparedness of our community.

- Arranging safe drinking water and keeping it covered
- Not bathing in dirty water and to avoid diseases like diarrhea, cholera, dysentery etc.
- We have spread burned chilly and bleaching powder in around the house and nearby jungle to prevent snack and insects.
- We have stored dry food like flattened and puffed rice and have taught that to others.
- We advised people to bring saline and medicine from community clinic beside Keramot member's place whenever someone is suffering from diarrhea. Who do not bring medicine we provide them from our surplus.
- We go door to door and raise awareness on extra care for children during flood so that no child gets drowned. Moreover, whenever we see any child getting closer to water, we move them away to safer places.

By doing these activities and by the grace of Almighty, we avoided loss during this flood and this is the significant change. If we had not done this, people would have become sick and they would have lost money obtaining treatment. Since they have no money, they would have borrowed it and, with the interest incurred, it would have been difficult to repay. Since we started to prepare ourselves preparation and keep cautious, our loss has been minimised and we saved on additional treatment costs. Nobody's children got drowned into water and people were happy. We have been successful to avoid loss in natural disaster by taking preparation. From this, we have learned that if we do this in future, we can avoid losses from fire during Chaitra (last month of Bengali calendar), from storm during Baishakh (first month of Bengali calendar) and from cold wave during winter. We all can be safe if we get prepared like this time.

Many people in other villages sold their CLP cow after receiving it. But nobody did that in our village. We prevented it. We know that the cow was provided to the villagers by CLP to develop them. Two years ago, a person tried to sell the cow. We stopped him and even today he still has that cow. There was once a quarrel between a husband and wife about selling the cow and someone tried to divorce his wife. However we spoke to them and were able to solve the problem. By keeping the cow, he has been able to build two tin houses!

Rashid said, Hajer Begum got into a quarrel with her husband about selling the cow. When we heard about it, we went to him and made him understand that it was provided to you for your development. You will rear the cow and when it grows up, it will give birth to calves. Then you can rear the calves too. Thus, you can develop yourself. CLP gave you an opportunity. If you

take it, your fate will change. If you sell it, you will go back to your previous situation. Your cash will be spent. You cannot hold it. If you endure for a while and rear the cow, you can be well-off in the future. After hearing this he decided not sell the cow.

### **MSC in the increased empowerment and protection of women and girls**

Prevention of child marriage is the most significant change: early marriage causes many diseases. Girls may die giving birth when they are very young and their health deteriorates. Unrest in the family increases. The marriage of a girl named Kajoli was prevented. If this had not been prevented, the girl would stop have studying. She can now study for a further 1-2 more. Being educated she will be able to better serve her family and her husband will like her. We have learned that we will not allow early marriage and will tell others to do the same. A few days ago, a child marriage was stopped which so far makes a total of four marriages that have been prevented by the VDC.

We prevented child marriage. We, VDC members, went there hearing from other members of the community that the marriage was going to take place. Abul Hossain's daughter was only 14/15. After we went to the family, the marriage has been stopped. Due to this incident, another child marriage in the community was stopped. Now everyone knows about child marriage. No child marriage takes place in the community anymore.

The VDC has stopped early marriages in this village, from my viewpoint this the most significant change in our community that has resulted from having a VDC. I learned from a CLP training that early marriage is similar to sacrificing a girl to death. Early marriage causes health damage to a girl very rapidly. It also causes complexities during labour and at the time of child birth, even can bring death to that girl. So, knowing all these, we cannot push our girls into marriage knowing this risk. Therefore I feel that stopping child marriage is the most important to community. Once we heard that Abdul Hai's young girl (Nazma) was about to being forcibly married, VDC members responded to it very quickly and stopped it. Even though it was a good initiative, we had to tolerate criticism from different persons of the village. However, after 8 months of this incident, Nazma's family again initiated to get her married and remained successful. From this incident, we learned that in every good initiatives we might have to face barriers and also it might take some time to grow a positive attitude upon it among the community. After this incident we worked hard and nowadays there is no early marriage in this village and still it is noticeable in the community

There used to be early marriages. VDC has been able to stop it with the help of the villagers. There is no early marriage anymore. Overall we think it to be the most positive change in our village. When someone is married early, she gets sick. She herself is a child. So giving birth to another child is very difficult for her. I send my daughter to school and she reads in class seven. As a mother I understand the risks of early marriage. I will not arrange her early marriage. People in our village have become conscious and so do not arrange early marriage. Since there is no early marriage, there is no unhappy family. So it is the most significant positive change. When someone is married early, there are problems/unhappiness in her family. So she comes back to her parents' house. Then her parents become unhappy and the village gets affected. She becomes sick and cannot maintain household chores. She becomes less attractive and her husband marries again. The child she gives birth to can also become sick and suffer from malnutrition. As a result, the mother can suffer from hysteria and other diseases and dies; some commits suicide. When we were children, we saw a girl who was married early. Her family were always unhappy and eventually she committed suicide. Since this time, I am afraid of early marriage. That is why I think stopping it is the most significant.



Since early marriage has stopped, people and families in the village are happy now. Adolescent mortality decreased, nobody commits suicide. Every girl is married at proper age. I have become more patient doing this. Many proposals are offered for my daughter but I refuse them cold-headed. I do tailoring. When Vanu's daughter's cloth were brought to me to prepare, I understood that Lipi's (Vanu's daughter) marriage was being arranged. But she was only 14 years old. I made Vanu understand the demerits of early marriage. She understood and tried to convince her husband. But he did not listen to her and said that if they arrange the marriage early, less money will be spent. She then sent me the news in secret and asked for help. Then I along with other VDC members and the CLP staff went her house and made her husband understand and he listened to us and stopped the marriage. At first, when we tried to stop early marriage, many opposed us and threatened us. Then we threatened them by saying that we would call the media and spread the news. Then the threats stopped. We have convinced the people that the same amount of money is spent whenever the marriage takes place. People's minds have changed now and we succeeded in stopping early marriage. Since then, there is no early marriage in our village and we hope that it will be forever.

### **Other achievements noted by the VDCs**

An example was provided by a now non-active VDC, whereby the VDC was able to provide 200 persons with family planning products as a result of linkages with the Union Family Planning Office.

Earlier, we did not plant vegetables or fruit plants. We did not know how to plant, we just used to sprinkle seeds. After receiving training, we can plant now. They taught us to make beds in a line and we learnt how to plant trees. Now we can eat fruits. Moreover, they trained us: how to rear cattle; how to make compost; how to take care of our crops; and what ingredients to use for compost etc.

About a year ago, in our village, around 100 cows were stolen. To prevent theft, the VDC formed a committee with the villagers. They guarded the village at night. They awoke people when necessary. They guarded the village well for few days and now, for a whole year there has been no theft.

Sometimes there is high tide in the river which destroys our land. We worked to stop it. To prevent river erosion we needed bamboo, so we arranged bamboo from the villagers.

Minara said, my son did not go to school and I am not educated either. The villagers told me to send my son to school. They made me understand that we need to send our children to school. They have to be educated. They can help their parents if they are educated and when they grow up educated, they can help to maintain their family.

On one occasion, a person's cow entered another crop land. The owner of the land caught the cow and kept it and he would not return it without compensation. The owner of the cow was not willing to pay the compensation. Then there was a quarrel. When the committee heard about this, they found an agreeable solution to the problem. Had VDC not been there, it could have led to a bigger fight. Even the administration in the village alluded that they would not be able to solve it.