



CLP Impact Series

Food Security in the Chars

The CLP's Contribution



Chars Livelihoods Programme

Reducing Extreme Poverty on the Riverine Islands of North West Bangladesh

Food Security

The CLP's Contribution



Defining Food Security

Following the 1996 World Food Summit, food security was defined as existing when “*all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life*”. Defining food security was recognised as a complex and multidimensional issue that should be broken down according to three pillars:

Food Availability

Food must be available in sufficient quantities on a consistent basis

Food Access

Households must be able to regularly acquire adequate amounts of food

Food Utilisation

Consumed food must have a positive nutritional impact on people



How the CLP helps improve food security

Food security is one of the desired outcomes of the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP). The CLP seeks to improve food security through the provision of a wide range of interventions. These include an income generating asset, livelihood's training and inputs, such as homestead gardening and cattle management, as well as facilitating access to clean water and sanitary latrines.

Measuring Food Security in the CLP

Food security is extremely difficult to measure. From April to June 2012, the CLP has developed a new approach to measure food security. By framing it according to the three pillars and using local understandings of food security, the CLP is now able to provide a context specific and holistic picture of food security in the *chars*.

The figure below presents the key indicators used to measure food security and determine whether a household is food secure or not.



The CLP's Impact on Food Security



In order to understand the impact of the programme on food security, the CLP conducted a food security study in July 2012. The findings are presented below according to the three pillars of food security: Access to Food, Food Availability and Food Utilisation.

Pillar 1: Access to Food

Access to food is achieved when households are able to regularly acquire adequate amounts of food. Improved access is based on food expenditure, food consumption, food diversity and the use of food shortage coping strategies.

The CLP has a positive impact on access to food. The CLP helps:

- Reduce vulnerability to food insecurity as participants spend a smaller percentage of their income on food.
- Increase the quantity and quality of food eaten.
- Diversify diets and improve household food consumption with a higher intake of nutritious food.
- Reduce the frequency of food coping strategy used as well as reducing their severity.



Pillar 2: Food Availability

Food availability is achieved when food is available in sufficient quantities on a consistent basis. Understanding food availability sheds light on a household's vulnerability and ability to cope with external shocks, such as changes in food prices or extreme weather.

The CLP has a positive impact on food availability. The CLP helps:

- Accumulate assets, increase household income and facilitates access to cultivable land.
- Reduce reliance on markets, neighbours and relatives and increase a household's ability to grow crops, rear animals and use their own produce.
- Diversify food sources and household food stocks.





Pillar 3: Food Utilisation

Improving food utilisation is achieved when food that has been consumed has a positive nutritional impact. Food utilisation refers to a household's safe use of food and an individual's ability to metabolise nutrients.

The impact of the CLP on food utilisation has shown mixed results:

- Improve intra-household food utilisation.
- Improve women's hand washing behaviour.

Nevertheless, there is still progress to be made, as:

- Not enough participants are hand washing with soap at all critical times, suggesting improper food preparation and use.
- Not enough participants have access to clean water and sanitation according to CLP standards. This makes them more prone to contamination and increases their vulnerability to water-borne diseases, thus preventing consumed foods from having a positive nutritional impact.

Case Study Monowara

With the CLP's support, Monowara has improved her food security status. She no longer struggles to access food. She says that she has *"no more sorrows now that I can have food whenever I want."*

Monowara was once extremely poor. Her family's eating habits were dependent on her husband's irregular daily income. They never ate enough protein and often picked wild vegetables, such as pumpkin leaves and wild spinach. Such practices are considered by *char* dwellers as a clear sign of food insecurity.

There were days when Monowara did not have enough money to buy food. She would skip meals to provide for her children. This was one of many food shortage coping strategies she resorted to. In extreme cases she would beg for food.

In 2009, Monowara joined the CLP. She bought a cow and sold it for profit to lease 350 square metres of land. She also learnt how to cultivate a homestead garden. She is extremely proud of it. Monowara eats the vegetables she grows, sells the ones she doesn't particularly enjoy and gives the surplus to poorer households.



Monowara now consumes a diverse diet and eats three times a day. She owns five chickens and often eats their eggs. She also eats fish every day, and meat every month. She no longer resorts to extreme coping strategies. Over time, she has even put on some weight. She looks healthier and is happy about it.

Case Study Nilufa

With the CLP's support, Nilufa and her family no longer struggle with food utilisation. This means the food they consume is shared evenly within the household and has a positive nutritional impact.

Before the CLP, Nilufa was food insecure. She was always the first to sacrifice meals to provide for her children. Her children were always ill, suffering from diarrhoeal diseases and cholera. She links this to poor access to sanitation and clean water.

Earlier, Nilufa's family did not have a latrine. She practiced open defecation or improvised a latrine where she could. She also did not have access to clean water and collected unsafe water from a neighbouring tube well.

In 2007, Nilufa joined the CLP. As part of the CLP's package of interventions, she received a tube well with a concrete platform. She is happy to finally be drinking clean water. She also received a sanitary latrine, which she learnt how to use during training sessions. She understands the importance of wearing sandals and how to reduce the spread of diseases within her household. She also learnt about hand washing with soap and now washes her hands at all critical times.

Nilufa claims she is now food secure – she eats three times a day, drinks clean water, no longer practices open defecation and most importantly, her children are healthy.



Case Study Honufa



With the CLP's support, Honufa and her family have improved their food security status. Food is now available in sufficient quantities on a consistent basis.

Before the CLP, Honufa and her family only ate once or twice a day. She often skipped meals for days at a time when her husband could not find work. They did not have many assets – only a few chickens and one shared goat – and food was never readily available. They could not always afford to buy rice from the market and sometimes received donated rice from local government support.

In 2009, Honufa joined the CLP and bought a cow using the asset transfer grant. She then decided to sell it for profit (about £150). They used that money to lease land, to buy a small cow and to plant 100 eucalyptus trees and 100 fruit trees. She now grows jackfruit, lychee, pumpkin and her favourite, mango. Last year she made some extra money by selling 40 kg of her apples.

Honufa recently used all of her savings and sold her cow to purchase the land they previously leased and bought it for Tk.90,000 (about £700). This is extremely rare in the *chars*. She uses this land to grow her own rice. Now, they no longer require government assistance and don't even need to buy rice from the market.

Over time, Honufa has accumulated a number of assets, including cows, ducks, sheep and chickens. This has allowed her to diversify her sources of food. Now she can decide to consume her own produce, use her assets as a source of food or buy goods from the market. Everyday she eats eggs that her chickens produce and fish that her husband catches.

The CLP also taught her how to cultivate a variety of vegetables. Honufa has a large bed crop that she is extremely happy with and finds very helpful. Honufa sells the vegetables she grows and invests that money into her daughter's studies. She is extremely proud of her daughter and decided to use some of her savings to buy her a desk for her schoolwork.

Honufa and her family no longer struggle and food is always available in abundance . They claim they are now eating without thinking. Honufa says that "*if we wished we could all eat four meals a day*".

The Chars Livelihoods Programme works with extreme poor households living on island chars in North West Bangladesh. The Programme aims to improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of at least one million extremely poor and vulnerable women children and men living on chars. The CLP provides a package of interventions with the aim of improving social and economic assets, reducing environmental and economic risks, and increasing access to markets and services.

For further information on the CLP's impact on food security, please visit the Publication page of our website. The most relevant documents are:

Cordier, L. (2012) *Reviewing the CLP's Approach to Measuring Food Security*.
Cordier, L., Kenward, S., Islam, R. (2012) *The CLP's Impact on Food Security*.

This brief is part of the CLP's Impact Series, which outline the CLP's impact across key thematic areas. Forthcoming briefs in this series will address Women's Empowerment, Livelihoods, Nutrition and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).



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Learn more at:
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