



MAKING PRODUCTIVE USE OF KHAS LAND: EXPERIENCES OF EXTREME POOR HOUSEHOLDS

BRIEFING PAPER

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Uttaran

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OVERVIEW

Accessing khas land can help poor households diversify their incomes and facilitate a process of asset building alongside reducing the risks which threaten their livelihoods: It is, one way of accessing a means of production. However, for a particular section of people, the extremely poor, fulfilling the right to government-provided khas land and further making a sustainable production from it, is a difficult and challenging task. These are people who have no assets, whose daily income and expenditure rarely exceeds 50 Taka, whose daily consumption does not cross the recommended minimum consumption level of 2100 kilo calories, and who spend the majority (70 percent) of their income on immediate food consumption. As noted by Divine and Notely (shiree 2009) 'the extreme poor are not merely poorer than poor people: they face a fundamentally different set of situations.' To overcome these distinct situations, new social relationships need to be built and negotiations with different agencies need to take place. In some cases, these negotiations cost and initiate circumstances which lead the extremely poor into

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he paper has been peer reviewed by colleagues in either the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP), the UNDP Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) and BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction – Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR-TUP) programmes – all part of the DFID/UKAID extreme poverty portfolio in Bangladesh.

severely disadvantaged situations, while in other cases, these work in favour of building more secure futures for the extremely poor.



Landscape in South-West Bangladesh

The Uttaran/shiree supported project "SEMPTI" has been an active attempt to provide support to extremely poor households in the southwestern districts of Khulna and Satkhira through 1) the provision of khasland (on a temporary and permanent basis) and 2) income generating assistance, with the overarching aim of graduating them from their existing situations of extreme poverty. It is in this context, that research has been undertaken to capture the major learning of the project so far.

This study investigated three key aspects influencing negotiations for the purpose of understanding how the gains were made from the khas land by extremely poor households. These were: 1) if and how intra-household dynamics and characteristics impacted the negotiations; 2) if and how the local socio-political situation and the location of the land bear influence and 3) how the extremely poor's relationships with external agencies including markets, the state and institutions have an impact on the negotiation process and how the land is made productive.

To answer these research questions, the primary data collection tools were case studies, 'Focus Group Discussions' (FGDs) and 'Semi-Structured Interviews' (SSIs). Respondent groups of this study included: SEMPTI project beneficiary primary groups; households getting access to government khas land through Uttaran's assistance; Uttaran Bhumi Committee members; SEMPTI project IGA (fisheries and agriculture) officers; Upazilla Nirbahi

officers; AC/Land and Union Parishad chairmen. To identify the informant households, five FGDs were held with SEMPTI Project Primary groups located in various geo-economic contexts. Based on the opinion of the FGD participants, 14 respondent households were selected.

The data collected through FGDs and SSIs with different respondent groups point to three major arguments: 1) though khas land is considered an important source of livelihood for extremely poor people, generating and protecting the gains for sustainable livelihoods for those with low quality, under-sized land, and land situated in isolated locations, is difficult; 2) the strength and functionality of the extra-household relationships and networks that the households have built up, are key to ensuring better productive use of the land. The more non functional or 'exploitative' these relationships, the less successful the households become. These relationships need to be negotiated and negotiations bring both opportunities and costs; 3) Finally, khas land is an important source of livelihood, however female-headed households have not been able to be as successful as their male counterparts. This is because the networking in relation to production with the outside world, in addition to decisions about selling, is still dominated by men. Women therefore 'shy away' or are 'shied away' from these contacts important to improve productivity. These impact negatively on their ability to make better use of their assets.

Overall, the study has come to the conclusion that the social structures within which extremely poor households function, constrain them in various ways. In most of the cases, a lack of capacities in terms of having inadequate knowledge, skills, negotiation and bargaining power, and access to government agencies for services, limit them in overcoming these constraining forces. The low productive practices of extremely poor households coupled with the difficult and isolated locations of their land are manifestations of their relative powerlessness.

The study has revealed a number of important suggestions for project-level improvement. Firstly, IGAs should be harmonised with the requirements of making land productive. This should be done in a way which allows the beneficiary to supplement project activities on their own terms. Additionally, field level staff should be more thoroughly trained

in IGAs so that they can assist households in deciding the IGAs most appropriate for them. Trainings could also be done in more visible and demonstration-based ways. Given that female-headed households were found to be facing distinct challenges, attention needs to be given to developing gender-sensitive assistance which meets women's unique needs while also raising their confidence and voice. Also, to maximise the return of investments in land, investments need to be made in a timely and appropriate way. In addition to these project-based recommendations, the research findings also point to wider policy issues which deserve attention, namely: khas land identification and distribution should be considered as a development imperative by the government. In this way, there is scope for rural development policies and farmer development projects to include components for the development of khas land receiving households. While land needs to be transferred, simultaneous assistance is also needed to make the land productive. The role of UNOs needs to be expanded so that they fulfil their responsibilities set out in the 1997 policy on khas land identification and distribution.



Typical housing structure of SEMPTI beneficiaries

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research questions of this study were as follows:

1. In what ways do the characteristics, demographic conditions and intra-household dynamics of extreme poor households affect the productive use of land?

2. In what ways do the geographic and socio-political aspects of the location of the land affect the productive use of land?

3. In what ways do households' relationships with wider contexts and agencies (institutions, markets and the state) affect the productive use of land?

KEY ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the case studies of the three regions in south western Bangladesh, namely: production of tiger shrimp; production of paddy; and production of paddy with giant white shrimp, and from the themes generated from FGDs with Uttaran's Bhumi Committees and interviews with other key informants, three major arguments can be drawn:

1) Though khas land is considered an important source of livelihood for extremely poor people, generating and protecting the gains towards achieving sustainable livelihoods, for those with low quality, under-sized and land inundated during high tides, is difficult. This was seen with the cases of less successful paddy farmers whose low production can majorly be contributed to the location of their land. The experiences of the informant households have shown that the location of the land can make the households vulnerable to different environmental hazards which can drastically reduce households production from the land.

2) The strength and functionality of the extra-household relationships and networks that households build up are key to ensuring better productive use of the land. The more non-functional or 'exploitative' these relationships, the less successful the households become. These relationships need to be negotiated, and negotiations bring opportunities and costs. The relationships between paddy farmer and ward union members, or the relationships between female headed households and PL traders or between female headed households and their relatives, between the farmers and the local elites, between the farmers and agriculture input (seed beds) providers, are examples of negotiations at different levels of production resulting in opportunities and costs. In all these cases, the households that could come up with the most favourable opportunities with the minimum cost have become the most successful. The reverse situations have created less

productions and less income. In the case of the successful paddy farmers this could be seen more clearly. The ward member is ploughing his land with tractors and helping him with irrigation but in return the member has the right to use his land for nine months of a year. Though the farmer is now supposedly gaining as he doesn't have to pay for irrigation or ploughing, in the long run he is losing from not being able to cultivate his own land throughout the year. Here the farmer is gaining little but paying a very high cost.

3) Khas land is an important source of livelihood, however female headed households are not able to be as successful as their male counterparts. This is due to the fact that the networking with the outside world in relation to production and selling decisions is still dominated by men. Women therefore 'shy away' or are 'shied away' from these contacts. This impacts negatively on their ability to make better use of their assets. The female headed households depending on the relatives even for basic production decisions or the husbands not encouraging the wives to learn the skills to be able to make important production decisions or the female headed households willing to trade with local middlemen rather than venture out to the 'katas' or 'arots' can be examples of this scenario. Not understanding the importance of becoming skilled themselves could also be a reason for them not wanting to go to the market to purchase the inputs or sell their produce. Accurate information brings power to negotiate for more opportunities with minimum costs, and the female headed households along with the female members of the male headed households seemed to be lacking that. Different strategies work for different households, and the initiative, mobility and skills of women shapes their strategies, impacting the gains made. Most of the households interviewed for the study do not seem to have strategies involving women so they can maximise their gains.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROJECT

The research highlights the following implications for the SEMPTI:

1. **The project should consider harmonising IGAs with the requirements of making land productive**, to maximise the potential to achieve a sustainable income from the

land. Presently, the project is distributing IGAs in a way that means they can produce a daily income and short-term income. In this way, it has been noted that the project is not providing the full and adequate input support for fish/paddy cultivation, at least for one production cycle. It has been observed through the SSIs that the project is providing some portion of the input support and that the beneficiaries are not supplementing it. This is not bringing in the maximum production from the lands. Moreover, the IGA distribution period according to the project management framework doesn't always match the production seasons. The need for quick delivery of IGAs to fulfil the target excludes any such seasonal production needs.²

2. **Field level staff who are directly involved with assessing the needs of the households should be more thoroughly trained in IGAs** so that they can assist the households in deciding the most appropriate IGAs for them. For instance, one field officer, after learning that 1 bigha of land requires at least 33 kgs of Calcium Oxide in the preparation stage, explained that if she had previously known this, she would have encouraged households to use the proper amount of Calcium Oxide for fish farming.
3. The project should provide **more focus towards IGA trainings and include demonstration sessions.** This would encourage the households to change

² The project has provides a package of 14000 taka worth of income generating support to each beneficiary household along with providing access to khas land. This support is given to the beneficiary households through providing life and non-life assets. When the beneficiary households are selected, they inform the project about their IGA needs and what skill development training they require to productively use the assets received from the project. According to the demands of the beneficiary households, assets are gradually distributed and one member of the beneficiary household (who will be managing the assets) is invited to attend the skill development training.

their existing low production generating practices.

4. Households are making investments in the khas lands, however, these investments are not undertaken at the correct time or in the most appropriate way. The project can **encourage households to get the most return from the investments they are making.** And this can only be done if their existing practices can be changed, for instance, by applying good practices such as applying the adequate amount of lime at the time of pond preparation, or providing a regular amount of fish feed, or releasing the fish fries at the right time and in the right amount.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR SEMPTI TO PROVIDE INPUT PACKAGES WITH KHAS LAND TRANSFERS

From the interviews with various respondent groups who are the stakeholders of SEMPTI project, it became evident that improved coordination between khas land transfer and input packages is needed to maximise the production from the land. For this purpose, the following steps could be considered:

Step 1: Providing information on all IGA options to the households. While analysing the household demands, the field staff can discuss land productivity issues with the households along with different marketing options for the produce. If the household shows interest in utilising IGAs in the land, then field staff can discuss with his or her supervisor and take necessary actions.

Step 2: Harmonising IGA distribution periods with that of the production periods, may it be paddy or shrimp. In some cases, it was seen that the fish fries were given at the end of the production cycle. This did not bring in higher production. It was also observed that beneficiaries were not aware that they could ask for inputs like fertilisers and seedlings as IGAs.

Step 3: Training of field staff in shrimp, paddy and mixed cultivations so that they can provide technical assistance to the households.

Step 4: Intensive training of the beneficiaries based on field level demonstrations. Beneficiary households who have done relatively well can be asked to facilitate sessions as resource persons. This would ensure effective communication of messages among the households.

Step 5: Regular monitoring of households combined with continual encouragement to households to invest in high production generating practices.

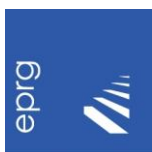
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this study the following national and local level policy messages have been identified:

1. Extremely poor people with no homestead or agricultural land should have full access and control over the khas land allocated to them. They should be able to exercise full control of it to make it productive. Policies should include strict measures against land grabbers who pose threats to the tenure security of extremely poor households.
2. Khas land identification and distribution should be considered as a development imperative by the government. In this way, rural development policies and farmer development projects should include components for the development of khas land receiving households.
3. Though the 1997 policy has given Upazilla Nirbahi Officer the responsibility to oversee both how khas land is given to the landless and how it is being used, this is rarely carried out by the UNOs. The UNO's role as the Chair of the 'Upazilla Khas land Identification, Recovery and Settlement Committee' could be further strengthened in this regard.

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The Extreme Poverty Research Group (EPRG) develops and disseminates knowledge about the nature of extreme poverty and the effectiveness of measures to address it. It initiates and oversees research and brings together a mix of thinkers and practitioners to actively feed knowledge into practice through interventions taking place in real time. It is an evolving forum for the shree family to both design and share research findings.

The data used in this publication comes from the Economic Empowerment of the Poorest Programme (www.shreee.org), an initiative established by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) to help 1 million people lift themselves out of extreme poverty. The views expressed here are entirely those of the author(s).