



## The Baseline Empowerment Status of CLP2.1 Households

### Background

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) aims to reduce extreme poverty of the poorest and most vulnerable people living in the chars of North-West Bangladesh. The first phase of the CLP reached 55,000 households directly and the second phase (CLP2), which began in April 2010, continues to promote pro-poor livelihoods and opportunities, targeting a further one million people. The CLP's holistic approach recognises the inextricable link between reducing poverty and empowering individuals, households and communities to gain control of their own lives. As shown in the Empowerment Baseline Survey Report (Helmich 2010)<sup>1</sup>, women and adolescent girls are often the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society. CLP2 seeks to empower women and adolescent girls by raising households' financial, physical and social capital.

The empowerment baseline survey for CLP 2.1 households provides an overview of the levels of empowerment among core participant households (CPHHs) in CLP2.1 prior to households' receipt of income generating assets and implementation of other CLP projects. The baseline data presented (collected in June and July 2010) serves as a reference point to measure, and monitor the impact of CLP2 on empowerment, through the knowledge, attitudes and practices of women and households.



### Methodology

The Innovation, Monitoring and Learning (IML) Division uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data on empowerment amongst CLP2 CPHHs. Many of the households in CLP2 were from CLP1 villages, therefore some of the participants were already benefiting from the impact of CLP1, for example living on a raised plinth. The empowerment survey, which is based on a panel sample of 405 CPHHs, is part of a three-fold methodology for monitoring empowerment. The other two

### Key Findings

- The average age of marriage reported for females was 14.3, despite the legal age being 18 for girls in Bangladesh.
- 56% of men in CPHHs were aware of the existence of a law against dowry, compared to 42.8% of women. Yet 72.7% of CPHHs reported having paid dowry for their daughter's marriage and 67.9% of CPHHs reported receiving dowry payments for their son's wedding.
- Men's and women's awareness of a law against domestic violence were 57.5% and 45.9% respectively.
- Women reported high levels of self-perceived respect from their husbands, in-laws and communities (99.1%, 95.2% and 98.7% respectively).

tools are Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and longitudinal case studies. FGDs engage men, women, adolescent girls and/ or boys from CPHHs and are based on interesting issues brought to attention in the findings of the panel survey. The in depth longitudinal case studies of five core participant women and their households tracks the participants' progress concerning empowerment, nutritional and socioeconomic status and enrich the study with more qualitative information. A series of 'empowerment' workshops alongside the Logframe indicators informed the selection of the empowerment indicators used. For each of the six cohorts in CLP2, data are collected at baseline, baseline + 12 months, baseline + 18 months and annually thereafter, enabling IML to monitor changes over time. Respondents were core participants of CLP2, and where possible, their husbands and daughters. Some of the baseline CLP2.1 survey questions were directed at females only, some at males only and others at both the husband and the wife in each CLP2.1 CPHH.

### Discussion

Increased empowerment of women and households is expected to be reflected in improvements in nutritional status, levels of social inclusion, self-confidence, decision-making power, ability to cope with crises, and general well-being.

### Basic Household Characteristics

The majority of core participant women were reported as married, however amongst the female-headed households, which accounted for 18% of the sample, 58.6% were widowed and a further 25.8% were separated, abandoned or divorced.

### Household Knowledge of and Access to Services

Linkages to public and private basic service provision on the chars is limited and knowledge of and access to services, including safety net entitlements varied among the sample. Amongst the sampled households who had children and therefore needed to access schools in the six months prior to the survey, only 33.1% have accessed public primary education in the last six months and 55.4% of households with children reported that they knew how and where to access public secondary level education.

<sup>1</sup> Helmich (2010). Empowerment Baseline Survey Report 2010, CLP2.1.



## Household Contacts, Networks and Relationships

People's social relations are important indicators of levels of social capital and social inclusion/exclusion. Despite an average of 5.7 social and community groups existing in each village, membership by respondents of these groups was extremely limited. Household members reported that the mean number of groups that male and female participants were members of was 0.07 and 0.04 respectively. However, self-perceived levels of respect within the family and community were high (97.7% and 99% respectively).

## Household Confidence Regarding Ability to Cope With Future Crises

CLP2 projects aim to reduce char dwellers' vulnerability to crises such as floods, health shocks, death of livestock and the annual hunger season (*monga*). Yet the sampled CPHHs reported high levels of confidence in their ability to cope with *monga* (95.7%) and flooding (89.7%) in the future. This could be attributed to the fact that CLP2 CPHHs have already benefited indirectly from plinth raising projects under CLP1 (Mascie-Taylor, 2010, p1)<sup>2</sup>.

## Illegal Practices: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice

Women and girls living in the chars are vulnerable to illegal practices such as domestic violence, dowry and marriage below the legal age. CLP2 aims to reduce violence against women and girls, incidence of early marriage and dowry practices.

- **Marriage:** Baseline levels of awareness of the legal age of marriage for boys was 9.2% amongst men and 21.6% amongst women, whilst awareness of the legal age of marriage for girls was much higher, with 69.6% of men and 67.5% of women correctly reporting the legal age (18). However the average age of marriage reported for females was 14.3.
- **Dowry:** 56% of men were aware of the existence of a law against dowry, compared to 42.8% of women. Nevertheless, 72.7% of CPHHs reported having paid dowry for their daughter's marriage and 67.9% of CPHHs reported receipt of dowry for their son's marriage.
- **Violence against women:** Men's and women's awareness of a law against domestic violence were 57.5% and 45.9% respectively. Verbal abuse was reportedly the most common form of violence. 32.2% of female participants reported knowing other females in their community who had suffered verbal violence.

## Female Social Status

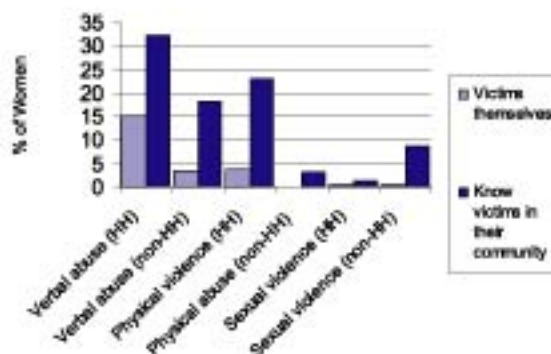
Women reported high levels of self-perceived respect by their husbands, in-laws and communities (99.1%, 95.2% and 98.7% respectively).

## Levels of Females' Self-confidence

Women reported feeling least confident to participate in a village *Shalish*<sup>3</sup>, this is also reflected in their non-participation in group membership. Women also felt least confident to take large economic decisions alone. Facing

different challenges, adolescent girls reported feeling least confident to leave their village alone, to tell outsiders they have been sexually abused and felt that they have little say in the choice of their husband.

Incidence of Violence Against Women and Girls in CLP2.1 Households and Communities During the Last 3 Months



## Women's Income-earning and Decision-making Power

Marked distinctions were found between male and female-headed households with regard to women's income-earning contribution and decision-making power. Women in female-headed households were more likely to be the sole-economic decision-makers but were also more likely to involve other people, such as family and community members in decision-making, especially concerning purchase/sale of large assets.

## Conclusion

The Empowerment Baseline Survey Report for CLP2.1 CPHHs shows that levels of female self-confidence are lowest regarding economic decisions and marriage. The high incidence of early marriage, under aged pregnancies and reported domestic violence, combined with women's lack of decision-making power in the choice of her husband points to a lack of female empowerment within the household. Levels of awareness of the legal age of marriage and knowledge of illegal practices were low, especially amongst women.

CLP2.1 CPHHs' levels of confidence are relatively more optimistic regarding their ability to cope with future crises. Female participants' self-perceptions amongst the community were also relatively high, despite the limited group membership reported and the low levels of access to and use of public and private services within the community.

To receive a copy of the report on which this brief is based, contact the CLP's Innovation, Monitoring and Learning Division ([info@clp-bangladesh.org](mailto:info@clp-bangladesh.org)).

<sup>2</sup> Mascie-Taylor (2010). *Socio-economic Characteristics and Nutritional Status of Households Recruited in CLP2.1; Report of the Baseline Survey Conducted in April 2010.*

<sup>3</sup> *Shalish* is an informal village level judicial system in which village elders and the concerned parties gather to resolve local disputes.