

Rural Livelihood Programme Capturing Lessons Learned

Final Report



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List of abbreviations

ANR	Agriculture and Natural Resources
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BIDS	Name of Local NGO
BRAC	Name of Local NGO
CAP	Country Assistance Plan
DAE	Department of Agricultural Extension
DFID	UK Department For International Development
DLS	Department of Livestock Services
ELC	Experiential Learning Cycle
FFS	Farmer Field School
FT	Field Trainer
GBK	Name of Local NGO
GO-INTERFISH	Greater Opportunities for Integrated Rice and Fish Production
GPIG	Gender Policy Implementation Guideline
HH	Household
IGA	Income Generating Activities
IR	Inception report/review
LC	Livelihood Coordinator
LM	Livelihood Monitoring
LMP	Livelihood Monitoring Project
LMU	Livelihood Monitoring Unit
LRSP	Long Range Strategic Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFI	Micro Finance Institutions
MGD	Millennium Development Goals
MSE	Medium- and Small-scale Enterprise
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NW	North West
NWE	North West East
NWLS	North West Livelihood Survey
NWW	North West West
OPR	Objective to Purpose Review
PDO	Programme Development Officer
PLA	Participatory Livelihood Assessment
PM	Project Memorandum
PNGO	Partner Non Governmental Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSE	Participatory Self Evaluation
RBA	Rights Based Approach
RLP	Rural Livelihood Programme
RLS	Rural Livelihood Strategy
SDU	Social Development Unit
SE	South East
SHABGE	Strengthening Household Access to Bari Gardening Extension
TCU	Technical Coordination Unit
ToR	Terms of Reference
UP	Union Parishad
WFP	World Food Programme

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Executive Summary

Background

The CARE-Bangladesh/DFID Rural Livelihood Programme (RLP) is coming to an end in March 2005. The programme is a consolidation of 3 projects: GO-INTERFISH and SHABGE which began in 1999 and LMP which was approved in December 2000. After a joint review in November 2002 it was decided to consolidate the 3 projects into the CARE RLP in order to obtain greater synergy and effectiveness in implementation. A new log-frame and organisational structure was created to support this and the programme was formally approved in October 2003. The overall aim of RLP is to contribute to poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

RLP works in 3 regional areas of Bangladesh: South East, North West East and North West West. The regional areas work through FFS groups and Community groups. Some of these were originally focussed on training in rice and fish production systems others on training in homestead gardening. After the FFS training were completed, the groups were trained in other topics according to their priorities and organisational development in order to improve the sustainability. The area programmes receive technical, educational and monitoring support from four units: Social Development Unit (SDU), Markets Unit, Technical Coordination Unit and Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. Over the years, the programme has trained 6368 FFS groups with 154,000 participants.

LMP was designed to develop tools and systems for monitoring change in livelihoods of the rural poor and to disseminate analyses of causes and issues behind livelihood changes. The lessons learned from the LMP have a separate section in the report.

The present document is a result of a process of distilling the major lessons learned from the lifetime of the programme. The aim is to capture the lessons valuable for future planning and decisions on similar programmes aiming at empowering poor communities and especially women to improve their livelihood. The lesson learning process combined a desk study of available reports, case studies and monitoring data with interviews, meetings and workshops with stakeholders. The meetings with stakeholders were carried out as appreciative inquiries. The lessons emerging from the appreciative inquiries are analysed in a framework for empowerment of poor rural communities.

Evolving strategies

Since the start in 1999, the projects and the programme have undergone several changes both in structure, approaches and themes. It started with agricultural training and extension for transfer of agricultural technologies to poor and marginal farmers. It then moved towards a strategy of improving the wider livelihood opportunities of the farmers combined with a Rights Based Approach (RBA). The programme currently moves towards a strategy of broader empowerment, which has potential for addressing fundamental causes of marginalisation and poverty.

The evolving strategies have created learning, capacity and skills in the programme. The strategies have moved towards increased flexibility to participant's needs and priorities, which has increased prospects for impact on the lives of poor rural people. Integrating the fast evolving approaches was however extremely challenging and created important learning lessons on how to handle a constantly changing programme. The lesson is that for a development programme to handle rapid changes in an efficient way, it needs to have strong leadership with a clear purpose, a strong communicative profile, which includes a constant

process of capacity building and dissemination of lessons learned. Clear communication channels must ensure that knowledge and learning pass horizontally in the organisation and vertically both upward and downward

It has been difficult to monitor and evaluate the progress of the programme because the goals and the information needs changed and new tools and data collection methods were added to the existing. The lesson from this would be that radical changes in a programme's objectives and strategies must be followed by radical changes in its approach to monitoring and evaluation.

The projects started out with a strategy of increasing production, income and food security of poor rural households by introducing new farming technologies and practises through agricultural extension. In line with the overall strategy, the success of the projects was measured on adoption of the introduced technologies. Male farmers with access to land benefited most from the projects in particular the GO-IF project. A number of women have benefited from the homestead gardening in SHABGE and appreciated the knowledge and skills they obtained from this but the income they could obtain was limited and depending on the sizes of their homestead as well as their possibilities for marketing their produce. During this process it was learned that poor rural households cope with poverty through several livelihood opportunities. The poorer the household is in Bangladesh, the less they are likely to benefit to a significant degree solely from the introduction of agricultural technologies.

The programme therefore shifted towards adopting a rural livelihood strategy and has widened its scope of interventions to focussing on developing human, social and financial capital with a broader perspective to livelihood options including livestock, poultry and non-agricultural activities. The result of the wider scope of interventions has been that particularly the poorer participants and more women have been able to benefit from the programme.

The RBA has furthermore contributed to the development of RLP and enabled the staff and groups to work to a certain degree on root causes of poverty. Some groups have achieved access to land and ponds, they did not have before and most groups have increased their access to both public and private services – agricultural services and also education, health and social safety nets. Moreover especially the women's groups have appreciated the information on social rights and have achieved a number of successes in reducing early marriages and dowry payments. The adoption of a RBA therefore complemented the Rural Livelihood Approach by going beyond the focus on income and resources of the poor to address social, political, economic and other power structures that are fundamental root causes of poverty.

Along with the merging of the projects, in 2004 a Market and Business Development Unit was introduced. The background for this was that RLP staff realised that despite significant increases in agriculture production most poor farmers were constrained in accessing markets and private sector linkages, in part due to their small amounts of saleable produce and thereby ability to meet market demand. This component has since focused on enabling farmer groups to become better organised and to identify market linkages who can offer better prices. Some of the groups have had valuable experiences especially in the area of group marketing. The initiative however meets strong constraints in the areas of women's participation.

CARE has a strong gender policy and the projects have all applied strategies to contribute to empowerment of women and promote gender equity. The approach to gender has evolved from addressing the practical needs of women as farmers towards a more holistic strategy of understanding and addressing women's strategic needs. The first approach limited the

outcomes for the women participants. Women's mobility has increased a little to the extent that women can meet in groups outside their homestead but it is still not to the extent of enabling women to access local markets on their own, which continue to limit their economic opportunities. In the last two years the activities have expanded to introduce information about structural obstacles to women's empowerment. Some individual women and FFS groups have begun to address issues within the families and communities which are of strategic importance to women.

The ultimate outcome of the evolving strategies of the RLP has been working towards a strategy of empowerment. The priority of empowerment was however introduced so late that it in effect functioned as an exit strategy for enhancing sustainability of the groups. The RLP has achieved empowerment in many areas, but a programme focussed on empowerment as a goal would have needed different goals, strategies, approaches, training, roles of field staff, roles of management and monitoring and evaluation systems.

Prospects for empowerment

In the analysis of the lessons towards opportunities for empowerment, this defined as: *A process that increases the capability of socio-economically marginalised individuals or groups to make choices and to influence collective decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices.*

This means that empowerment is seen as processes resulting in individuals or groups possessing the capacity to make choices end to translate these into desired actions and outcomes. This capacity is influenced by two sets of factors:

- Agency is defined as the ability to make informed choices and this implies that the individual is able to envisage and choose options
- Opportunity structures are defined as the formal or informal institutions that determine the individual or group's ability to transform agency into effective collective action¹

The empowerment processes must build and change both the capabilities of individuals (agency) and the opportunity structures that they face.

The present report analyses the potential of the RLP interventions as empowerment according to their contributions to: Knowledge empowerment, organisational empowerment and Institutional empowerment.

Knowledge empowerment

Knowledge empowerment has been pursued through training participants in Farmer Field Schools (FFS). The training has provided the participants with new and increased farming skills and knowledge. Apart from the general training of FFS participants, the programme also provided special training to selected members of the groups in order to make special services available in the community e.g. local suppliers of fruit and vegetable seedlings, poultry vaccination and fish seed. This training has furthermore increased the total knowledge resources available in the communities. The FFS learning methodology is based on the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC), which is used as a theoretical basis for trainers to design training and education with adults.

¹ Opportunity structures are here more precisely defined as the policies, rules and practises found in social and economic institutions which determine the conditions for life and production, for accessing services and resources and for controlling assets and thereby poor people's possibilities for breaking out of poverty

Particularly the learning-by-doing method was much appreciated by the participants. They learned the practical skills and were therefore confident in applying these. The practical demonstrations in the study plots were a major factor for the participant's motivation to adopt the technologies. The outcome was however limited in terms of changes in the participants ability to analyse their farming problems and make decisions and also in terms of the actual sharing of experience and continuous experimentation among farmers.

The reasons for the limited outcome are several. During earlier reviews (Bartlett, 2002 and Bartlett et al. 2004) it was found that the focus of the training was more on knowledge and technology transfer as well as the structure of the sessions rather than on the learning process. During the lesson learning mission it was also found that the trainers had experienced difficulties in utilising and applying the ELC as a methodology for guiding their training practise.

The lesson learned is that the FFS training has the potential to take the participants further than transfer of knowledge and technology into wider processes of real knowledge empowerment. The ELC method is however challenging to apply with people outside the circles of natural sciences and /or without strong democratic traditions. It therefore needs:

- Continuous development and mentoring of trainers and participants
- Focus is on the learning process rather than on the structure of the training session and transfer of knowledge
- Freedom for the trainer to adapt to the particular context and dynamics of the groups both in terms of topic and structure
- That the performance of the trainers is not only evaluated on quantitative measurement of technologies adopted but also on qualitative measure such as participants' ability to adapt technologies and participant behaviour
- That the quality of the training is evaluated by the participants themselves in order to motivate the trainers for further development

It was furthermore found that the strategy used in the last year of training and interventions on needs driven activities and technologies have been more effective to improve the livelihoods of the poor and women. Women, the poorer farmers and the landless have other priorities than agricultural training to improve their livelihoods. They have benefited most from the training in livestock, poultry, sanitation and other Income Generating Activities such as tailoring, handicrafts and different cottage productions, which do not require access to land and did not involve pre-described technology packages.

Opportunities to learn have particular strong impact on women. Women participants in the RLP have gained confidence and capacities by acquiring skills, experience, knowledge and information. Providing training for women has thus been a first step to encouraging their empowerment. Generally the training in rights and gender issues has developed a stronger social knowledge and understanding for women in the communities.

RLP has in the last years facilitated linkages of groups to service providers and this has increased the participants' knowledge on and access to relevant service providers. RLP has also trained local service providers in the groups such as vaccinators, plant nursery managers and seed sellers. However, real knowledge empowerment in terms of service access would mean facilitating group analyses of appropriate content and quality of the required services.

The market initiative has developed increased knowledge about markets and skill in group marketing with selected groups. It is however, a lesson that there are strong barriers of social rule in terms of women's access to market information. There are exceptions, particularly

among the poorest women. A substantial increase in women's access to market information would need long term efforts of challenging existing rule but could also be supported by other kinds of market information, eventually through use of tele- or radio services.

Organisational empowerment

Organisational empowerment is strengthening horizontally dependent and mutually supportive groups, which can increase livelihood assets by collective action. In rural Bangladesh, the poorest often depend on vertical linkages into patronage and local power structures. These linkages are often very fragile for the poor and sustain the fundamental causes of poverty in a community. Building social capital is an important way of redressing the power relations. RLP activities have facilitated organisational development at group level and many groups have acquired organisational experience. As examples are the following:

- Many groups have initiated collective action in their communities for sanitation
- Most groups have established a system of group savings
- All groups have acquired access to services that they did not have before
- Many of the groups have marketed their produce together and thereby increased their income
- Marketing groups have also successfully negotiated for lower prices of inputs and seeds by collective purchasing
- Some groups have interacted with local government structures to get access to social security services and productive resources such as khas land and ponds on lease
- Some groups have successfully interacted with other organisations for establishment of infrastructure e.g. BRAC primary school in their communities

The FFS was an entry point to mobilisation of groups, but did not automatically result in organisational development. Organisational development needed a focussed effort and the FTs have over the last two years facilitated organisational development and through the last year's exit strategy shifted much responsibility for activities to the groups.

One problem with the organisational development was probably that the RLP FTs mobilised the groups and selected the participants. More self-organisation would have increased the sustainability of the groups. The lessons learned from the process are that groups based on common interest, are most likely to be sustainable. The poorest and the women will participate when there is focus on issues that address their needs. Interventions from development agencies should focus on strengthening of solidarity, functionality and dialogue. The methodology should focus on inclusiveness and democratic and transparent procedures.

It was also learned that is it difficult to develop groups, which attend to the needs and interests of the poor in communities, where there are powerful elites. Empowerment of organisations of the poor around their interests have more chance of being coherent, independent and sustainable when they develop in communities less dependent on powerful economic, social and political patrons.

Women in the RLP have benefited greatly from working in groups. It is an important learning lesson that women benefit most by working in separate women's groups and these have wider outcomes in terms of women's organisational empowerment. The social capital accumulated through working in women's groups can be even more important for women's empowerment than the individual economic improvements.

Community savings groups have particular prospects for benefiting poor people and women in particular. Almost all the communities are engaged in micro credit schemes with other NGOs.

But at the same time most of the groups had engaged in group savings for capital accumulation. These are high priority with the groups, especially with the poorer members. Compared to other systems, the group savings are:

- More democratic
- Savings based – less risky
- Community driven
- More transparent for the members and more accountable to them
- Decreases vulnerability because the accumulated capital can be used to cover emergency expenses
- Builds social capital
- If loans involve interest, it is profit for the group

The groups have increased access to services. But the ability of groups to articulate demand and sustainably access services is more questionable. There have been signs of increased responsiveness from government institutions towards the poor participants, but overall the outcomes have depended much on well-meaning individuals, strong advocacy from the FTs towards government institutions and local elites and coincidences of political coherence between the groups and the local power structure rather than organisational empowerment. Some groups have strengthened their negotiating power to and responsiveness from markets and some few private sector input suppliers. This has been especially so for men and for better off farmers. The lesson is that it requires a more comprehensive effort to ensure ongoing provision of value services that are sustainable.

A missed opportunity is that the programme has not generated experience in linking the groups to higher level organisation, which could have increased the voice and broadened the base for demand articulation towards service providers and private sector linkages.

Institutional empowerment

The programme started out as projects with pre-designed activities and groups mobilised and selected according to a pre-designed structure. The scope of activities was narrowly focussed on transfer of certain technologies. The joining of the projects into one programme created a platform for improvements in terms of human resources and synergy between the different sets of technologies, thus widening the scope for the participants. It also increased the scope beyond the focus on technology transfer to include other activities to do with other livelihoods concerns of the participants.

The organisational structure was challenged in pulling together as program. In part, because the M&E unit remained within the SDU, which was originally a component of GO INTERFISH, and because the LMP was struggling to achieve its objectives the programme did not have a shared and strategic information and learning system that could contribute to institutional empowerment. This created a gap between the support units and the regional programmes, which had the effect that the support units have been less driven by demand from the field level.

The lessons are that a programme with a goal of empowerment needs to have institutional arrangements that ensure that the activities are demand driven. It must therefore encourage feed back from field level to management and the field level staff must have the flexibility and capacity to respond to participants' demands and priorities. Strategic leadership is needed in an organisation of this complexity to ensure dialogue, collaboration and a shared vision.

The FTs have had to be very adaptable and pragmatic throughout the ongoing programmatic change. The formal season-long training, the other shorter training sessions in RBA, gender, social, technical and marketing issues and on the job learning-by-doing has increased the experience, knowledge and skills of the field staff. They now constitute a very strong resource base for training, lobby and advocacy for the interests of poor rural people.

However, until this last year their activities have been very prescriptive and they have not excelled as enablers or facilitators of rural development. During the last year there has been some progress towards empowering FTs to be more innovative. This has resulted in more needs based activities and greater responsibility being placed with the participants. The lesson is that continuous capacity building, vertical and horizontal communication processes and greater flexibility for the staff to be innovative and responsive to community priorities can create strong resources for facilitation of community empowerment.

Another area that is important is the issue of gender in the organisation. RLP has set up the Gender Policy Implementation Guideline (GPIG) and a gender action plan. The many competent female FTs are strong role models in communities as they practically demonstrate what women can achieve in rural development. However, it is still apparent that there is a metaphorical 'glass ceiling' for Bangladesh women in the RLP and percentages of women staff decrease drastically going up the RLP hierarchy.

Monitoring and evaluation of the programme through the changing approaches have been challenging and not functioned satisfactorily. It has been particularly difficult to utilise the monitoring systems for internal learning and building of knowledge. Different factors have contributed to this. Above is mentioned the fragmentation between the M&E and the LMP. Another factor is that the changing goals resulted in several times adding new tools and indicators to the existing, without actually changing the set up and competencies of the M&E unit.

Vertical and horizontal communication and learning systems are required and should be channelled into an overall programmatic data and knowledge framework. Participants need to become institutional parts of this system of learning. Tools and mechanisms should ensure participation in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme and services. Moreover, it would be essential to develop analytical tools to measure social change beyond behaviours and outcomes of the participants. It is also important to ensure sufficient numbers and competencies of staff to analyse data, make sense of findings and craft messages for an external audience.

An important exit strategy has been linking the FFS or community groups to service institutions. As mentioned before, the groups have been successfully linked to the service institutions but there has been no visible impact in terms of increased poverty focus, responsiveness or sustainability of the service institutions. To achieve institutional empowerment in this area would require a thorough analysis of the required services and of the public and private sector roles in these. For many services related to income opportunities, they would probably be best served from the private sector. The training of community based service providers is a beginning of private sector development for pro-poor service provision, but it would need stronger interventions in terms of analysis of economical viability of the services, access to Business Development Services and professional backstopping. In order to improve responsiveness of public sector services there would be need to facilitate horizontal linkages of organisations much beyond the group level.

Conclusions

RLP has been a massive laboratory for learning on empowerment at community level, despite not originally being designed for empowerment. Through the evolving strategies it has made progress in terms of particularly the following:

- Knowledge empowerment
- Strengthening community groups
- Institutional empowerment set-up
- Gender empowerment

The most substantial outcomes of RLP have been increased individual capabilities while the change of opportunity structures, which would address fundamental root causes of poverty, have been much more limited.

The RLP interventions have assisted rural families to strengthen their coping strategies and that some of these families are on the way out of poverty. There is evidence, from interviews and project monitoring and evaluation reports that many participants have increased their income from these activities and household food security has been improved. The Livelihood Changes in Northwest Bangladesh: Pattern and Processes (LMP,2004) report, which is based on a comprehensive survey of actual livelihood changes of households, found evidence of positive changes in some asset values such as livestock, education and social capital that were related to participation in RLP activities.

The question is therefore how to take empowerment further and substantially change the opportunity structures which sustain rural poverty?

RLP has successfully operated in the area of strengthening individuals and community groups and in a few cases this has led to the beginning of some degree of organisation in the form of coherent groups taking collective action. A programme design towards real empowerment of poor rural people can therefore build on the lessons learned in terms of approaches, methodologies and strategies at the grass root level, but it must furthermore include strategies to take the steps further towards changing opportunity structures to become enabling for pro-poor development.

Nijera was started as a pilot to analyse livelihood strategies and social issues with communities and to try to build a dialogue to initiate self-reflection and the ability of people to question and change their social condition. This is based on the learning of what had been obstructing comprehensive empowerment in the RLP. It also set out to truly incorporate the principles of RBA: addressing socio-political, economic and power dynamics that are obstructing poverty reduction. Nijera has started a process that has the potential to enable greater awareness and understanding of the social context, greater agency of individuals and groups in the community and greater possibilities for clusters of groups to have influence over social norms, services and markets to sustainably improve their livelihoods. In time the pilot will be able to provide more valuable lessons on the possibilities for addressing the fundamental causes of poverty through empowerment at community level.

According to the lessons learned in the RLP during the last five years a programme towards empowerment of the poorest rural people must apply to the following principles:

- Be led by participants' own identification of needs, opportunities and planning from the beginning
- Place the responsibility for implementation with the participants
- Clearly define poverty and equity criteria
- Work with a strong approach to gender empowerment
- Use empowering funding mechanisms (e.g. community managed funds for accessing services)
- Enhance organisational development of common interest groups and horizontal linkages between such for a stronger citizen voice

The methodologies and strategies used must prioritise elements such as:

- Agency for social action as it is the key to moving up the vulnerability ladder
- Focus on building social capital that prioritise capacity for inclusive solidarity
- Facilitate knowledge, economic and most importantly social capital empowerment for women

To take empowerment a step further will also require undertaking activities beyond the communities in order to impact policy, service provision and formal and informal power structures. Therefore it is emphasised that full scale facilitating empowerment may not be possible for one programme alone. Achieving impact on policy, service provision, formal and informal power structures are long term goals and require both social and political transformation. It will need cohesive efforts of many development agents. It is therefore recommended to build networks of partners who have the competencies and strengths to make a contribution at different levels of this landscape of empowerment.

1. Background

The CARE-Bangladesh/DFID Rural Livelihood Programme (RLP) is coming to an end in March 2005 and the present document is a result of a process of distilling the major important lessons learned from the lifetime of this programme. The aim of this is to capture the lessons in such a way that it will be valuable for future planning and decisions on similar programmes aiming at empowering poor communities and especially women to improve their livelihood in a sustainable manner (Terms of References for the assignment are attached as Annex 1).

The overall aim of RLP is to contribute to poverty reduction in Bangladesh and the purpose is: To improve the livelihood security of men and women living in 221,375 poor and vulnerable households in Bangladesh.

RLP works in 3 regional areas of Bangladesh: South East, North West East and North West. The regional areas work through FFS groups and Community groups. Some of these were originally focussed on training in rice and fish production systems others on training in homestead gardening. The area programmes receive technical, educational and monitoring support from four units: Social Development Unit (SDU), Markets Unit, Technical Coordination Unit and Monitoring and Evaluation Unit.

RLP has used Farmer Field Schools as a strategy for training in the food production technologies, 18 months for rice and fish and 36 months for the homestead gardening. After the FFS training has been completed, the groups have been trained in other topics according to their priorities and organisational development activities have been carried out in order to improve the sustainability of the groups. Over the years, the programme has trained 6368 FFS groups with 154.000 participants.

A separate unit under RLP – Livelihood Monitoring Unit (LMU) is developing tools and systems for monitoring change in livelihoods of the rural poor and to disseminate analyses of causes and issues behind livelihood changes.

The programme started in July 1999 as two separate projects: GO-INTERFISH and SHABGE. These were supposed to operate for 5 and 6 years respectively. The Livelihood Monitoring Project (LMP) was approved in December 2000 for 5 years. After a joint review in November 2002 it was decided to consolidate the 3 projects into the CARE Rural Livelihoods Programme in order to obtain greater synergy and effectiveness in implementation. A new log-frame and organisational structure was created to support this and approved in October 2003.

Since the start in 1999, the projects and the programme have undergone several changes both in structure, approach and themes. This has to a large extent shaped the process of learning in the programme. The evolutionary process of these changes is further elaborated under chapter 3: Evolving strategies of rural poverty reduction. The present document seeks to capture the learning lessons from this process of change and used an analytical framework for empowerment with a perspective to feed into the discussions for future directions for sustainable poverty reduction in rural Bangladesh.

2. Methodology

The lesson learning process combined a desk study of available reports, case studies and monitoring data with interviews/meetings/workshops with stakeholders.

The meetings with stakeholders focussed on capturing their learning lessons and this was carried out as appreciative inquiries. The stakeholders were encouraged to focus on the good experiences – what worked in the different interventions, what were the factors that made it work and what changes it has made to the lives of the participants. The process becomes future oriented by including the visioning of an ideal future programme and reflecting on what changes/actions would be needed to make it possible.



Semi structured interviews were carried out in 23 communities: 6 FFS groups in South East region, 12 FFS groups in North West, 4 Nijera communities in North West and 1 Community Based Organisation receiving Livelihood Challenge Funds. Most of the interviews were carried out with focus groups and supplemented by a few individual interviews. Where the FFS groups were mixed male and female, the focus groups were formed on the basis of gender. The overall structure for the interviews and list of groups/communities are attached in Annex 2.

5 lesson learning workshops were carried out with groups of staff:

- Staff in Cox's Bazaar
- Senior Staff in Northwest West (Dinajpur) and East (Rangpur)
- RLP FTs in NW
- Nijera facilitators
- Livelihood Monitoring Team

The overall structure for the workshops and list of participants are attached in Annex 3.

The team also held meetings with the RLP Coordinator, Regional Coordinators, Markets Adviser, the Technical Coordination Unit, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Social Development Unit and women staff in NW. Apart from that the team had a number of more informal discussions with staff, coordinators and other stakeholders (e.g. service providers).

In accordance with ToR, the inquiry focussed particularly on tracking real examples of empowerment outcomes - both the changes to individual capabilities:

- Access and control with productive assets (land, livestock, water and labour)
- Access to and control of financial capital
- Skills and technical knowledge
- Ability to articulate demands and interact with markets and other social actors
- Knowledge and tools to use information on markets, services, technologies and rights
- Self respect, social esteem and relationships to authorities and other social actors

As well as the changes in people's relation to the opportunity structures:

- Government institutions: Elected, administrative and juridical institutions
- Markets and service providers: Rights, access, price negotiations, responsiveness
- Informal institutions: Especially for women: Status in family and community, mobility, social rules such as girls going to school, dowry, early marriages etc.

A separate section (7) focuses specifically on the Livelihood Monitoring Unit and details the most significant lessons learned from the five-year existence.

3. Evolving strategies of rural poverty reduction

The programme has undergone several strategic changes from the projects started in 1999 till now in 2005, when it is about to close. The programme log frame as well as the organisational structure changed. The projects were merged to one programme with a structure of area-based coordination, support units to these and a programme coordinator to oversee the whole programme. Annex 9 shows the organisational structure for the Rural Development Programme.

Moreover, the themes and approaches have undergone several changes. The changes are here referred to as evolving strategies for rural poverty reduction. It started with agricultural training and extension for transfer of agricultural technologies to poor and marginal farmers. It then moved towards a strategy of improving the wider livelihood opportunities of the farmers combined with a Rights Based Approach (RBA). The programme currently moves towards a strategy of broader empowerment.

3.1 Lessons learned in the process of evolution

Rapid changes in approaches and strategies are realities of development programmes today and can create tremendous learning and success in organisations if it is managed within a learning framework.

The above described process of evolution has created learning, capacity and skills in the programme. Both national and international lessons on rural poverty reduction strategies have along the way been incorporated in the programme and the overall trend is that this has increased flexibility towards participant's needs and priorities, which again has increased prospects for impact on the lives of poor rural people.

Looking at the portfolio of the RLP activities it is clear that the scope is multidimensional:

Box 1. Overview of RLP activities
FFS – methodology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Season long training of field staff • Technology transfer • Experiential learning • "Buddy" system to reach secondary adopters
FFS – organisational development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational strengthening based on democratic and inclusive principles • Participatory monitoring, evaluation and planning • FFS capacity tool
Access to services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linkages to service providers: Private, state and NGOs • Elected members to cultivate linkages to service providers • Training of local service providers: Vaccinators, seed and seedling suppliers, collectors and sellers • Facilitation of access to khas lands and ponds
Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market group development • Linkages to the private sector (Pran, Milk Vita, Arrong etc) • Agriculture sector business providers (paravets) • Market surveys and studies • Collaboration with other organisations
Social development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on social development issues and human rights • Facilitation of social development initiatives: Community establishment of schools, sanitation, roads etc. • Action research into social, economic and political context of rural poverty reduction
Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of female field staff • Gender action plan • Gender committees and focal points in regional offices (GIPC) • Learning sessions on women's participation in decision making for staff • Gender analyses at various field levels: Household, village and region • Gender learning sessions addressing men and women • Awareness-raising on women's rights
Partner NGO Organisational Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening conceptual skills • Planning, Management, Monitoring and evaluation • Livelihood Challenge Fund

Over time, the programme has thus moved towards a comprehensive integration of issues of agriculture, wider livelihood options and entitlements to services, productive resources and women's rights and now moves towards empowerment as a strategy which has potential for addressing fundamental causes of marginalisation and poverty.

Integrating the fast evolving approaches was, however, extremely challenging and created important learning lessons on how to handle a constantly changing programme.

RLP has expanded its activities, approaches and strategies, but each change was approached as an addition. In fact the changes needed profound organisational reflection and reorientation in terms of participants, field workers' roles, monitoring and evaluation systems and reprioritisation of activities and approaches. The process has required a number of changes:

- Activities changed from agricultural technology transfer to community empowerment
- The participants changed from groups of 25 farmers - men or women - to encompass whole community
- FTs from trainers to facilitators
- Successes gauged from production yield increases to improvements in community led development initiatives
- Management from being a prescriptive system to a more flexible bottom – up system

At each stage the process required strong leadership and a clear and concerted strategy. Until the last year, when the focus changed to empowerment, the programme has lacked a shared clear vision of the priorities and targets across the staff (Bartlett and Eggen, 2002; Bartlett et al. 2004). Capacity and comprehensive understanding of the changing approaches have been major challenges along the way. These have to a certain degree always lagged behind and been the cause of frustration. In 2001 all CARE staff was given a two-day training on RBA and were encouraged to experiment with the approach. Even beyond RLP many staff throughout the mission have expressed a need for clearer direction and more detailed training to apply RBA. In the context of the overall mission philosophy, RLP also did not have a clear strategy for addressing rights issues. At the same time, DFID was concerned about CARE’s approach to rights. This was discussed in depth with DFID in November 2002 after the OPR 2002. Here it was decided, which rights issues RLP could address.

Overall this lack of clarity on the RLP approach to rights lead to incomplete understanding among the staff and the prioritisation and effectiveness of activities furthering the rights based approach were therefore limited. The OPR 2004 recommended RLP to develop a “Rural Livelihood Strategy”, this could have been the opportunity to more clearly articulate RLPs approach to rights. Unfortunately, this recommendation came too late when it was not any longer feasible to focus on such a strategy.

The lesson is that for a development programme to handle rapid changes in an efficient way, it needs to have strong leadership with a clear purpose, a strong communicative profile, which includes a constant process of capacity building and collection and dissemination of lessons learned. Clear communication channels must ensure that knowledge and learning and changing pass horizontally in the organisation and vertically both upward and downward.

It has been very difficult to monitor and evaluate the progress of the programme because the approaches and activities and therefore the information needs changed several times during the lifetime of the programme and as they changed new tools and data collection methods were simply added to the existing, which resulted in overloading of the staff. Annex 5 describes how M&E has changed as the programme evolved. Each row in the table concludes with a team assessment of the M&E team’s comfort level with their accomplishments during each phase.

The RLP M&E system was rooted in the original technology transfer model, which emphasises adoption, production and similar indicators². The M&E system and the staffing provided at that time were probably adequate for such an orientation. The current M&E team, however, felt that

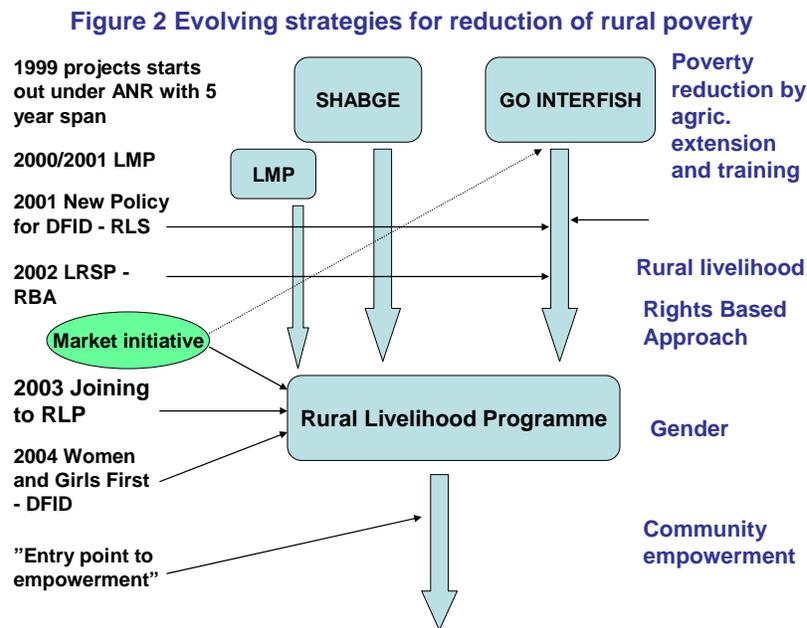
² The original GO-Interfish log frame has two indicators at the purpose level; one refers to adoption of new interventions and the other increased income as a result of that adoption. The SHABGE log frame from the same era has a broader focus, with purpose-level indicators pertaining to access to information and inputs, value of vegetable production, consumption of vegetables and oil, and nutritional status. The last indicator would be more appropriate at the goal level.

the information generated by the early project M&E systems is not useful in learning about issues of current interest, e.g. social change and empowerment.

The move to a livelihood analytical framework expanded the information that M&E units might be expected to produce, including the need to generate information on broader measures of asset acquisition or loss and livelihood outcomes. Some livelihoods training was provided to RLP field staff but the degree to which M&E staff were oriented to new information needs and trained in new methods is unclear. In any case, the M&E systems of the projects did not change significantly to capture livelihoods impact, because of the existence of the LMP and the perception that measurement at that level would be the LMP's responsibility. More recently, the programme emphasis on rights and empowerment is not adequately reflected in the M&E systems and staffing³.

The lesson from this would be that radical changes in a programme's objectives and strategies must be followed by radical changes in its approach to monitoring and evaluation. For example a rights based programme requires a change from collection of quantitative data to qualitative data and this again requires a major change in the competencies of the M&E unit, training of FTs in this type of M & E and a general change of focus.

Figure 2 depicts the evolving strategies. The boxes picture the evolving structures of the programme. To the right are the evolving themes/approaches and to the left is the chronology of forces driving the changes in structure, themes and approaches.



3.2 Focus on agricultural training and extension

The projects started out with a strategy of increasing production, income and food security of poor rural households by introducing new farming technologies and practises through

³ Two tools developed by the projects, Participants Capacity Matrix and Service Access Inventory, touch upon issues important in evaluating rights-based programmes and are interesting innovations for the RLP. However, they alone fall short of generating the information necessary to fully understand rights impact of the programme. Indeed, the M&E system, including these tools, was not intended or designed to measure impact and the M&E team was not sufficiently equipped for such duty.

agricultural extension. In line with the overall strategy, the success of the projects was measured on adoption of the introduced technologies.

GO-INTERFISH and SHABGE had a common purpose of reduction of rural poverty and a common strategy for agricultural extension through groups of farmers in Farmer Field Schools and they both used the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) as a training method. It was assumed that this strategy would increase the decision making ability of the participants.

The two projects, however, had different target groups. A precondition for success of the GO-INTERFISH project was that the involved farmers had access to land and the target group therefore was defined as medium, small and marginal farmers. The FFS groups included both male and female members of the selected households. In the beginning, there were separate male and female groups and later mixed groups were formed. Male farmers were trained in combined rice and fish production systems and female farmers in the same. In 2002-2003, having learnt that it was less appropriate to engage women in rice-fish training than in homestead gardening due to cultural, social and functional roles of women and men, GO-INTERFISH integrated homestead gardening. SHABGE focussed only on women in functionally landless and marginal households and had a particular focus on female headed households. The majority of participants were therefore women (99%) and the training concentrated on homestead gardening.

The general trend therefore is that the GO-INTERFISH FFS groups consisted of members from relative poor households (or occasionally poor), while SHABGE FFS members generally belong to the poorest strata (always poor) of the communities.

The entry point was transfer of a number of pre-designed technologies, which focussed on increasing the potential of the limited productive resources of the target groups. For GO-INTERFISH it was mainly intensification by the integration of fish and rice production and vegetable production on the dykes of the rice fields. For SHABGE the focus was to realise the production potential of the homestead through improved production methods of vegetable and fruits on the small pieces around the houses as well as seed production and preservation. The projects moreover trained some participants in the groups as Local Entrepreneurs (LE) and Farmer Leaders (FL), some in nursery management in order to secure a local supply of seedlings of both trees and vegetables and some in production and supply of fish seed.

SHABGE also had activities of training school children in the homestead gardening technologies. The focus of these activities was to develop the skills of the teachers to teach the students about homestead gardening using the experiential learning approach.

As it was also anticipated from the start of the GO-INTERFISH project that male farmers with access to land especially lower land, where rice and fish production were appropriate, benefited most from the projects. A number of women have benefited from the homestead gardening and appreciated the knowledge and skills they obtained from this, but the income they could obtain was limited and depending on the sizes of their homestead as well as their possibilities for marketing their produce.

3.3 Widening towards a Rural Livelihoods Approach

DFID adopted a new policy in 2001: Rural Livelihoods Strategy (RLS) and the DFID funded projects adopted this as well. SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH therefore shifted from being projects under the theme of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) to the theme called: Improved livelihood Security for Poor and Vulnerable Households. On one hand the change

was therefore donor driven. On the other hand, the change came from within CARE through learning from international and national experiences within SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH that:

Poor rural households cope with poverty through several livelihood opportunities. The poorer the household is in Bangladesh, the less they are likely to benefit to a significant degree solely from the introduction of agricultural technologies

This is in line with a general shift in Bangladesh away from agriculture as the primary source of household income towards an expansion of non-agricultural activities in the rural areas such as petty trade, rickshaw pulling, small scale construction etc (LMP, 2004). To access these new types of livelihoods, people need to draw on other types of assets such as human, social and financial assets. The livelihood approach of RLP therefore opened up for a wider scope of interventions focussing on developing human, social and financial capital with a broader perspective to livelihood options of the participating households.

The main activity in both projects continued to be the FFS, although efforts were made to expand the subject matter beyond the agricultural technologies. It was not until the merging of the projects to RLP in 2003 that a real frame was created to enable a wider scope of activities. The purpose here is stated as "to improve the livelihood security of men and women living in poor and vulnerable households in Bangladesh" and the 3 livelihood issues that were planned to be addressed were: Improved food security, retention of physical assets and social capital of women through improved household decision making (Rural Livelihood Programme CARE Bangladesh, 2003).

Moreover, as the programme has progressed, it continually widened its activities from pre determined agricultural extension to facilitating and training in a variety of livelihood opportunities identified by the FFS groups. This has included training of poultry and livestock vaccinators, para-veterinarians, linking to training in sanitation, home-crafts, marketing initiatives, leasing khas ponds and land etc.

The result of the wider scope of interventions has been that broader strata of the communities, particularly the poorer parts and more women have been able to benefit from the programme.

3.4 Implying a Rights Based Approach

The RBA has contributed to the development of RLP as a holistic programme and enabled the staff and groups to work to a certain degree on root causes of poverty.

Some groups have achieved access to land and ponds, they did not have before and most groups have increased their access to both public and private services – agricultural services and also education, health and social security. Moreover, especially the women's groups have appreciated the information on social rights and have achieved a number of successes in reducing early marriages and dowry payments.

In 2002 CARE-Bangladesh produced a Long Range Strategic Plan for 2002 to 2006 (LRSP). This stated the goal for CARE-Bangladesh for this period to be:

"In alliance with CARE and others, poor and vulnerable people will have improved livelihood security, demonstrating the capacity to influence policies and practises that eradicate poverty and promote human dignity"

The statement is emphasising social rights and justice (human dignity) as well as empowerment (capacity to influence...). CARE defines a Rights Based Approach (RBA) as a framework that focuses on human rights and responsibilities and states that:

"Development programmes guided by RBA focus on respecting human dignity, achieving fairness in opportunities and equal treatment for all and strengthening the ability of local communities to access resources and services. It exposes the roots of vulnerability and poverty, seeks to open up choices and it allows people to claim and exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities. A rights based approach recognises poor, displaced and war-affected people as having inherent rights essential to securing their livelihood".

The adoption of a RBA therefore complemented the Rural Livelihood Approach by going beyond the focus on income and resources of the poor and seeking to address social, political, economic and other power structures that are fundamental root causes of poverty.

After the LRSP the donor and CARE discussed how this should be interpreted and practised in the RLP. Moreover, the combined OPR in November 2002 raised concerns regarding the content, which the projects wanted to carry forward. The OPR 2002 argued that the activities in the FFS of the projects to a high degree provide the participants with improved opportunities to exercise important rights such as:

The rights to:

- Form groups and hold meetings
- Receive basic education
- Freely express ideas and opinions
- Make decisions about the use of household assets
- Participate in decision making about community activities
- Receive fair remuneration for one's labour
- Access to primary health service
- Access to clean water
- Social protection in times of need

The argument is that the programme provides the first opportunities to the women target group in terms of education, training, contact with people outside their kin group and opportunities to move outside the boundaries of their homestead. Moreover, it argued that the FFS method empowers people to take greater control of their lives. The OPR however, also identifies the issue of information about legal and political entitlements to be missing in the scope of activities. The OPR 2002 recommended that the new rights issues to be addressed should be:

- Women's rights
- Entitlements to public services
- Information concerning regulations on access to land, water and markets

The OPR also recommended that the project staff concentrate on developing awareness and capacity with the FFS group members.

A joint DFID/CARE workshop defined the priorities of the rights based activities as related to food security. It was agreed that the components should continue to work on Access to khas lands and khas ponds, access to state forest and rights of sharecroppers but should not work on improving access to rights of poor men and women through reorientation of salish (traditional court) or on promoting resistance to dowry

In 2004 the OPR team defined the guiding principles of a Rights Based Approach and what that meant in terms of RLP's development interventions:

- *"Participation as both a means and a goal*
- *Prioritisation of empowerment*
- *Non discrimination and focus on vulnerable group*
- *Goals defined in terms of reducing disparity*
- *Poor people not beneficiaries, but actors in their own development, and*
- *Outcomes and processes are tracked and evaluated*

Rights based approach interventions go beyond expanding the income and resource base of the poor and focus on the empowerment of households and communities to improve their access to services and resources. The poor are encouraged to see themselves as being citizens with rights and entitlements and the state with obligations and duties to deliver these services. A rights based approach involves addressing socio-political, economic and power dynamics that are obstructing poverty reduction of rural poor."

Before the 2004 OPR, RBA was often being used by staff as a way of naming the new rights based activities – such as the access to water bodies and governance pilots and social rights sessions in the FFS. Field staff received a two-day training on the rights based approach organised by the CARE Bangladesh mission, but the full meaning of RBA in relation to the programme activities was generally not well understood and there were different opinions in regard to the boundaries. The prioritisation of empowerment in last year of RLP has moved further towards integrating the guiding principles of RBA as it is described in the 2004 OPR.

3.5 Market initiative

GO-IF included already from 2001 market activities and along with the merging of the projects and formation of RLP in 2003, a Market and Business Development Unit was introduced. This was initiated with the aim to facilitate improved linkages between farmers and the private sector, in order to increase producer income. The markets unit has been initiating different interventions to meet this objective: Focused capacity building of 45 selected FFS groups; linkages with private sector enterprises able to procure from farmers; establishment of local private sector service providers (paravets); and linkage with other organisations. The initiative has been operational for less than a year and naturally the initiative meets strong constraints e.g. in the area of women's participation as well as involvement of poor producers with very small amounts of saleable produce. However, some of the groups have had valuable experiences especially in the area of group marketing, some of which have benefited poor as well as less poor, men and women in whole communities.

3.6 Approach to gender - towards changing the position of women

In the RLP the approach to gender has evolved from seeing gender as working with women to addressing the practical needs of women as farmers such as production, income and household food security and finally towards a more holistic strategy of understanding and

addressing women's strategic needs, which have stronger prospects for changing women's position in families and society.

CARE has a strong gender policy and in line with this, the projects have all along applied strategies that seek to contribute to empowerment of women and to promote gender equity. RLP has undertaken important research into how to improve the condition and status of rural women. SHABGE was totally directed to women. Despite the fact that the technologies in the forefront of GO-INTERFISH were benefiting men more than women, this project also applied specific strategies to improve impact on women by setting up separate study plots for men and women, focusing on homestead gardening with the women's groups, training of women in fish seed production etc. In the last two years the RLP has widened even further to support activities which are of greater importance to women than agricultural training such as rights training, sanitation and setting up community savings groups.

The projects and later the programme have a balanced gender ratio among its staff and have provided both male and female staff with training in social and gender awareness and confidence to practically apply gender concepts in the fieldwork.

The current rural Bangladesh context is extremely challenging in the terms of potential for empowerment of women and promotion of gender equity. In this environment it becomes very important to work on strategies that strongly support women's strategic needs as well as their practical needs. The gender training of staff has all along included awareness of both women's practical and strategic need and it is a fact that the many female FTs in RLP is a strong advancement in terms of women's empowerment.

However, because the strategies and activities during the years up to 2002/2003 concentrated on the practical needs of women, the impact was limited in terms of women's empowerment. Women were provided with the 'means' to empowerment, but RLP did not prioritise strategies to take their empowerment further - e.g. women's mobility has increased a little to the extent that women can meet in groups outside their homestead, but it is still not to the extent of enabling women to access local markets on their own, which continues to limit women's economic opportunities. It should be noted that the experiences with efforts to establish safe market corners for women showed that it is difficult for a programme like RLP to influence practises and behaviours outside the communities in which it works. Even if the men of their own community accepted women to go to the market, they would still be subject to harassment by men from the surrounding area and probably therefore women rarely express the wish to do so.

Moreover focussing on the practical needs of women as farmers led to the setting up of mixed post FFS community groups which may have reduced women's participation. This is further elaborated in section 5.

The DFID Country Assistance Plan (CAP 2003 – 2006) pushed the agenda of women's empowerment further. In the last two years RBA and the women's empowerment have become increasingly important foci for RLP and the activities have expanded to introduce information about structural obstacles to women's empowerment. FTs have been carrying out activities such as information and awareness raising on social relations and women's rights and have provided support to groups wanting to take action on this learning. In that context, some individual women and FFS groups have begun to address issues within the families and communities, which are of strategic importance to women. In most of the women's groups visited, the women told how they together had confronted cases of domestic violence, early marriages or demands for dowry payment in their communities. In many but naturally not all

cases had they been successful in changing the situation to the advantage of the women involved.

3.7 Empowerment as the future perspective

The ultimate outcome of the evolving strategies of the RLP from focussing on production and income base increase to focussing on rural livelihoods to including a gender and rights based approach, has been working towards a strategy of empowerment, which has become a strong agenda in many development programmes during the last years.

On the one hand, empowerment is neither part of the goal nor the purpose of RLP and was also not in the SHABGE, GO-INTERFISH or LMP. On the other hand it can be argued that empowerment is an important precondition for at least 3 of the 5 outputs of RLP:

- Output 2: Relevant service providers, institutions and partner organisations are more responsive to the needs of poor and vulnerable women and men
- Output 4: Strategies to improve male and female farmer understanding of markets, especially for women, are developed and piloted
- Output 5: Improved management of income, savings, assets, production and human capital by partner households to improve their livelihood

The OPR 2004 identified it as a critical issue that the programme was not being carried out in such a way to facilitate empowerment. The report Entry Points to Empowerment (Bartlett, 2004) was produced as a follow-up to this concern. The report provides a number of conceptual models, evaluation indicators and suggestions for enhancing a strategy towards empowerment of rural communities. The outcome was first and foremost that a pilot initiative (Livelihood Campus) was started in 5 communities as a social research pilot to gain experiences based on this strategy and learn more about how empowerment can be furthered through a rural development programme to eventually draw the experiences over to a future programme.

For the rest of the programme, the priority of empowerment was introduced. However, it has come in so late that it in effect has functioned as an exit strategy for enhancing sustainability of the groups. A set of indicators for empowerment (behavioural indicators) was introduced in the third quarter of 2004 and the impression from the discussions with staff and participants was that this has created a good understanding of the relationship between empowerment and sustainability. In the communities that the team visited, most of the field staff have more or less been able to withdraw from being in the forefront of group activities, and many of the groups appeared confident that they in future will be able to manage on their own. As will be shown in the rest of this report, the RLP has achieved empowerment in many areas, but a programme focussed on empowerment as a goal would have needed different, strategies, approaches, training, roles of field staff, roles of management and monitoring and evaluation systems.

4. Summary of stakeholders' findings and lessons learnt

During the mission, the team gathered a lot of experiences and lessons learned from stakeholders in the programme. This section presents only a short overview of general trends of the findings. Section 5 gives the external analysis of the lessons learnt.

4.1 How FFS participants rated the success of the programme

The FFS participants revealed many different stories of success during the lifetime of the programme. What was consistently expressed as an important outcome for them was the amount of new knowledge and skills that they had obtained and which they much appreciated.

Particularly many women participants strongly emphasised that for the first time in their lives they had been exposed to learning and that alone for them was valuable. They also said that the new skills in vegetable growing had improved nutrition and food security for their families and provided them with a small income from sale of some surplus. It is difficult to judge how far increases in income have been the cause of improved gender power relations within the household and community, but women participants mentioned that since earning their own income they had acquired greater capacity for dialogue in decision making. It was, however, also found that many women had so little space for cultivation that there were no prospects for poverty reduction only through vegetable production. Although poverty has been reduced this way, it has not been proved sufficient for lifting the functionally landless out of poverty as a result of small economies of scale. Many women therefore appreciated the combination with other new income generating activities. Poultry and livestock particularly were consistently mentioned as good livelihood opportunities for women. Women across the board also acknowledged the sessions on the structural obstacles to women's empowerment as important.

In areas where rice and fish production systems were feasible, the male participants expressed much appreciation of the new skills they had obtained connected to these systems. In other more upland areas, where rice and fish production was less feasible, issues such as increased utilisation of dykes, roadsides and access to khas lands and the marketing activities were more appreciated.

A major lesson learned in the groups was that as a group they were able to do things that they could not do alone. Many participants said that "the group has made us stronger". In all communities women expressed that through the groups they had found a place for discussions of social issues, building awareness and confidence and getting a voice in community development. Women often expressed that the group was security. They said the group membership reduced their vulnerability, because they could help each other in times of need. This was particularly the case where women have set up savings groups. Men said that they used the groups as a foundation for collective action such as marketing, getting access to services, land and ponds.

The most prominent success stories of collective action were that most groups, especially women's groups, had established savings groups and many groups had initiated sanitation in their communities. Some had even achieved 100% sanitation in the whole community.

The groups that were visited had developed different plans and visions for the future; some were already working towards achieving these. Generally they utilised the groups for a wide spectre of collective action to widen income generating opportunities, group marketing and to increase their voice in accessing services from the public and private sector. Many women's groups were planning to increase their production of poultry and livestock and some were establishing production of different home-crafts.

4.2 How RLP staff rated success of the programme

A number of different experiences were discussed as the main areas of success during the workshops and interviews with RLP staff members. Box 2 mentions these by topic and shows how many times the different areas of success were raised.

Box 2. Success stories from workshops and interviews with groups of RLP staff members
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Organisational development at community level (5 groups)
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Access to services – especially livestock and poultry (2 groups)
Increased mobility of women (2 groups)
Technologies adopted through FFS (1 group)
Improved decision making skills (1 group)
Technical and social skills and knowledge increased (1 group)
Income through poultry rearing (1 group)
Roadside plantation (1 groups)

The staff ranks the success of the organisational development high as a foundation for sustainable collective action, access to services, productive resources, and increased voice locally and also for initiation of community actions such as sanitation. When discussing what made it possible, the staff emphasised the facilitation of group dynamics and organisational mechanisms from the field workers, the capacity of staff to do this and also the advocacy roles that the FTs have had towards community leaders and public authorities for enabling a supportive environment to the activities.

The increased access to services came up twice as a success story and it was interesting that the organisational development at community level was mentioned as a very important ingredient to the success. It was, however, also clear that the success to a high degree also rested on intense facilitation and advocacy work from the FTs.

Increased mobility of women was also mentioned twice as a success in the workshop in South East, where the focus has been on women's development. This was recognised as a precondition for women to obtain new knowledge, information and skills and also for getting access to services outside of the community. The extensive awareness raising by FTs among male relatives of the participants and leaders in the communities was valued as an important ingredient to the success.

The technologies adopted through the FFS training also came up. It was emphasised that the Season Long Training of the FTs enabled this and it was found important that the training method enabled farmers to identify their problems and make decisions as to which action to take.

From senior to field level staff, there was convergence of thinking in terms of the future vision. The vision showed that there had been extensive learning since the beginning of the programme regarding how to have sustainable impact on people's livelihoods. All groups formulated a vision around empowerment of communities with a particular emphasis on poor and extremely poor women and girls. All the groups stated that the programme should be based on activities decided by the community and should focus on wide ranging livelihood opportunities, rights and social justice. The groups stated that the activities should be more community driven and that there should be advocacy at different levels to tackle the informal and formal rules, policies and practices that perpetuate poverty. There was also strong agreement in terms of the necessity for an organisation that can facilitate bottom-up planning and secure flexibility in terms of types of activities according to community priorities.

Box 3. Vision for the future

From senior to field level staff convergence in terms of strategies:

What	Community empowerment
Who	Poorest sections – women
How	More responsibility with community participants
	Community led interventions
	Flexible and empowering management

5. Lessons learned in the process of strategic change towards empowerment

5.1 Perspectives to empowerment

The ToR for the present mission requests the team to distil the important lessons learned from the RLP experience regarding the opportunities for empowering communities and especially women in order to enable these to improve their livelihoods in a sustainable manner.

So despite the fact that the programme was not explicitly originally designed to facilitate empowerment, which was also one of the conclusions of the OPR conducted in January 2004, the team has taken a future oriented view to assist CARE in understanding what works and why in the process of empowering groups of poor rural producers. We furthermore incorporate the specific issues connected to empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh, considering the overarching theme of DFID's Country Assistance Plan (CAP 2003-2006) - advancement of women and girls.

Empowerment is a strategy, which aims at change in the form of increased social justice and increased equality. Recently empowerment has become widely used among development agencies and practitioners as a concept and central tool for poverty reduction. The argument is that root causes behind poverty are strongly attached to political and social marginalisation and inequality for certain groups, classes or casts of people and that sustainable reduction of poverty therefore require empowerment of the marginalised groups.

There are however several diverse ways of understanding the concept and therefore also of measuring the outcome. The World Bank (2002) provides a brief summary of common definitions: Most definitions focus on gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of life. Most look at structural inequalities that affect social groups rather than individuals. The Unicef's Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework emphasises women's access, awareness of causes of inequality, capacity to direct one's own interest and taking control and action to reducing structural inequalities. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) uses a definition, which includes both access to productive resources and the capacity to participate in decisions that affect the least privileged. When discussing measurement of women's empowerment, Kabeer (1999) focuses on the three dimensions: Access to resources, agency and achievements, where both resources and agency is preconditions for the achievements.

To encompass common notions of empowerment the following definition of the concept of empowerment is chosen:

A process that increases the capability of socio-economically marginalised individuals or groups to make choices and to influence collective decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices.

The definition as well as the following analytical framework is moderated from Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) with the aim to grasp the empowerment processes included in the RLP interventions.

Figure 3 depicts an analytical framework for understanding empowerment. In line with the above definition, empowerment is seen as processes resulting in individuals or groups

possessing the capabilities to make choices end to translate these into desired actions and outcomes. Figure 3 illustrates how this capacity is influenced by two sets of factors:

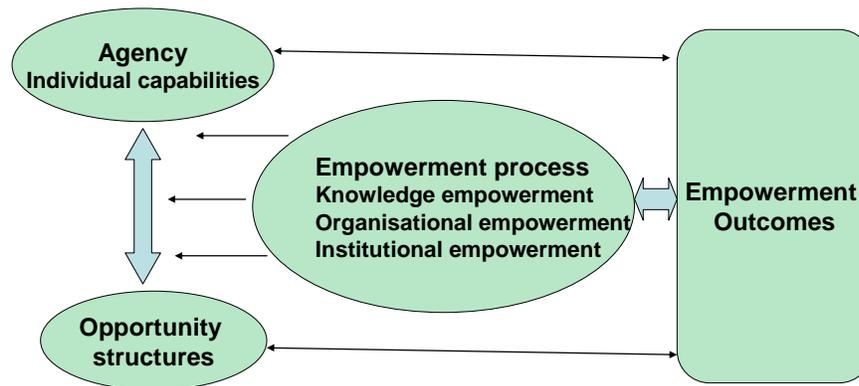
- Agency is defined as the ability to make informed choices and this implies that the individual is able to envisage and choose options as well as has the resources to do so
- Opportunity structures are defined as the formal or informal institutions that determine the individual or group's ability to transform agency into effective collective action⁴

The empowerment processes must build and change both the capabilities of individuals (agency) and the opportunity structures that they face.

For example, a group of poor farmers may be well informed about the existence of relevant agricultural services and decide to approach these to attend to their issues, but if the service institutions do not have it as their priority to serve these farmers, the action will have little result. In this case the formal opportunity structures are not enabling the desired action. Or a woman may make an income from production of vegetables and may choose to use it for further education of her daughter, the formal opportunity structure may be in place – the girl can enrol in the school but social rule in the community or in the family may discourage it or even make it impossible. In this case it is the informal opportunity structures that are dis-empowering.

In order to be effective, empowerment processes must therefore build and change both the capability of the individual (agency) and the opportunity structures – formal and informal.

Figure 3. Process of empowerment



The processes of empowerment

In the case of RLP it is found suitable to describe the processes of empowerment in terms of the three main dimensions:

⁴ Opportunity structures are here more precisely defined as the policies, rules and practices found in social and economic institutions which determine the conditions for life and production, for accessing services and resources and for controlling assets and thereby poor people's possibilities for breaking out of poverty

- Knowledge empowerment
- Organisational empowerment
- Institutional empowerment

Box 4 describes the roles of these processes.

Box 4. Dimensions of empowerment processes (moderated from DIIS 2004)	
Knowledge empowerment	Knowledge empowerment is the acquisition of technical, social and economic knowledge and application of this learning for improving livelihoods. Knowledge empowerment enables people to understand the causes and effects of their own problems and to articulate their development needs as informed demands. Knowledge empowerment allows farmers to actively participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services, in effect transforming them into development agents rather than passive beneficiaries.
Organisational empowerment	Organisational empowerment is realised when people are organised in groups that are coherent, independent and sustainable. Such groups can enable people to act collectively, to articulate their informed demands and interact with state institutions and private sector. They are also the basis for higher-level organisations that could represent their interests at local government and national policy level
Institutional empowerment	Institutional empowerment is when individuals and groups/communities can assert direct influence on development activities and services.

Empowerment outcomes at the individual level

Empowerment is expected to generate improvements in the capabilities of the individual in the following areas:

- Access to and control of assets
- Access to financial services and ability to manage funds
- Skills and technical knowledge
- Ability to articulate demands and interact with markets and other social actors
- Knowledge and tools to use information on markets, services, technologies and rights
- Self respect, social esteem and relationships to authorities and other social actors

Empowerment outcomes – changes of opportunity structures

In general terms, improvements of opportunity structures establish a more enabling environment for poverty reduction and rural development and they increase people's capabilities to make choices and influence collective decisions. Empowerment outcomes on opportunity structures should be found in changes in the relation of poor rural people to:

- Government institutions: Elected, administrative and juridical institutions
- Markets and service providers: Rights, price negotiations, responsiveness
- Informal institutions: Ethnicity, gender equality, social rules etc.

5.2 Knowledge Empowerment

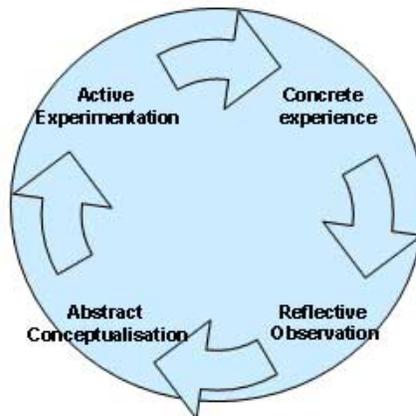
Knowledge empowerment is the acquisition of technical, social and economic knowledge and application of this learning for improving livelihoods. Knowledge empowerment enables people to understand the causes and effects of their own problems and to articulate their development needs as informed demands. Knowledge empowerment allows farmers to actively participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services, in effect transforming them into active citizens rather than passive beneficiaries.

FFS has increased farming skills and knowledge

The FFS training has provided the participants with new and increased farming skills and knowledge. As mentioned in 4.1, this is emphasised over and over again as a very important achievement from the participants. Apart from the general training of FFS participants in the rice fish technologies and the homestead gardening, the programme also provided special training to selected members of the groups in order to make special services available in the community e.g. local suppliers of fruit and vegetable seedlings and fish seed. Such training has increased the total knowledge available in the community and many – also non-FFS-members benefit from this.

The FFS learning methodology is based on the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC), which was formulated by Kolb (1984) and is used as a theoretical basis for trainers to design training and education with adults. Figure 4 depicts the Kolb's learning cycle as a cycle of reflection upon concrete experiences to abstract conceptualisation and a dialogue that initiates active experimentation with new ideas.

Figure 4. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



The idea is that everybody enters a learning situation with expectations, experiences and ideas and that learning occurs in the interface between the expectations, experience and dialogue. The objective of this kind of learning is not just the acquisition of technical and practical skills, but that the teaching practise is embedded in a social practise, which emancipates the individual as well as the collective. The training method is therefore in principle well suited for knowledge empowerment in the sense that is stated at the beginning of this section: "enables people to understand the causes and effects of their own problems and to articulate their development needs".

The FFS training was implemented with the following principles, which generally apply to most FFSs:

- Interactive mode of training through learning-by-doing, observation, reflection and dialogue
- Training in groups (25 participants per group) for shared experience
- Study plots for experimentation and demonstration of improved practises
- Application of technologies appropriate to the needs and capacities of the participants
- Long period of training – regular and frequent group sessions
- Trainers with season long training in applying the methodology

Particularly the learning-by-doing method was much appreciated by the participants. They consistently mentioned the impact it had for them that they had learned the practical skills and therefore were confident in applying these. From the interviews it was clear that the practical demonstrations in the study plots, where they could concretely observe the impact of the different management systems was a major factor for the participant's motivation and adoption of the technologies. The long periods of training are also appreciated and provide good opportunities for trying out new skills in practice.

The technical training has over time evolved from a prescriptive to a more action learning approach. The FFS training was implemented at fortnightly intervals of sessions lasting approximately one hour. The Season Long Training (SLT) was conducted specifically for field staff enabling them to facilitate the FFS learning session. Main weakness of the SLT was its emphasis on classroom based and rather theoretical training with little scope to practice facilitation and demonstrations in the field. This was later redressed with organising trainings, which were far more practical in nature using demonstrations in the field. Also the facilitation training organised by TITAN emphasised 'process facilitation' and using a wide number of practical tools for helping farmers to better understand the 'science behind the crops'. Examples are the seed germination for determining the quality of the seed and various practical soil tests, which help farmers to better grasp basic soil science and what type of vegetables to raise under specific soil conditions. These have now been widely adopted by other FFS programmes and even by Department of Agricultural Extension

It was, however, more difficult to assess whether the participants had increased their ability to analyse their farming problems and make decisions, which would be important for the participants to be able to adapt the achieved knowledge to their particular situation. The actual sharing of experience and continuous experimentation among farmers were equally difficult to assess. These are long term effects and require a special study years after completion of the training.

The interviews revealed that while the participants had increased their skills and also have adapted several technologies to their situation, they did not achieve the "expert" kind of knowledge that according to Bartlett (2004) was expected as an outcome of the FFS. E.g. the participants understood that compost is a good thing as it makes plants grow well, but not the reason why compost improves the soils. Also with the use of home-remedies as pesticides, their knowledge is rather superficial and in some cases incorrect. This suggests that there is need for frequent follow-up to the training, particularly seen in light of the generally low educational level of the target group.

At the time of the lesson learning mission, all the FFSs had been completed, so it was not possible to observe the learning in practice, but during the earlier review on SHABGE FFS (Bartlett, 2002) it was found that the focus of the training was more on knowledge and technology transfer as well as the structure of the sessions rather than on the learning process. It was therefore recommended to introduce the so-called "Phased FFS" on a pilot basis. This was subsequently adopted by the then SHABGE Management in 2002. The 'Phased FFS' concept is dividing the training into phases of different focuses:

- FFS primary school – with focus on horticultural training
- FFS secondary school – with focus on experiential learning
- FFS high school – with focus on social development
- Post graduate FFS – with self directed focus determined by the participants

It was at the same time recommended to strengthen the learning process. The facilitators were therefore provided with training in ELC methods on small studies, which have been widely applied by the Phased FFS as an attempt to make farmers start understanding the "science behind the crops". Whether this has resulted in experimentation by the farmers on a large scale is difficult to tell, but RLP staff has observed that farmers were able to explain in more detail the relevance and appropriateness of certain technologies, notably in soil amendment and composting and farmers have also managed to differentiate types of insects, knowing which one were the beneficial and which the harmful ones.

During the interviews and workshops it was found that the trainers had experienced difficulties in utilising and applying the ELC as a methodology for guiding their training practise. Understanding the causes to this might be the key to getting the lessons right in this respect: The Kolp's Experiential Learning Cycle is a method of learning that fits very well into the thought world of natural scientists and academics. But when we consider the trainers in the FFS, the reality is that they rarely share this background and they therefore have difficulties in understanding and applying the method. Particularly, going from observation to reflection and making a cause effect analysis is difficult for them. Moreover the developments of democratic processes (e.g. group reflection and open dialogue) that are needed for the success of the learning are being carried out in an educational, social and cultural context which may not be conducive to this methodology. This entrenched context does not easily change simply through the introduction of a new didactic method – it requires on-going support and inputs for the trainers.

One of the strengths of the FFS is that the training takes place at field level and that the trainer therefore is brought right into the community and thus very close to the reality of the participants and the farming practise. The study plots are important as motivation for the participants to learn because they get both practical experiences and demonstrations of the impact of the improved practises here. This enables a dual learning process where the trainer learns from the participant's reality and the participants learn both from the trainers and from the demonstrations. Training as a group provides in principle a space for dialogue and sharing of experiences to be cultivated despite cultural or social challenges.

The lesson learned is therefore that the methodology matters and that the FFS training has the potential to take the participants further than transfer of knowledge and technology into wider processes of real knowledge empowerment.

However, the ELC method may be challenging to apply with people outside the circles of natural sciences and /or without strong democratic traditions. Is it "democratic traditions" that are most critical or a culture and educational system which promotes and values critical/analytical thinking? It therefore needs continuous development and mentoring of trainers and participants. It is important that the main focus is on the learning process rather than on the structure of the training session and transfer of knowledge. The trainer needs freedom to adapt to the particular context and dynamics of the groups both in terms of topic and structure. It is therefore important that the performance of the trainers is not only evaluated on quantitative measurement of technologies adopted but also on qualitative measures such as participants' ability to adapt technologies and participant behaviour such as the behavioural indicators developed in 2004 (see Annex 7). The ideal would be that the quality of the training was evaluated by the participants themselves in order to motivate the trainers for further development.

Box 5. Success of ELC would need:

- Continuous development and mentoring of trainers
- Main focus on the learning process
- Freedom for the trainer to adapt to the particular context (topic and structure)
- Taking the learning method into other kinds of training
- Trainer performance evaluated on indicators of empowerment and by participants themselves

Motivation is fundamental for success of any kind of training

Needs driven rather than prescribed technologies and activities are most effective to improve the livelihoods of the poor and women.

For participants to be motivated for training, they need to feel that the content is relevant to their situation. During the first years of the training, the projects focussed on prescribed technologies. Success of knowledge transfer was therefore dependent on the appropriateness of the technology in the particular setting and for the individuals involved.

Overall, the training in integrated rice and fish technologies mainly benefited men with access to land and mainly in areas where the fish and rice production were feasible (lowlands with silt soils). Some poorer male and female farmers who sell labour or are sharecroppers also claimed to have benefited as with their new skills they are being hired more as skilled labour and have negotiated higher wages. However, further research shows that the improvements may have been due to general wage increases or female labourers being more in demand when the male farmers migrate.

RLP has also implemented technologies and agricultural practices well suited to the landless and resource poorer such as the use of fallow land and road side planting and dyke-cropping. Poorer farmers are benefiting from these pro-poor activities, but there are concerns that some of these technologies are not demand driven or appropriate to sustainably improve the poor's coping capacity. The viability of dyke cropping has for example been questioned because it is rather labour intensive and in the recent years it has been less emphasised in the Rice-Fish component.

The homestead gardening generally benefited women, who could produce some vegetables for home-consumption and sell a small surplus to get a little income of their own. There are, however, limited prospects for taking this to a higher level for the poorest and landless people. Moreover, it was obvious to the team during the mission that real commercial production of vegetables happens outside the homestead, where women are rarely involved.

Women, the poorer farmers and the landless have other priorities than agricultural training to improve their livelihoods. Poor people live on the margins of opportunities and risks; they therefore benefit from high degrees of diversity and flexibility for adaptation to their particular situation. In RLP, the poor have most appreciated and benefited from the training in livestock, poultry, sanitation and other Income Generating Activities which do not require access to land and did not involve pre-described technology packages. They have also appreciated the FTs' facilitating school scholarships, UP VGF cards, access to health services and access to other NGO and governmental on farm and off farm training.

The strategy used in the last year of training and interventions focusing on more needs driven activities and technologies have been more effective with the women and the poor. During the interviews it was found that the priorities of women and the poorest are as stated in box 6 – the priorities are not ranked:

Box 6. Priorities of women and the poorest

- Income generation activities and marketing
- Poultry and livestock
- Sanitation and health
- Education/literacy
- Savings for capital accumulation
- Information about rights and entitlements

Opportunities to learn have a particularly strong impact on women's empowerment

Opportunities to learn have particular strong impact on women, who may never have been trained before.

Women participants in the RLP have gained confidence and capacities by acquiring skills, experience, knowledge and information. Providing training for women has thus been a first step to encouraging their empowerment. In some meetings held with both women and men the team saw improved participation of women from last years OPR (Bartlett et al.2004). In a number of communities that the team visited, individual women had taken on new roles in the community as a result of the training. The team heard stories of wealthier women involved in the RLP now providing services to the community (seed, saplings, etc) and had acquired a degree of recognition amongst the normally male dominated development group. We also heard of poorer women providing services such as marketing and vaccinations which had not only provided them with income, but had improved their status within the community.

Across the board the RLP training in rights and gender issues has developed a stronger social knowledge and understanding for women in the communities. Knowledge, awareness and understanding of social, cultural and legal constraints for women and the poor to break out of poverty have increased. Some poorer women and adolescent groups have acted on this knowledge and encouraged families in the community to refrain from early marriages and dowry payments and also to access scholarships for children (particularly girls) to continue their education.

Knowledge about services and entitlements to services does not necessarily enable people to articulate informed demand on the services

In the last years RLP has facilitated linkages of groups to service providers and this has increased the participants' knowledge on relevant service providers and entitlements to services. This is seen in the service access inventory and was strongly confirmed during the interviews, where most groups emphasised their access to services and were confident that they because of the new knowledge would be able to continue many of their prioritised activities on their own with the assistance of public and private service providers. Women particularly value links to services such as: Health, sanitation, UP social security services and livestock services.

As mentioned before, RLP has also trained several local service providers in the groups such as vaccinators, nursery managers and seed sellers. This can be viewed as the beginning of pro-poor private sector development as it has provided knowledge and skills that can give poor people an extra earning and also serve the rest of the community with services that are important for the poor of the communities.

However, real knowledge empowerment in this area would mean "to enable people to articulate informed demand". In the last year the FTs have begun to facilitate more links based on group demand to different service providers. The priority services for the poor appear to be:

Livestock and poultry, health, education, sanitation, savings groups and off farm IGAs. The priority services for women appear to be: Livestock and poultry, health, sanitation, nutrition, social issues, legal aid and IGAs. If the programme had been focussed on enabling the poorest to articulate informed demand of services, it would have provided a forum in which participants analysed what services are available in these areas, their appropriateness, their cost and their quality. This has not happened and as such the participants are still passive beneficiaries of services that they receive. The lesson is that:

Real knowledge empowerment in terms of service access would mean taking knowledge building further to capacity building of the groups in demand formulation and facilitating group analysis of appropriate content and quality of the required services

A substantial increase of women's access to market information would need long term effort of challenging existing rule

The market initiative has developed increased knowledge about markets and skill in group marketing with selected groups. The results of the group marketing will be described under organisational development.

It is, however, a lesson so far that there are strong barriers in social rule in terms of women's access to market information, because women can generally not go to the market place, where all the information is being passed around and where producers are exposed to and get contact to the buyers. There are exceptions, particularly among the poorest women, who may have no choice but to access the places where they can obtain an income. However, a substantial increase in women's access to market information would need long term efforts of challenging existing rule but could also be supported by other kinds of market information, eventually through use of tele- or radio services.

5.3 Organisational Empowerment

Organisational empowerment is realised when people are organised in groups that are coherent, independent and sustainable. Such groups can enable people to articulate their informed demands and interact with state institutions and private sector. They are also the basis for higher-level organisations that could represent their interests at local government and national policy level

Building social capital is an important means to many other livelihood assets. In rural Bangladesh, the marginal and poorest often depend on vertical linkages into patronage and local power structures and institutions such as gushti, samaj and salish. These linkages are often very fragile for the poor and depending on the attitude of the patron they tend to sustain the fundamental causes of poverty in a community. An important way of redressing the power relations and taking empowerment beyond these fragile individual relationships is strengthening horizontally dependent and mutually supportive groups, which can provide an important space to increase livelihood assets by collective action.

RLP activities have facilitated organisational development at a group level. There is solid evidence both in reports from the programme (Wadud and Howlader, 2003; Bartlett et al. 2004; Wandschneider, 2004; Bode and Howes, 2004) and from the interviews in the groups during the present mission that many of the groups have acquired several organisational experiences, which are good steps towards building the capacity that would be termed as organisational empowerment. As examples are the following:

- Many groups have initiated collective action in their communities for sanitation in all households
- Most groups had established a system of group savings
- All groups had acquired access to services that they had not had before
- Many of the groups in the marketing initiative have marketed their produce together and thereby increased the prices of their goods
- Marketing groups had also successfully negotiated for lower prices of inputs and seeds by collective purchasing
- Some groups have interacted with local government structures to get access to social security services and productive resources such as khas land and ponds on lease
- Some groups have successfully interacted with other organisations for establishment of infra structure e.g. BRAC primary school in their communities

The following analysis is an attempt to capture the main lessons learned specifically in terms of organisational empowerment.

FFS was an entry point to mobilisation of groups, but did not automatically result in organisational development

RLP has achieved extensive experiences in organisational empowerment as the approach to organisation of participants has changed during the evolving strategies of the programme. The Farmer Field Schools were the first entry point to organisation as groups were mobilised to be mechanisms for cost effective delivery of the agricultural training. But more than that, it was assumed that training farmers in groups would facilitate experience sharing among farmers and thus strengthen the learning process. Moreover, it was expected that the mobilisation of groups would more or less automatically result in more spontaneous collective action. It was, however, experienced that this did not automatically result in the development of community farmers groups.

Only half of the FFS groups developed into some form of organisation after completing the FFS training. Development of the group as a group was not a priority focus during the FFS training. As such, organisational development activities became the next phase after the FFS technology training. Over the last two years the FTs have been very pro-active in facilitating organisational development and through the last year's exit strategy of role shifting much responsibility for activities has been passed to the group.

RLP developed a tool for Participatory Self Evaluation (PSE) that has been introduced in the groups of participants as a planning and monitoring tool for the groups. In the opinion of the 2004 OPR team this was not very participatory and did not create the intended capacity for self evaluation. During the past year, the RLP has made efforts to improve the PSE approach towards empowering community participants. The team observed sessions of PSE in two of the groups. Annex 6 describes the observations towards the improvements in the way PSEs are conducted. The sessions are less prescriptive with a corresponding increase in control and ownership by community members. The session notes have been reduced from nearly 15 pages to about four. The methods remain fairly scripted but the materials, while still employing a limited number of written messages that some participants cannot read, are much improved from the many written cards that were used previously. The FT, rather than leading the entire session, models a methodology then turns control over to group leaders. In the end, the information generated seems more relevant to group needs than was previously the case.

The lesson is that the groups are fully capable of assuming leadership, when they are given the opportunity and that the PSE has potential for facilitating group learning in line with the ELC, where the participants together reflect on their experiences, what they want to achieve and from there decide on future plans.

More self-organisation would increase the sustainability of the groups

One problem with the organisational development was probably that the groups were mobilised and participants selected by RLP trainers based solely on a wealth ranking exercise. Groups were not selected based on indigenous, self defined functional community groupings. The groups connected with GO-INTERFISH were particularly heterogeneous in terms of gender, wealth group, land holdings etc. SHABGE groups were more homogeneous as they are all women and the wealth group differentiation is less as it focuses on the poorest group.

Sustainable horizontal group solidarity may have been more successful in RLP communities if:

1. FFS groups had been formed based on an understanding of traditional socially embedded community groupings with a common interest
2. The creation of mutual trust, cooperation and appreciation for group collective action had been cultivated by the FTs as a priority both during the FFS and as the focus of organisational development. Instead, the focus of organisational development was more on structures – setting up committees, office bearers, bank accounts and by laws

When the first FFS training was completed and some groups developed as community organisations, they changed in terms of membership and became diverse in terms of sizes, gender, wealth groups, interest groups and focus. In some groups the wealthier members, who had benefited from the training but had little interests in common with the poorer members, left the groups after the technical training. In other groups the poorest members left because they had to take on work somewhere else and did not value working for the interests of the wealthier members. Other groups expanded to involve most of the community, which were then divided into sub-interest groups such as savings groups, marketing groups, youth groups, women's groups, occupational groups, social groups etc. The process of community sanitation has been a catalyst towards total community action. On the whole the SHABGE groups have remained mostly as the original group and have focussed more on developing new Income Generating Activities together.

The lesson learned from this process is that

Groups based on common interest or community groups, which include sub-groups of common interest are most likely to be sustainable. The poorest and the women will participate when there is focus on issues that address their needs.

Interventions from development agencies should focus on strengthening of solidarity, functionality and dialogue. The methodology and process of developing the group should focus on inclusiveness and democratic and transparent procedures rather than setting up structures or determining activities.

As will be discussed in the conclusions, the Nijera pilot, which has been developed over the last year, is addressing these issues. E.g. in one community the team found that applying these lessons had positive results. In Jalagari para (see Box 7) most families had lost their crops due to floods last year. Here we found exceptional levels of group agency in planning, networking and advocacy as well as organisational solidarity, democracy and leadership by women and men, who would usually be the most excluded members of the community.

Box 7. The success of Jalagari Community

Right after Nijera started working in the community, most of the fields in the community were flooded and all crops were destroyed. It was soon discovered that a number of families actually starved and it was decided to assist these families with food to carry them through the starvation period. It was then discussed with the community what could be done to avoid that the disaster spread over to the next growing season and it was decided to provide the community with funds to distribute among the poorest families as loans to start IGAs according to the wish and already existing skills of these families. The community managed the food aid and the funds in a very participatory manner. Some of the families were provided funds for sewing machines and were producing clothes sold in the community, some bought rice and sold it after polishing and others bought cycle vans for transportation.

It appeared to the team that the opportunities brought about by the funds available and the community management of the funds had triggered much hope for future collective action and also solidarity in the community.

The ingredients to this success were identified to be:

- Very good field facilitation which encouraged understanding of the communities social context and community leadership from the start
- Funds provided for community led activities
- Common interest in managing the fund and
- Working in what is defined as a tertiary para (see next section) where there was increased solidarity in the community at this moment of extreme adversity

It has been more difficult for the RLP to develop groups which attend to the needs and interests of the poor in communities where there are powerful elites

Both the experience of RLP staff and research carried out by RLP SDU – In Pursuit of Power (2002) and Securing Access to Water Bodies (2004) - reveal that the political economy of the para is very influential over what the RLP staff could and could not do to improve the livelihoods of the poor and marginalised. Where a few land holders also hold social and political power as well as access to resources such as tube wells or land or water bodies, vertical dependent relations are stronger and developing class based or gender based solidarity in groups has been more complicated. The poor and marginalised are apprehensive to organise outside of the systems permitted and encouraged by the elites as it may result in reprisals in terms of their economic livelihoods. The RLP staff had to spend much time and resources getting the consent of elites which have taken the form of providing technology transfer or including representatives from the elite in the groups. When the group has been dominated by presence of the elite there has been less potential for developing activities which challenge the political and social structural obstacles to poverty.

The SDU developed clear definitions of primary, secondary and tertiary paras depending on distribution of landholdings and links to political and social power. The findings of the SDU have been that in tertiary paras where land is most equally distributed and links to the politically and socially powerful is less there is greater homogeneity, equity and potential for solidarity and common interests amongst the groups. Here there is more potential to discuss and address not only financial aspects of poverty, but political and social structures that exclude the poor.

Empowerment of organisations of the poor around their interests and needs have more chance of being coherent, independent and sustainable when developed in communities less dependent on powerful economic, social and political patrons

Women can benefit tremendously from working in groups but they benefit most by working in separate women's groups

Women in the RLP have benefited greatly from working in groups as they have provided an opportunity for women to meet and work together in many cases for the first time outside their kin groups.

Women participate in RLP in different types of groups; some are groups with only women members and some have mixed men and women in the same groups. During the discussions with the groups and gender focus groups there was much debate as to the benefits of each, but in terms of long term gender empowerment it was generally agreed that:

Women benefit most by working in separate women's groups and these have wider outcomes in terms of women's organisational empowerment.

Social capital accumulated through working in women's groups can be as or more important for women's empowerment than the individual economic improvements

This is despite the fact that the mixed groups often manage to address bigger marketing issues and more easily gain access to service providers than women's groups. The presence of men in the group makes many practical issues easier, since men are more mobile, often better educated and can get access to information easily. The mixed groups, however, have the disadvantage that they tend to sustain and reproduce the structural constraints to women. They do not develop female leadership and even if women are office bearers in the groups they are there as presence rather than practicing participants. These groups also often work with marketing aspects that are beyond the reach of poor women and therefore they lose the potential for social empowerment.

Changing gender power relations depends on long term social and political transformation, but building women's social capital may be the best way to incrementally contribute. The RLP experience is that the coping strategies of poor women have been improved through the solidarity and social assets formed in the group.

Where women work alone in groups, we found that greater solidarity across class by gender is possible. It might mean that steps are more incremental and economic gains slower, but when women's groups nominate poorer women to do the marketing, or to become a service provider there is more strategic impact on women's livelihoods. Also the social capital acquired in the groups is of great importance for women to improve their confidence, capacities and leadership. Social security systems, which are established by the women and accountable to themselves rather than to outside powers (banks, MFIs or patrons) – lead to greater independence and empowerment. The team furthermore found that women's groups often acknowledged changes in terms of household decision making, improved income through collective sales of products and groups actions against social norms.

It has also been learnt that it is important that forums of dialogue are established between men's and women's groups in the current social context of rural Bangladesh so that the men continue to 'allow' the women to meet and they can begin to see the contributions women can make – beyond productive and reproductive tasks – in terms of leadership, analytical thinking, planning and development.

Community savings groups have particular prospects for benefiting poor people and women in particular

Almost all the communities that the team visited were engaged in micro credit schemes with other NGOs or the PNGO. But at the same time most of the groups had engaged in group savings for capital accumulation. The collective savings are high priority with the groups, especially with the poorer members. They use the funds to take loans in turns in some cases with and others without interest. The financial services were discussed with the groups and it was clear that many families combine several types of savings and credits, typically credits from local money lenders, micro credits from NGOs and the group savings. It was also clear that:

Group savings compared to other systems are particularly beneficial for poor people and women because they compared to other systems are:

- More democratic
- Savings based – less risky
- Community driven
- More transparent for the members and more accountable to them
- Decreases vulnerability because the accumulated capital can be used to cover emergency expenses
- Builds social capital
- If loans involves interest, it is profit for the group

That the poor prefer the community savings groups is consistent with other more specific studies, where the savings groups are called Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA) (LMP, 2004).

Marketing groups have increased their income

The concept of addressing markets was introduced as a pilot market initiative in 2002 with the assistance of Natural Resources Institute (NRI) UK. The intervention started in 2001 at a small scale within the GO-INTERFISH project with the assistance of external consultants. A training manual was produced and a one week training course conducted with selected staff in 2001. The manual has later been used to train more staff and also farmers. Initially, 10 strategies for 7 communities were implemented in 26 groups. There are now 628 FFS communities involved in various market initiatives.

Along with the merging of the projects and formation of RLP, a Market and Business Development Unit was introduced. This was initiated with the aim to increase the profit margins of the FFS participants by increasing the value of the produce. In 2004, after arrival of Market and Business Development Adviser, 45 FFS groups were selected to receive more intensive support that included capacity building of FFS participant on group mobilisation, business education, fund raising & use of funds in a constructive manner. These groups are being closely monitored.

Moreover, alliances have been created with organisations that have more experience in the area of market and private sector development for poor producers. The initiative has only worked intensively in the 45 groups for less than a year and naturally the initiative meets strong constraints e.g. in the area of women's participation as well as involvement of poor producers with very small amounts of saleable produce. However, some of the groups have had valuable experiences especially in the area of group marketing, some of which have benefited poor as well as less poor, men and women in whole communities.

A thorough review was carried out on the experiences of the initiatives up to the end of 2003 (Wandschneider, 2004) and a report from December 2004 (Black, 2004) assessed the potential for increasing markets for the rural poor. As the present review only had opportunity to hold interviews with few of the marketing groups, most of the following assessment is based on the mentioned reports and uses a few examples from the interview to illustrate the points.

RLP has gained experiences in marketing with the following focuses:

- Collective fish farming and marketing
- Group vegetable marketing
- Inventory credit for paddy
- Potato storage and off season marketing
- Linking milk producers to remunerative markets
- Linking egg marketing groups to markets

The present team furthermore found a successful community group involved in cultivation, post harvest treatment, storage and marketing of several types of seed such as herb and spices seed and seed potatoes.

The strategies are built on the experiences that it is generally impossible to develop improved markets links for individual producers, when these belong to the poorest and smallest in the rural areas. They therefore focus on:

- Cooperative approaches to marketing
- Promotion of direct linkages between groups and buyers in local urban markets

The group approach is mainly limited to the marketing. Production takes place individually except for the collective fish farming in khas ponds and a few of the vegetable groups, who utilise khas areas collectively for production.

According to the findings of Wandschneider (2004) the initiatives have different prospects for benefiting the different wealth and gender strata of the RLP target group. Table 1 shows amount of participation of the poorest (landless and marginal farmers) and women. It also shows the additional income that the initiatives have created per participant during the months from July to October 2003, and also how this is differentiated between genders.

Table 1. Outcome and impact of market initiatives (Modified from Wandschneider, 2004)				
Initiative	% landless and marginal farmers in the groups	% women in the groups	Additional income during 3 months	Gender differentiated income
Fish farming	76	7	535	
Vegetables	98	15	717	768 for men 412 for women
Inventory credit for paddy	60	0	430	
Potato storage	50	0	1110	
Milk	85	35	520	627 for men 321 for women
Egg	97	100	299	

Fish farming, paddy and potato production are traditionally men's domain and this is reproduced in the marketing initiatives, where women do not participate to any substantial degree. Women might participate in the production, but do not participate in the marketing of

these. Paddy and potato production furthermore involve a certain amount of land available and therefore the participation of landless farmers is considerably less than for vegetables, milk and egg marketing. It should be noted, however that even if women are members of vegetable marketing groups, they are very rarely involved in the practical marketing. The income from the marketing is generally smaller for women than for men, which reflects the fact that women members are generally from poorer households with less productive assets available and therefore they have smaller amounts of produce for sale. Furthermore it should be noted that real commercial production of vegetables appears to be outside of the homestead and women rarely participate in this kind of production.

The fish farming and marketing have involved rather large groups with a broad based group membership with the aim of including different strata and power relations in the communities. The experience is that the large and heterogeneous groups are rather difficult to manage and prone to conflict, but also that the membership of these groups was very beneficial to poorer households because they got access to an opportunity, they would not have had otherwise. This is also confirmed by the study of Bode and Howes (2004). With this type of intervention, there were cases of illegal appropriation of leased water bodies, which the programme was unable to deal with. The groups involved very few women (less than 7% average).

The lessons learned with organisation of large fish marketing groups was that consultation of community leaders and Government Officials is necessary to reduce the risk of illegal appropriation that it is important to link technical advice for increased production with the marketing in order to get a substantial impact and that it needs a long term effort of coaching to make the large groups function satisfactorily

Very small producers are involved in vegetable production, but as the amount of produce is limited to a small surplus after home consumption, they need to organise the sale and link to urban markets or else the prices are extremely low. The RLP interventions have been facilitating appraisal of the market opportunities for the groups and also facilitating groups processes as for example the rules for sharing proceeds from the sale. The review by Wandschneider (2004) concludes that there are good prospects for poor households to benefit from group organisation of the production and marketing of vegetables.

For some rice producing groups RLP has been able to link them to government programmes of storing rice and getting loans based on the crop value, which enables them to delay sales until prices increase. This has provided paddy farmers with opportunity to combine access to cash with better prices of their paddy as a consequence of storing. The principle of cold storage of potatoes is the same; storing potatoes as a group has enabled these to approach private owners of storage facilities and negotiated favourable prices for storing the potatoes with the aim to sell off-season at higher prices. Many of these groups have furthermore purchased inputs collectively at lower prices.

Like the vegetable producers, the small milk producers also need to organise in groups in order to improve their market channels. The RLP intervention has here linked the groups to different outlets such as Milkvita, Arong Milk and local markets and at the same time tried to find way to improve the groups' access to required livestock services. This has prospects for benefiting landless and marginal households and women in particular. The initiative has, however, been unable to deal with cases of lack of transparency in the big marketing organisations such as Milkvita.

The egg marketing might be the most promising experience in terms of benefiting poor women, because traditional egg production is inexpensive to establish and can provide a regular cash

income to very poor women and because the transactions involved in the marketing groups are very simple to manage. In the future it will be possible to scale up into more intensive production systems, which then require improving technical and management skills of producers and also training of service providers.

Despite the fact that the market initiative had a slow start in the RLP and therefore is rather new in the whole picture, it has revealed important learning lessons:

The approach of individual production and group marketing, linking groups and buyers in local urban markets have had promising results in terms of empowering the groups to negotiate better prices for their produce through different means – storing, sale of bigger quantities, improving quality, post harvest treatment, small processing etc., and also reducing prices of inputs through collective purchasing. The most sustainable initiatives have been those that were simple both in terms of organisation and in operation.

It is, however, critical to the continued sustainability of the initiative that good governance procedures are built and maintained in the groups as well as capacity to understand market processes. Attention to constraints in terms of illiteracy and innumeracy might also be crucial and in the long run market initiatives have to be combined with attention to production issues for the producers to be able to produce the right quality in a quantity that makes it profitable.

Group marketing has been particularly beneficial for poor farmers and women, who have small quantities of produce. Through the groups they can obtain important economy of scale in marketing.

The FFS groups have increased access to services but the sustainability is uncertain

The RLP FTs have provided support for communities by creating linkages to service providers mostly in the public sector. The involvement of the private sector has mainly been in connection with marketing and input supply. The services mentioned by most groups are: Agricultural extension, livestock and poultry – training and veterinary services, education, health, family planning and social security services from UP.

At the time of the survey for the Service Access Inventory for the SHABGE component in December 2003, it was found that many groups knew about the public agricultural extension services (70%) but only few groups (11%) actually received the services. Although the lesson learning mission did not make an assessment comparable to this, it was the impression from discussions with the groups that the extensive support from the FTs over the past year has changed this pattern and that in the communities, where RLP works, more people now receive agricultural extension services. The above mentioned report, however, also found that the level of satisfaction was low with almost all services. The participant's reasons for dissatisfaction were especially that the services were rarely timely that the services give most priority to well off farmers and often un-officially demand payment for the services.

The results of the groups in terms of getting access to the UP services are varied and seem to depend mostly on the political linkages of the particular groups. If the groups supported the election of the chairman in office, they are likely to get access, if they supported someone else; they are not likely to get access. There is, however, anecdotal evidence that some FFS group members have become UP council members and that the organised groups get more attention from the local politicians than they used to. However, this too may be simply because of the numbers of votes that the groups would be able to mobilise if they are supported by the UP chairman.

The report showed and the lesson learning mission confirmed that the FFS groups receive agricultural services from many other sources than the government, such as NGOs, private nurseries, seed shops and the community based suppliers.

Women's access to services is still limited by their lack of mobility and voice. Mostly they have to use male relatives as linkages to the service providers. However, as mentioned above, it does appear that certain women – often the poorest - have greater space for movement and exposure and they can therefore act as linkages for the women's groups.

The support from the FTs has been considerable to link up to service providers. It has involved facilitating the production of inventories of locally available services and providing information to the groups regarding their rights to services and procedures for approaching service providers. Many FTs described how they have had to transport public service providers to the communities on their motorbikes. Instead of concentrating on strengthening the capacity of the group to articulate its demands with diverse private and public institutions, the FTs have in many cases created a dependency on CARE to bring in services.

So, despite the fact that many groups expressed confidence to the team that they will have access to the service providers in the future, it is questionable how sustainable the linkages are in the future. This is particularly the case as a number of service providers, mainly from the public sector revealed that a great part of their operations are connected to donors funded programmes and that the coverage of the general services is quite inadequate, (e.g. agricultural extension has 23 Block Supervisors to serve 46,000 farm families in Kurigram and fisheries department has 10 field level extension officers in the same area). It is therefore not likely that these groups will receive the level of attention that they expect from these providers without the ongoing links with CARE.

The lesson learned in terms of organisational empowerment to enable people to articulate informed demand and interact with state institutions and private sector is that it is possible through information (see 5.2), lobby and advocacy to link groups to relevant service providers but it requires a more comprehensive effort to ensure ongoing provision of value services that are sustainable. If the link to service providers depends on the facilitation of CARE or tenuous political vertical relations, organisational empowerment is not being achieved.

The programme has not generated experience in horizontal linking beyond the community groups

Strengthening group organisations by facilitating horizontal linkages of groups with common interests would be a way of broadening the social base for articulation of demand driven opportunities related to markets, laws, policies and services in public and private sector. A stronger voice with clear demand coming out of a few paras within the same geographical area (union) might achieve greater sustainability in terms of relationships to markets and services as the cost for them to deliver is lower. This has, however, not been pursued in the RLP and as such could be said to be a missed opportunity.

Apart from capacity building to articulate group demand, mentioned in 5.2, it would be pragmatic for the RLP groups to organise at a higher level together in order to increase their voice and to increase the emphasis on private sector development

5.4 Institutional Empowerment

Institutional empowerment is when individuals and groups/communities can assert direct influence on development activities and services.

The institutional empowerment is the process that would change the participants from being passive receivers of development programmes to citizens, who assert influence on and take responsibility for their own development. A precondition for this is that the institutional set-up of the programme is empowering and that it has a communication and learning strategy, which makes it possible to carry learning processes and responses effectively up and down in the system.

As described in 3.2, the programme started out as projects with pre-designed activities and groups mobilised and selected according to a pre-designed structure. The scope of activities was narrowly focussed on transfer of certain technologies. The joining of the projects into one programme created a platform for improvements in terms of human resources and synergy between the different sets of technologies, thus widening the scope for the participants. It also increased the scope beyond the focus on technology transfer to include other activities to do with other livelihoods concerns of the participants.

The organisational structure fragmented the programme

Since its formation the RLP has advanced in bringing the separate projects together and created some synergy at the field level, but it has been a very complex process of change and the new organisational structure (see figure 1) has not led to complete mainstreaming of the support units (Technical Coordination Unit, Social Development Unit, Markets and Livelihood Monitoring) within the actual programme of regional activities (SE, NWE, NWW). There have been various degrees of mainstreaming due to different factors for each of the units. The result is that the support units have been less driven by demand from the field level and often compete for the same staffing resources. The support units were deciding and planning activities to be implemented in the regional programmes sometimes as response to demands from the field but often on their own and by recommendation from external consultants and review reports rather than supporting activities planned by the regional programmes. Moreover, the fragmentation between the LMP and the M&E system, which was placed in the Social Development Unit, left the programme without shared and strategic information and learning system that could contribute to institutional empowerment. A big disadvantage has been the gap created in terms of programme impact evaluation. Inconsistent perceptions about the role of the LMU in project and later, programme evaluation led to a missing ingredient in the set of M&E activities planned, i.e. the study of outcomes and impact at the community level, after FFS phase-out, for a broad range of demographic groups.

The lessons are that a programme with a goal of empowerment needs to have institutional arrangements that ensure that the activities are demand driven. It must therefore:

- Encourage feed back from field level to management
- Provide the field level staff with adequate flexibility and capacity to respond to participants' demands and priorities

Strategic leadership and fixed systems are needed in an organisation of this breadth and complexity to ensure dialogue, collaboration and a shared vision of the priorities and focus of the programme.

The capacity of the field staff has developed tremendously

The RLP FTs have had to be very adaptable and pragmatic throughout this process of ongoing programmatic change. The formal season-long training, shorter training sessions in RBA, gender, social, technical and marketing issues and on the job learning-by-doing have increased the experience, knowledge and skills of the field staff. Many of the FTs act not only as trainers but their ongoing presence has become akin to social workers as well as information carriers both of which have had immeasurable impact on rural people, particularly women participants. As such they now constitute a very strong resource base for training, lobby and advocacy for the interests of poor rural people.

However, as mentioned in sections 5.2. and 5.3, until this last year their activities have been very prescriptive and they have not excelled as enablers or facilitators of rural development. Last year's OPR (Bartlett et al. 2004) discussed in detail the institutional constraints to the empowerment of FTs:

- Performance appraisal based on quantitative and structural evaluations
- Inflexible top-down management and upward accountability
- Huge work load and too many tasks being added onto their already full schedules
- Too little communication from the field staff to the programme in order to influence planning, vision and focus of activities
- Too little training and follow-up coaching on the training methodology of the experiential learning cycle
- Not enough training or coaching on needs based facilitation or really understanding 'participation' and the power dynamics between FTs and the communities
- Too much focus in training on the structural aspects of organisational development and not the processes of group development
- Too much focus on delivering templates of technical transfer, production and income expansion

During the last year there has been some progress towards a more demand driven programme and empowering FTs to be more innovative. As part of the exit strategy, the FTs are assisting communities to identify and prioritise needs and services. Effort has been made to improve the vertical and horizontal communication processes in order to ensure better feed back from field level to management and vice versa. The process has been further supported by the greater flexibility that the empowerment indicators have provided to the staff in terms of their evaluation. This appears to have had an impact in terms of more needs based activities and greater responsibility being placed with the participants. This change was acknowledged in almost all the interviews that the team had at all levels of the programme. However, the change has come late and as part of an exit strategy of pulling out of the communities and its impact is therefore limited.

The lesson is that solid and continuous capacity building, vertical and horizontal communication processes and greater flexibility for the staff to be innovative and responsive to community priorities can create strong resources for facilitation of community empowerment.

Gender mainstreamed in the institution

Another area that is important in terms of empowering institutional set up is the issue of gender in the organisation. RLP has set up the GPICs and a gender action plan. Staff interviewed about gender mainstreaming claim that there have been improvements within the programme regarding inclusion and participation of women and the learning throughout the programme has improved overall understanding of the structural obstacles to women's empowerment. The many competent female FTs are strong role models in communities as they practically

demonstrate what women can achieve in rural development. The women FTs have a direct impact on rural attitudes to women's roles. However, it is still apparent that there is a metaphorical 'glass ceiling' for Bangladesh women in the RLP and percentages of women staff decrease drastically going up the RLP hierarchy (see figure 1).

Monitoring and evaluation have been challenging and internal learning and building of knowledge have been hampered

Monitoring and evaluation of the programme through the changing approaches have been challenging and not functioned satisfactorily. It has been particularly difficult to utilise the monitoring systems for internal learning and building of knowledge. Different factors have contributed to this. Above is mentioned the fragmentation between the M&E and the LMP. Another factor is mentioned in 3.1 that the changing goals resulted in the beginning in adding new tools and indicators to the existing, without actually changing the set up and competencies of the M&E unit.

Less has been accomplished since the 2004 OPR in tightening up the equally essential M&E role in assessing the overall success of the programme in providing sustainable and equitable benefits to marginalised groups. In other words, the gaps in the M&E system in evaluating community impact related to livelihoods, rights and empowerment remain open. A suggestion from the 2004 OPR was that the M&E unit might focus on post-FFS community evaluation to fill the gap that existed between the data collected by the M&E team (mostly outputs and mostly beneficiary only) and the (primarily numeric) data collected by the LMP (that samples both participants and non-participants but at a very macro level). The 2004 OPR report suggests some guidelines for such a community assessment. Not surprisingly, given the workload and human resource capacity of the M&E unit, this suggestion could not be acted upon in any meaningful way. This was an eventuality predicted in CARE's response to the 2004 OPR, which proposed that this recommendation be addressed in developing an M&E plan for future programmes.

A chronic problem with the M&E unit (as well as the LMU) has been its inability to get reports finished and disseminated promptly. The delays are due to a number of factors. For the M&E unit, one reason has been the slow delivery of monitoring data from field offices because the FTs have been participating in data collection, which was a task beyond their job descriptions. Even more significant has been the long delays experienced in the process of editing and proofing by senior staff. The LMP has had a slightly different experience, with delays mostly due to a chronic shortage of skilled analysts and writers, for collection, analyses and presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The tools that have been added towards measuring the progress of the RBA and empowerment such as Participants Capacity Matrix, Indicators for Behavioural Change and Service Access Inventory have been measuring behavioural change among beneficiaries as well as among staff in the programme and also outcomes in terms of entitlements for the beneficiaries. These have helped the programme in terms of promoting bottom-up processes. They are, however, still top-down implemented tools. The tools themselves do not make the participants more active in the monitoring and learning processes of the programme. Moreover, really measuring the progress of a RBA empowerment programme requires measuring real social change in a wider context than the particular beneficiaries, which goes beyond the behavioural changes.

The Participatory Self Evaluation tool is functioning as a tool for the groups to evaluate and plan their own performance and activities. Annex 6 provides an assessment of how the use of

the tool has developed since it was initiated. There is however still no tool or mechanism available for the participants to participate in monitoring the programme as such.

The RLP has struggled to find a balance between its reporting requirements and the desire to make M&E a participatory, community-based function. While M&E serves different needs for different stakeholders, its purpose can be generally captured in two main roles:

- Measuring and documenting accomplishments and progress
- Informing decisions regarding new policies, strategies and methods

This dichotomy is valid whether we are talking about a participatory process internal to an FFS group or the M&E system for the programme itself.

The lessons learned from these experiences are that

Vertical and horizontal communication and learning systems are required and should be channelled into an overall programmatic data and knowledge framework. Participants need to become institutional parts of this system of learning. Tools and mechanisms should ensure participation in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme and services. Moreover, it would be essential to develop analytical tools to measure social change beyond behaviours and outcomes of the participants.

It may be useful to think of two parallel systems: One that is owned by the participants and a second, managed by the programme's M&E system, which is essentially extractive and responds to needs of stakeholders external to the FFS. The two systems would share many objectives (e.g. detect and explain changes in attitudes of members and non-members regarding women's roles and rights) but require different methods. It should, however, be ensured that the participants' learning is integrated into that of the programme's.

M&E functions should not be scattered among disparate units but fit into a strategic plan that builds knowledge from data and then uses that knowledge for management decisions and strategic planning. The ideal structure may be for the M&E unit to report directly to project or programme coordinator, and that the coordinators have strong understanding of M&E systems to ensure that the information is relevant to program decision making and not overly burdensome.

It is important to ensure sufficient numbers and competencies of staff to analyse data, make sense of findings and craft messages for an external audience.

Linking FFS groups to service institutions only partly successful

An important exit strategy has been linking the FFS or community groups to service institutions in order to achieve sustainability. As mentioned before, most of the groups interviewed have been successfully linked to service institutions and made good use of the services. For example, the potato producing and marketing groups that were interviewed highly appreciated the services they received from DAE on plant protection. When they had experienced disease attacks, they had called the Block Supervisor, who could advise them what to do. Also the Livestock Services, especially on training of vaccinators were much appreciated.

The activities have however not included facilitation of empowerment of the groups towards the service institutions as such. The service institutions that the groups have been linked to have mainly been government institutions and NGOs, which operate in top-down systems, which by nature do not have the ability to respond to user demands. It could therefore not be

expected that the approach of linking the groups to the services would change the institutions in terms of increased poverty focus, responsiveness or sustainability. Several of the interviewed FTs expressed serious concern about the sustainability of the linkages.

The community based services that have been developed during the RLP have the effect of making services available in the communities at a low price and within the reachable distance for most poor women. It is, however, not clear how these will be sustained in the future in terms of professional backstopping.

To achieve institutional empowerment in this area would require a thorough analysis of the required services and of the public and private sector roles in these. For many services related to income opportunities, they would probably be most well served from the private sector, where the ability to respond to user demand is stronger.

In order to improve responsiveness of public sector services there would be need to facilitate horizontal linkages of organisations much beyond the group level.

The training of community based service providers is a good beginning of private sector development for pro-poor service provision, but it would need stronger interventions in terms of analyses of economical viability of the services, access to Business Development Services and institutional development for professional backstopping.

6. Conclusions

RLP has been a massive laboratory for learning on empowerment at community level, despite not originally being designed for empowerment. Through the evolving strategies it has made progress in terms of particularly the following:

- Knowledge empowerment
- Strengthening community groups
- Institutional empowerment set-up
- Gender empowerment

RLP was primarily designed to address issues of poverty from the community level. It is therefore not surprising that the most substantial outcomes of RLP have been in terms of increased individual capabilities while the change of formal and informal opportunity structures, which would address fundamental root causes of poverty, have been much more limited.

The main findings of the lesson learned mission have been the following:

RLP activities have increased farming skills and technical and market knowledge of participants. Male participants with sufficient land have improved and diversified their productive assets by applying the new technologies. Women participants have increased vegetable production.

There is evidence, from interviews and project monitoring and evaluation reports that many participants have increased their income from these activities and household food security has been improved. The Livelihood Changes in Northwest Bangladesh: Pattern and Processes (LMP,2004) report, which is based on a comprehensive survey of actual livelihood changes of households, found evidence of positive changes in some asset values such as livestock, education and social capital that were related to participation in RLP activities This confirms

the impression found during Lessons Learnt mission that the RLP interventions have assisted rural families to strengthen their coping strategies and that some of these families are on the way out of poverty.

The mission found that the FFS was successful in its methodology of practical training. The practical experimentation in study plots motivated the farmers to adopt new technologies and the practical training provided participants with the necessary skills. It was less clear to the mission whether farmers were able to critically analyse their production issues. Achieving this objective was constrained by educational culture, prioritisation of technology transfer rather than critical thinking, performance appraisals and insufficient training or coaching to FTs on methodologies to promote analytical thinking.

Small farmers and women were less able to benefit from the RLP rice-fish interventions. The more recent needs driven interventions have been more appropriate for the poor and women. This has been training in livestock, poultry, sanitation and other Income Generating Activities.

Small but significant steps towards women's empowerment have begun through the interventions of RLP. The catalysts have been the solidarity and social capital built through women's groups, the small income that they have accrued and the awareness raising about rights and structural causes of poverty and exclusion. Although it is hard to measure, many women RLP participants claim that these interventions have resulted in changes in terms of their confidence and security, their mobility and the power relations within households. There are stories of some women taking on service roles in the para, having greater control over assets, taking up positions which could influence institutions such as the salish and challenging structures that repress women within their communities. In the current social environment in Bangladesh working with women alone to strengthen their capacities in practical, strategic and structural opportunities is the best way to improve their condition and status.

RLP groups have acquired several organisational experiences of collective action. They are en route towards articulating informed demand and interacting with state institutions and the private sector. However, organisational empowerment has been constrained by:

- Prior to mid 2004 RLP focused on quantitative outputs and setting up structures rather than encouraging cooperative, democratic and inclusive group development
- Too much coordination by FTs and not enough self-organisation by group members
- Vertical dependency relationships, which deter potential development of horizontal solidarity

Spontaneous and sustained horizontal solidarity is best achieved when groups are self defined, homogenous, based on common interests and have incentives to work together. The groups that the mission visited showed greater levels of solidarity, mutual support and accountability than during the 2004 OPR.

The FFS groups have increased access to services. However, the ability of groups to articulate demand and sustainably access services is more questionable. There have been signs of increased responsiveness from government institutions towards the poor participants, but overall the outcomes have depended much on well-meaning individuals, strong advocacy from the FTs towards government institutions and local elites and coincidences of political coherence between the groups and the local power structure rather than organisational empowerment. Some groups have strengthened their negotiating power to and

responsiveness from markets and some few private sector input suppliers. This has been especially so for men and for better off farmers.

The incorporation of 'empowerment' as a goal in the last year has improved the programme's integration of the Livelihoods and Rights Based Approach. Staff has welcomed that change as they can see the impact on the more excluded members of the community. However, FTs state that the impact has been limited as the programme has no concerted activities to address the socio-political dynamics that sustain discrimination and poverty. The Nijera pilot is exploring with communities ways to challenge these constraints and is initiating work to affect change with relation to the enabling environment. The methodology of building informed agency of the most vulnerable citizens into groups linked by solidarity with broad membership is strategic in achieving the continuum: Voice – agency/citizenship – incentives towards cooperation of groups – responsiveness – accountability.

The RLP staff is well trained, committed and adaptable to constant and demanding change. The field staff has not only provided training, advice and linkages to institutions outside of the communities, but they have often taken on even bigger roles as social workers. However, more training on facilitation skills and processes of empowerment would be necessary for the promotion of more self-sustained development. Women FTs have had un-measurable impact on rural perceptions of women. Their mobility, confidence and capacity to interact with rural men and women have increased respect and tolerance by rural men and women and adolescent girls see them as role models.

RLP's investment in M&E has yielded many positive outcomes including some innovative M&E tools and interesting and useful information. But ultimately, the M&E system and team in place are not the system and team required for the programme as it currently exists. There are two reasons for this:

1. The programme's evolution was not matched by a corresponding evolution in M&E tools and skills. The changing nature of RLP's expected outcomes, with ever greater emphasis on rights and, quite recently, empowerment, would require an M&E system that places greater emphasis on qualitative data (while not negating the need for collecting quantitative data). This requires different and in many ways more sophisticated tools and skills for data collection, analysis and interpretation. This has been a challenge for the RLP, one that was not adequately addressed
2. Poor coordination among the various units involved in collecting data and generating information left gaps in the types of information being gathered. Most critically, the M&E unit's focus on monitoring outputs and effects and the LMP's focus on assessing change at the macro level left a gap in terms of impact evaluation at the community level

There has been very limited progress on strategically challenging the structural causes of poverty such as gender and social rules and power relations with local elites that perpetuate discrimination, exclusion and poverty. Social and political transformation is a long term process and cannot be addressed without having a concerted and strategic plan of action on the enabling environment. For example it is widely agreed that progress in terms of women's status requires action at a higher level legally, structurally and in terms of social and power relations to impact on patriarchy. RLP has improved the condition of women participants through some economic and social empowerment but not really caused the status of women to change.

The social development pilots have shown that understanding social and political context is fundamental to development work in rural communities. RLP has been constrained by local

elites and power structures, which in some communities are decisive to how far groups of poor people can develop beyond the boundaries decided by these elites. Moreover, the interventions have concentrated on strengthening groups at the community level but not moved into facilitating horizontal linkages of groups to higher level organisation.

RLP has produced massive learning, capacity and skills in rural development strategies. The move from interventions of prescribed technologies for food security to flexible demand driven activities has increased RLP prospects for impact on the lives of poor rural people. In this context the programme has made progress in terms of the institutional set-up. RLP has over time become more flexible to the requirements of the participants and has managed over the last year to facilitate greater learning horizontally and vertically from field level to management level and vice versa. There are, however, still drawbacks in the empowering aspects of the institutions. The participants have become more involved in the planning and implementation of the development activities. They have, however, no influence on design, monitoring and evaluation of the activities. In terms of institutional influence on services, there is still some way to go. Evolving trends and log-frames have meant several changing goalposts.

The adaptability of the programme and staff has been impressive, but impact could have been improved if:

- Learning had been comprehensively integrated and action taken earlier towards empowerment
- There had been greater emphasis on internal organisational reflection rather than outside influence
- Planning, prioritisation and strategies had been concerted and clear
- There had been stronger and clearer communication on rights and empowerment

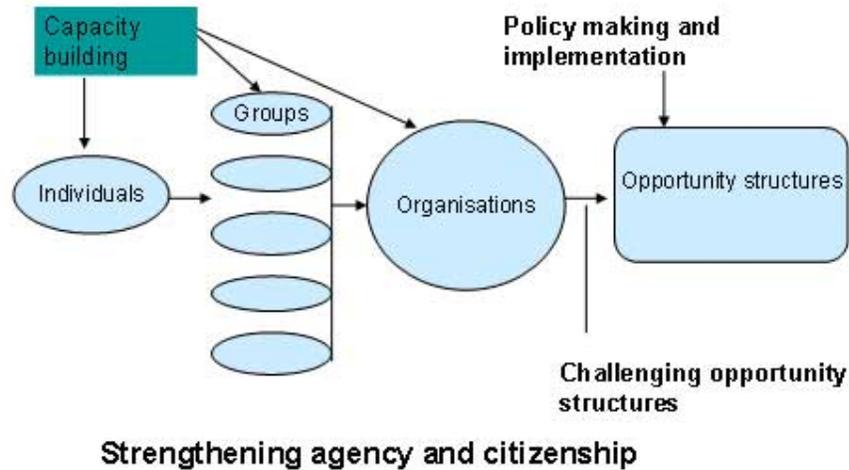
The question is therefore how to take empowerment further and substantially change the opportunity structures which sustain rural poverty?

Taking empowerment a step further

To take empowerment a step further will require a programme that challenges opportunity structures to become enabling for pro-poor development. Addressing poverty effectively therefore means working on rights, control and ownership of resources and power. This will require undertaking activities beyond the communities in order to impact policy, accountable service provision and formal and informal power structures

Figure 5 illustrates the issues involved in taking empowerment a step further towards strengthening agency and citizenship among poor and marginalised groups. It shows how capacity building and facilitation of individuals and groups of poor people with common interests can enable these to organise in such a way that they gain a voice that can challenge opportunity structures. It, however, also illustrates that the move from groups to higher level organisation also needs facilitation and much capacity building. This creates a push of challenging opportunity structures, which may have some impact but probably not unless it is supported and enabled by parallel processes at the level of policy making and implementation that creates formalised channels for influence of the organisations of the poor.

Figure 5. Taking empowerment a step further



RLP has successfully operated in the area of strengthening individuals and community groups and in a few cases this has led to the beginning of some sort of organisation. A programme design towards real empowerment of poor rural people can therefore build on the lessons learned in terms of approaches, methodologies and strategies at the grass root level, but it must furthermore include strategies to take the steps further towards changing opportunity structures.

The Nijera pilot project was established as a response to the OPR 2004's identification of some of the above mentioned limitations. "Entry points to empowerment" (Bartlett 2004) recommended piloting what was called livelihood campuses, where the FFS strategy is taken into a community wide approach in – 'a conducive setting, with a relevant entry-point and a capable facilitator'. The idea is to start with an activity that involves the whole community as an entry point and thereafter let the community define subsequent activities in groups of common interests as well as collective community activities.

Nijera was thereafter started as a pilot of social research based on learning of what had been obstructing comprehensive empowerment in the RLP. It also set out to truly incorporate the principles of RBA: addressing socio-political, economic and power dynamics that are obstructing poverty reduction; participation as both a means and a goal; prioritisation of empowerment; non discrimination and focus on vulnerable groups; goals defined in terms of reducing disparity; and poor people not beneficiaries, but actors in their own development.

It aims to increase the agency of poor men and women to improve their livelihood conditions and participate in key decision making forums within their community as well as the larger locality. A workshop was held in October 2004 that marked the beginning of the pilot with the Social Development Unit and twenty RLP field staff in five communities. The pilot had therefore been operating in the communities for only 3 months at the time of the lessons learned mission and it is not yet possible to conclude on the experiences. Box 8 describes briefly the pilot and points to the observations that relates to the prospects for strengthening agency and citizenship of the poor.

Box 8. The Nijera pilot for empowerment of the rural poor

The most important differences from the RLP activities are that Nijera:

- Have selected poorer communities with less class differentiation in order to avoid the influence of local elites and have greater possibilities for horizontal community solidarity
- Work specifically on empowerment, not with a particular focus on food security or service access
- Work with the whole community - not one particular group
- Do not bring in a technology package – the activities are supposed to be community driven
- Start in all communities with a community lead sanitation activity and thereafter the communities identify common interest groups which define the further activities according to their priorities
- The FTs have received special training as facilitators and in depth training on power relations
- The Nijera teams are semi-autonomous teams operating in the field with back up and expert support from SDU
- The FTs work at the times that are appropriate for the poor to meet
- There are 4 to 5 facilitators working in each community
- Work mostly on issues related mostly to class with a more indirect focus on gender
- Aim to work on a cluster of paras within one union to be able to develop a significant mass which may have more potential to influence formal and informal, public and private norms, institutions and services
- Support and encourage natural leaders in different activities from the outset to carry forward development work in the communities
- Facilitate a community analysis and understanding of their assets and obstacles to improved livelihoods and their own potential for self realisation outside of dependency relationships

The observations of the team were the following:

- Having selected communities with less class differentiation is likely to make the process of empowerment easier than having to deal with disempowering power structures and local elites. Interesting results may appear of how communities in this case can build solidarity and voice through collective action. Nijera should use this pilot to document what the different elements are that promote and sustain horizontal solidarity so as to be able to consider how to apply them and strengthen them to overcome the vertical dependency relationships with elites and conflicting interest groups found in primary and secondary paras.
- The pilot aims at promoting community led activities, which are in accordance with the overall experience of RLP and are likely to be more effective in terms of knowledge, organisational and institutional empowerment. In one community Nijera had provided a loan fund for the most food insecure families. The community carried the whole responsibility for managing the fund and this appeared to have created activities and leadership dynamics which were very interesting in a very short period of time. (see p 29)
- While it is acknowledged that the community led sanitation activity is extremely relevant in most rural communities in Bangladesh and also has potential to facilitate community cooperation, the team still questions the appropriateness of using a pre-described activity as an entry point. In 'Entry Points to Empowerment' where the livelihood campus idea was defined it clearly states – 'Don't use the same entry points in all locations'. The danger is that the communities loose part of the ownership from the beginning. The perception stated to the team in some of the Nijera communities was that "CARE wants us to work on sanitation" and one community were not 'allowed' to move on to other activities until they had completed 100% sanitation
- The training has made significant impact on the FTs' capacity to be more facilitators than trainers with a deeper understanding of the political, social and economic context of their work. At the outset of engagement with the community, the pilot has placed much emphasis on facilitating social analyses of the communities. On one hand the focus on facilitation has the potential to place greater responsibility with the community for activities and provides an in depth understanding of the community. On the other hand the observation of the team is that four or five facilitators in one community are overwhelming. The communities might be over facilitated, it should be remembered that facilitation is never neutral and therefore numbers do matter for true

self realisation.

- The system of semi-autonomous Nijera teams has the potential to overcome many of the institutional and organisational obstacles that RLP has had regarding empowering institutional set up. Without strict performance appraisals, top down management and upward accountability, the facilitators are more able to be flexible to the needs of the community and more capable of influencing the planning, vision and focus of activities.
- The lack of gender focus is likely to cause women to be marginalised. Gender based focus groups discussions in one community revealed that women were not well informed about the activities and had no part in leadership. Working on empowerment of class and gender are not mutually exclusive and the pilot will be improved if strategies are developed to focus on participation and inclusion of women's needs and interests.
- While it is acknowledged that Nijera is a social research pilot, the team would recommend that sustainability and possibilities for up-scaling should be a focus of ongoing attention.

Nijera has started a process that has the potential to enable greater awareness and understanding of the social context, greater agency of individuals and groups in the community and greater possibilities for clusters of groups to have influence over social norms, services and markets to sustainably improve their livelihoods. In time the pilot will be able to provide more valuable lessons on the possibilities for addressing the fundamental causes of poverty through empowerment at community level.

According to the lessons learned in the RLP during the last five years a programme towards empowerment of the poorest rural people must apply to the following principles:

- Be led by participants' own identification of needs, opportunities and planning from the beginning
- Place the responsibility for implementation with the participants
- Clearly define poverty and equity criteria
- Work with a strong approach to gender empowerment
- Use empowering funding mechanisms (e.g. community managed funds for accessing services)
- Enhance organisational development of common interest groups and horizontal linkages between such for a stronger citizen voice

An empowerment programme must have a strategy for sustainable development of poverty focussed and demand driven services. This involves:

- Strengthen capacity to articulate informed demands
- Analyse and clear out the different roles of public and private sector for service provision

For public sector services this means strengthening the voice of the poor. For private sector services it means to facilitate development of demand driven pro-poor services taking in a strategy of community based service providers.

It must furthermore have a strategy for improving the poor's access to markets. This means realistically analysing the particular opportunities of poor men and women and involves a private sector strategy in pro-poor development such as working with producer groups, Medium and Small-scale Enterprises (MSE) and access to business development services.

The methodologies and strategies used must prioritise elements such as:

- Agency for social action as it is the key to moving up the vulnerability ladder
- Focus on building social capital that prioritise capacity for inclusive solidarity
- Facilitate knowledge, economic and most importantly social capital empowerment for women

Lastly it must be emphasised that full scale facilitating empowerment as it is described in figure 5 with impacts of real changes of opportunity structures may not be possible for one programme alone. Achieving impact on policy, service provision, formal and informal power structures are long term goals and require both social and political transformation. It will therefore need cohesive efforts for many development agents. It is therefore recommended to build networks of partners who have the competencies and strengths to make a contribution at different levels of this landscape of empowerment.

7. Livelihood Monitoring

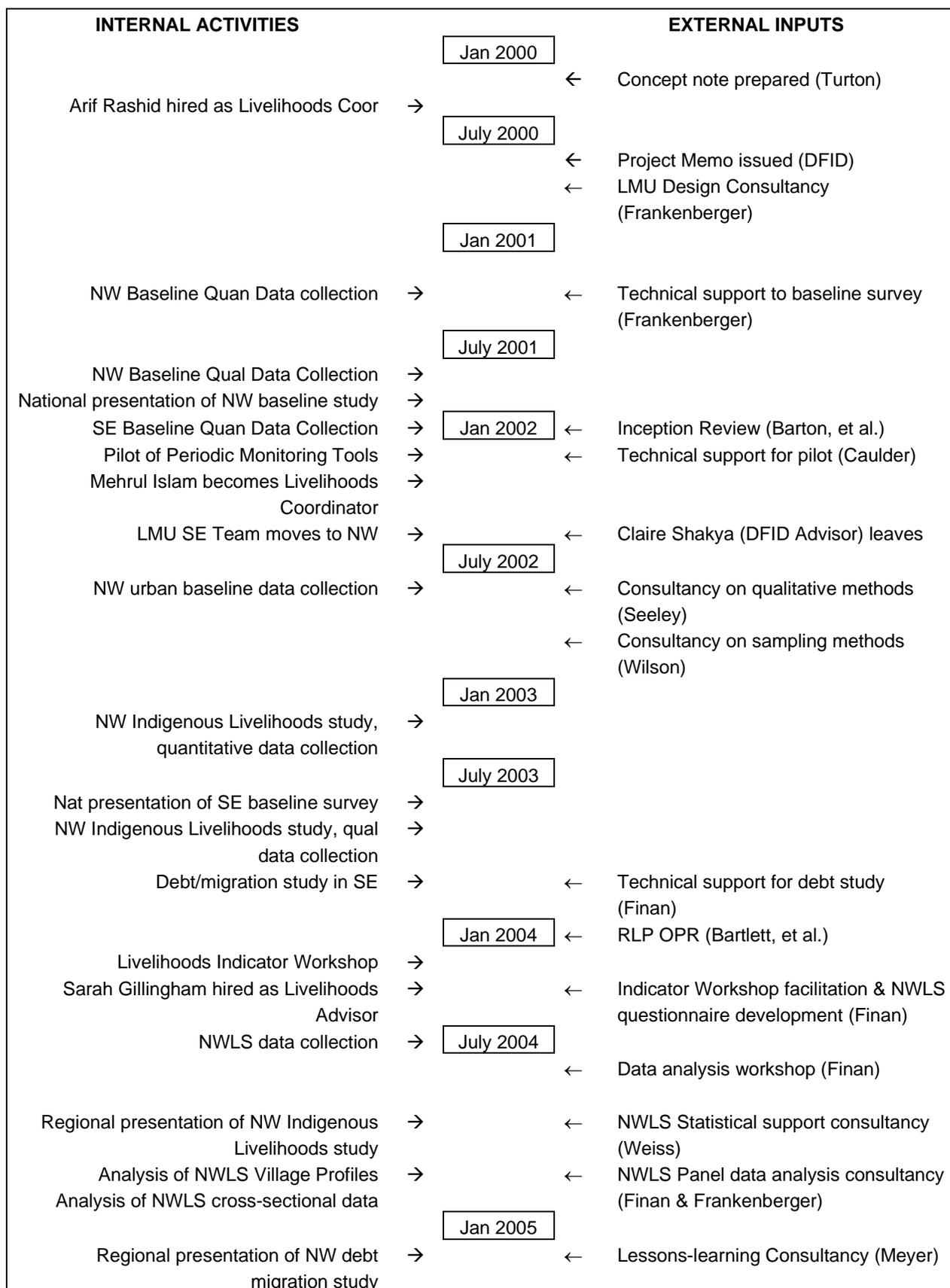
The Livelihoods Monitoring Unit (called the Livelihoods Monitoring Project until 2004) has been in service since late 2000. Besides an Inception Review in 2002 and a brief review as part of the RLP OPR of 2004, the LMU has not been formally scrutinised by external assessors. (Figure 1 on the next page presents a timeline with the major events in the history of the project.) Now, however, is not the time for a formative evaluation as LMU activities will soon end. Rather, some reflection is appropriate on the path the project has followed, what has been accomplished, and the lessons-learned from the experience. This report, which should serve as the first step in the reflection process, was based on a brief participatory review, including interviews with key stakeholders of the LMU and a document review. As such, most of the content of this report should be well known to most stakeholders.

7.1. LMU Achievements

The LMU staff was polled as to the accomplishments and value-added of livelihoods monitoring from their individual points-of-view. Box 9 presents a sample of team responses. In addition, Annex 10 has a set of brief stories written by individual team members, recounting personal highlights of their time with the LMU.

Box 9: Value and Accomplishments of the LMU, Point-of-View of the LMU staff*
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives broader understanding of livelihoods context in northwest and southeast geographical regions, including cross-regional comparisons, which is necessary to design interventions that can improve the livelihoods of poor people• Allow cross-sectoral learning about the underlying/root causes of poverty and the drivers of changing livelihoods systems. Helps to understand changes in people's livelihoods over time• Tested and developed key livelihood indicators to measure the changes in people livelihoods• Results are available to a wide range of development actors/organisations and can be used by them for designing programs/interventions. Some results have been applied by SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH• The information generated by LM is highly representative, robust – due to its sample size and methodology• Study findings have been disseminated in regional and national levels and published in newspapers• Embeds a livelihood monitoring system within CARE, rather than requiring CARE to contract with a third party. Spreads the HLS philosophy throughout the programme• Different projects and NGOs can adopt and use different LM tools (e.g. Indigenous study by GBK used LMU survey methodology). Collaborative/research partnership established: BRIF, GBK, Proshika, BIDS, PDO-ICZD, ITDG• LMU can assess the impact on people's livelihoods by different projects/programmes, and by different organizations• Exploration of debt and migration issues contributed to rethinking by micro-finance institutions their micro-credit programs• A study conducted on Indigenous Livelihoods in NW indicating some major crisis and problems of NW indigenous people <p>* Entries generated separately by senior managers, male FTs and female FTs. Results were combined here due to broad consensus and overlap. Some editing was done by the report author.</p>

Figure 6: Timeline of major activities and inputs, CARE-B Livelihoods Monitoring Project



The results of these exercises demonstrate/reflect the positive feelings of staff members about the accomplishments of the LMU. Viewed objectively, the staff do indeed have much of which to be proud. However, a comparison of proposed vs. actual outputs also reveals that the LMU has fallen short of expectations in a number of instances. Table 2 below presents the set of proposed and accomplished outputs of the LMU. The paragraphs that follow briefly analyse the degree to which the project has succeeded in meeting its milestones and objectives.

Table 2: LMU Products, Proposed and Actual

(Potentially) Recurrent	Ad Hoc / Commissioned	Proposed / Piloted (but not currently part of system)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Northwest and Southeast Baseline and Follow-up Surveys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cross-sectional and panel data analysis ▪ Village/Community Profiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Debt and Migration Studies in the NW and SE ▪ NW/SE Comparative Analysis for Debt Study ▪ NW Urban Livelihoods Baseline Study (for SHAHAR project) ▪ NW Rural-Urban Linkages Study (with IFPRI) ▪ NW Indigenous Livelihoods Study (on behalf of GBK, a local NGO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health Thematic Case Study ▪ Participant/Non-Participant Case Studies ▪ Periodic (six-monthly) livelihoods monitoring. ▪ Nutritional Surveys ▪ Market Surveys ▪ Livelihoods Monitoring Toolkit

LMU Successes and Gaps

Table 2 above outlines LMU products and notes some additional activities that were ultimately not accommodated within the work plan. A slightly different presentation would note activities proposed (in the IR, the most recent detailed design document) and accomplished, not proposed but accomplished, and proposed but not accomplished. If presented in such a way, Table 2 would be largely identical. The exception would be that most of the activities in column 2, while not explicitly proposed in the PM/IR, may satisfy their call for thematic case studies or studies related to policy and institutions. Given that a fair number of proposed outputs were not achieved, some shortfall would be expected in reaching higher objectives.

Indeed, the LMU purpose, shown in Table 3, which calls for a replicable livelihoods monitoring system, developed, documented and shared, was not achieved and does not seem to be achievable. This judgment is based on two distinct observations. First, as discussed in some detail later in this report, the methodology used in the latest livelihoods survey had some missing ingredients, most notably a tool for the collection of qualitative data to support and explain numeric findings. As important however, is the opinion of many key stakeholders that a totally replicable system is not a useful or feasible end product. Contextual differences, varying objectives and information needs, and even institutional capacity, would require that a new system (including indicators and the means for their measurement) be devised for each new case. What, then, has been achieved by the LMU? The following bullets highlight the most significant successes, from the author's point of view.

➤ Institutional Capacity

LMU studies generally involved RLP field staff and LMU staff frequently participated in M&E-related activities of projects/programmes. These circumstances have no doubt helped infuse CARE with key concepts and skills related to programming within the livelihoods framework. In addition, internal efforts to refine LMU tools, and particularly to select

relevant indicators for measuring rights and empowerment outcomes, have enhanced institutional awareness and capacity

➤ **Body of Knowledge**

The large LMU surveys, although perhaps not exactly conducted as anticipated by the original design team, are amongst the most comprehensive and in-depth studies available for the areas and/or themes studied. The two reports that have been in circulation the longest, the NW and SE baselines, are considered by many to be valuable references. Newer studies, particularly the debt and migration, indigenous livelihoods studies, which explored issues that have been understudied, will likely acquire the same reputations. In addition, comparative analyses between baseline and more recent livelihood studies will help CARE and other stakeholders understand the impact of RLP programme interventions.

➤ **Institutional Prestige**

While CARE does not necessarily seek acclaim; the awareness and respect generated by the regional and national presentations of LMU studies have likely facilitated CARE's interaction with a range of institutional partners.

➤ **Advocacy**

While specific cases of changed institutional attitudes and policies may not be visible, presentation of LMU-generated information may be a positive influence for some. For instance, the recent NW and SE sharing sessions for the debt/migration study have been positively received by a range of key stakeholders who have at least expressed an interest in shaping their programmes accordingly.

➤ **Methodology Promotion**

There has been significant interest in LMU methods/approaches by a number of partner organisations that would not otherwise be capable of carrying out such work. The best example, already well documented, is the use of LMU methods by the local NGO, GBK, during livelihoods assessments in indigenous communities. The LMU has made itself more valuable in this regard by carefully documenting its methods for each survey it conducts, an important part of the project's legacy.

Despite these successes, a number of LMU shortcomings or gaps can also be cited. Perhaps the most significant output that was anticipated but not achieved was a system for frequent (ultimately proposed as six-monthly) livelihoods monitoring, that would combine qualitative and quantitative data during an efficient analytical process. Nutritional assessment, proposed as a complement to the broader livelihoods surveys, proved impossible to implement. Finally, the LMU wisely decided recently that it would not attempt to develop a livelihoods monitoring toolkit, as was prescribed in its log frame, but would instead focus on identifying and documenting the lessons learned in the course of its implementation. In the first two instances, capacity gaps made it impossible for potentially valuable activities to be achieved.⁵ The proposed toolkit, on the other hand, does not seem like a sensible idea. Methodological toolkits are already in abundance; one specifically tailored to the LMU's operating environment and institutional requirements would probably not be applicable by others without significant

⁵ Regarding the six-monthly monitoring tool, a consultant-led process did not yield a workable design and the activity was dropped from the LMU work plan. Capacity for nutritional assessment is not resident in CARE-B, and although the 2001 Northwest baseline survey included a separate nutritional assessment, concerns were also raised regarding the quality of the data collected and report produced by the external organization contracted for that work. It subsequently proved impossible to find an alternative organisation with the required expertise in that field to undertake the additional nutritional assessments proposed in the original LMP design.

modification. The following sections, describe the events and decisions made over the past five years, focusing on the factors that made the LMU what it is and the lessons that can be derived from the experience.

Table 3: Livelihoods Monitoring Project – Evolution of Goal, Purpose and Output Statements

	Pre – 2002 (Project Memo)	2003 (Inception Report)	Post 2003 (RLP log frame)
Goal	To increase the effectiveness of CARE and DFID’s current and future interventions for rural poor in Bangladesh.	To increase the effectiveness of the CARE and DFID’s future interventions to strengthen rights and livelihoods in the countries where they work.	
Purpose	Livelihood lessons from SHABGE & GO-INTERFISH applied by DFID & CARE	To develop and pilot in Bangladesh a widely applicable system of monitoring change in the livelihoods and rights of the rural and urban poor and vulnerable.	A simple and replicable system for monitoring change in the livelihoods and entitlements of the rural poor is developed, documented and shared internally and externally.
Outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Livelihoods changes in project participants quantified 2. Cause of livelihood changes of project participants understood 3. Wider livelihood context of project area analysed 4. Guidelines for livelihoods monitoring developed 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Light, affordable, adaptable system and tools for monitoring livelihood change and project impact among poor and vulnerable in regions where CARE works in Bangladesh 2. Institutionalisation of system across all programmes in all sectors within CARE Bangladesh 3. In interaction with the poor, identification of issues for advocacy (with NGOs, local and national government, PRSP players) and advocacy activities piloted 4. Dissemination 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Key livelihood indicators are identified which effectively represent the most critical/vulnerable areas of livelihood for the poor, and the measurement of which, will allow organisations to effectively ascertain the impact of their programs 2. Robust, cost-effective, adaptable tools and systems developed for monitoring effectiveness of Rural Livelihood interventions, which are shared with a range of stakeholders in Bangladesh 3. At least 5 development organisations and/or relevant GOB departments (BRAC, Proshika, BIDS, Save the Children, WFP, DAE, etc.) join CARE in a dialogue on the identification, measurement and use of livelihood indicators during presentations/workshops and other existing forums. 4. Specific ongoing interventions (such as nutrition, savings, group formation etc.) within RLP projects and other CARE projects are identified and reviewed to ensure that “best practices” are being established and implemented consistently 5. There will be a greater understanding and more consistent use of commonly used livelihood indicators that might include: “food security”, wealth ranking, diseases, interest rates, nutrient deficiency, quantification of assets, etc. among development organisations within Bangladesh

7.2 LMU Design and Redesign

As noted in the timeline, the LMU came into being in late 2000 when a Project Memorandum (PM) was produced. The evolution of LMU objectives is described in Table 3. PM phrasing is in the second column. The PM states that the project was designed to “identify and document the lessons learned from SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH and share the lessons to enable DFID-B and CARE Bangladesh to apply these in project design and better targeting of interventions.”

A set of major activities was proposed to achieve the objectives, namely: a) develop a livelihoods monitoring framework and tools to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative information, b) administer quantitative surveys to collect information on a set of livelihood indicators; c) use PLA tools including semi-structured interviews and case studies to develop village profiles, and d) conduct participatory monitoring to understand the qualitative changes in peoples livelihoods. An additional activity implicit in the design was the dissemination of the findings of livelihoods monitoring and the promotion of the framework and tools throughout CARE and DFID. To achieve these tasks, the project was provided with the following human resources: one Livelihoods Coordinator, two PDOs, and seven FTs. External support was to be forthcoming from consultants, the DFID-B Livelihoods Advisor and CARE International. In addition, external support was to be contracted to help with anthropometric surveys.

With the benefits of hindsight, two major issues from the original design are apparent. Firstly, the proposed workload was unrealistic both in terms of sheer volume of work, given a relatively small staffing allotment, and the overloading of the work plan with data collection activities with very limited allowance/ consideration of the time required for data analysis. For comparison, the current LMU, about 50% larger than the original staff plan, has worked hard to fulfill a work plan significantly smaller than the one originally proposed. Secondly, the types of studies and analyses proposed did not correspond well with the skill-sets of staff engaged. The PM proposed that FTs (referred to as ‘enumerators’ in the document), with support of the PDOs, would be collecting and processing quantitative and qualitative data, generating case studies and village profiles, etc. History has shown that FTs, and even some PDOs, are well equipped to conduct quantitative surveys but are usually not highly skilled in qualitative research, data analysis or report composition. In addition, few FTs could be involved in data entry and processing, contrary to the expectations of the PM. This task mostly fell on the PDOs, who nevertheless needed substantial backstopping in the form of TA inputs from external consultants. None of this is meant as a criticism of FTs, who have usually conducted their work with skill and enthusiasm. Rather, it is a matter of unrealistic expectations by the PM author.

Inception Review and its Implications

Anyone who has written or reviewed PMs knows that they are often based on informed assumptions and rough estimations. Retrospective examinations typically reveal gaps or inconsistencies, unrealistic work plans or inadequate budgets. DFID has a useful system for correcting the flaws of PMs – the Inception Review (IR). It seems appropriate at this point to examine how the LMU IR went about trying to correct observed flaws in the PM. The gaps or problems highlighted in the IR are paraphrased below. The reader should note that these bullets, written in the present tense, are statements made by the IR team in early 2002:

- Considerable problems in working in partnership with GOIF and SHABGE, largely because of contradictory expectations about the services LMU was to provide. It is no longer obviously appropriate for the projects to see LMU as monitoring impact
- Complementarities between project and LMU monitoring systems is still not established; rather there is confusion, overlap and contradiction prevailing

- DFID has expressed doubts about whether there was sufficient high-level commitment to LMU. Milestones have been added to the log frame to provide indicators of commitment.⁶
- Despite the intention of cutting out redundant questions from the baseline survey or modifying them to be more culturally appropriate for the Southeast baseline, the number of questions was actually increased since it was still focused on meeting project specific output monitoring needs
- The project has been focused on fine-tuning tools and not on external interaction
- A major problem has been in data analysis. Much of the baseline data remains to be analysed. It has proved challenging for the LMU to link quantitative and qualitative information

The IR team proposed a number of changes to the project, ostensibly to respond to the problems identified above. Its primary suggestion was that, “the solution to these limitations on the project’s potential lies in lifting the level at which the project works, and lightening the load by developing tools more suited to capacity”. As has been amply documented, lifting the level at which the LMU worked failed to eliminate the confusion about complementarities with the projects. Many stakeholders still feel that the LMU is designed to evaluate the impact the programme and that the RLP M&E unit, therefore, is freed from that responsibility. The IR makes no mention of the fact that the proposed change in LMU focus would imply expanded M&E responsibilities for the projects. There is no evidence that others in CARE recognised this and took action. The Inception Reports of those two projects, both published in May 2000, refer to livelihoods monitoring but are vague on details as the LMU had not yet been designed. The joint SHABGE/GO-INTERFISH OPR of 2002 places the LMU in charge of assessment at the purpose and goals levels. This history probably has contributed to persisting confusion about how the LMU would serve and/or interact with the projects.

The IR goal of ‘load lightening and developing tools more suited to capacity’ also was fated to fail. In retrospect, no one feels that the workload on the team was lightened appreciably. What’s more, the one new tool explicitly proposed and piloted – six-monthly monitoring for qualitative and quantitative indicators, with a sample of 800 households in 40 villages – would actually accentuate two observed problems: a) slowness of the data analysis process and, b) difficulties encountered in working with qualitative data and integrating qualitative/quantitative data. The LMU team feels that much time was wasted on this pilot, which coincidentally came during a period of staff transition. Finally, the IR again recommended anthropometric surveys, contrary, at least in retrospect, to CARE’s lack of capacity in the area and the shortage of local firms available for recruitment. Given the recognised importance of nutritional status as an impact indicator in livelihoods programmes, this is clearly an area of expertise and institutional capacity that should have been addressed at an early stage of project implementation.

To help overcome bottlenecks, the IR recommended that an external consultant be engaged for data analysis on a twice-yearly basis. This person, presumably an expatriate, was to work with one or more local researchers/analytical writers, presumably also contractors. The project timeline shows a consultancy in early 2002 to develop and test a tool for six-monthly

⁶ Milestones referred to are activity progress indicators included in the IR team’s revised log frame. A sample milestone reads, “Operation of LMS across minimum of two sectors by March 2003 in these 2 regions (NW and Chittagong)”. This time period was one of organizational transition for CARE-B. Establishment of regional programme offices has only recently moved forward; new regional offices are not yet supported by monitoring systems. Milestones related to operationalising a livelihoods monitoring system in each region, supporting all sectors, have not been met.

monitoring. The consultancies did not continue and the activity was dropped soon thereafter. The IR also suggested that “higher levels of analysis” would be performed by members of the Livelihood Monitoring System Steering Committee (e.g. analysis of thematic studies being used for advocacy purposes would be the responsibility of the Rights and Social Justice Coordinator), although no mention is made whether those individuals were qualified analysts or whether they had agreed to take on the new responsibility. The point is moot however as the Steering Committee stopped meeting soon thereafter.

Among the things not proposed in the IR were significant increases in staff numbers or capacity, or comprehensive training for existing staff in themes such as qualitative data collection and analysis, computer applications, etc. (The current staff of FTs said they received only three days of training in qualitative methods, far short of what they would need to acquire the required skills. Although limited in scope this is reported to have been one of more useful training inputs provided. Its outputs have been used to some extent for both debt migration study and in the synthesis of qualitative interviews from NWLS.) The IR did, however, suggest that LMU staff provide training to other M&E personnel within CARE, again in clear contradiction of time constraints already observed. What’s more, with the higher positioning of the LMU, recommended in the IR, the Livelihoods Coordinator (LC) was expected to work at a higher level as well, leaving “the administration to the next tier of management”, i.e. the two PDOs. (A later consulting report noted that the LC continued to be overloaded with administrative duties, and suggested an administrative assistant be hired.⁷) Finally, the IR suggests a more active effort in dissemination of tools/methods as well as the results of monitoring activities. It does not, however, recommend a new staff position to take charge of the increased workload, assuming perhaps that the Livelihoods Coordinator would be in charge.

Ultimately, an examination of the documents corroborates LMU staff attitudes that the PM and IR were over-ambitious and did not offer realistic plans for success, and that the IR, rather than correcting the shortcomings of the PM, actually added to the institutional confusion, increased the workload, and rendered the project less valuable to many of its stakeholders, particularly field staff associated with SHABGE or GO-INTERFISH.

Implications of RLP Formation

The LMU was formally joined with the SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH projects in 2003 to form the RLP. As noted in Table 1, objectives for livelihoods monitoring were modified at that time, with some new phrasing of outputs but few tangible changes to proposed activities. Not much has been said about the impact of this merger on the LMU, although certain subtle effects can be surmised. It is acknowledged that the RLP coordinator devoted more time in supporting the LMU than had CARE managers in prior months or even years. One outcome of this attention was the hiring, after a long recruitment process, of a livelihoods advisor to provide technical guidance during the final year of the programme. It is likely that this new arrangement re-established the bonds between the LMU team and the managers/field staff of the RLP (and may have reinforced attitudes/expectations of programme staff about an LMU role in programme evaluation).

The 2004 OPR report, in which I was responsible for making recommendations related to M&E, stated that, “it is highly desirable that the follow-up livelihood surveys planned for the Northwest and Southeast produce information that will help answer the outcome-related

⁷ See Wilson, I., 2002. *Survey/ Sampling Methodology and Framework*, Statistical Services Centre, University of Reading. During the current review, LMU staff noted that the LC continues to devote much of his work time to administrative tasks.

questions yet unanswered by the project M&E systems. It would be useful to assure that the objectives, sampling methods and data collected by LMP are directly relevant to understanding the impact of the RLP.” In a sense, the OPR advocated a reversal of the IR, by suggesting a direct link between the LMU and the information needs of the RLP. Indeed, RLP managers were already moving in this direction by planning to include the participation of the M&E unit and programme staff in a workshop designed to revise the set of indicators. The OPR also suggested that the, “LMP be particularly cognisant of the need to measure impact for rights and social development indicators, given the evolving importance of those outcomes in the RLP.” This also reinforced the pre-existing intention of programme managers to try to add an RBA focus to LMU tools and indicators, to better match the approaches increasingly employed by the programme itself. In retrospect, those recommendations may have been somewhat unrealistic given that the project, at the time, only had about year left to run. Even so, the LMU made a commendable effort to respond to the recommendations, particularly in the design of the Northwest Livelihoods Survey (NWLS), including significant attention to rights indicators. The LMU livelihoods advisor also carefully documented the internal thought-processes and decisions related to application of OPR recommendations.

In the previous sections I presented a fairly detailed recapitulation of the evolution of the LMU, with some discussion of the challenges presented by the various changes made. Specific lessons from this are highlighted in the sections that follow. For instance, the need for clarity of purpose and the pitfalls of confusion about project objectives are described in the next section. Later, lessons are presented regarding staffing, institutional positioning and other themes affected by the evolution of the LMU's design.

7.3. Livelihoods Monitoring Project/System/Unit

The evolution of the LMU is well known; perceptions about the role of the LMU have and continue to vary depending on with whom you are speaking (ranging from project impact assessment to macro-level qualitative social research). As a way of sorting out varying attitudes, I have forced them into one of three types/visions – a project, a system or a unit – each with unique theoretical objectives and activities. Stated objectives and perceptions of stakeholders are generally a blend of the three, but a strong argument can be made that the three are largely mutually exclusive, that pursuing one ‘vision’ would compromise the others.

LMProject

Projects are by nature goal-oriented with the valuable product coming at the end. The implication, then, for an LMProject would be a process of continual designing, refining and improving of a set of tools, and building a staff capable of applying the tools, so that at the end of the project an efficient and effective model for livelihoods monitoring is tested and ready to be put to use. This sounds sensible but presents some obstacles as well. Firstly, this approach implies a fairly lengthy process before any major surveys or studies are conducted, thereby dispelling any lingering aspirations that the LMU should be a mechanism for impact evaluation of the RLP or its constituent projects. This is true mostly because it would be impossible to conduct large baseline surveys early on, as was done in the LMU.

The IR essentially shifted the livelihoods monitoring enterprise from a system to a project by eliminating language about evaluating impact of SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH. A recent example of the LMU functioning as a project was the process by which the indicators to be tracked in livelihoods surveys were radically reworked prior to the second cycle. At that point, the emphasis was not on comparison with baseline values but to use past experience to develop a new indicator set that, in turn, could also be tested and refined.

LMSystem

The converse of an LMProject, an LMSystem would place the focus on measuring change and attributing that change, when possible, to the projects or programme. In such a case it would be much more important to have everything (indicators, methods, sample frame, etc.) established early so that comprehensive baselines could be conducted, which is what occurred early in the LMP. Some staff members now believe that the original baseline was rushed, before tools and skills were fully developed. The opportunities for revision/evolution of tools and indicators are less; the pitfalls of such revisions greater. LMU staff is careful to point out that the recent livelihoods survey in the Northwest was not intended to repeat the baseline survey, for the purpose of indicator by indicator comparisons. Comparative analyses are being attempted anyway, to the extent possible. Some stakeholders, such as those responsible for analysis of the panel data sets, regret that the indicators from round two don't mirror more closely those from the baseline, an attitude reflecting their bias towards the LMU as a system for measuring change rather than a project that would refine methods and indicators.

The LMU functioned as a system recently during the design of the NW follow-up livelihoods survey when it devised its sampling strategy to allow comparisons with baseline data for the purpose of programme evaluation. This attempt was made more difficult due to problems in matching households from the baseline and 2004 NWLS. Ultimately however, the team is confident that households included in the panel data set were accurately matched. A broader issue that could apply to the LMU analysis relates to the inherent problem of such panel data sets, i.e. with each round of the survey, the degree to which the sample is representative of the population as a whole will decrease as households drop out/ die off etc.) The value of the resulting analysis may also be limited by the differences in the two survey questionnaires, noted above, which prevents comparisons for some livelihoods themes. The LMU also contributed to a 'system' by documenting thoroughly the methods and procedures followed for each of its surveys. These can serve as resources for future practitioners.

LMUnit

In a generic sense, an LMUnit would be an on-call social research unit, available for thematic studies deemed valuable by CARE and DFID and also, perhaps, other clients and stakeholders. An LMUnit might have some core functions (perhaps even programme evaluation) but would also be equipped to identify and conduct research relevant to CARE and its partners and to accept assignments from external entities. Its work plan would evolve to meet the changing needs of the institutions. The IR, by calling for what it called thematic case studies, and DFID, by encouraging the LMU to take on new tasks such as an urban study, advocated for an LMUnit vision.

The LMU functioned as an LMUnit when it took on the assignment of supporting the NGO GBK conduct indigenous livelihoods surveys. Basically, LMU contributed the ideas, technical support and human resources to a study conceived by an external stakeholder based on its exposure to LMU products and methods. Conducting studies of debt and migration in the northwest and southeast would also qualify. These in-depth studies, while important to a deeper understanding of livelihoods opportunities and risks, were outside of the core objective of the LMU (i.e. developing a system for livelihoods monitoring).

To provide services in this way, the LMU team would need to be structured differently. Field-level enumerators might not be a significant part of the plan. Broader and deeper experience would certainly be required at higher levels (with less of a need to contract out the intellectual part of the process to consultants). An LMUnit would need to be more visible in the 'community', as an active participant in seminars and policy debates. More workshops would

be expected to present findings and advocate for policies. The largely positive GBK collaboration, described above, demonstrates the difficulties experienced by the LMU when asked to function as a Unit. It has taken nearly two years to bring the study to closure, due to core priorities and a shortage of analysts and writers/editors.

I would argue that on-going confusion expressed by stakeholders about the role and objectives of the LMU is due in large part to the programmed contradictions of project vs. system vs. unit. The basic lesson of this trichotomy is the need to have and maintain consensus on objectives and mandate, with a proper match of staff skills and numbers with the tasks assigned. A broader lesson is that the generation of comprehensive information (including measures of social change) requires an additional component to the staffing hierarchy; one with specialised skills and experience in qualitative research methods.

7.4. Matching Resources with Tasks/Objectives

Coping with an Evolving Work plan

The evolution in the RLP from technical transfer through livelihoods to rights/empowerment, which proved challenging to the programme's M&E unit, has had less impact on the LMU. The project was conceived during the livelihoods phase and was designed around the sustainable livelihoods framework espoused by DFID and CARE. The LMU, in response to the RLP's move to rights and empowerment, did seek to identify suitable indicators for its second set of livelihoods surveys. The team realises the shortcomings of the new indicators and the fact that they are attempting to do with quantitative data what qualitative data is better equipped to do. Frankly speaking, the LMU work plan evolved to match the capacity of the staff on board rather than evolving along with programme strategies. Two significant compromises were made. Firstly, it was decided that, since the team in place was not adequately skilled in collecting and analysing qualitative data, monitoring activities would be based almost entirely on quantitative surveys. Secondly, time constraints encouraged the team to give up on the plan to conduct twice or thrice-yearly monitoring.⁸

LMU Team Composition

In its PM, the LMU was originally provided with a staff of one Livelihoods Coordinator (LC), two PDOs, and seven FTs staff. No additions were overtly called for in the IR, but during the course of the project staff was added to reach the current level: an LC, a Livelihoods Advisor (added to the team in the spring of 2004), a Technical Coordinator, two PDOs, and nine FTs. The design documents anticipated assistance from a variety of sources. The original budget allocated enough money to support about one month service per year by a recurrent advisor and another significant consultant input annually.

What is apparent is that even with a more modest work plan than originally envisaged and without the complexities of qualitative data analysis to deal with, the LMU suffers from a shortage of analysts and critical thinkers. An expatriate livelihoods advisor was added to the team in the spring of 2004 after a long but unsuccessful search for a national candidate. This advisor has provided technical and intellectual guidance to LMU staff as it works to complete its work plan before programme closure. By all accounts, she has worked extremely hard during the past year, as have the other 13 members of the LMU team. This, along with considerable additional consultant support during 2004, was required for the LMU to complete

⁸ In addition to time, the LMU team felt that change for most livelihoods indicators could not be expected within such a short timeframe. This attitude reveals a perception that the purpose of the exercise, and perhaps the LMU in general, was to track changes due to project interventions, while others argue that the short timeframe monitoring was to help in understanding trends in the livelihoods system during the course of a year – more of a research goal.

its basic set of deliverables. This situation illustrates well the level of human resource needed to design and implement the types of surveys that the LMU has in its work plan. A senior advisor, of the type made available for the last year of the programme, was clearly needed throughout, along with greater in-house capacity for analysis and report composition.

Significant advisory and analysis roles were defined for the DFID Livelihoods Advisor (in the PM) and for members of the project steering committee (in the IR). The DFID advisor's role included monitoring the work of the livelihoods monitoring team; supporting qualitative and quantitative monitoring activities; analysing and synthesising qualitative and quantitative data and liaising with local and international consultants. The individual filling this role was very active in project technical management. Her departure in 2002 left a void in two ways. First, the technical and analytical capacity she provided was missing until the programme hired its own livelihoods advisor in 2004. Second, the link to DFID was seriously diminished; a gap that has endured.

The LMU steering committee was considered important in the early years of the project. Key stakeholders wrote that, *“One of the institutional strengths was the LMP steering committee that met bimonthly and involved management from all three projects and senior CARE and DFID staff. This committee allowed LMP to respond flexibly to new issues and sought to mediate between the projects”*⁹ The IR also made strong statements regarding the role for the LMU steering committee, e.g. *“the rights and social justice, gender and governance coordinators will play an important role to LMU through their membership on the steering committee. These coordinators will be primary users of livelihood impact information for mission-wide (and external) advocacy and programme design. They will also provide support in the development of the thematic case studies and complex analysis of qualitative data for their specific theme areas.”* According to LMU long-timers, the steering committee continued to meet for a time after the IR but, despite the importance assigned to it, attendance soon diminished to the point that the group was disbanded.

The lessons related to team composition are as important as they are obvious. First, the project design and budget must provide staff skills and numbers in correspondence to the tasks defined. In the DFID system, the inception review should closely examine staffing composition, correcting inaccuracies from the original design. Second, assigning important implementation tasks to external advisors and committees is risky and ill-advised, as those people are under no obligation to perform as expected.

Institutional Positioning and Support

LMU stakeholders have varied ideas on the appropriate placement of an LMU, ranging from a mission-based unit to one integrated closely with the programme M&E unit. It seems likely that an individual's ideas on placement correspond with the same individual's views on the mandate of the unit. A bit of a paradox in the current scheme is that, while the LMU was moved 'upward' per IR recommendations, virtually all of its staff remain based in Dinajpur. This places them closer to programme activities and beneficiaries, to be sure, but isolates them from resources valuable for analysis and from most important senior stakeholders. This arrangement has resulted in practical and logistic problems associated with poor communications between CBHQ and the field office, which have caused significant delays in implementation of project activities at various key junctures during the past year. On balance, it seems that only as a component of the RLP M&E team would the LMU be best placed in the current location.

⁹ In, Rashid, A. and C.H. Shakya. 2001. *A Year of Livelihoods Monitoring*. Livelihood Monitoring Project, CARE/DFID Bangladesh.

IR recommendations regarding institutional placement implied an important role for LMU in the CARE-B management hierarchy. However, for those involved in the LMU from its early stages, the relative levels of institutional commitment of not just CARE but DFID as well have clearly diminished. This trend corresponded fairly well with a period of relative low productivity of the project, which ended with the hiring of the livelihoods advisor a year ago. A case in point is the involvement of the LMU steering committee. The set of tasks of the committee, partially described above included supervisory and monitoring duties and an important role in institutionalisation of a livelihoods monitoring system within CARE and DFID. The dissolution of the steering committee more than two years ago was an important and negative event in the LMU's history, which ultimately contributed to the lack of understanding between CARE and DFID as to what the project was doing and reasons for its activities¹⁰. This development had serious implications for the LMU and its ability to achieve its objectives. In purely practical terms, the jobs assigned to the committee, such as intellectual leadership and analysis for technical thematic 'case studies', were not accomplished. Beyond that, however, was the loss of prestige and importance that most likely occurred when senior stakeholders ceased active participation.

A lesson that can be gained from this, ironically, relates to participation and ownership. When DFID and CARE managers played an active role in LMU management and technical activities, the project was considered as important to shaping future programming initiatives of the institutions. Without that participation, the project became more insular and figured less in thinking and planning of those institutions. If any senior managers in CARE or DFID feel that the LMU had great potential but went astray, they might reconsider their own role, including lack of participation in the steering committee.

Consultants and Contracts

From its beginning, the LMU has made use of ample consulting services. This was, in part, by design – livelihoods monitoring (as opposed to livelihoods assessments or the framework itself) was a fairly new concept in 2000 and project design anticipated the need for assistance of outside experts early on. In addition, difficulties in keeping up with schedules and perceived lack of staff capacity in certain areas encouraged expanded contracting out of prescribed tasks. In retrospect, the LMU has misgivings about the role of consultants in the project. Three specific areas of concern were noted.

First, the LMU suffered by having so much of the intellectual ownership in the hands of consultants who are by nature transient creatures. In the absence of influential outsiders, the project tended to flounder a bit, not always firmly understanding or embracing the recommendations made earlier. Second, the quality of the inputs made by consultants was not always up to par. This may be a truism of consultants – some perform up to expectations while others do not – but become more significant as the importance of the consultants' role grows. Third, as the actual person doing the consulting changed from assignment to assignment, continuity and consistency was a problem. Anecdotally, philosophical differences among some of the LMU's consultant advisors pushed the changing LMU agenda. LMU's lack of in-house intellectual ownership during significant portions of its history limited its ability to buffer or mitigate differences of opinion among consultants

At least two lessons can be derived from this. One is that, while consulting services can be useful and often essential, intellectual ownership and consistent guidance should be a

¹⁰ Not all stakeholders, DFID in particular, fully appreciate that the LMU has continued to rely on mostly quantitative surveys, due to previously described staffing issues.

permanent feature. The second is that a sequence of different consultants can contribute to inconsistency. A long-term institutional relationship (with recurrent visits of the same advisor(s)) is in many ways superior to a series of independently recruited consultants.

7.5. Other Human Resource Needs

Two critical human resource needs have become apparent that were either unanticipated or were not given due attention.

Editing and Translation

A major challenge and cause of delay in the production and dissemination of LMU reports has been the lack of editors and translators on staff and the frequent difficulty in recruiting them when needed. As an example, during this review LMU managers were trying to cope simultaneously with several reports that needed thorough rewrites. They were pursuing a couple of options: finding the time to do it in-house, relying on consultants who were not professional editors, or trying to find available resource people in Dhaka. This is an inefficient process and has consumed an inordinate amount of the Livelihoods Advisor's time.

Even worse, the quality of the products may not meet minimal standards and could tarnish the reputation of CARE and the LMU. Rough documents are generally acceptable for internal consumption, but if documents are to be disseminated to a broad (at times international) audience, the writing standards must be considerably higher. Going one step further, if LMU products are meant to be tools for advocacy, i.e. to influence the opinions of people with opposing or neutral viewpoints, then the reports must be well written, accurately translated and demonstrating adherence to rigorous methodological standards.

The debt and migration study, which reached conclusions that were controversial enough that influential people with a vested interest could challenge the findings, is a good example. LMU managers rightly feel that those findings, and perhaps even the rigour of the research itself, would be held up to greater scrutiny and those perfectly valid findings could be rejected for apparently trivial reasons. In such cases, a higher standard of editing and publication/presentation is required.

Communications/Advocacy

This example points to a larger design issue, for which human resources is implicit; that is, if the LMU was intended to be a direct contributor to policy debates, it needed a much greater internal capacity in communications/advocacy. Despite assertions made by some that sharing raw data or rough drafts are adequate modes of information sharing, the fact is that most end-users need to be 'spoon-fed' information; few people have the time or inclination to distill out important information from big reports. While there is ample, albeit mostly anecdotal, evidence of interest/uptake by organisations working at the grassroots level, there have been cases where LMU products have been rejected or ignored by supposed end-users at the policy-making level. This supports arguments that an LMU requires skilled communications specialists on staff to be fully successful.

7.6 Utility and Use of LMU Products/Findings

During the course of this review, RLP staff were asked how information generated by the LMU, and RLP M&E in general, has contributed to programming decisions. The range of positive examples cited is summarised in Box 10.

Box 10: Positive Uses of LMU Information (according to RLP staff)

- Selection of villages covered in LMU profiles and baseline, information that was used by GO-Interfish in FFS activities.
- Expansion of SHABGE activities into Rangpur and Gaibandha helped by (based on) LMU information about agro-ecological zones (also useful to GO-Interfish)
- SHABGE (and GO-IN) identification of villages based on LMU PPAs.
- LMU data encouraged diversification of GO-IF FFS activities, e.g. sanitation, livestock, access to services, etc.
- Data on low wage rates from LMU contributed to GO-IF activities.
- Use of LMU data by PNGOs (e.g. GBK).
- Nilphamari, program asked LMU to collect info focusing on drought prone areas (village profiles). Data used to target and programme such areas.
- M&E unit used LMU information for comparative analysis, progress monitoring. Example given related to crop varieties, access to services by DAE and DLS.
- LMU and M&E information contributed to targeting of poorer households by indicating suitable activities for them (e.g. homestead gardening)
- Combined effect of LMU/M&E/LRSP led to expansion and/or evolution of the programme.
- In particular, the move to RBA/advocacy activities influenced by LMU.

Some of these examples refer to field-level concepts, e.g. geographic targeting based on village profiling, while others have contributed to more macro-level decisions, e.g. the introduction of rights-based approaches into the programme. The same staff members who generated the above list were asked to expand on some of the specific cases. Two examples are as follows:

	Case #1: RLP application of rights-based approaches	Case #2: LMU data encouraged diversification of GO-IF activities
Information Sources	LMU baseline and village profile, farmers' planning sessions, GO-IF study ('mapping the field') to identify advocacy issues based on focus group discussions with FFS members and other stakeholders (DAE etc.)	NW baseline, Village profile survey, data interpretation workshop and quarterly LMU workshop
How Information Used	Led to development of GO-IF advocacy strategies Identified implication for staffing capacity building, planning & monitoring interventions (with tools) By GO-IF management/field staff/PNGO's field staff collected information under leadership of GO-IF management. PNGO's provided information on their skills/capacity /experience. GO-IF management developed strategy	Used by RLP management, field staff and partner institutions. Included the topics in participatory planning sessions and during targeting exercises. Facilitated a move towards livelihoods (community) approaches and linkages with diverse service providers (DoL, UP, Youth Department, etc.)
Resulting Changes	Changed the nature of interventions, e.g. inclusion of RBA, including relevance to livelihoods (in	Poorest group now widely targeted for RLP activities; Community participation and

	correspondence with LRSP) Started working to make local service providers responsive, lobbying to enforce existing policies. Khas pond/access to irrigation based on formal /informal agreement.	community led initiative increased (Sanitation, vaccination-com to com) Influenced other service providers to extend benefits community-wide (beyond FFS) Shift from technical intervention to more social/right based approaches and entitlements Increased awareness about different service providers
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Despite these positive examples, many would argue that the sizeable investment made in the LMU has not been fully exploited. That is, information coming from LMU surveys could conceivably be shaped to better influence policy and to serve the needs of a broader set of stakeholders, beyond CARE Bangladesh and partners at the grassroots level. An example is the debt and migration study, useful in its slightly rough form for internal consumption and sharing with a regional NGO audience, but perhaps not crafted in a way to carry weight with higher-level policy makers. To repeat a lesson noted earlier, a unit such as the LMU requires an explicit strategy for external communications including decisions about advocacy vs. information sharing. It also needs a person/team equipped to promptly edit, translate and publish in various forms the range of products coming out of its surveys and studies.

Comments on tool/survey design

The most important issue in terms of design of LMU survey instruments has been the choices made between quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The original plan emphasised both types, with suggestions about integrating the results of both to generative knowledge that is sufficiently in-depth and descriptive while meeting standards of objectivity. For reasons recounted earlier, the LMU has chosen to emphasise quantitative measures at the expense of qualitative ones. It must be stated that arguments in favor of qualitative methods do not negate the importance and potential usefulness of LMU's quantitative data sets. The importance of being able to speak with the authority that a representative sample gives you about the status of certain livelihoods indicators that are amenable to quantitative measurement (e.g. landholding, livestock holding, water and sanitation access and practices) was recognised in the original project design, which included baseline and follow-up surveys as core elements of project activities. At no point during LMP's evolution has this aspect of the design been questioned or changed.

For at least two stakeholders, the LMU's emphasis on quantitative data has had detrimental effects on the value of information generated. Some DFID-B advisors have commented that the results of large quantitative surveys are not particularly useful to them in decision-making regarding policies and strategies. They argue that the LMU should be heavily focused on qualitative data analysis and feel that the IR pointed the project in that direction. (This attitude does not fully and accurately reflect the IR; the six-monthly monitoring tool recommended by the IR included quantitative measurement of approximately 20 indicators for samples of 800 households). As an example of how LMU products could be more useful, reference was made to two recent publications, *Hands not Land* and *Breaking New Ground*, which indeed broke new ground in development theory in Bangladesh. These works were the result of insightful analysis by a few experienced social researchers after a relatively short period of qualitative data collection in rural communities, a modality that differs radically from LMU's approach. The closest the LMU has come to such a product was its recent debt and migration study. Its report however is not yet in a form easily accessible to senior-level decision-makers, such as DFID advisors.

The other group that looks with some disfavour on the LMU bias towards quantitative data are social development specialists. Both the RLP and the review team's social development advisors have informally remarked that quantitative surveys in general, and the LMU livelihoods surveys in particular, do not yield the in-depth information needed to understand issues such as the changing social status of women and other marginalised groups. I conducted a brief web search to seek information on proven indicators and methods for evaluating social change. The search revealed that significant thought is being put into these issues, particularly in the NGO world. It also revealed that significant additional thought is needed, as few working models appear to be functioning and documented.

NWLS and its questionnaire

During the course of this review, a session was held with all LMU staff members to examine the questionnaire from the recent livelihoods survey in the Northwest. The results of that review is attached as Annex 10. An examination of their work reveals many details about the relative quality and utility of the indicators and questions used. As expected, some were acceptable as-is, while others were judged less positively, usually because they were too complicated or yielded unreliable data. As an example, question 4.1 reads, "How many months of the year does your household have sufficient food to feed all of its members?" (The LMU based this question on a review of standard/ widely accepted/ best practice indicators for the assessment of food security). Enumerators and respondents found this confusing as food can be available for a portion of a month but not the whole month. Unfortunately, it would be unrealistic to collect accurate data on the number of days in each month a household does not have food. Another case was question 5.7a, "Does this household hold any savings at present?" Enumerators felt that some household members may have hidden savings, making this an inappropriate question for a group survey.

Additional problem areas were noted for rights and empowerment-type questions. For instance, the survey had a question related to women's satisfaction with institutional services, ranked among 1) dissatisfied, 2) moderate satisfaction, and 3) very satisfied. The data generated from such a survey would quantify women's perceptions to some degree and may allow some rough comparisons but social development experts generally find such a measure of little value in exploring and explaining the changing status of the group in question. In this case, ironically, enumerators found that respondents had difficulty differentiating among three different ranks and advocated an even simpler 'satisfied' or 'not satisfied' choice. The answers to such a question would be even less informative. In another case, women were asked why they did not belong to village institutions or committees. Respondents seemed unable to answer the question, not surprising considering its poor design, and the LMU team considered dropping it altogether. This would 'improve' the questionnaire but diminish the survey's importance, as important information would not be collected.

It is difficult for an outsider like me to critique the details of the questionnaire without significantly greater insights into the context and expectations of distinct stakeholders. A bigger lesson that can be noted, however, is the fact that after years of effort, including significant assistance by expert consultants, the questionnaire remains a work in progress and the team is still learning how to improve it. While this situation is not unique to this questionnaire, it does reflect the difficulty that the LMU or any similar institution would have in producing/packaging a monitoring system that others could apply as-is. This also highlights the difficulty in reducing information needs, in particular those related to social and empowerment issues, to a relatively few close-ended questions.

Contributions to Future CARE Programmes

Two questions that can be asked are to what extent the information has generated by the LMU (and RLP M&E in general) contributed to new programming initiatives being planned and to what extent have lessons regarding LMU methods been considered when proposing new evaluation plans. On the surface, it appears that the answer to both of these questions is, not much. Many RLP stakeholders have commented that the PPA design process, for instance, is not making adequate use of lessons from the past, including the findings of LMU surveys. This is probably true, but may also be overstated. It is generally very difficult to trace a direct path from the findings and conclusions of a survey to a subsequent policy decision. LMU staff have been involved in PPA discussions and many of those involved with PPA formulation have reviewed the products of LMU work. It is probably safe to assume that the PPA does reflect, in some way or another, information generated by the LMU.

In terms of evaluation methods, it is again possible to argue that the plan put forth in the PPA violates the lessons-learned during the course of the LMU. Specifically, the new plan is almost entirely based on qualitative data, even though collecting and making sense of qualitative data proved to be a challenge beyond the capacity of most LMU staff. Basically, to make the PPA evaluation plan work as envisaged, a significant investment in staff capacity building is needed in skills for proper collection and analysis of qualitative data.

Links with MGD and PRSP Monitoring

It is assumed that development programmes such as the RLP are designed to contribute to achievement of the MDGs, and more immediately, the objectives set out in Bangladesh's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). If the RLP conforms to this programmatically, the information it (i.e. M&E unit and LMU) gathers should help measure progress towards the PRSP/MDG objectives.

Regarding the MDGs, it was suggested by an RLP stakeholder that nutritional assessment would be among the most useful roles for the LMU with regards to MDG monitoring. Indeed, nutritional status has been a favourite impact indicator for many livelihoods programmes, including those of CARE missions elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately, two factors have constrained the LMU's ability to monitor nutritional status. Firstly, CARE-B does not have a capacity to perform this function internally. An anthropometric survey is not a job for amateurs. Secondly, although the PM and others suggested that nutritional surveys be contracted out to a local firm, this has proved to be impossible. Capable local firms that might be contracted to do the job either don't exist or are unavailable due to their own time constraints.

The PRSP has (or will have) a broader set of indicators that can be cross-referenced with those that the LMU tracked in its latest livelihoods survey. Overlapping indicators are fairly common, which helps validate the utility of the LMU surveys, and more generally, the role of civil society in monitoring progress towards MDGs. Common indicators include the following (written as worded in the draft PRSP):

- Availability of savings instruments suitable for the poor
- Number of poor households receiving remittances
- Number of electricity consumers in rural areas
- Extent of household food insecurity (linked to both agriculture and food aid programmes)
- Participation of poor households in non-crop agriculture
- Percent of population using sanitary and semi-sanitary latrines
- Percent of population with access to safe water and sanitation
- Number of persons with access to arsenic-free water in arsenic contaminated areas
- Percent of households with housing facility

- Number of borrowers and size of credit
- Percentage of borrowers with large scale credit (> Tk. 50,000)
- Increase in poor women's employment
- Increase in women's wage rate and income
- Percent of educated girls employed/unemployed
- Less cases of marriage with dowry
- Age at marriage for girls

In addition, a number of indicator sets in the PRSP are not included in LMU surveys. The majority of these relate to government expenditures on infrastructure and public services, along with anticipated policy developments or changes in the way existing policies/laws are applied. These gaps are neither unexpected (the scope of the PRSP is broader than CARE's livelihoods portfolio) nor an indictment of the LMU and its potential value to PRSP monitors.

More problematic are issues of geographic coverage and aggregation. Essentially, those charged with assessing progress for PRSP indicators would have the difficult task of creating a formula for integrating data generated by CARE with those generated by a myriad of other sources to establish national benchmarks. A potential constraint posed by CARE's proposal for PPA evaluation is its heavy emphasis on qualitative data, which do not correspond well with the mostly quantitative PRSP indicators. In addition, external stakeholders are generally more sceptical of qualitative data, due to perceived lack of objectivity or difficulties in generalising local cases.

7.6 Conclusions and unfinished business

As the LMU approaches closure, it is an appropriate time to reflect on its accomplishments, of which there are many. In particular, the major surveys completed are amongst the most comprehensive and in-depth studies available for the geographic areas and/or themes studied. The information gained has been useful to a wide range of stakeholders and may be influencing institutional policies and strategies. The methods and framework have opened the eyes of many partner organisations, particularly local NGOs, some of whom are applying LMU methodologies in their own work. The experience has contributed to increased institutional capacity within CARE-B related to livelihoods concepts and programme strategies. Finally, efforts to refine LMU tools, and particularly to select relevant indicators for measuring rights and empowerment outcomes, have enhanced institutional awareness and capacity in those themes.

Despite these achievements, no one disputes that the LMU has not achieved all that was expected of it. Indeed, at this point in time many stakeholders look back almost wistfully on what might have been. However, this sense of disappointment should not detract from the effort put forth by many individuals to make the investment worthwhile. What the LMU has accomplished is by no means insignificant and has played an important role in CARE and RLP programming decisions. This review highlighted some fundamental lessons from the five-year LMU experience, summarised below.

1. A traditional staffing plan, with heavy emphasis on field-based staff can lead to a reliance on tried and true methods, in this case quantitative surveys. Quantitative methods alone are inadequate for in-depth understanding of issues important in RBA, but qualitative methods often prove difficult, at least without significant training, for most staff members
2. A livelihoods monitoring system, at least in the minds of some LMU stakeholders, is a misnomer. Indicators and methods for livelihoods monitoring cannot be prescriptive; they

will differ for different contexts and different programming approaches. In each case, experienced leadership would be needed to create a system that corresponds with stakeholder needs

3. While consultant inputs can be valuable, a LMU needs to own the process and be the source of consistency and continuity. This points, at least, to greater internal capacity and more senior level staff
4. As new elements of the livelihoods framework (formerly implicit but increasingly explicit), rights and empowerment require considerable new thought into appropriate indicators and monitoring methods. Social research can explore these issues in-depth but cost-effective methods for large-scale surveys, and indicators that can objectively measure change, are not yet evident
5. A unit such as LMU requires an explicit strategy for external communications including decisions about advocacy vs. information sharing. It also needs a person/team equipped to edit, translate and publish in various forms the range of products coming out of its surveys and studies

In the meantime, the LMU has not yet completed its assigned tasks, but is making good progress and should be in a position to complete key deliverables within the extension period recently granted by DFID. The priority will no doubt be to complete tasks in progress, e.g. final editing of Northwest livelihood survey reports, finalisation of the indigenous study, etc. As time allows, the LMU may wish to add to the task list a more thorough chronicling of the LMU experience, with input from a broader range of current and former stakeholders. Part of this exercise could be the creation of a detailed annotated bibliography of all documents produced by the LMU, with reference to methodologies and outcomes. Finally, the extension period provides an opportunity for the LMU to share conclusions about changing livelihoods with a wider audience, whether or not attributable to the RLP, based on five years of data collection.

Annex 1 Programme

Date	Sanne	Alice	John
24.01	Arrival in Dhaka Travel to Cox's Bazar		
25.01	Briefing and planning meeting Fieldwork in Cox's Bazaar Meeting fieldstaff and POs in Cox's Bazaar		
26.01	Fieldwork in Chakaria Meeting Fieldstaff at Chakaria Upazilla		
27.01	Workshop with staff at Cox's Bazaar Fieldwork in Ukhiya		
28.01 Friday	Return to Dhaka		
29.01	Report writing		
30.01	Reading reports		
31.01	Reading reports Meet with the team	Arrives in Dhaka Meet with the team	Arrives in Dhaka Meet with the team
01.02	Travel to Dinajpur Briefing and planning-meeting with NW staff	Travel to Dinajpur Briefing and planning-meeting with NW staff	Meetings in Dhaka
02.02	Fieldwork in Dinajpur	Fieldwork in Dinajpur	Travel to Dinajpur
03.02	Lesson learning workshop with Fieldtrainers	Lesson learning workshop with Fieldtrainers	Meeting with M&E unit
04.02 Friday	Fieldwork Takurgaon Travel to Rangpur	Fieldwork Takurgaon Travel to Rangpur	Fieldwork Takurgaon Observation of Participatory Capacity Matrix Travel to Rangpur
05.02	Lesson Learning Workshop with NW and NE managing staff Meeting with SDC	Lesson Learning Workshop with NW W and managing staff Meeting with SDC	Lesson Learning Workshop with NW and NE managing staff Meeting with SDC
06.02	Report writing Team meeting Meeting with RC of NW and NE	Report writing Team meeting Meeting with RC of NW W and E	Report writing Team meeting Meeting with RC of NW and NE
07.02	Observe Participatory Self Evaluation Fieldwork in Rangpur	Observe Participatory Self Evaluation Fieldwork in Rangpur	Observe Participatory Self Evaluation Travel to Dinajpur
08.02	Fieldwork in Nilphamari	Fieldwork in Nilphamari	LMP Workshop
09.02	Fieldwork in Kurigram Interview with service providers in Kurigram Briefing on Nijera	Fieldwork in Garibanda Briefing on Nijera	LMP Workshop

10.02	Nijera	Nijera	Meeting: M&E information
11.02 Friday	Report writing Team meeting	Report writing Team meeting	Report writing Team meeting
12.02	Nijera Workshop with Nijera Facilitators	Nijera RLP Gender Workshop	Nijera Workshop with Nijera Facilitators
13.02	Fieldvisit to RMUS, Badarganj Return to Dhaka	Fieldvisit to RMUS, Badarganj Return to Dhaka	Fieldvisit to RMUS, Badarganj Return to Dhaka
14.02	Team meeting and prepare for debriefing presentations	Team meeting and prepare for debriefing presentations	Team meeting and prepare for debriefing presentations
15.02	Writing debriefing report	Report writing	Meeting with DFID and LMP Departure
16.02	Internal Debriefing RLP Preparing for debriefing with DFID and ?	Internal Debriefing RLP Preparing for debriefing with DFID and ?	
17.02	External seminar	External seminar	
18.02 Friday	Report writing	Departure	
19.02	Departure		

Annex 2 List of references

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Annex 3 List of people met

A. Mannan Molla	Project Manager, RLP-NW, Rangpur
A.B.M. Shah Imyan	Field trainer, RLP, Rangpur
Abdul Awal	Regional Coordinator, RLP-NWW, Dinajpur
Abdul Jalil	Project Development Officer, TCU, Dinajpur
Abdul Mannan	Acting Project Manager – RLP-NW – Joypurhat
Abdul Malek Khan	Acting Programme Manager, RLP-NW, Thakurgaon
Abdul Rouf	District Fisheries Officer, Lalmonirhat Sadar
Abdus Sobhan	Regional Coordinator, RLP-NWE, Rangpoor
Abul Hasem	Supervisor, PPS, Cox's Bazaar
Abul Hasem Miah	Field Trainer, RLP, Kishongong
Aktaruzzaman	Field Trainer, RLP, Teknaf
Anima Rani Roy	Field trainer – JNS, Badargoni
Anita Prova Rudrah	Field trainer, RLP-SE, Cox Bazaar
Anjumanara	Programme Officer, Rangpur
Anowarul Haq	Project manager – SDU, RLP, Rangpur
Arajuman Ara	Field trainer, RLP, Dinajpur
Arun Kumar Ganguly,	Project Manager, RLP-SE
Asahar Ali	Block Supervisor, DAE, Lalmonirhat Sadar
Ashraful	Field trainer, MHOP, Bindhma
Asish Kumar Das,	Programme Officer, RLP-SE, Cox's Bazaar
Bazlur Rashid,	Project Development Officer - F&A, RLP-SE
Begum Zerina Reshma	Project Development Officer, TCU, Dinajpur
Bidyat Kumar Sanyal	Project Development Officer, TCU, Dinajpur
Bilash Mitra	Acting Program Manager – M&E
Brigitta Bode	Social Development Coordinator, SDU, Rangpur
Chandan Kumar Sarker	Project Development Officer, TCU, Dinajpur
Faijunnessa Begum	Field trainer, RLP-SE, Chakoria
Ferdousi Zannat	Field Trainer, RLP, Lohagara
Gias Uddin Talukder	Technical Manager, TCU, Dinajpur
Golam Sarowar Talukder	Assistant Regional Coordinator, RLP, Dinajpur
Hakibur Rahman	Field trainer, RLP, Joypurhat
Hamida Begum	Facilitator, Mukti, Cox's Bazaar
Hamidur Rahman	Acting Agricultural Officer, DA, Lalmonirhat, Sadar
Imam Hossain Chowdhury	CEO & FM, Nowzuwan, Cox's Bazaar
Jahan Akter	Project Officer, RLP, Kishongong
Jahangir Alam	Field trainer, RLP, Joypurhat
Jamal Hossain Chowdhury	Facilitator, ANANDO, Cox's Bazaar
Jashim Uddin	Supervisor, UDDIPAN, Banshkhali
Joynal Abedin	Project Officer, RLP, Cox's Bazaar
Judithum Schaik (Julee)	Volunteer, Nowzuwan, Cox's Bazaar
Kamrunnahar	Facilitator, SARPV, Chakoria
Kanij Fatema	Field Trainer, RLP, Garibanda
Khaleda Afroz	Programme Manager, RLP-NW, Rangpur
Khandakar Enanul Kabir	Upazilla Youth Dev Officer, Lalmonirhat Sadar
Kuntal Baran Mondal	Project Manager, RLP-NW, Thakurgaon
Laxkmi Rani Das	Field Trainer, RLP, Banshkhali
Loretta Payne,	Programme Coordinator; RLP, CARE Bangladesh HQ
M. Zakaria	Technical Coordinator, LMU, Dinajpur

M.D. Jahangir,	Project Officer, Mukti, Cox's Bazar
M.M. Morshed,	Technical Officer - M&E, RLP-SE
Mizanur Rahman	Field trainer, RLP, Nilphamari
Misang Prue Marma	Facilitator, PPS, Cox's Bazaar
Mokbul Hossain	Veterinary officer, DLS, Lalmonirhat, Sadar
Md. Nurul Amin	Project Manager, RLP-NW, Nilphamanri
Monir Alam	Facilitator, SARPV, Chakoria
Monowara	Field Trainer, Pirgonj, Rangpur
Morzina Akler	Field Organiser, SF, Dinajpur
Mozahidur Rahman	Field Trainer, RLP, Moheshkhali
Mriganko Shekhor Bhatt	Technical Officer, Social dev., SE, Cox's Bazar
Mufakkamul Islam	Field Trainer, RLP, Kishongong
Nashima Khan	Programme Officer, Gaibanda
Nasita Khan	Programme Officer, RLP
Nasrin Akhter	Programme Officer, Mithapukur
Niger Sultana Munni	Facilitator, GK, Cox's Bazaar
Nikar Chandra Howlader	Project Development Officer – M&E
Nils den Tex	Technical Development Coordinator, TCU, Dinajpur
Nur Mohammed	Facilitator, UDDIPAN, Lohagara
Nurul Islam	Project Development Officer, TCU, Dinajpur
Parvin Banu	Project Officer, RLP, Chakaria
Patima Begum	Facilitator, Mukti, Cox's Bazaar
Prodip Kumar Adhikary	Field trainer, RLP, Dinajpur
Raphael Ray	Regional Manager, ANANDO, Cox's Bazaar
Rashed Hossain	Field trainer, RDSS, Rangpur
Rehena Khalin	Field Tariner, RLP, Kishongong
Hemonta Roy	Field Trainer, RLP, Gaibanda
Ripon Mondal	Field trainer, R.B.N.S., Nilphamari
Rita Das	Field Trainer, Rangpur
Rojina Banu	Field Trainer, RLP, Kishongong
Roksana Ferdous	Field trainer, DD, Joypurhat
Romena Akhter	Programme Development Officer, Kurigram
Ruma Kharun	Field trainer, JAKAS, Joypurhat
Samima Akter	Facilitator, SARPV, Cox's Bazaar
Samina Akfar	Facilitator, SARPV, Chakoria
Sareful islam	Field trainer SUPK, Dinajpur
Shabnan Yeasmin	Field trainer – RLP, Nilphamari
Shah Emran	Field Trainer, RLP, Gaibanda
Shahana Sultana	Programme Officer, Pimgong
Shahidul Alam	Facilitator, GK, Cox's Bazaar
Shahnaz Rozi	Field Trainer, RLP, Thakurgoan
Shamsul Huda	Field trainer, RLP, Dinajpur
Shefali	Field trainer, RLP, Nilphamari
Sheuli Chakraborty	Field Trainer, RLP, Patiya
Shipon Akhler	Field trainer, RLP, Rangpur
Shohelia Akhter	Field trainer, RLP, Rangpur
Shohidul Islam	Agricultural Ext Officer, DAE, Lalmonirhat Sadar
Shova	Facilitator, SARPV, Chakoria
Shyan Sundar Saha	Assistant Programme Coordinator, RLP, HQ
Sima Majumder	Field Trainer, RLP, Gaibanda
Subimol Pal Panna	Facilitator, SARPV, Chakoria
Sujit Chowdhury	Chief Executive, Mukti, Cox's Bazaar

Sukhen Chandra Paul,	Project Development Officer, Education, SE
Suzit Kumar Ghosh	Executive Director, OVA, Lalmonirhat Sadar
Swapan Kumar Sutradhatar	Assistant Regional Coordinator RLP-NWE – Rangpur
Swapan Kumar Bairage	Project Manager, RLP-NW, Kurigram
Tuhin Sen	Functional Manager, RIC, Cox's Bazaar
Ummay Kulsum	Functional Manager, SARPV, Cox's Bazaar
Zahir Hossain,	Project Development Officer M&E, RLP, SE
Zahirul Hasau Chow	Field Trainer, RLP-SE, Chakoria
Zahunul Islam	Field trainer, BRIF, Taragonj

Annex 4 List of FFS groups visited

No.	District	Community
1	Cox's Bazaar	Utar Hindupara
2		Nuniarchara
3		Hamidullah Para
4		Manik Para
5		Sikdarbil
6		Tuturbil
7	Dinajpur	Maherpur
8		Sindurhata
9	Takurgaon	Daksin Horinmari
10		Barunagao
11	Rangpur	Chandrakutubpur
12		Mia Para
13	Nilphamari	Kalikapur Para
14		Baniz Para
15		Darjipara
16	Lalmonirhat	Pas Para
17	Kurigram	Grotiasham
18	Gaibanda	Raghunathpur
19		Khamar Pirgacha
20	Badarganj	Rustamabad
	Nijera Community groups	
21	Dinajpur	Adhikari Para, Chirirbandar
22	Thakurgaon	Mankira Para, Birgonj
23	Gaibanda	Jalagari Para, Palashbari
24	Rangpoor	Mostapur, Sadar

Annex 5 RLP Evolution and Changing M&E Needs¹¹

Prog. Phase	Information Needs to Guide M&E Design ¹²	Tool or Methodology Used by RLP	Capacity/Satisfaction
Agricultural Technology Transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adoption rates (primary and secondary) for promoted technologies - Production and productivity - HH income (from increased production) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology Adoption Monitoring (including secondary adoption) - Cost/benefit Analyses (including production estimates) (GO-IN) - Production/Consumption/Sales Study (SHABGE) - Attendance Monitoring - Pesticide Use Survey 	Tools matched well with information needs (i.e. quantitative indicators from log frames). Staff skills adequate for tools. In retrospect, satisfaction is low though, because the information gained is now seen as less relevant.
Sustainable Livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Livelihood Outcomes (e.g. food security, health, income) - Asset access/ownership/quality (human, physical, natural, financial, social) - Institutional processes/relationships, including the nature of government services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FFS Key Information Survey (incl. demographic profile, contextual info, institutional analysis) - Service Access Inventory - Participant Capacity Matrix - Inventory for community mobilisation. - Tools in the row above adding health and other livelihoods indicators. 	Period of hard work at this stage to design new tools while continuing with old ones. LMP was thought responsible for measuring livelihood outcomes. Moving from quantitative to qualitative methods proved difficult as did the challenge of blending qualitative and quantitative data during analysis.
Rights / Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisational empowerment and group action (including marketing outcomes). - Intra-household relationships (e.g. decision-making, food distribution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory Self Evaluation - Service Access Inventory - Participant Capacity Matrix - Case studies / stories / etc. (planned but 	M&E team felt that information at this level is most important but the tools employed are only partially successful. Concerns that information gaps exist. Further innovation, learning and

¹¹ This table was created with the participation of the RLP M&E team. It came out of a brief brainstorm session and, as such, may suffer from errors of omission or commission.

¹² The entries in this column offer a sampling of information that would theoretically be required but does not imply that they were or were not collected by the RLP.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to and equitable use of services. - Fulfilment of obligations by 'service providers'. - Inclusion, participation, equitable treatment of women and poor HHs. - Livelihood outcomes as noted above but emphasising social change, 'rights', gender 	<p>incomplete) Ex-post community impact evaluation (proposed but not accomplished)</p>	<p>testing required. More emphasis on skills for qualitative data collection/analysis needed.</p>
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Annex 6

Observation of Participatory Self Evaluation, Then and Now

Theme	PSE circa 01/04 Fershadangi Para, Thakargoan District	PSE circa 02/05 Mondolabari Pirgonj Para, Rangpur District
Indicators	A set of 49 predetermined indicators were used here. They ranged from technology adoption to social change indicators. Other FTs used the same or similar indicators with other FFSs.	Indicators were entirely proposed by group members. Five were selected: attendance in group meetings, participation in savings scheme, sanitation, social welfare, adoption of HH gardens.
Role of FT	The FT led the session throughout, following closely the procedure laid out in the written session guide. She did a good job of maintaining enthusiasm and getting broad participation from group members but never yielded control of the session of others.	The two FTs worked in a pair system, one actively facilitating and the other observing and assisting. The main facilitator started by getting agreement from the group on the objectives of the session.
Methods & Materials	The FT followed a session guide of more than 25 pages. A four-color card scoring system was introduced to help with scoring the indicators. Pink signified little progress, green meant full completion. Descriptions of the criteria for each score had been written on the cards.	The FT again consulted a session outline, although it was brief and did not include a list of 'sample' indicators. A similar colour coded system was proposed by the FT and readily accepted by the group. They chose which colour would correspond to which score. They described the criteria for each indicator's scores. A group member wrote the criteria on cards.
Role of group members	Group leaders were not empowered to take charge and the methods used did not seem to be replicable by the group. Although most members made contributions, a few were dominant.	The FT stated that CARE was leaving the community soon and they would have to conduct future PSEs by themselves. The group was enthusiastic about their ability to do that and selected one of their members to be the facilitator. She led most of the session and did a nice job. Group participation was fairly well balanced amongst those in attendance.
Session conclusion	The session was not overtly linked to future planning, although such discussions may have taken place after the observers left.	After scoring against the set of 5 indicators, the CARE FT again took charge and led the group through a fairly rapid planning for the next year. The task was to decide what score should be attained for the same indicators by next year, how it would be accomplished and who would be responsible. Only at the very end were participants allowed to offer ideas for new goals to pursue. They appreciated the opportunity.

Annex 7

Guiding questions for interviews with participants and field staff

Farmer Field Schools (FFS)

Good experiences – Best experiences.

What worked well?

What was most helpful to you?

What made it so good?

What made it succeed?

What took the initiative to do it?

How was it decided to do it?

What changes has it made to you lives?

What things do you want to do in the future to change livelihood?

Have you analysed the costs and benefit of that? – Who helped you?

What would be need for it to succeed?

In terms of:

- Services
- Capacity building
- Changes in relation to market, authorities or others

Organisational development

What did you like most about being in a group?

What was the best thing you did as a group?

Who took the initiative?

What made it so good?

How do you decide what to do?

If it means contacting outside agents - who will then take the contact?

What do you want to use the group for in the future?

What will you need to do to make that possible?

Do you link as a group with other organisations? Which?

How does it help you?

Do you link with other groups?

What will you need to do as a group?

Can you do that?

Access to Services

What other services do you have access to?

- Training
- Extension
- Livestock
- Inputs
- Market
- Health and family planning
- Other (education)

Has your access changed?

Who are the service providers?

Which are the best and most helpful services?

What makes them best?

How do you contact the service providers?

What are the most important criteria for good services?

How do you like the local services? (LE, VACC, seed supplier etc.)

When the project has ended, how will you get access to services?

What can you do as a group to make it possible?

FFS Learning Method

What is Farmer Field School?

What do you particularly like about the FFS?

- The group?
- The facilitation?
- The practical training?
- The experiential plots?

What did the experiential plots help you to understand?

How did the FT help you to understand?

Field staff

During the time of the project what were your best experiences, success stories?

What did you do that it made it a success?

What changes has it brought to the lives of the participants?

What about your own lives?

What is the FFS learning method?

What is characteristic to FFS compared to other training methods?

What is good about the method?

What made FFS a success for you?

What services do the farmers have access to?
Who are the providers?

Which do they particularly value?
And why?

How do you assist the groups in working better as a group?

What is your role?
How do you do that?

What are the best results of the org. dev.?

How do you think that the groups will continue after the end of the project?

What have you learned that you will apply elsewhere?

Annex 8 Indicators for Behavioural Change

What would we like to see at FFS at the end of March 2005

For "A" Category FFS (Indicators):

1. Majority of FFS groups member express themselves freely
2. Groups identify and address issues, which effect the community in general (immunization, education, dowry, health, sanitation etc.)
3. Group specifically help more marginalized members of community especially women and girl
4. Well managed planning with clear roles and responsibilities of group member and stakeholder
5. Group at least 3-4 members can facilitate discussion and decision making process
6. At least 5-6 members can lead the group and individual to access 3-4 relevant service providers
7. If the group are involved in saving, IGA or marketing activities there are transparent and accountable management systems

For "B" Category FFS (Indicators):

1. Almost half of the group members express themselves freely
2. Group beginning to identify and address other livelihood issues that are relevant to the poorer and marginalized members of the group, and gender issues
3. Group develop action plan with clear roles and responsibilities
4. At least 2-3 members are developing skills to facilitate discussing and decision making process
5. Majority of group members are aware about most common service providers (like health, DAE, DOL, Fisheries, Family planning)
6. If the group are involved in saving, IGA or marketing activities there are transparent and accountable management system

Behavioral Indicators

For Field Trainers (FTS):

1. FTs enable and encourage group members to discuss spontaneously livelihood, rights and other issues relevant and important to them
2. FTs delegate follow-up and organizational activities to various group members
3. FTs encourage and allow for times of reflection and brainstorming when there are no easy answers. Difficult issues can be brought up again at the following meeting when people have had time to think, discuss with community members and others to research options
4. FTs no longer fulfill roles and responsibilities of group members (i.e. accessing services, documentation)
5. FTs freely express their observation, ideas, concerns with one another, POs and others

For Project Officers (PO)

1. POs observe group dynamics and listen closely to staff and participants interaction and facilitate reflective, participatory discussion with FTs afterward
2. POs site examples of good works by FTs to others
3. POs listen closely and facilitate analytical open-minded discussion with FTs twice a month
4. Allow FTs to act independently within context of program purpose (empowerment)
5. POs will ensure upward and downward communication between FTs and others
6. POs freely express their concerns and ideas, on empowerment process and programmatic issues to PMs and other

For Project/Program Manager (PM)

1. PMs observe group dynamics and listen closely to staff and participants interaction and facilitate reflective, participatory discussion with PO/TO and afterward
2. PMs site examples of good works by POs/TOs/FTs to others
3. PMs listen closely and facilitate analytical open-minded discussion with staffs twice a month
4. Allow junior field staff to act independently within context of program purpose (empowerment)
5. PMs will ensure upward and downward communication between team, Units, RCs and others
6. PMs freely express their concerns and ideas, on empowerment process and programmatic issues to RCs and others

Other Important Cross Cutting Issues

1. Effective Communication
2. Appropriate Delegation
3. Mutual Respect (Gender responsive)
4. Fair Treatment and Professional Behavior

Annex 9**Livelihood Monitoring Unit Team Members,
Rural Livelihood Program, CARE-
Bangladesh**

SL	Name	Position
1	M. Zakaria	Technical Coordinator
2	A.N.M Kaiser Zillany	Program Development Officer
3	Khandaker Aminul Islam	Program Development Officer
4	Md. Taslim Uddin	Field Trainer
5	Md. Ashrafal Alam	Field Trainer
6	Nargis Begum	Field Trainer
7	Kazi Shahinur Islam Depon	Field Trainer
8	Md. Azizul Haque	Field Trainer
9	Fahmida Quadir	Field Trainer
10	Aklima Begum	Field Trainer
11	Nurjahan Begum	Field Trainer
12	Md. Jahangir Hossain	Field Trainer
13	Md. Mehrul Islam	Livelihood Coordinator
14	Sarah Gillingham	Livelihood Advisor

Annex 11 LMU Stories: Staff Members' Reflections

LMU Northwest baseline findings help to diversify project intervention, Ms. Nurjahan, FT

In the beginning SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH projects started field operation with their own technical based program intervention. In the middle of the project cycle, both projects took initiative to facilitate the social development issue, marketing, livestock, sanitation etc. During that time I was the FT of the GO-INTERFISH project. Being a FT it was my curiosity to learn why these new initiatives had introduced suddenly. I along with other learnt that LMU's northwest livelihood baseline findings had revealed that implementing only the technical intervention would not bring any significant changes in people's livelihood, therefore other important issues like social development, access to the market, sanitation should be addressed and these initiative would be more stronger if the projects facilitate these issues with establishing linkage and network with other local development organisation i.e. NGOs, CBOs and GOs. Whenever I had learnt the contribution of LMU's survey into the program intervention, I was very delighted for that moment. I feel proud of working with LMU, RLP.

How poorer household make its livelihood strategy, Ms. Aklima, FT, FT

I joined CARE's SHABGE project in 2000. This project (now a component of RLP) facilitates the agricultural intervention in the homestead area. Later, I was transferred to LMU on 17th May 2004. After my immediate joining LMU, I participated in the Northwest Livelihood Survey 2004 and Gaibanda district was my area of study. During the survey, a sample household's livelihood strategies did strike my mind. The household was consisted of five members and it had no any sustainable source of income. It owned a milking cow and earning from milk was only the way of carrying out household expenditure. From the discussion I learned that the household had purchased the cow with loan taken from BRAC. The cow used to give 8 litter milk in a day and the earning from the milk was used to bear the expenditure of household need and pay back the loan instalment. The way of maintaining the household livelihood was appeared to me very interesting. I do believe if I had no opportunity to work in LMU, it could not have been possible to learn the in-depth condition of a household's livelihood. Therefore, the day I learned the household's livelihood strategy from the community is very remarkable and interesting memory for my life.

Debt is more danger even than AIDS, Md. Ashraful Alam, FT

After immediate my joining I got the opportunity to take part in an in-depth study on debt and migration in the northwest Bangladesh in December 2003. Jurai West Para under the Parbattipur Upazila of Dinajpur district was one of the sample villages where I collect data as a member of the research team.

During the FGD (male), one Zahir passed remarks that debt is more danger even than AIDS. In response to the query about its reason, he informed *'if I was diseased/attacked with AIDS, then I could have died. As a result, the members of the family could have got to weep for few days. Besides that, they could have been able to keep their body and soul together. Thus there may not have had any impact on future generation'*. But he reported the fact that he had not used the loan properly. He had to use that for his daughter's marriage but he did not able to pay back loan. He pointed out that the debt burden was going to increase day by day and its negative impact had been causing erosion of my kids' lives. He informed that he was doubtful whether they (children) would be able to repay the existing debt burden. In consequence of this danger, he perceived that his kids would lay him under a curse for this indebtedness.

As a development worker, I worked for 4 years in a micro credit organisation where I had to disburse credit. But it was totally unknown to me about the negative implication of debt burden and people's perception about it. After joining LMU, I learned the dynamics of people's livelihoods in relation to debt management through this study, which I think would be ever memorable in my life. LMU has been succeeded digging out the dynamics of debt in relation to rural livelihoods, which, I strongly believe, would contribute and help CARE itself and other organisations to find out appropriate path of reducing as well as making the peoples lives free of debt burden.

Methodological learning - Qualitative Data Synthesis, Khandaker Aminul Islam, PDO

It is necessary to indicate that the LMU was designed to capture the wider context of rural livelihoods in the geographical regions over the time so that GO-IF and SHABGE-DFID the intervention implementing projects could bring the changes in programmatic strategies if demand is created. On the other hand, preparing a livelihood monitoring guideline based on the lessons from different studies was another responsibility of LMU. So in addition to quantifying changes and understanding the causes of those changes in livelihoods, LMU is appeared as a livelihood monitoring methodology development component of Rural Livelihood Program which could contribute in bringing the effectiveness of CARE and DIFD's program where they will be working in future as well.

As I have said earlier that the LMU is research oriented and methodology development project, so the analytical framework of the project was required to be comprehensive, robust and mixed. Thus conducting qualitative livelihood profile in addition to the quantitative study in the sample villages was an important event of delineating the broader picture of livelihoods and changes over time.

When I joined the LMU (August 2001), I saw that the team was near to complete the work with regards to doing the qualitative profile in the sample villages of the Northwest. However, there were two sample villages to be brought under the qualitative study and I had opportunity to participate as a member of the study team. According to the topical outline, each of the village profile was very thick and long because of the duplication of the same information under different heads of livelihood framework. The team had to struggle fitting the qualitative findings with quantitative information while preparing the Northwest baseline report. Thus there was a need of improving the team's understanding about the qualitative data collection process and synthesising the data in a systematic way so as to ensuring proper use of data. Being a member of LMU, I attended the three day workshop on qualitative data synthesis process in the month of July 2002 for which a resource person was hired from the University of East Anglia, UK.

Apart from the broad based learning on the issues of rural livelihoods through my involvement in a number of livelihood studies, here I along with other member of LMU staff particularly learned the process/methods of synthesising data through a participatory exercise. It is important to mention that during the exercise we used the raw data, notes, and village profile text to accomplish the task so that we can be capable to handle the data in future. The important lessons I learnt in the workshop that are as follows:

- Firstly, identify the themes in line with the livelihood framework or quantitative stuff. Then distribute the themes among the team members
- Secondly, reading all raw data, note books and village profile report carefully so that the team member can find out the information in connection with the specific theme and underline the relevant text using any colour pen

- Thirdly, pulling together all underlined text under the specific theme. In this case, mentioning the name of the village, source of information is very important. If it is necessary, we can organise the data even by agro-ecology or any other attribute
- Finally, interpret the information of the specific theme by describing the common, uncommon and exceptional findings and mention the data source and quotations where it is applicable

After the workshop, I along with other senior staff completed the village profile synthesis where we first used our learning. And it is very important to highlight that the learning on the process of qualitative data synthesis helped the LMU team a lot to synthesise the qualitative session of debt and migration study that finally allowed the research team preparing the qualitative profile of the sample village. Last but not least, the senior LMU staffs applied the learning in synthesising the community overviews of the sample villages in relation to the Northwest Livelihood Survey 2004. In the end, I would like to conclude that the lessons I learnt with regards to rural livelihood dynamics and applied research techniques during my job in LMU would be more valuable to signify my professional growth in the area of development research.

Vegetable market may be a sustainable intervention to improve the households' livelihood condition, Mohan Lal Roy, FT

I joined CARE's LIFT project in 1995. I started to facilitate the vegetable cultivation techniques in homestead area with the goal to improve the project participants' nutritional status and women's decision-making capacity. During the extension work, there had an emphasis on improving farmer's skill in case of applying vegetable cultivation techniques. Although it was appeared that the production was increased due to using modern technology, but it used to go down after closing the project's operation in the said area. It is perceived that, as the project did not take any initiative to market the farmer's produced vegetable, therefore they appeared to be less interested in keep going the production up.

In 2000, SHABGE project was operated in the field. At the same time, LMU started its activities. In primary stage, SHABGE project facilitated the agricultural technologies in the working area. After the LMU's northwest study findings, the project felt necessity to incorporate other intervention into the program strategy.

Being a member of SHABGE component I had opportunity to involve in LMU's studies twice: - the NW baseline study 2001 and recently completed the Northwest Livelihood Survey, 2004. During the survey I found that the data was collected from different types of area and households. It was appeared to me that people's livelihood condition was seemed to be varied from one community to other community due to different context of the villages. Thus understanding these contextual influences on the livelihoods, I understand and would like to mean that CARE or other organisations can mobilise the farmer's community by establishing the vegetable market in the community which would bring a sustainable impact in improving the livelihoods of the disadvantageous people in the community they work for. While I was involved to survey a community adjacent to a market in Gobindagonj upazila under Gaibanda district, I analysed all opportunities and context that leaded me perceiving the idea I reported above. After turning back in my working pace, I shared my views with my other colleagues, which created a lot of curiosity among the project staff. I would like to give credit to LMU, which gave me opportunity to learn the dimension of rural livelihoods.

Learnt the women status while I was involved in LMU's Northwest Qualitative Livelihood Profile in the Sample Villages, Ms. Shohelia, FT

There is very limited opportunity in the SHABGE and GO-INTERFISH component to analyse households' livelihoods or understanding the community's context in detail, as we have to facilitate the technical issues in the program area. I had an opportunity to work as a study member of the LMU team in 2001 to do the qualitative profile in a sample village. During the qualitative survey, it was very interesting to me to learn the insights of people's livelihoods through facilitating different types of PRA tools: Household semi-structure interview, FGDs, LGD, trend analysis that allow me internalising and triangulating the issues and event in relation to different components of livelihoods framework.

During the qualitative survey, it revealed to me that

1. Households' female member's decision-making capacity had been increasing
2. The household's agricultural production could be improved using agricultural modern technology
3. The economic condition of the people was being changed
4. Community leadership was found to be increased with the involvement in CBOs

Finally I would like to conclude that after profile broader livelihood in the community, the formation of FFS can be more effective to improve the changes of people's livelihood as it allows the facilitator to understand the real problem

One poor member's history of success, Md. Azizul Haq, FT

Background The village is Partakhata Khandaker Para under Chilmari upazilla of Kurigram – there one poor HH affected by river erosion came to that village and took shelter to one's house with his wife, sons and daughters. Then he became a member of Grameen Bank (GB). He took loan from GB and with that amount he started a business of mixing fried-rice with sweet ('mua') and he repaid the instalment on regular basis. After 5/6 years of his business, he bought 3/4 bigha land, he also built two tin-shed houses. Now he is sending his children to school.

Why it was most satisfying Due to getting the opportunity to work with LMU, I got the chance to take an interview of a HH, whose livelihood was very much vulnerable in last 5/6 years, but who has become able to recover that with the assistance of GB and with his energy & intelligence.

Bad impact of Mohajoni loan on poorer households livelihood, Depon, FT

I was then a new staff in CARE. Generally, I felt fear to work as a new employee in a new organisation; how I could do better in CARE – that was my intension. During our training period, we had a discussion that it is a challenge to find out and to take interview with a real *Mohajan*. Previously we knew that it is very difficult to get a *Mohajan* and also difficult to interview them.

In our first village and first day, I was searching for a real *Mohajan* as like detective. After 2 days searching, I could not found any *Mohajan*. Then I make a friendship with 2 younger child, 10 – 12 years old and visited the whole village with them – in this way, I could able to make rapport with them. Then, I had been known the actual name of *Mohajan* from them and with that *Mohajan* I settled a time for an interview. Next day we two interviewed that *Mohajan*.

Why important?: The above story was in our Debt and Migration study. We had to know from this study, how severely the Mohajan affect to rural poorer households. Our finding of debt and

migration study also supports that the poorer households are very distressed due to Mohajani debt.

Also the non-poor (rich) Indigenous female sell agriculture labour, Ms. Fahmida, FT

Background Being a team member of North-west Livelihood/Follow-up Survey, I went to an indigenous community, named Chotobukchi under Parbatipur upazilla of Dinajpur district. One of my sample HHs was non-poor and during my data/information collection, I found that the female members of that HH are involved with agriculture labour selling – both in their own and other people's land. That day was very much interesting to me.

Why it was most satisfying I have been working with CARE Bangladesh for more than 5 years with INTERFISH-II, GO-Interfish and LMU projects and before joining LMU (just 9 months behind), I could not find any single rich family whose female members were involved with any type of labour selling. But from rich to poor - all indigenous female are involved with agriculture day labour. This lesson I could not gain, if I didn't work with LMU and as I learnt this lesson getting opportunity to work with LMU, so that day was my 'most satisfactory day' with LMU.

The findings/information from North-West Baseline Survey helped the project (especially GO-Interfish) to change their interventions, Md. Taslim, FT

Which information project used:

- The devastating picture of sanitation of the North-west (NW) region
- The death rate of poultry and livestock in the NW region is high due to diseases
- Excessive Debt Burden of the rural poor of NW region
- Technical support is not enough to improve project participants' livelihood

Why it was most satisfying

Whenever the project started work with their new directed intervention using LMU baseline findings, then I felt proud and I was satisfied.

Program's contribution to Food Security, Md. Jahangir, FT

Introduction: Every mankind has some memorable day/s, which touches his/her heart – I have the same during LMU North-west Livelihood/Follow-up survey in 2004. The 'Food security' status of the rural poor, especially the poor people of remote rural areas is very acute and at the same time my realisation had come to know that if they are assisted with some technical supports, they can improve their livelihood.

Description: While I was discussing with one participant of Boalmari Farmer Field School under Boda upazilla of Panchagarh district regarding food security information, then I had come to know that his family never could manage 3 meals a day – their general # of meals is 2 and even in most of the cases this 2 meals are not as a full-meal. The most crisis months for them are: Ashin-Kartik and Chaitra-Baishakh. During crisis period, they take one meal. But being involvement with SHABGE project, they cultivate vegetables, preserve the sweet-gourd and sale it during crisis period. Using the sold money, they run their livelihood to some extent. Which seems to me an impact of project intervention. This touches my heart.

Methodological learning-Sampling Framework, A.N.M. Kaiser Zillany, PDO,

The most satisfying day of mine with LMU is not just a day's memory/learning; rather it's an accumulated learning/knowledge, which has build up my confidence to a greatest extent and the specific area is to deal with 'Designing, formulating and implementing a very robust SAMPLING FRAMEWORK of North-West Livelihood Survey (NWLS) in 2004.

Here it is important to mention the nature and objective of LMU, which will be easy to link with my satisfying area. Primarily The goal of LMU was to increase the effectiveness of the project (GO-IF and SHABGE) interventions for the rural poor in Bangladesh. Later, it added in its objective to: i) capture the wider context of rural livelihoods and ii) establish a livelihood monitoring guideline based on the lessons learned by the project. To do that, in the spheres of LMU life, it attempted two major tasks:

- a. North-West Rural Livelihood Baseline, 2001 and
- b. North-West Livelihood/Follow-up Survey

In both cases, LMU applied a broad, comprehensive and robust 'Sampling Framework'.

The NWLS 'Sampling Framework' was comprehensive in terms of disaggregating dimensions (agro ecological zone, considering baseline/non-baseline participants, project participants/non-participants and wealth categories) and the sample size itself. The framework followed a very systematic multi-stage random sampling to make the sample representative at the ecological zone, baseline/non-baseline participants, project participants/non-participants and wealth categories level.

The framework was developed with 46 villages: 19 from project participating, 10 non-participating and 17 mixed villages; the villages were also divided into the three agro-ecological zones (drought = 14, flood = 11 and favourable = 21). Then the number of samples from each village was finalised taking consideration the proportionate distribution of the wealth categories of total population of that village. Then sample HHs were selected as randomly and in this task, the widely used standard random table formula was used. In this way, the total 782 HHs were selected from 46 villages and prepared a 'Sampling Framework Table' for each village mentioning the basic criteria against each HH head – which type of HH it is? Is it baseline surveyed participant or not? Is it project participant or not? Which type of wealth category it holds? etc. Throughout the whole process, I was directly guided by Livelihood Advisor, Sarah Gillingham – it built up my confidence. The task required a great amount of patience, technical know-how about computer and the thirst to know a detailed process of sampling – whose value is really outstanding in accomplishing a research work with a full justifying way.

Sampling is a very crucial part of any research. Apart from that, the mentioned particular one was very special from CARE perspective. In CARE Bangladesh, such type of vast and robust survey and sampling is rarely done. It's a matter of feeling proud-ness to execute such type of rich work and I am the lucky person who got that chance, which contributed a lot in accomplishing the whole teams' work with a success.

LMU broaden my understanding about the use of credit to improve livelihood condition of poorer households, Nargis, FT

I took part in debt and migration study after immediate of my joining LMU. I facilitated a number of household interview and case studies in different sample villages. I can recall a sample village name Harper, Panchagar district where I found a household female who used to saving in the NGO and did not take loan until she got the opportunity of using loan in income generation. The household had five children who were not active age. So the female took loan when her eldest son grew up to involve in income generating activities such as driving ability of a van.

Starting with the van, the households had owned a number of assets like homestead, agricultural land, and shop with the earning generated by the use of loan. It seems to me that if a poorer household can decide when and how the loan could be used then it can improve its

livelihood condition. In addition to this, the thematic study allowed me to learn the dynamics of rural livelihoods as well as how to facilitate the qualitative study.

Annex 11 NWLS Questionnaire

- Section 1. Demography (3 parts)
- Section 2. Shelter, water and sanitation (1 part)
- Section 3. Health (2 parts)
- Section 4. Food security (2 parts)
- Section 5. HH economic status (11 parts)
- Section 6. Community participation male & female (3 parts each section)
- Section 7. Access to institutions male & female (1 part each section)
- Section 8. Status of women (5 parts)

Question	Rating ¹³	Remarks	Comments
Section:1 Demography			
1.1	Acceptable	In case of HH member definition needs to specify duration of staying in households (maximum time). We suggest considering more than six months, need to be documented.	
1.2	Acceptable	Can we use pre-coded occupation as we have already robust and stable coding book/system? the code for education can be specified as it signifies the people livelihood.	
1.3.a	Not simple, having link with 1.1.: Needs to improve	Ambiguity in explanation in case of definition for non-residence HH member. Members of HHs, who were absent for more than six month, but present during the day of interview should be regarded as non resident member.	
1.3.b	Acceptable		
Section 2 : Shelter and WATSAN			
2.1.a	Acceptable		
2.1.b	Acceptable		
2.1.c	Simple: Needs to improve	Enough to mention the smallest unit (e. g 'Para' need not to mention village)	
2.1.d to	Acceptable		

¹³ Rating of questions was based on the following four criteria: Simple, Reliability, Usefulness, Sensitivity

Question	Rating ¹³	Remarks	Comments
2.1.h			
Section 3: Health			
3.1.a	Acceptable		
3.1.b	Reliability and usefulness: Need to improve	Needs to re-structure the question. Need to the name of each month to capture, is there any severe period of diarrhea?	
3.2 (work day lost)	Reliability: Needs to improve	It is difficult to determine the # of women work day lost.	
3.2 (type of illness for women)	Sensitivity and reliability: Needs to improve	It is difficult to get answer of some women's special type of illness. When female enumerators discuss with female respondent, this question could be asked.	
Section : 4 Food security			
4.1 food security)	Simple: needs to improve	# of months for food security, need to collect data for # of days of a particular month (e.g. if a household is food secure for 15 days in a month, then will it be secure or insecure?) - same thing for '# of meals' and 'quantity reduced'	<i>House did not agree with this.</i>
4.3	Simple and Sensitivity: needs to improve	'Aged pension' should be included. Reason: relevant with VGD card - Sensible to ask upper classes	<i>House suggested to include widow pension</i>
Section:5 Economic status			
5.1	Needs improved	In many cases, due to the practical reason it is difficult to segregate the 'own other land' (e.g bamboo stand, wood lot) Suggestion: Collection of data could be avoided from multi- ownership arrangement	
5.2	Needs improved	It is difficult to measure actual size of BEEL	
5.3	Acceptable		
5.4	Needs improved	In terms of joint ownership of STD, power tiller, and paddy husking mill, actual share needs to be specified. Getting correct information on jewelry is not always possible, respondents tend to report high	

Question	Rating ¹³	Remarks	Comments
		or low.	
5.5	Need improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ranking the heads of expenditure is a complex Suggestion ranking could be avoided. - Expenses on paying dowry (irregular type of cost) and expenses on social/religious purposes (regular cost) should not be counted in a same row. Sugg: Expenses on dowry should put in different row. - Collection of accurate information on food and inputs for production (agri.) is difficult. Sugg: Some major items should be identified for capturing food and agri.inputs. 	
5.6	Need improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection of incomes of HHs' joint initiatives by member is difficult. Sugg : Incomes from joint initiatives should be accounted as joint incomes. - Collection of savings data is difficult in some cases as information of savings is not known to each other in the same HH. 	
5.7a. to 5.11	Acceptable		House suggested a set of pre-code for crisis events to avoid misses.
Section 6 community participation (male and female)			
6.1 b/c table-10	Not simple : needs improvement	<p>We suggest to segregate CBO from NGO and CBO might be grouped under local club/samity. Grameen bank should be separated from bank and need to be merge with NGO as its operational mode is almost same as NGO.</p> <p>We need to be clear what responses we expect from the household in terms of benefit. We should be clear about the operational procedure and differences between village court, shalish and gram sarkar. After wards, we can group/segregate the event/issue.</p>	
6.2a.b.c	Sensitivity, not simple . needs to improve	The question seems easy for interview. But it was found difficult for HH in respect of responding the column 'why do you not belong'. It is sensitive and complex. We suggest making it simple or ignoring.	
6.3	Not simple, understandable, needs to improve	<p>it was not clear enough for the HHs while asking the question 'how the household participated in the festival?</p> <p>We suggest to improve the wording 'whether did you spend money with respect to the participation in the festival? And how the expenditure had impacted on livelihood?'</p>	Consider the above points and remarks (6.1-6.3) also for female part.

Question	Rating ¹³	Remarks	Comments
Section 7 Access to institution (male and female)			
7.1 a/b Table 11	Not simple, less reliable : needs improvement	<p>Column 1 (Type of service)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DAE/DoL/DoF should be separated from each other, because each one has large implication in Livelihoods. - Grameen Bank should be included as NGO <p>Column 2 (frequency)</p> <p>In place of frequency, we suggest to use the mode of service by 'yes/no', because it was difficult to have reliable information against the response for frequency. The households in many cases reported the frequency of going to service providing organisation although they didn't receive any further service. So what we expect in this column?</p> <p>We suggest considering only the received service/information. (e.g advice for ag./liv./fish.cre. for ...1,2,3)</p> <p>Column 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It seemed difficult to differentiate the level of satisfaction with three levels. We suggest to use two levels to make easy the response for HH as, Satisfied 2. Not satisfied 	Consider all notes/remarks for female part as well
Section 8 : Status of Women			
8.1	Reliability : needs to improve	No variation found in between male/female and boys/girls for food consumption.. may be women and girls also take fish/meat.... but the quantity is not equal. (same as in PCM)	
8.2	Acceptable		
8.3.a	Sensitivity and Reliability : needs to improve	Usually women do not account their own age Women hide information of their marriage age due to complication of govt. law. Suggestion: By cross checking with other information of age.	
8.3.b to 8.3.d	Sensitivity: needs to improve	Women hide information about the amount of dowry due to complication of Govt. law	
8.4.a to 8.4.b	Acceptable		
8.4.e	Usefulness:	Decision making of gold or silver is not the same. So silver should be removed or it should be	

Question	Rating ¹³	Remarks	Comments
	needs to improve	asked as another question.	
8.4f Credit & savings use)	Simple : needs to improve	Use of credit and use of savings is not the same. So it should be asked as separately	
8.4.g to 8.4.h	Acceptable		
8.4.i	Simple : needs to improve	Treatment for women and children should be separated	
8.4.j	Acceptable		
8.5	Acceptable		