FSUP-H NEWSLETTER

A quarterly newsletter published by CARE Bangladesh, funded by the European Union

3rd Issue

Project Background

Food Security for the Ultra Poor (FSUP-H) is a five year project funded by the European Union and being implemented by CARE Bangladesh and three national partners, Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS), Assistance for Slum Dwellers (ASD) and People's Oriented Program Implementation (POPI). The overall project goal is to **reduce extreme poverty, food insecurity and vulnerability in the Haor region of Northeast Bangladesh.** FSUP-H targets 55,000 ultra poor households, with a focus on ultra poor women, in the three districts of Sunamganj, Netrakona and Kishoreganj.

Message from CARE Bangladesh Country Director – Jamie Terzi

It is my pleasure to introduce the third issue of the FSUP-H newsletter which draws attention to some important events and activities that have taken place in recent months. In this issue you will find a summary of key findings for the project's recent internal monitoring survey which highlight FSUP-H's progress towards its objectives. The results of the survey are particularly encouraging and highlight the important impact FSUP-H has had on the ultra-poor women and their families. The survey findings serve to show the importance of using an integrated programming approach in tackling food security.

This newsletter also provides a summary of FSUP-H's recent national level round table which was jointly organised by SHOUHARDO II, a project being implemented by CARE and funded by USAID and the Government of Bangladesh. SHOUHARDO II is working to reduce the vulnerability of 370,000 poor and extreme poor households in 11 Districts of Bangladesh.

The round table focused on the importance issue of access to government *Khas* land for the landless poor. Current constraints in distributing *Khas* land to the landless were discussed, along with recommendations for how the government can improve the current process. The event provided a forum for CARE Bangladesh to share its experience assisting the landless gain their legal rights to *Khas* land with a number of Government of Bangladesh officials and other stakeholders.

In this issue you will also find engaging articles on FSUP-H's recently completed cash-for-work schemes and the new initiative of couple counselling which is being implemented in conjunction with the Engaging Men Initiative. Couple counselling is addressing gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and equitable household work through targeted discussions with young couples. Finally the newsletter presents a number of stories from FSUP-H participants with a particular focus on the impact of income generating activities on ultra-poor women and their families.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and find the content interesting and engaging. If you have any questions regarding the content or with the FSUP-H project in general please let the project team know through the contact details on the final page.

European Union SUS ASD POPI care

This project is funded by the European Union

This project is implemented by CARE and its partners

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Monitoring and Evaluation Survey March 2013

In March, FSUP-H's internal monitoring and evaluation team undertook a survey to assess the project's progress and understand the impact of the project against its objectives. The survey captured quantitative data from 408 project participant households using a specifically designed questionnaire. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were carried out at the community level to understand FSUP-H progress and impact on the ultra-poor households.

The survey findings are extremely encouraging and highlight the excellent progress the project has made towards achieving its objectives and the overall project goal of reducing extreme poverty, food insecurity and vulnerability among the ultra-poor project participants. The following article highlights some of the key findings from the monitoring survey.

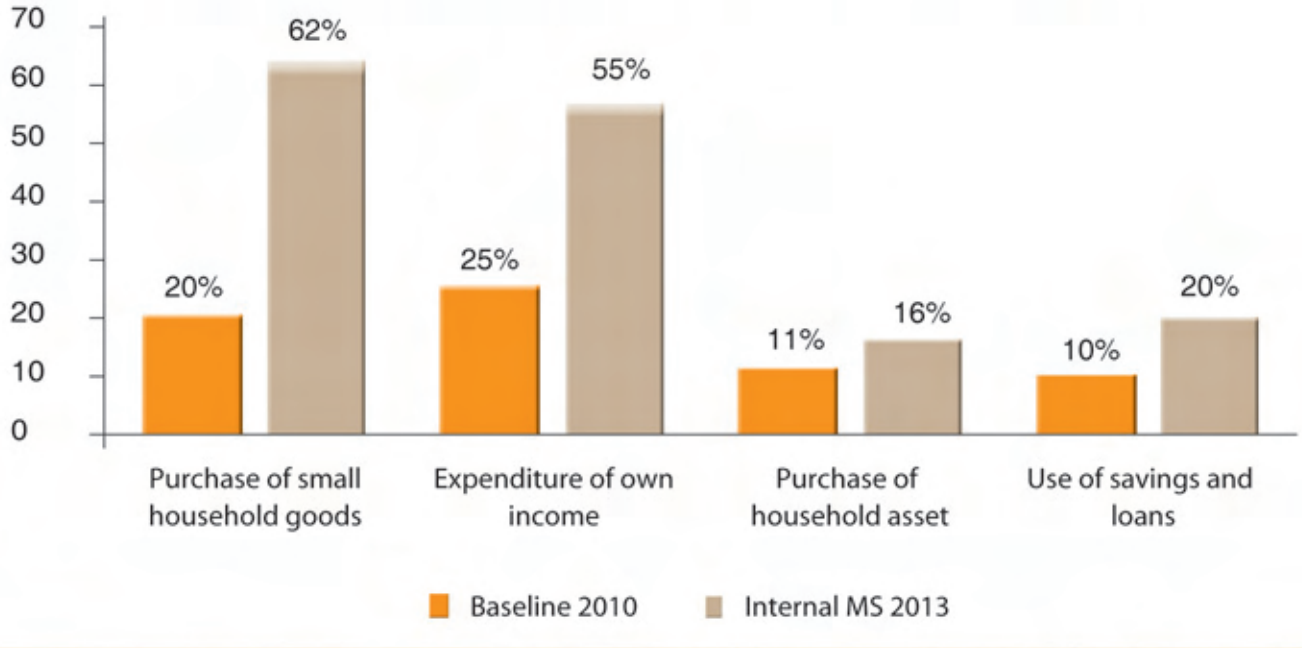
Result 1: Women's Empowerment

The monitoring survey findings revealed women's involvement and capacity to actively engage in development processes is improving. The survey found that 87% of FSUP-H households participated in different development activities including being members of community platforms such as Village Development Committees, EKATA (women's empowerment) groups, collective income generating activities, cash-for-work, community nutrition gardens etc. This widespread involvement in development processes by the ultra-poor participants can be seen in contrast to the low baseline figure in 2010 of 4.5%. Furthermore the survey found that 96% of women project participants were participating in community savings groups which considerably exceeds the FSUP-H's project target of 80%.

Links to the government were also seen to have improved with 87% of households reporting to have accessed at least one Government service in the past 12 months compared to the 2010 baseline of 68.7%. Social safety nets were received by 45.4% of respondents with 31.27% receiving health services.

Women's empowerment also appears to be increasing at home with women reportedly having more of a say in household decision making. Women reported increased decision making from the 2010 baseline in purchasing small household goods, expenditure of their own income, purchase of household assets, and use of savings and loans. The table below highlights the extent of the reported increase in decision making by women compared to 2010.

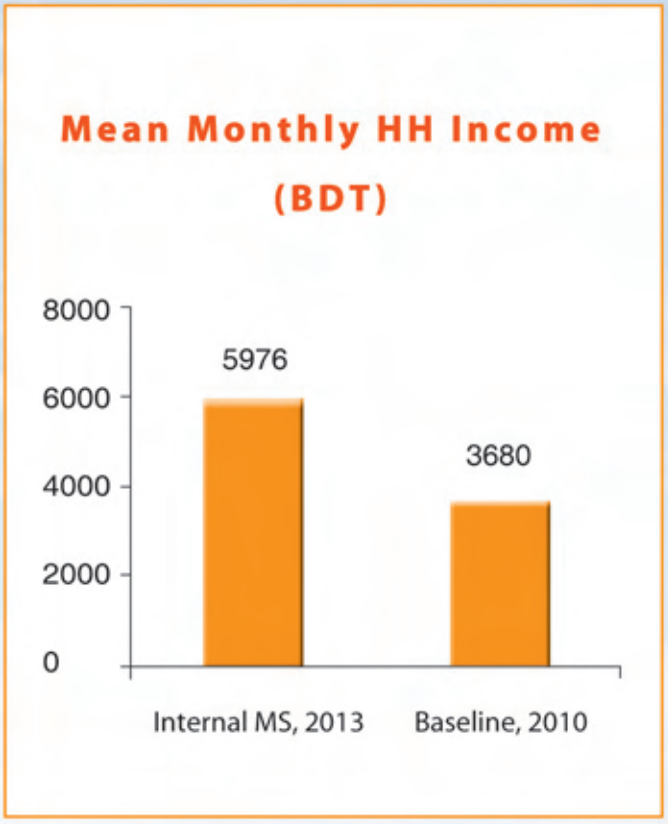
Women's Household Decision Making

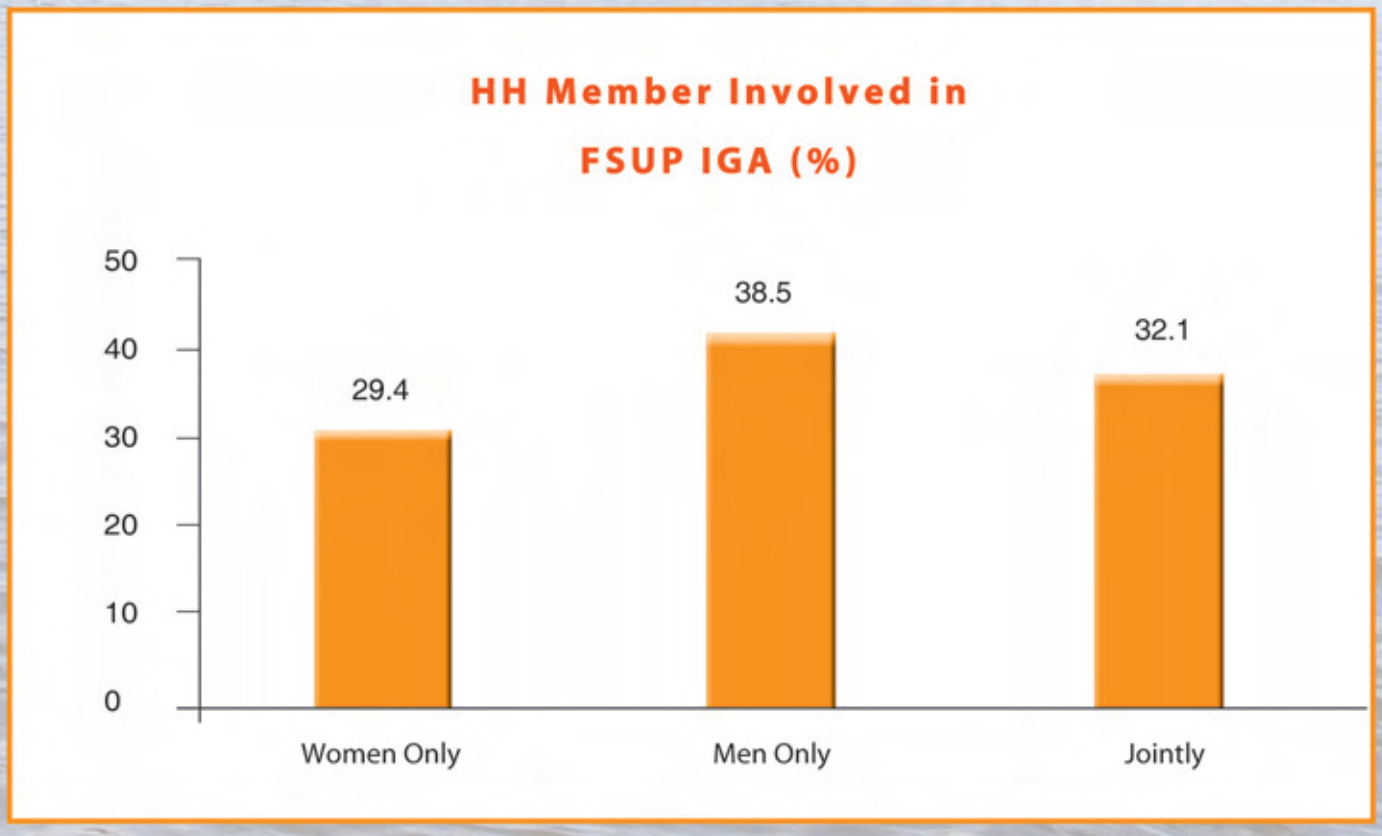


Result 2: Economic Empowerment

FSUP-H reported increased economic activity since 2009 with a reported increase in the mean monthly household income from 3680 Bangladeshi Taka in 2010 to 5976 in March 2013. This represents a considerable increase in income for ultra-poor households in the *Haor* region and surpasses the FSUP-H target of 5500 Bangladesh Taka by the end of the project.

The survey findings also suggest economic resilience to shocks and stresses is also increasing among the ultra-poor households through increased income earners and sources per household. The survey found an average of 3.34 income sources per participant household with the average number of 2.2 income earners per household compared to 1.35 income earners in 2010. The survey also revealed women's increased involvement in economic activity with 61.5% of women reportedly carrying out income generating activities (IGAs) either alone or jointly with male members of the household.



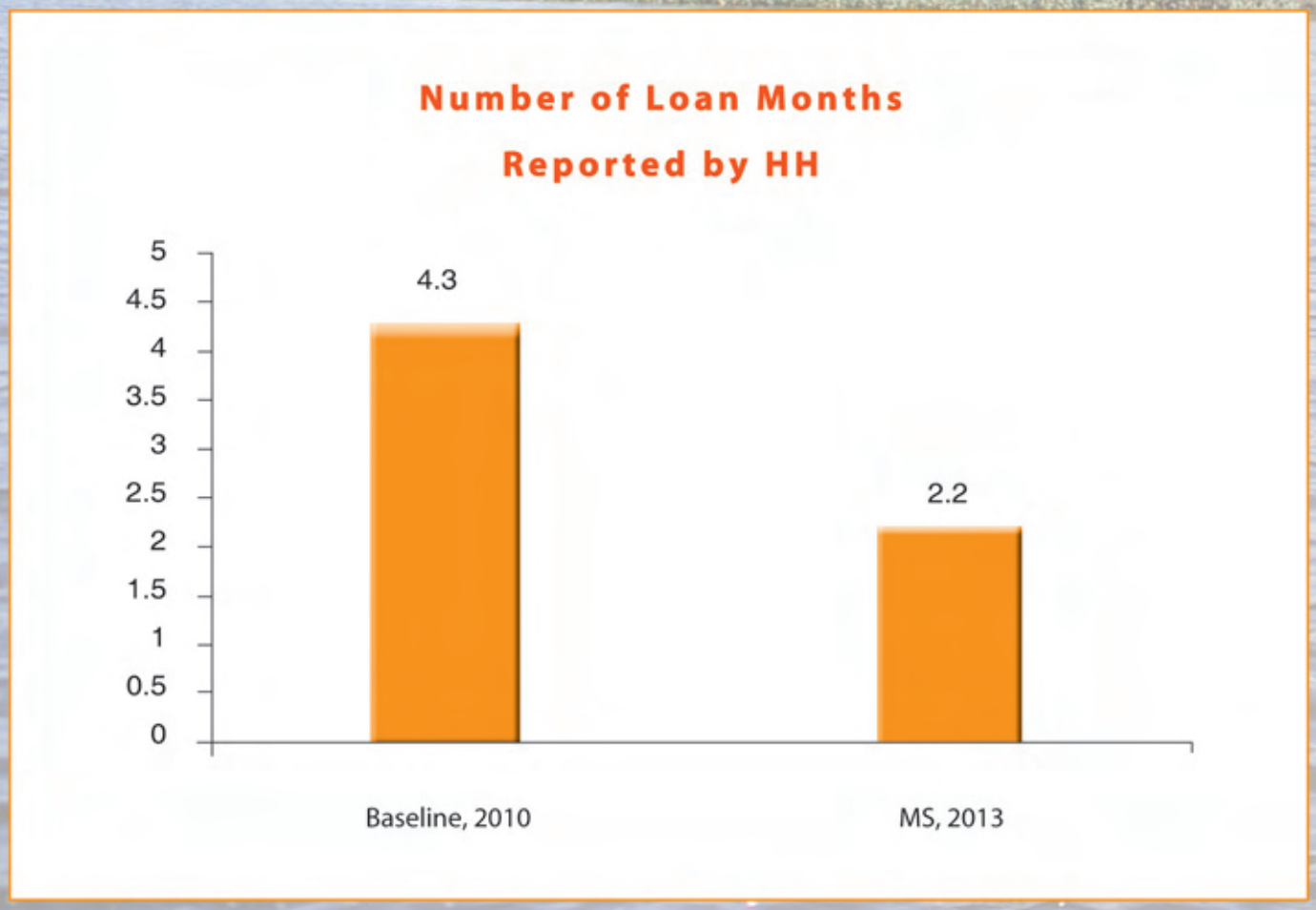


Result 3: Improved Resilience to Disasters and Reduced Vulnerability to Food Insecurity

The monitoring survey findings show the number of lean months reported by ultra-poor households has decreased from the baseline figure of 4.3 months to 2.2 months on average. This suggests a reduction in the vulnerability of food insecurity for these households since 2010. The average income during the lean months was reported to have increased from 1750 Bangladeshi Taka in 2010 to 3050 in the 2013 survey.

Despite this finding the survey also revealed that 40% of household members seasonally migrated during lean months, an increase from the 35% in the 2010 baseline. This suggests migration is still an important coping strategy for many ultra-poor families in the *Haor* region during the lean period.

The FSUP-H project has also now completed 419 small flood protection schemes such as homestead or school ground raising and 20 village protection walls to increase community resilience to flooding and erosion of homesteads caused by waves. More than 12,500 FSUP-H women participants have received 30 days cash for work to construct the schemes. This provided a valuable source of income for the women during the lean period and challenged social norms by supporting women to carryout paid work traditionally associated with men.



Result 4: Increased Utilisation of Food and Reduced Malnutrition

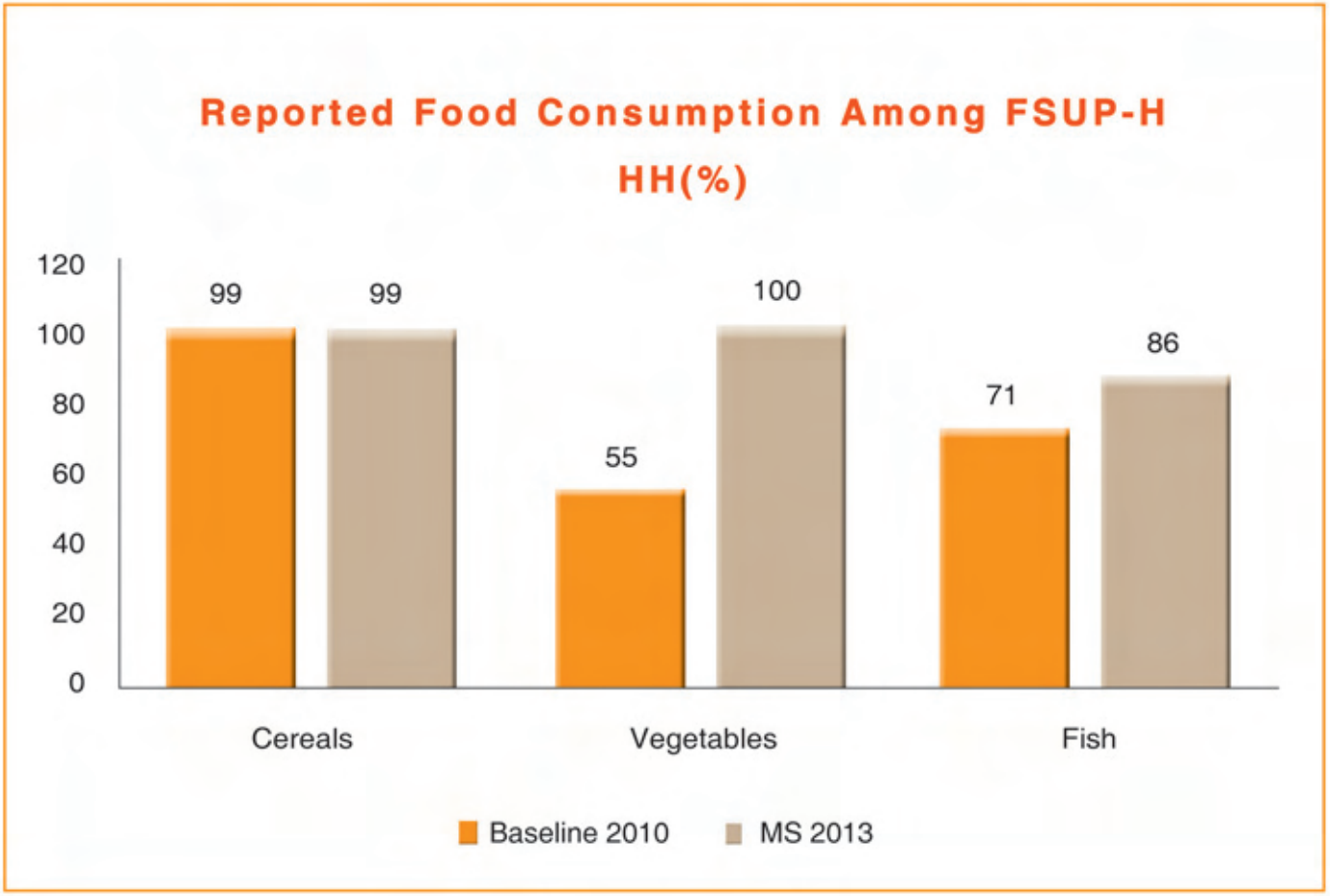
The monitoring survey showed some promising findings relating to increased dietary diversity among the respondents who reported considerable increase in consumption of vegetables and fish. In fact 100% of households reported consuming vegetables regularly as part of their diet. It is likely this is a reflection in the provision of homestead gardening training and seeds to all 55,000 FSUP-H households along with establishing community nutrition gardens across the project working area. The food consumption scores taken from the 2013 survey were also encouraging showing 91.7% of households scored an acceptable score compared to only 52.3% in the 2010 baseline.

Health practices also show positive signs with 18.3% of pregnant women reportedly completing 4 anti-natal care visits against a 5% baseline figure. 96% of women who had given birth in the past 12 months reported initiating breastfeeding in the first hour of birth compared to a 45% baseline suggesting improved new born child health practices are taking place among the target group.

Photo: @ Ahmed Shahed

Concluding Remarks

The survey revealed some interesting and positive signs of FSUP-H's progress towards achieving its overall goal. The results confirm some of the findings produced by the Outcome Survey conducted by the Program Coordination Unit (PCU) in May 2012. The monitoring survey also helped to highlight some areas where improvements can be made. The project team is now using these findings to focus activities and improve achievements further in the final year.



Accessing *Khas* Land for the Ultra-Poor: National Level Roundtable

Through FSUP-H's advocacy strategy, the project seeks to influence policy around the extreme poor's access to land and water bodies. In particular the advocacy strategy focuses on raising awareness among policy makers on issues related to access to government *Khas* land and water bodies for the ultra-poor.

On 1st June 2013, FSUP-H, in partnership with SHOUHARDO II funded by the USAID, organised a national level advocacy roundtable entitled *"Accessibility of Poor and Extreme Poor People to Khas Land: Existing Constraints and Way Forward"*. The aims of the roundtable were to review the policy and legal environment affecting land access, review past contributions and existing efforts to access these resources, and to identify opportunities, challenges and strategies to address issues and gaps in access to land for the poorest.

The roundtable was attended by several high profile special guests including the Advocate Md. Qamrul Islam, M.P, State Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and Md. Rezaul Karim Hira, M.P, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Land. Attendees of the event included academics and practitioners working across research institutes, local government representatives, lawyers, land experts, rights activists, funding bodies and NGOs.

The FSUP-H study "Accessing Khas Land and Water Bodies for the Ultra-Poor: A Qualitative Study" was disseminated at the roundtable event. The study highlights the issues faced by the ultra-poor in accessing Khas land and water bodies at the local government level. The roundtable began with the screening of the documentary "Voices of Hazarigaon", which shared the story of FSUP-H participants in Sunamganj who had claimed their right to Khas land after living on the land for 26 years and paying rent illegally. The film highlighted the difficulties the community faced in accessing the land, the benefits related to access, particularly relating to women's empowerment. The conclusion of the documentary highlighted the ongoing barriers to accessing *Khas* land including corruption, failures of local governance and lack of rights awareness.

Recommendations from the study and issues highlighted in the documentary were included in a keynote paper presented by Professor Mesbah Kamal, Department of History, University of Dhaka and Chairperson of Research and Development Collective (RDC). Specific recommendations were made to the government for strengthening the human resources of government office's involved in *Khas* land distribution as well as the need to accelerate the pace of *Khas* land distribution to the poor.

Both the attending Members of Parliament gave speeches at the roundtable with the State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs especially linking the issues of land grabbing raised in the FSUP-H film by stating both political parties are responsible for such practices.

CARE Bangladesh will take learning from this roundtable and from FSUP-H's work to continue to advocate for access to these important resources for the ultra-poor. FSUP-H is also now carrying out district level advocacy workshops to raise these issues to the administration in the FSUP-H working area.

Photo: @ Shohel Ahmed / CARE

Couple Counselling: A New Initiative

During this quarter, FSUP-H, funded by the European Union, and the EMI project, funded by CARE Norway, have begun a new initiative of couple counselling. This provides the opportunity for wives and husbands to sit together in structured sessions to discuss issues such as violence against women, equitable share of household work, and sexual and reproductive health.

In Mohorkona village, in the union of Nikli, Kishoreganj district, ten couples have been taking part in the couple counselling sessions and explained how they had discussed the different types of violence common in their community including mental torture, physical and sexual violence against women. The project's community facilitator uses specially designed visual materials to explain to the couples that it is against the law in Bangladesh to commit violence against women, raise awareness on sexual harassment and promote women's rights. The men discussed how they can reduce this violence and recognised they needed to be more open in their relationships in the future. One husband from Mohorkona explained, "the husband must make a sacrifice to stop violence against women".

Beauty Nag , the community facilitator who has been supporting the couple counselling sessions in Mohorkona

Photo: @ Indrani Saha / CARE

The importance of the couple counselling sessions is that it allows women and men to openly discuss their behaviour, beliefs and practices in an open forum. In the past, project platforms have focused exclusively on women in women's empowerment groups where female participants discuss negative local practices such as violence against women. "Men didn't understand these meetings" one male counselling participant explained, "now we are included we understand more". The women in Mohorkona also agreed that the couple counselling approach was having a positive impact on the way their husbands behave. The women reported being involved more in decision making in the household, and one woman explained how her husband accompanied her to the doctors whereas in the past he would not go with her.

Beauty Nag, the community facilitator who has been supporting the couple counselling sessions in Mohorkona explained, the couples are now openly "committed against violence" and are discussing what they learn in the sessions with their neighbours. They have identified "real faults" in their behaviour and are beginning to change the traditional negative practices so common in this remote region of Bangladesh.

The project is now carrying out couple counselling sessions across 116 communities in FSUP-H working areas. This initiative is reaching over 1,160 couples from the project participants directly through the sessions and in time, the wider community as couples begin to change their behaviour and attitude.

Anzu Mia Becomes a Role Model for His Community

Salma says she has seen a "radical change" in her husband Anzu Mia in the past year and he has become committed to supporting the most vulnerable families in his community. In 2009, Anzu Mia contracted tuberculosis (TB) and was taken to hospital. "Many people died in the hospital from TB" he explained, "and I thought I would die too". But Anzu Mia did not die and he thanks the community people both men and women for praying for him and supporting him during this difficult time in his life.

After his experience, Anzu Mia began to make small changes in his behaviour with his wife and in the wider community. He began to appreciate and support his wife more. "In the past we quarrelled a lot" Salma explained, "but now our relationship has improved". Anzu Mia not only changed his behaviour in his married life but also became more vocal in the community and started speaking out about the negative ways some men treat women.

Young men in the community would observe the positive way he would behave towards his wife and other women and began to openly discuss this with him. Slowly he became seen as a positive role model for young men by both women and men in the community.

Last year the project formally identified him as a positive example for others in his community. As a recognised positive male role model, Anzu Mia speaks regularly with adolescent men in his community to discuss issues relating to the way men treat women. He has also helped to establish an Ending Violence through Engaging Men (EVEM) forum in his community which discusses issues relating to violence against women with young men. Anzu Mia also attends the project's couple counselling sessions with his wife where they discuss issues of fair share in household chores, women's rights, and sexual and reproductive health.

Since attending these sessions Salma says Anzu Mia takes more of a share in household activities such as cooking. Anzu Mia explained "I feel no shame in taking on these roles" which are traditionally associated with women and when neighbours see him carrying out this work he explains he is supporting his wife. In the future they plan to start a family and raise their children in a healthy and happy marriage.

photo: © Ahmed Shahed

Cash for Work: Providing Support During the Lean Months

Between December and February, FSUP-H has supported 3,534 extremely poor women carry out 146 small scale flood protection schemes by providing 30 days cash for work to each woman. The cash injection provides vital support for the extremely poor families during the lean months in the Haor region as well as providing protection from the annual flooding which takes place in this region of Bangladesh.

The flooding in the Haor region regularly inundates homesteads, causing damage, washing away assets and spreading disease. As a result, FSUP-H prioritised schemes focused on raising the homesteads of project participants. This helps to reduce homestead flooding and increases household resilience to disasters. In addition to homestead raising, a number of other flood protection schemes were carried out including road maintenance, school ground raising, market ground raising and pond excavation. Schemes were prioritised by the Village Development Committees (VDCs) before FSUP-H carried out a feasibility assessment. The ultra-poor women are chosen by the VDC to carry out the work and a number of the women, along with some pro-poor men form a Project Implementation Committee (PIC) to oversee the scheme.

CARE's partner, ASD, oversaw a cash for work scheme to raise 1 kilometre long road linking Rosoroi VDC in Laximipur Union to a community market in Dowarabazar, Sunamganj District

photo: © Rawshan Rahman / CARE

The cash for work schemes provide a number of important benefits including;

i) The cash injection provides and important supplement to the household income during the lean months. Project monitoring has shown that this money often goes on food items or is invested in productive assets such as poultry or ducks.

ii) The cash also provides an alternative to taking high interest loans so commonly taken by ultra-poor families as a way of coping during the lean months of the year.

iii) All cash for work is provided to women which creates an opportunity for women to work outside of their homestead. This challenges conservative norms which restrict women's mobility and ability to work outside the home. The focus group discussions carried out for the internal monitoring survey revealed many men had begun to change their attitude towards women working outside of the home after witnessing their wives take part in an FSUP-H cash for work scheme.

iv) Raising homesteads not only provides long term protection from flooding but also creates additional space for families to carryout livelihood activities such as homestead gardening or livestock raising.

v) Other schemes have helped to protect community infrastructure from the floods and the raising of roads has helped to improve the communication system in the area. One example of this was in Sunamganj where CARE's partner, ASD, oversaw a cash for work scheme to raise a 1 kilometre long road linking Rosoroi VDC in Laxmipur Union to a community market in Dowarabazar.

FSUP-H has now implemented 422 cash for work schemes across the Haor region which provided over 12,500 extremely poor women with short term employment.

photo: © Rawshan Rahman / CARE

Stories from the Field

Building Resilience through Wise Investments

Taslima lives with her husband and three children in the village of Shohila, Kishoreganj district in Bangladesh. Prior to 2009, Taslima's family lived in extreme poverty, relying solely on Taslima's husband's small income to survive. But in 2009, things began to change in their lives when Taslima was selected as a participant in the FSUP-H project. FSUP-H provided Taslima with business training and helped her to establish a small grocery shop in her home by providing seed money to start the business. Her husband, Habibur, supported Taslima in her new income generating activity and purchased items for Taslima to sell in the neighbouring markets.

Taslima is now earning an average of 2,000 to 3,000 Bangladeshi Taka a month and up to 7,000 a month during harvest period (3 months) when community people have more money to spend on luxury goods. In 2011, Taslima and her husband used the profits from the grocery shop to buy a cow. Within a year, the cow had two calves and they sold one calf, using the profits to lease a small plot of land to grow rice. In the first year of leasing the land, they produced enough rice to feed their family for the whole year and still with rice left over to sell in the community.

FSUP-H also provided Taslima with training on homestead gardening to enable her to establish a vegetable garden around her home. Taslima received vegetable seeds from the project to begin cultivation. Now her family are supplementing their diet with fresh fruit and vegetables. Excess vegetables and fruit are sold at market to increase their income further.

Prior to 2009, Taslima's family relied on Habibur as the sole income earner. Using the skills learnt in the FSUP-H business training and the small investment, Taslima's family now receive income from the grocery shop, livestock rearing, land leasing and vegetable cultivation in addition to Habibur's income as a day labourer. It is through this diversification of income sources that families like Taslima's can build up resilience to disasters and shocks that might occur.

In addition, one of the most important factors of economic resiliency is the number of income earners in a household. In the case of Taslima's family, prior to 2009 they relied on one income earner, her husband but since then they have invested in a number of income generating activities which can be carried out by Taslima and their children such as the grocery shop or raising livestock. If Habibur was unable to earn an income for example, the family now have other income sources which they can rely on. The FSUP-H project baseline survey showed on average, project participant households had 1.35 income earners compared to the recent internal monitoring survey which revealed project participant household have an average 2.2 income earners per household suggesting economic resilience has increased considerably among FSUP-H project participants.

photo: © Ahmed Shahed

photo: © Ahmed Shahed

The Economic Empowerment of Horchona Creates a Positive Change in Her Husband

Horchona Rani Das lives with her husband, Jotilal Das and their three children in the village of Koroncha in Northeast Bangladesh. In 2009, Horchona was selected as a participant in the FSUP-H project and in 2010 she received 4,700 BDT as seed money to start a business. Prior to receiving the money Horchona did not have an income and her family relied solely on Jotilal's income as an agricultural day labourer. Jotilal's income was irregular and reliant on him finding work each day. Some days Horchona's family would go hungry.

On receiving the seed money to start a small business, Horchona sat with her husband to plan how they could improve their family income. Jointly they decided to invest the seed money in selling dry fish and they made a plan on how they could work together in the business. Jotilal travels to market and purchases the dry fish and then travels door-to-door in neighbouring communities selling the dry fish. Horchona sells the dry fish from her home in their community. In the past the family relied solely on Jotilal's income as a day labourer and Horchona would remain idle in the household but now they are working together to change their lives.

With the profits from the dry fish business they have purchased a bed and display cabinet to store their household goods. Horchona and Jotilal have also been able to invest in a small solar panel which provides electricity in their house for the first time. This is an impressive change in the life of Horchona's family, no longer are they reliant on candles to light their house at night and their children can carry out school work after dark.

In 2011, FSUP-H project constructed a village protection wall in Koroncha to protect households from the devastating erosion caused by destructive waves that come from the inundation of water in the region each year. Knowing that their home is now protected, Horchona and Jotilal have been able to invest in their homestead by extending their land and establishing a vegetable garden on the land. They are now regularly consuming vegetables and are able to sell excess vegetables to supplement their income.

Despite all the positive changes which have taken place in Horchona's family in the past year, perhaps that most important is that sharing the responsibility for family income has resulted in her husband being more supportive of his wife. As Jotilal is winnowing the rice, a job traditionally carried out in rural Bangladesh by the women, Horchona explains "now my husband takes an active role in household activities and we work together to provide an income for our family".

photo: © Ahmed Shahed

Small Scale Entrepreneurship: Catalysing Women's Empowerment

Haresa(55) a widow with three sons is a pioneering small scale business women in her village Chatol, in Karimganj under Kishoreganj district. Haresa sells seasonal fruits to her neighbours, fruit businessmen and to the local weekly market. She started her business with an investment of BDT 300 ten years ago. She was struggling to enhance her business due to inadequate money and on top of that the pressure to repay the high interest loan she received from the local money lender.

In 2009 Haresa was selected as a participant of the FSUP-H project and received a cash grant of BDT 4700 under the same project implemented by CARE Bangladesh, funded by the European Union. This small amount of money channelled big changes to Haresa's family. Before receiving the cash, she only sold fruits to her neighbours or supplied fruits to local vendors. As investment increased, more fruits could be purchased, stocked and sold that consequently led her to start selling fruits to the local market on market day. Now she earns about BDT 13000 per month with an interest. She continues to invest BDT 10000 for the next month and the rest of the money as her expenditure and savings. Since received small asset grant from the FSUP-H, she is also a member of the VDC savings group. Her current saving is BDT 1450.

Haresa's business is of seasonal fruits entailing: Mango, Jackfruit, Banana, Berries and Guavas. Usually it is Bananas that she sells round the year. Her business technique is to buy whole trees with fruits before the season begins. It takes bargaining skills to do this, given the male dominance involved in the business process from the tree owners to fruit vendors. As a part of the project, like many others Haresa received Business Management Training that enriched her skills towards a successful entrepreneurship. Her negotiation skills increased with a boosted confidence. Her business requires regular movement across the village and to market. Women's mobility is traditionally restricted by men in this conservative region of Bangladesh and when asked if there is any issue concerning mobility: she replied with smile that

*"I was a member of the **Cash for Work** scheme by the FSUP-H, and undertook work that was previously considered as men's work like building village protection walls to name one. This experience has enriched my ability to move around whether in my village or in the market"*

Haresa is an inspiration to her fellow villagers not only for earning money but also for how she is managing her family and business in a dignified way. She has paid back the high interest loans since she received the small asset grant. As a self reliant woman she is a strong support to her sons and their families. She lends money to her sons without interest so that they do not get caught in the vicious cycle of high interest loans. She buys her medicine and food by her own money. Women from her neighbourhood often come to learn how she improved her condition of extreme poverty to today's secured living. She also gets invited to neighbour's houses and community events, which is an indicator of her increased social prestige.

Progress to date

645 Village Development Committee (VDC) completed Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the community level for reviewing their Community Action Plan, presenting different success stories, preparing a future sustainable plan etc.

Project has completed 645 trainings on organisational development for capacity building of VDC, EKATA and EVEM forum members at the community level. 25 Participants participated in 2 days training from each VDC and they developed a constitution for each Village Development Committee (VDC) for their future sustainability.

Project has completed 2 days capacity building training on engaging men and boys including gender equity and diversity for 645 newly formed Ending Violence through Engaging Men forums at the community level.

120 FSUP-H community groups (each group consists 5 members, total 600 participants) completed cross learning visits in different VDCs to share project success stories, project activities and innovations.

FSUP-H project participants have established linkages with 94 Local Government Institutions (Union Parishad) through linkage building workshop with local service providers for easy access to government services.

A total of 39,706 FSUP-H households received access to different safety net services (VGD 6,296, VGF 23,341, widow allowance 1,316, old age pension 2,015, 40/100 days Cash for Work, disability allowance-356).

Project has completed 89 day long refresher training sessions for capacity building and strengthening Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC) at the Union Porishod. 30 Union Disaster Management Committee members participated in each training session.

A total of 368 communities completed disaster preparedness planning and early warning system training at the community level.

Project has completed 17 trainings on health, hygiene and nutrition (HHN) for capacity building of community development assistant (CDA) and community facilitators (CF) for performing HHN issues at the community level.

Photo: © Angela Platt/CARE

Meet the partners

Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS) has been working with underprivileged and marginalised people, especially women, children and adolescents in disaster prone areas of Bangladesh since 1986 and has been working with CARE since 1994.

Since 1990, Assistance for Slum Dwellers (ASD) has been focused on community development and women empowerment activities across Bangladesh. ASD has been a CARE partner since 1995.

POPI People's Oriented Program Implementation (POPI) has been working with CARE since 1998 and specializes in poverty focused food security programs in hard to reach areas.

"If you have any comments or thoughts you would like to share please do so by contacting Masud Alam Khan (Team Leader) at masudkhan@bd.care.org <mailto:masudkhan@bd.care.org> ."

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