

“ By improving our skills, we have now diversified our products according to the market demand. We have good contacts with the buyers who place new orders as well as provide us with raw material. Now we are planning to get the necessary finances to start investing by ourselves and buy the raw material ”

Monica Chakma from Shabchori, Rastapara. VDC member and recognised trainer for handicrafts



QUICK FACTS

Location	Rangamati and Bandarban districts, Bangladesh
Project start	September 2009
Phase duration	2009-1013
Budget for Current phase	310,000 CHF
Local partners	Green Hill and BNKS
Major Donors	Canton de Vaud and City of Zürich
Contact	infobd@helvetas.org Tel: +880-02-8829208

THE PERSPECTIVES: BUILDING ON THE FIRST ACHIEVEMENTS

The transformation of production systems, i.e. the wide-spread adoption of improved practices takes time. The most significant change however, is the gradual development of the producers' entrepreneurial attitude. The benefits from collective actions like purchases of inputs or collective marketing become visible. Farmers are eager to consolidate their first achievements. The strengthening of these collective endeavours is one of the next challenges to tackle.

The Village Development Committees (VDC) have become a crucial element to ensure inclusiveness and grass-roots participation. However, their capacities to adequately engage with the necessary public sector institutions and private sector market actors still need to be strengthened. This will be a critical next step that the project will address.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES - SEERC

“ With the training on ginger and turmeric cultivation, we have now increased our production three times more. We have managed to attract large buyers that come all the way from the capital to buy our product. ”

Dharma Moni Chakma, secretary Chelachara Joutha Khamar Chakma para, VDC

“ Before we didn't really know how to properly grow pineapple. With the new techniques we have learned, we are not only growing more and better quality fruits, but we also do it in a more sustainable manner by preventing soil erosion. ”

Chandra Ketu Chakma, membr of Digalibak, VDC

FROM SUBSISTENCE FARMER TO A SUCCESSFUL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDER

Chonu Marma, from the village of Khanadon in Rasbillah Union (Bandarban Sadar) belongs to the Marma community. On his acre of land, he used to produce some vegetables and pulses to sell at the market. His profit rarely exceeded 5,000 Taka a year.

As he got involved in the Village Development Committee (VDC), he started exploring market demand and conducting market surveys. The VDC identified ginger, turmeric and papaya as promising products. Chonu decided to produce papaya which offered very attractive returns.

However, Chonu and the other farmers had never produced papaya on a commercial basis before, and they did not know how to properly apply fertiliser, how to find good quality seedlings and how to handle them. So, with the support from the project and the VDC, Chonu received training on papaya cultivation from the Department of Agricultural Extension in Bandarban and was able to exchange with other farmers.

Today, Chonu is not only successfully growing papaya, he is also recognised in the village as a competent local service provider, advising his community on the best cultivation practices and helping them to improve their production and income. Together with four other farmers whom he trained, he is now selling his product to a wholesaler in Chittagong for a good price. From the 20 decimals of land on which he grows papaya, he now gets a net profit of more than 19,000 Taka; a great contribution to the household income.



THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

In one of the poorest and most densely populated countries of the world, where over 95% of the population are Bengali, the Chittagong Hill Tracts stand out with their hilly landscape and indigenous population with 11 different communities and languages. This cultural richness is however confronted with some of the highest levels of poverty in the country (with more than 50% of the population below the poverty line), geographical isolation linked with poor infrastructure and persistent discrimination. As a predominantly agricultural society relying on the traditional slash and burn *Jhum* cultivation on the slopes, the demographic pressure and land degradation put the livelihoods of the indigenous communities at further risks.

ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

- 170 Village Development Committees (VDC) support over 5000 farmers and their families to access skills, services and market opportunities
- 89 local service providers trained in new production techniques provide door-step advice and services to over 1500 farmers
- 243 training courses developed the human and institutional capacities of 3,536 VDC leaders. Almost 100% of all VDC members have received training on gender and social equality.
- 52 collection points have been established, attracting larger buyers and higher prices for the farmers.

THE PROJECT: BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR LOCAL EMPOWERMENT

The objective of the project is that poor and extreme poor indigenous families develop their livelihood options, generate additional income and improve their socio-economic situation. In order to achieve this, the project aims at:

- **Strengthening the community organisations based on principles of equality, inclusion and participation.** The Village Development Committees play an active role in supporting the development of various social and economical activities. The organisational strengthening and leadership skills are developed under the principles of equality and social inclusion in order to benefit all segments of the community. Participation of all is key to develop ownership.
- **Promoting new production technologies and marketing skills.** Focusing on new technologies and marketing allows producers not only to improve their existing production practices, taking into account environmental aspects like land degradation through soil erosion, but also to learn, adapt and adopt new production practices. This results in significant productivity gains and increased production. In the case of ginger for example, producers already report a three-fold increase in production simply through seed sterilization and proper intercropping. But better production isn't the whole story. Market information, even basic, as well as stronger organization and collaboration between producers are essential for producers to sell their produce at a good prices.
- **Creating access to technical, advisory and financial services.** To ensure that farmers have continuous access to affordable, door-step services, in their own language, the capacities of Local Service Providers have been developed. These advanced farmers play a critical role in demonstrating and disseminating new agricultural practices. But technical services are often not enough: financial means to adopt and invest in new practices are needed. Therefore, access to adapted financial services are promoted, linking farmers and VDC to microfinance institutions.

.....
Picture information: credits HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh
.....