



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR HILLTRACTS UNDERPRIVILEGED PEOPLE

**A Project of
Bangladesh Baptist
Church Fellowship
and Sunrise Potato
Systems Institute**

Background as to why SPSI chose to focus attention in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT):

During the 1970's Peter VanderZaag was an agricultural specialist working with the Mennonite Central Committee based in Feni Noakhali. Peter worked on crop diversification with focus on vegetables and potatoes in all of Bangladesh except for the CHT. During that time there were limitations on foreigners being able to go into the CHT. Later the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) was able to start some missions work in the CHT. This work blossomed. There were problems over the decades with civil unrest and restrictions imposed on the CHT.

Extreme poverty persisted amongst many of the rural populations in the CHT. In 2016, Peter received an informal request to consider supporting the various church communities where Christian churches were established. After much discussion and introductions to the leadership of the BBCF, Peter arranged to come for a recognizance mission to the CHT in March 2017. Due to severe travel restrictions, Peter was only allowed to visit the Tripura tribal area around Khagrachari. That visit established some good relationships with key leaders as well as allowed Peter to see the challenges and opportunities that exist for supporting numerous communities with improved agricultural practices and finding the locally available resources including the Government run Fruit tree research station.



Industrious happy farmers work together to grow better crops with the support of SPSI and BBCF

Steps taken to launch the Chittagong Development Program:

Dr. Victoria (Vickie) Demonteverde was permitted by the national authorities to visit the Chakma area in October 2019. Vickie gathered good baseline information for the Chakma area. She also then cohosted a workshop with CHT BBCF leaders in Chittagong City to discuss the way forward on how we could empower their communities with credit and technology.

Milton Chakma and Kamendra Lal Tripura were chosen as the 2 young men to help launch the program. They came to the Philippines from January to early April 2019 to the PSRTC in Canlaon City. Under Vickie's leadership, the trainees spent 3 months learning about improved vegetable and fruit tree production as well as how to provide credit support for farmers in communities.

Memorandum of Understanding between BBCF and SPSI:

In November 2019, Peter was able to meet with the BBCF leadership and finalized and signed a MOU. Along with the MOU a work plan and budget were formulated and approved for a program to start in January 2020. The program was named: **Community Development Program for Hilltracts Underprivileged People (CDPHUP).**

Peter VanderZaag, Ph.D.

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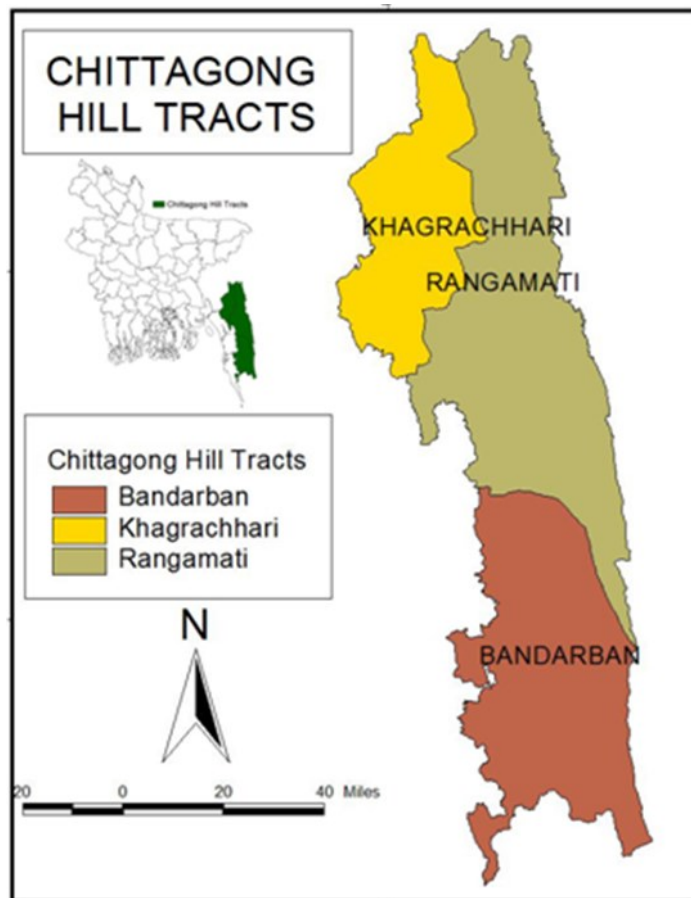
Description of the CHT:

The CHT is in the south-eastern region of Bangladesh. It shares international boundaries with Indian States Tripura to the north and Mizoram to the east, and Chin and Rakhain states of Myanmar (Burma) to the south-east and south.

CHT has a total surface area of 5,089 sq. miles (13,189 sq. kilometers.). The Hilltracts has 3 districts namely: Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban.

CHT is divided into 4 valleys formed by rivers: Feni, Karnaphuli, Matamuri, and Sangu and their tributaries. The CHT has lush vegetation of tropical and natural forests of evergreen and deciduous trees, sungrass and bamboo.

CHT is a home to ethnic groups namely the Bawm, Sak, Chakma, Khumi, Khang, Marma, Mru, Lushai, Uchay (also called Mrung, Brong, Hill Tripura) Pankho, Tanchangya and Tripura (Tipra). The largest group in terms of population is the Chakma.



Source of map: <https://www.assignmentpoint.com/arts/sociology/development-of-eco-tourism-in-chittagong-hill-tracts-problems-and-prospects-part-1.html>



Typical Landscape of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

These ethnic groups are bound together by a shared history, years of peaceful cohabitation, and a common future. The ethnic groups differ from the majority Bengali population of Bangladesh in their physical features and culture. The indigenous people are mostly of Mongolian Stock and are closer in appearance and culture to their neighbors in north-eastern India, Thailand, and Burma than to the majority Bengali population. Economy of the indigenous people are predominantly land-based. Traditionally, they engaged in "jum" (slash and burn or shifting cultivation).

CDPHUP program implementation:

a total of 10 (5 Chakma; 5 Tripura) communities were chosen in Khagrachari (Tripura), and Rangamati (Chakma) Districts.



CDPHUP in Khagrachari



The Khagrachhari District with an area of 2,699.55 sq. km is composed of 8 Upazillas namely: Khagrachhari Sadar, Dighinala, Panchhari, Mahalchhari, Matiranga, Manikchhari, Ramgarh, and Lakshnichhari. The population of 525,664 can be divided by religion. There are 228,753 Muslims, 206,473 Christians, 86,351 Hindus, 3,745 Buddhists, and 342 others. Average literacy rate is 41.8% (male 49.9%, female 32.7%). Main sources of income are: Agriculture (59.92%), non-agricultural laborer (9.33%), industry (0.44%), commerce (10.67%), transport and communication (1.11%), service (7.94%), construction (0.92%), religious service (0.24%), rent and remittance (0.37%) and others (9.06%).

Source: (https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Khagrachhari_District (last edited 18 June 2021)).

In response to the need to increase livelihood opportunities at Khagrachari, the CDPHUP had organized 5 community Self- Help Group (SHG) through which SPSI supports families and family groups with credit and technical guidance in improved agricultural practices. Projects by individual farmers varied from raising chicken and pigs to various crops.



Chelachara



Jamtoli



Chotabari



Dumnigath



Khagrapur

Location	Name of Association	Project Leaders
Chelachara	Kaitorni Hamari	1. Kinaram Tripura
		2. Smol Kanti Tripura
Jamtoli	Yak Baksha Unnoyon Association	1. Ripon Tripura
		2. Sadan Tripura
Chotabari	Borok Hamary Buthup Association	1. Arun Joty Tripura
		2. Ful ronjon Tripura
Dumnigath	Hamary Association	1. Karmochan Tripura
		2. Hemonta Tripura
Khagrapur	Khagrapur Christian Unnoyon	1. Hemongkor Tripura
		2. Damini Tripura





CDPHUP in Rangamati District



Gangarum Muk: Baibonchora Baptist Church

Gangarum muk can be reached by 2 hour boat ride from Rangamati. The project area is located at 50-80 km from the city and the mode of transportation is motorcycle. Majority of the residents are Chakma people. At present, by God's blessing thru CDPHUP they are farming, doing agricultural work, through this way they develop themselves. CDPHUP provided loans to 5 families who farm forest potato, arum, paddy rice, cucumber, beans, papaya. At present, beans and cucumber were already harvested.



Christian Para Baptist Church

This area is 30 km from Khagrachari City and is known as a Christian village because many missionaries had worked here since 1994. At present, there are many non-government organizations that are working in this village. Majority of the people are Chakma of which 32 families are Christians. Ten families benefited by receiving loans for planting pineapple, paddy, turmeric, and cucumber.



Gongaram Muk: Gongaram Muk Baptist Church

This is a beautiful place about 60 km from Khagrachari. The Chakma and Bengali people live together in this place. There are 20 Christian families here. The people depend on agriculture, business, fruit garden, jum cultivation, and fishing. On February, 5 families benefited from loans which they used for growing forest potato, arum, ginger, and cucumber. At present, they have harvested the cucumber and are growing turmeric. They plan to grow potato by November.





CDPHUP in Rangamati District continued...



Prasongsha Baptist Church

It is situated in the Southeast area of Chattogram division. It is the biggest district in Bangladesh. There are Chakma and Bengali that lives in this area. There are Baptist and Catholic Churches that were established in this area. The project site is 75 km from Rangamati. The sources of income are business, fishing, poultry, pig farm, mushroom, handloom, and service jobs. CDPHUP provided loans to 10 families for doing ducks, chickens, pigs, bag making, and growing forest potato. At present, the families are earning thru selling bags, ducks and chickens.



Rangkarja Baptist Church

This community is located at 80 km from Rangamati. Majority of the residents are Buddhists but there are 40 Christian families that live here. Sources of income are fruit garden, paddy, jum cultivation, business, and daily wage earner. In February, 10 families received loans and they planted papaya, arum, turmeric, fruit trees and paddy rice. They were also used for jum cultivation and fishing.



All of the families were happy and are thankful to CDPHUP and SPSI.

Success Stories

Khagrachari District

Mukto Lal Tripura is Happy with His Success



Mukto Lal Tripura lives in Chotobari Para of Khagrachari Sadar Upazila. He is a member of Barak Hamari Self-Help Savings Group (SHG). He is a member of Chotobari Para Baptist Church. He has five members in his family. He is the bread winner in a family of 5 members. He owns a farm and he cultivates vegetables including paddy every year. However, he cannot grow crops profitably due to lack of funds for purchasing the needed inputs.



Mukto Lal Tripura is a very hardworking farmer in his village. He had a 5,000BDT loan from his SHG with the support of CDPHUP. He used the loan for planting potatoes and maize. After the harvest of these crops, he planted papaya. Currently, the papaya are bearing fruits and he thinks that he will greatly benefit from the papaya. Seeing the success of his papaya cultivation, others in the village are also thinking of cultivating papaya in the future. He said, "I am very happy for this support from the project and especially thankful to SPSI for the help. I also like to give thanks to the project staff for their time and suggestions."

Sujata has Found a Way through Savings Group



Sujata Tripura lives in Choto Bari Para village of Khagrachari District. She is a member of Borok Hamari Buthup Self-Help Savings Group (SHG). She is also a member of Choto Bari Para Baptist Church. She has five members in her family.



She successfully reared local chickens. In February, 2021 Sujata Tripura borrowed BDT 5,000 from her savings group and brought 5 hens and 2 cocks. Previously she had some chickens, and she had a problem in rearing the chickens as they are suffering from night blindness and smallpox disease. She consulted a veterinarian and followed his prescription. She successfully produced many chickens and on June 2021 sold 25kg chicken meat (per kg 500 taka) and some eggs. She earned nearly BDT 13,000 from the chicken and eggs. Her income augments the income of her husband and used to meet family needs. She hopes she can earn more money from the remaining chickens.

Her success encouraged the other women in the village to start poultry too. Sujata said, 'It was very helpful for my family. I think other women of my village can also do this. I like to give thanks to CDPHUP for their support.'

Success Stories

Through Hard Work Swapan has Overcome Poverty

Swapan Tripura lives in Chelachara Para village of Khagrachari Sadar Upazilla. He is a member of Chelachara Baptist Church and Kaitroni Hamari Self-Help Savings group. Swapan is the head of the family with six member. Being the sole bread winner, he is always faced with financial problems. Although, he has land of his own, he cannot cultivate properly due to lack of money to buy fertilizer and pesticides.

Swapan is a good farmer and he likes to cultivate winter season vegetables and paddy in rainy season. When he heard about the CDPHUP, he applied for BDT 5,000 loan from his savings group. He started cultivating sweet potatoes, nuts, sweet pumpkins and chilis. He benefited very much and he can now provide for his family's financial needs. He said, "It used to be a very frustrating time for me. Now I am happy that I earned extra money for my family. I like to give thanks to my savings group and the project. I hope that in the future, more families will be able to benefit from our Self-Help Savings Group".



Success Stories

Rangamati District

Church Members Encouraged by Church Pastor

This project site is situated at 80 km away from the city and is the border of Rangamati and Khagrachari Districts. Majority of the Chakma in this area are Buddhists. There are 40 Christian families that are living in this area. These families encountered many difficulties; however, they kept on supporting each other. The CDPHUP is supporting the development of crop production and poultry. Almost all the families are cultivating fruit garden, paddy, and practice jum cultivation. Others are also into business and as daily wage earners.

Pastor Niton Chakma, 37 years old lives in this village. His wife is Nity Chakma and they are blest with one son and one daughter. He is the Pastor of the Rangkarja Baptist Church and also a member of the self-help group. He works in agriculture to encourage the church members and support his family. Indeed, he is a model farmer in his community. Through the 10,000 Taka loan from CDPHUP, he was able to plant papaya and orange seedlings in one acre of land. He has also bought additional seedlings with his own money. Right now the Papaya and Orange are growing well. He and his family are very happy. He said, "I like to give thanks to SPSI and CDPHUP for their help during these critical times".



Paban is Happy for the Extra Income for His Family

Situated in the nearby Khagrachari City, Gongaram muk is a very beautiful place with adjoining two rivers. The Chakma and Bengali are living together. There are 20 Christian families in this community and the rest are predominantly Buddhist.

Pabon Bijoy Chakma live in this village. He is 27 years old and a member of the Gongaram muk Baptist Church and also a member of the SHG. He have four members in his family. As the sole income earner, he has to provide for his family and he always faced difficulty. From his 10,000 Taka loan he was able to plant Forest Potato, Arum, and Cucumber on about one acre of land. The cucumbers were already harvested and sold while Potato and Arum are still growing. He and his family are very happy that he was able to get the loan at the right time. He said, "I am very happy and I like to give thanks to SPSI and CDPHUP for their support."





CDPHUP Addressing General Farming Needs of the Selected Communities



One of the major needs in the community is water both for household use and irrigation. In many places, people have to queue or depend on dripping water as source of drinking water and carry them on jars to their homes. Agricultural lands are mainly rainfed because there are no water tanks or pipes available to carry water to their farms. This year, the problem was addressed by providing 3 diesel powered water pumps each to the Tripura and Chakma tribal communities respectively.

In addition, CDPHUP provided a back pack sprayer for each of the 10 communities to be used for spraying to prevent or control pest and diseases. These equipments are to be shared by all members of the SHG. The communities are thankful for these equipments as it will surely help ease their burden and improve agricultural practices.

Thank you CDPHUP and SPSI.



Water Pump and Sprayer for Communities

Water Problems in Several Communities





Synopsis of the CDPHUP by Simon Amit Das, Project Coordinator, BBCF, Dhaka.



The CDPHUP project started last year in Rangamati and Khagrachari Districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. It was a great opportunity for church members of 5 Tripura and 5 Chakma communities to improve personally and economically. CDPHUP is being implemented by Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) with the supporting partners, SPSI and PSRTC. SPSI provided the financial support for the program. CDPHUP worked closely with the 10 churches from Tripura and Chakma communities.

In 2020, 10 Self Help Groups (SHG) were formed. The main objectives were to help SHG members develop their self-confidence; leadership & management skills; and accounting & bookkeeping skills. Likewise, to help them to have savings and propel their economic development. Several trainings were conducted, and now church members are capable to lead their groups. They are now skilled in accounting and book keeping and in the management of their accounts. Each church has its own bank account. The CDPHUP project provided loans for their groups which they invested in agriculture and livestock. CDPHUP project staff helps the church group members to process their loans, follow-up loan refund and to implement their livelihood projects.

Due to increase income, the members can now contribute to their children's education cost. The savings of church members in their savings groups are also increasing. CDPHUP is having a positive impact in the church communities. The leadership capacity and unity among church members are increasing because of the different activities that were implemented by the program.

May God continue to bless CDPHUP, churches and the SHG.

The People Leading the CDPHUP



Milton Munshi



Simon Amit Das

***“Coming together is a Beginning.
Keeping together is Progress,
Working together is Success.”
- Henry Ford***



Dirba Chakma



Ananta Tripura



Milton Chakma



Kamendra Tripura

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