

## **Social & Economic empowerment of Rural Poor Women**

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### **Abstract:**

The rights of the people particularly the poor women of Haor area are frequently oppressed by domestic violence, fatwa, torture, inhuman behavior and attitudes in the prevailing social, credit slavery, economic and environmental contexts of Bangladesh. This study has been designed to examine the HAOR project Implemented by Environment and Development (IED) and ManusherJonno Foundation (MJF) and aims to develop capacities of the poor and marginalized people in order to raise their voice and represent their interest. Despite the severity of poverty and the magnitude of economic, social and practical challenges, there have been prospects of Bangladesh meeting most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The MDGs could be achieved through putting appropriate focus on the extreme poor especially on women, addressing their vulnerability and risks, promoting access of the poor to resources and institutional constraints including those local government.

Finding show that under such circumstances or social reality, a project like this has assembled the rural poor women, attempted for their social and economic empowerment and succeeded in reducing discrimination against women, ultra poor and vulnerable segments of the society control on resources, strengthened the local government, etc.

### **Background and Rationale:**

Institute of Environment and Development (IED) has been working since 1994 for developing and promoting livelihood and citizenship among civil society members including community people with special emphasis the poor, women, youth, and minority.

Since its inception, IED is an active partner of development efforts in Haor and coastal areas (Sunamgonj), Netrakona, and Shandip). IED experienced that awareness raising, social mobilization, encouraging local peoples' initiatives and sensitisation of local elected bodies could play an important role to create the momentum in order to achieve significant result in improving the status of women and poor in the area. Harmonize the Actions against inequalities and Oppressions of Rights (HAOR) project in DharmapashaUpazila under sunamgonj district and Barhatta and MohangonjUpazilla under Netrakona district have been working since April 2007 with financial support from ManusherJonno Foundation (MIF)

With different kind of controversy it is said that Bangladesh has made a significant progress in reducing poverty over the last 1-2 decades, still a remarkable portion of over 14 million people live below povertyline. Despite of the severity of poverty and the magnitude of economic, social, and political challenges, there have been prospects of Bangladesh meeting most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The MDGs could be achieved through putting appropriate focus on the extreme poor especially on women, addressing their vulnerability and risks, promoting access of the poor to

resources and institutional constraints including that local government. For any people addressing causes of social and economic poverty, empowerment, and rights based approach have to be applied. These will be enhanced towards desirable direction for improving quality of the community if the human resources are properly developed through institution development, creating awareness on rights, empowerment and training. These in turn would play a significant role in providing food security, employment generation, nutrition uptake and income earning and reduce poverty and to enhance condition and position of women in family and society. Midterm evaluation at this point will help to compare situation with baseline.

### **Geographic Location:**

Ten hard to reach adjacent unions mainly in the Haor area under Dharmapasha, Barhatta and Mohanganj Upazilas in the borders of Sunamganj and Netrakona districts will comprise area of the project. The following table presents the districts, upazilas and unions to be under the project coverage.

<b>District</b>	<b>Upazilla</b>	<b>Union</b>
Sunamgonj	Dharmapasha	Uttar BangshiKunda, DakshinBangshiKunda, Madhya Nagar/Dharmapasha =4 Unions
Netrakona	Barhatta	Chiram, Sindha, Asma, = 3 Unions
	Mohongonj	BakshiaBirampur, BarataliSuair =3 Unions
<b>Total 2 Districts</b>	<b>3 Upazilas</b>	<b>10 Unions</b>

### **Objective of the Study**

To evaluate impacts of the project HAOR or Harmonize the Actions against inequalities and Oppressions of Rights.

### **Study Methodology:**

Deskwork with existing documents i.e. proposal, baseline survey, reports, and manuals and threw other publications given light to design methodology and understanding the project and activities. Both qualitative info and quantitative data have been gathered from the field of depending on the type of beneficiaries and target institutions.

There are 360 groups, 90 ward platforms and 10 community forums at UP Level under the project. Out of these, groups 6 were selected randomly from 3 ward platform of 3 unions to conduct individual interview with pre designed questionnaire. As the beneficiary groups were formed only with women, all respondents are also women. In addition to this 6 males were interviewed in relation to male participation.

**Semi-structured Interview:** Group leaders are the spokesman for individual group and semi-structured interview were conducted with 6 group leaders.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were conducted with students of 2 School and standing committee members of 3 Union Parishad (UP). For

conducting this FGD, school students of class VIII and class IX were selected from 2 different randomly selected school taking 1 from each project district. FGDs were also conducted with standing committee members of 3 Ups. A check list was used for FGD with student UP standing committee members.

Tools for individual interview, semi-structured interview, FGD, observation and open discussion were developed and used. All tools were pre-tested in the field by the involvement of concerned respondents and fine-tuned based on findings of field test.

### **Need Assessment:**

Considering the national context, the poor women of Haor region is the most vulnerable. The severity of poverty in the Haor is more compared to other areas of the country. In addition to the low level leveled of food and other livelihood security, the people are suffering from lack of knowledge and information about their rights. Responsible organizations including the local Govt. Institutions (LGIs) are either ignoring or not able to resolve the fundamental issues of the Haor people.

Due to the increased influence of religious fundamentalism and terrorism and, failure of political forces to undertake practical measure to uphold the democratic and tolerant environment of the country, women and poor are losingspace, which is an alarming situation for culture of human rights. Moreover, this situation has a tremendous negative effect on personal and livelihood security of women and the minority groups in particular. The rise of fundamentalism restricts freedom of women and reinforces discrimination against them and minority groups. Youth are growing without having necessary knowledge and values towards democracy, tolerance and gender sensitivity.

Strategic gender interest including women's empowerment issues is quite neglected or overlooked in the rural community level. Misperception of people about the role of women, lack of democratic culture and values in society, less representation of women and marginalized groups in power structure due to ignorance severely contributed to this deplorable situation.

IEDs experiencing with Haor people showed that most vulnerable people are not receiving even the government services like Shalish, support from line agencies representatives, and allowances like VGD, VGF, widow and old age allowances, due to different kind of nepotism based distribution system and weak governance of UP. They also stated that such kind of allowances could help them in food security and to initiate some micro level income gathering activities. They also expressed that they knew about the scope of different Govt. allowance at Union Parishad (UP) and Upazila Level, but do not get benefit from these because their isolation and failure to organize themselves to create enough pressure to derive the benefits from various sources. Through there is policy of Bangladesh Govt. that there would be 13 standing committees in each Union involving the representative of different class and occupation from community people , NGO representative, line agencies representatives, elected UP representatives etc. in order to make UP more participatory, accountable, and transparent governance system in local level. The elected representatives of UPs are not well aware about their responsibilities and reluctant to inform and activate these standing committees.

Many legal reforms have taken place but villages are still regulated but customary laws or religious directives. Women are the worst victims of these patriarchal commands and absence of institutional arrangements to protect women from the violence occurring in the rural Bangladesh. Following are the key issues to consider in the proposed intervention in the Haor area1 (i) hard to reach and isolated geographic location; (II) women rights are seriously denied and violated in family and community; (III) very limited support from the government and/ or development agencies during disaster ; (IV)access to and support from education , health, and other social service is too low particularly fro the poor ; (V) serious exploitation exist for the poor , women and minorities ; (VI) UP s and its standing committees are not well placed and poor in the delivering their envisaged services and responsibilities. The Idea is thus develop capacities of the poor and marginalized in order to raise their organized voice to access public service and benefit as their rights and ensure their livelihoods security and represent their interest in the communities and amongst the local authorities through different mechanism to reduce discrimination and contribute in establishing the rights of disadvantaged, poor and women and make capable UP s and its different organs to deliver their envisaged responsibilities.

#### **The Goal and purposes of the proposed project:**

Enhancing accountability and responsiveness of local govt. for ensuring rights of poor and vulnerable segments especially women.

[Special note: Aiming enhanced status of women and the extreme poor in hard to reach areas the project started from April 2007 and continued up to September 2007 in five working unions for full filling the objectives and outcomes is required for putting on more emphasis on governance focused issues as per recommendation of ManusherJonno Foundation. In November 2007, the project activities extended in another more five unions which were under 2<sup>nd</sup> shift of the project for creating greater impact in the whole project areas. With the rearranged goal, objectives and activities and expected outcomes the project is being implemented in 10 hard to reach unions of Sunamganj and Netrakona district.]

**Project objectives and outcomes:** It seems changed by first year of implementation of the project where needs more attention to realize situations. Remarkably found that running phase is more rights based where women are empowered and powered by themselves to have access to different kind of service delivery and economic activities.

Objectives	Outcomes
01. To organize poor, marginalized and vulnerable especially women under the rights based platform so that they can raise their voice to ensure social rights and services	01. A friendly environment is promoted within the targeted community and family level through formation of solidarity of groups, individuals and network
02. Creating an enabling environment in Union Parishad to make them supportive and responsive towards women, poor and marginalized people in providing services and benefits	02. The Ups and other govt. line agencies would be more sensitized, supportive and active towards women, poor and marginalized people in providing services and benefits

03. To ensure access to services form union Parishad and relevant govt. institutions through creating organizational network and rooted advocacy	03. Extreme poor and vulnerable people have better access to the public allowances and services as their right
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### **Implementation strategy and activities:**

In order to attain the expected outcome, the project follows several strategies, which certainly contributed in achieving the goal and objectives of the proposed project. The strategies were:

1. Development of training modules/guidelines: In order to facilities various training courses, awareness raising events and to enhance the capacity of project staff, community forum, group members, the following training curriculum/modules/guidelines already developed professionally in the different time of the project period by the project and IED staff member:

- a) A guideline for orientation of the project staff.
- b) A planning exercise guideline for ward platform has been developed to facilitate the planning process in Ward platform level.
- c) IEC materials on UP management have been developed the capacity of UP Chairman, Member, and Secretary.
- d) A guideline on formation, functioning and orientation of the Community Forum has been reviewed and finalized.
- e) A guideline/curriculum on conducting awareness sessions for the group members on gender, rights, services and benefits available in Ups, local governance has been developed but needs to be more sequential.
- f) Helping Standing Committees to be functional considering govt. roles and regulations.
- g) Two training modules on gender, facilitation, social mobilization, local level advocacy, and local government were developed for building the capacity of the projects staff.

### **2. Formation of ward Platform, Considering need and sequential manner was found effective to go ahead step by step.**

- a) In first phase, five unions supposed to be covered by the project activities but remaining five unions also covered simultaneously immediate after first step.
- b) Project staff with the help of local community and existing women group leaders identifies around 360, WP 90 in number and community forum 10 in number with functional bodies.

### **3. Planning Exercising in Community level is very much participatory and in line with project goal and objectives.**

a) Project staff is facilitating the Ward platform members to diagnose their rights and livelihood related problems, analyze and prioritizing, find out the feasible alternatives solution and help them to develop a ward level annual action plan through 3-4 planning exercise meeting within first quarter of the project following a standard planning tool and guideline. Project priorities and activities also integrated with their plan during this process. Specific stakeholder, service providers (UP/line agencies) and required support type will also be identified through this process.

b) A union level compilation of ward level plan also developed, which later on was shared with the community forum, Union Parishad and civil societies and their support has been asked accordingly in specific cases.

**4. Formation and orientation of the community forum was community friendly in terms of group size with representation from different perspective. During MTE we found that meetings of community forum are very much interactive and motivational to achieve goal.**

- In collaboration with identified/ formed groups, the project identified conscious local opinion makers/ local leaders, Imam, teacher, matchmaker, youths and civil society members and motivated to form the union level platform including some selected representatives from the ward level platform. i.e. “Community Forum” (around 20-25 members in each representing women-5, community leaders-5, professionals-5, students/youths-5, poor people-5) at each union as a local watch and pressure group to UP in favor of the disadvantaged women groups for materializing their interest and planned activities.
- To enhance the capacity of the community forum, the members of the community form went through orientation on UP & Civic rights, social environment and gender issues at the union level with special emphasis on their roles and responsibilities in making the local government people friendly and maintaining a gender friendly environment in the society.
- Meeting of community forum: Meeting of community forum normally organized at union level on bi – monthly basis to review the progress of the activities planned and implemented during last two months and prepare the plan of action for next two months. The meetings particularly discuss issues about the activities and services of the union parishad, violation of human and women rights in the locality (if any), identify the social problems in the area and find out the ways and means to solve the problems with the support from the community people. The community forum actually plays a role of raising voice of the local people.

**5. Awareness raising events at Ward Platform and Community level for involving bigger communities were successful and result oriented.**

Different behavioral changing events i.e. debate and cultural program (folk song, theatre) and rally organized involving other women, youth and men members of the households for changing perception and the psychographic profile of the community and youth alongside the publication and distribution of different IEC materials.

- **Ward level platform:** Awareness raising events/meeting organized for ward level platform on monthly basis in favor of gender equalities, rights, UP and local Governance gender to increase their level of understanding and mobilize them to realize their rights from the Ups and to implement their planned activities.
- **Community Form:** A wariness raising events and meeting organized for Community Forum on quarterly basis in favor of gender equalities, rights, and to make them able to support the Ward level platforms.

The project Staff facilitating and providing accompanied support to the ward level platform and community forum for implementing the planned activities in a collaborative manner.

- **Debate for school students:** Since debate is considered as the most appropriate tool for sensitization of the students/youth, therefore, one debate competition is being organized for school students in each union involving all secondary schools of the union. The topics of the debate are selected in the basis of gender, to intercept the meaning of democracy, gender, human and women rights issues among the students, theirs parents, teachers, members of the civil society groups and youth of the locality.
- **Cultural program at union level:** Cultural program like alternative/ people's theatre, folk songs etc. are organized at the union level to raise awareness on human/women, social and democratic rights among the community people including the youths of the locality. It is to be noted here that, involving local youths in performing the theatre and rendering the folk songs creates more impacts.
- **Development of IEC materials:** Information, education and communication (IEC) materials i.e. poster and leaflets on strengthening union parishad functionality has been developed and distributed in the working areas to create mass awareness on local government, social environment and gender issues during the project period.

**6. Strengthening Union Parishad and its standing Committees considering possibilities for creating success of operating standing committees rather than increasing n umbers only. Focused attention on selected four standing committee and created confidence to carry on timely meeting and implementation of decision by involving all members.**

- Activate standing Committees of UP:** The project initiatives in order to make capable and activate the minimum four standing committees of UP (Agriculture, Health and Family Planning , Social Welfare and *NariNirzatonProtirodh Committee*).
- The Project staff makes a primary assessment of existence and functionality of standing committees. Based on the findings, project staff motivate and facilitate Ups to reconstitute and reorganize the said standing committees as per the

government rules and provisions. It is noticed that the project focuses its attention in incorporating the priorities of community plan with UP and standing committee and make them responsive to implement those.

The Project is Facilitating Ups to organize the meeting of selected four standing committees on bi-monthly basis. Necessary motivation and awareness raising session is going on for the standing committee members in order to play an effective role through these meetings.

- c) **Organize workshop/sharing meeting at Union level:** Workshop on annual planning and budgeting with UP representatives and community forum have already been Organized at the union level for ensuring people's participation in annual planning of the Ups integration the priorities of ward level planning.

Community Forum and standing committee representatives, UP and civil society members and the concern Govt. officials participated in different planning / sharing meetings at Ups in the working area of the project in order to share and seek support from UP and GOB. Line agencies specified through mutual discussion in this kind of workshops. Ups has been encouraged to allocate money from their block grant/ other resources to implement some activities of ward level planning, which is beyond the capacity of local community.

- **Organize meeting at Upazilla level has been created a wider group feelings that can lead the initiative to national.**

One sharing meeting at Upazilla level for each working Upazilla has been organized at the beginning of the project implementation for getting leverage to implement the project activities. Project approach, activities, strategies and expected role of different agencies has been shared and discussed in this meeting. Upazilla administration and relevant line agencies, UP and civil society members participated in this meeting.

- **Learning Visit to best practice for selected UP and Community Forum representatives:** In order to enhance knowledge, skills and capacity of the UP and Community Forum representatives, learning visit to the best performing. Ups arranged but needs to be organized more frequently for building better sisterhood and developmental understandings.

**Mukhomukhi:** The project facilitated Ups to organize an open forum event at a common place of the respective Union or in UP complex to share the outcome of the Ups annual plan and tentative budget, their capacity and performance including the process of integrating the community priorities. Representatives from all segment of community people, line agencies, standing committee members, and the elected UP representatives has participated in this kind of meeting.

- **Mobilization/Rally at Union level:** Mobilization of people's/rally on democratic and social rights and local government issues has been organized at union level involving the group members, women professionals civil society representatives,



teachers, students and youths. The rallies organized in conjunction with the significant day observation i.e. International women day and Human Rights day.

### **The baseline survey findings and project performance:**

All group members of the HAOR project are female. So, the respondents for baseline sampled for the questionnaire survey from the group members are female. It was found that 65.5% are within the age bracket of 26-40 years, 16.2% are below 26 years and the rest are over 40 years age. Average size of the respondent household is 5.27. Only 10% respondent households are headed by females. About 90% respondents have either no (65%) or primary level education (25%). 27.7% respondent households own no land, 43.6% own less than 0.5 acre and 13.7% own land between 0.5 acre to 1.0 acre. These give the figure that 85% households own no or less than 1 acre of land. On their other hand, only 3% respondents own land over 3 acres. About 25% respondents expressed that they could not manage food for their family for 3 meals every day in regular basis as they used to charge their profession frequently.

At the time of baseline according to the respondents, lack of scope of free movement (65%) , violence against women, early marriage (37%) and lack of security (37% each) exist within the family or society. In addition to these, women have to face economic problems, problem of expressing views/opinion and also problems relating to different types of physical and mental harassments, sexual abuse and teasing etc. Violence against women in the family is generally created by their husbands, sometimes by the sisters, mothers and brothers of the husbands. The respondent women opined that they did not get any support to reduce domestic violence against them.

At the time of study considering 60 responded from different ward platform, we found that mobility increased by 50% after intervention and security feelings increased for togetherness or sisterhood.

Although from baseline about 59% respondents do not have any idea about the function of UP and none of them know about the standing committee. Over 97% respondents do not know about the roles and responsibilities of the women UP members. Whereas from our study we found that 50% women have clear idea about the function of UP and 30% have partial. Unfortunately, still only 30% respondents know about the roles and responsibilities of the women UP members and 60% know about Chairman's roles and responsibilities as the chair is more focused all the way from classical period till today. Baseline shows that about 51% and 30% respectively expressed that they may have the scope to visit health clinic and hospital. Their access to other local services is minimum, only 15% in education office, 10% in UP and 5% in family planning office. 83% respondents believe that getting services from different public offices is their right. More than 70% respondents got treatment from village quack, only 27% from government health centers. 97.3% pregnant mothers did not get advice from government staff. They received assistance from dai, TBA (78.3%) and trained dai, TBA (8.5%). Children of 58% households of the respondents do not get education mainly due to economic problems.

On the other hand study shows that about 60% visits health facilities at locality and 25% (lower than baseline) visited hospital. We found that improving local facilities can decrease health cost from outside. Their access to other local services is minimum but improving slowly, only 25% in education office, 40% in UP and 35% in family planning office. Total respondents believe that getting service from different public offices is their right. At present more than 60% respondents got treatment from village quack, only 40% from government health centers (some of them go simultaneously govt. facilities and village doctors). From baseline children of 58% households of the respondents do not get education mainly due to economic problems. But HAOR intervention convinced them about the necessity of education and also provided information about scholarship for female children that may increase number of enrolment and decrease dropout in the near future.

During baseline found that over 84% respondents are involved with local organization mainly as group members of NGOs mostly for receiving micro credit. But there was no visible function for shalish or any development activities. HAOR insist women to extend their comfort zone by participating in family level decision making like poultry and cattle rearing, agricultural issues, stopping child marriage, abolishing of dowry custom, visit relative house, participation in local arbitration (salish) etc.

According to the study respondents, their major rights as human being are to live with dignity and honor (60%) right to vote (60%) get education (40%) to work (40%) and health (50%). On the other hand, as women, they have some rights within the family and society which is, maternity (60%), Involve in IGA (60%), expressing views (50%), to save (40%), to take decision (10%), participate in planning (10%) etc. They expressed that women rights may be established through getting knowledge (70%) and increasing of awareness (80%). However, very few respondents do not have any idea about gender equity.

As a part of study, in addition to structured interview, open discussion with group leaders, focus group discussion with students and UP standing committee members and, discussion with civil society and community leaders were conducted. During the discussion sessions issues like gender equity, human rights, local government (UP and UP standing committee), social environment, local conflict and arbitration, access to social services and services providing organizations were discussed. Finding of the issues from the discussion sessions are generally common. Regarding gender equity the participants expressed that men and women have equal rights but mostly it is not practiced. According to the participants, to improve gender equity women participation in the society needs to be increased, women should be respected by men and, opportunities should be created for establishing rights of woman. The participants identified rights to speech and opinion, free movement, social participation, express of opinion, rights to education and health rights to vote as human rights.

It was realized from study that, success can be ensured faster by ascertaining the involvement of males rather than isolating the females by blaming the males. This has again been evident from in –depth interviews that the activities of the HAOR project would be more meaningful if males could be made more involved. The males have also admitted that they would render cooperation if they are included. Since the involvement

of males in project activities such as meeting, procession, group discussion, etc. would bring-forth better results, ensuring their increasing participation would make the lives of their female counterparts easier and happier.

According to the community forum participants UP is formed by chairman and members who are elected by local people. They identified the activities of Union Parishad which are local development, public service, building road, and service for poor, protect law and order, and eradicate smuggling, birth-death registration, tree plantation and giving VGD / allowance to poor. The participants do have partial idea about the standing committees under UP. The participants identified women harassment, early marriage, dowry, divorce, lack of unity lack of proper judgment, dishonest local elected representative, lack of women participation and limited mobility, violation of women rights, gambling, smuggling, social conflict etc. are the social problems. The participants recommended that to improve the social environment, increase awareness of people, jointly addressing the social problem by the community and organization social gathering in various social functions etc. are to be given priority.

According to the respondents major issues of conflict are land, power structure of community leaders and multi-marriage. Local Matobbers and UP Chairman/members take initiative to mitigate conflicts. Most of the participants stated that arbitration is done by local elite, rich people and UP chairman/members though sometimes people do not get proper justice. The respondents expressed that health worker and agriculture officer visit them after months interval. They told that their children have access to school. They are not getting proper service from government department but they have better access in NGO. They identified major problems in the community like quarrel, pollution of environment, scarcity of water & sanitation system, insecurity of women, health service, illiteracy, robbery/ theft, improper selection of beneficiary for VGD/VGF and agriculture related problems. They suggested address the problems in the following manner solve at local level, involve local elite, jointly address the problem and raise awareness of community people.

All findings, achievement and failure indicate that formulation of social capital is necessary to achieve HAOR goal and objectives.

### **Recommendations:**

Against the backdrop of the fact that the conventional concept of development is dependent on micro-credit, it is really difficult to organize the rural poor women without any micro-credit facility or immediate monetary benefit. The way assembling organizing of rural people, particularly rural women is tied up with micro –credit programs, it is undoubtedly praise-worthy that the HAOR project has successfully convened and organized them without these benefits. Central ideas and philosophy of the project is clear to management. At this point after learning from this phase if the project can be nurtured properly with creative input and professional support here is for the ..... every possibility to be a role model exploring social capital and development understanding from grassroots.

Although micro-credit dependent development has supplied cash money to the rural poor women the control over that money is not in their own-hands rather it is in the hands of their husband. Since the omen can access the flow of micro-credit relatively easily, most of them are being exploited to hand the money over to their husbands either forcibly or following the convention. A good number of them become members of 3-4 micro-credit organizations. In such cases, for example, they might have taken the 1<sup>st</sup> loan from and organization and handed over to their husbands, have taken the 2<sup>nd</sup> loan and invested in small businesses and have started utilizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> loan to pay back the installments of the first two loans.. Following this path debit/credit has already forced some people to be evicted from their ancestral homesteads and to migrate. Under such circumstances or social reality, a project like this has assembled the rural poor women, attempted for their social and economic empowerment, succeeded in reducing discrimination, strengthened the local governanceetc. Yet for proper implementation of the project and the expected results, it is important to shed some lights on the following:

- As development Understanding is not clear to many of so called development initiatives in Bangladesh and low paid field level workers themselves are marginalized many ways it is crucial that the field –level workers should have a clear idea about development when they are also from the same communities, the ins and outs of the HAOR project in particular. It is appreciable that IED invested deep attention for necessary orientation and training already needs to be increased by topic and frequency. A special workshop involving ED of IED, MJF representative, PC, PM and UP facilitator is recommended for sharing different school of development and analyzing HOAR project achievement and failure to achieve more in future.
- Any joint initiative of men and women is appreciated in case of development. For a project, success can be ensured faster by ascertaining the involvement of males rather than isolating the females by blaming the males. This has again been Evident from in-depth interviews that the activities of the HAROR project would be more meaningful if males could be made more involved. The males have also admitted that they would render cooperation if they are included. Since the involvement of males in project activities such as meeting,procession, group discussion, etc. would bring-forth better results ensuring their increasing participation would make the lives of their female counter parts easier and happier. Example: Traditionally it was believed that men had little or no genuine interests in health issues, especially reproductive health and family planning. Perhaps as a result of this belief, many health services and programs have not been perceived as “male friendly”. The misconceptions regarding male involvement in health needs to be changed. Men are partners in reproduction; therefore they must play a significant role in family planning programs. If HAOR can set objectives like increasing the knowledge of reproductive health needs amongmen; Increasing the use of reproductive health and family planning services among men; creating an enabling environment in the facilities and communities that supports men’s access to services; and Encouraging men’s support and engagement in maternal health. This example may be an alternative way to involve male that finally can dissolve lot of problem around male and female

relationship and health. Empowerment, health and poverty are closely related that's why recommended to take action like this in a participatory way.

- It is necessary that the modules of training and orientation needs to be more specific in line with learning and unlearning needs considering number of ill motivation by the name development work around. Philosophy of HAOR lasting of project is much more familiar with social capital driven development whereas there are lot of other initiative around just reverse those can be treated as ill motivation that's required special training modules and training.
- Needs More training to extend “comfort Zone” from project personnel to community people. The comfort zone is a behavioral state within which a person operates in an anxiety –neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviors to deliver a steady level of performance usually without a sense of risk. IN development sector extending comfort zone is very much expected to employ human potentials. It has been notice during MTE that motivation for sustainable change is not that strong at community level. May be it's a tradition became a truth in Bangladesh that we don't believe in our potentials that we have already. The donor or development partners are implementing projects with some fixed mind setup for 3 years of 5 years with fixed amount of money that they have in their budget. On the other hand, many NGOs are receiving money without flexibility and considering necessities around grassroots level. Community people are seasoned with so called evaluation process where external peoples intervenes project areas to know about progress from different level involving communities. Performance of development or show down of activities by the community instructed by NGOs creates new relationship with NGO and communities where NNGOs have every possibility to be threatened by communities rather than strengthen if not done properly. Maybe this kind of fake developmental situation has been treated as comfort zone for community people and field workers as well. IED already noticed and agreed to extend comfort zone for sustainable development at their project area by implementing HOAR. Therapeutic training study visits and self evaluation can help to do so.

#### **Example of Extending Comfort zone: Coping cycle**

When people are subjected to change this has a significant impact on their self-esteem. Linked to this impact on self-esteem will be and impact on performance and that rebuilding self-esteem is essential to rebuilding performance after major change has taken place. It's like disturbing the steady state and thus causing change to occur and needs to be included coping mechanism with the same.

Stage1: denial –when significant changes are first mooted the initial response may be to deny the need for change. People suddenly find that the current comfort zone is really just what they are happy with and change invokes fear and anxiety. A sudden increase in anxiety may well push people towards the danger zone and this instead of enhancing the performance, may well have a detrimental effect. Please note that the

initial response does not always cause an immediate decline in performance but it does generate resistance. However, eventually performance does decline well below previous levels.

**Stage 2:** defense people in this stage demonstrate defensive behaviors and try to force the new reality into the old model that has allowed them to continue to perform in the current comfort zone. But, defensive behavior channels effort and energy into resisting change and not into performance and so there is often a severe decline in performance. Note that ritualistic behavior emerges as people try to defend the old ways and postulates that such behaviors have the effect of allowing the person space in which to come to terms with change. Part of these rituals may be a demonstrable willingness to attempt the new but with the objective of 'proving that new won't work or is simply wrong. There are lots of examples available from development field and community perceptions that demonstrate the same.

**Stage 3:** discarding – Stages 1 and 2 are focused on the past but in Stage 3' people discard and abandon the old ways of doing things and either commit to new work methods or invent new ways of action. A fatalistic attitude often accompanies this discarding- if things have got to change we suppose we'd better go along with it' Behaviors emerge that suggest that people are able to undertake the new actions but that considerable unwillingness exists and that they want group support . This suggests a lack of confidence. Discarding the old ways and committing to the new' their self-esteem returns and with it a renewed performance that results in a definite positive.

**Stage 4:** adaptation-as people adapt to the new realities of their situation, they spend significant levels of energy on finding ways of making things work. They are attuning and aligning themselves with what they have to do. This boosts self-esteem and, performance starts to recover at a significant rate. This stage produces acceleration in performance and people are willing and able to do what is being asked.

**Stage 5:** internalization- it is how the people involved have adopted and adapted the new working methods and made them their own- they have internalized the new procedures. But this very process, which has resulted in high levels of anxiety, is now running out of steam ' and the growth in performance is decelerating as the people involved settle towards a new and sustainable level of performance: a new comfort zone , performance of a lifetime .

**It may be noted that:** coping cycle is a valuable approach to understanding how people deal with change but change is an ongoing event and every time a modification of behavior or performance is recommended, then a new change process starts and a new coping cycle begins.

5. It is crucial that the initiative for evolution of women leadership and setting –up of self-reliant women organizations through the HAOR project is sustained . for making self-reliant society for women in the light of the far –reaching thoughts, it

- will be very effective for the marginalized women-folk if the glorious history of evolution of women leadership/empowerment and women's success stories in reducing discrimination and poverty reduction can be clearly and meaning fully highlighted. Kind of low priced publication with pictorial support can be distributed among group members on women leaders and their success story.
6. For the sake of sharing experiences, women from one area under the project should be allowed to visit other areas more frequently and strategically. In doing so, the benefited women of the HAOR project would also be able to establish an effective network among them.
  7. It is important that the assembled / organized women of the project area develop increased communications with other NGOs, local government bodies, and social and cultural groups.
  8. Local level GO-NGO-UP & GO-NGO-Upazila development Coordination should be facilitated more effectively so that a mutual cooperation is established and thereby poor people get improved service from the local service providing institutions. It was found during MTE that some other initiative is supporting Union parishad financially or non –financially where HAOR project staff may feel marginal in some cases if mutual cooperation doesn't happen. Considering practical reality high quality training on social capital driven development for UP level GO-NGO –UP needs to be organized where HOAR will be rote player to deep all other development work more transparent.
  9. People organizations should be more action oriented so that the poor and marginalized people can possess public & common resources like khas land/ water body, etc. as they are entitled for. Traditionally, UP chairman and others members are so powerful to hold all these resources or powerful peoples are elected by traditional voting system. During MTE we found that some UP representatives are supportive to HOAR project at this moment but recommended to keep more empathetic motivation and strategic actions when issues will be discussed or really public and common resources will be shifted among poor people.
  10. Using ICT needs to be encouraged these days when mobile accesses minimizing geographical distance. A hotline (single mobile number) for HAOR project can be set to build organized sisterhood and meaningful network among all project personnel including grassroots. It is highly recommended to orient marginalized female that how mobile technology can give them relief from loneliness and encourage togetherness to build solidarity for reducing financial and psychological poverty.

**Reference:**

- Project documents, HAOR Project implemented by IED and MJF, Funded by DFID.
- Baseline Survey, HAOR Project
- Project proposal developed by IED

**Abbreviation and Explanations**

UP - Union parishad

NGO - Non-Government Organization

Social & Economic empowerment of Rural Poor Women

HAOR	-	harmonize the Actions against inequalities and Oppressions of Rights
IED	-	Institute for Environment and Development
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
TBA	-	Traditional Birth Attendant