



Fact Sheet

CHANGING HORIZON

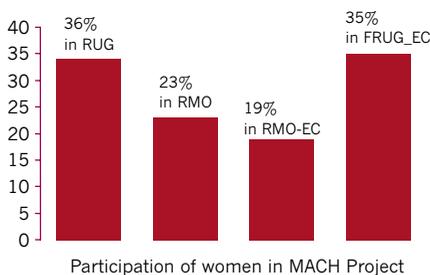
Women's decision making and how much it is valued by others within the family or in society depends greatly on their economic strength. Yet too many women still do not have the opportunity to earn as well as manage money. Almost three-quarters of women, especially the poor section, depend on their husband or other male members of the family¹.

In addition, a traditional society's resistance to women's mobility and ability to take decisions slows the progress of women's empowerment. Women being the natural teachers in their families can play a significant role in any community based development project. The empowerment of women especially poor women can have a positive impact on the community.



MACH APPROACH

MACH has given special attention to ensuring participation of women in every aspect of the project. The MACH project has a total of 5,194 members in its Resource Users Groups (RUG: the savings groups through which training and micro-credit are channeled). Among them 1870 (36%) are women. MACH has established 13 Federation of Resource Users Groups (FRUG) where 33% of General Body and 35% of Executive Committee members are women. MACH has organized various activities for RUG women to share knowledge on different socio-economic and health issues and arranged training to develop skills for new economic enterprises. Among 35 other trades, the training covered poultry-duck rearing, tailoring, cow rearing, and fattening, fish culture, bamboo and cane work, vegetable cultivation, enterprise development etc. In addition, 940 women participated in a six-month literacy training course. A total of 2,132 loans worth Taka 6,026,545 have been given to the women members of the RUGs. As a policy, MACH provides 25% of its larger enterprise loans to women members. A total of 58 enterprise loans amounting to Taka 445,000 have been given to women. The total amount of savings accrued by women is taka 3.23 million which is 42% of the total RUG savings.



In the key area of wetland resource management and decision making, MACH has established 16 Resource Management Organizations (RMOs). At present, there are 316 women active in the general bodies of the RMOs (23%), with 52 women appointed to the respective Executive Committees (19%). A total of 156 women members of the Executive Committees and General Bodies of the RMOs received leadership training. About two-thirds of the women in RMOs are also RUG members.

¹ Source: BBS Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003

RESPONSE



Terjan Begum is a leader in the making. In her own words, “In absence of our President, I chair the meetings. I have an active role to play in sanctioning loans and monitoring the progress of the members. Though harsh I sometimes have to take measures against the defaulters. As executive committee members we discuss about the income- expenditure of our samity. I have even had to present our samity problems at FRUG meetings and been to various Upazila level meetings. I feel my contributions have brought great benefits to my samity.” Terjan is at present the Vice-president of Vunobir-Ashidrone Union, RUG. She is also a general member of Dumuria Resource Management Organization, Sreemangal.

“I don't cook mother fish carrying eggs any more and tell my husband and son not to catch or buy fish like that. I tell other women of the village whatever I learn at RMO (Resource Management Organization) meetings. This is how we can stop over fishing and increase the number of fish in the beels. Now people of our area are very conscious about it, not only have they stopped catching mother fish carrying eggs, they stopped others from doing so.” Mojiron Begum, a house wife and MACH RMO and RUG (Resource Users Group) member from Taltoli village, Kaliakoir.

Since women control the kitchen in this country; it is possible for them to change the food practice. That is what has happened in the MACH project areas. Women Resource Users Group members learned the negative consequences of destructive and over fishing in their training and meetings. They shared this knowledge with other women of the village. Women's stand against these practices has helped in increasing and diversifying fish populations in and around the beels of the project areas.

“Five years back the roads of this village were littered with garbage, there were open toilets everywhere. Any one walking through those roads could not avoid the stink. Now there is not a single open toilet and no garbage can be found on the road. People have become conscious about health and hygiene practices, which changed their behavior.” Sahela Begum, adult literacy teacher and vice president of the Federation of Resource User Group, Boruna village of Hajipara, Sreemongol.

Women are becoming aware of different health and social issues in the adult literacy classes and various meetings. Their income from different activities has helped to raise family living standards and empowered them to have a stronger voice in the family. These have also ensured women's active participation in the various Resource Users Groups and Resource Management Organizations established through MACH. Almost all the children from these families now attend schools.

The status of women, especially the poor women, has changed within the family and the society as a result of their increasing, social participation and economic contribution to the family. They have become equal partners in a traditionally male dominated family. Additional income in a poor family means better living conditions and more opportunities for the children. Women have also gained respect and a voice even in places that were previously considered a man's space.



For more information contact
 MACH Headquarters
 House No. 2, Road No. 23/A
 Gulshan 1, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh
 Phone: 8814598, 9887943
 Fax: (880-2) 8826556
 URL: www.machban.org