

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment are Integral to CREL's Work



A recent study by the World Bank identified women's ability to work for pay as one of the most visible and "game-changing" events for households and communities (Boudet, et al. 2012).

Gender equality and women empowerment are at the heart of CREL's policies and approaches. The project is fully committed to ensuring gender equality, and in working toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination and Gender-Based Violence (GBV). **CREL's Gender Strategy provides practical guidance for equitably engaging all beneficiaries (both women and men)** in: (1) reducing unsustainable extraction and dependence on natural resources (forests, wetlands, and ecologically critical areas); (2) increasing knowledge and resilience in response to climate change (adaptation and mitigation); and (3) strengthening joint decision-making and women empowerment in households through financial literacy training and increased incomes from alternative income generation and market linkages. It also ensures a gender-sensitive work environment for all staff.

Gender equality is not only better for improving overall results or outcomes, it is better for Bangladesh. Women's involvement in agriculture, cottage industries, and natural resource management (NRM) varies by region and economic status in Bangladesh, but gender-based constraints remain acute almost everywhere. Women play major roles in pre- and post-harvest agricultural activities and, increasingly, resource management groups and protection committees. However, these contributions tend to be unrecognized or under-valued. This inhibits choices and potential.

CREL applies a gender-balanced approach that is mutually-supportive and gender transformative. Transformative approaches promote gender equity by engaging both men and women in changing harmful attitudes and behaviors, and transforming the institutions

and practices that create or reinforce inequalities.

Agency is the ability to make decisions and act upon them in order to achieve a desired outcome, free from violence, retribution, or fear (World Bank 2014). The ability to make those kinds of choices is a realization of empowerment, particularly when this is coupled with activities that increase collective voice and gender-sensitivity, and help establish greater autonomy or control over products and income.

CREL's work is fostering agency through economic empowerment and gender-equitable relationships. It is doing this through its emphasis on supporting climate-

"When I first started to participate I could barely say my name... Over time I learned to speak out and now I do not hesitate to speak up." (Rema Khalenga People's Forum, Executive Committee, Chunariaghat, Srimangal Region)

"If our husband complains [about sharing food equally among family members] we explain that this is gender and then they are quiet." (Keruntoli FLC/CPG, near Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary, Cox's Bazar Region)

"We control our income now that we are earning. ...Sometimes we provide our husbands with 'pocket money'." (Tea Garden, Handicrafts Livelihood Activities, Chakaria, Cox's Bazar Region)

resilient livelihoods and food security, increasing value-chains and market access, and strengthening collective action and social cohesion in the management and protection of natural resources. The project's Financial Literacy and alternative income generation training programs have over 63% women beneficiaries, and quotas for reforming community-based organizations and co-management institutions (with at least 40% women participation as group members as well as representatives in office-bearer positions) are transforming both decisions and decision-makers. These initiatives are changing household dynamics and gender relations. These steps toward greater equality and women empowerment are essential for the health and sustainability of ecosystems, communities, and future generations, creating a basis for greater resilience, more effective engagement, and better results.

Key accomplishments

- Nearly 63% of livelihood beneficiaries are women, more than 50% livelihood demonstration plots are being managed by women, and over 90% of participants in the Financial and Entrepreneurial Literacy Centers are women
- Comprehensive Gender Opportunities Action and Learning (GOAL) Strategy integrated into policies and approaches
- Gender Scorecard Survey conducted, based on the domains from the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), to measure performance and impact of gender equality and women empowerment on CREL outcomes

USAID's Climate Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project

